



*Institute of Technology  
Blanchardstown  
Institiúid Teicneolaíochta  
Baile Bhlainséir*

# making education accessible

Priorities for the Next Five Years  
Strategic Plan 2006-2011



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**Strategic Plan 2006-2011**



# FOREWORD

The Institute of Technology Blanchardstown, which has become recognised as ITB, was established by an Act of the Oireachtas in 1999. As with all other Institutes of Technology, ITB carries out its functions in accordance with Section 5 of the Regional Technical Colleges Act 1992 as amended. From the outset, it was envisaged that we would have a unique mission. Announcing the proposed establishment of ITB in the Dáil the then Minister for Education and Science, Micheál Martin TD, stated;

*“The welcoming and supportive attitude to students from an educationally and socially deprived background will be the defining characteristic of the Institute”*

To date, we have lived up to that challenge. The first phase of development is complete and ITB has become an established third-level institute with a unique identity and remit. As we reflect on our role in the future, it is clear that ITB's mission remains relevant and valid. Although in recent years we have enjoyed major economic growth in Ireland, there remains a need to provide high-quality and innovative third-level education wherever educational and social disadvantage continue to be a reality.

This strategic plan for 2006 – 2011 sets out ITB's main aims over the next five years. It is informed by the regulatory framework under which the Institute operates and by feedback from consultations with our stakeholders – our partners in this work and those who benefit, directly and indirectly, from our activities and success;

This strategic plan will:

- set out academic strategies, specifically dealing with teaching, learning and research
- address resource issues (financial, physical and personal)
- incorporate the distinctive values and ethos of ITB.

This strategic plan will inform the operational plans to be prepared by each school and support service within the Institute. More detailed actions and targets are set out in a companion document, Operating Plans 2006-2011. This strategic plan was approved by the Governing Body of ITB on 25 October 2006.

Donal Connell  
*Chairperson of the Governing Body of the Institute*

Mary Meaney  
*Director*



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## OUR AIM

ITB's mission is to serve students and the community by:

- achieving consistently high standards of relevance and quality in teaching, research, development and consultancy  
and
- offering a welcoming and supportive environment to students from educationally deprived backgrounds and to adults wishing to increase or update their level of skills.

Underpinning this mission is our belief in the capacity of people to develop their potential through education and training. We aspire to realise the potential of:

### STUDENTS

through the excellence of our teaching and backup support services

### EMPLOYERS

by preparing high-quality graduates and by providing research and training relevant to employers' needs

### LOCAL COMMUNITY

by providing learning opportunities locally and by contributing to important local initiatives

### STAFF

by providing rewarding careers and a positive and diverse working environment.

## THE CHALLENGE – TODAY AND TOMORROW

It is clear that ITB operates within an environment that poses both opportunities and challenges for the future. Economic policy, new technology, competition and demographic change are changing the Irish higher education market. This can be seen in:

- growing competition for students
- increased access to higher education by people previously excluded because of age, social or economic status
- a developing culture of lifelong learning
- new approaches to teaching and learning involving web technology.

Modern economies look to third level institutions to develop the workforce, transfer new technology to business, support social inclusion and enhance the cultural and intellectual life of local and regional communities.

A number of other factors are shaping the environment for ITB. The HEA predicts a slow but steady increase in the number of students participating in higher education over the period of this strategic plan. Strong demand still exists among students from non-EU States for college places in Ireland but limited growth is predicted in the number of school leavers joining third level education.

The number of people returning to education is expected to increase, in line with government policy to upskill people in employment. This is particularly important to ITB. The adult population in our catchment area is growing by over 20% per annum. Given the mission of the Institute to widen participation in education, adult learners must be an important target group.

Competition for students is keen. ITB operates in the greater Dublin area, along with eight other third level colleges, whose marketing techniques are increasingly sophisticated and aggressive. Students have higher expectations concerning the organisation and delivery of academic programmes. Students and the wider public are increasingly aware that the quality of education and associated services can vary between higher education institutions.

Over the next five years, the basis for funding Institutes of Technology will change. Funding from the HEA will be driven by student numbers and the delivery of national strategic priorities. Institutions are unlikely to be fully funded from exchequer sources and we will need new sources of funding. Greater collaboration between institutions will be expected.

