



Waterford Institute *of* Technology
INSTITIÚID TEICNEOLAÍOCHTA PHORT LÁIRGE

Towards a Strategic Plan 2011-2014

A discussion document on the development
of an Institutional Strategy, 2011 to 2014
for Waterford Institute of Technology

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1. Introduction

This discussion paper has been produced as part of the development of the Institute's next strategic plan to run from 2011 to 2014.

The discussion paper is part of the institutional consultation which will enable all members of the community, internal and external, to participate in a wide ranging discussion around the future strategic direction of the Institute.

The paper is informed by the external context and the very challenging funding environment for higher education. It does not seek to provide a set of answers, only to put forward questions, which the Institutes community can collectively engage with. Equally, not all issues which have been presented for discussion in this paper or the structure herein will necessarily become part of the future institutional strategy and indeed there may be some additional issues that need to be addressed.

A wide-ranging engagement will ensure that the strategy development process is well informed and that the views of the stakeholders are represented.

1.1 Context

The internal and external environment facing the Institute in 2010 reveals a very different picture than existed prior to the current plan. Significant pressures include; global financial turmoil, economic decline, increased indebtedness, rising unemployment and instability in the financial sector. In considering a new strategy 2011-2014, we are clearly facing a challenging environment which is set to become even more challenging over the implementation of the plan.

Higher education is also changing with impacts from the Government policy on the Smart Economy, the development of a strategy for Higher Education and the need for balanced regional economic and social growth.

Budget cuts in education are a reality and yet there is a widespread conviction that the key to future prosperity is an increasingly skilled population. In 2008, the government announced plans to develop a higher education strategy, but there is still uncertainty around future funding and the reintroduction of third level fees. Moreover, the current economic crisis is likely to alter significantly the student population and their requirements.

The institute is therefore setting its strategy for 2011-2014 in the face of great external uncertainty, within a complex and rapidly changing context, at a time when successful operation will become even more challenging.

1.2 Strategy Implementation since 2007

As the Institute develops its new strategy, work on existing initiatives continues and progress with these will be an important base on which to build.

Significant growth and development has occurred in the Institute. Student numbers are increasing in line with targets, and the Institutes international and access student population has significantly increased. The learner community has grown to over 7,100 full-time and approximately 1,500 part-time students in the 2009/10 Academic year. Significant numbers of entrants come from non-standard routes including a continuing increase in mature learners.

Research growth has been particularly strong with the Institute punching well above its weight in terms of drawdown of EU funding in particular. Over the last ten years the Institute has secured more than 86 million in research funding. This represents approximately one quarter of all researching funding received by the Institute of Technology section as a whole. In addition, the Institute has established a knowledge transfer office. The Institute's postgraduate programme development has continued with new programmes being developed and the training for students and supervisors being prioritised. The Institute has also taken a strategic approach to the development of Professional Doctorate awards with the creation of a Doctorate in Business Administration.

WIT continues to lead innovation, evidenced by the recent announcement that WIT is one of the largest participants in the Innovation Vouchers Programme funded by Enterprise Ireland completing 144 innovation voucher projects since the initiative was launched three years ago.

There has also been major investment in research infrastructure through PRTLI and the Research Facilities Enhancement Scheme. Other major capital investments in the Institute included the opening of the new Tourism and Leisure Building and the initiation of two major Public Private Partnerships (PPP's). Public confidence in the Institute is evidenced by the growing level of engagement between the WIT research community and industry and other external stakeholders on collaborative research. For example, over the last five years Enterprise Ireland has funded the development of three Applied Research Enhancement Centres in the area of communications services, applied materials and pharmaceutical and molecular biotechnology.

WIT also plays a community and social role. For instance, WIT has secured EU funding to develop as a European City of Scientific Culture, a move that will strengthen the location's appeal to inward investors and recognise existing scientific research and communications activity. It also supports local arts, culture and heritage projects and houses a number of valuable collections such as the Bewick Collection and the Bonaparte-Wyse papers. It also provides facilities such as a music and entertainment venue working with significant local, national and international festivals.

