



# **Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes**

**Lahti University of  
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# AHELO feasibility study

- A. The goals
- B. The benefits
- C. The content
- D. Who and how
- E. The current status

**Recent developments in higher education lead to greater attention to quality by all stakeholders**

**International agreement on the need to tackle the quality challenge**

- Students and employers (better-informed choices)
- HEIs, departments or faculties (comparative strengths and weaknesses)
- Policymakers (supply of high-level skills, impact of policy decisions)

# Context: why undertake the study?

**Peer pressure and public accountability now more powerful than legislation and regulation**

**International comparisons now inevitable in this previously national-only domain**

**Action is challenging ...  
But the cost of inaction is high too!**

**Judgements about higher education outcomes will continue to be made on the basis of rankings derived from inputs or research-driven outputs**

**AHELO is not about ranking nor standardization, it is about evidence for policy and practice**

# Moving from Quantity to Quality...

## Consensus on need to tackle quality challenge

2006: Tokyo Ministerial Meeting

## But how? Information gap on LO...

2007: Experts meetings to explore the scope for an AHELO

**Conclusion**

**Carry out a feasibility study to provide a *proof of concept***

## From decision to action

2008: Seoul Informal Ministerial Meeting

Launch of AHELO feasibility study, provided it takes into account institutional diversity

Recruitment of team and participating countries

2009: Initial work and Call for Tenders

# Project overview

## What is AHELO?

A ground-breaking initiative to assess HE learning outcomes on an international scale, by creating measures that would be valid:

- For all cultures and languages
- And also for the diversity of HE institutions (not just universities)

## Why is AHELO important?

- Employs a wide range of measures
- Provides a more balanced assessment of HE quality
- No sacrifice of HEIs' missions or autonomy in their subsequent efforts to improve performance

## Yet, a debated initiative

Raises fears within some circles → Implications for how we run the project

- Involving stakeholders in the process
- Ensuring that the results will be un-attackable scientifically
- Keeping budgets under control

# The feasibility study at a glance

## Goal?

To assess whether reliable cross-national comparisons of HE learning outcomes are **scientifically possible** and whether their **implementation is feasible**.

## What?

Not a pilot, but rather a research approach to provide a proof of concept and proof of practicality.

## Why?

The outcomes will be used to assist countries to decide on the next steps.

## When?

The testing window is from August 2010 to April 2011 (with final results available by end 2011)

## Who?

Data will be collected from a targeted population of students who are near, but before, the end of their first 3-4 year degree.

## How?

OECD's role is to establish broad frameworks that guide international expert committees and contractors charged with instrument development in the assessment areas.

## ... Limited timeframe compared to a fully-fledged study

This prevents us from developing a “perfect” instrument... but by using existing tools or instruments whose development is already underway, we can properly provide sufficient proof of concept

→ Focus on cross-cultural appropriateness

## ... FEASIBILITY study, not a pilot study

This provides flexibility in exploring several directions/methodologies, and allows some degree of risk-taking (e.g. unexplored areas)

→ Request by countries to explore different methodologies/instruments

## ... Does not preclude the existence of a full-fledged study in the future

This allows us to be open-minded about the outcomes, and about what its instruments might look like.

→ It is expected that further work would be required for a main study.

# Expected Outcomes

Goal?

***Scientific and practical feasibility***

**No publication of int<sup>al</sup> comparisons and no league tables**

**Focus of final report on feasibility aspects: cross-cultural validity, cultural biases, reliability issues etc.**

**Feasibility of implementation**

**Focus on how to ensure student and faculty participation (or correct response biases)  
Need for some feedback (anonymous)**

**Political feasibility**

**Analyses to demonstrate the potential analytical value of AHELO for institutional improvement**

# Multi-dimensional def<sup>o</sup> of quality

## Addressing the needs of various users and uses

- “Bottom line” of performance
- “Value-added” to assess the quality of services
- Contextual data to reveal best practices and problems, and to identify teaching and learning practices leading to greater outcomes

## Both in discipline-related competencies ...

- Easily interpretable in the context of departments and faculties ...
- But require highly differentiated instruments

## And in generic skills

- Less dependent on occupational and cultural contexts, applicable across HEIs ...
- But reflect cumulative learning outcomes and less relevant to the subject-matter competencies that are familiar to HEIs, departments or faculties

# AHELO: 4 strands of work

## Discipline strand in Economics

Initial work on defining expected learning outcomes through 'Tuning' approach.

