Co-operation in Higher Education between the United States of America and the European Union to produce a robust methodology to evaluate the application of the Tuning approach

Negotiated procedure EAC/59/2010

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This is the Executive Summary of the final report on the outcomes of the contract (number EAC-2010-1243): "Co-operation in Higher education between the United States and the European Union to produce a robust methodology to evaluate the application of the Tuning approach". The report has been prepared (as the whole project formulation, set up and execution has) in cooperation with the Lumina Foundation for Education.

The concept of formulating a set of evaluation instruments and processes that could be used across the boundaries of national, state, regional higher education systems was born out of the Tuning USA Pilot Project (see below) and the close relationship that naturally had with Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. The need for such instruments had been recognised in Europe and this co-operation proved to be the fruitful bed for this study. This was then mooted at the EU-US Educational Policy Forum in Brussels in 2010. The project was launched in the spring of 2011. A work in progress report was made to the US-EU Education Policy Forum in Washington D.C. in November 2011.

Process and methodology

The study was based on a two pronged approach, namely:

(1) To design a robust methodology, based on qualitative and quantitative parameters, to measure the effects of applying the Tuning approach to degree programmes, teaching staff, students and graduates, and

(2) A focus on a comparison of the processes and outcomes of the development of conceptual frameworks in the subject areas of history and physics, which should result in an alignment of academic standards and reference points. This undertaking should serve as a model for other subject areas.

A US evaluation team (comprising persons from Lumina Foundation for Education and its contracted lead organization on Tuning USA – the Institute for Evidence Based Change) has worked in collaboration with faculty (mainly from Utah because of its high state of development in Tuning USA) and the European Team. The teams (EU Study Team, funded through the above EU Study, and Tuning USA Study Team, funded by Lumina Foundation for Education) summary is:

- Tuning Educational Structures in Europe is a university-driven project which offers a universal approach to subject development at institutional and subject levels. The Tuning approach consists of a methodology to (re-)design, develop, implement and evaluate study programmes for each level of post-secondary degrees (the three

Bologna cycles). Tuning serves as a platform for developing reference points at subject area level.

- The reference points are relevant for making programmes of studies comparable, compatible and transparent. These reference points are expressed in terms of learning outcomes and competences, distinguishing between generic, transversal and subject-specific ones.
- The Tuning methodology has created interest around the world as well as within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The broader "Tuning family" encompasses projects related directly to, and being guided directly by, what is generally referred to as the Tuning Co-ordination group (University of Deusto and the University of Groningen including the Tuning Academy) and those projects, university adaptations and so forth that have encompassed the Tuning methodology (often in part rather than in total) and have sought to redefine their curriculum using the reference points and approach to learning outcomes and competences on the basis of student-centred learning. The former are easier to map and keep track of, the latter are virtually impossible to map and keep track of in any ordered way. The scale of Tuning adaptations across the EHEA, whilst impossible to quantify or systematically evaluate, is estimated to be large.
- In the USA the private Lumina Foundation for Education, has, as a part of its Big Goal to achieve 60% of Americans with high quality degrees by 2025. The foundation funded a number of analytical tracts of the Bologna Process and projects (Tuning USA) and discussion working documents in the last two years with the help of U.S. and European higher education experts.
- The Tuning USA pilot project (2009) involved three states (Minnesota, Indiana and Utah) and six disciplines (biology, chemistry, education, history, physics and graphic design) with a mix of two-year, four-year, public and private institutions. The initial pilot project was completed in August 2010. This evaluation project builds on the reports of 2 subjects/disciplines and the work in 2 states (Utah and Indiana).
- The danger of categorizing the EHEA as homogenous or the United States as homogenous was avoided because of the strength of experience, knowledge and understanding of the two teams. However, notwithstanding this there were errors in interpretation of terminology and context along the way and great care had to be taken to ensure that a word, term or description of role were understood and thus able to be compared and contrasted.
- In the United States evaluation (qualitative and quantitative) is a *sine qua non* of projects and thus it was natural for the US Team to take a lead on developing instruments for evaluation. What was equally clear was that, as with all higher

education work, recognition of the context is of paramount importance. Any attempt for "one size fits all" would be doomed to failure.

- Information is needed that is not only of relevance for the degree programmes, but also for continuing education (qualifications frameworks) as well as employability related issues (time needed to find employment after graduation, level of employment, career path).
- A series of meetings took place to enable the end product deliverables to be arrived at.

