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STRATEGIC PLAN

ATHLONE INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
2009-2013



2009-2013

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2013

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THE PLAN ENSURES
CONTINUED EMPHASIS ON THE
ACHIEVEMENT OF INNOVATIVE
EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING
AND ENHANCEMENT OF THE
LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

GATEWAY

INTRODUCTION

This strategic plan for AIT is formulated within the context of the wider social and economic development of the Midlands Gateway/region and the Irish economy. A vision for the Gateway was enunciated in the Strategic Development Framework for Midlands Gateway, which was launched by An Tánaiste and Minister for Finance, Brian Cowen, in December 2006, and entails 'the development of a world-class, knowledge-based and competitive Gateway, underpinned by a quality urban structure and environment, excellent infrastructure and a visionary leadership, which maximises quality of life for its citizens.'

The designation and development of the Midlands Gateway is of key importance and will provide the basis to develop a range of high quality employment and educational opportunities centred on first-rate accessibility and mobility.

As the premier higher education and research institution in the Midlands, AIT will play a catalytic and leadership role in the realisation of this vision and in the successful development of a world-class, knowledge-based and competitive Gateway.

This strategic plan sets out a challenging and ambitious, but realisable, vision for the Institute's development, supported by a set of strategies, priorities, objectives and actions delivered over the next five-year period. The plan ensures continued emphasis on the achievement of innovative excellence in teaching and enhancement of the learning environment, the development of a strong reputation in research and innovation activities and a leadership role in the economic, social and cultural development of Midlands Gateway/region and the Irish economy.

The economic development of the Midlands Gateway/region is dependent on the enhancement of skills and an increase in high value-added economic sectors. The sectors which have been agreed as part of the Midlands strategy have been taken into account in the preparation of this strategic plan and there is now an exact alignment of the strategic plan for AIT and the development needs of the Gateway. The Midlands has a high percentage of lower valued economic and industrial activity and there is a need to attract high quality employment. This will be facilitated by this new strategic plan and AIT will play the key role in enhancing the skills base and human capital in the Gateway.

AIT has therefore responded comprehensively to the challenges facing the Midlands region.



THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE MIDLANDS GATEWAY/REGION IS DEPENDENT ON THE ENHANCEMENT OF SKILLS AND AN INCREASE IN HIGH VALUE-ADDED ECONOMIC SECTORS.



FOREWORD BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE GOVERNING BODY

This strategic plan for AIT will see the Institute building on its strengths to become a higher education institution of choice for learners and researchers regionally, nationally and internationally.

The plan involves a radical enhancement of the role of the Institute in the economic and social development of the Midlands Gateway and includes an increased emphasis on the development of AIT's research strengths, while continuing to promote excellence in learning and teaching as a key priority. The plan presents a series of transformational initiatives which build on the considerable success of the Institute to date and encompasses ambitious targets for the next five years.

As the sole third level institution in the Midlands, the success of the Gateway/region will be significantly influenced by the extent to which these targets are met.

In the foreword by the President, the key priorities and supporting initiatives which will enable the targets to be realised are identified. Distinctive features of this plan include the extent of collaborative actions, the creation of a genuine interactive e-learning institution and a new emphasis on strategic research. In each case, ambitious measurable targets give detailed expression to the larger vision. The Governing Body of AIT will strongly support the President, the management, staff and other stakeholders to achieve these ambitious targets, which will benefit both our students and the wider community.

Paul Breen
Chairman

REGIONALLY
NATIONALLY
INTERNATIONALLY

TARGETS FOR AIT 2009-2013

- Achieve increase of 40% in student numbers to 7,700
- Continue to achieve very high levels of employability and mobility of AIT students and for 95% of students to be employed or go on to further study within six months of graduating
- Increase postgraduate population to 1,000 over the life of the plan
- Extend the internationalisation of the campus, such that overseas students comprise 15% of full-time learners by 2013
- Increase to 20% the percentage of the Institute's programmes which are offered in collaboration with other higher education institutions
- Win research funding of €10 million per annum by 2013
- Increase, in conjunction with other agencies, the percentage of the Midlands Gateway population holding third level qualifications from current levels of 28.9% to at least the national average of 34.3%, with a target of 48% by 2020
- Target for 70% of research undertaken at the Institute to be characterised by industry/enterprise collaboration
- Support innovation and entrepreneurship development in the region
- Develop significant research strengths in medical technology, pharmaceutical science, health/life science, ICT/engineering and the humanities
- Develop learning and teaching strategies to enable a minimum completion rate of 85% among students across all programmes
- Develop interactive e-learning platform for students



FOREWORD BY THE PRESIDENT OF AIT

The priorities outlined in this strategic plan will be supported by initiatives to achieve national and international visibility as a college of choice for learners, to promote excellence in learning and teaching, to strengthen our research capacity and capability to play a catalytic role in the Midlands Gateway and its hinterland.

The vision for AIT forms the basis for the Institute's strategic priorities. Practical initiatives to realise the potential of learners at all levels and to develop the Institute's research capabilities will be implemented.

The scale of the challenge to achieve this vision should not be underestimated, but with commitment from all staff and with support from national policymakers, the plan is achievable. This vision will be realised in a collaborative setting through cooperation with Irish and overseas higher education and research institutions and with other key stakeholders.

AIT WILL BECOME A COLLEGE OF CHOICE FOR LEARNERS AND STAFF REGIONALLY, NATIONALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY. THIS WILL BE ACHIEVED THROUGH THE DEVELOPMENT OF INNOVATIVE EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING AND ENHANCEMENT OF THE LEARNING-CENTRED ENVIRONMENT, THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A STRONG REPUTATION IN RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND INDUSTRIAL COLLABORATION, AND A LEADERSHIP ROLE IN THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEVELOPMENT OF MIDLANDS GATEWAY/REGION.

VISION

College of Choice



The key supporting initiatives to achieve a regional, national and international reputation as a college of choice are summarised across. Achieving this objective will enable the Institute to expand sufficiently to meet its obligations to learners and to the wider community.

