

TUNING EDUCATIONAL STRUCTURES IN EUROPE

A pilot project supported by the European Commission in the framework of the Socrates programme

The Bologna Declaration

The Bologna Declaration of June 1999 calls for the establishment by 2010 of a coherent, compatible and competitive European Higher Education Area, attractive for European students and for students and scholars from other continents. The European Education Ministers identified six action lines in Bologna and they have added three more in Prague in May 2001:

1. Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees
2. Adoption of a system essentially based on two cycles
3. Establishment of a system of credits
4. Promotion of mobility
5. Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance
6. Promotion of the European dimension in higher education
7. Lifelong learning
8. Higher education institutions and students
9. Promoting the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area

The Bologna process addresses not only national governments, responsible for the education systems in their countries. The process also addresses the higher education sector, the individual universities, their associations and networks. Many universities have started preparing Bologna reforms in their institutions before being obliged to do so by their governments.

In fact, the European universities have declared at their Convention in Salamanca in March 2001 that: 'European higher education institutions recognise that their students need and demand qualifications which they can use effectively for the purpose of their studies and careers all over Europe. The institutions and their networks and organisations acknowledge their role and responsibility in this regard, and confirm their willingness to organise themselves accordingly within the framework of autonomy'. And furthermore: 'Higher education institutions endorse the move towards a compatible qualification framework based on the main articulation in undergraduate and postgraduate studies'.

The university response through Tuning

In the summer of 2000, a group of universities has taken up the Bologna challenge collectively and designed a pilot project called "Tuning educational structures in Europe". They have asked the European University Association EUA to help widen the group of participants and they have asked the European Commission for grant support in the framework of the Socrates programme.

The Tuning project addresses several of the Bologna action lines and notably the adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, the adoption of a system based on two cycles and the establishment of a system of credits. The Tuning project contributes also to the realisation of the other Bologna action lines.

More specifically, the project aims at identifying points of reference for generic and subject-specific competences of first and second cycle graduates in a series of subject areas: Business Administration, Chemistry, Education Sciences, Geology, History, Mathematics and Physics. Competences describe learning outcomes: what a learner knows or is able to demonstrate after the completion of a learning process. This concerns both subject specific competences and generic competences, like communication skills and leadership. University staff, students and employers have been consulted on the competences they expect from graduates.

Competences are described as points of reference for curriculum design and evaluation, not as straightjackets. They allow flexibility and autonomy in the construction of curricula. At the same time, they provide a common language for describing what curricula are aiming at.

Some 100 institutions participated in phase one of the project (2000-2002), representing the EU and EEA countries. The project is being co-ordinated by the University of Deusto, Spain and the University of Groningen, The Netherlands. Tuning builds on earlier experiences of co-operation in Socrates-Erasmus Thematic Networks and the ECTS pilot projects. It is expected that the results of Tuning will be of interest to higher education systems, institutions and programmes across Europe.

The name *Tuning* has been chosen for the project to reflect the idea that universities do not look for harmonisation of their degree programmes or any sort of unified, prescriptive or definitive European curricula but simply for points of reference, convergence and common understanding. The protection of the rich diversity of European education has been paramount in the Tuning project from the very start and the project in no way seeks to restrict the independence of academic and subject specialists, or damage local and national academic authority.

The Tuning methodology

In the framework of the Tuning project a methodology has been designed to understand curricula and to make them comparable. Four lines of approach have been chosen:

1) generic competences, 2) subject-specific competences, 3) the role of ECTS as an accumulation system and 4) the role of learning, teaching, assessment and performance in relation to quality assurance and evaluation. In the first phase of the Tuning project the emphasis has been on the first three lines. The fourth line received less attention due to time constraint, but will be central in the second phase of the project (2003-2004).

Each line has been developed according to a defined process. The starting point was updated information about the state of the art at European level. This information was then reflected upon and discussed by teams of experts in the seven subject related areas. It is the work in these teams validated by related European networks that provided understanding, context and conclusions which could be valid at European level. All together, the four lines of approach allow universities to “*tune*” their curricula without losing their autonomy and their capacity to innovate.

