



Waterford Institute *of* Technology
INSTITIÚID TEICNEOLAÍOCHTA PHORT LÁIRGE

WIT Learning, Teaching & Assessment Strategy

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| Purpose: | The purpose of LTAS is to enhance the student learning experience by establishing a framework for co-ordinated decision making across the Institute on the future development of Learning, Teaching and Assessment. |
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Process for creating the strategy

Executive Board commissioned an initial draft Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (LTAS) document to provide a basis for further discussion and submissions from the Institute community. The Learning Teaching and Assessment Strategy Forum was established by open invitation to all staff and the following process was agreed to generate the draft strategy document:

- LTAS Forum meetings at Cork Rd. and College St. campuses;
- Discussion and benchmarking against examples of good practice;
- Working groups established:
 - Institutional Goals;
 - Data Collection;
 - Teaching, Learning and Assessment Practices;
 - Learning Environment and Resources.
- Data gathering:
 - Open electronic survey of all students;
 - Alumni survey.
- LTAS finalise discussion draft – Jan16th
- Consultation based on first draft:
 - Committees of Academic Council:
 - Support Committee for Learning and Teaching
 - Research & Development Committee
 - Academic Quality and Planning Committee
 - Admissions & Awards.
 - Student Union
 - Research Office, Computer Services, Library, School of Ed.
- Final meeting of LTAS – 24th Feb
- Draft document to Academic Council – 31rd March
- Draft to Executive Board
- Implementation Planning.

LTAS Forum

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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy

The purpose of this strategy is to enhance learning at WIT by establishing a common framework, aligned with overall Institute strategy, for decision making across the Institute on the future development of learning, teaching and assessment. The document outlines out a common institutional statement of:

- the environmental factors that influence how learning, teaching and assessment at the Institute can operate and develop;
- the capabilities and attitudes that we aim to foster in learners, and;
- the values, rights and responsibilities underpin learning, teaching and assessment at WIT.

Within this context the strategy sets the following institutional objectives in the development of learning, teaching and assessment:

- **delivering a distinctive learner – capability, skills and attitudes;**
- **realising the potential learning benefits of the modular system;**
- **promoting learner access, integration, achievement and lifelong learning;**
- **engaging with stakeholders in learning design, delivery and enhancement;**
- **supporting and developing good learning and teaching practices;**
- **supporting and developing good practice in assessment;**
- **developing the physical, social and technological environment in support of learning, teaching and assessment;**
- **quality management : identifying and facilitating further enhancement in learning, teaching and assessment;**
- **enhancing learning, teaching and assessment through staff development.**

It is intended to be a living document that is renewed and refined as required on an ongoing basis. Further development may particularly be required in the period leading to the next WIT strategic planning cycle reflecting:

- further planned major development of the MAP system;
- the academic recommendations of the Quality Enhancement Plans developed by School's through the School Review 2009/10 processes, and;
- any revisions in strategic direction arising from the proposed National Strategy for Higher Education and the development of the next institutional Strategic Plan.

A draft implementation plan will be published following the adoption of this strategy document detailing the specific actions required on the nine objectives above.

1.2 The need for a LTA Strategy

As discussed in the Context section below the Institute is working within a transforming higher education environment with:

- changing expectations and demands on the sector from government, employers and society;
- changing expectations and demands on and from learners in higher ed.;
- increased competitive pressure in student recruitment between existing and new providers;
- the ongoing process of working to deliver choice and flexibility to learners through a credit based modular system (CBMS) – a fundamentally different way of organising learning and teaching;
- new opportunities for learning enhancement and delivery possible through technology;
- changing economic circumstances and ongoing debate on funding of higher ed.;
- the promise of a new national strategy on higher education that may recommend significant restructuring.

While Schools, Departments, teaching staff and support services endeavour to respond to all of the challenges and opportunities presented by changing circumstances some aspects of the response needed are beyond the capability of any one individual or unit to effectively respond to - for example:

- how the CBMS is designed and developed, and inter-disciplinarity is facilitated;
- how learning and teaching is supported in working within a CBMS;
- how the physical and technological environment is developed in support of the teaching and learning methods and supports required by staff & learners;
- how effective practice can be promoted and shared by colleagues across the Institute;
- how a coherent and consistently high quality of service can be provided to learners by the diversity of staff and services that contribute to the learning experience of any one student;
- how limited resources are best deployed towards a common goal of enhancing the learning experience.

A common co-ordinated response is required to address these challenges and opportunities towards a common goal of enhancing the learning experience. Indeed there is increasingly an expectation – as evidenced in competitive funding and institutional quality review processes – that higher education institutions will have formulated and codified strategies for the development of their learning, teaching and assessment activities.

