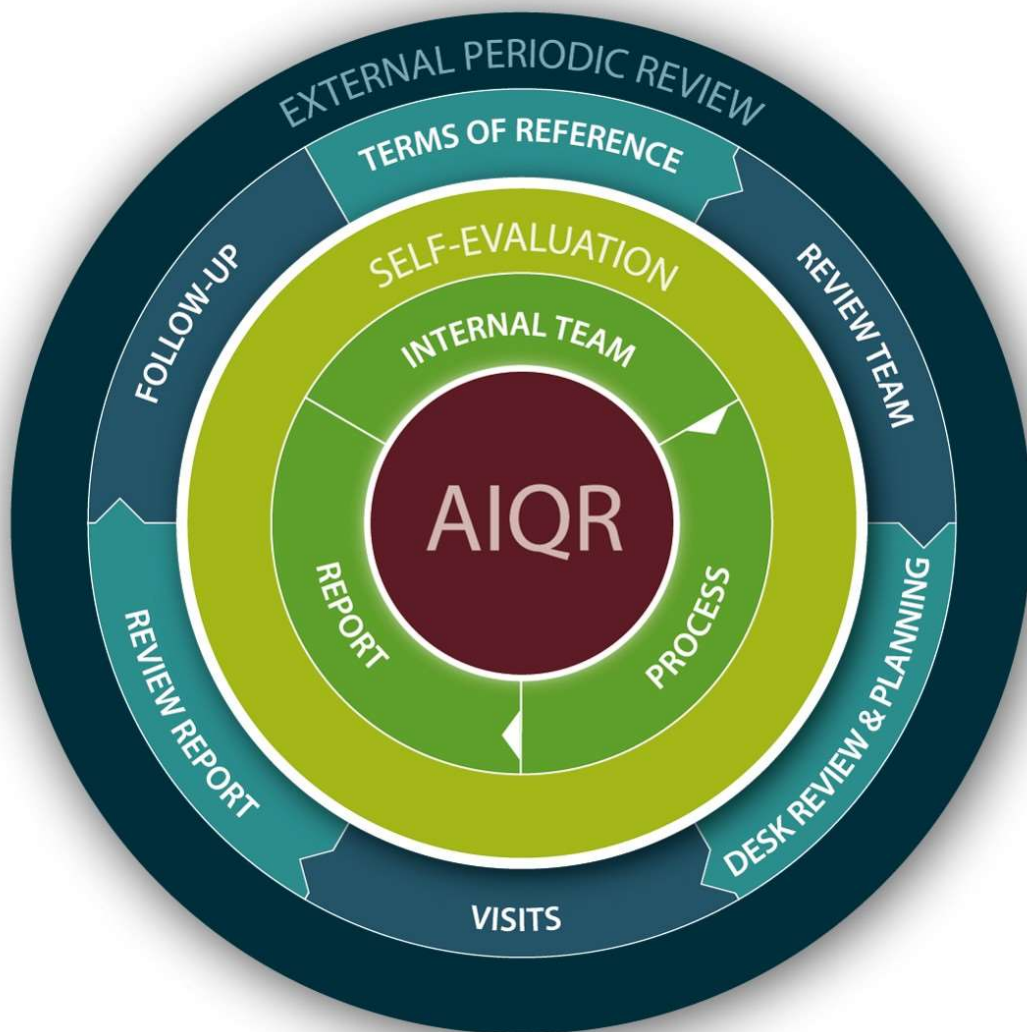# Athlone Institute of Technology

Annual Institutional Quality Assurance Report 2020

Based on the reporting period 1 September 2018 – 31 August 2019

The Cyclical Review Process

Part 1

Overview of internal QA governance, policies and procedures

Overarching institution-level approach and policy for QA (ESG 1.1)

1. Overarching Institution Quality Policy
A brief synopsis of the overarching institution quality policy which sets out the links between QA policy and procedures and the strategy and strategic management of the institution.

Athlone Institute of Technology is a contemporary third level institute distinguished by academic excellence in teaching, learning and research. The institute was awarded The Sunday Times 'Institute of Technology of the Year 2018 and Runner-Up in 2017. The institute also tops Ireland's official league table for research and was listed in U-Multirank's 'Top 25 Performing Universities in the World for Interdisciplinary Research' in 2018 and 2019. Athlone Institute of Technology is currently ranked number one nationally for student satisfaction - a position it has maintained for six consecutive years. During the reporting period the Strategic Plan 2014-2018 *Global Focus – Regional Impact* came to conclusion. This was a very successful plan that brought with it a number of notable achievements, such as:

- Sunday Times Institute of Technology of the year 2018.
- ISSE- AIT students most satisfied in Ireland leading in quality of interactions and collaborative learning.
- First Institute of Technology to be awarded College of Sanctuary.
- 94% of the graduate class of 2017 were employed, in training or in further study six months after graduation.
- Software Research Centre w Horizon 2020 funding in Cyber security.
- Institute applied for Athena Swan Bronze award.
- 1st third level college in Ireland to receive APS accreditation in pharmaceutical sciences.

Planning for the new strategic plan coincided with the HEA strategic dialogue and performance compact. This provided an opportunity to fully integrate areas of priority to ensure the precision of

future endeavours.   Taking a thematic approach to both the Compact and Strategic Plan has enabled the development of crosscutting themes that reflect national objectives and AIT priorities. In essence the Compact is a subset of our emerging Strategic Plan that sets out our ambition and vision for the next 5 years.

Our Strategic Plan 2019-2023 will guide the next phase of evolution which is the transition to becoming a technological university, that will ensure the midland region's continued growth and prosperity from an economic and social perspective. Each of the five themes identified in our plan – Learner Experience, Educational Provision, Research and Innovation, Engagement, and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion - are central tenets underpinning this transition. These were derived from an extensive stakeholder consultation process with representation from students, staff and a broad cross section of civic, social, cultural, business and industry groups.

As the sole higher education institute servicing the Midlands, we have an integral role in educating and upskilling the people in the region in key areas of technological advancement. It is vital that our graduates are agile and adaptable, imbued with the skills and competencies necessary to succeed in today's fast-moving innovation economy. This will enable the future proofing of Midlands region and ensure its continued competitiveness.

The higher education ecosystem is in a state of perpetual flux and is being revolutionised by disruptive forces, such as shifting learner demographics, changing modes of delivery and educational pathways. As we navigate this period of considerable change, we are firmly committed to providing a high quality, student-centred experience with a strong focus on applied and academic excellence, and improved teaching and learning outcomes for all. We are also intent on fostering our relationship with our stakeholders, ensuring that we are firmly embedded in the social and economic fabric of the communities we serve.

Supporting this Strategic Plan's themes and associated priorities are three enablers - Our People, Infrastructure and Operational Frameworks. Each of these will play a pivotal role in helping us achieve our ambitious mission and will enable us to respond dynamically to challenges and opportunities in the higher education landscape. This forward-thinking, flexible approach is vital to unlocking the potential of both the institute and the Midlands region as a strategic growth corridor and will be instrumental to the successful implementation of this Strategic Plan.

Enveloping the 5 core themes with the plan is our commitment to quality culture enhancement and excellence in operation and governance.

We are firmly committed to maintaining our academic standards and continually enhancing the quality of our teaching and learning provision. The professionalism and creativity of our staff makes a vital contribution to the enhancement of provision through their attention to students' experiences as learners, to the development of their disciplines and their engagement with teaching.

Our students' voices are integral to our academic quality and remain a central tenant underpinning our quality assurance strategy. These are elicited through participation in initiatives such as the Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE). We are committed to our continuous improvement process, and ensuring excellence in educational provision as a designated awarding body.

As an agile and ambitious institute, our Quality Office will continue to build robust systems, data, and operational protocols to ensure the protection of the enrolled learner while leading contemporary and relevant educational provision. Our partnership approach to quality culture enhancement will be strengthened by supporting the voice of all stakeholders to uphold the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion.

Quality assurance related information for learners is provided on the AIT Website.

https://www.ait.ie/contact/staff/quality/

> ## 2. Quality assurance decision-making fora
> A brief description of institution-level quality assurance decision-making fora

The responsibilities of the institute's academic council are set out in statute. It is supported in its work by the office of the Vice President Academic & Registrar and by the Quality Office. The Academic Council delegates responsibility for quality assurance and enhancement to the active academic strategy & quality committee which is chaired by the ViPAR and supported by the Quality Office. The Governing Body takes a particular interest in the quality agenda and periodic reports are made to it, both in writing and through direct presentation.

The Academic Strategy and Quality (ASQ) Committee, which is appointed by Academic Council, has the responsibility for identifying appropriate strategies and developments to facilitate the institute's achievement of its academic development objectives; and advising on the policies, processes, and procedures which impact on the academic standards of education and training which is provided, organised, or procured by the institute.

This committee is a sub-committee of academic council and has responsibilities for the following:

- Monitoring and reviewing the institute's access, transfer, and progression policies and considering new or alternative qualification methods for facilitating students' access onto institute programmes.
- Making recommendations to academic council on the identification, achievement and enhancement of standards for the institute's programmes.
- Identifying the requirement for, establishing, monitoring and reviewing procedures for quality assurance for the purpose of further improving and maintaining the quality of education and training which is provided, organised or procured by the institute in accordance with Section 28 of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012.
- Actively contributing to the major quality assurance instruments such as institutional and programmatic reviews.
- Evaluating at regular intervals and as directed from time to time by academic council of the institute's programmes of education and training in relation to the development, validation

and review of programmes; assessment of student performance; ongoing monitoring and evaluation of programmes; evaluation by learners of that programme; and evaluation of services related to that programme.

- Recommending strategies relating to all aspects of the institute's strategy for the development of lifelong learning provision across all faculties, departments, and functional sections of the institute. This includes the provision of guidance on collaboration, the establishment of new courses, major changes to existing courses, and graduate programmes.
- Leading on all elements relating to learning and teaching and assessment approaches.

Please see link below under the Quality Section of the AIT website to the Institute Committee Structure:

https://www.ait.ie/contact/staff/quality/ait-organisational-and-management-structure

Confirmation of QA Policy and Procedures

1. Programme Design and Approval (ESG 1.2)
Links and/or text relating to the institution-wide quality assurance policy and procedures for the design and approval of new programmes.

Please see link below under the Quality Section of the AIT Website to the Procedures and Guidelines document for the Design, Development, Evaluation and Withdrawal of Taught Programmes at Athlone Institute of Technology.

https://www.ait.ie/contact/staff/quality/policies-procedures

In keeping with QQI requirements a rigorous and consistent process to the design and review of programmes has been developed and agreed by the relevant stakeholders. This process must be adhered to when developing new programmes within the institute. A detailed process flow chart was devised by the Quality Office which assists programme design teams by outlining the steps involved and can be accessed at the following link on the website:

https://www.ait.ie/contact/staff/quality/summary-of-new-programme-proposal

In addition, the Quality Office in consultation with the Learning and Teaching Unit devised a Programme Development Support Document and Checklist and Sign-off by the Faculty Heads. This document is a tool to support the programme development process. It aims to give the programme development team (PDT) a guide to the key areas for consideration and inclusion in advance of submitting a programme proposal to the Academic Standards and Quality (ASQ) committee. In addition, it includes a checklist and sign off sheet. A copy of this document can be accessed on the quality section of the AIT website at:

https://www.ait.ie/contact/staff/quality/summary-of-new-programme-proposal

Finally, external expertise and reference points are also an integral part of programme design and form part of all programme validation panels.

2. Programme Delivery and Assessment (ESG 1.3)
Links and/or text relating to the institution-wide quality assurance policies and procedures for the ongoing delivery and assessment of programmes.

Please see link below under the Quality Section of the AIT website which leads to the Institute Policy on Programme Delivery and Assessment. A link is also provided to the AIT Standards, Assessment and Awards document.

https://www.ait.ie/contact/staff/quality/policies-procedures

https://www.ait.ie/contact/staff/quality/standards-assessment-awards

These documents outline the Quality Assurance Policies and Procedures for the ongoing delivery and assessment of programmes.

3. Research Quality (ESG 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.9)
Links and/or text relating to any specific quality assurance procedures for the design, approval, delivery, assessment and monitoring of research programmes, if they exist.

Athlone Institute of Technology offers Masters and PhD research awards in line with QQI specification at Level 9/10.

The Institute has delegated authority to award Masters and PhD degrees in the areas of

- Toxicology
- Microbiology
- Polymer Engineering
- Communications and Software Engineering

and may be the facilitator of research in other areas, supported by QQI as the awarding body.

Whilst the Institute develops and supports its research strategy by providing human and physical resources, its principle role is in maintaining the standard of the awards that it offers. To this end AIT is in the process of introducing new Structured Research Programmes for all students for the next academic year. The Institute has updated its delivery of research modules, research regulations, and its governance under this proposed new structured research programme to be ratified by the Academic Council in September 2019.

Research Structured Modules

At present AIT provides Research Degree programmes with a structured or taught element since 2011. The modules, and other elective elements of learning, were developed and implemented to support the personal and professional development of the postgraduate research students at AIT. Specific modules were taught by both internal and external academic staff with the support of the Office of Research. The modules were delivered annually and although critical elements within an individual postgraduate student's professional development plan; the sequence of delivery or the requirement to complete learning was not staged within a specific programme of learning i.e. the student only has to complete the modules prior to graduation which sometimes, because of the timing of the modules, did not support the student's learning as best it could.

Students were mandated to complete 3 core modules and in some cases were required to pick up additional training and specialist learning for their programme of study. This additional learning, although it was included in the student's Personal Development Plan, was not afforded ECTS credits.

The proposed updated structured programme is aimed to remedy these anomalies as the student will complete a suite of modules and an Individual Study Plan in consultation with his/her supervisor which may now afford them additional credits. This will allow the student to develop his/her generic transferable skills, discipline specific competencies and attributes associated with a graduate who has completed a research programme of study at AIT.

The proposed modular element consists:

- Core modules: These modules will enable the student to refine his/her skills, the majority of which will be undertaken in the first year of learning. The student in consultation with his or her supervisor will decide upon how and when these modules are completed which is informed by the student's identified learning needs.
- Discipline specific modules: These modules are taught and facilitated within the faculty. They will provide the discipline specific theoretical input relevant to the student. The decision as to when a student completes these modules will be taken in consultation with his/her supervisor.
- Elective modules: These modules can be taken across all faculties within AIT and must be part of a level 9 major or minor award. The student identifies up to 20 ECTS of learning which he/she can complete in year 2 and 3 or his/her studies
- Individual Study Plan: The completion of this plan will be a mandatory requirement for the new Structured Research Programme. The plan will be shared by both student, supervisor and Graduate School. The responsibility for the maintenance of the plan will be with the student.

It is envisaged that the development or rollout of a more structured approach in AIT's research degree programme will:

1   Enhance the learner experience and his/her capacity to meet the demands of a research programme.

2.   Enhance interdisciplinary learning, thus increasing research capacity in
        other growth areas for research within the Institute.

Quality Assurance for Research under the new Structured Research Programmes

The AIT Research Postgraduate Academic Regulations document will provide a common point of reference for all staff and postgraduate research candidates in the institute and relevant funding agencies. The academic regulations will apply to all postgraduate studies undertaken by a research and thesis mode at AIT. Quality Assurance for research practices in AIT is also influenced by the series of booklets produced by the Irish Universities Quality Board on *'Good Practice', 'In the Organisation of PhD Programmes in Irish Higher Education.*

Research is managed by many facets, but at its core is the support of the research candidates and their supervisors.

The proposed new research Governance under the new Structured Research Programmes

The Academic Council is responsible for research governance. It will ultimately be responsible for the approval of any updates or deviations from the approved governance/regulations that may occur, in the development of research practice at the Institute. The responsibility for the upkeep and development of research regulations and governance lies with the VPAA's office.

The Role of the Academic Council to Research

As per the institute's statutory frame, the institute has an Academic Council appointed by the Governing body. With regard to research the Academic Council of the Institute is responsible for the research governance. The Academic Council delegates formulating, developing and reviewing Institute research policy and strategies, the implementation and development of operating systems, application of national research guidelines, research funding applications, student application, progression and examination to the Research Innovation and Enterprise Committee, the office of the VPAA, the Graduate School Research Committee, and the Faculty Research Committees as appropriate as indicated in Fig 1. The Academic Council is ultimately responsible for the approval of any updates or deviations from the approved governance/regulations that may occur, in the development of research practice at the Institute.
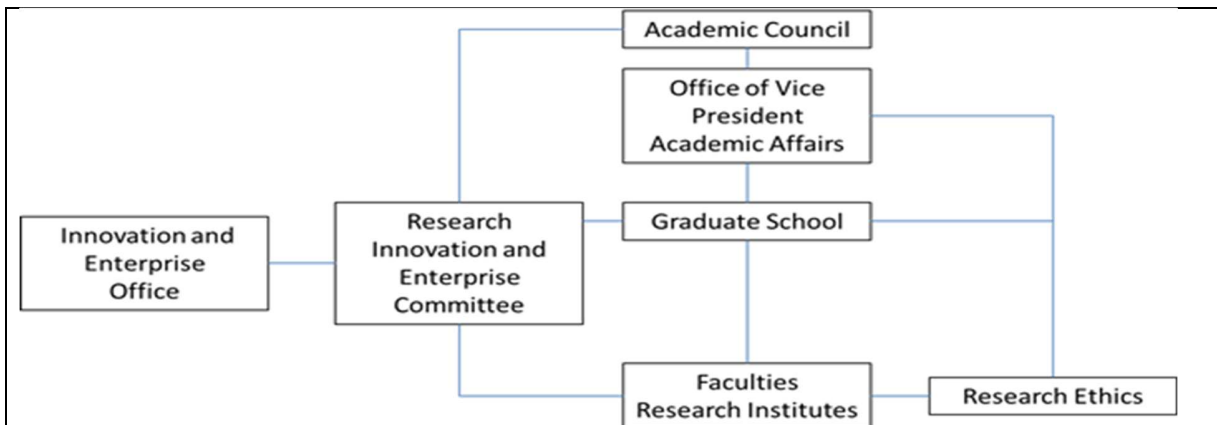
Research whilst guided by the strategy of the Institute is intertwined between three major elements:

- The academic administration regulation and procedures need to ensure that the standard of research is maintained within the Institute, responsibility of the Graduate School.

- The research itself, responsibility of the Faculty and Research Institutes.

- Commercialisation and technology transfer, responsibility of the Innovation and Enterprise Office.

The Academic Council acknowledges and supports the work of administrative offices, faculties, departments and individuals with regard to research. Its terms of reference in this regard are to:

- Ensure the Institute is aligned with national policy/procedures.

- Approve research programmes proposed by Faculties.

- Approve, amend or otherwise research student applications and enrolments into the Institute as presented by Graduate School Research Committee (GSRC)

- Approve, amend or otherwise the progression of research students through programmes

- Approve, amend or otherwise the appointment of external examiners for research programmes as per the academic regulations.

- Approve or otherwise the outcome of research examination boards.

- Approve, amend or otherwise academic appeals in regard to research in line with the Institute's procedure.

- Approve, amend or otherwise student/staff disciplinary decisions in line with the Institute's procedure.

- Note the decisions made by the Research Innovation and Enterprise Committee in line with the Institute's procedure.

The Academic Council is the ultimate body in regards to reporting and recording of academic decisions for research. It may also have statutory requirements to report to Governing Body and/or government bodies.

Research Innovation and Enterprise Committee

The Research Innovation and Enterprise Committee (RIEC) of Academic Council has overall responsibility for the development of research, innovation, and enterprise policies and assists Academic Council in its work.

The Research Innovation and Enterprise Committee is responsible for:

- advising Academic Council on matters related to research and innovation work
- formulating, developing and reviewing Institute research, innovation and enterprise policy and strategies;
- enabling and encouraging research within the Institute consistent with the mission of the Institute, and regional and national strategies for research, innovation and enterprise;
- further developing and reviewing guidelines and procedures in respect of internal resource allocation for research and advising on the most effective utilisation of the Institute's research accommodation, facilities and expertise;
- determining and applying performance indicators in relation to the Institute's research activities;
- formulating, monitoring, and further developing the Institute's policy in relation to intellectual property rights, patents, copyrights, trademarks, technology transfer licensing, consultancy, commercialisation of research and campus companies;
- advising on legal, ethical and safety issues in relation to research projects;
- monitoring compliance with the Institute rules and regulations relating to the award of postgraduate degrees;
- liaise with other subcommittees of Academic Council and appropriate external institutions, as required;
- carrying out any or all such functions as may be assigned to the subcommittee from time to time by Academic Council and/or Governing Body.

The RIEC may establish subcommittees and working parties, some of whose members may be from outside the Committee or from outside the Institute, with the approval of Academic Council and Governing Body. The Graduate School Research Committee, the Research Ethics Committee and the Intellectual Property Committee have reporting responsibilities to the RIEC.

The Research Innovation and Enterprise Committee reports to Academic Council.

The Role of the Office of VPAA to Research

In terms of research within the Institute, the office of Vice President Academic Affairs is supported by the Academic Council and acknowledges the research work carried out by the Graduate School, Faculties, Research Institutes and individuals in this regard. The terms of reference include but are not limited to:

- Ensuring the academic standard of research is upheld within the Institute.
- Ensuring national and Institute research policy is applied within Institute.
- Evaluating the research procedures.
- Ensuring that research within the Institute is carried out in an ethical mode.
- Ensuring that any proposed research is in line the Institute's research interests and does not bring the Institute into disrepute.
- Adjudicating on appeals/disciplinary in line with the Institute's procedures.
- Maintaining this document.

The office of the Vice President Academic Affairs will report on research matters to Academic Council in regard to the;

- Decisions of the Institute's research examination boards.
- Outcomes of academics appeals /disciplinary procedures, disputes.
- Any legal, financial, academic issues that will affect the Institute in regards to research that the office has adjudicated on.
- Decisions of the Research Ethics Committee.
- Evaluation of the Institute's research procedures, application of national research policies.

