At its formal establishment in 1970, the Academic Council was given the general functions of planning, co-ordinating and developing third level education in the CDVEC colleges. Since that time, it has contributed to the academic work of the colleges, particularly in the areas of course development and validation, examination procedures and the promotion of research. It brought about improved co-ordination of approach and stimulated discussion about developments in higher education affecting the operation of the colleges.

**QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCEDURES OF THE ACADEMIC COUNCIL**

In order to assist it in carrying out its work, the Academic Council established a number of subcommittees and working groups to report on specific educational and related issues and this contributed to the formulation and adoption of DIT's educational policies. These included examination regulations, appeals procedures, admissions requirements, transfer procedures, research, development and consultancy policies, reviews of DIT courses and their awards, special awards for students who demonstrated academic excellence, staff development and postgraduate studies. The work of these subcommittees and working groups assisted the Academic Council in developing procedures for the peer review of programmes and the general enhancement of academic standards in programmes leading to DIT awards.

**Course evaluations**

The Academic Council established Boards of Studies and Course Review Boards to satisfy itself about both the standards of proposed new courses and the operation of existing courses respectively, according to broadly specified criteria. The main objectives of these course evaluations were to:
• ensure that the standards of the courses were appropriate to the types of award proposed
• ensure that the nature and content of an approved course remained in accord with its objectives and the standards approved by the Academic Council
• confirm that an approved course kept abreast of developments in the discipline concerned
• provide constructive feedback to the Academic Council, the college and Course Committee responsible for the proposal and for developing the course, through the reports made by the evaluation Board to the Academic Council (and also, where appropriate, to the University of Dublin in respect of courses leading to its degree awards under the partnership agreement).

Between periodic course reviews, the Academic Council monitored matters affecting the conduct and standard of each course through annual reports, including examination results and external examiners' reports, submitted by the college responsible for conducting it.

These procedures were similar to those of the Council of National Academic Awards (CNAA) in Britain and also those of the National Council for Educational Awards (NCEA).

Documentation required for Boards of Studies and Course Review Boards

The documentation submitted to Boards of Studies (for initial course validation) and Course Review Boards (for periodic course review) was required to include the following:
• details about the background to the course, the need and demand for it, competing courses in Ireland and elsewhere
• resource and equipment requirements (library, computer, laboratory and other student accommodation)
• course philosophy, aims and objectives
• admission and entry standards of students, arrangements for student transfer from other courses, non-standard entrants, access courses and student numbers
• course curriculum and structure, contact hours, teaching methods, tutoring arrangements, project work and assignments, other teaching and learning measures
• course content, syllabuses, arrangements for supervised work experience, field trips, synthesis of theoretical and practical elements
• marks and standards, methods of student assessment, examination and progression requirements
• membership of course committees
• staffing details, including CVs, support staff
• facilities available and required
• professional recognition.

Memberships of Boards of Studies and Course Review Boards

Boards of Studies and Course Review Boards normally had the following membership:

• four senior academic staff of the DIT, drawn from colleges other than the one offering the programme, with special consideration given to selecting those familiar with the disciplines of the course (in the case of Course Review Boards, two of the four DIT members were drawn from the college offering the course, but from schools or departments other than that responsible for its management and day-to-day operation)

• two external nominees, one of whom was normally a senior academic in the relevant discipline in a university or other institution, with the other one usually being a leading professional practitioner in the discipline in industry or commerce.

The Board typically spent two or three days visiting the college offering the course, having received the course documentation in advance. The visitation normally included meetings with staff and students and an inspection of facilities available to students on the course. There would also normally be meetings with recent graduates in the case of existing courses. Before concluding the visit, the Board would meet in private and formulate the main points for their report. The chairperson of the Board would normally outline the main conclusions of the Board to senior staff of the college before the end of the visit. A draft report would be prepared and circulated to the Board members for consideration and approval. A favourable report would normally contain a number of observations and recommendations. An unfavourable report would require additional work by the school or department responsible for the course and further submission to the Board until the course was acceptable to it. Subsequently, the chairperson of the Board would present a report on the course to the Academic Council and at the same time forward copies of it to the college
and school or department offering the course, inviting a response to Council.

