

**2016 Strategic Dialogue Cycle 3
Self-Evaluation Report**

Appendix 1 Institutional Profile 2017/18

SECTION 1

OVERVIEW

1.0 Introduction

The Institute's Compact was developed in tandem with the Institute Strategic Plan during the 2013/2014 academic year. The Strategic Plan's targets and the Compact's objectives are aligned and complement each other.

The prioritisation of the Compact Objectives was founded on the Institute Vision and Mission:

- Our clear Vision is to be a Technological University.
- Our Mission is to provide student centred, career focused education, training and applied research programmes for our diverse cohort of learners within a professional and supportive environment. We are fully committed to intensive engagement with regional business, enterprise and social communities while maintain our global orientation.

During the review of the Compact cycle the Institute has prioritised three core areas:

- The Student Experience
- Applied Research
- Fulfilling Technological University Criteria

2.0 Reflection and Stretch Targets

As we now report on progress in Cycle 3 of the Compact we have reviewed how the process has developed and considered how the Institute is placed in meeting and/or amending its Compact objectives.

In general:

- The Institute has made significant progress in implementing its Strategic Plan and Compact objectives.
- The Institute has met or exceeded Technological University criteria.
- The Institute's vision and mission remain valid and the Institute is currently preparing an Expression of Interest document for submission to become a Technological University.
- The Dublin/Leinster II MEND Cluster is performing to target and we are collaborating effectively with our partner institutions.

It is well documented that recent years have been challenging with a significant reduction in state funding. This has been an unfortunate necessity due to the severe financial downturn and the Institute has had to adapt to these changed circumstances. The shift in revenue source is perceptible over the last few years;

- A. Towards research and postgraduate provision;
- B. Towards more diverse revenue sources.

The move towards research and postgraduate provision is reflected in the growth of research institutes and is further evidence of a maturing organisation.

The move towards more diverse revenue sources is positive in the main but has risks attached. Industrial engagement has increased significantly (UG/PG company provision, Road Safety Authority Training) together with labour activation initiatives (Springboard). The Institute is becoming dependent on such funding, however this funding source is highly volatile and leaves the institute vulnerable. We require sufficient funding to institutionalise and sustain processes that will allow us to continually source and secure this service provision. AIT is eager to continue to develop its portfolio towards a more diverse segmentation, fulfilling its remit to be community, enterprise and industrially focussed.

At present, with current resources there is clear tension between increasing our student population and;

- Improving services and reaching targets both in our Strategic Plan and Compact and
- Maintaining the initiatives and improvements recently made.

Succinctly, with restricted funding should we do more (i.e. student numbers) or better (i.e. targets and goals).

On reflection it is our firm view that under current circumstances this Institute must prioritise improving services over increasing student numbers. Bearing this in mind, the Institute has revised its Institute profile included at Appendix I. In our revised profile we are estimating that student numbers will not increase significantly over the next two years. There is a clear risk that the Institute will be stretched too thinly in attempting to grow student numbers aggressively, while embedding recent improvements to achieve further targets. Slow growth is an inevitable consequence of the restrictions placed on the Institute, with particular reference to laboratory space in the STEM areas, and the resulting limitations on student intake numbers.

A restructuring of funding levels would allow capacity to be increased to meet the expected demographic driven increases in student numbers over the coming years. We have the capacity to attract increased applicants as demonstrated by the growth in the Faculty of Science since 2011. However, following from Institutional Review in 2011 and the positive comments received from the panel regarding the establishment and maintenance of academic standards, the institute is continuing to focus its efforts on the quality of provision. We need to consolidate all that has been achieved in order to safeguard academic standards.

The Institute recognises that to attain many of the goals and targets in both its Strategic Plan and Compact requires a significant degree of stretch. By stretching we are becoming a better Institution and this supports our desire to become a Technological University. An example of stretched targets is our review of research metrics and our upward revision of the compact metrics 2015/16.

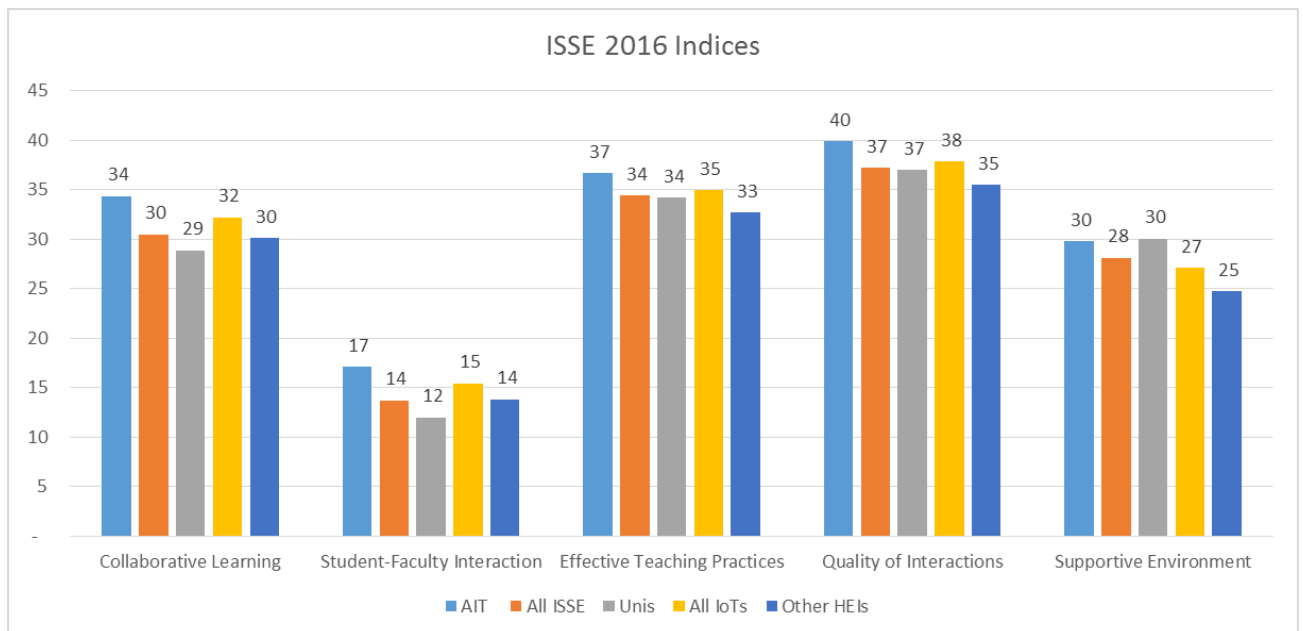
The degree of stretch which the Institute experiences comes not just from the Strategic Dialogue process but from a myriad of interactions, financial, regulatory, legislative and many others. Demands are placed upon the Institute from many directions. The Institute needs to manage all these demands and ensure that it operates to the highest standards in everything that it does. Under current resource limitations this is no easy task but we are determined to ensure that the very positive recent developments at the institute are safeguarded.

3.0 Institute Priority Areas

3.1 The Student Experience

The scale of the Institute along with its reputation for openness and friendliness all contribute to the quality of the student experience in AIT. This is attested by the engagement with the current Irish Survey of Student Engagement (the ISSE) and especially with the outcomes from that instrument which is now being analysed and discussed within the institution. The high level indicative return is especially telling when benchmarked against all HEIs, Universities, and other Institutes of Technology.

Benchmark



AIT is seen by its students to be particularly strong in the areas of

- Collaborative Learning
- Student Faculty Interactions
- Effective Teaching Practices
- Quality of Interactions
- Supportive Environment

This is supported by the qualitative information which is positive about the interpersonal and learning supports that are afforded to students. The student voice is appreciative of the life-cycle approach that is taken by the institute to the enhancement of the student experience, one that has focused on improved pre-application information, a reconstituted induction experience, strong peer-learning and support with more academic writing and numeracy supports, innovative and timely supports from the student resource centre, and a teaching staff that is itself keenly engaged in advancing its own pedagogical approach in support of the learners of AIT.

AIT's strong support for the ISSE provides us with detailed and reliable data now available over a three year period. One score that caused us to reflect was the initial low score from students in respect of student feedback. For an institution with a strong record in learning and teaching, this elicited a strong response. It is interesting to note that the scores in respect of student feedback have responded to the concentration that has been afforded this aspect.

ISSE on Feedback 2014	ISSE on Feedback 2015	ISSE on Feedback 2016
31.9%	35.9%	53.4%

This refers to the ISSE return in respect of the question concerning prompt and detailed feedback and the percentage is the combined score for those who received "quite a bit" and "very much" feedback.

3.2 Applied Research

We have developed a core expertise in strategically focussed areas in applied research. The chosen domains of Pharmaceutical and Biopharmaceutical Science, ICT and Material Sciences are of strategic importance to the industrial strength of the Midlands region. AIT's applied research function has a defined and resourced management and organisation structure, critical mass of research expertise and strong industry experience in these areas, which are closely aligned to our four areas of Delegated Authority at level 10.

We have developed a wide range of industry supports through our three industry centres, Applied Polymer Technologies (APT), COMMAND Software centre and the Centre for Industry Services & Design (CISD) which together with our three Research Institutes have a strong track record of industry engagement in applied research, design projects and contract analytical services. AIT are ranked second nationally in the number of innovation vouchers completed with industry partners. Our prioritising of applied research has enhanced our close links with regional industrial and business partners. This is complemented by the

Midland Action Plan for Jobs and the newly formed Regional Skills Forum.

We have implemented a time release programme for academic staff involved in research which helps embed a research ethos within the faculties while informing learning and teaching at both postgraduate and undergraduate levels.

3.3 Technological University Criteria

The publication of the “Programme for a Partnership Government” (May 2016) includes provision for Technological Universities and states

“The new Government will support the creation of Technological Universities. These regional institutions will have greater links to industry and will have an enormous impact on our capacity to create and retain jobs in regions. We will prioritise those institutions with clear ambitions and plans for the furthering of industry-relevant technological research and education. The requirement of a mandatory merger of existing institutions can be reviewed, if a case can be proven, that for geographical reasons, a merger isn’t feasible”.

