Dissertation in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MSc in Marketing Practice

Exploring the marketing of Higher Education: Evidence from the Institutes of Technology Sector

Submitted by: **Yvonne Rudden**

Date: **July 2012**

Presented to: ***Dr Simon Stephens***

School of Business

Letterkenny Institute of Technology

Disclaimer 1

"I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit in Partial Fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree MSc in Marketing Practice is entirely my own work and has not been obtained from the work of any other, except any work that has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work."

Signed: ……..

Disclaimer 2

"*I agree to assign the rights of any intellectual property arising from this study or other activity to LYIT. This dissertation may be used by LYIT for teaching purposes on future Masters Programmes and may be published on the Institute's Library Website."*

Signed: ……

Abstract

The purpose of this research dissertation is to explore the marketing of higher education institutes, looking in detail at evidence from the Institutes of Technology (IoT) sector. The aims of the research are to profile higher education in Ireland, to discover what the marketing objectives of IoTs are and investigate possible future challenges, and to assess the marketing techniques employed by IoTs.

The methodology approach which utilised for the purpose of this research dissertation is a mixed methods approach, based on sequential explanatory strategy. This involves conducting quantitative research in the first instance, followed by qualitative research. When both have been completed the findings from both are combined to give an overview of the area being researched. The quantitative research took the form of questionnaires distributed to students in the Institute. The qualitative research took the form of interviews with those with responsibility for marketing in the five IoTs in the BMW region, and an additional interview with the Director of Academic Affairs in Institutes of Technology, Ireland.

The research found that there was a contrast between how students see the marketing techniques employed by IoTs and how the staff within the IoTs perceive student's requirements are in relation to marketing.

It was evident from the interviews that there is not much emphasis placed on the marketing function within the IoTs, despite the fact that this is one of the key determinants which influence a prospective student when deciding whether or where to pursue third-level education.

There was also some discourse between what the staff in the IoTs believe might happen as regards consolidation or amalgamation and the possible establishment of a technological university versus what is being discussed at a higher level in this regard.

Four recommendations were made following the research process. These included:

- Setting up a designated marketing department within the IoTs
- To devise a marketing strategy which would be implemented by the marketing department
- Organising a more vigorous approach to marketing so that all avenues are explored in terms of the recruitment of students
- Select certain IoTs who see themselves as being on a par with institutions internationally and make them a fee-paying IoT therefore putting them into a niche area but with added value in terms of the courses they can offer, the calibre of staff they can attract and to types of student who pursue third-level education there, rather than somewhere else.

Dedication

I would like to say a special thank you to my Fiancé Alec, for all his help and support and for putting up with all the ups and downs associated with the completion of this dissertation. I would also like to thank my family, friends, housemates and classmates for all their help and support over the past year and for their encouragement and good wishes especially towards the end when the enthusiasm had died down.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank my supervisor, Dr Simon Stephens for his guidance and support over the past year, for his speedy response to my queries, and for keeping me on track and helping me realise that there's always a plan B.

I wish to thank Ann O'Reilly, Guidance Counsellor, Scoil Carmel, Limerick for her participation in a preliminary interview which guided me in the creation of the questionnaire

I wish to thank all those students who filled in the questionnaire

I wish to thank those who participated in interviews for the purpose of completing qualitative research:

- Mr Brian Lynch, Communications and Marketing Manager, Athlone Institute of Technology
- Mr Diarmuid Cahill, Schools Liaison Officer, Dundalk Institute of Technology
- Dr Carina Ginty, Schools Liaison Officer, Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology
- Ms Aine Doherty, Marketing Executive, and Ms Sheila King, Management Support Officer, Letterkenny Institute of Technology
- Mr Gerry Hegarty, Academic Administration & Student Affairs Manager, Institute of Technology, Sligo
- Dr Jim Murray, Director of Academic Affairs, Institutes of Technology Ireland

I wish to thank Mr Paul McCusker, for his advice and assistance with this dissertation

Table of Contents

List of Figures and Tables…….……..v

Chapter One – Introduction …….…..1

1. Introduction and Research Questions ….……....…..1

2. Context ….……....…..2

3. Proposed Methodology ….……...……....…..3

4. Limitations of the Research Project ……...……....…..4

5. Conclusion ……..……...……....…..5

Chapter Two – Literature Review ……..…….…6

1. Overview of the Literature ……..…….……....……..6

2. Strategic Plans ….……..……....……...6

3. Strategic Plans Areas of Commonality …..…..…….....…..6

3.1. Growth …..…..…….……....…..7

3.2. Provider of Choice ……...……....…..8

3.3. Learning and Teaching ……...……....…..8

3.4. Role in Region ……..……...……....…..8

3.5. Research ……..……...……....….10

3.6. Research ……..……...……....….10

4. Strategic Plans of IoTs in the BMW Area…….……....….12

4.1. Online Learning …..…….……....…12

4.2. Student Participation …….……....…12

4.3. Community Engagement …….……....…13

4.4. Cultural Diversity …….……....…13

4.5. Additional Funding Methods …….…….……....…13

4.6. Communications with Secondary Schools …….……....…14

4.7. Communications with Secondary Schools …….……....…14

5. Prospectuses …….……..…15

5.1. Name of Institute ..……...…….……...…15

5.2. Logo ..……...…….……...…15

5.3. Cover ……...…….……...…15

5.4. Cover Photos ……...…….……...…15

5.5. Contact Details ……...…….……...….16

5.6. Postal Address ……...…….……...…17

5.7. CIT ……...……...…….……...…17

5.8. Bi-lingual ……..……...…….……...…17

5.9. Social Media and Web Access ……..……...……...…….……...…17

5.10 Other Contact Points ……..……..…18

5.11 Inside Page Areas of Commonality ……..…18

5.12 Areas of Difference ……..……..…18

5.13 Tag-lines ……..……..…18

Chapter Three – Research Methodology ……26

Chapter Four – Research Findings …….……33

Chapter Five – Analysis …….……..…….42

Chapter Six – Conclusion and Recommendations ……..…….…..…46

References ……..……...……..…50

Apendices ……..……...…..…56

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Figure 3.1 Sequential Strategies

Table 2.1 Athlone Institute of Technology Prospectus Review

Table 2.2 Athlone Institute of Technology Strategic Plan Review

Table 2.3 Cork Institute of Technology Prospectus Review

Table 2.4 Cork Institute of Technology Strategic Plan Review

Table 2.5 Dundalk Institute of Technology Prospectus Review

Table 2.6 Dundalk Institute of Technology Strategic Plan Review

Table 2.7 Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology Prospectus Review

Table 2.8 Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology Strategic Plan Review

Table 2.9 Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Dun Laoghaire Prospectus Review

Table 2.10 Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Dun Laoghaire Strategic Plan Review

Table 2.11 Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown Prospectus Review

Table 2.12 Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown Strategic Plan Review

Table 2.13 Institute of Technology, Carlow Prospectus Review

Table 2.14 Institute of Technology, Carlow Strategic Plan Review

Table 2.15 Institute of Technology, Sligo Prospectus Review

Table 2.16 Institute of Technology, Sligo Strategic Plan Review

Table 2.17 Institute of Technology, Tallaght Prospectus Review

Table 2.18 Institute of Technology, Tallaght Strategic Plan Review

Table 2.19 Institute of Technology, Tralee Prospectus Review

Table 2.20 Institute of Technology, Tralee Strategic Plan Review

Table 2.21 Letterkenny Institute of Technology Prospectus Review

Table 2.22 Letterkenny Institute of Technology Strategic Plan Review

Table 2.23 Limerick Institute of Technology Prospectus Review

Table 2.24 Limerick Institute of Technology Strategic Plan Review

Table 2.25 Waterford Institute of Technology Prospectus Review

Table 2.26 Waterford Institute of Technology Strategic Plan Review

Table 2.27 Social Media: Twitter Activity

Chapter One - Introduction

1. Introduction and research questions

The Institute of Technology (IoT) sector performs a pivotal role in the provision of higher education in Ireland. The thirteen Institutes are geographically diverse, but their course provisions are largely similar. The marketing challenge, therefore, is one of differentiation. Variables such as the subject choice within specific courses, student finance options available, and the facilities and support services etc. that each IoT can offer becomes the key determinant in the prospective students' decision-making process.

The primary research aim is to:

Explore the marketing techniques adopted and adapted by the IoT sector in achieving their marketing objectives

The 3 research objectives are to:

Objective 1: profile higher education in Ireland.

Outcome/deliverable for this objective: to provide the reader with a clear description of the present and possible future landscape of the IoT sector. This will show the structure of the market that IoTs are operating in.

Objective 2: Discover what the marketing objectives of IoTs are and investigate possible future challenges.

Outcome/deliverable for this objective: Through a review of relevant literature, and findings from data collection process, to establish marketing objectives and discuss challenges.

Objective 3: Assess the marketing techniques employed by IoTs.

