



# OECD Initiative on Assessing Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO)

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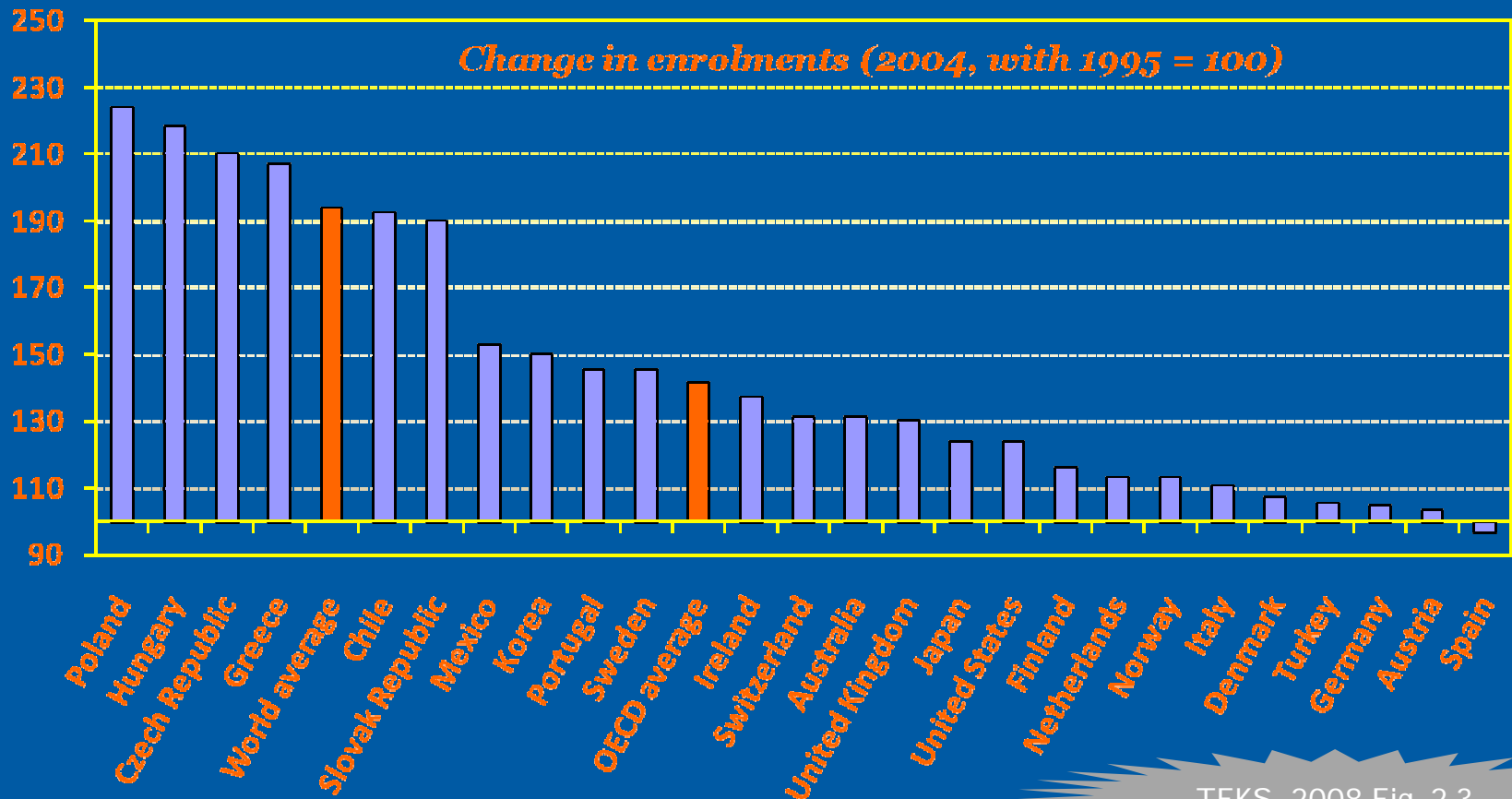
International Association of Universities

Utrecht, *18 July 2008*

# The context: key trends

## 1. Growth

Tertiary education is growing... but in some places much faster than others  
 Pressure on budgets