## THE ITB ADVANTAGE



ITB is a name that has become increasingly familiar to people over the last seven years. The character of our Institute has continued to evolve, reflecting the contribution of our staff and students and our response to changing needs.

As part of our strategic planning process, we have undergone a period of reflection about the kind of organisation we believe ourselves to be.

The Institute has great vitality, springing from the interactions between people who work and study here. We strive to be modern and responsive, but also open, transparent and genuine in our dealings with people. ITB offers people the opportunity to transform their lives, to develop and use their energies and abilities. We aim for excellence – ambition and competition are an important part of that. But so also is the need to create and maintain a community of learning where each person supports others and is supported in achieving his or her potential.

ITB aims to be different and the things that make us different are increasingly relevant. The diversity of the people who study in ITB – people from different backgrounds, cultures, disciplines and with different points of view – creates a learning environment suited to the complex society in which our graduates will live and work.

ITB is an innovator in many areas, e.g. work based learning. At the heart of this creativity we recognise that an ability to thrive in a complex and ever-changing world is vital. Central to our work is our desire to make third level education accessible to as many people as possible.

Hard work and a belief in getting results are fundamental. So also is the knowledge that a sense of fulfilment in work is a key contributor to personal happiness. Helping people to find and do what energises them is an essential part of ITB's mission.

The new ITB corporate identity is expressed in a logo highlighting a sense of place, a modern forward-looking place ready to meet the challenges of the future, where values have not changed but where activities are always changing.



## VISION AND VALUES

Our vision is that by 2011, ITB will be nationally recognised as a leader in providing high-quality third level education.

The values that inform our work are:

### COMMUNITY

We acknowledge the diversity of people involved in our work. We respect the different role played by each person. We listen with patience and understanding. We work to build genuine relationships founded on acceptance and trust.

### ENJOYMENT

We aim to enjoy our work and derive fulfilment from it. We value positive attitudes throughout our workplace.

### EXCELLENCE

We strive for excellence in the provision of internal and external services, courses and programmes.

### SUCCESS

We will celebrate our achievements.

## OUR ROADMAP

Following a period of reflection, research and consultation, we in ITB have reached consensus about where to focus our efforts and what to prioritise. Over the next five years, we want the Institute to develop a higher profile as a provider of quality third-level education in north-west Dublin and its environs.

We will maintain our commitment to widening participation in education and to serving the needs of the community. We will build on our emerging strength by substantially expanding and facilitating access to higher education for work-based students.

Our vision is that, by 2011, ITB will be nationally recognised as a leader in providing high-quality third level education.

We will move from being a small fledgling Institute towards market leadership in the provision of quality third-level education to diverse communities of learners. While we plan to expand the scale of our activity, we will remain relatively small and we will retain our unique sense of community.

Over the next five years, we aim to:

- Achieve a more diverse student community and growth in student numbers
- Develop our teaching role- same high standards, new styles and methods
- Make ITB a vital resource for the region.

To do this, we will:

- Set high standards for the use of our resources
- Ensure cohesion in our work as a college community.



## Priority 1:

### Achieve a more diverse student community and growth in student numbers

This first priority stems from the need to extend educational opportunity and achieve an economically viable student population.

Our existing number of students is not sufficiently large to allow maximum economic usage of physical and support service capacities.

There is a greater need in the population as a whole to engage in lifelong learning. This is driven by economic and social factors. Our focus must be on meeting this aspiration by providing innovative and flexible possibilities in education.

We plan to increase our student numbers by targeting:

- Schools in the catchment area of the Institute
- People in the workforce who wish to upskill
- People previously unable to participate in third-level education.

Given the competitive environment, the presentation, design and marketing of the Institute and its courses will be critical. Another factor is the growth in student expectations. To meet these challenges effectively, we will operate to a higher standard in the provision of academic and student support services.

#### OBJECTIVES

In pursuit of an economically viable and diverse student population we will:

- Achieve a steady rate of growth in student numbers up to 2,000 full-time equivalents by 2011
- Achieve a balance of new admissions between CAO (33%) and non-CAO (67%) entrants by 2011
- Achieve overall student retention rates in excess of the national average
- Achieve sustainable levels of revenue from course fees, sufficient to support 10% of the Institute's overall budget.