External examiners

In addition to course validation and review procedures, and as another important element in the quality assurance process, the Academic Council and the DIT colleges annually appointed external examiners for each course in the Institute approved for a DIT award. The general function of external examiners, as specified in the DIT’s General Examination Regulations, was to ensure that the standards achieved by students were satisfactory, as judged by their performance in examinations and/or other forms of assessment.\(^1\) External examiners were expected to have regard to the level of award, the objectives and nature of the course and appropriate national and international standards prevailing in the discipline. They were drawn from persons of standing and experience in the relevant academic field and/or the professional practice of their discipline in Ireland or abroad. They were normally appointed for a period of three years with the possibility of an extension for one further year. External examiners were issued with the following detailed terms of reference:

- to serve as a member of the examination board for the particular (usually final) year of the course
- to assess drafts of examination papers or other material including marking and assessment schemes
- to discuss with the appropriate head of school possible changes or modifications to the draft examination papers or material, including the marking or assessment schemes
- to examine each student’s marked examination scripts or other materials as considered necessary or where requested to do so by the head of school
- to monitor, where appropriate, students’ course work, project work or laboratory work assessments and records or reports pertaining to such work
- to suggest where considered necessary, in consultation with the appropriate head of school and internal examiner(s), alterations to the marks awarded
- to examine students orally when this was considered necessary and appropriate

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1. *General Examination Regulations* (Dublin: Dublin Institute of Technology), 1990.
to submit an annual report to the college on the examinations and standards achieved by the students.

At the end of the term of office, the external examiner was required to present a report to the college, a copy of which was also sent to the Academic Registrar for the attention of the Academic Council. This report was expected to include comments on the general standards achieved by the students and on the operation of the course, the examinations and other assessments.

**DEVELOPMENTS IN QUALITY ASSURANCE AFTER THE DIT ACT 1992**

The academic quality assurance procedures in the Institute emerged as a key prerequisite in relation to the Institute being given degree awarding power at the time the DIT Bill was being processed in Oireachtas Éireann. For instance, in his final response to the debate on the Bill in Seanad Éireann in July 1992, the Minister for Education, Séamus Brennan TD, said:

> The DIT will be given degree awarding powers and my target, subject to discussions, would be that within twelve months, we might be able to arrive at that position... It is appropriate that, before we take that final step we should have an opportunity to consult with the new Governing Body and the Academic Council as to qualitative matters... . . .

In 1993, following the statutory establishment of the DIT, the composition and functions of the Academic Council were also given a statutory basis under the DIT Act. At that time the Academic Council decided to undertake a fundamental review of its work and operating procedures and to give special attention to quality assurance as it affected all aspects of its work.

**Steering committee to develop quality assurance procedures**

Against this background, the Academic Council decided in March 1994 to establish a quality assurance steering committee with the then deputy president, Michael O’Donnell, as its chairperson and Thomas Duff, Joseph Hegarty and Matthew Hussey as members. The terms of reference of the steering committee were to:
Highlights of the DIT's Academic Profile

• review the situation
• investigate best practices elsewhere
• produce a report highlighting the good practices already operating in the Institute
• identify issues which needed to be addressed, with special attention directed towards further enhancing quality assurance measures in the Institute.

Work of the quality assurance steering committee

The steering committee began its work by examining in detail the relevant provisions of the DIT Act and reviewing the existing quality assurance procedures in the DIT, outlined earlier in this chapter. A range of published documentation on quality assurance was studied and colleagues experienced in implementing such procedures in other university-level institutions in Ireland and abroad were consulted. The steering committee organised a one day seminar in May 1994, which was attended by some 150 staff members and was addressed by experts in the subject from Britain, the Netherlands and Ireland. Members of the steering committee made presentations outlining how its work was proceeding and invited members of the Academic Council and other staff to make submissions on any aspects considered appropriate.

Initial report of the steering committee

The steering committee prepared a first report reflecting the presentations made at the seminar and feedback received afterwards, together with their own developing views. It was submitted for consideration at a special meeting of the Academic Council in July 1994.