The Institute has formally signalled the HEA of our intention to apply for Technological University status and we are in the process of developing an Expression of Interest document for that purpose. We believe that in relation to the Midlands Region, a case can be made for a stand-alone Technological University for the Midlands and we are confident that we will meet the criteria.

We have consistently espoused the belief that our region would gain significantly from having a Technological University. In fact, a Technological University is essential if the Midlands is to achieve its untapped potential. We believe that the Institute has worked hard to position itself to be ready to apply for designation and has met and in some instances exceeded the criteria. This progress has not happened overnight, it has been in train for a number of years and is the central tenet of our Strategic Plan.

4.0 HEA Requests

4.1 Systems and Workload Management

The Institute operates with nationally negotiated Contracts of Employment. These contracts have been in existence for a considerable time and are in need of re-negotiation.

The Institute has operated a resource allocation process for a number of years. This process ensures efficient utilisation of academic staff. The

Institute reviews the allocation of academic staff hours annually, as does the Internal Audit process ensuring that all resources are fully and appropriately utilised.

On an annual basis in the 2nd semester of each academic year a detailed review is carried out for each faculty and function of the Institute by a committee comprising of the President, Finance, HR and each Head of Faculty/Function. Workload management is analysed in detail at these meetings and all pro rata and part time contracts are reviewed. Decisions on whether to increase, reduce or eliminate hours/resources for the following academic year are made based on this review process in line with meeting the Institutes strategic priorities.

The Institute has operated a centralised timetabling system, as a consequence of Audit recommendations, for several years. This has allowed detailed analysis of resources leading to a more efficient and effective use of academic resources and infrastructure. We are aware of the fact that some academic areas and facilities are at full capacity which has the potential to inhibit or impede growth particularly in the STEM areas, which are critical to the industrial success of the Midlands region.

4.2 Transitions Agenda

Since September 2011, the Higher Education Authority in conjunction with key stakeholders have been working to enhance the transition from second-level education to higher education in Ireland. While some of the concentration has been on the proliferation of offerings at Level 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications, AIT has consciously maintained a balance in its undergraduate programme suite from Levels 6-8; this best serves the Midlands region where there are still many first-time entrants to third-level education.

The debate has been the catalyst for considerable reflection in AIT. We have looked at our mean entry points by level and, consistent with the original HEA *Study of Progression in Irish Higher Education*, we have considered what such entry metrics reveal about indicative ability as self-directed and autonomous learners.

Level 6 Mean	Level 7 Mean	Level 8 Mean
260	340	375

This refers to CAO points for those entering as first-year students through the CAO. The figures are supplied by the CAO. The figures refer to the entry cohort of 2015/16.

On foot of this reflection, AIT has

1. Focused more attention on the pre-entry phase for prospective new learners (please see below)
2. Refashioned its student induction process and procedures

3. Taken student feedback on the revised approach at induction which has been strongly positive; there is a related review of the process within the faculties which proved equally positive
4. Established working groups to re-examine
 - a. maths entry thresholds
 - b. progression thresholds
5. Utilized the HEA funding through the cluster to take a holistic reappraisal of early student supports
6. Increased its dedicated support for numeracy and literacy through the provision of dedicated tutors and an academic writing facility
7. Focused on the quality of the Peer Assisted Student Support (PASS) Programme which is now delivered across years 1 and 2 on 26 programmes throughout the institute
8. Worked through the Learning & Teaching Unit on a range of initiatives focused on pedagogical supports to enhance the transition for students into and through the initial semesters in higher education

The Equal Status Act 2000-2011 prohibits discrimination against people on nine grounds, including disability, while placing a responsibility on public bodies, including Higher Education Institutions to provide reasonable accommodation for the needs of students with disabilities. Athlone Institute of Technology is committed through its Access Policy to ensuring students, including those with disabilities, can engage meaningfully with all aspects of learning at third level. We have invested in Assistive Technology and Learning Support as resources throughout the lifecycle of the student. We promote these resources to help build independent and autonomous learning, academic self-efficacy, and reduce anxiety and self-limiting beliefs.

Pre-entry Access

AIT runs the only assistive technology summer camp in the country. Now in its 5th year and targeting 2nd level students from 2nd to 5th year; we train students in the assistive technologies they will use in 3rd level to help build their confidence and to open a conversation about progression to 3rd level. Initiatives include:

- Access course, now accredited at Level 6 – geared towards mature learners
- Directions course – developed in tandem with Athlone Training Centre, geared towards student who drop out in first year. This course gives them an opportunity to sample elements of the various academic disciplines including science, business, and hospitality. During this course they receive educational and career guidance to help them make informed choices about their

next steps either in re-joining 3rd level or pursuing vocational training.

4.3 Retention

The Institute continues to address the challenge of attrition especially at levels 6 and 7 and the President has established a working group on non-progression. This has enabled a multi-faceted institute wide response to the issue. Some of the recommendations are:

- Appointing a personal tutor to each first year student;
- Introduce collaborative and compulsory induction activities;
- Approach timetabling through a retention lens;
- Use Programmatic Review process to place highly engaging content early in first term of first year;
- Timetable the more experienced lecturers in Semester 1 to engage students at the start of their third level experience;
- Use Programmatic Review to ensure that course scheduling and pacing meets the needs of the student body to the most practical degree possible.

Specific Retention initiatives

As part of the Programmatic Review 2015 problem based learning was extended where feasible. Modules that were hitherto very separate became linked to provide the student with a more holistic understanding of the programme and to present an inherent logic to the choice of topics taught.

Assessment methods were reviewed as part of this process by linking modules together where possible. To date, the feedback has been positive.

We have determined that attendance at lectures and laboratories is a significant factor in predicting academic success. We have introduced mandatory attendance for all students with a particular focus on first years at laboratories in 2014/2015. There is a discernible improvement in examination success rates and the initiative is now introduced across all relevant disciplines.

One initiative to improve attrition rates involved setting aside a day during which first year students could interact with each other by playing games. This initiative was piloted in 2015/16 and is a good example of the use of social integration to address attrition. We know that the first 6 weeks are critical to retention and that the ability to 'settle' into the environment and to make social connections facilitates retention significantly. The all-day series of activities were provided by an external company, familiar with university settings and they afforded staff and students the opportunity to meet in an informal and fun setting

while including a series of individual and group problem solving exercises. The initiative has proven very successful and will be repeated and extended institute-wide.

We have continued the practice of bringing first year students to visit industrial/enterprise settings during their first term. The idea is to allow them to see beyond the study of individual modules and to understand the types of environments where they may work and the skill-sets they will acquire. This is now embedded as a fixture in the calendar of all first year students and helps them to confirm their course choices.

Guest lectures by practitioners are a regular feature of all programmes in all years and this too is aimed at building a deeper understanding of the programmes students are studying.

We have continued to develop tutoring services in the areas of concern, mainly in Maths, Chemistry, Physics and Business Studies.

As above, we have continued to roll out the Peer Assisted Student Support (PASS) Programme which is of crucial value in engaging with students especially in first year.

5.0 Conclusion

The Institute commenced working on the Compact in a co-ordinated fashion and it was fortunate that its new Strategic Plan was being developed at the same time. A consequence of the compact is the fact that the Institute has redesigned how it does its business. Executive Management has been re-organised and its focus is now on strategic issues. Operational matters are now dealt with by an Operational Management team consisting of senior and other managers. The Institute has re-structured its four schools in line with University format, into three faculties with Humanities being subsumed into the Business and Science faculties. Functional areas have also been rationalised and retitled. The Institute has embedded the Strategic Dialogue into its Strategic Decision Making process. It is not an isolated “stand-alone” process, but rather it is integrated with

- Strategic Risk Analysis;
- Resource Planning;
- Cluster activity and;
- The National Landscape.

The Institute has and will continue to adapt to the changing environment that it finds itself in and will engage with all stakeholders to achieve the best outcomes for students, stakeholders and the Region.

SECTION 2

STRATEGIC DIALOGUE CYCLE 3

1. Regional Clusters – Overview

Dublin/Leinster II Cluster (Midlands, East and North Dublin - MEND Cluster)

During this reporting period, the Dublin/Leinster II or MEND Cluster, comprising Dublin City University, Maynooth University, Dundalk Institute of Technology and Athlone Institute of Technology, has continued to demonstrate its commitment to the on-going development of the cluster with considerable progress made in implementing the objectives agreed by the Cluster HEIs with the HEA. The MEND Cluster finalised its programme of work as detailed in the Strategic Innovation Development Fund (SIDF) proposal in Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 of 2015 which aimed:

- to establish and support a sustainable, shared academic planning process to ensure coherent, co-ordinated and rational educational provision and ease of transfer and progression;
- to collaborate for student success and regional economic development.

This multi-component project, designed to enhance the quality of teaching and learning, and improve access and transition comprised a number of components, namely:

- *Coherence of provision:* the analytic and preparatory work required to enable a more co-ordinated provision, through mapping of existing provision, development of protocols for collaboration, and preparing for interoperable student records systems;
- *Collaboration with Further Education:* a network of FE providers, a regional ‘one stop shop’ portal, a comprehensive mapping of progression paths, and foundation courses to assist transition;
- *Enhanced Student Learning Supports:* enhanced supports for student learning and retention through increased resourcing and leveraging of complementary expertise across the cluster.

The SIDF Final Report detailing the outputs of the programme activities was compiled and forwarded to the HEA in September 2015. The Cluster Partners subsequently sought additional funding to build on the strands that had informed the initial phase of activity – namely those concerning access, transfer, and progression; the building of a FE-HE network; the mapping portal for FE provision and progression within the region; the agreement on SRS protocols to facilitate collaborative programme development and potential for enhanced transfer within the region and the demographic study and mapping of existing provision.