1.3 Relationship with other WIT strategies

1.3.1 Institutional strategy

The Institute’s mission is to “apply excellence in teaching, learning and research within a student-centred environment to foster graduates of distinction who are ready to take or enhance their leadership role in business, the professions, industry, public service and society” and sets high-level goals towards:

- empowering a distinctive learner, and;
- enhancing knowledge generation and knowledge transfer;

It sets specific objectives regarding:

- renewal of the academic portfolio;
- the transition from learner to graduate, and;
- the development of a student-centred learning environment.

The Strategic Plan sets the strategic direction, targets and consequent allocation of resources at a high-level (including growth and development planning for the overall portfolio of programmes, research activities Institute management and structures and allocation of resources). The role of LTAS is to focus specifically on the detail of the learning, teaching and assessment, and learning support, activities and objectives required to deliver on the targets set in the Strategic Plan and to, in turn, inform the subsequent strategic planning cycle.

The LTAS also articulates with the other key Institute strategies as follows:

1.3.2 Research & Knowledge Transfer Strategy 2007 - 2010

Enriching undergraduate and postgraduate teaching and curriculum development through the integration of research activities is one of the six strategic objectives of the Research and Knowledge Transfer Strategy and a recurring theme of the LTAS. Both strategies recommend support and development for subject groups and centres of excellence that work across the academic continuum and for ongoing support staff development in research and scholarship. The LTAS objective in “delivering a distinctive learner – capability, skills and attitudes” is based on the Institute’s graduate profile that requires all programmes to include research awareness and research skills building amongst the learning outcomes.

1.3.3 Staff Training & Development Strategy 2007 - 2010

The LTAS is aligned with the Staff Training and Development Strategy through its emphasis on the scholarship of teaching and learning, peer development through subject groups, building staff capacity to realise the learning benefits of modularisation and making use of Institute quality processes to identify and implement enhancements.

1.3.4 Strategy for Student Integration Success and Tracking (ASSIST)

The ASSIST strategy is aligned with the LTAS in through a number of shared objectives:

- enhancing the quality of the student learning experience;
- enhancing learner supports;
- promoting learner engagement;
- promoting the potential of enhancement in curriculum design, delivery and assessment to facilitate learner success.

ASSIST deriving these objectives from the point of view of enhancing engagement and progression, and the LTAS from the point of view of enhancing the student learning experience.

2. Context : the Institutional and External Environments

The growth in the breath and depth of learning opportunities, and in the physical, social and virtual learning environment, at Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) over its almost 40 year history is of great credit to the students and staff who made this happen. From its beginnings as a further and vocational education college intended to cater for just 400 learners the Institute has delivered a continuous academic progression. Driven by and driving the evolving learning needs of the society and the economy of the region, it has become a thriving academic community of over 10,000 students and 750 staff operating largely at university level. The needs and expectations of learners and of society that we serve continue to change and evolve however, as does the Institute itself, and our strategy in teaching, learning and assessment must take account of relevant factors within the internal and external environments.

2.1 The institutional environment

2.1.1 Learner intake

The Institute continues to meet the challenge of providing an intellectually challenging and supportive learning experience for students with a broad diversity of levels of previous formal academic achievement and for increasing numbers of ‘non-traditional’ students with steady growth in the numbers of both mature and international students. In terms of student intake the majority of our school-leaver entry is now at Level 8, having almost doubled over the preceding 5 years, while there has been a decline in entry at Level 6. Overall numbers remain steady at circa 6,000 full-time and 4,000 part-time learners.

2.1.2 The curriculum

WIT has delegated authority to make awards from Level 6 to Level 10 of the National Framework of Qualifications. The way in which learning is organised is in the process of moving from a course or programme-based system (traditional to HE in Ireland) delivered over academic years towards a modular credit accumulation system based on attainment of learning outcomes and delivered in semesters. Moving to modules and semesters similarly necessitated a major effort from staff throughout the Institute in the re-design of the curriculum and the processes of curriculum design for a modular, semesterised system continue to mature. Work is similarly ongoing on the academic administration and support systems towards realising the full potential benefits of this system in terms of enhanced opportunities for learner access, retention and lifelong learning, along with enrichment of learning opportunities through the introduction of multidisciplinary programme offerings.