## Discipline strand in Engineering

Initial work on defining expected learning outcomes through 'Tuning' approach.

**Focus on 'above content' skills:**

*students' ability to reflect, and to apply their knowledge and experience to novel and real world tasks and challenges*

# AHELO: 4 strands of work

## Discipline strand in Economics

Initial work on defining expected learning outcomes through 'Tuning' approach.

+ contextual data

## Discipline strand in Engineering

Initial work on defining expected learning outcomes through 'Tuning' approach.

+ contextual data

## Generic skills strand

International pilot test of the US Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), to assess the extent to which problem-solving or critical thinking can be validly measured across different cultural, linguistic and institutional contexts.

+ contextual data

### **With each assessment, a collection of contextual information:**

- to look beyond student performance: (e.g. institutional missions, selectivity, student characteristics and exposure to “good practices”, satisfaction).
- to make AHELO an effective tool to reveal best practices and to identify shared problems.

# AHELO: 4 strands of work

## Discipline strand in Economics

Initial work on defining expected learning outcomes through 'Tuning' approach.

+ contextual data

## Discipline strand in Engineering

Initial work on defining expected learning outcomes through 'Tuning' approach.

+ contextual data

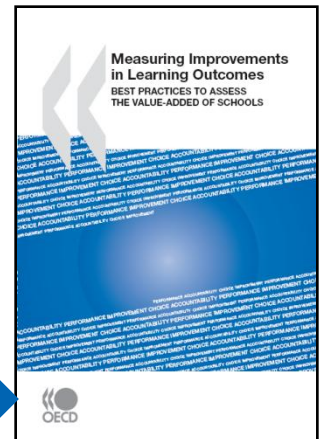
## Generic skills strand

International pilot test of the US Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), to assess the extent to which problem-solving or critical thinking can be validly measured across different cultural, linguistic and institutional contexts.

+ contextual data

## Research-based “Value-added” or “Learning gain” measurement strand

Several perspectives to explore the issue of value-added (conceptually, psychometrics), building on recent OECD work at school level.



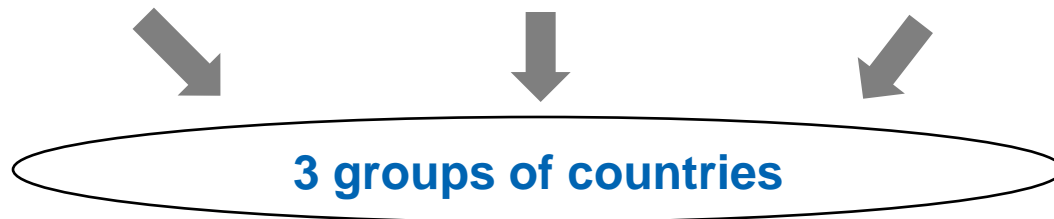
# AHELO tests of instruments

## 3 assessment instruments

<b>Generic skills</b> Finland Korea Mexico Norway	<b>Engineering</b> Australia Japan Sweden	<b>Economics</b> Belgium (Fl.) Italy Mexico Netherlands
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## 4 contextual instruments

Contextual indicators and indirect proxies of quality



# Further countries?



**Canada (province level)**



**Russia**



**Slovenia**



**South Africa**



**Spain**



**Turkey**



**US (state level)**

# Remarks on data collection

- **No comparative data** at the national level
- **Institutions/departments** are the units of analysis, hence **measures** and **reporting** at HEI/dept level
- Feedback to HEIs: **performance profiles** and **contextual data**, with their own results and those of other HEIs (**anonymously**)
- Pragmatic and cost-effective mode of delivery



