D06.3 - ARQUS JOINT DEGREE PROGRAMMES

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Authors: WG06 members from partner universities of Arqus II.
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0. Introduction and context

The development of Arqus joint degree programmes constitutes one of the central ambitions of the Arqus European University Alliance's second work plan (2022–2026), embedded in Task Force T06.1 "Arqus Degrees for Europe and the World" within Work Package 6 – Arqus Learning Pathways (WP06). The overall objective of WP06 is to design and provide a flexible joint academic offer, with the development of joint degree programmes representing one of the key activities contributing to this objective.

Deliverable D06.3 encompasses partnership agreements and related documentation for joint degree programmes at EQF Levels 6 and 7, developed on the basis of bottom-up proposals from partner universities and building on the experience accumulated during Arqus I (2019–2022).

During Arqus I, the Alliance successfully established three joint programmes: a Joint Master's Programme in European Studies – Europe as a Global Actor, a Joint Master's Programme in International Cybersecurity and Cyberintelligence, and an Arqus Multiple Master's Degree Programme in Translation. Two of these programmes lead to joint Master's degrees accredited under the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. The experience gained through these initiatives directly informed the development approach adopted in Arqus II.

The development of new joint programmes in Arqus II contributes directly to the objectives of Task Force T06.1 and supports the Alliance's efforts to advance the European Degree concept through highly integrated, interdisciplinary and mobility-oriented programmes. In this regard, D06.3 is closely linked to D06.1 (Guidelines for the Award of the Arqus Label) and D06.2 (Arqus Position Paper on the European Degree), both of which have been completed within the Arqus II timeline.

1. The Arqus Call for the Implementation of Joint Programmes

In order to structure and govern the development of new joint programmes in a transparent, merit-based and Alliance-wide manner, WP06 designed and implemented a dedicated call process. This section describes the key stages of that process.

Priority areas for new joint programmes were first collected from all partner universities, then discussed within the Education Board and approved by the Rectors' Council and informed the design of the call. The final call reflected both the priorities identified by partner universities and the strategic objectives and thematic priorities of the Arqus Alliance. This approach helped ensure alignment between the proposed joint programmes and both institutional and Alliance-level priorities.

WP06 launched an open call for joint programme proposals in February 2024, with a submission deadline of 31 May 2024. The call was addressed to academic and administrative staff across Arqus partner universities interested in developing Joint Master's or Joint Bachelor's programmes and was published on the Arqus website and disseminated through institutional channels at each partner university. The call defined a Joint Programme as “an international study programme jointly developed and delivered by at least two Arqus partner institutions, characterised by a high degree of academic and organisational integration and leading to a joint, double or multiple degree”. Particular emphasis was placed on joint curriculum design, integrated mobility pathways, common quality assurance arrangements, and active participation of staff and students from all partner institutions.

Priority was given to multilateral consortia and to proposals addressing the thematic priorities of the Alliance: Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability, Digital Transformation and Artificial Intelligence, and European Identity and Heritage. Additional consideration was given to innovative

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learning and teaching approaches, links between education and research, and complementarity of expertise across partner universities.

All submitted proposals were evaluated by WP06 using predefined criteria covering strategic relevance, expected impact, institutional support, consortium composition, implementation planning and long-term sustainability. Each proposal was assessed using a dedicated evaluation form and subsequently ranked. The evaluation results were submitted to the Education Board and subsequently to the Rectors' Council for approval and funding allocation. As a result of this process, five Joint Master's Degree programme initiatives were approved for funding and development:

- Joint Master's programme in Translation, Technologies and Artificial Intelligence;
- Joint Master's programme in Food, Nutrition and Health;
- Joint Master's programme in Sustainable Development;
- Joint Master's programme in Environmental and Energy Law: Technology, Security and Sustainability;
- Joint Master's programme in Digital Humanities.

The Bachelor's level proposals submitted in response to this call were returned to their developers for revision, as they did not fully meet the established requirements at that stage.

