

**DIRECTORATE FOR EDUCATION
INSTITUTIONAL MANAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNING BOARD**

Group of National Experts on the AHELO Feasibility Study

REPORTING GUIDELINES

Paris, 15-16 March 2010

This document is meant to present the revised principles on the access and use of data and on reporting of the AHELO results.

During the last meeting, the GNE took note of the wide range of positions of GNE members regarding data access and use, binding to the national legislation; asked the Secretariat to explore the scope for providing HEIs with access to benchmarks in an anonymous way; asked the Secretariat to distinguish and further explore the notion of data and results; and asked the Secretariat to revise the principles taking into account policies of other similar OECD projects and the purposes of the AHELO feasibility study.

This document builds on work undertaken by the AHELO GNE and the OECD Secretariat, including a survey of country representatives as well as the technical insights and experience of the AHELO Consortium and taking into account policies of other OECD projects.

The AHELO GNE is invited to:

- TAKE NOTE and DISCUSS benchmarking possibilities
- AGREE on reporting principles for the AHELO feasibility study data

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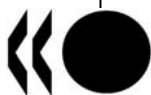


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INTRODUCTION

Overview

1. The purpose of the AHELO Feasibility Study is to assess whether it is possible to measure at the international level what undergraduate degree students know and can do, in order to provide better information to higher education institutions, governments, and other stakeholders including students and employers. This entails evaluation of the scientific feasibility of undertaking an international assessment of higher education learning outcomes at the end of a bachelor degree programme, as well as gauging the feasibility of its practical implementation.

2. The AHELO Reporting Guidelines present principles of the Group of National Experts (GNE) on the access and use of data, and on reporting of AHELO Feasibility Study results. They document international principles within which country-specific protocols and practices can be developed. They are designed to support data analysis, and to assist with transparent, valid and efficient dissemination of data and results.

3. The AHELO Reporting Guidelines build on work undertaken by the AHELO GNE and the OECD Secretariat, including a survey of country representatives, as well as the technical insights and experience of the AHELO Consortium and taking into account policies of other OECD projects.

4. Both the structure and contents of this document rest on an important distinction between ‘data’ and ‘results’. For the purposes of the AHELO Feasibility Study:

- ‘data’ refers to raw or compiled information in database, including either observed or derived variables, that is yet to be analysed; and
- ‘results’ refers to information that has been analysed and is presented in tabular, graphical or textual format.

Scope of these guidelines

5. The data access and reporting principles are international in scope. They take account of national contexts, but they are intended to guide rather than be prescriptive about national practice. National practices should adhere to and uphold these principles to the fullest extent possible. Some national legislation might opt for a more liberal stance than the principles suggested below, especially regarding data access. Access is sometimes warranted by the law when pertaining to official documents while in other countries data collection must abide by privacy protection-type legislation.

6. The AHELO Reporting Guidelines are intended to apply to all stakeholders who may, by design or accident, have access to data or reports from the AHELO Feasibility Study. Stakeholders include, but are not limited to:

- OECD: Secretariat, AHELO GNE, IMHE Governing Board, Education Policy Committee;
- Countries: government officials and National Project Managers (NPMs);
- Institutions: Institutional Coordinators (ICs), data collectors, coders, student respondents, faculty respondents;
- Consortium;
- Expert Groups: Economics Expert Group, Engineering Expert Group, Contextual Dimension Expert Group, Technical Advisory Group; and
- Public: regulatory agencies, funding agencies, media, researchers, general public, AHELO Stakeholders' Consultative Group (SCG).

7. The principles are reported for the AHELO Feasibility Study rather than for any full-scale study which may follow. The AHELO Feasibility Study is a landmark study that includes designing, implementing and evaluating new methods and practices. It is likely that new principles would be developed for a full-scale study which itself would be premised on the finding that AHELO is feasible.

General confidentiality principles

8. Confidentiality is extremely important to ensuring the validity of project processes and outcomes. The AHELO Feasibility Study involves dealing with secure test materials, collecting confidential information about countries, institutions and individuals, managing secure data, and reporting sensitive performance results.

9. In general, individuals and organisations will have access to data and results on a need-to-know basis. All individuals who may have contact with secure test materials, with the study's methods, and with confidential data will sign a confidentiality agreement.

DATA ACCESS AND IDENTIFICATION GUIDELINES

Overview

10. The following sections present principles regarding the access to and the identification of data within these data products:

- AHELO Database;
- AHELO National Databases; and
- AHELO Institution Databases.

11.

Table 1 summarises the default access that identified stakeholders will have to different data products. Note that different access arrangements may be negotiated for various data products in special circumstances by seeking permission from OECD, countries or institutions. As a general rule, and subject to the confidentiality measures detailed below, data access is regulated in a cascading fashion. Individuals and organisations will only have access to data that pertains to their own or subsidiary levels of aggregation:

- OECD will have access to (largely de-identified) international, national, institutional and respondent data;
- countries will have access to national, institutional and (de-identified) respondent data;
- institutions will have access to institutional and (de-identified) respondent data;
- individual respondents will not have direct access to any data;
- members of the consortium associated with data analysis will have access to all data products;
- Expert Groups will not have access to any data products; and
- Public will not have access to any data products, unless given approval by OECD.

