Creating the human resources for technology: the case of Ireland and the specific role of DIT.

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Creating the Human Resources for Technology

The Case of Ireland and the specific role of DIT

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Dublin Institute of Technology
Ireland

To: President’s Conference
Universidad Anáhuac, Xalapa, Mexico

March 2004
1. Economics and the Celtic Tiger

The economic boom which Ireland has experienced in recent years, particularly in the period from the middle of the 1990s, has been dubbed by the media as the ‘Celtic Tiger’ and certainly has been the focus of widespread international media (and indeed governmental) attention. Recall that Ireland, or at least the part excluding Northern Ireland, became an independent state in 1922. It was, in many ways, a rather poor country at that time although it is interesting to note its standard of living in 1922 was higher than in many other countries of Western Europe. However, the next 40 years saw its ‘ranking’ within Europe fall significantly. In particular, economic performance was dismal in the 15 years after World War Two. In the late 50s domestic economic policies began to change but the next 30 years was very much a period of ‘catch-up’ punctuated with periodic bouts of inappropriate policy making.

Table 1 gives some idea of how far behind Ireland was, even in the mid 80’s.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>122.1</td>
<td>114.5</td>
<td>116.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>105.3</td>
<td>110.5</td>
<td>109.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>87.3</td>
<td>94.0</td>
<td>102.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>112.1</td>
<td>107.1</td>
<td>102.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>123.9</td>
<td>104.4</td>
<td>101.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>61.1</td>
<td>54.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>56.9</td>
<td>74.8</td>
<td>69.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>122.7</td>
<td>115.0</td>
<td>112.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>60.8</td>
<td>58.9</td>
<td>63.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 GDP per head of population, EU 15 =100

In fact in 1986, of the 15 only Portugal (54.0) and Greece (61.4) lagged behind Ireland.

The 1990s however saw economic growth rates which previously had been achieved only by the ‘Tiger Economies’ of South-East Asia. If we take the corresponding data for 1999 in Table 1 we get:
Table 2    GDP per head of population, EU 15 =100

Now only 3 countries of the 15 exceeded Ireland’s ranking:

- Belgium (112.5)
- Luxembourg (165.9)
- Denmark (114.6)

If we think more about people than economic indicators, then the unemployment figures are interesting:

Table 3    Unemployment, Ireland and EU

(*includes new German Länder from 1994 onwards)

So by the late 1990s Ireland had moved from one of the highest rates of unemployment in Europe to a chronic shortage of every form of labour. Employment was at an all-time high in the history of the State and emigration was replaced by the new experience of mass immigration.
Creating the Human Resources for Technology

The “World” of course wanted to know the secret!. Here let me issue a disclaimer: I am a mathematician, not an economist. So let me give some quotes from the ‘experts’

- The canny use of EU funds not their huge scale
- Prudent public spending and a lower birth rate
- Low-cost, English speaking home in EU for foreign corporations

**TABLE 4**
(Newsweek Dec 1996)

- Sound macroeconomic management
- Sustained foreign investment

**TABLE 5**
(OECD 1997)

Academic commentators have generally agreed that a range of factors is at play and these generally included the following external factors:

- External Economic Environment
- EU Funds
- Foreign Direct Investment
### The Communications Revolution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 6</th>
<th>External Factors for Success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
The internal reasons for success are generally more extensive and tend to include:

- Fiscal Reform
- Structural Revolution in the Economy
- Demographics
- Social Partnership
- Recognition of Competitiveness
- A Commercialised Public Enterprise
- Industrial Policy
- New Forms of Work Organisation
- Cultural Confidence Building
- An Educated Workforce

**TABLE 7**

**Internal Factors for Success**

It is not my purpose to go through each of these factors here – greater details may be found, for example, in [1]. Let me briefly look at Industrial Policy and Foreign Direct Investment before concentrating on my main theme: Education.