Initiatives to Achieve Visibility as a College of Choice for Students

- Enhance the learner-focused ethos and culture of the Institute through emphasis on teaching excellence and innovation in programme delivery.
- Delivery high quality, innovative programmes, from Level 6 to Level 10, that meet societal and industry needs
- Increase student involvement in the decision-making processes of the Institute
- Expand taught and research-based postgraduate programmes
- Enable opportunities for lifelong learning
- Increase emphasis on attraction of high quality students through innovative scholarship scheme
- Improve mentoring and tutoring support systems for students
- Support existing initiatives to encourage access, inclusiveness and diversity
- Expand collaborations in programme offerings with other higher education institutions
- Attract increased numbers of international learners, such that they comprise 15% of full-time learners by 2013
- Expand clinical and practical placements across all programmes
- Invest in physical development of the campus

Excellence in Learning and Teaching



Excellence in learning and teaching is a cornerstone of the strategic plan for the Institute and the foundation on which research excellence will be built.

AIT's Learning and Teaching Unit, a notable success of the previous plan, will be strengthened through 2013. Supporting actions to prioritise excellence in teaching and the development of an innovative learning-centred environment will be implemented. These include the development and expansion of existing programmes and the creation of an interactive e-learning Institute.

Initiatives to Achieve Excellence in Learning and Teaching

- Develop targeted new and innovative programmes, and implement improvements in traditional undergraduate, postgraduate and lifelong learning offerings. The full potential of modularization will be exploited.
- Expand the use and application of IT and other technologies to create an interactive e-learning institution
- Attract, recruit and retain high quality and motivated staff
- Continue with the internal quality assurance processes
- Provide ongoing professional development opportunities for all staff

Development of Strategic Research



A new element of this strategic plan is the emphasis on the development of the research capability and capacity of the Institute. Supporting actions include the development of an ambitious new research strategy and the creation of a new research campus. The research strategy will feature initiatives in collaboration with Irish and international higher education institutions (HEIs) and will attract exceptional researchers with international reputations. These initiatives are designed to transform the research strengths of the Institute and the region, and to build on AIT's recent successes.

Initiatives to Develop Strategic Research Activities

- Develop research strategy for Institute which will:
 - Increase emphasis on development of strategic research activities aligned with the strengths of Midlands Gateway/region
 - Increase annual recurrent budget channelled into development and operation of research support measures/programmes to 'seed' new research staff and support existing researchers
 - Increase mentoring and training supports for research staff
 - Increase focus on targeted, high quality competitive research funding proposals
- Create a new research campus:
 - Develop in partnership with research and industry stakeholders
 - House high-tech industrial R&D space, phase two of the Midlands Innovation and Research Institute, and an auditorium
 - Host AIT's existing strategic research institutes
- Explore joint research initiatives, collaboration with HEIs in Ireland and internationally:
 - Develop existing links with Irish and international partners, including Georgia Tech Ireland and Dublin City University (DCU), with which AIT has a Memorandum of Understanding
 - Initiate new Programme for Research in Third-Level Institutions (PRTL), Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) and other competitive fund proposals with industry in the region and with higher education partners
- Attract a number of exceptional researchers with international reputations:
 - Contract basis with attractive terms
 - Secondments
- Appoint additional outstanding researcher to research institute advisory boards
- Generate research income of €10 million per annum by 2013
- Expand 4th level programmes

Catalytic Role in Midlands Gateway and Wider Region

AIT is in a unique position to play a catalytic role in the economic, social, cultural and environmental development of the Midlands Gateway and the wider region. A high level of commitment to new enterprise development and to collaboration with industry is envisaged and will lead to significant quantified achievements as outlined in the targets for the plan, including a target that 70% of research will involve industry/enterprise collaboration.



Initiatives to Play Catalytic Role in the Region

- Increase numbers of third and fourth level graduates among the population of Midlands Gateway/region to at least national levels
- Act as a catalyst to develop world class knowledge-based competitive gateway by focusing on applied research initiatives with industry in the region
- Concentrate on core research areas: medical technology, pharmaceutical science, health/life sciences, ICT/engineering and the humanities
- Increase the level of commitment to new enterprise development and collaborative engagement with industry
- Develop joint initiatives with Georgia Tech Ireland
- Expand industry secondments:
 - Student placements
 - Industry participation in teaching programmes
 - Staff secondments to industry
- Expand work-based learning
- Assist in the skills development in the region, including access for lifelong learning and access for non-traditional students through innovative delivery mechanisms and alternative modes of education
- Develop outreach centres
- Support cultural development in region

Conclusion

This strategic plan will provide the framework for one of the most exciting phases in the history of ait. It can only be achieved with an all-prevailing focus on our students and with the determined support of staff. It represents a unique opportunity for ait as an institution, for our learners and for the wider region. This opportunity is one we are determined to seize. Actions have already been taken to start to implement the plan and i look forward to working with all stakeholders to achieve the ambitious vision and priorities over the next five years.

Professor Ciarán Ó Catháin
President



BACKGROUND

AIT has a student population of 5,500 learners, providing programmes that are developed in line with regional, national and international needs. In recent years, the Institute has successfully started a process of building its research capacity and research base with an emphasis on applied research activities. This emphasis, as well as liaison with industrial and commercial organisations, have helped to ensure the relevance and technological competence of programmes at the Institute, and has enhanced the employment prospects of our graduates. AIT has also been successful in attracting international students and has agreements with more than 200 higher education institutions around the globe.

This success has been based, in part, on the Institute's previous strategic plan, which covered the period 2003-2008, and which contained a review mechanism to facilitate the transition to a new five-year plan period. This strategic plan for AIT covers the period 2009-2013 and aims to underpin the development of the Institute over the medium term and to significantly enhance its role in the wider economic and social development of the Midlands Gateway. It is based on integrated planning, with a goal to build on the Institute's achievements in a sustainable manner. The plan articulates a vision for the future of the Institute and presents a set of strategic priorities and initiatives geared towards realising that vision. This ambitious, yet realisable plan is based on consultation with stakeholders, as well as an analysis of internal and external factors.



DEVELOPING THE STRATEGIC PLAN

In developing this strategic plan, due consideration was given to ensuring that it fully reflects and considers the implications of the external environment, government policies, and various internal and external drivers.

The planning process was based on a number of elements:

- Detailed background research was undertaken in relation to the external context framing this strategic plan. This included a realistic analysis of the Institute and an assessment of demographic developments, as well as policy developments in Ireland and abroad.
- Wide-ranging consultations with staff, students and other interested groups were undertaken to ensure that all were given the opportunity to input to the strategic planning process.
- An extensive consultation programme was undertaken with external stakeholders and with members of senior management; Governing Body; heads of departments; student representatives; as well as with heads of research institutes. Meetings were also held with the Partnership Forum and the Academic Council.
- Focus groups were held and an opportunity was given to all members of staff to attend.