Table 1: Access to data products

Data product						
	OECD	Countries	Institutions	Consortium	Expert Groups	Public
AHELO Database	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N
AHELO National Databases	N	Y	N	Y	N	N
AHELO Institution Databases	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N

12. Access to data at a certain level of analysis does not imply that the data will be identified at that level. A complex identification system will be implemented to sustain the confidentiality of different countries, institutions and respondents. This system, which flows through all sampling, field operations and computer systems, is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Control of identifiers within the AHELO data products

Data product	Entity		
	Countries	Institutions	Respondents
AHELO Database	De-identified	De-identified	De-identified
AHELO National Databases	Identified	Identified	De-identified
AHELO Institution Databases	Identified	Identified	De-identified

AHELO Database

13. A full documented AHELO Database will be prepared by the AHELO Consortium and delivered to the OECD Secretariat.

14. This database will include de-identified grouping variables that represent different countries and institutions. It will not be possible to establish the identity of any country or institution. This involves removal of country and institutional identifiers, and introducing various aggregations and randomisations.

15. The AHELO Database will not contain information that can be used to identify respondents as individuals. Individual responses will be identified in the file using randomly assigned identification codes. Only Institutional Coordinators (ICs) will be able to link these codes with respondent personal information.

16. The AHELO Database will allow the OECD Secretariat, the AHELO GNE, NPMs and institutions to conduct their own further analyses.

17. The AHELO Database will include:

- management variables to assist with analyses and reports;
- responses to all test and context instruments questions;
- student proficiency scores;
- composite indices derived from context instruments; and
- final weights and replicate weights for sampling variance.

18. The AHELO Database will not be released into the public domain.

19. Access to archived data after the completion of the AHELO Feasibility Study will be subject to approval from the OECD, and will be subject to the principles in this AHELO Reporting Guidelines.

AHELO National Databases

20. To assist with production of institution reports NPMs will be supplied with a file containing identifiable data for each participating institution in their countries.

21. This file will contain institution identifiers, statistics to facilitate reporting of context and demographic characteristics, and of scores from the assessment instruments. For reasons of security and confidentiality national databases will contain item data that corresponds with the items available to the country.

22. National databases will not contain information that can be used to identify respondents as individuals. Individual responses will be identified using a randomly assigned identification code. Only ICs will be able to link these codes with respondent personal information.

23. National Project Managers will not be given access to data from other countries, although they may negotiate such access with other NPMs. NPMs should not release data that contains institutional identifiers to any party other than the institution concerned.

AHELO Institution Databases

24. Participating institutions will be supplied with an AHELO Institution Database that contains summary information for their own student and staff respondents.

25. Institutions will not be given access to data from other institutions, although they may negotiate such access directly with other participating institutions either directly or via an NPM.

26. Institutional Coordinators at participating institutions are the only personnel able to link identifiers in the AHELO Institution Database to individual identifying information. Personal data shall be protected at all times. Respondents will not be identified as individuals. The complex identification system means that only personnel within participating institutions are able to match individual responses to personal details.

REPORTING GUIDELINES

Overview

27. The following sections present principles on reporting results from the AHELO Feasibility Study. Guidelines for the following reports are presented:

- AHELO Feasibility Study Report;
- AHELO Technical Report;
- AHELO Compendia;
- AHELO Assessment materials;
- AHELO National Reports;
- AHELO Institution Reports; and
- AHELO Respondent Reports.

28. The identification of different entities in reports derives from data access and identification guidelines associated with the different data products. These are summarised in

Table 1 and Table 2.

AHELO Feasibility Study Report

29. The AHELO Feasibility Study will report results at the international level. A report of the AHELO Feasibility Study Report will be prepared and released publicly. This report will present the main findings from the study, including an evaluation of AHELO's feasibility.

30. It is anticipated that the AHELO Feasibility Study Report will consider:

- methodological and technical questions raised by an international AHELO – including issues of domain definition, conceptual assessment frameworks, validity of instruments, translation and cultural adaptation, field implementation, coding, scaling and reliability of results, data analysis;
- issues that arose during implementation and in the analysis of results; and
- conclusions on the scientific and practical outcomes of the feasibility study as well as guidance for the longer-term development of an AHELO should the initiative be taken forward.

31. The OECD Secretariat may publish analyses based on aggregated and anonymous data in order to document and illustrate the analytical potential of AHELO for evidence-based research on effective teaching and learning practices. The AHELO Feasibility Study Report may publish data at the institution, department, program or any other subgroup, so long as it is not possible to determine the identify of any subgroup. In particular, the OECD will not publish national or institution results in any way that enables individual institutions or countries to be identified.