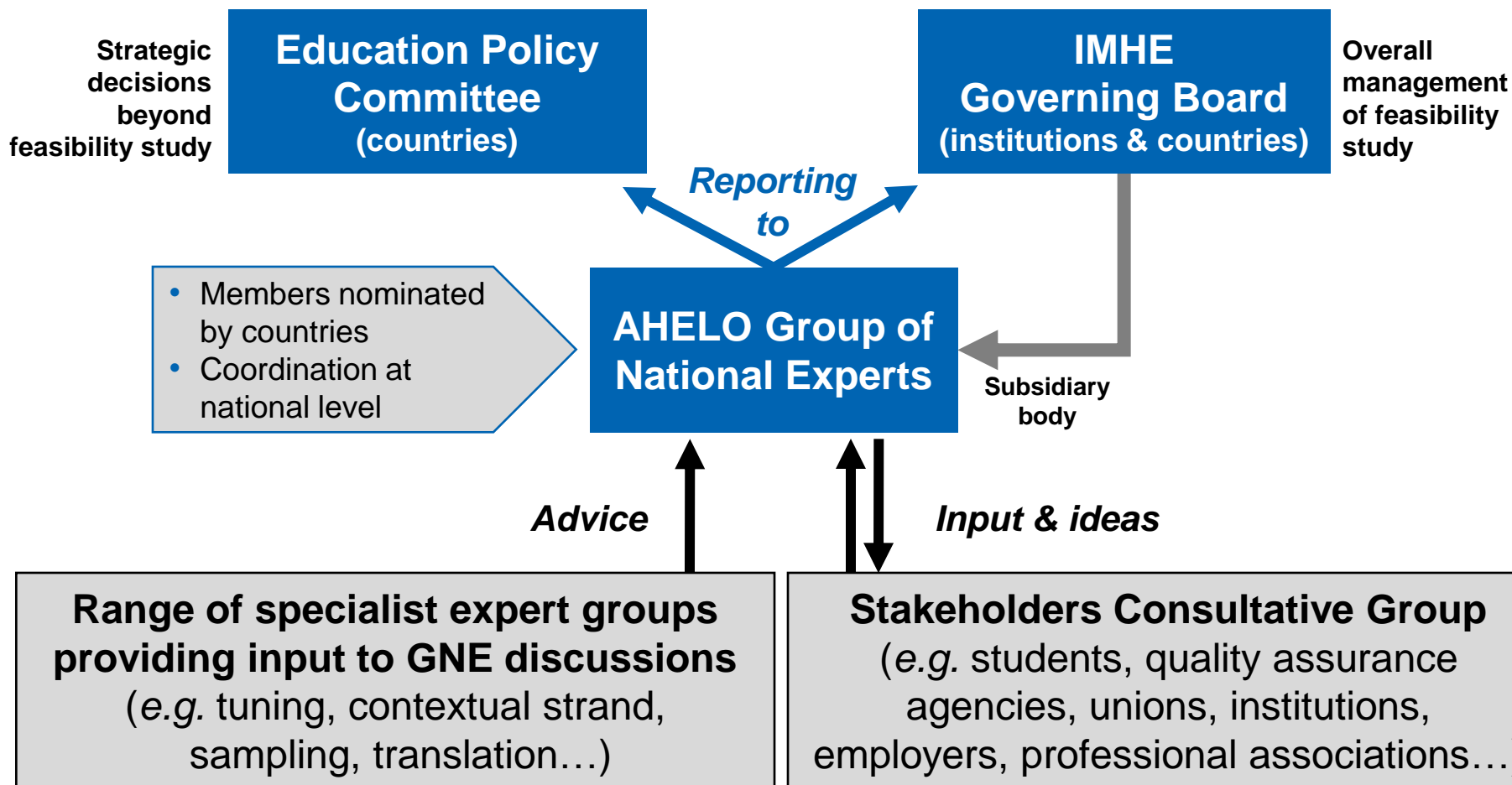
# Practical considerations



- **Test of practicality of implementation:** international standards for test administration and student participation rates within HEIs
- Assessments possibly **computer-delivered** or **web-based**
- Performance described through **proficiency levels** and “**can-do**” statements
- Feedback to HEIs: **performance profiles** and **contextual data**, with their own results and those of other HEIs (**anonymously**)
- Use **existing** instruments, respecting their integrity; or **combine** item pools of existing instruments in ways that cover frameworks; or **develop** new test material?

