# Tuning Occupational Therapy Structures in Europe.

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# Introduction

This reflective piece focuses on the experiences of working with the Tuning process in two North European Countries, namely the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. It will explore the methodology of Tuning and set this methodology in its own context of the Bologna Declaration.

It will discuss the implementation of Tuning with respect to curriculum design, stakeholder engagement, and identify aspects of good practice and collaboration. Both authors are active members of the Tuning Group for Occupational Therapy and continue to collaborate in the Tuning Project.

### The Bologna Declaration – The Roots of Tuning.

The Europa website provides us with a concise introduction to the Bologna Declaration and Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. The following excerpts from this website set the context for the work undertaken by the Occupational Therapy Tuning Group.

In June 1999 The Bologna Declaration called 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 and one more in Berlin in September 2003:

- 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
- 10. Doctoral level (third cycle).

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.'

At the Universities Convention in Salamanca in March 2001 European universities declared 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'.

(www.europa.eu.int)

The Bologna declaration has been supplemented and strengthened at a number of meetings and is now sometimes referred to as The Bologna-Prague-Berlin-Bergen process.

# Tuning Educational Structures in Europe

The Tuning Management Committee describes Tuning as;

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

Furthermore, Tuning serves as a platform for developing reference points at subject area level. These are relevant for making programmes of studies comparable, compatible and transparent. Reference points are expressed in terms of learning outcomes and competences. Learning outcomes are statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to demonstrate after completion of a learning experience. According to Tuning, learning outcomes are expressed in terms of the *level of competence* to be obtained by the learner. Competences represent a dynamic combination of cognitive and meta-cognitive skills, knowledge and understanding, interpersonal, intellectual and practical skills, and ethical values. Fostering these competences is the object of all educational programmes. Competences are developed in all course units and assessed at different stages of a programme. Some competences are subject-area related (specific to a field of study), others are generic (common to any degree course). It is normally the case that competence development proceeds in an integrated and cyclical manner throughout a programme. To make levels of learning comparable the subject area groups/Thematic Networks have developed cycle (level) descriptors, which are also expressed in terms of competences.' (Subject Area Group Brochure: Occupational Therapy 2007 pg. 9)

In addition to addressing the implementation of a three-cycle system, Tuning is also concerned with developing further the use of the student workload based on European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), quality systems, and the Lifelong Learning agenda.

Ministers have indicated their support for the Tuning process stating that 'degrees should be described in terms of workload, level, learning outcomes, competencies and profile'. They have also supported the development of an overarching Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (EQF). This Framework was adopted at the Bergen Bologna follow-up conference in 2005. Following this, the Dublin Descriptors were produced by an informal group of higher education experts, the Joint Quality Initiative (JQI). These criteria distinguish between the different cycles in a broad and general manner.

The Tuning Management Committee explain the complementarity of these initiatives as follows:

<sup>6</sup>From the beginning, the JQI and the Tuning Project have been considered complementary. The JQI focuses on the comparability of cycles in general terms, whereas Tuning seeks to describe cycle degree programmes at the level of subject areas. An important aim of all three initiatives (EQF, JQI and Tuning) is to make European higher education more transparent. In this respect, the EQF is a major step forward because it gives guidance for the construction of national qualification frameworks based on learning outcomes and competencies as well as on credits. We may also observe that there is a parallel between the EQF and Tuning with regard to the importance of initiating and maintaining a dialogue between higher education and society and the value of consultation - in the case of the EQF with respect to higher education in general; in that of Tuning with respect to degree profiles'. (Subject Area Group Brochure – Occupational Therapy 2007 pg10)

The European Commission launched the European Qualification Framework for Life Long Learning (LLL) in 2006. This initiative aims to encompass all types of learning in one overall framework. Although the concepts on which the EQF for Higher Education and the EQF for LLL are based differ, both are fully coherent with the Tuning approach being based on the development of level of competencies.

# Occupational Therapy in the UK and the Netherlands

Occupational therapy is a profession whose primary goal is to make it possible for people to participate in the occupations of everyday life. An occupation is a group of activities that has personal meaning, is named within a culture and supports participation in society.

