ATHLONE INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

PRESIDENT’S REPORT AND STRATEGIC ISSUES

December 2019
## Contents

President’s visit to China ......................................................................................... 4

International Office .................................................................................................. 9

Office For Strategic Planning & Institutional Performance, Equality & Diversity ......................................................................................... 14

Human Resources ...................................................................................................... 16

Faculty of Engineering and Informatics .................................................................... 18

Faculty of Science & Health ...................................................................................... 26

Faculty of Business and Hospitality .......................................................................... 35

Marketing and Communications Department, Student, Recruitment Office, School Engagement ......................................................................................... 38

Research, Innovation and Enterprise ......................................................................... 42

Student’s Union ......................................................................................................... 50

Faculty Of Continuing Professional, Online And Distance Learning ........................................... 53

Office of the Vice-President Academic Affairs and Registrar ........................................ 56
President’s visit to China
Professor Ciarán Ó Catháin Visit to China, October 2019.

Professor Ciarán Ó Catháin arrived in Shanghai on the evening of 14th October 2019. Over a period of seven days, Professor Ó Catháin and Mr. Meng Jing, AIT Director for Asia visited eight cities with total distance of 3830km to meet with AIT’s partner universities in China.

Shanghai
Shanghai SIPO Polytechnic
Shanghai SIPO Polytechnic is a full-time vocational and technical college approved by Shanghai Municipal People’s Government with investment from Shanghai United Media Group, Shanghai Xinhua Distribution Group Ltd. since 2003. In July 2019, AIT received a delegation from SIPO to visit the campus and meet Deans and Heads of Department at AIT. During that visit, the President of SIPO extended invitation to Professor Ó Catháin to visit SIPO Shanghai campus during his next trip to China. President Gao Yudi gave a detailed introduction to programmes at SIPO during the visit to Shanghai. The discussion focused on the topics of 2+2 program, online blended learning and the possibility of setting up an Irish college within SIPO, Shanghai. There is a delegation from SIPO planning a visit to AIT in December 2019.

Shanghai Yucui Education Consulting Company
Professor Ó Catháin met with Mr. Alex Liu who is the owner of Shanghai Yucui Education Consulting Company and his colleagues in Shanghai. Yucui is the intermediary which established the joint programme for Civil Engineering with Luoyang Institute of Science and Technology. Mr. Alex Liu briefed Professor Ó Catháin on the operations of the joint programme and English language delivery in Luoyang.

Hefei City, Anhui Province
Anhui Finance and Trade Vocational College (AFTVC)
President Liu Yinguo and Vice President Hu Daixin together with Deans and lecturers welcomed Professor Ó Catháin and Mr. Meng Jing to their campus in Hefei. AFTVC and AIT are long term partners for Business and Accounting programmes. More than one hundred AFTVC students have graduated from AIT over the past five years. AFTVC plans to send a group of academic staff to visit AIT to enhance the relationship. AIT also sends academic staff to lecture in AFTVC for our joint programmes. A number of academic staff from AIT have lectured there over the past five years. The relationship with AIT academic staff is important to AFTVC to improve teaching styles and understanding of AIT curriculum. During this visit, Professor Ó Catháin met with first year programme students to encourage them to achieve good grades to prepare for their study in Ireland in the future.
After the visit to AFTVC, Professor Ó Catháin and Mr. Meng Jing visited Hefei Normal University. Professor Ó Catháin met the Party Secretary, Xu Chenggang, President Sun Daosheng and Vice President Li Jinhua in HNU. AIT and HNU cooperate on delivery of joint programme in Pharmaceutical Science. The first cohort of twelve students graduated from AIT in October 2018. During the discussion in Hefei, both sides exchanged ideas about how to improve the teaching quality of the joint programme in HNU.

Chaohu University

Professor Ó Catháin and Mr. Meng Jing travelled from Hefei to Chaohu city to visit Chaohu University. Vice President Xu Liufan gave the welcome speech. AIT has a Ministry of Education approved programme in Hospitality Management with Chaohu University. Lecturers from the Department of Hotel, Leisure and Tourism have delivered lectures at Chaohu University and Dr. Tony Johnston has met the Dean in Chaohu University. Vice President Xu expressed interest in cooperating with AIT in other disciplines. A delegation from Chaohu University is planning to visit AIT in December 2019 to strengthen the relationship between the two institutions.

Wuxi City, Jiangsu Province

Wuxi Institute of Technology (WXIT)

Wuxi Institute of Technology and AIT have established a joint Sino-Irish Institute. This joint institute has recruited 100 students across four majors in September 2019: Mechatronics, Mechanical Engineering, Computer Engineering and Design. The purpose of this visit was to launch the joint institute, as well as celebrating WXIT’s 60th anniversary. Professor Ó Catháin met with the first intake of the joint programme students. He was also invited to give a speech to the audience of 4000 at the anniversary celebration at WXIT.

Irish Embassy in Beijing

Professor Ó Catháin and Mr. Meng Jing travelled from Wuxi to Shanghai and on to Beijing to attend the Irish Embassy reception in Beijing to mark the Ministerial Education mission. During the reception at the Embassy, AIT and Zhengzhou University of Technology (ZUT) signed agreement to establish Sino-Irish Joint Research Institute for Software Engineering. The signing of this agreement was witnessed by Minister John Halligan and His Excellency, Eoin O’ Leary, Ambassador of Ireland to the People’s Republic of China.
During the reception, Professor Ó Catháin also met with President Liu Gonghui from Beijing University of Technology (BJUT). BJUT and AIT are long term partners for Software Engineering. President Liu invited Professor Ó Catháin to visit BJUT during his next visit to China.

**Beijing International Convention Center**

AIT attended the biggest educational exhibition that takes place each year in Beijing. The Education Mission to China was led by Minister of State for Training and Skills, Mr. John Halligan T.D. Minister Halligan visited the AIT booth to discuss AIT’s links with Chinese Universities with Professor Ó Catháin and Mr. Meng Jing.

**Capital University of Physical Education and Sports (CUPES)**

Professor Ó Catháin and Mr. Meng Jing met with Party Secretary, He Ming and his colleagues in Beijing. CUPES sent two sports science students to study at AIT in September 2019 and they are enjoying their semester of study abroad at AIT. CUPES is planning to send more students to AIT in the future. Also, CUPES explored the possibility of joint supervision for PhD with AIT in the area of sports science.

**Beijing International Education Institute (BIEI)**

Professor Ó Catháin and Mr. Meng Jing visited Beijing International Education Institute. Dean Wang of BIEI and Deputy Dean Aling Huo hosted the meeting at their Beijing office. BIEI is the intermediary which established AIT’s Graphic Design program in Jianghan University, Wuhan city, Hubei Province. Professor Ó Catháin outlined the importance of the link with Jianghan University to Dean Wang. Dean Wang briefed Professor Ó Catháin on the programme at Jianghan University.

**Zhengzhou city, Henan Province**

Professor Ó Catháin and Mr. Meng Jing travelled from Beijing to Zhengzhou to meet with President Wang Zongmin and Vice President Cao Jian from Zhongyuan University of Technology (ZUT) to finalise the agreement for transfer of PhD students between the two institutions. ZUT is planning to send two PhD candidates in the area of computer and software engineering to study PhD at AIT during 2020.
Launch of the Sino-Irish Joint Research Institute for Software Engineering

AIT and Zhongyuan University of Technology (ZUT) had a detailed discussion about the establishment of a joint research institute. The final agreement was signed at the Irish Embassy witnessed by Minister John Halligan. The launch of the research institute was witnessed by Minister John Halligan and also received support from the deputy government of Henan Province, Mr. He Jinping and his colleagues. This signing ceremony marked the beginning of cooperation between AIT and ZUT.

Beijing

An agreement was signed at the Capital University of Physical Education and Sports to conclude the visit by Professor Ó Catháin to China. Professor Ó Catháin and Mr. Meng Jing travelled from Zhengzhou back to Beijing to visit CUPES to sign the agreement for transfer of postgraduate students to AIT. The Party secretary, Mr. He Ming and his colleagues welcomed the visit by AIT to commence the collaboration with AIT in the area of joint PhD programmes in sports science and artificial intelligence.

Professor Ó Catháin concluded his visit in Beijing and travelled back to Ireland after a successful visit to partner universities and participation in the Ministerial Education Mission to China, led by Minister John Halligan T.D.

A special word of thanks to Meng Jing and Zhang Ting at the AIT Office in China for coordinating the education exhibitions and visits to Chinese partner universities this October.
International Office trip to India
President’s Report

Karl Turley, Deputy Director of International Relations (Non-EU markets), travelled to India from 11th to 22nd October 2019. Dr. Declan Byrne Lecturer in the Department of Computer & Software Engineering joined this trip from 15th to 21st October.

The trip’s purpose was to attend the Enterprise Ireland education mission and to visit partner universities/agents, develop new university partnerships, meet with potential students and new education agents. The education roadshow was built around Education in Ireland Fairs organised by Enterprise Ireland in five Indian cities: Bangalore, Coimbatore, Chennai, Pune and Mumbai.

India has been identified by Education in Ireland’s international education strategy as a priority market. Admission staff and academics from 20 Irish Higher Education Institutions engaged with over 1200 Indian students during the Education in Ireland Fairs.

Athlone Institute of Technology was among the higher education institutions that participated in the five Education in Ireland fairs.

**Friday 11th October: Fateh Education Fair-Bangalore city**

Fateh Education are one of the leading agencies in India and approved by Education in Ireland for student recruitment. Fateh Education was set up in 2004 and since then have been awarded a tier 3 status by the British Council (the highest for any institution in Delhi for IELTS). Karl met with Mr. Suneet Singh Kochar (CEO) of Fateh and discussed AIT’s new programme offerings for September 2020 intake. Mr. Suneet was very impressed with the broad range of Master programmes available in Software Engineering and Software Design in AIT.

The Fateh Education fair was excellent, resulting in a high number of quality one on one meetings being arranged. Over 190 students pre-registered and attended this in-house event. The main areas of interest were computer/software engineering and data science. All leads were at post-graduate level. Following this in-house Education fair a number of students have since applied to AIT for September 2020 intake.

**Saturday 12th October: Education in Ireland Education Fair-Bangalore city**

Karl Turley attended the Education in Ireland Fair in Bangalore. This was an excellent event with high calibre students attending. Total attendance was 308 students. This fair had over 90% of postgraduate enquiries. The main areas of interest were Computer/Software Engineering, Data Science, Cyber Security & Artificial Intelligence.

Later that evening Karl Turley flew from Bangalore to Coimbatore.

**Sunday 13th October: Education in Ireland Education Fair-Coimbatore city**

Karl Turley attended the Education in Ireland Fair in Coimbatore. This was the first time Education in Ireland hosted a fair in this city. A total of 330 students attended this event. Surprisingly this fair had over 100 students enquiring for undergraduate study opportunities. A visa info-session was also organised prior to this event with Ms. Emer Davis, Visa Office Manager who is based in New Delhi. Ms. Davis gave feedback on items relating to the current recruitment period, and provided details on potential future changes.

Karl also had a meeting with counsellors of Gesucristo Education Consultancy and provided staff training. Gesucristo is a study abroad consultancy based in Kerala with a special focus on Ireland. Gesucristo is a Trusted Agent of Education Ireland and are now actively recruiting students for AIT.

**Monday 14th October: Krishna Consultants Agency Fair and Edwise International Fair-Coimbatore city**

Karl Turley had a meeting with Ms. Prasanthi manager of Krishna Consultants, Coimbatore who have 34 offices across India, Sri Lanka, Nepal & Bangladesh representing 700+ Universities globally. Karl took part in Krishna Consultants...
in-house Education Fair and met with potential students/parents in one to one meetings.

**Edwise International Fair**
Edwise International are one of the leading agencies in India and are approved by Education in Ireland for student recruitment. Edwise International was established in 1991 and provides information regarding higher education in various countries such as UK, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Ireland, Switzerland, France, Malaysia, Dubai.

Karl attended Edwise International an in-house Education Fair on Monday afternoon and met with potential students in one to one meetings throughout the day where he provided a detailed overview on the below points:

- Programmes provided by AIT
- Support Services provided by AIT
- Living in Athlone, Ireland
- Cost of programmes
- Entry requirements
- Post-graduate employment potential

Following these two in-house Education fairs a number of students have since applied to AIT for September 2020 intake.

That night Karl Turley flew from Coimbatore to Chennai city.

**Tuesday 15th October: Fateh Education and Edwise International Fair- Chennai city**

**Fateh Education Fair**
Tuesday morning Karl took part in Fateh Education in-house Education Fair and met with potential students in one to one meetings. Over 180 students pre-registered and attended this in-house event. The main areas of interest were life and physical sciences, software engineering and data science. All leads were at post-graduate level.

**Edwise International Fair**
Karl attended the Edwise International in-house Fair on Tuesday afternoon and met with potential students in one to one meetings. In addition, staff training was provided for the Edwise counsellors Ireland section.

Following these two in-house Education fairs a number of students have since applied to AIT for September 2020 intake.

**Wednesday 16th October: Education in Ireland Education Fair-Chennai city**

Karl attended the Education in Ireland Fair in Chennai. This was a very good event with a total of 159 students attending. Although the volume was low there were a number of quality engagements with potential students.

That evening Karl Turley flew from Chennai to Pune city.

**Thursday 17th October: Signing of MoU with VIIT and visit to BVDU Amplify- Pune city**

**MoU signing with Vishwakarma Institute of Information Technology (VIIT)**
AIT and Vishwakarma Institute of Information Technology (VIIT) signed a MoU in October 2019. AIT were represented at the exchange of MoU by Mr. Karl Turley and Dr. Declan Byrne. Prof. Bilavari Karkare Director of VIIT, Prof. N.P. Pathak Head of Information Technology Department, Prof. Sachin R. Sakhare Head of Department of Computer Engineering from VIIT and Ms. Victoria Sukhia of Southern Seas were present. A number of potential collaboration ideas were discussed including faculty and student exchange, pathway programmes and joint research. VIIT have invited AIT to participate in their VISHWA 2019 conference this December 2019.

Following the ceremony Dr. Declan Byrne gave a guest lecture to 60 students on the 3rd year of the B.Tech Computer Engineering programme. A general presentation and Q&A session was also conducted for the same group of students.
Visit to partner BVDU Amplify
Bharati Vidyapeeth Deemed University (BVDU) ranks in India’s top 10 private universities. AIT has a partnership with BVDU Amplify. BVDU Amplify are based in the “Department of Information Technology & Management” (DITM) within Bharati Vidyapeeth Deemed University. Currently there are a group of students from BVDU Amplify studying on the Bachelor of Engineering (Honours) in Software Engineering Year 4 in AIT.

Dr. Declan Byrne lecturer gave a guest lecture to over 40 students on the BSc in IT & BSc in Game Design programmes. Chairman of BVDU - DITM, Prof. Vijay Kaushik was also present and thoroughly enjoyed Declan’s guest lecture. A general presentation and Q&A session was also conducted for the same group of students.

A meeting also took place with Dr. Joy Basu, Director of BVDU - DITM after the presentations to discuss the potential expansion to other programmes other than computer science and collaborative research.

Friday 18th October: Visit to AISSMS - CHMCT, IOIT, COE & POLY- Pune city
Visit to AISSMS College of Hotel Management & Catering Technology (CHMCT)
Karl Turley visited partner institute AISSMS CHMCT. During this visit he met with Principal Dr. Sonlai Jadhav to discuss potential cooperation and finalise a short-term plan for staff exchange and transfer of students from AISSMS CHMCT to AIT. Karl Turley met with Year 3 and Year 4 students and conducted a general AIT presentation and Q&A session. Following this visit Dr. Milind Peshave a lecturer from AISSMS CHMCT spent two weeks in AIT’s Department of Hospitality, Tourism & Leisure Studies from 11th to 22nd of November as a guest lecturer.

Visit to AISSMS Institute of Information Technology (IOIT)
The same morning Dr. Declan Byrne visited AISSMS IOIT a potential new partner. During this visit he met with Principal Dr. Pradeep B. Mane for a tour of the campus and also gave a guest lecture to a large group of Computer Engineering and Information Technology undergraduate students.

That afternoon Karl joined Dr. Declan Byrne in AISSMS IOIT to meet with Principal Dr. Pradeep B. Mane and for a discussion with him and other relevant Head of Departments on potential collaboration. A number of potential collaboration ideas were discussed including faculty and student exchange, pathway programmes and joint research. It was agreed to sign a general MoU between the two institutes in the coming months.

Meeting with AISSMS College of Engineering (COE) and AISSMS Polytechnic College
After the visit to AISSMS IOIT Karl Turley and Dr. Declan Byrne met with two new potential institutes AISSMS COE and AISSMS Polytechnic. They met with Dr. D.S Bormane Principal of AISSMS COE and Dr. Shri. S.K. Giram Principal of AISSMS Polytechnic. A number of potential collaboration ideas were discussed including faculty exchange, undergraduate pathway programmes and summer study group tours.
Saturday 19th October: Education in Ireland Fair- Pune city
Karl Turley and Dr. Declan Byrne attended the Education in Ireland Fair in Pune. This was a successful event with a total of 160 students attending. Throughout the event there was consistent footfall and quality leads. Ms. Victoria Sukhia of Southern Seas assisted AIT at the fair. The main areas of interest were Business, Computer/Software Engineering, Data Science and Cyber Security.