Ireland was the first state in Europe to base its development on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI); since the abandoning of protectionism in 1956, FDI has been the central strand of all Irish economic policy. The policy has been pursued consistently by all governments for some 40 years – see e.g. [2] - and there is an almost complete political consensus on it. This climate of certainty, coupled with significant grants and attractive rates of corporation tax, has certainly played a significant role in our economic development but it hardly explains the Celtic Tiger phenomenon since such policies were in place long before the unprecedented boom of the 90s. Some commentators have argued – see e.g. [3] - that
the “big domestic change was the transformation of the state finances”: the new social partnership along with greatly reduced state expenditure and borrowing made Ireland a low tax economy which, when taken in conjunction with the fortuitous arrival of EU cohesion funds and a revival of the US economy, resulted in just the correct climate for large scale manufacturing to flourish. A key complementary strategy in relation to education was, of course, vitally important here and we shall return to this later.

The level of this manufacturing increase is illustrated by:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>EU-15</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>Ireland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>100.2</td>
<td>99.4</td>
<td>104.7</td>
<td>108.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>104.8</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>112.3</td>
<td>126.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>109.1</td>
<td>101.3</td>
<td>117.8</td>
<td>147.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>110.8</td>
<td>101.4</td>
<td>122.8</td>
<td>156.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 8  Industrial Production: Manufacturing, 1995=100**

Even allowing for some scepticism about the figures – ‘transfer pricing’ by MNCs seems to have been common – this is an impressive performance. It is also important to remember that the overall small scale of the Irish economy means that the concentration of this, almost totally foreign, manufacturing investment has more effect than in larger countries – see e.g. [4]. Because much of FDI in Ireland comes from the ICT and pharmaceutical areas, there is often an erroneous assumption that high technology employment is the key to Ireland’s success. In fact employment in high technology manufacturing and high technology services account for only some 11.6% of total employment. However as a proportion of manufacturing employment, the high technology area is significant, being exceeded within the EU only in Germany and the UK. Again size is important: high
technology industries do not require a high standard of education for the entire population but they do require a pool of labour with relevant skills – see [3].

This is perhaps an appropriate time to review the higher education system in Ireland in general and my own institution, Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) in particular.

2. Higher Education in Ireland

The Irish Higher Education system has been organised since the 70s on a binary system of universities (offering largely degree and postgraduate programmes) and regional technical colleges (offering in the main two year certificates with a one year “add-on” diploma). However, in Dublin a number of colleges of technology (curiously always known by the name of the street in which they were located) had existed since the late 1880s and these colleges entered into an arrangement with the University of Dublin whereby the colleges diplomas were recognised by the University for a degree award. As a result these colleges, which later became a single institution, the Dublin Institute of Technology, effectively straddled both sides of the binary divide. In the mid 1990s the regional technical colleges were renamed ‘Institutes of Technology’ but continued to have their awards made by a central body, the Higher Education Training Awards Council. The Dublin Institute of Technology, on the other hand, became an awarding body in its own right with the same powers to make awards (including awards at doctoral level) as the universities.
TABLE 9  Structure of Irish Higher Education

It is interesting to note that most of the non-university sector, including DIT, continues to provide the theoretical dimension of the training of apprentices across a range of disciplines.

The provision of part-time programmes has been largely the preserve of the extra-university sector, particularly DIT, but this has changed significantly in recent years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Universities</td>
<td>19,959</td>
<td>23,908</td>
<td>42,213</td>
<td>72,168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIT</td>
<td>2,447</td>
<td>5,384</td>
<td>11,745</td>
<td>9,873</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Institutes</td>
<td>590</td>
<td>7,119</td>
<td>17,903</td>
<td>40,017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>22,996</td>
<td>36,411</td>
<td>71,861</td>
<td>122,058</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 10  Full-Time Students in Higher Education in Ireland
TABLE 11  Part-Time Students in Higher Education in Ireland

It should be noted that part-time enrolments do not include apprentices who attend on a ‘Block Release’ basis.

In view of some comments we wish to make later, it is instructive to consider the numbers of new entrants to institutions. The latest available data refer to 2001/2002.

### TABLE 12  New Entrants in 2001/2 to Irish Higher Education

Notice that the number of new entrants in the non-university sector exceeds that in the university sector. It is also interesting to look at the gender balance of students in full-time higher education:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MALE</th>
<th>FEMALE</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Universities</td>
<td>29,918</td>
<td>42,250</td>
<td>72,168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIT</td>
<td>5,249</td>
<td>4,624</td>
<td>9,873</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 13 Students in Irish Higher Education (2001/02) by Gender

In some measure these figures are explained by the large number of women attending arts/humanities programmes in the universities; the non-university sector has traditionally been focused on science, engineering and technology but this has changed significantly in the past few years.

