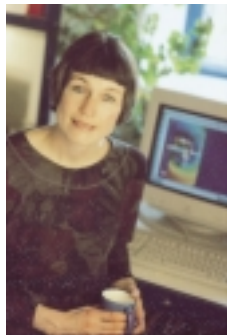


DISABILITY TELEWORKING



At first sight it seems obvious – teleworking means disabled people not having to travel into work, not having to encounter insurance problems due to limited mobility, not having to

cope with assumptions about their abilities based on physical appearance. It is flexible, computer-based work that can be done whenever you like as long as it's completed on time, so it must offer new work opportunities.

The reality is more complex, and our conference last November tried to tease out the pros and cons, and to look at why teleworking has made little progress in tackling the problem of unemployment for disabled people to date. Some problems relate to teleworking in general – not just to disability issues. There are many more people who want to telework than there are people willing to take on teleworkers, although attitudes are changing due to skill shortages in the IT industry, and traffic congestion.

In general, employers worry about issues of trust – how can they tell the work is going to be completed on time? What would happen if you hit a technical

support problem? If you got sick? Introducing teleworking means a shift in mindframe for managers in a company – instead of managing the people in front of them by “eyeball” they must learn to manage by results – to set a deadline, brief and budget and allow the teleworker the freedom to complete the work as they wish.

There are many IT skills training schemes available for disabled people, but the majority are aimed at basic computer literacy. At the moment, most of the telework opportunities available are high-skill jobs in areas like journalism, translation, web design, programming, technical support and so on. So another problem is that many disabled people do not have the skillsets that employers need.

Technical support is still a big issue, as Cathy Cumberbeach and Mary Duffy outline below, although the CRC's Aphrodite project wants to plug the gap.

But there is one big area of opportunity opening up – call centre work carried out from people's homes. The skillsets required are not as high as for professional teleworkers, although the risks of isolation and lack of visibility for disabled people still remain. I hope you find this briefing useful and encourage you to use the contacts and resources here to explore whether teleworking could suit you or your organization.

Imogen Bertin, ETD project

Taking to telework in Kinsale



Cathy Cumberbeach carries out administrative work for the personnel department of a Cork pharmaceutical company from her home in Kinsale. “The only difference compared to before my accident is that now I walk down the hallway to my spare bedroom instead of travelling in to an office, which is a lot easier for me.” The NRB helped Cathy to purchase a one-handed keyboard and voice recognition software, but she has found technical support difficult to source. “It can be very lonely, particularly if you also live alone as I do. You have to make an effort to get out and meet people. But I can't thank my employer enough for their support – I think it would be very hard for someone recovering from a stroke as I was to go out and make new contacts to get work.”



Seize the chance – but it's no panacea

Mary Duffy is an artist and journalist who works from her home near Newcastle, Co. Wicklow. “Teleworking is isolated work which suits certain disabled people, but is not a panacea for the 80% who are underemployed, disregarded and feeling dumped. But when you're teleworking people can't see you, so they don't prejudge you as disabled. It opens up the job market, as do computers. Now I can use an Apple Mac to create and email designs that twenty years ago would have meant using scalpels and letraset with my toes. I can research on the Internet without leaving my room. I love the autonomy teleworking offers, but technical support is still a problem.”

Credits and contacts

This briefing has been produced through collaboration between several organisations and projects. In November 1998, a conference on Disability and Teleworking was held by kind permission of the European Foundation at Loughlinstown House. The conference was co-organised by the Foundation and the European Telework Development Project (ETD), which is run in Ireland by the Communication Workers Union. Other supporters included the Central Remedial Clinic and its Aphrodite Horizon project, and the government's Information Society Commission. Video-conferencing facilities were sponsored by PVL Communications. The Aphrodite project paid the production costs of this briefing and ETD has created the content.

ETD is a dissemination project of the European



Commission aimed at increasing the uptake of teleworking as a method of flexible working. ETD has a helpline – Freefone: 1800 225070. Email: imogen@ctc.ie

The Communications Workers Union has a “virtual branch” for teleworkers and has recently negotiated a wide-ranging agreement on teleworking for its members in Telecom Éireann. www.cwu.ie Tel: 01 836 6388.



