



CASE STUDIES

‘Shared Governance, Leadership and Regional Development – A Case Study’

**UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK AND LIMERICK
INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY¹**

¹ This case study report was prepared by Richard Thorn for the OECD in collaboration with staff members at the University of Limerick and Limerick Institute of Technology

INTRODUCTION

This case study shows how two of Ireland's higher education institutions, the University of Limerick and Limerick Institute of Technology have come together at the most senior leadership and governance levels to address issues of regional development and the sharing of services between the institutions.

In the mid 2000's the Irish Government, through the Higher Education Authority, established a Strategic Innovation Fund to promote collaborative innovation in all aspects of higher education in Ireland. Limerick Institute of Technology and the University of Limerick, together with other regional education partners, quickly established themselves as innovative and entrepreneurial adopters of the principles of the fund, and its finance, through the Shannon Consortium².

The publication of Ireland's *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* in 2011 has led to the Higher Education Authority using a process of strategic dialogue to agree institutional compacts with institutions within a Higher Education System Performance Framework established by the Department of Education and Skills. The performance framework lays out national priorities and key objectives, including the development of regional clusters, for the higher education system, achievement of which is built into each compact. Following evaluation, a portion of institutional funding is tied to achievement of objectives in the compact. Additionally, the *National Strategy* made provision for Institutes of Technology to become Technological Universities provided certain criteria were met.

Within the region relatively recent Government Agency and Local Authority reorganisation and amalgamations have resulted in what was an administratively fragmented region becoming more coherent and more able to address unemployment and social deprivation problems.

It is within the context of the Strategic Innovation Fund, the policy imperative to develop regional clusters, the provision for technological universities and the regional administration restructuring that the two institutions have established a successful collaborative approach to external regional challenges and internal opportunities for teaching, learning and shared services.

The University of Limerick and the Limerick Institute of Technology are public institutions. The University of Limerick was established as a University in 1989 having initially been created as a National Institute for Higher Education in the early 1970's. Limerick Institute of Technology was formally created in 1992 from the Limerick College of Arts, Commerce and technology (CoACT) which in turn had its origins in technical education institutes dating from the late 1900s. UL in 2012/2013 had 11,103 students of which 8847 (80%) were undergraduate and 2,256 (20%) were postgraduates. LIT had 4,984 students of which 4,816 (97%) were undergraduate and the balance post graduate.

The city that these two HEIs occupy has a troubled history of unemployment and social unrest. However, more recent years have seen the city become home to many multinational corporations and community (both corporate and social) engagement by these two institutions is a significant feature of their profiles. The close working relationship between the HEIs, as they address the challenges, has been developed and promoted at the most senior levels within

² The Shannon is the name of the river that flows through the city of Limerick.

the HEIs and accordingly the Case Study will focus on the **Leadership and Governance** dimension of the HEInnovate model.

The collaboration between the two institutions actively demonstrates the five statements in the HEInnovate ‘Leadership and Governance’ dimension. The statements are listed below and discussed in the body of the Case Study.

- Entrepreneurship is a major part of the HEI’s strategy.
- There is commitment at a high level to implementing the entrepreneurial agenda.
- There is a model in place for coordinating and integrating entrepreneurial activities across the HEI.
- The HEI encourages and supports faculties and units to act entrepreneurially.
- The HEI is a driving force for entrepreneurship and innovation in regional, social and community development.

In the case of statements two and three, the commitment and structures for coordinating entrepreneurial activities are jointly manifest in the arrangements that the HEIs have put in place and accordingly are dealt with together below.

Entrepreneurship is a major part of the HEI’s strategy.

The leadership in both Limerick Institute of Technology and the University of Limerick have given substance, at a strategic level, to their joint attempts to help address regional development issues and shared services opportunities. Their actions manifest themselves as jointly grasped opportunities, strategic plan statements and public commitment to their region.

