



Learning, Teaching, and Assessment Strategy

Institute of Technology Tallaght

2011

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Summary of Key Features

Theme	Key Features
Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop generic institute modules • Cross-disciplinary approach to 'generic' module development and delivery • Consider workload of students • Review structure of first year when reviewing programme structures • Where appropriate, utilize learning technologies
Vibrant and challenging learning opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-disciplinary approach to programme design and enhancement • Professional body recognition of programmes • Integrated service learning activities • Integrated personal and professional development planning using portfolio of evidence • Learning to Learn module for all first year students
Assessment and feedback integrated into learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme Assessment Strategy, procedures and criteria given to students during week 1 • Review and alignment of all learning, teaching and assessment activities
Professional development framework for staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional development model designed • Delivery of Special Purpose Award in Higher Education Teaching and Learning
The enhancement of a culture that supports learners and promotes student success, whichever entry route they have taken	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Learning Agreement implemented

Development and maintenance of infrastructure and support systems to facilitate an effective learning environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Further development of pre-entry study resources and materials
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Foreword

As a modern innovative third level institution we strive to continuously improve our teaching and learning model(s) such that students get the best possible academic experience and results during their time with us.

Given the nature of continuous improvement we shall be revisiting this strategy time and again to validate that it is delivering the desired results for both staff and students alike. The strategy will change over time.

As an institute we have invested significant time and resources in developing our teaching capability based on international best practice models. Our staff has participated in a variety of workshops, seminars and conferences and some have pursued specialist teaching qualifications. All of these activities were aimed at delivering on our Strategic Plan commitments as represented in goals A1 – A6.

While we are currently operating in a very challenging environment we will not lose sight of the fact that our raison d'être is to teach and make our knowledge accessible to students while simultaneously producing an independent learner. To achieve these goals it is imperative that students actively engage with the curriculum and the teaching process and that they develop a motivation and discipline to learn in both group and individual settings. This strategy was developed to facilitate achievement of these goals.

This strategy represents our approach to delivering the best possible learning experience for students that will promote independent learning and academic achievement. In implementing the strategy departments and lecturers will strive to ensure that students are exposed to modern, effective teaching models that engage students.

I would like to thank all those who have contributed to the development of this strategy and have no hesitation in commending the approach to you.

Mr Pat McLaughlin

President

ITT Dublin

ITT Dublin's Mission and Vision

As outlined in the Institute Strategic Plan 2009-2014, the Mission of the Institute of Technology Tallaght is to be the centre of higher education and knowledge creation within South Dublin County and its environs, to broaden participation in higher education in the region, to be recognised as a leader in supporting research and commercial innovation, and to assist in the advancement of the economic, social and cultural life of the region.

In developing this plan, the Institute will build on achievements to-date and continue to provide:

Career Focused Higher Education (Strategic Plan Goals A1-A6)

- Offer a range of relevant and flexible learning opportunities, which are career focussed, within a professional and supportive learning environment
- Provide increased lifelong learning opportunities commensurate with the career requirements of those living in the region and the developmental needs of business, industry and society
- Promote equality of access and opportunity to widen participation and facilitate all learners in achieving their potential
- Cultivate a range of national and international partnerships and initiatives to advance the role and core activities of the Institute and the region

Research, Innovation and Enterprise (Strategic Plan Goals B1-B3)

- Serve as a leading centre for the advancement of research, commercial innovation and enterprise development within the region

Civic Engagement (Strategic Plan Goals C1-C3)

- Implement civic engagement initiatives to increase opportunities for, and maximise participation of, all citizens in the development of the region

Educational Philosophy

ITT Dublin's educational philosophy is that learning should inspire and empower the individual through the creation of independent and reflective thinking driven by a healthy capacity for critical analysis. The development of knowledge, know-how, skill, competence and literacy for lifelong learning, in a vibrant and inquiring learning environment will lead to our graduates achieving sustainable active citizenship.

How does this strategy enable us to achieve our vision?

The Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LTA) Strategy fosters collaboration between students and staff to ensure that successful learning takes place in a diverse and vibrant learning community.

The Institute is committed to achieving excellence in all its learning, teaching, and assessment activities and to developing a student centred culture that encourages innovation, promotes student integration and continual reflection on practice by staff and students to assist in achieving their full potential, and ensures that all of our resources – human, financial and physical – are valued and used thoughtfully and effectively.