The Institute has a tremendous history in sport and recreation with over 30 sports clubs and upwards of 25 societies registered each year. The addition of facilities in the West Campus strengthens the base of sports and provides valuable links to and from other community and sports organizations.

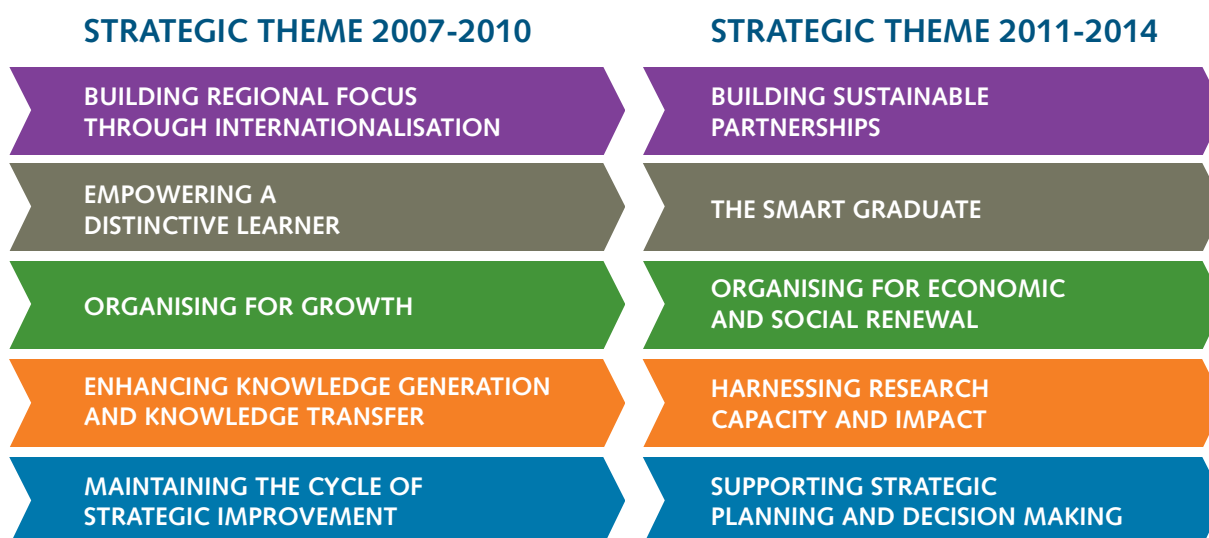
1.3 Social Responsibility

As a community of almost 9,000 learners WIT has a social responsibility to foster a sense of belonging and commitment to the region, building ethical and social awareness among all learners and contributing to the welfare of the region as a whole. It strives to achieve this through its social and cultural engagement programmes and through supporting arts, social and sports organisations. Our student body play an important role in contributing to the social and cultural development through their participation in voluntary, charitable and other organisations. WIT also recognises its need to be a leader in demonstrating social and corporate responsibility which includes activities from recycling to engagement with local communities.

1.4 Evolution of 2007-2010 Major Themes

The Strategic Plan 2007-2010 identified five major themes which informed the overarching goals for the Plan. These themes will be further advanced and developed through 2011-2014, (see figure 1). Based on the achievements to 2010 each high-level goal has been reframed to better reflect the changes and challenges that will emerge in 2011-14. These themes are set out in Table 1 below and the structure of the consultation process is designed to address how each of the high level goals (and the subsequent details) will be further developed.