That evening Karl and Declan travelled to Mumbai by bus.

Sunday 20th October: Education in Ireland Fair- Mumbai city
Karl Turley and Dr. Declan Byrne attended the Education in Ireland Fair in Mumbai. This was another highly successful event organised by Education in Ireland. A total of 265 students attended this event. This fair had over 95% of postgraduate enquiries. The main areas of interest were Business, Life & Physical Science, Computer/Software Engineering and Data Science.

That evening Karl transferred to Nashik city and Dr. Declan Byrne travelled home.

Monday 21st October: Visit to Sandip Foundation (Sandip Institute of Technology & Research Centre and Sandip Institute of Engineering & Management), Nashik.
Karl Turley travelled to Nashik to meet potential partner institute Sandip Foundation. Included in this Foundation were two separate institutes that were interested in exploring a potential partnership with AIT.

Karl met with Dr Sanjay Gandhe, Principal of the Sandip Institute of Technology & Research Centre and Prof. Dipak P. Patil Principal of Sandip Institute of Engineering & Management. A number of potential collaboration ideas were discussed including faculty exchange, undergraduate pathway programmes, joint research and summer study group tours.

That afternoon Karl travelled by road from Nashik to Mumbai Airport and departed Monday 21st October 2019 to return home. The International Office would like to acknowledge the support and hard work of Dr. Declan Byrne during this trip to India.
OFFICE FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING, INSTITUTIONAL PERFORMANCE, EQUALITY & DIVERSITY
HEA Strategic Dialogue
The current Strategic Dialogue with HEA is for the year 2018 to 2021. The Institute completed its 2019 Progress Report and submitted it to the HEA on 14th October 2019. This Progress Report showed significant progress. Seventeen initiatives have been completed. Twenty five initiatives are in progress and no initiatives are yet to start. The Institute also submitted to the HEA a Case Study as part of this process. The Case Study centres our priority areas of:
• Connecting Research and Teaching and
• Building Research Capacity and Scale

Senior Academic Leadership Initiative
The HEA launched a Senior Academic Leadership initiative in June 2019. The Institute made an application in October 2019. We are currently awaiting the outcome of this application.

Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan 2020
The VP for Strategic Planning, Institutional Performance, Equality & Diversity attended the Midlands Regional Enterprise meeting in Portlaoise on 15th November. AIT are involved in a number of actions in the plan most notably to progress a feasibility study for the Midlands Technology Campus.

Regional Skills
The VP for Strategic Planning, Institutional Performance, Equality & Diversity attended a meeting of the Chairs of Regional Skills with the Minister for Education & Skills Mr. Joe McHugh on 13th November. The meeting was also attended by Mr. John Costello, Midlands Regional Skill Manager.

AIT-Industry Working Group
A meeting of the AIT-Industry Working Group was held in the Hodson Bay Hotel on 3rd of October. This brought together AIT staff and representation of industry throughout the Region and helps an exchange of views on current developments with industry.

Recent Athena SWAN/Equality agenda activities that have taken place:
• Diversity and Inclusion on-line training programme (supplied by Legal Island) was circulated to all staff on the 15th October 2019.
• The EDI Office produced an Athena SWAN Champions Guidance Document (on 4/11/19) to further embed Athena Swan principles within the Institute.
• The Athena SWAN Champions Guidance Document was presented to APO’s and HoD’s by the Vice President responsible for Equality Diversity and Inclusiveness on 12th November 2019.
HUMAN RESOURCES
**Employee Awareness Day**
The Human Resources Department hosted a very successful Employee Awareness Day on 30th October 2019. The theme of the event was to develop an internal community culture in AIT where employees feel appreciated, motivated, engaged and proud of being part of a workplace that feels inclusive. This event was a huge success with over 300 staff engaging with HR Department, Library, Healthy Campus, Sports Co and the 10 External Companies who joined us on the day. The students from Hotel and Catering also had a display of their wonderful baking efforts.

One of the actions on the day was to highlight the level of community involvement by staff members in AIT. HR has identified over 50 charities with which AIT staff are involved, which equates to hundreds of hours of voluntary work per year.

Human Resources also had a suggestions box for staff and a sample of these suggestions were;

- More microwaves in the staff canteen area
- Staff Pilates at reduced rates at the Gym
- Proper cups to be used in the canteen
- Staff pictures to be on staff emails
- Better signage for departments and reception within the college
- Migraine/sensitivity room to be provided for staff
- One to one instructions for on-line information

The Human Resources Department would like to thank everyone for their help and support on the day.

**New Terminal installed in Reception**
This terminal was set-up for those staff who do not have access to a PC to allow access to the following information:

- Employee Self-Service (ESS)
- Campus Map
- Bus & train Timetables

**Professional Development**
The next meeting will take place on December 10th.

**Training and Development**
- Diversity and Inclusion – On-Line Training with Legal-Island

**This training is now extended up to Friday 6th December 2019.**

**Course Information:**
The Legal-Island Equality & Diversity Module is CPD Accredited. On successful completion of the assessment each user will automatically receive a certificate.

The course covers
- Unconscious Bias
- Stereotyping
- Harassment
- Diversity at work
- Dignity at work
- Types of discrimination
FACULTY OF ENGINEERING AND INFORMATICS
Education Fairs across West Africa

Lecturer for Civil Engineering, Cyril Morris travelled to West Africa during October as part of an Enterprise Ireland Higher Education initiative to build links with prospective students and agents across Ghana and Nigeria. More than 15 Irish colleges participated in this initiative. A very successful education fair was organised in Ghana’s capital, Accra, during which many prospective students attended and expressed an interest in a wide range of AIT programmes both at undergraduate and postgraduate level.

Building on the positive experience in Ghana, the Enterprise Ireland delegation travelled to Nigeria’s capital, Abuja, where a second education fair was held and large numbers of potential students from Northern and Central Nigeria enquired about a range of programmes including engineering, business, science and nursing. The Irish delegation also met with education agents across the region at the Irish Embassy in Abuja, allowing AIT to strengthen existing agent relationships and to establish fresh contacts.

The final fair was held at Lagos, Africa’s most populous city, in southern Nigeria. Prospective students from all parts of Nigeria as well as other West African nations attended the busiest education fair during the trip. Queries were received across a full spectrum of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, but master’s degrees in data analytics, biopharmaceutical technology, nursing, software engineering and business were of particular interest. At a separate meeting, the delegation had beneficial discussions with agents, who facilitate the majority of student transfer between Nigeria and Ireland.

Education Visit to India

Dr. Declan Byrne (Department of Computer and Software Engineering) travelled to India on Monday 14th October for a week long promotional trip. Along with Karl Turley from the International Office he visited the VIIT, BVU and AISMMS colleges in Pune. He delivered some guest lectures and also outlined the undergraduate and postgraduate opportunities available at AIT. In addition Declan assisted at the Education in Ireland Fairs in both Pune and Mumbai where there was a particular interest shown in the post-graduate opportunities available in Artificial Intelligence and Virtual Reality at AIT.

Visit to LOETB Dr Enda Fallon

Continuing on the active and progressive relationship which has developed between Laois/Offaly Education Training Board (LOETB) and AIT over recent years, Dr. Enda Fallon held a workshop with Level 5 Computer Networks with Software students on software coding on Thursday 17 October. From January 2020 the Computer Networks with Software students will attend AIT for classes on Friday mornings.
College Visit Athlone and Mullingar VTOS
Both Athlone and Mullingar VTos visited the Design Department on Thursday the 21st of November. The students enjoyed the tour of all the creative spaces, visited the graphic design studios and the animation and illustrations rooms. The students were hosted by Tara Cullen who also gave students all the information they needed about the design courses we have on offer and the new entry criteria for CAO.

Industry Engagement NPD Group Global Development Team and Faculty of Engineering and Informatics
Members of NPD Groups Global Development Team visited AIT to review ongoing research collaboration between the company and AIT’s Software Research Institute in AIT on 13th of November. Following a briefing from Dr. Sean Lyons, Dr. Enda Fallon and Mr. Anthony Cunningham the group were introduced to AIT President Professor Ciarán Ó Catháin who outlined the potential for further high impact research engagement.

Pictured includes Darren Person (Chief Information Officer – NPD Group), Hal Danziger (System Development Team Lead– NPD Group), Richard Schiller (Chief Architect– NPD Group) and Gabe Abreu (Head Global Enterprise Systems and Operations at NPD Group).

Ericsson/AIT Research Programme
As part of the ongoing Ericsson/AIT Research Programme (EARP) Dr. Enda Fallon working with Anthony Cunningham and Mary Pidgeon from AIT’s Software Research Institute has received outline approval for an Enterprise Ireland Innovation Partnership valued at €300,000. The project will evaluate mechanisms by which artificial neural networks can enable cognitive network management for 5G telecommunication networks.

Autodesk BIM (Building Information Modelling) 360 Summer School
On October 10th and 11th, three lecturers from the Department of Civil Engineering, Ms Finola Deavy, Mr. Paul Dolan and Mr. Alan Duffy, were invited to a two-day training workshop on BIM 360 in the new Autodesk offices in Dublin. Lecturers from Ulster University, Sligo IT, Dundalk IT were also in attendance and it therefore proved an invaluable networking opportunity with our fellow BIM educators. This is the second year AIT were invited to the Summer School, last year’s being held in Galway and attended by Finola Deavy. The aim is to both upskill lecturers in the current version of the BIM 360 software and to also provide feedback to Autodesk on how they can better integrate their software in an educational setting. As part of the training, a tour was arranged for the attendees to have a walk around the Autodesk offices which is in a LEED accredited building, one of only a handful with such accreditation in Ireland.

JJ Rhatigan Presentation to Final Year Quantity Surveying students
On Monday 21st October, Mr. Sonny Mc Nulty, BIM manager with JJ Rhatigan, visited AIT to speak with the final year Quantity Surveying students. The visit, organised by Ms Finola Deavy, was focused on the process of implementing BIM level 2 on commercial projects. It was an essential component within the module for the students to see classroom theory being put into practise. Sonny showcased the large scale developments being completed by the company and how the software and BIM standards, being taught to the students by Finola in the BIM management module are used in their work processes.
Shabra Plastics and Recycling Center - Women in Engineering
A group of ten students with their lecturer Dr Edel Chadwick visited Shabra Plastics and Recycling Center, on 6 November. The group was comprised of female students in years 1-4 of the Mechanical Engineering programmes and they visited Rita Shah’s company Shabra Plastics in Monaghan. Rita Shah was given an Honorary Fellowship from AIT in 2018, and as the recipient of many other awards nationally and internationally she was keen to meet with the next generation of women engineers to help motivate and inspire them. Ms Shah, the CEO of Shabra and other companies, gave generously of her time. She gave the students a personal tour of the factory, then over lunch provided by Shabra she chatted with the students for another hour and a half. She talked about her life and career and gave students encouragement and inspiration for their future careers.

The trip also provided an opportunity for students in different years to get to know one another and provided an excellent insight into state of the art plastics recycling plant.

Conference on Affective Computing & Intelligent Interaction (ACII 2019)
PhD student Jonny O’Dwyer (supervisors Dr Ronan Flynn and Dr Niall Murray) presented his paper “Eye-based Continuous Affect Prediction” at the 8th International Conference on Affective Computing & Intelligent Interaction (ACII 2019), which was held in Cambridge, UK, from the 3rd-6th September 2019. Jonny is pictured at the ACII conference with Professor Rosalind Picard from MIT, who is the founder and director of the Affective Computing Research Group at the MIT Media Lab.

Microsoft One Ireland – Site visit
On the 15th of October, 50 first year BSc Software Design & Mobile Apps students from the Faculty of Engineering visited Microsoft One Ireland in Dublin. During this industrial visit students toured the facility and took part in workshops with employees from different departments who discussed careers, market trends, technological advances, creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, cooperation and communication. This trip was organised by Karol Fitzgerald, lecturer within the Faculty of Engineering and Informatics.

Offline Film Residents Birr, Student Visit
The Year 1 cohort from BA (Hons) in Animation & Illustration visited the OFFline film residents in Birr, County Offaly on 14th of November. OFFline currently offer two 6-month residencies to artists working in the medium of animation. This is the 10th year of the Festival and the 2nd year of the Animator-in-Residence programme. This year, the resident animators, based in the OFFline Animation Studios in Green Street, Birr are Carolina Larson (Sweden) and Keith Kavanagh (Ireland).

Along with John Johnston of OFFline Film Festival, the resident animators, welcomed the students to their studio open day for a 90-minute tour and Q&A. The students learned what to expect when pursuing animation and got a brief overview of the animation process in both of the animators very different styles.

The AIT students spent the morning with the Artists in Residence, Carolina and Keith who talked about their artwork, process and passion-projects which they are currently undertaking. After a lengthy Q&A session, the students were treated to a private viewing of animated films which had screened at the OFFline film festival weekend in October.

The visit helped students to learn about this rapidly expanding industry with Animators who both excel in their areas of animation in a studio environment. In the nearby Birr Theatre and Arts Centre, the students were also given a special screening of a selection of short animated films featured in the 2019 OFFline Film Festival in October.
Uisce Screening at the Dun Laoighre Film Festival & Dingle Animation Festival 2020
Animated film, UISCE, by the BA (Hons) in Animation & Illustration Year 3 cohort 2018/19 screened at the 9th Dublin Animation Film Festival in Dun Laoghaire on October 18th. The student category had 55 entries and awards were received on the night for Best Student Short Film. UISCE was selected by a panel of judges to screen with seven other student films from colleges throughout the country. AIT students that attended met with the CEO of Boulder Media in Dublin on the night as well as Aidan McAteer, the storyboard supervisor for Cartoon Saloons upcoming Puffin Rock movie.

In addition, UISCE has been selected to screen in the prestigious Dingle Film Festival in March 2020. Dingle Film Festival is a fantastic platform to promote the AIT Animation programme. At Dingle 2020 the Animation students hope to showcase Year 2 student work by Rosie Mc Guinness at The Big Pitcher competition during the festival weekend.

Westmeath Poet in Residence Dr Martin Dyar.
Dr Martin Dyar, Westmeath Poet in Residence, gave a talk last month to 2nd year Animation and Illustration students during their Narrative & Scriptwriting module. Martin discussed the creative process, narrative, compression and the similarities between writing poetry and writing for animation. Martin analysed Commercial Break: Road-Runner, Uneasy by Tim Seibles, which was a great choice for the students, who thoroughly engaged with Martin and his work.

Graphic Design Awards
Emer Redmond and Anne Brady; 2 of last year’s graduates of the BA in Graphic Design, Level 7 made the short list for the IDI Graduate Awards out of 600 entries. Emer was shortlisted in the “Vis Comm Brand Identity” category with her branding project ‘KOVR’ & Anne was shortlisted in “Vis Comm Use of Typography in Design” with her project ‘In Bed with James Joyce’. Both students accompanied by their design lecturer Tara Cullen had a lovely evening at Technical University Dublin on Thursday the 14th of November for the award presentation.
Field Trip/Live Design Project
The current graphic design year 3 students are working on a collaboration with Kells Type Trail and the Celtic Media Group as part of their module for Professional Practice in Collaborative Environments. To gather primary research and content the students visited the town of Kells accompanied by design lectures Tara Cullen and Carmel Joyce. The day proved to be very insightful and informative, they got to interview both Mark Smyth from the Kells Type Trail and local historian Chris Murphy. The highlight of the day for both students and lecturers was an opportunity to see and photograph the original 1920’s posters that were lost until 3 year ago.

Electric Racing Car Project
Students from Year 3 and Year 4 Bachelor of Engineering in Mechanical/Mechanical (Hons) Degree programmes are involved with an innovative project developing an Electric Racing Car under lecturer in Mechanical Engineering Dr Pat Buckley.

The objective of the project is to convert a Jaguar X type to a competitive electric racing car. The project will feature in Retro Classics magazine for the next three issues over the next nine months. The group has made contact with the local newspapers regarding features.

The AIT racing car team received an invite from ADK Solutions to attend a track event in Mondello Park on Sunday 17th of November. This event provided necessary insight, guidance and expertise into building high performance race cars. An enjoyable and highly informative day was had by all in attendance at Mondello Park. Sponsors of the project to date include Westward Scania and Solidworks.

Maths Week 2019
AIT participated in the Maths Week initiative for the second year on Thursday 24 of October. The Maths Week initiatives are coordinated through the directors of Calmast STEM Outreach Centre at Waterford Institute of Technology. After several years’ working hard to promote STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths), they came to the realisation that mathematics was the foundation underpinning of STEM and in order to increase uptake among the public, attitudes towards maths had to change. Dr Ken Farquhar brought his show “It Doesn’t Add Up” to Athlone Institute of Technology as part of the Maths Week 2019 festival.

Dr Ken Farquhar is one of Britain’s leading STEM presenters, inspiring young people since 1995. His acclaimed maths show is designed to entertain and educate. There were two shows on the day both for National Schools from Offaly, Westmeath and Roscommon. In all, 8 Schools participated on the day with approx. 200 students and over 15 teachers & assistants. There was universal praise for the show. On the day we raffled prizes donated by a local toy company.
Maths Week 2019 – Canal Way Educate Together National School
For Maths Week 2019 Lecturer in Mechanical Engineering, Mr Cian Bregazzi-Nevin visited Canal Way Educate Together National School and demonstrated for several class groups. Using a 3D printed model hand and some simple micro controller code the children experienced the application and importance of Maths Beyond the Classroom. The demonstrations were thoroughly enjoyed by both students and staff. This initiative could be used for our own Maths Week events at AIT.