The office will also relay decisions back to relevant committees/faculties

Graduate School

The Graduate School is responsible for the academic administration of all research students, from application to graduation.

The Graduate School acknowledges the research work carried out by the Faculties, Research Institutes and individuals and is supported by the office of Vice President Academic Affairs, the Research Innovation and Enterprise Committee and Academic Council. Its terms of reference are:

- Implement national and Institute policy.
- Administrate Graduate School Research Committee, which includes decisions on:
    - Research student applications.
    - Enrolment types.
    - Progression/non progression of research students.
    - External examiners, research examination panels.
    - Aid in the creation of appeals panels.
- Administrate Research Ethics Committee.
- Offer staff and student training programmes.

The Graduate School reports to the Academic Council for **approval** of the decisions at the Graduate School Research Committee in regards to:

- Standard and non-standard enrolment.
- The composition of research examination panels.
- External examiners.
- Implementation of National and the Institute's research policy.
- Aid where necessary in the creation of appeals panels.

 The Graduate School will report to the Office of the VPAA in regard to:

- Appeals issues.
- Research student progression decisions.
- Exceptions to the research student progression regulations.
- Research examination board outcomes.

The Graduate School will report to the faculties/research supervisors the decisions of the Graduate School Research Committee, via the Assistant Deans of Research.

Graduate School Research Committee (GSRC)

The Graduate School is responsible for calling meetings of the GSRC.

The Graduate School Research Committee will have the authority to make decisions on:

- Research Student Applications in terms of:
    - Alignment with Institute strategy.
    - Entry qualification including where necessary English language requirements.
    - Institute ability to service the research (facilities, Library etc.).
    - Student/project finance.
    - Adjudicate on disputes between Faculties in regard to cross Faculty research.

The Committee will have the authority to return research student applications to faculties based on the above criteria. They will <u>not</u> be able to return research student applications based on the definition of the project, or the expertise of the supervisor/supervisory panels.

- Enrolment method. Based on the qualification of the applicant, a decision will be made as to how the student is enrolled.
- Standard: The applicant holds a suitable undergraduate award at 2.1 NQQI Level 8 or above, or non-national equivalent; or at least a second-class honours level award in higher graduate programme.
- Qualifier Programme. The Applicant will complete a qualifier programme outlined by the Faculty before enrolment onto a research programme.
- Have the required amount of work experience deemed appropriate for entry to a research programme as indicated in the academic regulations.
- Holds a Professional qualification deemed suitable for entry onto a research programme as defined under the Institute's APEL policy.

The Committee will have the authority to refuse enrolment based on the above criteria. The Committee will also be able to define changes or request amendments to qualifier programmes. The Committee will also be able to change the enrolment type e.g. professional qualification to qualifier programme.

- Research student progression/non progression
    - Note decisions of Faculty Research Committees to progress individual students for reporting to exam boards.
    - Approve the panels put forward by the Faculty Research Committee to review non-performing research students.

- Approve panels put forward by Faculty Research Committees to review non-performing students outside normal progression points.
- Approve, amend or otherwise the outcomes of the non-performing research student panels for reporting to exam boards.
- Approve, amend or otherwise exceptions to the above to allow research student progression, to be reported to examination boards/Academic Council.
- Approve the withdrawal of a research student from the registrar in line with academic regulations.

The Graduate School Research Committee has the authority to approve, amend or reject the decisions of the faculties based on the above criteria, before reporting their decisions to Academic Council/examination boards. If amendments are made, they must be relayed to the faculty via the Assistant Dean of Research.

- External examiners, research examination panels.

The Graduate School Research Committee will have the authority to approve, amend or reject the external examiners and examination panels put forward by the faculties, prior to submission for approval by Academic Council.

- In line with the Institute's research appeals policy, the Graduate School Research Committee may be asked to aide in the creation of appeals panels.
- Implementation of National/Institute research policies.

The Graduate School Research Committee will make decisions on the most appropriate way of implementing research policy.

Decisions made by the Graduate School Research Committee are presented to:

- Research Innovation and Enterprise Committee
  - Graduate School Research Committee update.
- Academic Council:
  - Make up of Examination panels for approval.
  - Appeal panels when asked to aid in their formation.
- Examination Boards
  - Research student progression decisions.
  - Examination outcomes.
- Office of Vice President Academic Affairs

- Application decisions.

- Appeals of decisions by Graduate School Research Committee.

- General research appeals panels when asked to aid in their formation.

- Faculties

- Decisions of the Graduate School Research Committee that do not require approval of Academic Council.

Faculties

The faculties and individual supervisors hold the expertise to carry out the research. As such the faculty will make the decision on the suitability of a student to carry out the research, their progression through the research programme and whether the facilities to carry out the research are available. The Faculty will in line with Institute regulations appoint supervisor(s) and supervisory panels, propose examination panels, accommodate viva voce examinations and administer research review panels. All Research students will be aligned to a faculty, for the purpose of application, progression and examination. In order to complete this process, research student applications, and their progression through the research programme will be vetted by the Faculty Research Committee. The outcome of the decisions made on academic research ability will be reported to the Graduate School Research Committee who will review the decisions based on academic regulation. The Faculty will have the responsibility to:

- Apply national and Institute policy

- Administrate Faculty Research Committee, which includes decisions on:

  - Research student applications

  - Enrolment types

  - Research student progression/non progression

  - External examiners, research examination panels.

- Form Research review panels for student transfer and non-performing students as per the postgraduate research regulations.

Faculty Research Committee (FRC)

Each Faculty has the responsibility to create a Faculty Research Committee (FRC).

The Faculty Research Committee will make decisions in regard to:

- How to apply national/Institute research policy.

- Research student applications
    - The suitability of the applicant to carry out the proposed research (which may include qualification, and English language requirements).
    - The expertise of the primary supervisor/supervisory panel to complete the research.
    - The ability of the Faculty to support the research in the form of facilities, finance and support personnel.
    - The alignment of the research with the Institute strategy.
    - Feedback from the Research Ethics Committee.
- Enrolment Type
    - The way in which the student should be enrolled (standard, qualifier programme other).
    - Define the qualifier programme or other enrolment requirements.
- Research student progression
    - Research students should be reviewed at least once a year in line with postgraduate research regulations.
    - All outcomes (positive, negative, or proposals outside academic regulations) of the review must be presented to the GSRC.
    - The review should be informed by the individual study plan of the candidate and include information regarding ECTS awarded for the review period.
    - Each Faculty will define the optimum format of the review.
    - Each Faculty will inform research students of progression formats immediately after enrolment.
    - Faculties wishing for a research student to progress, that fall outside academic regulations must make a formal submission to GSRC indicating the reasons for the default.
    - Faculties that consider a student not to be performing will propose a Research Review panel to GSRC for approval in line with academic regulations. The outcome of the review will initially be reported to FRC prior to reporting to GSRC in line with academic regulation.
    - An extraordinary meeting of FRC may be called on the request of the Dean of Faculty, to review progression outside normal time frames, to constitute a review panel, in line

with academic regulations. The outcome of the review will initially be reported to FRC prior to reporting to GSRC in line with academic regulation.

- External examiners/ research examination panels.
  - External examiners/research examination panels proposed by the faculty will initially be vetted by FRC for their suitability based on qualification, expertise and qualification, prior to being presented to GSRC for final approval by Academic Council. (Academic Council may approve examiners retrospectively).

All decisions of the Faculty Research Committee will be reported to the Graduate School Research Committee.

Outcomes of decisions that affect research students/supervisors should be relayed to them as soon as possible after approval by the relevant Committee / Academic Council.

Where research crosses Faculty boundaries, each Faculty Research Committee must approve the Research student application. Disputes between faculties in regard to cross faculty research will be reviewed by GSRC.

Future Plans

AIT is currently completing the development of the new structured Masters and PhD programmes with a view to having the proposals ratified by the Academic Council and having all research students registered under this new programme for the 2019/2020 academic year. Information sessions have already been held for both students and staff and further such workshops are planned for early in the next academic year. A review will be documented in the AIQR return for the 2019-2020 period.

As per the Strategic Plan (2019-2023), AIT will 'continue to embed research excellence within our teaching and learning activities to support staff development, student progression and knowledge creation, maximising the economic and social returns from our research and innovation activities'.

CASE STUDY: Development of the Individual Study Plan (ISP) for Level 9/10 Structured Research Programmes in AIT

The Learning and Teaching Unit) was engaged to develop an Individual Study Plan (ISP) for Level 9/10 Structured Research Programmes in AIT. The use of the ADDIE instructional design model to frame the approach to development allowed for an iterative process, to incorporate feedback and revisions.

The purpose of the ISP was to document the research student's progress and learning throughout the programme.

- The tool should be easily accessible by all research supervisors and students and it should be user-friendly.
- A standard template should be used (feedback and revisions are expected in the initial stages).
- Lead in time for setup and staff development was short given that the first intake of new entrants was scheduled for October 2019.

Following extensive consultation, the development of a user-friendly interface that is GDPR compliant was implemented. The Microsoft Office 365 application, Microsoft Class Notebook was identified as a suitable platform. This platform was introduced and used successfully in the Faculty of Science & Health as part of the National Forum funded TEAM (Technology enhanced Assessment Methods) project, providing proof of concept. The benefits of using Class Notebook are:

- Minimal set up time: AIT staff and registered students already had access to the suite of Office 365 applications, so setup time would be significantly reduced.
- Agile Platform: The Class Notebook platform could be redesigned according to our requirements, reducing the need for a purpose-built platform, thereby greatly reducing costs.
- With Office 365 online, staff and students could access the resource from any location.
- Staff and students were already familiar with the MS Office interface, so requirements for training and support would also be reduced.

A prototype was developed following consultations with the Graduate School (Figure 1.).
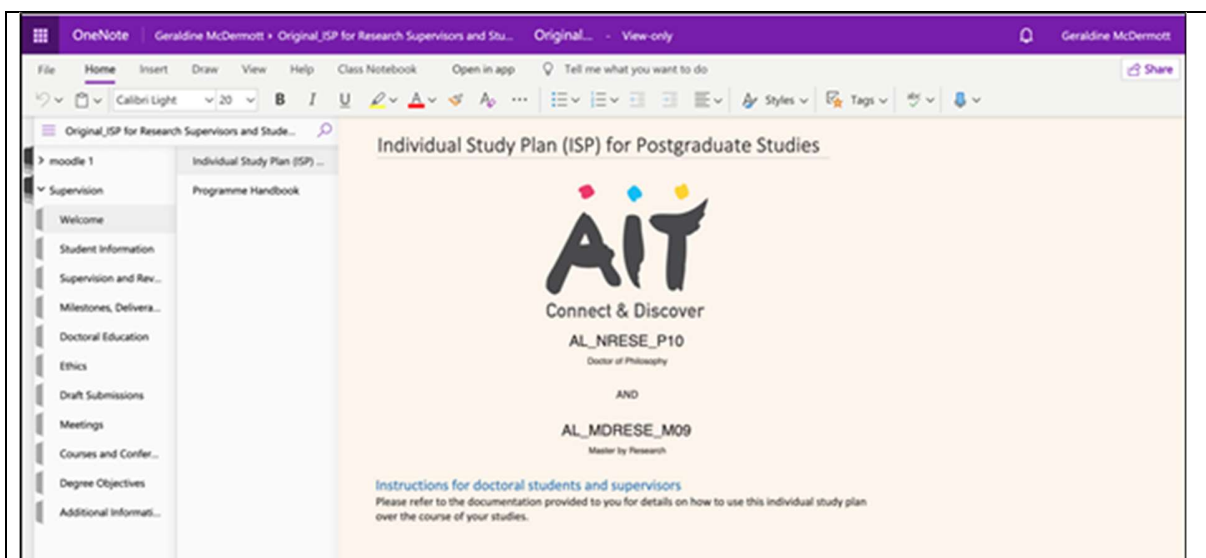
Figure 1: ISP Prototype

Following this, the ISP was presented to a number of stakeholder groups within the Institute:

27th November 2018	Postgraduate Review Group (PRG)
28th November 2018	Academic Strategy and Quality (ASQ) Committee
11th June 2019	As part of an information session on new AIT Procedures, Regulations and Governance for Research, the ISP was presented to Research Supervisors, Deans of Faculties, Directors of Research Institutes, Heads of Departments, Faculty Administrators, and other relevant administrators.
22 October 2019	Research students as part of the induction programme.

The Class Notebook includes key areas for supervision in a hierarchical structure. Initially, this would be shared with research supervisors via the SharePoint app. Features include:

- Version history to reflect changes made by research supervisors and students
- Transparency: authorship of changes is linked to Office 365 login credentials.
- Online/desktop versions available.

The prototype was tested by a number of research supervisors, specifically in terms of ease of access, navigation, usability and suitability.

Feedback loops were integral to the development process.

Implementation

A workshop to present the ISP was delivered to research supervisors in the Department of Sports Science and Department of Nursing. It is envisaged that the template for the ISP will reside in the Graduate School, and to this end, a specific email (isp@ait.ie) was created so that the template is not linked to a personal account. The workflow for ISP set up is currently as follows:
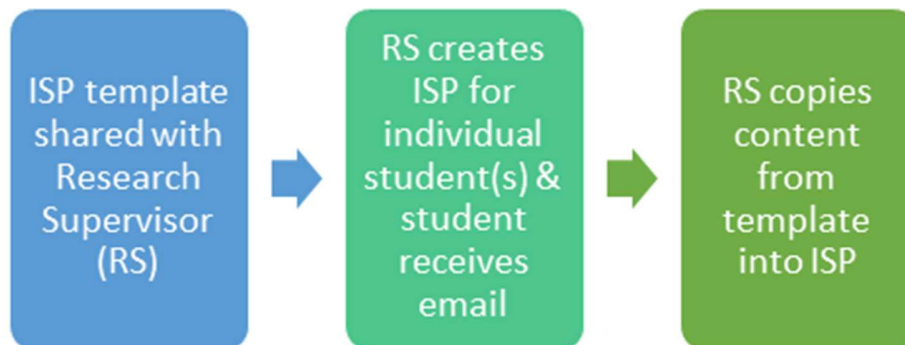
An instructional video was created for research supervisors, to provide a walkthrough of how to set up the ISP. Additionally, both workshops and individual clinic sessions have been provided to facilitate research supervisors, as they set up each ISP for their student(s). This support will continue to be provided by the Learning and Teaching Unit.

Evaluation

It is envisaged that research supervisors and the development team will evaluate the ISP in terms of the following:

- Ease of access
- Ease of use
- Content, i.e. does the template provided match the needs of the supervisor/student?
- Is the ISP fit for purpose?

Supervisors will be invited to provide their feedback in advance of the next intake of research students, i.e. October 2020. Following this, the design of the ISP will be reviewed and revised.

4. Student Lifecycle (ESG 1.4)
Links and/or text relating to the institution-wide quality assurance procedures that are encompassed by the student lifecycle.

Student Lifecycle Management

The Registry Department, under the direction of the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Registrar and the management of the Academic Administration and Student Affairs Manager, in collaboration with the Faculties, and other key functional areas, such as the Student Resource Centre and Library are responsible for Student lifecycle management from pre admission to graduation and beyond. In managing the entire student life cycle the department supports the institute in achieving its stated vision and mission.

Policies and procedures for student access, transfer and admission are managed by the Admissions office and centrally located at https://www.ait.ie/life-at-ait/registry/admissions. Application to the Institute for Year 1 programmes is through the Central Applications Office (CAO) system. The Institute recommends those eligible for offer and instructs the CAO to make the appropriate offer. Application to second and subsequent years is direct to the Institute.

The Institute plays a pivotal role in educational provision in the Midlands and fulfils this role by contributing to the creation of access pathways that link industry with the Institute. The provision of the one-year Access programme for mature students, designed to equip candidates with the necessary skills, knowledge and confidence to progress to third level education also fulfils this objective. Details of the programme are available at https://www.ait.ie/courses/special-purpose-award-of-access-programme-preparatory-programme-for-third-l

The Access office delivers a range of supports to promote access to higher education and the office also co-ordinates a College of Sanctuary programme and participates in the Path 2, 1916 Bursaries programme and Path 3, Higher Education Access Fund, College Connect, all designed to promote and increase access to High Education.

Standards, Assessment and Awards is the guiding policy document in relation to examination, assessment, publication of results and classification of awards, administered by the Examinations Office and available at https://www.ait.ie/life-at-ait/registry/examinations .

The Collection of Fees policy document details the guiding principles regarding student registration, fee collection and fee payment and comes within the remit of the Registration office https://www.ait.ie/life-at-ait/registry/registration and the Fees and Grants office https://www.ait.ie/life-at-ait/registry/Fees. The schedule of fees is approved annually by the Executive Management Team and Governing Body in consultation with the VP for Financial and Corporate Affairs and the registration department. The views of the Student Union feed into the policy development, with the institute cognisant of the financial demands on students while also endeavouring to provide a student-centred education with all the supports necessary to assist the diverse student body through their third-level journey.

The Registry Department, in conjunction with the Banner Office and the Faculty Offices, maintains and controls the institute's student record system, including personal information, grant records, student registration, student results, the issuing of all graduate parchments and the publication of all timetable and examination schedules. All records are maintained under GDPR guidelines and the student privacy policy determines how the data is processed and maintained. The policy is available at https://www.ait.ie/about-ait/gdpr/student-privacy-policy-agreement. Student progression information is considered at the faculty level and implemented by the Registry Department.
The input of the Registry department to student lifecycle management is crucial to the institute and in managing this function the department supports the quality initiatives of the institute.
https://www.ait.ie/contact/staff/quality/student-lifecycle

The First Year Experience
Following acceptance of a place on a first-year programme in AIT, we begin engaging with incoming students. An information pack is sent out with details of how to register on-line and their invitation to attend their faculty tailored **New Student Induction** programme. This programme has been developed and honed over a number of years with consideration given to students' immediate commencement needs while trying to balance the potential for information overload. The emphasis is on creating a warm and welcoming environment and giving students enough and timely

information to get their first year off to a flying start. The process is centrally managed through the Student Resource Centre with involvement from the faculties, progressing students and the Students' Union who all play a role in creating an atmosphere of welcome and celebration.

A focus on the first-year experience and assisting students with a successful transition to third level led to the collaborative development of an extended seven-week induction programme called '**AIT Connect'**. https://www.ait.ie/life-at-ait/current-students/your-first-year/.   This programme is geared towards student needs and addresses themes such as settling in and making connections with new friends, faculty staff and support services, welfare and health, learning support, mental health, time management and finding professional inspiration.

Ready, Steady, Connect

In 2019 a tailored pre-induction programme of events for HEAR and DARE applicants was piloted. We call this programme '**Ready, Steady, Connect'**. During this half day programme, incoming HEAR and DARE applicants had the opportunity to meet support staff such as Tutors and Counsellors in addition to receiving vital information on finances and supports. We included icebreakers and team building being mindful of the importance of helping students integrate from a social perspective. They also met HEAR and DARE students in more advanced years who were an invaluable source of information, support and mentorship. Feedback from this pilot has been very positive and we will build on this for next year.

The Peer Assisted Student Support Scheme (PASS)

Pass fosters cross year support between students and encourages students to learn co-operatively under the guidance of trained 2nd year students who can be awarded academic credit for their voluntary role https://www.ait.ie/life-at-ait/student-supports/

AIT Connect Social Media Ambassador programme

3rd year students who had been PASS leaders in their previous year of study were trained to run faculty specific social media accounts throughout the academic year. As AIT Connect Social Media Ambassadors, these students are available to answer incoming students' questions, build awareness about events and supports and sign post to staff and services through social media

Channels (Snapchat, Instagram). This peer to peer approach has been very successful and the use of social media has enabled us to engage with students in their preferred mode of communication. We have taken this mode of communication a step further by regularly releasing sound bite videos introducing support personnel such as counsellors and tutors, awareness building, disseminating just in time learning tips, reminders and calls to action when student engagement is sought.

Student Progression

A review and analysis of progression rates is carried out an annual basis. Progression of Year 1 Full time students to Year 2 has been reported and trends identified. A further analysis has taken place in this academic year for year 2 to year 3 and year 3 to year 4 on ab initio programmes. Where non progression rates are outside the institute and national norms a more detailed review at module level will inform further for department analysis.

Ab Initio Programmes- Progression Data Analysis – Average data by level since 2010			
NFQ	Year 1 to Year 2	Year 2 to Year 3	Year 3 to Year 4
Level 6	70%		
Level 7	70%	82%	
Level 8	80%	86%	84%

Analysis of Non Progression Year 1 New Entrants Full time by NFQ Level					
	2013/14 to 2014/15	2014/15 to 2015/16	2015/16 to 2016/17	2016/17 to 2017/18	2017/18 to 2018/19
NFQ Level	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
6	22%	27%	26%	15%	25%
7	28%	26%	27%	26%	20%
8	16%	14%	17%	15%	14%
Grand Total	21%	23%	23%	19%	19%

PLACEMENT

The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 endorses the fact that many undergraduate programmes in Irish higher education institutions already include work placements or internships but notes that more such opportunities should be provided. Within the Faculty of Business and Hospitality, the BA in Hospitality Management (with International Placement) has recently been validated and will be offered from September 2018. This programme will include a mandatory 600-hour international placement, to be completed in the summer the between 3rd and 4th year of the course. There are currently no other programmes in Athlone Institute of Technology with a mandatory international placement. Nevertheless, students from AIT have completed placements in Europe, China, Canada, Australia, South Africa and the USA. Some of these international placements are organised and managed by individual lecturers, while others are organised with support from the International Office.

Both the Placement Review report and the AIT Placement Models Guide was ratified by Academic Council and was implemented in January 2019 across the faculties.

The AIT Placement Models Guiding Document can be accessed on the AIT website at the following link: https://www.ait.ie/contact/staff/quality/placements-in-ait

THE INSTITUTE LIBRARY

AIT Library is an integral part of the student lifecycle at AIT. There is facilitation of online 24/7 access to a range of subject specialist database and other electronic resources such as eBooks.

