SECTION THREE

A View of the Future of the DIT
Chapter 12
The Challenges Facing the DIT Beyond 2000

The outcome of the Section 9 process of the Universities Act 1997, through which the DIT sought to be designated as a university, was a rebuff to the Institute. It postponed reconsideration of the issue for at least three to five years. At the same time the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 called for a redefinition of the Section 9 process such as to lead to a type of university that would not be designated under the Universities Act but under this new Act. Essentially this would be a university of technology or technological university. Therefore such a designation is likely to become the objective of the Institute in the immediate years ahead.

Many of the developmental aims of the Institute were outlined in the various submissions to the review team, which undertook the audit of quality assurance procedures in 1995/96, and the review group, which evaluated the Institute for designation as a university under the Universities Act in 1997/1998. These aims need to be developed further in a systematic fashion. The observations and recommendations in the reports of both of these evaluations provide strategic guidelines for the Institute over the next five to ten years. These also need to be debated, clarified and adopted as policy.

In particular the multi-level nature of the Institute needs to be defined and declared. The implications need to be fully articulated in terms of priorities, funding, physical resources and staff allocations, as well as staff recruitment and promotion. The complementary aspects of the different levels must be developed and exploited. In this regard the dangers of academic drift must be fully considered in the planning process.

Internal as well as external influences will shape the actual development of the Institute over the coming period. The external factors will include government and European Union (EU) policies, technological and economic change, and societal developments. The internal factors will include the Institute's own vision for the future — the path it chooses to travel, the unity of purpose of its members and the flexibility and relevance of its responses to external challenges. The success of the DIT will depend on its collective ability to understand the external factors and manage its forces and resources to respond effectively to the opportunities and challenges. A further, not inconsiderable, prerequisite is the establishment of measurable parameters of success in different activities.

The strategic plan must clarify what the Institute intends to do with the available resources in the arenas open to it and within the evolving political, social, economic and physical constraints. Such a strategic plan must build on the present situation, and take account of the dynamics of each of the key external and internal factors, which must be carefully studied and evaluated. The plan must be inspired by a realistic and challenging vision of what the Institute plans to achieve. It is essential that a broad consensus be developed regarding the evaluation of the current state of development of the Institute, the understanding of the key factors affecting its further development and the vision of its future. Out of such a broad philosophical consensus across the Institute community, a viable plan of action to which most members would subscribe, can logically emerge.

**Planning for the Future**

**Development of a strategic plan to 2005**

Strategic planning involves a widespread consultative and participative process in an institution, designed to map out in some detail its development path for the next five years or so. Within the DIT it requires:

- to be founded on an understanding of the culture of the Institute
- an inspirational expression of the academic, quality improvement and other organisational targets over the period of the plan based on promoting professional growth of staff
- a thorough reflective self-evaluation of the functioning of the Institute and its faculties, schools and other sections, over the past number of years and an action plan for the future
- a clear statement of how the constraints of funding, accommodation, government policies, demography, local, national and international fac-
tors, social, economic and technological contexts, organisational inertia and internal impediments to change and improvement in the Institute will be overcome.

The strategic plan must be sufficiently flexible to engage every development and activity over the next five years and more. Major events that cannot be anticipated, and that can have significant impact on the plan, will inevitably happen. Therefore the strategic plan will be at best a rolling plan that must be monitored, changed, corrected and improved as events unfold and experience develops. The DIT must develop contingency plans for such eventualities, not merely react to them as they arise.

The DIT, an institution of higher education largely dependent on public funding and subject to public regulation, must develop and maintain effective relationships with the Department of Education and Science and other public bodies and representatives. These need particular attention in the process of strategic planning.

Constructing the plan

Such a thorough-going process, embracing every section of the Institute — staff and students — requires the participation of the widest cross-section of the staff at all levels. It is therefore a process that must be founded on teamwork among all members of the Institute. Such a foundation will also give the greatest assurance that the plan will be viable. It requires organisation and leadership in order to give it focus and ensure an overall integrated and institutional structure in the eventual strategic plan. The leadership must help to guide the difficult process of setting and agreeing the various priorities and of balancing between short-term and medium-term perspectives across the Institute.

Mechanisms for implementing strategies

In a large educational institution such as the DIT a strategic plan may not call for major change in all activities. It is likely that a substantial range of activities would be continued with relatively slight modifications. But whether proposed changes are major or minor, they need careful planning, inspiration and commitment.