IN ORDER TO BE EFFECTIVE, THIS STRATEGIC PLAN IS INFORMED BY THE MISSION OF AIT, A CLEAR VISION FOR THE FUTURE, NATIONAL POLICIES FOR HIGHER EDUCATION, REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES, AS WELL AS INTERNATIONAL TRENDS IN HIGHER EDUCATION.

A VISION FOR AIT

AIT will build on its strengths to become a college of choice for learners and staff regionally, nationally and internationally. This outcome will be achieved through an emphasis on the development of innovative excellence in teaching, academic exchange and enhancement of the learning centred environment, the establishment of a strong reputation in research, innovation and knowledge transfer, and a leadership role in the economic, social, cultural and environmental development of Midlands Gateway/region.

The plan will involve a special emphasis on collaboration with Irish and overseas higher education and research institutions and with other key stakeholders. Collaboration will maximise the Institute's contribution to our learners & to the wider community.

When this vision is implemented AIT will be differentiated by the extent of collaboration, the quality and flexibility of its teaching, its student centred approach to learning, the excellence of its research, and its leadership in developing the economic, social, cultural and environmental capital of the Midlands Gateway/region.



STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR AIT

Main Strategic Priorities 2009-2013

1. Achieve reputation and visibility as a college of choice
2. Develop excellence in learning and teaching
3. Strengthen research capability and capacity
4. Play catalytic role in the economic, social, cultural and environmental development of the Midlands Gateway/region

The vision for AIT forms the basis for the strategic priorities for 2009-2013. A determined programme of practical actions will be taken to support their implementation.

The strategic priorities identify areas that need to be addressed in order to achieve the vision, and are based on analysis of the internal and external environment confronting the Institute.

The institute will implement practical initiatives as outlined here, to meet the strategic goals and realise its vision. These are designed to realise the potential of learners at all levels and to develop research capabilities so that we can maximise the Institute's contribution to the region. The vision will be realised in a collaborative setting through cooperation with Irish and overseas higher education and research institutions and other key stakeholders.

ACHIEVE A REPUTATION AND VISIBILITY AS A COLLEGE OF CHOICE

An overriding priority of the strategic plan is for AIT to achieve a reputation and visibility as a college of choice, and this encompasses a number of reputation-related objectives. This requires an imaginative and aggressive marketing and communications strategy for the national and international market. An enhanced reputation for the Institute will help attract students in an increasingly competitive market place, while also assisting with student retention.

Academic programmes which meet and anticipate the needs of industry and society will be hallmark of the Institute. These courses will in turn deliver on the needs of Irish and international learners, which will facilitate them to enjoy successful and rewarding careers. The reputation of AIT will be linked to excellence in teaching and to the Institute's research profile.

Securing a high retention rate of students in the new environment will involve ongoing improvements in teaching, as well as in the broader domain of student supports.

These reputational objectives will also support an increase in the scale of AIT, while helping to attract and retain high quality staff.

The ambitious vision will see student numbers increasing by 40% and one-fifth of all programmes will be offered in collaboration with other higher education institutions. All of the main disciplines will offer postgraduate programmes.

REPUTATION-RELATED OBJECTIVES

Achieve national and international reputation as a college of choice for learners and staff, including research leaders, in order to:

- Increase student numbers in an increasingly competitive market by 40%
- Improve retention rates of currently enrolled students
- Increase the participation of high achieving students
- Increase the scale of AIT to realise potential of the Institute
- Retain and attract high quality staff
- Increase postgraduate population to 1,000 students

In order to achieve these strategic objectives, various initiatives will be undertaken to ensure an enhanced reputation and visibility for AIT as a college of choice. These are detailed below.

Enhance a learner-focused ethos and culture

An enhanced, learner-focused, ethos and culture will help to retain currently enrolled students, attract increasing numbers of students, and increasing the overall scale of AIT. Specific initiatives to achieve this are outlined in the next section.

Increase student involvement

Provision for greater participation and involvement by students in relation to decisions made by the Institute which directly impact on students' experiences will be made. A review of student services in consultation with the Students' Union will be undertaken to ensure this student focus is effectively implemented.

Expand provision of postgraduate programmes

Continuing to expand the provision of postgraduate programmes will help realise the potential of the Institute through increased student numbers and a diversified student population. Furthermore, it meets national objectives in helping to create the knowledge economy. Each major academic discipline will provide opportunities at Levels 9 and 10.

Expand provision of lifelong learning opportunities

The Institute will continue to build relationships with industries in the Midlands Gateway/region and will expand its provision of lifelong learning opportunities.

Attract high quality Irish students

An increased emphasis on attracting high quality Irish students through an innovative scholarship scheme will be implemented and will have an impact on improving the national and international reputation of AIT, and will also raise the overall standard of both students and graduates.

Improve mentoring and tutoring support systems

Improved mentoring and tutoring support systems for students will represent an important supporting initiative to improve the learning experience for students and leading to improved results. Such systems will be consistent with the creation of a learner-focused ethos and culture at the Institute.

The learner-focused nature of the Institute will be further enhanced through specific and quantified actions including the delivery of a minimum level of tutorial support for every learner. For some modules reduced lectures and the use of electronic delivery will free-up resources to implement interactive small group tutorials, supplemented by progressive assessment methods.

Support existing initiatives to encourage access, inclusiveness and diversity

AIT has played a leadership role in higher education in attracting and supporting students with disabilities and from non-traditional backgrounds. The Institute will look to find new ways of encouraging access, inclusiveness and diversity on campus through its support structures and through the latest information technology.

Expand programmes offered in collaboration with other higher education institutions

The expansion of programmes offered in collaboration with overseas and Irish institutions will improve the profile, reputation and visibility of the Institute. It will also enhance the relative attractiveness of the Institute to students by providing an opportunity for an alternative learning experience. This will represent one aspect of the collaborative approach which will be a distinctive feature of this plan. A target of the plan is to offer 20% of programmes on a collaborative basis.

Attract increased numbers of international students

AIT has relationships and agreements with more than 200 higher education institutions around the world. Attracting greater numbers of international students will make AIT a more attractive college for learners and will support the international reputation of AIT. A targeted marketing campaign will be undertaken to extend the internationalisation of the campus, such that 15% of full-time learners will be overseas students.

Embed clinical and practical placements within programmes

The inclusion of clinical and practical placements within academic programmes enhances the learning environment and introduces the student to relevant work experience. AIT will expand this element within its academic offerings.