Following the very positive assessment by the Higher Education Authority which reported that “*the cluster has both achieved the minimum outcomes and has moved beyond that to deliver more ambitious outcomes*”, the MEND Cluster was considered a best practice exemplar for the sector. This was corroborated by the additional funding of €287,000 approved by the HEA in its letter to the Presidents

on 5th November 2015. This funding was made available to support a specific project, to be developed by the MEND cluster, in respect of student pathways and academic planning across four specific elements:

1. Maintenance and development of the Higher Education and Further Education Network;
2. Maintenance of the FE-HE portal, and the investigation of the feasibility of establishing a national portal;
3. Development of the short- and medium- term academic planning process as an exemplar for the sector; and,
4. Mapping of small and medium sized enterprise across the region and developing systematic engagement with SMEs.

As part of its on-going activities, the MEND Cluster partners have since submitted its detailed project plan setting out the proposed approach to each of these four projects to the HEA in April 2016. The four strands of the project are viewed by the Cluster as interlinking. Thus, the overall governance of the project takes a holistic view, with each element of the project managed by a senior manager and each working group comprising members from the four institutions.

This project plan is the basis of the work plan for the Cluster for 2016. In this regard, some of the targets set out in the Mission-based Performance Compact for the Cluster for 2015 have been incorporated into the MEND Cluster Project Plan 2016 (Appendix 2). For these reasons, the Cluster proposes that the Compact targets for 2016 are replaced with the outputs set out in the MEND Cluster Project Plan 2016, namely:-

Institution Objective	Interim Target, End 2016
<p>Within the Dublin/Leinster 2 (MEND) Cluster, agree and implement processes to establish and support a sustainable and shared academic planning process to ensure coherent, co-ordinated and rational higher educational</p>	<p>This institution objective is reflected in the MEND Cluster Project Plan 2016 in Strand 3: Academic Planning.</p> <p>The target output of this activity will be an academic plan for the cluster for full time undergraduate courses of level 6, 7 and 8, showing:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Existing enrolment b) Planned intake c) Planned entry routes d) Projected demand e) Projected changes in disciplinary mix. <p>As supplementary outputs, the cluster will produce:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i) An analysis of postgraduate enrolment across the cluster. ii) An analysis of available information on future skills needs in the cluster catchment area.

provision across the region.	iii) A mapping of transfer and progression options within the cluster
Within the Dublin/Leinster 2 (MEND) Cluster, develop a regional approach to access, transfer and progression (ATP).	<p>This institution objective is reflected in the MEND Cluster Project Plan 2016 in Strand 1: Higher Education and Further Education and Training Network and Strand 2: Pathways to Higher Education – PHASE II activity.</p> <p>Target outputs resulting from these activities will be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) A working paper on access, transfer and progression (ATP) which is intended to be the first in a series produced by the Network, its dissemination within the Network and beyond the Network by means of its presentation at a number of conferences b) A Network regional conference which will be held in November 2016 c) Collation and dissemination within the Network of regional data relating to formal and informal links between relevant bodies. d) CPD delivery across the four HE institutions targeted in specific areas, including but not necessarily restricted to STEM. <p>In addition, following the development of a pilot portal designed to improve knowledge on access routes from further education (FE) to higher education (HE) in the MEND cluster area, the second phase of development will focus on (a) updating the existing MEND portal with the latest data and (b) scoping out the development of this portal on a national scale resulting in the output of a working prototype of a national portal hosted on the AIRO server.</p>
Within the Dublin/Leinster 2 Cluster, map SME Engagement.	<p>This institution objective is an additional objective and is reflected in the MEND Cluster Project Plan 2016 in Strand 4: MEND cluster: the mapping of small and medium enterprise across the region and developing systematic engagement with SMEs.</p> <p>Target outputs resulting from these activities will be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) The development of a sub network of Regional Skills Fora project managers within the four regions covered by the cluster b) The mapping of SMEs across the MEND region c) The build of a portal providing access to the SME network d) The establishment of an SME/agency/HE & FE forum to identify and develop the optimal mode of systematic engagement between enterprise and the academy within the MEND region.

The progress on targets for 2015 is therefore reported within the context of the MEND Cluster Project Plan 2016. Any deviation from the targets is mainly due to the re-focussing of activity following the approval of additional funding and as incorporated into the MEND Cluster Project Plan 2016. The four partners remain highly committed to building upon the recognised achievements to date. This commitment was further strengthened with the formal signing of an MOU between the HEI partners in December 2015.

Regional Clusters – Targets

Institution objective	<p>Agree and implement processes to establish and support a sustainable and shared academic planning process to ensure coherent, coordinated and rational higher educational provision across the region. The shared academic planning process will involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) preparation of projections of demand for higher education in the region and consideration of options for a strategic approach to provision by the cluster institutions, (b) preparation of a scoping study that will map existing course provision, student numbers, catchment areas, and arrangements for access, transfer and progression. It will seek to identify areas of demand, potential for collaboration, and potential for more coherent and rational provision, and c. a review of the student records and administrative systems and agreement of protocols for the delivery of joint programmes, and also shared registration, alignment of marks and standards, and quality assurance procedures.
Performance indicator	<p>The cluster institutions will agree and implement a regional cluster enrolment plan for higher education provision. More specifically, we will monitor (a) the number of CAO entry routes by institution and (b) the number of, and enrolment on, joint academic programmes as per published Compact.</p>
Baseline	<p>There is a complete absence of systematically compiled data and information at the regional cluster level.</p>
Interim target, end 2015	<p>Outputs from a scoping study and high level demand projections reviewed by Cluster Board and management and governance structures in each institution. A draft plan for regional academic programme provision will be completed and agreed among participating institutions, and discussed with the HEA. The draft plan will include high level targets</p>

	<p>for undergraduate and postgraduate provision, and an agreed approach to CAO entry routes in line with the national process.</p> <p>Develop and collectively approve proposals in relation to systems, protocols and procedures for shared and joint academic programmes, and also agree performance indicators for collaborative provision.</p>
<p>Progress against 2015 target, commentary and data source</p>	<p>Very considerable progress has been made in implementing the objectives agreed by the Cluster HEIs with the HEA. All targets have been achieved.</p> <p>The Cluster represents one-sixth of total enrolments in the entire HEA funded higher education system. The constituent institutions cater for distinctive geographical hinterlands by providing an extensive range of programmes across NFQ levels 6 to 10. There are strong commonalities and complementarities in provision of programmes between each of the universities and each of the Institutes, and particularly strong complementarities between the universities and the institutes. The Cluster activities are led by the Registrars, with oversight provided by the Cluster Board which includes the Presidents and Registrars of each institution along with the Maynooth University Vice-President for Strategy and Quality. An important factor in the success of the cluster has been its capacity to harness expertise across the four institutions to make successful bids for funding targeted towards collaborative projects. This regional cluster was the only collaboration awarded funding under the SIDF programme. More recently, three of the ten projects funded by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning involved the cluster members. Two of the projects explore the potential of digital technologies to support flexible learners and provision of feedback in first year. A comprehensive report has already been produced on the feedback project. The third examines examples of resources and types of formative assessments to support first year UG mathematics education.</p> <p>A high level Working Group from the four HEIs reviewed enrolment patterns, the range of programmes provided and levels of demand, and also progress towards the 2016/17 Compact targets, and longer term demand projections. The review highlighted some shifts in demand between full-time and part-time students, more emphasis on level 8 degree programmes, and shifts in demand across the major ISCED categories, with different responses from the Universities and Institutes in relation to each of these shifts in demand patterns. There is very little evidence of programmes for which there is insufficient demand, but the projections for the next 15 years indicate that a significant expansion in demand is likely to</p>

	<p>occur. The DES 2014 full-time UG demand projections imply that the numbers of full-time UG new entrants to the four HEIs could increase by between 2,570 (assuming no increase in current share of all new entrants) and 3,580 (sustained modest rate of increase in line with recent years) over the period to 2028. The comparable figures for increases in total enrolments are 7,720 and 8,100</p> <p>Work on reducing the number of designated entry routes is progressing at a national level with leadership provided by leaders of the cluster HEIs.</p> <p>A Working Group that included the Registrars and others has prepared a <i>Protocol for the initiation, approval, management and implementation of joint academic activities within the Midlands East, North Dublin (MEND) cluster</i>. This provides a framework for resolving a wide range of issues that are likely to arise in the context of joint programme provision. This WG also examined the requirements for effective, reliable and efficient systems for <i>Student Data Exchange for Joint Academic</i></p>
Final target, end 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commence implementation of plan for regional academic programme provision and commence implementation of rationalised entry routes, • The number of, and enrolment on, joint academic programmes as agreed in shared academic programme finalised in 2015, • Complete review of pilot phase of delivery of shared and joint programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.
Summary	<i>Target achieved</i>

Institution objective	Develop a regional approach to access, transfer and progression
Performance indicator	<p>The cluster institutions will:</p> <p>(a) develop an integrated regional approach to access, transfer and progression, and</p> <p>(b) Prepare regional inventory of all options and mechanisms for ATP from FE to HE at programme and institutional level. The quantitative performance indicator will be the number of students transferring into or between institutions.</p>
Baseline	There is an absence of systematically compiled data and information at the regional cluster level.
Interim target, end 2015	Identification of new progression routes and agreement on pathways to be enabled in 2016; performance indicators agreed for transfer and progression.