Occupational therapy emerged as a profession in America at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, it can be argued that the use of work and gainful occupation in the treatment of illness has been advocated since ancient times in Egypt, Rome and Greece. The use of the title occupational therapy was introduced in America in 1914, and the first European school of occupational therapy opened in the UK in 1930. The first OT school in the Netherlands opened in 1954 in Amsterdam. The profession has expanded since then throughout Europe and there are currently more than 320 educational institutions delivering occupational therapy education. The use of the term occupational therapy has been debated throughout Europe and whilst it is used in English translations, the term ergo therapy is used in some countries. In 1952, the World Federation of Occupational Therapists was established, which developed standards for occupational therapy education in 1954. These standards are regularly updated and are used by many regulatory bodies as minimum

standards for the education of occupational therapists. These standards have also assisted in developing and maintaining a common understanding of the profession worldwide. There are now 4 Schools of Occupational Therapy in the Netherlands and 31 in the UK. Students can study occupational therapy at first and second cycle in both countries as well as taking their studies to third cycle. The practice of occupational therapy is well established in both countries with therapists working in all aspects of health and social care, including physical and mental health, and with all ages. In the UK and the Netherlands, there is a growing emphasis on working with people in their own homes or workplaces rather than hospital based work, though it would be fair to say that most therapists are still employed by hospitals. There are 6,000 occupational therapists practising in the Netherlands and 29,000 in the UK.

#### Tuning Occupational Therapy

The Occupational Therapy Tuning Group was established following an invitation from the European Commission for Thematic Networks to take part in Tuning under the ERASMUS programme. The European Network of Occupational Therapy in Higher Education (ENOTHE) as a thematic network had already started on work linked to the Bologna Declaration and so together with practitioners of occupational therapy from the Council of Occupational Therapy of European Countries (COTEC) established the Occupational Therapy Tuning Group early in 2003. It was considered essential that both academics and practitioners collaborated closely in this project. The decision to include practitioners has strengthened the work and ensured that professional bodies across Europe have been enabled to participate and comment upon the competencies as they were developed. In the UK and the Netherlands, this philosophy has been supported by the current drive to establish employer led education. The inclusion of practitioners from the outset has been noted as something unique to the occupational therapy Tuning process and has received positive feedback from the Tuning Management Group.

Although this work is focussed on the occupational therapy project, it is important to appreciate the scope of Tuning. The project aims to deliver the academic input for the development of an overarching European framework of qualifications, particularly for undergraduate, graduate and doctorate level education. The subject areas so far engaged in the Tuning process cover a wide range from vocational programmes such as nursing, occupational therapy and business administration to pure academic subjects such as chemistry, history and mathematics. Tuning has also been recognised as a valuable tool to develop educational process and structures on other continents and is now being adopted in Latin America and Russia.

The work of the Occupational Therapy Tuning Group focussed initially on the development of specific and generic competencies, which would be achieved on successful completion of a programme in occupational therapy. Although the concept of using competencies is not uncommon within occupational therapy education, it became clear that the scope and depth of learning described had a variety of definitions. It was also a challenge to the group to work in the English language and agree what was meant by each competency statement. This issue would continue to be a challenge as the competencies were translated into 25 languages of Europe and cultural values were embedded within the translations. The group used existing competency statements from a number of countries and regulatory bodies both within Europe and from North America as a basis for the development of the competencies. It was important that any new competencies not only had vision for the future but that they also nested within statutory or regulatory statements from participating countries. This would ensure a degree of familiarity by all stakeholders and take account of existing validated work. The collaboration of academics and practitioners in the working group also ensured that the competencies were rooted in current practice and took account of the politics of the workplace and the future direction for occupational therapy practice. This collaboration resulted in greater ownership from both sides and a firm endorsement and acceptance of the final product. It was recognised in the early stages of the project that even though the focus was firmly in education, the implications for practice were clear. The competencies would after all be describing the new graduate as a practitioner.

Encouraging and fostering greater collaboration at all levels became a key component to the success of the project. At each stage of the process it was essential to get feedback from students, academics and practitioners. This required a range of strategies to be adopted. In the Netherlands the smaller size of the occupational therapy population resulted in more effective networking to be adopted and direct contact with the schools by telephone and email facilitated a greater response rate to the consultation than was achieved in the UK. Both countries adopted the strategy of using professional publications to promote the work of the Tuning Project and to prepare occupational therapists for the consultation event. An online questionnaire

was utilised by all participating countries and some problems with this questionnaire were responsible for universally low participation rates. However, in the UK the response was particularly low especially as the UK has the second largest population of OTs in Europe. The following table shows response rates in the UK and the Netherlands. Respondents were asked to rank the specific and generic competencies according to their relevance to the practice of occupational therapy on a scale of 0-4.