Engagement and development are the focal point of the regularly updated LibGuides about subject resources, referencing and plagiarism.

5. Teaching Staff (ESG 1.5)
Links and/or text relating to the institution-wide quality assurance procedures for assuring the competence of teaching staff, including staff recruitment and staff development.

In a knowledge community, our people represent our core asset and AIT is committed to providing its staff with clear guidelines and support. A range of documentation is available to staff on the intranet and the professional development policy states that the institution recognises that staff are a vital and valued asset and encourages and enables everyone to develop their potential. Support for professional development encompasses staff at all levels and in all categories of the institute.

A range of policy documents are provided here by way of example. Included is the institute's Professional Development Policy and the Register of Professional Development undertaken by staff in 2018-2019.

https://www.ait.ie/contact/staff/quality/professional-development-recruitment

The Institute has a range of other policies and procedures in place for all staff. These are all published on the Institute's intranet. They are as follows:

- Adoptive Leave Policy
- AIT Dignity and Respect Policy
- Career Break Policy
- Disciplinary Procedures
- Flexi Time Policy
- Time in Lieu Policy
- Parental Leave Policy
- Grievance Procedures
- Staff Handbook
- Code of Conduct for Employees

The Executive Management Team fully supported the introduction onto the academic calendar of a two-day induction programme for new staff in key aspects of learning, teaching and assessment including the use of technology to enhance learning. This was initially piloted in 2016-2017 and is implemented annually by the Learning and Teaching Unit.

For the academic year 2018-2019, the Learning and Teaching Unit continued to engage in a range of activities in keeping with the mission of the institute.

Post Graduate Diploma in Teaching, Learning and Assessment

The continued support of the institute and the level of engagement of academic and professional support staff in formal and informal offerings of the L&T Unit enhances the AIT student experience. This focus on professional development has been a contributing factor in recent successes of the Institute. These include reported findings in the ISSE 2017-2018 that AIT students are 'the most satisfied in Ireland'. Being included in the Top 25 Performing Universities in the World for interdisciplinary research was an additional accolade with 'Teaching and Learning' being one of five key metrics used in the U-Multirank university rankings.

Fourteen participants graduated with the Postgraduate Diploma in Learning, Teaching and Assessment in October 2019. In addition, forty-one special purpose awards or modules, on the AIT flexible pathway and taught by the Learning and Teaching Unit team, were successfully completed.

Accredited provision: Postgraduate Diploma in Learning, Teaching and Assessment 2018-2019

Special Purpose Award/Module 2018-2019	ECTS	No of Participants
Certificate in Learning & Teaching	15	10
Certificate in Technology Enhanced Learning	15	8
Certificate in Formative Assessment Feedback	15	12
Developing Practice in Online Learning, Teaching and Assessment	15	9
Designing a UDL Curriculum	10	2
Total Number		41

A more extensive report of key staff development initiatives in learning, teaching and assessment are outlined in the Learning and Teaching Unit key activities document, accessible from this link: https://www.ait.ie/contact/staff/quality/learning-teaching-unit-key-activities-

6. Teaching and Learning (ESG 1.4, 1.5, 1.6)
Links and/or text relating to the institution-wide quality assurance procedures for assuring the quality of teaching and learning.

ISSE (Irish Survey of Student Engagement)

The data obtained and analysed from the ISSE is used annually as a guide to develop enhancements in programme design and delivery at institute and faculty level. The ISSE data which are both quantitative and qualitative, provides valuable feedback from students.

Faculty level approaches to institution-wide quality assurance procedures for assuring the quality of teaching and learning:

- Programme boards - feedback from students and staff leading to continuous improvements supported by ASQ

- External examiner induction and feedback via external examiners' reports

- Exam board meetings and annual statistical analysis of examination results for consideration by Academic Council

- Focus on timely feedback to students

- Consideration for timing of teaching and calendar of assessments

- Academic Writing Centre to provide supports to students when faced with challenges in academic writing, referencing etc.

- External accreditation bodies (for example, the Veterinary Council of Ireland, Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland, Engineers Ireland, the Irish Dental Council)

Learning environment

Multi-purpose and specialised teaching laboratories, art studios, design laboratories, simulated nursing and veterinary clinical laboratories, classrooms, lecture theatres and IT laboratories with data projection facilities. Library with comprehensive book-stocks, journals and databases.

Moodle

Moodle is the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) used across the institute to support formal and non-formal learning activities. Academic staff use Moodle to frame and support active learning, by providing resources specific to their modules, as well as activities designed to foster engagement and collaboration.

Moodle is also used as an assessment tool, and teaching staff create a range of assessment types to assess different forms of learning, e.g. quizzes and reflective journals. Turnitin assignments, used in AIT to promote academic integrity, is embedded within Moodle for ease of access. The VLE is also used to communicate with students, both in the provision of feedback and also as a support mechanism.

Moodle is also used to provide support for students by way of resources for Peer Assisted Student Support (PASS)and Academic Writing.

Learning and Teaching Unit

The Learning and Teaching Unit had four applications funded in 2018-2019. Reports of the events were submitted to the National Forum. Evaluations indicated the seminars were all highly successful with participants providing extremely positive feedback particularly in relation to impact and informing future developments.

Seminar Title	Date & Venue	Facilitator/s	No of participants	No of institutes/areas represented
Innovative teaching across subjects with digital photographs: an inquiry graphics method	19/02/2019 AIT	Dr.Natasa Lackovic, Lancaster University	16	1. AIT 2. IADT 3. Dept of Education
Pigs might fly? Changing the assessment narrative through Transforming the Experience of Students Through Assessment - TESTA's programme approach	09/04/2019 AIT	Professor Tansy Jessop, Pro-Vice Chancellor, University of Bristol	34	1. AIT 2. TU Dublin 3. IT Blanchardstown
Aligning Teaching and Learning Across the Technological Sector (ATLAS): sharing outputs from mapping accredited professional development to the National Professional Development Framework	13/04/2019 THEA Offices, Dublin	Nuala Harding , AIT Dr Moira Maguire, DKIT Gina Noonan, IT Carlow Deirdre McClay, LYIT Mary Fenton, WIT	21	1. AIT 2. CIT 3. GMIT 4. IT Tralee 5. TU Dublin 6. LIT 7. IADT 8. DKIT 9. LYIT 10. IT Tallaght 11. THEA
The Impact and Experiences of Delivering a Programme using Team-Based Learning (TBL)	04/06/2019	Dr Simon Tweddell, University of Bradford Rebecca McCarter, Educational Development Consultant	14	1. AIT 2. IT Sligo 3. LIT
			Total 85 participants	Total 14 institutes

Y1 Feedback Project: This two-year, multi-institutional project was funded by the National Forum in 2016 was spearheaded in AIT by the Learning and teaching Unit. Recently, two international experts and researchers, Dr Naomi Winstone and Professor David Carless, included case studies, developed as part of the project by AIT staff in a forthcoming publication. The case studies were cited by the authors as examples of best practice in developing technology enhanced feedback for first years. Publication details:

Winstone, N. E., & Carless, D. (2020). *Designing effective feedback processes in higher education: a learning-focused approach*. Oxon: Routledge.

Student Response Systems SRS (Clickers) institute-wide pilot:

This pilot project initiated by the Learning and Teaching Unit in collaboration with the four faculties, is in keeping with key themes and priorities outlined in the AIT Strategic Plan 2019-2023, particularly in relation to 'Learner Experience', 'Equality', 'Diversity and Inclusion', and 'Research and Innovation'. There are several examples from literature of the benefits of SRS, these include:

- support increased student engagement, particularly in large group settings;
- the anonymity provided allows students to test knowledge and understanding and receive feedback;
- allowing students to judge their performance relative to their peers;
- supporting dialogic feedback;
- providing opportunities to adjust teaching (Y1 Feedback, 2016).

The use of Student Response Systems was initially piloted in AIT in 2011. Subsequently the technology has been introduced on an ad hoc basis in the institute, through National Forum project funding, specifically, Y1 Feedback and TEAM. To date leadership has been provided by the Learning and Teaching Unit, supported through the Department of Life and Physical Sciences. Approval by Executive Management Team (EMT) in 2018-2019 to invest in an institute-wide licence provides the impetus to reach a critical mass, using the 'Triple E Framework' (Kolb, 2017) to 'enhance', 'engage' and 'extend'. This approach was previously adopted by the L&T Unit to advance the use of Moodle in the institute to mission critical in supporting learning, teaching and assessment practice. A comprehensive project plan was developed. With the assistance of Computer Services, the software has been integrated into the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) as a plug in and all staff have access to the software. There is ongoing evaluation of the impact of the pilot, which will be reported on in May 2020.

7. Resources and Support (ESG 1.5)
Links and/or text relating to the institution-wide quality assurance procedures for assuring funding and resources for learning, teaching and research. Also, links and or text relating to the quality assurance procedures for learning resources and student support.

Staff Resource Planning: AIT operates an annual resource planning process in tandem with the preparation of the annual Operational Programme and Budgets (OPB) whereby relevant managers (i.e. Finance, HR and Academic) review existing staff levels and competencies vis a vis existing and planned new modules and programmes, additional years on existing programmes and all other programme, quality assurance and regulatory requirements to ensure maximum utilisation of existing staff resources and timely and effective recruitment of new staff to meet organisational needs. AIT has an organisational and management structure (see link below)

https://www.ait.ie/contact/staff/quality/ait-organisational-and-management-structure which is approved by the Governing Body to ensure the efficient and effective operation of the institute to the highest national and international standards.

Non-Pay Budget Allocation Process: The resource planning and OPB process also involves review of existing non-pay budget (i.e. operational, equipment and minor capital) allocations by department and requirements for forthcoming year. This process includes review of learning and student support resource requirements.

Capital Projects and Facilities Management (CP&FM): AIT operates a CP&FM committee to review short and long-term capital projects and on-going facility management issues. The estates office seeks capital / projects requests from all departments for existing and planned new programmes and developments to ensure infrastructure and facilities are fit for purpose and meet stakeholder needs.

New Programme Development: The institute encourages differing modes of delivery appropriate to any given programme. Any proposed mode of delivery will be evaluated initially on how it addresses student characteristics and the requirements of a given cohort of learners. The preferred mode of delivery will be consistent with the pedagogical and presentational requirements of the subject matter and reflect the preferred teaching strategy, both in terms of methodologies and learning

outcomes. The proposed delivery model will be evaluated at the initial programme development stage and will be reviewed as part of the regular monitoring of a programme.

The QA process for new programme development is summarised in the chart below. It outlines the responsibility and actions required at the various stage gates of the process.

Faculty	Initial idea for new Programme	Idea can be generated by an individual or group and submitted to Dean of Faculty
Faculty	Faculty Support	Faculty to be mindful of CAO deadlines*
Executive Management Team (EMT)	To EMT for approval	Faculty to forward new programme summary document. Includes detailed market, business & financial evaluation backup for EMT
Faculty	Programme Development Team	Assistance from the Learning & Teaching Unit when drafting the programme submission document
Quality Office	Quality Office	Programme submission document is submitted to the QA Office for ASQ Committee
Academic Strategy & Quality Committee (ASQ)	Academic Strategy & Quality Committee	Document reviewed by ASQ Committee. Recommendations issue to the Programme Development Team
Faculty	Programme Development Team	Submssion document is updated based on the recommendations of ASQ & submitted to QA Office for Programme Evaluation Panel
Academic Registrar	Programme Evaluation Panel	Review the documentation and issue report - Conditions/Recommendations
Faculty	Programme Development Team Respond to Programme Evaluation Panel Report	1 Conditions & Recommendations of the panel are addressed. 2 Module Manager updated & Approved - HoD 3 Final document & response of Panel is sent to QA Office by HOD. The following are also notified; Admissions Office, Banner Office & Marketing

SUPPORTS PROVIDED TO STUDENTS

The AIT Student Resource Centre provides a range of supports and resources to all registered students of AIT including the Access Office, Student Assistance Fund, Careers Office, Health Centre,

Counselling, Tutor Support, Academic Writing Centre, Disability and Learning Support. We support students who may have queries, challenges or problems during their time in the institute. We pride ourselves on being friendly and welcoming and strive to do our utmost to help students. Through our work in facilitating the student experience we engage with fellow staff members throughout the institute and external agencies, employers and stakeholders. We also endeavour to respond to the evolving nature of student needs. As many of our students commute and have conflicting schedule pressures and busy class timetables, we offer phone and email learning support through our Science, Maths and Business Tutors and also through the Academic Writing Centre. Optimum use is made of available technology with a significant number of online resources for students such as our Moodle Writing Skills page.

The procedure for engaging with the Student Resource Centre to seek learning resources or student supports varies somewhat according to service area and the nature of the help sought. Details of these procedure documents can be accessed by following the link below which is located under the Quality Section of the AIT website.

https://www.ait.ie/contact/staff/quality/student-lifecycle

Case Study: The Academic Writing Centre at Athlone Institute of Technology

The Academic Writing Centre (AWC) at Athlone Institute of Technology first opened its doors in 2015, at a time when many other third-level institutions in Ireland were developing similar services. Over the past five years the centre has become firmly established and is now central to fostering academic excellence across the AIT student body. It delivers immediately tangible transformative benefits to many students.

The AWC is run as part of the wider Student Resource Centre, but it has a distinct, stand-alone identity – in the form of a highly visible physical presence (an office just off the main campus canteen), and a dedicated writing tutor who handles the day-to-day running of the centre and delivers the bulk of its engagements. This strong identity has been vital to its success: both students and staff know where to find the AWC, and who the writing tutor is.

The writing tutor post is a part-time (20 hours per week) assistant lecturer position, and additional tutoring is provided by other academic staff with appropriate expertise. Rather than using peer tutors or postgraduate students for writing support (as is the case in some other institutions), at AIT tutoring is provided entirely by lecturers, ensuring quality and consistency. Having a main appointed writing tutor allows for new initiatives and continuous development of the writing centre project. It also

provides a single point of contact for academic staff looking to call on the AWC's services, or simply wanting to seek advice and discuss general ideas for improving students' writing.

Currently, a total of 27 staff hours go into the writing centre, with 80 students on average reached each week. The AWC provides a mixture of one-to-one appointments, one-off group workshops and class sessions on request. It also provides an extensive and carefully curated set of digital resources via the Moodle platform. One-to-one sessions are available to all students, bookable online on a first-come, first-served basis via the highly effective Yellow Schedule booking system. Drop-in slots are available whenever there are no pre-booked appointments. A marked shift in the nature of student engagements over the last five years clearly indicates how well embedded in student life the AWC has become: at the outset, most one-to-one appointments were referred by lecturers; today the vast majority of students using the centre self-refer.

Class sessions – sometimes one-off, sometimes with follow-up sessions – are typically requested by individual lecturers to address a specific writing or research skills issue, or to provide guidance ahead of an upcoming assignment. There is considerable crossover here, with many students first encountered during class sessions going on to become one-to-one attendees.

Although it is difficult quantitatively to assess the impact of the AWC on actual academic writing standards across the institute, its value to students is plainly demonstrated in the most recent Irish Survey of Student Engagement, where the centre's services feature prominently amongst the positive responses. And the flexible, highly accessible one-to-one service means that tutors are very often able track dramatic and long-lasting benefits for individual returning students.

An article on the AIT Academic Writing Centre was featured in the 'Education Reference Guide magazine (page 24). For access to same, please see the following link:

https://issuu.com/educationmagazine/docs/education_yearbook_2019?e=6437851/70634825

AIT LIBRARY – Resources and Supports 2018/2019

The library extended its opening hours to facilitate the wide range of learners using its services, offering non-stop access to physical resources and study spaces from 8am to 10pm during the week and 9am to 4pm on Saturdays. Consequently, it functions as a central academic support beyond hours.

The appointment of a scholarly communications librarian is ensuring consistent support to our research community, staff, researchers and postgrads. The role is ensuring appropriate guidance is

available in emerging areas of open science and open data and will be essential in the identification of a suitable research data management system for the institute.

The library has moved into a role of collaborator and adviser to the recently created graduate school and is constantly promoting the institute's repository to its community. (see promotional video of the repository: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FrhSLPcx2E8)

The library has been instrumental in the creation, content input and maintenance of the repository (which was launched in April 2019) https://library.ait.ie/ait-repository/ and is advising academic staff and researchers throughout the publishing process.

Further development has been undertaken with the new Library Management System Koha (which was installed in the Summer of 2017), the acquisition and inter-library loans supporting software are now fully implemented and functioning. The next step is the implementation of a reading lists supporting package, KeyLinks which is currently being introduced to academic staff and should be fully running by September 2020. Extensive staff training and development have been undertaken to further utilise and integrate the features of this system to support library users.

The library is a strong advocate of the library world and celebrated Library Ireland Week by hosting a talk by two leading authors Senator Mary-Louise O'Donnell and Sinead English of Hilt Career who presented on the Theme 'The Way We Work'. (see link to the promotional video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sVeA28oAuhg)

Library resources are introduced during the general induction programmes at the start of the academic year - see promotional video of the induction programme:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0LuKlAshydI).

 International students are offered a specially tailored programme prior to the main induction to cater for their specific needs. Students who have missed the induction programme can avail of drop-in induction sessions until the end of October. Similar support is offered to students (mainly international students) who joined the institute at the start of semester 2. This is followed up by intervention in the classroom with the delivery of Information Literacy Skills and Digital Skills Training Programme organised by the deputy librarian in collaboration with academic faculties. All library staff are highly skilled in the delivery of the sessions, allowing for a significant number of students to be reached within 5 weeks of the initial induction programme. Lecturers can request follow-up sessions, with a particular emphasis on specific subject searches, advanced training on databases and introduction to referencing.

Referencing sessions for classes in Harvard, APA and Vancouver are available at the lecturers' request. Smaller groups sessions and one-to-one consultations are also offered to students at their own convenience. Subject specific libguides, referencing support and advice on free referencing software as well as online tutorials are accessible through the library's website https://library.ait.ie/. Athlone Institute of Technology referencing policy was updated in 2019 and new guidelines as well as a new referencing guide will be launched in September 2019. These will be available to consult or download as PDF on the library's website. A quick guide for each referencing style in a printable format allows students to have instant access to sample bibliographies including all material types. Literature reviews and systematic reviews support is offered in small groups or one-to-one sessions to complement Academic Integrity support (referencing, citation and how to avoid plagiarism). Research support under the guidance of the scholarly communications librarian offers research bootcamps and targeted support in the areas of publishing, social media use in research, altmetrics and bibliometrics, analytics, impact factors and research impact strategy, grants application process and the promotion of ORCID. The support is provided in the form of topical workshops, libguides, clinics and consultations.

The importance of outreach is recognised in the library and a number of pop-up library events are run throughout the year in the Student Union and in faculty buildings scattered around the campus. This allows staff to reach out to students who do not usually visit the library and introduce our services to them thus encouraging them to engage more proactively with our range of services and resources.

The library's strategic plan will be launched in February 2020, outlining a path to 2023. In the document, 5 main strategic actions to support the institute will be outlined: active engagement with academic partners, diversity and inclusion, support for all levels and stages of provision, development of a range of information and digital literacy initiatives and research collaboration and scholarly engagement.

8. Information Management (ESG 1.7)
Links and/or text relating to the institution-wide quality assurance procedures for collecting, analysing and using relevant information about programmes and other activities.

Student Data is collated and submitted to the HEA twice annually for statistics purposes. November is the provisional student numbers report and March is the final student numbers report. These extracts are used within AIT to analyse trends and numbers by the institute, faculty, department and programme and many different reports are derived from this source data. It is used in various strategic discussions which contributes to programme planning and review of numbers across the institute and is used to inform internal discussions.   AIT has a 'Procedure for preparation, validation and submission of the HEA SRS (Nov & March)' which is regularly reviewed and updated for changes as required.

AIT has continued to make changes in the area of information management. The roles of FOI and Data Protection have been combined under the title of Information and Data Compliance. This provides a more cohesive approach to the management of data due to the connected nature of the processes.

> **9. Self-evaluation and Monitoring (ESG 1.9)**
> Links and/or text relating to the institution-wide quality assurance procedures for self-evaluation and internal monitoring.

Programmatic Review:

This is a quinquennial quality review process which gives the faculties within AIT an opportunity to conduct a critical evaluation and review of their programmes. This review is a core statutory obligation for the institute under Section 28(2) of the Qualifications, Education and Training Act. It is a positive, supportive and open process and results in the production of a five-year plan for the faculties which should align with the institute's Strategic Plan. The self-evaluation process, with inputs from experts and stakeholders (internal and external), involves the production of a self-evaluation report (SER). The self-evaluation comprises a critical evaluation of all aspects of each programme being reviewed – its strategy, learning outcomes, modules, assessment, resources etc. Review of the SER by external peers results in a Programmatic Review Report which will include a set of conditions and recommendations. The faculties will then provide a response to this report and both the report and responses are published on the AIT website. Previous programmatic review reports are available on the AIT website: https://www.ait.ie/contact/staff/quality/programmatic-review-2015-reports

The next programmatic review at AIT is scheduled for 2022.

Institutional Review:

QQI has established a policy for the Cyclical Review of Higher Education Institutions. Cyclical Review takes place on a periodic scheduled basis. The last Institutional Review for AIT took place in 2011. The next Institutional review is scheduled to take place in 2022.

Completion Dates	ISER	PV	MRV	Report
Athlone Institute of Technology	Q2 2022	Q3 2022	Q4 2022	Q1 2023

Institutional Review provides AIT with an opportunity to evaluate the quality of its provision of education, training and research, the fulfilment of its public service mission and the effectiveness of its ongoing monitoring and review activities, to ensure they are fit for purpose and for an external

team to provide an external reflection on the effectiveness of the procedures and to provide external advice on their enhancement where necessary. It offers assurances to learners that their experience is being monitored for good practices and assurances to the public that the institution is offering a valuable service.