Outcome/deliverable for this objective: To demonstrate the elements of the marketing mix used by IoTs to the reader.

Product: courses provided by the IoTs.

Price: cost of registration and tuition for those who are not eligible for a grant, as well as indirect costs e.g. rent, transport etc.

Promotion: how the IoTs are currently promoting themselves to potential students e.g. through their prospectus, website, social media etc.

Place: how do they use the location and facilities to attract potential students?

2. Context

The first objective: to profile higher education in Ireland is detailed below.

> *'The higher education and training sector in Ireland comprises a range of higher education institutions – universities, institutes of technology, colleges of education and other recognised institutions, including private colleges'*
>
> (National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, 2009).

The types of awarding bodies within the higher education and training sector include the universities, Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) and the institutes of technology (through delegated authority from HETAC). The focus of this study is on the IoT sector (excluding DIT).

An overview of all thirteen IoTs will be documented and a more detailed analysis of the marketing activities of the IoTs in the Border, Midlands and Western (BMW) region will be carried out. The reason for focusing on this area in particular is due to the fact that discussions are at an advanced stage in relation to the establishment of a technological university (TU) in this region. In particular, three of the five IoTs have formed a new

strategic partnership, the Connaught-Ulster Alliance, with the aim of achieving technological university status. This follows from one of the recommendations in the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 which states:

> *'The institute of technology sector should commence a process of evaluation and consolidation; amalgamated institutions reaching the appropriate scale and capacity could potentially be re-designated'*
>
> (Department of Education and Skills, 2011, p. 23)

The marketing objectives of IoTs can be found in their multiyear Strategic Plans. The IoT's future marketing challenges will be coloured by the reintroduction of fees. Whereas before, the government subsidised third level entrants, this cost will now fall on the shoulders of the students themselves. There should be some tangible evidence in place which demonstrates how the Institute would offer students 'value for money' particularly if privately run Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) with appropriate accreditation can offer better alternatives for the same or less money.

Another of the primary research objectives in this research study is to assess the marketing techniques of IoTs using the current marketing mix. It is clear that as long as the IoTs remain as individual entities, this exercise will be more straight-forward. One of the main challenges IoTs in the BMW region will face should they amalgamate, would be how to carry out their marketing as a single entity.

3. Proposed Methodology

When considering the various data collection and analysis options, the most appropriate methodology for the purpose of this research project is a mixed methods approach which incorporates both the quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis. These will be explored in detail in the Methodology Chapter (Chapter 3). In brief, quantitative research is quite

specific; it deals with figures and statistics, and all data which can be quantified. Qualitative research on the other hand is descriptive; it deals with data that cannot be easily measured. The focus is more on interpretation and perception of the data gathered rather than precise statistics. The method which will be utilised for the purpose of this research project is a mixed methods approach of quantitative research in the form of surveys conducted on students within Letterkenny Institute of Technology, followed by qualitative interviews with those with responsibility for marketing in each of the five IoTs in the BMW region, and the Director of Academic Affairs in Institutes of Technology Ireland.

There is very little evidence of previously published research in this area to date. However, one such example is a dissertation entitled:

Key issues for developing marketing strategies in Third-Level colleges – with particular reference to Athlone Institute of Technology (Claffey, 2001).

4. Limitations of the research project

There are also a number of limitations which may be encountered when conducting a research project such as this. Examples include:

- availability of the members of staff in the other IoTs to conduct a qualitative interview within a specific time-frame
- reliability of students in returning completed questionnaires within a specific time-frame
- accuracy of results of questionnaires – i.e. incomplete questionnaires returned; an insufficient amount of responses being received from students.

5. Conclusion

In summary then, the rationale behind this research project is as follows:

The research will

- profile the provision of higher education in Ireland
- detail what the marketing objectives of IoTs are
- Assess the marketing techniques employed by IoTs.

While all thirteen IoTs are included in the study, there will be a particular focus on those in the BMW region. Future amalgamation, should it occur, would pose new challenges for the IoTs in terms of the approach to marketing. The current individual approach is more conducive to its purpose than any collective approach might be. The looming prospect of increased fees is a further challenge to the viability of the Institutes. This is further exacerbated by the ability of private colleges to compete both academically and in the market place.

Chapter Two - Literature Review

1. Overview of the literature

A documentary analysis was carried out reviewing each IoTs strategic plan, prospectus and their websites in order to gain an understanding of how they target prospective students. The strategic plans were analysed in order to establish the marketing objectives for each of the IoTs while the prospectuses and websites were analysed to establish which marketing techniques were used by the IoTs in order to achieve these objectives. Tables detailing each IoT's strategic goals and how they plan to achieve these goals are attached in the appendices section of the dissertation.

In the next section, I will examine how the five IoTs in the BMW region currently use their strategic plans as marketing tools, and highlight areas where there are similarities as well as differences in the approach taken by these IoTs. An analysis of each of the IoTs strategic goals was carried out to establish which of these goals represent marketing objectives. Following this, the methods they planned to use to achieve these marketing objective related goals were analysed to identify marketing techniques. These should be reflected in the IoTs prospectuses and websites. The IoTs prospectuses and websites were examined to establish whether these marketing techniques were in fact utilised to achieve the strategic goals.

2. Strategic Plans

There are differences between the IoTs strategic plans. These include: duration of the plan, sponsorship/funding of the publication and issues regarding the document being bi-lingual or solely in English. Some Institutes have also adapted their publications to reflect the latest technology by including 'Quick Response' (QR) codes which can be scanned and read by certain smart phones without having to search for the document on-line or enter the full

document address. There are similarities amongst the plans; most notably that they have all addressed their strategic planning objectives – whether by prioritisation, through the use of a framework, or by identifying action areas. All five IoTs in the BMW region have stated what their vision for the duration of the plan is. In addition, three out of the five have also identified their mission and values.

3. Strategic Plans – Areas of Commonality

Five areas of commonality in the strategic goals were identified following a review of the 13 IoTs Strategic Plans. These are: Growth; Provider of Choice; Learning and Teaching; Role in the Region and Research. Each of these will be discussed in further detail below – in relation to how they are strategic marketing objectives.

3.1. Growth

ITB, IADT and WIT all identified growth as one of their strategic goals. Both ITB and IADT are seeking to grow the number of students, from full-time equivalents to post-graduate, international and mature students as well as attracting students from under-represented groups in the region. They have identified two marketing techniques by which they plan to achieve this goal. Firstly by adapting their existing programme offerings to facilitate participation by learners off-campus, provided it is economically viable. Secondly, by improving the facilities and services provided on-campus in order to meet the increased demand and students' needs. Waterford Institute of Technology, meanwhile, claims to be 'Organising for growth'. However, they do not specify what types or numbers of students they wish to attract or what marketing techniques will be employed to do so. Instead, they merely state:

> ‘We will continue to renew and develop appropriate governance, financial and operating structures in line with best international practice to ensure delivery of our strategic aims.’
>
> (Waterford Institute of Technology Strategic Plan 2007 – 2010, p.11).

In contrast with the above, ITB has recognised the importance of ‘Developing integrated marketing and communications strategy’ (Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown Strategic Plan 2006-2011, p. 14).

3.2. Provider of Choice

One of AIT’s strategic goals is to become a ‘college of choice’ for prospective students (Athlone Institute of Technology Strategic Plan 2009 – 2013, p.24) as opposed to attending a university, private college or availing of an on-line or distance-learning course elsewhere. IT Carlow’s strategic goal is to become a ‘higher education provider of choice’ (Institute of Technology, Carlow Strategic Plan 2009 – 2013, p.7). Again IT Carlow faces the same scenario as AIT in terms of alternative providers in the region.

Of the two, only IT Carlow has addressed this issue from a marketing perspective as they plan to: ‘Enhance the image and profile of the Institute and in particular its academic portfolio.’ (Institute of Technology, Carlow Strategic Plan 2009 – 2013, p. 8)

3.3. Learning and Teaching

AIT and IT Tralee both plan to use innovative marketing techniques to enhance learning and teaching. In the case of Athlone Institute of Technology: ‘The full potential of modularisation will be exploited’ (Athlone Institute of Technology Strategic Plan p.15). Modularisation is defined as: dividing programmes into a number of related subjects known as modules, which are thought over a specific teaching period, referred to as a semester.

IT Tralee plans the development of: ‘distance learning and e-learning opportunities’ (Institute of Technology, Tralee Strategic Plan 2008 – 2013, p.26). Distance learning is defined as an educational technique employed whereby the learner does not need to be physically present to receive tuition. Instead, they can partake in a course from a remote location. Correspondence with the provider may take the form of e-mails, video-conferencing, by telephone or in writing. E-learning, as the name suggests, is similar to distance learning, but with the emphasis being on the fact that it is carried out through electronic means rather than by post.

