

Cork Institute of Technology's Erasmus Policy Statement 2014-2020

Overall Strategy

The Erasmus+ programme 2014-2020, prioritises investment in people, as a means of growth and prosperity for the region and beyond. Cork Institute of Technology's strategic vision [to be] "an internationally-recognised centre of excellence in the provision of career-focused education which produces effective, ethical professionals capable of entrepreneurship, innovation and creativity", acknowledges this priority. Consolidating and developing targeted internationalisation activities is one of the eight key strategic goals of the Cork Institute of Technology Strategic Plan. The need for HEIs to embrace internationalisation has never been greater. Inter alia, the increasing demand for international education, the globalisation of business, the ready availability of information and communication technologies, the pressure for higher education institutions to self-fund and the growing influence of some major world economies have, in the view of many commentators, positioned internationalisation centrally in the strategic thinking of many institutions.

Internationalisation is therefore central to many of CIT's ambitions. Knowledge and experience of international cultures and business environments is a key requirement for graduates in an increasingly internationalised world. To this end, CIT has long been engaged in the development of international relationships for the benefit of its students and other stakeholders. Over many years, CIT has developed strong relationships with international institutions (primarily in Europe and North America) which have provided student exchange and training opportunities, staff development avenues, and research collaboration mechanisms in an international context. In more recent years, CIT has broadened this activity through the development of a number of highly promising strategic relationships in India, China, the Middle East and South America, and looks forward to engaging with institutions from the Neighbouring countries through the Erasmus+ programme.

In line with the programme's aim of "putting a stronger focus on the crucial role of education and human capital for innovation by promoting education-business partnerships, targeting excellence in teaching and learning, employability and entrepreneurship", CIT will continue to establish and maintain significant and high quality strategic partnerships with selected overseas higher education institutions, which align with the Institute's innovation, research and entrepreneurship ecosystem. Priority is therefore given to signing bilateral agreements with HEIs where there is a strong possibility, not only of balanced two-way mobility, but also the potential for "added value" collaborations, such as mutually interesting research and curriculum development areas, as well as valuable industry training opportunities for students.

In addition to the continued development of strategic international partnerships, CIT continues to develop a number of deep and wide-ranging international dimensions to all of its core activities, at all levels of study, with the aim of developing graduates as global citizens who have the necessary abilities, confidence and cultural awareness skills to live, work, achieve and participate fully in an international environment. These include:

- Ensuring that all programmes (taught and research) incorporate appropriate international elements.
- A requirement that every academic department has a significant international dimension to its core activities.
- Achieving increased student and staff mobility with international partners.
- Developing additional international relationships with high quality partner institutions.
- Raising the profile of the Institute's international activities internationally.
- Expanding the extent of engagement outside of the EU.
- Extending CIT's embedded innovation research and entrepreneurship ecosystem to incorporate a significant international dimension.

CIT's portfolio of programmes has been developed to the highest international standards through its rigorous quality assurance processes. In addition, all programmes are available in modular format based on the European Credit Transfer System. The ongoing development of the European Higher Education area is supported and facilitated by ensuring that all CIT programmes are compliant with the EHEA and ECTS guidelines, facilitating mobility throughout Europe for both lifelong learning and future employment purposes.

Cork Institute of Technology was the first Institute of Technology in Ireland to introduce a joint BA Honours degree in Multimedia, with our partner institution, Hochschule Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences. The design of this joint award was a new development for the Irish Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) and the University of Applied Sciences in Darmstadt.

The success of this joint award arrangement provides the Institute with a tried and tested model on which to build similar arrangements with other partners and consortia across Europe and beyond, to provide further internationalisation opportunities for staff and students under the new Erasmus+ programme.

CIT's Strategy for the Organisation and Implementation of International (EU and non-EU) Cooperation Projects

Over the past 25 years, the Institute's involvement in the Socrates and LLP Erasmus programmes productive academic, cultural and research partnerships have been formed with institutions and enterprises in other EU member states and beyond, resulting in effective student and staff mobility and the development and implementation of research and innovation projects.

The Erasmus mobility programme has had a very positive impact on developing research partnerships and projects, primarily by facilitating peers from different institutions to engage in face-to-face discussions which might otherwise not have taken place. These discussions have been the critical factor in catalysing the partnerships that have led to research projects and collaborations. It is our experience that the physical –peer-to-peer interactions are considerably more productive than electronic methods of contact. Of the 120 Erasmus partnerships, approximately 20% have resulted in research collaborations which involve either staff or staff and students. Examples include Antwerp Maritime Academy, Universite Catholique de Louvain, Lahti University of Applied Sciences, IUT Paris 13, University of Vigo and Southampton Solent University. The largest programme of research is with Hochschule Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences, whereby the two institutions engage with about 30 jointly supervised PhD students and a number of successful applications for grants from international research funding competitions.