The self-evaluation process will take place in Q2 2022. This is a self-reflective and critical evaluation completed by the internal staff members of AIT. The Report produced by the Institution following the self-evaluation process, called the Institutional Self-Evaluation Process (ISER), is the core document used by the Review Team. The ISER shapes the key points of dialogue with the Review Team, the structure of the Review visits and the resulting review report. The purpose of the ISER is to provide the Review Team with sufficient information and evidence to assess the effectiveness of quality assurance at AIT.

Annual Institutional Quality Assurance Report (AIQR)

The AIQR is an annual report about internal quality assurance that the Institute provide to QQI.

Part One provides an overview of internal QA governance, policies, procedures and schedules within AIT. Parts Two to Six give an overview of QA activities, themes, changes, enhancements and impacts for the reporting year. QQI publish the Annual Reports on their website:

https://www.qqi.ie/Articles/Pages/Annual-Institutional-Quality-Report.aspx

Academic Strategy and Quality (ASQ) Committee:

The Academic Strategy and Quality (ASQ) Committee, appointed by academic council, has responsibility for identifying appropriate strategies and developments to facilitate the institute's achievement of its academic development objectives; and provides advice on the policies, processes, and procedures which impact on the academic standards of education and training which is provided, organised, or procured by the institute. The committee may establish subcommittees and working parties some of whose members may be from outside the committee or from outside the institute, as approved by academic council and governing body.

Institute Policies and Procedures:

Annually, the Institute actively reviews the national and international QA policies and procedures and benchmarks its own policies and procedures against best practice. Any relevant changes are incorporated into the institute's own regulations and procedures with the approval of Academic Council.

Programme Boards:

Each faculty appoints Programme Boards to consider all matters affecting the operation and innovation of each programme within the faculty. Programme boards may;

- monitor the implementation of academic policy including learning, teaching and research issues, maintenance of standards and administration of the course, including selection, teaching, academic counselling and industrial/professional placement of students, and publication of course publicity material.
- appoint such subcommittees as are deemed necessary for assisting in the administration of the course.
- assess the progress of students and, where necessary, propose exclusion on academic grounds in accordance with the appropriate institute regulations.
- review the reports of external examiners and propose appropriate action.
- review student feedback and recommend appropriate action.
- review annually the operation of the programme, consider proposals for its improvement and complete annual reports for tabling at ASQ.

- consider from time to time the need to revise, develop or otherwise substantially alter the course in the light of prevailing circumstances, and prepare appropriate proposals.
- approve minor programme changes and table them for final sanction at ASQ.
- prepare relevant materials for school and institutional review.
- discuss and make recommendations upon, as appropriate, the resource and staff development requirements of the course.
- carry out such duties as agreed in conjunction with other schools, in relation to joint programmes.

External Examiners:

External Examiners act as independent and impartial advisors providing the institute with informed comment on the standards set and student achievement in relation to those standards. External examining is therefore an integral and very important part of institutional quality assurance. The main purposes of external examining are:

- To verify that Learning Outcomes as assigned to a programme / module to which the external examiner has been appointed have been met.
- To assist AIT in the comparison of academic standards across higher education awards and award elements.
- To ensure that AIT's assessment processes are fair and are operated fairly and are in line with AIT regulations. It shall be the External Examiners' task to scrutinise the examination process on a continuing basis and report to senior management on whether particular students' performances have been judged properly against the institute's awards standards and further, whether the assessment process has measured Learning Outcomes appropriately and whether the examination process has been conducted fairly. It shall be the institute's task to respond to any observations made by the External Examiners in an appropriate manner.

See the following link: https://www.ait.ie/contact/staff/quality/external-examiners

The Irish Survey of Student Engagement:

The Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE) is a survey designed to seek students' views on their experience of higher education.

Students have a major contribution to make in influencing the design of curricula, and in reviewing and providing feedback on their experience of college. Good student feedback will contribute to students experiencing an education that is relevant and responsive to their personal development and growth as fully engaged citizens within society. The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 report recommends that higher education institutions should put in place systems to capture feedback from students to inform institutional and programme management, as well as national policy. ISSE is based on best practice internationally as developed by the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) since 2007 and the US National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) since 2000.

The initiative is managed as a collaborative partnership. It is co-sponsored by the Higher Education Authority (HEA), institutions' representative bodies (the Irish Universities Association, IUA, and the Technological Higher Education Association, THEA and the Union of Students in Ireland (USI).

The partnership approach in place is an important feature of the project. Working groups consisting of institutions' and students' representatives manage the national project. A project manager supports the working groups and reports to the co-sponsoring organisations. An external third-party company provides the online survey system to the national partnership.

The information obtained from ISSE is a key output to the quality assurance mechanisms of AIT.

It has done so by:

- increasing transparency in relation to the student experience.
- enabling direct student input on levels of engagement and satisfaction in AIT.
- identifying good practice that enhances the student experience in AIT.
- assisting AIT to identify issues and challenges affecting the student experience in the institute
- serving as a guide for continual enhancement of institutions' teaching and learning and student engagement.
- documenting the experiences of the student population, thus enabling year on year comparisons of key performance indicators.

- providing insight into student opinion on important issues of higher education policy and practice.

- facilitating comparison with other higher education systems internationally.

See the following link:

https://www.ait.ie/contact/staff/quality/irish-survey-of-student-engagement-isse

For postgraduate students the PGR StudentSurvey.ie will run every second year, and the next survey will take place in spring 2021.

The survey for postgraduate students was piloted in 2018 and was fully implemented across 22 higher education institutions in 2019.

The Irish Survey of Student Engagement and the Irish Survey of Student Engagement for Postgraduate Research Students will be rebranded to StudentSurvey.ie and PGR StudentSurvey.ie (respectively) will be launched in October 2019.

Case Study:
The Irish Survey of Student Engagement - Achieving student partnership in all aspects of ISSE

Title:

ISSE in AIT: a successful collaboration to enhance the Student Experience

Short Description:

ISSE plays a key role to the enhancement of Quality Assurance within AIT. The Institute puts in a significant effort into ensuring it captures and acts upon the voice of the student.

Long Description:

The ISSE experience in AIT has been extremely positive since it was first introduced in 2014. Each year the response rates have increased steadily. In 2019 AIT achieved its highest participation rate to date, with 69% of the student cohort engaging in the survey. The survey is promoted on an ongoing basis through social media, posters and face to face interaction with staff and students. Incentives are also used as part of this promotion campaign. Another key motivation for the students is the €1 donated per survey completed to the Student Hardship fund.

A thorough analysis of the results of the survey is carried out annually by the quality office, and a report is circulated to the relevant stakeholders within the institute. An action plan is then implemented based on the information obtained, playing a key role in our continuous efforts to enhance the student experience at AIT.

Presentation of cheque to the AIT Student Hardship Fund
(this represents 1 euro per survey completed in 2018/2019 academic year)
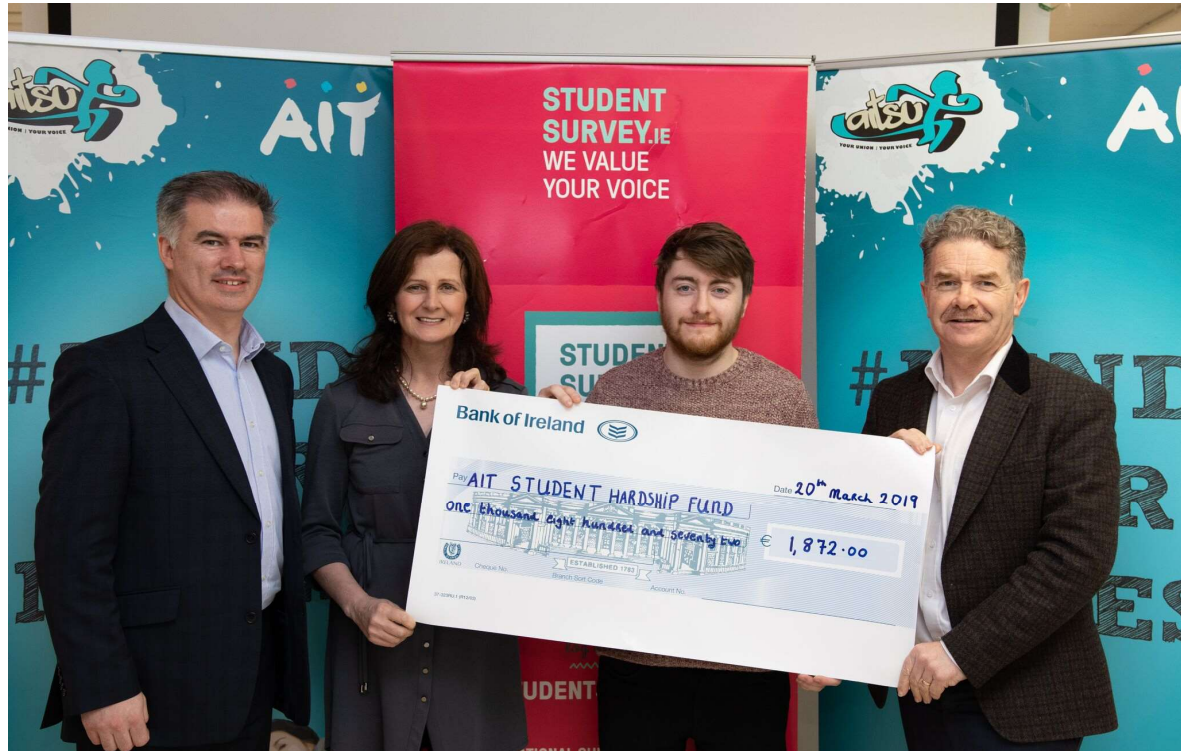
Left to right: Dr Niall Seery, Vice-President Academic Affairs & Registrar, Cora McCormack, Quality Officer, Oisín Moloughney, SU President, Professor Ciarán Ó Catháin, President of AIT.

10. Stakeholder Engagement (ESG 1.1)
Links and/or text relating to the institution-wide quality assurance procedures for the involvement of external stakeholders in quality assurance.

Please see link under the Quality Section of the AIT website which leads to the Institute Policy on Stakeholder Engagement: https://www.ait.ie/contact/staff/quality/policies-procedures

At the core Institute Stakeholder Engagement policy is the commitment to engage intensively with the society that the institute serves. This engagement is managed through the identification of the distinct stakeholder groups who have a legitimate interest in the operations of the institution. Stakeholders are defined as those individuals and groups who impact and/or could be affected by this organisation's activities, learning and teaching, research, and engagement. The relevance of the institute's offerings and activities requires regular interaction with identified stakeholder groups.

The institution maintains a current list of stakeholders. The intention is not to develop an exhaustive list but rather to build and maintain a catalogue of stakeholders who can influence the work of the institute and/or who are themselves dependent or impacted by the institute.

Stakeholder observations and concerns are fed into strategic monitoring and planning by the strategic plan oversight group. This group works closely with the EMT (Executive Management Team).

Athlone Institute of Technology provides a minimum of annual feedback to its stakeholders. This is managed via both electronically and/or through direct meetings. The mode of interaction is determined through the preference of individual stakeholders.

11. Engagement with Other Bodies (ESG 1.1)
Links and/or text relating to the institution-wide quality assurance procedures for engagement with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies and other quality assurance and awarding bodies (details of specific engagements should be provided in the online section of the form).

Please see link below which provides details in relation to the Professional Body Accreditation in AIT.

https://www.ait.ie/contact/staff/quality/programmes-and-registers

The institutes three faculties have extensive links with professional bodies which include the following organisations; The Veterinary Council of Ireland, Athletic & Rehabilitation Therapy Ireland (ARTI), Tusla, Nursing & Midwifery Board of Ireland, The Dental Council of Ireland, The Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland, Engineers Ireland, Chartered Accountants Ireland (CAI), Association of Chartered and Certified Accountants Ireland (ACCA), Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA), Certified Public Accountants in Ireland (CPA), Accounting Technician Ireland (ATI).

The faculties liaise on a regular basis with the relevant bodies and undertake periodic reviews to ensure the programme content aligns to the professional bodies to ensure accreditation is maintained. In some cases, such as with Chartered Accountants Ireland (CAI) our Masters of Arts in Accounting programme is subject to an annual quality assurance review via a joint board. To ensure the QA process with regard to a programme which has exemptions up to and including the penultimate level of their professional accountancy examinations.

CORU

CORU (www.coru.ie) is an independent statutory body established under the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 (as amended). Its role is to protect the public by promoting high standards of professional conduct, education, training and competence through statutory registration of health and social care professionals. It is made up of the Health and Social Care Professionals Council and the Registration Boards, one for each profession named in the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005 (as amended).

The Social Care Workers Registration Board was appointed in March 2015. It is currently undertaking the necessary preparatory work to open its register for Social Care Workers and regulate the profession. One of the statutory functions of the Board is to approve the education and training required for entry to the Social Care Workers register. Regulatory approval of education and training is a judgment as to whether a programme consistently and effectively prepares graduates for entry into the register of that profession. To receive approval, a programme must demonstrate that it meets the operation and governance requirements of the Board. Students must be able to demonstrate successful achievement of specified standards of proficiency on programme completion. An application for programme approval will be lodged to CORU in semester 1 2019 for each of its Social Care programmes: BA (Hons) in Social Care Practice, BA in Applied Social Studies in Social Care and BA in Applied Social Care (part-time). A panel visit for each programme will take place in 2020.

PSI (Psychological Society of Ireland) Accreditation

The Department of Social Sciences in AIT launched a new BSc (Hons) in Applied Psychology CAO programme in September 2018. The programme attracted exceptional interest and a healthy cohort of 25 students registered. In 2019, the CAO points for entry to the programme will increase to 440 points, signalling the calibre of applicants. In September 2020, it is expected that AIT will see a likely further increase to 450 points or above, which would make it the highest entry points CAO programme in the Institute.

The Department is currently finalising an application to the *Psychological Society of Ireland* (PSI) for accreditation. Any new psychology programmes must be up and running before the PSI will review it. AIT's programme will have completed two full years or half its four-year duration by the time PSI's campus accreditation process takes place on campus in early Summer. A panel of at least three members appointed by the PSI will rigorously assess whether AIT's application for the BSc (Hons) in Applied Psychology meets its acceptance criteria. The panel of psychologists appointed by PSI will review the curriculum to ensure the programme has sufficient ECTS credits devoted to the core psychology pillars, which include personality, developmental psychology, social psychology, cognitive psychology, biological psychology, etc. In addition, the panel will scrutinise the resources available to the programme to ensure that 80% of hours on the programme are taught by lecturers with PhDs. In addition, they will probe to ensure that the programme has the appropriate levels of dedicated

administrative and technical support. Most importantly, the Institute will be asked to demonstrate that the library resources meet their high standards.

The team of lecturers and staff in the Department of Social Sciences have almost completed the process of preparing the Institute's submission to PSI. Stage 1 of the accreditation process is a desk review of the documentation provided by AIT. PSI's second step is the site visit, hopefully before June 2020. At that point, PSI will notify the Institute of its decision. Receiving PSI accreditation for the new BSc (Hons) in Applied Psychology will be a significant achievement. It will be warmly welcomed by the current students on the programme who took a chance and enrolled before the accreditation process could begin. It is envisaged that the programme will become a chosen destination for new CAO applicants in the future.

THE REGIONAL SKILLS FORUM

The Regional Skills Forum is a Department of Education and Skills initiative to focus on fostering stronger links between enterprise and education & training providers. The Forum is a cohesive structure for employers and the education system to work together. The Forum is made up of representatives from The Education and Training providers in the region, state agencies and employer bodies with a sole aim of addressing the skills needs of the region and promoting greater collaboration.

The Forum was reconvened in January 2019 with the appointment of Mr John Costello as Regional Skills Forum Manager. One of the key tasks in 2019 was obtaining robust skills analysis including critical vacancies along with upskilling needs. This data was used by the Forum in supporting the Springboard applications which resulted in the Midlands rolling out just under 1000 places on courses aligned to Industry needs.

The Forum will be proactive in supporting the Regional Enterprise Plan 2020 with responsibility to "Ensure the availability of skills and talent to realise the region's economic potential and address upskilling requirements". Work will be completed in areas such as assisting local enterprises identify their skills' needs, linking up with providers and digital skills training provided to low skilled workers. Upskilling events will be held in Mullingar and Longford where all Education & Training Providers and Local Enterprise are due to attend.

The Forum was to the fore in supporting the Regional Just Transition Team, addressing the needs of Bord Na Móna workers who were losing their jobs. This included attendance at briefing sessions with all agencies, skills audits with redundant workers and upskilling initiatives made available.

12. Provision and Use of Public Information (ESG 1.8)
Links and/or text relating to the institution-wide quality assurance procedures for the provision of clear, accurate, up-to date and accessible public information.

The Institute provides a wide range of public information on its website www.ait.ie. The primary source for stakeholders is the AIT website (www.ait.ie).

Please see the link below under the Quality Section of the AIT Website to the Institute Policy and Procedure Governing Information Management and Public Information

https://www.ait.ie/contact/staff/quality/policies-procedures.

The role of the AIT marketing and communications department is to enhance our institutes national and global reputation, help build effective stakeholder relationships, and attract and develop students with the potential to excel. We are responsible for building and maintaining the Institutes brand and competitive position regionally, nationally and internationally. We are committed to delivering world-class communications; engaging with future students, students, staff and stakeholders to help build an outstanding educational and student experience, develop high quality services and to raise awareness about the institute and all its activities. We engage with stakeholders in Ireland and all around the world and have expertise in branding, strategic marketing, event management, digital and traditional media and internal communications.

AIT ensures that all information about our activities including programmes is clear, accurate, up to date and readily accessible for general consumption either for prospective, current students, graduates, other stakeholders and the public. All publications issued by the institute for either public consumption or internal communications perspective are made visible on the website and through the internal intranet. This ensures that there is visibility and transparency with regards to the institute. Examples of such publications include AIT's Strategic Plan, Presidents reports, graduate survey, UG and PG prospectus etc.

The AIT prospectus is available at https://www.ait.ie/courses/prospectus : Details of current programmes on offer at AIT is available at: https://www.ait.ie/courses.

AIT is cognisant of Section 8 of the Freedom of Information Act 2014 which requires bodies to prepare and publish as much information as possible in an open and accessible manner on a routine basis,

having regard to the principles of openness transparency and accountability as set out in Sections 8(5) and 11(3) of the Act.

Details on AIT's FOI Publication Scheme can be found on the AIT website:

https://www.ait.ie/freedom-of-information/details/freedom-of-information-publications

Details on the following can be found in the following key areas:

- Governance and Decision-Making Process
- Financial Reports
- Procurement – How we spend
- FOI Disclosure Log and Organisational Information
- Information on the services we offer
- Other relevant public interest information

Moodle

A range of documentation is made available to students through the VLE. These include: Programme and Module Assessment Strategies, Module descriptors, Calendar of Assessments, Student Handbook, Department Handbook, Programme Manual.

Module Manager System

The Academic Module Manager system is used in the design of programmes and modules and also acts as a central repository for all approved programme documents and module descriptors. This programme development software supports the identification of resource requirements for the delivery of each module and each programme. During module definition and validation, these requirements are explicitly listed and reviewed.   In collaboration with a number of other Institutes of Technology, AIT upgraded its Module Manager system to version 3.0 at the commencement of the academic year 2018-2019. This has greatly improved the quality of information relating to the programmes and modules, which are generated from the system, both internally, and for external panel evaluation purposes. A key outcome will be the publication of a summarised version of all programme documentation to the web, which will be of major benefit to current and prospective students in addition to other key stakeholders.

13. Linked Providers (for Designated Awarding Bodies) (ESG 1.1)
Links and/or text relating to the institution-wide quality assurance procedures for assuring engagement with linked providers including the procedures for approval, monitoring, review, withdrawal of approval and appeal for linked providers.

The institute has an existing range of provision that falls under the terms of the QQI's collaborative policy. In addition, links will be considered only where clear benefits from establishing any collaborative programme and from the involvement of each of the partner providers can be shown. It is recognised that contemporary higher education involves a greater range of collaborative partners and arrangements.

AIT subscribes to the guiding principles set out in the Irish Higher Education Quality Network's (IHEQN) draft Guidelines for Collaborative and Transnational provision, namely:

1. **Principle one:** providers of higher education have primary responsibility for the management and provision of programmes of higher education and training for learners

2. **Principle two:** providers of higher education have the primary responsibility for the quality assurance of their provision, wherever or however it is delivered

3. **Principle three:** providers of higher education must ensure that learners enrolled on collaborative or transnational programmes (whether at home or overseas) which lead to awards of an Irish awarding body, receive an equivalent learning experience to that of learners studying at their campus in Ireland

4. **Principle four:** providers of higher education are cognisant of the strategic context for collaborative or transnational provision

5. **Principle five:** providers of higher education give due consideration to the academic support and pastoral care of students, and to their representation on appropriate institutional bodies/groups

6. **Principle six:** providers of higher education, recognising that their decisions to collaborate and/or provide transnational higher education programmes may involve ethical considerations, are committed to respecting the human rights of their staff, learners, and partners in all their joint ventures

7. **Principle seven**: providers of higher education develop institutional approval and quality assurance processes for collaborative/transnational provision which include the conduct of appropriate due diligence checks

The procedures with regard to the procedures for approval, monitoring, review, withdrawal of approval and appeal for linked providers are set out in our policy on Supplementary Quality Assurance Procedure for collaborative provision, to include national and transnational programmes. The full policy document can be accessed here: https://www.ait.ie/contact/staff/quality/policies-procedures#.

14. DA Procedures for use of QQI Award Standards (IoTs only)
Links and/or text relating to the specific procedures for the approval of programmes in keeping with Core Policy and Criteria for the Validation of Education and Training Programmes by QQI, the Sectoral Protocols for the Awarding of Research Master Degrees at NFQ Level 9 under Delegated Authority (DA) from QQI and the Sectoral Protocols for the Delegation of Authority by QQI to the Institutes of Technology to make Joint Awards, May 2014.