# Governance and management

## OECD bodies



# Current status



- ✓ **Institutional framework in place**
- ✓ **Recruitment of partic. countries**
  - ✓ Allocated to various strands of work to ensure geog. language & cultural diversity
- ✓ **Communication & dissemination**
  - ✓ Web page, conferences, brochure
  - ✓ Stakeholders' Consultative Group
- ✓ **Call for Tenders launched**
- Substantive work**
  - ✓ Contextual dimension analytical framework
  - ✓ Tuning-AHELO project to define expected LO in economics & engineering → reports
  - ✓ Project timeline
  - Planning international test of CLA
  - Research-based value-added strand
- Meeting of AHELO GNE: 18-19 Nov**
- Fundraising campaign underway**

# Indicative timeline

- Constraint of results due end-2011
- Constraint of academic years in different countries (testing windows)
- Some degree of flexibility between milestones

## Planning

June  
'09

### Initial Work

- CD
- Learning Outcomes

July  
'09

### Contract GenS

Oct  
'09

### Contracts EcoS, EngS, CD, PMSO

## Administering

### EngS + CD

Australia  
Japan  
Sweden

Aug '10  
to  
Mar '11

### GenS + CD

Korea,  
Finland  
Norway  
Mexico

Nov '10  
to  
Apr '11

### EcoS + CD

Netherlands  
Belgium (Fl.)  
Italy  
Mexico

Feb '11  
to  
Apr '11

## Planning

June '09

### Initial Work

- CD
- Learning Outcomes

Nov '09

### Contract GenS

Nov '09

Contracts  
EcoS,  
EngS,  
CD, PMSO

## Developing

Development of instruments and procedures

Translation and adaptation

Layout, printing and delivery

NPM and IC training

Coordination

## Administering

### EngS + CD

Australia  
Japan  
Sweden

Aug '10  
to  
Mar '11

### GenS + CD

Korea,  
Finland  
Norway  
Mexico

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Apr '11

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Nov '08

Apr '11

## Administering

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Finland  
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Feb '11  
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Netherlands  
Belgium (Fl.)  
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Mexico