The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions is an autonomous body of the European Union which carries out research to advise on policy options in the member states. www.eurofound.ie Tel: 01 204 3100.



The Central Remedial Clinic provides advice on assistive technology for disabled individuals. Through its Aphrodite project, the CRC



provides technical liaison officers around the country. The TLOs, who are all disabled themselves, provide a local support service for users of assistive technology. Tel: 01 833 2206. Email: lisamc@crc.ie

The Information Society Commission was appointed for a three-year period to the end of 2000 to oversee development of the Information Society in Ireland. www.infosoccomm.ie Tel: 01 670 3092.





Message from the Minister

Mary Wallace, Minister of State at the Department of Justice with responsibility for disability issues, opened the conference.

Two hundred years ago the Industrial Revolution altered society by mechanising physical work. People moved into the towns in order to work in the factories where the machines were located. As we approach the 21st century, the 'mechanisation' of information work will create an equally drastic revolution. By early 1998, the number of people in Europe teleworking rose to over 4 million or almost 3% of the workforce.

Telework is now on the agenda in Ireland, with the formation by the government in April 1998 of a National Advisory Council on Teleworking, which is to advise Minister Noel Treacy on teleworking employment opportunities in Ireland and recommend attainable actions.

At the same time, the importance of access to work and training for people with disabilities cannot be overemphasised if people with disabilities are to achieve economic and social independence. Reliable statistics on people with disabilities in the workforce are not available, but surveys by disability organisations suggest that the unemployment rate is as high as 70%. Other evidence suggests that where employment is available it is often poorly paid and of low status.

In this context the benefits of teleworking are clear. Constraints on the physical location of work are relaxed. The timing of work can be adjusted to take account of the needs of all parties involved. The jobs market for both employers and individuals is widened, both geographically and in professional range and quality. Trust becomes the key to most, if not all, work relations, and work becomes more dynamic and flexible.

Teleworking also has benefits for the individual. Individuals can take more responsibility for their own development of skills, competence and career paths. They can develop skills of working independently but also cooperatively, and the individual's ability to integrate work with personal and family life is enhanced.

I was struck by the work of the TEAPOT EU project carried out by the NRB and the Work Research Centre some years ago, which concluded teleworking could make an important contribution to improving employment opportunities for people with disabilities, but that training would be required, and that telework is not a substitute for ensuring accessibility in conventional workplaces, nor for equitable treatment in the conventional labour market.

Where there are centre-based teleworking initiatives, these should be integrated and avoid the tendency to "ghettoise" people with disabilities.

Many of you will be aware of the government's current actions setting up the National Disability Authority, and transferring vocational training and employment services for disabled people to FÁS. This is part of the changes moving away from the old "medical" model of disability to a social model, where training and employment opportunities are integrated.



Videoconference links supplied by PVL Communications brought in speakers from abroad

In relation to teleworking, a number of schemes such as the approval of European Social Fund training programmes, the operation of Employment Support Schemes and Workplace Adaptation Grants will be moving to FÁS and some period of transition and adjustment will be inevitable, but I have no doubt that the benefits of this process of mainstreaming will be immeasurable to people with disabilities.

In conclusion I would like to thank you for inviting me to speak, and to request that the input from your discussions today be made available to me and to the National Advisory Council to assist in their deliberations.

TWI ADAPT project offers telework training

Joe McCormack, a former BT Marketing Manager in Northern Ireland, is managing the Telework Ireland ADAPT programme, providing training in software localisation skills. He gave details of the scheme, which has several disabled participants in the Republic, by videoconference from Belfast.

Our project involves a consortium of four partners. Apart from Telework Ireland, the partners are FÁS, the East Clare Telecottage and Postgem, the holding company for Internet service provider Ireland Online.

What we are doing is to find and train 100 people in basic IT literacy skills, specific teleworking skills like how not to overwork 80 hours a week and upset your family, and specific software localisation skills.

We're doing this through distance learning – people learning on their own PCs at home rather than wheeling them along to a training centre from nine to five, Monday to Friday.

