



Section 1

Background

1. INTRODUCTION

This first section of Letterkenny Institute of Technology's Quality Assurance Handbook sets out the operating environment relevant to quality assurance. The section details the Institute's Mission, Vision and Values together with the Institute's history in respect of both Quality Assurance and Delegated Authority. In addition, the legislative background for Quality Assurance and the important Institute committees and management posts are profiled.

2. QUALITY ASSURANCE HANDBOOK 2.0

Quality Assurance Handbook (QAH) version 2.0 was drafted to address Part One of the European Standards and Guideline for Quality Assurance (2005), the review of quality assurance undertaken for the Institutional Review (December 2008), and the Report of the HETAC Expert Panel (March 2009). Version 2.0 of the handbook reflects HETAC policies and procedures including Assessment and Standards (2009), Core Validation Policy and Criteria (2010), General Programme Validation Manual (2010) Provider Monitoring Policy and Procedures (2010) Effective Practice Guideline for External Examining (2010); and also represents an initial Institute response to the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 (2011)

The revised QAH also includes changes arising from the Institutes of Technology Act 2006, the adoption by the Institute of modularisation and semesterisation in 2007, and changes arising from the Institute's *Strategic Plan 2007-2013* (December 2007).

Previously when sections of the QAH were updated, the individual sections of the handbook were replaced and made available via the website. In this case all sections of the QAH are being revised and the documents are being formatted consistent with the Institute's new design template, for these reasons it was deemed appropriate to release the updated sections simultaneously as Version 2.0.

In terms of improving the readability of the QAH it was decided to combine a number of separate sections from QAH Version 1.2. This includes bringing sections A, B, D and E together and including them in a new Section 1 *Background*. Section F on *Course Boards* and Section J *Feedback from Learners* is brought together in a re-written Section 4 *Procedures and Guidelines for the Ongoing Monitoring of Programmes*. Section K *Feedback from Employers* is addressed in re-written Section 3 *Procedures and Guidelines for the Design and Validation of New Programmes* and Section 5 *Procedures and Guidelines for Regular Periodic Evaluation of Programmes*. The content of the previously large section on *Procedures and Guidelines for the Assessment of Learners*, which ran to 44 pages, is now addresses in a number of separate sections: Section 6 *Procedures and Guidelines for Assessment Planning*, Section 7 *Examination Procedures*, Section 8 *External Examiner Procedures* and Section 9 *Marks and Standards*. Additional changes will include the inclusion of Section 11 *Recognition of Prior Learning*.

3. MISSION, VISION AND VALUES

To reflect the Institute's appetite and preparedness for confronting emerging challenges; new Mission, Vision and Values statements were articulated in the Institute's second strategic plan, *Strategic Plan 2007-2013*, published in December 2007.

Mission

To continuously develop as an academic institution of international repute, serving regional and national needs and pursuing, in a collaborative fashion, an ambitious progressive agenda that delivers on the aspirations of its vibrant Institute population and its external stakeholders.

Vision

- To be the higher education institution of choice for a wide spectrum of learners on a broad range of employment-focused, high quality education and training programmes delivered in a supportive and increasingly innovative learning environment.
- To make a major contribution to the development of the region in partnership with stakeholders through the exploitation of research, innovation and enterprise.

Values

In achieving its mission the Institute is committed to continue to

- pursue an ambitious development agenda which will see continued growth in learner numbers, an enhanced portfolio of programmes and increased Institute capacity.
- improve the quality of programmes and the opportunities they offer learners.
- strengthen Institute competitiveness through innovation and change in partnership with staff.
- maintain and develop the learner centred ethos through working in conjunction with learners.
- work determinedly to meet relevant national policy objectives.
- consult and co-operate with stakeholders in our region to tailor service to meet their needs and the development of the region.
- enhance provision through collaboration with other higher education providers on an all-island basis.

4. LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

4.1 Regional Technical Colleges Acts

The Institutes of Technology are governed by the Regional Technical Colleges Act 1992, the Regional Technical Colleges (Amendment) Act 1994 and the Regional Technical Colleges (Amendment) Act 1999. The 1992 Act established the colleges, set out their functions, established the Governing Bodies and Academic Councils of the colleges, set out their functions and established the post of Director. The 1994 Act made provision for the appointment of a Commission in certain circumstances and amended the terms of appointment of Governing Bodies. The 1999 Act principally dealt with the establishment of the Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown.

The colleges when established in 1971 were titled Regional Technical Colleges. By Ministerial Order entitled the Regional Technical Colleges Act 1992 (Change of Name of College) Order 1998 the names of the colleges were changed to Institutes of Technology with effect from 28 January 1998.

4.2 Qualifications (Education And Training) Act, 1999

The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999 came into force in June 2001. The main objects of the Act are to:

- establish and develop standards of knowledge, skill or competence
- promote the quality of further education and training and higher education and training
- provide a system for co-ordinating and comparing education and training awards
- promote and maintain procedures for access, transfer and progression.

This Act established three bodies, the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) and the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC). Separate interdependent roles are set out in the Act for the NQAI, HETAC and FETAC. The objects of the Act are to be attained by co-operation between the three bodies with full co-operation from a range of other stakeholders.

The NQAI has three principal objects which are set out in the Act :

- the establishment and maintenance of a framework of qualifications for the development, recognition and award of qualifications based on standards of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired by the learners
- the establishment and promotion of the maintenance of the standards of awards of the further and higher education and training sector, other than in the universities
- the promotion and facilitation of access, transfer and progression throughout the span of education and training provision.

The Act requires the NQAI to establish and maintain a framework of qualifications based on standards of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired by learners. NQAI is also charged with responsibility to promote and facilitate access, transfer and progression for learners.

NQAI has published its policy on access, transfer and progression and launched the National Framework of Qualifications in October 2003. The framework is a ten level framework with higher education assigned to levels 6 to 10. Level 6 is shared with further education. As part of its determination, NQAI has decided on higher education award types at levels 6 to 10 as follows:

Level	Award Type
6	Higher Certificate
7	Ordinary Bachelor Degree
8	Honours Bachelor Degree
8	Higher Diploma
9	Masters Degree
9	Post-graduate Diploma
10	Doctoral Degree

HETAC makes awards for learning in a wide range of higher education and training institutions, including the Institutes of Technology (IoTs). HETAC is the successor to the National Council for Educational Awards (NCEA).

HETAC's main role is to set standards for named awards, validate programmes, make awards, agree and monitor Quality Assurance procedures and ensure fair and consistent assessment of learners.

Under section 29 of the Act, HETAC may delegate authority to make awards to recognised institutions. Under the Act recognised institutions currently comprise the IoTs.

FETAC makes awards for all learning in further education and training programmes, and has generally assumed the awarding functions of the former National Council for Vocational Awards (NCVA), FAS, Teagasc, the National Tourism Certification Board (CERT) and Bord Iascaigh Mhara.

FETAC's main role is to set standards for named awards, validate programmes, make awards, agree and monitor Quality Assurance procedures and ensure fair and consistent assessment of learners.

4.3 Institutes of Technology Act 2006

Institutes of Technology Act was passed by the Oireachtas and signed into law in 2006. The sections of the Act were commenced by Order of the Minister for Education and Science on 1 February 2007. The Institutes of Technology Act 2006 designates the Institutes of Technology and the Dublin Institute of Technology under the Higher Education Authority (HEA). The Act substantially amends the Regional Technical Colleges Acts 1992 to 2001 and the Dublin Institute of Technology Acts 1992 to 2001 and also amends the Higher Education Authority Act (HEA Act) 1971. The Act also designates the Tourism College, Killybegs (TCK) as a school of Letterkenny Institute of Technology.