- The joint bid (together with other regional partners) to the Strategic Innovation Fund, referred to above, in 2006 to establish a Shannon Consortium, arose directly as a result of the close personal working relationship between Dr. Maria Hinfelaar, President of Limerick Institute of Technology and Prof. Roger Downer³, then President of the University of Limerick. That working relationship addressed the strategic requirement to work cooperatively for the betterment of the Limerick region. It allowed the development of a comprehensive proposal for HEI’s in the region to work collaboratively in a number of areas including teaching and learning and shared procurement services. It should also be noted that Mary Immaculate College of Education is part of the Shannon Consortium. This Case Study focuses on the relationship between the two larger partners.
- Both Institutions, more recently (2011 to 2015 in the case of the University of Limerick and 2011 to 2020 in the case of Limerick Institute of Technology), have copper fastened the initial personally established relationships through strategy statement commitments to collaboration
 - ‘We will ..., sustain and extend the range of successful collaborations within the Shannon Consortium...’ (University of Limerick)

³ The close working relationship continued with the appointment of Prof. Don Barry as President of the university

- ‘LIT is committed to continuing collaborative relations with other providers of higher education within the region, in particular with the university sector through the Shannon Consortium. This consortium covers joint projects in access, teaching and learning innovations and efficiencies through joint procurement.’ (Limerick Institute of Technology)
- The strategic commitments have been complemented by regional commitment to the principles of supporting the growth and development of the region through both institutions being signatories⁴ to the Limerick Charter which commits the institutions, inter alia, to
 - ... re-build a thriving local economy that is given impetus by the knowledge and expertise of our brightest thinkers and innovators, that summons imagination and creativity, invites investment by our friends and partners, rewards commitment to vision, enriches the livelihoods of citizens in every quarter and community, and, especially, that renews and sustains the commercial lifeblood of our city’s heart;
 - ...uphold the value of learning and maximise equality of opportunity for education;
 - ...enhance mobility and the connectedness between people, communities, goods and services in our environs.

There is commitment at a high level to implementing the entrepreneurial agenda.

There is a model in place for coordinating and integrating entrepreneurial activities across the HEI.

Recognising that the joint work of the institutions needs to be led from the top a Memorandum of Understanding has been signed to cover the collaboration and structures have been established to ensure agreed programmes of work are implemented across the institutions.

- The Memorandum of Understanding for the Shannon Consortium (that also covers the joint work of the University of Limerick and Limerick Institute of Technology) establishes the aim of developing a deep and formalised alliance across a range of core areas including taught programmes, e-learning, teacher education, transfer/progression pathways, research programmes, enterprise and the community, shared services and facilities and promotion of the region.
- To oversee the collaborative arrangements a Steering Committee of Presidents⁵ has been established that meets every two months. This group has appointed an independent chair to oversee their deliberations. This group is supported by two other groups.

⁴ Together with Mary Immaculate College of Education, Limerick City and County Councils, Limerick Chamber of Commerce, Limerick Enterprise Development Partnership, Shannon Airport Authority and Shannon Foynes Port Company.

⁵ Please note that while this Case Study is concerned with the collaborative efforts of the University of Limerick and Limerick Institute of Technology a third institution has some involvement in the joint activities *viz* Mary Immaculate College of Education and so is represented in some fora.

- An Implementation Board that also meets every two months, shortly after the Steering Committee has met. This group consists of the three Vice Presidents (Academic) plus two other senior management representatives from each institution. The group is chaired on a rotating basis by the members.
- In turn, and as appropriate, working groups are responsible for progressing agreed actions.

The HEI encourages and supports faculties and units to act entrepreneurially.

The commitment and structures in place at leadership and governance levels have allowed a number of regionally important developments at faculty level to emerge.