What do we want to achieve?

Building on success so far in learning, teaching and assessment we aim to:

- Be forward-thinking in the design of our programmes in supporting lifelong learning and anticipating and responding to changes in demand and need, providing vibrant and challenging reflexive learning opportunities
- Enhance the students' learning experience, making assessment activities, support and feedback, and use of portfolios, powerful integrated features of learning.
- Implement a professional development framework for staff that raises the base, improves practice and promotes excellence in learning, teaching and assessment

- Encourage programme teams to design curricula that are informed by their research and/or scholarly activities and individual modules which can be shared by other academic programmes.

How will we make this happen?

Underpinning these activities is the quality assurance commitment to continue to ensure that curricula are designed in accordance with the Bologna Guidelines, European Standards and Guidelines, HETAC guidelines, and within Institute policies.

Theme 1 - Structure

Building on the flexibility already enjoyed by our students engaged in full-time, part-time and other flexible modes of delivery within our modularized and semesterised environment, which have been designed to encourage wider participation and engagement with our diverse student body and societal requirements, we will prioritise activities into five themes.

Under the Bologna Framework, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) has been adopted and the Institute's undergraduate programmes will continue to equate to 60 ECTS credits per academic year.

The Institute will undertake a detailed review of its structures for education provision to ensure that they facilitate the strategy in an effective and efficient manner. For example, to increase the breadth of learner experience the Institute will develop 'generic Institute modules' that will add value to our students in a model that allows for mixing the composition of discipline groups.

A cross—disciplinary approach to programme and module development will be facilitated to allow greater flexibility for the learner in terms of module mix. It is envisaged that modules will be developed across schools and departments to minimize unnecessary duplication in programme development and delivery.

Programme Boards will be requested to consider the workload of students for independent learning to ensure that greater emphasis is placed on independent learning as students progress.

Programme Boards will be requested to review the structure of the first year when reviewing programme structures to ensure provision is made to assist students with developing the skills for, and providing greater opportunities for student independent learning. Recognition of knowledge, skills and competencies outside of the formal learning environment will be encouraged. For examples, students who undertake appropriate internal or external activities that help develop their business or social acumen might be given academic credit on presentation of authenticated evidence of same that meets module learning outcomes.

Wherever possible, courses will utilize appropriate learning technologies to facilitate the flexible learning requirements of students.

An active research programme is vital in a dynamic education system seeking to respond to the needs of students, employers, community and society in general, and in helping educational institutions retain a relevance to the marketplace. Therefore, a key ingredient to the Institute's strategy is that research impacts upon the teaching activities of the institute as a whole at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. To this end we will continue to be proactive in strengthening the link between research and undergraduate teaching.

Theme 2 – Vibrant and challenging learning opportunities – the delivery of a flexible, accessible, engaging, responsive and relevant curriculum (Strategic Goal A1)

To be forward thinking in the design of our programmes in supporting learning for life, and anticipating and responding to changes in demand and need, providing vibrant and challenging learning opportunities.

In order to do this, we will:

- **Continue to ensure that our programmes are relevant to business**, industry and society, is an Institute core value. Programme Boards will strive to enhance, embed and integrate employability skills and attributes, and opportunities for work placement, where appropriate, within our learning, teaching and assessment activities. We will continue to achieve this through imaginative approaches to enhance the employability of our graduates.
- **Continue to promote learner autonomy** by encouraging students to take responsibility for their own independent learning, working effectively within a team and demonstrating their self-directed learning through different assessment activities whilst acknowledging the maturing process that leads to the award of an Honours degree.
- **Continue to support Programme Boards** in the design and development of flexible programmes and modules using appropriate technologies, where appropriate.
- **Continue to provide learning opportunities** that integrate appropriate learning technologies, embed employability skills and opportunities for personal development planning into the curriculum.
- **Seek professional body recognition/validation** of programmes, (e.g. Professional Accountancy bodies, Engineers Ireland, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, etc.) and alignment with Graduate Teacher Training programmes, **where appropriate**.

- **Integrate relevant recommendations of professional agencies** into our teaching and learning approach. An example would be the HEA-supported Association for Higher Education Access and Disability's Charter for Inclusive Teaching and Learning.

