

<b>ATHLONE INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY</b>	
<b>Report of Panel of Assessors undertaking the Programmatic Review</b>	
<b>Provider</b>	<b>ATHLONE INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY</b>
<b>School</b>	Business
<b>Date</b>	Tuesday, 28 April & Wednesday 29 April 2015
<b>Venue</b>	Boardroom, Athlone Institute of Technology
<b>Report version</b>	<i>Dated 02 September 2015</i>
<b>PANEL MEMBERS</b>	
Dr Stephen Jackson (Chair), Sometime Director of Quality Assurance QAA UK	
Ms Cat O'Driscoll, Executive Committee Member, The European Students' Union	
Dr Stephen Cassidy, Dean of Academic Quality Enhancement & Acting Dean of Graduate Studies, Cork Institute of Technology	
Ms Mary Rose Stafford, Irish Academy of Hospitality & Tourism, Institute of Technology, Tralee	
Professor Denis Harrington, Head of Department of Graduate Business, Waterford Institute of Technology	
Dr Barry Feeney, Head of Department of Computing, Institute of Technology, Tallaght	
Professor Joseph Coughlan, Head of School of Accounting & Finance, College of Business, Dublin Institute of Technology	
Dr Joseph Ryan (Secretary), Academic Registrar, Athlone Institute of Technology	
Ms Cora McCormack, Quality Officer, Athlone Institute of Technology	
Ms Amanda Ryan, Quality Office, Athlone Institute of Technology	
<b>Meeting Record</b>	
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	
The panel had been furnished with a SharePoint access to the core documentation in advance of the site visit in Athlone which was scheduled for 28 and 29 April 2015.	
<b>DAY 1 Tuesday, 28 April 2015</b>	
<b>12.00 - 13.00</b>	<b>Private Meeting of Panel</b>
<p>The chair and panel met initially over lunch at noon on Tuesday, 28 April 2015, in Athlone Institute of Technology. The draft schedule for the site visit, previously circulated, was agreed.</p> <p>Dr Stephen Jackson, QAA UK, opens the meeting with a welcome and introductions. He also signalled a number of the themes that were likely to emerge in the course of the review.</p> <p>The expert panel complimented the institute on the organization to date for the review and on the quality of the documentation received and the form of electronic interface. The panel noted that the documentation was appropriately self-critical and considered what was provided an honest evaluation.</p> <p>The chair invited a review of the draft schedule for the two days. This was approved. He noted the contextual framework including the stated ambition of the institute to gain Technological University status.</p> <p>The chair introduced a discussion on the themes that were suggested from the documentation provided. The Business School (BS) is under a new management team; it was proposed to explore this</p>	

in the 2<sup>nd</sup> session. Given the economic recession, the impact of spending cuts and impact on quality was proposed as another topic for discussion with the management team.

Given the time available, and reflecting earlier discussions and communications, it was agreed to focus on AIT's own processes rather than on a detailed examination of each programme. Luncheon was taken at 12.30 hrs.

<b>13.00 - 14.00</b>	<b>Meeting with Management team of School to include brief presentation on strategy, context, landscape, and outcomes from previous reviews including Programmatic Review 2010 and Institutional Review 2011</b>
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<i>In attendance:</i>	Mr Eoin Langan, Mr Owen Ross, Mr Brendan Doyle, Dr Tony Johnston
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The head of school and management team joined the meeting at 13.00 hrs. Introductions were invited from the chair. The chair again praised the quality and comprehensive nature of the documentation provided; it was viewed to provide an excellent basis for the evaluation.

A contextual presentation was provided by the academic registrar, Dr Joseph Ryan, who then passed over to the head of school (HoS), Mr Eoin Langan. He provided an introduction to the school with its 1,600 students mainly fulltime and including the largest cohort of international students in the institute. The HoS referenced the outcomes from the 2014 National Student Survey (ISSE). A priority had been to create a clear separate branding and personality for the school. The Entrepreneurship Academy was cited as a flagship. The school was proposed as having strong engagement with L&T and a focus on graduate attributes. The three heads of department continued the presentation. Mr Owen Ross, head of department of Business Studies, spoke to L&T and the commitment of the institute to staff development. This moved to an exploration of graduate competencies. Also discussed was the school's retention strategy and the interventions that have been introduced. This was stated to be an evolving approach. The presentation provided an exposition of graduate competencies that are sought by the Business School.

The head of department of Accounting & Business Computing, Mr Brendan Doyle, continued the presentation. A programme assessment strategy has been developed for each programme and each element links to a graduate competency. More timely and effective feedback is recognized as something that can be improved. Examples were provided of a shift toward some pilot cross-modular assessments. The power of the student feedback was especially referenced given the wealth of ISSE information. The school contends that it has a strong formalized process for capturing feedback in other ways with strong engagement from student representatives.

Dr Tony Johnson, head of department of Hospitality, Tourism, & Leisure, addressed the research and engagement agendas. He cited the breadth of the enterprise within the school. The school's research focus is on three strands

1. L&T research, live action on pedagogy
2. Applied research in collaboration with local community and industry; this is fuelled through the innovation voucher scheme
3. Academic research within the school and through the Entrepreneurship Academy. Speaking self-critically, the school has to develop clusters and move toward a more formalized research strategy

The HoS concluded with reference to the institute’s Strategic Plan and how its leading actions are informing the work of the school. This is proposed as part of a continuum. However the HoS did cite the impact of the current funding constraints.