- Limerick for IT is a regional partnership initiative that was set up to build a pipeline of job-ready graduates in IT areas of global/national shortage in partnership with industry, to provide accommodation suitable for such businesses at attractive rates and to support start-up businesses with local knowledge through the network. The members of the partnership include industry (General Motors, Johnson and Johnson, The Kerry Group), Limerick Institute of Technology and University of Limerick and Government Agencies (Limerick City and County Council and IDA Ireland). The initiative has used a variety of national labour market activation programmes to leverage national funding (e.g. Springboard, Springboard Plus and Momentum) as well as institutions' own resources. Promotion and delivery of the programmes is undertaken individually and collectively and, often, hosted and supported by industry. The success of the initiative is reflected in the fact that it has been cited as an example of best practise in the 2015 National Skills Strategy and one element of it (a specific collaboration between the University and General Motors has been developed as a UIIN (University Industry Innovation Network) best practice case study.
- Limerick for Engineering follows a similar model as that developed for Limerick for IT and is also a consortium based approach to ensuring that there will be a pipeline of engineers and technicians available in the region to support career opportunities.
- Following the success of the Limerick for IT and Limerick for Engineering initiatives it is now proposed to examine the possibility of a Limerick for Film initiative.

The previously noted initiatives are externally oriented. The collaboration has also resulted in significant internally oriented initiatives in teaching and learning, including research, and the development of shared services:

- There is an agreed plan in place to establish a National Institute for Studies in Education that will encompass all teacher education in the three Limerick HEI's. Already, Limerick Institute of Technology's Art and Design teacher education programme is under University of Limerick validation and some module sharing is taking place.
- A federated Limerick Graduate School is in the process of establishment with Doctorate validation through the university. This School will align policies and provision for generic doctoral training and Institute of technology students are now registered under the new arrangements.

- The Shannon Consortium has a well established track record in shared procurement of utilities with verified savings to the institutions. The Consortium also offers this service to other Irish HEIs. The Office of the Irish Comptroller and Auditor General conducted a detailed audit of Strategic Innovation Fund activities and concluded in respect of the Shannon Consortium that it was a ‘Best Practice Collaboration’ with significant reported savings to partners.

The HEI is a driving force for entrepreneurship and innovation in regional, social and community development.

The University and the Institute of Technology have not restricted their collaborative activities to teaching, learning and research. They have collaborated to ensure that national programmes for enterprise support are adopted in a manner that maximises effectiveness for the region.

- In 2012 Enterprise Ireland, the state agency responsible for supporting indigenous enterprise, established a Technology Transfer Strengthening Initiative. In essence this initiative provided for Technology Transfer Offices in the universities but not in the institutes of technology on the basis that the scale of research and innovation in those institutions did not justify such investment. In the Shannon region the University’s Technology Transfer Office has partnered with Limerick Institute of Technology and the Institute of Technology, Tralee to form the Midwest Technology Transfer Consortium. The aim of the Consortium is to share technology transfer resources and expertise to deliver a professional and responsive service to Industry, spin out companies and our academic communities.⁶
- In contrast to the Technology Transfer Strengthening Initiative which is University of Limerick based, the New Frontiers programme, which is also supported by Enterprise Ireland, is Limerick Institute of Technology based. This programme is designed to support emerging entrepreneurs in their attempts to establish themselves as high performance companies. The programme provides entrepreneurs with a package of supports including funding of €15,000, free office space, mentoring and workshops to help accelerate their business development. The aim is to equip participants with the skills and contacts they need to start and grow a company. The Institute leads the programme but collaborates with the University and the Institute of Technology in Tralee to ensure as wide a reach as possible for support for entrepreneurs.
- The Regional Action Plan for Jobs for 2015-2017 recognises the value of the Shannon Consortium activities by noting that it maps well against its administrative region ‘...for the purpose of the Action Plan for Jobs and the Regional Skills Forum, thus ensuring cohesion of objectives and implementation...’. The Regional Skills Forum noted in the quote is an integral part of the regional action plan for jobs and incorporates all the relevant education providers, industry and business representative groups.

⁶ In the most recent application for TTSI funding Institute of technology Tralee is not included as it now forms part of a regional cluster incorporating University College Cork and Cork Institute of Technology.

