Learning Innovation Network
Eye on IT, Tralee

1. Introduction to IT, Tralee

The Institute of Technology, Tralee has been to the forefront of learning since its establishment and has since, gained a reputation as a centre of distinction for teaching, learning and research. Most recently, the Institute earned the runner-up spot in the Sunday Times University Guide 2010 in the Institute of Technology of the Year Award.

The Institute is a major contributor both nationally and regionally to economic, social and cultural development. Our courses and research are influenced by the needs of the world at large and are constantly refined to absorb the very latest developments and trends. Our strong links with external organisations and companies means that the Institute is delivering true competitive advantage to the business community.

The Institute of Technology, Tralee is committed to maintaining a high level of research activity and to further developing its collaborative links with industry and with educational and research institutions internationally.

The Shannon Consortium is a collaborative alliance between the Institute of Technology, Tralee (ITT), the University of Limerick (UL), Mary Immaculate College (MIC) and Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT) which aims to establish the Shannon region as a zone of excellence in teaching, learning and learner support. Since its establishment, the Shannon Consortium has successfully implemented and supported a wide range of initiatives and programmes.

Image Caption: ***Award Winning Sólás Building at the Institute of Technology, Tralee***

2. The Centre for Educational Development (CED)

The Institute of Technology, Tralee is committed to excellence in teaching and learning. The Centre for Educational Development (CED) at the Institute has been established to support and advance the areas of teaching, learning and learner support. The centre assists in the identification and dissemination of best practice through the formation of internal working groups as well as external consultation.

The CED works in collaboration with all departments across the Institute to support and enhance learning, teaching and educational development. The activities offered through the centre include:

- leading the Institute in developing a blended learning policy and strategy including training and support;
- supporting, enhancing and influencing academic practice at the Institute;
- advancing various projects as they relate to teaching and learning activity;
- facilitating the generation of pedagogical materials for excellence in teaching in partnership with the academic departments and appointed learning champions;
- administering and managing the annual Peer Support and Teaching Awards Programmes at the Institute in partnership with the Shannon Consortium;
- organising and developing CPD training for staff relevant to teaching and learning activity;
- developing postgraduate training support, where appropriate in partnership with Shannon Consortium partners;
- advancing the development of learner support initiatives as they relate to academic writing, learning styles diagnosis, languages, numeracy, communication and scientific competence for students;
- advancing the development of a Learning Support Unit (LSU) at the Institute;
- creating and encouraging discussion around relevant topics;
- development of formative evaluation instruments through which staff can self-assess and come to the CED for support and assistance if necessary.

Image Caption: ***Students availing of the new Library and Information Resource Centre at the Institute of Technology, Tralee***

2.a Learning Styles Diagnostics

IT, Tralee is the lead partner on the Learning Styles Diagnostics project within the Shannon Consortium partners. During orientation week the learning style preferences of all first year students in the region (ITT, LIT, UL) are assessed and analysed statistically. Excellence in the quality of teaching and learning in the region is a priority for the region and IT, Tralee taking the lead on this project places the Institute at the forefront of educational development.

The diagnostics tool used for this study is the Brent and Silvermann model. In September 2009 the project was rolled out to second level on a pilot basis. The third level data is analysed by course and this analysis is circulated to the teaching staff in

each institution. The second level data is analysed by subject. This analysis is circulated among teaching staff and CPD sessions are provided. This initiative with second level schools has not only enhanced the scope of the learning styles project but has also provided the perfect opportunity to work more closely with one of our main feeder schools.

2.b Staff CPD

Staff Development Days represent a unique approach to workplace learning by giving all staff the opportunity to exchange ideas and a forum for discussion regarding developments in teaching and learning.

The Institute's next Staff Development Day is planned for **17th December 2009.** The day will include presenters as follows:

Ann Healin, AHEAD will present on "*Practical strategies for teaching and accessing students with specific learning difficulties and other disabilities.*"

Conor Hartigan, Assistive Technology Assessment Centre, UL will deliver a presentation titled *"Accessible Formats and Documents."*

Martina Crehan. Learning & Teaching Centre, DIT will deliver a workshop on "*Exploring Formative Assessment*". The workshop will address some principles of good assessment practice, and provide some examples of good practice strategies related to these principles e.g.
In 2010, Staff Development Days are scheduled to take place on
Monday, 1st March 2010,
Tuesday, 2nd March 2010,
Thursday, 13th May 2010.

2.c Teaching Awards

Each year, the Institute recognises staff for their outstanding contribution to teaching. The Teaching Awards celebrate excellence in teaching and learning in the Institute.