	Responses Practitioners	Responses Lecturers	Responses Students	% of total population
OCCUPATIONAL				
THERAPY:				
Specific				
Competences				
Netherlands	14	3	2	.42%
United Kingdom	30	10	2	.14%
OCCUPATIONAL				
THERAPY:				
Generic				
Competences				
Netherlands	37	5	16	1.05%
United Kingdom	58	12	8	.24%

Table 1.

This exceptionally low response rate could be due to a number of factors. The lack of direct contact with the occupational therapy population resulted in a lack of ownership or interest in the project. Nationally in the UK, there is a low participation in political and local elections and at best, questionnaires can only expect to achieve a 30% response rate. However it is clear that this response rate was especially low and so additional factors to be considered could be related to the willingness of the UK to get involved in European initiatives as well as the already stated problems with the website.

The results of the consultation taken across the whole of Europe revealed that all specific competencies received scores higher than 2.4 for 1<sup>st</sup> cycle education. For the 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle, all specific competencies received scores higher than 3.3. Overall, there was a clear acceptance of the competencies with a high correlation between teachers, practitioners and students. There was no difference between the results of the UK and the Netherlands. The advice to reduce the number of competencies was followed up.

Following consultation within the profession the next stage of consultation was with employers, service users, and other stakeholders such as insurance companies. It was important that we learned from the experience of the first consultation and took a more direct approach.

	CLIENTS	CLIENTS	EMPLOYERS		
		ORGANISATIONS			
NETHERLANDS	0	9	18		
UK	1	2	60		
Table 2					

Table 2 shows the results of this consultation. In both countries, specific employers were contacted in person
and their help in the consultation requested. This resulted in a much better return rate. Telephone
conversations were backed up by email correspondence and offers of help in clarifying the competencies. In
addition to this, all OT managers in the UK were sent a questionnaire. This improved the response rate to
12% in the UK. These stakeholders were not asked to rank the competencies but they were asked to endorse
each competency as being relevant to OT practice. The results of this consultation gave a strong validation to
the competencies related to practice with some questions being asked of the relevance of research and
management skills. These competencies were seen as less relevant to the practice of occupational therapy.

In addition to these large scale consultation events, focus groups and workshops were held at ENOTHE conferences and during COTEC meetings. All feedback was discussed and incorporated into the final set of competencies and level descriptors.

It is clear that this project has facilitated high levels of collaboration and the development of a much clearer mutual understanding of the practice and education of occupational therapists across Europe. It has also stimulated discussions between practitioners, students, and academics in participating countries about the nature of competence and the level of competence that should be expected from the new graduate. In order to consult with wider stakeholders in the UK and the Netherlands it became apparent that in both countries it could not be assumed that everyone understood the nature and practice of occupational therapy, even though the stakeholder had worked alongside therapists for a considerable period of time. In the Netherlands the Dutch association of OT (NVE) was happy to support this project as it was a way to promote OT on different levels in the country. It was also important to understand the relevance of the occupational therapist for different stakeholders, as this affected the importance of different categories of competence. For example, research skills were less important to the employer but were very important for the academic and student. The importance of using clear language cannot be over emphasised, this is not simply about translations from English into Dutch but also within a language the use of jargon or professional terms can obscure the meaning and the intent. With this in mind, the Tuning Group have had to make changes to the language used and the structure of the work in order to be more explicit about occupational therapy and how the competencies can be used in both education and practice. The outcomes of consultations with stakeholders has also identified potential uses of competencies. Each stakeholder group may find their own way to use them.



# Commissioners

Below are some examples of how some stakeholders may use the competencies in the future.

#### Employers:

- Have more insight in what can be expected of an OT and can use the competencies to make job profiles
- OT departments can design specific Lifelong Learning programmes

#### Students:

- Will be able to structure their own learning process and profile using the competencies as a goal/reference point
- Can change from schools and country as programmes will be more comparable and compatible

#### Schools:

- Curriculum design
- Make own profile/specialist programmes with competencies as reference point
- Gives institutions the chance to identify areas of expertise and enables a way to communicate this expertise
- Be more transparent what they do
- Make the learning/teaching and assessment more student centred

#### Countries/regions:

• Mobility across Europe

- Mobility within the country own benchmarks and competencies
- Have more insight into the curricula and qualifications/competencies of immigrating OT's
- International perspective of expertise

#### Associations:

• Standards for practice

# Competencies and Curriculum Design

In both the UK and the Netherlands, competencies are used in the design of undergraduate education. They are commonly used as assessment tools for fieldwork placements and are divided into learning outcomes by the higher education institution, student and/or their mentor. Some build the learning process into structured steps starting from the generic to the specific competencies. Other universities choose to take the competencies as a whole and differentiate the levels the student should reach in a certain period. They can also be used to guide a student through situations that grow in complexity.