To support further programme development, WP06 organised a joint programme implementation workshop at the University of Wroclaw (18–19 November 2024). The workshop brought together representatives of the approved Master's programme consortia as well as teams working on Bachelor's-level joint programme initiatives. Following the workshop, in February 2025, the Education Board and the Rectors' Council approved funding for two Joint Bachelor's programme:

- Bachelor’s double degree programme in Business Data Analytics and Economics;
- Joint Bachelor's programme in Physics for Technology.

As a result, seven joint programmes are being developed under Arqus II, comprising five Joint Master's programmes and two Joint Bachelor's programmes. To support their development activities, a lump-sum budget of €195,000 was allocated to the joint programmes. WP06 allocated the budget in two stages, reflecting the programme selection and approval process described above. Following the approval of the Master's programme proposals, €30,000 was allocated to each joint programme, with the exception of the Joint Master's Programme in Food, Nutrition and Health, which received €20,000. As this joint programme was based on an already developed Erasmus Mundus Joint Master proposal, it did not require the same level of development funding as programmes designed from scratch. From the remaining budget, €5,000 was allocated to organise the Arqus Joint Programmes Implementation Workshop in Wroclaw, and an additional €5,000 was provided to each of the two Bachelor's programme consortia to cover their travel costs for participation in the workshop, as their programme development funding had not yet been approved at that stage. Following the subsequent approval of the two Bachelor's programmes, each programme received €20,000 for its development. Where accreditation costs could not be covered from the allocated programme lump sum, these costs were covered separately.

2. Overview of Arqus Joint Programmes

As outlined above, seven joint programme initiatives supported under Arqus II are currently at different stages of development, accreditation and implementation. This section provides an overview of each joint programme, its consortium structure and its current implementation status. A summary of the status of all seven joint programmes is provided in Annex 1.

JOINT MASTER'S PROGRAMME IN TRANSLATION, TECHNOLOGIES AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

This is a two-year (120 ECTS) Joint Master's Degree programme (EQF Level 7) combining translation studies, language technologies and artificial intelligence. The programme aims to prepare graduates for emerging professional roles at the intersection of multilingual communication, translation and AI-supported language technologies.

Partner institutions

- University of Graz, coordinating institution, full partner, degree-awarding institution
- University of Granada, full partner, degree-awarding institution
- University of Minho, full partner, degree-awarding institution
- Vilnius University, full partner, degree-awarding institution

This programme is now fully developed and accredited. The cooperation agreement between the partner institutions was signed in February 2026 and the Self-Evaluation Report was submitted to the Austrian quality assurance agency (AQ Austria) for evaluation under the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. An on-site evaluation visit took place at the University of Graz on 10 June 2026. In August 2026, the consortium received the final expert evaluation report, which provided a very positive assessment of the programme and recommended its accreditation to the Board of AQ Austria, with only a few minor recommendations. On 24 September 2026, the programme was officially accredited by AQ Austria without any conditions. The programme is planned to be launched in the 2027/2028 academic year.

JOINT MASTER'S PROGRAMME IN FOOD, NUTRITION AND HEALTH

This is a two-year (120 ECTS) Joint Master's Degree programme (EQF Level 7) focusing on the interactions between food, nutrition and human health. The programme addresses nutrition-related challenges, food sustainability, food systems and health policy, preparing graduates to work across food science, nutrition and public health domains.

Partner institutions

- University of Padua, coordinating institution, full partner, degree-awarding institution
- University of Granada, full partner, degree-awarding institution
- Université Claude-Bernard Lyon 1, full partner, degree-awarding institution
- University of Agriculture in Kraków, full partner, degree-awarding institution
- University of British Columbia, associated partner

This programme is now fully developed and accredited and is in the implementation phase. The cooperation agreement between the partner institutions was signed in June 2026. The programme was evaluated by ACCUA (Agencia para la Calidad Científica y Universitaria de Andalucía) in accordance with the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes and received official accreditation on 5 May 2026. The programme was launched in September 2026, making it the first newly developed joint programme under Arqus II to enter the implementation phase. A total of 51 students were admitted for the 2026/2027 academic year: 12 EU students and 39 non-EU students.

JOINT MASTER'S PROGRAMME IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

This is a two-year (120 ECTS) Joint Master's Degree programme (EQF Level 7) focusing on sustainable development and the societal transformations required to address global sustainability challenges. The programme combines perspectives from environmental sciences, social sciences, economics and governance, while offering students the opportunity to follow specialised study paths aligned with their academic interests and career aspirations.