# The context: key trends

## 2. Diversification of provision

Growth of vocationally-oriented HEIs

Growth of private provision in some countries

## 3. More heterogenous student bodies

Rising participation by female and mature students

More heterogenous socio-economic backgrounds than in the past

## 4. New governance arrangements

Growing autonomy... coupled with greater accountability requirements

Development of quality assurance systems

## 5. New funding arrangements

Diversification of sources (cost-sharing)

Increasing focus on accountability and performance

## 6. Internationalisation

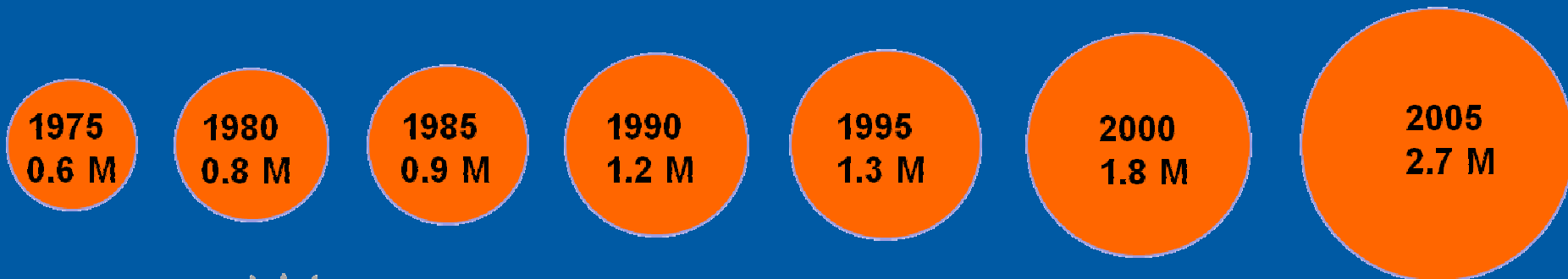
Bologna Process

Internationalisation of curricula

Emergence of cross-border delivery

Growth in international student mobility worldwide

*Long term growth in the number of students enrolled outside their country of citizenship (1975-2005)*