2.1.3 Teaching, learning & assessment practices

The majority of teaching at the Institute takes place in face-to-face lecture format with learners on average having a greater number of contact hours that are traditional in the university sector and teaching staff similarly carrying a greater teaching load. In addition to lectures and small group

teaching students benefit from a range of innovative teaching & learning approaches being used by staff across the including case studies, simulations, reflective learning approaches, enquiry based learning, problem – based learning, experiential learning and the multiple intelligences teaching approach. These activities are systematically promoted within some Schools and Departments through School Committees, Subject Groups or dedicated teaching development functions while in other areas innovative practices are developed through individual practice or continuing professional development or on an informal peer to peer basis.

Development in the use of ICT in enriching learning is continuing with the Institute’s virtual learning environment (Moodle replacing the previous WebCT system) being widely used by staff for dissemination, communication and assessment. A dedicated ICT Learning Support unit has been established to support staff in further exploiting this technology in enriching teaching and learning including effective andragogical approaches in the use of technology. Feedback from students is very positive with regard to teaching and particularly regarding the friendly and supportive relationships between learners and teaching staff.

The terminal exam is still the most widely used method of assessment with a continuing growth in the use of continuous assessment. A wide variety of assessment techniques are in routine use across the Institute including assignments, field reports, group presentations, portfolios, practice based assessments. The learner experience survey and feedback from student representatives point out the continuing challenge however in setting the overall assessment load, the timing of assessment and the usefulness of assessment in facilitating learning through the availability of feedback to learners on their assessment performance.

2.1.4 The linkages between research, knowledge transfer and LTA

There has been very significant growth in research activity over the past decade adding to the richness of academic life at the Institute and affording new opportunities for the enrichment of teaching and learning. Teaching staff draw upon their research activities to enrich the learning experience for students and in participating in curriculum development. Research awareness and research orientation is developed in early undergraduate years through generic skills modules and the library information literacy training programme. Students’ research orientation is further developed through project work and problem–based learning activities. The latter years of all undergraduate programmes and all taught postgraduate include research-based learning activities. Another confluence of research and teaching activities is in the Institute’s programme of postgraduate skills training (including capacity building for postgraduate skills training) and research supervisor training. Staff across the Institute are involved in collaborative developments in these areas through active participation in the National Academy for the Integration of Research and Teaching and Learning project and the WIT – led Knowledge Transfer in the Curriculum Project.

2.2 The external environment

2.2.1 The national context

The direction of national policy on higher education has been largely driven by the economic and social development potential of the knowledge economy and broadened access to higher learning and lifelong learning. The environment is characterised by increased competition amongst institutions for the same prospective students in HE ‘marketplace’ along with the entry of new providers including e-learning providers. Providers are marketing to prospective students on the basis of their relative standards of services and facilities they can offer to learners including multidisciplinary programmes, opportunities for learner self-determination in curriculum pursued and the relative quality and value of their awards.

In addition to capitation funding the government has in recent years offered targeted funding schemes such as the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTLTI) aimed at developing fourth level education and more recently the Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF) directed at, amongst other things, teaching and learning development projects. A proposed new national strategy for higher education is currently being drafted and is likely to address the future role of the Institute of Technology sector amongst other issues. Waterford Institute of Technology has played a leading part in this debate through its application for designation as a university under Section 9 of the Universities Act. The “post Celtic Tiger” economic downturn is expected to have a significant impact on higher education policy, strategy and funding.

2.2.2 European policy

European policy on education has similarly been driven by the potential economic and social development possible through education. The Bologna processes are creating a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) based on a common framework of qualifications and a comparability of learner attainment facilitating both economic and social development through facilitating free movement of workers and citizens. The Lisbon agenda again aims to deliver both economic and social development through the development of the European research and knowledge economy including social and environmental renewal. A standardised European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) has been introduced to achieve compatibility and comparability of higher education awards. The ECTS is reflected locally in the introduction of the National Framework of Qualifications.

2.2.3 Quality culture

The emergence of the EHEA has driven a renewed emphasis on the management of the quality of the learning experience delivered to the student in both quality assurance and quality improvement terms. In order for awards across Europe to be comparable there must set of common quality assurance standards. The European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (the ‘ESG’) fulfils this need and the Irish government has signed up, at Council of Ministers level, to the ESG. In addition to this basic requirement international good practice in quality management requires institutions not just to measure performance against externally adjudicated standards but to

actively take control of quality management within the organisation and use it to facilitate all units in identifying and implementing ongoing improvements. In Ireland this philosophy of developing the internal quality culture in organisations is reflected in the work of the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) and in the emerging Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) framework for institutional review. The work of both organisations also reflects an increasing national policy imperative to demonstrate transparency and accountability in services provided and in expenditure of public money.