- We will **provide opportunities for students to undertake service learning activities** relevant to specific academic programmes and gain academic credit towards a validated Award. This could involve a student participating in an elective or additional module to obtain additional academic credit (e.g. 5 ECTS above that awarded for the programme).

- Programme Boards will be asked to consider appropriate opportunities for the inclusion of work placement/mobility within the academic programme.
 - Programme Boards will be requested to **establish personal and professional development opportunities** as an integral part of learning. For example: this could be especially relevant for students engaging with work placement or service learning activities.

- We will continue to **promote and encourage inquiry approaches** to learning through the provision of resources and undergraduate opportunities through the Dublin Region Higher Education Alliance, Technological University of Dublin, and other alliances (Strategic Goal A6).

- Research impacts strongly upon teaching activities within the Institute at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. The various tools that can be employed to ensure the attainment of this objective and hence the successful implementations of the teaching programme are as follows:
 1. New course/module development
 2. Relevant undergraduate research projects
 3. Research seminars
 4. Workshops and specialist teaching modules and placement activity

- We will continue to encourage the support mechanisms to deliver integration of research with pedagogical goals, ensuring an enhancement in the quality and relevance of the undergraduate experience.

Design and deliver flexible learning experiences

- We continue to be committed to providing flexible learning opportunities that reflect students' personal and professional circumstances. Learning environments will be real and virtual, formal and informal, lively and innovative.
- We continue to encourage the design and delivery of flexible learning experiences to include independent and reflective learning, critical thinking, information literacy, and problem solving skills.
- We will continue to embrace the ECTS system and develop cross-discipline modules, joint programmes and opportunities for integrated assessment.
- We will continue to facilitate programme re-design by providing opportunities for Programme Boards to engage in curriculum renewal activities.

Supporting inclusivity and diversity (Strategic Goal A3)

- This support will be a feature of all aspects of the student experience, from pre-arrival to graduation, and will feature pedagogic approaches sensitive to previous educational experiences. We will provide students with the guidance, support, resources, and learning opportunities to enable them to make an effective transition to studying in an Irish Higher Education environment and to successfully complete their chosen programme of study.
- We will continue to provide academic support to learners through scheduled drop-in tuition clinics and other initiatives through the Centre for Learning and Teaching.

Enhance continuing professional development (CPD) provision for students

- We will continue to provide and support an institute-wide portfolio solution to support the CPD opportunities available to our students to enhance their professional status or career opportunities and to respond to the changing demands of the knowledge-based economy. Programme boards may wish to consider integrating this into academic programmes.

- We will design the content of a 'Learning to Learn' module for all first year students, the integration and delivery of which is the responsibility of each Academic Department.

Theme 3 – Assessment and feedback integrated into learning – the further development of assessment that is engaging, promotes learning and enables continuous development (Strategic Goal A1)

To enhance the students' learning experience, making assessment activities, support and feedback a powerful integrated feature of learning.

In order to do this, we will continue to:

Provide timely and effective feedback

Constructive, prompt and timely feedback improves student learning and it increases engagement and motivation. It allows students to take responsibility for the progression of their own learning. We will encourage students to recognise and reflect on all forms of feedback to enhance their ongoing learner development

Engage students with formative assessment

Designing and scheduling formative assessment tasks, where feedback can be used developmentally, will enhance student performance.

Ensure constructive alignment of assessment strategies, learning outcomes, and learning and teaching approaches

- We will continue to align learning, teaching and assessment activities to allow students to continuously develop and enhance their personal profile. We see ongoing feedback, through formative and summative assessment, as key to their success.

- We will encourage assessment for learning (where students are provided with opportunities to engage with formative assessment of progress, and feedback) as well as of learning (summative assessment).

Explore issues of effectiveness and efficiency in assessment

We will continue to enhance our knowledge and scholarship of assessment practice.

Theme 4 – Professional development framework for staff – the development and support of staff in an environment that promotes innovation, continuous enhancement, scholarship and pedagogic research (Strategic Goal A1)

To introduce a comprehensive professional development framework that raises the base, improves practice and promotes excellence in learning, teaching and assessment in collaboration with our partners, such as within the Dublin Region Higher Education Alliance and other alliances.

