

# From international governance to individualised learning: The complexity of contemporary higher education

## Editorial

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Editor

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Since the last edition of the Journal, six months ago, the world has experienced not only the first wave of COVID 19, but for many countries they are now in the grip of the second wave. Universities in both hemispheres have returned to new semesters, with students experiencing more ‘online’ learning, outbreaks of COVID in university or local residences. The psychological and mental health consequences of no longer being able to live life in ‘close proximity’ means that our students have missed social events that formerly were an integral part of university enculturation. The acceleration of distance, virtual and other forms of ‘remote’ learning has provided an overnight transformation of the academy, with Faculty staff learning new skills and a new vocabulary as the curricula are reformed and reframed out of necessity. We are now ‘zoomed out’, ‘booked on teams’, and ‘ergonomically strained’ through ‘working from home’ with ‘unstable internet’ connections. We get ‘locked out of buildings’ or ‘locked in our homes’ as we avoid physical proximity with anyone not in our household or ‘bubble’. Masks of various shapes, sizes, materials and designs are de rigueur, and perhaps a vaccine may be ready for Christmas or the New Year. Work placements, travel and adventure seem a faint memory, and all this has happened in six months!

So where might we be for the next edition in May 2021? Who knows? Will we be emerging from the metaphorical winter of discontent<sup>1</sup> into the ‘summer sun’ armed with our jabs, swabs and test results? We can foresee a range of dilemmas that will follow the pandemic, not least of which is when and how will the ‘ferryman’ be paid?<sup>2</sup> Ever hopeful, as the summer sun approaches, the academy needs to be ready to analyse, question and raise the

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from: William Shakespeare, *Richard III*, Act 1, Scene 1.

<sup>2</sup> Reference to Charon the ferryman in Greek mythology.

trumpet for equality of access to the vaccines and economic support across the world. How can the international Tuning family use its skills in programme design and competence development to promulgate existing or new generic competences<sup>3</sup> that will be sorely needed as we come out of the pandemic? Having just perused our Tuning generic competences, I note the omissions of some key survival qualities, namely physical and mental resilience, crisis management, the discernment to recognise fake news and having a sense of humour and the ridiculous! I offer, without prejudice and in no order of priority, my ‘top 10’ competences for being effective in the pandemic- perhaps this should be our next Tuning survey?

1. Capacity to learn and stay up-to-date with learning- health and COVID literacy
2. Capacity to generate new ideas (creativity)- science for COVID-19 solutions
3. Commitment to safety- infection control and population management
4. Ability to work in a team- collaboration not competition
5. Ability to act on the basis of ethical reasoning- how to ration without discrimination
6. Ability to act with social responsibility and civic awareness- compliance, volunteering and supporting others
7. Determination and perseverance in the tasks given and responsibilities taken- keep on carrying on
8. Ability to work autonomously- not to be swayed by the herd
9. Ability to adapt to and act in new situations- new pedagogies, new ways of working
10. Ability to motivate people and move towards a common goal- boosting morale and being collegial

And now to our Christmas/ end of year examination question suitable for scholars in any discipline. Based on the global experience of the ‘winter of discontent’, in no more than 150 words, explain how in the early days of the pandemic- despite there being no national shortages in the warehouses- some countries were overwhelmed by a shortage of basic hygiene and other necessary products like toilet paper, pasta and tinned goods and others were

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<sup>3</sup> “Generic Competences,” Tuning Education Structures in Europe (Tuning EU), University of Deusto and University of Groningen, <https://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/competences/generic.html>, accessed 13th November 2020.

not? Creative answers by 1<sup>st</sup> February 2021 please for a potential special article in the May edition of the Journal.

Indeed, a key question is whether some of our generic competences, if properly mastered, have or would have helped to deal with the shortage of such basics more effectively, with much less stress and panic?

Wishing all our readers a New Year of good health, hope and promise!

*The editorial team*

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