The chair acknowledged the value of the presentation and noted that it would assist in framing the discussions to follow across the various sessions; appreciation was recorded to the presenters. Dr Jackson noted that the institute and school presented themselves as confident and ambitious. He wondered how problematic change has been against the funding downturn. The HoS talked of the uncertainty around funding downturn and the related matter of communicating this to staff. He reiterated the stated ambition to become a Technological University (TU). It was noted that the age profile of staff within the BS is a challenge. The chair questioned whether the panel was seeing the school in a state of transition; the HoS agreed stating the school is still in a period of change. It was proposed that the new management team requires a period of stability at this stage and Mr Ross spoke of the requirement for rebranding and energizing staff to embrace change.

Topics covered within the session included the challenge of student recruitment, the build of the school’s strategy and processes to support this, and the link between the programme development strategy and the school’s research priorities and capacity.

The session concluded at 14:00 hours after which the chair encouraged the panel to take some few minutes to take stock. Some higher-level themes were identified with the indication that these might inform discussion in some of the subsequent sessions.

- Management of change, & how the school is coping
- Research and staff
- Staff development
- Business v STEM; how business can compete at a time when the national focus is on the encouragement of STEM (an acronym referring to the academic disciplines of science technology, engineering, and mathematics)
- Graduate attributes
- How does industry inform programme development
- Level of programmes on the National Framework and where does this sit within the school strategy
- Identifying a distinct personality for the school
- Notice that the school’s portfolio provision is particularly large with some 46 programmes; an indication that decisions around prioritization or rationalization would be a useful area to explore

<b>14.15 - 15.30</b>	<b>Meeting with representative staff from the School to be supported by Research, Support Services, Learning &amp; Teaching, and Library</b>
<i>In attendance:</i>	Eoin Langan, Owen Ross, Brendan Doyle, Dympna Scanlon, Brian Toolan, Barry O’Loughlin, Jason Palframan, Alison Sheridan, Michael Lonergan, Peter Melinn, Sarah LaCumbre, Una O’Connor, Nuala Harding, Geraldine McDermott, Sean Arthur, Shane Banks, John Harding, Joe Meegan, Luke Fannon, Teresa O’Hara, Sean Connell

Dr Jackson opened the session with a welcome and brief introductions. The purpose of the session was to hear from the staff within the school and those in support. The chair indicated that he wished the session to be deliberative and wide-ranging. He noted the developments over the past 18 months or so. This is evidently a school that has experienced significant change and has opportunities; how is the school coping with the process of change? How well are things going?

The subsequent discussion focused on the management of change within the school and the role of the Learning & Teaching Unit in supporting such change along with the outcomes from the National Student Survey.

Attention was afforded the move towards a focus on research strategy, currently there are 11% of staff with a PhD and the documentation states an ambition to realize 18% in the school.

The discussion moved to student numbers and retention. This included a discussion on the character of the portfolio of programmes offered by the faculty. The discussion covered the criteria employed by the school when considering new programme development or discontinuation of an existing offering. A supplementary query focused on whether 46 programmes might represent too broad a portfolio. Mr Langan admitted that there were some challenged programmes and these are under review.

The emphasis upon graduate attributes was explored and it was stated that these rely on reports and feedback from employers. ISSE also informed this. Work-related learning is sought by employers. They repeatedly mentioned the need for soft skills, confidence, communication, technological competence (and especially a mastery of Microsoft Excel). The school aims to produce a rounded individual which is what is sought. Assessment for competency was also raised and it was suggested that curriculum mapping might be employed to provide a simple matrix to afford the students better understanding of the desired attributes.

The panel wondered whether the programme assessment strategies as produced were not overly cumbersome. There was a sense that they would benefit from revision.

Feedback, both formal and informal was also raised as a topic for discussion. It was agreed that consistency and structure were desirable. There was a related discussion on the nature of feedback and whether some feedback was recognized as such by students. The attention of the meeting was drawn to the current funded study on the subject being undertaken by the MEND cluster (the Midlands East & North Dublin [MEND] consortium of HEIs comprising Dublin City University, Maynooth University, Dundalk Institute of Technology, and Athlone Institute of Technology).

The support for staff development and the number of staff engaged on L&T accredited programmes was commended. The commitment of staff and the work of the L & T unit were praise in this regard.

Attention was afforded a research and knowledge transfer strategy. Advice was provided that this needs additional work. This was related to the build of a greater appetite for research. It was noted that research numbers are static. Presenting research findings to undergraduates was suggested as a way of building awareness of the opportunities.

The chair thanked all for a good session with a wide-ranging discussion. He invited the panel to reflect in private on the outcomes from the session. The panel noted the positive comments about the teaching and learning environment in the school. It was clear also that there was strong and sustained support for staff development which was appreciated by many who had spoken.

While the staff has clearly considered the breadth of the portfolio, there remained a feeling that this was large. The staff had defended impressively the approach to the Level of awards offered, however the panel did indicate that it wished to explore the employment options for that small number of students who elected to exit the institute with a L6 award. On a related matter, the panel sought information on the graduate destinations for all merging with awards from the institute. This was provided in a later session.

The panel noted the concerns raised by certain staff in relation to the location and future of the Sport & Recreation programme. While the panel recognizes that this is a matter for the institute, it notes the concern raised.

It was considered likely that a recommendation would emerge attaching to the merits of developing a knowledge research strategy for the school (see Recommendations and Comments section below). A more comprehensive support infrastructure to build research capacity within this school was also considered necessary although the panel did acknowledge the resource constraints that have been cited by school management and staff.

<b>15.45 - 16.45</b>	<b>Meeting with Stakeholders</b>
<i>In attendance:</i>	Mike Pearson, Director, Gurteen Agricultural College, Eddie Higgins, Equal Ireland, Nuala Keher, Equal Ireland, Orlagh Claffey of the Health Service Executive and Tullamore Hospital (HSE), Dolores O'Connor of Ambassador Recruitment, Dermot Ainsworth, The NPD Group Market Research, Yvonne Grenham, HR Manager, Sheraton Hotel, Barbara Mangan, HR Manager at LHM Casey McGrath, Karen Buckley, Russell Brennan Keane, Donal Egan, Ferbane Food Campus, Jimmy Keane, Athlone Community Taskforce, Ross O'Callaghan, Sheraton Hotel, Ursula Gilleran, The NPD Group Market Research.