In order to market to potential and current stakeholders, Dundalk Institute of Technology aims to: ‘Identify and develop partnerships with other organisations’ and ‘Review and re-design courses to facilitate wider learner access in the light of the requirements of their lives outside college’ (Dundalk Institute of Technology Strategic Plan 2006 – 2011, p.25) while Letterkenny Institute of Technology simply plans to ‘enhance information provision to stakeholders’ (Letterkenny Institute of Technology Strategic Plan 2007 – 2013, p.10). Although they haven’t provided detailed information as to how they are going to achieve this.

3.4. Role in Region

Nine of the thirteen IoTs have identified playing an important role in the development of the geographic region in which they are based as being one of their strategic goals. These goals also double up as marketing objectives. ITT Dublin has branded it as: ‘Active Citizenship’ (Institute of Technology, Tallaght Strategic Plan 2009 – 2014, p.15). Through the mechanism of ‘Internationalisation’ which is defined as: A means of dispersing economic activities across a geographical area which covers more than one jurisdiction. ‘Waterford Institute of Technology will benchmark their activities not just against those in the region, but against international standards as well.’ (Waterford Institute of Technology Strategic Plan 2007 – 2010 p.10) In an effort to strengthen their role in the region, ITC will engage in the

‘promotion and support of entrepreneurship’ (Institute of Technology Carlow Strategic Plan 2009 – 2013 p.21). IT Sligo plans to ‘Gain recognition as an essential contributor to the economic and social development by actively engaging with key partners’ (Institute of Technology Sligo Strategic Plan 2009 – 2012, p.14) in order to enhance their role in the region.

Five of the IoTs refer to the development and utilisation of centres based on campus in order to engage with the wider community, and highlight how significant their role in the region is.

AIT has stated it will ‘Develop outreach centres’ (Athlone Institute of Technology Strategic Plan 2009 – 2013, p.19). ITB will leverage their role in the region by ‘Exploiting the resources of our Learning and Innovation Centre’ (Institute of Technology Blanchardstown Strategic Plan 2006 – 2011, p.18). DkIT has identified their ‘Regional Development Centre’ (Dundalk Institute of Technology Strategic Plan 2006 – 2011 p. 40) as a means of promoting their role in the region. Similarly, LIT will use the ‘LIT Enterprise Acceleration Centre’ (LIT Vision and Strategy to 2020, p.15). IT Tralee will use the ‘Tom Crean Business Incubation Centre’ (Institute of Technology, Tralee Strategic Plan 2008 – 2013, p. 27).

3.5. Research

The fifth area of commonality amongst the thirteen IoTs is research. Ten of the thirteen IoTs have listed this as a strategic goal and marketing objective. AIT aims to have a separate research budget, and also to ‘create new research campus’ and to explore the possibility of participating in joint research initiatives with other Higher Education Institutes (HEI’s). Additionally, it aims to attract international researchers while planning to ‘Generate revenue income of €10 million per annum by 2013. (Athlone Institute of Technology Strategic Plan 2009 – 2013, p.17)

GMIT has stated it is going to 'Consolidate research activities for economic sustainability' (Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology Strategic Plan 2010 – 2015, p.12). CIT has devised a clever way of generating revenue streams – by operating a 'consultancy' service. (Cork Institute of Technology Strategic Plan 2005 – 2010, p.13)

DkIT, LIT and IT Sligo have all expressed their intention to focus on niche areas that they wish to explore further over the duration of the strategic plans. LIT already knows what its' niche research areas are and they are ready to exploit them. Under their Knowledge Transfer Research strategic goal, LIT states it will 'continue to operate its seed fund to strengthen further our niche areas' (LIT Vision and Strategy to 2020, p.14). LIT also states they will 'benchmark ourselves against other higher education institutions'

In the case of DkIT, their objective is to 'secure a national and international reputation for excellence in a select number of strategic research areas' (Dundalk Institute of Technology Strategic Plan 2006 – 2011, p. 36). One of the ways they plan to achieve this is 'To build a profile in four thematic research and development areas with particular emphasis in building an international reputation in the area of Smooth Muscle Research' (Dundalk Institute of Technology Strategic Plan 2006 – 2011, p.36)

IT Sligo has stated its intention to 'Develop the number of research projects and the supporting process that is capable of generating patents and intellectual property' (Institute of Technology, Sligo Strategic Plan 2009 – 2012, p.13) thereby adding a constant revenue stream in the form of royalties.

4. Strategic Plans of the IoTs in the BMW region

Of the five areas of commonality identified above, Research was the only one to be addressed by all five IoTs in the BMW region. In contrast with this, none of the five IoTs identified Growth as being one of their marketing objectives. Is this either because they think it's a given, and therefore they don't see it as an area for concern? Or is it because they know that growth is not going to continue and therefore, it's not seen as a strategic goal? Three out of the five identified Learning and Teaching and Role in the Region as being a marketing objective while only one IoT mentioned that they plan to be the Provider of Choice. Is this because they the rest of the IoTs think there are equal or better alternatives elsewhere?

4.1. Online Learning

Following a review of the remaining strategic goals not already identified above, there was one more strategic goal which doubles up as a marketing objective: 'To increase the quality and scope of online learning through innovation and flexible delivery' (Institute of Technology, Sligo Strategic Plan 2009 – 2012, p.11). The marketing technique which shall be employed to achieve this is:

> 'To increase the proportion of revenue generated from the provision of online learning programme, with an emphasis on workforce transition by re-skilling and re-training'
>
> (Institute of Technology, Sligo Strategic Plan 2009 – 2012, p.11)

4.2. Student Participation

IT Sligo plans to utilise marketing techniques such as 'To develop and enrich the student experience and promote student well-being' (Institute of Technology, Sligo Strategic Plan 2009 – 2012, p.15). Additionally, two very similar marketing techniques have been identified by IT Sligo 'To implement appropriate methods of obtaining and responding to employer and

student feedback' (Sligo Institute of Technology Strategic Plan 2009 – 2012, p.10) while GMIT will 'Create a system that will engage students in the quality of their learning' (Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology Strategic Plan 2010 – 2015, p.8).

4.3. Community engagement

The second marketing technique which will be employed by IT Sligo is 'To make fuller use of the campus and facilities in promoting better outreach and community engagement' (Sligo Institute of Technology Strategic Plan 2009 – 2012, p. 15) and in GMIT they have stated it is their intention to 'Collaborate with industry, professions and other communities ensuring programme relevance and currency' (Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology Strategic Plan 2010 – 2015, p.14).

4.4. Cultural Diversity

GMIT and DkIT have both identified similar marketing techniques for addressing the area of cultural diversity: GMIT states it will 'Promote cultural diversity and understanding among our staff and students' (Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology Strategic Plan 2010 – 2015, p.16) while DkIT will focus on: 'The development of Student Services to reflect the multi-cultural and multi-faith profile of the Institute' (Dundalk Institute of Technology Strategic Plan 2006 – 2011, p.43)

4.5. Additional Funding Methods

Another marketing technique which DkIT will use is to 'Develop a Foundation or equivalent mechanism to facilitate private fundraising' (Dundalk Institute of Technology Strategic Plan 2006 – 2011, p.49).

4.6. Communications with Secondary Schools

One marketing technique which LYIT plans to use is to:

'ensure that external relations with schools are enhanced and developed to attract sufficient learner numbers onto programmes appropriate for the individual learner'

(Letterkenny Institute of Technology Strategic Plan 2007 – 2013, p.12).

5. Prospectuses

Prospectus, as the name suggests, is a document designed and constructed to appeal to prospective students. The prospectus for the IoTs varies from one Institute to another. Some are all-encompassing documents, whereas others are categorised as follows: (undergraduate, post-graduate, continuing education, life-long learning). The layout of these prospectuses varies from one institute to another from being a pdf document to an e-publication. Tables detailing the name of the institute, logo of institute, cover photo, inside cover, tag-lines, marketing objectives and marketing tactics are set out in the appendices section.

5.1. Name of Institute

Only IADT of the thirteen IoTs does not have an Irish language version of the institute on the cover of its undergraduate prospectus.

5.2. Logo

Nearly all IoTs see the importance of visual cues, with all bar DkIT having their logo on the cover page of their undergraduate prospectus.

5.3. Cover

ITT Dublin has been quite innovative in that they have chosen to advertise their "Open Day" on the cover. This call to action tells the prospective student a definite date and time, an open invitation to enquire further about the courses of interest between the covers.

5.4. Cover Photos

IADT and GMIT are the only two to have no cover photos on the front of their prospectuses, with CIT opting for a graphic representation of an outsized computer keyboard to dominate their front covers, with a key marked CIT, along with an appropriate tag line. AIT has also

adopted this approach, teaming their inanimate object, namely a stopwatch with a snappy tagline.

Ten of the thirteen IoTs feature photographs of students on the front cover, with the most popular activity being students graduating in caps and gowns, focussing on the successful outcome of attending the particular IoT. It is also popular to portray students in white medical coats in a laboratory situation, perhaps to portray research or technology.

ITC show a student playing Rugby, showing another aspect of student life available at this particular IoT.