32. It is imperative that all reports present results in a way that is commensurate with the scope and focus of the feasibility study. Given the global interest in AHELO, any results that are published are likely to be interpreted as formal reports, and great care will need to be taken to ensure they are interpreted in an appropriate fashion.

AHELO Technical Report

33. The AHELO Technical Report will summarise all aspects of the AHELO Feasibility Study, and will be released publicly.

34. The AHELO Technical Report will clearly describe all data and statistical conventions and approaches applied in the study, information on matters of test and questionnaire design, field operations, sampling, data adjudication and quality control mechanisms, methodologies used to analyse the data and other technical features of the project will be described at a level of detail that allows researchers to understand its analyses.

AHELO Compendia

35. A range of compendia will be prepared. These compendia will include a set of tables showing statistics for every item in the questionnaires, and the relationship of background variables with performance. The tables will show the percentage of students per category of response and the average performance by assessment and domain for the groups of students in each category.

AHELO Assessment materials

36. As is standard in other assessment projects, sample test items from the discipline tests may be publicly released as examples of test items used. The generic skills test includes only two items, so these will not be released.

37. Assessment frameworks and support information, such as illustrative items, will be released and be accessible to all potential users provided their scope within the feasibility study is clearly acknowledged.

AHELO National Reports

38. The AHELO Feasibility Study will not report results aggregated to the national level, but it will provide countries with the means to produce National Reports that contain institution-specific results.

39. Aggregating results to the national level is not possible because only a convenience sample of institutions is participating. The study has not involved stratifying institutions, selecting them randomly into the study, and ensuring that the sample of institutions reflects the national distribution (although this may have occurred within a national context).

40. It is more appropriate to regard the AHELO Feasibility Study as an ‘international’ or ‘institutional’ study rather than a ‘cross-national’ study.

41. The publication of institution results within a national report is permitted provided that:

- the evaluation of feasibility indicates that such comparisons are meaningful;
- all participating institutions formally agree to have their data published; and
- no international benchmarks are published.

AHELO Institution Reports

42. To assist institutions make best use of AHELO data, institutions will be provided with a detailed diagnostic report of their own results.

43. The AHELO Institution Reports will provide a major means of developing the value of the AHELO Feasibility Study to institutions. Considerable emphasis will be given to their design and production. They will be designed to supplement and enhance existing data on student achievement, graduation rates, industry feedback, teaching quality.

44. Design of the AHELO Institution Report is in its early stages, but it will likely include:

- an executive summary of results and overview of the AHELO Feasibility Study;
- protocols for appropriate use of results;
- institution-level results and criterion-referenced performance profiles (except for the generic skills test, which will not be criterion referenced);
- disciplinary benchmarks (that maintain the confidentiality of countries and institutions);

- breakdowns for any contextual groups (as available given data availability and privacy considerations);
- recommendations for continuous improvement; and
- summary feedback sheets for leaders, faculty and students.

45. There will be no public report of institution results as part of the AHELO Feasibility Study. There will be no report that ranks or compares any institution's results against those of other institutions. This is very important, for such reports could jeopardise the AHELO initiative by conveying the impression that AHELO aims at establishing a new ranking or league table of institutions.

46. It is very important to be transparent about the nature, use and limitations of the AHELO Feasibility Study data and results. Protocols will be developed on how AHELO Feasibility Study data should be used, as well as provide ideas on ways to use the data and results most effectively. Participating institutions will be asked to sign an agreement to ensure that AHELO Feasibility Study results are not to be released in the public domain.

47. The production of AHELO Institution Reports can be managed in various ways. Reports for each institution could be produced centrally by the AHELO Consortium and distributed to NPMs. Alternatively, report templates, databases and manuals could be produced and delivered to NPMs who could use this as a basis for reporting to institutions in their country. A third innovative option, which could usefully underpin the previous two, would be to use the online assessment system to generate programmed institution reports. These reports could be accessed in a secure fashion by NPMs and used as a basis for developing their own customised versions.

AHELO Respondent Reports

48. Institutions will be encouraged but not obliged to provide respondent groups with reports of their own results.

49. Given instrument and sampling characteristics it is more appropriate to prepare general summary feedback sheets for students about the performance of their cohort, rather than detailed individual reports. The assessment is low stakes for students. Thus all students within a target faculty, not just those who sat the test, could use these reports as a broad complement to other records of achievement.

50. Reports that identify the performance of individuals or subgroups will never be made public.

51. While the AHELO Feasibility Study is low stakes for students, providing reports to respondents:

- is recognised as good practice in terms of human research ethics;
- assists greatly with many institutional improvement activities;
- is a major driver of future engagement; and
- provides useful diagnostic information to respondents.

52. Personal data shall be protected at all times. With the possible exception of individual reporting, respondents will not be identified as individuals. The complex identification system that underpins all

sampling, field operations and computer systems means that only personnel within participating institutions are able to match individual responses to personal details.