



Athlone Institute of Technology Scheme 2020 - 2023

Under Section 15 of the Official Languages Act 2003

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This scheme was prepared under Section 15 of the Official Languages Act 2003 (hereinafter referred to as the Act) by AIT. Section 11 provides for the preparation by public bodies of a statutory scheme detailing the services they will provide:

- Through the medium of Irish,
- Through the medium of English, and
- Through the medium of Irish and English, and

the measures to be adopted to ensure that any service not provided by the body through the medium of the Irish language will be so provided within an agreed timeframe.

1.1 Guidelines for the Preparation of a Scheme

This scheme has been drawn up, having regard to the guidelines published by the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media and following consultation with staff, students and representative stakeholders. The Institute appreciates the time and effort put in by all concerned in this process.

1.2 The Content of the Language Scheme

The services provided in AIT are currently through the medium of English. The Institute has a limited number of staff with verbal competency in Irish and an even smaller number with written competency. The priorities of the scheme are to:

- Gauge and monitor the level of demand for services in the Irish language
- Create an awareness among staff of the content and purpose of the scheme
- Provide training for staff to develop competency in the Irish language
- Comply with the regulations of the Act
- Ensure effective implementation of the Scheme and that commitments given are delivered upon

1.3 Commencement Date of Scheme

The scheme has been confirmed by the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media and will commence with effect from 21 December 2020. The scheme will remain in force for a period of three years from this date or until a new scheme has been confirmed by the Minister pursuant to Section 15 of the Act, whichever is the later.

1.4 Overview of AIT

1.4.1 Vision Statement

Athlone Institute of Technology's vision is to be a contemporary and engaged technological university distinguished by outstanding learner experience, international focus and impactful applied research. Through the provision of student-centred, career-focussed education, training and applied research programmes for our diverse cohort of learners within a professional and supportive environment, it is our goal to lead the Midlands' continued social and economic growth for the benefit of the communities we serve and we are fully committed to intensive and impactful engagement with regional business, enterprise and our communities.

1.4.2 The Institute

Our Institute was established in 1970 as Athlone Regional Technical College (RTC) in the midst of an educational reform with the goal of providing technician level courses at both certificate and diploma level. We quickly outgrew the limitations of the RTC designation, which prompted a change in name and a shift in public perception towards the value of an applied, industry-focused education. We became an autonomous institution in 1993 and later, in 1998, were officially redesignated Athlone Institute of Technology. In 2004, we were awarded delegated authority to confer our own HETAC-accredited primary degree awards by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council. This was a pivotal moment in our development as an institute of higher learning and indicative of our consistent growth, evolution and ambition. In 1970, our student cohort consisted of 40 students, by 2000; it had increased to nearly 4,200. By 2018, more than 6,000 students were enrolled.

Since the launch of the Asia Strategy in 2000, Athlone Institute of Technology has been actively committed to facilitating the bilateral flow of students and staff between itself and its many international partner institutes for the purposes of academic and cultural enrichment. This is achieved through the promotion of international study and placement opportunities,

and international exchange programmes, highlighting the benefits of studying and working aboard.

With more than 185 students, China is by far the institute's largest non-EU market. Athlone Institute of Technology has developed a number of significant partnerships with Chinese universities focusing on key areas of growth, including mechanical engineering, accounting, design, pharmaceutical science and software engineering. The expansion and success of our institute is reflected in our increasingly globalized campus, which is home to students from 66 countries around the world, including 2,000 Chinese students studying in China on joint programmes approved by the Chinese Ministry of Education.

To cater for our rapidly increasing student numbers, we remodeled and modernised our original 1970 campus, providing new buildings for Sport and Recreation (1991), Hospitality Studies (2003), Nursing and Healthcare (2005) and later our Research HUB (2010) and a state-of-the-art International Arena which opened in 2013 to widespread acclaim and contains the country's first international-standard indoor athletics track.

Our brand new STEM building, which will create capacity for an additional 1000 students and 70 staff, is the latest in a period of considerable expansion. Expected to commence building shortly, this facility will enable us to meet the increased demand for STEM programmes such as pharma, biopharma and microbiology. Each of these developments will underpin our ambition of achieving technological university status.