Athlone Institute of Technology adopts for use QQI awards standards published at

http://www.qqi.ie.

The Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (Amendment) Act 2019 will be signed into law by the President on 23 July 2019[1]. Section 36 (a) of the new act amends Section 5 of the Regional Technical Colleges Act 1992 to enable institutes of technology, including AIT:

> to make awards, with the exception of doctoral degrees, to students where the college has satisfied itself that the students have acquired and demonstrated the appropriate standard of knowledge, skill or competence for awards that are included within the National Framework of Qualifications.

Section 36 (b) provides that such awards may;
> only be conferred, granted or given on the recommendation of the academic council of the college to or on persons who satisfy the academic council that they have attended or otherwise pursued or followed appropriate courses of study, instruction, research or training provided by the college, or that they have previously acquired learning in accordance with procedures established by the college under section 56 of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012,[2] and have attained an appropriate standard in examinations or other tests of knowledge or ability or have performed other exercises in a manner regarded by the academic council of the college as being satisfactory.

The effect of these provisions is to establish all existing institutes of technology, including AIT as designated awarding bodies, on the same basis as the previously established universities, RCSI and TU

Dublin, except in relation to the awarding of doctoral degrees. The conferral of designated awarding body status on the institutes of technology is reflected in the Revised Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, prepared by the Law Reform Commission under its remit to keep the law under review and to undertake the revision and consolidation of statute law. Updated to include all acts up to and including the Family Law Act 2019; and all statutory instruments up to and including the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (Amendment) Act 2019 (Commencement) (No. 2) Order 2019 (S.I. No. 540 of 2019), made 5 November 2019; the Revised Act defines a 'designated awarding body' as a previously established university, the National University of Ireland, an educational institution established as a university under section 9 of the [Universities] Act of 1997, F2 [a technological university,] F1[an Institute of Technology,] the Dublin Institute of Technology and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland.[3]

It is of note that the conferral of doctoral awarding powers will be made to those institutes of technology that achieve designation of technological universities.

Under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (Amendment) Act 2019 (Commencement) (No. 2) Order 2019 (S.I. No. 540 of 2019), which will be implemented on 5 November 2019, the institutes of technology will make awards up to Level 9 of the National Framework of Qualifications, and become designated awarding bodies, on 1 January 2020.[2]
It is envisaged that AIT's AC will adopt the QQI standards as an interim measure until AIT develop their own Standards in due course.

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[1]   https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/act/2019/32/eng/enacted/a3219.pdf

[2]   The reference here is to procedures for access, transfer and progression, established under Sections 56(2) and 56(3), which include 'procedures for credit accumulation, credit transfer and identification and formal assessment of the knowledge, skills or competence previously acquired by learners', and provide for RPL. See:
http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2012/act/28/enacted/en/pdf

[3]   http://revisedacts.lawreform.ie/eli/2012/act/28/revised/en/pdf?annotations=true
[4]   http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2019/si/540/made/en/print and
http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2019/si/540/made/en/pdf.

15. Collaborative Provision (ESG 1.1)
Links and/or text relating to the institution-wide quality assurance procedures for engagement with third parties for the provision of programmes.

At present, Athlone Institute of Technology has a range of partnerships, exchanges and collaborations of varying degrees of complexity and engagement.

Please see links below on the AIT website to the Supplementary Quality Assurance Procedures for Collaborative Provision and also AITs register of collaborative provision.

https://www.ait.ie/contact/staff/quality/policies-procedures#

https://www.ait.ie/contact/staff/quality/programmes-and-registers

16. Additional Notes
Any additional notes can be entered here.

> **17. Internal Review Schedule**
> The internal reviews schedule or cycle at the level of unit of review within the institution. The units of review can be: module; programme; department/school; service delivery unit; faculty. The cycle will usually run over a 5-7 year period and all units should be encompassed over the full period of the cycle.

Year	2018/19
Areas/Units	Faculty of Business and Hospitality Faculty of Engineering and Informatics Faculty of Science and Health Faculty of Continuing, Professional Online and Distance Learning
Number	**26 programmes from all 4 faculties which include Level 6, Level 7, Level 8 submissions. A number of Springboard+ funded programmes and desk reviews are included also, as follows:** **New Programme Submissions** 1.　BA (Hons) in Food Business and Technology 2.　Certificate in Mentoring & Facilitation for Recognition of Prior Learning 3.　Bachelor of Business (Hons) in International Business Level 8 ab initio 4.　Bachelor of Business (Hons) in Sport Management 5.　BSc in Music and Sound Engineering Level 7 6.　Certificate in Robotics and Automation, Level 6 7.　Bachelor of Engineering (Hons) in Civil Engineering Level 8 ab initio 8.　BSc (Hons) in Software Design with Virtual Reality and Gaming 9.　Certificate in Checking Accuracy for Pharmacy Technicians (Special Purpose Award) Level 7 1 x 10 credit module 10.　Certificate in Real Estate Administration (60 credits) **Springboard+ Funded Programmes** 11.　Higher Diploma in Science in BIM for Civil Engineering and Construction Level 8 (60 credits) 12.　An Introduction to Networks and Configuration Level 6 (20 credits) 13.　An Introduction to Data Analysis and Visualisation Level 6 (20 credits) 14.　An Introduction to Virtual and Augmented Reality Level 6 (20 credits) 15.　Postgraduate Certificate in Blockchain Security Level 9 (30 credits) 16.　Master of Science in Software Design with Augmented and Virtual Reality with a Postgraduate Certificate in Augmented and Virtual Reality (30 credits) 17.　Master of Science in Software Design with Artificial Intelligence with a Postgraduate Certificate in Software Design with Artificial Intelligence (30 credits) 18.　Master of Science in Software Design with Cyber Security with a

	Postgraduate Diploma in Cybersecurity Level 9 (60 credits)
	19. MSc in Advanced Polymer Materials & Post Graduate Diploma in Advanced Polymer Materials
	20. BSc in Quality and Lean Management Level 7 (180 credits)
	21. Certificate in Logistics and Supply Chain Management Level 6 (60 credits)
	22. Postgraduate Diploma in Business in Executive Management Level 9 (60 credits)
	23. Certificate in Applied Laboratory Science Level 6 (30 credits).
	The following submission was shared over all Faculties (Research)
	24. Full-time/part-time Structured Research Programmes leading to the awards of: Masters by Research and Doctor of Philosophy
	The following 2 Desk Reviews were carried out to modify existing programmes. The level of change warranted a desk review in both cases.
	25. BEng (Honours) in Civil Engineering
	26. BSc (Honours) in Science with Nutrition
Link(s) to Publications	https://www.ait.ie/contact/staff/quality/summary-of-new-programme-proposal https://www.ait.ie/contact/staff/quality/module-manager-process

Year	2019/20
Areas/Units	It is planned to have a number of Thematic Reviews
Number	
Link(s) to Publications	
Year	2020/21
Areas/Units	
Number	
Link(s) to Publications	

Year	2021/22
Areas/Units	Programmatic Review and Institutional Review will take place

Number	
Link(s) to Publications	

Year	2022/23
Areas/Units	Institutional Review Report due in the first quarter of 2023
Number	
Link(s) to Publications	

Year	
Areas/Units	
Number	
Link(s) to Publications	

Engagement with Third Parties Section

Details of engagement with third parties, including:

1. Arrangements with PRSBs, Awarding Bodies, QA Bodies
2. Collaborative Provision
3. Articulation Agreements

1. **Arrangements with PRSBs, Awarding Bodies, QA Bodies**

If you have data for the 'Arrangements with PRSBs, Awarding Bodies, QA Bodies' section please indicate below the TOTAL number of arrangements you have in place in the appropriate boxes.

Provide details of 5 programmes linked to arrangements with other bodies. These should be the TOP 5 programmes based on the number of students currently enrolled in them.

Type of Arrangement	Total Number
PRSBs	14
Awarding Bodies	
QA Bodies	

First Type of Arrangement (PRSB/Awarding Body/QA Body):	PRSB
Name of Body:	Veterinary Council of Ireland
Programme Tiles and Links to Publications	Bachelor of Science in Veterinary Nursing
Date of Accreditation or Last Review	07-12-2017
Next Review Year	2022

Second Type of Arrangement (PRSB/Awarding Body/QA Body)	PRSB
Name of Body:	Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland
Programme Tiles and Links to Publications	Bachelor of Science (Hons) in General Nursing Bachelor of Science (Hons) in Psychiatric Nursing
Date of Accreditation or Last Review	2018
Next Review Year	2023

Third Type of Arrangement (PRSB/Awarding Body/QA Body):	PRSB
Name of Body:	Engineers Ireland
Programme Tiles and Links to Publications	HC in Engineering in Civil Engineering HC in Engineering in Electronic and Computer Engineering HC in Engineering in Mechanical Engineering BEng in Civil Engineering BEng in Computer Engineering BEng in Electronics and Wireless Communications Beng in Mechanical Engineering BEng in Mechanical Engineering and Renewable Energy BEng in Mechatronics BEng (Hons) in Civil Engineering (2 year)
Date of Accreditation or Last Review	01-09-2017 The majority of programmes listed above are accredited until 2021 – for complete listing see the following links: https://www.ait.ie/uploads/downloads/Professional_Body_Accreditation.pdf https://www.cpaireland.ie/Become-A-Student/Exemptions/Courses/Exemptions-Results?col=7
Next Review Year	2021 in most cases

Fourth Type of Arrangement (PRSB/Awarding Body/QA Body):	PRSB
Name of Body:	1. The Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) 2. Chartered Accountants Ireland (CAI) 3. Certified Public Accountants Ireland (CPA)
Programme Tiles and Links to Publications	Details of the programmes accredited by the above three Accrediting Bodies can be found at the following link: https://www.ait.ie/uploads/downloads/Professional_Body_Accreditation.pdf
Date of Accreditation or Last Review	Various dates depending on programmes
Next Review Year	2020 – 2024 (depending on which programme) The renewal dates are listed on the AIT website.

Fifth Type of Arrangement (PRSB/Awarding Body/QA Body):	PRSB
Name of Body:	CORU
Programme Tiles and Links to Publications https://www.ait.ie/uploads/downloads/Professional_Body_Accreditation.pdf	BA in Applied Social Studies in Social Care Level 7 BA in Applied Social Care (part-time) Level 7 BA (Hons) in Social Care Practice Level 8
Date of Accreditation or Last Review	
Next Review Year	2019-2020

If you have additional (up to a maximum of 5) 'Arrangements with PRSBs, Awarding Bodies, QA Bodies' please copy and paste the above box (change from "Second Type" to "Third" and so on)

Collaborative Provision

If you have data for the 'Collaborative Provision' section please indicate below the TOTAL number of arrangements you have in place in the appropriate boxes.

Provide details of 10 collaborations. These should be the TOP 10 collaborations based on the number of students currently enrolled in them. For Designated Awarding Bodies, details of ALL linked providers should be included.

Type of Arrangement	Total Number
Joint Research Degrees	
Joint/double/multiple awards	
Collaborative Programmes	5 programmes 1 with Cavan Institute 1 with Gurteen College 3 with Equal Ireland
Franchise Programmes	
Linked providers (DABs only)	

First Collaborative Provision (Joint Research Degree or Joint/double/multiple awards or Collaborative Programmes or Franchise Programmes or Linked providers [DABs only]):	
Name of Body (bodies):	Cavan Institute https://www.cavaninstitute.ie/
Programme Tiles and Links to Publications	Higher Certificate in Applied Social Studies in Social Care, Level 6.
Date of Last Review	30-05-2013
Next Review Year	Currently being reviewed

Second Collaborative Provision:	
Name of Body (bodies):	Gurteen College https://gurteencollege.ie/
Programme Tiles and Links to Publications	BSc in Veterinary Nursing Level 7
Date of Last Review	25-05-2011
Next Review Year	Currently being reviewed

Third Collaborative Provision:	Equal Ireland

	http://equalireland.com/01_About_Us.htm
Name of Body (bodies):	
Programme Tiles and Links to Publications	1. Higher Certificate in Business Enterprise and Community Development Level 6 2. Bachelor of Arts in Business and Community Development Level 7. 3. Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Social Enterprise, Leadership and Management Level 8.
Date of Last Review	30-04-2013
Next Review Year	Currently being reviewed

If you have additional (up to a maximum of 10) Collaborative Provision Arrangements, please copy and paste the above box (change from "Second Type" to "Third" and so on)

2. **Articulation Agreements**

If you have data for the 'Articulation Agreements' section please indicate below the TOTAL number of formal articulation arrangements you have in place.

Provide details of 3 programmes linked to articulation agreements with other bodies. These should be the TOP 3 programmes based on the number of students currently enrolled in them.

Articulation Agreements - Total Number	**134**

First Articulation Agreement:	
Name of Body (bodies):	Dongbei University and Economics (DUFE), Dalian, China
Programme Tiles and Links to Publications	Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Accounting Level 8 https://www.ait.ie/contact/staff/quality/programmes-and-registers
Date of Agreement/Arrangement or Last Review	30-04-2013
Review Year for Agreement	2018-2019

Detail of the Agreement	AIT recognises the Accounting curriculum of DUFE. More than 60 students have studied on the Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Accounting at AIT. Graduates of the BA (Hons) in Accounting at AIT have the option of studying for the remaining examinations of the Professional Accounting bodies or studying on the Master of Accounting at AIT. AIT receives 3-10 students from DUFE to this programme each year. Awarding Body: Students receive an AIT award when they transfer to AIT.

Second Articulation Agreement:	
Name of Body (bodies):	East China University of Technology (ECUT)
Programme Tiles and Links to Publications	Bachelor of Engineering (Hons) in Sofware Engineering Level 8; Bachelor of Engineering (Hons) in Mechanical Engineering Level 8;
Date of Agreement/Arrangement or Last Review	Annual review meeting takes place annually at AIT or ECUT.
Review Year for Agreement	Agreement expiry date is 03 December 2022
Detail of Agreement	A Memorandum of Understanding between AIT and ECUT for Software Engineering was first signed in 2008. Students complete the first three years of study at ECUT and transfer to the final year of the Bachelor of Engineering in Software Engineering at AIT. Athlone Institute of Technology recognises the curriculum taught at ECUT. AIT receives 10-15 students per year for transfer to the Bachelor of Engineering in Software Engineering (Hons) at AIT. Awarding Body: Students receive an AIT award when they transfer to AIT.

Third Articulation Agreement:	
Name of Body (bodies):	Jianghan University, Wuhan, China
Programme Tiles and Links to Publications	Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Graphic and Digital Design (Level 8)
Date of Agreement/Arrangement or Last Review	31-01-2015
Review Year for Agreement	2023

	In addition, an annual review meeting takes place in Jianghan University.
Detail of Agreement	Athlone Institute of Technology and Jianghan University received approval from the Ministry of Education in China to commence a joint undergraduate programme for Visual Design Communication with an intake of one hundred students in September 2015. Students complete the first three years of Design programme in Jianghan University and have the option to transfer to the final years of the Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Graphic and Digital Design (Level 8) programme in AIT. There was a cohort of 10 students who transferred to AIT during the reporting period 2018-2019. Students receive an AIT award when they transfer to AIT.

Parts 2-6

Institution-led QA – Annual Information

Parts 2-6 are completed annually with information pertaining to the reporting period (i.e. the preceding academic year only).

Part 2: Institution-led QA – Annual

Part 2 provides information relating to institution-led quality assurance for the reporting period.

Section 1: Quality Assurance and Enhancement System Developments

1.1 The evolution of quality assurance and enhancement systems in support of strategic objectives in the reporting period.

Athlone Institute of Technology has adopted an inclusive and reflective approach to quality assurance. There is an enhancement focus and the goal of initiatives in this area is to improve the student experience. This focus is informed by the attention that quality received within the institution's strategic plan https://www.ait.ie/about-ait/strategic-plan/.

The introduction leads to the proposal that AIT is on a path with mission distinctiveness and quality enhancement as the lodestar.

AIT continues its commitment to the quality of learner experience and maintains this focus in the development of the new Strategic Plan 2019-2024. Our priorities emphasise the successful, connected, engaged and holistic student, demonstrates the importance placed on the student experience. The consistently high ISSE participation rates give reliability and validity to the student voice and a confidence in the associated QA actions. Ensuring the integrity of decision-making AIT integrates all stakeholder views in QA processes and decision and utilise all available data to ensure fully informed decision making. The growing commitment and emphasis on becoming a data-driven institute has witnessed the development of data dashboards and reporting structures that clearly direct and target intervention. Notably, the development of the Student lifecycle dashboard that monitors students from application to completion has highlighted a number of targeted actions. This coupled with the

development of the ISSE institutional report has empowered decision makers. Learner experience as a central tenant of AIT's focus impacts on all facets of instructional activity and therefore is a significant focus of all QA policies and procedures.

Over the recent years more members of our community, both students and staff, have become engaged with the quality discussion. This results from a conscious endeavour to embed enhancement and to have this supported by a strong quality office with informed and permanent support. The strategic objectives of the institution are delineated under five pillars within the strategic plan and quality is the prerequisite for all. In addition, the implications of the recent legislative change and especially the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, has demanded greater responsibility from individual institutions as they assume increasing autonomy. Athlone Institute of Technology has responded with an increased emphasis on enhancement and on empowering its community to contribute to the fullest over the full lifecycle of the life of a learner. Our Learning and Teaching Unit has worked diligently to equip staff to foster a distinctive approach in respect of learning, teaching, and assessment, and further enhance opportunities for learner engagement and individual development. In addition, the institution has developed and promoted a distinctive set of AIT graduate attributes, thereby helping shape the professional growth of our learners and the holistic development of the individual. These graduate attributes were first introduced during the reporting period of this AIQR and are now included in the upgrade to the Module Manager System.

1.2 Significant specific changes (if any) to QA within the institution.

Student Policy on Gender Identity and Gender Expression:

The drafting of this policy was in response to the growing need for Athlone Institute of Technology to recognise the range, type and nature of gender diversity within its student body and in particular to form a policy framework to ensure good practice in its approach to diversity. This policy will establish the philosophy and values that the Institute applies to its operations, in recognition of the need for respect and dignity for each student. Its purpose is to guide institutional action and to direct procedures that impact on gender identity and expression. It also recognises the legal and regulatory

framework within which the Institute operates and the obligations, constraints and opportunities that the legislation creates.

https://www.ait.ie/uploads/downloads/Gender_Identity_Gender_Expression_AC_25.10_.2019_.pdf

AIT'S Equality Journey

AIT commenced its Equality Journey in September 2017 through the appointment by the President of John McKenna as VP for Strategic Planning, Equality and Diversity. In the current AIT Strategic Plan 2019-2023 it says "We will champion an agenda of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion among our students, staff and the wider community as we recognise its value in fostering an environment of equal opportunity for all. Intensifying our efforts to widen third level participation, we will work to dismantle barriers to education and make the wider community aware of progression pathways and other EDI Initiatives. To assist in this work, the institute appointed Jackie Farrell as Equality Officer commencing in September 2018. Since that time a number of initiatives have been rolled out:

- Unconscious Bias Training for Management Staff Diversity and Inclusion Training for all staff.
- The review of Institute policies and procedures and communications through an 'equality lens'.
- The celebration of both International Women's Day, and International Men's Day.
- Profiling successful female researchers at AIT as 'game-changers' in industry and science.
- Application for a senior academic post under the SALI Initiative (Senior Academic Leadership Initiative aiming to assist women in securing roles as senior academic in Irish HEI's). AIT was successful in securing one such post under this Initiative.

The Athena SWAN Charter

The Athena SWAN Charter was established in 2005 to encourage and recognise commitment to advancing the careers of women in science, engineering, maths and medicine (STEMM) employment in higher education and research. The Charter recognises organisations' commitment to, and progress on equality and diversity, particularly race and gender. Members of the Charter apply for an Athena SWAN award at Bronze, Silver or Gold Level. Athlone Institute of Technology is currently working on its application for a Bronze Award to be submitted at the end of April 2020.

In particular, the Charter seeks to address what is known as the 'leaky pipeline' of women progressing to senior positions, by removing obstacles, ensuring pay parity, and providing support.

In May 2015, the Athena SWAN Charter was expanded to recognise work undertaken in the arts, humanities, social sciences, business and law. And to addressing barriers more broadly, not just barriers to progression that affect women.

The Athena SWAN Charter is managed by the UK Equality Challenge Unit (now Advance HE)

In order to apply for an Institutional Bronze award, an Institution has to go through a process of honest self-reflection and self-assessment. The self-assessment is progressed by an Institute self-assessment team, who oversee the Athena SWAN application. An all-staff survey has been conducted across the Institute and the data obtained from this survey is currently being supplemented by issue-driven staff focus groups.

Currently a draft of our Athena SWAN application is being drafted. This draft will be moderated and edited before submission to Advance HE in April 2020.

Establishment of Working Groups

A number of working groups considered and made recommendations on such matters as the academic calendar, the admissions policy, the examinations policy and the Institute Standards, Assessment and Awards document.

Recognition of Prior Learning Policy

Currently the AIT RPL policy is under review. A new policy will be put in place, once finalised.

Placement Models

The report on the output of the Placement Models Working Group was produced in May 2018. Please see the following link for this report:

https://www.ait.ie/contact/staff/quality/placements-in-ait

A Graduate Attributes Template was also devised from this working group:

An AIT Graduate will demonstrate:	Year 1 Assessments	Year 2 Assessments	Year 3 Assessments	Year 4 Assessments
• A sound and in-depth knowledge base				
• A high level of ethical, social, cultural, environmental and wider professional conduct				
• The ability to solve problems and think creatively and critically				
• The ability to communicate effectively in a wide variety of appropriate ways				
• The ability to collaborate and work in multi-disciplinary teams				
• A commitment to continued personal and professional development and desire to learn				

Indicate the assessments which will provide evidence of students achieving each AIT Graduate Attribute over the programme – address any gaps emerging.

