



# The TESCEA approach to Joint Advisory Groups (JAGs)

## CASE STUDY

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Joint Advisory Groups (JAGs) strengthen the relationship between universities and their external stakeholders. They enable universities, employers, and the wider community to come together to inform and contribute to each other's practices.

## 1 Introduction

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Joint Advisory Groups, known as JAGs, were the main mechanism created by the TESCEA project for universities to engage with their external stakeholders. They were developed in response to the experiences of universities, who reported that relationships with employers often did not last and that they depended on individual lecturers and their relationships with particular organisations. Further, both universities and employers saw a need to improve student placements to ensure their usefulness for both the students and the hosting employer.

JAGs were designed to reformulate the relationship between universities and their external stakeholders by allowing universities, employers, and the wider community to come together to inform and contribute to each other's practices. For example, and key to TESCEA, JAGs helped by identifying skills, competencies and attitudes expected by industry which graduates are missing and feeding these into the course redesign process.

*"It was addressing the need to get feedback and feedforward from the job market regarding our curricular, both content and training methods... Specifically, it was meant to bring out the soft skills required by the job market (Critical Thinking and Problem-solving skills/attitudes)."*

Professor Flora Fabian, University of Dodoma

JAGs create a forum in which all stakeholders can benefit and learn; community stakeholders inform curriculum development, and universities are able to develop and enrich student experiences. During TESCEA, the role of the JAGs evolved and expanded beyond what was originally envisaged. They have provided input into the course redesign process, facilitating student and lecturer placements, and delivering guest lectures on campus. However, the JAGs have also provided input into the development of university policies and facilitated strategic connections between the universities, senior government, and policy officials.

*"[JAGs] have become more conversant with the [university's] institutional structure and how it operates. This has helped them to provide the critical support required in the transformation of lecturers and students. UDOM JAGs do engage and commit themselves in support of teaching and learning by providing mentorship to students, supporting students' placements, university policy reviews and development, and advocating for the TESCEA approach."*

Dr Edwin Ngowi, formerly University of Dodoma

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### TRANSFORMING EMPLOYABILITY FOR SOCIAL CHANGE IN EAST AFRICA

Transforming Employability for Social Change in East Africa (TESCEA) is helping young people in Tanzania and Uganda to use their skills and ideas to tackle social and economic problems. With partners in Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya, TESCEA supports universities, industries, communities and government to work together to create an improved learning experience for students – both women and men. This improved learning experience fosters the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and allows for practical learning beyond the classroom that improves a graduate's employability.

The TESCEA partnership is led by INASP (UK), working with Mzumbe University (Tanzania), University of Dodoma (Tanzania), Gulu University (Uganda), Uganda Martyrs University (Uganda), Association for Faculty Enrichment in Learning and Teaching (Kenya) and Ashoka East Africa (Kenya).

## 2 The JAG approach

Each university's JAG has over 25 external members from government, municipal/district leadership, commerce and industry, non-governmental organisations and associations, and community representatives. New JAG members are often identified or recommended by existing members, in response to the needs of the group. These groups meet in a range of ways, depending on the university, and can change over time as the relationship evolves. Read this mini case to find out more about the composition of the JAGs and how meetings are run.

Throughout TESCEA, the universities have benefitted from the support of Ashoka East Africa. As a project support partner, Ashoka played an active role in the establishment of the JAGs, delivering 'changemaker organisation mentality' training and also recommending fellows from the Ashoka network to join the groups. Once established, representatives from Ashoka have regularly participated and supported JAG meetings. Read this [blog post by Vincent Otieno Odhiambo](#), Regional Director of Ashoka East Africa in Kenya, describing their involvement.



Ashoka Fellow Joseph Nkandu of NuCafe speaking at Uganda Martyrs University

## 3 Key contributions of JAGs

- Literature review and identifying skills gaps**  
 JAGs contributed to the collation and review of literature in their countries and worldwide related to graduate skills and employment. This literature was analysed to develop a skills matrix, which informs the approach to course redesign. **Read this paper to find out more about the TESCEA skills matrix and process:** [Graduate skills for employability in East Africa: Evolution of a skills matrix for course redesign.](#)
- Establishing agreements with universities**  
 JAGs co-developed memorandums of understanding (MoUs) with the universities. These agreements ensure that JAG member organisations save a dedicated number of internship slots for the University's students, allowing them to benefit from experiential engagement with industry.
- Work experience**  
 JAG members facilitated authentic, work-based experiences for students, which complimented their theoretical studies. Some universities engaged JAG members as visiting lecturers (pracademics), while others arranged training and placements for students.
- Mentoring**  
 JAG members mentored students. In particular, this mentoring concerned how students can build their profile and ability to share what they know and present themselves to potential employers and investors.