CIT, LIT and DkIT also display images of their campus and IoT buildings, giving prospective students a physical impression of their possible future place of learning.

5.5. Contact Details

Marketing communications have altered radically in recent years worldwide with a huge move towards mobility and social media. How organisations such as IOTs interact with an audience of new media literate millennials is crucial.

Traditional lines of communication such as post and land-line telephones have been supplemented by fax, and some would say usurped by electronic mail and social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter. These new non-traditional forms of communication are low cost, interactive and reach a mass audience instantly. However, their effectiveness relies heavily on intangible such as confidence of the provider and credibility of the message. IoTs must become trusted by their stakeholders when it comes to marketing through digital media.

5.6. Postal Address

Eleven of the thirteen IoTs list their full postal address, probably to highlight their physical locations rather than elicit postal correspondence from prospects.

IT Tralee do not list a postal address on their prospectus covers, and in fact only offer a phone number without delving further into their published offering. This seems slightly unwelcoming and underdeveloped from a marketing perspective.

5.7. CIT

CIT have left behind all traditional communication points, instead only listing a website address and offering a ‘QR’ code. This is a ‘Quick Response’ code, which reads barcodes and can automatically redirect smart phone users to a website hyperlink. This would infer that CIT believe their target audience are smart phone owners, familiar with this bar-coding reading application already. This, while noble in its forward thinking, may lose out on a larger audience, particularly those of an older generation.

5.8. Bi-Lingual

ITC and IADT are the only two IoTs not to have their contact details in Irish as well as English.

5.9. Social Media and Web Access

Only ITB, ITT Dublin and WIT have embraced the move to Social Media, with symbols denoting Facebook and Twitter amongst their contact details.

Many of the IoTs have listed their worldwide web address, but not under their contact details, and in some cases, on a different area of the page. This would suggest websites, rather than a point of contact, have become a marketing tool in their own right, a non-physical location of the Institute located on line or an alternative or possibly a replacement for the printed

prospectus. The fact that many of the prospectuses are available for download in electronic format from every IoT website that the prospectus is directing the reader towards is ironic.

5.10. Other contact points

AIT has taken the step to imprint Braille for the visually impaired on their prospectus.

5.11. Inside Cover Page-Areas of Commonality

Nearly as important as the front cover is page 3 of the prospectus. On examination,

There is much commonality in the approach taken to fill this page. The most common uses of these prime marketing spaces are:

- Table of Contents
- Contact Details
- Course Guide
- Welcome from an Institute Authority figure

5.12. Areas of Difference

AIT and GMIT both wish to be a provider of choice, giving prospective students

‘Top reasons to Choose AIT’ and ‘Five great reasons to Choose GMIT’.

IT Tralee and IADT use this page to advertise “Open Day” or “Open Evenings” for further interaction with their target audience.

ITB have taken an uninteresting approach by leaving the page 2 blank and repeating the cover page on Page 3

CIT offers an Academic Calendar, while LYIT highlight ‘What’s New’

ITC have used the inside cover of their Lifelong Learning Prospectus as a marketing tool, providing the prospect with a detachable application form. This possibility of instant feedback is a novel idea.

5.13. Taglines

A tagline is a phrase or slogan to aid memory of a product and reinforce positive association with it.

LYIT and IADT have surprisingly not printed a tagline.

The remaining IOTs had limited areas of commonality, with the below highlighted keywords appearing most frequently among the 11 other offerings:

- Learn/Learning (x 6 times)
- Future (x 3)
- Live/Living (x 3)
- Active (x2)
- Inspired (x2)
- Time (x2)

The above suggest that the IoTs see themselves as bastions of learning, offering prospective students a better future should they enrol. Living also appears, as perhaps, a reminder, that attending an IoT offers a social experience too. They also infer that IoTs will inspire and also encourage activity based learning. The inclusion of ‘Time’ is perplexing although it does suggest that the offer to a prospective student is time specific, for a limited time only, or that time is also a commodity to be spent.

6. Online Operations

A detailed analysis was carried out on all of the IoTs online operations in order to gauge how effective their communications techniques were. Whilst some Institutes engage heavily with social media such as Facebook and Twitter, others tend to rely more on their websites. The online operations were categorised into three areas as follows: Website, Facebook, and Twitter.

6.1. Website

Traditionally, the home page of a website will contain a menu (a list of headings considered by the organisation to be of greatest importance and generally span either across the top of the home page – positioned centrally or along the side of the home page vertically. Two of the IoTs (IADT and IT Tralee) have taken a different approach to the design of their home page. They have an 'Information For' section and within this they have created different categories for the user to choose from e.g. 'Information For'… current students, future students, international students, staff etc. They also have an 'Information About' section and again have created different categories of information e.g. 'Information About'… Institute and Departments, Research, Community Engagement, Entrepreneurship etc… This not only makes it easier for the user to navigate to a particular section but it eliminates the problem of having to second guess where one might find a particular piece of information if it's not clearly defined in the menu items.

Of the eleven who used the traditional 'Menu' below is a list of items which appeared, starting with the most common one.

6.2. Menu Items

6.2.1. Home

Firstly, the Home page of each of the IoTs websites was analysed. Nine out of the thirteen IoTs had ‘Home’ as a tab on their menu items.

6.2.2. About

Eight out of the thirteen IoTs had ‘About…’ as part of their menu items. Although the remainder have an ‘About’ section, they were located elsewhere on the home page.

6.2.3. Study at

Six IoTs had a ‘Study at…’ or ‘Study @...’ section as one of their menu items.

6.2.4. Research

Research and Innovation features in various ways as a menu item on eleven of the thirteen IoTs menu items. Six of the thirteen have called it ‘Research and Innovation’ four of the thirteen refer to it as ‘Research’, two of the thirteen refer to it as ‘Industry and Innovation’ and one of the IoTs refers to it as ‘Enterprise and Research’. The remaining two IoTs have located a link to this elsewhere on their home page.

6.2.5. Student Life

Student life was addressed in a variety of ways across nine of the thirteen IoTs: Five refer to it as ‘Student Life’, two refer to it as ‘Campus Life’ while the remaining two refer to it as ‘Life @...’ and ‘Campus and Student Life’.

6.2.6. International

Four out of the thirteen IoTs had an ‘International’ section as one of their menu items, while the remaining nine had an ‘International’ section, it was located elsewhere on the page.

6.2.7. Past/Current/Future Students

Two of the IoTs have an Alumni tab as part of their menu items list. Three of the IoTs have listed ‘Current Students’ amongst their menu items, and two IoTs have a ‘Future Students’ tab along their menu items.

6.2.8. Search

Only one IoT (ITB) has a ‘Search the site’ area as part of their menu items. The decision by ITB to include this as one of the menu items is innovative as it demonstrates they are thinking from the users’ perspective.

6.2.9. Contact Us

Two IoTs have a ‘Contact Us’ tab as one of their menu items.

6.2.10. Courses

One IoT (ITT Dublin) has included ‘Full Time Courses’ as part of their menu items, making a distinction between it and part-time courses. Although, surprisingly, they did not include a ‘Part-time Courses’ tab along-side it. Another three IoTs have included a ‘Courses’ tab amongst their menu items.

6.2.11. Schools

Two of the thirteen IoTs have included a ‘Schools’ or ‘Schools and Departments’ tab as one of their menu items.

6.2.12. Info for Schools

ITC was the only IoT to have an ‘Info for Schools’ (referring to second-level schools as opposed to schools within the IoT) section amongst their menu items.

6.2.13. Admissions

One IoT (LYIT) has an ‘Admissions’ section as part of their menu items.

6.2.14. Staff

LYIT has an ‘Organisation’ section as part of their menu items, while DkIT has a ‘Staff and Admin’ section instead.

6.2.15. Library

DkIT has included a ‘Library’ section as one of their menu items.

6.2.16. Location

LYIT has included ‘Location’ as one of their menu items.

6.2.17. News

CIT has got a ‘News’ tab in their menu items.

In terms of marketing techniques being used to reflect their strategic goals, two of the thirteen IoTs have included one of their strategic goals as one of their menu items.

6.2.18. Open and Distance Learning

IT Sligo mentioned Open and Distance Learning as part of one of their strategic goals, and has included an ‘Open and Distance Learning’ tab as one of their menu items.

6.2.19. Community Engagement

GMIT mentioned Community Engagement as part of one of their strategic goals, and has included a ‘Community Engagement’ tab as one of their menu items.

7. Social Media

Social media can be defined as web-based platforms which support electronic media and facilitate social interaction. They are instantly accessible, and much of the content is user-driven.

7.1. Facebook

Facebook is defined as ‘a social utility that connects people with friends and others who work, study and live around them’ (Facebook (nd)).

Of the thirteen IoTs, IT Sligo has the largest number of Facebook followers, followed by WIT, CIT and ITC. There is a substantial drop in the number of followers after this point. There are possibly a number of reasons for this. However, I believe the main one is due to the fact that the number of students attending each of the IoTs varies from one IoT to the next. As a consequence, for that reason alone, the number of Facebook ‘Likes’ may not be high.