3. Common Skills, Values, Rights and Responsibilities

All objectives of this strategy are underpinned by the vision for a profile of capabilities, skills and attitudes that all graduates should leave the Institute with and by the statement of core values underpinning the WIT learning experience. The provisions of the strategy are also informed by the rights afforded and the responsibilities required by the Institute to all learners.

3.1 The WIT Graduate Profile

The graduate profile is the primary vision statement for learning, teaching and assessment at WIT. All of the objectives outlined in this strategy are aimed at supporting and developing a learning environment that facilitates learners in developing the academic, interpersonal and practical capabilities and self-awareness enshrined in the profile. The graduate of WIT is defined as someone who will be:

- capable in all of the outcomes of the qualification awarded;
- disposed towards ongoing learning and self-directed in learning;
- research-literate and research-informed;
- fluent in interpersonal and communication skills;
- enabled and further supported in career management and the mapping of career pathways;
- equipped with other life skills reflective of the development of the whole person and of a culture which will equip students for success after graduation, to include:
 - a capacity for independent critical thought;
 - teamwork;
 - ethical sensitivity;
 - self and community awareness.

3.2 Core institutional values

The following values and principles underpin the WIT Teaching, Learning and Assessment strategy:

- the Institute recognises and respects the right of the individual to think, learn and teach in accordance with the established principles of academic freedom;
- the Institute embraces, encourages and supports diversity;
- the Institute encourages teachers and learners to take responsibility for their own teaching and learning and supports them in doing so;
- the Institute recognises that reflection on practice is vital for effective teaching and learning;
- the Institute understands that clear communication of roles, responsibilities and expectations is vital for effective teaching, learning and assessment;
- the Institute acknowledges teaching as a scholarly and a professional activity.

Accordingly the Institute will seek:

- to create learning experiences that challenge learners intellectually, actively engage them in the learning process and facilitate their academic, cultural, social and personal awareness and development;
- to create learning experiences that foster ethical awareness, ethical responsibility and an understanding of how to observe high standards of academic integrity;
- to create learning experiences that foster in learners the research skills and capacity for independent critical thought necessary for ongoing and self-directed learning;
- to create learning experiences that clearly communicate to learners a high level of expectation regarding their engagement in the learning process and a sense of responsibility for their own learning;
- to create a learning community where mutual inquiry and dialogue, and mutual respect and cooperation, characterise the relationships between and amongst learners and staff;
- to create a learning community where the widest possible diversity of learners have the opportunity to achieve their highest learning potential;
- to create a learning community where scholarship informs practice, and where staff and learners are empowered and supported in creative innovation in teaching and learning;
- to manage the quality of all teaching and learning and assessment activities with a focus on assurance and continuous improvement in standards, and the active participation of staff and learners.

3.3 Learner rights and responsibilities

Waterford Institute of Technology has a commitment to placing the student at the centre of its activities. Placing the student in such a position confers on the student certain rights but also certain responsibilities and obligations. The Institute declares in its Strategic Plan 2007-10 that the learner is at the centre of the learning experience and goes on to say that “the learner is best placed to shape and guide the development of the services and activities that inform and shape their experience at the Institute” (p.45). The Institute upholds and promotes the learner’s right to:

- be fully informed of their rights and responsibilities while attending a programme of study at the Institute;
- be fully informed about their programme of study, its duration, level, structure, and the content of its component modules, its overall learning outcomes and the outcomes of each module;
- be fully informed in a timely way about the methods of assessment and the criteria for that assessment for the programme and all the component parts of the programme on which they are registered;
- receive appropriate teaching and other guidance by way of preparation for those assessments;

- receive appropriate, comprehensive and constructive feedback following those assessments consistent with the right to appropriate teaching above;
- be fully informed of the basis for determining their final award classification;
- be informed of progression and/or employment opportunities, including professional accreditation where appropriate;
- be consulted, through student representatives, regarding the ongoing administration and governance of the programme and of the Institute;
- be consulted, through representatives, regarding the ongoing regulation of the Institute's programmes;
- seek appropriate redress from the Institute through the appropriate channels where the above rights are not upheld.

The learner is also required to take responsibility for their own learning through:

- attending and actively engaging with learning activities as directed by the academic faculty in a manner that does not compromise the learning efforts of others;
- informing themselves of the regulations governing their programme of study;
- participating in the enhancement of the learning experience through taking part as student representatives on bodies such as School committees and in quality management processes
- engaging in active dialogue with the Institute's staff regarding their ongoing intellectual and professional development.