Athlone Institute of Technology is home to knowledge creators, innovators and leaders. It is a beacon of collaborative, crosscutting research and an innovation partner of choice for industry, which is central to propelling Ireland's knowledge economy forward. We are firmly committed to further developing our world-leading applied research and development activities and continuing to be a catalyst for positive change.

AIT's vision is to positively disrupt future ways of living, learning and working, and to build new partnerships that strengthen innovation and create new and exciting opportunities for our communities. Our goal is to become a contemporary, vibrant and impactful technological university; a higher education institute that reflects the educational demands and economic needs of the Midlands Region and the community we serve.

Our challenge is to conceive a future that develops embraces and utilises new technologies and scientific understandings in a manner that enhances the way we live, learn and work. In doing so, we will continue to develop as a leader in applied knowledge creation and exchange; capable of conceiving, designing, implementing and operating futures yet to be realised.

Underpinning this vision, the formation of strategic European and global partnerships, with industry and academia will help develop and sustain our collaborative, crosscutting research and further enhance our capacity to enrich civic, social and cultural engagement while providing new and essential access and pathways for all learners.

We are ambitious in our resolve to afford learners opportunities previously unavailable in the region by delivering transformative education that defines new interdisciplinary competencies and presents a community of learners with access to limitless possibilities. As a catalyst for positive social change in the region, our vision is to extend these opportunities to non-traditional, professional and global learners through state-of-the-art online, flexible, and blended delivery modes. We have a clear vision for the future and the role we play in balancing the regional development of the Midlands Region.

1.4.3 Customers and Clients

The Institute's principal customers are its students to whom it has a particular duty of care. It also interacts with other educational institutions and agencies and the general public. Its key client and customer base comprises the following, but this list is not exclusive:

- Higher Education Authority (HEA)
- Department of Education and Skills
- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)
- The Technological Higher Education Association (THEA)
- Irish Research Council
- Midlands Gateway Chamber
- Education and Training Boards (formerly Vocational Education Committees)
- County Councils
- County Development Boards
- Enterprise Ireland
- IDA Ireland
- Cavan Institute
- Fáilte Ireland
- The Arts Council
- Engineers Ireland
- The Teaching Council
- Lionra

1.4.4 Main Functions

Function Area

President's Office

Department

International Office
Marketing and Communications
Human Resources
Commercial
Health, Safety & Wellbeing

Vice President Academic Affairs & Registry:

Quality Office
Library
Academic Admin.' & Student Affairs
Student Resource Centre
Learning & Teaching Unit
Computer Services
Graduate Studies

Vice President Financial & Corporate Affairs:

Finance
Estates
Information Technology
Sports Department
Information Compliance

Vice President Strategic Planning
& Institutional Performance

MIS Analysis
Equality and Diversity

Research

Midlands Innovation & Research Centre
Bioscience Research Institute
Materials Research Institute
Software Research Institute
Funded Programme Manager
Technology Transfer Office

Faculty of Business & Hospitality

Business & Management
Accounting and Business Computing
Hospitality, Tourism & Leisure

Faculty of Science & Health

Life and Physical Science

	Nursing & Health Science Sport and Health Science Social Science
Faculty of Engineering & Informatics	Polymer, Mechanical & Design Computer & Software Engineering Civil Engineering & Trades
Faculty of Continuing Professional Distance/Online Learning	Lifelong Learning Business Development Regional Skills

1.4.5 Assessment of Extent to which services are already available through Irish

The primary function of the Act is to ensure better availability and a higher standard of public services through Irish. The main function of AIT is to provide quality education programmes and at present, all programmes are delivered through English. Services to the general public, stakeholders and other agencies are also exclusively through English at the present time. Annual reports, financial accounts and headed notepaper are published bilingually, while pre-recorded oral announcements are also bi-lingual.

CHAPTER 2

SUMMARY OF SERVICES/ACTIVITIES BY DIVISION

2.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the position in relation to service provision/activities by individual departments within the Institute.