7.2. Twitter

Twitter can be defined as: ‘a real-time information network that connects you to the latest stories, ideas, opinions and news about what you find interesting’ (Twitter, (nd)).

Two out of the thirteen IoTs do not appear to have an official Twitter page. Of the remaining eleven IoTs their Twitter activity has been analysed based on the following criteria: Tweets, Following and Followers. The table below (table 2.27) sets out the Twitter activity amongst the IoTs based on the highest to lowest under each category.

Table 2.27 Social Media: Twitter Activity

Tweets	Following	Followers
CIT: 1,079	CIT: 616	CIT: 1,676
IT Sligo: 1,060	IT Sligo: 598	IT Sligo: 1,141
ITB: 1,041	WIT: 226	ITC: 1,073
WIT: 791	ITC: 223	AIT: 952
AIT: 538	ITB: 174	IT Tallaght: 715
DKIT: 534	AIT: 110	DKIT: 697
ITC: 285	LIT: 109	WIT: 672
LIT: 223	DKIT: 22	IT Tralee: 506
LYIT: 110	IT Tralee: 1	LYIT: 448
IT Tralee: 87	LYIT: 0	ITB: 382
IT Tallaght: 12	IT Tallaght: 0	LIT: 219

Source: Each of the IoTs' Twitter pages. *All figures correct at time of publication

As can be seen from the above table, for some IoTs, Twitter has become a regular means of communication and has attracted quite a large following. For others, however, the medium is still in its infancy, and has not been used to its full potential yet.

Chapter Three – Research Methodology

1. Introduction

The methodology which shall be used in this research dissertation is the mixed methods approach. The mixed methods approach involves using a combination of qualitative and quantitative research in order to achieve research objectives. For the purpose of this dissertation, the mixed methods approach of 'sequential explanatory strategy' (Creswell, 2003) has been used. Creswell states that sequential explanatory strategy

> 'is characterized by the collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data' (Creswell, 2003).

The diagram below is a visual representation of this approach:

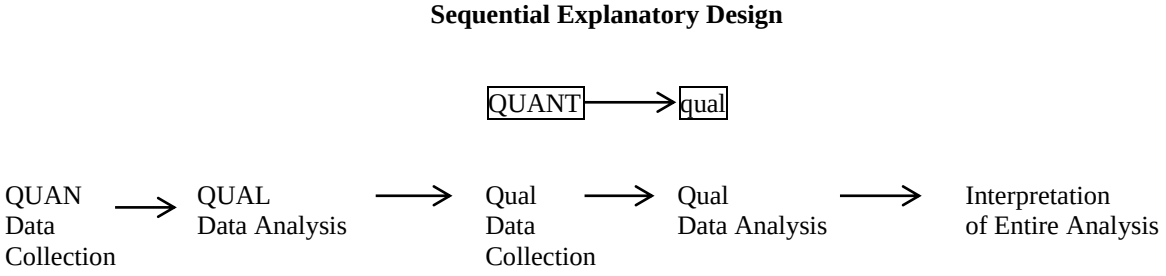

Figure 3.1 Sequential Strategies (Creswell, 2003).

An example of where this type of mixed methods approach was previously used is: 'Utilising a minority language to develop brand identity: an evaluation of current practice(s) using the Irish language' (Campbell, 2009).

2. Research Objectives and the Mixed Methods Approach

In this section, I will detail how the mixed methods approach of quantitative research followed by qualitative research relates to the 3 research objectives set out in Chapter One.

The primary research aim is to:

Explore the marketing techniques adopted and adapted by the IoT sector in achieving their marketing objectives

The 3 research objectives are to:

Objective 1: profile higher education in Ireland.

Outcome/deliverable for this objective: to provide the reader with a clear description of the present and possible future landscape of the IoT sector. This will show the structure of the market that IoTs are operating in. This was achieved by researching literature pertaining to this area in the form of the Country Education Profile for Ireland as documented by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland. Additionally, in relation to qualitative research, it was achieved through conducting an in-depth interview with Dr Jim Murray, Director of Academic Affairs, Institutes of Technology, Ireland (IOTI).

Objective 2: Discover what the marketing objectives of IoTs are and investigate possible future challenges.

Outcome/deliverable for this objective: Through a review of relevant literature, establish marketing objectives and discuss challenges. This was achieved through a mixture of quantitative research in the form of questionnaires distributed to students within LYIT, followed by qualitative research in the form of 6 in-depth interviews with Mr Gerry Hegarty,

Academic Administration & Student Affairs Manager, IT Sligo, Mr Brian Lynch, Communications and Marketing Manager, AIT, Dr Carina Ginty, Student Liaison Officer, GMIT, Ms Aine Doherty, Marketing Executive and Ms Sheila King, Management Support Officer, LYIT, Mr Diarmuid Cahill, Schools Liaison Officer, DkIT and Dr Jim Murray, Director of Academic Affairs, IOTI.

Objective 3: Assess the marketing techniques employed by IoTs.

Outcome/deliverable for this objective: To demonstrate the elements of the marketing mix used by IoTs to the reader.

Product: courses provided by the IoTs.

Price: cost of registration and tuition for those who are not eligible for a grant, as well as indirect costs e.g. rent, transport etc.

Promotion: how the IoTs are currently promoting themselves to potential students e.g. through their prospectus, website, social media etc.

Place: how do they use the location and facilities to attract potential students?

This was achieved through quantitative research in the form of questionnaires distributed to students in the Institute, and through qualitative research in the form of interviews with the six aforementioned people.

3. Quantitative Research

Quantitative research is quite specific. It deals with figures and statistics, data which can be quantified. Those who carry out quantitative research are looking to find precise answers to their research questions, which tend to have a numeric aspect to them. This type of research tends to be more straight-forward, with little scope for the participant becoming confused by

what they're being asked. With quantitative research, the researcher is less likely to be affected by the outcome of their findings and can remain objective. Types of quantitative research include: surveys, questionnaires etc.

3.1. Participants for the quantitative data collection process:

For the purpose of this research project, I had proposed to conduct quantitative research in the form of questionnaires which shall be distributed to first year students in Letterkenny Institute of Technology (LYIT) and sixth year students in local community schools. I contacted the principals of five mixed gender second-level schools in the province, based on the way they have been classified by the Department of Education and Skills. There are six classifications altogether – they are as follows:

Category 1: School provides education through the medium of Irish for some or all of its pupils. School contacted: Coláiste Ailigh, High Road, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal

Category 2: School caters for day pupils only, all of whom receive free education. School contacted: Coláiste Ailigh, High Road, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal

(As there are no schools which fit into category 1 in the area, I choose a school which has been classified as 1&2 by the Department.)

Category 3: School caters for boarders and day pupils but provides free education for day pupils only. School contacted: Royal and Prior School, Raphoe, Co. Donegal

Category 4: School caters for boarders only, all of whom pay fees. As all schools which fell into this category consisted of single-sex students instead of mixed-gender students, I did not contact any of the schools as I would not achieve a balance between the genders of the recipients of the questionnaire.

Category 5: School caters for day pupils only, all of whom pay fees. School contacted: Monaghan Collegiat School, Corlatt, Co. Monaghan.

Category 6: School caters for boarders and day pupils all of whom pay fees. School contacted: Royal School, Cavan, Co. Cavan

None of the schools responded to my requests and therefore it was not possible to get a sample of questionnaires from sixth year students as anticipated. Therefore, the questionnaires were only distributed to students attending LYIT. It was my intention originally to distribute the questionnaires to first year students, as they were the ones who would have the most recent experience of making a choice to pursue third-level education. However, when I asked the Student's Union to assist me with the distribution of the questionnaires to first year students, the link to the questionnaire was sent out by e-mail to all students, rather than just first year students. This meant that I had no way of knowing which of the respondents were first year students and which were not. The fact that all students whether in first year or not all had to go through the same process prior to pursuing third-level education no matter what age they were or where they came from meant that they were equally as entitled to respond to the questionnaire as those in first year.

The questionnaires themselves consisted of nine questions. Of the nine questions, there was one relating to demographic information, the rest were all attitudinal and behavioural questions.

4. Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is descriptive. It deals with data in a way that cannot be measured. Instead, it focuses more on interpretation and perception of the data gathered rather than

precise statistics. There are various means of carrying out qualitative research including: in-depth interviews, focus-groups, observational research, discourse analysis etc. There is a possibility when conducting this type of research, however, of subjectivity becoming an issue as the researcher's own views might affect their interpretation of their findings. The qualitative analysis used for this research dissertation will be in the form of semi-structured interviews. The interviews consisted of eight questions. The data was collected in the form of a digital recording through the use of a Dictaphone and were transferred in the form of an mp4 file onto a secure memory stick.