By then it had emerged that the main task of the subgroup was to prepare a quality assurance handbook, in the context of the requirements of the DIT legislation and the agreed desire for greater devolution of responsibilities to staff members for self-evaluation of different aspects of their work. This handbook would formally and systemically document and suitably revise the existing practices in relation to initial course approvals, on-going course reviews and procedures relating to examinations and assessments.
Quality assurance handbook

In December 1994 the steering committee tabled a draft quality assurance handbook at the Academic Council. Over the next three months the subgroup held information and consultation meetings in all of the centres of the Institute. In March 1995 the handbook was finally approved and adopted after a number of amendments had been incorporated. It was accepted as a first edition of a handbook that would be reviewed and up-dated regularly. It was also understood that in its initial implementation its guidelines would have to be interpreted in a sensitive and flexible manner. The handbook was reviewed in academic year 1996/1997 by the Academic Quality Assurance Committee of the Academic Council, in the light of the experience of its application and feedback from across the Institute. The second edition was approved by the Academic Council in May 1997 after the quality audit of 1995/96.2

The course quality assurance handbook set out a system of quality assurance procedures for courses throughout the Institute, as well as a system of subcommittees of the Academic Council and local Faculty (Academic) Boards and Course Committees to implement and monitor the procedures.

The subcommittees of the Academic Council, each with agreed terms of reference, were allocated responsibilities in each of the following areas: Standing, Academic Quality Assurance, Postgraduate Studies and Research, Examinations and Awards, Recruitment and Admissions, Teaching and Learning Strategy, Staff Development Strategy, Apprentice Education and Library.

As an interim measure, and until the new faculty structure is fully implemented, it was agreed that college Academic Boards (in place of the proposed Faculty Boards) be established in the six colleges.

The procedures set out in the handbook were based on the recognition of the key role that the individual staff members play in course teams and Course Committees devoted to delivering courses of the highest quality. They were also designed to devolve to the Course Committee and thence to each member of the course team the greatest degree of authority, autonomy and responsibility for the various aspects that contribute to the quality of the course(s) to which they would be assigned.

The handbook set out the procedure, with guidelines, for proposing a new course and preparing it for validation. It recommended a general format for the course document, set out the ancillary and support documenta-

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tion usually required, and prescribed the internal consideration of this docu-
mention before the validation event. The handbook also outlined the
formation of the validation panel and the validation process for a pro-
posed course before it could receive final approval.

The Course Committee would prepare an annual report on its course,
making a critical review of the year’s operation of the course and incorpo-
rating its responses to the suggestions of the external examiners. It would
make a general assessment of a number of key aspects of the operation of
the course and also suggest minor modifications to the course for the fol-
lowing year. The annual report would be forwarded to the Faculty (Ac-
demic) Board and from there to the Academic Quality Assurance Com-
mittee of the Academic Council.

Each course would be reviewed formally at least once every five years
or so. An internal self-study of the course would be the key element of this
review. After the self-study was completed and a modified course docu-
ment prepared, it would be considered by the Faculty (Academic) Board
before examination by an external review panel. The general nature and
timing of a review process were also set out for the guidance of the Course
Committee.

**Quality Audit 1995–1996**

The DIT Act made provision that a ministerial order from the Minister for
Education would give the DIT the power to make degree awards. In 1995,
the Minister, Niamh Bhreatnach TD, requested the HEA to carry out an
audit of the quality assurance procedures in place in the Institute. The
HEA appointed an authoritative review team, the membership of which is
given below, to carry out this task.

**Self-evaluation the key process in the quality audit**

At the start of the 1995–1996 academic year, the review team decided that
its approach would be to require the Institute to carry out a “self-evalua-
tion” and then to review the report from the Institute on this process. This
approach was very similar to a quality audit in the British and various
other higher education systems.
Members of the Review Team 1995–1996

Chairperson
Dr R. H. McGuigan, Provost and Pro-Vice Chancellor, University of Ulster

International academic experts
Dr Marianne Bauer, University of Gothenburg, Sweden
Christian Thune, Centre for Quality Assurance and Evaluation of Higher Education, Copenhagen, Denmark

Irish academics
Prof. John Coolahan, Education Department, St Patrick’s College, Maynooth
Prof. Cecily Kelleher, Health Promotion Department, University College, Galway

Irish industrialists
Dr Tom Hardiman, Chairperson, IBM (Ireland) Ltd, Dublin
Eileen Sweeney, Senior Financial Analyst, Aer Lingus, Dublin

Secretary
Mary Kerr, Higher Education Authority

The report on the self-evaluation of the quality assessment and control procedures in the Institute was to be “concise, but comprehensive in its coverage”, giving information that was “both descriptive and evaluative” and highlighting weaknesses as well as strengths. Furthermore, according to the review team, the self-evaluation was to “be placed in the context of the Institute’s mission”.