A vital aspect of the implementation of a strategic plan is change and improvement. Change tends to emerge from some deficiency in or dissatisfaction with aspects of the current situation, and can give rise to disquiet amongst staff. This has indeed been apparent in the DIT over the past
number of years, where the change underway and a degree of uncertainty about the future have given rise to discontent in many areas. Implementing change requires that all staff participate in the development and have a significant role to play in the process. Clarity, openness and trust are needed. Effective leadership involves empowering staff members at all levels so that they have ownership of the changes and improvements envisaged. In this respect, as in the overall elaboration of a strategic plan, extensive consultation, communication and assurance are vital.

Communication

In the process of developing the strategic plan and subsequently implementing it, effective communication between the different sections of the Institute will be of key importance. This will mean representative meetings, consultation meetings, general staff meetings, seminars and workshops, together with an Institute newsletter, bulletins and written feedback. In particular the main decisions and activities of the Governing Body, Academic Council, Directorate and each Faculty (Academic) Board, together with other matters of academic and other interest, should be made available to staff on the Institute’s intranet and in all branch libraries throughout the Institute.

Furthermore the annual and other reports of each section of the Institute (Governing Body, Academic Council, Academic Council Subcommittees, Faculty (Academic) Boards, schools, departments, course committees, library, student services, personnel, computer centre, etc.) should be made readily available.

Of course a key requirement in communication is absorbing the message, even — indeed especially — when it is unpleasant and/or critical. Another requirement that is often difficult is the need to form and hold as critically objective a view of the current situation and its dynamic as possible, and to distinguish between what might be the optimistically desirable and the actual reality. A genuinely participative, partnership approach will help to ensure such communication is effective.

Monitoring the implementation of the plan

It is primarily the responsibility of the president and Directorate to lead, oversee and facilitate the implementation of the strategic plan, working

through the faculty and other structures of the Institute. However, a well established partnership across the Institute would strongly underpin this task. Each DIT Annual Report should include a review of the implementation of the strategic academic and physical policies as well as a summary of the developments in these policies over the period. In carrying out this responsibility the directorate should prepare an annual review and progress report, together with an academic action plan for the following year, with tactical priorities based on the overall strategy.

**EXTERNAL FACTORS**

**Government policy**

The increasing involvement of the government in higher education over the past thirty years, and some of the changes that have followed, have been outlined in Chapter 3.

In 1995, the government’s White Paper on education set out the framework for the development of higher education in Ireland in the years ahead and outlined the policies of the government for the sector. The Institute should pledge its commitment to playing its part in implementing these policies, responding effectively and efficiently to the challenges of “the projected growth of numbers participating in higher education”. Policies arising from this and the commitment of the Institute to the concept of wider access to third level education should find expression in the strategic plan.

The government has set out other strategies for the education and training of the unemployed and other socially disadvantaged members of the community. The Institute’s policy is to collaborate with the Department of Education and Science and other agencies in these policies of inclusion, and DIT must seek necessary resources to fully participate in determining the best ways of progressing this socially desirable programme.

The demographic trends and related suggestions made in reports of agencies such as the Higher Education Authority (HEA), must also be considered and incorporated in any strategic planning.

The aims of Irish industrial and general economic development policy,

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3. Charting our Education Future, op. cit.
as articulated by the government and its agencies such as Enterprise Ireland, include the encouragement of local small and medium enterprises as well as attracting substantial high technology investment from abroad.\(^6\)

On the world stage there is increasing industrial and economic competition. It is the policy of the DIT to continue to play a major role in helping the economic development process by providing advanced and flexible education, research and training opportunities that will help to keep Ireland at the forefront of technical advance and industrial development in this new industrial revolution.

The technology foresight exercise undertaken in 1998/1999 by the Irish Council for Science, Technology and Innovation on behalf of the Minister for Science, Technology and Commerce set out a range of research and development priorities for Ireland.\(^7\) These key areas include:

- chemicals and pharmaceuticals
- information and communications technologies
- materials and manufacturing processes
- health and life sciences
- natural resources (agriculture and food, marine, forestry)
- energy, transport and logistics
- construction and infrastructure.

All of these areas are disciplines that have been developed within the Institute over a long time by DIT staff so that there is a considerable body of experience, learning, expertise and publications in these fields within the Institute. The recommendations in the technology foresight reports present particularly graphic and clear signposts and opportunities for the development of the Institute and its activities, both in research and taught courses at all levels.