In order to do this, we will:

Offer meaningful academic development opportunities through the Centre for Learning and Teaching

- Through a structured blended programme of learning, teaching and assessment development activities, which relates to the specific culture and structure of the Institute and incorporates cutting-edge thinking, the Institute will provide academic and other staff and researchers involved in teaching and assessment with opportunities to develop the necessary expertise to enhance the student learning experience, as resources permit. This will partly be developed in collaboration with partners such as those within the Dublin Region Higher Education Alliance and other alliances, (Strategic Goal A6).
- As resources permit, there will be a full range of professional development opportunities to enhance academic practice in teaching and scholarship.
- As resources permit, Academic Schools/Departments will provide funding to support the development of discipline-specific skills for academic and support staff.

Support the ongoing professional development in the discipline-specific areas for academic and support staff

- As resources permit, the ongoing professional development of academic and support staff will be supported by academic departments, schools, and functional areas.

Support and encourage staff to utilise diverse and appropriate student centred approaches to learning, teaching, and assessment.

- We will continue to advertise events to staff to encourage student centred approaches to teaching and assessment (Strategic Goals A1 and A6).
- We will redesign course submission templates using Course Builder to include Strategic Goals C1-C3.

Increase awareness of the learning support resources available

- We will continue to disseminate information to staff and students about learning resources and events through our VLE. (Strategic Goals A1 and A2).

Encourage research to inform practice, and Scholarship of Teaching, Learning and Assessment

- To do this, we will continue to advertise funding opportunities to staff to engage with scholarly activities.
- We will continue to encourage staff to engage in research into the teaching of their disciplinary area, the integration of their own research into their teaching, and incorporate new developments in their discipline into their teaching, and use this to inform the development of academic programmes.
- We will continue to encourage staff to consider the influence of relevant external stakeholders when designing programmes.

Theme 5 – The enhancement of a culture that supports learners and promotes student success, whichever entry route they have taken (Strategic Goal A1, A2, A3, A4, A5)

This theme acknowledges the varied support needs of the Institute's diverse student body and takes account of research into the student experience. It recognises that the student experience extends beyond their learning, teaching and assessment related activities and it suggests the provision of co-ordinated supports throughout the student life cycle.

In order to do this we will:

Ensure that students are fully informed of the expectations of their programme of study through the student life cycle

- We will implement a Student Learning Agreement and monitor the effectiveness of this.

Ensure that students, particularly those with non-standard qualifications are fully prepared for and supported in their studies.

- We will further develop the blend of support initiatives available to all students, in consultation with students and staff (Strategic Goal A2).

Ensure that PDP¹/Personal and Professional Development is considered by each Programme Board for integration as appropriate within the curriculum

- We will continue to organise events to encourage student engagement with the PDP/PPD process as part of the curriculum.

¹Personal Development Planning has its origins in the UK Dearing Report, 1997 and is defined as 'a structured and supported process to develop the capacity of individuals to reflect on their own learning and achievement and to plan for their own educational and career development.' The 'primary objective of PDP is to improve the capacity of individuals to understand what and how they are learning, and to review, plan and take responsibility for their own learning, helping students: become more effective, independent and confident self-directed learners; understand how they are learning and relate their learning to a wider context; improve their general skills for study and career management; articulate personal goals and evaluate progress towards their achievement; and encourage a positive attitude to learning throughout life'. (QAA, 2001)

Explore ways to integrate international students more fully academically and socially within the wider student body (Strategic Goal A5).

- We will enhance our range of initiatives to encourage integration.

Continue to undertake an annual review of student data in relation to retention, progression, achievement and employment and the adoption of an evidence-based approach to identifying factors contributing to student retention and success (Strategic Goal A1)

- We will also review the effects of ethnicity, gender and disability on progression, prior educational achievement and employment, and recommend action to ameliorate differences, as appropriate (Strategic Goal A3).

Provide support and other services that are appropriate to the diverse student body through the Registrar's Office/Centre for Learning and Teaching/Lifelong Learning Office (Strategic Goal A2).

- We will collaboratively review the supports on an annual basis and make recommendations for implementation of new initiatives (Strategic Goal A2)

Theme 6 - The development and maintenance of infrastructure and support systems to facilitate an effective learning environment (Strategic Goals A1 and A2)

This theme supports the previous themes. All staff involved in the support and administration of student learning can expect an infrastructure that enables and supports them. The emphasis will be on ensuring that Institute systems, strategies and the physical infrastructure support flexible learning and our learners.

