

TUNING Educational Programmes in Russian HEIs: Curricula design in the Bologna context

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Introduction: problem-setting

Last decade the educational system of Russia is in the process of reforming which has been to a certain extent provoked by the collapse of the Soviet Union. Searching for its way to modernize the higher education system, in 2003 Russia signed the Bologna Declaration thus making explicit its commitment to the aims of integration into the European higher education area.

From the political perspective Bologna signatory countries expressed strong concerns about:

- European Economic Area not underpinned by EHEA,
- Competitiveness of European economy,
- Labour force not sufficiently flexible.

On the other side, Higher Education Institutions (*further – HEIs*) were concerned about:

- Attracting sufficient students for degree programmes,
- High dropout rate in many countries,
- Social responsibility regarding under-represented groups,
- Transparency of educational offers (degree programmes),
- Mismatch of content of programmes and needs of society (accountability and responsiveness),
- Transnational cooperation and recognition issues,
- Competitiveness of European HE degree programmes in global perspective,
- Quality of degree programmes.

For Russia that political decision meant the actual starting point for a long-term discussion: the comparability and transparency of curricula in terms of structures, programmes and actual teaching.

The TUNING project: main idea, key phases and results

TUNING Educational Structures in Europe started in 2000 as a project to link the political objectives of the Bologna Process and at a later stage the Lisbon Strategy to the higher educational sector, namely:

- To involve academics in the Bologna Process at subject area level,
- To make Higher Education in Europe highly competitive at world level,
- Make students better employable,
- Enhance structures for mobility and recognition,
- Raise awareness about importance of citizenship,
- To develop a common language for all stakeholders,
- Europe wide introduction of Learning Outcomes and Competences approach,
- Raise awareness about importance of generic competences besides subject specific ones,
- To transfer the European credit system (ECTS) into a student workload based credit accumulation and transfer system,
- Raising awareness of the importance of quality in process and delivery,
- Responds to growing demands of a lifelong learning society which requires more flexibility and differentiation.¹

The TUNING project is a project developed *by and for* HEIs – academics and students. The project respects diversity of the educational systems, cultures and programmes that is reflected in its motto: “*Tuning of educational structures and programmes on the basis of diversity and autonomy*”.

¹ Tuning Management Committee. Tuning Educational Structures in Europe and beyond: from project to process. Presentation, 2009.

Over time TUNING has developed into a *process*, an approach to (re-) design, develop, implement, evaluate and enhance quality of educational programmes. TUNING focuses on educational structures (instead of educational systems) and the content of studies, which are primarily the responsibility of HEIs and their academic staff.

In particular, the TUNING project offers:

- A transparent way to (re-)design degree programmes based on the concept of student-centred learning,
- A language understood by all stakeholders (employers, professionals and academics),
- An approach respecting and allowing for differentiation / diversity,
- An approach for developing flexible and diverse degree programmes in a Life Long Learning context,
- Shared reference points (not standards) at subject area level,
- Methodology for high standard degree programmes in terms of process and outcomes.²

The TUNING project started in 2000 in Europe and now involves more than 55 countries all over the world:

- 2000: Tuning Europe,
- 2003: Tuning Latin America,
- 2005: Ukraine and Kyrgyz Republic,
- 2006: Russia,
- 2007: Georgia,
- 2008: Belarus, Moldavia, India and Japan,
- 2009: USA. Taiwan and Australia express their interest.

The project is jointly coordinated by the University of Groningen (the Netherlands) and Deusto University (Bilbao, Spain).

Key results of the TUNING project have a special significance for integration of educational systems and raising the quality of educational programmes in Europe and worldwide:

- Universities all over the world have recognized the need for change.
- TUNING offers consistent methodology and powerful tools for enhancing quality in programme design and delivery that were validated and can be used by institutions and their staff everywhere to manage programme development in the Bologna context in an effective way that fosters learner-centred cultures.
- Subject specific and Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks, identifying generic and subject specific reference points for (re-)designing educational programmes, have been elaborated.
- Tuning has gathered and elaborated examples of good practice coming from a variety of countries and subject areas.
- A series of information, dissemination and implementation activities is performed on a regular basis, including establishing of Tuning Information Points (starting with model points in Europe and Latin America); distribution of information and instruction materials in several European languages, as well as in Russian, Kyrgyz and Japanese; organization of National Tuning Dissemination and Information Conferences.