4. Delivering the Distinctive Learner : Capability, Skills & Attitudes

Delivering graduates with the distinctive attributes set out in the Institute's is one of the high-level goals set in the Strategic Plan 2007-10. In addition to requiring graduates to be capable in the academic area it also describes a set of interpersonal and practical capabilities and self-awareness required for graduates to succeed in employment, to continue to learn independently and to play a constructive role in society throughout their lives. Realising this commitment to producing graduates with these capabilities, skills and attitudes requires them to be consistently mapped into all learning design, learning delivery and quality management processes across the Institute.

Priority areas in delivering the Graduate Profile are:

- learning outcomes for programmes and modules will explicitly contribute to developing the characteristics outlined in the graduate profile. Programme learning outcomes will be aligned with the graduate profile and will progressively require learners to demonstrate their achievement of the required profile;
- programmes will explicitly incorporate opportunities for students to develop the study, critical thinking and research literacy skills required to transition from second-level learning practices towards becoming more independent, self-directed learners;
- all learners will be made aware on what is expected of them over the course of their programme in how they engage with the learning process towards developing the required skills and attributes and in demonstrating increasing levels of discipline and responsibility for their own learning;
- programmes will have outcomes that seek to develop deeper skills that will persist and empower learners in lifelong learning skills in understanding, analysing, synthesising, evaluating and applying;
- the graduate profile will be reviewed periodically and renewed as appropriate through the LTA strategic planning process.

5. Realising the Potential Learning Benefits of the Modular System

Modular systems offer clear potential benefits to learners in terms of choice in learning opportunities available and flexibility in where and when learning is accessed and in how and when they progress towards an award. The more flexible modular structure affords learners new possibilities in accessing learning and in persisting and progressing towards an award. It offers new possibilities in learning enrichment through multidisciplinary offerings and lifelong learning. Significant progress has been made in implementing a modular programme structure at WIT and work continues on realising these potential benefits.

Priority areas in realising the benefits of the modular system are:

- finalise and publish model of the WIT modular system, deliverable within current constraints, in terms of:
 - learner flexibility in routes and rates of progress towards an award;
 - learner choice of modules and specialisms;
 - opportunities for cross disciplinary studies;
- develop appropriate academic structures to support the design, delivery, quality assurance and quality improvement of modules;
- develop appropriate information systems, administrative structures and quality procedures to support the operation of flexibility and choice in the modular system;
- establish an expert resource to provide on demand advice to staff in developing modularised learning opportunities and ensure compatibility of the module structure with National, European and International frameworks;
- develop policy and procedures for recognising prior learning.

With the progression in the credit-based modular system the Institute is working towards academic quality management procedures at both module and programme levels. This will facilitate flexibility and choice in how learners access learning and accumulate credit. Module level quality management operating through subject groups will also present the opportunity for enhancing consistency of academic decision making and exchange of experiences and practices amongst peers.

6. Promoting Learner Access, Integration, Achievement and Lifelong Learning

WIT has an established record in affording access to higher learning education, in supporting students to succeed through a great tradition of supportive work by academic staff and by an integrated student support service. A draft institutional retention strategy has been developed entitled “A Strategy for Student Integration Success and Tracking” (ASSIST). WIT recognises the importance of student progression through the first year in their overall success and the importance of transitioning learners into the skills of higher learning from second-level methodologies in this progression. Student non-progression is a multifaceted problem and research shows us that ongoing improvement in the overall learning experience is the best route towards solutions. In this context, therefore ASSIST is predicated on five key measures:

- the development and implementation of a registration audit system;
- the tracking of students through Management Information Systems;
- the integration of retention data/initiatives/measures with existing institutional systems and within academic schools;
- the development of new retention initiatives through a collaborative Retention Forum;
- the provision of a coordinated student support framework.

Further priority areas in promoting learner integration, success and achievement are to:

- create a learning community where the widest possible diversity of learners have the opportunity to achieve their highest learning potential;
- further develop the modular system to allow learner flexibility in accessing learning and in routes and rates of progress towards an award;
- offer training and support to staff in supporting student progression in their own practice through enhancing learner activity, engagement, motivation and engagement with learning;
- promote use of an appropriate balance of both formative and summative assessment techniques in all modules and provide students with timely and appropriate feedback on their performance in order that they can better manage their own learning;
- transition learners from second level methods to the practices of learning in higher education and in acquiring the key skills required to develop as independent learners including study skills, learning styles, time management, information literacy and research;
- systematically monitor and review learner retention and progression, and dissemination of findings to facilitate academic and support staff in enhancing activities to promote retention based on quantitative and qualitative evidence;

- identify enhancements to the learning environment and learning supports that have the potential to improve retention through facilitating greater access to learning including use of information and communication technologies;
- research the potential positive impact on retention of enhanced pre-entry guidance and information aimed at facilitating prospective students in making informed decisions on programmes pursued;
- research potential positive impact on transition, retention and completion of refocused academic supports and academic support roles and responsibilities.