<p>Progress against 2015 target, commentary and data source</p>	<p>A further project has reviewed the procedures for access, transfer and progression between the HEIs and also between the FE and HE institutions in the regional cluster. A Higher Education and Further Education Network has been established and is supported by an MOU signed the Presidents, and CEOs of the relevant ETBs.</p> <p>A prototype portal has been developed to assist students to navigate through the extensive range of FE and HE programmes that are available, identify the locations at which courses / programmes are provided, and provide information on pathways between FE and HE provision. The prototype is a model that could be rolled out across the entire HE and FE sectors.</p> <p>The prototype portal can be accessed at http://pathways.maynoothuniversity.ie/</p> <p>The success of the Cluster can be attributed to the leadership and commitment provided by the four leadership teams; the sustained efforts to build trust and relationships at different levels between the institutions; and the availability of funding via the SIDF that provided resources to progress projects that are closely aligned to the institutional strategies.</p>
<p>Final Target end 2016</p>	<p>To have the full implementation of new transfer and progression pathways underway.</p>
<p>Summary</p>	<p><i>Target achieved</i></p>

2. Participation, Equal Access and Lifelong Learning – Overview

The region is characterised as economically less advantaged than average with lower incomes and higher unemployment. We are focussing here on measures to address this and are concentrating on mature entrants, lifelong learners and outreach initiatives.

Mature Students

Benchmark

	AIT	CIT	DKIT	GMIT	IT Blanch	Carlow	Sligo	Tallaght	Tralee	L/kenny	Limerick	WIT
Mature Entrants	23%	11%	21%	23%	34%	25%	18%	15%	22%	24%	24%	18%

Source: Higher Education System Performance Institutional and Sectoral profiles 2012/2013

The comment around what was viewed as a comparatively poor performance by AIT in respect of provision for mature learners in the second year of the current compact cycle has occasioned the institute to reflect upon this important aspect of its provision. AIT has strong links within the region and has traditionally been characterised by the high number of mature learners attending. The economic upturn undoubtedly impacts the situation but it does not explain the case sufficiently. The benchmarked figure above proposes that AIT is in line with national trends.

Lifelong Learning

Lifelong Learning exists in many forms across the institute. Uniquely AIT espouses to create an awareness of the value of Lifelong Learning throughout all its programmes. This is demonstrated through the high percentage of mature entrants attending programmes across the entire institute.

More specifically, the Institute has a dedicated department focussing on the lifelong learner and towards the creation of learning opportunities for the lifelong learner. This department works in partnership with the institute community (faculties, research, students services) to provide student-centred, career and work-focused education, training and applied research programmes for the diverse cohort of lifelong learners within a professional and supportive environment. The department is committed to promoting the principle of lifelong learning, through the implementation of varied access routes leading to accredited and professional qualifications, delivered in the midlands region and beyond. In 2015/2016, 857 lifelong learning students participated on dedicated part-time programmes offered by AIT both in the Midlands and on an outreach basis. In particular, in recent years the Institute has offered lifelong learning outreach programmes in Galway, Tullamore, Castlebar and off –campus in Athlone as depicted in table below:

Centre	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016
Tullamore	22	22	22	17
Galway	--	21	21	43
Castlebar	--	--	--	17
Athlone (Alkermes)	--	--	--	20
Total	22	43	43	97

In 2016, the Institute produced a specific Draft Lifelong Learning Strategic plan. This plan is a subset of the overall institute Strategic Plan, but takes the sole perspective of the Lifelong Learner in its delivery. The objective is articulated through the mission of the Department of Lifelong Learning namely:

In partnership with the Institute Community to provide student-centred, career and work-focused education, training and applied research programmes for our diverse cohort of lifelong learners within a professional and supportive environment. We are committed to promoting the principle of lifelong learning, through the implementation of varied access routes leading to accredited and professional qualifications, delivered in the midland region and beyond.

Access

AIT's Access Strategic Plan reflects and documents Athlone Institute of Technology's (AIT) continued commitment to widening participation at third level and to providing a supportive equal opportunity learning environment for all of our students. In particular our plan focuses on those within our society who are under-represented in the third level educational environment, namely, mature students, people with disabilities, migrants, travellers and socio-economically disadvantaged learners (The National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education, 2008). The current plan is being reviewed to reflect the new National Access Plan published in Dec. 2015.

There is a considerable effort made to increase participation of people with disabilities. Links are maintained with disability related organisations (AHEAD, PWDI, NLN, DAI, Deafhear, NCBI, IWA, MESA, Offaly PPN) and to schools in the region and nationally.

Training is offered in Assistive technology to external individuals and organisations.

The institute hosts, annually, an Assistive Technology Summer Camp aimed at second level students to begin instructing them in the use of the Assistive Technologies that will be utilised in a third level setting.

Post entry support. Includes the following:

- Advice and individual needs assessments available for all students on entry to AIT so they will be familiar with their strengths and individual learning styles
- Assistive Technology plus training in standard IT applications
- Assistive Technology Centre (ATC) where students have access to training, PC's, specialised software, printing, photocopying and an Assistive Technology Trainer
- Counsellor available as part of mainstream provision for all students with disabilities
- Educational Support Workers (Personal Assistants, Academic Assistants, Note takers) for certain categories of disability (Students with Sensory or Physical Disabilities)
- Examination Supports (reader/scribe, separate room or smaller shared venue, additional time, rest periods, alternative furniture, use of computer and/or audio recordings of exam papers, Read & Write Software to read paper, marking guidelines for students with SpLD and hearing impairments)
- Learning Support Tutor (focusing on students with SpLD, but available for all registered service users)
- Orientation provided individually or in groups – separate from induction programme for all student with disabilities (additional orientation training focusing on students with Asperger's Syndrome, ADHD, Dyspraxia and Sensory Impairments)
- Academic Skills Mentor through Project 360 which has a dedicated person offering one to one support for students with ASD and Mental Health Difficulties who encounter particular difficulty in a navigating their way through third level education, providing learning support and advocacy as required to individuals.
- Promote the use of Assistive Technologies in the lecture setting, e.g. Livescribe pen, to give greater autonomy too students in the classroom.
- Site licencing of the most commonly used Assistive Technology Software to enable their usage at all locations on campus.
- Tutorial Support (individual tuition available but also integrated with Accountancy, Science and Maths & IT Tutors available for all students)
- Transport assistance (for students with physical/mobility difficulties).

AIT endeavours to increase participation of under - represented groups through links with DEIS schools in the midland region, PLC colleges, VTOS centres, FAS, local youth groups, training for employment centres, the national learning network, Intreo and the probation services.

Participation, Equal Access and Lifelong Learning – Targets

Institution objective	To increase the number of non-standard learners engaging through Lifelong Learning
Performance indicator	To realise an increase in student enrolments from the current annual population of some 800 learners. The funding challenge is perceived to be an obstacle currently to growth.
Baseline	827 students registered in September 2012
Interim target, end 2015	900 students – <i>to include all lifelong learning provision i.e. accredited, professional, hobby and personal development programmes.</i>
Progress against 2015 target, commentary and data source	1,196 part-time students registered as at 1 March 2016 There are also almost 300 students registered on Hobby course and personal experience demonstrates that many of those who commence a hobby course progress to accredited programmes after this experience.
Final Target End 2016	Total Part time students of 1,200
Summary	<i>Target achieved</i>

Institution objective	Participation in new AIT ENGAGE programme
Performance indicator	Student membership of clubs and societies, in particular those societies involving civic engagement and volunteering.
Baseline	This is a novel departure and thus has a zero baseline engagement currently. There are, however, various examples of local engagement and volunteering to be found currently within the faculties.
Interim target, end 2015	200 active members, 20 students to complete student leadership training. For information, AIT has also signed to support the national Campus Engage initiative
Progress against 2015 target, commentary and data source	The target of 200 is achieved. Training target is also achieved through this metric.
Final Target End 2016	300 active members, 30 students to complete student leadership training
Summary	<i>Target Achieved</i>

Institution objective	Further develop and embed Peer Assisted Student Support programme (PASS)
Performance indicator	Increase in number of 1 st year courses offering PASS
Baseline	8 courses in 2012/13
Interim target, end 2015	20 courses
Progress against 2015 target, commentary and data source	26 programmes Academic Year 2015/16. No additional programmes due to resource limitations.
Final Target End 2016	23 courses
Summary	<i>Target Achieved</i>

3. Excellent teaching and learning and quality of the student experience - Overview

Our focus here is on student engagement, our continued support for Level 6 and Level 7 and how learning and teaching is helping to improve the student experience.

Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE) 2016

AIT are the number one Higher Education Institute in the country in terms of response rate to the ISSE. In 2016 the AIT response rate is 54.4% against a national average of 22.2%. The excellent response rate is achieved via a strong partnership with the students union who promote the benefits to students. Feedback is provided to students on the impact of the survey results and the actions that have been taken to address points raised in the survey. The ISSE has been implemented following a recommendation in the national strategy for higher education to 2030.

“Every higher education institution should put in place a comprehensive anonymous student feedback system, coupled with structures to ensure that action is taken promptly in response to student concerns”.

This year has seen significant changes to the survey instrument being employed that has resulted in a new set of indices that measure the outcomes of the responses received. The below table shows AIT's score in one index Student Faculty Interaction against the categories for HEIs deployed when publishing the national results.

	AIT	All ISSE	All Universities	All IoTs	Other HEIs
Student Faculty Interaction	17.1	13.7	12.0	15.4	13.8

As the above table demonstrates AIT is achieving an index score well in excess of the other classifications used to analyse results.

Level 6/7 Provision

Benchmark

	AIT	CIT	DKIT	GMT	IT Blanch	Carlow	Sligo	Tallaght	Tralee	L/kenny	Limerick	WIT
Level 6	27%	11%	5%	5%	8%	13%	14%	13%	13%	11%	16%	9%
Level 7	30%	42%	45%	64%	41%	24%	52%	35%	39%	52%	25%	31%
TOTAL	57%	53%	50%	69%	49%	37%	66%	48%	52%	63%	41%	40%

Source: Higher Education System Performance Institutional and Sectoral profiles 2012/2013

The Institute will continue to provide a mix of provision at Level 6, Level 7 and Level 8. We will ensure that the Ladder System will be kept in order to ensure pathways are available for our students.