Partner institutions

- University of Graz, coordinating institution, full partner, degree-awarding institution
- Leipzig University, full partner, degree-awarding institution
- University of Minho, full partner, degree-awarding institution
- University of Wroclaw, full partner, degree-awarding institution
- Ca' Foscari University of Venice, full partner, degree-awarding institution
- Maynooth University, associated partner
- Utrecht University, additional partner
- University of Basel, additional partner
- Hiroshima University, additional partner

Significant progress has been made in the development of the joint programme. Building on an existing international programme and the experience of the partner institutions, the consortium has agreed on the programme structure, qualification profile, learning outcomes, study paths and specialisations. The cooperation agreement is currently under preparation. The joint programme team plans to subject the programme to an accreditation procedure based on the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in 2027. The programme is expected to welcome its first cohort of students in the 2027/2028 academic year.

JOINT MASTER'S PROGRAMME IN ENVIRONMENTAL AND ENERGY LAW: TECHNOLOGY, SECURITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

This is a two-year (120 ECTS) Joint Master's Degree programme (EQF Level 7) in Environmental and Energy Law, with a particular focus on Technology, Security and Sustainability. The programme provides students with advanced knowledge and competences to analyse and evaluate legislation, case law and legal doctrine related to environmental and energy issues, identify complex legal problems and develop strategies for their solution in a cross-cultural environment.

Partner institutions

- Vilnius University, coordinating institution, full partner, degree-awarding institution
- University of Granada, full partner, degree-awarding institution
- University of Padua, full partner, degree-awarding institution

The development of the programme has faced a number of challenges, particularly in reaching a common understanding among the partner institutions on key aspects of programme design, structure and delivery. As a result, the development process has taken longer than initially anticipated. Nevertheless, the programme consortium has remained fully committed to the initiative and has continued working closely to address these challenges.

Significant progress was made during the final months of Arqus II. The partners agreed on the programme structure and course syllabi, and a face-to-face working group meeting took place on 8–9 June 2026 in Padua to review the state of development and define the next implementation steps. By 30 September 2026, the programme was developed, the cooperation agreement had been fully prepared and agreed upon by all partner institutions and was already in the process of being signed. The next step will be the preparation and submission of the Self-Evaluation Report to the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC), Lithuania, for evaluation under the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. Subject to a successful accreditation process, the programme is expected to be launched in either the 2027/2028 or 2028/2029 academic year.

JOINT MASTER'S PROGRAMME IN DIGITAL HUMANITIES

The development of the Joint Master's programme in Digital Humanities faced significant challenges related to maintaining a stable consortium structure and securing long-term commitment from the participating institutions. During the implementation period, changes in institutional priorities affected partner participation and slowed down the programme development process.

WP06 invested considerable effort in maintaining the initiative and exploring possibilities for continuing the programme development. Multiple discussions were held to identify potential solutions and ensure the conditions necessary for the successful implementation of the programme.

Despite these efforts, it was not possible to ensure a partnership structure that would support the further development and implementation of the programme. As a result, programme development activities have been suspended.

BACHELOR'S DOUBLE DEGREE PROGRAMME IN BUSINESS DATA ANALYTICS AND ECONOMICS

This is a three-year (180 ECTS) Bachelor's Double Degree programme (EQF Level 6) developed on the basis of existing accredited study programmes at the partner institutions: the Bachelor's in Business Data Analytics at Vilnius University, the Bachelor's in Economics at the University of Minho, and the Bachelor's in Big Data Analytics at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. The programme integrates the fields of data analytics, business and economics and includes a mandatory mobility period of at least 60 ECTS at a partner degree-awarding institution, leading to the award of a double degree by Vilnius University and the University of Minho.

Partner institutions

- Vilnius University, coordinating institution, degree-awarding institution
- University of Minho, degree-awarding institution

- National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy (Ukraine), associated partner, non-degree-awarding institution

Significant progress has been made in the development of the programme. The academic and organisational framework of the double degree programme has been agreed by the partners, including student mobility pathways, credit recognition procedures, quality assurance arrangements and programme governance through a joint Programme Steering Committee. The National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy participates as an associated partner and contributes to the programme through dedicated mobility windows and academic offerings available to participating students.