Field Trip Polymer Apprentices
Phase 2 Polymer Apprentice students accompanied by their lecturer Ms. Colette Breheny, recently visited Creganna Medical in Galway for an in-depth tour of their facility. Creganna Medical currently sponsor a Phase 2 student on the Polymer Apprentice Programme. A greater understanding of leading industry technologies, materials and processes were obtained throughout the visit. The visit also coincided with a plant Quality Day which introduced the students to all aspects of quality including regulatory, complaints, labelling and sterilisation.

RSA
The Trades Department at AIT are in the process of rolling out our Continuous Professional Development courses for all active (Commercial Vehicle Roadworthiness Test) CVRT testers countrywide. AIT currently offer courses in five locations across a geographical spread including Dublin, Sligo, Cork and Carlow with Athlone Institute of Technology being the main centre. Over any 12-week training period 498 Light Commercial Vehicle testers and 330 Heavy Commercials Vehicle testers are trained by AIT staff.

Department of Trades Plumbing update
In September 2019 the Trades Department (Plumbing) Phase 6 changed to the new syllabus version 4.2. This involved the installation of 4 cubicles, each one to accommodate 4 plumbing apprentices. Each apprentice will have to install and show their practical skills on the installation and commission of a solar system and also install a gas boiler to include domestic hot water, radiator, underfloor and AHU circuits. In this cubicle the apprentices will also wire various controls which will include the wiring up of a control board for temperature and time control of HW and CH zones.
**Institute of Geologists of Ireland (IGI) 20th Anniversary Conference**

Stephen Harney as a founding member of IGI attended 2019’s the 20th anniversary of the formation of Institute of Geologists of Ireland (IGI) conference on Friday October 11th in the Sheraton Hotel, Athlone.

The conference included a number of keynote speakers and was themed on climate action and the response of society including the extractive industries, both the petrochemical and mineral mining industries. The high profile speakers presented challenging and thought-provoking discussions on climate emergency and the role of geoscientists in this emergency.

Prof. Marko Komac, an external part-time researcher at the University of Ljubljana, and the President of the Board of the European Federation of Geologists (EFG), discussed the role of EFG in the drafting of geo related EU directives and policies.

Emeritus Professor John Sweeney from Maynooth University delivered, ‘a where we are at now’ with regard to climate change, by discussing the natural changes since the last ice age to present and using predictive analysis projecting the near future. He discussed the impact on sea level rise within the next 20 years if the world does not invest in strategies to mitigate and reduce the release of ‘greenhouse’ gases into the atmosphere.

Dr. Cara Augustenborg, a Fellow in Environmental Policy at University College Dublin, followed with a review on how the national task force and citizen’s assembly have been outlining actions that Ireland need to take to reach already agreed targets as part of the Paris accord.

Nic Bilham C. Geol., a researcher responsible sourcing of minerals from University of Exeter, the relationship between mining and the circular economy, and the challenge of assuring environmental and social impact standards across complex value chains and production-consumption networks. Nic presented on the minerals/elements needed to build the eco smart economy, their rarity and accessibility as well as the carbon footprint in their production.

Brendan Slattery, Head of Environment and Planning at McCann FitzGerald Solicitors, spoke on the legal and permitting routes to major renewable infrastructure such as with the first major carbon capture and storage project in the State, the Bus Connects programme, the fresh applications for consent for the Shannon LNG project, the Greenlink interconnector, renewable energy projects, and two offshore wind projects and countless onshore wind projects.
FACULTY OF SCIENCE AND HEALTH
Approval and Accreditation of Programmes - Update.
The Department of Social Sciences formally submitted applications to CORU (Ireland's multi-profession health and social care regulator) for approval Health and Social Care Professionals Act, 2005 (as amended) on 31st October. Three social care programmes were included in the submission:

- Bachelor of Arts in Applied Social Studies in Social Care (NFQ Level 7 full-time).
- Bachelor of Arts in Applied Social Care (NFQ Level 7 part-time)
- Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Social Care Practice (NFQ Level 8 full-time).

A CORU site visit is expected to take place during November 2020.

Work is currently underway within the department on a formal application to the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI) for accreditation of the BSc (Hons) in Applied Psychology. A site visit from the PSI is anticipated before the end of the 2019-2020 academic year.

The Faculty of Science and Health has submitted an application to QQI for research approval to NFQ Level 10 in the discipline area of Health. A site visit is expected during the first half of 2020.

Sincere thanks and appreciation is extended to all the staff in the Department of Social Sciences, the Department of Nursing and Healthcare and the Department of Sport and Health Science who were involved in the preparation of these submissions.

Science students and staff visit Jazz Pharmaceuticals.
Fourth year Pharmaceutical Science and Toxicology students visited Jazz Pharmaceuticals on October 30th for a site tour accompanied by Dr Noreen Morris and Dr Therese Montgomery. Jazz Pharmaceuticals, based in Monkland Athlone, is a bio-pharmaceutical company, which develops and commercialises sleep, haematology and oncology, narcolepsy, pain, and psychiatry products. Jazz Pharmaceuticals’ commercial portfolio includes Xyrem (sodium oxybate) oral solution, Erwinaze (asparaginase erinia chrysanthemi), Prollt (zinconotide) intrathecal infusion, and Fazaclo (clozapine, USP).

Dental Nursing students and staff conducting Oral Health Promotion.
Staff and students from AIT’s Dental Nursing programme returned to St Brigid’s national school in October to deliver the Oral Health promotion (OHP) workshop to 4th, 5th and 6th class pupils.

This is the third year AIT students have visited St Brigid’s, aiming to make OHP part of the annual curriculum and enabling the school to receive GOLD status recognition as part of the ACE Healthy Schools Programme.

Inaugural MSc Biopharmaceutical Technology graduates.
Congratulations to the inaugural MSc Biopharmaceutical Technology graduates, 2019, pictured below.

The class included graduates from AIT, TU Dublin, along with international students from Brazil, India and Mexico. Working with these students over the past year helped immensely in the evolution of this new course. As graduates of a bespoke programme, designed to develop and enhance knowledge, technical skill and contemporary thought on key areas related to biologics, the graduates are perfectly positioned to contribute to this important sector. In the past decade, the Biopharmaceutical industry has made capital investment of approximately $10 billion in new facilities in Ireland, including the state-of-the-art National Institute for Bioprocessing Research and Training (NIBRT) where the class received six days of training. The 2019-20 class boasts 22 students, mainly international from India and Nigeria, developing and strengthening links with international academic institutions. Our continued
commitment to this innovative program will deliver top-class, well-trained scientists with the potential to rise to senior positions in this industry. We wish our newly minted M.Sc. graduates every success in their future careers.

Veterinary Nursing students and staff site visits.
On Tuesday 29th October, Gillian Coughlan and Maeve O’Reilly accompanied the 3rd year veterinary nursing students on a field trip incorporating three site visits. The group firstly visited the ICBF (Irish Cattle Breeding Federation) testing station in Tully, Kildare, which helped provide context for some theory in their Animal Breeding and Genetics module. Subsequently, they visited Troytown equine hospital to view the equine surgical and anaesthesia facilities, as well as the medical wards and diagnostic units. This visit linked directly with their Equine Medical Nursing, Surgical Nursing, and Anaesthesia modules. Finally, the group visited the Irish Equine Centre, where a wide range of diagnostic procedures for horses, farm and companion animals are performed. The students reported that the day was both enjoyable and informative and helped them to apply the theory from their modules.

Abbott Seminar
Dr Noreen Morris, Dr Therese Montgomery and Dr Nuala Commins were delighted to invite former AIT Toxicology student Helen Hamilton from Abbott Longford to speak to the 4th year Pharmaceutical Science and Toxicology as well as the MSc in Biopharmaceutical students. Helen delivered a most inspirational talk to the students as she spoke about the company, her career path and the skills needed to progress one’s career in industry. Helen has been working with Abbott for the last 14 years since completing her MSc in Toxicology in AIT under the supervision of Dr Antoinette Sweeney.
Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) Science Week 2019 at AIT

With recent announcements in the national media that AIT was named The Sunday Times Institute of Technology of the Year for 2019 and that funding for a new STEM building for AIT has been secured as part of the Department of Education and Skills €200 million investment in the Institutes of Technology, Science Week 2019 hosted by the Faculty of Science and Health at AIT had an even greater importance in November 2019 than in previous years. Science Week Ireland is an annual week-long event in Ireland held each November celebrating science. It is the largest public science festival in the country, involving tens of thousands of members of the public participating in workshops, presentations, laboratory demonstrations, science walks and other science-related activities. 2019 marked 24 years of Science Week which is a national, annual event that celebrates the fascinating worlds of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). The aim of Science Week is to promote the relevance of science, technology, engineering and maths in our everyday lives and to demonstrate their importance to the future development of Irish society and to the economy. Science Week is managed by SFI – Science Foundation Ireland. Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) has partnered with organisations and businesses across Ireland, including running science festivals across Ireland, including the Midlands Science Festival. The Department of Life and Physical Sciences ran several events this year as part of Science Week.

One of the showcase events was the Science-Foundation Ireland (SFI) sponsored series of roadshows for local primary schools across AIT’s core catchment area of Co. Westmeath, Co. Offaly and Co. Roscommon. On Wednesday, November 13, 2019 close to 200 pupils from 5 local primary schools (Cloonkilla, Co. Westmeath, Gaelscoil de hÍde, Co. Roscommon, St. Kierans National School, Broughall, Co. Offaly, Ballybay National School, Co. Roscommon and Glanduff National School, Co. Roscommon) attended three highly engaging Science Magic shows in the Department of Nursing & Healthcare building where the schools were entertained by two presenters from WS Ireland’s Award Winning Science & Discovery Centre, Belfast, Northern Ireland. The title of the show was Science Magic. With the aid of several household objects, some cooking ingredients and even a chicken (!), the students discovered the science underpinning indicators, gravity, angular momentum and polymers. All 200 students were presented with a small gift from SFI at each show. The three shows were organised by Ms. Chris McCormack and Dr. Brian Murphy from the Department of Life and Physical Sciences.

Gallen Community School, Ferbane visit to AIT.
Thirty 5th year Biology students from Gallen Community School Ferbane visited Athlone Institute of Technology to hone their STEM skills on Tuesday the 12th of November. Students enjoyed lab demonstrations on the influenza virus and participated in immunoassays assays and rapid influenza diagnostic tests to identify positive and negative patient samples. Students also demonstrated how quickly viruses can spread using UV technology and how to implement a correct hand washing validation procedure as is used in an industrial laboratory environment.

“It was a very interesting, enjoyable day especially seeing how you test for influenza. It was amazing how quick we could perform the tests” Kieran, 5th year student Gallen Community School.

“I loved looking at the bacteria on my hands under the UV light” Rachel, 5th year student Gallen Community School.

Students then identified Fibonacci sequences and how these mathematical patterns can be found throughout nature. In the natural world, it can be expressed in the petals or leaves on many plants, in the structure of pineapples and artichokes, and in the shell of a nautilus, as well as in galaxies in space, and in hurricanes over the ocean. The Fibonacci Sequence is a numerical pattern in which the next number in a recurring series is produced by adding the previous two numbers together. The sequence reads as: 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, etc. You can most commonly spot these sequences by studying the manner in which various vegetables and plants grow.

“My favourite part of the day was drawing different vegetables showing the Fibonacci sequences. It was so interesting!” Siobhan, 5th year student Gallen Community School.

It was a very enjoyable day promoting STEM at AIT, enjoyed by students, teachers and lecturers. It was a fantastic opportunity to showcase the practical skills, courses and approachable staff at AIT. It was exciting to witness the interest in STEM subjects in AIT from Gallen Community School students.

“Our trip to AIT was absolutely fantastic. We were delighted to attend to have the opportunity to see state of the art facilities in AIT. It was great meeting the lecturers and head of department who gave tremendous insight into the course and research taking place in AIT” Mrs. Buckley, Biology Teacher Gallen Community School.
“It was a fantastic day for Gallen Community School students in terms of hands on practicals. The interaction between staff in AIT and our students was fantastic and so welcoming” Ann Marie Brennan, Head of Department of Science, Gallen Community School.

Glanduff National School pupils visit AIT for Science Week.

Students from Glanduff National School checked out the facilities at AIT during Science week. The tour took them through the microbiology, biotechnology, pharmaceutical and analytical laboratories. They were particularly interested in the range of equipment, glassware and the smells they encountered in the labs and enjoyed watching some of the 4th year students working on their projects. The highlight of the trip was their visit to the veterinary lab where they listened intently to Gillian Coughlan, RVN discuss equine health.

SciFest at Roscommon CBS.
The CBS Roscommon held their annual SciFEST@School competition. A huge variety of well thought out projects were on display covering a diverse range of themes. Students from local National schools were invited in to both demonstrate their science skills and to ask well thought out questions of the competitors. Congratulations to all concerned.

Annual ISTA Science Quiz hosted by Dr Sean Reidy as part of National Science Week.

Photo: Professor Ciarán Ó Catháin, Mary Simpson Director of International Relations, Dr Nuala Commins Head of Department of Life and Physical Sciences, Shane Carrington Sports.

Photo: Dr Nuala Commins and Dr Ann Friel from the AIT join the SciFest winners at CBS Roscommon celebrating their win as part of National Science Week. Technician with students and staff of Glanduff National School during Science week.

Photo: Pupils from Glanduff National School visit AIT’s Veterinary Clinical Laboratory.

Photo: Serious Science Competitors Representing Marist College: Ciaran Clear, Amechi Emetia and Eoin McCarthy with the Winners’ Cup in hand. Representing Our Ladys’ Bower: Isabel Clarke, Kate Duffy and Katie Commins.
Veterinary CPD Event.
On Thursday 13th November, a veterinary CPD event on the topic of Lyme disease took place. The event was organised by the AIT veterinary nursing program team, in conjunction with the Midland’s Veterinary Clinical Society and Science Week. The event was very well attended by veterinarians, veterinary nurses, undergraduate vet nursing students, and lay people. There were 28 local veterinary/veterinary nursing professionals present, all of whom will be awarded VCI CPD points for their attendance.

Kerry Lawless gave an excellent presentation on the risks of contracting Lyme disease in Ireland and the possible impact of infection. Kerry Lawless is a Lyme disease patient, member of ‘Tick Talk Ireland’ and volunteer with the Lyme Disease Resource Centre. Kerry is currently undertaking a PhD in Science and Health Communication in Dublin City University. She has personal experience due to her own infection with Lyme disease and has educated herself widely on the risks of infection in Ireland; the difficulties in obtaining a diagnosis; and the treatment options available in Ireland and abroad.

Conference Presentations
In May 28-31, 2019, Caroline Coyle, lecturer in the Department of Social Sciences travelled to Trent University, Peterborough, Canada to present ‘Older Irish Women on the Edge: Using Poetic Inquiry to Explore Identity’ at TrentAging 2019.

Held at Trent University in Peterborough, Canada, Take Back Aging: Power, Critique, Imagination is the second joint conference organized by NANAS and ENAS that invites researchers, writers, and scholars from all disciplines and at every career stage to share their diverse approaches to conventional fields of gerontology and critical aging studies. We wish to encourage new insights into assumed styles of life and thought, imaginative reflections on the meanings and representations of aging, challenging perspectives from cross-cultural and global experience, and activist strategies to take back aging from those powers and practices that relegate it to the margins of social existence and citizenship.

Jim Maguire, lecturer in the Department of Nursing & Healthcare attended the 11th European Congress on Violence in Clinical Psychiatry in Lillestrøm, Norway, October 23rd to 25th 2019.

Preceding the Congress, there were meetings of the board and general assembly of the European Violence in Psychiatry Research Group (EViPRG), on which Jim is a board member.

Discussion centred on coercion-reduction, inclusion of central and east European countries in research projects, and a new FOSTREN bid for EU funding towards these objectives.

FOSTREN (or Fostering and Strengthening Approaches to Reducing Coercion in European Mental Health Services) is a COST action designed to establish a sustainable, multidisciplinary network of researchers and practitioners focused on reducing the degree to which mental health services use coercion in hospital and community mental health services.

The main Congress was a 2-day event with presentations and workshops on issues related to violence in psychiatry i.e. the causes, prediction, reduction and prevention, and management of violence.

Dr Therese Montgomery, lecturer in the Department of Life & Physical Sciences will present a paper at the ‘New Perspectives in Science Education’ conference in Florence, Italy in March 2020. Dr Montgomery's paper is entitled ‘Curriculum Objectives of the Irish SURE Network’.

Visiting Professor.
Professor Ralph Kenna theoretical physicist and Head of the Statistical Physics Research Group at Coventry University visited AIT last week to meet with Caroline Coyle regarding future collaborative work.

Ralph, a native of Athlone is a theoretical physicist whose interests are centred around statistical mechanics. After completing a Doctorate at the Karl Franzens Universität...
President’s Report

Graz, he held postdoctoral positions at the University of Liverpool and in Trinity College Dublin. He was awarded a Readership in 2006 and became Professor of Theoretical Physics in August 2012. His research interests include phase transitions and critical phenomena as well as digital humanities and sociphysics. He is a specialist in critical phenomena and editor of the book Maths meets Myths: Quantitative Approaches to Ancient Narratives.