While the Act primarily amends previous legislation it has a significant effect on the Institutes of Technology sector with many of the changes involving replacing the roles of the VEC and Department of Education and Science with the HEA. The Act provides for new arrangements whereby the HEA, rather than the VEC or the Department of Education and Science, will approve an Institute's budget and allocate funding from the overall allocation from the Department of Education and Skills.

The Act includes a specific provision requiring Institutes to contribute to the promotion of the economic, cultural and social development of the State and to respect the diversity of values, beliefs and traditions in Irish society.

In respect to strategic planning, the Act empowers the Governing Body of each Institute to require the Director/President to prepare a strategic plan for the college, to approve this plan and to provide a copy of it to the HEA and the Minister. In addition, the Act also requires the Director/President to prepare a statement of the policies of the college with regard to access for under-represented, disadvantaged and disabled persons and equality, including gender equality. The Governing Body will be required to approve this statement of policies.

An important aim of the Act is to provide for improved institutional governance at Governing Body level and give greater clarity to the respective oversight role of the Governing Body and management role of the President.

5. QUALITY ASSURANCE

Under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 the Institute shall "establish procedures for the purpose of further improving and maintaining the quality of education and training which is provided, organized or procured by" the Institute and shall agree these procedures with HETAC. In particular, Section 28 of the Act requires providers to establish quality assurance procedures and agree them with HETAC. The Act specifically requires providers to have procedures for "(a) evaluation at regular intervals ... of the programmes of education and training ... (b) evaluation by learners of that programme, and (c) evaluation of services related to that programme." In addition, there is the requirement under Section 23 of the Act, that the Institute "establish procedures for the assessment of

learners which are fair and consistent and for the purpose of compliance with standards determined” by HETAC.

Having examined each section of the handbook, the Academic Council agreed the final document for submission to HETAC on 16 June 2003. The documentation underwent some final editing and was submitted as Quality Assurance Handbook Version 1.0 to HETAC in early July 2003. The procedures in the Quality Assurance Handbook were framed to help embed a quality ethos within the Institute. The handbook developed from the previous collection of Institute Quality Assurance procedures placed Quality Assurance into a framework of continuous quality improvement. Version 1.0 of the handbook attached great importance to learner involvement, achieved through learner participation in committees with Quality Assurance responsibilities and systematic structures for capturing learners’ views. The handbook provided for learner representatives on the School Student Committee, Course Boards, and the Academic Council. Version 1.0 of the handbook put a system in place for providing essential programme information to learners.

The Institute’s commitment to self-study and peer review permeates version 1.0 of the handbook with external experts playing an important role in the development of the handbook. The HETAC evaluation of the Institute’s Quality Assurance submission culminated in a meeting of the HETAC Quality Assurance expert panel on 13 October 2003 where the procedures were agreed and a quality assurance certificate was issued to the Institute.

The Quality Assurance Handbook principally contained procedures for designing, monitoring and reviewing programmes and also procedures for the assessment of learners. In addition, the handbook contains learner disciplinary procedures and a complaint procedure for resolving learners’ concerns. Access to the handbook is in the first instance available electronically and in modular form at www.lyit.ie to facilitate wide accessibility, transparency and ongoing modifications. A summary of amendments to previous versions is also available at this address.

Quality Assurance is also seen as a central element in bringing together the higher education systems of the 45 signatories to the Bologna Process within a European Higher Education Area. The Berlin Communiqué of 19 September 2003, issued by the education ministers from the signatory countries, echoes the Qualifications Act in recognising that the primary responsibility for quality assurance resides with the providers. The Bergen Communiqué of 20 May 2005 adopted "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" as proposed by ENQA, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

6. DELEGATED AUTHORITY

The Institute applied to HETAC in January 2004 for delegated authority under Section 29 of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 to make its own awards up to Level 8 on the NFQ. A HETAC convened Evaluation Group visited the Institute on 27/28 of April 2004 and conducted a rigorous assessment of the Institute’s application. A HETAC Order in Council was communicated to the Institute on 27 September 2004 confirming that the Institute’s application for delegated authority had been successful. The Order in Council specifies the award types that the Institute receives delegated authority to make.

