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Executive Summary

LIT Vision and Strategy to 2020 describes teaching at LIT as one which embraces a distinctive and agile education philosophy. Strong emphasis is placed on an educational philosophy of active learning.

In support of that philosophy this strategy sets out major values and goals for teaching, learning and assessment in Limerick Institute of Technology. It was developed and is maintained, by the Academic Council Sub-Committee on Active Learning, Placement and International Dimensions in consultation with staff. It builds on the commitment in the LIT mission statement to “active learning through a fusion of theory and practice”.

VISION AND VALUES
The following values underpin this strategy:

1. Active Learning: LIT seeks to engage learners in activity which stimulates their interest and enhances their learning.
2. Learner-centred: LIT respects learner autonomy and is committed to helping learners to become independent managers of their own learning.
3. Authentic Experience: LIT seeks to align learning experiences in the Institute with the authentic world of practice.
4. Evidence Based Best Practice: LIT is committed to identifying and implementing best practice in teaching, learning and assessment through benchmarking and research.

LEARNERS AT LIT
Learners are at the core and focus of activity in LIT. Learner diversity is recognised and valued and LIT will reach out to new learner groups, by widening access routes and by providing flexible delivery methods. All learners will receive appropriate induction and support to help them develop as independent learners.

THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE
LIT will continue to offer programmes and modules that are responsive to societal and industrial needs and that reflect the interests of learner. There will be a focus on authentic performance and on the development of generic skills. Active learning methods will be used which engage learners and which help them to achieve specified learning outcomes. These methods will be described in an Active Learning Compendium to be shared throughout the Institute.

Staff will be encouraged to engage in research on best practice in teaching, learning and assessment. Also, steps will be taken to ensure that results from postgraduate research are fed back into undergraduate teaching, so that learners have the benefit of the most recent research findings in their discipline. LIT will seek opportunities to collaborate with other institutions or bodies where such collaborations enhance teaching, learning and assessment for learners at LIT.

ASSESSMENT AND LEARNING
LIT is committed to best practice in assessment. All assessment practices within LIT will be valid, fair and consistent, and appropriate to the outcomes with which they are linked. LIT promotes innovations in assessment which support active learning and authentic performance. Feedback on assessment will help learners to monitor their progress and take control of their learning.

STAFF SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT
This strategy depends on the abilities, knowledge, skills and commitment of staff. To ensure best practice in the development and delivery of programmes, new staff will receive induction in pedagogic techniques and flexible continuous professional development opportunities will be made available for all staff. Staff will be encouraged to engage with the scholarship of teaching and learning.

LEARNING RESOURCES AND FACILITIES
LIT seeks to create an environment which engages and enthuses learners and staff, and which is conducive to active learning. Learning spaces and facilities will be audited for their suitability for active learning. New developments and refurbishment activity in the Institute will take account of the need for configurable learning spaces for individual and group learning and top quality
library resources and learning technology. Technology based learning methodologies will be used to support innovative and flexible approaches to programme delivery.

IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING
Operational decisions within Schools, Departments and programme boards will take due regard of this strategy.

1. Introduction

This Teaching Learning and Assessment Strategy sets out major values and goals for teaching, learning and assessment in Limerick Institute of Technology. It is an integral part of LIT’s Vision and Strategy to 2020. Strategic Goal Two in the Academic Profile Domain states:

LIT has embraced a distinctive and agile educational philosophy, cognisant that our graduates will need to function in the regional workplace as well as the global workplace and wider community.

LIT has an educational philosophy of active learning which is described in its Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy document (TLA) and captured in the LIT Compendium of Active Learning Strategies available to all staff. LIT will continue to embed and implement this strategy in academic programme delivery and development across the wider organisation. LIT fosters creative, innovative and independent thinking and enhances employability prospects through equipping the learner with transferable skills as well as excellent knowledge and competencies in their own field.

This TLA Strategy of active learning is supported with appropriate facilities and technology and state of the art equipment and materials both inside the classroom and outside it, such as the Computer Centre and the Library and Information Resource Centre. Active learning can take place in any setting whether it is a laboratory, a studio, a work placement, a self-directed group or individual assignment accessed remotely, or an interactive lecture. Such facilities and technologies may include relevant Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and social or professional networking platforms. Staff development (such as further qualifications) in pedagogical approaches and diversity of learning styles underpin the TLA philosophy.