4.1. **Participants for the qualitative data collection process:**

- Gerry Hegarty, Academic Administration & Student Affairs Manager, IT Sligo
- Brian Lynch, Communications and Marketing Manager, AIT
- Dr Carina Ginty, Schools Liaison Officer, GMIT
- Aine Doherty, Marketing Executive and Sheila King, Management Support Officer, LYIT
- Diarmuid Cahill, Schools Liaison Officer, DkIT
- Dr Jim Murray, Director of Academic Affairs, IOTI

As can be seen from the above, both methods must be utilised in order to obtain a comprehensive overview.

5. Evidence of previously published research

There is a relatively small amount of previously published research in this area to date. However, one such example of this research is a dissertation entitled:

Key issues for developing marketing strategies in Third-Level colleges – with particular reference to Athlone Institute of Technology (Claffey, 2001).

6. Problems/limitations relating to the data collection process

Problems/limitations encountered during this exercise include:

- An insufficient amount of responses were received from both groups of students originally selected to participate in the questionnaire.
- reliability of students in returning completed questionnaires within a specific time-frame
- accuracy of results of questionnaires – i.e. incomplete questionnaires were returned.

Chapter Four - Research Findings

1. Introduction

In this chapter the findings from the data collected are presented in the order in which they were gathered. In accordance with the mixed methods approach of sequential explanatory strategy, the findings from the quantitative research is presented first, followed by the findings from the qualitative research. The outcomes from the data collection process are linked to the research objectives as set out in chapter one.

2. Findings from quantitative research

The quantitative research undertaken for the purpose of this dissertation was in the form of a questionnaire. The eight questions in the questionnaire were formed following analysis of a preliminary interview with Ann O'Reilly, Guidance Counsellor, Scoil Carmel, Limerick. During this preliminary interview, I asked nine questions, and constructed the questionnaire based upon the answers to these questions. I also took the following research objectives and the outcome/deliverables for these objectives into consideration when devising the questionnaire.

Objective 2: Discover what the marketing objectives for IoTs are and investigate possible future challenges

Outcome/deliverable: Through a review of relevant literature and analysis of findings from data collection process, to establish marketing objectives and discuss challenges.

Objective 3: to assess the marketing techniques employed by IoTs

Outcome/deliverable: to demonstrate the elements of the marketing mix used by the IoTs to the reader

3. Questionnaires

A link to the questionnaire (constructed through the use of a specialist website www.surveymonkey.com) was sent out by e-mail to all students in LYIT. There were eight questions in total. Two of the questions were open-ended. The other six questions were closed-ended questions, and contained a mixture of two categorical, two Likert-Scale and two ordinal type questions. A total of 146 valid responses were received.

4. Findings from questionnaires

4.1. Open-ended questions

Open-ended questions are questions which allow the participants to choose more than one option when answering a question. The question is open to how the participant might respond. Questions two and five were open-ended questions. The second question asked the participant to state which of the IoTs they have sought/received information about. The five IoTs in the BMW region were listed along with the option of picking 'Other' followed by a space to state where that was. The participants were also given the option to tick more than one box if applicable. Besides the fact that the vast majority of students (almost ninety-seven per cent) had stated that they had sought/received information about LYIT, the next most popular IoTs were those closest or at least perceived to be closest to Letterkenny, namely IT Sligo with sixteen per cent and GMIT with fourteen per cent. It was interesting to note that of the remaining two IoTs in the BMW region, just over three per cent indicated they had sought/received information about AIT and just over six per cent indicated they had sought/received information about DkIT. These figures are actually lower than those who selected 'Other' institutes outside this catchment area almost seven per cent. Out of thirteen respondents, eight indicated they had sought information about another IoT outside the BMW region. Five referred to an IoT in Dublin area (four mentioned DIT and one mentioned ITB).

Two other respondents mentioned LIT and one respondent mentioned ITC. This means that statistically, even though DkIT and AIT are closer to Letterkenny than Dublin, Limerick or Carlow, if a student didn't choose LYIT, IT Sligo or GMIT, they are more likely to pursue third level education somewhere other than Dundalk or Athlone. This may be worth taking into consideration when looking at possible amalgamations of IoTs and possible locations when looking at the establishment of a technological university.

Question five asked the respondents to indicate which of the following promotional tools (prospectus, website, Facebook page, Twitter page, You Tube clip) they had seen from any of the five IoTs in the BMW region. They were given the option to tick more than one box if applicable. The results show that the website was the most popular, followed closely by the prospectus. Facebook was the third most popular, with You Tube and Twitter being less popular. This indicates that there is a need to focus more on the use of on-line operations as promotional tools.

4.2. Closed-ended questions

Closed-ended questions require the participant to choose from a limited number of answers – the amount will depend on the researcher and the type of question being asked. There are five types of closed-ended questions: Categorical, Likert-Scale, Multiple Choice, Numerical and Ordinal. For the purpose of the questionnaire, three of the five types of closed-ended questions were utilised: Categorical, Likert-Scale and Ordinal.

4.2.1. Categorical questions

Categorical questions are questions which, as the name suggests place the respondent into a particular category, depending on how they answer the question. E.g. are you male or female?

Questions one and seven on the survey were categorical questions. Question one covered the demographic aspect of the participants by asking them to state whether they were male or female. Just over fifty three per cent of respondents were male, and almost 47 per cent of respondents were female.

Question seven asked the participants to indicate whether IoTs would appeal to them more if they were to change any aspect of their marketing. Almost sixteen per cent said yes and over eighty-four per cent said no.

4.2.2. Likert-Scale questions

Likert-Scale is a type of question where participants are asked to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with a statement. For the purpose of the questionnaire, a scale from 1 to 5 was used, with 1 indicating strongly disagree and 5 indicating strongly agree.

Question three and question eight were Likert-Scale questions. Question three dealt with the product aspect of the marketing mix. It referred to the students' decision to pursue third-level education, and asked them specifically to indicate which factor has a greater influence; the course offered or the Institute itself. They were given five options with one being very much the course and five being very much the Institute and were asked to tick the relevant box. Almost fifty-five per cent of respondents said it was 'very much/mainly the course' and only eleven per cent said it was 'very much/mainly the Institute'. This demonstrates that product perception is crucial, rather than the Institute. However, this is also at odds with what was revealed earlier in the questionnaire.

Question eight dealt with the place aspect of the marketing mix. The participants were asked to respond to a statement regarding the location of the Institute being far more important than the facilities offered by selecting one of five options: strongly disagree, disagree, neither

agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree. There was almost a 50/50 split between both extremes with fifty-four per cent strongly disagreeing to the statement, whereas almost forty-eight per cent strongly agreed with it.

4.2.3. Ordinal questions

Ordinal questions are generally used when you want to establish what a person's attitude is towards a particular thing. Generally the question will contain a list of items or statements and the participant will be asked to rank these items or statements in order of preference with one being the most preferable or important and five being the least preferable or important. Questions four and six of the questionnaire were ordinal questions. Question four focused on the price aspect of the marketing mix. The question posed asked the respondents to indicate which of the following costs they were most concerned about: registration fees, grant, rent, transport, other. They were asked to rank these options in order of importance with 1 being the most important and 5 being the least important. The trend for this answer was that fees were of greatest importance, followed by grant, rent, transport, other. These responses reflect marketing challenges which will need to be addressed by individual IoTs if these aspects of being a student become a more prominent concern for the student, as if the first two variables (fees and grants) were to change, this could have a bearing on whether a student attends third-level or not.

Question six dealt with the promotional aspect of the marketing mix. This question asked respondents to indicate what their most preferred promotional medium is from a list of ten marketing media. They were asked to rank their answers on a scale of one to ten with one being most preferable and ten being least preferable. The results showed that Open day/evening was their most preferred option, followed by a visit to the school, and then guidance counsellor third. This clearly demonstrates that although IoTs are engaging more in

the use of social media and other electronic means of communicating, there is still a strong preference for face-to-face communications.

5. Findings from qualitative research

The qualitative research undertaken for the purpose of this dissertation was in the form of in-depth interviews. The aim of this exercise was to address the following research objectives:

Objective 2: Discover what the marketing objectives of IoTs are and investigate possible future challenges.

Outcome/deliverable for this objective: Through a review of relevant literature, and findings from data collection process, to establish marketing objectives and discuss challenges.

Objective 3: Assess the marketing techniques employed by IoTs.

Outcome/deliverable for this objective: To demonstrate the elements of the marketing mix used by IoTs to the reader.

5.1. Interviews

Firstly, interviews were conducted with those with responsibility for marketing in each of the IoTs in the BMW region. There were eight questions in total. The same questions were put to all the representatives from the IoTs. This was followed by an interview with the Director of Academic Affairs in IOTI. Again, there were eight questions in total.

