



## Collaborative Provision of Programmes Policy

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## Contents

<b>1. Purpose</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Scope</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3. External Reference Documents</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>4. Policy</b>	<b>5</b>
4.1 Guiding Principles	5
4.2 Definitions and Key Terms	6
4.3 Collaborative Partnerships	7
4.4 Development and Approval of Collaborative Programmes	8
4.5 Quality Assurance in Collaborative Provision	9
4.6 Further Requirements for the Quality Assurance of International Joint Awards	10
4.7 Transnational Programmes	11
4.8 Quality Assurance of Linked Providers	11
4.9 Roles and Responsibilities	12
4.10 Contingency Planning	13
<b>5. Associated Documents Generated by this Policy</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>6. Revision History</b>	<b>13</b>

## 1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide a clear and comprehensive framework for the establishment, management, and review of the collaborative provision of programmes in which ATU serves as a partner. Collaborative programme provision<sup>1</sup> aims to enhance the quality and diversity of educational offerings, foster internationalisation, and promote academic excellence through partnership.

Among the functions set out for a Technological University in the *Technological Universities Act (2018)* is to:

*‘...collaborate with institutions that provide higher education inside and outside the State, including on joint research projects and provision of programmes of education and training’.* (TU Act, 2018; p. 14)

ATU recognises that engaging in inter-institutional collaborations and transnational partnerships with suitable institutions presents opportunity to enhance the quality of academic programmes offered by the University. Such endeavours not only benefit students and staff but can also contribute to the strategic growth and development of the University.

The strategic importance of collaborative programme provision in advancing internationalisation within higher education is widely acknowledged. The European Union emphasises the importance of cooperation among various institutions across the EU, underscoring the integral role of collaboration in the *European Education Area* and the *European Research Area*.

Collaborative programme provision aligns with ATU's vision of a university dedicated to delivering high quality educational experiences, inspiring individuals, and fostering sustainable economic, social, and cultural development both nationally and internationally.

## 2. Scope

This policy details ATU's approach to developing, operating, and managing all collaborative programmes (whether established or prospective) with national and / or transnational higher education providers and linked providers. This policy applies to collaborative programmes, whether domestic or international, undertaken by the University, and encompasses both taught and research-based *programme* collaborations.

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<sup>1</sup> In the context of this policy, *collaborative provision* refers to two or more education providers being involved through formal agreement in the provision of a programme of higher education and training. Collaboration with, for example, industry partners and consortia, may be examples of *collaborative design* and / or *collaborative delivery* (of a programme), but these in themselves do not amount to collaborative provision.

The scope of this policy extends to programmes and awards initially created and approved as single-provider programmes or single awards by a provider, and later adapted for collaborative provision by a national or transnational consortium. Any programme or award that undergoes such conversion must undergo revalidation to ensure alignment with collaborative programme quality assurance requirements and / or joint award criteria, as applicable. Similarly, for programmes and awards initially developed and sanctioned through collaborative provision by a national or transnational consortium and subsequently transitioning to be managed as an ATU (single provider) programme and award, a comprehensive review will be required. This is to ensure the programme's academic integrity and relevance remains valid and that it meets the University's programme quality assurance standards and award criteria when offered as a single-provider programme.

This policy does not apply to other types of collaborations the University engages in (such as, for example, research collaborations, and industry collaborations), nor does it apply to statutory apprenticeship programmes (which are governed by the Industrial Training Act 1967) or the new consortia-led apprenticeships (since 2016) to which Quality and Qualifications Ireland's 'Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Statutory Apprenticeship Programmes' apply.

### 3. External Reference Documents

- *Industrial Training Act 1967*
- *UNESCO / Council of Europe Revised Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education (2007)*
- *Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Education (OECD / UNESCO 2005)*
- *Policy for Collaborative Programmes, Transnational Programmes and Joint Awards (Quality & Qualifications Ireland (QOI), 2012)*
- *European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (2014) (Approved by EHEA ministers in May 2015)*
- *Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012 (as amended, 2019)*
- *Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Statutory Apprenticeship Programmes (Quality & Qualifications Ireland (QOI), 2016)*
- *Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Designated Awarding Bodies (Quality & Qualifications Ireland (QOI), 2016)*
- *Technological Universities Act 2018*

## 4. Policy

Through this policy, associated procedures and relevant University functions, ATU endorses the development of strategically relevant collaborative provision arrangements that are appropriately aligned, underpinned by due diligence, and compliant with the University's quality assurance and enhancement standards.

Collaborative programmes should align with the University's strategic objectives, enhancing its academic reputation, fostering innovation, and expanding its global reach. Collaborations should offer tangible benefits, such as access to diverse resources, expertise, and opportunities for students, faculty, and the broader University community.

The University will ensure that collaborative programmes align with international standards, such as those set by ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education), UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), INQAAHE (International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education) and other relevant bodies, promoting the comparability and recognition of higher education systems.