2.2 Registrar's Office

2.2.1 Library

The library of the Athlone Institute of Technology is situated on two campuses with the principal library located on the Main campus and the Nursing Library on the East Campus.

AIT Library represents a "Third Space" for students, staff and researchers. This positioning places the library alongside the lecture hall and home as the collaborative community space. It is a safe neutral space where students are enabled to develop critical thinking and knowledge evaluation skills. Working in consultation with our academic partners, we provide the print and electronic resources to support students in completing assignments, learning about their subject areas of interest and to explore beyond the reading list. The library is comprised of a team of information professionals who are engaged in the application of best practice for information support, etc. The AIT Repository is the cornerstone of research monitoring, engagement and promotion for our institution.

2.2.2 Academic Administration and Student Affairs

The Academic Administration and Student Affairs office is responsible for the management of the student life cycle, commencing with admission, through registration, fee collection and examination and culminating in the graduation of students. The office also has responsibility for timetabling, ID card production and the print room functions.

2.2.3 Information Technology

The Computer Services Department (CSD) is responsible for the maintenance of the Institute network, Internet connections, staff and student email, phone system, staff and student computers and management of site licenses for a range of software products. CSD is also responsible for the connection to the shared MIS systems –Core, Banner and Agresso.

2.2.4 Student Resource Centre

AIT offers a wide range of ancillary support services to students. The Student Resource Centre is one of the first ports of call for students seeking information and help on any aspect of student life. Services offered include Financial Support, Pastoral Care, Careers Advice and Coaching, Counselling, Disability and Learning Support Service, Access office, Health Centre, Health Promotion, Tutor Services and Academic Writing Centre.

First Year Experience

The Student Resource Centre runs a seven-week programme of events and supports for incoming first years; the 'AIT Connect' programme kicks off with New Student Induction and is built around student needs in transitioning to third level. These supports continue throughout their time in AIT and have been central in AIT's high student satisfaction levels as reported in the ISSE and awards such as the Sunday Times Institute of the Year.

2.2.5 Learning and Teaching Unit

The Unit is dedicated to the support and advancement of learning and teaching in AIT. The unit works collaboratively to continue to develop a culture that:

- Respects and supports individual differences among learners.
- Encourages the development of student-centered learning environments in which students can learn and excel.
- Values and rewards teaching.
- Supports staff in educational research.
- Assists with the dissemination of best practice in higher education.
- Encourages the implementation of pedagogical initiatives/innovations.
- Promotes and supports the objectives and measures outlined in the Institute Strategic Plan, which relate to excellence and innovation in Learning and Teaching.

2.2.6 Sports Department

The Sports Department is the coordinating function for the institute's multiple sports teams and activities. A full range of sports is catered for at both elite and recreational level with a focus on gender balance for the provision of these activities. Our teams compete in third level competitions organised by the national governing bodies of these sports and in competitions organised by Student Sport Ireland, the governing body for third level sport on the island of Ireland. AIT Sports Co Ltd., in co-operation with the sports department, operate IAAF approved outdoor and indoor athletics tracks, a full size FIFA approved artificial soccer pitch, a full size GAA pitch, and an adjacent grass training pitch. Our multipurpose sports centre contains a basketball court, four badminton courts, two volleyball courts, futsal (indoor soccer) and a state-of-the-art fitness suite. A cross-country trail exists around the campus outdoor facilities. A picturesque local greenway 'Old Railway Trail', which is utilised by walkers, runners and cyclists lies less than 1km from the campus and this trail extends east for 40km. The sports department manages AIT's sports scholarship scheme, which rewards and supports excellence in performance. The Scholarship operates on two levels. A Gold Scholarship is worth up to the value of €1,000 in supports which include use of our sports facilities, physical therapy, one on one strength & conditioning coaching, functional screening assessments, cookery demonstrations, academic support, nutritional advice, lifestyle management and sports psychology. An Academy level scholarship includes many of the supports listed above for those aspiring to the Gold level. Each institute coach report to their relevant development officer and/or the Sport & Recreation Manager or the Assistant Sports Officer. Development Officers support the following sports: Gaelic Games, Camogie, Soccer, Rugby and Athletics.