6. Findings from interviews with IoT representatives

6.1. Lack of structure

The most striking feature of the interviews that were conducted was the fact that there seemed to be no proper structure in any of the IoTs for marketing. Without a marketing department, it is very hard to construct a strategy, let alone implement it. Marketing, it seems, was not even considered a function of the organisations in question up until the recent past,

and interviewees were quite open about the fact that there was no marketing strategy in place in the past. The only common structural components in the featured IoTs were that each had a communications team or Schools Liaison Officer in place. The communications team was a defensive and reactive grouping designed to represent the Institute in a positive light in the media, rather than attracting prospective customers. The Schools Liaison Officer is depicted as over-stretched and/or under-resourced to perform their function adequately.

6.2. Marketing

In some cases, the Schools Liaison Officer was the only member of staff that would be employed to recruit students. A lack of market research led to guidance counsellors and word of mouth becoming gate-keepers for potential students. In fact, many IoTs do not conduct market research at present. A lack of continuity led to a loss of brand identity across the various marketing media used by each IoT.

6.3. Group-Think

It is unfortunate that many of the marketing functions performed by IoTs are judged on their ease of use by the provider, rather than the end user. For example, the use of technology to liaise with secondary-school students in a class-room situation, where the same technology could also have been employed to create an entirely new distance-learning market has not been exploited. This is also obvious in the presentation of IoTs websites.

Many of the marketing initiatives are judged on efficiencies which are created for staff within the relevant IoTs, rather than how successful they are at targeting relevant stakeholders.

As there is no defined marketing department, it seems that marketing successes will have many parents, while failures will be orphaned and abandoned. An example of this is that variables which may have a negative impact on the Institute are considered outside of the

Institute's control, whereas any variable which has a positive impact on the Institute is claimed as a triumph of marketing.

7. Evidence of use of marketing techniques to achieve marketing objectives

Evidence of the use of marketing techniques to achieve stated marketing objectives as identified from IoTs strategic plans can only be found in two places: the prospectuses and the websites. While the marketing objectives are in fact the strategic goals of the Institutes at the highest level, the marketing objectives are how these goals are communicated through the organisations' primary marketing media.

Unusually, in the analysis, it is the absence of marketing techniques from the two key documents which strike the reader first.

7.1. Communications with second-level schools

This was documented in the prospectus. However, it was not referenced at all on-line.

7.2. Community Engagement

GMIT had listed creating an outward facing organisation as one of its marketing objectives. However, their marketing technique of aiming to collaborate with relevant stakeholders was not documented in their prospectus.

7.3. Additional Funding Methods

DkIT's marketing technique of developing a foundation or equivalent mechanism to facilitate private funding for the Institute, while not a marketing objective or strategic goal was not evidenced in its' prospectus.

Chapter Five - Analysis

Since the publication of the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 in January 2011, the newly elected Government has taken considerable steps to ensure that unlike other reports commissioned by previous Governments, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) report the Review of National Policies for Education: review of higher education in Ireland (OECD, 2004), which were seemingly put to one side and left to gather dust on the shelves, they are, instead, taking steps towards the implementation of some of the recommendations set out in this report. One recommendation which is of particular relevance to the IoT sector is:

> 'The institute of technology sector should commence a process of evolution and consolidation; amalgamated institutions reaching the appropriate scale and capacity could potentially be re-designated'
>
> (Department of Education and Skills, 2011, p.23)

This was also affirmed by Dr Jim Murray, during the course of the interview he stated: "We do need to build up more critical mass in the institutions, and that can be done through consolidation." However, he also commented on the fact that the proposed process of consolidation refers only to the IoTs and not the university sector. He thinks that "it is interesting that the only consolidation that's envisaged really is in the non-university sector". (Murray, J. 2012)

One of the most interesting observations from the interview was the contrast between what was conveyed by Dr Murray in relation to the Government's position regarding the amalgamation of IoTs with universities (they are not in favour of traditional universities and IoTs amalgamating), and the recent publication of an article: 'Alliance between DCU and

Dundalk institute' (Keogh, E. 2012). These two perspectives are contradictory, and it remains to be seen which of the two is more realistic.

Since the publication of this report in January 2011, significant progress has been made by various IoTs in relation to this recommendation. In an article in The Irish Times, AIT President Professor Ciarán Ó Catháin states

> 'it is the desire of all the institutes of technology to work together and to rise to the challenge set out in the Hunt Report published last year to meet and exceed the criteria for becoming a technological university' (Ó Catháin, 2012).

In addition, an article published on LYIT's website states:

> 'the five institutes of technology in the Border Midlands and West (BMW) region are at an advanced stage in discussions regarding the establishment of a technological university' (LYIT, 2012).

1. Criteria for Designation to Technological University Status

In 2011, the Department of Education and Skills asked Dr Simon Marginson, an international higher education expert to compile a report on the criteria for the designation of a technological university. Those recommendations which impact on the marketing function of current IoTs and prospective TU's are:

- Mission of a Technological University

Under this heading, Dr Marginson has identified the need for a marketing department within the IoTs or TUs which has been reflected in his report as follows:

> 'A professional office within the institution with a specialized focus on building enterprise and community link, working in conjunction with other units' (Criteria for Technological University Designation, 2012, p.13).

The next point raised by Dr Marginson was:

- Institutional Profile (scale, level and breadth of provision)

Under this heading, Dr Marginson has clearly stated that in order for an institute to be considered for designation as a technological university, it needs to be 'An institution large enough to be comparable with existing universities in Ireland' (Criteria for Technological University Designation, 2012, p.13).

In order for this to happen, the IoTs need to build up a critical mass. Therein lays the marketing challenge – to recruit and retain the required amount of students to achieve this.

From an international perspective, Dr Marginson suggests there should be a 'combined provision of programmes' (Criteria for Technological University Designation, 2012, p.13).

Under the staff capacity and staff development heading, Dr Marginson has identified that there needs to be 'A plan to develop a more output-based approach to the management of working conditions and staff employment' (Criteria for Technological University Designation, 2012, p.15). When reviewing the strategic plans of each of the IoTs they mentioned increased productivity amongst staff members as being part of their strategic goals. However, during the course of the interviews carried out, the interviewees did not convey details regarding metrics which may be employed to achieve this goal.

2. Issues relating to the current and possible future landscape of third-level sector

Some of the issues raised during the interview with Dr Jim Murray in relation to the current and possible future landscape of the third-level sector in Ireland will be discussed further in this section.

One of the questions asked during the interview referred to the fact that Dublin Institute of Technology was not part of Institutes of Technology Ireland which may confuse members of the public, especially those not familiar with the education system in Ireland, and who don't have a clear understanding of what an Institute of Technology is. In his response, Dr Murray suggested that the fact that Dublin Institute of Technology's title was "identical to the vast majority of the thirteen IoTs was an issue" (Murray, J. 2012) but in relation to the fact that DIT was not part of IOTI was not the main concern. Instead, he concluded that:

> "there are bigger issues about public perceptions and understandings of what an Institute of Technology is – I think it's a more fundamental issue than whether them [DIT] not being a part or being a part of IOTI and how the public perceive that…".
>
> (Murray, J. 2012)

Given the acknowledgement that the public's perception/understanding of what an IoT is has been raised not only during the interview with Dr Murray, but also during the interview with Diarmuid Cahill, DkIT, it would seem rather strange that anyone would consider using the word 'Technological' when coming up with a new title for these new designate institutions. The last thing this sector needs is for the public perception of what these institutions do to be adversely affected when it could be avoided instead.

In conclusion, there are many complex issues which will need to be addressed by all relevant stakeholders in relation to the current landscape of higher education in Ireland, before they can consider altering the landscape in future.

Chapter Six – Conclusion and Recommendations

1. Conclusion

The aim of this dissertation was to explore the marketing of higher education, and looking specifically at evidence of this from the IoT sector. In order to achieve this aim, three research objectives were identified and outcomes/deliverables were linked to these objectives. At each stage in the dissertation, these research aims and the outcomes/objectives associated with them were continuously referred back to.

In the Literature Review Chapter, three key marketing tools were identified as playing a major role in establishing the marketing objectives and techniques of each of the IoTs. These were their strategic plans – which were analysed in order to establish the IoTs marketing objectives, followed by their prospectuses and on-line operations, which were analysed in order to establish the IoTs marketing techniques.

The marketing objectives of each of the IoTs were identified in the strategic plans, and these objectives and the marketing tactics which the IoTs planned to use to achieve these objectives were documented in tables (strategic plan reviews – located in the appendices section). The prospectuses and websites of the IoTs were then analysed to see if the marketing techniques the IoTs planned to use to achieve their marketing objectives were actually documented in the prospectuses or on the websites. These techniques were not as easily identified in the prospectuses and websites as the marketing objectives were in the strategic plans.

The methodology used in order to fulfil the outcomes/deliverables associated with the three research objectives was in the form of a mixed method approach using sequential explanatory strategy which encompasses quantitative research (by conducting questionnaires), followed by qualitative research (by conducting interviews).

The findings from this research were analysed and mapped to the research objectives.