## JAG composition

Membership of the JAGs is not formulaic; each university has spent time individually identifying their key stakeholders (local, national, and regional) to participate, informed by the programmes they intend to redesign. Each JAG includes a mix of people from the public and private sector (potential employers); entrepreneurs (inspirers); community leaders, and government (policy enactors). While membership numbers across the JAGs differ and can fluctuate over time, all universities maintain a group of over 25 members and found it beneficial to appoint a chairperson.

All universities have strived to achieve gender balance within their JAGs, especially within leadership positions, and some have invited gender-focused organisations to be members. For example, one of Mzumbe University's JAG members is from Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE). This JAG member's contribution has led to an increased awareness of gender-responsive pedagogy practices among JAG members and a review of the institution's gender policy.

Beyond success or relevance within their field, it is necessary for JAG members to also be interested in leading innovation within their communities. However, it is worth noting here that all universities generally found that people were pleased to join and support the group. Once the JAG members are selected from different sectors of interest to the university, terms of reference are shared and agreed upon.

In addition, lecturers and students from the universities are also invited to participate in meetings, either regularly or on a more ad-hoc basis. The sections below illustrate how the JAGs have been formed at each university.

### UNIVERSITY OF DODOMA (UDOM):

*"The JAG is currently formed by the TESCEA team, Director of Undergraduate Studies (UDOM), lecturer champions, student champions, external members from both public and private sectors (Ministry of Education Science and Technology, The Commission of Science and Technology (COSTECH), Small Industry Development Organisation – SIDO, Association of Tanzanian Employers – ATE, Confederation of Tanzania Industry – CTI, District Councils (Mpwapwa and Bahi), Dodoma Municipal Council."*

There are approximately 30 core members of the group but, depending on the objectives of a specific meeting, there can be up to 45 stakeholders in attendance. The decision on who to invite is based on stakeholder analysis. Initially, UDOM considered including representatives from banks and mobile phone companies. However, it was considered that these large employers had established recruitment processes and only hired from defined programmes (such as ICT, accounting, and commerce).

### MZUMBE UNIVERSITY:

Mzumbe University's JAG includes employers, student representatives from the participating programmes, Heads and Deans of participating programmes, TESCEA multipliers, TESCEA team members, teachers from secondary schools, and representatives from banks and the manufacturing industry. It also includes representatives from: the Prime Minister's Office Labour, Youth, Employment and Persons with Disability; the Ministry of Labour and Employment; Tanzania Private Sector Foundation; Ashoka East Africa; Small Industry Development Organisation; Association of Tanzanian Employers; Confederation of Tanzanian Industry; and several NGOs (including FAWE). In total, there are 35 members.

Regarding the selection of members: *"students are selected from representative courses, employers are selected based on the role of that office towards employability of graduates or policy reforms, or gender role in teaching and learning."*

### GULU UNIVERSITY:

The Gulu University team began by asking the faculties participating in TESCEA (Agriculture, Medicine, and Business) which community organisations and businesses they worked with within the community. Community members with a passion for community development, including local politicians, and community representatives, and academicians were also approached. Ashoka East Africa supported Gulu University in identifying a further member, who later was nominated as the chair, from their Changemaker Community. The JAG membership in Gulu University is composed of prominent community members from agribusiness, business, community development, non-governmental organisations, medicine and peace and development. This diversity in composition was necessitated by the need to have diversity in representation since the JAG at Gulu is constituted at the institutional level.

## JAG meetings

The frequency of meetings, and their format, has also been approached flexibly by all universities, responding both to the preferences of members and evolving priorities. When the JAGs were in their early stages, it was useful to meet regularly to establish the group appropriately and educate members about the TESCEA project. For example, Gulu University held a “Transforming Communities stakeholder engagement and learning evening” to develop a greater sense of community around the TESCEA project at the university. You can read more about the event here: Transforming learning and connecting communities to support higher education, by David Monk. However, over time this changed, and universities convened their JAGs quarterly or to coincide with key activities:

*“They began as a very engaged team ...we did some initial workshops with them, facilitating sessions about skills that are needed for employability and they participated in community engagement activities to connect with lecturers, and they also participated in another workshop around gender and employment... [However, later on, they] requested to be more of an advisory committee”*

Dr David Monk, Gulu University

As Monk suggests, JAG meetings can be run like workshops, with group work and activities, but they can also take the form of a classically facilitated meeting or even a networking session between the university and stakeholders.