There's a big demand for localisation skills – 38 companies do this in Ireland and there's a skills shortage of about 6,000–7,000 people a year. We've worked closely with the industry, for example substituting a module on HTML, the language behind web pages, for one on MS-DOS, because the industry told us HTML was relevant and DOS wasn't.

One of the unique things about this training scheme is that we are also encouraging the trainees to set up as self-employed or as subcontractors at the end of the course as one economic option. The raw material costs of this business are nil, and the starting salaries are about £17,000 a year.

The course is 36 weeks long with four residential weekends and we'll be encouraging trainees to go on a 6-week work placement with a localisation company at the end of it for "corporate acclimatisation" – learning about the company culture and the way things are done. It's also accredited by FÁS and by City and Guilds, and FÁS training allowances are available.

Email: mccormack@btinternet.com
Tel: 01232 894500.
Web: www.telework.ie



Finding open-minded employers is the problem...

Derek Farrell of the Disabled Drivers Association has been involved in teleworking schemes for many years. "If you can bring the work to the individual you avoid transport problems and architectural barriers are no longer a problem. Teleworking can do much to bring about economic independence for persons with disabilities. Of course, like all modern cures it has its side effects. By its very nature it reinforces isolation. It deprives one of social interaction at work," explains Derek. The DDA was part of the "TEAPOT" European project which provided telework for a number of participants. "It raised confidence, gave them a sense of self-worth, and it opened up windows of opportunity. It was a pilot project, it lasted little more than six months and for some of them that was the end and they were then out of work. The funding dried up." However, Derek described how one participant still works for the company involved in TEAPOT, while another went on to marry the boss. Two others now work on a conventional, non-teleworking basis for the companies that TEAPOT assigned them to.

A second project, TELELEARNING, involved training disabled people in IT skills through distance learning, and was so successful that it now attracts mainstream ESF funding. However, employers are still the problem – "that is evident in the telework assignments we get. In the main it's low level stuff – data input, word processing and suchlike," says Derek. He does see opportunities for homeworkers to carry out highly confidential work such as accounts and medical records, where the distant location of the teleworker is an advantage. Derek also welcomes the recent innovations allowing disabled people to earn up to £50 per week without the loss of benefits. "The NRB's supported employment scheme and the workplace adaption grants have done much to assist the uptake of meaningful employment. However, current statistics tell us more than 80% of persons with disabilities are unemployed, so for them there is no Celtic Tiger. Rather, it's the Emerald Donkey."

Ennis the Information Age Town

Dermot Hayes, Programme Manager of the Disabled People of Clare project, talked of DPOC's involvement in the Ennis Information Age Town scheme. Objectives include:

- Provision of training on information technology and assistive technology
- Disability awareness training for all trainers and providers of information technology in particular issues such as universal access and access for all
- Access to hardware and electronic resources – barrier-free access to the Internet.

Ennis has approximately 15–17% of people with disabilities living in the environs, which translates to around 3000 people. Almost 4,400 homes in Ennis have applied to be connected up for this experiment with a PC and Internet connection. Each household was requested to pay £260 per PC – quite a sum for someone on disability benefit, although registered disabled people can get a waiver of £50 on the contribution. DPOC has also been involved in providing a local office for the CRC's assistive technology services, as journeying to Dublin is a serious burden for its members. However, plans to provide a videoconference link have not yet come to fruition, and there have been other problems such as the lack of PC training using sign language for deaf people. Dermot remains hopeful that the Ennis project will include and integrate DPOC members.



Dermot Hayes and Conor O'Sullivan of DPOC with Minister Mary Wallace and Jer O'Donoghue, Booths

Research on the benefits of teleworking

Nadia Clarken of the Work Research Centre has been involved in a number of projects on teleworking. One disabled teleworker she interviewed said: "telework gives me a sense of achievement, of recognition, of being able to contribute and earn money". Telework also gives people flexibility to work when and where it suits them. A disabled graphic designer said: "Naturally there are time limits to respect for submitting work but I can work at times that suit me. I often start my day at 6 am as I perform better then. When it's warm, I can switch on my ventilator, which I would not be able to do in office because I would disturb my colleagues." On the negative side, missing out on the opportunities to talk informally with colleagues about developments or problems within the job is considered a major drawback, especially where disability confines someone to their home. Teleworking requires the individual to have a sense of autonomy, to be self-motivated and disciplined and to impose a structure on their working time. Where people work for themselves they need to do all the ancillary tasks – there's nobody to take calls, do the filing. One disabled teleworker said: "I'm not an accountant. The financial aspects of my job take up a lot of time simply because I lack these skills." Telework centres can sometimes provide a half-way house, preventing isolation and supplying support where needed.