1.4.1 Figure 1. Major Strategic Themes



1.4.2 Table 1. Major Themes

Major Theme 2007-2010	High-Level Goal 2007-2010	Developed into Major Themes 2011- 2014	New High-Level goals
Building regional focus through internationalisation	“We will develop an internationally relevant and vibrant knowledge region that fosters an international exchange of ideas, technology and people”	Building Sustainable Partnerships	Open to Consultation
Empowering a distinctive learner	“We will create a learner of distinction recognised by the unique characteristics of our graduates and empower them to develop through life-long learning”	The Smart Graduate	Open to Consultation
Organising for growth	“We will develop appropriate governance and operating structures in line with best international practice to ensure the delivery of our strategic aims”	Organising for Economic and Social Renewal	Open to Consultation
Enhancing knowledge generation and knowledge transfer	“We will create new knowledge in partnership with our region and we will help our region to use new knowledge to the benefit of economic, social and cultural development”	Harnessing Research Capacity and Impact	Open to Consultation
Maintaining the cycle of strategic improvement	“We will place quality improvement as the centre of all our activities in an open and transparent manner.”	Supporting Strategic Planning and Decision-Making	Open to Consultation

What follows is an examination of these themes and how, in the context of changes which are occurring both within and outside the Institute, they might appear in a future strategic plan. This will focus on:

- What the high level goals could be up to 2014 and how they will differ from current goals?
- Initiating dialogue on how to best position WIT to respond to changes in the coming years?
- How to plan for these changes to enable WIT to be more responsive and flexible?
- How the balance and mix of our activities might need to change?
- How this supports and responds to the regional context?

This paper uses the high-level themes as the focus for consideration, debate and consultation and maps them onto potential “new” themes which are an evolution from the current Strategic Plan, and which endeavour to capture the totality of the Institute’s activities. Challenges and issues are set out under each theme and questions are posed in an attempt to provide a focus for discussion. These are by no means exhaustive or definitive.

2. Evolution of Theme 1

BUILDING REGIONAL FOCUS
THROUGH INTERNATIONALISATION

BUILDING SUSTAINABLE
PARTNERSHIPS

The first theme is centred on building the strengths of the South East region through a mix of international influence and embedding the Institute strongly in its region. In our knowledge-based economy, Higher Education Institutes have assumed a position of central importance to the economic vitality of Ireland. Increased levels of education are now required across a wide range of occupations, and programmes of research are viewed as major sources of innovation and new approaches to solving complex societal issues. The strategic plan in the Institute will focus on building partnerships at three levels - regional, national and international.

2.1 Regional

The relationship of the Institute to the South East region is a defining characteristic of the Institute and significant levels of interaction occur in this regard, at Institute, School, Department and Research-Centre level. The economic importance of the Institute to the region is frequently cited, but equally important is the role that it can play in society more broadly.

In addition, the scale of the Institute in a relatively small city creates a number of distinct advantages as well as challenges. Close integration of the Institute with its local community needs to provide the opportunity for our students to become contributing citizens and to experience the rewards of civic engagement.

The Institute has relationships with community groups, local government, Chambers of Commerce and industry groupings, and these are a basis to assist in understanding the social, economic and planning requirements of the region, but also in terms of serving the social, economic and business needs of these communities. Embedding a partnership between Institute and region, where the former generates scholarly, evidence-based input into issues facing the latter is mutually beneficial.

Building appropriate linkages is dependent on having appropriate structures and interfaces in place that promotes and facilitates bi-directional flows of people and knowledge and which are open and accessible to those wishing to engage with the Institute.

2.2 National

Nationally, the Institute has built partnerships and collaborations with other Higher Education Institutes, frequently through jointly funded research initiatives, such as SFI Research Clusters and the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutes, through strategic partnerships under the Strategic Innovation Fund and through membership of professional bodies or business organisations.

The environment for higher education in Ireland has been moving further towards collaborative efforts between Higher Education Institutes, and consolidation and rationalisation in the current economic climate appears inevitable.

Opportunities to collaborate with others beyond that of funded activities such as research, can be considered in terms of the inherent potential collaboration provides in leveraging resources, especially human resources, strengthening the quality of teaching and research, and enabling stronger influence at policy level. The development of such institutional relationships is one of the keys to achieving the future goals of the Institute.