The chair welcomed the many and representative stakeholders who came to contribute to this session. The list of contributors is provided above.

In his introduction, the chair encouraged those present to treat this as a round table discussion.

The chair opened by wondering whether the stakeholders were aware of one another and whether they had met previously; it led to the response that there is no inclusive forum that brings together stakeholders who engage with disparate programmes within the school.

The stakeholders spoke warmly of their individual engagements with the faculty and the institute. The consensus was that the quality of the AIT graduate is good but work experience is often lacking due to the manner in which courses are structured. The work experience component might be reviewed. It was felt that graduates emerge with good confidence.

Data analytics was mentioned as an area with possibility for extension. One contributor stated there is sometimes a failure to see the link between the education and the work that follows.

The role that industry might play in attracting students was explored as part of this discussion. There was a readiness on the part of the stakeholders to contribute in collaboration with the institute in the recruitment into their industry profession.

Considerable attention was afforded work placement. The shared sense from stakeholders was that placement periods need to be longer in order to be of value for the student and the host; a minimum period of six months was mentioned. One criticism voiced focused on the preparedness of students to undertake placement. It was stated that on occasion the basic qualifications of incoming placement candidates are too low to make the experience meaningful. Sometimes there is a disconnect between the prerequisites or qualifications and what industry wants. Perhaps a discussion is warranted on rethinking the location of placement within certain programmes in order that students have sufficient skills to inform such a placement. While there is a challenge in encouraging Irish students to undertake an international placement, the stakeholder view was that such a period abroad would be a significant addition to the CV of a graduate. This led to an inclusive discussion on incentivizing students to engage with an element of international placement or study.

The contribution of the stakeholders to new programme development was also discussed. Stakeholders contribute to industrial advisory boards and are available to offer advice when required.

The stakeholders considered IT skills, facility with spreadsheets, databases in Excel as generic skills that were desirable in a graduate. Computer literacy and presentation skills were proposed as a real necessity. There was consensus that a key skill was how a graduate might present at interview; it was judged a measure of how one might perform in employment. One contributor noted that students those who have enjoyed 9-12 months paid placement come back much better equipped.

The chair recorded appreciation to the stakeholders for their presence and contributions and brought the session to a conclusion.

In private session with the panel some of the topics raised were listed:

- The importance of work experience
- Engagement with industry and the professions
- Placement
- Interaction between industry and the institute
- To restructure the placement? - but perhaps with different models. Sharing lessons on what works best
- It was noted that DIT advocates an interview for placement
- Expectations: on the part of both hosts and students
- Link of academic accomplishments & how this connects with employment; could this be part of the learning to learn module?
- The benefit of a placement handbook and necessity for a resource behind it
- Seasonality of certain placements – opens other options
- Industry not seeing a role as a partner in attracting talent into their industry
- Scholarships from industry

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The panel noted some of the strong praise for AIT and the BS from the stakeholder session</li> <li>➤ The panel noted that the relationship with stakeholders appears very good – this should be complimented</li> <li>➤ More structured advisory panels might be reconstituted; the BS might be open to ideas how these might meet and be repopulated occasionally</li> </ul>	
<b>16.45 - 17.30</b>	<b>Quality documentation review</b>
<i>In attendance:</i>	The chair and panel members along with the academic registrar and quality office staff.
<p>There was opportunity for the panel members to view a range of quality documentation at both institute and school level.</p>	
<b>19.30</b>	<b>Dinner at Hotel for Panel and Management Team</b>
<p align="center"><b>DAY 2    Wednesday, 29 April 2015</b></p>	
<b>9.00 - 10.00</b>	<b>Meeting with Students</b>
<i>In attendance:</i>	Paddy Rooney, Philip Gillen, Donna Mulkerrins, Melanie Allard, Francesca Martino Eoin Costello, Richard McLoughlin, Jason Finn, Jacinta Mahoney, Debby Weyimi-Oboyo, Clem Wiggins, Joseph Dunne, Kate Butler, Victoria Grehan, Tyler Lovenuk, Wayne Devlin
<p>The chair welcomed the panel and previewed the topics likely to be discussed in this opening session of the second day. Mentioned were the student experience and preparedness for employment and student survey (ISSE) and response; the panel wished to ascertain what has happened as a result. Feedback on assessment was also to be focused upon. So too programme feedback and enhancement and how students feel on this. Amongst other matters of interest to the panel was student awareness of their own graduate attributes; interest in L8 and progression to L9; feedback on their experience and voice on course boards; and finally, the effectiveness of module reflection on part of students.</p> <p>The chair, Dr Jackson, welcomed the student representatives. Introductions were invited. Present were a good cross section of students, undergraduate and postgraduate, including international students. The cohort included some class representatives.</p> <p>In general the students present felt they were well represented. They stated there was no fear factor and the staff of the institute are welcoming and make it comfortable to have a discussion. Tutorial support is readily available – although it can be in strong demand - and seeking support from one's fellow students is also a feature in AIT. The structured peer support system – PASS (Peer Assisted Student Support) – was cited as especially beneficial.</p> <p>The students stated they do have an input into programme enhancement but that the process can be slow. There was criticism around the restriction of language electives and especially of the notice afforded when such an option was to be withdrawn. In a separate example, criticisms around</p>	

equipment were addressed when raised with school management by a class representative. One student voiced the opinion that in certain cases material was not as current as it needed to be.