Learning and Teaching Unit:

The Learning and Teaching Unit continues to offer opportunities for staff to undertake postgraduate awards in keeping with pillar one of the AIT Strategic Plan 2014-2018, Performance and Strategic Target 5.1.3. 10 to “increase the number of staff with pedagogical qualifications by 25% over the lifetime of the plan” (p.24) and the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 which states that “all higher education institutions must ensure that all teaching staff are both qualified and competent in teaching and learning, and should support on-going development and improvement of their skills (DES, 2011, p. 62).

Enhancing the quality of student experience is of utmost importance and this is reflected through the many offerings of the unit with particular reference on the offering of postgraduate modules in both creating and supporting an inclusive curriculum. In addition in 2015, the work of the Student Led Learning Special Interest Group SLL (SIG) under the Learning Innovation Network – Networks Funding 2015 which is led by the AIT Learning and Teaching Unit and GMT, culminated in the [SLL Symposium](#) with keynote addresses by Professor Liz Thomas from the ‘What works and why?’ UK project and Eve Lewis of the sparqs programme. Electronic resources developed by the Student Led Learning special interest group were launched at the SLL Symposium in May 2015 and are available at www.lin.ie/sll.

Designed collaboratively by SLL to assist students make a successful transition to higher education, and to enhance the overall quality of the student experience the resources include:

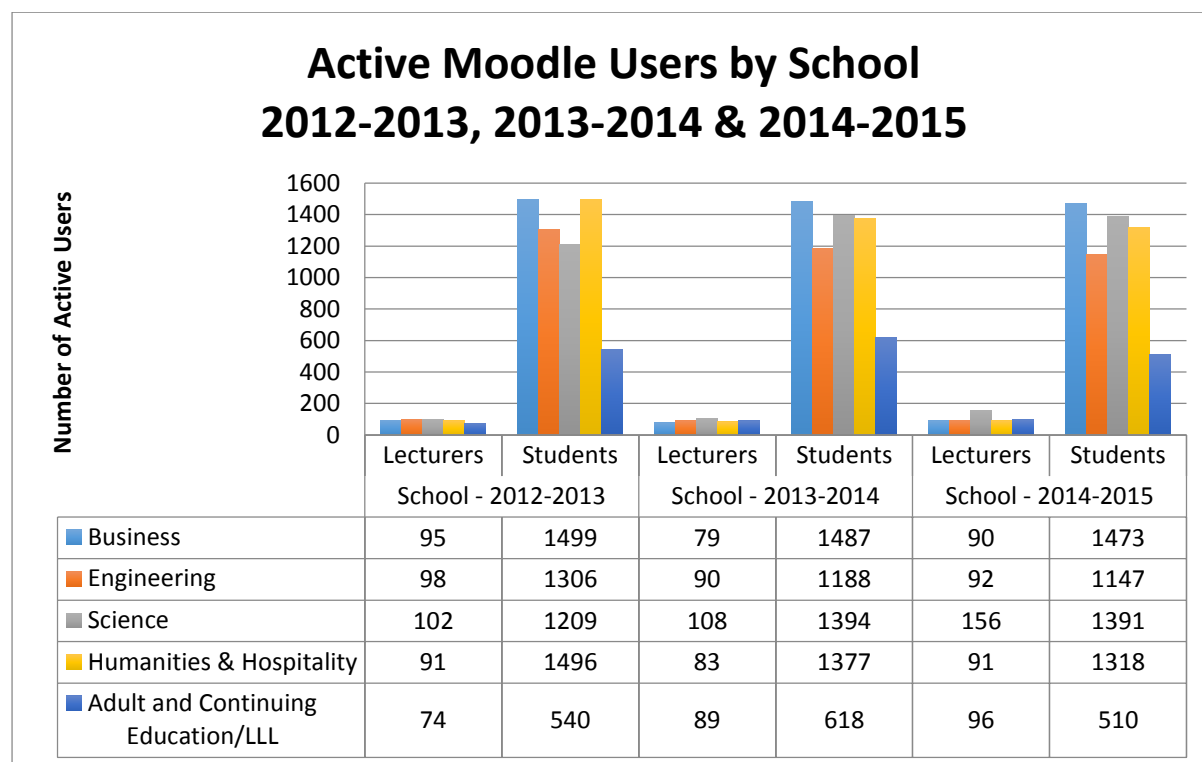
- [First Six Weeks Framework](#) for institutes and individuals who are considering offering an extended induction to students making the transition to college.
- [Cracking the College Code Webinar Series](#) Each screencast provides practical advice for making the transition to further and higher education, for students, parents, guidance counsellors, educators and support staff.
- [SLL Peer Learning eGuidebook and Student Leader Training Video](#) developed for use by institutes or individuals who wish to implement a Peer Assisted Learning scheme to empower students in transition to further and higher education.
- [Student in Transition Video Journey](#) provides an insight into the experiences of a diverse group of students about starting in college.

Learning Analytics

Virtual Learning Environment and Student Diary Pro (SDP)

Moodle is the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) used in AIT. As students engage in the online VLE they leave a data trail that can be accessed and analysed for meaning. Learning Analytics is the term used for the approach to interrogating that data. Learning Analytics can be considered to be the analysis and representation of data about students in order to improve learning, it is a new lens through which teachers and the institute can gain an insight into how students engage with the online learning environment.

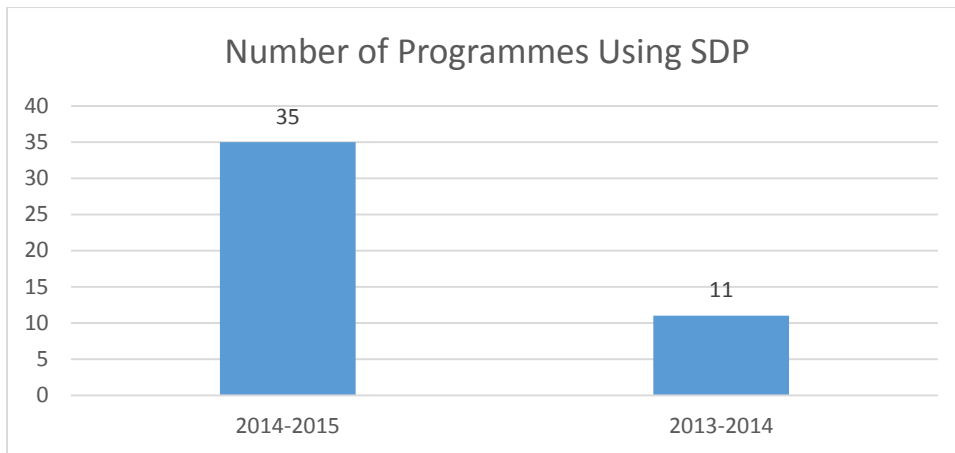
In this context, it is being used to present data indicating the enhanced use of the VLE within the institute in 2012-2013, 2013-2014 and 2014-2015. The chart below shows the active Moodle users by Faculty over a three year period.



Placement and Student Diary Pro (SDP)

An analysis of all modules in Moodle shows that the word “Placement” appears in the title of 69 modules.

An analysis of the use of Student Diary Pro shows active use with SDP used on 11 modules in 2013-2014 and 35 in 2014-2015. Programmatic Review 2015 and subsequent new programme development has resulted in the introduction of placement or work based modules, with an increased focus on the use of Student Diary Pro.



Graduate Attributes:

The AIT Graduate Attributes project is a leading action project in the Strategic Plan 2014-18. AIT graduate attributes will inform all future programme design, curriculum development and assessment strategies. A report of the Working Group on Graduate Attributes, chaired by the AIT Learning and Teaching Co-ordinator, was prepared for approval by the steering committee for the implementation of the strategic plan in December 2014. Prior to programmatic Review 2015 a template for the inclusion of graduate attributes was distributed to all faculties. Each faculty developed graduate attributes pertinent to their competencies in order to ensure that graduates are meeting the demands of industry and employers.

**Excellent teaching and learning and quality of the student experience -
Targets**

Institution objective	Increase participation and attendance at new student induction
Performance indicator	Increased metrics around attendance at sessions, library facilitation visits, and engagement with HEA Equal Access Survey completion during induction.
Baseline	As example, 44% completed the HEA Equal Access Survey in 2012/13 based on first year intake.
Interim target, end 2015	75% completion
Progress against 2015 target, commentary and data source	86.5% of students attended the first stages of New Student Induction.
Final Target End 2016	85% completion
Summary	<i>Target Achieved</i>

Institution objective	To promote excellence in learning, teaching and assessment, thereby enhancing learning experience of all students.
Performance indicator	65 members of AIT staff and 72 external participants have commenced on the flexible pathway to the LIN/AIT Postgraduate Diploma in Learning, Teaching and Assessment since 2009. Prior to this, between 2007 and 2010, 18 members of staff completed the off-campus DIT Postgraduate Certificate under SIF 1 funding.
Baseline	L&T Unit commenced offering accredited programmes in 2008. L&T Unit commenced targeted training in the use of the VLE in 2008. Prior to this such training was provided on an ad hoc basis. The figures above provide the current baseline. AIT is working with Cluster partners to consider a mechanism for best sharing of expertise in this area.
Interim target, end 2015	A further 10 members of AIT staff to graduate in 2015. Continued support for staff in the use of the VLE on all programmes of study. Continued support for staff in the use of Student Diary Pro for placement. Increase usage across all academic departments with placement incorporated in programme design.
Progress against 2015 target, commentary and data source	3 staff members from AIT graduated with Postgraduate Diploma in Learning, Teaching and Assessment: 75 members engaged with flexible pathways. VLE in use in AIT is Moodle with continued growth in usage recorded – staff usage has increased from 460 users in 12/13 to 525 users in 14/15. Student Diary Pro shows active use on 6 modules, with 130 students using the eportfolio tool on placement. PR 2015 introduced more placements with an increased focus on the use of Student Diary Pro. Therefore, it is expected that an analysis of Moodle 2015-2016 in 2017 will show an increased usage of Student Diary Pro on the placement modules.
Final Target End 2016	In proportion to above subject to resourcing-
Summary	2 out of 3 targets achieved Staff are continuing to engage with flexible pathways on a route to graduation

4. High quality, internationally competitive research and innovation - Overview

Having reflected on comments in Cycle 2 we have acknowledged that original targets set in this domain were less than what should have been set. It is now acknowledged that the Institute should have been more ambitious with the research targets at the outset of this process and the success of the unit and the research centres was underestimated. We revised targets at our Dialogue meeting last year and have adjusted these here. We have also revised 2016 targets.