CONFERENCE CONCLUSIONS

Conference delegates were particularly concerned that some form of email discussion group be established to gain funding and further discuss how to carry out some of their recommendations below:

- Teleworking can provide employment options for some disabled people and should be encouraged. However, it must not be used to replace the need for conventional workplaces to be made universally accessible. The increased danger of social isolation for disabled teleworkers should be considered.
- All teleworkers can encounter difficulties in gaining work. Successful projects in Finland and Holland have been carried out where skills registers of disabled teleworkers have been actively marketed to companies. The marketing function is vital, otherwise registers languish unused. There is a danger in creating skills registers exclusively for disabled teleworkers as these may encounter prejudice. Registers must also focus on core skills such as languages, journalism, *etc.*, rather than IT skills such as specific software packages though these should also be recorded.
- In addition to social isolation dangers, many disabled people are unable to work fulltime, so it is particularly important to encourage the formation of networks of disabled teleworkers who can collaborate on projects and support each other.
- Existing disabled teleworkers report major problems with obtaining technical support and repairs to their equipment.
- IT training programmes for disabled people mostly provide basic IT skills which are insufficient for teleworking. Training needs to provide higher level skills in areas of skill shortage. Communications skills such as telephone use are vital. Work is required to ensure that territorial difficulties between the NRB and NTDI concerning IT training schemes do not continue under the new NDA/FAS structures.
- Those responsible for the workplace adaptation grant must make information about this scheme easily available to potential disabled teleworkers and emphasise it can be used to equip home offices, and that disabled people who wish to be self-employed are also eligible.
- Awareness of teleworking amongst human resource managers is poor and needs work through professional HR organisations such as the IPD and the IITD to raise awareness and improve teleworking opportunities.

Assistive technology services at the CRC

Communication, education and independence are three precious gifts that most of us take for granted unless we lose them. In the Client Technical Services Unit of the Central Remedial Clinic, we strive to ensure that they are available to everyone with a physical disability as far as possible.

We provide an evaluation and recommendation service, employing various solutions to meet individual needs. We are problem-solvers, employing our experience, skills and technical knowledge to overcome the difficulties posed by a physical disability. Within CTS the team includes a rehabilitation engineer, an occupational therapist, a speech therapist, an education resource teacher and a technician. Working closely with our colleagues in other departments, we carefully identify the needs of individuals and come up with practical, effective solutions.

For people who have difficulty communicating we can provide a range of solutions – from low-technology, but highly effective, picture boards, to state-of-the-art computers with voice output. In the area of independent living we use modern technology to empower people with physical disabilities, liberating them from being dependent on other people in every aspect of their lives. This can encompass simple call and alarm systems or environment control units for telephones, doors and televisions. We also advise on adaptation of the workplace to meet special needs, and access requirements for specialised powered wheelchairs.

A wide range of electronic and mechanical solutions are available but they are of limited value if the person with a disability has difficulty using them. We look closely at the best ways in which such equipment can be controlled by the individual – using switches, customised keyboards, mobile arm supports, head-pointing systems or voice recognition technology. We will modify virtually any piece of equipment to ensure that it meets specific user's needs.



Minister Wallace (right) meets Lisa McCormack and Gerry Craddock from the Central Remedial Clinic and Selina Bonnie (centre) of the Information Society Commission at the European Foundation

Our clients have a variety of needs. Our aim is to help them by integrating different technologies that meet their various needs into a single package. This makes life easier for the user, and usually gives cost savings too. Often, people who come to us have difficulty writing, which can inhibit their educational prospects. Recent advances in technology such as home and portable computers plus new software packages have opened new doors of opportunity, helping people to express themselves through the written word.