AIT Policies

A full list of the AIT policies can be found on the AIT website through the following link:

https://www.ait.ie/contact/staff/quality/policies-procedures

1.3 The schedule of QA governance meetings.

Governing Body Meeting Dates Academic Year 2018-2019
Wednesday 9th May 2018

Wednesday 20th June 2018

Wednesday 19th September 2018

Wednesday 24th October 2018

Wednesday 5th December 2018

Wednesday 6th February 2019

Wednesday 20th March 2019

Wednesday 8th May 2019

Wednesday 19th June 2019

Academic Council Meeting Dates Academic Year 2018-2019
Friday 14 September 2018

Friday 12 October 2018

Friday 30 November 2018

Friday 25 January 2019

Friday 8 March 2019

Friday 10 May 2019

Thursday 13 June 2019

Academic Strategy and Quality Committee Meetings Dates Academic Year 2018-2019
Friday, 21st September 2018

Friday, 19th October 2018

Wednesday, 28 November 2018

Friday, 14th December 2018

Wednesday, 23rd January 2019

Friday, 15th February 2019

Thursday, 14th March 2019

Friday, 12th April 2019

| Tuesday, 21st May 2019 |
| Thursday, 6th June 2019 |

Section 2: Reviews in the reporting period

2.1 Internal reviews that were completed in the reporting period.

During the academic year 2018-2019 there were a number of new programme proposals brought forward from the Institutes' four faculties https://www.ait.ie/contact/staff/quality/summary-of-new-programme-proposal. All proposals went through the quality assurance processes at AIT. They were first brought to Executive Management for initial approval and financial analysis and then to the Academic Standards and Quality Committee for review and finally to external panel for evaluation and approval. Upon completion of these steps the programmes were brought to Academic Council for ratification.

The following is a summary of these proposals:

The Faculty of **Business and Hospitality** presented three programmes:

- Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Food Business and Technology
- Bachelor of Business (Hons) in Sport Management
- Bachelor of Business (Hons) in International Business

Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Food Business and Technology (with work placement)

Full Award Title	Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Food Business and Technology
Department	Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure
Programme Code	AL_BAFBT_8
Level	08
Required Credits	240
Duration	4 years
Proposed Start Term	September 2019
Minimum Course Grade	40
Contains Work Placement	Yes

Bachelor of Business (Hons) in Sport Management

Full Award Title	Bachelor of Business (Hons) in Sport Management
Department	Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure
Programme Code	AL_BSPOR_H08
Level	08
Required Credits	240
Duration	4 years
Proposed Start Term	September 2020
Minimum Course Grade	40
Contains Work Placement	Yes

Bachelor of Business (Hons) in International Business Level 8 (ab initio) programme

Full Award Title	Bachelor of Business (Hons) in International Business
Department	Business and Management
Programme Code	AL_BINTE_H08
Level	08
Required Credits	240
Duration	4 years
Proposed Start Term	September 2020
Minimum Course Grade	40
Contains Work Placement	Yes

In addition to the above programmes, there was one Special Purpose Award submission from the faculty, which was a **15-credit part-time Certificate in Mentoring and Facilitation for Recognition of Prior Learning.** The aim of this programme is to provide support to participants seeking to gain access, advanced entry or exemptions in an education/training programme, via a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process.

The Faculty of **Engineering and Informatics** presented the following programmes:
- BSc in Music and Sound Engineering Level 7
- Bachelor of Engineering (Hons) in Civil Engineering Level 8
- BSc (Hons) in Software Design with Virtual Reality and Gaming Level 8
- Special Purpose Award: Certificate in Robotics – Springboard Funded
- Special Purpose Award: Certificate in Robotics and Automation Level 6 – Springboard Funded

Bachelor of Science in Music and Sound Engineering Level 7 (add-on year)

Full Award Title	Bachelor of Science in Music and Sound Engineering Level 7
Department	Department of Mechanical, Polymer and Design
Programme Code	AL_SMUSI_B07
Level	07
Required Credits	180
Duration	1 year
Proposed Start Term	September 2019
Minimum Course Grade	40
Contains Work Placement	Yes

Bachelor of Engineering (Hons) in Civil Engineering Level 8

Full Award Title	Bachelor of Engineering (Hons) in Civil Engineering Level 8
Department	Department of Civil Engineering and Construction
Programme Code	AL_ECIVI_H08
Level	08
Required Credits	240
Duration	4 years
Proposed Start Term	September 2020
Minimum Course Grade	40
Contains Work Placement	Yes

Bachelor of Science (Hons) in Software Design with Virtual Reality and Gaming

Full Award Title	Bachelor of Science (Hons) in Software Design with Virtual Reality and Gaming
Department	Department of Civil Engineering and Construction
Programme Code	AL_KSOFT_H08
Level	08
Required Credits	240
Duration	4 years
Proposed Start Term	September 2019
Minimum Course Grade	40
Contains Work Placement	Yes

Certificate in Robotics and Automation Level 6 (Springboard)

Full Award Title	Certificate in Robotics and Automation Level 6 (Springboard)
Department	Department of Mechanical, Polymer and Design
Programme Code	AL_EROBO_S06
Level	06
Required Credits	40
Duration	1 year part-time
Proposed Start Term	January 2019
Minimum Course Grade	40
Contains work placement	Yes

In addition, the programme development below was supported by a successful application for

Springboard+ funding during the academic year 2018/2019

Department of Civil and Construction	Higher Diploma in Science in BIM for Civil Engineering and Construction (60 credits) Level 8
Department of Computer and Software Engineering	An Introduction to Networks and Configuration (20 credits) Level 6
Department of Computer and Software Engineering	An Introduction to Data Analysis and Visualisation (20 credits) Level 6
Department of Computer and Software Engineering	An Introduction to Virtual and Augmented Reality (20 credits) Level 6
Department of Computer and Software Engineering	Postgraduate Certificate in Blockchain Security (30 credits) Level 9

Department of Computer and Software Engineering	Master of Science in Software Design with Augmented and Virtual Reality with a Postgraduate Certificate in Augmented and Virtual Reality (30 credits)
Department of Computer and Software Engineering	Master of Science in Software Design with Artificial Intelligence with a Postgraduate Certificate in Software Design with Artificial Intelligence (30 credits)
Department of Computer and Software Engineering	Master of Science in Software Design with Cloud Native Computing with a Postgraduate Certificate in Cloud Native Computing (30 credits) Level 9
Department of Computer and Software Engineering	Master of Science in Software Design with Cyber Security with a Postgraduate Diploma in Cybersecurity (60 credits) Level 9
Department of Mechanical, Polymer and Design	*New Programme Proposals:* • MSc in Advanced Polymer Materials & • Post Graduate Diploma in Advanced Polymer Materials

The Faculty of **Science and Health** presented one programme, as follows:
Special Purpose Award: Certificate in Checking Accuracy for Pharmacy Technicians, Level 7, 10-credit module.

Full Award Title	Certificate in Checking Accuracy for Pharmacy Technicians, Level 7
Department	Department of Nursing and Healthcare
Programme Code	PHRM07021
Level	06
Required Credits	10
Duration	1 year part-time
Proposed Start Term	September 2018
Minimum Course Grade	40
Contains work placement	-

The Faculty of **Continuing, Professional Online and Distance Learning** presented the following programme:
Special Purpose Award: Certificate in Business in Real Estate Administration, 60-credits, delivered over one academic year.

Full Award Title	Certificate in Business in Real Estate Administration Level 6
Department	Department of Lifelong Learning
Programme Code	AL_BREAL_S06
Level	06
Required Credits	60
Duration	1 year part-time (delivery: on-line in a blended learning format)
Proposed Start Term	September 2019
Minimum Course Grade	40
Contains work placement	Yes

In addition, the following programmes were developed and approved as part of the Springboard+ funding (2018-2019) for the faculty of Continuing, Professional Online and Distance Learning:

Title	Number of Credits	Award Type	Date of First Intake	Duration of Programme	Mode of Delivery
BSc in Quality Lean Management	180 credits	Bachelor of Science	September 2020	3 years	Part-time blended On-line

Certificate in Business in Logistics & Supply Chain Management Level 6	60 credits	Special Purpose Award	September 2019	1 year	Part-time blended On-line
Post Graduate Diploma in Business in Executive Management Level 9	60 credits	Post Graduate Diploma	September 2019	1 year	Part-time blended On-line
Certificate in Applied Laboratory Science Level 6	60 credits	Special Purpose Award Certificate	September 2019	1 year	Part-time blended On-line

Ongoing review/amendments to Programmes/Modules post Approval Process

If a faculty deems it necessary to amend a programme or module(s) following validation, during delivery to the students, there is a process in place for this. All changes requested are discussed initially at programme board level within the faculty and if agreed they are then brought to the Academic Quality and Strategy Committee who review the proposals twice yearly, in December and April. If they are agreed by the Committee, then all necessary updates are made to the internal systems such as Module Manager and Banner. For further information on this process and the regulations with regard to same please see the following link which is located on the Quality Section of the AIT website: https://www.ait.ie/contact/staff/quality/module-manager-process

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Case Study: The Success of the Springboard+ Initiative in Athlone Institute of Technology

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The Faculty of Continuing, Professional, Online and Distance Learning co-ordinated the Springboard+ initiative in Athlone Institute of Technology during 2018/2019. The primary objective of Springboard+ is to provide upskilling and reskilling courses to develop the talent base in Ireland in key growth sectors of the economy. It provides free and heavily subsidised upskilling and reskilling higher education opportunities in areas of identified skills need. The initiative's primary target group when it was established was unemployed people with a previous history of employment. Over recent years

with the decline in numbers on the live register the focus was changed to include more people in employment and those returning to the workforce.

All programmes approved for funding under Springboard+ are selected by an independent panel of experts from industry and education following a competitive tendering process. In particular, programmes with a proven track record in getting people back into employment are recommended for funding.

During 2018/2019, the Faculty partnered with local industry in the Midlands region and the Regional Skills Forum manager to design and deliver industry focused programmes. These accredited programmes were customised to the needs of industry and were delivered using flexible delivery channels such as on line and blended learning to suit industry partners and programme learners.

During 2018/2019, Athlone Institute of Technology was awarded over 350 student places on industry focused programmes at levels 6 to 9 on the National Framework of Qualifications. Each programme was a direct response to the current and projected skills needs in all sectors and industries in the region. The Springboard+ initiative continues to drive regional growth through the upskilling and reskilling of the workforce and its attendant benefits to business in the region.

Review of External Examiner Reports

External Examiner Reports are reviewed on an annual basis initially by the President and VIPAR and then by the relevant faculties. A summary of these reports is drafted by the Quality Office and the faculties are requested to provide updates on how they addressed the recommendations of the external examiners.

Programme Boards

Programme Boards are held within each faculty once per semester in order to consider all matters affecting the operation and innovation of each programme. Such issues as programme changes, external examiner reports, and assessment of the progress of students, are addressed at Programme Boards. There is always a student representative on the Board. The Programme Board plays an integral role in the smooth operations of each faculty within the institute.

2.2 Profile of internal approval/evaluations and review completed in the reporting period.

Number of new **Programme Validations/Programme Approvals** completed in the reporting year	**23**
Number of **Programme Reviews** completed in the reporting year	2
Number of **Research Reviews** completed in the reporting year	1
Number of **School/Department/Faculty Reviews** completed in the reporting year	
Number of **Service Unit Reviews** completed in the reporting year	
Number of **Reviews of Arrangements with partner organisations** completed in the reporting year	*

* Collaboration Agreements and a number of Articulation Agreements will be reviewed during the academic year 2019/2020.

2.3 Profile of reviewers and chairs internal approval/evaluations and review for reviews completed in the reporting period.

Composition of Panels	%
Internal	13
National	84
UK	3
EU	
Student	
Other	

Chair Profile	%
Internal	
Similar Institution	100%
Different Institution	
International	

Section 3: Other Implementation Factors

3.1 A description of how data is used to support quality assurance and the management of the student learning experience.

During the academic year 2018-2019 the main source of information with regard to the student learning experience was obtained via the Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE) which was carried out over a three-week period during February 2019. This survey was designed to ask students directly about their full experience of higher education.

An incredible 69% of students in AIT participated in the 2019 Irish Survey of Student Engagement. The cohort of students who participated in the survey were from first year, final year, and postgraduate taught master's programmes. The participation rate for the postgraduate research masters' students was **72%.**

Since the survey's inception in 2013 AIT continues to maintain the highest response rate annually.

The data gathered through the ISSE affords the opportunity to gain insights into the student and environmental factors which influence the nature of student engagement in the institution. Analysis of the data is shared among all relevant parties throughout the institute by means of presentations to both staff and student body representatives.

The number of AIT students who participated in the 2019 Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE) increased by 3.4% since 2018.

In the ISSE survey, 43 of the quantitative questions contribute to one of 9 indicators. The 9 indicators are as follows:

Higher order learning; Reflective and integrative learning; Quantitative reasoning; Learning strategies Collaborative learning; Student-faculty interaction; Effective teaching practices; Quality of interactions and Supportive Environment.

Indicator scores are based on the responses to the questions which directly contribute to that indicator. The responses to each question are converted to a 60-point scale, where 0 is the minimum response and 60 is the maximum.

Reflective and Integrative Learning:
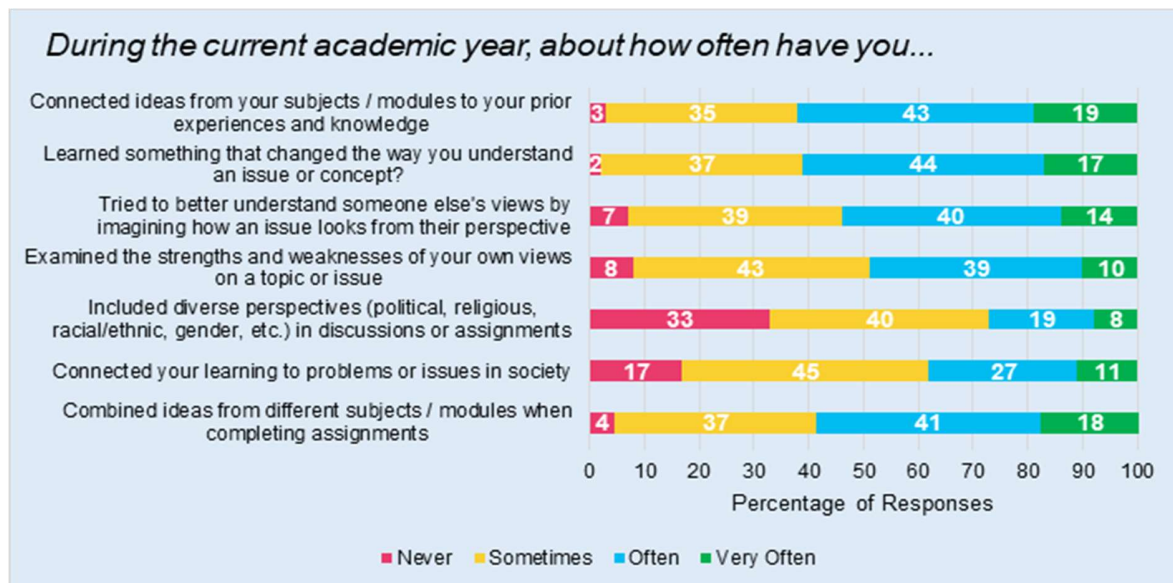
Effective Teaching Practices:
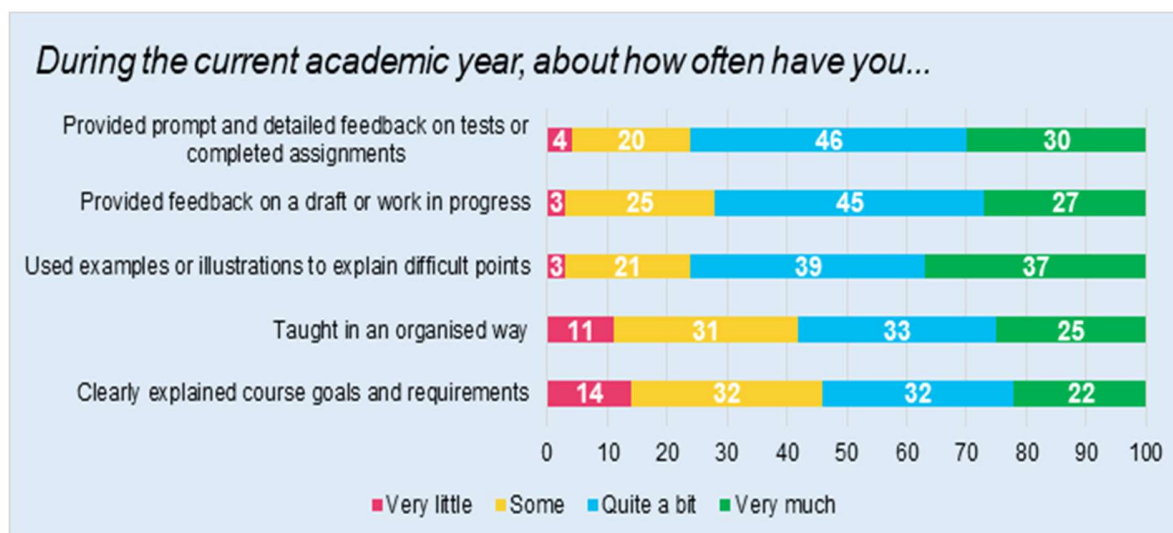
With regard to questions not relating specifically to indicators, students rated their entire educational experience at AIT very highly.

The resulting data obtained from ISSE is used at faculty meetings and programme boards. Areas for improvement are highlighted and continually being acted upon throughout the institute.

Please see link below under the Quality Section of the AIT website which outlines detail in relation to the Irish Survey of Student Engagement for the reporting period.

https://www.ait.ie/contact/staff/quality/irish-survey-of-student-engagement-isse

Student Engagement

AIT is committed to supporting student engagement and leveraging data to enhance student success. Throughout the institute there are pockets of excellent practice, where data is gathered, analysed and acted upon. Examples include:

- The use of the VLE (Moodle) at a basic level to record attendance and logins with follow up by Faculty
- A more advanced use of the VLE through the monitoring of activities for student engagement
- Specific educational research projects initially supported through the Learning and Teaching Unit and subsequently embedded in teaching practice.
  These utilise educational technologies such as classroom response systems, online portfolios and collaborative multi-media tools, to support learning and feedback.
- The National Student Engagement Programme (NStEP) is a national initiative addressing student involvement in decision-making processes. Athlone Institute of Technology is a participant of NStEP. They will host their annual conference in November 2019. The conference will unveil their new strategy for 2019-2021 and will comprise workshops and presentations.

In addition, systems used by the library and the academic writing centre provide valuable data on student engagement to inform the provision of services to students.

AIT has invested in a package of key initiatives to support the transition to higher education for a diverse student population. These include:

- AIT Connect - a seven-week extended induction/transition programme coordinated by the Student Resources Centre in collaboration with faculties and other key stakeholders
- Peer Assisted Student Support - a student-led facilitated study programme where trained 2nd year student PASS Leaders run a series of study sessions to help their fellow first year students
- Student Tutors – maths, business, programming and science
- Academic Writing Centre (AWC), which focuses on promoting excellence in writing.

Data Protection Regulations and how they support Quality Assurance

Athlone Institute of Technology has a strong commitment to ensuring that the processing of any personal data by any of its functions is compliant with data protection legislation. Since the GDPR came in to force in May 2018, AIT has completely reviewed it's data processing life cycle. This has brought about several changes, highlighted and replicated good practice, and increased the awareness around the need for strong data management. There is still work to be done to embed data protection fully into the culture of the Institute and one of the challenges is to do this in a way that does not detract from the ethos, and quality of care, which has been developed and nurtured between staff and students over the years.

The Information and Data Compliance office (IDCO) held meetings with relevant staff members within each of the AIT functions in order to develop a ROPA (record of processing activities). This ROPA captures details of all the personal data processed by the function under several headings, including types of data processed, third party and/or third country sharing, data storage, and data retention. From this ROPA a more comprehensively detailed retention schedule has been developed. The meetings also allowed opportunity for discussion in relation to the best way to process personal data while protecting the relationship with the students.

A data protection risk register has also been developed from these meetings. This identifies some areas where data protection can be improved, or where a DPIA may be required.
The IDCO is working on putting data processing agreements in place for existing and new processors. For those processors based in the UK, a specific agreement has been drawn up which contains a Brexit clause. This clause activates a separate, standard contractual clause agreement when Britain's exit from the EU takes place. A variety of data sharing, and confidentiality, agreements have been put in place with external providers in relation to the data protection. A comprehensive list of external providers has been collated as a review database for these agreements.

The training and awareness for staff and students around the GDPR has been carried out in several ways. Posters have been designed and displayed in prominent places around the Institute. Online training has been provided for all staff. The IDCO has given a number of presentations to both staff and students and the AIT Student's Union have also worked with the IDCO to raise awareness about data protection and privacy amongst the student cohort.

AIT is part of a collaborative sectoral working group who liaise on common issues for advice, discussion, and in order to develop uniform standards and codes of practice within the sector. This common approach helped to accelerate development in some areas such as policies, procedures, frequently asked questions, processing data breaches and staff training. It also provides a good environment for discussion around common issues.

Data protection impact assessments (DPIA) have been carried out on a number of new, and proposed, projects. These are carried out in order to determine any risks presented to the processing of personal data. ***The following case study shows how DPIAs are an essential part of deciding on the viability of a new service or process and should not be seen as just a 'tick box' exercise.***

Case Study: Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIA)

'The importance of carrying out a DPIA before the project starts.'

