

Report of the International Strategic Advisory Board (ISAB) of IT:U

Preamble

The International Strategic Advisory Board (ISAB) of IT:U convened on June 25–26, 2025 in Linz. Before the meeting the ISAB received a comprehensive strategic report from IT:U for prereading. The two-day agenda included a tour of the university's laboratories and sessions dedicated for key institutional areas: research strategy, faculty development, learning and education, study programs and infrastructure as well as interactions with society.

In addition to the ISAB members (Chairperson Prof. Tuula Teeri, Vice-Chairperson Prof. York Sure-Vetter, Prof. Patrick Baudisch, Prof. Nirav Merchant, Prof. Victoria Nash, Prof. Samantha Smidt, and Prof. Moshe Y. Vardi) the meeting was also attended by three members of the Founding Convent of IT:U (Chairperson Claudia von der Linden, Vice-Chairperson Prof. Martin Hitz, and Wilfried Eichlseder. The ISAB discussions during the meeting were grounded on the strategy document and the in-depth presentations and active participation of IT:U Professors, Founding Directors, and the Founding President Prof. Stefanie Lindstaedt.

This report reflects the outcomes of the ISAB's deliberations, as consolidated in a closed session at the end of the second day. The Board also engaged in direct dialogue with the Founding President, providing immediate reflections and feedback. The observations and recommendations summarized in this report are intended to support IT:U's continued development and strategic positioning.

To: IT:U President Prof. Stefanie Lindstaedt of IT:U and the Founding Convention

July 7. 2025



Tuula Teeri, Professor emerita

Chair, on behalf of the ISAB

Executive summary

IT:U stands out as a bold reinvention of the university model. Its interdisciplinary, project-based, and ethically grounded approach for both research and education is designed to address complex societal and technological challenges toward sustainable futures. The institution's commitment to responsible technology development, especially in areas such as artificial intelligence, is already evident across its academic structures, and will be further strengthened by inclusion of competences in art and design.

The ISAB highlights several key enablers of long-term success: the urgent need for a dedicated physical campus, formalization of the tenure process for faculty hiring, a holistic technology perspective, strategic hiring of professional non-academic leadership, and the cultivation of a strong, value-driven intellectual culture.

The Board sees clear potential for IT:U to serve as a national and international flagship institution. Its innovative practice-based education model, including plans to scale student numbers through advanced digital support and AI-driven mentoring, is progressing well. Planning for the university's Third Mission is likewise progressing well. A particular strength lies in IT:U's commitment to fostering regional impact through knowledge transfer, industry collaboration, and workforce development contributing directly to Austria's and Upper Austria's economic growth and social mobility.

The ISAB affirms its strong support for IT:U's vision and strategic direction and encourages continued investment in its infrastructure, people, and mission to ensure its success as a transformative institution.

Institutional Momentum and Future Development

A Remarkable Start

The ISAB commends IT:U on the extraordinary progress made since its launch in 2023. Within a single year, the university has recruited a founding faculty of 11 professors, launched two PhD programs, built several “learn labs” with up-to-date infrastructure for practice-based learning, and will be launching its first Masters’ program in October 2025. These developments are not only rapid but strategically well-aligned with the university’s mission, clearly demonstrating the visionary leadership of the Founding President and the Founding Faculty and staff.

A particularly noteworthy achievement is the creation of a research agenda with prioritized domains and a recruitment strategy that supports a holistic approach to responsible development of technology. IT:U’s interdisciplinary model fosters collaboration across domains, which will make it uniquely suited to address today’s most pressing societal and technological challenges. The foundations laid so far demonstrate the university’s potential to redefine academic norms and advance a new paradigm of research, education, and engagement.

Reimagining University

IT:U is not merely building “a new university” - it is aiming to reinvent the very concept of university thereby laying a new base for future higher education. As a new institution, it has the freedom to implement what established institutions often cannot: a project-based, interdisciplinary learning model grounded in societal and environmental relevance. The ISAB sees this as a unique opportunity for IT:U to position itself internationally as a trailblazer in technology education and research, especially in emerging fields like AI and responsible innovation.

Foundations for Long-Term Success

To support this trajectory, several foundational elements must continue to be developed with care:

- **Campus:** The success of IT:U depends critically on access to a dedicated, high-quality physical campus. Without shared facilities for faculty and students, it will not be possible to establish academic cohesion, institutional identity, and adequate research and educational infrastructure. This is a critical prerequisite of the execution of the IT:U strategy and solving this together with the founders and stakeholders of the university should have the highest priority in the coming year.

- **Holistic Technology Perspective:** IT:U is committed to addressing technology through an interdisciplinary, societal and ethical lens, all deeply embedded across all its prioritized domains. We, the ISAB are in full agreement that no single discipline can tackle these challenges alone; the IT:U model enables the necessary integration. This approach is also key to addressing the dual nature of technology with clear benefits to economic and societal development but also, sometimes, unforeseen consequences on the Earth ecosystems. Integrating expertise in social science and humanities, especially in the cross-roads of art and design, will be essential to achieving the depth and richness needed for a holistic approach. This development is already on the way with the currently on-going round of faculty recruitment.
- **Faculty hiring:** The tenure process for faculty hiring is of critical importance to the long-term excellence of IT-U. We witnessed a very well-designed faculty hiring process for selecting high caliber candidates who combine disciplinary excellence with interdisciplinary experience, have strong commitment to collaboration and education, and show alignment with IT:U's values and ambitions within the prioritized domains. The current hiring practices are well devised for the foundational development of the university but need to be considered carefully and formalized as the university grows.
- **Intellectual Culture:** The founding faculty is now laying a solid foundation to the development of IT-U, strengthened by every round of recruitment of new faculty and staff. With the current plan of rapid growth of the faculty and the student body, it is important to consider how faculty voice will be heard to ensure adoption of IT:U's values, to support visionary experimentation, and to foster continued dialogue across disciplines. It will also become important to consider ways of involving a much larger student body in building and sustaining an interactive intellectual culture.
- **Non-academic leadership:** IT:U is creating a management system with professional staff/directors complementing academic faculty. This is ideal for managing strategic/practical aspects of the university development thereby allowing faculty to focus on research, education and building relations with industry and society. The current directors we met are well on their way to creating the necessary structures and processes.

Education: Innovation with Intent

The ISAB reviewed the planning for the Masters' and PhD programs and found them to be well-designed, mission-aligned, and pedagogically innovative. The university's project-based learning approach is particularly promising as a model for combining research with practice and developing students' real-world readiness.

However, in our meetings with the faculty, we spent quite some time discussing the inevitable challenges of such an individualized curriculum for scaling it up for larger numbers of students. The critical issues include procedures for student intake, as well as availability of teaching resources and infrastructure. The leadership's forward-looking approach to scaling student numbers includes e.g. vertically integrated projects where students at different levels collaborate, faculty-led research initiatives and exploring innovative uses of AI technologies to support both students and mentors in meaningful, personalized ways. With the current requirement of a relatively rapid increase in student numbers, planning for the expansion needs attention in the near future.

Third Mission: Engaging Society

Planning for the university's Third Mission is underway. A clear, contextual definition is essential, along with a dedicated strategy that complements research and education. The Third Mission should focus on societal engagement, knowledge transfer, and public impact with specific attention to the benefits for Austria and Upper Austria, including both economic development and enhanced social mobility. IT:U's strategies to engage with industry, support workforce development, and foster a highly trained, AI-fluent talent base will be key drivers of regional innovation and growth. With new leadership role for outreach already in place, IT:U is well-positioned to anchor this mission in institutional practice from the beginning.