To do this we will:

- Ensure that all students are prepared and trained to fully engage with the Institute's Virtual Learning Environment and other core learning software

- Further develop pre-entry study resources and materials designed to build confidence in, and familiarise students with study in HE.
- We will continue to improve the learning environment through a process of discussion and feedback with staff and students
- Provide a robust IT infrastructure that supports increased accessibility, specifically by extending IT learning resources and support for the increasing flexible delivery of learning, this includes embracing the relevant learning technologies employed in the transfer of subject-specific knowledge and skills, as defined by the learning outcomes of each programme.
- Increase availability of real and virtual flexible learning spaces (including spaces for collaborative elearning² and flexible spaces for group study already offered in the Library) and increasing the accessibility of pooled and specialist IT resources, e.g. reviewing existing and planned teaching space for their fitness for flexible learning and flexible learners, and reviewing the provision of 'out of hours' services to support flexible curriculum delivery
- Further develop an effective, timetabling system that maximises the use of resources, supports learning, and integrates with the virtual learning environment and other systems
- Provide and maintain hardware necessary to support the Institute's core software and services
- Review of programme approval and quality assurance procedures which take account of relevant learning technologies, multi-media, digital learning objects and online delivery and support mechanisms.
- Development of systems to enable effective use of reusable digital learning objects
- We will build on the existing strengths of the Library and Centre for Learning and Teaching by reviewing and enhancing student supports, as practicable.

What does this mean in practice?

- An increase in effective dialogue, lively interaction and improved communication around learning, teaching and assessment throughout the Institute's learning communities and stakeholders, cross-disciplinary teams, and with other partners; the promotion of networks and events to engage in this dialogue

² Elearning is defined as the use of ICTs to improve the quality, flexibility and accessibility of learning for all students

- Significant engagement at departmental level, the Students' Union, other interested groups and external partners to ensure engagement for ensuring successful learning
- Communication with students around their experiences, expectations and needs to inform approaches to learning, teaching and assessment
- The use of evidence, based on the work of reflective and scholarly practitioners, to inform learning, teaching and assessment practices, policy and systems.

What does this mean for staff?

- Continuing the development/renewal of technical and pedagogic skills and applying these to enhance, support, excite and motivate student learning
- Embedding courses with enterprise, innovation, appropriate learning technologies, employability skills, opportunities for service learning, learner autonomy and personal and professional development alongside academic components
- Providing learning experiences which manage and meet student expectations effectively within available resources
- Forming learning partnerships where academic, technical, student support staff and students engage actively and effectively to achieve the intended learning outcomes
- Actively engaging in learning, teaching and assessment professional development activities in a supportive environment
- Continuously enhancing holistic learning experiences through cross-disciplinary team approaches to systematic and reflective programme design
- Linking students' learning to leading-edge knowledge, practice and research
- Embedding a rich mixtures of assessment strategies efficiently and effectively

What does this mean for students?

- Collaborating with other students, staff, employers and the community to support learning
- Creating and compiling a portfolio of evidence and reflection on learning
- Reflecting on progress and self-assessing
- Developing skills for effective independent learning

- Responding to feedback, and giving feedback to fellow students and staff
- Developing research and inquiry skills which empower students to become creators of knowledge
- Taking responsibility for managing learning
- Developing professional skills
- Working within the terms of the Student Learning Agreement and meeting programme expectations in terms of attendance and submission of assignments
- Engaging with technology
- Effective management of time

What does this mean for the Institute?

- Establishing institutional processes that encourage innovation, risk-taking, and change
- Promoting opportunities for staff and students to develop and communicate
- Creating opportunities for staff to critically reflect on their practice
- Providing appropriate learning environments
- Fostering a culture that recognises individuals' values and experiences in sharing responsibility for learning, teaching and assessment enhancement
- Listening and responding to the views of staff and students
- Celebrating what we do well

Alignment with other strategies and processes

The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy ensures that all our learning, teaching and assessment activities align with the Institute's Strategic Plan, which outlines *a distinctive student experience, wider participation, career focused lifelong learning, internationalisation, and collaboration* as key objectives for academic and departmental planning processes within academic schools and departments. It also provides a particular learning and teaching focus for other Institute strategies including human resources, finance, estates and IT, as well as inclusivity, research and business development.