The Office of Research has recently completed its own Strategic Plan. It is based on the Institute's key Strategic Goal:

“To support sustainable socio-economic development regionally and nationally through relevant and internationally excellent collaborative research, innovation and knowledge-based enterprise development”

Our enabling strategy to deliver on the above mission is to be an RDI partner of Choice for Enterprise. As stated in the Overview applied research is a key priority for the institute.

AIT is well positioned to help bridge the innovation gaps between new knowledge creation in HEIs and its real world application for maximum socio-economic value and impact in people's lives, both now and into the future. For example, in 2014 alone AIT undertook 182 projects with industry across a broad range of sectors, including the successful completion of 43 innovation vouchers.

Our research strategy is to focus our research efforts in a small number of strategic platforms areas based on core competencies built up over the years within the institute, aligned with regional needs and national research priorities, namely materials, bioscience and software.

AIT has achieved delegation of authority to award at PhD level in four areas:

1. Microbiology (September 2011 HETAC)
2. Toxicology (September 2011 HETAC)
3. Polymer and Mechanical Engineering (September 2011 HETAC)
4. Software and Information Communication Technology (ICT) (June 2015 QQI)

These areas are mirrored with our three research institutes and complement each other. They outwardly support industry in the region and inwardly support the

teaching faculties due to research active academic staff being involved with research through our time release programme.

This institute has met the Technological University metric in this area. Our strategy is to continue to build capacity in our targeted research areas over the coming years and to ensure that our aligned undergraduate programmes deliver a sustainable pipeline of postgraduate research students.

Benchmark

	AIT	CIT	DKIT	GMIT	IT Blanch	Carlow	Sligo	Tallaght	Tralee	L/kenny	Limerick	WIT
Research Income	3,234	14698	5,126	1,907	423	1,166	2,284	1,507	1,442	1,227	2,639	16,663

Source: Higher Education System Performance Institutional and Sectoral profiles 2012/2013

The Institute is ranked 4th in total research income with total income of €3,234,000 in 2012/2013

The Institute's commitment to research is evidenced by its investment through the President's Seed Fund for research. It is a key focus of the fund to allow new lecturers in the faculties to engage in research and bring the benefits of such research back to the faculties and informs undergraduate and postgraduate teaching. Undergraduate final year students are brought to the research hub to engage in project work. All postgraduate researchers are involved in undergraduate teaching. The linkage between teaching and Learning is reinforced through the academic staff engaging with the research centres and postgraduate students engaging back into faculty structures thus ensuring cross-fertilisation between faculties and research centres.

High quality, internationally competitive research and innovation - Targets

Institution objective	Build critical mass around focused areas of core research capability aligned with regional needs and national research priorities, and leverage to drive market-informed research in collaboration with industry partners
Performance indicator	Number of industry projects Number of companies engaged Total € value of projects Value of industry contribution to projects
Baseline	Projects = 53 Companies = 48 €000 value of projects = 625 €000 industry contribution = 212
Interim target, end 2015	Projects = 183 Companies = 188 €000 value of projects = 2,565 €000 industry contribution = 458
Progress against 2015 target, commentary and data source	Projects = 197 Companies = 200 €000 value of projects = 3496 €000 industry contribution = 592 <i>2015 was an exceptionally good performance year and while the 2016 targets are below what was achieved in 2015 they are significantly above the forecast for 2015 and will require a stretch in performance to achieve.</i>
Final Target End 2016	Projects = Revised to 193 Companies = Revised to 162 €000 value of projects = Revised to 2,943 €000 industry contribution = Revised to 526
Summary	<i>Targets Achieved</i>

Institution objective	Deliver top quality postgraduate research programmes at levels 9 and 10, aligned with our focused research areas and undergraduate programmes, in order to provide a sustainable pipeline of researchers to drive our impact-focused applied research mission. A key catalyst would be the reestablishment and maintenance of a postgraduate research foundation funding programme for the IOT sector
Performance indicator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delegated authority to award at L9 and L10 by research • Director of postgraduate research studies – position in place and operational • Provision of structured generic and transferrable skills modules; professional development plans; and progression review processes for all research candidates • Support infrastructure in place
Baseline	<p>Delegated authority currently in place to award at L9 and L10 by research in our focused research areas: polymer, biosciences (toxicology, microbiology) and software (level 9 only at date of Compact submission).</p> <p>Director of postgraduate research studies in place since 2010</p> <p>Structured postgraduate research training modules developed via ‘Graduate Research Alliance’ in place and operational for L9/L10 candidates and for research supervisors.</p> <p>Structured professional development training plans and progression review process in place and operational for all postgraduate research students.</p> <p>Research Hub facility in place providing the critical physical and management support infrastructure to meet the needs of top quality postgraduate research candidates.</p>
Interim target, end 2015	<p>To have 50% of agreed shared postgraduate research modules in place and operational with Maynooth University and cluster partners.</p> <p>Again and as above, this is contingent on the agreement of those partners.</p>
Progress against 2015 target, commentary and data source	Our collaboration with Maynooth University continues to grow. The Entrepreneurship Module is an example of successful co-operation in joint delivery of structured Post graduate education. We have also commenced co-supervision of Post Graduate students with Maynooth University.
Final Target End 2016	100% of agreed shared postgraduate research modules in place and operational with Maynooth University and cluster partners. With the same proviso as already stated.
Summary	<i>Targets Achieved</i>

Institution objective	Improved knowledge/tech transfer to enterprise via the commercialisation of AITs research activities, in the form of technology licensing to Irish-based companies, and the creation of knowledge intensive ‘spin-out’ companies
Performance indicator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Licenses, options and assignments • Spin-outs • Invention disclosures • Priority patent applications
Baseline	AIT IP Policy currently in place and operational
Interim target, end 2015	Licenses, options and assignments = 3 Spin-outs = 1 Invention disclosures = 4 Priority patent applications = 2
Progress against 2015 target, commentary and data source	Licenses, options and assignments = 6 Spin-outs = 1 Invention disclosures = 4 Priority patent applications = 1
Final Target End 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Licenses, options and assignments = 3 • Spin-outs = 1 • Invention disclosures = 4 • Priority patent applications = 2
Summary	<i>Targets achieved</i>

5. Enhanced engagement with enterprise and the community and embedded knowledge exchange - Overview

The Institute has developed strong links with industry throughout the Midland Region. This is a key to ensuring that the Midland Region gains from the economic recovery and that this will help to bring investment to the Region and help spread the economic recovery. The Midland Region has the second highest unemployment rate in the country (11.6% compared to a national average of 8.4%)

The New Frontiers programme continues to deliver high quality projects into the Enterprise Ireland High Performance Start-up (HPSU) programme. In addition significant investment has been allocated; 4 participants so far in 2016 have received Competitive Start Fund allocations of €50k each, and others continue to apply. The programme is highly regarded, concentrating on accelerating the progress of all participants to help them develop viable businesses that can deliver sustainable long-term employment. National statistics reveal the average cost for the creation of sustainable jobs delivered by the New Frontiers programme (>€10kper job created) is well beneath the national average for other similar programmes.

In late 2014 and the first half of 2015, the Institute worked very closely with the Department of Jobs Innovation and Enterprise, Enterprise Ireland and regional stakeholders in the development of an Action Plan for Jobs to support enterprise growth and job creation in the Midlands. The Plan, launched in June 2015, sees the Institute lead seven Actions, and as partner with other stakeholders in a broad range of Actions across the Plan. The Plan identifies as a key strength of the region: *Strong Institute of Technology (Athlone IT) serving R&D needs of both indigenous and multinational industry, with three strategic research institutes and close links to Universities and other Institutes of Technology.*

Benchmark

	AIT	CIT	DKIT	GMIT	IT Blanch	Carlow	Sligo	Tallaght	Tralee	L/kenny	Limerick	WIT
Technology Gateways	2	2	0	1	0	1	1	1	2	1	1	3

A clear indicator of our strength in applied research is the awarding of two Technology Gateways to the Institute by Enterprise Ireland. They are as follows:

- Applied Polymer Technology
- COMMAND – Connected Media

Key activities and developments during 2015 in relation to the Institute's engagement with enterprise and the community and embedded knowledge exchange included as follows:

- **Midlands Innovation and Research Centre**
In July 2015, the Institute submitted an Application to an Enterprise Ireland Call for the Extension of Business Incubation Facilities in the Institutes of Technology. This was followed by a Panel visit to the Institute in October 2015. In February 2016, the Board of Enterprise Ireland awarded the Institute €3.0m funding for the 1,135m² expansion of MIRC facilities. Expanded MIRC facilities will be key to achieving targets in the Midlands Action Plan for Jobs to increase the number of entrepreneurs/start-ups in the region by 25 per cent in the coming years, improve the five-year survival rate by 25 per cent and improve scaling performance of companies by 25 per cent.
- **New Frontiers**
AIT's New Frontiers Programme, delivered in the Midlands-Mid-East region in partnership with Maynooth University, continues to deliver high quality projects into the Enterprise Ireland High Potential Start-up (HPSU) programme. 4 participants to date from our 2015 programme have received €50k Competitive Start Funding from Enterprise Ireland. On foot of an Application submitted by the Institute in December 2015, Enterprise Ireland in February 2016 awarded us €1.9m to deliver the Programme over the period 2016-2020, increasing our annual contracted participant cohort from 12 to 14.
- **European Space Agency Business Incubation Centre Ireland**
AIT is part of a Consortium along with Tyndall National Institute, Maynooth University and the Irish Maritime and Energy Resource Cluster which has been selected by Enterprise Ireland and ESA to establish and operate an ESA Business Incubation Centre in Ireland. ESA BIC Ireland will facilitate access to ESA programmes, promote the adoption of space solutions and support the development of Irish companies, new and existing, in space and downstream sectors. ESA BIC Ireland will commence operations across the four partner locations in June 2016.
- **I-LOFAR**
The Institute is part of a consortium led by Trinity College Dublin to build and operate an Irish LOFAR (Low Frequency Array) telescope at Birr Castle which will connect Ireland into the international LOFAR telescope and sensor network. We see the I-LOFAR project as an opportunity to develop a cluster of data analytics companies, start-ups

and related collaborative R&D in the region. In January 2016, the I-LOFAR consortium was awarded €1.4m by Science Foundation Ireland, which along with €0.5m in philanthropic grants plus contributions of I-LOFAR members, means that an Irish LOFAR station will be built in Birr in 2016.

