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Educational Journeys in times of uncertainty:
Weathering the storms

GUEST EDITORIALS AND ARTICLES FOR THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF TJHE

The early years

Paul D. Ryan

Founding Editor

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Guest Editorial for the 10th Anniversary of TJHE

The early years

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Founding Editor

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Abstract: Setting up an international academic journal is no easy task. This article reviews the planning stages and the publication of the first issues of the Tuning Journal for Higher Education. The need for such a journal and its role in supporting the objectives of the Tuning Academy are outlined.

Keywords: Tuning; Journal; Higher Education; planning; citations.

“Ah Paul, do you want to do something wonderful for your science?” One day, very early in the new Millennium, I answered a circular email about Geological Education in Europe. The resultant phone call from Julia González began the 23-year long journey that led to this Issue of the Tuning Journal for Higher Education (TJHE).

With 12 countries and 5 subjects the early days of Tuning Europe were lively. We were tasked with developing a competence-based system for higher education in our disciplines. Robert Wagenaar and Julia distilled the reports from the working groups into technical documents which were much debated. Eventually, with the addition of more disciplines and countries, reports following a common template were developed for each subject area. These reports, still accessible on the Tuning website,¹ bridged the divide between diverse educational cultures and structures. They provided agreed

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More information about the author is available at the end of this Editorial.

¹ <http://www.unideusto.org/tuning/>.

guidance on what was needed to develop transparent and transferable degree programmes in the context of the Bologna Process. The British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher reputedly described reforming academia as “herding cats”. Tuning had developed a method to “herd European cats”! Soon, academics, universities and Education Ministries worldwide wanted to understand and develop such systems for their region. I have called this the Tuning Phenomenon.

We debated the need for a peer reviewed journal to present the results of this research into the delivery of competence-based degrees which focused on the student. However, knowledge of the language and philosophy of such systems was then largely restricted to educational researchers who were well served by their specialist journals. About 12 years later the wider academic community began to catch up and there was an increasing body of pedagogic research undertaken by discipline rather than educational experts. The Tuning Academy decided to host a journal to publish such material and appointed me Editor in 2012 and tasked me with establishing the product as an open access journal. I was delighted to take on this task. I was convinced that developing high quality teaching programmes was not valued as much as academic research and this journal would break this mould.

Setting up such a journal from scratch is no easy task. My inbox received over 2000 messages with the subject ‘Tuning Journal’ over the 18 months of the planning stage. Many, many decisions had to be made. These included: the title of the journal (there was much debate as to whether the preposition should be “for” or “of”); the structure of the Editorial Board; the management structure; the software platform to support the editorial process; adoption of an Ethical Statement; Editorial Policy; and even the design of the front cover. First though was gaining approval for the journal’s mission statement by the Tuning academy and its sponsors, the University of Deusto, Spain, who host the journal, and the University of Groningen, The Netherlands. I include that statement below.

The Tuning Academy as part of its mission to serve as an international meeting point for innovation and research in Higher Education has established the Tuning Journal for Higher Education. This Journal will facilitate the collaborative efforts of hundreds of international researchers who are working to develop Tuning in global higher education. The Journal will concentrate on the development of innovative degree programmes and the challenges of their recognition, relevance and quality.

In the early stages I was ably assisted by Paulina Sierra. Guiding wisdom was always available from Julia, Robert and Pablo Beneitone. The professionalism and expertise of Ladislav Bizimana, our Managing Editor, was absolutely essential to the success of the project. Journals must be professional.

They promote the reputations of scholars and their institutions. Each issue of TJHE represents perhaps five thousand to ten thousand hours of scholarship.

In 2013 the first issue of TJHE, “New Profiles for New Societies”, was published and this has been followed by two issues each year. The birth of a journal follows a predictable pattern. In the early stages excitement for the project ensures good quality copy and reviewing. After the first few issues it becomes more difficult to obtain articles, especially as journals are not considered for listing on citation platforms until they have been established for several years. We survived this stage thanks to the strength of the Tuning fellowship and the work of editors and reviewers in helping authors, especially those for whom English was not their first language, in developing their work. Under the leadership of Luigi F. (Lupo) Donà dalle Rose and Anna Serbati the journal was listed by SCOPUS in 2018 with a very favourable review. This was a spectacular accomplishment. Journals that achieve listing move to another phase where the problem becomes processing an increase in submissions. The number and efficiency of reviewers and sub-editors must increase to meet this need. This is a dangerous phase and it requires commitment. Reviewing articles is time consuming but if academics wish their work to be peer reviewed they must be prepared to peer review that of others. It is not a one-way street. TJHE acknowledges the work of our reviewers in print. Please continue to support the journal with your expertise by reviewing and helping the Editor as well as contributing your research. All are essential if there is to be a 20th year issue.

I recently conducted a survey of the citations, the crypto-currency of academia, for all articles published in TJHE using Google Scholar, which is free to access and includes citations in all publications including theses. Using the baseline values for Social Sciences suggests that we already have 9 “highly cited” articles (> 5 citations per year) plus 20 “top 10%” articles (<5 and > 2.5 citations per year) and approximately half of the articles published have citation values (< 2.5 and > 1 citations per year) “typical” of the top 50%. Citations accumulate with time, so these are very encouraging results for a young journal. My congratulations to the present Editor, Mary Gobbi.

I would like to end by thanking all my dear Tuning friends, some now departed, who have debated, created and laughed with me over the years. Without them you would not be reading this article in this journal.

About the author

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the management board of the ‘Tuning Project’: the European Universities’ response to the Bologna process. He co-chaired the Earth Sciences Subject Area Group from 2000-2009 and was principal author of the validated Tuning Template for Earth Science Higher Education in Europe. He has given over 40 invited presentations on Tuning and the Bologna Process throughout Europe and has acted as adviser to both Government Agencies, Thematic Networks and Tuning Projects including: Africa; Georgia; Ireland; Russia; Spain; UK; USA; AFANET; MRENET, EurAges and EAR-HEI. He was appointed Founder Editor of the Tuning Journal for Higher Education in 2011. Paul graduated with a First-Class Honours Degree in Geology and Chemistry from Keele University, Staffordshire, where he also read for a Ph.D. in Geology. He worked at NUI Galway since 1970 until his retirement at the end of 2009. He was Professor of Geology since 1997 and acted as University Bologna Advisor since 2005. He is now Emeritus Professor and an active researcher in a wide range of fields in the Geosciences and in Higher Education with over 30 000 citations.