### 4.1 Guiding Principles

**Strategic Alignment:** All collaborative provision must align with ATU's strategic objectives. In particular, any collaborative agreement must be of demonstrable benefit to students in terms of experiences and opportunities afforded to them through the collaboration.

**Quality Assurance Integration:** The assurance and enhancement of the academic quality of ATU's collaborative provision offerings are fundamental components of the University's commitment to academic excellence. All collaborative programmes leading to ATU awards, including *joint, double, and multiple* awards, are subject to rigorous quality assurance and enhancement processes. This policy document also sets out quality assurance provisions for linked providers providing programmes leading to ATU awards.

**EHEA Compliance:** Collaborations within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) must adhere to established quality assurance standards for same.

**Faculty Expertise:** Collaborative proposals should complement or align with the academic expertise and strategic plans of the relevant proposing faculty.

**Complementary Enhancement:** New collaborative arrangements should complement existing provisions rather than duplicate or compete with them.

**Academic Equivalence:** Collaborative programmes must meet the same academic standards as equivalent ATU programmes and ensure an equivalent learning experience (or similarly equivalent learning experience) and achievement of learning outcomes.

**Student Welfare:** Student well-being and support, including academic and pastoral care, must be appropriately provided for in collaborative provision agreements.

**Institutional Suitability:** Partner institutions should have an ethos and mission that aligns with ATU's vision and strategic aims. They must also satisfy criteria regarding legal status, staffing and staff qualifications, academic structures, relevant infrastructure, quality assurance framework, and financial stability.

**Risk Mitigation:** Risks associated with collaborative arrangements should be identified and mitigated whenever possible.

**Financial Viability:** Collaborative activities must be financially sustainable.

## 4.2 Definitions and Key Terms

- 4.2.1 Collaborative Provision: means *'two or more providers being involved through formal agreement in the provision of a programme of higher education and training'* (QQI). The collaborating partners (two or more parties) constitute a *consortium*.
- 4.2.2 Partner Provider: an institution or body with which the University collaborates for academic purposes *i.e.* the provider(s) involved in a *memorandum of understanding* and / or a *consortium agreement*.
- 4.2.3 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU): A formal (non-binding) agreement between parties that outlines the general intentions and principles of collaboration. It typically establishes a framework for cooperation and may include broad areas of collaboration, such as student exchanges, joint research initiatives, faculty collaborations and the collaborate provision of programmes. The MoU will state the purpose and intention of the collaboration and outline the process to be followed towards the development of a full *consortium agreement*.
- 4.2.4 Consortium Agreement: This is a formal binding agreement between the parties involved in the collaborative provision of a programme. The agreement is finalised prior to commencement of a collaboration.
- 4.2.5 Co-delivery: involves formal agreement between two or more providers to jointly deliver a collaborative programme. Within this arrangement, one organisation is designated as the lead provider and awarding body for the programme, while the co-provider(s) deliver specified part(s) of the programme as agreed.
- 4.2.6 Joint Programme: An integrated programme that is jointly developed, delivered, and assessed by ATU along with one or more partner institutions leading to either a *single, joint or double (or multiple) award*.

- 4.2.7 Single Award: one awarding body in the consortium confers a single parchment as the official award of the joint programme.
- 4.2.8 Joint Award: A parchment conferred by one or more higher education institutions offering a single joint programme and nationally acknowledged as the recognised award of the joint programme.
- 4.2.9 Double Award: Two individual awards and parchments, attesting the successful completion of two separate curricula (which may have potential overlap and efficiencies in course-delivery and completion; for example, shared modules). Each institution is primarily responsible for its own award.
- 4.2.10 Multiple Award: Separate awards conferred by higher education institutions offering the joint programme attesting the successful completion of the programme. (If two degrees are awarded by two institutions, this is a 'double degree / award'). Each institution is primarily responsible for its own award.
- 4.2.11 Transnational Education: refers to the delivery, either fully or partially, of an educational programme in one country by an institution based in another country (*i.e.* different from where the awarding institution is based). Transnational education does not necessarily involve collaborative provision.
- 4.2.12 Transnational Programme: An educational programme delivered in a country different from where the awarding institution is based. This policy covers such programmes quality assured by ATU *in collaboration* with foreign institutions.
- 4.2.13 Linked Provider: is an entity that, while not itself authorised to grant awards, establishes an agreement with the University. Under this arrangement, the linked provider delivers an education and training programme that meets all or some of the requirements for an award from the University.

### **4.3 Collaborative Partnerships**

Collaborative partnerships should be aligned with the University's strategic objectives, ensuring they provide tangible benefits to both students and the University.

#### **4.3.1 Establishing the Partnership**

Partnerships should be built on mutual trust, transparency, and respect. Regular communication, joint training sessions, and review meetings should be conducted to help ensure a harmonious collaboration.