Dr Cassidy elicited views on electives. One international student from Canada described himself an advocate for electives. They represented a broadening option and result in a more rounded graduate. Another HT&L student with no interest in sport desired some alternative options. Entrepreneurship students can sit in on additional electives and this is facilitated. It was noted that this freedom can be challenging for some students. Specific examples were provided by the students of elective pathways that they would like to see open to them; for example a student from the Social Media Marketing programme would like to be afforded opportunity to work with graphic design but no such engagement is currently in place. Another voice recorded that repetition of material is a possible downside of electives; that student found themselves revisiting material already taken in an earlier year of her programme.

The students were invited to comment on graduate competencies. What is known of these; what distinguishes an AIT graduate? The response to this was revealing in its practical focus. The students spoke of specific skills and competencies. Students particularly praised those programmes with a strong practical focus and with a link to industry.

Extra resources to feed into the entrepreneurship offering were proposed as desirable. The view from students present was that the programme is innovative and needs flexible timetabling. There was a call for a mentor from the industry. Even an occasional mentoring session would be beneficial, argued one student. The unstructured nature of the academy was seen to be progressive but it also posed challenges for staff and students.

The students reported that introductory talks had been given to those considering enrolment on conversion courses; good guidance had been provided. The workload was clearly set out.

Opinion was more mixed in respect of the experience of placement. In certain cases students were responsible for identifying their own placement and while, in one case, a journal was posted out during the summer, no explanation was provided of how to complete the document. Learning objectives were set but not all students were aware of these. Where placements were unsatisfactory, alternative arrangements were readily made by the school. However the placement experience was generally seen to be good. Greater work experience was something that was desired by students.

The chair noted and welcomed the presence of the number of international students in the session and invited comment on the students' experience in Athlone. Language appeared to determine the choice of some students to come to Athlone.

On the question of feedback, it was reported that at the end of each semester lecturers and students meet and students have a voice there. One student noted that you "say your piece and leave". But relations with HsoD are strong and such conversations do realize results. There was strong awareness of the ISSE. The students spoke of a concerted drive in the college from management and the Students' Union. "They took it seriously". In the view of one student, feedback from lecturers has to be proactively sought.



The session concluded at 10.00 hours with the gratitude of the chair to the students. The academic registrar recorded appreciation on the part of the school and institute to the students for generously giving of their time when they were facing into terminal examinations.

In a private concluding reflection, the chair and panel noted the following:

- It had been suggested that in at least one case lecture content and, perhaps, presentation templates were perceived to be out of date
- Mentors were seen to be a good idea; even a biannual engagement would be beneficial
- Electives were occasioning some difficulty; it was not so much the removal of an option but rather the notice provided
- There were evidently differing experiences of placement; there is a lack of consistency and perhaps some reflection on resourcing
- Expectations around placements are not always clear
- Do students have the skills required before they go on placement?
- Feedback that is more consistent and more structured would be desirable

<b>10.00 - 11.00</b>	<b>Meeting with selected Academic Staff on the development of new programmes and approaches to teaching and learning</b>
<i>In attendance:</i>	Eoin Langan, Owen Ross, Brendan Doyle, Tony Johnston, Paul O'Meara, Sean Arthur, Frances McGettigan, John Harding, Teresa O'Hara, Sinead Purtill, Mary Corrigan, Peter Melinn, Louise Murray, Aisling Keenan, Jason Palframan, Marc Cashin, Shane Banks, Barry O'Loughlin, Brian O'Ruairc, Dymrna Scanlon, Brian Toolan, Sean Connell, Luke Fannon, Ruth Kennington,

The large representative staff grouping from all three departments of the school were welcomed by the chair. Dr Jackson set out the intention to focus on:

- The development of new programmes
- Approaches to L&T and impact on delivery

The chair asked about the experience of developing new programmes and how staff found the experience and timing and he wondered whether the process adds value.

The shared feeling of the staff present was that the process works well and when one has engaged initially each subsequent exercise is easier. There is assistance in negotiating the process. Staff utilize modules from the existing 46 programmes and shared modules are feature of the offerings from the faculty.

With respect to research focus, it was agreed that the school might be more strategic about the research topics in which it is interested. Cognizance will also be taken of the established linkages with professional bodies. The panel also invited views from staff on how it releases capacity in order to engage more actively in research. The role of the regional cluster, the MEND cluster, is factored into this discussion.

The view of staff in respect of new programme development is that the system is robust and fair. Advice is available to any new staff member who is interested in becoming engaged with a new programme idea.

There is strong support from the staff for engagement with innovative learning and teaching approaches. They cited the increasing maturity of assessment approaches as evidence of the wider embrace of pedagogical developments. Staff reflection on their teaching and assessment is now a feature within the faculty and the institute. The very diversity of our cohort has demanded a rethinking of our teaching practices. The panel noted and praised the work within this area but suggested that approaches to assessment could be enhanced further. There was acknowledgement from staff of a tendency toward over-assessment; but staff were mindful of the pacing of assessments. This discussion also encompassed the reliability of continual assessment (CA). Staff acknowledged the challenges involved in achieving a consistency of approach in this regard and talked of utilizing a reflective journal. The benefits of a variety of assessment approaches were also acknowledged.

Attention was afforded the preparation and monitoring of the placement element. It was stated that the student journal was managed electronically through Student Diary Pro. The role of the placement officer and consistency of approach was also discussed. Placement visits are made but not in every case. Placement, or surrogate placement, is now being increasingly included on programmes within the school.

The session concludes at 11.15 hours. The chair recorded appreciation for the inclusive discussion.