TUNING methodology: quality cycle, key concepts

In 2005 when the idea of TUNING-Russia appeared, Russian HEIs, as well as education authorities, needed a clear, easy understandable and applicable approach to design and modernize educational programmes responding to the current social, economic and educational challenges local and international challenges. Here the experience of the TUNING project proposing powerful tools for designing of educational programmes in the Bologna context and enhancing their quality was indispensable.

The TUNING project offers a student-centred approach for designing study programmes, focused on learning outcomes and competences, which is based on five consistent features:

- An identified and agreed need and necessary resources,

² Tuning Management Committee. Tuning Educational Structures in Europe and beyond: from project to process. Presentation, 2009.

- A well described programme profile,
- Corresponding learning outcomes phrased in terms of generic and subject specific competences,
- Academic structure and content (modules and student workload, correct allocation of ECTS credits to units),
- Appropriate approaches to teaching, learning and assessment, and quality enhancement.

The use of learning outcomes and competences is necessary in order to make study programmes and their course units or modules student centred / output oriented. This approach requires that the key knowledge and skills that a student needs to achieve during the learning process determine the content of the study programme. It was extremely important for Russian educational system, where in 2005, and still today, many study programmes are staff centred, which means in practice that they are input oriented.

TUNING has developed a model for designing, implementing and delivering curricula offered within one institution, or, jointly, by two or more institutions. The following main steps in the process for designing a study programme either a local programme or an (international) integrated programme / joint degree were identified:

1. Identifying social and academic needs (on a regional/national/international level in consultations with key stakeholders: academics, employers, professionals and professional bodies), securing that necessary resources are available;
2. Definition of a degree profile;
3. Description of the objectives of the programme as well as the learning outcomes in terms of competences;
4. Identification of the generic and subject specific competences which should be obtained in the programme;
5. Translation into the curriculum: content (topics to be covered) and structure (modules and credits);
6. Translation into educational units and activities to achieve the defined learning outcomes and obtain defined competences;
7. 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);
8. Development of an evaluation system intended to enhance its quality constantly.³

TUNING pays special attention for quality of educational programmes' (re-)design and delivery. The TUNING dynamic quality development cycle involves all the steps mentioned above, starting from definition of academic and professional profiles and identification of resources, following by programme design: definition of learning outcomes / competences and construction of curricula (content and structure), and ending with selection of types of assessment, as well as teaching and learning approaches. It is on the assumption that programmes can and should be enhanced on the basis not only of feedback but also of 'feed forward' by taking into account developments in society as well as the academic field concerned. Hence, regular evaluation and improvement (on the basis of feed back and feed forward) is a crucial step in assuring and development of quality of educational programmes.

Key concepts that constitute the bases of the TUNING methodology should be considered in detail, i.e. degree profile, learning outcomes, competences, and ECTS.

Degree profile

According to the Tuning methodology, degree profile is a description of the character of a degree programme or qualification. This description gives the main features of the programme which are based on the specific aims of the programme, how it fits into the academic map of disciplines or thematic studies and how it relates to the professional world. A good profile takes into account different users' perspectives and interests: individual, professional, social, academic.

Key elements of a degree profile could be identified as follows:

- Orientation: theoretical or applied,
- Subject related knowledge/ know how (mono, multi, inter),
- Generic competences,
- Subject specific skills,
- Level of qualification (role of descriptors),

³ Julia González and Robert Wagenaar (eds.) Universities' contribution to the Bologna process. An Introduction. Tuning project, 2006.