**National and international context**

Within the country, which has long had a deep love of learning and respect for education, there is growing recognition of the importance of educational attainments. Higher education remains strongly correlated with

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economic and career success. In the next decade and beyond, young people who are now students will graduate to become leaders in industry, commerce and society. It is part of the Institute’s mission to offer courses and programmes, in a stimulating environment and an ethos of learning and scholarship, where the most advanced information and communications technologies are integrated with these programmes. During students’ time in the Institute, there must be a commitment to providing them with an education appropriate for a rounded intellectual and personal formation, helping to develop in them an eagerness to learn and a capacity for intellectual growth throughout life. This education will equip students with the learning capabilities to acquire the knowledge necessary for them to function well in their chosen careers in a rapidly changing technological world. It will enable them to provide leadership naturally and confidently in Irish and European society in the new century.

The extension of the European Union (EU) towards Eastern Europe, and the related diminution of subventions to Ireland, will present challenges and opportunities. It is possible that greater numbers of students from the continent may wish to study for at least part of their courses in the Institute. The provision of English language teaching to large numbers of such students and their effective integration into courses in the Institute will be a challenge, but will open the opportunity of using distance teaching and learning techniques before they travel to Dublin. Strong collaborative links with institutions across the continent will be needed for this. Opportunities to participate in helping to modernise institutions in Eastern Europe, particularly in regard to advanced technologies, will also emerge in the years ahead.

**Technological developments**

It is recognised that this is an era of rapid social and economic change, greatly influenced by information and communication technology and other leading edge technologies. The Bangemann Report, for instance, acknowledged that “throughout the world, information and communication technologies are generating a new industrial revolution already as significant and far-reaching as those of the past. It is a revolution based on information, itself the expression of human knowledge.”

The changes in computer and telecommunications technologies have the potential to fundamentally change the way the DIT functions and

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teaches. They change disciplines and suggest new disciplines. The Institute must clear the way in its strategic plan for the acceptance and constructive development of these changes, and seek to be in the forefront of these developments. For instance, the Institute should play a leadership role in developing the training, techniques and all other aspects of electronic commerce (e-commerce) and, indeed, electronic teaching through telematics and distance teaching and learning techniques, and other electronic social, cultural and personal activities.

Demographic changes

Many different aspects of the population of Ireland are in rapid change, such as its geographic spread, its social, professional and employment profile, and its age profile. Consequently the educational services that will be required in five to ten years' time will be different from those needed today. The Institute's strategic plan must reflect this reality.

The broad changes in the age profile of the population were indicated in a Forfás report in 1996. The percentage of the population in the 0–14 year old age group fell from 31 per cent in 1981 to 27 per cent in 1991, and is projected to fall to 22 per cent in 2001 and 17 per cent in 2011. Even though the numbers of students at second level continued to increase in the 1980s and to the mid-1990s, they are projected to fall steadily from 1998 to 2010. The number in the Leaving Certificate cohort in 1998 was about 66,000 and an HEA study of 1995 projected the numbers in this cohort each year would steadily fall over the decade from 2000 to 2009. While the fraction of that cohort entering higher education was projected to continue to rise from about 45 per cent in 1999 to over 50 per cent in 2010, late entry students, students from abroad and mature students were expected to hold the total entry numbers to higher education at about 35,000 over that decade. Projections so far into the future must be considered in the light of the assumptions underlying them, but there seems little doubt but that the competition for students will sharpen considerably and this must shape aspects of the strategic plan of the Institute.

Competition in higher education

The competition in higher education takes a number of different forms. There is the competition of example, fuelled by the contrast in facilities and resources between the different institutions. This plays a major role in the competition for students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. There is competition for funds from government, EU and private sources.
There is competition for technical and other discipline niches in the academic marketplace. There is competition for highly qualified staff. Each higher education institution in Ireland faces this competition and, generally based on its strengths, sets priorities to develop and make progress. In its strategic plan, the DIT must not only form a realistic depiction of the place of the Institute in the educational scene, but also review and evaluate the position of the other major institutions as well. The DIT must also face the issue of competition from international institutions already making inroads by means of distance teaching and even establishing campuses in Ireland. This will condition part of its strategy.

Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 and National Qualifications Framework

The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 was a significant piece of legislation, which, along the lines of the 1995 White Paper on education, will affect the forward progress of the DIT in the next decade and beyond. The Act proposed the establishment of a National Qualifications Authority. In turn, this Authority will establish and maintain a national qualifications framework, supported by quality assurance procedures, in which the DIT will play a key part. The specific role of the Institute and how this may guide its activities has yet to be elaborated. But it would appear that some provisions of the new Act significantly amend the DIT Act.

Regardless of the outcome of any further Section 9 process for the DIT, the Institute will remain under the aegis of this Act. Familiarity with the terms of this Act and constructive involvement in the national qualifications framework will be key elements of the DIT’s strategic plan.

**Internal Factors**

Vision and leadership

In elaborating the vision, the collective mind of the Institute must rise above the routine continuation of what is there now to arrive at proposals that can be inspirational and forward focussed. It is safe to say that there can be little chance of implementing a so-called strategic plan unless it is inspired by and suffused with a clear vision of the future. This vision must evolve from the membership of the Institute and be drawn together by the leadership. It should be a major determinant of the broad unity of purpose within the Institute’s community. The vision for the Institute must consist
of broadly attainable goals that are challenging to all staff, but which will be felt internally and perceived externally to be of significance.

Included in the vision should be a statement of ethical values and educational philosophy to underpin the work of the Institute. In the context of the changing nature of knowledge and the need to prepare students for life and work, education requires a greater emphasis on vocational instruction in this philosophy than before. It should also include consideration of the potential for social divisiveness in the binary system in higher education and how the Institute will seek to avoid the danger of such divisiveness. It should contribute to the democratic vision and general welfare of society. In this sense it should re-emphasise the primary commitment of the Institute to the students, to supplying the country with women and men trained in the higher level knowledge and skills needed for the civilization of the 21st century, intellectually, socially and culturally mature, devoted to critically pursuing the truth and capable of being productive citizens of Ireland and Europe.

Organisation

The Institute is currently engaged in an academic reorganisation to a discipline based faculty structure, with related schools grouped together in each faculty. The Governing Body reaffirmed this new structure, originally rooted in the Ballymun Project proposals of 1969 and proposed in the IPA study of 1993, in 1995 and again in 1997. Each faculty will be under the academic leadership of a Faculty Board, chaired by the relevant faculty director, with a range of responsibilities as set out in the Course Quality Assurance Handbook. An important task of the next two or three academic years will be the development of cohesion and unity of purpose in the six faculties and their Faculty Boards. This task will be the particular responsibility of the faculty directors.

But while cohesion is to be a key early goal in each faculty, this should not be an inwardly looking cohesion that might exclude essential cross-faculty collaborative programmes. It is a statutory responsibility of the Academic Council to ensure the development of effective collaboration between faculties in the design and development of courses and programmes with cross-discipline aspects.

A most appropriate way to legislate the governance of the Institute would be through the development of a charter. The Universities Act en-

visaged a charter for each university and the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act envisaged one for each regional Institute of Technology. Some progress was made during 1996/1997 in drafting a DIT charter which would serve essentially as the constitution of the Institute. But to give it life, it needs to be brought forward to all members of the DIT and developed in the spirit of partnership. The various internal statutes and regulations will be developed and adapted from current regulations to be compatible with the charter.

**Academic development — general principles**

The character of the DIT as an integrated multi-level higher education institution offering a range of courses from apprenticeship to master’s degrees, together with a range of postgraduate research activities meriting awards from postgraduate diploma to doctoral level, must be clearly articulated and developed. The relative proportions of the activities and resources of the Institute devoted to each level of educational provision may change with the evolving situation and market forces, but the same fundamental range and blend of elements will remain.

The Institute offers a framework of educational opportunities, with transfer possibilities and ladders at all appropriate stages, encompassing full-time, part-time, block release and other flexible access modes. In this context the DIT has much to offer the proposed new national qualifications framework. The Institute will continue to explore ways of improving the flexibility, accessibility and user-friendliness of the Institute to all sections of the society with which it interacts, and especially to those who are employed in industry or commerce and wish to improve their academic qualifications, as well as to those who are unemployed and are experiencing difficulty in obtaining access to third level education, and those who seek a second chance of higher education later in life than usual.