Ralph’s mission

‘The single motivation for all of my research is curiosity. I constantly hope to achieve greater understanding of various complex systems, from the physical sciences to the sociological and the humanities’.

ASPIRE with ABBOTT, in partnership with Midland Science Festival, is a bespoke event that brings parents, teachers and students together to learn & discover more about the career opportunities that exist within STEM disciplines. On the night, attendees heard from guest speakers, Abbott employees and patients whose lives have been impacted by innovative healthcare technologies.

The event included break out activities where students were given a first hand experience of the range of life altering products manufactured at Abbott sites. The event was wrapped up with a panel discussion which included Dr Nuala Commins, Head of Department of Life and Physical Sciences at AIT on the impact. The panel addressed the impact of STEM careers, the future of work and how lives have been impacted by innovative healthcare technologies.

AIT success at IT Sligo SURE Conference

The second national Science Undergraduate Research Experience (SURE) conference took place in three venues simultaneously - TU Dublin, IT Carlow and IT Sligo on Friday, 27th September. The IT Sligo conference was attended by 40 plus AIT undergraduate students from across the Faculty of Science and Health, nine graduates and two postgraduate students, accompanied by the AIT Life and Physical science lecturers Dr Therese Montgomery, Dr AnneMaire O’Brien, Dr Antoinette Sweeney, Ms Cathy Brougham and Dr Neasa Kinsella.

Following a competitive expert review process, students from AIT, IT Sligo, GMIT and Letterkenny IT were selected to present their 2018/2019 final year project research findings at the IT Sligo conference via poster or oral presentation. AIT’s BSc (Hons) in Toxicology graduate Ms Carina Hardy was awarded the top prize, Best Oral Presentation for her research on mitochondrial toxicity induced by the widely prescribed diabetes type 2 diabetes drug metformin, and the implications this may have for both patients and the drug discovery and development industry. Carina’s 4th year project was supervised by Dr Neasa Kinsella.

Best runner up prize for the poster presentation was awarded to Ms Emma Kane, recent graduate from the BSc (Hons) Health Science with Nutrition programme. Emma, supervised by Dr Patricia Heavey, examined iodine intake in women of childbearing age. Iodine is extremely important particularly during pregnancy. However, many women are not meeting the dietary recommendations for iodine and this may be due to low dairy intakes and increased popularity of milk alternatives and vegan diets.

An additional nine 2019 science graduates from AIT were invited to present their research on a diverse array of topics, ranging from the toxicity of common food additives, aspirin stability, the immunomodulatory effects of vitamin D, the environmental impact of intense dairy farming, the development of novel delivery systems for folic acid, the impact of the sugar tax, the anti-cancer properties of curcumin and the microRNA analysis of mesenchymal stem
cells to the development of novel ecotoxicological tests for the detection of fresh water pollutants.

AIT postgraduate research was represented by Mr Tomasz Szank and Ms Megan Fallon, both AIT PhD students who took an active part in the postgraduate discussion panel during the conference alongside postgraduate researchers from IT Sligo and GMIT.

Speaking after the conference, the chairperson of the SURE Network National Curriculum Committee Dr Therese Montgomery said, “The quality of research presented at the conference today is testament to the hard work and enthusiasm of both our students and the academic staff. The SURE Conference provides the perfect platform from which to display key skills developed through the 4th year research project, such as data analysis, critical thinking, problem solving, scientific writing and science communication, evidence of which is consistently demanded by both industrial and academic employers. Based upon the success of today’s conferences, it is clear that the undergraduate students in the IoT/TU sector are generating applied research of sufficiently high quality to impact upon human health and the environment, laying the foundations for future research funding initiatives and publication through the SURE Undergraduate research journal.”

Dr Anne Marie O’Brien (co-chairperson, SURE network National Programme Committee) also stated that “A recent IBEC report (2018) highlighted communication and literacy among the key graduate attributes that employers wanted. I think that the SURE series of conferences demonstrate that AIT graduates have these in abundance.”

Based on the success of the inaugural 2018 AIT SURE Network conference, co-organisers of the 2018 AIT conference Dr Therese Montgomery and Dr. Anne Maire O’Brien were presented with the Best Academic Partnership Award at the Irish Education Awards 2019 and continue to represent AIT as part of the SURE Network. Next year’s SURE Network regional conferences will take place in GMIT, Cork IT and TU Dublin on the 25th September 2020.
Faculty of Science & Health academic staff graduate with PhD degrees.
Clare McDermott and Mairead Cantwell (lecturers in the Department of Sport and Health Science) graduated from DCU with their PhD degrees on November 7th. Mairead’s PhD thesis title was ‘The development, implementation and evaluation of a physical activity intervention for individuals living with and beyond cancer’. Clare’s PhD thesis title was ‘Efficacy of a technology enabled home-based cardiac rehabilitation program on aerobic fitness, vascular health and cardiovascular disease risk factors’.

Department of Life & Physical Sciences Industry Seminars.
A series of seminars for 4thyear pharmaceutical students was organised over the last few months by Dr Noreen Morris as part of their module Contemporary Issues in Pharmaceutical Chemistry. Toxicology year 4 and MSc students from the biopharmaceutical class also availed of these seminars. Both academics and industrialists were invited to speak to our students. The list of speakers included: Dr Eddie Meyers, NUI Galway (October 14th), Mr Enda Fallon and Dr Greg Lawrence, Alkermes (October 21st), Ms Helen Hamilton, Abbott Diagnostics (November 11th), Professor Tom Moody, VP Almac (November 18th) and Dr Barbara Cooper, Jazz Pharmaceuticals (November 25th). These seminars are an invaluable tool for preparing AIT students for either the workplace or further studies as they highlight the skills necessary to progress. The industrialists spoke about their company, their role and other roles within the company and how best to get there. Dr Meyers and Professor Moody spoke about their recent research in Biorthogonal Chemistry and Biocatalysis respectively.
FACULTY OF BUSINESS AND HOSPITALITY
Lecturers in the Department of Business and Management David O’Hanlon and Stephanie Duffy presented at the Pre-Conference Workshop of the Higher Education Advances Conference in Valencia in June. The title of the workshop was Team Based Learning for Enhanced Engagement in Larger Class Settings: Experiences of Business School Staff and Students. Over thirty lecturers from universities across the globe had a chance to experience how we do ‘Team Based Learning’ at the Faculty of Business and Hospitality, partaking in an exercise designed to help them become more familiar with the history of Athlone. The paper upon which the workshop was based (co-authored with members of the AIT Team Based Learning Community of Practice – Nuala Harding, Luke Fannon and Seadna Ryan) is available at https://zenodo.org/record/3251703#.XdaGn5P7S71

During September, David O’Hanlon facilitated an online CPD workshop for members of the Division of Academics, Teachers and Researchers of Psychology (Psychological Society of Ireland). The subject of the workshop was the enhancement of student engagement in the teaching of psychology. Dave shared his experiences of technologies used to facilitate team based learning as well as online student seminars with lectures from several third level institutes.

Lecturer Mr Barry O’Loughlin visited Longford College of Further Education on 8 October to discuss the options for their students in relation to applying for our new programme Bachelor of Business (Honours) in International Business.

Alison Hough BL and Elaine Walsh, Law Lecturers in the Faculty of Business and Hospitality, organised a field trip to the Four Courts and the Criminal Courts of Justice, on Wednesday 9 October 2019, for the students of the Bachelor of Business (Honours) in Business and Law and the Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Accounting and Law programmes, in which the first and second year students ran a mock trial in the Criminal Courts of Justice.

Conferring of Awards – Graduation 2019

Management and support staff of the Faculty of Business and Hospitality were delighted to join the graduates at the conferring ceremony on Thursday 31 October. Presenting them for conferring, the Dean of Faculty Ms Michelle McKeon-Bennett congratulated all the students from the Departments of Business and Management, Accounting and Business Computing and Hospitality Tourism and Leisure on this special occasion. We were delighted to welcome the sponsors of the special awards who joined us on the day along with other invited guests.

Financial Wellbeing

Students from Lecturer Karen Guest’s Microeconomics for Business first year class and Lecturer Henry Joyce’s third year Economic Policy and Analysis class participated in a Financial Wellbeing lecture delivered by Ms Rachel Foster from Bank of Ireland. The lecture directed at third level students has been rolled out to selected third level institutions and is part of a wider programme initiated by the bank aimed at helping customers manage their money and plan for the future. Issues such as achieving financial goals, budgeting, understanding and protecting your profile in Personal Credit Reports were all addressed.

Faculty of Business and Hospitality First Year Students - Hands For Life CPR Training

For ‘Restart a Heart Week’ first years from the Level 7 Bachelor of Business and Level 6 Higher Certificate in Business accompanied by their lecturer Karen Guest, participated in the Hands For Life CPR training provided by the Irish Heart Foundation in AIT. An important and vital skill was learned and appreciated by all.
Mrs Aisling Keenan, Lecturer attended a workshop on Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS by Dr Jan-Michael Becker, University of Cologne in the J E Cairnes School of Business & Economics, National University of Ireland Galway on 11 and 12 November 2019.

A graduate of the Department of Accounting and Business Computing Ms Joy Salaja returned to the Institute on 18 November from London where she is now employed as a chartered accountant. Ms Salaja gave a guest lecture detailing how her career progressed from undergraduate study at Athlone Institute of Technology. She also visited Our Lady's Bower Secondary School where she delivered a talk to their students promoting AIT as a college of choice. Joy is a graduate of both the Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Accounting and the Master of Arts in Accounting programmes. After completing her training contract and her chartered accounting examinations, Joy worked for the American internet company AOL in Dublin and then LinkedIn, before moving to one of the big four accounting and business advisors Ernst & Young in their London offices. Joy spoke on the changing nature of accounting jobs and the benefit of her AIT education. She also recorded a promotional video with the marketing department. We were delighted to welcome Joy back to AIT and we very much appreciate her giving us her time.

Mrs Aisling Keenan provided a presentation to the Level 5 and Level 6 Digital Marketing students from Moate Business College on ‘Developing a Digital Marketing Strategy for SMEs in Ireland’ on 25 November 2019.

The Faculty of Business and Hospitality wishes recent retiree Mr Frank Conway every happiness in his retirement from the Institute. Management and staff congratulate and thank Frank for his long and dedicated service to our students and the Institute as a whole.

DEPARTMENT OF HOSPITALITY, TOURISM AND LEISURE

3rd Year Bachelor of Business in Sport Management.

Sport Tourism Fieldtrip to Castlebar and Westport.
The Bachelor of Business in Sport Management 3rd Year students studying Sports Tourism module visited Castlebar and Westport on the 23rd October 2019 where they had the opportunity to meet and have presentations from the stakeholders that operate in the region. These included Sport Tourism Officer for Mayo County Council, Andy Moran, Movement Gym, and Jarlath McHale, Mayo Adventure Experience, Lough Lannagh, Castlebar.
The group also visited Westport and had presentations from Biddy Hughes on Destination Westport, Noelle Angley, Municipal District Architect who spoke on “Smarter Travel” in Westport and the Great Western Greenway. Ciara Joyce Marketing Manager Castlecourt Hotel presented on the “Sea to Summit Event held in Westport every November. The students had the opportunity to discuss topics with the presenters during this trip which is an integral assessment component for the Sport Tourism module delivered by Frances McGettigan, Department of Hospitality Tourism and Leisure Department.

2nd year B.A.in Hotel & Leisure Management

EPIC Irish Emigration Famine Museum and the National Wax Museum Class field trip (November 2019)
Accompanied by their lecturers, Karen Gardiner and Dymphna Scanlon, the 2nd year B.A.in Hotel & Leisure Management students undertook a field trip to Dublin, visiting the EPIC Irish Emigration Famine Museum and the National Wax Museum.

1st year B.A.in Hotel & Leisure Management

Mount Druid Boutique Camping in Castletown Geoghegan and Belvedere House and Gardens in Mullingar.
Students in the 1st year B.A.in Hotel & Leisure Management group undertook a field trip to Mount Druid Boutique Camping in Castletown Geoghegan and also visited Belvedere House and Gardens in Mullingar.

Bar Supervision and Hospitality Management

Slane Whiskey distillery and Tankardstown House
Bar supervision and Hospitality Management students enjoyed a field trip to Slane Whiskey distillery and Tankardstown House.

Dine in the Dark fundraiser on behalf of the NCBI
Dine in the Dark fundraiser on behalf of the NCBI held in the Department of Tourism Hospitality and Leisure training restaurant on November 11th 2019. Springboard trainee chefs and food and beverage operations students delivered exceptional service and quality food to a range of attendees. Teamwork, professionalism, a welcoming atmosphere and good humour were the order of the night.

Businet
Dr Tony Johnston, Head of Department, presented research on field-based learning at the 33rd annual Businet conference in Belgrade, Serbia. The research examined ‘The Value of International Field Based Learning in Developing Entrepreneurial Characteristics in Undergraduate Students’.

Ashford Castle
Our culinary and food and beverage students were treated to world class hospitality in the marvellous Ashford Castle. Thank you to all the staff for showing us behind the scenes at one of the world’s best hotels.
MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS DEPARTMENT
The Marketing and Communications Department engages Athlone Institute of Technology’s multiple stakeholders through a variety of mediums, including print, broadcast, online and social, and uses the PESCO model (paid, earned, shared and owned media) as a vehicle for reputation management and brand advocacy. Together with its Design and Student Recruitment arm, the Department is tasked with helping the institute achieve brand salience nationally and internationally with the goal of boosting student numbers and attracting and retaining top talent – ultimately ensuring the continued prosperity of the Midlands region.

AIT Awarded The Sunday Times ‘Institute of Technology of the Year’ 2020 Following ‘Good University Guide’ Submission

Following a robust submission from AIT’s Marketing and Communications Department in July, Athlone Institute of Technology was awarded The Sunday Times ‘Institute of Technology of the Year’ award for 2020. This is the second time in three years that the educational powerhouse has won the prestigious accolade, further solidifying its status as a leader in applied education, research and innovation across the technological higher education sector.

Now in its 18th year, The Sunday Times Good University Guide (a national supplement dedicated to the award designation) is the country’s official league table ranking the country’s 19 higher education institutes against one another. The criteria involved in the adjudication of the rankings, include student satisfaction levels, points achieved by incoming students, progression ratio, student academic achievement, expenditure on facilities, research profile, and graduate employment prospects.

In winning this award, Athlone Institute of Technology has risen to its highest ranking yet and now sit at number 7 (up from 9) in the league table ahead of all other institutes of technology, technological universities and Maynooth University. The multi-award-winning institute, which is well on its way to achieving technological university status, has also retained its title as number one for research across the technological higher education sector for the second consecutive year.

The institute is also number one for student satisfaction for the sixth consecutive year, according to the Irish Survey of Student Engagement, a national higher education survey (comprising ITs and universities) that reports students’ satisfaction with their degrees and overall student experience. It is expected that this award will lead to an increase in student numbers and improve Athlone Institute of Technology’s reputational standing regionally, nationally and internationally.

Once The Sunday Times informed the Marketing and Communications Department that their submission had been successful, the team organised a significant amount of marketing collateral to accompany the national announcement of the award. This included a large banner flag with The Sunday Times ‘Institute of Technology of the Year’ 2020 logo (which was revealed by President, Professor Ciarán Ó Catháin during the second of the institute’s autumn conferring days) as well as print and radio advertising, stickers for prospectuses, signs for photography, banners for the institute’s social accounts and more.

The announcement press release issued garnered an extremely positive response from regional and national media. The story appeared on the front page of The Westmeath Independent and Athlone Advertiser, in the Longford Leader, Offaly Independent, Offaly Express, Athlone Topic and on radio stations like Midlands 103FM, ShannonSide FM and Spin1038. It also featured in national publications, including The Sunday Times, Maximum Media (Joe.ie/Her.ie), Breakingnews.ie (Irish Examiner family) and Newstalk. The Marketing and Communications Department also produced an announcement video which can be viewed on the institute’s Youtube channel. [Including link here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZkXAAOxYSwo]

Technological University + Funding Announcement

The Marketing and Communications Department prepared statements, press releases and social content ahead of Athlone Institute of Technology’s announcement that it was forming a consortium in partnership with Limerick Institute of Technology to develop a technological university for the Midlands and Midwest regions. This announcement was first made public on Tuesday, 15th October and was followed up by a funding announcement press release. The Marketing and Communications team engaged in targeted media relations which resulted in coverage in both provincial and national media across print, broadcast and online. The story was covered in TheJournal.ie, the Irish Independent, RTE and Breakingnews.ie, the Westmeath Independent, Roscommon Herald, and the Offaly Express (Non exhaustive list).

Strategic Plan 2019-2023

The Marketing and Communications Department worked closely with the President’s Office to deliver Athlone Institute of Technology’s new Strategic Plan 2019-2023 ‘A Technological University for the Region’. The Strategic Plan, which delineates the vital role Athlone Institute of Technology plays in educating and upskilling the region in key areas of technological advancement, was written with the needs of the institute’s internal and external stakeholders in mind following a lengthy consultation process and extensive market research. The decided upon five themes – Learner Experience, Educational Provision, Research, Engagement, and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion – and the enablers underpinning them (People, Infrastructure and Operational Framework) will guide the institute’s next phase of evolution as it undergoes a transition to becoming a technological university. The document was written, designed and prepared for print by the Marketing and Communications Department.

