

Research title	Research on the Impact of Learning Outcomes Assessment
Period	FY2009-FY2011 (April 2009 – March 2012)
Objectives	To investigate the intended and unintended impacts of introducing OECD's "Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO)"
Methodology	This study adopts a cross-national comparative approach (Japan, China, South Korea, Taiwan, the USA, the UK, Germany, France, Ireland, and Mexico). A country's higher education quality assurance system is comprised of multiple and complimentary approaches including learning outcomes assessment, and the ways in which countries combine and emphasize these approaches vary significantly. This study aims to identify how learning outcomes assessment is introduced and implemented in each country. The study examines how discussions among government, organizations, and universities regarding learning outcomes assessment, its preparation, and actual implementation generate changes in teaching and learning environments, governance and management structures, and existing quality assurance schemes.
Major outcomes and findings	In all of the countries examined in this study, efforts were being made to incorporate competence based quality assurance schemes. Their diverse approaches can be categorized into two broad types. The first type pursues a loose standardization of the scope and level of university education by incorporating systems designed to indicate the compatibility and comparability of credits and degrees, such as the ECTS and Qualifications Framework, and by requiring the attainment of learning outcomes for the conferral of credits and degrees. When degree programs are based on a shared competence framework, the evaluation of student performance conducted on a daily basis serves the function of learning outcomes assessment for quality assurance. In many of these countries, the principle of program design is shifting from "teacher centered" to "student centered" with the introduction of learning outcomes assessment. The second type conducts standardized assessment of learning outcomes on their graduating students. Since standardized assessment must be applicable to diverse programs, its assessment framework is abstract, and does not correspond directly to the competence framework on which degree programs are based on. Such assessment has proved to be of limited validity in assuring the quality of degree programs. Based on the recognition of the strengths and weaknesses of learning outcomes assessment, ongoing efforts are being made to develop more sophisticated tools.
Contributions to education policy	This study shows that there are two approaches to competence based quality assurance of higher education that differ in when standardization is introduced. OECD-AHELO (Engineering strand) is a learning outcomes assessment based on a shared competence framework. As such, it serves the above mentioned two functions at the same time. The development of a common test that corresponds to what is being taught in degree programs was made possible in the field of engineering because an internationally shared competence framework already exists. This situation does not apply to other fields of study. What are the implications that can be drawn from this study regarding the impact of introducing AHELO? Because AHELO can potentially provide concrete information about the effectiveness of degree programs, its introduction may provide opportunities for faculty to reflect on their educational approaches and explore ways to assist the learning of their students. However, in order for this to happen, the assessment tools and scoring rubrics must be made fully accessible to faculty.