2.3 International

Internationally, the Institute has succeeded in a variety of ways. The growth in numbers and diversity of the international student base has been significant. Through schemes such as Erasmus, the Institute has built strong linkages with Higher Education Institutes overseas. In addition, the Institute has been particularly focussed on building strategic linkages with Higher Education Institutes in Europe, Asia and the US.

Building collaborative ventures with Universities abroad provided specific challenges but also offers major opportunities in bringing new resources to the region and in offering outlets for the Institute's (and region's) intellectual property.

2.4 Potential Issues to be Addressed

Issue: *Should the Institute focus a high-level theme in the manner set out above, defining partnerships at three levels - regional, national and international with specific strategies dedicated to meeting agreed objectives at these levels?*

Issue: *How can the Institute ensure it is well placed regionally, nationally and internationally to inform and influence changes that impact on its own operations, but also to take a proactive role in providing its expertise to society and the economy more widely?*

Issue: *How can we capture facets of our location and regional economy to enhance our students' learning experience, curriculum and employability? Should we, for example, make civic and community engagement a feature of programmes, and if so how would we recognise such achievement?*

Issue: *How can the Institute build more meaningful relationships, at further second and primary levels, to enhance the educational continuum and best support the development of learning across the region and beyond?*

3. Evolution of Theme 2

EMPOWERING A
DISTINCTIVE LEARNER

THE SMART GRADUATE

The aim of the theme “Empowering a Distinctive Learner” is to enable the WIT graduate to develop their full potential both at college and beyond, in a distinctive manner. The Institute has taken a number of key steps in achieving this including the modularisation of the curriculum and strengthening knowledge transfer in the curriculum which enhances the ability of students to utilise the specific knowledge they gain at the Institute in the world beyond the Institute.

A challenge for the Institute - as for all Higher Education Institutes is how to translate the aspiration of developing distinctive graduates, as competent, mature, and critical thinkers into responsible, informed citizens, capable of success in their chosen professions and which are recognised by our stakeholders as such.

Central to students’ experience of higher education is teaching and learning: what and how students learn and how they are assessed and the relevance of that to stakeholders. In the current and future economic environment, students will increasingly choose Higher Education Institutes which can demonstrably provide them with the “best” experience, and the best chance of developing to their full potential. Current and imminent economic and demographic changes will make competition between institutes more intense, at the same time as competition continues to intensify for international students. It is likely that the student population will continue to diversify, with part-time and mature students becoming an ever-more significant part of that population.

3.1 Undergraduate Curriculum

Developing undergraduate education is - and will remain - a key strength of the Institute. This has been a core principle of the current and previous strategic plans. Significant progress has been made through the addition of new courses, further developments in modularisation, the initiation of an institute-wide approach on building knowledge transfer into the curriculum and the publication of the Institute’s Learning, Teaching & Assessment Strategy.

As the industrial and commercial base of the country changes so must the educational offerings, particularly, at undergraduate level. In that respect a continuing challenge is to ensure the currency and vitality of the curriculum offered. The Institute engages with external bodies in the development of all new programmes but nonetheless is conscious of the opportunities to strengthen engagement with stakeholders to support new and innovative programme development.

The transition for students into higher education and the responsibilities learning in higher education places on them is recognised by the Institute. Therefore the Institute has developed an induction programme to support students through the experience. Included in this induction programme is an introduction to the learning resources of the Institute, including the library. The programme complements the modules delivered across most programmes in the Institute in the first semester relating to the development of critical thinking skills and competencies in communications and in the use of information technology.

3.2 Postgraduate Provision

The Institute has prioritised postgraduate training development over recent strategic plans as a main priority for the region. Capacity building has resulted in significant up skilling of the Institutes own staff to build 4th level capacity, as well as increasing Doctoral level research and training for students.

In developing its Doctoral strategy, the Institute recognises that at its core is knowledge transfer and the advancement of knowledge through original research. The role of postgraduate student recruitment, supervision and assessment are critical in underpinning this aim. The Institute has been an early implementer of structured transferable skills programmes and supervisor training.