As the Irish Department of Education's approved National Assessment Centre, we provide our services to people

NTDI distance learning courses in IT

The National Training & Development Institute (NTDI), the training division of the Rehab Group, now offers a distance learning programme – Information Technology by Distance Learning – to people with disabilities.

The course was introduced to overcome the problem of marginalisation due to rural isolation among many people with disabilities who are unable to access in-centre training.

The course is holistic in its approach and structure, equipping participants with basic commercial IT skills such as word processing, database management, spreadsheets and desk top publishing, as well as skills in personal development, job seeking and business planning. NTDI tutors provide individual instruction in the home, with regular group sessions organised to bring participants together. The course is currently available in counties Kilkenny, Waterford, Wexford, Donegal, Sligo, Cork, Galway and Cavan.

As with all NTDI courses, materials and equipment are provided without charge to participants for the duration of the course, with an option to acquire same on completion. Instruction, free to participants, is part-funded by the European Union through the ESF fund.

Currently, NTDI can offer modules leading to the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL) in Cork, Galway, Sligo, Castlebar and Donegal, and is in process of seeking accreditation in Dublin, Offaly, Cavan, Waterford and Wexford.

For further details on this and other NTDI courses, contact The Marketing Department, NTDI, Roslyn Park, Sandymount, Dublin 4. Tel: 01 205 7200. Fax: 01 205 7211. Email marketing@ntdi.ie



A computer mouse operated by head movement

throughout the country. We recommend and modify equipment and provide sound advice from our wide experience on how the necessary funds can be obtained from private and public sources. We are here to deliver practical solutions which meet real needs.

Workplace adaptation grants from the NRB

The NRB administers the workplace equipment adaptation grant scheme (WEAG) through its local vocational officers. Under the scheme, it is possible to get up to £5,000 to provide adaptations to premises or equipment in order to make a workplace more accessible, or work equipment easier to use.

Usually the grants are used to provide items such as wheelchair ramps, or voice synthesizers for visually impaired computer operators, and the grant is normally paid to the employer of the disabled person.

However, as Mary Duffy explained at the conference, you can obtain a WEAG grant to adapt a workplace in the home. If you are self-employed, or starting up a self-employed business, the grant can be paid to you for purchase of equipment.

WEAG does not provide funds for computers as a matter of course to disabled people – instead it provides adaptations to make equipment easier to use, such as one-handed keyboards or voice-dictation software. However, if you can make a case that in order to carry out your work you need a computer because of your impairment (not because of the kind of work you do), it may be possible to get funds for a computer through WEAG.

To explore WEAG opportunities further, contact your local NRB centre and discuss your needs with your vocational officer. The vocational officer will help you to complete the grant application, but the award of grants is decided separately by a national committee.

If you have difficulties with the process, Mary Duffy has kindly volunteered to provide advice. You can contact her by email (duffym@rte.ie) or by telephone on 01 281 0839.

Project Aphrodite

Lisa McCormack, Co-ordinator of Project Aphrodite, describes the HORIZON funded project run by the Client Technical Services Department of the Central Remedial Clinic and aimed at supporting users of assistive technology



We train people with physical disabilities in the area of assistive technology so that they will become Technical Liaison Officers (TLOs) providing a local support in their home counties. Other partners in the project include the Centres for Independent Living and University College Dublin. There is also a transnational element to the project, with partners in Belgium and Spain.

The role of the TLO on the ground can be summarised under 3 key tasks:

- providing information about assistive technology products and services to people with disabilities, their families and service providers.
- assisting people with disabilities in gaining the technology they require, usually by referral to CTS and working with the department through the assessment process
- supporting people with disabilities, their families and services providers in using technology.

The Technical Liaison Officers are located in Tipperary, Mayo, Longford, Clare, Kerry, Cork, Galway and Dublin. All of our technical liaison officers, being physically disabled themselves, have first-hand experience of the services available for people with disabilities.