- Employability (regulated / non-regulated),
- Social and professional responsibility,
- Particular focus / specialisation,
- Approach(es) towards teaching, learning and assessment.⁴

Learning outcomes and competences

TUNING makes the distinction between learning outcomes and competences to distinguish the different roles of the most relevant players: academic staff and students/learners. Desired learning outcomes of a process of learning are formulated by the academic staff, preferably involving student representatives in the process, on the basis of input of internal and external stakeholders. Competences are obtained or developed during the process of learning by the student/learner. In other words:

- Competences represent a dynamic combination of knowledge, understanding, skills and abilities.
- Fostering competences is the object of educational programmes.
- Competences are formed in various course units and assessed at different stages.

Level of competence is expressed in terms of learning outcomes:

- Statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to demonstrate after completion of learning.
- They can refer to a single course unit or module or else to a period of studies, for example, a first or a second cycle programme.
- Learning outcomes specify the requirements for award of credit.

Competences can be distinguished in subject specific and generic ones. The last component, reflecting transferrable skills, is becoming more and more relevant for preparing students well for their future role in society in terms of employability and citizenship. TUNING distinguishes three types of generic competences:

- Instrumental competences: cognitive abilities, methodological abilities, technological abilities and linguistic abilities;
- Interpersonal competences: individual abilities like social skills (social interaction and co-operation);
- Systemic competences: abilities and skills concerning whole systems (combination of understanding, sensibility and knowledge; prior acquisition of instrumental and interpersonal competences required).

A large scale consultation among graduates, employers and academics should be organized to identify the most important generic competences for each of the academic field, as well as academic consultations are necessary for identification of subject-specific ones.

In TUNING competences are described as *reference points* for curriculum design and evaluation, not as straightjackets. They provide a common language for describing what curricula are aiming at. The use of learning outcomes allows for much more flexibility than is the case in more traditionally designed study programmes, because they show that different pathways can lead to comparable outcomes; outcomes which can be much more easily recognized as part of another programme or as the basis for entrance to a next cycle programme. Their use fully respects the autonomy of other institutions as well as other educational cultures. Therefore this approach allows for diversity, not only in a global, European, national or institutional framework, but also in the context of a single programme.

ECTS

One of the main innovations of TUNING has been to link learning outcomes, competences and ECTS workload based credits. This concept implies the change of the European Credit Transfer System into a European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, in which credits no longer have a relative value but have an absolute one and are linked to learning outcomes. In the new ECTS system the award of credits depends on full achievement of the desired learning outcomes for a unit or module and is based on the principle that 60 credits constitute the workload of a full-time student during one academic year. Workload-based ECTS credits make it possible to plan activities effectively as they take into account all the time that must be dedicated to learning, teaching and assessment activities and hence provide a crucial tool for effective programming. As well as being a system for facilitating the mobility of students

⁴ Tuning Management Committee. Tuning Educational Structures in Europe and beyond: from project to process. Presentation, 2009.

across Europe through credit accumulation and transfer, ECTS can also facilitate programme design and development, particularly in respect of overseeing the demands on students of concurrent course units.

TUNING-Russia: idea, key objectives and outcomes

Russia joined the TUNING project in 2005 aiming at implementation of the TUNING methodology in Russian HEIs. The initial project “Tuning Educational Programmes in Russian HEIs” (TUNING-Russia) acted as a pilot one and a bridge to implementation of competence-based approach in curricular design in particular universities programmes and national standards for higher education programmes development.

The main challenges for Russian higher education system at that moment were, on the one hand, provoked by the incapacity of the old system to respond to current social, economic and academic needs, and, on the other hand, related to integration to the European higher education area. TUNING offered a useful tool to address the following needs of HEIs and educational authorities:

- To identify current social and academic needs, and to make educational programmes relevant for dynamic changes of the labour market and economic needs;
- To development the system of lifelong education responding the needs of knowledge based economy and comparable with European system of degrees;
- To assure transparent access to educational services;
- To raise and guarantee the quality of educational programmes, which was concerned with growing private educational sector, diversification of educational programmes and individual educational trajectories;
- To promote and facilitate international cooperation in education: academic mobility, joint programmes, etc. paying special attention on the issues of recognition and comparability;
- To design and modernize educational programmes in accordance with current local and international tendencies;
- To raise competitiveness of Russian higher education programmes in global perspective.