Let us return to the Celtic Tiger!

3. Higher Education in Ireland and the Celtic Tiger

How significant a role did education really play? Conversely what has been the impact on education of the Celtic Tiger?

Clearly education is rated as a key factor by all commentators, so does this mean that education was a high priority for government spending? The figures are revealing:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Early Childhood</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>Tertiary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD Mean</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 14 Expenditure per student relative to GDP per capita (1997)
Note that Ireland’s direct expenditure at all educational levels actually decreased from 4.7% of GDP in 1990 to 4.5% in 1997 while the OECD mean increased from 4.8% to 5.1% over the same period – see [5]. What in fact has happened is that third-level expansion initially focused largely on low-cost short-cycle undergraduate programmes, followed a little later by a number of Government initiatives in areas of “skills shortage” in both the university and non-university sectors. (For example, the average duration of tertiary studies in Ireland in 1997 was 2.6 years compared to an OECD mean of 4.1 years). Thus relative to the OECD average we see a much greater percentage of Irish students taking certificates (short-cycle courses mainly of two years duration) in the regional institutes of technology and a lesser percentage taking degrees (of three or four years) in the seven universities and DIT. Let me emphasise at this point that although DIT shares many characteristics with the seven Irish universities (e.g. highly competitive entry requirements, specialised research groups, rapidly growing numbers of postgraduate students etc), it is in many ways different: it is unashamedly pro-industry, its research specialism all tend to the ‘applied’ end of the spectrum and it seeks to maintain its broad spectrum approach of having a mix of students at all levels from apprenticeship to doctoral level. Hence it must be kept in mind that degree and postgraduate students in DIT, while on a comparable academic level to that pertaining in the traditional universities, have a significantly more applied bias e.g. there is no traditional arts/humanities faculty in DIT. The Institute also maintains, and indeed has substantially increased, its commitment to be impoverished inner city areas of Dublin: it has led the way in the development of links with primary and secondary schools in deprived areas and heads up an important programme with industry partners in the development of ‘digital communities’.

4. DIT and the Celtic Tiger
So just what precisely has DIT done to help the development of the Celtic Tiger? Note that the Institute is operating on a very restricted land base so that significant expansion has not been possible; rather a change of direction has been the only possibility for DIT. A look at enrolment and awards show these points quite clearly:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Full-Time</th>
<th>Part-Time</th>
<th>Apprentice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1984/85</td>
<td>5,892</td>
<td>10,798</td>
<td>5,923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989/90</td>
<td>7,543</td>
<td>9,644</td>
<td>4,968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002/03</td>
<td>10,117</td>
<td>6,806</td>
<td>3,129</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


(* Apprenticeship numbers are difficult to compare directly due to a change in the mode of attendance)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Postgraduate</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Diploma</th>
<th>Certificate</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1984/85</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>694</td>
<td>585</td>
<td>1,699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989/90</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>670</td>
<td>869</td>
<td>931</td>
<td>2,470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002/03</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>1,372</td>
<td>761</td>
<td>740</td>
<td>3,053</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 16**  Awards by type in DIT (1984-2003)

In the mid 1990s the Government, through the Department of Education and Science, initiated a “Skills Shortage Initiative” whereby they requested higher education institutions to provide new programmes in areas that had been identified, in co-operation with industry, as being important to sustaining development. DIT responded enthusiastically to these requests at both degree and sub-degree level. New programmes were introduced as follows:

- Data and Network Communications
- Microelectronics Technology
- Advanced Industrial Maintenance
Creating the Human Resources for Technology

Table 17 Certificate/Diplomas in the Skills Shortage Initiative

- Plant Operation and Maintenance
- Systems Control and Electrical Power
- Manutronics

Table 18 Primary Degrees in the Skills Shortage Initiative

- Computer Engineering
- Computer Science (4 options)
- Information Systems
- Information Engineering and Management
- Manutronic Engineering
- Microelectronics