Invest in AIT campus

A programme of investment in the physical development of the AIT campus will be pursued. Improvements in the academic as well as non-academic infrastructure and facilities will be undertaken. The investment will include integrated IT within laboratories and the adoption of virtual laboratory learning. Actions will be taken to ensure that facilities are equipped to the highest standard and supported to give the best learning experience. Improvements will also be made in the Institute library and other facilities including sporting, recreational and health facilities.



Supporting Initiatives to Achieve a Reputation as a College of Choice

- 1 Enhance the learner-focused ethos and culture of the Institute through emphasis on teaching excellence and the delivery of high quality, focused outcomes that are relevant to individual personal development and to business and professionals. This will also include the provision of innovative learning for levels 6-10
- 2 Increase student involvement in the Institute decision-making processes
- 3 Continue to expand postgraduate programmes
- 4 Continue to expand the range of lifelong learning opportunities
- 5 Increase emphasis on attraction of high quality Irish students through innovative scholarship scheme
- 6 Improve mentoring and tutoring support systems for students
- 7 Support initiatives to encourage access, inclusiveness and diversity
- 8 Expand number of programmes offered in collaboration with other higher education institutions
- 9 Attract increased numbers of international learners to comprise 15% of full-time students
- 10 Expand clinical and practical placement within all programmes
- 11 Invest in physical development of campus

DEVELOP EXCELLENCE IN LEARNING AND TEACHING

A priority of the strategic plan is to promote excellence in teaching and the development of an innovative learning-centred environment. Learning and teaching is a core function of AIT and is the cornerstone on which research excellence will be built.

The launch of AIT's Learning and Teaching Unit represented a significant step and the unit will be developed over the period of this plan. AIT will foster an institute-wide environment where staff and students value and contribute to the enhancement of learning and teaching. We will promote an effective learning experience for all learners through an integrated collaborative approach. The plan promotes a learning culture that respects and supports individual differences among learners, encourages student-centred learning environments, values and rewards teaching, supports educational research, disseminates best practice, and implements pedagogical innovations.

There will be an emphasis on teaching excellence and the delivery of high quality, focused outcomes that are relevant to individual personal development and to business and professionals. Improved teaching standards will be achieved through investment in staff training and development. Excellence in learning and teaching will involve supports for academic development, including educational research.

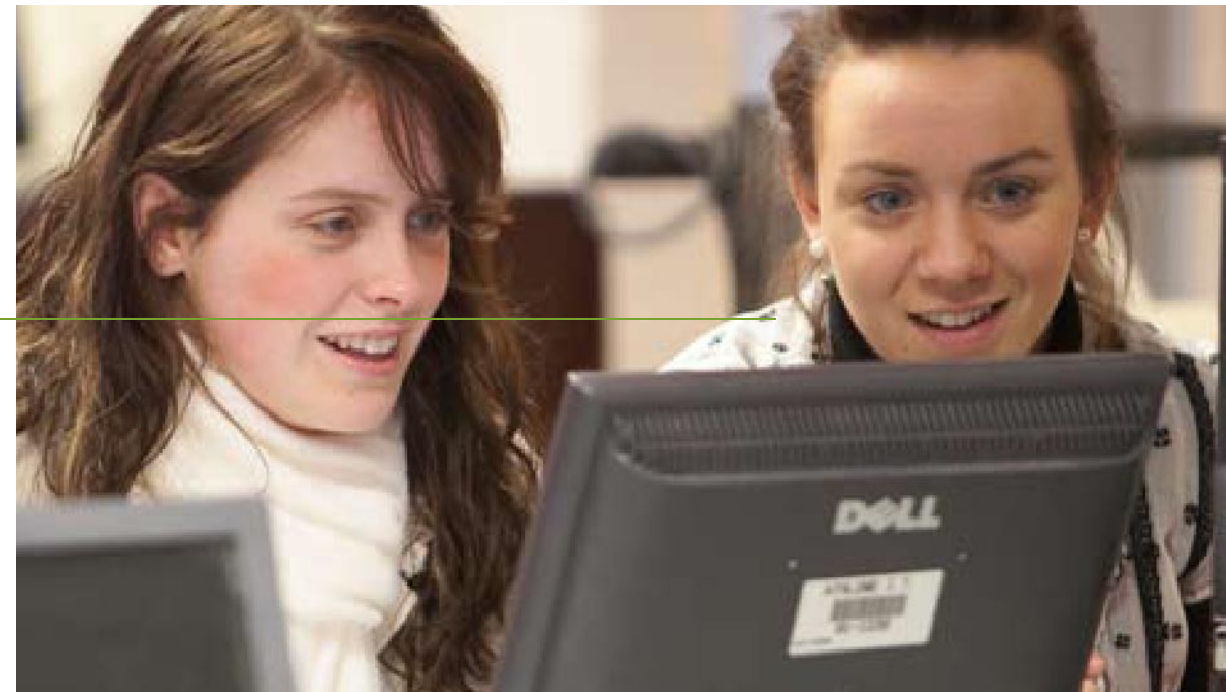
The provision of innovative learning for Level 6-10 programmes is a key to enhance student learning at AIT. The Institute will expand the provision of modularized programmes and will exploit their full potential, enabling students to combine modules from different areas into their overall qualification.

Improving the experience of first year learners will be a focus of the plan and will include effective induction programmes and supports. Measures to assist new learners to participate effectively will be implemented.

This plan will ensure that AIT will be differentiated for the excellence of its teaching. Baseline surveys of students and graduates will contribute to continuous improvement of learning and teaching. The standard of facilities in both classroom and laboratories will be benchmarked against international standards. The Institute's teaching support environment will be benchmarked against best practice and systematic supports will be put in place.

LEARNING & TEACHING OBJECTIVES

- Foster institute-wide environment where staff and students value and contribute to enhancement of teaching and learning
- Promote effective learner experience for all learners through integrated collaborative approach including work-based learning
- Progressive adoption of a tutorial-based & supplemented learning within a blended environment
- Develop a culture that:
 - Respects and supports individual differences among learners
 - Encourages student-centred learning environments
 - Values and rewards teaching
 - Supports educational research
 - Disseminates best practice
 - Implements pedagogical innovations
 - Facilitates graduates that are prepared for the knowledge economy and able to make a contribution to all aspect of society
 - Create a learning centred environment with on-going staff development



Various initiatives will be undertaken to ensure the development of learning and teaching excellence in AIT. These are enumerated below.