Sidero: From Course to Career – Marketing Campaign Targeting CAO Audience

Following on from the launch of Athlone Institute of Technology’s new CAO campaign ‘From Course to Career’ in September, the Marketing and Communications Department filmed another video in its series highlighting the clear progression pathways from one of Athlone Institute of Technology’s 60+ industry-focussed CAO courses to a successful career in industry. This six-part
series, which is being filmed on location, gives prospective students an insight into the careers on offer across a broad cross section of industry. This month’s instalment focussed on Sidero, a software company based in Monksland. The industry point of contact was HR Officer Marta Kenny. Episode one and two of this series has been completed in partnership with DPD Ireland and Almac to market business and science programmes.

**Campaign: New CAO Courses**

A new print, broadcast and social campaign is currently underway promoting Athlone Institute’s new CAO courses, including the Bachelor of Business (Hons) in Business Information Systems, Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Design with Product Innovation, Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Food Business and Technology, Bachelor of Business (Hons) in International Business with a Language, and an older programme – Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Accounting. The targeted social campaign is eliciting good engagement across Athlone Institute of Technology’s social channels. This pre-Christmas push is intended to increase CAO mentions and first preferences.

**Banking on Bottles: AIT and Shabra Plastic Recycling Partnership Launch**

The Marketing and Communications Department worked with the MRI and APT on a new plastic bottle collection and recycling scheme intended to educate staff and students about the benefits of appropriately sorting and recycling Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET), a clear, strong and lightweight plastic. Despite the fact that PET is one of the most commonly used materials for packaging food and beverages worldwide, consumer awareness remains low as to its value and how to dispose of it properly and sustainably. The team put together a press release raising awareness of the initiative, organised pull-ups, liaised with Repak Ireland to get a special recycling machine for the canteen and had it wrapped with an AIT-specific design, organised the launch in partnership with MRI and APT and designed social posts to encourage students and staff to recycle.

**STUDENT RECRUITMENT**

**Schools**

The student recruitment team have had a busy few months out on the road visiting schools. This year, we have welcomed one new addition, Claire Connor, to the recruitment team and have been able to cover significant ground over a short period of time. Since the middle of September, Daniel and Claire have visited nearly 83 schools across 20 counties. The school visits encompass a talk with a general overview of our institute, a detailed account of all our courses, the facilities on offer, our award-winning support services, sports, clubs and societies, international links, student supports, placements and career opportunities. To date we have visited 54 schools and 29 student recruitment events across the country.

**Recruitment Events**

As well as the school visits the recruitment team have been on the road covering over 29 recruitment events right across the country with an aim of enlightening minds and showing second level students the educational pathway that they can have at Athlone Institute of Technology. The careers fairs include events such as the Irish Guidance Counsellors Association in various regions across the country as well as National Bodies.

The largest of these was Higher Options in the RDS. The institute was represented by the Student Recruitment Officer, Graduate Ambassador, Student Ambassadors, and staff from academic departments. AIT is also exhibiting at various regional fairs, including Limerick, Galway, Laois, Kilkenny and Cavan. The institute was also present at an IGC Event in Carlow, Kilkenny and Limerick.
Open Day – 18 & 19 October 2019
On Friday 18 and Saturday 19 October, the institute held its October open days, which were attended by over 2000 people. A lot of preplanning went into the open day and there was a lot of digital and social focus on the event this year, which added to a winning formula for the event. This year’s event was held in the AIT International Arena, which had a huge impact on people’s perceptions of the institute and people were taken aback with the amazing facilities that our campus has to offer, which they had not previously experienced. An extensive pre-event communications and advertising campaign through social media and direct marketing (email, SMS, Facebook and Instagram) helped drive significant traffic to the open day bookings page. The audiences included those who had already signed up to our alert list at recruitment events and school visits. The reach of various Facebook and Instagram campaigns exceeded 250,000 people. Radio campaigns were also run regionally through iRadio and Midlands 103. This in turn drove traffic through to the web and to the Eventbrite bookings page where 2066 bookings were recorded. This all led to a huge increase in attendance, benchmarking against previous open days, and we will move on this momentum in planning the next open day in April, for which planning has already started to take place. Open day itself was a great success, both in terms of the visitor numbers, the depth of engagement between prospective students and staff, and the overall atmosphere in the International Arena and throughout campus on the day.

Upcoming Events
Having had a hugely successful two days for our October Open Days we have a number of events in the new year for prospective students. In January we have our Ask AIT: CAO Information Evening for students, parents, early school leavers and mature students. Attendees will have an opportunity to speak to admissions staff about the CAO application process and converse with current students from the Faculties of Business and Hospitality, Engineering and Informatics, and Science and Health. During our CAO Information Evening, attendees will learn about the CAO process, student support services, schemes and scholarships including HEAR and DARE, our brand new 1916 Bursary and our myriad sports scholarships. Our academic and support staff will be on hand throughout the evening to answer all queries.

Academic Achievement of Athlone Students Celebrated at AIT Scholarship of Excellence Ceremony
Athlone Institute of Technology bestowed Scholarships of Excellence upon eleven high-achieving first-year students at a recent award ceremony.

Inaugurated in 2017, Scholarships of Excellence acknowledge the academic endeavours of incoming first-year students. They are given to students who achieve in excess of 500 points in their Leaving Certificate examinations.

To mark their achievement, each recipient is awarded a bursary of €500 and a comprehensive gym membership which gives them access to the institute’s state-of-the-art sporting and leisure facilities for the academic year. This year, recipients’ respective schools were also honoured with a plaque commemorating the award.

Students from Athlone Community College, Moate Community School, Ballymahon Vocational School, Our Lady’s Bower, Oaklands Community College, Tullamore College, St Joseph’s Community and St Mary’s Secondary School were among those to receive awards.

Speaking at the ceremony, Athlone Institute of Technology’s President, Professor Ciarán Ó Catháin, commended the Scholarship of Excellence recipients for their diligence and commitment to their studies, and said he hoped that the award would encourage them to maintain that same level of commitment moving forward.

He also asked that students take a moment to recognise and give credit to their parents, teachers, principals and guidance counsellors all of whom have “played an integral role in nurturing and assisting you in your academic development to date.”

Following the Scholarship of Excellence award ceremony, the celebrations continued in the institute’s hospitality department training restaurant – a state-of-the-art culinary facility – where recipients and their guests were treated to a gourmet meal.

Athlone Institute of Technology has been named The Sunday Times ‘Institute of Technology of the Year 2020’ in Ireland’s official league table which benchmarks the country’s 19 third level institutions, after topping the national rankings once again.

This is the second time in just three years that the institute has secured the prestigious accolade, having previously been awarded the overall ‘Institute of Technology of the Year’ in 2018, and the ‘Institute of the Year Runner-Up’ in 2017.

This news follows a year of considerable success for the college, which just last month announced its intention to form a technological university with Limerick Institute of Technology.
Research, Innovation and Enterprise
**Funding Applications awaiting outcome**
- 13 Postgraduate Applications to IRC Postgraduate Scholarship
- 1 EPS IRC Postgraduate Application
- DTIF – Enterprise Ireland.

**Funding Applications for submission**
- IRC New Foundations
- H2020 NMP, AIT as partner
- COST Actions
- Erasmus Plus
- HRB
- Career FIT, Enterprise Ireland

**Successful Funding**
- SFI Zero Emissions call - Dr Yuansong Qiao
- Bord Iascaigh Mhara - Professor Neil Rowan.

**President Doctoral Scholarship 2019**
PDS 2019 funded a further 15 projects from the reserve list which are currently advertised on the Postgraduate Research Opportunities webpage. This brings to 30 projects funded from the list of projects submitted.

In addition:
- 3 Call for Applications in Business & Hospitality.
- 5 Call for Applications in Humanities, Social Science and Applied Psychology.

**Research Symposium**
A Research Symposium held on 22nd November brought together postgraduates from AIT through poster and presentations in the Douglas Hyde Theatre. The event invited postgraduates to give a ‘1 minute’ flash presentation of their research area - broken out over three groups with session chairs representing Business, Engineering and Science. Three guest speakers presented their experience of various aspects of the PhD journey.

**Time Release**
15 AIT academic staff have been awarded Time Release under the 2019/20 programme to enable them to actively engage in research across two faculties of Engineering and Science representing Departments of Polymer, Informatics, Civil, Life & Physical, Sport, Social Science & Nursing.

**MIRC Expansion Timelines**
- 31-Oct-19 - Appointed Contractor - Glenman Corporation
- 19-Nov-19 - Start date on site
- Aug-20 - Estimated time to completion
- Sept/Oct-20 - Final account

**New Frontiers**
Acres Machinery, a participant start-up on NF 2025, showcased its iTarra, the world’s first multi-industry driverless smart tractor, at the Agritechnica show in Germany in November, attracting attention from the industry’s largest manufacturers.

**TTSI3 Pipeline Fund**
- Knowledge Transfer Ireland issued a Call for groups of HEIs to establish a Technology Transfer Pipeline Fund – to award proof of concept funding of up to €20k to research projects – to undertake prototyping, market validation or spin-out business proposition development.
- Our TTSI3 Consortium (MU-AIT-WIT-ITC) submitted an application on 8 November.

**Technology Transfer**
The office supports RI directors, TGP managers, researchers and postgraduates in the three Research Institutes, CISD and the Faculties by reviewing and drafting documents in relation to Inter-Institutional Agreements, Heads of Agreements, IP Ownership Arrangements, NDAs, Material Transfer Agreements, Data Management Agreements and IP queries on numerous collaborations, wholly funded contract research and postgraduate projects. The office concludes all funding contracts and where applicable negotiates terms of these contracts in line with best practice.
Bioscience Research Institute

There is a sustained strategic push to grow researcher capacity and scale in the BRI that will serve core innovation and educational needs of the institute and meet commensurate needs of sister faculties. To this end, BRI has recently been successful in securing €128k from Bord luscaigh Mhara for the development of freshwater aquaculture that will support recruitment of a dedicated postdoctoral researcher and a Research Assistant. This will see further development of cutaway freshwater aquaculture trial studies powered by wind turbines and supported by Bord Na Mona. This funding will retain Dr Emma Murphy as new BRI postdoctoral researcher who was conferred recently from AIT – a LinkedIn tweet highlighting Emma’s doctoral success received over 3,000 views and 58 likes globally.

This, akin with a considerable number of other ongoing funding, is focused on developing eco-innovations for advance agriculture, food, medtech. International research in these domains has also been actualised where advert has also been posted for new postdoctoral research under the new €2.9M Interreg Atlantic Area Neptunus project. The duties of this postdoctoral research will develop an effective transnational model that will exploit social marketing and mixed methodology approaches to review and highlight major outputs from this EC project to inform behavioural change of stakeholders and policy makers. This new postdoctoral research will merge Arts, Humanities, Social Science (AHSS) with STEM education and will also be supported through collaboration with Aisling Keenan, Faculty of Business. This Interreg project focuses on advanced eco-innovation and eco-labelling across the seafood-water-energy domain for regional development and is highly impactful.

BRI will also kick-start a new €1.2m H2020 MSCA RISE project in January 2020 on workforce training and mobility for the seafood sector across Europe. In advance of same, Prof Rowan and Lorna Walsh met with Irish SME partners Keywater Fisheries Ltd and Wild Atlantic Shellfish Ltd earlier this month (refer to image taken at Keywater Fisheries, Boyle, Co. Roscommon).

Prof Rowan supported a dedicated Future Jobs and Skills Workshop on Circular Bioeconomy by way of presentation of research funding secured nationally and internationally on this topic, which was organised by the Faculty of Adult Education and Life Long Learning here at AIT.

Dr Mark Lynch (BRI Hub Officer), facilitated through Dr Huw Lewis and the Registrar’s Office in providing induction to new postgraduates on new structured doctoral programme.

Prof Rowan participated in RD&E meeting of THEA that discussed topical issues that included inter alia provision for research integrity training, support for researchers and career path.

Prof Rowan conducted expert evaluations for European Commission under H2020 Future and Emerging Technologies call. Several engagements were made with industry and stakeholders including Bord Na Mona, Teleflex with view to exploring partnership funding. The BRI is enhancing further engagement with faculties across AIT viz a viz mentorship of 4 early phase staff who are co-supervisors of doctoral students along with chairing Stage 1 panel interviews for postgraduate students.

BRI is facilitating and supporting important institutional initiatives including Research Day Seminar on 22 November, 2019 along with providing expert advice and references for high-calibre postgraduate students who had applied under prestigious Irish Research Council Doctoral Scholarship.

Prof Rowan and BRI staff are supporting Faculty of Science and Health in trajectory towards achieving DA10 in Health and Sports domains along with meeting needs for achieving Technological University (TU) status.

Prof Rowan met with Dr Jon Parry, new Principal of Gurteen College to discuss collaborative opportunities for research and in education.

BRI staff and researchers continue to publish extensively in leading journals and are grateful to AIT librarian Jane Burns and her team for their continued expert support to our enrolled learners.

BRI is also supporting international mobility and doctoral training for Brazil in the area of health.

Prof Rowan also attended British-Irish Chamber of Commerce for Research and Higher Education in the Mansion House that discusses strategies for growing collaborations between Irish and UK researchers.

Materials Research Institute

AIT Future Jobs and Skills Event: Preparing the Midlands to Transition to a Circular Economy

AIT has a central role to play in the reorganisation of the midlands and Irish economy as a circular economy. At the AIT Future Jobs and Skills Event, Dr. Margaret Fournet presented on how science can be used to solve the plastics waste problem and provide a route to transition away from our current resource, use and dispose based economy. “In the case of plastics, the life-circle can be completed using innovative technological developments. In tandem with nature’s methods we can develop the science to biodegrade waste plastic and regenerate it as new bioplastics which meet our needs without resulting in pollution”, explained Dr. Fournet. Dr. Fournet is leading AIT’s new pan EU-China flagship Horizon 2020 project designed to mitigate against the unintended consequences of plastics and provide an avenue for a sustainable future.
As we transition to the circular from the current linear approach, the opportunities for new skills, job creation, information and technology development, enhanced cross continent and international collaboration are immense. Indeed studies highlight that the largest job growth will be localised in more rural and less congested settings, pointing to a bright future for the Midlands region and beyond.

Horizon 2020 is the EU’s Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. It is one of seven flagship initiatives in Europe 2020, the European Union’s ten-year jobs and growth strategy. It has a budget of €75 billion and runs from 2014 to 2020. Horizon 2020 funding (i.e. grants) is awarded on a competitive basis to researchers and companies across three main pillars: Excellent Science, Leadership in Enabling and Industrial Technologies and Societal Challenges.

AIT joined Irish stakeholders in welcoming the EU Commissioner for Research Science and Innovation to Ireland.

Commissioner Moedas is renowned for the key role he has played in advancing European research and innovation. On a recent visit to Ireland the commissioner engaged with academic and industrial stakeholders leading Irish research and Innovation. At a round table meeting at the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, AIT’s Dr. Margaret Fournet outlined AIT’s newly awarded H2020 EU-China flag ship project. The commissioner remarked how very encouraging it is that EU funding is being adeptly applied in dealing with some of our greatest global challenges. Horizon 2020 is the EU’s Framework Programme for Research and Innovation.

Ireland has secured €760 million in funding under the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme to date. Minister for Training, Skills, Innovation, Research and Development, John Halligan stated “I am delighted to welcome Commissioner Moedas and highlight the significant efforts and successes of Irish researchers and businesses in Horizon 2020.

AIT’s success in leading H2020 projects highlights its role in ensuring that Ireland is well positioned to embrace new innovation and technological changes. The subject of AIT’s latest H2020 entitled “Bio-Innovation of a circular economy for plastics” is both apt and timely as the Ireland impinges on the transition from a linear to a circular economy. The H2020 project outputs are designed to develop new skills and next generation technologies and is fully aligned with the Government’s Future Jobs Ireland and Innovation 2020 strategies.

European Space Agency project update meeting

AIT is a consortium member on the ESA funded IMPERIAL project which aims to develop a 3D printer which is capable of producing high strength polymer parts in space which are unlimited in size. The Project is led by OHB in Germany with BeeveryCreative (Portugal) and Azimut Space (Germany) and AIT as collaborators. The latest project update was held in Averio Portugal and included a site tour of the BeeVeryCreative 3D printing manufacturing and research site. The consortium meeting was held in the local Averio incubation centre and was attended by Dr Declan Devine who is a part of the AIT team along with Dr Sean Lyons, Dr Ian Major and Dr Ali Reza ZanJanjiam. The project is progressing well and if it is successful there is scope for further funding to send the developed printer to the ISS. ESA have also recently launched a call for ideas where researchers can propose projects that can be implemented on a future moon base.

AIT joins the Irish Bioeconomy Foundation

AIT has formally joined the Irish Bioeconomy Foundation (IBF). The IBF (Growing the Irish Bioeconomy Together) is
Ireland’s national bioeconomy association and innovation cluster. IBF was founded in mid-2017 to establish a fora of industry, academia and policy leaders around Ireland’s emerging bioeconomy. Our mission is to promote the conversion of Ireland’s natural land & sea resources to high value products for the development of a sustainable bioeconomy that is globally competitive and creates local development.