Significant challenges and opportunities exist for the Institute in furthering its postgraduate provision. How the Institute perceives and prioritises its taught Masters provision and positions it within the curriculum will determine future skills and competencies available to the region for economic development and renewal. Priority must be given to specific areas of competencies upon which the Institute, in partnership with industry and commerce, will build to secure regional competencies in specific sectors.

3.3 Quality Enhancement

A key initiative identified in the mid-term review of the current Strategic Plan is the roll-out of the Schools Quality Assurance & Enhancement Reviews process in 2009-2010. The purpose of the Review was to develop Quality Enhancement Plans for each of the academic Schools for the coming five year period, in light of school and institutional strategic priorities. It will play a major role in shaping the next Strategic Plan and therefore in how Institute resources are allocated over the period of the Plan. Consequently, these five year plans will perform an important function, both as a link to the current strategy - as they will continue to feature strongly in the annual planning cycle - and as part of the background that informs the new strategy.

3.4 Supporting Excellence in Teaching and Learning

The Institute's strength in teaching and learning is based on the excellence of its faculty. Incentivising developments and innovation in this regard is already a part of the Institute's strategy. The Institute has strong expertise in the theory and practice of education and pedagogy and will continue to contribute to educational research, practice and policy.

3.5 Potential Issues to be Addressed

Issue: *What new subject and programme areas would fit with a successful WIT by 2014? How can this support and enhance regional development? And how would we give priority within limited resources to fund new developments?*

Issue: *How should the Institute achieve a balance among pressures to address critical teaching needs, strengthen programmes overall, and support new academic initiatives?*

Issue: *How can the Institute ensure that teaching is innovative, inclusive and consistently of a high standard? Should we do more to provide specific development support and recognition for teaching where it is needed?*

Issue: *Where does the Institute need to be more flexible and how should the Institute respond to the increased need for flexibility of delivery?*

Issue: *To what areas and objectives should the Institute give priority so as to most effectively improve undergraduate and postgraduate students' experience? Should the Institute prioritise making the learning environment and the student experience "distinctive", in the face of all institutes advertising themselves as offering the best?*

Issue: *How strong and pervasive should our focus on employability, transferable skills, interdisciplinarity and community engagement be in the next strategic plan? How will the Institute ensure that such developments do not result in the curriculum becoming crowded, or displace core content?*

Issue: *How could student support services be further integrated so as to improve their performance and availability to students, and ensure they meet the needs of access, part-time, mature, international and postgraduate students as well as those of traditional undergraduates?*

Issue: *How can the activities of the Institute be made more attractive to potential learners?*

Issue: *How can the 'graduate' be made more attractive to potential employers and to society more generally?*

Issue: *How can the Institute best support the diversity of learner types?*

4. Evolution of Theme 3

ORGANISING FOR GROWTH

ORGANISING FOR ECONOMIC
AND SOCIAL RENEWAL

A principal determinant of a high quality student experience is the financial, as well as the academic viability of the Institutes curriculum. This means that the resources (human, learning, estates and facilities) deployed to support each individual student's experience is sustainable. Therefore, a key principle arising from this is that the Strategic Plan should be built on a financially robust and viable basis. Managing human, financial, and physical resources effectively and efficiently to achieve its goals will be critical for the next Strategic Plan.

4.1 Balancing Strategy and Resourcing

As with the entire higher education sector in Ireland, the Institute is experiencing financial pressure in an environment of finite resources and decreasing state funding. The Institute will continue to actively manage its cost-base, particularly in areas of declining demand, in order to ensure that it remains competitive in an increasingly volatile and market-driven climate. In this regard, the Institute needs to balance financial prudence with academic developments in the Institute to be able to invest in those new areas which have growth potential and regional relevance. Diversifying the income base is essential to further increase resources and in order to reduce reliance on state funding.

4.2 Human Resources

The Institute spends over 80% of its core state income a year on its workforce and recognises that its success depends upon harnessing and recognising the potential and talent of its entire staff to optimise the benefits from this significant investment. The Institute's reputation, growth and success depend on its ability to initiate, implement and sustain effective people management strategies across all areas and at all levels.