Achieving a balance between incoming and outgoing study exchanges presents an ongoing challenge, in common with other institutions in English first-language countries. The Institute's involvement in Erasmus Intensive Programmes, both as coordinator and partner, has created opportunities for larger numbers of short-term international experiences, which also have the potential of motivating students to undertake longer-term mobility exchanges. Increasing numbers of English language taught modules at partner institutions, as well as an integrated language strategy, will also have a positive impact on increasing participation rates.

The majority of CIT undergraduate/first cycle courses have an integral practical training element. Students are encouraged to use this opportunity to gain international professional experience, in preparation for careers which are likely to require international skills and competencies, whether graduates find work in Ireland or abroad. In recognition of the move towards a knowledge-based European economy, CIT has specifically developed partnerships with institutions which can provide networking opportunities for international high-quality work experience. Quality of placements is safeguarded not only in the careful sourcing of host organisations, but also in securing their commitment to honour the terms of the training agreements.

CIT's Erasmus mobility activity has traditionally been driven by highly motivated academic staff. Some of the most successful inter-institutional partnerships have their origins in the early Erasmus ICP networks, which demanded a high level of commitment from the academic staff involved. Erasmus staff mobility, whether in the context of lecturing visits, staff training, the organisation of future mobility activities, networking with industry, monitoring visits to students, or as intensive programme participants, is considered a very important aspect of staff development, and is facilitated by the Institute wherever possible. In particular, new and younger staff members are encouraged to participate in Erasmus exchanges. This successful model of international academic contact and collaboration is being followed in the development of extra-EU partnerships, with inter-partner institution exchange visits and the signing of MOU's.

Expected Impact of CIT's Participation in Erasmus on the overall Modernisation of the Institution

One of the key stated goals of the current CIT Strategic Plan is to offer high-quality and flexible programmes, through the expansion of the Institute's existing open/distance learning capabilities, and services, across all disciplines and levels. Through its flexible learning initiatives such as the CIT Extended Campus (www.cit.ie/extendedcampus) this development will enable significantly broader levels of participation (from less traditional groups) in third level education and achievement of higher education qualifications.

The Strategic Plan also prioritises the area of student retention, focusing on meaningful student consultation, followed by appropriate action, to achieve consistently high student satisfaction ratings. The successful outcome of this objective will have a positive impact on the completion rates of students, and consequently, the overall number of higher education graduates.

Another stated priority of both the Institute's Strategic Plan and Internationalisation Strategy, is to double the international student population by 2015.

A number of the Institute's key research groups include former Erasmus programme participants (both staff and students) who have been instrumental in developing CIT's research capacity. Without EU-funded education and training mobility programmes, such alliances would not have been possible.

Through the continued development of international and inter-cultural skills, competencies and experience in all programmes of study, the Institute can ensure that staff, students and graduates will continue to be equipped to participate in the international professional environment and the broader global society. Regular European Project meetings are held for staff members across the institution, who are involved in EU projects. At these meetings project coordinators present their projects to the other members of the group. Issues and concerns are raised and discussed and these discussions are often very beneficial to all attendees of the meetings. Some staff members have vast experience working with multiple EU partners while others may only be involved for the first time on an EU project.

Since the introduction of a modular and two-semester structure, arranging full-semester exchanges and integrated placement periods has become more straightforward. Some departments are now sending large groups of students abroad to do their placements, and this trend is set to continue, as more contacts are built up. It is widely acknowledged in the Institute that all students can benefit from internationalisation activities, particularly when many graduates will be seeking their first jobs abroad. Skills such as self-reliance in a new environment, cultural awareness, and professional development through experience of living and working in an international environment are essential assets for today's job seekers. The Institute will continue to prioritise the encouragement, mentoring and facilitation of higher numbers of students to gain an international experience, whether as Intensive Programme participants, semester exchanges or training periods spent abroad, in both EU and extra-EU countries.

Strengthening and extending research, innovation and entrepreneurship activities, is a key strategic priority. Research and innovation, which is consistent with, and complementary to, our overall mission, is an essential core activity. This research will inform and support all other activities including teaching and learning, as well as innovation, entrepreneurship and other enterprise support activities. Our research strategy focuses on developing expertise, critical mass and research excellence in specific disciplines. The Institute will continue to enhance and promote technology transfer activity through contract research, licensing and other such initiatives. Support mechanisms for new enterprises, such as CIT's on-campus Rubicon business incubation centre for new enterprises (www.rubiconcentre.ie) will be consolidated and entrepreneurship training will be expanded. The Institute has a target of increasing its researcher numbers and research activity and innovation output by 20% by 2015.

There is an EU Projects oversight function in the CIT Finance Office, which oversees and monitors EU Funded projects and reports to the Finance Committee and the Audit Committees of the Institute. CIT has also funded a post in the Office of the Vice President for Development to target, access and advise on EU funding opportunities. The Institute is in the process of diversifying its income sources through initiatives in online delivery, internationalisation and industry engagement. Income generated from these sources will be invested to support the implementation of the Institute's strategic plan, in which a central focus on expansion of CIT's international activity has been targeted. The Institute has recently appointed two new international office staff members to coordinate and support non-EU exchanges, collaborations and full time international student recruitment.