**TSM/Sumitomo-Demag agree to loan state-of-the-art injection moulding machine to AIT**

At the K show (Worlds no 1 Plastics show) in Dusseldorf, AIT researchers announced a new collaboration between (APT/AIT), TSM and Sumitomo DeMag working towards the creation of a Injection Moulding centre of excellence for the Irish Polymer industry at AITs APT facility. The collaborative technologies will be available to industry early December 2019. Dr Michael Hopkins and Dr Noel Gately have been working on this agreement for several months and this machine aids to AITs already impressive list of industry relevant items of research equipment.

**Funding success**

AIT’s new EU-China Horizon 2020 project “Bio Innovation of a Circular Economy for Plastics” *Opening an avenue to a sustainable world*

Horizon 2020 is the EU’s biggest EU Research and Innovation programme. AIT will lead a new €7M EU-China flagship project designed to biotransform plastic waste into new sustainable ready to use plastics. This pan European-Chinese collaboration, includes partners from nine countries, representing some of the world’s most polluted regions. Plastics are ubiquitous with our modern lifestyles and have facilitated much of our social, technical, and economic advancement. However, plastic now permeates every corner of our planet and countries including Ireland continue to exceed annual greenhouse gas emission allocations. The BioICEP project technologies will be critical to decarbonising Irish and global economies.

**AIT and AMBER partners forge links on new sustainable materials developments**

AMBER (Advanced Materials and BioEngineering Research) is a Science Foundation Ireland funded centre that provides a partnership between leading researchers in materials science and industry. AMBER is now building a new focus on sustainability, led by Prof. Justin Holmes of the Department of Chemistry at UCC. AIT’s strong track record in polymer engineering and established strategic alliances with industry, combined with new developments in bioplastics and EU funded research on waste plastic valorisation, were recently presented by Dr. Margaret Fournet at the Amber Polymer/Plastic Recycling event in UCC’s Environmental Research Institute. Prof Holmes and his team now plan to visit AIT to further explore opportunities for AIT and AMBER partners to deliver ambitious research- industry sustainability goals.

**BioICEP: Transforming waste plastic into sustainable ready-to-use bioplastics**

In nature, DNA and other large bio macromolecules, akin to the polymers in plastics, are readily digested and recycled to produce new functional biomolecules such as proteins. This a continuous and completely sustainable cycle. Polymers and waste plastic are in fact a valuable carbon resource and the BioICEP technologies are designed to access and harvest this rich resource in tandem with nature. The project co-ordinator
and lead scientist, Dr. Margaret Fournet explained “This technology will be instrumental in the global mission to sustainably manage and transition away from petroleum based plastics, while reducing our carbon emissions and contributing positively to our environment, economy and society. To achieve this the BioICEP team will operate a series of innovative technologies to accelerate and enhance plastic biodegradation processes that would organically develop over much longer time scales”.

BioICEP Technology to Complete the Life Circle for Plastics

In a biomimetic strategy mirrored in nature, petroleum plastic waste will first undergo depolymerisation using mechanano-mechanical, microbial and enzymatic breakdown releasing the carbon rich feedstocks. New high market demand biopolymers and bioproducts will then be generated using fermentation and boprocessing.

Carlos Moedas, Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation has stated that: “Research and innovation are the engines of Europe’s progress and vital to addressing today’s new pressing challenges like immigration, climate change, clean energy and healthy societies”.

The AIT led BioICEP project has the potential to reduce the burden of plastic waste in the environment and pave the way for a decarbonised economy making sustainability the lifestyle norm.

Dr Yuanyuan Chen SFI Industrial Fellowship progress

Yuanyuan Chen was the inaugural recipient of the Athena Swan ‘Women in Science ‘Award. Yuanyuan is currently a postdoctoral researcher and is working on biodegradable stents with Boston Scientific Galway funded by SFI, this fellowship started from Aug 2019 and will complete by July 2020. The project is going well and a prototype of biodegradable endo stents were built via braiding technique, which expanded the focus of the current project from coronary stents to endovascular stents, such as peripheral stents etc. Up to now Yuan has completed training from Boston Scientific Galway in the areas of R&D engineering, Process & Development engineering, SolidWorks, Arduino, and lean essential course.

Yuan is involved in an EU project InSilC in coronary stent designing and attended the consortium meeting in Belgrade 4-7 Sep 2019. She has attended several Cost Action meetings, including ENIUS in Switzerland 9-13 Sep and BIONECA in Greece 7-11 Oct. She also presented in a seminar in reinforced polymer for use in coronary stents in NUIG on 18th Oct 2019. Finally, she attended the SFI summit 7-8 Nov 2019.

ENIUS Training school funding awards:

**Ureteral stents: from modelling to commercialisation, Switzerland Date – Sep 10th – Sep 11th 2019.**

Chaitra Venkatesh, Yuanyuan Chen and Yvonne Cortese from the MRI were successful in obtaining travel grants out of 15 EU students to attend the “Urethral stent: from modelling to commercialisation” training school held in the Swiss institute for translational and entrepreneurial medicine (SITEM), University of Bern, Switzerland. As a part of ENIUS COST Action, the training school assembled a multi-disciplinary group of clinicians, biologists and physical scientists to present recent advances in mathematical, computational, in-vitro, and in-vivo approaches to further our understanding of fluid mechanics within the stented ureter and to identify current challenges in urinary stent design. Leading speakers from the world of industry and regulatory affairs shared their experiences of commercialisation in the medtech industry, and how they have addressed industrial and regulatory challenges when taking their “next-generation” products from bench-to-beds.

Whilst taking part in the training course, Chaitra Venkatesh presented a poster of her work titled “Development of high strength drug-eluting biodegradable stent by additive manufacturing”. This work was awarded as ‘Best Poster award’ in the category of ‘Ureteral stent Innovation’. Under the supervision of Dr Declan Devine, Dr Ian Major and Dr Sean Lyons, Chaitra Venkatesh has transferred to the Ph.D. register and will continue her work on development of biodegradable stents.

Yvonne Cortese presented a poster of her work entitled “In vitro urethra model to demonstrate bacterial migration during medical device insertion”. Under the supervision of Dr Declan Devine and Dr Andy Fogarty, Yvonne has transferred to the PhD register and will continue her work as part of an industry collaboration between AIT and Teleflex.

Dr Yuanyuan Chen, under the supervision of Dr Declan Devine, presented a poster titled “Development and in vitro evaluation of Polylactic acid/halloysite nanotubes based biodegradable composites for use in coronary stents”.

**Depolymerisation**

Mechano-
Biocatalytic

**Biosprocessing**

output feedstocks

**New Bioplastics & Bioproducts**
Advances in Urinary Stents. Biomaterials, Coatings and Drug Eluting Stents (DES), Poland
Date – Sep 26th – Sep 27th, 2019.

Chaitra Venkadesh also received funding to attend the ‘Advances in Urinary Stents. Biomaterials, Coatings and Drug Eluting Stents (DES)’ training school which brought together a multidisciplinary group of engineers, researchers and urologists to present the Complications, Impact of Quality of life, future developments in Urinary Stents (Biomaterials, Coatings and drug eluting stents) by facilitating scientific knowledge exchange between young researchers.

Whilst taking part in the training course, Chaitra Venkatesh presented a poster of her work titled “Development of high strength drug-eluting biodegradable stent by additive manufacturing”.

Publications

Dr Yuanyuan Chen (SFI industry Fellow MRI/Boston Scientific) has recently published a study which investigated the sterilisation of 3D printed parts. The project was a collaborative effort with industry with Arburg (Germany) producing 3D printed parts and Steris (Tullamore) sterilising the parts prior to testing in AIT.

Yuanyuan Chen, Martin Neff, Brian McEvoy, Zhi Cao, Romina Pezzoli, Alan Murphy, Noel Gately, Michael Hopkins Jnr, Neil J Rowan, Declan M Devine, 2019. 3D printed polymers are less stable than injection moulded counterparts when exposed to terminal sterilization processes using novel vaporized hydrogen peroxide and electron beam processes. Polymer 183, 121870

PhD candidate Chaitra Venkadesh has recently published her research findings related to the use of nanotubes to control the release rate of active pharmaceutical ingredients while simultaneously reinforcing the polymer Matrix.


PhD candidate Yvonne Cortese who is working in collaboration with Teleflex has recently published her findings related to the development of a novel invitro model which can be used to test bacterial migration during insertion of urinary catheters. This model will be further developed to test the effect of antimicrobial coatings on the prevention of urinary tract infections without the need for animal testing.

AIT research team attends the annual CONFIRM plenary in Killarney

10 researchers from the Software and Materials research Institutes (SRI/MRI) recently attended the annual “get together” of the SFI Centre for Smart Manufacturing (CONFIRM) in Killarney on October 24 and 25. CONFIRM is a six year €47 million project with 5 million attributed directly to AIT. This project intends to establish Ireland as a world leader in the field of manufacturing. CONFIRM is led by the University of Limerick. AIT is making a major contribution to CONFIRM in the areas of Smart Polymer Manufacturing and the design of Artificial Intelligence (AI) assisted manufacturing infrastructure as well as using Virtual and Augmented Reality to achieve more effective human-robot interaction. The AIT research team includes PhD students, post-doctoral researchers as well as funded investigators from both MRI and SRI. AIT makes a very significant input to CONFIRM both through original, leading research as well as driving innovative industry solution through collaboration with commercial partners.

The CONFIRM team is shown in the picture below:
Students’ Union
1. Welfare Week

Welfare week took place during the week of the 16th of September by our VP for Welfare and Accommodation officer Mary Doyle. The week involved running mini events around mental health, consent, drug and alcohol awareness and healthy relationships. Any Man Domestic Violence organisation and Esker House facilitated a workshop during the week along with Consent and Safe Talk training provided for the students during the week. Our VP held a bake sale fundraiser for the Mater Foundation with an amazing €350 raised on the day.

2. Mental Health Week

This week involved the 3Ts who came on campus to provide a visual event of 105 bags with each bag representing the number of students lost last year to suicide. We had Rory’s Stories in attendance which gathered great interest from our students on campus and got the conversation around men’s mental health going. We also had a visit from Athlone SPCA to provide some stress relief with their puppy’s and dogs which was truly enjoyed by our students and staff.

3. Class Rep training

This year we have over 161 student representatives recruited across campus by our Deputy for Education and Communications officer John Devine. We held our annual class rep training on the 7th of October in the Sheraton hotel in Athlone, with 81 reps receiving training on the day. The AIT staff members in attendance on the day were John Doyle from the Fees Department, Bernie Langtry from the Disability Services, Joanne Gillivan from AIT library, Fr. Shay Casey our Institute Chaplain and Mick McGann from our Counselling services. Mick conducted a workshop with our reps on consent. Marie Lyons, BMW Regional Officer from the USI in attendance.

4. Lobby Day

Due to safety concerns with storm Lorenzo on October 3rd, the annual student march in Dublin for Higher Education Funding was called off. Storm Lorenzo may have stopped our students marching but they ensured their voices were still going to be heard. The students came out in force to the Students’ Union Hub on the day to write letters to their local TDs and Ministers voicing their dissatisfaction at the lack of Higher Education Funding. Over 200 letters were sent out on behalf of our students on the day.

5. Day of the Dead Festival - New Horizon fundraiser

The Union together with Charlies Bar and Karma Nightclub facilitated a festival to raise funds for the New Horizon charity, who work closely with the two local direct provision centres operated in and around Athlone. The Union wanted to build awareness on the direct provision system operated in Ireland and bring awareness to the initiative on campus that earned AIT the College of Sanctuary award back in 2017. With the assistance of the students we raised €4,000 for New Horizon a worthy charity.

6. Fundraiser AIT Counselling services

The Union handed over €5,266.75 on the 14th of November to AIT Counselling services. This fundraiser was in memory of our deceased student Jordan Murphy who tragically lost his life on the roads last year. The fantastic amount raised was due to the tremendous work by Jordan’s Dad Alan Murphy and student Aoife Moloughney along with the Unions RAG week fundraising events.

7. Societies Officer

The Union employed a member of staff to coordinate societies for students on campus. Shannan McKenna took up her role in August 2019. She organised a society week on campus to increase engagement and get students involved. Societies has grown from 12 active societies last year to 44 active societies this year & continues to grow each week all contributing to the student experience on campus.
Faculty of Continuing Professional, Online and Distance Learning.
1. Lecturers and students from BA in Law programme attended Justis database training, an online legal database, on 14th October. This training was organised by AIT Library.

2. The Faculty offers a schedule of one day Career Workshops to our part-time flexible students. The objective of the workshops are to give students the opportunity to prepare for job searching and interviewing, career development and career coaching. The first of these sessions was held on Saturday 19th October and was attended by 18 students.

The objective of the day was to gain the tools and discover the resources to

a. Identify the different ways to manage your career development
b. Set short and long term career goals
c. Develop a career plan
d. Explore career options
e. Initiate career coaching conversations with your manager
f. Identify how to make a successful job application
g. Prepare for a job interview
h. Using social media in your job search

This was delivered by Ms. Denise Dolan Careers office.

3. The Department delivered a number of writing skills workshops on Saturdays for part-time flexible learners. The academic writing workshop is available to all Faculty students and helps the students to improve their writing skills in completing assignments, essays and projects. The workshop covers the following topics

Planning to Write

a. Making sense of the assignment brief
b. Planning your writing using mind maps
c. Time management

4. The Faculty hosted a conference focusing on ‘Future Jobs and Skills for a Circular Economy’ on Tuesday 29th October in the Douglas Hyde Theatre, with over 100 delegates from academia, industry and public service attending. The conference was jointly organised by the Community Reuse Network Ireland (www.crni.ie), the Eastern Midlands Region Waste Office (www.emwr.ie), the Chartered Institute of Waste Management (www.CIWM.Co.Uk) and the Midlands Regional Skills Forum manager.

5. On Thursday 7th November, the Faculty, in conjunction with Teaching and Learning delivered a lunch time webinar to all part-time academic staff as part of its ongoing CPD programme and COP hour. This online workshop was been designed to provide an opportunity for staff to discuss the issues of plagiarism and become more familiar with identifying it. Similarity checking software, Turnitin, was examined as a tool for assisting staff and students in recognising instances where work may need attention to avoid plagiarism. Staff were given the opportunity to share ideas on how they encourage students to avoid plagiarism in their own classes. The lecture is available online for staff who did not attend the class. The lecture was facilitated by Ms Nuala Harding and Ms Catherine O’Donohue.

6. The Faculty participated in a number of Workshops for Bord na Mona employees in Lanesborough, Co Longford (7th October) and Blackwater, Co Offaly (8th October), Mountdillon (Nov 7th) and Blackwater (Nov 8th). The workshops give Bord na Mona employees an opportunity to explore reskilling and upskilling courses in AIT. Mr Niall O’Connor attended on behalf of the Faculty.

7. The MSc in Environmental, Health and Safety (Year 2) completed a field trip to Edenderry power station, Mount Lucas Wind Farm and Lough Boora Bogland rejuvenation project on Saturday 9th November. Mr Andy Fogarty, Ms Chris McCormack and Mr David Fallon led the visit.

8. The Faculty welcomes eight (8) new external examiners to a number of its programmes. The increase is as a result of the significant increase in academic programmes in the Department this year.

9. The Certificate in Bio Pharma and Med Technology class in Athlone was visited by Ms Elaine Nicholson, HR manager, PPD on 11th November and in Longford by Mr Ciaran Corcoran, Programme Director, Abbotts Longford on 19 November. These visits are part of the Faculty’s industry collaboration programme to give students an insight into local industries in the various industry sectors.

10. The Faculty participated in the Graduate Fair on 17th October. The stand received a considerable number of queries in relation to Springboard+ programmes and funding eligibility.

11. The Faculty Dean and HOD attended a HEA/Garda Siochana meeting in the Garda College in Templemore. The meeting discussed the availability in the IOT sector of suitable teaching and learning spaces throughout the
country on an ongoing basis to maintain An Garda Síochána's ongoing CPD programmes and the possibility of developing research and academic programme links.

12. The Faculty’s graduation took place on Friday 1st November. 190 students graduated with a variety of awards in business, law, social studies, early years care and education, Springboard+ programmes.

| Business and Law programmes | 34 students |
| Social Care and Early Years Care programmes | 52 students |
| Special Purpose Awards | 78 students |
| Professional Awards | 26 students |

13. The ceremony also included nine (9) employees from the Heat Merchants Group who graduated with a Certificate in Business in Management and Leadership. This was a year long blended learning programme delivered exclusively for and to staff from the Heat Merchants group, which culminated with group presentations by the students in the Boardroom, AIT which were attended by members of Heat Merchants’ senior management team.