Detailed specification of the self-evaluation required

The review team drew up the following detailed specifications for the self-evaluation report:

- brief outline of the Institute — formal mission, aims and goals, with reference to the DIT Act and its impact on strategic planning and internal decision-making
- management and organisational structure of the Institute — organisational arrangements, oversight of academic affairs, implementation of proposed faculty structure, decision-making process and role and function of senior officers and committees, co-ordination between faculties/ schools and central administration
• academic profile of the Institute — list of courses and programmes (including externally accredited courses), academic development plan, proposed new courses (undergraduate and postgraduate), together with expected year of introduction and rationale, arrangements for student transfer between courses (internally and externally), areas of research strength, strategy for development of research in the light of the DIT Act, responsiveness to local, regional, national and international needs, structure of programmes for example modularisation and semesterisation), plans for future academic structure (introduction of grade of professor, proposed nomenclature for degrees)

• quality assurance policies, structures and procedures

• course planning and design — market testing, evidence of demand or need for new programmes, curriculum design, content, innovation, organisation, procedures for internal course approval, external validation procedures, management and allocation of staff resources, assessment of relevance and effectiveness (views of students, employers of graduates, external examiners, how these are co-ordinated, follow-up action), review procedures

• strategy for teaching, learning and assessment — policies, implementation and evaluation, student progress and achievement

• quantitative data on staff and students — with comments, staff recruitment policies and procedures, terms and conditions of employment of academic staff, appraisal and advancement or reward criteria, student access and admissions procedures, equity and equality of opportunity

• staff issues — staff training and development in teaching and assessment, personnel policies in relation to management of human resources, technician and administrative support

• student issues — support systems for students, student appeals systems, involvement of students in evaluation procedures and structures

• financial position of the Institute — budget and outturn for recent years and estimated expenditure for the coming year, sources of funding, breakdown of expenditure by categories (e.g. for academic units, library and premises), financial management, autonomy, delegation and management of resources

• facilities, buildings and laboratories, in the context of student and staff numbers, location, age, details of academic support facilities — library (book stock, places per student, etc.), information and communications technology, maintenance support

• external relationships — liaison with other academic institutions, in-
dustry, commerce, public agencies, professional bodies, student and staff mobility, international links
• overall institutional self-evaluation — relative maturity of schools as regards academic development, research and other achievements
• institutional capacity for change — responsiveness to internal and external demands, needs and opportunities.

Planned review of the self-evaluation report
The review team planned to review the self-evaluation report and consider the Institute’s quality assurance procedures, seeking to ensure that they were:
• consistent with the Institute’s aims and objectives
• robust, rigorous and effective
• self-renewing and subject to continuous review
• able to facilitate quality improvement
• supported by students and staff
• inclusive of external involvement
• able to ensure that outcomes of the process lead to the establishment of standards which are recognised nationally and internationally and acceptable to students, employers and professional bodies.

The self-evaluation report would also assist the review team in identifying areas requiring particular attention during their visit to the Institute in March or April 1996. After that visit the team would draft its report. The Institute would have the opportunity to review and comment on the draft report of the review team. The team would submit its final report to the HEA by June 1996 and the HEA would then forward it to the Minister for Education, with comments.

Institutional self-evaluation and preparations for the visit of the review team
A quality audit office was established with a senior member of staff seconded full-time together with an administrative assistant. A dedicated steering committee of five senior staff members, including the president and the four members of the steering committee that drafted the quality assurance handbook, was also set up to expedite the process. A newsletter was issued fortnightly during the period of the self-evaluation process, to clarify
the outline requirements, to inform all staff of progress and of any problems encountered and to remind them of deadlines and other matters.

In order to meet the demanding schedule for carrying out the self-evaluation and preparing a thorough self-evaluation report on the Institute as a whole, it was necessary for heads of schools to undertake self-evaluations in their schools, according to the outlines specified. It was also essential for them to place a top priority on compiling data and fulfilling other requirements for the overall report, which were communicated to them from the central office from time to time over the period of the self-evaluation.

It was also considered essential that all members of staff contribute to this process and that the maximum amount of help be recruited in order to carry it through as fully and efficiently as possible.

The president visited every school during the self-evaluation to inform staff about the process. It was a major item on the agenda of each monthly Academic Council meeting and two special meetings of the Academic Council were also held to discuss the issue. The steering committee attended a meeting of each of the Academic Boards in the main colleges and also held consultative meetings with senior administrative staff and student representatives from all the colleges.