One of the departments within AIT contacted the IDCO in relation to a new record management system proposed to be used by the department.   A high level of personal and special category data is processed by that function. The IDCO met with the contact within the department in order to discuss the requirements and gather information to carry out a DPIA. There is a commonly held belief that any company offering record management systems will have already taken all the steps necessary to ensure that data is protected within the system they are providing. This is not always the case, as different data privacy laws apply in different countries. Where the system being considered is supplied by a company whose base is outside of the EEA, there is a risk that the data privacy elements for the system are not as robust as the GDPR requires. In this case the base for the company on which the DPIA was to be carried out lay outside of the EEA and this was initially considered to be the first and highest risk.

At the time of the assessment there was a legal challenge to the validity of both the standard contractual clauses (SCC) (in place to accommodate the transfer of personal data between EEA countries and Third Countries) and to the Privacy Shield (which allows for the sharing of personal data with registered companies in the USA. These challenges had to be considered when carrying out the DPIA. The situation with the legal challenges made this risk difficult to mitigate as there was uncertainty around the outcome. AIT could not take on a third-party supplier where the agreement we were basing the privacy security on could be found to be weak.

Another consideration to be taken into account was the security around Cloud based service hosting. While the company were able to provide verifications of a robust security structure and protocol, the use of data for a purpose other than that which it was collected raised some concerns. The privacy laws in the system's host country could potentially allow access to the data outside of the authorised users. The lack of control and uncertainty over privacy protocols, underpinned by the instability of the SCC and the Privacy Shield, combined to raise the level of risk. One way to partially mitigate this risk was to apply a strict retention period to the data. Given that some of the student data could be required for up to five years and possibly longer due to National funding requirements and audit processes, the mitigation factor could not be significantly reduced. Pseudonymisation of the data after a specific period could reduce the impact but would not sufficiently address the risk.

While the company engaged fully with the process it was necessary for the IDCO and the contact for the Function to review and discuss whether choosing to accept the risks identified and implement the new system was a reasonable way to proceed. Given the sensitive nature of the data, it was decided that it would be necessary to explore alternatives in order to locate a system that did not pose the risks associated with the first provider. The DPIA had helped to identify risks which were unacceptable given the nature of the personal data.

Following a search, the department liaison found a number of alternative systems, which were based within the EEA. One system had implemented a privacy by design approach when developing the modules and were able to address any questions AIT posed in relation to security of the data and other general data protection queries. A DPIA was carried out on the quality of this system and its data processing standards. The risk factor result from the DPIA was 'low risk' and therefore acceptable. The department in question decided to engage the other service provider.

A data protection audit was carried out in the Information and Compliance Data office in order to identify areas where improvements could be made. While changes were being implemented across the Institute, there wasn't a strong process quality check for a number of procedures. To address this and other recommendations made in the audit report, a number of actions have been taken. These include an Institute Consent to Processing procedure with a checklist and template form which will assist to record the collection of consent – where consent forms part or all of the lawful basis for data collection.

In order to implement the GDPR throughout the Institute, the IDCO had held meetings to determine the risks in each area. These meetings helped to identify processes that might require a DPIA. The audit report recommended a change to the format of these meetings so that they would be more recognisable as a pre-DPIA investigation. A standardised question list was recommended. This is currently being developed.

3.2 Factors that have impacted on quality and quality assurance in the reporting period.

The Institutes Strategic Plan 2019 – 2023 - 'A Technological University for the Region', will guide the Institutes' next phase of evolution – our transition to becoming a proto technological university, ensuring our regions' continued growth and prosperity from an economic and social perspective.

The establishment of the Institute Strategic Plan Steering Group in February 2018 commenced the development and planning process for the Institutes Strategic Plan 2019-2023, and an extensive consultation process with representation from students, staff and a broad cross section of civic, social, cultural, business and industry groups ensued. Focus groups held throughout the Institute involved ten working-groups comprising in excess of 110 staff. In-depth interviews conducted amongst key industry and public sector groups, facilitated input from a good spread across industries and stakeholder sectors. This extensive process resulted in the identification of five key Strategic Themes:

Learner Experience; Educational Provision; Research and Innovation; Engagement and Equality Diversity and Inclusion and two foundational priorities, – Excellence in Operation and Governance and Quality Culture Enhancement, which govern all Institute initiatives. Facilitating the development of the Institutes Strategic Priorities, Initiatives and Metrics will be our three enablers - Our People, Infrastructure and Operational Frameworks. Each of these will play a pivotal role in helping us achieve our ambitious mission and will enable us to respond dynamically to challenges and opportunities in the higher education landscape.

The Institute's new strategic plan, with an expected launch in Semester 1 of 2019/2020, will be a valuable opportunity for us to set a course for the future, put forward new ideas in response to changing times and circumstances, while affirming enduring values and vision. This Strategic Plan will provide

the Institute with the means for co-ordinated change in such a way as to achieve our vision to positively disrupt future ways of living, learning and working; and to build new partnerships that will strengthen innovation and create new and exciting opportunities for our communities.

The demand for Higher education, it is clear, will continue to increase in line with demographic and labour market trends, government policies, and digital learning opportunities. Athlone Institute of Technology intends to respond to the demand and future skills needs in accordance with our mission recognising always, the importance of delivering the high-quality educational provision and learning experience that students expect and deserve.

3.3 A description of other implementation issues.

Going forward, it is essential to the future economic growth of the greater Midlands region that Athlone Institute of Technology achieves technological university status. Decade after decade, education has been the springboard of Ireland's successes. The future of the greater Midland's region will be shaped by the availability of skills and the educational attainment of its citizens. Consequently, the establishment of a technological university is of strategic importance as a key engine of future economic growth and opportunity and we remain steadfast in our commitment to achieving this key objective.

To this end, Athlone Institute of Technology has made joint application with Limerick Institute of Technology for funding to the Higher Education Authority 2019 call for submissions for higher education landscape restructuring, consolidation and collaborative projects. A successful outcome to this application will act as a catalyst in expediting the AIT/LIT application for technological university status; facilitate the building of research capacity, increase the number of staff with cutting-edge technical and research-based skills and continue our efforts to upskill our talented workforce; and supply industry with a talent pipeline of work-ready graduates. In doing so, it will further our status as a leader in applied education, industry-focussed research and innovation output – all of which is regionally impactful.

Both AIT and LIT envision a TU Consortium as catalysing a transformation in provision, knowledge creation and engagement, underpinning a Higher Education institution capable of dynamic, positive disruption to the landscape and affording learners opportunities previously unavailable in our regions. We believe that resourcing of this proposal is a strategic imperative for higher education landscape

reform. The concept of a Technological University with strengthened and complementary Regional Cluster networks speaks to both the National Strategy for Higher Education and to Project 2040.

Athena Swan

The Institute is currently working on its application for Athena SWAN Bronze Award, which will be submitted for panel review at the end of April 2020. In preparation for the submission, and to inform the subsequent action plan, the Institute conducted an all-staff survey, collated and analysed the data. Following analysis of this data, a number of focus groups were facilitated across the Institute to address issues that came to attention. The process of self-assessment has resulted in the championing of Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity across the Institute. The subsequent Action Plan, approved and supported by the Executive is crucial to our progression and will be given the necessary resources to ensure its successful implementation. It promises the on-going development of effective and transparent policies leading to enhanced job satisfaction, and a working environment in which all staff will thrive and prosper.

Following on from this process will see the establishment of the Institute's Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Steering Committee, which will be a sub-group of Governing Body and will be chaired by the President. It will provide strategic context to the Athena SWAN process going forward and both guide and direct the formulation of strategy on Equality for the Institute. It will act as a steering group to the EDI office, with an oversight role and advisory function on activities and policy direction, which will also include overseeing the writing and submission of the current Athena Swan Bronze Award Application and any future applications.

The Institute's new strategic plan, with an expected launch in Semester 1 of 2019/2020, will be a valuable opportunity for us to set a course for the future, put forward new ideas in response to changing times and circumstances, while affirming enduring values and vision. This new Strategic Plan demonstrated our commitment to the principles and values of the Athena SWAN Charter by embedding Equality Diversity and Inclusion as one of five central tenets, with specified outcomes and targets. Attaining Athena SWAN Bronze is a stated key priority.

Part 3: Effectiveness and Impact

Part 3 provides information relating to the effectiveness and impact of quality assurance policy and procedures for the reporting period.

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1. Effectiveness
Evidence of the effectiveness of QA policies and procedures during the reporting period.

During the reporting period evidence of the effectiveness of QA Policies and Procedures was reflected and the following are a number of examples of how this occurred.

- The Implementation of QA policies across functional areas.
- Review process facilitated through programme and examination boards.
- New programme development across all faculties.
- Programme and module revisions.
- Policy development and review of existing policies.
- Review of External Examiner Reports.

Below is a synopsis of how the External Examiner process is carried out within the institute:

External Examiners who are approved by Academic Council and appointed for a three-year period, which may be extended thereafter. External examiners act as independent and impartial advisors providing AIT with informed comment on the assessment process itself and on student achievement against approved learning outcomes.

External examining is therefore an integral and very important part of AIT's quality assurance. It shall be the External Examiners' task to scrutinise the examination process within AIT on a continuing basis and submit their reports to senior management on whether particular students' performances have been judged properly against the institute's awards standards and further, whether the assessment process has measured learning outcomes appropriately and whether the examination process has been conducted fairly.

Senior management circulates the external examiner reports to the faculties for consideration at discussion and action at programme board level. Feedback is then provided by the faculties to both the external examiners and quality office in order to complete the process.

Training is delivered to External Examiners on an annual basis by the institute to ensure all quality procedures are being adhered to and all parties are familiar with their roles and responsibilities.

Many programmes within AIT are accredited by **professional bodies** which protect both the public interest and the interests of professionals. The professional bodies may act to protect the public by maintaining and enforcing standards of training and ethics in their profession.

Programme Boards

Each academic programme delivered across AIT, through its programme board, reports on the effectiveness of the delivery, assessment and quality for all programmes. The programme board meets at least once each semester with student representatives across all stages of the programme. All of the issues reported are documented and reviewed by the programme board to ensure an efficient resolution. These include strategy, proposed programme changes, resources, retention, assessment, documentation, qualifications, contact hours, placement and any other relevant programme changes. The effectiveness and impact of AIT's quality assurance policies and procedures is reflected in the nature, breadth, depth, and rigour of its targeted QA activities, as reported through internal and external channels, including the **Academic Strategy and Quality Committee** which is a subcommittee of academic council. The Academic Strategy and Quality Committee has responsibility to monitor and review the institute's access, transfer, and progression policies and consider new or alternative qualification methods for facilitating students' access onto institute programmes. Also, the committee will make recommendations to academic council on the identification, achievement and enhancement of standards for the institute's programmes. The committee actively contributes to the major quality assurance instruments such as institutional and programmatic reviews. It has the responsibility to evaluate at regular intervals and as directed from time to time by academic council of the institute's programmes of education and training (including evaluation by persons who are competent to make national and international comparisons in that respect) in relation to the development, validation and review of programmes; assessment of student performance; ongoing monitoring and evaluation of programmes; evaluation by learners of that programme; and evaluation

of services related to that programme, and shall provide for the publication in such form and manner as the institute thinks fit of findings arising out of the application of those procedures.

2. Impact
Evidence of the impact of QA policies and procedures during the reporting period.

- AIT's Academic Council, supported by its associated committees, for example, the Academic Strategy and Quality Committee, recommends new and revised policies for approval to its Governing Body.

- The increased use of technology enhanced learning and teaching and assessment methods is evident across the institute.

- The level of external engagement is notable throughout the institute.

- The level of training and support provided by the Learning and Teaching Unit continues to have a significant impact to the quality across the institute.

3. Themes
Analysis of the key themes arising within the implementation of QA policies and procedures during the reporting period.

Retention

Student retention and progression continues to be a concern. It is being addressed by the institute.

There are a number of initiatives being undertaken by the faculties of the Institute which will focus on improving student retention and enhancing the learner experience among the first-year student cohort. Some of these initiatives will include:

- The introduction of a first-year assignment at Induction Day.
- Speaking with all first-year students within the first 2 weeks of the commencement of programme.
- Regular student meetings with the Head of Department.
- Ensuring that students are aware of the calendar of assessments.
- Informative parent's evenings.
- Improved engagement of students in the classroom.
- Briefing for students with failed modules following semester 1.
- Emphasis on specific areas such as performance, esteem, personal Life, mental health, resilience, determination, personal organisation, respect, humanity, work-life balance.
- Identifying at-risk students through attendance monitoring, assessment submission and Moodle usage.

Case Study: International Mobility in the Department of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure

In the Department of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure Studies, Athlone Institute of Technology, field based international learning plays an important role in attracting and retaining students. Since 2016, more than 200 students have participated in an international experience, including non-credited short residential study visits, credited semester abroad studies, credited work placements and representing the Institute at competitions. Students from the department have visited more than 20 countries, including France, Italy, Spain, the UK, and Poland in Europe and the UAE, India, Malaysia, and China in Asia, among others.

The short residential field visits have included 30 students visiting Beijing (2016), 50 visiting Dubai (2017 & 2019), 22 visiting Shanghai and 24 visiting Kuala Lumpur. These trips are not credited or formally examined, however preparatory work is expected. Students also submit written reflections. The trips are self-funded, usually costing €1,200. Students are selected to participate through monitoring of their

attendance, engagement, and motivation. Interestingly, an entrepreneurial spirit organically emerges among the students to help them subsidise the cost of the trip. This involves students running commercial events and using the profits towards their experience. The age range of students participating has been between 18 and 60, with a mean age of 25 and a standard deviation of 10.81.

The itineraries for the visits included a mixture of academic, cultural and industry related activities. Each trip has five fundamental aims:

1. To enhance the student experience and develop bonds between disparate groups
2. To play a role in retention and progression
3. To promote the students of the Department of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure Studies in AIT to a wider audience
4. To encourage student mobility and develop placement and graduate pathway links
5. To act as a professional development opportunity for HTL staff

Qualitative analysis of the success of the trips indicates that passion, motivation, self-belief, confidence, and planning skills are all enhanced through participation. From a quantitative perspective, students participating on the trips appear to have excellent progression potential, with 94% of students participating completing their course or progressing to further study after their trip.

Students wrote very positively about the fieldtrips, describing them as 'life-changing', 'eye-opening' and 'unforgettable' with a participating lecturer noting that the fieldtrips were 'exciting, educational experiences for all, leaving students with lasting memories, a respect for the Chinese people and their culture and the possibility for each student to pursue a working experience in China when they graduate from AIT'.

Professional Body Recognition

Many professional bodies associated with AIT perform professional certification to indicate a person possesses qualifications in the subject area. Membership in a professional body is a requirement by the graduates in order to be legally able to practice the profession.

Below you will find a directory of the main professional bodies affiliated to AIT which are reviewed on an ongoing basis.   https://www.ait.ie/contact/staff/quality/programmes-and-registers

AIT Graduate Attributes

AIT Graduate Attributes inform the development of Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategies at both institute and faculty Level.   The rationale is to offer an alternative perspective to staff when designing and revising modules and programmes and to differentiate the institute and its graduates. AIT Graduate Attributes are included for consideration and mapping to assessments at programme design stage, in the updated version of Module Manager 3.0.

See below the Graduate Attributes template:

When capturing AIT Graduate Attributes ask which assessments during each year of the programme will provide the evidence of achievement of the AIT Graduate Attributes.

For example the following questions can be used to guide programme design teams:

1. how will students will be demonstrate the specified academic and professional knowledge and capabilities for their programme?
2. how will students show evidence that they can conduct themselves to high ethical, social, cultural, environmental and professional standards?
3. how will students show evidence of being able to solve problems?
4. how will students demonstrate they can communicate effectively?
5. how will students provide evidence they can think and act critically?
6. how will students provide evidence they can think and act creatively?
7. how will students provide evidence they can collaborate across disciplines?
8. how will students provide evidence they can continue to learn and develop?

An AIT Graduate will demonstrate:	Year 1 Assessments	Year 2 Assessments	Year 3 Assessments	Year 4 Assessments
• A sound and in-depth knowledge base				
• A high level of ethical, social, cultural, environmental and wider professional conduct				
• The ability to solve problems and think creatively and critically				
• The ability to communicate effectively in a wide variety of appropriate ways				
• The ability to collaborate and work in multi-disciplinary teams				
• A commitment to continued personal and professional development and desire to learn				

AIT has three strategic research institutes in Materials research (MRI), Bioscience research (BRI) and Software research (SRI), along with two Enterprise Ireland funded Technology Gateways – Applied Polymer Technologies (APT) and Connected Media Application Design and Delivery (COMAND) - driving market-informed research in collaboration with industry partners. Further research clusters exist at faculty level.

AIT's strategy is to be partner of choice for enterprise, focusing our applied research, innovation and enterprise support activities on addressing the needs of regional and national industry by proactively collaborating with start-ups and established companies and by providing a comprehensive range of knowledge intensive services, with a focus on SMEs.

AIT's Midlands Innovation and Research Centre (MIRC) provides incubation facilities for innovative and knowledge-based enterprise, delivers the Enterprise Ireland New Frontiers entrepreneur development programme in partnership with Maynooth University, is a location of ESA Space Solutions Centre

Ireland, and makes available the resources and expertise of AIT to support client companies and enterprise in the region.

AIT has been building its research, innovation and enterprise capacity over recent decades and has in place the conduits to transfer knowledge and technologies in a manner that supports entrepreneurs, innovators, SMEs and industry partners.

9 projects were awarded funding under the postgraduate research President's Seed Fund 2018, along with 2 co-funds (SFI and EPA). The stipend element of the PSF award was increased to €1,000 per month.

11 academic staff were awarded Time Release under the 2018/19 programme to enable them to actively engage in research.

In October 2018, 15 high potential entrepreneurs commenced on Phase 2 New of Frontiers 2018. In June-July 2019, 40 entrepreneurs participated on Phase 1 of New Frontiers 2019.

In November 2018, AIT's Bioscience Research Institute was successful in a €2.9m EU Interreg Atlantic Region project NEPTUNUS that seeks to develop marine and freshwater aquaculture across jurisdictions. This followed on from funding by Bord Iascaigh Mhara for the EcoAqua enhanced production of freshwater aquaculture project in partnership with NUI Galway.

Knowledge Transfer Ireland's Annual Review and Knowledge Transfer Survey 2018 ranked AIT number one for research agreements and consultancy with industry across Ireland's higher education sector.

In February 2019, planning permission for expansion of the MIRC was granted by Westmeath County Council.

In February 2019, the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020 was launched. The Plan includes 17 Actions where AIT is leading, a partner, or involved.

In April 2019, AIT subscribed to and rolled out for all staff 'Research Professional' - a research funding database which provides information regarding funding opportunities tailored to individual researchers' areas of interest.

In April 2019, AIT joined the IN-PART Portal of IP available for commercialization in a joint subscription with Maynooth University and IT Carlow.

In May 2019, a very successful AIT Research Seminar was held, featuring research paper presentations, interdisciplinary research presentations, 'Poster Madness' sessions (where researchers made 60 second pitches), a Poster Session, and Awards. A book of 66 posters was produced for the event, along with a book of 23 abstracts.

Epigeum Research Integrity training modules (IUA and THEA) were rolled out by AIT during 2018/19, offering staff and postgraduate students online Research Integrity training (162 places).

A mid-term review of the Technology Transfer Strengthening Initiative 3 programme 2017-21 took place during Q2 2019. The MU-AIT-WIT-ITC Consortium met with the Review Panel on 4 June. The Panel reviewed our performance and activities during the first 28 months of the programme. Our Consortium received an overall rating of A+.

AIT's Intellectual Property Policy and Conflict of Interest Policy were updated for the outcomes of the HEA/KTI Review of IP Management and Conflicts of Interest (2018) and the updated National IP Protocol (2019). Both updated Policies were approved by Governing Body on 19 June.

Faculty of Continuing, Professional, Online and Distance Learning - Engagement with Industry

The Department of Lifelong Learning (DoLL) within the Faculty is partnering with local industry in the Midlands region, designing and delivering industry focused programmes. These accredited programmes are customised to the needs of industry and are delivered using flexible delivery channels to suit industry partners and programme learners. The Faculty co-ordinates the Springboard+ initiative within the Institute, necessitating close ties with industry and the Regional Skills Forum Manager. The success of this is demonstrated in the number of students who attend the range of AIT Springboard programmes during 2018/2019 and who work in industry across the entire Midlands region. The Springboard+ courses are a direct response to the current and projected skills needs of local industry.

In addition to Springboard+, DOLL works collaboratively with numerous industries in the Midlands in the design and delivery of bespoke professional and academic programmes across levels 6 – 9 on the National Framework of Qualifications

Part 4: Quality Enhancement

Part 4 provides information which goes beyond the description of standard quality assurance procedures. Quality enhancement includes the introduction of new procedures but also extends the concept of quality assurance to other initiatives, activities and events aimed at improving quality across the institution.

4.1 Improvements and Enhancements for the Reporting Period
Improvements or enhancements, impacting on quality or quality assurance, that took place in the reporting period.

Academic Module Manager 3.0
The Quality Office, Learning and Teaching Unit and the Banner Office worked collaboratively to manage the enhancement of the system used for design or review and retention of programme documents. The upgrade was implemented in February 2019, after consultation with key stakeholders. All information pertaining to new programme development will be generated directly from Academic Module Manager 3.0, in one publication.

Features of the upgrade include:

· A more user-friendly interface – Academic Module Manager 3.0 design includes a navigation bar of tabs for the user to populate.

· Additional fields in keeping with QQI requirements/sectoral norms and Institute Policy and Guidelines.

· Information sheets and Help Bubbles at each stage of the process to assist users.

· A comprehensive User Guide within the application which can be downloaded from AMM3.0 by the user.

· Additional formatting options are available - for example, the inclusion of tables, graphics and the inclusion of a spellcheck facility.

· Additional fields which encompass Programme Theme Mapping and AIT Graduate Attribute Mapping.

· The inclusion of Independent Learning on the Approved Programme Schedules.