*“The meetings are structured as workshops with short presentations, group work, plenary sessions and mainly participatory... gender representation was always considered.”*

Professor Flora Fabian, UDOM.

## 4 Challenges

During the implementation of the JAG approach within the TESCEA project we encountered the following challenges:

- **Parameters of the JAG**  
As the groups evolved, some universities found that it could be challenging to know when to engage the JAG, and how to define what they wanted them to do, as the potential scope is broad. It is necessary to address this challenge by spending time collaboratively identifying the group’s priorities, and where their interests align. It is also important to recognise that this is an iterative process, and the priorities will develop and change over time. For example, as described later, Gulu’s JAG evolved into an advisory committee.
- **Slow process of buy-in**  
Some universities have put significant effort into advocating for this approach to senior management and sourcing institutional funding. Especially at large institutions, the adoption of new approaches can *“take time and constant push and lobbying”* (UDOM).
- **Keeping up with industry developments**  
As mentioned above, it can be difficult to make improvements to the curriculum at the speed at which industry changes and develops. *“The purpose of JAG is to get inputs from industry to come up with improved curriculum, but the industry is dynamic such that by the time you come up with a new curriculum it is no longer relevant.”* (Mzumbe team). However, it is important to note here that keeping up with industry changes will always be a challenge but would be harder without JAG involvement.
- **Subject and industry specificity**  
At times, the advice provided by JAG members may be specific only to a particular industry or field. As such, it is a challenge for universities to identify what advice is generalisable and what is not. To address this challenge, some universities plan to create departmental (rather than institutional) JAGs. This will enable members to come from associated fields and be best placed to inform curriculum developments in those fields.

Gulu University JAG members sharing a meal with university staff early on in the project



- Evolving and changing membership**

JAG members are consistently very busy and, at times, it can be challenging to secure their participation in meetings. In addition, a challenge can arise when a member sends a delegate in their place, as the delegate may not know the approach well, and may have different competencies. Incentivisation of membership (explored below) and careful scheduling of meetings can promote regular participation. However, it is necessary to accommodate some changes in membership. This can be made easier by clear documentation of meetings and events and induction resources, so new members are brought up to speed quickly.
- Incentivisation**

Appropriate compensation of time and travel can be an effective way to incentivise long-term participation. However, finding an institutional budget for this can be challenging. Advocacy with senior management is crucial when working to secure institutional funding and support.

### The process of developing MoUs:

At Gulu University, the JAG members have guided the process of developing partnerships with key stakeholders, and a core part of this is the development of memorandums of understanding (MoUs). The MoUs provide for a basis of agreement and engagements between the university and businesses, organisations, or individuals to undertake collective action in internship placement in particular, and community engagement in general.

In Gulu University's case, the MoUs are focused on student internships placements, community development projects and community-focused research. Key aspects of the MoU are the commitment to host a certain number of student placements each academic year; specification of the roles and responsibilities of the university and partners, and specification of what each partner will expect/benefit from the relationship. This is critical as the success of community engagement depends on mutual understanding and benefits for all involved parties.

As the University's commitment to a community integrated approach to curriculum design has developed, the JAG members have been asking for the formalisation of this long-term commitment to the community. In response, Gulu University has developed a community engagement policy and approved the establishment of a directorate of community engagement. Once operational, the Directorate of Community engagement will be responsible for the development of MoUs with community members, ensure community participation in curriculum development and reviews, and documenting and sharing experiences of community engagement activities with university partners.

## 5 Beyond TESCEA

All the universities within the project are exploring ways to sustain the JAG approach beyond the project's lifespan. At UDOM and Mzumbe, there are plans to institutionalise the approach, however, it will be brought down to a departmental level. At Gulu University, the Directorate for Community Engagement will assume responsibility for continuing engagement with external stakeholders. While there will not be a budget for large-scale JAG meetings after the project, the hope is that JAG members will continue to engage with the university at the faculty level and that they will remain "champions" of the TESCEA approach.

For more case studies of TESCEA approaches see  
[www.transformhe.org](http://www.transformhe.org)

**Contact: [TransformHE@inasp.info](mailto:TransformHE@inasp.info)**

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