14. The Faculty programme boards for semester 1 took place on Wednesday 13 November.

15. The Faculty along with other Faculties was successful in its bid for additional funding via extra places under the Springboard initiative. In total an additional €312,869 was awarded to the Institute across four programmes:

a. An Introduction to Data Analysis and Visualisation (10 places)
b. Certificate in Supervisory Management and Team Leadership (25 places)
c. Higher Diploma in Leadership (20 Places)
d. Certificate in Culinary Skills (10 Places)

16. The Faculty Dean attended an update on Springboard + on 20th Nov for 2020/2021. In summary:

a. Only 58% of programmes submitted received funding in 2019/2020.
b. 7,500 places were awarded nationally. AIT were awarded 807 in 2019/2020.
c. Springboard+ will be approx. €34m again in 2020/2021.
d. Requirements are similar to 2019/2020.
e. Significant emphasis will be placed on student data and success rates at programme level to support funding for following years.
f. Evidence based research on companies and how the funding has benefitted them will be required as both corporate and industry level.
g. The call will open in January with similar deadlines as 2019/2020.
h. Workbased projects as opposed to work placement are now required, as the majority of students are now working.
i. All documentation must be maintained for a minimum time period for all students from an administrative perspective. These will be required for audit purposes.
j. Only 4.5% of Springboard+ participants are ‘returners’ or ‘homeworkers’. All providers are requested to consider how they could motivate this group going forward. This group has approximately 250,000 people that we need to target.
k. Each provider must create significant collateral in relation to how they market and promote the programmes (video, podcasts etc.), using student testimonials.
l. All ESF logos etc. must be on all Institute material as the funding given is significant.
Office of the Vice President Academic Affairs and Registrar
Firstly, I would like to acknowledge all the hard work by the staff within the remit of the VP Academic Affairs and Registrar over the last number of months which has been an extremely busy and hugely productive period. Below is a snapshot of some of the work that has been done.

**AIT Library**

**Information Literacy & Research Skills**

Since the start of the Autumn Semester of 2019 the Library Staff have very busy working with our students and Academic partners in a variety of ways. The most significant of these endeavors has been an increase in the number of Information Literacy Sessions delivered by library staff in classrooms. There have been a total of 100+ Library sessions carried out by library staff since the start of this academic year. These sessions took place with the support and invitation of the college lecturers and are to support students in their information literacy and referencing needs and training. The majority of library outreach sessions are 1 hour in length and consisted of Subject tailored Information literacy and referencing support sessions, there was also a number of AIT library ‘Positive Living section’, outreach/class relaxation sessions carried out during this time.

As part of the Library Research Workshop Series there was a workshop delivered on the topic “An Introduction to Twitter & How to use it effectively for Research & Networking”. There are 3 planned workshops for the Spring Semester these are;

**Semester 2**
- Monday February 17th Introduction to Research Management- How to Organise your Data
- Monday March 23th Managing Your Research Identity with ORCID
- Monday May 18th Systematic Reviews- Management & Publication

**AIT Host Library Regional Event**

On Oct 11th AIT Library hosted a joint CPD event organised by the Western Regional Section and the Academic & Special Libraries Section of the Library Association of Ireland.

Library staff from across library sectors gathered at Athlone Institute of Technology for a networking event where Skills and CPD were the themes steering the seminar.

The opening talk related to library outreach and collaboration with student support personal in AIT library. Michael Doheny, AIT presented about the library initiative around a bibliotherapy section in the AIT Library and an accompanying Positive Living LibGuide.

The second training on CPD involved a presentation by Michelle Breen (WRSLAI chair) and David Hughes (A&S Chair) and a facilitated discussion/workshop on the topic by all attendees. Participants from HSE libraries, the Institutes of Technology, university and public libraries were vocal in their contributions around the CPD needs they identify for themselves and for the profession.

Tania Marsh represented AIT Library at the FORCE 11 Annual Conference https://www.force11.org/ on October 16th and 17th at the BT Murrayfield Rugby Stadium, Edinburgh. FORCE11 (The Future of Research Communication and eScholarship) is a community of scholars, librarians, archivists, publishers and research funders that help facilitate the change toward improved knowledge creation and sharing. FORCE11 aim to bring about a change in modern scholarly communications through the effective use of information technology.

With presenters ranging from Günter Waibel (Vice Provost, California Digital Library), Erika Pastrana (Editorial Director, Springer Nature), Jacqueline Proven (Open Access Services Manager, University of St Andrews) and Jason Priem (Co-founder, Our Research/UnPaywall), attendance at this event afforded Tania the opportunity to learn from some of the most prominent people in the Scholarly Communications community and will in turn enable development of library services in support of AIT’s Research endeavours.
Employee Awareness Day (Library Stand) – Oct 30th

Association of Ireland
AIT library hosted a stand at the Employee Awareness Day on October 30th. The HR Employee Awareness Day was an opportunity for employees to better understand the policies/procedures and employee benefits available to AIT staff. The library role in supporting staff and students primarily through our Positive Living Collection was on display. There was also information about other library services, research support and outreach to students. The ‘Positive living’ collection in AIT library is a bibliotherapy collection created with support and consultation with the AIT counselling service. Staff and students consulted with the library staff at the Library stand, on library supports. There was also facility to check out the ‘Positive Living’ books at the stand and a good number of books were issued on the morning. There was a lot of interest from attendees and a good exchange of information and networking.

AIT Student Ambassadors
At the end of October AIT Library celebrated our Student Ambassadors who were involved in all student Library Induction this past semester. This new initiative was developed and managed by our Outreach/Marketing Librarian, Joanne Gillivan.

Student Resource Centre projects and initiatives

Counselling Service
The Counselling service continues to respond to increased student demand, seeing a 21% increase in counselling sessions provided as compared to the same time period last year.

In addition to providing counselling to students, the service also provides support and consultation to staff involved in helping students and works with external stakeholders involved in mental health provision.

The Counselling Service and Healthy Campus coordinator brought a series of workshops regarding mental health by REGARI on campus this term.

The Counselling Service delivered a series of workshops on Resilience and Procrastination in addition to delivering Active Consent Training to Class Reps this semester.

HEA Innovation and Transformation Project
In 2018 the Higher Education Authority established a fund to support innovative and transformative proposals from institutions or groups of institutions with potential application and impact across the higher education system.

A consortium of HEI’s (TCD, UCD and AIT, with TCD as overall lead) were successful in their proposal under this Innovation and Transformation Programme call, securing €3 million in funding for their proposal:

Student Support Services’ Retention and Engagement Strategy: Consolidation of Best Practice, Centralisation of Data and Innovation in Student Experience.

This project is a 3 year project and is divided into 3 work packages. AIT is lead on Work Package 2:

Lead: AIT Treasa Fox with postdoctoral researchers Dr Deirdre Byrne and Dr Jessica Surdey. SynthSCS Project: Synthesis and Knowledge Transfer across Irish Higher Education Student Counselling Services

2. A. Assisting with the research and development of best practices in relation to suicide prevention and critical incident response across the HEI sector

2. B. Development & mapping best practice in relation interagency work so as to enhance service for students

2. C. Developing a repository for all HEI student counselling services containing evidence-based and best practice resources e.g. groups, workshops, self-help and online resources

• In response to one of their commitments in “Connecting for Life – Ireland’s National Strategy to Reduce Suicide 2015-2020”, the HEA have tasked the AIT project team to draft a national strategy for the Higher Education sector for HE student mental health and suicide prevention.
The draft is in progress with wider stakeholder consultation due in Q1 and Q2 2020, and publication due in Q3 2020.

**Other early outputs include:**
- Partnering with Student Affairs Ireland in producing a conference on campus crises, tragedy and recovery: “A Day Like Any Other, Until It’s Not”, 12th June 2019 UCC.

Presentations included: Dr Chris Flynn, Virginia Tech, campus response to a mass shooting; Gardaí Special Operations and Emergency response, lessons learned from a large scale exercise on a campus, Exercise Barracuda in DCU 2018; media and communications in a crisis; UCC Emergency Management Team.
- Partnering with National Suicide Research Foundation on their national seminar, 10th October 2019. Masterclasses on initiatives for prevention of HE student suicide
- Working groups established with HSE Mental Health services, HSE national clinical leads in suicide prevention and National Office for Suicide Prevention.
- Community of Practice and Research partnerships established with relevant international bodies/researchers.

**Student Health Centre**
The influence of staff shortages, emergency department overcrowding, waiting times for procedures and a shortage of general practitioners across our health service continue to severely impact our students which is reflected in an ever increasing demand at the student health centre.

**Locum Nurse**
We are delighted to welcome Mary Muldoon R.G.N. to our team this month as locum nurse.

**Student Health Matters App**
Institute Nurse & Health Centre Coordinator, Laura Tully was delighted to collaborate with The Irish Student Health Association and Expert Self Care Ltd to deliver an exciting innovative health tool to students which was given a soft launch this semester. The FREE ‘Student Health Matters’ mobile app provides clear and reliable health information for students in Ireland. When students download the app, they can choose AIT as their college for additional information about our own college supports. The app helps students look after their health and to stay safe when worried about a health problem or when they are too embarrassed to ask for help and don’t know what to do next. Similar to a digital book, the app works offline and offers easy and quick access to useful health information, help and advice and more. Available to download from both the App Store and from Google Play.

**Sláintecare Fund**
Following a successful ‘pitch to Sláintecare’ by Institute Nurse & Health Centre Coordinator, Laura Tully, Athlone Institute of Technology is to launch a comprehensive student sexual health service on campus in January 2020. The innovative nurse-led service will be funded by the Sláintecare Integration Fund and will reduce the substantial medical, non-medical and economic costs associated with sexually transmitted infection and address the general upward trend in STI notifications, the greatest burden of which falls among those aged under 25 and men who have sex with men. The pioneering sexual health service will be delivered directly to students in the context of the campus community, ensuring equitable access in familiar surroundings which promotes patient comfort and ultimately prevents and reduces the burden of sexually transmitted infections. The service will be delivered in line with the aims of the HSE National Sexual Health Strategy (2015-2020) and the Healthy Ireland Framework (2013-2025).
The granting of this fund has attracted significant acclaim to date on social and print media as well as on Midlands 103 / Shannonside FM. Laura Tully was invited to write an article in this month’s Epi-Insight which can be accessed here: http://ndsc.newsweaver.ie/epiinsight/10c9xoyti3o

Disability and Learning Support Service
Alongside new students intake and assessment, and ongoing learning support provision, the Disability and Learning Support service have introduced a new client management system, MindaClient. In addition to holding student data, the system will allow staff to track interactions and communications with students which we expect will improve service efficiency, data management and reporting and most importantly the student experience.

Tutor Services
Maths/IT Tutor
Tutorial attendance in Semester 1 has increased compared with the previous academic year with most students seeking supports attending weekly classes since week 2 of term.

In comparison to recent years, Semester 1 has seen a significant increase in the number of attendees from the Faculty of Science and Health in particular.

Science Tutor Service
The demand for science tutorials has been exceptionally high this year and from earlier in the semester than usual. This could be as a result of the greater visibility and flexibility of the service afforded by the new office along the perimeter of the canteen and increased emphasis during AIT Connect 7 week student induction programme.

The service is also seeing some new demand for tutorials for students from the Department of Lifelong Learning. These sessions are being facilitated during normal business hours with classes from 5pm – 6pm which are not popular with undergraduate students.

Academic Writing Centre
We welcomed Tim Hannigan as our new Acting Academic Writing Centre Tutor this semester. Tim is an experienced writer and journalist. He is the author of several narrative history books, and he has worked on travel guidebooks to destinations across Asia. He studied journalism at the University of Gloucestershire, and recently completed work on a PhD at the University of Leicester. As an academic he mainly works on travel literature and nature writing. His research has been published in various international journals and edited collections.

AIT Careers Expo 2019
On Thursday, 17th October, we held our annual Career and Further Education Expo with record numbers of employers participating. We welcomed 75 exhibitors from a broad cross section of industry, among them Abbott, Alexion Pharmaceuticals, Almac Group, RBK, Johnson and Johnson Vision, Neueda Technologies, Centre Parcs Longford Forest Park, Harmac Medical Products, Ericsson, PPD, Medtronic, Sidero, Teleflex, and Boston Scientific. Over 1,200 students also attended the event and were well prepared to talk to employers having had assistance with CV preparation in the previous weeks through the Careers Service. The event was heavily promoted through social media.

Careers Connect Software Launch
Athlone Institute of Technology’s Careers Office have launched a brand new ‘AIT Careers Connect’ website which will help manage contact with students, graduates and employers more efficiently.

With our new AIT Careers Connect, students can book a 15 minute appointment with a career development adviser, book a CV or application review, book their place at an event, view graduate job vacancies, graduate programmes, ask a question or sign up for email alerts. Employers can also use it to advertise student or graduate job vacancies and book to attend our events or recruitment fairs.

Alumni
At this year’s graduation ceremony, graduates were encouraged to register and join the AIT Alumni Association on Careers Connect. We had Alumni Ambassadors actively promoting sign up during pre-graduation assembly and post-graduation refreshments and also ran a competition with an overnight stay in the Sheraton which was kindly sponsored by our Employer contacts in the Hodson Bay and Sheraton hotels. We will meet with final year classes throughout 2019-20 to encourage advance sign up as next year’s Alumni and encourage maximum engagement and registration.

AIT Careers Webinars
AIT Careers have moved into the on-line space broadcasting webinars in September 2019 and making recordings available on Moodle Student Resources page to ensure
flexibility of access and wider dissemination of learning for our students. These webinars are also a very useful resource for students for whom English isn’t their first language as they can replay sections to ensure they fully understand the content.

**AIT Work Readiness Podcast**
This semester, we launched a bespoke programme designed and delivered by external Leadership Consultant and Corporate Coach, Stephen Naughton. We had tremendous engagement by students who were very enthusiastic in their praise for the initiative. Over 300 students were in attendance over 3 days and our 2 hours Workshop focussed on:

- Needs versus wants – in the role search
- Personal branding & professionalism
- Network to get work
- CV tailoring and standards
- The role of influencing in interviewing.

**AHECS Executive Board**
It has been a busy few months with the Executive Board of Careers Services reviewing progress to date and planning for the next two year term of office. We had our recent Strategy planning session in NUIG in October. AIT hosted the November meeting with 9 Universities and Institutes of Technologies in attendance.

**Access office**
**Programme for Access to Higher Education. (PATH)**

**PATH 3: Higher Education Access Fund**
The MEND cluster programme under PATH3 is College Connect and has 4 strands; connecting the Cluster, the Region, the Learner and connecting to College.

AIT have developed and piloted a College Introduction Day for young school leavers. 88% of participants indicated that the day increased their knowledge about how college works and 94% liked the visit to AIT. The next stage of this project is to develop a programme introducing the young people to the courses and areas of study in AIT.

The launch of College Connect was held in Dublin and was attended by an AIT mature student, Declan Rodgers, who did an excellent job representing the college. The Access Officer and Registrar also attended.

**College Awareness Week, November 18 to 22, 2019**
Every year the Access and Disability Offices coordinate a range of activities as part of College Awareness Week. Thanks to Marian Kennedy and Anthony in Sports Co. for running excellent team building activities with the groups.

Kilbeggan & Ballymahon Youthreach & Athlone Community Training Centre attended the College Introduction Day. 56 early school leavers enjoyed a great day in AIT.

Cara Phort Family Resource Centre, Ballinacargy came to visit with 43 primary school children from Miltown N.S., Møyvore N.S., Ballymacargy N.S., Emper N.S. and Sonna N.S. They completed team building activities in the arena, had lunch in the canteen followed by a table quiz.

Approx. 40 LWETB mature students from Athlone, Longford and Mullingar, who are currently studying FTEAC Level 5, with Longford Westmeath ETB visited on Thursday, they had talks from the Business Dept, completed a college connect workshop and had lunch in the training restaurant.

**College of Sanctuary**
The women of AIT are working on a project to support the women in Direct Provision in the local area. The first part of this is to gather unused cosmetics to put together Christmas gift bags for each of the female residents.

The annual children’s Christmas party for the children in the local Direct Provision centers is being organised at the moment. A second hand book sale was run by staff to gather funds to buy toys.

Volunteer and outreach activities supporting women are being recorded for inclusion in our next Athena SWAN award submission.
Healthy Campus

Walktober: Our Walktober Challenge was a great success, with three AIT students named as the top team on the Deskbased Leaderboard. Well done to everyone who took part.

Consent: “The kinds of sex you might have in college”
Performed by NUIG drama and Theatre students, this thought provoking play was well attended by both students and staff alike and is part of a number of activities being run in AIT to build awareness and positively influence behaviour.

Safer student nights: this campaign was developed by USI and the HSE to provide harm reduction information to students regarding drug use and included an information stand in the canteen with AITSU, Midland Regional Drug and Alcohol Taskforce and Athlone Community Gardai and a social media campaign.

International Men’s Day: Healthy Campus partnered with AIT Equality officer to promote our first International Men’s Day. Our coffee morning was well attended and information was provided to encourage positive mental health and wellbeing amongst men.

Mental health awareness week: during this week videos were disseminated on Facebook and Snapchat, one for each day of the week.

Employee Community Day: Healthy Campus had a stand at the employee day to inform staff about topics such as mental health and tobacco free campus.

Graduation
Graduands and their families were welcomed to AIT Thurs 31st Oct and Fri 1st Nov. to celebrate their Graduation. The event was livestreamed in the canteen this year to be enjoyed by extended family and staff on site and was broadcast on-line for friends and family to enjoy. A Family Room with Graduation livestreaming and activities for children was also provided.

Academic Integrity Network Meeting facilitated by QQI and the HEI
Cora McCormack Quality Officer, Louise Higgins, Examinations Officer and Catherine O’Donoghue, from the Learning and Teaching Unit attended an academic integrity network meeting and workshop facilitated by QQI and HEI on Thursday, 14th November 2019.

There were two international speakers presenting, Prof Michael Draper, Swansea University and Prof Cath Ellis, University of New South Wales, both of whom highlighted the fact that in recent years, higher education, both nationally and internationally has seen a sharp rise in contract cheating and other forms of online academic fraud. Contract cheating often consists of companies, regularly referred to as ‘essay mills’ selling learners bespoke assignments, essays and even theses which learners then submit for assessment as their own work. The facilitation of learner cheating by “essay mills” represents a growing threat to the integrity of Irish higher education.