At the time of the Institute’s application for delegated authority in January 2004 the Institute had not commenced offering postgraduate taught programmes at Level 9 on the NFQ. HETAC policy in January

2004 only permitted the granting of delegated authority to include all programmes at a particular level on the NFQ. Following the change of policy by HETAC, to grant delegated authority for a subset of programmes at Level 9, and the development of the Institute's provision of postgraduate taught programmes, the Academic Council decided on 27 January 2006 to seek to extend delegated authority status to Level 9 taught programmes. An application was prepared and submitted to HETAC in June 2006. This second delegated authority evaluation took place in May 2007 and the Institute was granted the authority to make awards for all taught programmes in October 2007.

7. INSTITUTE STRUCTURES

7.1 Governing Body

The Governing Body of the Institute is established under Section 6 of the Regional Technical Colleges Act 1992 as amended by Section 4 of the Regional Technical Colleges (Amendment) Act 1994. Section 7 of the 1992 Act provides that "Save as otherwise provided by this Act, the Governing Body of a college shall manage and control the affairs of the college...". The 1992 Act gives the Institute the specific function of providing such courses of study as the Governing Body considers appropriate. It gives the Governing Body the function of approving annual programmes and budgets and determining numbers and terms of conditions of staff subject to the approval of the Minister.

The Governing Body consists of a Chairman and seventeen ordinary members and the Director of the Institute. The Chairman is appointed by the Minister for Education and Skills. The seventeen ordinary members are appointed by the Minister for Education and Skills on the recommendation of the Vocational Education Committee as follows:

- Six persons of whom at least three shall be members of a local authority nominated by the Vocational Educational Committee
- Two full-time members, one male and one female, of the academic staff of the institute elected by the academic staff in accordance with regulations made by the Governing Body
- One non-academic member of staff elected by the non-academic staff in accordance with regulations made by the Governing Body
- Two registered students, one male and one female, of the institute chosen in accordance with regulations made by the Governing Body
- One person nominated by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions
- Five persons nominated by the Vocational Educational Committee from nominations by organisations that the institute on the recommendation of the Academic Council considers require representation having regard to the activities of the institute.

There is a gender requirement that at least seven of those nominated are male and at least seven are female. The term of office of Governing Body members is five years with the exception of the two student representatives who are appointed annually.

7.2 Academic Council

Section 10 of the Regional Technical Colleges Act 1992 requires that each college has an Academic Council to:

- assist the Governing Body in the planning, co-ordination, development and overseeing of the educational work of the college, and
- protect, maintain and develop the academic standards of the courses and the activities of the college.

Meetings of the Academic Council are held approximately three times per semester.

The Governing Body is required to make regulations for the membership and terms of office of the Academic Council. The term of office, as set down in the Act, is three years.

Table 1 Membership of the Academic Council (Governing Body Tuesday, 10 June 2008)