#### STRATEGIES

We will achieve these objectives by:

- Selectively expanding and adapting existing programmes, subject to considerations of economic viability
- Attracting more mature students and more academically able and committed school leavers from under-represented groups in the region
- Attracting an increased number of full and part-time fee-paying students
- Expanding the provision of student supports and developing further student retention initiatives
- Developing an integrated marketing and communications strategy.



## Priority 2:

### Develop our teaching role – same high standards, new styles and methods

This second priority arises from the emergence of the learner and the learning process as key priorities in education. As an academic institution we are committed to excellence in education. The Institute recognises that we must offer flexibility in the content and delivery of programmes. Our competitive advantage will come from developing a reputation for learner-centred excellence in teaching and, in parallel, maximising the flexibility of modular course design and the system of accumulation of credits. Organisational agility, responsiveness to the needs of students from a range of educational and employment backgrounds, and quality of teaching and support will be key requirements.

A culture of continuous review, improvement and service in all areas will be necessary. The attainment and retention of Delegation of Authority from HETAC will provide a framework for meeting these challenges. Supporting and encouraging excellence in teaching practices and methodologies, in addition to flexible course design and delivery, is essential.

It is vital that ITB builds on its emerging strengths in research and the development of professional practice in the workplace. Strength in these areas will be essential to developing the teaching capability of academic staff and to the maintenance of relevant and stimulating curricula.

#### OBJECTIVES

We will:

- Be responsive to the diverse needs of our targeted learners
- Attain a culture of continuous review, improvement and quality assurance in the provision of education
- Ensure that a critical mass of staff is actively involved in research, scholarship and professional practice.

#### STRATEGIES

We will achieve these objectives by:

- Undertaking the measures needed to achieve flexibility in student learning
- Developing and delivering appropriate student supports aligned with the mode of course delivery
- Fostering and developing teaching excellence, supported by research in pedagogy and education
- Creating a centre of excellence in teaching and learning
- Supporting all educational programmes through appropriate quality assurance processes
- Stimulating the active involvement of at least 25% of lecturing staff in research, and achieving a commensurate increase in postgraduate student numbers.



## Priority 3:

### Make ITB a vital resource for the region

This third priority arises from awareness that the presence of an Institute of Technology in an area results in expectations that it will contribute significantly to the economic development and prosperity of that area. Our future success and growth will depend to a large extent on how we are perceived to have contributed to Dublin north-west and the surrounding area.

The creation of links with education providers, businesses, community organisations and the public sector has always been a priority for ITB. Our strategy for the next five years is to build on these relationships and to launch a range of initiatives to address the needs of each of these stakeholders.

ITB will contribute by providing knowledge and technology transfer alongside enhanced educational opportunities and achievement. We will build on our emerging strengths in research and the development of professional practice in the workplace. This will provide the flow of new knowledge and skills essential to develop ITB's links with business and the community.

#### OBJECTIVES

We will:

- Support the business community in tangible and practical ways
- Encourage and support start-up businesses
- Expand and deepen our links with public sector bodies, community representative organisations and other education providers
- Stimulate research activity with strong links to industry and the public sector.

#### STRATEGIES

We will achieve these objectives by:

- Undertaking collaborative initiatives in research, training, and consultancy with industry stakeholders
- Exploiting the resources of our Learning and Innovation Centre to provide links to local business and industry and to provide mentoring/incubation facilities for start-up businesses
- Supporting individual research activity which focuses on specific technologies, application and know-how which will enable the formation of at least two research centres
- Optimising the training and education opportunities in the region by developing learning networks with industry and other education providers
- Collaborating with local government, business associations and community bodies.



## Priority 4:

### Adopt high standards for the use of our resources

To achieve our objectives, we must optimise the use of our existing resources while taking the necessary steps to develop further. During the life of this plan, the HEA rather than the Department of Education and Science will provide ITB's main funding. Part of the funding provided will be linked to achievement of strategic priorities set by the HEA and the attainment of acceptable unit costs per student.

This latter requirement poses a particular challenge. ITB's existing scale of activity results in high unit costs per student when compared with other Institutes of Technology. Whilst this is to be expected in a new and developing organisation, it is an issue that must be addressed for the future.

In the longer term, exchequer sources will not fund third-level education in its entirety. Recognising this, ITB will take steps to generate other sources of revenue.

Over the next two to three years, space utilisation strategies will be extremely important. Our current student numbers require the use of almost all our teaching space. Approval has been secured for additional space as a National Priority I project, phase IB, in the Kelly Report, and this is scheduled for completion in September 2009 subject to funding. However, if there are delays and student numbers increase, there will be significant pressures on teaching space at ITB.

