



TUS

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**TUS Policy for Participation in the
European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes**



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1.0 Introduction

Joint Programmes are a hallmark of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). They are set up to enhance the mobility of students and staff, to facilitate mutual learning and cooperation opportunities and to create programmes of excellence. In the Technological University of the Shannon (TUS), the process of internationalisation is leading to a diverse range of transnational collaborations and enhanced interest in the development of collaborations including joint programmes. The Regional University Network - European University (RUN-EU) initiative will contribute significantly to enabling the development of transnational study opportunities for students across its network. TUS is committed to the development of such strategic partnerships and the associated development and provision of collaborative programmes, including Joint Programmes, will be an important part of this activity.

TUS recognises its quality assurance obligations to ensure that learners enrolled on transnational collaborative programmes receive an equivalent learning experience to that of all TUS learners. TUS Academic Council approved the *TUS Policy and Procedures for Collaborative Provision (National and Transnational)* in May 2023¹. As set out in this Policy, TUS aligns with the *European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (2015)*² as required by the *QQI Sector Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Designated Awarding Bodies*³.

2.0 Purpose of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes

The European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (hereafter referred to as the European Approach) was approved by the Ministers of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in May 2015. Joint programmes as defined within the European Approach '*are understood as an integrated curriculum coordinated and offered jointly by different higher education institutions from EHEA countries and leading to double/multiple degrees or a joint degree*'. It is noteworthy, that this definition differentiates between the joint programme and the awards/degrees that may be made to a candidate on successful completion of the joint programme.

The EHEA is characterised by a diversity of legislative requirements and quality assurance systems within member countries. This includes the quality assurance arrangements for the validation/accreditation of programmes of education and

¹ [TUS Policy and Procedures for Collaborative Provision \(National and Transnational\)](#)

² [European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes \(2015\)](#)

³ [QQI Sector Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Designated Awarding Bodies](#)

training, including Joint Programmes offered by consortia of Higher Education Providers.⁴ In some countries, such programmes may require external quality assurance prior to being accredited or validated by the relevant institution or regulatory agency/authority. The European Approach was developed to ease external quality assurance of these programmes. The approach has been designed to enable any EQAR-registered (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education)⁵ external quality assurance agency to carry out a single QA procedure of a joint programme using agreed European criteria. The criteria for the European Approach are based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015)⁶. The outcomes of this single QA procedure should then be accepted by the other EHEA countries that are involved in the joint programme.

3.0 Application of the European Approach in Different Systems of External Quality Assurance

In aligning with the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, TUS will operate a system of programme validation/accreditation for a Joint programme proposal as follows:

1. All Joint Programmes leading to TUS awards must be approved by TUS Academic Council.
2. As specified in the European Approach *“if all cooperating higher education institutions in a joint programme consortium are subject to external quality assurance at institutional level only and have “self-accrediting” status, a joint internal validation/accreditation process may be established.*
3. As specified in the European Approach, *“if some of the cooperating higher education institutions require external quality assurance at programme level (e.g. external programme accreditation or evaluation is mandatory), then the cooperating institutions should select a suitable quality assurance agency from the list of EQAR-registered agencies. The agency will use the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes to carry out a single evaluation or accreditation of the entire joint programme.”* As further outlined in the European Approach, *“dependent on the national legal framework, the external quality assurance decision should come into force or be recognised in all countries where*

⁴ [Joint Programmes from A to Z. A Reference Guide for Practitioners](#)

⁵ [The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education - EQAR](#)

⁶ [Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area \(ESG 2015\).](#)

the programme is offered, as agreed in the Bucharest Communiqué".⁷

4.0 TUS Participation in European Approach Policy Statement

- a) In accordance with the European Approach *"the institutions that offer a joint programme in collaboration with TUS should be recognised as higher education institutions by the relevant authorities of their countries. Their respective national legal frameworks should enable them to participate in the joint programme and, if applicable, to award a joint degree. The institutions awarding the degree(s) should ensure that the degree(s) belong to the higher education degree systems of the countries in which they are based"*.
- b) The joint programme should be offered jointly, involving all cooperating institutions in the design and delivery of the programme, in accordance with the European approach.
- c) The terms and conditions of the joint programme should be set out explicitly down in a Cooperation Agreement. In TUS, this is referred to a Joint Awarding/Consortium Agreement, in accordance with the TUS Policy and Procedures for Collaborative Provision (National and Transnational).

4.1 Considerations Where All Participating Institutions have "Self-accrediting" Status.

- a) As specified in the European Approach, if all cooperating higher education institutions in a joint programme consortium are subject to external quality assurance at institutional level only and have "self-accrediting" status, a joint internal validation/accreditation process may be agreed and established.
- b) This validation/accreditation process should be consistent with *TUS New Programme Validation Policy and Procedures*⁸ and take account of the *TUS Policy and Procedures for Collaborative Provision (National and Transnational)*⁹. The precise approach to the joint validation/accreditation process shall be agreed as part of the Cooperation Agreements, as specified in the TUS Policy and Procedures for Collaborative Provision (National and Transnational).

⁷ [Bucharest Communiqué](#)

⁸ [TUS New Programme Validation Policy and Procedures](#)

4.2 Considerations Where One or More Participating Institutions Require External Quality Assurance at Programme Level.

- d) In applying the European Approach where one or more participating institutions require external quality assurance at programme level, a suitable Quality Assurance agency shall be selected from the list of EQAR registered agencies, with the consultation and agreement of all cooperating institutions. As outlined in the European Approach this shall involve a single validation/accreditation process, involving one evaluation and site visit, by one panel, delivering a single report to be accepted by the co-operating institutions/other accrediting bodies under the Bucharest Communiqué.
- e) A self-evaluation report (SER) shall be jointly submitted by the cooperating institutions to the selected quality assurance agency. The SER should contain comprehensive information that demonstrates the compliance of the programme with the Standards for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the EHEA (European Approach, Part B). It should contain the necessary information about the respective national frameworks of the cooperating institutions that international agencies and experts might need to appreciate the context, especially the positioning of the programme within the national higher education systems. The SER should focus explicitly on the distinctive feature of the joint programme as a joint endeavour of higher education institutions from more than one national higher education system.
- f) If the selected Quality Assurance Agency provides a template or guidelines on how to prepare the SER, these template/guidelines should normally be utilised. If the selected agency does not provide template/guidelines, the consortium may consider using the template developed within the Erasmus+ ImpEA (*Implementation European Approach*) project, specifically developed to support efficient implementation of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. The template is available at: [Self-Evaluation Report ImpEA Project Template](#)
- g) In accordance with the European approach, the outcome of the validation/accreditation process by the selected EQAR Registered Agency will result in a Panel Report with a judgement in respect to compliance with the Standards for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the EHEA and an accreditation decision (with or without conditions). The agency may supplement the formal outcome and the accreditation decision by recommendations.

h) Based on the Final Panel Report received from the EQAR Registered Agency, and subject to the satisfactory addressing of any conditions and/or recommendations, the decision on validation/accreditation shall be made independently by the respective participating institutions.

1. The decision shall be made by TUS Academic Council on behalf of TUS.
2. The decision shall be made by the cooperating institutions/agencies in line with the academic regulations and/or legislative requirements within their respective jurisdictions¹⁰.
3. The Consortium member shall include appropriate arrangements for the communication of resulting decisions in the Cooperation Agreement.

¹⁰ TUS recognises that the process for the decision on validation/accreditation differs from country to country.