1	President <i>ex-officio</i>
1	Registrar <i>ex-officio</i>
1	Head of Development <i>ex-officio</i>
4	Heads of School <i>ex-officio</i>
10	Heads of Department in Schools of Letterkenny Institute of Technology <i>ex-officio</i>
1	Librarian <i>ex-officio</i>
2	Students appointed by the governing body on the nomination of a student representative body recognised by the governing body for the purpose. The persons nominated shall at all times: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) be one male representative and one female representative (b) be registered students of the Letterkenny Institute of Technology or full-time (c) agree, in a letter accompanying their nomination, that they shall be deemed The Students Union in Letterkenny Institute of Technology, being the student representative body currently recognised by the Institute, shall be asked, through its President, to nominate two representatives in accordance with the foregoing.
1	person, being a member of the technical support staff, i.e. technician and craft assistant and attendant grades, elected by that staff in accordance with these regulations. A person elected to the academic council through this process shall be deemed to have resigned his/her place on ceasing to be employed by the Institute as a technician, craft assistant or attendant. The election shall provide for one alternate who will assume a place on the council should it be vacated for any reason by the person first elected.
22	persons, being members of the academic staff of the Institute [other than the Registrar, Heads of School, Heads of Department], 11 of whom shall be females and 11 males, who are employed on a permanent, full-time basis or who are required, during the period beginning on the 1st day of September in the preceding academic year and ending on the 31st day of August of that academic year, to teach not less than 280 time-tabled hours in the Institute, elected by that staff in accordance with these regulations. A person elected to the academic council through this process shall be deemed to have resigned her place on ceasing to be employed by the Institute as a member of the academic teaching staff. The election shall provide for eight alternates, four on the female list in order and four on the male list in order, who will assume any places on the council vacated for any reason by an elected academic staff member.
43	Total membership

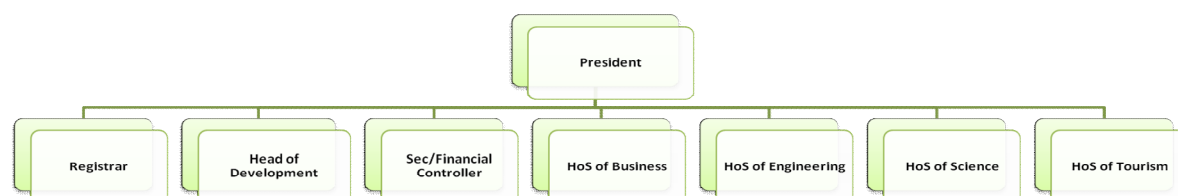
The Standing Committees in place are detailed in the Standing Orders of the Academic Council contained in Appendix 1.1.

7.3 Executive Board

The membership of the Executive Board is:

President, Registrar, Secretary/Financial Controller, Head of Development, Head of School of Business, Head of School of Engineering, Head of School of Science, and Head of School of Tourism.

Figure 1 Executive Board Organisational Chart

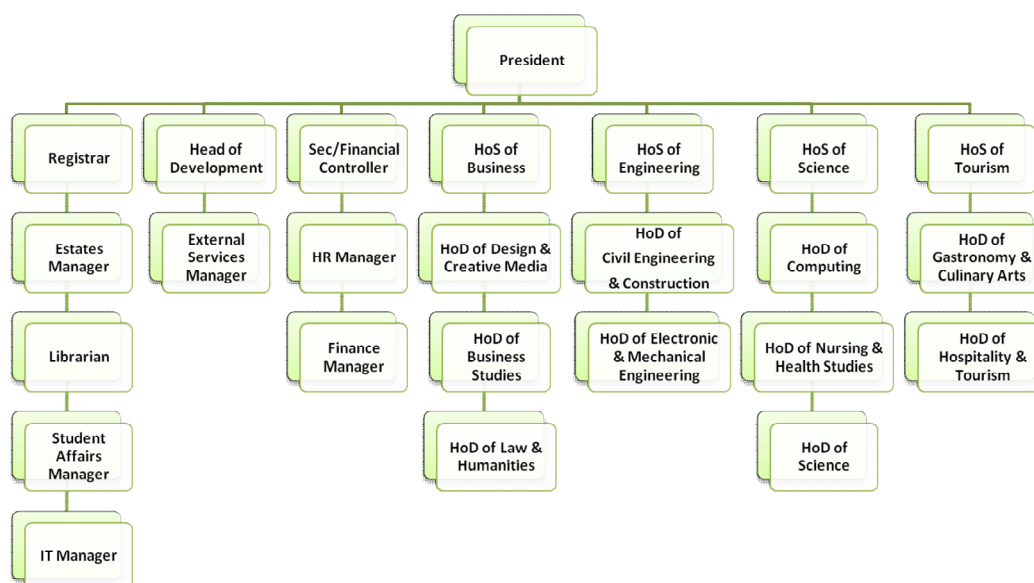


7.4 Executive Council

The membership of the Executive Council is as follows:

President, Registrar, Head of Development, Secretary/Financial Controller, Head of School of Business, Head of School of Engineering, Head of School of Science, Head of School of Tourism, Head of Department of Business Studies, Head of Department of Design and Creative Media, Head of Department of Law and Humanities, Head of Department of Civil Engineering and Construction, Head of Department of Electronics and Mechanical Engineering, Head of Department of Science, Head of Department of Computing, Head of Department of Nursing & Health Studies, Head of Department of Hospitality and Tourism, Head of Department of Gastronomy and Culinary Arts, Librarian, Human Resources Manager, Academic Administration & Student Affairs Manager, Estates Manager, Finance Manager, IT Manager and External Services Manager.

Figure 2 Executive Council Organisational Chart



8. INSTITUTE ROLES

8.1 President

The President is the chief officer of the college. The RTC Act provides that the President shall, subject to the provisions of the Act "control and direct the activities of the college and control and direct the staff of the college and be responsible to the Governing Body therefore and for the efficient and proper management of the college". The President is ex-officio a member of the Governing Body and is entitled to be a member of every committee appointed by the Governing Body. The President is ex-officio a member of the Academic Council of the college and, if present, presides at all meetings of the council and is entitled to be a member of every committee established by the council.

8.2 Registrar

The Registrar has an Institute-wide responsibility for academic affairs through a statutory Academic Council and also has an Institute-wide responsibility for services supportive of the academic programme. Registrar works directly with the Heads of School, Heads of Department and staff members in promoting the quality, relevance and development of the Institute's portfolio of programmes. Within the Registrar's purview is the more long-term planning of programmes and the work of the Academic Council.

Broad categories of responsibility for the post of Registrar include:

- Academic Council
- The Registry, which includes Learner Admission, Registration, Examinations and Learner Records
- Institute's portfolio of Programmes and Academic Planning
- Promotion of Academic Research and Scholarships
- Liaison with Accreditation Bodies, Quality Audits
- Joint Programmes with other Colleges, Institutes, Articulation and Learner Transfer/Exchange
- Learner Affairs/ Learner Discipline/Student Union
- Co-ordination of Staff Development
- Performance Indicators
- Schools Liaison and Promotion of the Institute's Programmes
- Library Services
- Co-ordination of Academic Computer Services
- Estates Office.

8.3 Head of Development

The Head of Development is responsible for the overall management of the Institute's research, consultancy, training/developmental work and related services. Head of Development is responsible for the external relations of the Institute in the context of its developmental role. The post holder oversees arrangements with other institutions inside or outside the State for the purpose of offering joint programmes of study and of engaging jointly in programmes of research, consultancy and developmental work appropriate to the Institute. The Head of Development makes arrangements to exploit any research, consultancy or development work undertaken by the Institute, either separately or jointly including participation in limited liability companies. The remit also involves playing a leading

role in promoting the Institute as an agent of development within its region and in the European Union and in promoting other international developmental Institute/industry projects. The Head of Development develops the framework whereby Institute facilities can be accessed by commercial entities, agencies and communities.

8.4 Secretary/Financial Controller

The duties of the Secretary/Financial Controller include responsibility for financial planning, budgetary allocation and control, the human resource function and administrative affairs of the Institute. The post holder is also responsible for the legal affairs of the Institute together with its insurance and health and safety obligations. The Secretary/Financial Controller is secretary to the Governing Body of the Institute.