As Client Technical Services is based in Dublin, until the Aphrodite project started all assessments were carried out in Dublin and clients had to travel to the capital. Though the Aphrodite project we can now provide an outreach service to clients around the country.

During 1998 there were 11 outreach trips to different locations around Ireland, each lasting 1-5 days. The total number of clients seen on these trips was 63. The outreach service has been a success due to the local Technical Liaison Officers and the work they are doing on our behalf at a local level.

Another achievement of the Aphrodite project is the establishment of an accredited course in assistive technology. The first Certificate in Assistive Technology Applications (CATA) was held from September 7th-18th in the National University of Ireland, Maynooth.

CATA is aimed at anyone who either uses assistive technology, or requires a knowledge of assistive technology

applications for personal or professional purposes, such as:

- Individuals with disabilities and family members
- Occupational therapists, physiotherapists, and speech and language therapists
- Training and employment personnel
- Personnel from health and education funding agencies
- Teachers and educationalists.

The course, which consists of 80 hours intensive training, self-study, and a certificate project, aims to train participants:

- to identify a wide range of applications for assistive technology in the home, school, work place, and community environments
- about existing and new assistive technologies for people with disabilities to include, but not limited to, augmentative and alternative communication, environmental controls, seating and positioning, mobility devices, computer access technology, and technology for people who may have learning, physical, cognitive and/or sensory disabilities
- to address individual needs through a collaborative team approach to resources available to support assistive technology devices and services
- to address leadership challenges

regarding assistive technology implementation

- to implement this training upon completion of the course.

The 1998 course was attended by 31 participants from all over Ireland, as well as the US and Belgium, including teachers, therapists, people with disabilities, information officers and assistive technology practitioners. The following are some comments from participants on the first CATA course:

"I got information – which I came for – but have also learned so much about effective ways to use the information"

"I came to learn about AT technology, but moreover I learned how to deal better with the individual user and people with or without a disability"

"While I expected to meet people from different areas, I didn't realise how valuable these contacts would be in the future"

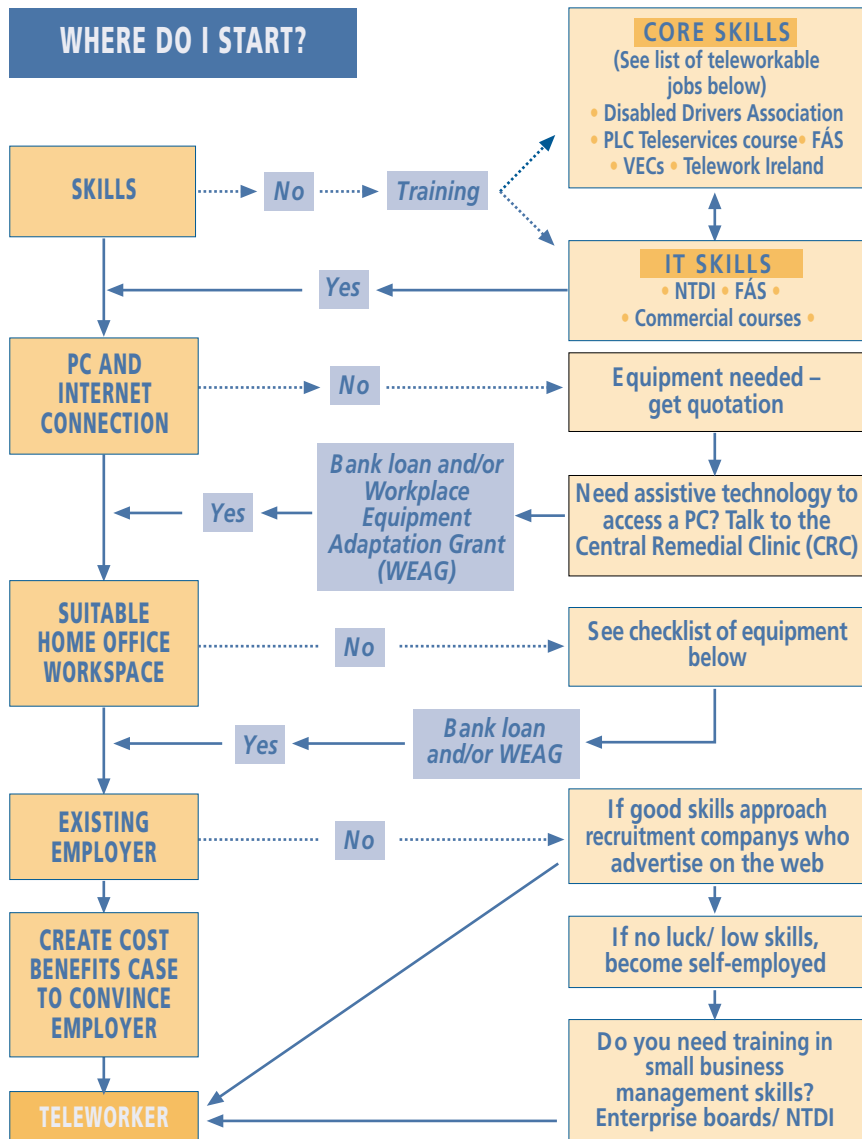
"It was an absolutely excellent course and one I would highly recommend to any individual involved in any way in the area of disability who is seeking an objective, honest and professional course"