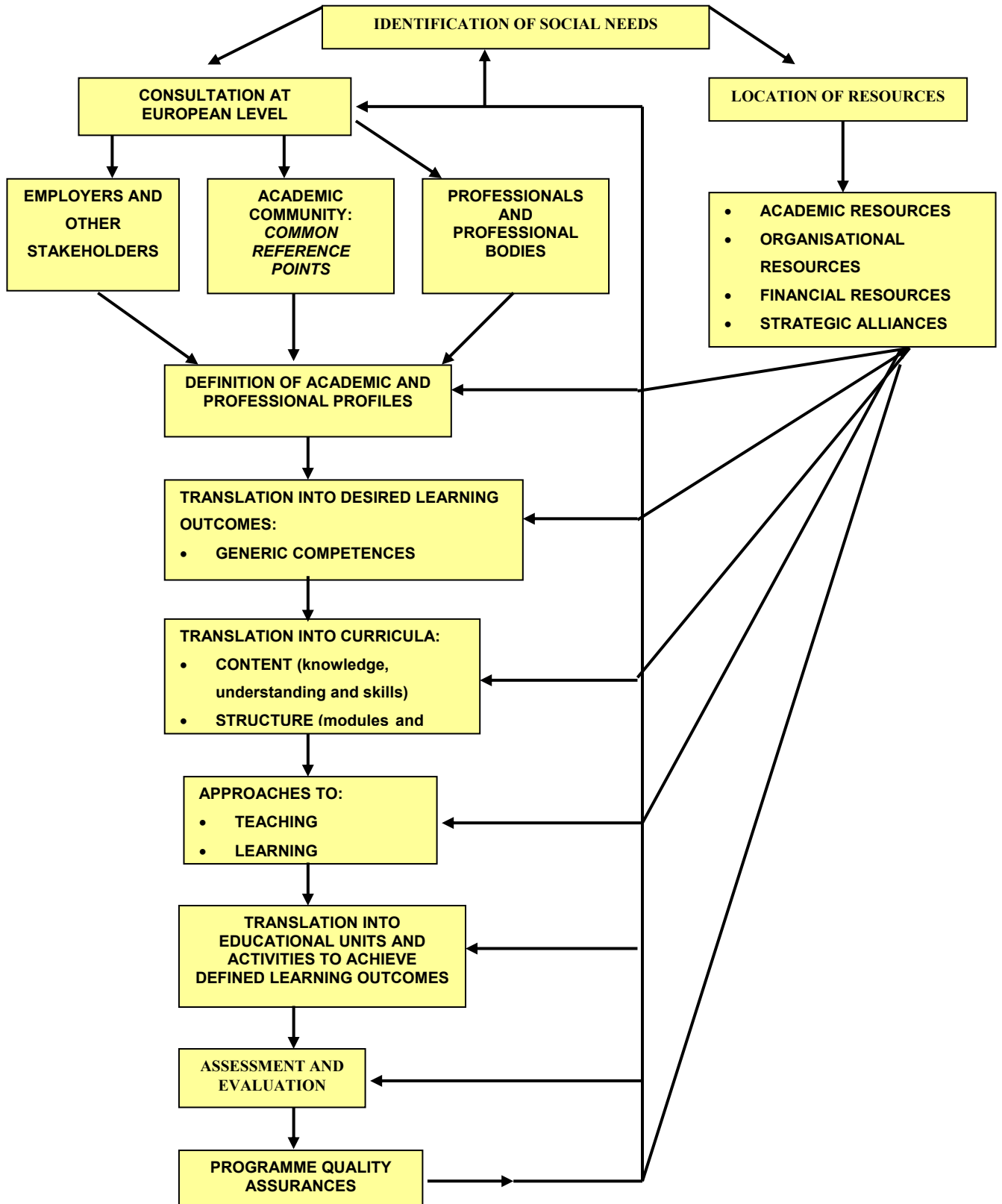
Furthermore Tuning has developed a model for designing, planning and implementing curricula offered jointly by one, two or more institutions. The main steps in the process for designing a study programme or an (international) integrated programme / joint degree is the following according to the Tuning model:

1. Meeting the basic conditions:
 - Is there commitment of the institutions concerned? In what terms: an (official) agreement or a strategic alliance?
 - Is there sufficient guarantee that the programme will be recognised legally?

- Is there agreement with regard to the length of the programme to be designed in terms of ECTS-credits based on student workload?
 - Has the social need for a joint programme on a European level been identified? Has this been done on the basis of a consultation of stakeholders: employers, professionals and professional bodies?
 - Is the programme of sufficient interest from the academic point of view. Have common reference points been identified?
 - Are the necessary resources for the programme available inside or, if required, outside the partner institutions concerned.
2. Definition of academic and professional profiles.
 3. Description of the objectives of the programme as well as the learning outcomes (in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills) that have to be met.
 4. Identification of the generic and subject-related competencies which should be obtained in the programme.
 5. Translation into the curriculum: content (topics to be covered) and structure (modules and credits)
 6. Deciding the approaches to teaching and learning (types of methods, techniques and formats), as well as the methods of assessment (when required, the development of teaching material)
 7. Translation into educational units and activities to achieve the defined learning outcomes.
 8. Design of a programme of quality assurance.