8.5 Heads of School

Heads of School report directly to the President and have responsibility for the overall management of their Schools including:

Programmes

- Through the Head of Department manage the day-to-day operation of existing programmes.
- Encourage and supervise the development of new programmes.
- Organise the periodic review of existing programmes.

Administration

- Take part in overall institute management as a member of the Executive Board.
- Manage the academic staff, technical support staff and administrative staff within the School.
- Manage the overall School budget.
- Manage a staff development programme to ensure all staff have the appropriate skills.
- Coordinate the academic preparations for examinations.

Liaison

- Meet and liaise with Heads of School from other IoTs to assist with the national coordination of academic matters.
- Play a role within appropriate national bodies.

8.6 Heads of Department

Heads of Department reports to Heads of School and have a leading role in the academic direction of programmes at department level including teaching, research, academic assessment and academic administration. This includes managing and directing staff including timetabling and evaluating staff performance. The Head of Department acts as an advisor and leader in quality assurance issues and implements agreed quality assurance procedures regarding the design, monitoring and reviewing of programmes and the assessment of learners. The Head of Department works with the Head of School as part of a School executive to formulate School policy and is responsible for delivering the policy.

8.7 Librarian

The Librarian is responsible for delivering a quality and cost effective service to academic, learner and Institute users, both internal and external. This includes the provision of hardcopy and electronic material with support computers and printers. The Librarian is also responsible for providing a scholarly atmosphere conducive to quiet, reflective individual study as well as providing group study rooms for teamwork. The Librarian is assisted by the Deputy Librarian, Assistant Librarian, Systems

Librarian (responsible for the computer networks and agreed data-bases), Senior Library Assistant and currently two full-time and five part-time Library Assistants.

8.8 Academic Administration and Student Affairs Manager

Reporting to the Registrar, the Academic Administration and Student Affairs Manager is responsible for contributing to policy and procedures and for general management in the areas of student Admissions, Registration, Examinations, Learner Records/statistics (including certain Returns). The postholder also manages general recruitment activities such as Open day, Schools Liaison, Publication of Prospectus, Careers Exhibitions, etc. Management of general non-academic Student Services also fall into the remit of this post.

8.9 Estates Manager

The Estates Manager is responsible for the planning, development, use and maintenance of the Institute's own physical facilities and rented premises, land and infrastructure in accordance with Institute policy and procedures including implementation of the Campus Development Plan.

8.10 I.T. Manager

The IT Manager is responsible for Computer, Audio Visual, Communications, Telephony and Reprographics services. The post holder is responsible for the operational management of infrastructure and facilities through technicians/attendants and the tactical management of change and development.

8.11 External Services Manager

The External Services Manager reports to the Head of Development in the establishment, promotion and delivery of a range of services, in accordance with Institute policy and procedures, to industrial, commercial, and other organisations, aimed at supporting the maintenance and development of enterprises and employment and for the commercial use of Institute resources. The External Services Manager assists in the promotion and co-ordination of research and development (R&D), technology transfer and other industry interactions.

8.12 Human Resources Manager

The Human Resources Manager is responsible for all aspects of human resource management in the Institute including the development, implementation and co-ordination of policies and programmes relating to the recruitment and appointment of staff, employee relations, equality, staff training and development, superannuation, staff welfare, personnel administration, compliance with Employment Legislation and industrial relations.

8.13 Finance Manager

Reporting to the Secretary / Financial Controller, the Finance Manager is responsible for the preparation of annual statutory accounts, monthly management accounts, various tax returns, various returns to the Department of Education and Science, and the provision of financial reports to other funding bodies. The post holder is responsible for cash flow management, budget monitoring, maintenance and development of financial internal control procedures and the management of the finance and payroll systems of the Institute. In addition, the post holder has responsibility for the implementation of and compliance with legislation affecting the operations of the Institute's finance function, liaison with other Institute management and management of other Institutes of Technology, and liaison with external bodies (e.g. Comptroller and Auditor General, Banks, etc).