Currently, the cooperation agreement between the partner institutions has been fully prepared and agreed upon by all partners and is in the process of being signed. As this is a double degree programme based on existing and already accredited national study programmes, no additional programme evaluation is required. Depending on how the programme is implemented, the consortium may consider turning it into a joint degree programme in the future. The first student mobility activities under the double degree scheme are expected to take place in the 2027/2028 academic year.

JOINT BACHELOR'S PROGRAMME IN PHYSICS FOR TECHNOLOGY

This is a three-year (180 ECTS) Joint Bachelor's Degree programme (EQF Level 6) combining physics, mathematics, informatics, electronics and chemistry. The programme provides students with strong analytical, computational and experimental competences, preparing them for advanced studies and careers in physics-related fields.

Partner institutions

- University of Wroclaw, coordinating institution, full partner, degree-awarding institution
- University of Granada, full partner, degree-awarding institution
- University of Padua, full partner, degree-awarding institution
- Vilnius University, full partner, degree-awarding institution

Significant progress has been made in the development of the joint programme, which is now fully developed. The cooperation agreement between the partner institutions was signed in February 2026. The Self-Evaluation Report was submitted to the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC), Lithuania, on 25 June 2026 for evaluation under the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. At the time of preparation of this deliverable, the external evaluation had not yet taken place and the accreditation decision had therefore not yet been issued. Subject to a successful accreditation process, the programme is expected to be launched in the 2027/2028 academic year.

The accreditation of this joint programme is directly linked to WP06 milestone MS09, "First joint bachelor's degree accredited", which was expected to be achieved by the end of the Arqus II. Although the programme was fully developed and submitted for external evaluation, the accreditation procedure could not be completed by 30 September 2026 due to delays in the external quality assurance process resulting from internal processes within the quality assurance agency. Consequently, the milestone could not be fully achieved within the Arqus II period for reasons outside the control of the programme consortium and WP06.

3. Alignment with the Joint European Degree Label Initiative

Following the Council Resolution of 12 May 2025 inviting the Commission and Member States to roll out a joint European Degree Label (jEDL), the European Commission launched the call "Partnerships for Excellence: European Universities – European Degree exploratory action" (ERASMUS-EDU-2025-PE-EUED), aimed at supporting higher education institutions in the design, adaptation and implementation of joint programmes aligned with the jEDL criteria.

It is important to note that four of the joint programmes described in this report have been included in the EDLive project application ("EDLive – The European Degree Label Live: From Vision to Action"), coordinated by the University of Graz, based on their compliance with the project's requirements:

- Joint Master's programme in Translation, Technologies and Artificial Intelligence;
- Joint Master's programme in Food, Nutrition and Health;
- Joint Master's programme in Sustainable Development;
- Joint Bachelor's programme in Physics for Technology.

The EDLive project proposal, submitted under the European Degree Exploratory Action by the Arqus European University Alliance, was successfully selected for funding, receiving an excellent evaluation score of 88/100. In its assessment, the European Commission particularly recognised the project's strong strategic relevance and expected impact, highlighting the consortium's extensive expertise, previous achievements and capacity to contribute to the implementation of the future Joint European Degree Label. The evaluation also acknowledged the Arqus Alliance's advanced level of institutional integration, extensive experience in developing joint programmes, and well-established governance structures, confirming the Alliance's strong position to contribute to the future European Degree framework. Participation in EDLive will further support the alignment of relevant Arqus joint programmes with the jEDL criteria and build on the results achieved through the joint programme development activities described in this deliverable.

4. Support Provided to Joint Programme Consortia

The development of joint programmes requires expertise in a wide range of academic, administrative and quality assurance areas. To support programme teams throughout the entire development process, WP06 provided a combination of training activities, workshops and individual consultations.

A dedicated online training series on joint programme development was organised between 2024 and 2026, covering key topics such as joint curriculum design, cooperation agreements, quality assurance, accreditation procedures, student administration, financial management and the European Degree Label initiative. These sessions were open to both academic and administrative staff across the Arqus Alliance and contributed to building institutional capacity for joint programme development. Participant feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with many returning for multiple modules.