The academic activities of the Institute are designed and monitored in accordance with the general quality assurance regulations drawn up by the Academic Council. In codifying the range of its monitoring and reporting arrangements, and specifying lines of responsibility, these regulations seek to guide each course and optimally match its standard and delivery to the needs of the student, industry and society. They seek also to imbue those involved in the delivery of a course, including staff and students, with an ethos of continuing improvement in all aspects of teaching and learning, training and personal formation. These regulations and procedures themselves are also regularly reviewed and improved in the light of experience.
Teaching and learning are complex and rapidly changing processes, especially in this era of mass higher education. There is an intellectual and emotional interaction between the teacher with her/his skills, knowledge, character and motivation, and the students with their range of talents and levels of participation. The teaching and learning facilities and environment play an important role in these processes.

The policy of the Institute must be to achieve and reward excellence in teaching at all levels. It must also ensure that assessment of student performance is closely matched to course aims and students’ needs. This necessitates the recruitment of teaching staff of the highest quality, followed by proper induction to help and inspire them to develop and maintain a high level of motivation. It also entails the recognition and encouragement of their efforts as they engage in effective teaching. It requires the provision of the full range of advanced facilities and techniques — to allow the delivery of an appropriate blend of lectures, practicals, tutorials, computer-assisted learning, multimedia methods, self-paced learning and distance teaching — to achieve the academic goal.

A fundamental facility to underpin and facilitate the new and emerging integrated educational process required will be the Institute library system. The Institute has plans to develop its library facilities including the branch libraries in the separate centres, increasing the student reading space, developing the book and journal holdings, while continuing to enhance their computerisation and accessibility and upgrading to a state-of-the-art library using computer networks and other electronic and multimedia technologies. This will involve the reorientation and retraining of teaching staff in relation to the nature of courses and teaching techniques to more fully exploit the educational riches that are available in the library and accessible through various electronic databases and networks.

In order to achieve and maintain the excellence in teaching and learning to which the Institute is pledged, the Academic Council has established a committee on Teaching and Learning Strategy and a Teaching and Learning Resource Centre. This centre will enable the staff of the Institute to study and assess third level teaching practices and innovative assessment methods, as well as promote better student learning strategies in all areas of its activities. It will focus also on the development and exploitation of the new library and IT facilities. It will commission and conduct research into and devise experimental programmes applying new thinking to teaching, learning and assessment processes. It will advise and train the academic and other staff within the Institute on its findings on these matters. The aim of the centre will be to become a powerhouse for advancement of the higher education process in Ireland and internationally.
A clear policy of continuing to improve the Institute, founded on partnership across the staff grades and across the disciplines, must be coupled with the appropriate devolution of authority, ownership and management decision-making in respect of each course and programme, to the faculties, schools, course committees and to lecturers and students involved in its education and training processes. In the policies and procedures outlined in the Course Quality Assurance Handbook, the course committee is given the front-line responsibility for managing the design and delivery of its course.

Programmes at each level need to be developed and nurtured. The excellence and coherence of each course, together with the value of the award and the dignity and contribution of the staff involved, need to be copper-fastened and reaffirmed. But the courses need to be considered also in the light of the new national qualifications framework and designed or redesigned for optimum transferability of credits within the Institute and externally in Ireland and internationally.

In order to improve the flexibility and accessibility of the courses and programmes offered in the Institute, it is desirable that courses be progressively modularised, with each module assigned a credit weighting of the appropriate level in the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). When a module is passed, the student will be accorded academic credits and will accumulate these to qualify for a certificate, diploma or degree award, as appropriate. This will facilitate students seeking to pursue courses on a full-time, part-time or other flexible access mode, including distance education and summer and other vacation modules and courses.

All of these quality assurance processes and the Institute’s experience of implementing them can be related to the national qualifications framework and related systems. The DIT’s experience with quality assurance procedures can contribute to the shaping of these systems.

The Institute has long established links with Irish industry and commerce, professional bodies, government and other agencies at individual, research/development and institutional levels. These help the Institute to identify the needs of industry and society and enable it to respond quickly and flexibly to them. It is the policy of the Institute to extend, enhance and formally structure these links in order to respond more effectively to the education and training needs of Irish society. In the design of and justification for each new programme of the Institute, the Course Quality Assurance Handbook prescribes, as fundamental criteria, the examination of the market for the programme and the needs for it in industry and society in general.

It is an established priority of the Institute that research activities be
enhanced in all its schools. These activities assist in improving the quality of the syllabus content, teaching and learning. The Institute has adopted the policy of encouraging research by reducing impediments for existing staff to participate as well as facilitating the employment of additional full-time researchers, or part-time industry based researchers. The Institute is committed to increasing the number of postgraduate research students in each faculty and in each school, so that the overall postgraduate student enrolment will constitute 10 per cent by about 2010.

