Foresight and Strategic Planning at the Institute of Technology, Sligo, Ireland

FUTURES & REGIONS CONFERENCE
Background

- Established 1970
- 6000 students
- Third level Higher Education Institute
- Awards from Higher Certificate to PhD
- €50 million budget
Strategic Planning 2002

- First strategic plan – converted "strategic vision" to a physical plan
- Developed at executive level
- Traditional planning tools (SWOT, PEST, etc.)
- Lack of ownership by staff
- Lack of understanding of why strategic planning is important
Mapping the Future

Strategic plan – 2007 to 2012

- How to ensure staff ownership
- How to ensure clarity of mission

Hypothesis – to achieve these, need:

- Wide participation
- Wide consultation
- Innovative approach
- “Engage the academic heartland”
Foresight Process

Steering committee representative of stakeholders
- Partnership Committee (Trade Unions)
- Senior management
- Academic Council
- Student Union
- Local employers (External stakeholders)

Series of facilitated meetings
Identification of Themes

Using techniques such as brainstorming, brainwriting, mind mapping, “What if”.

Five themes were identified:
- Scholarship
- External Environment
- Internal Organisation
- The Student
- Institute Identity

Four sub groups were established to look at the first four themes.
Scenario Building

- Foresight planning involves taking a much longer view into the future and can involve Scenario Building
- External Environment sub-group undertook this task
- Based on two criteria 15 years hence:
  - The economy
  - Level of Institute autonomy
The Scenarios

Autonomy       Centralisation

Strong economy

Mickhail
24/7

Independent
Ingrid

Weak economy

Sad
Paddy

Disillusioned
Deirdre
Consultation

Extensive consultation was necessary, both written and face-to-face.

In particular the “main” external bodies:

- HETAC
- HEA
- Sligo Chamber of Commerce
- Enterprise Ireland
- Industrial Development Agency

Feedback and sub-group reports formed basis for writing the plan
Writing the Plan

Based on an optimistic future:
- Strong economy
- More autonomy both budgetary and academic
- Good industrial relations

But aware of:
- Demographic problems
- Rising oil prices
- Technological change
- Changing student profiles
Evaluation

- Short questionnaire (10 questions) to each of the committee members
- Number of questionnaires – 100
- Response rate 50%
Involvement and Role

Previously involved in Strategic Planning?

Role?

- Yes
- No

- Group chair
- Group member
- Steering group member
Membership and Foresight

Which group were you a member of?
- Steering
- Scholarship
- Internal
- External
- Student

Opinion on foresight?
- Not satisfactory
- Satisfactory
- Very satisfactory
- Unaware of method
Ability to Participate and Foresight Culture

Ability to Participate?
- Yes
- No

Established a Culture of foresight?
- Not at all
- Not obviously
- Perhaps
- Definitely
- Most definitely
Foresight approach and Final Plan

Is foresight appropriate?
- Don't know
- Not appropriate
- Appropriate
- Very appropriate
- Essential

Read Plan?
- Yes
- No
Group Input and Foresight in 2012

Groups input to final plan?

- Not reflected
- Poorly reflected
- Moderately reflected
- Well reflected
- Very well reflected

Foresight in 2012?

- Don't care
- No opinion
- Definitely not
- Neutral
- Strongly
- Very strongly