In addition, two face-to-face workshops were organised specifically for joint programme development consortiums. The first workshop, held at the University of Wroclaw in November 2024, served as a kick-off event for the selected joint programme initiatives and provided practical guidance on programme development and implementation.



The second workshop, organised at the University of Minho in Braga in April 2026, focused on programme implementation, inclusion and accessibility, and the European Degree Label initiative, while also providing an opportunity for programme teams to exchange experiences and discuss challenges. As part of this workshop, WP06 organised two dedicated feedback sessions — a Collaborative Review Lab and a Collaborative Improvement Lab — in which representatives of joint programme consortia analysed the challenges encountered during programme development and proposed concrete process improvements and tools needed from the Alliance to facilitate the design and implementation of future joint programmes. The information gathered through these sessions was discussed within WP06 with a view to refining processes within Arqus and supporting the design and implementation of future Arqus joint programmes.



In addition to these structured training events, WP06 has provided ongoing individual counselling and tailored advice to all joint programme development teams throughout the process, supported by templates covering key areas such as cooperation agreements, curriculum design, mobility paths, self-evaluation reports.

5. Challenges and Lessons Learned

The development of joint programmes across multiple countries and higher education systems has highlighted several common challenges.

One of the most significant challenges has been the diversity of national legal and regulatory frameworks. Differences in accreditation requirements, quality assurance procedures, recognition arrangements and regulations governing joint degrees have increased the complexity of programme development and implementation.

In addition, although the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes is intended to enable a single external evaluation of a joint programme, its implementation still varies across national higher education systems. Programme consortia therefore need to consider different national requirements, identify an appropriate EQAR-registered quality assurance agency and ensure that the outcome of the evaluation can be recognised in all participating countries. Accreditation procedures may also involve considerable costs and lengthy timelines, which need to be taken into account at an early stage of joint programme development. These factors can make it difficult to align external accreditation procedures with programme development timelines.

The Joint Bachelor's Programme in Physics for Technology provides a practical example of this challenge. The Lithuanian quality assurance agency (SKVC) was selected to carry out the external evaluation under the European Approach. This choice was based on SKVC's previous experience in evaluating the Arqus Joint Master's Programme in International Cybersecurity and Cyberintelligence developed during Arqus I, as well as the fact that the evaluation did not involve additional accreditation costs for the consortium. However, the external evaluation process took longer than initially anticipated. This experience highlighted that, even when an agency has previous experience with the evaluation of joint programmes under the European Approach, the duration of the external quality assurance process may be difficult to predict and should therefore be taken into account when planning the overall timeline for the development and launch of a joint programme.

The establishment of a common fee structure also emerged as a significant challenge for joint programme consortia. National legislation and institutional regulations related to tuition fees, student contributions and financial management vary considerably across partner countries, limiting the flexibility of some institutions to adopt common fee arrangements. Consequently, programme consortia devoted substantial time and administrative effort to identifying financially sustainable and legally compliant solutions that could be accepted by all partners. Therefore, reaching agreement on common fee policies became an important component of joint programme development across the Arqus Alliance and highlighted the need to identify sustainable and compatible funding solutions for future joint educational initiatives. This challenge was discussed at a face-to-face meeting of Arqus Vice-Rectors held in Brussels on 12 May, where partners acknowledged the importance of establishing a common fee policy for joint programmes. As a result, it was agreed to develop an Arqus Joint Fee Policy document, which is currently being finalised and reviewed within the Arqus Education Board.

Another recurring challenge has been the time required to reach agreement among partner institutions on programme structures, mobility pathways, learning outcomes, assessment approaches and governance arrangements. Developing genuinely joint programmes has required extensive consultation and coordination across institutions with different academic traditions and internal procedures.

The experience gained through the development process has also highlighted the importance of sustained institutional commitment and adequate administrative support. Joint programme development is resource-intensive and requires long-term engagement from both academic and professional staff.