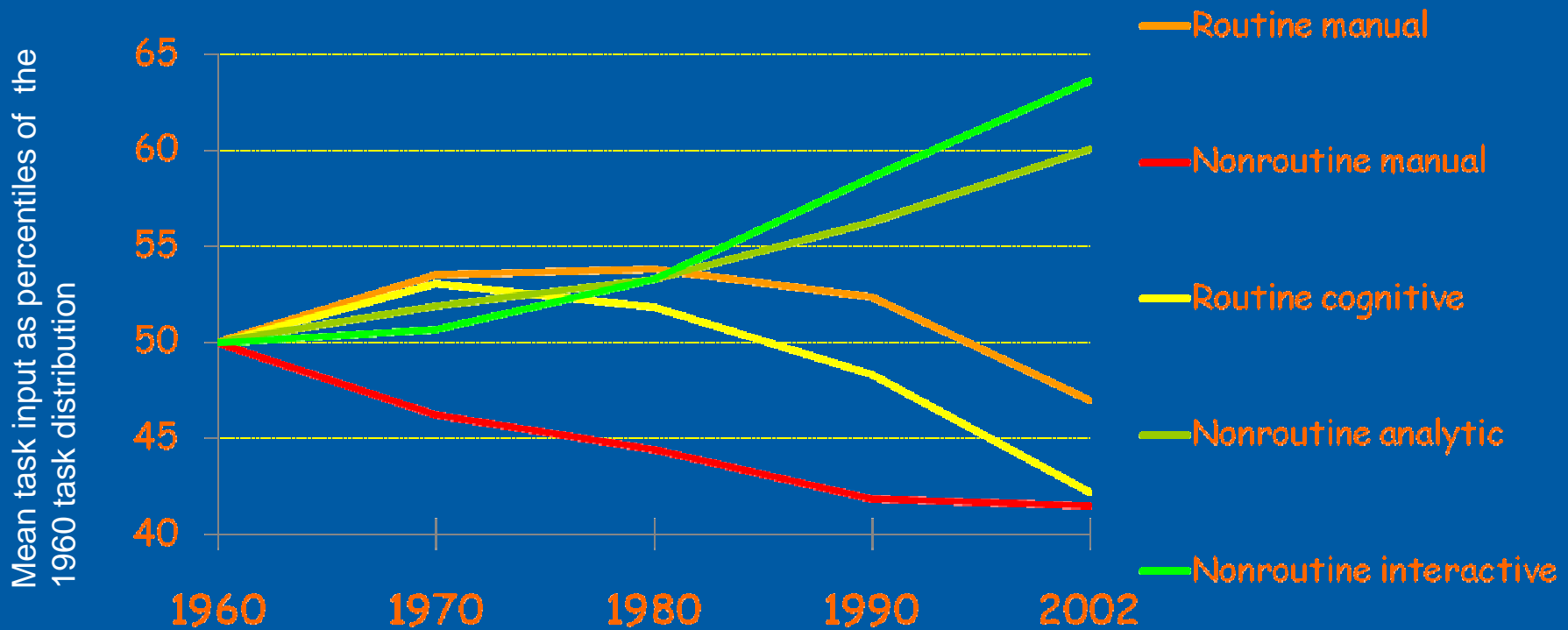


EAG, 2007  
Box C3.1

# The context: key trends

## 7. Change in the demand for skills with the advent of the knowledge economy

*Economy-wide measures of routine and non-routine task input (US)*



# The context: key trends

## 8. Impact of international rankings

Research biased

Need for alternatives to capture learning outcomes

## 9. National and regional drivers

Europe: Bologna Process; development of learning outcomes; 'Tuning' project

USA (1): Spellings Commission; focus on accreditation, accountability, access, affordability

USA (2): culture of testing and assessment; the Collegiate Learning Assessment; NSSE

Japan and Korea: loss of confidence in the quality of tertiary education

China: demand from consumers and those advising them

UK and US especially: demand for relevant customer information

# From quantity to quality

- **These trends point in the same direction**
  - **Greater attention to quality by stakeholders**
    - Students and employers to make better-informed choices
    - HEIs, departments or faculties to better understand their comparative strengths and weaknesses
    - Public policymakers to quantify stocks and flows in high-level skills and to assess the impact of policy decisions.
- **OECD Education Ministers Meeting, Athens (June 2006)**
  - **How to manage this change from quantity to quality**

# Summary: Why this initiative?

- **Information feeding peer pressure and public accountability has become more powerful than legislation and regulation...**  
... makes international comparisons inevitable in a field hitherto primarily of national interest
- **The cost of action is significant...**  
Major challenges to be overcome  
**... but so is the cost of inaction**  
Judgements about tertiary education outcomes will continue to be made on the basis of rankings derived from inputs or research-driven outputs
- **Not a ranking, nor standardisation, but evidence for policy and practice**



# AHELO scope and purpose

- **Our measures need to reflect parts of higher education teaching that relate to quality of outcomes**

Capture what students know and can do in order to

- Provide better information to HEIs, governments, and other stakeholders including students and employers
- Assist HEIs in their development and improvement efforts

- **Challenge of getting the balance right between breadth and depth**

Not everything that is important needs to be dealt with in detail but the complexity and diversity of higher education needs to be reflected

- **Seek measures that are as comparable as possible...**

... but as specific for institutions as necessary

- **Focus coverage as much as feasible...**

... but keep it as large as necessary to be useful for policy formation



# A multidimensional definition of quality

## *Potential users and uses*

- **Stakeholders and information needs**

- Individuals, whether prospective students or employers, may be interested in the *“bottom line” of the performance of HEIs*, departments or faculties
- Individuals, HEIs and policymakers wishing to assess the quality of services provided may be interested in the *“value added” by the HEIs*
- OECD committed to explore both kinds of outcomes measures, but sequentially given the layers of complexity involved in the latter

- **The relevance of contextual data...**

... to make the assessment an effective tool to reveal best practices and to identify shared problems

# A multidimensional definition of quality

*What might we be trying to assess?*

- **Both discipline-related competencies ...**
  - Strengths
    - Easily interpretable in the context of departments and faculties
  - Challenges
    - Requires highly differentiated instruments
    - Excludes competency areas that are not amenable to large-scale assessment or not sufficiently invariant across cultures and languages
  - Menu: Engineering, Economics as a start
- **... as well as transversal higher-order competencies manifested or required in disciplinary contexts**
  - Strengths
    - Less dependent on occupational and cultural contexts, applicable across HEIs
    - Powerful driver for improving the quality of teaching in the disciplines
  - Challenges
    - Reflect cumulative learning outcomes, need to be related to prior learning
    - Does not relate to the kind of subject-matter competencies that many HEIs, departments or faculties would consider their province.