2.3 Finance/HR Office

The Finance Office is responsible for all procurement and payment and consequently advertises contracts, produces tender documents, pays invoices, salaries and prepares the annual accounts.

The Human Resources Department is responsible for advertising staff vacancies, production of job descriptions and person specifications and arranging interviews. It is also responsible for staff welfare and discipline. The Professional Development Committee supports the Institute's goal of ensuring that staff have the opportunity to train and upskill as necessary to deliver effectively on given targets. The HR Department can offer the option to receive pay slips in Irish should it be requested by a staff member.

2.4 Faculties

The Faculties undertake the core activity of the Institute. Programmes are provided in a wide range of disciplines under the auspices of the four Faculties: Business and Hospitality, Engineering and Informatics, Science and Health, Continuing, Professional, Online & Distance Learning. All programmes of study are delivered and assessed through English and there is no evidence of a demand for the provision of any course material through Irish.

2.5 Office of Research, Innovation and Enterprise

AIT has three strategic research institutes in Materials (MRI), Biosciences (BRI) and Software (SRI) whose research thrusts are aligned with key regional and national priorities. The establishment of Enterprise Ireland-funded Technology Gateways Programmes – the Applied Polymer Technologies Ireland (APT Ireland) and COMAND (Connected Media Application Design and Delivery) Technology Gateway centres – further strengthen the existing support for strategic industry collaborations in the Polymer and ICT space.

The Midlands Innovation and Research Centre at Athlone Institute of Technology - working in partnership with Enterprise Ireland - provides incubation and business support for innovative start-ups, delivers the New Frontiers entrepreneur development programme in collaboration with Maynooth University, and makes available the resources and expertise of AIT to support client companies and enterprise in the region.

2.6 Marketing and Communications Department

Athlone Institute of Technology's Marketing and Communications Department engages its multiple stakeholders through a variety of mediums, including print, broadcast, online and social, and uses the PESO model (paid, earned, shared and owned media) as a vehicle for reputation management and brand advocacy. Together with its design and student recruitment arm, the department is tasked with helping the institute achieve brand salience nationally and internationally with the goal of boosting student numbers and attracting and retaining top talent – ultimately ensuring the continued prosperity of the Midlands region.

CHAPTER 3

ENHANCEMENT OF SERVICES TO BE PROVIDED BILINGUALLY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter sets out the position in relation to service provision enhancement through the Irish medium by individual divisions within the Institute. AIT accepts that service provision in Irish should be introduced incrementally. However, AIT does not predict a demand for course provision in Irish and understands that other third-level institutions, some of which are located in Gaeltacht areas, are collaborating to form a unified approach to such provision. AIT is supportive of this collaboration; however, it does not foresee that it will play a role in this provision during the lifetime of this scheme.

3.1 Means of Communication with the Public

The Institute's communication with the public is largely via the following media and at present is through the English language.

- Prospectus
- Application forms/Brochures/Information leaflets
- Miscellaneous publications
- Website
- Email
- Letter
- Oral Communication
- Public relations.

An exception to this is the use of bi-lingual invitation cards to all Institute official events. The following commitments are being made in respect of this language scheme.

3.1.1 Prospectus

AIT does not produce the entire prospectus bilingually, nor do we envisage that we will during the lifetime of this scheme. However, section headings and programme titles contained in the prospectus are produced bilingually. Material particularly aimed at the international market will continue to be delivered in the language appropriate for the market. All direct applications for undergraduate and postgraduate students are now online with direct link into the Banner system. There has been no reprint of application forms and as all applications are now online, no further plans for re-print.

Brochures and information leaflets will be published in English only. Consultants' reports and dedicated technical reports will be published in the language in which they were originally presented.

3.1.2 Miscellaneous Publications

The graduation booklet is published in time for the graduation ceremony, mainly listing students and their award. The following sections are produced bilingually:

- Introductory pages
- Titles of courses and programmes

3.1.3 Website

The content management system underlying AIT's website has the capacity to display information bilingually. The Institutes' website is currently under review and being updated. Headline content of the website will be available in both English and Irish. Material particularly aimed at the international market will continue to be delivered in the language appropriate for the market.

