



European Commission
Directorate-General for
Education and Training



Australian Government

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

TUNING AUSTRALIA: A Proposal for Enhanced Co-operation in Higher Education between Australia and the European Union to align Academic Standards and Reference Points

1. European Context

Tuning Educational Structures in Europe is a university-driven project which offers a universal approach to implement the Bologna Process at the level of higher educational institutions and subject areas. The Tuning approach consists of a methodology to (re-)design, develop, implement and evaluate study programmes for each of the three Bologna cycles.

It serves as a platform for developing reference points at subject area level. Among these subject areas are: chemistry, physics, mathematics, earth sciences, medicine, nursing, history, social work, music, performing arts, fine arts, architecture, education sciences including teachers training, European studies (as a sample of interdisciplinary studies), business administration and engineering. This work is based on a wide stakeholder consultation, including employers, graduates, students and academic staff.

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.

Tuning contributes to the development and enhancement of high-quality competitive study programmes by focussing on fitness of purpose (to meet expectations) and fitness for purpose (to meet aims).

The Tuning approach is fully in line with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (2005) issued by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and has been instrumental in developing the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (2005) and the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (2008).

2. Australian Context

The Australian Government is developing a new Higher Education Quality and Regulatory Framework which includes the establishment of the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA). TEQSA will be a national body for regulation and quality assurance of tertiary education against agreed standards.

The standards framework is in development and comprises several elements. The Australian Government has funded the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) to undertake a one year project to develop Learning and Teaching Academic Standards in a number of discipline areas and propose a longer term process for the development and maintenance of academic standards across all discipline areas. The project began in February 2010 and will

conclude with a final report to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations on 17 December 2010.

At this stage eight broad discipline areas have been identified - architecture and building; arts, humanities and social sciences; business, management and economics; creative and performing arts; engineering and technology; health, medicine, and veterinary science; law; and science. A Discipline scholar has been appointed to lead each discipline cluster to achieve the project outcomes. The key deliverable for each Discipline Scholar is the production of a document identifying minimum learning outcomes for the specified discipline at an agreed level.

The overall project report to DEEWR will evaluate the process and outcomes and highlight opportunities and recommendations for sustainability of the process into the future.

The Australian project has many similarities with the Tuning approach and each Discipline Scholar will be using Tuning project reports as reference material for the project. Formal interaction between key players in the Tuning project and the Australian project would be beneficial to both projects.

3. Proposal for Enhanced Cooperation between the EU and Australia

Project Objectives

The objectives of this pilot project will be to:

- Facilitate greater cooperation between key higher education stakeholders in Australia and the European Union
- Share experiences of the Australian Standards Project and the European Tuning project to enable more effective long-term outcomes for each project
- Enable closer ties between academic discipline communities in Australia and Europe
- Enable closer ties between higher education policy makers in Australia and Europe
- Investigate the alignment of academic standards and reference points in higher education for Australia and Europe
- Establish a foundation for the development of a shared understanding and language for Australian and European higher education stakeholders in their approaches to curriculum development, standards, qualifications frameworks and quality assurance.

Project Outline

This pilot project is designed to meet the undertakings of the European Union-Australia Partnership Framework to *“jointly develop a Tuning Australia pilot project to define the learning outcomes representative of higher education degrees in specific disciplines across different degree levels”*. It is expected this approach will lead to better definitions of higher education learning outcomes in Australia and improved linkages between higher education systems in the EU and Australia.

This pilot project together with the Academic Standards project which the ALTC began in early 2010 may be an integral aspect of a broader Tuning Australia umbrella project.

Up to three Discipline-specific Scholars from Australia will be funded to travel to Europe to meet with relevant leaders of Tuning Subject Area Groups to discuss their respective projects. Four leading members of Tuning Subject Area Groups will travel to Australia to meet with relevant leaders of Discipline Clusters in the Australian Standards Project.

Funding will also be available for the respective Pilot Project Co-ordinators (that is the co-ordinator of the Australian Academic Standards project and an overall co-ordinator of the Tuning initiative) to travel once to the respective partner country/region to hold meetings relevant to the

broader project objectives. If this does not prove feasible the funding could be used to fund an additional academic participant to travel.

Pilot Project Co-ordinators from Europe and Australia will collaboratively develop a programme of meetings for each participant which would take place over approximately a week. These would include meetings with relevant scholars; central agencies (e.g. European Commission, ALTC, DEEWR, Quality Assurance Agencies); universities or higher education institutions; professional associations; and other key discipline/subject area stakeholders.

Travel for all parties is expected to take place by 31 December 2010.

Meetings would be designed to facilitate the sharing of experiences and outcomes by participants from their experience of the process and outcomes in their country/region.

Each travelling participant would be expected to provide an individual report on their engagement and the outcomes of the meetings. These would be summarised by the Pilot Project Co-ordinators to provide a joint report on project outcomes to DEEWR and the European Commission by March 2011.

The Discipline/Subject areas proposed for 2010 are:

From Australia: Business, Health (nursing) and Science.

From Europe: three from Performing Arts, Humanities (History), Science, Architecture or interdisciplinary studies.

Project Budget

Funding will be provided by the Australian Government and the European Commission to cover the following for their respective project elements:

- Costs for four travelling participants for Australia and five travelling participants from Europe-business class airfares for Australia/Europe flights, economy class airfares for internal Australia/Europe flights, accommodation, travel/subsistence allowances (meals, taxis, incidentals and fees for the European participants. For Australia – approximately \$15,000 per person; for the EU – approximately 10.000 €
- Costs for Project Co-ordinators and administration of project. The ALTC will absorb the administration costs of the Australia Tuning project from the funds already provided by the ALTC and DEEWR to the Academic Standards Project. The European Commission will make available an amount of 5.000 € for the overall co-ordination and administration.

The Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations will contribute \$60,000 from its 2009-10 International Education and Training allocation under a funding agreement with the ALTC which will manage those funds to achieve the agreed objectives of this project.

The European Commission will contribute a total of 55.000 € for the implementation of this project.