Data and details gathered for the self-evaluation

With respect to each course in the Institute, the quality audit office compiled the composition of the Course Committee and the annual course report for the previous academic year. It also gathered the following data for each year of each course, over the previous five academic years:

- student numbers and types
- CAO/CAS first preferences (at that stage degree courses were on the CAO list and non degree courses were on the CAS list)
- spread of Leaving Certificate points of student intake
- enrolment trends
- completion rates
- teaching hours annually per student (THAS) rating for each year
- for the overall course — student contact hours and study load, senior, junior and part-time academic staff allocation, percentages achieving each grading of awards and first employment statistics for graduates.

The office also compiled brief CV details about each full-time member of
staff. These included name, school, academic and professional qualifications, present staff grade, date of appointment, previous staff grade(s), nature of current appointment, specialist teaching areas, specialist research areas, teaching experience to date in the DIT, work experience before appointment, current memberships of and involvement in professional and other bodies, administrative and committee involvement in the DIT, courses and seminars attended over past three years, research involvement, publications, exhibitions or performances and any special achievements, prizes or awards.

Details about each school

The steering committee held meetings, aided by an external facilitator, with all senior staff in each school, to carry out a strengths/weaknesses/opportunities/threats (SWOT) analysis and self-evaluation of the school. These resulted in reports on each school, with the following elements: good features and strengths of the school and how they might be developed, weak features of the school and practical ways of addressing them, problems and impediments to progress and how they may be addressed practically, any relevant needs of industry or society that were not being addressed, priority actions, the impact of the DIT Act on the school, desirable developments in the school in the next ten years, new courses which should be developed in the school with priority and rationale, additional resources (staff, space, equipment, budget) required for developments over the next five years, which courses in the school were to be phased out, measures needed to improve the teaching, learning and assessment environment, the strengths and weaknesses of quality assurance procedures, the appropriate balance for the school of postgraduate, primary degree, diploma and certificate, apprenticeship and short courses in terms of staff work and student numbers, advantages, disadvantages and priority five year targets for research, development and consultancy, strengths and weaknesses of the management and organisational structure of school, measures needed to achieve improvement in the school and make it more responsive to change, ways in which the school and Institute should promote themselves in industry, business and society.

Submission of documentation for the review

After some months of drafting, extensive work in the Course Committees and Academic Boards, involvement by members of the Academic Council in workshops and submission of a large number of written submis-
sions, the following documentation was submitted to the HEA.

1. **Volume 1 — Self-Evaluation Study**: This contained a brief outline of the DIT, the management and organisational structure of the Institute, academic profile of the Institute, quality assurance policies, structures and procedures, the financial position of the Institute, staff issues, facilities, external relationships, the Institute’s capacity for change and overall institutional self-evaluation with special reference to degree awards.


3. **Volume 3 — Appendices**: The appendices included a historical profile of the Dublin Institute of Technology, an account of the relationship with the University of Dublin (TCD), key features of the DIT legislation, contributions made by government ministers and opposition spokespersons during the Oireachtas debates on the DIT Bill (with particular reference to the discussion on possible degree awarding powers for the DIT), apprenticeship and related craft courses, details of industrial and international links, the development of quality assurance procedures in the DIT and tables of student and staff data.

A range of supporting Institute and related documentation was also made available.

**Institutional visit of the review team**

In preparation for the institutional visit of the review team, copies of the Self-Evaluation Study and the Appendices were circulated for discussion in all units of the Institute. At that stage, the documents were discussed at special meetings of the Directorate, the Academic Council, each subcommittee of the Academic Council and each college Academic Board, which were attended by members of the steering committee. This committee also held meetings with student union leaders and senior administrators at that stage to review the documents. There were also meetings of staff of each school to prepare for the institutional visit.

The review team visited the Institute during the week of 29 April 1996. This visit consisted of meetings with the senior management, the steering committee, Academic Council subcommittees, staff groups, students and
graduates at each site. The team also toured each site. Members of the team also attended, as observers, a number of course review events taking place during their visit.

**Report of the review team**

The 1996 report of the review team highlighted a number of the characteristic strengths of the Institute and outlined the progress that had been made since its formal establishment on 1 January 1993.³

The report noted a number of weaknesses that needed special attention, including the level of autonomy of the Institute, the high student contact hours, deficiencies in the physical plant of the Institute and the need to develop staff members with postgraduate supervision competencies.