Develop new and innovative programmes

We will implement continued development of targeted new and innovative programmes, whilst ensuring that improvements in existing undergraduate, postgraduate and lifelong learning programmes are ongoing. In particular, the full potential of modularization will be exploited, creating a rich learning for all students.

Create an interactive e-learning Institute

Focus will be given under this priority to the expansion of the use and application of integrated state-of-the-art learning and teaching technologies to help create a genuine interactive e-learning institution. This represents an important initiative in order to promote excellence in teaching and to develop an innovative learning-centred environment.

Attract, recruit and retain quality staff

A key initiative will be an on-going emphasis on the attraction, recruitment and retention of high quality and highly motivated staff. Increased investment in staff training and development, involvement of staff in key decisions, as well as the development of improved lines of communication between management and staff and learners will be implemented to improve the experience of staff at AIT.

Promote internal quality assurance process

The internal quality assurance process will continue to ensure the high quality and relevance of programmes and help to promote excellence in teaching.

Provide supports for staff development

The provision of ongoing supports for the professional development of staff will promote excellence in learning and teaching. A plan will be put in place to support teaching. Staff development will be addressed in the light of this strategic requirement.

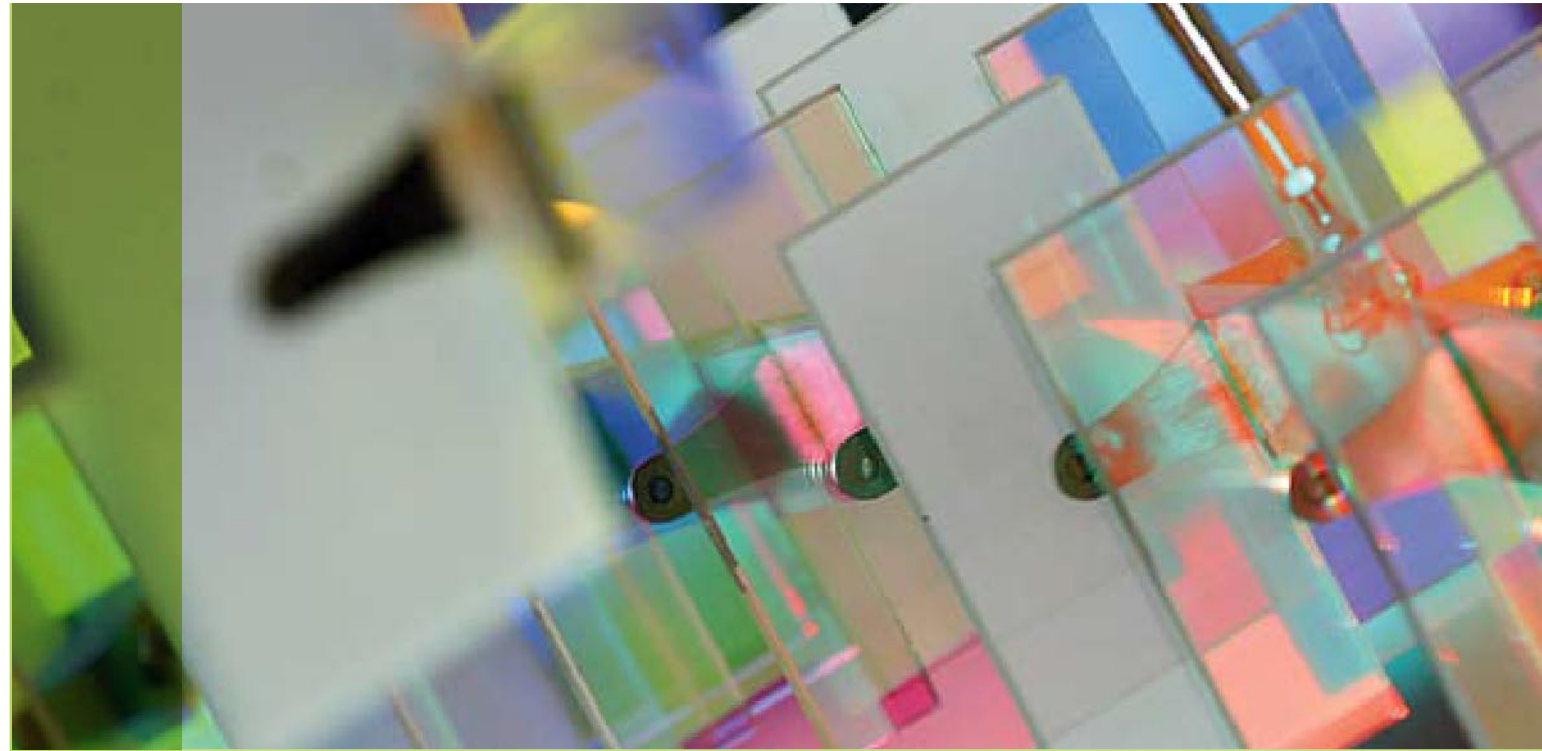
Supporting Initiatives to Develop Excellence in Learning and Teaching

- 1 Implement continued development of targeted new and innovative programmes and improvements in existing undergraduate, postgraduate and lifelong learning programmes. The full potential of modularization will be exploited.
- 2 Expand the use and application of integrated state-of-the-art learning and teaching technologies to create a genuine interactive e-learning institution
- 3 Emphasise the attraction, recruitment and retention of high quality and highly motivated staff
- 4 Promote the internal quality assurance process to ensure quality and relevance of programmes
- 5 Provide ongoing supports for staff development



STRENGTHEN RESEARCH CAPACITY AND CAPABILITY

A priority of this plan involves a new emphasis on developing the strategic research capacity and capability of the Institute. In order to achieve this priority, a number of research objectives have been identified. These include increasing the base-line research-active participation, the scale of competitive research, the number of postgraduate research students, and the level of strategic research collaboration.



RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

To significantly enhance the Institute's research capability and capacity by increasing:

- Base-line research-active participation
- Scale of competitive research
- Annual competitive research income to achieve a €10 million per annum target by 2013
- Postgraduate research students numbers to 1,000
- Strategic research collaboration and development leading to the commercialisation of intellectual property (IP), technology transfers, joint ventures and spin-off companies
- Strategic investment in leading-edge research infrastructure and networking.

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The scale of initiatives which will be implemented to develop strategic research activities at AIT and to strengthen the research capacity and capability of the Institute is a distinguishing feature of this plan. These are required to develop strategic research collaborations and to enhance the Institute's research standing nationally and internationally. These are detailed below.