The Academic Council Sub-Committee on Active Learning, Placement and International Dimensions developed this document through a series of consultations amongst staff. Under the Institutes of Technology Acts 1992 to 2006, the Academic Council assists the Governing Body “in the planning, co-ordination, development and overseeing of the educational work of the Institute.” Through its sub-committees, the Academic Council develops the academic policies and strategies of the Institute. It is fitting, therefore, that the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy is firmly embedded into the Academic Council structures and processes. The Sub-Committee on Active Learning, Placement and International Dimensions elicited views of staff through meetings with programme boards and academic departments. This document is the result of these consultations.
2. Vision and Values

LIT commits itself to “Active learning through a fusion of theory and practice”. The following is the definition of Active Learning adopted by the Institute:

*Active Learning is a strategy which encourages students to be active participants in the learning process, and allows them to take ownership of their own education. Connecting theory and practice, students apply their learning and develop their understanding through problem-solving exercises, case studies, reflection and other activities. As an outcome, graduates are equipped to continuously develop personally and professionally.*

Active learning means that learners engage with the topic, exploring its relevance and deepening their understanding:

*LIT’s educational philosophy of active learning, therefore, is aimed both at the acquisition of deeper understanding and competency in the core area of study, and at the acquisition of generic skills so that we produce rounded graduates (Hinfelaar, p. 3).*

The following values underpin the LIT Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy:

1. **Active Learning:** LIT seeks to engage learners in activity which stimulates their interest and enhances their learning. A recurrent consideration in the educational approach at LIT is the question: “What is it that learners are doing, through which they may learn effectively?”

2. **Learner-centred:** LIT respects learner autonomy and is committed to helping learners to become independent managers of their own learning. The methods used in LIT promote structured independent learning and learner self-direction, while acknowledging and endeavouring to supply the necessary scaffolding and support that particular learners require from time to time.

3. **Authentic Experience:** LIT prepares learners to function as competent practitioners in various fields of practice, as laid down in the approved learning outcomes. It seeks to ensure that the learning experiences provided are aligned to the authentic world of practice.
4. Evidence Based Best Practice: LIT is committed to identifying best practice in teaching, learning and assessment through benchmarking and research and to implementing best practice for the benefit of learners at Higher Education Institutions.

3. Learners at LIT

Learners are at the core and focus of activity in LIT.

1. The increasing diversity of the learner population and the diversity of learner needs are recognised and valued.

2. LIT is committed to ongoing dialogue with learners to establish and respond to learner needs.

3. LIT will reach out to learner groups who have traditionally been under-represented in higher education, by widening access routes and by providing flexible delivery mechanisms.

4. Special attention will be paid to the first year experience, and particularly to the first few weeks of the first year, as a learner’s initial experience of higher education is crucial in determining the likelihood of future success.

5. LIT will continue to develop responsive support services to help address diverse barriers that learners face.

6. Learners vary in their abilities and in their previous experience of learning. The LIT approach will be supportive, engaging with learners at their current level and helping them to gain in confidence and competence.

7. Each learner is an individual in a learning community. LIT will endeavour to accommodate the particular characteristics and learning styles of individual learners.

8. LIT will continue to encourage learner peer support, to build a collaborative learning environment.

9. Because of prior experience and expectations, it cannot be assumed that new students will be ready and able to engage immediately with active learning approaches. New students will receive induction in approaches to active learning.

10. Learning support has as its main goal the development of independent learners.

In summary: LIT’s learner-centred approach acknowledges and values learner diversity, responds flexibly to learner needs, and seeks to build a community of confident, capable and independent learners.
4. The Learning Experience

LIT offers a range of programmes and modules to meet the societal and industrial needs of the region and to provide the community of learners with high quality learning opportunities:

1. LIT will continue to develop links and to consult with the community, and with industry and professional bodies, to inform the development and review of programmes and modules, to ensure that they are responsive to existing and emerging stakeholder needs.