<b>11.30 - 13.00</b>	<b>Meeting with academic staff by Department:</b>
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<b>Department of Accounting &amp; Business Computing:</b>	
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<i>Location</i>	Institute Boardroom
<i>In attendance:</i>	<p>Panel Members: Professor Joseph Coughlan, Chair, Mr Barry Feeney, Dr Joseph Ryan, Cora McCormack, and Amanda Ryan, Quality Office</p> <p><i>Representative staff from the Department of Accounting and Business Computing:</i></p> <p>Brendan Doyle, Sean Arthur, Barry Donnelly, Nuala Harding, Brenda Reilly, Noel Tierney, Dermot Duffy, Frank Conway, Paul Pendergast, Imelda Fallon, Jason Palframan, Brenda Flaherty, Enda Keegan, Peter Melinn, Orlaith Kelly, David Holland, Terry O'Neill, Geraldine McDermott, Jarlath Nolan, Luke Fannon, Shane Banks, Mike O'Dowd, Barry O'Loughlin, Dermot O'Leary, Ruth Kennington,</p> <p>Representing Equal Ireland: Eddie Higgins, Nuala Keher, Liam Boyle, Brendan Mulry, and Dermot Cavanagh, External Examiner,</p> <p>Representing Gurteen Agricultural College: Aisling Deverell &amp; Anna Cannon</p>

The chair delegated this session to Prof Joseph Coughlan.

An introductory presentation was delivered by the HoD, Mr Brendan Doyle. This presentation is attached as Appendix 1.

Mr Doyle explained that there are 21 programmes delivered by the department. The HoD presented detail on the academic profile of the area. Two programmes are professionally accredited and are not presented for review in this process. The various changes and enhancements were presented to the panel in the presentation. Particular mention was made of the redesign of BA in Accounting and Law and a major recasting of the PGDip in LT&A. There was a concentration on changing approaches to assessment including cross modular and inter-programme assessment.

The panel first considered the changes being proposed in the computing areas. The influence of the industry boards was cited in this regard. For example, they wished to see more of the web presence. On the question of the distinction of computing awards within the Business School, the response was that the differentiation is through the presence of the business perspective.

Accounting students follow a more prescribed syllabus. The influence of exemptions is felt here. Resulting from student feedback, the department dropped the mini thesis and brought in an integrated case study. Example of integrated assessment on a case study was proposed to help in programme integration.

Indications from students, including mature students, is that they value the placement option. Having this on the CV is seen to be a plus but this is balanced by the current buoyant market for accountancy graduates.

The subsequent discussion covered the research ambitions of the school and the support given by the institute to staff development.

The session also explored progression options including those open to students who elected onto a Level 6 award initially. Particular focus was afforded the community-based Equal Ireland programmes and the quality oversight of same.

Attention turned to assessing group projects. The weekly log was mentioned. The panel wondered whether students working in a group attract the same marks. There are different approaches to this with some programmes varying marks for student members based on a presentation.

Examples of approaches to integrated assessment and the use of integrated projects that cross schools were provided to the panel. In one such case there is a lengthy case study straddling two modules which allows for differentiated assessment.

A recommendation was offered by Prof Coughlan about integrating a literature element in the accountancy stream. DIT have a 10 ECTS credit literature module in the final year. The department was encouraged to consider the integration of literature when designing assessments.

Dr Feeney acknowledged the recent achievements of accountancy students and the benefits of competition. The department encourages this although it can be a challenge to get students involved initially.

The HoD, Mr Doyle, thanked the subgroup of the panel for an engaging conversation.

The session closed at 12.55 hrs.

<b>Department of Business Studies 11.30 - 13.00 (breakout session)</b>	
<b>Location</b>	<b>Room B1029</b>
<i>In attendance:</i>	<p><b>External Panel Members:</b> Dr Stephen Cassidy, Professor Denis Harrington</p> <p><b>Department of Business Studies Staff:</b>  Owen Ross, Alison Hough, Cormac Mc Carthy, Brian Toolan, Karen Guest, Henry Joyce, Martin O' Rourke, Seamus Ryan, Joseph Price, Alison Sheridan, Linda Reidy, Louise Murray, Aisling Keenan, Thomas J O Donoghue, Ken Kinahan, Dr Teresa O' Hara, Joseph Egan, Paul O Meara, Mary Corrigan, Craig Sheriff</p> <p><b>Apologies</b> Jim Dalton</p> <p><b>Minute Taker:</b> Anne Handy, Business School</p>
<p>Panel members opened the session by introducing themselves and their professional roles:</p> <p>Dr Stephen Cassidy from CIT  Professor Denis Harrington from WIT</p> <p>Mr Owen Ross, head of department of Business Studies, gave a short presentation on the Department of Business Studies.</p> <p>Summary of presentation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programmatic Review is covering 16 programmes in total for Business Studies – 11 Undergraduate, 5 Post Graduate  13 active programmes, 3 dormant</li> <li>• 7 new programmes on line since 2010, one more Level 8 add-on planned for 2015/2016 going through validation currently</li> <li>• International students are an important part of the department <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— The International Business Management programme (70 students)</li> <li>— Torino Partnership for 2<sup>nd</sup> year and 4<sup>th</sup> year</li> <li>— Higher Diploma in Business – as pre Masters for overseas candidates</li> </ul> </li> <li>• School has an emphasis on the student and a focus on retention</li> <li>• Emphasis on innovation in teaching and learning with diversity of assessment and use of technology</li> <li>• Challenges for the future <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— First year numbers and demand for business programmes</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>The discussion covered support for students and particularly those at risk; this included an explanation of how the induction process is managed within the school. The PASS (Peer Assisted Student Support) system which is in place for first year programmes was also referenced.</p> <p>Comment was invited on feedback to students. This was discussed in some detail and the staff provided example of how it is managed currently. The attendance of class representatives at programme board meetings was raised by Prof Harrington. The HoD outlined the fact that in addition to inviting the class reps to programme board meetings there were separate class rep meetings every term. Students also have direct access to staff members.</p>	

Prof Harrington asked the group to reflect on the internationalization theme given that approximately 60% of the institute total of such students are within the BS. How has this influenced the development of work at AIT? Practical examples of current collaboration and the management of same were provided by staff.