- Mapping by programme author and module author, which will lead to greater efficiency in devising programme documents.
- AIT Work Placement Models are now indicated in the programme build with further details on the module build.
- An additional field which encompasses programme alignment with the strategic direction of both the Institute and proposing faculty.
- Validation of Contact and Independent Learning Hours to ensure that it follows Institute recommendations/guidelines.
- Consistent reporting and information for planning resources.

The increased functionality of AMM 3.0 will also assist in publishing programme information to the web, which is the next development phase for the consortium.

The Irish Survey of Student Engagement

Mention has been made previously of the Irish Survey of Student Engagement popularly known as the ISSE. AIT has consistently demonstrated its commitment to the importance of this initiative through the levels of engagement recorded. This reflects a commendable commitment from various bodies within the institute including the Students' Union and most especially from the student body itself which clearly values this opportunity to register an opinion.

Students acknowledged that they were provided with prompt and detailed feedback on tests or completed assignments.

AIT ISSE indicator performance comparison between 2018 and 2019

Institute Library

The appointment of a scholarly communications librarian is ensuring consistent support to our research community, staff, researchers and postgrads. The role is ensuring appropriate guidance is available in emerging areas of open science and open data and will be essential in the identification of a suitable research data management system for the institute.

The library has moved into a role of collaborator and adviser to the recently created graduate school and is constantly promoting the institute's repository to its community. (see promotional video of the repository: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FrhSLPcx2E8)

The library is a strong advocate of the library world and celebrated 'Library Ireland Week' by hosting a talk by two leading authors, Senator Mary-Louise O'Donnell and Sinead English of Hilt Career, who presented on the Theme 'The Way We Work'. (see link to the promotional video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sVeA28oAuhg)

National Student Engagement Programme

The National Student Engagement Programme is a collaborative initiative under development by the Union of Students in Ireland (USI), the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). The National Student Engagement Programme will develop student capabilities and institutional capacity to enhance engagement at all levels across the higher education system.

The programme has two objectives. The first is to develop and support the implementation of a student training programme. The second related objective is to build institutional capacity to provide high quality opportunities for learners to engage.

NStEP will host their annual conference in November 2019 where they will launch their new Strategy for 2019 – 2021.

CASE STUDY: An Enhancement Initiative:

Taking a programmatic approach when reviewing assessment using TESTA – 'Transforming the Experience of Students through Assessment'

The Department of Sport and Health Sciences, in collaboration with the AIT Learning and Teaching Unit, engaged in a review of assessment across all programmes in the department, using the TESTA approach. This review involved the participation of key stakeholders including all teaching staff in the department, students and the department administrator. The purpose of the review was two-fold as in addition to examining assessment approaches across the department, using TESTA was piloted by the department in order to determine suitability for replication across the institute as part of a continuous review process.

TESTA is an evidence-led approach to understanding assessment patterns across full degree programmes in order to improve the quality of student learning. The purpose of TESTA is to help programme teams identify enhancements for student learning based on evidence and assessment principles.

Led by the Head of Department, the review involved 17 Sport & Health lecturers and 21 lecturers from other discipline areas for 2018-2019. The review was facilitated by Professor Tansy Jessop, Pro

Vice Chancellor Education, University of Bristol. TESTA uses three methods to gather evidence about the typical assessment experience of students:

- Programme audit (evidence from documents and the programme team)
- Assessment Experience Questionnaire (based on established assessment principles)
- Focus groups with students

After receiving ethical approval, the Learning and Teaching Unit and Department of Sport and Health Sciences worked together collect data between February and March. 131(36%) of students from across the four-degree programmes: BSc in Health Science & Nutrition; BSc in Sports Science & Exercise Physiology; BSc in Athletic & Rehabilitation Therapy and BSc in Physical Activity & Health completed the electronic Assessment Experience Questionnaire (AEQ). This was supplemented with qualitative data from focus groups involving 13 students from the final and second years, conducted by researchers in the Learning and Teaching Unit, with all programmes represented.

In April 2019, two days were allocated to undertaking the programme audit which involved gathering evidence from all programme coordinators. Due to the high response rate in the AEQ, the BSc Sport Science and Exercise Physiology was selected as a case study for further examination, with lecturers identifying common key areas for enhancement of all programmes. This process involved identifying positive aspects of programmes from the staff perspective in addition to aspects which needed to be addressed. The comprehensive case study report included a summary categorisation of all assessments across the programme, a comparison between the assessment on the case study programme and similar TESTA programmes. Finally, TESTA allowed for the identification features emerging from across all programmes in relation to volume of assessment, the ratio between formative and summative assessment, the variety of assessment and the role of feedback in learning. Key ideas were incorporated into an action plan which will form the basis of for the review of programmes in the department. The TESTA experience, particularly the impact of the process for staff in one department in addition to findings from the case study will be further disseminated in the institute through Academic Council, the Academic Standards and Quality Committee and other relevant fora.

4.2 Quality Enhancement Highlights
Analysis of quality enhancement activities that were initiated during the reporting period and which would be of interest to other institutions and would benefit from wider dissemination.

During the reporting period 2018-2019 there were many improvements made in the institute which impacted on Quality Assurance. Examples of enhancements which took place during this year are as follows:

1. Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT) was designated as a College of Sanctuary in recognition of a range of initiatives demonstrating a commitment to welcoming asylum seekers and refugees into the college community and fostering a culture of inclusion for all. The award was marked at a celebratory event held on campus which was attended by all of the stakeholders involved. The establishment of the AIT Institute of Sanctuary Scholarship Programme was announced. This programme will run on an annual basis and will comprise of six places on the AIT access programme, as well as 3 scholarships for undergraduate programmes in the Institute.

2. The Marketing Department launched a CAO2018 helpline to help applicants with their CAO 2018 application. Applicants can contact the AIT CAO Helpline from Monday 22nd January to February 1st with any queries in relation to the application process and they will be guided in the right direction.

3. The Institute has been part of a Network of HEIs that took part in the Carnegie Framework. This is a U.S. based foundation which assists HEIs in the area of engagement. The Institute was recently awarded with a Certificate of Recognition for the work it did with the foundation. The process was helpful in developing Community Engagement initiatives and forging stronger links with community groups.

4. The Human Resources Department held an Employee Awareness Day on 30th October 2018. The theme of the event was to create an internal community culture in AIT where employees feel appreciated, motivated, engaged and proud of being part of a workplace that feels

inclusive. The inaugural event was a huge success with over 200 staff engaging with HR on the day. Other departments that participated were the Library, Healthy Campus and Sports Co. One of the actions on the day was to highlight the level of community involvement by staff members in AIT. HR has identified over 40 charities that AIT staff are involved which equates to hundreds of hours of voluntary work per year. Human Resources also had a suggestions box for staff.

5. Students studying at Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT) are the most satisfied in Ireland, according to The Sunday Times Good University Guide 2019. The Good University Guide, now in its 17th year, is Ireland's only league table ranking the country's 21 higher education institutes against one another.

6. More than 400 students from ten secondary schools around the Midlands attended special Leaving Certificate workshops in Athlone Institute of Technology's Faculty of Engineering and Informatics on the 12th and 13th of December 2018. The workshops, which ran for two days, focused on special subject areas like Engineering Technology and Construction
Studies and were designed to support students in their preparation for Leaving Certificate exams in these areas. Over the course of the programme, each group of students attended four workshops consisting of a series of lectures and laboratory demonstrations. Those studying Construction Studies attended workshops in Building Information Modelling, Water Quality, Hydraulics, U Values and Concrete Testing, while students studying Engineering Technology covered areas like Polymer Physics, Automation and Control and Polymer Processing.

7. The Science Undergraduate Research Experience (SURE) Network was awarded the Best Academic Partnership Award at the 2019 Education Awards which was held in the Ballsbridge Hotel, Dublin on the 21st February 2019. Launched in 2017, the Education Awards recognise, encourage and celebrate excellence in the third level education sector in Ireland. The SURE Network was selected from a wide range of international and national nominees to receive the highly competitive accolade of the Best Academic Partnership Award.

8. On Friday April 5th 2019, the AIT Institutional Repository was launched. This event was very well attended by researchers and staff from within AIT and also by education staff and

Librarians from other institutions. There was also a large social media reaction and interest to the launch, from other institutes and libraries throughout Ireland.

The repository will collect, preserve, and disseminate digital copies of this intellectual output of AIT while representing the centralisation of research and scholarly output under the domain of the institute library. The new repository will also facilitate compliance with the National Open Research Forum (NORF) call for research producing organisations to support open access by making work available in a repository and enable researchers to meet funding stipulations from major funding agencies, such as Horizon 2020, who increasingly have open access requirements pertaining to the publication of research.

9. Athlone Institute of Technology has become the first Institute of technology and eight higher education institute to formally accede to AMBER, a prestigious SFI-funded research centre headquartered at Trinity College Dublin. Athlone Institute of Technology's involvement with the centre is expected to drive advances in materials science and engineering and translate research excellence into new products and technologies for society and solutions for industry.

10. The Faculty of Engineering & Informatics underwent a thematic restructuring in September to align provision along core offerings and to provide support to growing areas. As a result, the Faculty Departments have been altered; Breda Lynch has been appointed Head of Department of Polymer, Mechanical & Design, Joe Lawless remains Head of Department for Civil Engineering & Trades and Dr Enda Fallon has been appointed Head of Department of Electronics & Informatics. To coincide with the restructure of Departments a state of the art Animation Studio opened in the Engineering Building to support Design and Animation programmes. The studio contains bespoke workspaces and shelving for 30 students.

11. AIT hosts global conference on Pupils' Attitudes Towards Technology from 18th – 21st June 2018. More than 60 Higher Education Institutes with delegates spanning 15 countries and five continents participated in PATT36 hosted by Athlone Institute of Technology. Organised by the Technology Education Research Group (TERG), PATT, as a community, endeavours to put the enhancement of pupil experience and the culmination of a plurality of perspectives at its centre. The conference, aimed at helping teachers improve their teaching through design and technology, examined the role of research and practice in technology education from the

perspective of human capacity and development. In total, more than 70 papers were presented showcasing the richness of technology education in Ireland and abroad. The conference was opened by Minister of State for Higher Education, Mary Mitchell O'Connor, who spoke about the importance of realising "the potential of digital technology to enhance teaching, learning and assessment" so as to "help students become engaged thinkers, active learners, knowledge constructors and global citizens". "The development of these skills is critical for our young people and in an increasingly digital landscape they will define their future prospects in life," she said. In his keynote address on the importance of "cultivating imagination and innovation" specifically in the context of the Leaving Certificate examination former Assistant Head of the Irish State Examination Commission, Sean Ó'Broin, echoed the Minister's sentiments.

12. Ireland's first conference "SURE Conference" dedicated to promoting STEM research in the technological higher education sector was held at Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT), Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) and Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) simultaneously on Friday 28th September, attracting crowds of more than 200 third level students. At AIT, some thirty recent STEM graduates from AIT, GalwayMayo Institute (GMIT) and Institute of Technology Sligo (IT Sligo) delivered a range of oral and poster presentations showcasing the depth and breadth of research happening at undergraduate level in Ireland. The conference's national opening ceremony was held at AIT and live streamed to the other conference venues in Dublin and Waterford. Minister Kevin 'Boxer' Moran was in attendance to officially kick off the ceremony following an opening address by President of Athlone Institute of Technology, Professor Ciarán Ó Catháin.

13. The Department of Sport and Health Science in AIT was proud to host the 5th All-Ireland Postgraduate Conference in Sport Sciences, Physical Activity and Physical Education which took take place on Friday, May 10th, 2019. The overall theme of this conference was 'network to progress' where postgraduate students from third level Institutes across Ireland can come together to present their work, share their learning, and build partnerships in their chosen discipline. Research was presented in the following core areas; Sport Performance, Physical Activity and Physical Education, Injury Prevention and Rehabilitation and Exercise and Health. Awards were presented for oral and poster presentations across these areas. There were

three keynote sessions throughout the day, from Dr Brendan Egan who holds a position as Associate Professor of Sport and Exercise Physiology in the School of Health and Human Performance at Dublin City University; Dr Kate Kirby, Head of Performance Psychology at the Sport Ireland Institute and Robin Healy, AIT Staff Member who had recently completed his PhD in resistance training for sprint athletes. The audience comprised of postgraduate students from across 10 third level institutes in Ireland (WIT, UL, DCU, Carlow IT, Cork IT, UU, GMIT, LIT, Mary I, UCC) with some academic staff in attendance as well. The conference presented an excellent opportunity for students in the discipline to meet, network and build a community of researchers moving forward.

14. AIT Successfully hosted the 43rd Institute of Chemistry of Ireland Congress 'Congress on Drug Development, Delivery and Manufacturing' May 24th, 2018. The conference, which convenes on an annual basis, featured a range of oral and poster presentations, as well as a trade exhibition. Academics and researchers from across the country spoke at the event highlighting the breadth of the research taking place in Ireland in the Pharmaceutical and Medical Device industry. Topical subject matters such as Green Chemistry (the design of chemical products and processes that reduce or eliminate the use or generation of hazardous substances) were discussed as were issues related to contamination and purity. Speakers also detailed the challenges surrounding commercialisation and current and future legislation issues.

15. In April 2019 Mary Mulryan from the Institute Library took home first prize in the poster competition at #laicilip19 Mary's poster was entitled 'Engaging & Informing Students with Disabilities - Inclusiveness and Information'.
https://research.thea.ie/bitstream/handle/20.500.12065/2619/2019%20LAI%20Poster_mary mulryan%20-%20Final%20AIT%20-%20CC%20Irl.pdf?sequence=7&isAllowed=y

16. During the Academic Year 2018-2019 an AIT Customer Service Charter was implemented. https://www.ait.ie/about-ait/customer-service/customer-service-charter. This Quality of Service Charter enables the clear communication of our commitment to the delivery of education and services as part of the fulfilment of a framework for effective governance. The standards articulated in this charter are linked to the foundational Priorities of Quality Culture

Enhancement and Excellence in Operation and Governance outlined in our Mission-based Performance Compact 2018-2021 and the forthcoming Strategic Plan 2019-2023.

Part 5: Objectives for the coming year

Part 5 provides information about plans for quality assurance in the institution for the academic year following the reporting period.

5.1 Quality Assurance and Enhancement System Plans
Plans for quality assurance and quality enhancement relating to strategic objectives for the next reporting period.

The reporting period saw significant investment in the development of the new strategic plan (https://www.**ait**.ie/about-**ait/strategic-plan**) finalised in September 2019 and a number of thematic areas for development were identified and planned.

As set out through the enablers in our Strategic Plan our operational framework captures the following objectives:

- Having identified the thematic areas and critical variable we now want to further develop our reporting schedules and critical data to align with decision-making timelines.

- Building on the existing student dashboards (programmes, CAO and Studentsurvey.ie) we plan to develop a more comprehensive suite of datasets, managed and mediated by central digital technologies, to ensure improved decision making.

- Implement Power BI as a central data management system, to align Compact, Strategic Plan, Risk Register, Internal Control Framework and Health and Safety, review and exploit digital technologies.

The foundational priority of quality, culture and enhancement from the Strategic Plan sets out to:

- Review pre-clearance procedures to qualify the impact of the process change on strategic dialogue at the Academic Strategy and Quality Committee.

Within the research and innovation priority of the Strategic Plan, Priority 1 commits to research excellence and aligns with:

- Systematically implementing the new structured research programme ensuring contemporary and relevant research provision.

- Design the governance and structures of the Graduate School, and relationship with the faculties and research institutes, we have now designed and will continue to implement the new structures.

The Educational Provision priorities as set out in the Strategic Plan priorities our responsiveness to industry and the development of the talent pipeline. Our aligned objectives are:

- In light of increased competitive provision (Springboard and Human Capital Initiative), review the function of the Faculty of Professional, Online, Distance and Continuous Learning, to ensure the agility of the institute's responsiveness.

- Development of a Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy for AIT in alignment with the AIT Strategic Plan.

- Following a review of FE provision and the TU agenda, a portfolio-based review is required to ensure the future position of our academic provision.

The strategic alignment of the Performance Compact and the New Strategic Plan supports the idea of connected activities. The thematic approach facilitates the use of transversal initiatives to achieve a coherent eco-system that links research, contemporary provision with 'best in class' learner experience.

5.2 Review Plans
A list of reviews within each category (module, programme, department/school, service delivery unit or faculty), as per the internal review cycle, planned for the next reporting period.

- In response to the New Strategic Plan 2019-2023, each functional area is required to have a Strategic Plan.

- All Collaboration/Articulation Agreements which are due for renewal will be reviewed in the context of Educational Provision Priority 3 (Academic Partnerships) and new Agreements signed.

- In line with our Equality Diversity and Inclusion theme of our Strategic Plan all policies and procedures will be reviewed.

- The establishment of the Quality Office and all associated structures and resources.

- The establishment of a Central Data Centre within the Quality Office, which will collate and manage reports such as CAO, ISSE and Attrition.

- To establish a centralised work placement office and digital system to manage and administer all work placement activities aligned with the academic departments.

- Accreditation of AIT Social Care programmes by CORU.

- Following Upgrade of the Academic Module Manager System, to AMM3, publishing a synopsised version of all programmes to the AIT website.

- Continuing to build research capacity and scale in line with the Institutes areas of research excellence and evolving research strengths.

- In line with the Strategic Plan, establish Thematic Reviews across the Institute in advance of Programmatic Review, to include work placement, student success, digital learning and access progression and transfer routes from apprenticeship to Level 10.

- Upgrading to latest version of Exam Scheduler.

- Implementation of GURU Academic systems package.

5.3 Other Plans

ISSE (Studentsurvey.ie)
Further analysis of ISSE will take place during the academic year 2019-2020 in order to further enhance all aspects of the student experience.

Athena Swan Submission
Work is currently taking place on the Athena Swan Application for the Bronze Award. It is hoped to have all documentation submitted during the academic year 2019-2020.

European University Consortium

Plan to identify and build partnership in order to submit a European University Consortium application for designation.

To seek approval from Governing Body to establish a TU consortium.

Exams Office:
- PWC carried out an audit in 2018/19. Continued implementation of changes based on recommendations will take place for 2019/2020.
- Implemented seating plans and pre-filled attendance registers to improve structure of exam sessions in 2018/19. Continued quality improvements throughout 2019/2020.
- Employment of shared service provider, Unijobs, in August 2019 for invigilation staff allowing more flexibility in scheduling and constant supply of suitable candidates.
- Introduced use of GOMEDI in Banner to facilitate load of additional needs requirements to exam scheduler increasing security of data and reducing risk of error from transcription.
- There are continued efforts to introduce a soft exam paper management system for handling examination papers from creation to printing with a view to increasing efficiency and security in the process.

For additional information on examinations AIT see the following link: https://www.ait.ie/life-at-ait/registry/examinations

Part 6: Periodic Review

Part 6 provides information that acts as a bridge between the AIQR and periodic external review.

6.1 The Institution and External Review
A description of the impacts of institutional review within the institution.

AIT is scheduled for an institutional review in 2023. Preparation for the review is supported by the identification of thematic priorities that form the basis for data, initiatives, and KPI's prior to the review event. Please see section 6.3 of this document for details of thematic focus.

6.2 Self-Reflection on Quality Assurance
A short evaluative and reflective summary of the overall impact of quality assurance in the reporting period or, over a more extensive period, in the review.

AIT continues to have robust QA processes and policies. This position has been strengthened during the reporting period with the addition of a number of new policies and a continuous review and development of existing policies and practices. The addition of data and the emphasis on utility of reports (with increased access to data by virtue of timey reports) forms a best practice approach to quality assurance and enhancement activities.

The student voice makes a significant contribution to the quality culture at AIT and is further strengthened by the internal ISSE report, Data dashboards, and NStep programme, for example.

The new strategic plan will support the development of more comprehensive data creation and reporting and links transversal initiatives that will collectively ensure QA assurance and enhancement.

6.3 Themes
Developmental themes of importance to the institution which will be relevant to periodic review.

Over the course of the 2014 – 2018 Strategic Plan, Athlone Institute of Technology has risen to its highest ranking in The Sunday Times Good University Guide league table, further eroding the traditional divide between the Universities and Institutes of Technology. AIT's appeal to students is evidenced in the findings of the Irish Survey of Student Engagement, with AIT's response rate continuing to be the highest in the country by a considerable margin at 69%, achieved via a partnership approach between the quality office, academic staff and the students' union.

The successful delivery on initiatives of *"Global Focus-Regional Impact"* Strategic Plan have to date provided a high-quality, student-centred educational experience with a strong focus on academic excellence; creating a "best in class" learning environment for the AIT learner. Additionally, the Institutes ability and strength in identifying areas of skills shortage and working with businesses to improve links between enterprise and academia have contributed to its graduates enjoying jobs success with 93% either employed, in training or in further study 6 months after graduation, which is a testament to AITs innovative approach and close links with industry.

AIT continue to be as ambitious for our Institution as we are for each of our students and our 2019-2023 Strategic Plan, currently in the write-up stage is being informed by internal and external stakeholders, including staff, students, industry, business, civic and cultural groups who are united in shaping our region and our future collectively.

The Institutes vision to be a contemporary, ambitious and engaged educational institute driven by impactful research and capable of changing practices and thinking worldwide, will be enabled by the successful delivery on the initiatives and priorities identified in the 2019-2023 Strategic Plan:

- To create agile and adaptable global graduates with the skills and competencies necessary to succeed in today's fast-moving innovation economy.

- To provide a high-quality, student-centred educational experience with a strong focus on academic excellence; creating a "best in class" learning environment.

- To champion an agenda of inclusivity and diversity within our institute, recognising its value in attracting top talent and unleashing a bright and upwardly mobile future for.

- To engage actively and impact fully with students, staff, businesses and our communities.

- To engage in research that changes practice and impacts on societal issues for future generations.

The Strategic Priorities for AIT going forward and aligned with regional and national strategy, are, that in providing a high-quality, student-centred educational experience with a strong focus on academic excellence; creating a "best in class" learning environment, we will produce agile and adaptable global graduates with the skills and competencies necessary to succeed in today's fast-moving innovation economy.