2. Stakeholder needs will be translated into learning outcomes incorporating appropriate knowledge, skills and competencies, and focused on authentic performance.

3. Relevant generic and transferable skills will be integrated into the learning outcomes for each module and each programme, to ensure that learners emerge as mature and competent practitioners and citizens.

4. Subject to requirements for academic coherence, and to logistical and resource constraints, LIT will provide flexible routes to qualifications, providing for different modes of delivery and significant module choice, to facilitate learners in shaping their academic programme according to their needs and interests.

5. Staff are encouraged and supported to carry out research into good practice in teaching, learning and assessment.

6. Mechanisms will continue to be developed to effectively disseminate good practice within LIT, including results of staff research into teaching, learning and assessment practices.

7. Decisions concerning design and delivery of programmes and modules in LIT will be informed by a commitment to active learning, with methods chosen for their ability to engage learners and to help them to effectively achieve specified learning outcomes.

8. Active learning does not prescribe a particular method. Instead, it refers to any method where the learner is not passive, where the learner is encouraged to fully engage with the material. It can occur in a well-constructed lecture, tutorial and laboratory session. It is also exemplified in such practices as projects, teamwork, placements, exhibitions, visits, field trips, journals, discussion, crits (in LSAD), small group teaching, group work and games. LIT maintains an Active Learning Compendium to describe the range of active learning methods in use throughout the Institute and to be used as a resource by staff to support further development of such methods.

9. The Active Learning Compendium contains clear and practical accounts by LIT staff of proven active learning strategies and approaches used throughout the Institute. Colleagues can access the Compendium in order to view tips and guidance on how to develop, implement and assess particular approaches, and
to adopt and adapt ideas from the Compendium to use in their own modules/programmes.

10. It is recognised that best practice in active learning methods depends on subject and discipline, and on the ability and prior experience of the learner.

11. Programme and module specifications will make explicit reference to the active learning methodologies to be employed. The teaching and learning approaches used across modules within programmes Institute-wide will be considered on an annual basis through an Annual Programme Review (See Appendix 1).

12. LIT will continue to develop postgraduate programmes. Steps will be taken to ensure that results from postgraduate research are fed back into undergraduate teaching, so that learners have the benefit of the most recent research findings in their discipline.

13. LIT will seek opportunities to collaborate with other institutions or bodies where such collaborations enhance teaching, learning and assessment for learners at LIT.

In summary: Programmes at LIT will respond to identified needs and will reflect up to date research. Active learning methodologies will be employed which engage learners and which support the achievement of authentic performance-related learning outcomes.

5. Assessment and Learning

LIT is committed to best practice in assessment:

1. All assessment practices within LIT are valid, fair and consistent, and are appropriate to the outcomes with which they are linked.

2. Assessment practices in LIT will be reviewed to ensure that they correspond with best practice nationally and internationally.

3. A range of assessment approaches and assessment instruments will be employed. Specific approaches and instruments will be selected in particular cases to ensure alignment between assessment and learning outcomes and to ensure that assessment is appropriate to the requirements and level of the learners.

4. LIT promotes innovative methods in summative assessment, which support active learning and authentic performance, while maintaining standards of validity, fairness and consistency.

5. Assessment for learning (formative assessment) will be used extensively to provide timely and supportive feedback to learners from assessment activity.
6. Where appropriate, programmes will incorporate opportunities for formative self and peer assessment, in order to help learners monitor their progress and take control of their own learning.

7. The Active Learning Compendium will include recommendations for appropriate modes of assessment tailored to specific pedagogical approaches in active learning settings. Regard will also be had for a balanced range and mix of assessment methods as reflected in credits allocated.

8. The needs of learners with a disability will be accommodated in LIT assessment practices.

9. Innovative methods of assessment may pose some challenges to traditional practices, such as the handling of repeats, absences and deferrals. Clear procedures will be incorporated into existing policies described in the Institute’s Academic Council Regulations and Procedures for Taught Programmes (ACRP) for dealing appropriately and fairly with such cases.

In summary: Assessment practices within LIT will be valid, fair and consistent, and they will be aligned to learning outcomes. Innovation in assessment will support active learning and will help learners to take control of their learning.