Partners

The EU members of the Consortium included University of Groningen (the Netherlands), Deusto University (Bilbao, Spain), Metropolitan University (London, UK), University of Limerick (Ireland).

The members of the Consortium from Russia were:

- The Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation – on an expert level,
- National Training Foundation [NTF] (Moscow, Russia),
- Russian University of Peoples’ Friendship [RUPF] (Moscow, Russia),
- State University – Higher School of Economics [SU-HSE] (Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod, Perm, Saint Petersburg – Russia),
- Tomsk State University [TSU] (Tomsk, Russia).

These three leading Russian universities have been actively involved in the Bologna reform process in Russia, they are members of the Bologna working group and have an excellent track record of successful international cooperation projects, as well as projects implemented within the framework of the Innovational Project for Development of Education and the Priority National Education Project “Education”, initiated by the Russian Ministry of Education and Science.

The National Training Foundation is one of the key actors in the field of educational reforms in Russia. For about ten years NTF has been acting as an operator of the World Bank education loans to Russia. After all these years they have managed to establish the broad HEIs and expert networks covering all Russian territory. Hence, participation of the NTF in Tuning-Russia was important for enhancing the dissemination effect of the project significantly.

Objectives

The overall project objective was to assist implementation of Bologna objectives in Russian HEIs through promotion of collaboration between the Russian and European universities within Europe-wide project “Tuning educational structures in Europe”.

The specific project objectives were:

- Analysis of the methodology and results of the “Tuning educational structures in Europe” project.
- Dissemination of TUNING methodology developed so far.

- Development of model curricula in two subject areas – Applied Mathematics and European Studies, including consultations with main stakeholders - academic community, professionals, employers, students and graduates.
- Development of the outcomes of the pilot project further for application in development of competences-based curricula in Russian universities.
- Establishment of a platform for the exchange of HEIs' experience and knowledge between Russian and European universities, higher education institutions and staff with regard to the implementation of the Bologna process on a Europe-wide level.

Main project activities included:

- A series of information and training meetings aimed at dissemination, mastering and analysis of TUNING methodology, and establishment of an expert platform;
- Consultations with key stakeholders aimed at defining generic and subject-specific competences;
- A series of working meetings with participation of main stakeholders – academics, alumni, students, employers, aimed at development of model curricula;
- Design and maintenance of the project web-site, containing key TUNING and TUNING-Russia methodological materials, information on meetings, project results, etc.;
- Publications aimed at dissemination of TUNING methodology as well as information and results of the TUNING-Russia project;
- A series of dissemination meetings aimed at presenting the project results and discussing their application for the development of competence-based curricula in Russian HEIs.

The project tangible outcomes included:

- Elaborated guidance to programme descriptions;
- Electronic questionnaires and survey results on generic and specific competences for both subject areas;
- Model programme descriptions in Applied Mathematics and European Studies developed in compliance with TUNING methodology by three Russian universities;
- Best practices of curricula design, including approaches to teaching, learning, assessment and quality assurance, developed in participating Russian HEIs were accumulated and disseminated;
- Project bilingual Russian-English web-site <http://www.iori.hse.ru/TUNING>;
- Publications: translation and publication in Russian of the TUNING brochure “Universities’ contribution to the Bologna Process. An Introduction”, TUNING-Russia information booklet;
- Introduction of TUNING to academic community and educational authorities, mastering a competence-based approach and TUNING methodology through a series of conferences and training activities;
- Package of training materials for further dissemination of the TUNING methodology;
- Database of employers, graduates and academicians who actively participated in the surveys, as well as in working, information and dissemination meetings;
- Creation of international European and Russian experts and coordinators network which worked efficiently in close collaboration during the whole project period;
- Russian HEIs were integrated into the TUNING international network;
- Conclusions and recommendations on improvement of the new state educational standards for higher professional education, as well as further steps of improving the quality and development of higher education system in Russia prepared and submitted to the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation;
- The project implementation was highlighted by a series of publications in periodical journals.