Also discussed was the manner in which material is kept current between the programmatic review processes. Staff agreed this was challenging in an increasingly busy environment.

The manner in which the research interests of staff members influences the undergraduate curriculum and experience was another topic for discussion. The HoD mentioned that there is an applied research project for 20 ECTS credits planned for the Level 8 for Digital Marketing.

On the question of interdisciplinary projects, it was replied that there are not many examples in this department currently but some early examples were cited. Future programmes will have a focus on collaboration with humanities in Business Psychology and Digital Marketing at Level 8. The internal ASQ (Academic Strategy & Quality Committee) process can make amendments if there are recommendations on this matter.

Prof Harrington said he expected more of an international dimension to the programme schedules; this was not evident in those he reviewed. He could see that AIT had a particular strength in this area which might better be exploited.

Dr Cassidy noted the addition of work placement on the Bachelor of Business Programme and indicated that the panel welcomed this addition; he wondered how will it be resourced? The HoD responded that placement will not run until 2016 due to the changes that are required to the programme. There are plans to follow the established model at AIT and offer a 5-credit module for supervisors also.

The panel members thanked Owen Ross and the staff for the visit and for getting the documentation out so far in advance. The HoD thanked the panel members on behalf of the school.

The meeting concluded at 1pm.

#### **Department of Hospitality, Tourism, & Leisure Studies**

<i>In attendance:</i>	Eoin Langan, Tony Johnston, John Lydon, Karen Gardiner, Katherine Grace, Madeline Murtagh, Nicola Ryan, Ita O'Connell, Marie O'Halloran, Oonagh Claffey, Nora Shine, Fiona Budds, Niamh Foley, Sarah Jane Coffey, Sandra Griselain, Pat Hannon, Brian O'Ruaric, Kevin McLoughlin, Kevin Ward, Dymphna Scanlon, Sean Connell, Sinead Purtill, Frances McGettigan, Margaret O'Loughlen, Joe Meegan, Joe Tierney
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#### **Introduction**

This session was delegated by the chair to Ms Mary Rose Stafford and to Ms Cat O'Driscoll.

Dr Anthony Johnston, HoD, opened the meeting by introducing the panel members to the staff and giving an overview presentation on the department and courses.

### **Programme Changes**

The panel members used this meeting to discuss the focus on changes made to each programme and the rational on assessments.

The current and proposed course schedule documents for each course were discussed and the course coordinators explained the reasons for each proposed change.

Some of the key points to note from the panel were:

- Internationalization: practicals are considered key. It gives an insight to where ideas come from and how they are going to be implemented.
- Online learning element: incorporate at least one module in each programme with an online learning element.
- Placement: in the nature of the HT&L courses placement is an important factor. It is good, the panel noted, to hear the department are engaging to try to introduce international placements. Articulation is key for all students when it comes to preparing them for placement. This will include their CVs, interview skills, and engagement.
- The panel queried the mention of the possible removal of a sports courses from the department and invited comment and clarity. It was discussed and the staff sentiment was that it stay as it was is noted by the panel.

The meeting concluded at 13.00

**14.30**

### **Interim Feedback to institute and school management**

The panel reconvened under the chair in plenary session at 14.00 hours following lunch. Dr Jackson invited comment to inform the final report and the interim feedback to the school management team.

He noted initially:

- The sense of a positive organization with purpose
- The documentation quality was a feature of the review
  - It provided a strong information base – the electronic medium was praised
- He commended the willingness of those met with to engage in discussion

The panel was sensitive to the timing of the review and the context. He proposed to affirm the circumstances:

- That there is a new management team
- The team is engaged in the management of change and the panel recognizes the challenges
- The panel is meeting a school in transition
- Management and staff are working to embed new structures and arrangements; this is thus a particular point in time

- Awareness of the difficulties imposed by the resource constraints
- Indications at the macro level that things are improving economically
- To acknowledge the political context and ambition to be a TU and that it is conditioning the manner in which matters are being handled

## Recommendations and Comments

### 1. Research

- a. There is fair information available; it is recognized by the school as an important issue and the panel wants to support this
- b. Time and resources are the two principal barriers; difficulty with teaching loads and with little opportunity for remission
- c. Research networks, collaboration both internal and external might be better exploited within , for example, the MEND cluster
- d. Scholarly activity is an important consideration, and a possible prerequisite for a deeper culture of research engagement
- e. To develop a knowledge and transfer strategy for growing research in the school which moves beyond individual staff ambition and interest
- f. Undergraduate students should be provided with opportunity to attend presentations from staff and postgraduates on current research projects
- g. The school might consider integrating a literature element into the accountancy stream

### 2. Employer engagement

- a. Reflecting on the conversations with the stakeholders, the one-to-one links appear good and work well
- b. Business advisory panels might be reexplored by the management team; the infrastructure doesn't seem sufficiently comprehensive currently. The school is advised to adopt a more structured approach
- c. Flexibility and responsiveness; level of qualifications of the graduates as voiced by industry; is the school sufficiently responsive to the needs and structures of industry?
- d. Mentoring scheme as mentioned by the students wishing to commence their own business; the panel sees merit in this and encourages the school to consider same
- e. Engagement of employers as partners including in the role of attracting learners into a particular domain; utilize employers more
- f. To compliment the fact that the school is engaged with, and aware of, the economic expectations of the region