Research and consultancy activities allow the staff of the Institute to make their extensive range of expertise available to industry and commerce. Research work in the Institute will continue to have mainly an applied, technological emphasis, with a focus on the needs of industry or commerce and society. This emphasis and character will continue to be a hallmark of most of the DIT’s work. In this context the Institute is developing policies on intellectual property rights and technology transfer which will enable and enhance the closer involvement of the staff of the Institute with industry and commerce.

The Institute has for many years provided a wide range of industry and commerce led programmes of continuing education as well as short courses in different discipline areas, responding to specific training needs. The Institute is undertaking a fundamental reappraisal of its current provision in this area to ensure that it provides students in the new century with an education that will equip them with the knowledge and skills sufficient to engage the challenges of industry and commerce. It must meet the demands from potential participants to enhance their expertise and update their skills and competencies. A continuing education unit will be established to promote and co-ordinate this important aspect of the Institute’s mission. The general policy of the Institute in relation to such courses is to assign academic credits at appropriate levels to them, as it is doing with its other programmes, so that the participants can accumulate academic credits towards certificate, diploma or degree awards. These courses will also be appropriately monitored by the Institute’s quality assurance procedures.

**Physical resources**

There is a fundamental link between the provision of the highest standard of general facilities — classrooms, laboratories, equipment, libraries, telecommunications — and the assurance of academic quality. The Institute must make budgetary provision to maintain its facilities at the highest standard for the benefit of the whole academic community. The fact is
that the facilities and accommodation in the most recently built section are a benchmark for all other areas. Accommodation in the older buildings now suffers seriously on this comparison. This means that a priority must be given to the refurbishment and/or the replacement of older buildings.

Appropriate accommodation and facilities must be made available for all planned activities, and all accommodation maintained in the safest and most professional manner with suitable technologies to underpin the full institutional commitment to the highest quality environment.

In committing to develop the buildings, land and resources to optimally achieve the teaching/learning aims of the Institute, the strategic plan should also consider how it might optimise the use of buildings and facilities in a cost-effective way, including at times when they are vacant.

There is a pressing need for a doubling of the Institute's physical resources for academic, social, sporting and cultural purposes, as outlined in the Physical Development Plan. The Grangegorman proposal should be progressed quickly in the coming five years. The strategic plan will offer the perspective of solving the accommodation problems as early as possible over the next decade.

Financial autonomy

Probably the single greatest limitation on the ability of the Institute to set and implement priorities is its virtually total reliance on exchequer funding, mainly from the Department of Education and Science. The funding arrangements and lines of responsibility set out in the DIT Act are adequate for the majority of the relatively routine base-load activities of the Institute. But they place strict limitations on the autonomy and freedom of action of the Institute's management to optimally and flexibly recruit, reward and deploy its staff, to sell, buy or rent accommodation as required and to acquire other specialised resources.

Thus far the Institute has not managed to develop substantial income independent of the direct government subvention. However, it is of the greatest importance that such sources be developed in the years immediately ahead in order to create the autonomy so urgently needed.

For the DIT to be in a position to enhance the academic freedom of the Institute and to allow greater flexibility in its development, it probably needs to raise some 10 per cent of its revenues from sources other than the exchequer in the next five years or so. Consequently the Institute needs to put in place procedures, structures and staffing to raise funds through a range of activities.
Among the activities which might be planned to generate income are the following:

- research and consultancy
- advisory think tanks for industry, state and EU agencies
- campus companies
- campus services
- short industry-led courses
- international (non-EU) students
- donations for specific projects
- industrial collaboration on specific projects
- local government collaboration on specific projects
- collaboration with other organisations, sporting, social, etc.
- an international foundation with charity status
- bequests and others.

Management information system

This Information Technology (IT) age has deep implications for all aspects of education and training. The DIT aims to be in the forefront of the evaluation, use and development of IT for internal and external applications. It aims to incorporate the latest pedagogic applications of IT into all disciplines and courses throughout the Institute, as appropriate. It also aims to provide courses in, and research into, IT at all levels and in all disciplines. A new network-based management information system for the Institute will be introduced on a phased basis from 2000. This will make a wide and developing range of student, course and school management information readily available throughout the Institute. All individual staff members will have networked PCs with email and internet facilities. This plan will require a commitment to a robust and fully supported physical infrastructure and software provision. It must be extended to all appropriate areas in the Institute, and it must be continually and critically developed and grown over the years ahead.