Develop a new research strategy

A key initiative under this priority is the development of a new research strategy for the Institute, which will increase the emphasis on the targeting of strategic research activities aligned with existing and emerging strengths of the Midlands Gateway and the surrounding region. It will increase the annual recurrent budget channelled into the development and operation of research support measures/programmes in order to 'seed' new research staff and support existing researchers.

The new research strategy will provide increased mentoring and training supports for research staff as well as providing an increased focus on targeted, high quality competitive research funding proposals. Active publication will be encouraged. The strategy will include a target-driven incremental release of staff for research purposes with the objective of encouraging more of the Institute's staff to engage in research activity.

The research strategy will emphasise the linkage between research activity and learning and teaching. Individual researchers will be encouraged to engage in and explore new areas of knowledge. Individual research ambitions will be supported where possible and new emerging areas of research will be facilitated.

Create a new research campus

The creation of a Midlands Gateway Research Campus will be a significant component of this strategic plan. Developed in partnership with regional and national research and industry stakeholders, it will house high-tech industry R&D space, phase two of the Midlands Innovation and Research Centre (MIRC), as well as an auditorium. It is also anticipated that the Research Campus will host the Institute's existing three research institutes – the Software Research Institute (SRI), the Materials Research Institute (MRI) and the Bioscience Research Institute (BRI). The Research Campus will be the focus of AIT's submission to PRTL V.

Develop joint research initiatives and collaboration

Joint research initiatives and collaboration will be initiated with higher education institutions in Ireland and internationally. AIT will look to develop its existing links with Georgia Tech Ireland and Dublin City University (DCU) and also initiate new PRTL V, SFI and other competitive funding proposals with industry in the region.



Attract exceptional researchers

The research reputation of any institution is a function of the quality of its research staff, students and research output. AIT intends to attract a number of exceptional researchers with international reputations. Potential avenues for attracting such research staff include on a contract basis with attractive terms, as well as by offering secondments at the Institute.

Appoint additional outstanding researcher to research institute advisory boards

A further initiative to achieve the research objectives of this priority will entail the appointment of an additional outstanding researcher to the Institute research centre advisory boards. This will help to strengthen the level of research output, scope and standards.

Target for research income

An ambitious target for research income has been set at a minimum of €10 million per annum by 2013. This will require high quality faculty members focused on research as well as excellent funding applications.

Expand 4th level programmes

An expansion of 4th level programmes at the institute will support the development of research activities at AIT. The Midlands region needs to significantly move up the value chain in terms of its economic activity and the expansion of 4th level programmes at the Institute will be central to this.

Supporting Initiatives to Strengthen Research Capacity and Capability

1 Develop research strategy for the Institute which:

- Increases emphasis on targeting of strategic research activities aligned with existing and emerging strengths of Midlands Gateway and surrounding region
- Increases annual recurrent budget channelled into development and operation of research support measures/programmes to 'seed' new research staff and support existing researchers
- Provides increased mentoring and training supports for research staff
- Provides increased focus on targeted, high quality competitive research funding proposals

2 Create a new research campus in partnership with research and industry stakeholders to:

- House high-tech industry R&D space, phase two of the MIRC and an auditorium
- Host AIT's three existing strategic research institutes

3 Explore joint research initiatives, collaboration with universities and other HEIs in Ireland and internationally:

- Develop existing links with Georgia Tech, DCU and other higher education institutions
- Initiate new PRTL, SFI and other competitive fund proposals with industry in the region and with other HEI partners

4 Attract a number of exceptional researchers with international reputations:

- Contract basis with attractive terms
- Secondments

5 Appoint additional outstanding researcher to research institute advisory boards

6 Generate research income of €10 million per annum by 2013

7 Expand 4th level programmes





PLAY CATALYTIC ROLE IN MIDLANDS GATEWAY AND IN NATIONAL ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEVELOPMENT

A priority for AIT is to play a catalytic role in the economic, social, cultural and environmental development of the Midlands Gateway and the wider region, as well as contributing at a national level. As the only third level institution in the region, AIT has a unique responsibility to play a leadership role and this plan will ensure that the Institute fulfils this requirement.

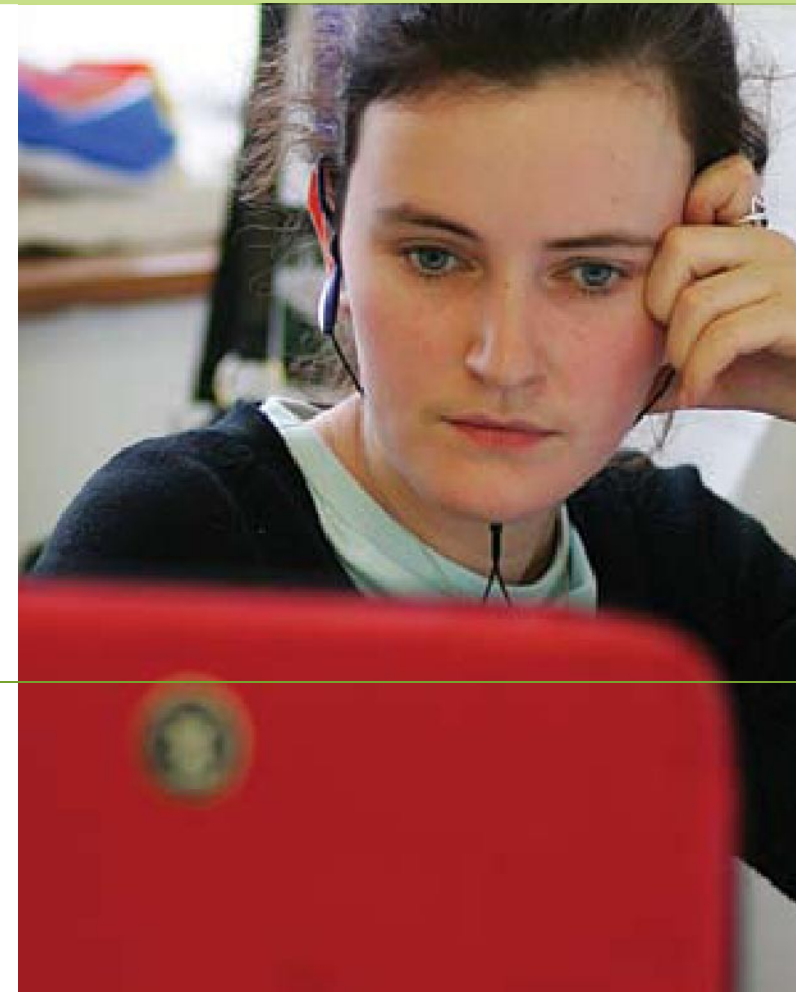
As stated in the recent Strategic Development Framework for the Midlands Gateway, global economic forces have moved to an environment where survival and success in a high income country such as Ireland are dependent on the ability to compete on the basis of higher value-added, knowledge-based activities. This means that if the Midlands Gateway and surrounding region is to prosper economically, the focus of development must be on knowledge-based enterprise and innovation activities which capitalise on strong linkages between industry and high quality 3rd and 4th level sectors in the region.