4.3 Capital Development

The current campus master plan encompasses development of the multi-campus environment of the Institute - its Main Campus, College Street and The West Campus.

Currently, new investment will see the completion of two major new builds on the main campus - the Engineering School Building and the Business and Enterprise Building. A new Research Building is also at a final stage of development on the West Campus. The Institute continues to enjoy a substantial landholding available for development. The funding environment for this will however remain challenging throughout 2011-14.

The Institute's lands at the West Campus also forms part of an alliance with Waterford County Council, The IDA and Enterprise Ireland with the vision of creating greater connectivity between adjoining lands to harness, jointly, a true Knowledge Campus.

4.4 Use of Facilities

The capital stock has uses beyond the standard use of teaching and learning. For instance in the promotion and enhancement of cultural and social activities (e.g. The Bewick Art Collection), in sporting and recreation (e.g. The Sports Facilities), for concerts (i.e. Waterford New Music Week) and in revenue generation (e.g. International Summer programmes). The Institute will continue to support the most productive use of these facilities across all of these activities.

4.5 Potential Issues to be Addressed

Issue: How can facilities be used to further assist and support local community organisations?

Issue: What should the future size of the Institute be?

Issue: How can we maximise the essential capital investment in the estate to support the delivery of an improved student experience? How can we extend the use and value of our physical assets?

5. Evolution of Theme 4

ENHANCING KNOWLEDGE GENERATION
AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

HARNESSING RESEARCH
CAPACITY AND IMPACT

The aim of the theme “enhancing knowledge generation and knowledge transfer” is underpinned in the Institute by its Research and Knowledge Transfer Strategy, which sets out as its key objective:

“To contribute to the economic and cultural well being of the nation and the region through the pursuit of research at the highest international level. The quality of our research and scholarship will sustain a research informed learning environment within the Institute at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The Institute is committed to the transfer of knowledge created through the research process for the common good of society and in particular the development of the region.”

In developing the strategic framework for the Institute for the period 2011-2014, the Institute must ensure that it continues to build the best possible platform for sustainable growth in research, which links strongly into our undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and the regional development agenda.

5.1 Identifying and Supporting Research Areas

A central tenet of the current research strategy is the prioritisation of research centres of excellence and development of research clusters to focus investment. An ongoing challenge is creating a platform for increasing and sustaining research activity of the highest quality and relevance regionally, nationally and internationally.

Like the majority of Institutes, our main strengths lie in disciplinary research, with the majority of the successes to date having come from the traditional disciplines most often associated with knowledge transfer - information communication technology and biosciences, including health. However, increasingly many of the major problems facing society today require a multi- or interdisciplinary approach. The Institute recognises the need to build both additional and deeper research centres. The strategy for 2011-14 will be to further cluster and layer cross-disciplinary activities across all areas of the Institute. The Institute will configure around three principle research themes; Telecommunications, Life Sciences and Health sciences. In addition an emerging pillar in Business will also be developed.

Research will be enhanced by relating it to practical and real outcomes. Commercialisation of research outputs will be a key priority.

5.2 Sustainability of the Research Base

The Institute has been hugely successful in winning public funding for its research. Over the last ten years the Institute has secured more than €86 million in research funding. However, the external environment is changing and winning research grants from funding bodies is increasingly competitive. The current economic climate indicates a much tougher funding situation ahead. The Institute has rigorous policies and procedures in place to ensure that high quality applications, which can realistically challenge for successful funding, are submitted. At the same time, the research community must be encouraged and supported to increase applications to alternative sources of funding from the wide range of opportunities available - including contract research from the public and private sector, commissioned research from government agencies, as well as the EU and other overseas funding bodies. Connection with and leveraging of the skills and competencies of regionally based industry and other clusters is an important component in building additional capacity to attract funding into the region.