Core Instruments

With regard to the design of a robust evaluation methodology:

- Three core instruments were eventually identified as necessary to capture core data, namely:
  (a) Tuning Impact Survey – this is for academic staff (faculty) and management and administration in universities.
  (b) Tuning Student Survey – for current students.
  (c) Tuning Graduate Employment Survey - the spine for this survey had its origins at the University of Groningen Faculty of Arts from which the current (new) instrument was developed (see Appendix 2 of the Finall Report).
- Two of the core instruments, the Tuning Impact Survey and the Student Survey (also see Appendix 2) were developed taking in to consideration the contextual complexities: culture, language, role definition, cycles, diversity of institutions etc.
- It was essential to achieve instruments that addressed the core issues (change and development), were flexible (able to deal with different respondents) and captured a mix of qualitative and quantitative data.

Next Steps

- The evaluation of completion rates remains as an issue to be tackled in the follow up stages to this project, in all systems the formal length of the degree, the average length of study to completion and the reasons for the difference (if there is a difference, which there often is) are complex and bound up in, inter alia, funding, degree structures, advice received, credit requirements and frameworks.
- There will also be a need to participate in and monitor the movement to scale use of the instruments and the collection and subsequent analysis of the data.
- The "Venn approach" recognises the need for core instruments as well as additional methodologies that might be needed in different contexts.

- To this end it is recognised that further work will need to be done to design qualitative instruments consisting of interviews and (group) meetings of those directly involved in the teaching and learning process and its outcomes on the basis of a standardised procedure and set(s) of questions.
- The core elements are: data, behaviour and opinion collection and analysis. This will give valid points of comparison and valid reference points. The fact that the methodology is developed and tested in and by two parties, the European Union and the United States, with different cultural, economic and social settings gives global significance to the project outcomes.
- The required follow up process has:

    - The completion of the final pilot versions (see Appendix 2 for the agreed and final pilot versions)
    - A small scale pilot of the surveys both in the USA and Europe with either history or physics groups, to test whether a cold user finds the survey understandable, focused and usable (July 2012).
    - Adjust the instruments in the light of feedback (August/September 2012)
    - Re-pilot the instruments on a slightly larger scale in both the USA and Europe (October 2012)
    - Adjust the instruments in the light of feedback (November/December 2012)
    - Establish a small Steering Committee to have oversight of the evaluation going forward, reporting back to both Tuning Europe and Tuning USA (on behalf of the Lumina Foundation)
    - Roll out the surveys (March 2013) – this then to be repeated on an annual basis.

Comparison of Subjects

With regard to the subjects:

- The two subject groups identified as being best positioned for the project (history and physics), took this opportunity to focus in on their own subject and to analyse the methodology, reference points, outcomes arrived at - similarities and differences. Naturally the groups reported back in a style framed by their subject methodology and the slightly diverse approaches are a good reflection of using the same analytical instruments and frameworks and producing subject specific outcomes.
- As an overall conclusion the physics group stressed the fact that by being in contact, Europe – USA, they were able to develop a common educational “language” and where there are differences, to know better how to “translate” and interpret them. Lessons

have been learned to be able to appreciate the educational approach of one another, there is a shared conviction that both will benefit from future common projects.

- The physicists made a detailed analysis of the approaches taken to, for example, Learning Outcomes and the consultation with stakeholders.
- The history group felt that there are notable differences in how the expression 'Tuning' has been understood on the two sides of the Atlantic. Some of the reasons for these differences are quite clear, and depend on the different institutional, cultural and political contexts in which the various takes on Tuning have been elaborated.
- The historians felt that only the first two of the five Tuning 'lines' were implemented, those regarding the general and the subject specific competences. The other themes (student workload based credits as a planning and quality tool, the exploration of approaches to learning, teaching and assessment and their alignment with the required competences, and finally the Tuning Quality Cycle and the creation of tools for embedding 'quality culture' in institutions) whilst discussed were not taken in to the project.

Conclusions

- The longitudinal nature of the evaluation of what in itself is a longitudinal process – Tuning- must be stressed.
- The project provided the basis to exchange ideas, build academic trust, investigate the respective varied contexts of higher education, negotiate and navigate their way through terminological and linguistic differences.
- The groups have emerged, at this point, with a clearer understanding of the frameworks that history and physics operate in – this will provide invaluable aid to those operating in the field in the future
- Three instruments for the evaluation of the Tuning process have been developed including on-line skip logic versions for ease of use and analysis. The ground made has been significant and will provide a valuable, robust methodology to collect data, analyse trends and make evidence based decisions.