Promoting Ireland and the Midlands as the knowledge economy, is also a strategic priority for IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland and other development agencies. The ability to use knowledge quickly, flexibly and creatively is a distinguishing feature of Ireland for many companies. The unprecedented changes in the economy reinforce the need for the Midlands to develop a knowledge-based strategy for industry. This means building relevant skill sets and developing closer cooperation between industry and AIT.

As the sole third level provider in the Midlands Gateway/region, we will facilitate the move towards high value activity in the region. We will align the research focus of the Institute with areas of strength and the requirements of economic activity in the region. This plan will enable the Institute to contribute to wider national economic and social development, and to support employability and professional career readiness.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES

- Play distinct leadership role as the sole third level provider in development of Midlands Gateway/region and facilitate the move towards high value activity
- Align research focus with areas of strength and with the requirements of economic activity in the region
- Contribute to the national economic and social development
- Support employability and professional career readiness



A number of significant initiatives to play a catalytic role in the Midlands Gateway and wider regional and national economic, social, cultural and environmental development will be implemented. These are enumerated below.

Increase numbers of 3rd and 4th level graduates

In partnership with regional and national stakeholders, AIT will work to increase the number of 3rd and 4th level graduates among the population of the Midlands Gateway/region to at least national levels. Current higher education levels in the region stand at 28.9%, with the national average at 34.3%. National policy has posted a target of 48% of the population to hold a Level 6 qualification or higher by 2020. This will be a significant factor in the ongoing development of a world-class knowledge-based society in the Midlands.

Develop world class knowledge-based competitive gateway

AIT, in association with the development agencies, will act as a catalyst to develop a world class knowledge-based competitive gateway by focusing on applied research initiatives with industry. The Institute will concentrate on the following research areas: medical technology, pharmaceutical science, health/life sciences, ICT/engineering and the humanities. The Institute will be differentiated by its ability to engage in research relevant to enterprise.

Increase the level of commitment to new enterprise development and industry collaboration

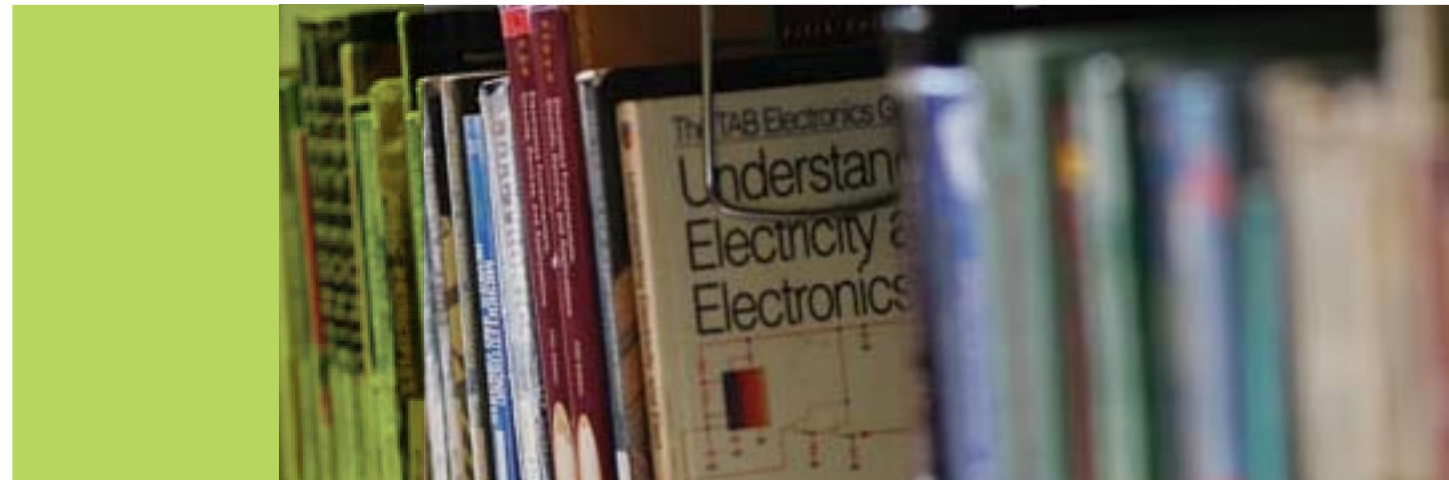
There is a strong commitment in the Institute to new enterprise development and industry collaboration. AIT has been a pioneer in supporting innovation partnerships with indigenous High Potential Start-Ups (HPSUs). Under this plan, the Midlands Innovation and Research Centre will be expanded to deliver even more effectively as a hub for academic and enterprise collaboration, through the provision of incubation facilities for innovative and knowledge-based enterprise and facilities. Research expertise and business development support of the Institute will be made available to both indigenous and multinational enterprises. A target of the strategic plan is for 70% of research undertaken to be characterised by industry/enterprise collaboration.

Develop joint initiatives with Georgia Tech Ireland

AIT will develop joint initiatives with Georgia Tech Ireland to support this priority. This will require outcomes which are mutually beneficial and will involve the development of niche capacities. This is in addition to collaboration with other institutions. The proximity of Georgia Tech Ireland to AIT provides a unique opportunity to develop collaborative initiatives of real significance. Areas which will be explored include joint degrees, faculty secondments and research collaborations.

Expand industry secondments

AIT will pursue the expansion of industry secondments, including student placements, industry participation in teaching programmes, as well as staff secondments to industry, in order to support the economic and social development of the Midlands Gateway/region. Student placements as part of academic programmes will be focused on national and international companies. Placements at all levels will be encouraged, including the creation of effective PhD internships with relevant industries. The formalisation of an industry training unit that meets FÁS and Forfás goals will also be progressed with our industry partners.