The Athlone Institute of Technology Scheme 2020 - 2023, together with the Official Languages Act 2001 Guidebook, is published on our website under the following link, once approved.

<https://www.ait.ie/contact/staff/official-languages-act/>

3.1.4 Email

The email disclaimer is displayed in both Irish and English

3.1.5 General Correspondence

The institute will respond in the same language when a person communicates in writing through Irish.

3.1.6 Oral Announcements

Pre-recorded oral announcements are bilingual.

3.1.7 Reception Operation

Our main reception telephone greeting has the Irish language options applied. Reception staff are made aware of the contact details for the nominated spokesperson in the event of a query to them in the Irish language and that they can put members of the public in touch with the official responsible without delay. If the official is unavailable, the following options will be offered:

- Calling back when an Iris speaker is available
- Conducting business through another member of staff providing a translation service
- Continuing to conduct business in English

Reception staff will be provided with an up to date list of staff members who can provide a service through Irish.

3.1.8 Public relations

All press releases pertaining to Irish language issues will be issued simultaneously in Irish or bilingually. The official version of Gaeltacht placenames will be used for official purposes. We will provide a member of staff to liaise with the Irish language media and an Irish speaking spokesperson will be available for interviews with the Irish language media. .

AIT will increase the level of published press releases bilingually from 7% to 9%.

3.2 Support Services

The Institute does not have a significant number of staff who are proficient in Irish and expects that the numbers of volunteers who will become involved will be low. For the duration of the scheme, it will be necessary to contract out all translation services of substantive documents, annual reports, etc. With regard to the receipt of any communication received by the Institute on a day-to-day basis, we have identified a staff member who has volunteered to provide assistance as translator. Contact details of this staff member has been provided to the Institute receptionist and all relevant Departments.

3.3 Recruitment

AIT will be conscious of its obligations under the Act when recruiting staff. All new recruits will be advised of development opportunities to improve their competence in Irish, as and when those opportunities arise.

3.4 Training and Development

The Institute has an on-going commitment to provide appropriate training and supports the development of all staff. Subject to demand and budgetary provision the Institute will provide training in the Irish language for reception staff. Staff will be made aware of language

resources such as www.tearma.ie ; www.focloir.ie ; www.teanglann.ie ; www.abair.ie as well as WinGléacht, the electronic version of the Ó Dónaill Irish-English dictionary.

The Professional Development Committee will evaluate any Irish language courses and promote their suitability amongst staff for gaining proficiency in the written and spoken Irish language. Subject to demand, AIT proposes to continue to take the following steps throughout the duration of the scheme to enhance the level of Irish among AIT staff by:

- Providing guidance to individual staff members who wish to leave bilingual telephone voice mail announcements on their personal handsets.
- Providing bilingual announcements on after-hours voicemail messages

CHAPTER 4

MONITORING AND REVISION

The Executive Management Team (EMT) of the Institute will keep the effective operation of the scheme under review. The day-to-day monitoring function will be carried out primarily by the Heads of Department/Heads of Function, who will be responsible for the implementation of the scheme within their own areas.

Achievement of stated targets will be monitored as follows:

- Letters, phone calls, requests, etc. received in Irish will be logged to allow for monitoring of demand
- Level of expenditure on translation of letter correspondence, press releases, website, publications, etc.will be recorded
- Level of expenditure on training in Irish will be recorded
- Level of expenditure on bilingual advertising will be recorded.

CHAPTER 5

PUBLICISING THE SCHEME

The contents of the scheme, along with the commitments and provisions of the scheme, will be publicised to the general public by means of:

- Advertising of provisions
- Circulation to appropriate agencies and public bodies through email notification
- Publication on the institute website.

Internally the scheme will be promoted as follows:

- A copy of the scheme will be circulated to all staff as soon as possible after approval.

A copy of this scheme has also been forwarded to Oifig Choimisinéir na dTeangacha Oifigiúla.