### 3. Work placement

- a. Many issues raised may have been addressed but management of the placement and comments from students give rise to concern. How are employers prepared and supported? The same can be said for students. This touches upon the quality of the student experience. The school is recommended to revisit the consistency of its approach to and management of placements.
- b. Resourcing requirements attaching to the management of placements. The school should revisit realistically its requirements in this regard.
- c. The panel supports opportunities for placement in other programmes where they are not currently available

- d. The panel notes the risk of reputational damage to the school and institute if this important element is not managed satisfactorily
- e. The school might usefully seek greater consistency in the use of placement handbook and/or the use of software such as Student Diary Pro

#### 4. Learning & Teaching

- a. The panel records a commendation for the many examples of good practice it met with in respect of L&T; but that good practice might also inform student feedback
- b. There is evidence of variable student feedback approaches; this might be reflected upon. The school should review. The institute has performed excellently in engaging with the ISSE but the feedback at individual lecturer level within the school appears inconsistent and should be addressed as a priority.
- c. It appears that information may be dated in some lectures, this was a perception from some students; the panel recommends that the school investigate this matter
- d. Advanced entry can lead to repetition of material especially through electives; be conscious of this danger
- e. The panel notes that there is strength in that business lecturers are embedded in the HT&L; the panel is positive concerning this integration
- f. The panel notes the comments from students on elective choices – lack of notice is the issue here. While acknowledging the resourcing constraints, the panel encourages the school to make and communicate decisions in a timely manner

#### 5. International students

- a. Managing their expectations is key. The consistent engagement of the institute in the international market is acknowledged; the Business School hosts a significant proportion of incoming students. The panel heard from international students and cannot but conclude that in at least some cases there is a mismatch between the students' expectations and the reality. The school is encouraged to work with the international office of the institute to consider and address this matter.
- b. In addition to the above, the school might consider the fit with what international students do here with what they do at home; in this respect, there might usefully be an initial focus on the partnership with Torino and on what students are engaging with their prior to arrival in AIT
- c. Following on from above, there is opportunity for the school to elevate the relationship with the Politecnico di Torino. A joint or double degree might be explored as a point of difference.

#### 6. General comments

- a. The panel commends the retention initiative; the school has enacted the institutional strategy very well on retention
- b. A little more structure around the entrepreneurship offering is desirable
- c. The HT&L focus group on integrated assessments is commended
- d. Student recruitment is a challenge; the panel notes that the world of work and the professions might be harnessed as allies in this respect
- e. There is little evidence that blended learning has been embraced to any meaningful degree



- f. The panel encourages the school to reflect on the manner in which it can manage the programme development strategy; the portfolio is noticeably broad at the moment; be careful of diluting existing offerings; the panel reflects that there are many courses and it is seductively easy to introduce a new programme which only dilutes the existing base
- g. The panel is not entirely convinced that the school has thought through the build into a focused research strategy; there remains the requirement to grapple with the larger progression question. Please see research recommendations above.
- h. Looked at holistically, student numbers are worrying; FE L6 programmes are attractive and are well supported in the school but such students are mobile
- i. The panel is conscious that the restructure of the school is not yet complete. It heard from some staff concerns over the location of the Sports & Recreation programme. This is a matter for the institute but the panel encourages an early resolution as part of the general management of change.

The formal interim feedback from the chair was delivered to the HoS and his HsoD at 14.15 hours. The chair thanked the school management and pointed out that the fuller detail would emerge in this report. He found this to be a rewarding event and constructive exercise. The panel appreciated the work that informs such an evaluation and again praised the documentation and the accessible electronic format.

The chair recorded thanks to those who came to meet the panel; people were generously forthcoming, resulting in a genuine open dialogue.

He acknowledged the good work that is going on in the school citing L&T as example. There is a school that has a sense of knowing where it is going.

To affirm the context, the panel is seeing a work in transition, changes in management and organization will have preoccupied people and the school faces a challenge in delivering a wide portfolio for a diverse student cohort. Good integration of the HT&L and discussion around the sports area are mentioned. Some changes have been precipitated by events. Linked is the theme of resource constraint and maintenance of quality. The school has had to accommodate that circumstance. Also acknowledged is the political and policy context and how the institute is responding to the opportunity to become a TU; this links to the way in AIT ensures that it is meeting the expectations of HE. Finally, the chair commended the work on retention and the manner in which the school is delivering on this institute priority.

The panel is proposing revalidation of the programmes for a period of not longer than seven years; the panel has confidence in the institution's processes and procedures.

The school is a work in progress: the management of the portfolio of the programmes is still in train. The challenge is that this is not easy. The report embeds suggestions on where the school might concentrate activity for the future with the intention that school management can be assisted to see the picture holistically.

Research development. The panel afforded this attention. An outline research strategy is in place with indication there is more to be done. The panel is entirely sympathetic to the resource challenge in meeting the research objectives. The report will give encouragement to this ambition. The school will be encouraged to look at research networks both internal and external within the cluster. There is more to be done to develop the embryonic research strategy and in setting out how the BS intends to make this happen; the panel encourages the BS to work on this. Be mindful of building scholarly activity.

Employer engagement. Some strong links are in evidence. The panel has not seen evidence of a consistent framework for standing strategic advisory group(s). It recommends that the BS revisit this and capitalize on the stated willingness of employers to support developments in the school. This will help define how well programmes are attuned to the expectations of industry. That the school has to be more responsive and flexible, is the stated view of business. An aim is working with employers as partners in the delivery of programmes; meeting with students, and having enterprise more on board. The chair referred to the entrepreneurship student recommendation that a mentor be considered.

Work placements: the value is recognized. The panel heard some critical comments on the management of placements. These covered the setting of learning objectives, and learning contracts; there were equally some critical voices from the students around their experience of placement. The panel advises exploration of opportunity for placement in other areas in the school. Resourcing is an issue and it is recognized but placement is integral and needs to be resourced accordingly.