- **Innovation Vouchers**

The Institute continues to make our knowledge resources available in a flexible manner to respond to the needs of SMEs – as evidenced by our continued ranking second among 38 Knowledge Providers on the Island of Ireland for completion of Innovation Voucher projects on behalf of SMEs.

- **Midlands Manufacturing Technologies Campus**

Building on the Midlands’ demonstrated capabilities in manufacturing processes and technologies and AIT strengths, the Institute in partnership with regional and national stakeholders plans to position the Midlands as a Centre of Excellence for the development and adoption of advanced manufacturing processes and technologies. Located on a 1.7 hectare AIT site in the Garrycastle Business and Technology Park, the MMTC – with a focus on Advanced/Discrete/Additive Manufacturing technologies, Industrial/Product Design and ‘Smart Factories’ – will position the Midlands at the leading edge of technology development and adoption, building the necessary skills and capabilities in companies, providing a dynamic industry-focused R&D environment with co-location of industry and academic researchers, industry training, industry access to specialised equipment and facilities, and regional outreach. Incubation facilities will support early-stage FDI companies and second-stage indigenous companies – with a focus on technology-intensive and software start-ups/companies addressing the needs of the manufacturing sector. A conference facility will actively engage research and industry partners as well as local stakeholders. The Midlands Action Plan for Jobs is strongly supportive of the MMTC recognising that:

The development of the Midlands Manufacturing Technologies Campus (MMTC) will be an important step in building regional competitiveness and innovation capacity in the Midlands.

- **Community Engagement**

Community engagement is an important facet of the Institute life and to highlight the importance of this we have this year entered into the Carnegie Classification Framework. This framework defines community engagement as follows:

Community engagement describes the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity.

The purpose of community engagement is the partnership of college and university knowledge and resources with those of the public and private sectors to enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity; enhance curriculum, teaching and learning; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good.

The Institute commissioned a survey among staff to ascertain levels of community engagement and the willingness of staff to become involved in such activities. This was the first such survey commissioned by the management of AIT and demonstrated the management's commitment to the Carnegie Framework classification process and to the promotion of community engagement. 123 staff members completed the survey which was an exceptionally high percentage for completion of a survey commissioned by management. 50% of those who completed were academics which demonstrates the importance placed on community engagement throughout the academic lifecycle and the value associated with the inclusion of community engagement as service learning. 70% of respondents considered community engagement to be inherent in their role within the institute and almost 80% of respondents have been involved in community engagement activities under the auspices of AIT. Education and Sports and Volunteering and Community Activity rate equally highly in the sphere of importance and almost 40% of respondents have increased the time spent at community engagement activities over the last 5 years. Almost 90% of respondents are also involved in community engagement activities outside their role in AIT which demonstrates a high level of participation of staff in such activities overall.

The facilities and Infrastructure of the Institute are fully utilised by the community. The Sports facilities are used by Primary and Second level schools and also by a wide range of sporting clubs from all of the major Sports Codes from under-age up to Inter-County and provincial squads. The Sports facilities are also used by the Active Age Group. Our new gym is one of the best nationally and is open to the community and links in with the Healthy Campus initiative.

The facilities are made available to the Community Games on an annual basis and over 10,000 children partake in events at the Institute.

The Institute run Saturday Maths classes for second level and hosts DEIS Primary School groups.

All of these are examples of our open campus commitment and we are continuing to develop our engagement. An example of this is our decision to engage in an Age Friendly Initiative being developed by DCU.

- **Action Plan for Jobs**

The Institute was instrumental in driving this initiative and the Midlands was the first region in the country to appoint a Regional Skills Manager. The Institute has responsibility for several actions in the Midlands Action Plan for Jobs and separately is currently leading the Regional Skills Forum. This work will also contribute to the work of the MEND Cluster.

Enhanced engagement with enterprise and the community and embedded knowledge exchange - Targets

Institution objective	Working with Enterprise Ireland, support the development of knowledge-based start-ups in the Midlands region via MIRC campus business incubator, including the New Frontiers entrepreneur development programme delivered in partnership with Maynooth University.
Performance indicator	# Number of New Frontiers Phase 2 participants/year. # Number of other entrepreneurs/projects supported per year (including incubation clients and New Frontiers clients not progressing to Phase 2).
Baseline	13 New Frontiers Phase 2 participants in 2013. 35 other entrepreneurs projects supported in 2013.
Interim target, end 2015	13 New Frontiers Phase 2 participants. 39 other entrepreneurs projects supported
Progress against 2015 target, commentary and data source	14 New Frontiers Phase 2 participants 57 other entrepreneurs projects supported
Final Target End 2016	14 New Frontiers Phase 2 participants. 44 other entrepreneurs projects supported
Summary	<i>Target Achieved</i>

Institution objective	Provide a broad range of knowledge intensive innovation services to regional and national industrial clients, delivering results in a time frame that matches industry needs, and with a focus on startups and SMEs.
Performance indicator	# Industry projects # Companies supported # Innovation Vouchers
Baseline	# Industry projects = 166 # Companies supported = 82 # Innovation Vouchers = 30
Interim target, end 2015	# Industry projects = 242 # Companies = 86 # Innovation Vouchers = 22
Progress against 2015 target, commentary and data source	# Industry projects = 241 # Companies supported is now referenced in Section 4 as CISD is now part of MRI as a result of consolidation of research activities which has been informed through previous Compact discussions with the HEA. # Innovation Vouchers = 44
Final Target End 2016	# Industry projects = Revised to 224 # Companies (Ref Section 4, CISD now part of MRI)

	# Innovation Vouchers = Revised to 39
Summary	<i>Targets Achieved</i>

6. Enhanced internationalisation - Overview

The Institute values internationalisation not just for its economic contribution but also for its ability to improve the student experience for all. It is recognised that the impact of internationalisation on campus impacts throughout the student and staff body creating cultural diversity, impacting Teaching and Learning and creating an inclusive atmosphere on campus. In the most recent Compact discussion with the HEA, it was advised that AIT reflect further on the risks associated with internationalisation. We have adhered to this advice with a particular concentration on risks under three distinct headings, as follows:

Market Shifts in Demand	The Institute was very conscious of the SARS epidemic a decade ago and the potential impact ensuing for the Institute. Since that time we have focussed our international efforts on a broader range of markets.
Academic Risk	The Institute has agreed its collaborative and transnational policy and processes with QQI. We distinguished between formal collaborations and articulation agreements, both of which are managed consciously and carefully.
Financial Risk	The Institute is conscious of the financial exposure relating to internationalisation. Our focus has been on building and enhancing relationships with reputable and established HEIs in a de-limited number of countries and in working with such partners to guarantee full protection for enrolled students.

Benchmark

	AIT	CIT	DKIT	GMIT	IT Blanch	Carlow	Sligo	Tallaght	Tralee	L/kenny	Limerick	WIT
International (F/T)	11.3%	4%	11%	4.6%	3%	7.3%	3.3%	6.9%	8.8%	3.5%	0.7%	7.1%

Source: Higher Education System Performance Institutional and Sectoral profiles 2012/2013

Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT) is deeply committed to the principle of mobility of students and staff between partner institutions in Europe and priority global markets. Since the launch of the Taoiseach's Asia Strategy in 2000, AIT has been active in receiving students outside the EU from countries such as China, India, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, North America and Zambia. The Institute aims to give direct and meaningful international experiences to students and staff through exchange programmes with partner universities in Europe and other global markets.

AIT's Strategic Plan 2014-18 entitled Global Focus – Regional Impact identified internationalisation as a key pillar and will contribute to the development of the

Midlands region. As the only higher education and research institution in the Midlands, AIT has played a catalytic and leadership role in attracting international students to the region. 12% of our international students chose to study at AIT during academic year 2015-16. This maintenance of international numbers is despite a significant downturn in the global market. AIT was impacted by the discontinuation of the King Abdullah scholarship scheme, the reduction in funding for Malaysian students and the discontinuation of the Science Without Borders Scheme but despite this the Institute has continued to achieve a significantly high international presence on campus.

The presence of international students on the AIT campus contributes to the economic, social and cultural development of Midlands region and the economy of Athlone town. It is estimated that an international student contributes on average €15,000 in the local economy per annum. Parents, relatives and friends often visit the student during their studies and this contributes to spending in the local economy and attracts visitors to tourist attractions in the region and further afield. When the multiplier effect is added, the economic impact on the Region is in the order of €15m per annum.