7. Engaging with Stakeholders in Learning Design, Delivery and Enhancement

The Institute exists not only to foster learning for its own sake but also to empower a diversity of students with the skills and attributes required to succeed in employment, to continue to learn independently and play a constructive role in society throughout their lives. The Institute engages with a variety of external stakeholders – including employers, alumni, parents, professional and regional bodies - and has succeeded in recording amongst the highest graduate employment/study records in all of Irish higher education. The Institute needs to ensure that the mechanisms it uses to interface with external stakeholders continue to operate effectively and that the skills and qualification needs of employers and of society are reflected in learning opportunities offered. In the field of knowledge transfer WIT is coordinating a Strategic Innovation Fund Project on Knowledge Transfer in the Curriculum with the objective of building employability and transferrable skills into the curriculum at all levels. The project also aims to enhance the interface between academic and employers, in terms of curriculum design and its implementation.

Priority areas in engaging stakeholders in curriculum development are to:

- widen and strengthen linkages with external partners, and their role in the Institute’s curriculum development and quality management processes, towards ensuring the relevance of learning offerings to the society and economy of the region;
- work towards further fulfilling the Institute’s regional role in “empowering knowledge generation and knowledge transfer”, and widening participation in education, through developing mainstream institutional capacity to deliver lifelong learning, work based learning and knowledge transfer activities relevant to the region;
- develop mechanisms to capture and evidence external stakeholder demands and expectations and requirements for graduate skills and attributes, including generic, subject-specific and personal transferable skills, and use this input in ongoing development of curricula, skills profiles and strategy;
- continue to develop the internationalisation of teaching programmes through partnerships with overseas Universities for research and curriculum development.

8. Supporting and Developing Learning and Teaching Practice

Teaching is the traditional strength of WIT. Feedback from learners consistently highlights the support received from academic staff as one of the most positive aspects of the learning environment. The Institute is rightly proud of this heritage but recognises the need for ongoing support and promotion of good practices in teaching and assessment in order to enhance learning. Learning is the 'core business' of WIT and the fundamental purpose of all of our efforts. Teaching is important not of itself but in that it makes learning possible. Teaching practice must be informed by what type of learning experience we want WIT students to undergo – the desired learning outcomes of a WIT education.

Evolving understandings of how people learn, the need to deliver learning to an increasing diversity of learners, and new opportunities to facilitate learning through technology create new questions for professional teaching practice:

- if information can be easily disseminated electronically should the primary role of the lecture shift more than ever towards explaining, interacting, motivating, and enthusing rather than dissemination?
- if we expect students to make the transition from second-level methodologies to become independent, self-directed learners should we re-examine balance in time and methodologies in the amount of time they spend learning and the amount of time they spend being taught?

Priority areas in promoting and developing good teaching practice are:

- supporting teaching and learning support staff in developing their practice through continued support for:
 - scholarship and research;
 - subject groups;
 - engagement with external peers and practice;
 - establishing, where possible, dedicated expert learning, teaching and assessment development resources to promote and support staff in developing and sharing good practice;
- promoting the use of an appropriate balance of learning and teaching approaches designed to help students develop as self-directed, independent learners and moving away from any over-reliance on didactic methodologies;
- empowering staff in exploiting the potential of learning technologies to enrich and facilitate learning including the development and adoption of andragogical models and techniques to underpin the use of technology in learning enrichment, use of blended learning approaches and in flexible delivery;
- promoting the ongoing development of quality systems and procedures that facilitate active participation and input by learners and teaching staff in enhancing the quality of learning design and delivery through capturing useful feedback, examining the effectiveness of

current methods and planning future developments.

9. Supporting and Developing Assessment Practice

Assessment is an intrinsic part of the learning process. The adoption of a learning outcomes based system facilitates assessment as learning through constructive alignment of assessment with the learning outcomes. Timely feedback to learners delivered as part of an appropriate balance of formative and summative assessment allows students to monitor their own learning and become more self-directed as learners. Assessment practice can also directly influence learning practice through being designed to assess deeper learning rather than an ability to memorise and recall information.

The wide variety and ongoing development in assessment strategies and methodologies used across the Institute demonstrate the very positive attitude amongst staff towards maximising the learning benefits of assessment. Feedback from staff suggests that some of the key challenges in the area include guarding against over assessment and the streamlining of assessment administration. The student learning experience survey highlights the challenges of getting feedback and the timing of assessment amongst the key concerns of learners.