6. Integration of Joint Programmes in the Digital Arqus Ecosystem

As foreseen in the Arqus II work plan, joint programmes developed under this task are expected to make use of the digital infrastructure developed within WP12 – Digital Arqus, in order to ensure their visibility, accessibility and sustainable management across the Alliance.

- **Arqus Plaza / Course Catalogue** — Once accredited, joint programmes are listed in the Arqus catalogue of joint academic offer, providing prospective students and staff with centralised, up-to-date information on programme content, partner institutions, and application procedures.
- **Arqus Learning Management System (LMS)** — The Arqus LMS has been developed as the Alliance's joint platform for all joint academic offerings, including joint programmes. Joint programmes developed under this task will make use of the Arqus LMS where possible.
- **Arqus Virtual Office** — As this tool continues to develop within WP12, joint programmes are expected to be progressively integrated into the Arqus Virtual Office, supporting centralised registration and programme management processes across the Alliance.

Concluding remarks

Overall, one of the key outcomes of the work carried out under WP06 and presented in Deliverable D06.3 – Arqus Joint Degree Programmes – is the establishment of a more structured and supportive framework for the development of joint degree programmes across the Alliance. This includes procedures for the selection and approval of new programme proposals, practical documents and templates supporting programme development, including a Cooperation Agreement template and Self-Evaluation Report templates, as well as workshops, training activities, continuous consultation and individual support for joint programme development teams. Equally important, this work has strengthened cooperation between academic and administrative staff across Arqus universities and created a network of colleagues with practical experience in developing and implementing joint programmes.

The expanded Arqus joint programme portfolio opens up new opportunities for students to study at several Arqus universities, benefit from the expertise and academic environments of different institutions, and obtain joint or double degrees. More broadly, participation in an Arqus joint programme means studying in different countries, learning alongside peers from diverse academic and cultural backgrounds, developing multilingual competences and building the kind of international experience that is genuinely valued in today's labour market and in students' personal development. This is the real value of the work carried out under this deliverable: not just the programmes themselves, but the opportunities they create for the people who study in them.

For the European Higher Education Area, the Arqus joint programme portfolio contributes concrete, tested models of transnational cooperation, demonstrating how universities operating within different national and institutional frameworks can work together to develop and deliver integrated educational opportunities. Ultimately, the experience, structures and institutional capacity established through this work provide a strong foundation for the continued development of the Arqus joint academic offer and for creating more opportunities for students to study, learn and develop across Europe.



The Arqus European University Alliance is co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or EACEA. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Annex 1. Status of Joint Programmes Developed under Arqus II

Joint programme	Type of degree	Cooperation agreement	Accreditation status	Implementation status / next step
Translation, Technologies and Artificial Intelligence	Joint Master's Degree	Signed (February 2026)	**Accredited** by AQ Austria under the European Approach (24 September 2026), without conditions	Planned launch: 2027/2028 academic year
Food, Nutrition and Health	Joint Master's Degree	Signed (June 2026)	**Accredited** by ACCUA under the European Approach (5 May 2026)	Launched in September 2026
Sustainable Development	Joint Master's Degree	Under preparation	Accreditation under the European Approach planned for 2027	Planned launch: 2027/2028 academic year
Environmental and Energy Law: Technology, Security and Sustainability	Joint Master's Degree	Fully prepared and agreed upon by all partner institutions; signing process is underway	Accreditation under the European Approach planned for early 2027; evaluation to be carried out by Lithuanian QA agency (SKVC)	Planned launch: 2027/2028 or 2028/2029 academic year, subject to successful accreditation
Digital Humanities	Joint Master's Degree	-	-	Development suspended due to inability to secure a stable consortium structure
Business Data Analytics and Economics	Bachelor's Double Degree	Fully prepared and currently being signed (signed by Vilnius University; University of Minho and NaUKMA to follow)	Based on existing accredited programmes at partner institutions. No additional external evaluation will be required	First student mobility under the agreed mobility pathway (VU→UMinho): 2027/2028 academic year
Physics for Technology	Joint Bachelor's Degree	Signed (February 2026)	External evaluation in progress; Self-Evaluation Report submitted to the Lithuanian QA agency (SKVC) under the European Approach on 25 June 2026	Planned launch: 2027/2028, subject to successful accreditation