#### 4.3.2 The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

A MoU should be created to formalise collaborations with a view to working toward a formal *consortium agreement* in time.

#### 4.3.3 Roles and Responsibilities

Clear delineation of roles and responsibilities for both the University and the partner organisations should be established, ensuring accountability and clarity in operations. This detail should be recorded in the *consortium agreement*.

#### 4.3.4 The Consortium Agreement

The consortium agreement should detail the specific terms and conditions of collaboration, including the roles and responsibilities of each partner, the governance structure of the consortium, quality assurance measures, financial arrangements, intellectual property rights, conflict resolution mechanisms, and terms for termination of the agreement.

#### 4.3.5 Due Diligence and Partner Evaluation

Before finalising any partnership through a formal *consortium agreement*, a thorough evaluation of the potential partner's financial stability<sup>2</sup>, reputation, academic quality assurance framework, and alignment with the University's values should be conducted. Likewise, ATU will enter a reciprocal process with potential partners, if requested.

### 4.4 Development and Approval of Collaborative Programmes

#### 4.4.1 Proposal Process

Proposals for collaborative programmes should detail the programme's objectives, curriculum, assessment methods, expected outcomes, and benefits. They should also outline the strategic alignment with institutional goals. The University Planning Team (UPT), which has executive responsibility for the provision of programmes, will evaluate the strategic alignment of the proposal, benefits to learners, and the suitability of collaborative partners. Feedback will be provided, and revisions may be requested before a final decision is taken. In completing its evaluation of collaborative proposals, the UPT may refer such proposals to Academic Council for review and comment.

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<sup>2</sup> ... With the possible exception of certain publicly funded Irish Higher Education and Further Education providers and agencies, which may become exempted from this requirement during the due diligence process.



#### 4.4.2 Programme Approval and Validation

An approved proposal for a collaborative programme must, as far as is practicable, align with ATU's framework for programme development, and have regard to the principles outlined in *AQAE003 – Developing and Validating New Taught Programmes Policy*, while also integrating any specific accommodations for collaborative provision. The University acknowledges the potential for “unique” aspects of collaborative programmes, such as varying module credit sizes, by applying a flexible approach to validation. This flexibility will ensure that the programme can accommodate and respect the diverse academic structures of our partner institutions. This policy for collaborative provision of programmes recognises that the development, validation, and delivery of joint awards may need to deviate from standard ATU policies and procedures.

### 4.5 Quality Assurance in Collaborative Provision

#### 4.5.1 Quality Assurance Framework and Standards

To ensure the highest standards of quality in collaborative programmes, the University will augment its existing Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Framework (AQAEF) to specifically address the nuances and challenges of collaborative and transnational provision. While our current QA framework sets a solid foundation for programme and award quality assurance, we recognise the need for tailored approaches in the context of joint ventures. This enhancement will integrate best practices at both national and international levels, ensuring alignment with the University's QA standards and accommodating, where relevant, the diversity of our partners' frameworks also. The specifics of this augmented approach are outlined in the University's *AQAE039 Procedure for Quality Assurance of Collaborative Programme Provision*, which provides detailed guidance for adapting our quality assurance processes to the unique requirements of collaborative educational models.

#### 4.5.2 Academic Monitoring and Review

Programmes of study developed through partnerships, culminating in an ATU award, will generally follow the University's established framework for annual monitoring, and periodic review, as delineated in *AQAE020 Monitoring, Evaluation, and Enhancement of Programmes*. However, in acknowledgment of the augmented quality assurance framework detailed in section 4.5.1 above, specific adaptations or deviations from these standard procedures may be implemented to facilitate the unique aspects of collaborative and transnational provision. These modifications will be clearly defined and agreed upon within the consortium agreement, ensuring that

all quality assurance practices are appropriately tailored to reflect the collaborative nature of the programme, whilst upholding the integrity and standards of ATU.

#### 4.5.3 Continuous Improvement and Feedback Mechanisms

Feedback from students, faculty, and external stakeholders should be actively sought and used to drive continuous improvement in collaborative programmes.

### **4.6 Further Requirements for the Quality Assurance of International Joint Awards**

Joint awards refer to academic qualifications conferred jointly by two or more institutions. Proposals for joint awards must detail the curriculum, assessment methods, and administrative arrangements relating to the awards. Joint awards should be recognised by relevant accrediting bodies in all participating institutions, thus helping to ensure their widespread relevance and validity.

*International* Joint Awards in the context of this policy are understood as programmes with an integrated curriculum coordinated and offered jointly by higher education institutions from *different* countries and leading to either double / multiple awards or a joint award. As such, the partner institutions to international joint awards each fall under the auspices of a different national regulatory agency for quality assurance (the *European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)* serves as the official register of quality assurance agencies (QAAs) within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)).