Priority areas in supporting and developing good practice in assessment are to:

- ensure that assessment strategies are clearly articulated in programme and module documentation to ensure that the assessment workload is appropriate and consistent across a set of modules;
- focus on assessment of higher level competencies such as synthesis, analysis and application that assess genuine attainment of the required outcomes rather than a awarding credits based on a superficial understanding or ability to memorise;
- support staff in utilising multiple methods of assessment and ensuring an appropriate balance in formative and summative assessment techniques that test both understanding and knowledge;
- provide practical and pedagogical support and guidelines to staff on assessment methodologies, including use of the virtual learning environment for assessment and feedback;
- provide information and guidance to students on their responsibilities in terms of academic ethics;
- support staff in implementing administrative (e.g. plagiarism detection software) and andragogical measures (e.g. assessing students ability to apply knowledge and demonstrate understanding rather than recant information) to assure and police high standards of ethical behavior;
- develop capacity across the Institute to optimise the value of assessment through constructively alignment of assessment with module and programme learning outcomes.

10. Developing a Physical, Social and Technological Environment that Supports Learning

The past decade has seen considerable improvement delivered in the physical, ICT and student support services environments. Much of the physical LTA environment has been transformed with the addition of new buildings and extensive renewal of existing stock. Ongoing challenges persist however in delivering a consistently high-quality of student-centred learning environment comparable with international standards across multiple campuses and catering for the changing teaching and learning demands and numbers enrolling in the different academic areas. The technological environment has similarly developed with the delivery of a dedicated ICT building, the introduction of an institutional virtual learning environment, ongoing development in ICT availability in the classroom. The pace of development in user expectations and in technologies available pose challenges in formulating ICT and information strategy. Student support services and facilities have made progress by developing an integrated holistic approach to support service delivery whilst continually striving to improve their physical environment.

The physical, social and virtual environment within which learning takes place can have a great impact on the capacity of students to learn and teachers to teach. Self-directed, independent learning cannot be fully realised without the appropriate range of range of information resources, learner supports and resources. A learning - centred environment requires flexibility in access to learning supports and services to serve a diversity of students. In addition to these practical benefits of being fit for the purpose at hand, well designed learning spaces create a positive atmosphere for staff and students to become engaged, enthused and inspired in teaching and learning, facilitate effective support of learning support services and foster the sense of academic community.

Staff and students who have worked and studied through the delivery of new and regenerated facilities will have experienced first-hand the positive impact on learning that the environment can have. Of course the environment must continue to develop to meet the learning and support needs of the future student profile. Feedback from learners points to existing ongoing challenges including parity of provision across different campus, flexibility of access to learning and learning supports and services, augmented access to an increasing range of information technologies.

Priority areas in developing the learning environment are to:

- plan development of the physical, information, communications and social learning environments based on the needs of the current and projected future learner profile, teaching staff and learning support staff as identified in the curriculum development, quality enhancement and strategic planning processes;
- provide a high quality physical learning environment appropriate to the needs of as great a diversity of learners as possible including part-time, international, wider access, postgraduate students, and staff. Inherent in this priority is the requirement for universal design;

- improve administrative and communications service provision making it easier for learners to access relevant and timely information at entry, at all transitions and in time for any significant programme requirements. Access to information can require information to be available or provided in alternative formats;
- develop a co-ordinating information strategy, incorporating undergraduate and postgraduate library, ICT, audio-visual resources and service provision to optimise learner access to:
 - high quality library and information resources;
 - computer facilities which facilitate computer-based learning and computer-assisted assessment;
 - audio-visual resources which enhance teaching effectiveness;
 - classrooms well adapted to the styles of teaching and learning employed;
 - adequate facilities for private study;
- empower staff and students to engage in technology in the effective delivery and support of learning. Develop an information and learning support environment infrastructure that provides easy access to appropriate teaching and learning tools and resources for both staff and students.

11. Quality Management : Identifying and Facilitating Further Enhancement in Learning, Teaching and Assessment

Quality at WIT is a process of continuous enhancement in the quality of services and experiences provided to learners, clients and other stakeholders, and of the underlying management systems and processes that support the delivery of services. Informed by national and international policy and guidelines, the quality culture at WIT is based on the following principles:

- (a) We aim to assure the quality of the entire student experience;
- (b) All members of staff are responsible for quality;
- (c) We aim to improve quality whenever possible;
- (d) We are committed to the principle of external peer involvement in assuring quality;
- (e) We take into account the views of our students;
- (f) We use an evidence-based approach in quality management.