# HEIs as units of analysis

*From whom should we collect data?*

- **Comparative data at system level beyond the scope**
  - Variation in institutional structures across countries
  - Nationally representative samples unrealistic – at least in the short term
  - Large cross-country differences in enrolment rates and system structure raise questions about interpretation of performance measures at national level
- **Focus on measures at the level of HEIs, departments or faculties**
  - Combining the definition of OECD measures of quality with reliable assessment methods to which HEIs could voluntarily subscribe... and which might progressively find wider acceptance.
  - Reporting at institutional (vs student) level to permit wide substantive coverage with a limited response time burden (matrix techniques)

# Some practical considerations

- **Target population**

Collect data near, but before, the end of the first degree (large testing window)

- **Successful institutional participation contingent on meeting international standards for test administration and student participation rates**

- **Computer delivered assessments**

Possibly web-based

- **Describe performance through proficiency levels**

Can do statements

- **What feedback to HEIs?**

Performance profiles and contextual data

Their own results and those of other HEIs (anonymously)

- **What feedback to students?**

How to motivate them?

# The AHELO feasibility study

- **Goal**

... to assess whether reliable cross-national comparisons of higher education learning outcomes are scientifically possible and whether their implementation is feasible

- **Not a pilot!**

Proof of concept AND practicality

Designed to assist countries decide by the end of 2010 whether to pursue the AHELO initiative towards a full-scale pilot

- **OECD role**

Establish broad frameworks that guide international expert committees charged with instrument development in the assessment areas

- **Timeframe 2008-2010**

- **Countries to determine further steps on the basis of the outcomes**

# The AHELO feasibility study

*4 strands of work: carried out independently but coherently*

## 1. Generic skills strand

International pilot test of the US Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA)

To assess the extent to which higher-order skills of the type measured by the CLA can be validly measured across different cultural, linguistic and institutional contexts

## 2. Discipline strand

Engineering and Economics (following experts' advice)

Instruments yet to be determined

## 3. “Value added” or “Learning gain” measurement strand

Exploring the issue of VA measurement conceptually from several perspectives

Examination and analysis of existing data sources, methodologies and psychometric evidence

## 4. Contextual strand

Development of contextual information indicators at institutional level – about the institutions and about the students

# The AHELO feasibility study

*For each strand involving a pilot*

- 3-4 countries and 10 HEIs per country
- Seeking to ensure diversity
  - Geographically
    - Ideally 1 Asia-Pacific, 2 Europe, 1 North America
  - Linguistically
    - Anglo-Saxon, Asian, Latin...
  - Culturally
    - Latin, Nordic, Eastern European, Asian...
  - In the types of HEIs
    - Universities vs vocationally-oriented HEIs, research-intensive vs teaching focus, elite...
- Proof of concept of international validity and reliability of instrument



# The AHELO feasibility study

## *Current status*

- **Circulation of roadmap**
- **Invitation to countries for participation**

Deadline end-August

Cost per country 150K over 2009-2010 + national implementation costs (100-400K depending on strands)

- **Fundraising**
- **Communication and consultation**

# The AHELO feasibility study

## *Governance and management*

- **Education Policy Committee**

OECD member countries and observers

Strategic direction for EDU work

Political oversight on AHELO (decision beyond feasibility study phase)

- **Institutional Management in Higher Education (IMHE)  
Governing Board**

Institutions, agencies, governments

Responsible for managing the AHELO feasibility study → joint steering

- **Group of National Experts of those directly involved and expert groups working on various strands**

# The AHELO feasibility study

## *Next steps*

- Allocation of participating countries to various strands
- Planning for field implementation in the various strands
- Securing funding

Countries and foundations

- Developing instruments for the different strands with international experts

Selection of instruments, translation, cultural adaptation, development of computer platform *etc.*

- Establishment of networks of experts
- More discussion and debate

IMHE General Conference, 8-10 September 2008, Paris

Outcomes of higher education: quality, relevance and impact

Thank you

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