

PRESS RELEASE

The future of the alliance was discussed at the first RUN-EU General Assembly

Leiria, 16 November 2021

Between 1-5 November, up to 200 RUN-EU delegates, comprising students, researchers, academic staff members and associated partners from each country drawn from industry, enterprise, regional government and society, as well as the rectors/presidents of the seven member universities, came together as part of the first RUN-EU General Assembly (GA) at the Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest (TUS).

The week of events was an opportunity for the RUN-EU Management Committee to discuss and evaluate the alliance's first-year achievements, deepen institutional cooperation, improve cross-border collaboration between all members and associated partners, and discuss the plans for the future of RUN-EU.

It included visits to TUS campuses in Athlone, Thurles, and Limerick, as well as visits to relevant stakeholders in the Irish Midlands and Midwest regions (Limerick City and County Council Chamber Offices, Irish Bioeconomy Foundation, and CONFIRM). These visits provided an immersive experience to the GA guests in the Midland and Midwest regions of Ireland and opportunities to network.

Throughout the week, 15 student representatives from the seven higher education institutions participated in four different Short Advanced Programme (SAP) Challenges, based on teamwork activities related to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. They were spread across the three TUS campuses and given the opportunity to provide innovative sustainable solutions for real-life societal issues, such as sustainable development, plastic pollution, eco-innovation, and food waste.

James Clifford, a TUS postgraduate student who participated in the Sustainable Development – Social Enterprise SAP Challenge in Thurles, said of the event: 'We've been meeting different chairpersons for a couple of weeks in preparation for this week. And on Monday, when we were put into our groups and divided up, it was just great to get to know people, their different backgrounds, how they work, how to think, it was just amazing. Absolutely brilliant. I really enjoyed this week'.

In her speech at the gala dinner, the TUS Student's Union President, Áine Daly, said: 'Even though we are six countries, seven universities, we are one community with RUN, with everyone working together as a collective with a common goal and purpose. Having been involved since the beginning of RUN-EU, back in February 2020, over in Brussels, and seeing how much it has progressed, it is very inspiring and reassuring that the network is exactly what our students need. We are one, we are RUN'.

On the last day, TUS Millennium Theatre hosted the final GA meeting, where students and members from the Management Committee were able to showcase the conclusions they have come up to during the week and provide recommendations for the future of the alliance to the whole RUN-EU community. TUS also took the stage to launch the RUN-EU+ project, a long-term research strategy of the alliance.

In their opening speeches, both the president of TUS, Vincent Cunnane, and the president of Polytechnic of Leiria, Rui Pedrosa, have reinforced the idea that students hold a central role in the development and maintenance of RUN-EU.

'This GA is the culmination of a lot of work, a culmination of a hard week, and the Student Advisory Board is central for RUN-EU cooperation and success', said Vincent Cunnane.

Speaking to the students, Rui Pedrosa said: 'You are in the centre of our strategy because you are the future. All of you are entering today in the history of the Regional University Network because you are the first students who participate in the Student Week. That is a unique event, not only because around 100 students participated and contributed to the future of the RUN-EU strategy through the GA, but also because you had the opportunity to participate in four Short Advanced Programmes'.

Among the speakers at the event was Olivia O'Sullivan, Deputy Mayor of Limerick City and County, who said: 'The RUN-EU concept of European Education Area is a wonderful addition to the student life of our citizens. By enabling students to obtain a degree that combines studies in multiple EU countries, we can do our best to make the motto of the EU a reality, united in diversity. While our cultures do share some strong similarities, it is our differences that make our continent a great place to live, work and study'.

'Real understanding comes from being together, laughing together, studying together, and innovating together. We can enrich the lives of students in all our regions by making the European Education Area a reality', she added.

After two years of virtual communication, the RUN-EU Coordinator and Vice-President of the Polytechnic of Leiria, Nuno Rodrigues, said: 'Two years ago, we were here on the margins of the Shannon river, thinking about what we wanted to do with RUN-EU. A lot went on in the last year and a half. All of us were challenged on a personal and

professional level, beyond what you could have imagined. But, during this week, looking at everybody's faces, we've realised it is real and it is happening. In the last year, we had the will to be one even when we were forced to be apart and we did it'.

'Thank you to all of you for the commitment, for believing, for sharing, for realising that, yes, we have a lot of challenges, but that most of all, RUN-EU is about the opportunities', he added.

The next RUN-EU GA will take place in Finland, in October 2022.

Live updates from the event can be found on social media at the hashtag [#RUNEUGA21](#).

Editor's Note

The [Regional University Network – European University](#) (RUN-EU) is an alliance of seven like-minded higher education institutions drawn from all regions of Europe and established in 2020 under the [European Universities Initiative](#). It works collaboratively across languages and national frontiers to secure the sustainable economic, social, cultural, and environmental progress of our regions and stakeholders through education.

The seven higher education institutions that compose the alliance are the Polytechnic of Leiria (Portugal), the Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest (Ireland), the Polytechnic of Cávado and Ave (Portugal), the Häme University of Applied Sciences HAMK (Finland), the University of Győr – Széchenyi István University (Hungary), the NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences (The Netherlands), and the Vorarlberg University of Applied Sciences (Austria). Overall, RUN-EU comprises a student population of more than 75,000 students and 97 research centres and groups spread across Europe.

RUN-EU's mission is to deliver future and advanced skills that will help students, researchers, academics, and partners successfully meet the challenges of the future, engage in societal transformation, and promote active citizenship, thereby leading to the creation of a new type of multinational interregional alliance, a European Zone for Interregional Development.

For further information, please contact:

Nuno Rodrigues

RUN-EU Coordinator | Vice-President of the Polytechnic of Leiria

(+351) 244 830 010

nuno.rodrigues@ipleiria.pt | www.run-eu.eu



The content of this publication represents the views of the author only and is his/her sole responsibility. The European Commission and the Agency do not accept any responsibility for use that may be made of the information it contains.
Grant Agreement Number: 101004068.