While higher education institutes may not recognise the use of these services within their student body, international research suggests that it is likely to be happening in all faculty areas.

To proactively ensure that Ireland is well positioned to protect the integrity and reputation of its qualifications system, the government has introduced new legislation criminalising the facilitation of learner cheating. This is outlined in Section 43A of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Amendment) Act 2018, and QQI is committed to developing a national response to contract cheating.

While the new legislation pertains to all levels of the NFQ (with the exception of school awards), the national approach to enacting this element of the legislation will firstly address higher education and training, as this is the area identified as of highest risk. QQI will, going forward, engage with HEIs to establish a better understanding of the national context in this area and understand how best to support HEIs and their learners.

An advisory group will be established to inform the development of a national position and policy approach to addressing academic cybercrime. In its work, the advisory group will look at current practices, identify areas of
vulnerability, and factors for consideration in a dedicated communication strategy for stakeholders.

The advisory group may establish sub-working groups for the purpose of meeting these objectives. The outcomes of the advisory group’s work will inform any subsequent communication strategy and/or enhancement initiatives undertaken.

The team who attended hope to continue to liaise with QQI and represent AIT as members of the advisory groups.

**The Irish National Digital Experience (INDEx) Survey**

[Image]

https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/index/staff-who-teach/

AIT are participating in The Irish National Digital Experience (INDEx) Survey, which is being co-ordinated by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. Cora McCormack, Quality Officer attended the launch of this survey which took place in the Lighthouse Cinema in Dublin on the 24th of October 2019.

The purpose of the INDEx Survey is to understand more about the digital experiences and expectations of students and staff who teach in Irish higher education. All students and staff who complete the survey will contribute to the evidence that informs important decision-making around digital teaching and learning within AIT and will also influence the future enhancement of digital teaching and learning across the Irish higher education sector.

This on-line survey will be accessible in AIT from the 4th to the 24th of November 2019 and will be co-ordinated by The Dean of Faculty of Continuing, Professional, Online and Distance Learning, with the support of the Quality Office and Students Union.

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**Learning and Teaching Unit 2018-2019 - Overview of key activities and achievements**

**Graduation 2019**

[Image]

Nuala Harding, Colette Breheny, Kirpa Chadran, Professor Ciarán Ó’ Catháin, Kieran O'Shaughnessy, Mary Nestor and Michelle Kenny, (Graduates missing from the photograph: Aoife Walsh, Cathal Flanagan, Siobhan Gallagher, Eva Perez, Peter Meighan, Vasileios Gourgournis, Deirdre Fitzgerald, Barbara Ní Fhatharta and Saragh Ward).

**Postgraduate Diploma in Learning, Teaching and Assessment**

The continued support of the institute and the level of engagement of academic and professional support staff in formal and informal offerings of the L&T Unit enhances the AIT student experience. This focus on professional development has been a contributing factor in recent successes of the institute. These include being named Sunday Times Institute of the Year 2020 and reported findings in the ISSE 2017-2018 that AIT students are ‘the most satisfied in Ireland’. Being included in Top 25 Performing Universities in the World for interdisciplinary research was an additional accolade with ‘Teaching and Learning’ being one of five key metrics used in the U-Multirank university rankings.

Fourteen participants graduated with the Postgraduate Diploma in Learning, Teaching and Assessment in October 2019. In addition, forty one special purpose awards or modules on the AIT flexible pathway, taught by the Learning and Teaching Unit team, were successfully completed.
Successful funding applications 2018-2019

Erasmus+

Funding Call - Erasmus+ 2019 Key Action 2 Strategic Partnerships for the Field of Education Supporting Innovation

Project title: Developing Excellence in Team-Based Active and Collaborative Learning to Enhance Student Outcomes (TALENt)


Budget Awarded: €439,407

This three year educational research project introduces Team-Based Learning (TBL) as an active and collaborative learning pedagogy to teachers in participating schools in Europe. The project will fund the collaborative development and implementation of training events, development of Open Educational Resources (OERs), multiplier/dissemination events and will culminate in a symposium in Madrid in 2022. In AIT, the funding application was devised by Nuala Harding, Learning and Teaching Unit, with the support of Dr Anne Marie O’Brien, Faculty of Science and Health and David O’Hanlon, Faculty of Business and Hospitality. Feedback on the proposal indicated that it:

‘clearly stated the objectives which target 3 horizontal EU priorities and focus on a team-based learning approach which is used for teaching and learning in higher education institutions, but educators now want to extend this approach in schools. The research for this proposal is based on sound educational needs and provides evidence that this approach can improve students taking ownership of their own learning’.

AIT partner schools identified in the project application are:

- Athlone Community College
- Coláiste Chiaráin
- Our Lady’s Bower
- Marist College

The TALENT project is in keeping with the key themes of the AIT Strategic Plan 2019-2023 relating to ‘Research and Innovation’ and ‘Engagement.’ In particular it offers an opportunity for the institute to develop further links with local schools and to develop AIT as a centre for excellence in TBL.

As AIT project lead, Nuala Harding attended the initial transnational project meeting in the University of Bradford on November 4th and 5th 2019. AIT will host the first transnational training event for teachers participating from Irish (Athlone), UK, Dutch and Spanish schools between May 6th and 11th 2020.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Special Purpose Award/Module 2018-2019</th>
<th>ECTS</th>
<th>No of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Certificate in Learning &amp; Teaching</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate in Technology Enhanced Learning</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate in Formative Assessment Feedback</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing Practice in Online Learning, Teaching and Assessment</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designing a UDL Curriculum</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Number</strong></td>
<td><strong>41</strong></td>
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</table>

Funding Call - Strategic Alignment of Teaching and Learning Enhancement Funding in Higher Education 2019

Special Purpose Award/Module 2018-2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ECTS</th>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
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<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Number</strong></td>
<td><strong>41</strong></td>
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</table>
The National Forum opened this call in June 2019 which was ‘designed to form a coherent basis to drive teaching and learning innovation and enhancement across the higher education sector through a single fund, bringing together RFAM investment and the Teaching and Learning Enhancement funding’. AIT was allocated €134,000 for proposals under the call. After initial stakeholder engagement in June 2019, Nuala Harding was nominated by the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Registrar, Dr Niall Seery, as institute lead for the AIT application. Four Learning Enhancement Initiative (LEI) proposals were developed and submitted. A video outlining key elements of each proposal was required for the international reviewers. President Ciarán Ó Catháin, each Dean of Faculty and Student Union President, Áine Daly lent their support in this process.

The call required that one proposal be developed for small-scale projects, to be led by a Centre for Learning and Teaching. Each AIT proposal was informed by National Forum priorities and key themes and priorities outlined in the AIT Strategic Plan 2019-2023. All four applications were successful, with no conditions attached to funding the full amount available to AIT under the call.

The AIT Learning Enhancement Initiatives (LEIs) will involve all Faculties, the International Office, the Library and the Student Resources Centre working collaboratively. A key aspect is the involvement of students in each LEI. Commencing in January 2020 these enhancement initiatives will culminate in an AIT Symposium in December 2020.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AIT Learning Enhancement Initiatives</th>
<th>LEI Lead</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LE1 CLearning Enhancement Projects – small scale projects for sustainable impact (Ringfenced seed funding for themed projects in areas such as the introduction of capstone projects in sports programmes, digital badges, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), evaluation of clinical skills in nursing, addressing ISSE/Student Survey data from 2018-2019).</td>
<td>Nuala Harding &amp; Learning and Teaching Unit Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LE2 Working collaboratively to enhance provision for those who teach and learn online in Athlone Institute of Technology.</td>
<td>Dr Michael Tobin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LE3 Developing Team Based Learning as a Unique Student-Centred Pedagogy (USP)</td>
<td>Michelle McKeon-Bennett and Dr Don Faller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LE4 Enhancing Placement Experience in Civil Engineering</td>
<td>Dr Sean Lyons</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### AIT Learning and Teaching Unit National Forum Funded Seminars 2018-2019

The L&T Unit had four applications funded in 2018-2019. Reports of the events were submitted to the National Forum. Evaluations indicated the seminars were all highly successful with participants providing extremely positive feedback particularly in relation to impact and informing future developments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seminar Title</th>
<th>Date &amp; Venue</th>
<th>Facilitator/s</th>
<th>No of participants</th>
<th>No of institutes/areas represented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Innovative teaching across subjects with digital photographs: an inquiry graphics method.</td>
<td>19/02/2019 AIT</td>
<td>Dr.Natasa Lackovic, Lancaster University</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1. AIT 2. IADT 3. Dept of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pigs might fly? Changing the assessment narrative through Transforming the Experience of Students Through Assessment - TESTA's programme approach.</td>
<td>09/04/2019 AIT</td>
<td>Professor Tansy Jessop, Pro-Vice Chancellor, University of Bristol</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1. AIT 2. TUD Dublin 3. IT Blanchardstown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Aligning Teaching and Learning Across the Technological Sector (ATLAS): sharing outputs from mapping accredited professional development to the National Professional Development Framework

13/04/2019
THEA Offices, Dublin

Nuala Harding, AIT
Dr Moira Maguire, DKIT
Gina Noonan, IT Carlow
Deirdre McClay, LYIT
Mary Fenton, WIT

21
1. AIT
2. CIT
3. GMIT
4. IT Tralee
5. TUD Dublin
6. LIT
7. IADT
8. DKIT
9. LYIT
10. IT Tallaght
11 THEA

The Impact and Experiences of Delivering a Programme using Team-Based Learning (TBL)

04/06/2019
Dr Simon Tweddell, Rebecca McCarter, Educational Development Consultant

14
1. AIT
2. IT Sligo
3. LIT

Total 85 participants
Total 14 institutes

Y1 Feedback Project – this two year, multi-institutional project was funded by the National Forum in 2016 and led in AIT by Seamus Ryan, Learning and Teaching Unit. Recently, the international experts and researchers, Dr Naomi Winstone and Professor David Carless, included case studies, developed as part of the project by AIT staff, Dr Ann Marie O’Brien and Dr Mairéad Seery, in a forthcoming publication. The case studies were cited by the authors as examples of best practice in developing technology enhanced feedback for first years.

Publication details:

Overview of Collaborative L&T Enhancement Initiatives 2018-2019

Transforming the Experience of Students Through Assessment (TESTA)

In 2018-2019, the Learning and Teaching Unit in collaboration with the Faculty of Science and Health engaged the expertise of Professor Tansy Jessop to implement a TESTA case study within the Department of Sports and Health Science. TESTA is an evidence-led approach to understanding assessment patterns on whole degree programmes. The purpose of TESTA is to help programme teams identify enhancements for student learning based on evidence and assessment principles. TESTA uses three methods to gather evidence about the typical assessment experience of students:

- Programme audit (evidence from documents and programme teams)
- Assessment Experience Questionnaire (based on established assessment principles)
- Focus groups with students

The initial data collection with students was gathered for analysis by Eimear Kelly and Nuala Harding, Learning and Teaching Unit with the support of Dr Aoife Lane, Helen Bradley, Department Administrator, the academic staff and students in the department. Subsequently, Professor Tansy Jessop worked with all the Sports Science academic staff over two days, in April 2019.
The process led to the development of a case study report and the agreement of key objectives for the design of assessment using a programmatic approach, in the Department. The work will also inform plans for the forthcoming programmatic review. Staff have identified the transformative effect the process has had on their approach to assessment design and the positive impact it will have in future programme design and review.

**Student Response Systems SRS (Clickers) institute-wide pilot**

This pilot project initiated by the Learning and Teaching Unit in collaboration with the four faculties, is in keeping with key themes and priorities outlined in the AIT Strategic Plan 2019-2023, particularly in relation to ‘Learner Experience’, ‘Equality’, ‘Diversity and Inclusion’, and ‘Research and Innovation’. There are several examples from literature of the benefits of SRS, these include:

- supporting increased student engagement, particularly in large group settings;
- the anonymity provided allows students to test knowledge and understanding and receive feedback;
- allowing students to judge their performance relative to their peers;
- supporting dialogic feedback;
- providing opportunities to adjust teaching (Y1 Feedback, 2016).

The use of Student Response Systems was initially piloted in AIT in 2011. Subsequently the technology has been introduced on an ad hoc basis in the institute, through National Forum project funding, specifically, Y1 Feedback and TEAM. To date leadership has been provided by Dr Anne Marie O’Brien, supported through the Department of Life and Physical Sciences. Approval by Executive Management Team (EMT) in 2018-2019 to invest in an institute-wide licence provides the impetus to reach a critical mass, using the ‘Triple E Framework’ (Kolb, 2017), to ‘enhance, engage, and extend’. This approach was previously adopted by the L&T Unit to advance the use of Moodle in the institute to mission critical in supporting learning, teaching and assessment practice. A comprehensive project plan was developed by Dr Anne Marie O’Brien, Geraldine McDermott, Seamus Ryan and Nuala Harding. Since January 2019, fourteen training sessions have been provided by Dr Anne Marie O’Brien. With the assistance of Computer Services the software has been integrated into the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) as a plug in and all staff have access to the software. There is ongoing evaluation of the impact of the pilot, which will be reported on in May 2020.

**Visiting Chinese Academics Programme - ‘Effective Practices in Higher Education’**

Presentation of Certificates of Attendance and Digital Badges to visiting academics from Jingchu University of Technology, April 11th, 2019

Led by Catherine O’Donoghue, and in collaboration with the International Office, the L&T Unit team developed and implemented a programme entitled ‘Effective Practices in Higher Education’. Tailored for visiting academics from partner institutes in China, this programme was piloted in semester one 2018, with nine participants. It was evaluated and extended to a 12 week programme in semester two, with twelve participants. The programme provides educators a chance to review existing classroom based skills, and explore new techniques. With a focus on classroom practice, participants explored new practices to complement their existing teaching strategies. Participants attended regular class sessions and participated in a variety of in class based activities and learning tasks supported through Moodle. Assessment tasks were based on authentic classroom experience. On successful completion of this 12 week programme, participants were presented with the following by President Ciarán Ó Catháin on April 4th 2019:

- an AIT certificate of participation
- a Digital badge/micro-credential in learning, teaching and assessment practice
- a Digital badge/micro-credential in technology enhanced education

This was the first time Digital Badges were formally awarded in AIT.

In addition, the L&T Unit in conjunction with the International Office provided Cultural Awareness training for seventeen staff and sixty students in 2018-2019.

**Team Based Learning Community of Practice (Faculty of Business and Hospitality)**

The TBL CoP continued in 2018-2019, and contributed to the successful outcomes in the ERASMUS+ bid and the proposal to extend this as a cross-faculty Learning Enhancement Initiative to include the Faculty of Science and Health, under the National Forum Call 2019.
Team Based Learning (TBL) Knowledge of the Fundamentals of Team Based Learning (TBL).

With the support of the Professional Development Committee (PDC) the unit facilitated a training programme certified by the Team Based Learning Collaborative (TBLC) between 5 – 7 June 2019. TBL is an inclusive pedagogic approach that promotes peer learning, peer discussion, and a peer support network within the team. In addition, it involves regular formative assessments which quickly identify lack of student engagement or understanding so that interventions can be planned in advance of high stakes assessments. 14 AIT staff completed this training programme facilitated by Dr. Simon Tweddell, School of Pharmacy and Medical Sciences, University of Bradford and Becka McCarter, Consultant Educational Developer. This capacity building will continue in 2019-2020 with places also offered to staff from the Limerick Institute of Technology.

Selection of key dissemination activities 2018-2019

The All-Ireland Conference on Learning, Teaching and Assessment in Further and Higher Education took place in the Marino Institute in October 2018. This event was a collaboration between the All Ireland Society for Higher Education (AISHE) and THEA. Papers were presented on a variety of aspects of learning, teaching and assessment in further and higher education focusing on the conference theme of ‘Using evidence to enhance learning’. The welcome address was given by Dr Teresa Doherty, President Marino Institute. The keynote speaker was Professor Roni Bamber, Director of the Centre for Academic Practice, Queen Margaret University. The conference Co-Chairs were Dr Moira Maguire, DKIT and Nuala Harding, AIT.

QQI Conference Tuesday 18 December 2018

The QQI Internationalisation Conference provided an opportunity to focus on the impact of introducing TBL to diverse student groups, specifically international students.

The TBL CoP in the Faculty of Business and Hospitality designed a research poster entitle ‘Facilitating Intercultural Integration using Team Based Learning (TBL)’. David O’Hanlon, Stephanie Duffy, Luke Fannon, Nuala Harding, Dr Eoin Langan, Seadna Ryan.
Edtech Conference May 2019

AIT was well represented with several presentations at this annual educational technology conference which was hosted by DKIT in May. The theme of the conference was Edtech 2019: The Digital Transformation of Irish Higher and Further Education- Real or Imagined?

Conference Presentations by Learning and Teaching Unit 2018-2019


McDermott, G., (2019). Yes, but can it do this? Are we asking the right questions of Moodle? Moodle Moot Conference. Manchester


Publications


Jeff Buckley’s graduation on Nov 15th from KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Sweden.

KTH is one of Europe’s leading technical and engineering universities, home to students, researchers and faculty from around the world.

The graduation was in the Banquet Room at Stockholm City Hall where the Nobel Prize Awards are held!