L&T developments. These are commended, especially the innovative approaches in respect of delivery. It has resulted in more autonomous patterns of learning.

It is worth reflecting on student feedback and the variability of such feedback and how this leads into course enhancement.

Turning to the currency of courses. How can the school ensure its programmes are up to date and relevant? The chair referred to commentary on utilizing the most appropriate software and current examples. Additionally there was student comment that the same topics might be repeated in different streams and at different levels; this spoke especially to the management of electives. Elective choices have occasioned problems, not concerning viability but rather with respect to the notice provided to students.

International students are making a significant contribution but their expectation and the nature of the relationship to the programmes in their home country deserves attention. Again it may be that some material is being recovered, repeated. The school should reinvestigate the nature of the fit with the home programme. The chair affirmed the potential to develop the links further with the Politecnico di Torino.

The head of school. Mr Langan, acknowledged the work of the panel and especially the constructive manner in which the dialogue had been managed over the period of the site visit. The academic registrar, Dr Ryan, congratulated the management and staff of the school on the work underpinning the exercise and on the emerging outcome and on behalf of the institute recorded a formal thanks to the chair and panel members for the manner in which they had approached and expedited this

evaluation. Finally, a general vote of thanks was recorded to the quality office and Ms Cora McCormack and Ms Amanda Ryan for their logistical support.

**Signed:**

**Dr Stephen Jackson**  
**Chair of Panel**

**Dated:**

**12.02.2016**

# Appendix 1

## Programmatic Review Business School Presentation



# Programmatic Review Business School

*28 April 2015*

*Dr Joseph Ryan*

*Academic Registrar*

## Appendix 2

Department of Accounting and Business Computing

Presentation by

Mr Brendan Doyle Head of Deparment

# Programmatic Review 2015

Department of Accounting &  
Business Computing

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## **Report from Professors Denis Harrington and Joseph Coughlan with respect to School review AIT Business School**

**25<sup>th</sup> May 2015**

The report is a summary of the key points from our discussions with management, staff, students and other stakeholder at AIT. While the Chairperson Dr Stephen Jackson provided an agreed and comprehensive summary of discussions from our recent meetings at AIT School Review, we would like to jointly make the following summary remarks from our review of business and accounting programmes and research at AIT Business School. We hope that management and staff find our comments to be worthwhile as they seek to continually evolve and further develop the School's activities:

1. Requirement for a strategic review of programme activity – it would helpful over the coming years to review current provision with particular emphasis on aligning key programme development activity to overall School and Institute strategy.
2. There appears to be good integration between the two original Business departments. The departments need to continue to embed good practices from each other across the School.
3. School should examine the potential to work collaboratively with other Schools on both programme provision and research activities. During our breakout sessions it appeared from feedback that there are evolving strengths here that are not fully capitalised. For example a 'live' HSE case study that stakeholders discussed in detail at their session could be rolled out in different ways across the School.
4. Engagement with students appears to be an area where there is potential for further leverage in terms of the School's overall positioning. While the results of the recent engagement study are impressive, this should be communicated to students and other stakeholders.
5. There is a wide degree of innovative teaching and learning and assessment methodologies being employed by the teaching staff. This is to be commended and better integrated across all programmes.
6. School research strategy is underdeveloped and the targets presented are overambitious. In this regard there is a requirement for the management team to develop a Research and Knowledge Transfer strategy. It was evident in our meetings with staff that some are keen to undertake research supervision and grow their research activities. However we are not fully convinced that this is aligned to overall School strategy, programme development or institute strategy. In the development of the strategy it would be important to have wide ranging discussions on the identification and development of potential research strands within the School – some of these might even develop with other Schools.
7. Programmes should be better integrated into the research activities of the School. There is potential to further develop the entrepreneurship academy; however the team might consider what direction/focus it will take over time. For instance, how is/will it be different to other academies located in other universities?
8. The graduate attributes initiative is an interesting and worthwhile idea. However again it would be of value if this was integrated into the programmes and research in ways that are clearly visible to prospective students, employers and other stakeholders. It would also be of interest to see these at the forefront of programme level documentation and mapped to NQF learning outcomes according to the level of programme.



9. The incorporation of placements into some of the programmes is again a sensible initiative. However, there should be further work undertaken to establish clear policies, practices and procedures so that students can feel confident about the nature and level of support that they will receive.
10. The stakeholders that we met were clearly taken by the support that they receive from the School and the talent pool that is available to them from AIT. We feel that this should be further leveraged so that the School can continue to benefit from these types of engagement. Consideration in this regard should be given to the establishment of a Business Advisory Group with planned meetings and agreed action items over the course of the academic year. We were made aware of the use of the Industry Review Panels but these should be established within the structures of the business school. An Alumni group would also be useful in this regard to steer the Business School.
11. The student group that we met were also largely positive about their overall student experience at AIT. However there is a requirement for greater clarity on the mechanisms for collating student feedback. While staff were clear that this occurs within the established course board structures, the students were less than clear about how such feedback was solicited. The reliance on ISSE data, which focusses on first and final year students, is potentially problematic as for direct entry three and four year degree programmes their feedback is not solicited during some of their time at AIT and some key insights may be missed. There were also critical of course content for some programmes especially the use and incorporation of dated materials on slides/handouts. The students also wanted more clarity on whether or not programme options would run earlier in the semester.
12. We would have some concerns about the feedback from the international students most of whom were not entirely positive about their student experience. We think this warrants further attention especially as there is some potential to leverage the Torino relationship in a strategic way – for example, the potential for the development of a double degree or potential collaboration on research activities.
13. A further concern would be the overall structure for the learning on the Level 8 entrepreneurship programme. This needs a dedicated resource as the programme is innovative and could be a potential star programme for the School.