## Analysing

Scoring  
and  
coding

Data cleaning  
and  
processing

Scaling  
and  
analysis

Coordination

Technical  
report  
GenS

Technical  
report  
EcoS

Technical  
report  
EngS

Technical  
report  
CD

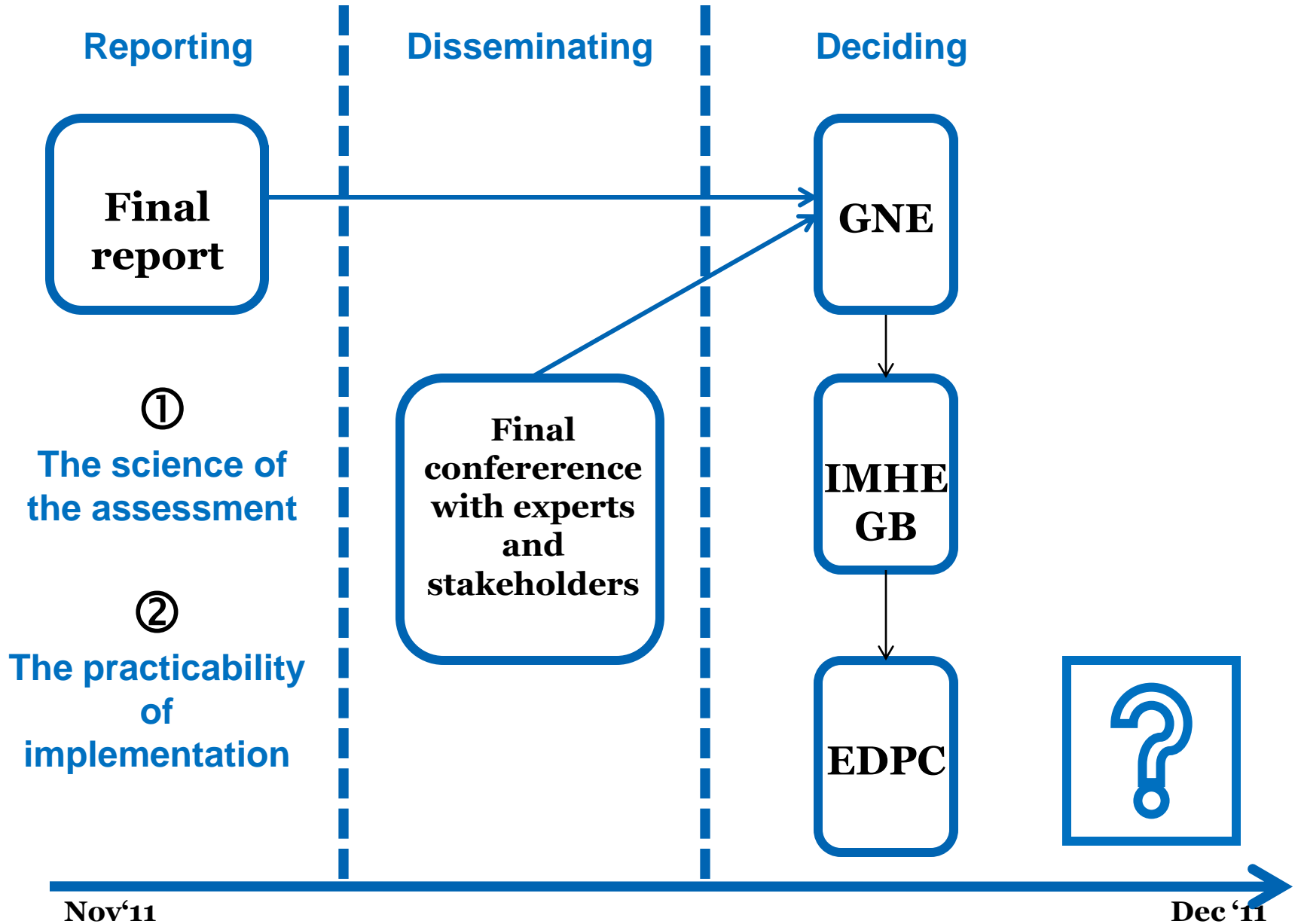
Technical  
report  
PMSO

Technical  
report  
VamS

## Reporting

Final  
report





# Available on the AHELO website

**[www.oecd.org/edu/ahelo/](http://www.oecd.org/edu/ahelo/)**

- **AHELO brochure**
- **AHELO Guide for Sponsors**
- **AHELO Newsletter**
- **AHELO Meetings and Documents**
- **Feasibility Study Road Map**
- **Initial work on frameworks in Economics and Engineering**
- **Initial work on the contextual dimensions**
- **Interviews with participating countries**
- **FAQs**

# Looking forward: challenges

**We must find the right balance between breadth and depth**

**Not everything needs to be dealt with in detail, but the complexity and diversity of higher education needs to be reflected**

**We must seek measures that are as comparable as possible**

**And yet we must also be as specific for institutions as necessary**

**We must focus coverage as much as feasible**

**But we must also keep it as large as necessary to be useful for policy formation**

**We must address political challenges**

**Assessment and evaluation in higher education is a controversial issue**

## If AHELO were one of the QA instruments available to HEIs...

- HEIs could decide to participate... or not
- HEIs could decide to use it for internal improvement only, or make results public

## What AHELO *could* do...

- Benchmark HEIs against their peers to identify strengths and weaknesses
- Assist HEIs' with student recruitment and students' choices
- Limit academic drift by showcasing result's within one's mission
- Enable researchers to investigate teaching and learning processes at depth: What works and under which contexts/conditions
- Spur QA reflection

## What AHELO *would not* do...

- Rank countries and/or HEIs...
- Provide a miracle solution to accountability requirements: learning outcomes are only one aspect of the mission of HEIs (along with equity, regional mission, etc)  
There is no single criterion in HE quality space
- Replace QA

**Please send any  
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**For more information, visit  
[www.oecd.org/edu/ahelo](http://www.oecd.org/edu/ahelo)**

**Vi tackas**  
**Thank you**