The use of standards and benchmark statements is common to both countries. In the Netherlands programme design is based on the standards set by the World Federation of Occupational Therapy, and the Curriculum Guidelines developed by ENOTHE, the NVE professional profile of OT, and the 'legislation of the Ministry of Health in the UK these standards are also used in addition to the benchmark statements for occupational therapy developed by the Quality Assurance Agency in collaboration with the College of Occupational Therapists and the Health Professions Council. These various standards and benchmarks are expressed as competencies and as such provided the Tuning Group with a foundation to develop the Tuning standards from. The familiarity of using such tools also enabled practitioners and academics in both countries to grasp the use of the Tuning competencies and to identify how they could embed them within existing curricula. However there are differences in the delivery of occupational therapy education, in the UK there are a variety of routes to become an occupational therapist and most routes incorporate 1000 hours of placement learning. These routes may take anything from 18 months to 4 years to complete. In the Netherlands, students must study for 4 years and within this complete more an average of 1600 hours of placement learning. An OT 1st cycle degree can also be achieved by completing a two year part time programme, accessed with first cycle studies in another field. Clearly, this is a challenge to harmonisation of education. In a climate where speed is of the essence it may be difficult, to rationalise why one student will take 4 years to complete their studies and another will take only 2 or 3. They will all graduate with the same competencies but is there equity of workload to achieve these competencies? It is also the case that in the UK students may study to become an occupational therapist at Masters level or second cycle. Their academic work is therefore at this level, however they graduate with the same competencies as a student who has studied at first cycle. Employers in the UK already find this confusing and expect a Masters graduate to demonstrate higher level practical skills than the Bachelor graduate when in fact they will probably start at the same point of competence. However, it can be argued that the Masters graduate will become proficient in a shorter time than the Bachelors graduate. The level descriptors developed alongside the Tuning competencies should provide more clarity to these issues and enable all parties to identify where they are on the sliding scale of competence.

#### Summary and Conclusion

In conclusion there are some specific and general uses for the competencies. These are:

- curriculum design
- quality enhancement
- in the workplace
- profile of expertise and standards for practice
- Identifying the gaps in practice
- catalyst to develop links between the workplace and education
- develops an international perspective of expertise
- Gives institutions the chance to identify areas of expertise and enables a way to communicate this expertise.
- Mobility across Europe

The use of competencies will not homogenise the process of learning across Europe. It will identify a common outcome but the journey taken will be different. Emerging countries can use the competencies as a point of reference to develop the profession and the education and training needed to underpin practice. It is

interesting to note that in the emerging countries they often start at a higher level, most students have a bachelor or master degree in another subject. Different ways of learning may result in students developing additional competencies, but they will all have arrived at the same basic competencies.

The process of developing the Tuning competencies and evaluating the differences between the Netherlands and the UK has demonstrated that there is much in common in terms of issues raised and the future uses for competencies. In addition participants in the project have learnt from each other and developed closer working relationships to the benefit of the profession and the future implementation of the project. Tuning will enter the next phase of its work early in 2008. This phase will focus on the establishment of 'common platforms', and the development of competencies for the life long learning curricula.

# References

European Union: Bologna Declaration June 1999 http://ec.europa.eu//education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna.pdf (Visited 2007-10-21).

Gonzalez & Wagenaar (2003) Tuning Educational Structures in Europe Final report Phase One University of Deusto and University of Groningen, Printed by IPAR, Bilboa, Spain.

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Further information on the education of occupational therapists in Europe is available at the ENOTHE website: <u>www.enothe.hva.nl</u> this website also provides contact information for all member higher education institutions throughout Europe.

Further information on the profession of occupational therapy in Europe is available from the COTEC web site: <u>www.cotec-europe.org</u> this web site also provides links to the individual members of COTEC; professional associations in the countries of Europe