The Institute continues to be challenged by the structural framework in place for the Institutes of Technology sector.

5.3 Embedding Research

As an Institute with a major interest in the needs of and development of the regional economy and of the professions, research should be both an activity in its own right and an integral part of teaching and learning. A successful approach ensures that the Institute's teaching and learning are based upon current thinking, and that an inquisitive research-based attitude is supported and encouraged in its students.

There are increasing opportunities for disciplinary or interdisciplinary research collaborations involving overseas researchers, often in large research consortia that involve public and/or private institutes. As the Institute's research success has continued, these opportunities have also increased. The Institute values participation in such prestigious partnerships and will continue to embed them more into its academic structures. A key challenge is continuing to attract and retain academic leaders to drive such developments, particularly in the worsening economic climate and with strong competition nationally.

5.4 Research Strategy Support

Success in research is dependent on the enthusiasm and initiative of research-active faculty and also requires the support of administrative staff. The Institute must provide an enabling framework of support across all disciplines. Central to this will be support in a focused and strategic manner for individual schools and departments and their connectivity to external partners as they further develop their research strategies, as well as support for individual and collaborative research initiatives.

Increasing importance is being placed by government and funding bodies on knowledge transfer, applied research, collaboration with industry and the commercial exploitation of research. Like research, successful knowledge transfer often relies on the determination of individuals to succeed. However, it also relies on the expertise and knowledge of the technology or knowledge transfer resources in the Institute. The Institute will continue to embed this aspect of its overall research strategy into the future strategic plan.

5.5 Potential Issues to be Addressed

Issue: What should the components of our Research and Knowledge Transfer Strategy be to best maximise the national competencies within the region? How can we improve Research, Development and Innovation impacts?

Issue: Should the Institute develop criteria for selecting the research that it supports? If so, what criteria should be used and how should such decisions be made? What should be the balance between supporting disciplinary or cross-disciplinary research, or should research excellence be the deciding factor above all others?

Issue: How can the Institute flexibly respond to the needs of business/industry and the pace of change in the commercial world? How can the Institute plan the infrastructure and support necessary to deliver the research and knowledge transfer strategy in a meaningful way to its partners?

Issue: How do we maximise the opportunities for engagement with local industry sectors? How can we plan to raise the profile of research and knowledge transfer in the region?

Issue: What institutional alliances at a regional, national and international level need to be prioritised/developed to build and sustain research?

6. Evolution of Theme 5

MAINTAINING THE CYCLE OF STRATEGIC IMPROVEMENT

SUPPORTING STRATEGIC PLANNING AND DECISION MAKING

The Institute has an established Quality Assurance framework recently reviewed and accredited by HETAC (Higher Education & Training Awards Council), the national accrediting body. In addition, the Institute has invested in developing an 'Institutional Research Capacity' (the development of key performance data to assist management and strategic planning). Notwithstanding these developments the Institute recognised the need to enhance data collection and connectivity both within the Institute and between the Institute and external partners and stakeholders. This consultation process is one step in that direction.

Effective strategic development is underpinned by strong external engagement and a variety of perspectives that help shape and form dialogue. Creating channels of communication that facilitate and foster dialogue is therefore an important aspect of strategy development and implementation. The Institute has a number of faculty level boards that engage specific sectors and industry. In addition there are employer representatives on all programme development boards and on periodic school review processes. Notwithstanding this the Institute must continually endeavour to improve the extent to which decisions are informed by relevant external inputs.

6.1 Potential Issues to be Addressed

Issue: How can the Institute improve systems to support the bringing together of data from disparate operational systems internally and externally? How can it draw from and contribute to local knowledge sources?

Issue: How can we best engage with external communities in supporting data/input for Institutional decisions, and ensure currency of actions taken?

Issue: What structures are appropriate to ensure greater connectivity between the Institute and the external community?

Issue: How can stakeholders be more involved in the Institute's quality assurance and decision making process?

Issue: How can feedback from learners, stakeholders and employers be better captured and harnessed?

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