This process is reflected in the following flow chart:

**THE TUNING MODEL
FOR EUROPEAN COMPARABLE DEGREES**



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Tuning phase II

The second phase of the Tuning project (2003-2004) is based on the outcomes of the first phase (2000-2002). In its second phase the project will consolidate its findings together with a series of stakeholders (professional associations, employers, quality assurance agencies etc.), extend its scope to pre-accession and candidate countries, to other fields (inter-disciplinary and professionally oriented disciplines) and transfer its methodology to the Socrates-Erasmus Thematic Networks. Phase II of the project will give special attention to Tuning line 4: the role of learning, teaching, assessment and performance in relation to the new line 5 Quality assurance and evaluation.

A more general ambition of the Tuning project is to be a platform for the exchange of experience and knowledge between countries, higher education institutions and staff with regard to the implementation of the Bologna process at Europe-wide level. To facilitate further transparency in the educational structures and to further innovation, through communication of experience and identification of good practice, in order to produce convergence in higher education teaching in Europe.

For this, Tuning will act in a co-ordinated manner with all the actors involved in the process of tuning educational structures in Europe: universities and university staff (EUA), students (ESIB), other higher education institutions (EURASHE), Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agencies (ENQA), the Bologna Follow-up Group, Ministries of Education, the European Commission, employers and Professional Associations.

Activities of phase II

Validation and consolidation

- Fine-tuning the results of lines 1 and 2 (identifying point of reference for generic competences and subject specific competences of first and second cycle graduates, including level descriptors) in the subject areas Business, Chemistry, Education Sciences, Geology, History, Mathematics and Physics. These reference points for common curricula on the basis of agreed competences would enhance recognition and European integration of diplomas. They should be made operational for distance learning and lifelong learning as well.
- Validation of the results of lines 1 and 2 together with the main stakeholders: universities, employers, professional associations, students, quality assurance and accreditation agencies.
- Associate existing and future Socrates Erasmus Thematic Networks by offering the outcomes and experience of the Tuning Pilot project for further development and updating within these networks, which operate as platforms for consultation with other stakeholders.

New Activities

- To fine-tune the general methodology for measuring workload developed as part of phase I of Tuning, to make this methodology operational and to test it at the level of subject areas.
- To establish a link between competences and ECTS credits and to test the use of the ECTS as a tool for curriculum design.
- To develop of the role of different approaches regarding teaching, learning, assessment and performance within the framework of curriculum design.

New Partners, New Fields

- To open the Tuning process to more applied universities.
- To open the Tuning process to institutions in the pre-accession and candidate countries.

- To identify generic and subject-specific competences (skills, knowledge, content) in two new areas: Nursing (applied sciences) and European Studies (interdisciplinary studies) and, by doing so, to create two new European networks that can present examples of good practice, encouraging innovation and quality in the joint reflection and exchange, also for comparable fields.

Participation in phase II

In Tuning phase I mainly universities in the traditional sense were selected. This was done in order to match best the subject areas selected and to have a comparable type of institution in the different countries. Well-mapped subject areas from five scientific fields were chosen to avoid further complication of the project. It was expected that the benchmarking of professional profiles and desired outcomes, in terms of knowledge, skills and competences would be easier for this type of disciplines.

Now this approach has proven to be successful, a new challenge is to apply the Tuning outcomes to different types of subject areas. In phase II of the project the Tuning methodology will be implemented in two new subject areas: an interdisciplinary programme for which *European Studies* has been selected and an applied science, for which *Nursing* has been chosen. These should serve as examples for comparable types of subject areas. Another important task will be to extend the project to the pre-accession and candidate countries.

Therefore, the existing Inner circle of some 100 institutions is enlarged with another 30 institutions of which 15 will come from pre-accession and candidate countries. Furthermore, to each of the existing area groups one institution from a pre-accession or candidate country has been added. The existing institutions will continue to work on the methodology developed in phase I, but they will concentrate on a number of specific problems that have remained.

More information

The papers of the Closing Conference, held in Brussels 31 May 2002, the Final Report and Conclusions of Tuning Phase I, which was published in April 2003, as well as other information, can be found on the web sites of the two co-ordinating universities:

University of Deusto, Bilbao (Spain): www.relint.deusto.es/TuningProject/index.htm

University of Groningen (The Netherlands): www.let.rug.nl/TuningProject/index.htm

These websites can also be reached from the Europa server of the European Commission:
<http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/Tuning.html>

More information about the project can also be obtained from the following e-mail addresses:

University of Deusto: pbeneito@relint.deusto.es

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Bilbao and Groningen, May 2003
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