The review team recommended “that degree awarding powers be extended to the Institute in respect of undergraduate and postgraduate courses with effect from the 1998/1999 academic year, and that the existing relationship with the University of Dublin in relation to undergraduate degrees, be phased out commencing from that date”.

In its report, the review team offered a range of helpful suggestions as to how the Institute might develop. It also made a series of specific and detailed recommendations in respect of extending quality assurance arrangements to all aspects of the work and gave a high priority to developing postgraduate research. It recommended in the light of “the unique nature of the DIT as a multi-level institution” providing “an important complementary dimension to the higher education system in Ireland . . . (that) its vocational character should be preserved and nurtured and its close working relationships with both public and private sectors should be promoted further”.

**Ministerial order conferring degree awarding power on the Institute**

The HEA endorsed the report and recommendations of the review team and forwarded them to the Minister for Education in the autumn of 1996. The resolution on the draft ministerial order, giving the power to award degrees to the Institute, was moved in Seanad Éireann in May 1997 by the Minister for Education, Niamh Bhreathnach TD. The ministerial order was signed on 15 May 1997.

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The report of the review team on quality assurance procedures in the DIT was a significant academic and political watershed in the development of the Institute and was warmly welcomed by the Institute’s staff. Its outcome, the authority granted to the DIT to confer its own degree awards at primary and postgraduate levels, significantly enhanced the general academic recognition and status of the Institute. The findings and recommendations of the review team helped to shape and guide the ongoing work of developing the Institute.

The review team stated that “improved prioritisation particularly in relation to academic planning” would be necessary. In relation to academic planning, the six faculty directors and four central directors were appointed and had taken up their duties at the start of academic year 1996/1997. The directors undertook an extensive consultation throughout the Institute about the new faculty structure and as a result the president submitted an amended faculty structure proposal to Governing Body in early 1997. Furthermore, the Directorate initiated a process of medium to long term strategic academic and administrative planning for the Institute. The process of consultation and discussion on the Directorate’s draft outline strategic plan began in 1997 in the faculties and schools. Amendments to the core plan are being proposed and a “bottom-up” contribution to the strategic plan is being developed.

The review team suggested the expansion of student representation on the Academic Council and its subcommittees “in order to secure an appropriate level of student feedback”. The Institute acted on this suggestion and extended to three the number of student representatives on all of these bodies as well as on Faculty (Academic) Boards, and one student for each year of the course on Course Committees.

The review team was of the opinion that “insufficient emphasis is given to the promotion of self-learning by the student” and that the Institute should “review its course curricula, course organisation, length of academic year and the teaching and commitments of staff and use its management discretion to deploy staff resources in such a way as to encourage and promote the expansion and development of research and scholarly work”. This was fully accepted by the Institute, which began the process
of planning the requisite changes in teaching methods. This was done particularly through the Teaching and Learning Strategy Committee of the Academic Council, by discussing the implications throughout the Institute, by systematically developing the IT networking of the Institute to facilitate new approaches to teaching and learning and by increasing the staff development budget to allow staff time and resources to become involved in these developments. This work is continuing.

In relation to the “phased approach to the development of postgraduate teaching and research work which is now being implemented by the Institute”, experienced advisory or mentoring supervisors have been appointed with all inexperienced supervisors to facilitate the induction and training of research supervisors. Furthermore, a series of training modules on issues relating to research supervision (regulations for postgraduate study by research, project planning, assessment of progress, report writing, thesis writing and thesis submission), are now run each year for research supervisors by the Postgraduate Studies and Research office. After extensive consultation, the second edition of the Institute’s Regulations for Postgraduate Studies by Research was approved by the Academic Council in April 1997 and distributed to all academic staff in the Institute. A central postgraduate studies and research office has been organised since 1996 to provide day to day advice and guidance to both supervisors and postgraduate students.

The review team suggested that “human resource policies and contract terms should be reviewed by the Institute in the context of promoting both research and innovation in teaching and learning”. Under the provisions of the DIT Act, the Institute has only limited freedom and flexibility in relation to staff contracts. Contract terms for academic staff members are currently the subject of national negotiations, in which the Institute is a minority party. Nevertheless, it is anticipated that the work outlined above, to reduce the students’ class contact time, will contribute considerable flexibility in staff time tabling to facilitate research and teaching and learning innovation. Increased investment in staff development has also contributed to this development. An annual competitive scheme of bursaries for research and development projects in areas of teaching and learning innovation was introduced in 1997 for staff across the Institute.