Impacts

The impact of the joint University of Limerick and Limerick Institute of Technology leadership and governance initiative has been evaluated in three independent processes. First, as part of the national academic quality control processes each institution has to undergo an Institutional review, the results of which are published. Second, a key component to the initiative laid out above was funding through the Strategic Innovation Fund and this was evaluated with results published. Third, as part of the strategic dialogue process the results of evaluations are published. To date there have been two rounds of review and the results have been published. In addition to the evaluations the joint activities have been cited as an example of best practice in the National Action Plan for Jobs published in 2015.

- Limerick Institute of Technology underwent an Institutional Review in 2010. The independent peer review panel made a number of commendations including specific ones relevant to this case study.
 - The proactive leadership being shown by LIT in responding to the economic downturn in the Limerick region.
 - The level of engagement by LIT, both formal and informal, with stakeholders in the region.
 - The collaborative work undertaken by LIT with the Shannon Consortium on joint projects such as staff development, procurement and other work.
- The University of Limerick underwent an Institutional Review in 2013 with the panel commenting favourably on the long tradition of ties with the local economy and community.
- The Strategic Innovation Fund, which was a key element to the initial success of the collaboration, was independently evaluated in 2010. The author notes that ‘The Shannon Consortium, consisting of UL, Limerick IT, IT Tralee and Mary Immaculate College, is a very successful collaboration that has become a brand name within its region’. He further notes that ‘Throughout its projects, it is evident that the partners can think as a group rather than just as individual institutions’.
- The Strategic Dialogue performance evaluation process reports very positively on the work of the university and the institute individually and collectively in their region.
 - The UL compact is very strong on job creation and support throughout most sections of the compact. This is a distinctive feature of UL, with a focus on placement, up-skilling, CPD and bespoke provision for employers, on commercialisation, on knowledge transfer.
 - The regional cluster is operational, performing strongly and has formal structures in place including an Independent Chair. The report is consistent with the information provided by the other two institutions in the cluster (UL and MIC).
 - There is a clear recognition of the contribution that the cluster is making to Limerick City and the Region.

- Steady progress appears to be taking place in relation to the Federated Limerick Graduate School
- Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025 published in 2105 cites Limerick for IT for its team based approach to the identification of future skills needs and the securing of mandates within the partner companies to further develop existing operations in Ireland.

Lessons Learned

- When the first round of funding in the Strategic Innovation Fund was announced in 2006 the fact that Dr. Maria Hinfelaar, the President of the Institute, and the then President of the University, Professor Roger Downer, had a close working relationship meant that they were able to immediately initiate a joint response. This relationship was continued with Professor Don Barry, Roger Downer's successor, and has ensured joint leadership from the top.
- The additional funding provided through the Strategic Innovation Fund was important in allowing for the development of the initiative in circumstances where few other resources would have been available.
- It has been necessary for both institutions to recognise the complementarity of their mission. However, it should also be recognised that the provision in the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 for Institutes of Technology to become Technological Universities would have required different partnership arrangements and would potentially have resulted in a dissolution of the Shannon Consortium. Likewise the strategic decision by LIT not to pursue Technological University is recognised as limiting the Institute's long term strategic options.
- The fact that the joint work is addressing real needs within the Limerick region helps to keep focus on the programme of initiatives.
- As the range and scale of collaborative work grows, particularly under the Limerick for IT brand, questions are emerging about the desirability of dedicated management and governance arrangements for the activity.

Contact:

Professor Mary Shire

Vice President Research, University of Limerick, Plassey, Limerick.

Telephone: 00353(0)61 213005

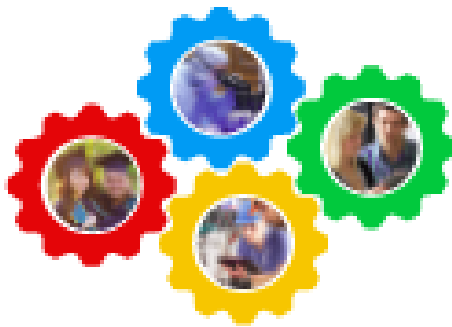
Email: vpresearch@ul.ie

Mr. Terry Twomey

Vice President Academic Affairs and Registrar, Limerick Institute of Technology

Telephone: 00353(0)61293000

Email: terry.twomey@lit.ie



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