### OBJECTIVES

We will:

- Develop a diversified funding base
- Achieve a balanced budget
- Utilise the existing physical infrastructure to address the needs of students and staff
- Provide high quality, well-maintained physical infrastructure which is properly managed and ensures value for money in all aspects of its use
- Provide additional physical infrastructure which addresses identified needs over the time period of this strategic plan.

### STRATEGIES

We aim to achieve these objectives by:

- Maximising funding from the HEA by ensuring that our own strategies are aligned with HEA priorities
- Reducing ITB's unit cost per student to a level favourably aligned with other institutions by increasing student numbers and controlling expenditure
- Achieving an agreed operating surplus on all self-financed activities, sufficient to finance 10% of departmental budgetary needs on an annual basis
- Utilising appropriate resource allocation, monitoring and control strategies
- Developing an estates strategy to address the Institute's needs over the next five years
- Completing the second phase of the campus development plan
- Developing an integrated approach to physical space usage, achieving convergence between estates management and academic planning.



## Priority 5:

### Ensure cohesion in our work as a college community

Making progress on the objectives identified so far ultimately depends on the extent to which everyone working in ITB is prepared to embrace change and do things differently. We need to balance individual needs to grow and develop with ITB's need to deliver on its mission. The balance to be struck should optimise the benefit for everyone.

The current working environment in ITB is characterised by a substantial level of interdependence between the schools and support services, such that individual departments are unable to function without the co-operation of others. To achieve our objectives, significant levels of cross-functional team-based activity will be needed, together with effective communication and a shared approach to solving problems.

Support for the growth and development of students is enabled through effectively supporting the individual growth and development of everyone working in ITB. This is a key requirement. Alongside this, and equally essential, is the need for everyone collectively to create a working environment in which each person feels valued and appreciated.

The next five years will present challenges. Meeting these will require an ability to adapt to changing circumstances. Most importantly it will require us to work actively as a team with energy, creativity and commitment, overcoming difficulties in pursuit of our common goal.

#### OBJECTIVES

We will develop an Institute:

- Which has a strong sense of its own identity
- Where staff feel valued and actively involved
- Where priorities are clear and there is a commitment to common goals
- Which is open and transparent and strives for excellence
- Where teamwork is central
- Where decisions balance the needs of the Institute with the needs of the individual
- Where it is enjoyable and fulfilling to work.

#### STRATEGIES

We aim to achieve these objectives by:

- Providing for a period of consolidation to allow existing systems and processes to be firmly embedded
- Developing open and transparent decision-making processes and mechanisms for effective communication between different sections of the Institute
- Creating a positive working environment for everyone
- Enabling staff to grow and develop by providing the right training opportunities, work experience and challenges
- Developing a leadership style which balances competitiveness, personal initiative, risk and responsiveness with co-operation, consideration, agreement and fairness
- Recruiting highly-motivated and positive staff to share our efforts.



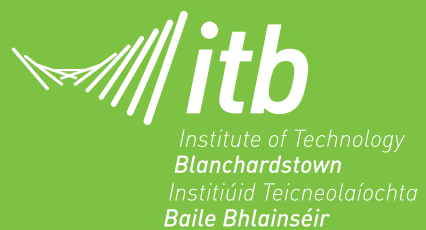
## THE OUTCOME

It is hard to be precise about what ITB will look like in five years time, but if we pursue our new direction with vigour, the Institute will show some of the following characteristics. ITB will:

- Be distinguishable from other institutions by the excellence of its teaching and other activities
- Have a much larger student population, with more part-time and work-based students
- Be known for making education accessible to people previously excluded by age, social, economic or educational backgrounds
- Have diverse sources of income
- Engage in significant research activity in most academic areas
- Be home to several new campus buildings.

Intensification of activity in those areas where we can compete successfully can only improve ITB's reputation. If we can hold fast to the core values which have guided our development thus far, including our inclusive approach to education, we will enable ITB to become more successful in promoting access to high quality education for students in Dublin North-West and the surrounding area.

We believe that our students deserve the best educational experience we can provide. We hope that by channelling our energies in the right direction, we can provide a high quality experience for our students, while ensuring that ITB is a rewarding place in which to work.



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