



## BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE TUNING PROCESS

### TUNING EDUCATIONAL STRUCTURES IN EUROPE

#### A pilot-project in the framework of the EU-programme Socrates-Erasmus,

##### Introduction

*Tuning Educational Structures in Europe* is a very ambitious project. The rationale behind it is the implementation of the process following the Bologna Declaration of 1999 at a university level by making use of the experiences built up in the ERASMUS programme and SOCRATES programme since 1985. In this respect, in particular *the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)* is of importance. The project focuses on generic and subject-specific competences of *first* and *second cycle* graduates. In addition, it has a direct impact on academic recognition, quality assurance and control, compatibility of study programmes on European level, distance learning and lifelong learning. In other words: all issues mentioned in the Prague Communiqué of June 2001 are addressed by the project. It is expected that in the intermediate and longer run the results of the project will affect most if not all European Higher Education institutions and programmes in general, and educational structures and programmes in particular.

##### Focus on structures and content

The Tuning project does not pay attention to educational systems, but to educational structures and content of studies. Whereas educational systems are primarily the responsibility of governments, educational structures and content are that of higher education institutions.

As a result of the Bologna Declaration the educational systems in most European countries are in the process of reforming. This is the direct effect of the political decision to converge the different national systems in Europe. For higher education institutions these reforms mean the actual starting point for another discussion: the *tuning* of curricula in terms of structures, programmes and actual teaching. In this reform process the required professional profiles and needs of society (should) play an important role. But this is not sufficient. Equally important is the expression of the level of education in terms of competences and learning outcomes.

The Tuning project also needs to be seen in the context of the Convention that the European universities held in Salamanca in March 2001. There, they declared that: 'European higher education institutions recognise that their student 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'.

##### Why the name *Tuning*?

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 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 objectives are the contrary: Tuning looks for common reference points.

*Tuning* has been designed as an independent university driven project, which is co-ordinated by university staff members from different countries. The participating higher education institutions cover all EU and EFTA

countries. The European Commission and the institutions involved finance the project. For phase one of the project (2000-2002) an Inner Circle and an Outer Circle of institutions were established. The Inner Circle consists of five so-called subject area groups, *Business Administration*, *Education Sciences*, *Geology*, *History* and *Mathematics*, which holds a total of 76 higher educational institutions. Two thematic networks, *Physics* and *Chemistry*, work closely together with the project as the groups six and seven making up a total of around 100 institutions.

### **Tuning methodology**

In the framework of the Tuning project a methodology has been designed to understand curricula and to make them comparable. As part of the methodology higher education teaching has been divided into two main elements: generic competences and subject-specific competences (skills, knowledge and content). For each of the mentioned subject areas these elements have been described in terms of reference points: learning outcomes and competences to be met. The beautiful thing of (comparable) competences and learning outcomes is that they allow flexibility and autonomy in the construction of curricula. At the same time, they are the basis for formulating so-called common(ly understood) level indicators.

In total four lines of approach have been distinguished: 1) generic competences and 2) subject-specific competences (skills, knowledge and content), 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 control. 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 the time constraint but will be central in the second phase of the project (2003-2004).

Each line, in turn, has been developed according to a defined process. The starting point was updated information about the state of the art at the European level. This information was then reflected upon and discussed by teams of experts in the seven subject related areas. These teams were made of people from each of the EU and EFTA countries. It is the work in these teams validated by related European networks that provided understanding, context and conclusions, which could be valid at a European level.

More detailed information about the initial outcomes and conclusions can be found on the Websites of the two universities which co-ordinate the Tuning project:

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

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

Information regarding QUAACAS can be found at [http://elixir.bham.ac.uk/menu/quaacas\\_frameset.htm](http://elixir.bham.ac.uk/menu/quaacas_frameset.htm)

Information about ELFA can be found at : <http://www.elfa-afde.org/>

### **Tuning Phase II: Aims and Objectives**

In 2003 the second phase of the Tuning project will start. This phase is based on the outcomes of the first phase of the project (2000-2002), which have been made public at its Closing Meeting on 31 May 2002 in Brussels. The actual results will be published in January 2003.

The first aim of the Project Tuning phase II is to develop further approaches regarding teaching, learning, assessment and performance and to link-up Tuning outcomes with quality assurance and assessment as well as with professional bodies. Furthermore, it is thought necessary that the methodology and results of the lines 1 to 3 are updated and refined. In addition, the outcomes should be made operational for distance learning and lifelong learning.

For the Tuning project phase I mainly universities in the traditional sense were selected. This was done for two reasons: 1) to match best the subject areas selected and 2) to have a comparable type of institutions 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.

Therefore, the second major task of phase II of the project will be the implementation of the Tuning methodology to 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.

So far, only higher education institutions from EU and EFTA countries participate in the programme.

A third important task will be to extend the project to the *accession countries*. Therefore, the existing Inner circle of some 100 institutions (including those who participate in the subjects of Chemistry and Physics) will be enlarged with another 30 institutions of which 15 will come from Central European countries. 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.

Besides these three main purposes of the project, another achievement of phase I should be part of, and further developed in phase II: the offering of 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 on a Europe-wide level. This includes the further development and implementation of the European transfer and accumulation system ECTS on the basis of described competences and learning outcomes.

The main aims and objectives of the project can be summarised as follows:

#### *Validation and consolidation*

- Fine-tuning and validation of the results of Action lines 1 and 2 (generic competences and subject specific competences of first and second cycle graduates and level descriptors) of the Tuning phase I Pilot Project together with the main stakeholders: universities (Socrates-Erasmus Thematic Networks), employers, professional associations, students, quality assurance and accreditation agencies.
- To associate existing and future 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 the Tuning project and 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 further stimulate a high level of Europe-wide convergence in Higher Education in at least the subject areas Business, Education Sciences, Geology, History and Mathematics (and probably also Chemistry and Physics) by developing reference points for common curricula on the basis of agreed competences, enhancing in this way the recognition and European integration of diplomas.
- The identification (of the importance) 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 accession countries.
- To identify generic and subject-specific competences (skills, knowledge, content) and skills 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.

#### *General*

- 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.
- To act in a co-ordinated manner with all the actors involved in the process of tuning of educational structures, in particular the Bologna follow-up group, Ministries of Education, Conferences of Rectors (including the EUA), other associations (EURASHE), Quality Assurance Organisations and Accreditation Bodies, as well as Universities.

### **Call for participation in Law February 2005 (via the Quaacas Committee of ELFA)**

A Call will be launched for participation in the LAW phase of the Tuning project.

For submitting an application a specially designed form has to be used. It should accompany this background document. The Call, basic information about the project and the required form will be distributed widely. From 27 February 2005, the information can also be obtained from the following e-mail address:

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