The Institute also participated with the seven universities in the Advanced Technical Skills Programme. This programme was an early initiative of the Department of Education and Science with a view to producing masters-level graduates in areas of importance to the economy. It was, in fact, largely replaced by the more focused Skills Shortage Initiative.
In addition, DIT commenced a range of new programmes, many of them in a part-time mode suitable for people working in industry, which reflected emerging new needs within the economy. These were:

- Project Management
- Facilities Management
- Strategic Management
- Spatial Management
- Food Safety Management
- Hospitality Management
- Logistics
- E-business

Table 19  New Masters Programmes in DIT

And at undergraduate level:

- Transport Technology
- Environmental Planning and Management
Creating the Human Resources for Technology

- Transport and Logistics
- Tourism
- Physics Technology
- Analytic/Forensic Chemistry
- Digital Media

Table 20  New Primary Degree Programmes in DIT

A little earlier DIT, with EU support, had initiated two important schemes: A Graduate Training Programme (GTP) and an Enterprise Development Programme (EDP). These schemes were nurtured by the DIT Project Development Centre, a grouping established in 1983 to help and support entrepreneurial graduates. The Enterprise Development Programme focuses on the development of entrepreneurial skills through real trading experiences. In summary EDP is concerned with

- Entrepreneurship through real trading
- Takes business ideas to the early trading stage
- Some formal training in key business skills
- Provision of individual mentors

Table 21  The Enterprise Development Programmes in DIT

To-date the programme has led to the establishment of 230 new small business firms.
The Graduate Training Programme was effectively a postgraduate research training programme leading to a Masters award but with the added dimension that the research project be industrially relevant.

### Table 22  The Graduate Training Programme in DIT

In the period 1994-98, 211 graduates were involved interacting with 117 companies.

The Project Development Centre at DIT has more recently undertaken a number of new initiatives relating to entrepreneurship/commercialising of research. These include

- **Hothouse Programme**
Creating the Human Resources for Technology

► knowledge intensive start-ups

- Fast Growth Programme
  ► moving from start-up to expansion

- Prospect Programme
  ► commercialising Irish University research

Table 23  Project Development Centre Initiatives

5. Conclusion

Before trying to draw together some conclusions, let me illustrate the extent of socio-economic change that has occurred in Ireland since 1996. Recent census data reveal the following changes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-Economic Group</th>
<th>1996</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>Change %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employers &amp; Managers</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>608</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Professional</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Professional</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other non-manual</td>
<td>613</td>
<td>671</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manual skilled</td>
<td>514</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>-22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-skilled</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unskilled</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>-30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own Account Workers</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>-26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural Workers</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>-54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>423</td>
<td>696</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>3,624</td>
<td>3,917</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 24  Socio-economic change in Ireland (numbers in 000s)
Suggestions of change of this scale made in the early 1990s would have met with derision. It will be interesting to see the role played by our education system in this change; analysis is not yet available but will be in the not too distant future.

What can we say about the extent of the contribution of the very specific policy of “low cost volume production” - in the terminology of [3] – of technical graduates to the Celtic Tiger phenomenon? Without doubt, the calculated political risk of producing, for a period, an over-supply of technical graduates, has been largely successful. Ireland has been able to move from a mainly agrarian to an industrial (some would even say post-industrial) economy. It is however an economy which is highly dependent on mainly American companies in a very small number of high technology areas. The long-term sustainability of this policy is, of course, a major issue for discussion in Ireland to-day. A consensus seems to be emerging: Ireland must continue to climb the “value chain” and that brings with it new challenges for higher education; research-led initiatives which can subsequently be translated into commercial opportunities take on increasing significance and this will necessitate further quite fundamental changes in our whole tertiary education system.

Finally, I should address, if only briefly, the obvious question: can the Celtic Tiger phenomenon be reproduced elsewhere? I hope that I have demonstrated that there were some very important peculiarities of the Irish situation which played a disproportionately important role in our country’s success. These are not easily replicated elsewhere. One dimension of our success can certainly be moulded into other environments: the production in a highly focused way of appropriate graduates at low cost.
REFERENCES