Through a Teaching Awards process, the Shannon Consortium Institutions have collaborated to create new networks of teachers in higher education working together to reflect on their practice, gather meaningful evidence about the quality and nature of their teaching activities and apply the principles of best practice to their work as teachers in higher education.

The teaching awards are open to all academic staff in the Institute and involve an extremely rigorous process aimed at identifying outstanding teachers within the region.

At the beginning of each Academic Year the Institute calls for expressions of interest in the Awards process. On acceptance of a nomination, candidates will be invited to submit a detailed teaching portfolio that will be used as the basis of the ultimate award decision.

Candidate's participation in the process is facilitated through workshops and one to one support sessions. As part of the process, award candidates submit a DVD of their teaching and participate in a peer support session. Participants in the process receive ongoing support from consortium partners and International experts. Participants are recognised and awarded locally. The Regional Awards also hold an annual event

recognising and rewarding the participants. The monetary award received by participants is used to further their teaching endeavours.

The Peer Support Process is a voluntary system of collegiate support and advice that can help teachers at any stage in their career gain valuable insights about their teaching performance in a confidential, trusting and formative climate. At its simplest, it involves inviting a colleague into a lecture or tutorial and asking them to give you their insights about the delivery of material, the student experience, and other important teaching related factors including clarity, pace, learning outcomes, ideas and suggestions. The Peer Support Process is open to all lecturers in the Shannon Consortium and not just Teaching Award participants. IT, Tralee has a panel of trained peer observers and can also provide peer observers from partner Institutes if required.

Image Caption: ***Shannon Consortium Regional Award for Teaching Excellence in Higher Education 2009. L-R: Pictured at the 2009 Awards are IT, Tralee award recipients Anne Marie Courtney and Michael Crossan with Michael Carmody, President, IT, Tralee.***

2.d National Digital Learning Repository (NDLR)

The National Digital Learning Repository (NDLR) is a sectoral initiative, providing an online service and support to enable the sharing of digital learning content and teaching experience across all third level institutions. The project is part of the HEA's strategic initiative to support greater collaboration in e-learning within the higher education sector. All Irish Universities, Institutes of Technology, and associated colleges funded by the HEA have embarked on this collaborative partnership of sharing teaching and learning resources.

IT, Tralee has been a member of the NDLR for a number of years, providing staff with access to online resources and supporting Tralee in the development of its own e-learning material. In April 2009, Catherine Bruen from the NDLR presented to staff at the Institute an overview of the NDLR, its aims and objectives and the e-learning pilot project. Staff have been provided with individual accounts to the NDLR and interest in the use of the repository and the development of RLO's is growing.

2.e Young Entrepreneur Programme & Awards (YEP)

Entrepreneurship underpins the ethos of the Institute of Technology, Tralee and Shannon Development's Kerry Technology Park and global entrepreneur Jerry Kennelly, who collectively foster and promote entrepreneurship and enterprise in the local region. The differential factors of the programme are based on:

- multiple pedagogies used in its delivery;
- high profile, interactive events attracting Ireland's leading entrepreneurs;
- entrepreneur based seminar series;
- customised training programmes for teachers and lecturers;
- customised mentor briefing sessions;
- Certificate of Entrepreneurship awarded to participating students;
- applied learning and strong community involvement through a network of local mentor entrepreneurs;
- prestigious Awards Ceremony and Prizes for Young Entrepreneur of the Year and other prizes.

The Young Entrepreneur Programme & Awards programme aims to initiate the process of setting up your own business. Students engage in the process of developing a business plan for their own idea. Students apply their business knowledge and acumen in developing each stage of the business plan. They interact with and pitch their business idea to a panel of entrepreneurs on an ongoing basis throughout the programme. These entrepreneurs advise the students on 'Do's 'and 'Don'ts' of your first start-up and relevant entrepreneurial skills.

This is a unique programme which is the result of educators, state bodies, entrepreneurs, private sector companies and individuals pooling their resources for the common good. It focuses on teaching students the principles of setting up a business using multiple pedagogies including the case study method, applied theory, entrepreneurial DVDs, role playing, mentoring and reflective practice. A further pedagogy is also employed in the form of a seminar series as offered through The Blue Sky Day, Business Boot Camp and Business Plan workshop. All students at second level compete for the title of Young Entrepreneur of the Year – Second Level and all students at third level compete for the title of Young Entrepreneur of the Year – Third Level.

Image Caption: ***Winners of the 2009 Young Entrepreneur Programme and Awards L-R: Robert O'Shea, CBS, Tralee, Best Second Level Award; Aisling Ni Shúilleabháin, from Pobailscoil Chorca Dhuibhne, Dingle, Overall Winner and Tim Lane from the Institute of Technology, Tralee, Best Third Level Award***