2. Recommendations

Three recommendations were identified following the analysis of the marketing in the IoT sector. These are as follows:

Recommendation 1:

There should be a designated marketing department within each IoT. The department should consist of four key personnel: a marketing director who should be appointed at Board level. A marketing manager should be appointed to oversee the day-to-day running of the department and should report directly to the marketing director. Along with a marketing manager, there should be a Stakeholder Liaison Officer – as it is apparent that although Schools Liaison Officers play an important role in the recruitment of students, there was a general consensus amongst the IoTs that wider community engagement was something they wished to get more involved in. The best way of achieving this is to have a person dedicated to liaising with the wider community on issues of mutual interest or benefit. Additionally, there should be a separate digital marketing executive who would have responsibility for on-line operations and social media aspects of marketing the IoT. This will become increasingly important in future as people become more familiar with this mechanism and adapt to it – it will soon become the norm, and the consumer will come to expect this type of communication from organisations such as IoTs. Each member of the marketing team should have at least a Level 8 marketing qualification.

Recommendation 2:

The marketing department should be responsible for the production and implementation of a marketing strategy to include the IoT's marketing objectives over a minimum of three years, and the tactics they plan to use to achieve these objectives. This strategy should be disseminated to stakeholders with direct links to the IoTs such as the DES, HEA and IOTI.

Recommendation 3:

Presently, the marketing function in IoTs is centred around a centrally planned public sector approach. The Government funds the IoTs who target students who are supported by the Government. There is a lack of vision when it comes to targeting potential students. The IoTs don't see themselves as being in competition so much with the other IoTs, but rather with other providers outside the IoT sector. They might conduct a more vigorous marketing campaign if they were all vying for the same customers.

Recommendation 4:

Some of the IoTs have identified benchmarking themselves against international standards as part of their strategic goals. If you consider that some of the best third-level education providers in the world are those with substantial fees associated with them, it's not because the student wishes to pay the highest price for their education, but rather the fact that these institutions have built up their reputations to such an extent that graduates from these institutions are being sought after by employers. If IoTs wish to 'jump on the band-wagon' they should consider the concept of choosing selected IoTs in the country and making them a fees-only IoT. The money generated from the fees should be put towards attracting the calibre of staff that is found in the other highly regarded institutions

around the world and building a reputation for themselves in terms of the quality of the courses offered, as well as the tuition and facilities provided.

References

Athlone Institute of Technology (2011) Adult and Continuing Education Evening and Part-Time Courses, Athlone, Ireland: Athlone Institute of Technology

Athlone Institute of Technology (2010) Postgraduate Prospectus, Athlone, Ireland: Athlone Institute of Technology

Athlone Institute of Technology (2009) Strategic Plan 2009 – 2013, Athlone, Ireland: Athlone Institute of Technology

Athlone Institute of Technology (2012) Undergraduate Prospectus 2012/2013, Athlone, Ireland: Athlone Institute of Technology

Campbell (2009) 'Utilising a minority language to develop brand identity: an evaluation of current practice(s) using the Irish Language

Claffey (2001) Key issues for developing marketing strategies in third-level colleges – with particular reference to Athlone Institute of Technology, Master's Thesis, Athlone Institute of Technology

Creswell, J.W. (2003) Research Design Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches (2nd edn), Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Cork Institute of Technology (2011) Continuing Education Courses 2011 – 2012, Cork, Ireland: Cork Institute of Technology

Cork Institute of Technology (2012) Full Time Courses 2012, Cork, Ireland: Cork Institute of Technology

Cork Institute of Technology (2005) Strategic Plan 2005 – 2010, Cork, Ireland: Cork Institute of Technology

Department of Education and Skills (2011) National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030, Dublin: Government Publications Office

Dundalk Institute of Technology (2012) Part-Time Courses Handbook, Dundalk, Ireland: Dundalk Institute of Technology

Dundalk Institute of Technology (2011) Postgraduate Handbook, Dundalk, Ireland: Dundalk Institute of Technology

Dundalk Institute of Technology (2006) Strategic Plan 2006 – 2011, Dundalk, Ireland: Dundalk Institute of Technology

Dundalk Institute of Technology (2012) Undergraduate Prospectus 2012/13, Dundalk, Ireland: Dundalk Institute of Technology

Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (2012) Postgraduate Opportunities at Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology, Galway, Ireland: Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology

Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (2012) Prospectus 2012-13, Galway, Ireland: Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology

Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (2010) Strategic Plan 2010 – 2015, Galway, Ireland: Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology

Institute of Art, Design and Technology Dun Laoghaire (2012) Prospectus 2012, Dun Laoghaire, Ireland: Institute of Art, Design and Technology

Institute of Art, Design and Technology Dun Laoghaire (2012) Postgraduate and Professional Development Prospectus 2012, Dun Laoghaire, Ireland: Institute of Art, Design and Technology Dun Laoghaire

Institute of Art, Design and Technology Dun Laoghaire (2008) Strategic Plan 2008 – 2012, Dun Laoghaire, Ireland: Institute of Art, Design and Technology Dun Laoghaire

Institute of Technology Blanchardstown (2012) Full-Time Prospectus 2012/2013, Blanchardstown, Ireland: Institute of Technology Blanchardstown

Institute of Technology Blanchardstown (2012) Part-Time Prospectus 2012/2013, Blanchardstown, Ireland: Institute of Technology Blanchardstown

Institute of Technology Blanchardstown (2006) Strategic Plan 2006 – 2011, Blanchardstown, Ireland: Institute of Technology Blanchardstown

Institute of Technology Carlow (2012) Part-Time Programmes, Carlow, Ireland: Institute of Technology Carlow

Institute of Technology Carlow (2012) Prospectus, Carlow, Ireland: Institute of Technology Carlow

Institute of Technology Carlow (2009) Strategic Plan 2009 – 2013, Carlow, Ireland: Institute of Technology Carlow

Institute of Technology Sligo (2012) Prospectus 2012, Sligo, Ireland: Institute of Technology, Sligo

Institute of Technology Sligo (2009) Strategic Plan 2009 – 2012, Sligo, Ireland: Institute of Technology Sligo

Institute of Technology Tallaght (2012) Prospectus Full Time Courses, Tallaght, Ireland: Institute of Technology Tallaght

Institute of Technology Tallaght (2012) Prospectus Part Time Programme Guide, Tallaght, Ireland: Institute of Technology Tallaght

Institute of Technology Tallaght (2009) Strategic Plan 2009 – 2014, Tallaght, Ireland: Institute of Technology Tallaght

Institute of Technology Tralee (2012) Lifelong Learning Prospectus, Tralee, Ireland: Institute of Technology Tralee

Institute of Technology Tralee (2012) Prospectus, Tralee, Ireland: Institute of Technology Tralee

Institute of Technology Tralee (2008) Strategic Plan 2008 – 2013, Tralee, Ireland: Institute of Technology Tralee

Keogh, E. (2012) 'Alliance between DCU and Dundalk institute', The Irish Times, 19 July 2012

Letterkenny Institute of Technology (2012) Prospectus 2012/2013, Letterkenny, Ireland: Letterkenny Institute of Technology

Letterkenny Institute of Technology (2007) Strategic Plan 2007 – 2013, Letterkenny, Ireland: Letterkenny Institute of Technology

Limerick Institute of Technology (2012) Graduate Studies and Research Handbook, Limerick, Ireland: Limerick Institute of Technology

Limerick Institute of Technology (2011) LIT Lifelong Learning Handbook 2011 2012, Limerick, Ireland: Limerick Institute of Technology

Limerick Institute of Technology (2012) LIT Programme Handbook, Limerick, Ireland: Limerick Institute of Technology

Limerick Institute of Technology (2012) LIT – Tipperary Programme Handbook, Limerick, Ireland: Limerick Institute of Technology

Limerick Institute of Technology (2011) LIT Vision and Strategy to 2020, Limerick, Ireland: Limerick Institute of Technology

Marginson, S. (2012) 'Criteria for Technological University Designation', Dublin, Ireland: Higher Education Authority

Murray, J. Interviewed by Rudden, Y. (12 June 2012)

Ó Catháin, C. (2012) 'A strong case for a new university', The Irish Times, 7 February 2012

Waterford Institute of Technology (2011) Part-time Prospectus 2011/12, Waterford, Ireland: Waterford Institute of Technology

Waterford Institute of Technology (2012) Postgraduate Opportunities at WIT, Waterford, Ireland: Waterford Institute of Technology

Waterford Institute of Technology (2012) Programmes for International Students, Waterford, Ireland: Waterford Institute of Technology

Waterford Institute of Technology (2007) Strategic Plan 2007 – 2010, Waterford, Ireland: Waterford Institute of Technology

Waterford Institute of Technology (2012) Undergraduate Prospectus 2012, Waterford, Ireland: Waterford Institute of Technology

Facebook [online] (cited 28 July 2012) Available from

<URL:http//www.facebook.com>

Twitter [online] (cited 28 July 2012) Available from

<URL:http://www.twitter.com>

Appendices