Quality assurance of International Joint Awards, including their approval and validation will be conducted under the provisions, guidelines and procedures detailed in the '*European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes*'. The current European approach aims to simplify the external quality assurance of such programmes. It endeavours to achieve this by removing significant barriers to the creation of joint programmes by establishing standards for these programmes, aligned with the agreed-upon tools of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), without imposing additional national criteria. The '*European Approach*' document provides detail on how it should be applied depending on the needs of the cooperating higher education institutions and the requirements of their national frameworks.

## 4.7 Transnational Programmes

Transnational programmes are educational programmes delivered in a country different from where the awarding institution is based.

Providers of transnational programmes are encouraged to follow the relevant parts of the *Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Education (OECD/UNESCO 2005)* which are hereby adopted by ATU as its guidelines. Where ATU becomes a provider of new transnational programmes, the University will use the codes of practice referenced therein particularly the *UNESCO/Council of Europe Revised Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education (2007)*.

### 4.7.1 Quality Assurance for Transnational Programmes

Special attention will be given to ensure that transnational programmes meet the same quality standards as our domestic programmes. This includes adherence to / consideration of both the University's standards and the standards of the host country. Further detail on the quality assurance of transnational programmes is detailed in *AQAE039 Procedure for Quality Assurance of Collaborative Programme Provision*.

### 4.7.2 Recognition and Equivalency

Programmes should be designed such that they ensure that qualifications from transnational programmes are recognised internationally, facilitating student mobility and employability.

## 4.8 Quality Assurance of Linked Providers

A *linked provider* is an entity that, while not itself authorised to grant awards, establishes an agreement with the University to deliver an education and training programme that meets all or some of the requirements for an award from the University.

Statutory guidelines require that where the University makes an award in respect of a programme offered by a linked provider, the University includes in its own quality assurance framework procedures to approve, monitor and review the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures of each of its linked providers.

Accordingly, linked providers of ATU must satisfy the requirements of the University's *AQAE040 Procedure for Approval and Monitoring of Linked Providers*.

This procedure provides for:

- the approval of the quality assurance procedures of linked providers whose programme(s) leads to an ATU award,

- the monitoring of linked provider programmes leading to awards of the University,
- arrangements to ensure that enrolled learners can complete programmes leading to similar awards if the linked provider ceases to offer the programme(s) for whatever reason, including withdrawal of the awarding function by the awarding body. These requirements are for the protection of enrolled learners on linked provider programmes leading to university awards,
- periodic review (in accordance with the procedures for cyclical review established by QQI) by the University of the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures established and implemented by the linked provider, and,
- the withdrawal of approval by the University of a linked provider.

## **4.9 Roles and Responsibilities**

### **4.9.1 Institutional Responsibilities**

The University will ensure that all collaborative programmes align with its mission, vision, and strategic objectives. It will also provide necessary support and resources for the successful implementation of these programmes.

### **4.9.2 Partner Provider Responsibilities**

Partner institutions are expected to adhere to the terms of the collaboration agreement, ensure the quality of the educational experience, and provide timely feedback and communication. Likewise, ATU will fulfil all its obligations under the collaborative agreement in a timely and open fashion.

### **4.9.3 Learner Responsibilities**

Students participating in collaborative programmes must comply with the academic and behavioural standards of the host institution where they are currently enrolled or actively participating. This approach ensures that students are always subject to, and protected by the specific regulations, policies, and procedures applicable at the institution they are attending at any given time, whether for coursework, examinations, or any other academic activities. This policy respects the diversity of our partner institutions' standards and endeavours to facilitate a seamless integration of students into their current academic environment.

## 4.10 Contingency Planning

### 4.10.1 Due Diligence and Risk Management

In accordance with Section 4.3.5 of this policy, a comprehensive due diligence process must be completed prior to the finalisation of any partnership via a consortium agreement.

Potential risks associated with collaborative programmes, including financial, legal, operational, academic, and reputational risks, will be identified and mitigated through proactive planning and periodic monitoring.

### 4.10.2 Addressing Disruptions and Changes

In the event of unforeseen disruptions or changes, such as geopolitical issues, regulatory changes, or other external factors, the consortium partners will meet to develop and implement contingency plans.

### 4.10.3 Exit Strategy and Termination of Collaborations

A clear exit strategy will be outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) or the consortium agreement. This strategy will detail the steps and procedures to be followed in case a collaboration needs to be terminated, ensuring minimal disruption to students and stakeholders.

## 5. Associated Documents Generated by this Policy

*AQAE039 Procedure for Quality Assurance of Collaborative Programme Provision*

*AQAE040 Procedure for Approval and Monitoring of Linked Providers*

## 6. Revision History

Revision No	Description of Change	Approval Date
000	New Policy Approved Academic Council	19 Apr 2024