Outward Mobility Initiatives

One of the targets of the current strategic plan is to increase outward mobility of students and staff to our long established network of universities in Europe and Non-EU markets (target 80 outbound students). We continue to promote international study and placement opportunities abroad to students when they join in first year of Bachelor degree programmes at AIT to foster the spirit of an international experience while studying at AIT. Faculty and students who have participated in international exchange programmes will highlight the benefits of an international experience. While the number of AIT students undertaking study and placement abroad is low, there are initiatives at faculty and international office levels to actively promote outward mobility of students. The table below illustrates outward mobility of students for study and placement.

Summary of international placements and study abroad at AIT

Faculty	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Business & Hospitality	11	21	24
Science & Health	33	40	60
Engineering & Informatics	3	8	12
Total	47	69 *	96 *

Note: *Estimated number of students

The campaign to increase outward student mobility from AIT has been embraced by senior management, faculty and international office staff during academic year 2015-16 and some examples of the outward mobility initiatives are:

- The number of students from the Bachelor of Science (Honours) Athletic and Rehabilitation Therapy who completed their placement in North America was 22 during academic year 2014-2015.
- Ten Stage III nursing students of the Bachelor of Science in General Nursing to Uganda, Africa in June/July 2016 on an overseas volunteer programme. This project will be facilitated through the Nurture Africa Organisation which has extensive experience in the overseas placement of healthcare and educational volunteers. The project will provide exposure for staff and students about the provision of essential and primary healthcare in a developing country.
- Social Care students have been afforded the opportunity to complete a study/work placement programme at MacEwan University, Edmonton, Canada. Faculty from MacEwan University supervises the placement of AIT students in social care agencies in Edmonton and students attend classes one day per week.

Priority Markets

AIT is committed to maintaining and strengthening links with European Higher Education Institutes under the Erasmus programme. From the launch of the Asia Strategy in 2000, AIT has participated in Enterprise Ireland Trade Missions to Asia. AIT opened an office in Shanghai in 2004 to strengthen relationships with partner universities in Asia.

We are using the Government of Ireland Scholarship and Claddagh Scholarship in promoting the Institute to attract high calibre students.

China is the key market for AIT as depicted in the table below and relationship building in China is important to AIT. The Institute received approval from the Ministry of Education in Beijing for eight joint programmes, one of the highest approval rates for joint programmes in China for an Irish Higher Education Institute. AIT and Jiangnan University has submitted an application to run a joint

institute under the call for Sino-foreign partner institutes by the Ministry of Education in Beijing. A decision on the joint institute is pending approval by MoE.

AIT/ China MoE Approved Programmes: Student Numbers								
						Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
1	Luoyang Institute of Science and Technology	Bachelor (Honours) Degree	Luoyang	Civil Engineering	2+2	83		
2	East China University of Technology (ECUT)	Bachelor (Honours) Degree	Nanchang	Software Engineering	3+1	82	48	84
3	ECUT	Bachelor (Honours) Degree	Nanchang	Sustainable Energy Engineering	3+1	98	69	112
4	Chaohu University	Bachelor (Honours) Degree	Hefei	Hotel and Leisure Management	3+1	35	30	
5	Hefei Normal University	Bachelor (Honours) Degree	Hefei	Pharmaceutical Science	3+1	41		
6	Jiangnan University	Bachelor (Honours) Degree	Wuhan	Design in Digital Media	3+1	100		
7	Anhui Finance Trade Vocational College (AFTVC)	Diploma	Hefei	International Business	3+1	34	28	24
8	AFTVC	Diploma	Hefei	Accounting	2+2	86	67	53
9	Anhui Institute of International Business (AIIB)	Diploma	Hefei	Accounting	2+2	25	17	11
10	AIIB	Diploma	Hefei	International Business	3+1	35	21	20
Subtotal:						619	280	304
Total number of students:						1203		

The International markets are volatile as recent downturns in funding in Malaysia and Saudi Arabia testify. Under these circumstances reaching our stated target of 15% international students will involve a stretch and will require a concerted effort by the Institute.

Enhanced internationalisation - Targets

Institution objective	Extend the internationalisation of the campus,
Performance indicator	The ambition is that international students should comprise 15% of full-time learners by the academic year commencing 2020.
Baseline	Currently international students represent some 11% of the student cohort
Interim target, end 2015	While figures for succeeding years are defined in the AIT Strategic Plan as an end achievement figure in 2018, it is anticipated that the proportion will increase incrementally. A target of 12.5% for 2015.
Progress against 2015 target,	SRS returns for 2015/2016 report 12% of full-time students are international.

commentary and data source	
Final Target End 2016	A target of 15% for end 2018 as set in AIT Strategic Plan 2014 - 2018
Summary	<i>Target Achieved</i>

Institution objective	Further internationalise the curriculum of AIT programmes, particularly in the Business School
Performance indicator	This has to be determined in the context of the current strategic review.
Baseline	Currently there is one full-time dedicated international programme.
Interim target, end 2015	Develop a cultural awareness module for staff and students. Offer specific English classes to Brazilian students Offer optional credits for English language modules
Progress against 2015 target, commentary and data source	Module designed and training implemented for study abroad students English, French and German modules offered to Brazilian students Accredited English module (5 credits) offered to international students with over 60 registering. Online English module in development. One to one academic writing support provided
Final Target End 2016	A target of 80 students undertaking an international placement, study or training abroad programme by 2018 has been set in AIT Strategic Plan 2014-2018.
Summary	<i>Target Achieved</i>

Institution objective	Develop mobile technologies to communicate with international students
Performance indicator	Greater ease of access and through a variety of media for international students. This is currently under active consideration
Baseline	There is currently a usage of social media tools, the intention is to develop this further with the use of a more flexible mobile platform.

Interim target, end 2015	<p>Subject to the availability of appropriate funding, redesign AIT website to: Ensure website design optimisation for multi-platform mobile devices</p> <p>Include the availability of multi-language options of key web pages for priority international student markets e.g. Brazil and China</p>
Progress against 2015 target, commentary and data source	<p>AIT website currently under re-design. Content management system (Expression Engine) supports multi language translation</p> <p>AIT is now part of Learnon Campus which is a dedicated mobile platform in china for international student recruitment and agency network liaison for university networks. International bound higher education students now predominately use social networks and mobile messaging apps on mobile devices to gather information about major decisions regarding their international study and this app will provide the relevant information.</p>
Final Target End 2016	<p>Continue to develop mobile technology in line with ICT developments and budgetary flexibility.</p>
Summary	<p><i>Target Achieved</i></p>

7. Institutional consolidation - Overview

AIT's current Strategic Plan 2014-2018 sets out its ambition to achieve Technological University status. This ambition has informed discussion with the Authority through the previous years of this initial compact cycle. In May 2016, AIT wrote formally to the Authority on foot of the publication of the programme for government setting out the intention to submit an Expression of Interest consideration. It is anticipated that this Expression of Interest will be with the Authority during the course of this compact process.

The parallel focus for the institution has been on further enhancing the strong collaborative relationship with the partners within the MEND cluster. This is reported on under section 1 of this compact.

Institutional consolidation - Targets

Institution objective	To put in place the foundations for enhanced collaboration with partners within the MEND cluster.
Performance indicator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A scoping study that will map existing course provision, student numbers, catchment areas, and arrangements for access, transfer, and progression. • A study of the student records and administrative systems • A scoping and feasibility study for a system to allow for seamless transfer of student information and records. This will be a phased project which eventually may extend to AIT.
Baseline	By the nature of the exercise, it is difficult to establish a baseline in this regard. The cluster, although it has various pockets of valuable collaboration, is effectively starting from scratch.
Interim target, end 2015	Protocols for joint degrees and joint registration
Progress against 2015 target, commentary and data source	Protocols for joint degrees and joint registration in place and reported to HEA
Final Target End 2016	An implementation plan for sharing and transfer of student information across the cluster.
Summary	Target Achieved

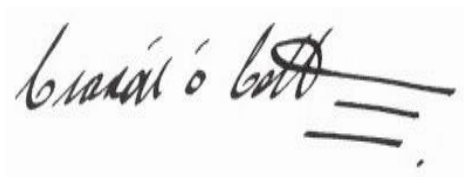
Institution objective	To build a collaborative platform for digital learning
Performance indicator	We will create a network of expertise in digital pedagogy, which is the key enabler in capitalising on the affordances of digital technologies.....
Baseline	As performance indicator
Interim target, end 2015	A common technological platform to capture and stream lecture theatre activities in two lecture theatres in AIT as part of a wider initiative to extend capacity in this area throughout the cluster.
Progress against 2015 target, commentary and data source	Common technological platform developed

Final Target End 2016	A set of ‘learning analytics dashboards’ that will systematically underpin a process of continuous improvement of the curriculum.
Summary	Target achieved

Institution objective	Increased collaboration with further education to enhance coherence, access, transfer, and progression.
Performance indicator	Conduct a scoping exercise which identifies and brings together the cluster’s regional FE stakeholders and examines existing instruments and mechanisms for access, transfer and progression (ATP) from FE to HE at programme and institutional level.
Baseline	As above, there are some platforms in place and AIT has a strong and successful series of relationships with local ETBs and FE colleges. The proposal here is to embed these within the Cluster and to join them with parallel initiatives established by our partners.
Interim target, end 2015	A formal network of FE and HE providers within the region specifically established for the purpose of collaboration on improving access, transfer and progression opportunities across the region
Progress against 2015 target, commentary and data source	Regional Skills Forum is established and operational. The Midlands Region was the first region to appoint a Regional Skills Manager in April 2016 and a formal network has been established.
Final Target End 2016	A bridging or foundation programme developed and ready to be offered with a number of FE providers and which is recognised by all HE providers in the region.
Summary	Target achieved

I hereby submit to the HEA the Self-Evaluation report for Strategic Dialogue Cycle 3.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ciarán Ó Catháin", followed by three horizontal lines indicating a signature line.

Date:

Professor Ciarán Ó Catháin
President

29th June 2016

Appendix I

Connect & Discover



Institiúid Teicneolaíochta Bhaile Átha Luain
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