6. Staff Support and Development

Effective implementation of this strategy is built on the knowledge, skills and commitment of the staff:

1. Induction training will be provided for all new teaching staff in active learning pedagogy.

2. Professional development opportunities will be provided for all staff on an ongoing basis in teaching, learning and assessment methodologies to ensure best practice in development, delivery, support and assessment.

3. Professional development will include both structured and accredited options as well as more informal opportunities.

4. Where possible, professional development opportunities will be available through flexible learning modes, to facilitate participation by all.

5. LIT will promote staff engagement with the scholarship of teaching and learning.

6. LIT will maintain and continue to develop the Active Learning Compendium as a key resource available online for staff, so that they will have active learning methodologies and innovative assessment methodologies at their fingertips. Many methodologies are transferable across Schools, Departments and academic discipline areas.

In summary: The success of this strategy depends on the abilities knowledge, skills and commitment of staff. Staff will be encouraged and supported to pursue professional
development opportunities in the area of teaching, learning and assessment methodologies and to engage with the scholarship of teaching and learning.

7. Learning Resources and Facilities

LIT seeks to create an environment which engages and enthuses learners and staff, and which is conducive to active learning:

1. An audit will be conducted of existing spaces and facilities to evaluate their appropriateness for active learning.

2. Decisions concerning the development of facilities and resources at LIT, for instance within the scope of the Campus Development Committee, will take due account of their value in promoting and supporting effective active learning.

3. In order to provide learning spaces which are focused on the needs of active learners, it will be necessary to develop increased amounts of configurable seminar rooms, independent study spaces, and spaces for learners to pursue group projects. New developments and refurbishment activity will take into account these requirements. An example of best practice in this respect is the new Library Information and Resource Centre (LIRC) which will incorporate space for active learning groups – small rooms which can be booked on a once-off basis.

4. Top quality library resources will continue to be provided for staff and learners.

5. LIT will continue to introduce and develop appropriate technology to support the learning process and make pedagogically sound and effective use of available technology.

6. Technology based learning methodologies, including the Institute’s virtual learning environment (VLE) will be used to support innovative and flexible approaches to programme delivery, and to provide access for full-time and part-time learners to relevant resources at a time and place that suits them.

In summary: Learning spaces, library facilities and learning technologies at LIT will be used to support effective, innovative and flexible approaches to programme delivery and to promote active learning.

8. Implementation and Monitoring

Each member of staff has a role in ensuring the implementation of this strategy.

1. Operational decisions with regard to new programme development and programmatic reviews and delivery modes within Schools, Departments and programme boards take due regard of the goals set out here.
2. Implementation will be monitored by the Academic Council Sub-Committee on Active Learning, Placement and International Dimensions, with periodic reporting on progress.

3. Implementation will be flexible and responsive to changing circumstances and changing needs.

9. References

This strategy references the following LIT internal documents:

- “The Educational Model for LIT – A Position Paper” By Dr Maria Hinfelaar, Director
- LIT Vision and Strategy to 2020
- Academic Council Regulations and Procedures for Taught Programmes (ACRP)
- LIT Research Degree Programme Regulations
APPENDIX 1

Annual Programme Reviews are held at the end of the academic year. The review is a critical self-evaluation of the programme. Different methods and structures are applied in the evaluation process based on year-, stream- or subject-groupings.

The Review process is based on information collated and presented by Lecturers relating to their modules as appropriate, which may include:

1. A module overview from the Lecturer. Typically this review centres on module content, continuous assessment (type, timing etc), cross modular opportunity and discussion of active learning techniques.
2. An analysis of the relevant facilities, resources and materials available for the module/programme.

Where appropriate, the review may also consider issues that have arisen at student feedback meetings and at Programme Boards. In addition the review may be informed by the most recent available statistics relating to the programme, which may include:

- CAO application data for that academic year, and trends over previous years
- Enrolment details for that academic year (including student numbers and entry points, where applicable), and trends over previous years
- Attrition rates for each year of the programme, and between years
- Award levels
- Student demographics (showing age, gender, nationality and student status breakdowns)