Staff

The dedicated efforts of DIT's staff members at all grades over many years have brought the Institute to its present stage of development. The further development of the Institute will be equally dependent on their commit-
ment, knowledge, expertise, talent, imagination, goodwill and hard work in the years ahead.

The human resource policies of the Institute should be formulated to empower staff members to fulfil their responsibilities to their students, to the Institute and to society to the highest standard. While based fundamentally on the partnership principle, these policies must aim to help each staff member to continuously develop, retain and improve her/his professional expertise and participate actively in the development of the Institute and its facilities. They should seek to develop in staff members an in-depth and up-to-date knowledge of their disciplines and subjects. They should also develop a spirit of peer collaboration and teamwork, committed to achieving excellence in all aspects of the work of the Institute. They should especially facilitate the provision of education to the students, inspiring them with a thorough knowledge of their disciplines, the capacity to continue to learn and develop personally throughout their careers.

These ideas should underpin the general approach to recruitment, induction, allocation, training, development, welfare and encouragement, as well as to job specifications in relation to all grades of staff — academic, administrative, library and technical support, maintenance and reception, porters and security.

**External strategic relationships and collaborations**

In addition to the successful partnership with the University of Dublin that has been in operation for over twenty-five years, and is now developing in new directions, the Institute should value academic collaboration and co-operation with other third level institutions in this country, as well as internationally. Proposals for joint courses or for the DIT’s involvement in or validation of courses conducted elsewhere, or for other forms of co-operation, should continue to be welcomed and responded to positively, recognising that the DIT has much to benefit from and contribute to such initiatives.

The DIT is an active participant in a wide range of EU programmes involving student and staff exchange with universities and other third level institutions across Europe. The Institute should continue to recognise the importance of these links, seeking their further development, expansion and integration into the work of the Institute. Accordingly the DIT should commit itself to providing the organisational and administrative support to facilitate and encourage staff and students to enter into these exchanges and avail of the educational benefits and personal development that can result from them.
Links between the Institute and industry/commerce include:

- research and development and consultancy co-operation
- using professionals as external examiners for courses and as members of course and programme advisory boards
- provision of opportunities for student work placements as an integral part of many courses
- obtaining feedback from tens of thousands of DIT graduates in employment on courses and other programmes of the Institute.

These links provide considerable peer review to help to ensure the continuing currency of the DIT’s syllabuses and courses. The Institute’s policy is to continue to develop and strengthen these industrial relationships through mechanisms such as course and faculty advisory or liaison boards in different areas. It is envisaged that, where appropriate, it will be possible to include a period of industrial or commercial work placement or international placement as an integral part of more undergraduate courses.

The Institute has long-standing links with local government agencies such as County Councils and Corporations, as well as with state agencies such as Enterprise Ireland, FÁS, CERT and others. It should be Institute policy to continue to positively develop and build these collaborative links.

The colleges which now constitute the DIT have for over a hundred years had close links with a wide range of professional bodies, preparing students for membership examinations and providing further education and training opportunities for their members. It should be the policy of the Institute to continue to develop these relationships. In this way some of the professional bodies may be freed from the direct tasks of syllabus design and examinations. The Institute can provide academic elements, with an emphasis on quality assurance to appropriate academic standards. The professional bodies will make key inputs to course committees by way of advice and feedback, and by providing members for validation and review panels and to act as external examiners.

It has long been recognised that the numbers of students entering third level education from Dublin and the surrounding region are substantially lower than from the rest of the country. Entry rates from the more disadvantaged areas in Dublin are very low. The DIT policy to develop effective access mechanisms and link programmes to address this situation will be given high priority. There are formal links with a number of second level City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC) schools which facilitate the offering of places on a limited selection of courses to applicants from Post-Leaving Certificate courses and the policy will be to
develop and expand these links. Within the DIT’s open access policy, it is proposed to evaluate and implement, where appropriate, other mechanisms to develop these links, including outreach campaigns to schools and neighbourhoods, open days in the DIT schools, reserving numbers of places on specific courses, introducing more foundation and transition courses, as well as scholarships and special tutoring arrangements. Such arrangements are currently under active development by the Institute in collaboration with external organisations, such as the Dublin Chamber of Commerce.