Building on the existing academic quality assurance policies developed by Academic Council the Institute has committed to embedding a quality improvement culture throughout the Institute as one of the high – level goals of the Strategic Plan 2007-10. The plan states that “best practice in determining and monitoring quality provision and quality improvement is an essential component of effective future provision both in teaching and research”.

A major periodic academic quality assurance and enhancement review process is taking place across all Schools in 2009/10. As part of this process all Schools will produce a reflective self-assessment report on all aspects of activity at both strategic and granular levels. Based on the learnings of the self-assessment and following external peer review all Schools are required to publish plans for enhancing the quality of all aspects the learning activities they deliver – including how learning is organised, teaching, learning and assessment strategies and subject groups. These Enhancement Plans will directly inform future iterations of the LTAS.

Priority areas in managing the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are to:

- continue to develop and implement quality management policies and procedures that:
 - monitor and guarantee the standards of academic provision;
 - effectively contribute to the improvement teaching, learning and assessment activities;
 - are sufficiently flexible, adaptable and scalable to cater for all current and future planned teaching, learning and assessment activities including facilitating greater learner choice and flexibility;
- continue to develop the involvement of learners and other stakeholders in quality assurance and improvement of learning design, delivery and assessment;

- provide practical and policy guidelines, and training where appropriate for students and staff in operating and participating in WIT quality assurance and improvement procedures;
- continue to implement and develop the system of annual review of teaching, learning and assessment in all academic areas according to WIT quality policy and guidelines;
- facilitate all units in conducting a reflective self assessment review at least every five years according to WIT quality policy and guidelines. The aim of the review is to critically reflect on current operation and the future services based on answering these questions:
 - What are we currently doing?
 - Why are we doing it?
 - How effective is our approach? How do we know?
 - What lessons have we learned?
 - What will we do differently in the future as a result?

Based on the findings of the self-assessment and peer review reports all units will publish a quality enhancement plan;

- systematically monitor and review student retention and progression and disseminate findings to facilitate academic and support staff in enhancing activities to promote retention based on quantitative and qualitative evidence.

12. Enhancing Learning, Teaching and Assessment through Staff Development

The primary resource of any higher educational institution is the expertise of its staff. The Institute has a very creditable record in developing its staff (with a targeted spend of 3% of the non-pay budget) particularly through funding staff in working towards further qualifications, seminars, conference attendance and through subject groups. A dedicated CPD Coordinator promotes an ongoing programme of activities and a rich programme of events is made available during the Professional Development Week. Many staff have personally made a significant investment of time and effort in working towards higher qualifications, and in the development of their research activities, affording new opportunities to enrich teaching. Formal teaching and learning qualifications are available to all staff on a voluntary basis. Responsibility for academic staff development is devolved to Schools while postgraduate supervisor training is offered centrally as is general non-academic staff training. Some Schools have made provision for dedicated teaching development roles but there is as yet no dedicated central expert LTA development resource available on demand to staff.

Staff are also, of course, the main cost to the Institute – currently at upwards of 80%. The Institute must therefore ensure that it effectively recruits, retains and develops the expertise required to deliver learning, teaching and assessment.

Priority areas in enhancing learning, teaching and assessment through staff development are to:

- support staff in their scholarship, including the scholarship of teaching and learning, and in linking their scholarship and research activities research with their teaching;
- encourage and facilitate teaching staff in the andragogy and practical use of variety of assessment and feedback methods, tools and approaches to promote the learning value of assessment for students;
- support staff in meeting the needs of non-traditional cohorts including learners with disabilities, mature students, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds and ethnic minority groups.
- provide technical and andragogical training and support to staff in using technology in enhancing the delivery of learning and assessment of learning, and in curriculum development for technology enriched learning;
- promote structures and opportunities for staff to reflect on and develop their practice through
 - subject groups;
 - liaison with external academia;
 - mentoring, peer-to-peer development and group development initiatives;

- a relevant and stimulating programme of continuing professional development activities;
- continue to develop induction and mentoring provision for new staff including encouragement to, unless they have already undertaken an equivalent elsewhere, follow an appropriate programme of induction into teaching, learning and assessment in higher education, and that they should also be supported through a mentoring process;
- improve communication with and facilitate staff participation through providing them with publish practical and policy guidance on academic roles, rights and responsibilities, good practice in learning design, delivery, assessment and support (including guidelines on fostering the skills and attributes of the graduate profile) and academic quality management procedures;
- establish a systematic role for professional ability, qualifications and experience in learning design, delivery and assess learning as part of the recruitment and career progression processes for academic staff;
- investigate the feasibility of establishing a centralised, expert teaching, learning and assessment development unit available on call to assist staff in developing their practice.