Expand work-based learning

Given the high proportion (38%) of the 25-64 age cohort in the Irish population with less than upper secondary education and the fact that 80% of the current workforce will still be in the labour force in 20 years time, in-employment training has been earmarked by government as crucial to Ireland's positioning as a knowledge-based society. Building on its success in the Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF) I, AIT has embarked on an initiative, in partnership with eight other third-level institutions, to develop work-based learning (WBL) in the Midlands Gateway/region.

This strategic plan will build on the success achieved to date in delivering bespoke programmes to employees in the construction and energy industries. A full programme to deliver substantial workplace partnerships and the significant extension of accreditation of prior learning (APL) to workers in the Midlands will be a feature of the coming period.

Assist skills development

Allied to the work-based learning programme, an initiative to assist skills development in the region, including access for lifelong learning and access for non-traditional students will be followed. This will be in addition to the wider, more fundamental role of AIT in developing human capital and the knowledge base and skills in the region.

A supporting initiative to expand non-traditional adult entrants with innovative delivery mechanisms and alternative modes of education including open distance learning and modular structures will be implemented. All new programmes will be offered remotely and progressively this will also be rolled out to existing programmes.

Develop outreach centres

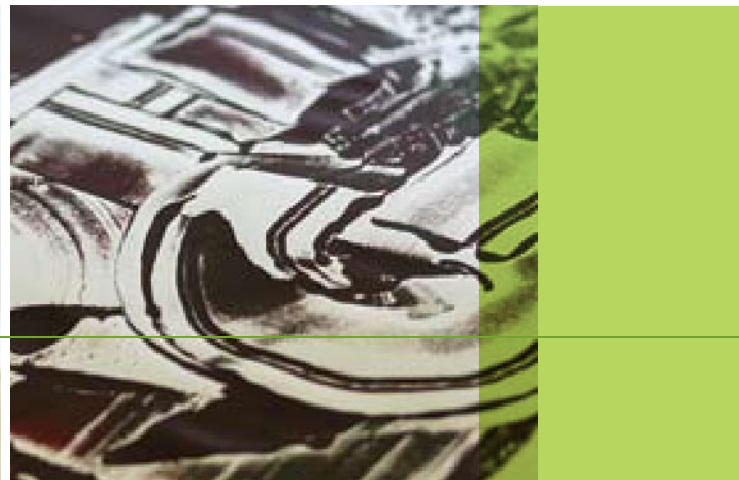
As part of its commitment to the development of the Midlands, AIT will look to expand the provision of its services throughout the Gateway/region. The Institute has undertaken research into the feasibility of developing outreach centres in a number of urban centres, which will provide up-skilling, re-skilling and higher education on a part-time basis.

Support cultural development

AIT will continue to support cultural development in the region. The attractiveness of the Institute for students and the incentives for investment in the region will be influenced by the overall quality of life, including cultural development, on offer. This mirrors the vision enumerated in the Strategic Development Framework for the Midlands Gateway 2006.

Supporting Initiatives to Play Catalytic Role in Midlands Gateway and in Wider Regional and National Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental Development

- 1 Increase numbers of 3rd and 4th level graduates among population of Midlands Gateway/region to at least national levels
- 2 Act as catalyst to develop world class knowledge-based competitive gateway by focusing on applied research initiatives with industry in region. Concentrate on specific areas:
 - Medical technology
 - Pharmaceutical science
 - Health/life sciences
 - ICT/engineering
 - Humanities
- 3 Increase the level of commitment to new enterprise development and collaborative engagement with industry
- 4 Develop joint initiatives with Georgia Tech Ireland
- 5 Expand industry secondments:
 - Student placements
 - Industry participation in teaching programmes
 - Staff secondments to industry
- 6 Expand work-based learning
- 7 Assist skills development in region, including access for lifelong learning and access for non-traditional students through innovative delivery mechanisms and alternative modes of education
- 8 Develop outreach centres
- 9 Support cultural development in region



AIT's investment in sporting facilities positions the Institute as a venue of choice for national and international events. AIT's success in becoming the venue for the National Finals of the HSE Community Games from 2009 is indicative of the scale of activities which is possible.

ACHIEVING THE VISION: IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGIC PLAN

Actions to support implementation of strategic plan

This ambitious plan for AIT requires a determined focus on undertaking appropriate practical actions in order to support its effective implementation. The plan will be fully implemented on time and a monitoring system with agreed targets will be developed, to measure performance.

Appoint individual with responsibility for implementation

The implementation of the plan will remain the responsibility of the President and senior management, monitored by the Governing Body. It will require the support of all staff, as well as the cooperation of students.

It is envisaged that a dedicated support resource is needed to drive this ambitious plan. Actions to support its implementation include the appointment of an individual with responsibility for coordination, who will develop a plan to adapt the organisation to support this strategy, focusing on structures, governance and internal communications. Responsibilities will also include assisting with inputs to policymakers on resource requirements, the development of an AIT Funding Foundation and the implementation of a new marketing/branding strategy. These initiatives are essential to realise the vision set out for the Institute. Organisational and structural changes will be required and timelines and targets will be developed.

Organisational structures will be adapted in line with goals and targets set for the lifetime of the plan. An audit will be undertaken of the quality of the Institute's activities at pre-determined intervals and of the success in achieving the targets in the plan.

Input to policymakers

Input to policymakers regarding resource requirements is central to the implementation of the plan. National support will be required to support the Institute to implement this transformational document.

Develop AIT Funding Foundation

While national support will be needed, AIT believes that it is appropriate that we take action to raise funds independently to contribute to the overall increase in resources which are required. The establishment of an AIT Funding Foundation has been approved by the Governing Body.

Implement new marketing/branding strategy

A new marketing/branding strategy will be implemented to support the strategy. AIT's market position will be defined, reflecting the strengths of the AIT brand.

SUPPORTING INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN

- 1 Appoint individual with responsibility for implementation and to develop plan to adapt organisation to support strategy
 - Structures
 - Governance
 - Internal communications
 - Systems
- 2 Input to policymakers re resource requirements
- 3 Develop AIT Funding Foundation
- 4 Implement new marketing/branding strategy



CONCLUSION

This strategic plan is not an end in itself, but the first step on a challenging journey for AIT. It is essential that everyone in the Institute and in the wider region, supported by national policymakers, support this transformational plan. Only in this way, can we adequately serve our students, be a leader in research, meet the needs of industry and contribute to the major development challenges facing our region.

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