The review team noted correctly that the “implementation of quality improvement in course content and delivery” had “been constrained, for example, in relation to involving students in the evaluation of their courses and their general educational experience”, in spite of the “paramount need for student involvement in any quality assurance process”. The Institute acted on this recommendation in the review of the Institute’s quality as-
surance procedures. This review produced the second edition of the Course Quality Assurance Handbook (approved by the Academic Council in April 1997) and involved extensive staff and student input during academic year 1996/1997. Additionally courses hold at least one staff/student meeting during the academic year through which many improvements in the course administration are carried out. It is also fully realised that student consultation and feedback will also be of key importance in the efforts to reduce student class contact time and develop more student/learner centred approaches to the work of the Institute. The implementation of students’ feedback on their courses continues to be an industrial relations issue on a national scale.

As recommended by the report, the “induction of new students requires careful attention and the communication to them of all relevant course materials and data is of importance to their successful recruitment.” Each September, major induction events are organised for new students in each DIT site. Each student is supplied with a general student handbook. A specific course book, together with a tour of the facilities and talks on a range of academic, social and recreational aspects of Institute life, are presented to the different class groups. In each college a team, including academic, counselling and chaplaincy staff, organises these events. The Institute is developing a Student Charter, a draft of which is under discussion with student representatives.

“The physical plant and facilities of the Institute vary in quality from site to site. Some locations enjoy modern buildings and excellent infrastructure while others must be regarded as inappropriate and less than adequate for a third level educational institution.” The facts behind this accurate evaluation by the review team have occupied the attention of the Directorate for some years and are slowly being remedied as funds become available. In relation to physical planning the Institute has long laboured under the limitations imposed by its restricted accommodation and available site areas. Therefore, it attaches high priority to progressing its Physical Development Plan. Such progress will be vital if the Institute is to respond to such critical aspects as providing adequate office accommodation for staff, library, social and recreational facilities for students and laboratory and workshop space to support its research development plans.

The new extension to DIT at Cathal Brugha Street, completed in 1997, has helped to improve the provision in that area. A number of neighbouring houses have been purchased near both Kevin Street and Bolton Street colleges, which will provide improvements in accommodation for staff on those sites at an early stage. Construction of the extension (Phase II) to DIT at Aungier Street is to commence in 2000. Discussions to progress
the development of the major site at Grangegorman, as indicated in the Physical Development Plan, are also being pursued.

Possible application of the universities legislation to the Institute

With regard to the comment of the review team in relation to extending features of the universities legislation to the DIT, the Institute sought designation as a university within the Universities Bill as it was being processed through the Oireachtas. However, the Minister for Education decided that the Section 9 process of the Universities Act should assess the Institute’s application. The assessment of the Institute under this process was outlined in Chapter 6.

SUMMARY

The development and growth of higher education in Ireland in the 1970s led to increased government involvement as well as increased uncertainty and disquiet within the higher education institutions. In the Dublin colleges, the Academic Council was formally established in 1970 to oversee its higher education programmes. It served to improve the integration of the colleges, raise the level of the academic activities and introduce quality assurance procedures.

After the DIT was statutorily established in 1993, the Academic Council was re-organised and a more formalised approach to quality assurance procedures was developed, systematised and implemented for undergraduate and postgraduate courses and postgraduate research work. The enhancement of the quality assurance procedures represented an institutional commitment to the continuing improvement of standards and was based on devolving considerable autonomy to Course Committees and individual teaching staff members.

The institutional quality audit in academic year 1995/1996 led to the achievement of degree awarding power up to the highest postgraduate level for the Institute from September 1998. This was a major new level of academic recognition for the DIT.

The processes of preparing for the audit and the audit itself were processes of high intellectual achievement within the Institute. The preparation process was a new experience that engaged members of the Institute in widely participatory and constructive self-evaluation exercises at all levels and in all schools. The audit was a deep-going evaluation of the Institute, its quality assurance procedures and educational ethos, by a pres-
tigious international team of academic and industrial experts. It largely confirmed the internal view of the quality and robustness of the Institute’s systems and this was a major boost to morale throughout the Institute.

Furthermore, the review team made a number of constructive recommendations and pointed to strategic paths that the Institute should take to make progress — weaknesses to remedy and strengths to be improved upon — many of which are still to be fully implemented. The provisions of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999, which includes arrangements for quality assurance within the higher education sector, will also have considerable implications for the DIT.