The location of the different colleges of the Institute at the centre of the city of Dublin must be taken as an opportunity to put down roots deep in the local community. In the immediate hinterland of each college there are ranges of businesses, areas for development and considerable population numbers. Each such hinterland can offer a variety of modalities in which the local college or the Institute as a whole can develop the services it offers and allow the Institute to provide help and even leadership in local community development. The Institute must investigate the feasibility of a proactive policy of forming local coalitions for development.

A learning organisation

Modern applied technical knowledge and knowledge technologies, together with critical reflection on them, must be at the core of the DIT’s values and activities. Internally, it must focus clearly on learning, developing and correcting courses, improving, enhancing and growing more flexibility and trust, listening, responding and interacting constructively with the outside world, and in general, becoming an intellectual powerhouse and a learning organisation in this technological age.

Students in the Institute

The Institute has a positive record of giving personal attention to its students. In delivering a personalised higher education service, the DIT will continue to place the education and professional development of the student as a person in the broadest sense at the centre of the Institute’s values and agenda. This will enable the Institute’s graduates to continue to contribute effectively to providing industrial, commercial and social leadership in Irish and European society.

The Institute’s policy over the next five years will be that all its courses, including its assessment and examination arrangements, will be modularised. Credit accumulation will be introduced and this will pro-
vide very flexible programmes for the widest range of students. This will be linked to the introduction of a system of assessment and accreditation of prior learning. Students will be facilitated to pursue courses in a wide range of modes — full-time, extended part-time, block release and others. It will also help students who wish to take part-time work, or even full-time work, for periods during their courses. When fully implemented this measure will remove the distinction between full-time and part-time courses and will enable classes to be timetabled throughout the day from 8.00 am to 10.00 pm.

The Institute is committed to developing policies to attract and cater for a greater number of mature students in all its programmes.

It is Institute policy to provide a student handbook for each course or programme offered. The salient features of such a handbook are set out in the Course Quality Assurance Handbook. In general the student handbook provides information and guidance to the student on course syllabuses, timetables, class schedules, examination arrangements, and other details about the student's course and the Institute, its facilities and services.

A key feature and characteristic of the Institute which will continue is the ladders of educational opportunities which enable students to transfer vertically or horizontally to fulfill their career aspirations as effectively as possible within the Institute or through other higher education institutions in Ireland or elsewhere in Europe.

Work is currently underway in the Academic Council to analyse student completion rates. This issue will be addressed by the Teaching and Learning Resource Centre on an Institute-wide basis in order to improve retention rates, especially in first years of courses. Student examination performance will be correlated with original selection criteria and efforts will be made to retain students until they have achieved an appropriate level of academic award.

The feasibility of alternative modes of course delivery — distance learning, summer modules, the provision of foundation or linking modules for students entering higher level courses — will be examined. Such measures may involve using guest lecturers from outside the Institute. These can have the benefit of extending the use of the Institute buildings and facilities over a long working year.

In relation to each course, the staff/student meetings and student survey feedback about the course and its delivery are important means of improving learning opportunities and teacher/student relations, as is consulting with students about the programme and facilities provided. In this way the priorities and needs of the students can be identified. The feed-
back from the students is considered by the Course Committee, which recommends how issues arising might be addressed. Student membership is a key aspect of all committees in the Institute, including Course Committees.

A Student Charter of Rights is in preparation. It will spell out the facilities available, the rights of all students and students’ responsibility for their own learning.

The Institute currently offers a very limited range of facilities to students but it is committed to greatly improving and expanding these, including recreational and sporting facilities. It is Institute policy to provide a range of playing fields and covered sports facilities, gymnasiums and halls.

The Institute’s policy is to improve the welfare, counselling and assistance services for students and it is the priority, in general, to continue to be a caring organisation.

A PROUD HISTORY, A FUTURE OF PROMISE

The DIT will continue to be a vital national educational asset in the heart of Dublin.

With a “long and distinguished record of advancing knowledge and promoting learning, particularly in their industrial and social applications”, the Institute plays a “unique role in higher education in Ireland”.

The DIT will continue to be oriented towards the community, the economy and the client with a strong emphasis on service and applied knowledge, opening up avenues for part-time study, for “non-traditional” students and providing opportunities for individuals to broaden their practical knowledge and competence by combining the academic and applied approaches to learning.

The strategic plan will set out the methods by which the DIT, as a multi-level, multi-function institution, will maintain its history of success and achievement and transform itself successfully to meet the new conditions and new challenges of the new century.