Intangible outcomes important for development and modernization of higher education system, in general, and educational programmes in Russia were:

- Broad dissemination among the Russian academic community, employers, graduates and students (including country regions) of TUNING project results in particular subject areas and the general methodology based on competence approach;
- Dozens of academic staff trained and knowledgeable in the modern methods of effective curricular development;
- Project experts and coordinators acquired skills to act as trainers for other groups and do further consultations and dissemination of the TUNING methods in different subject areas;
- Development and actual use of an electronic questionnaire to identify the relevance of generic and subject specific competences;

- The project has become a good example of HEIs activity meeting challenges of the Bologna process;
- Generally, the project enhanced efficiency and quality of educational programmes, as well as promotion of the Russian inclusion in EHEA.

Curricula design in Russian HEIs: TUNING-Russia contribution and follow-up activities

On the HEIs level, the success of TUNING-Russia lies in that Russian HEIs has recognized the need to change, have become a part of a broader TUNING community, are able to work independently and initiate new projects. Hence, the capacity to further extension has been established. Mobility performed during the project contributed to establishing new academic contacts between Russian and European HEIs, and resulted in new joint educational projects that, in turn, facilitate Russia's integration into the common EHEA.

During the project various schools of thought, as well as teaching, learning and assessment traditions were put into contact: by sharing knowledge and experience, a wide range of effective methods and techniques has been gathered and described. The project's findings indicate that using a variety of approaches to learning and teaching in each programme gives the best results.

Project results were reported not only on the TUNING-Russia meetings but also at other relevant seminars and conferences with participation of the leading Russian HEIs that insured broad presentation and dissemination of TUNING ideas and achievements.

Currently more and more universities all over Russia rethink their educational approaches in a competence-based student-centred mode and modernize their curricula with the help of TUNING methodology. In participant universities developed curricula has been tested and now is being successfully delivered, also on a Master's level.

On the governmental level, the crucial achievement of TUNING-Russia was in developing awareness between educational authorities of usefulness and applicability of competence-based approach for Russian higher education system. As a result, the Russian Ministry has recognized the modern challenge of a competence based approach and the next generation of educational standards were developed using "universal" and "professional" competences to describe learning outcomes of both cycles (Bachelor and Master). National Standards of Higher Vocational Education are the federal law establishing basic legal frameworks for structures of educational programmes, compliance with which is critical to award state degree certificates (diplomas) to graduates at all levels.

Project results are sustainable due to the created web-site communicating TUNING experience, the package of training materials elaborated, a series of publications and translations made, established network of experts and practitioners, trained core group of experts and coordinators able to provide advice and consultations.

At the same time it should be realized that one year of running the project in Russia is not enough to see a broad and sustainable impact. Therefore, a series of follow-up steps could be proposed to develop the project success and facilitate further adaptation of competence-based approach to curricula design in Russian HEIs:

- Application of the current project results to educational programmes in Applied Mathematics and European Studies in other Russian HEIs;
- New projects aimed at design and modernization of curricula in other subject areas should be initiated by Russian HEIs;
- A series of information activities aimed at dissemination of the Russian projects results and making academic and educational practitioners familiar with TUNING methodology should be initiated and supported by educational authorities, primarily the Russian Ministry of Education and Science;
- The core expert-coordinators group from the HEIs – participants of the first round of TUNING-Russia with the continued advice and consultations of the EU colleagues could extend the network and act as trainers to disseminate the TUNING methodology cover more subject areas and involve more regions in applying it, specifically:
 - Assisting in organizing the national information and dissemination conference,
 - Offering information and counselling,
 - Collecting main obstacle and questions regarding the implementation of the Tuning approach,
 - Acting as interface between HEIs and Tuning Management and Coordination team,
 - Acting as coordinator of the countries' related Tuning website.

- The created bilingual website should be kept in operation as a point of fresh information about TUNING developments in different counties and regions, external and internal interaction of experts and communicating TUNING experiences in all directions.