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Putting Ideas Into Practice- the New Greenway Hub.

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Putting ideas into practice

Locating the Greenway Hub—a new building focused on research and innovation and incorporating incubation space for start-ups—at the geographic centre of its Grangegorman campus is a clear indication of the importance of entrepreneurship at Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT).

"Entrepreneurship is core and central to DIT," says the institute's president, Prof. Brian Norton. "We're an institution that is inherently linked to industry—everything from manufacturing to the creative sector—and we are very much focused on practice-led education leading people into entrepreneurship."

Recently completed and set to be occupied in February, the Greenway Hub has been funded through FERTI and Enterprise Ireland, with matching funding from DIT. It is intended to be the intellectual core of research and innovation on the new campus. As well as housing the DIT Hothouse incubation facility and commercialisation team, the building will be home to 90 PhD students and 40 staff researchers of the Environmental Sustainability and Health Institute (ESHi). Students will have access to a large central lab which is adjacent to state-of-the-art facilities for areas of research strength in vision sciences, assistive technology, food chemistry, microbiology, solar energy, etc.

"It's the kind of building that's on the edge of the campus because that's how universities develop," says Norton. "Because we have access to a new campus we had the opportunity to put it smack in the middle to be emblematic of the importance of innovation and entrepreneurship to the institution."

But the physical location alone will not achieve that, he says. "We're obviously going to have a lot of activities that begin to focus the students on the idea that entrepreneurship and creating your own business is equally legitimate as going to work for somebody."

"It's very much part of the culture of the organisation: entrepreneurs being in the middle of the campus rather than at the edge. It's physically, emotionally and in terms of our educational mission, inherently linked to what we're about."

Hothouse is the innovation and technology transfer office responsible for commercialising intellectual property arising from research at the institution. According to Norton, since being set up in 2007, it has consistently outperformed other Irish university technology transfer offices, completing up to 30pc of the annual commercial technology transfer licences in Ireland. And, through its Enterprise Ireland-funded incubation programmes, it has helped create some 200 sustainable businesses that have attracted €11m in equity investment.

"We have a policy that unless there's another agreement in place, intellectual property belongs to colleagues and students as of right," says Norton. "It's very much encouraging the identification and disclosure and protection of intellectual property and we have one of the highest licensing rates in Ireland as a result. And, 1,400 people are currently working in our spin-outs."

The focus on entrepreneurship varies from programme to programme, but all are practice-based, research-informed and developed with input from industry partners. "They're all based on the idea of going into practice, into the professions, whether as an employee or an employer or setting up their own business," explains Norton. "They're very practically oriented but also very informed by context and research. You offer academic and research, but practice-based and research is quite an interesting combination."

To further tie this idea with industry and its focus on innovation, DIT is planning a collaborative, interdisciplinary, multi-storey research and science park at the entrance to the campus at Broadstone. The complex, which is expected to be completed and occupied by 2019, is one of the highest licensing rates in Ireland as a result. And, 1,400 people are currently working in our spin-outs."

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