The closing date for the 1999 course is June 25th, but if you are interested in finding out more information on the Technical Liaison Officers or the Course in Assistive Technology, please feel free to contact me, Lisa McCormack, at Client Technical Services, Tel: 01 833 2206. Fax: 01 833 5496. Email: lisamc@crc.ie



Top row l – r: Lisa McCormack, project co-ordinator, Bryan Boyle, Assistive Technology Adviser, Lisa Kilbride, Project Trainer, Bob Martin, Assistive Technology Adviser, Siobhan Long, Assistive Technology Adviser, Ger Craddock, Manager of Client Technical Services, John Gilbert TLO Cork, Sharon Murphy Secretary, Client Technical Services Bottom row l – r: Jack Callanan TLO Galway, John Bennett TLO Tipperary, Rosemary Halton TLO Dublin, Andrew Hunt TLO Mayo, Paul Sinclair TLO Dublin, Connor O'Sullivan TLO Clare

So you want to be a teleworker?



What kind of jobs are suitable for teleworking?

Almost any job which does not require face to face contact or expensive machinery can be teleworked – or at least certain aspects or tasks of the job can be carried out from a distance. Here are some examples:

Professionals and management specialists such as architects, accountants, managers, marketing, public relations, human resources, finance, financial analysts and brokers.

Professional support workers such as bookkeepers, translators, proofreaders, indexers, researchers, technical writers, webmasters, multimedia authors, quality managers.

Itinerant field workers who travel around to customer sites including company representatives, surveyors, inspectors, property negotiators, auditors, journalists, insurance brokers and insurance assessors.

Information technology specialists such as systems analysts, software programmers, engineers, localisation engineers, network administrators, technical support workers.

Clerical support workers including data entry staff, word processor operators, directory enquiries staff, call centre workers (telesales, telemarketing).

What is teleworking?

Working at a distance from your client or employer and keeping in touch by phone, email and fax. It can be full-time at home, part-time office, part-time at home or full-time in a centre.

When are teleworkers used?

Employers are resistant to teleworking unless they trust the teleworker. The most likely source of telework is a current or former employer or colleague who knows you and your work and trusts you.

Employers will use teleworkers they don't know if the teleworker has a specialist skill which they can't easily get by phoning up a temp agency and getting a temp to walk through the door the next day.

Employers prefer to use teleworkers who can easily attend the office for a face to face meeting when required – 80% of employers surveyed in the 1996 Telefutures report would prefer a teleworker located within 25 miles.

What do I need?

- ▶ A skill that's in demand
- ▶ An up-to-date PC with Internet connection
- ▶ A suitable home office workspace
- ▶ A client or employer.

Home office checklist

- ▶ Computer with modem
- ▶ Office software
- ▶ Internet connection
- ▶ Suitable desk and typist's chair
- ▶ Voicemail or answerphone
- ▶ Fax machine or faxmodem in your PC
- ▶ Storage space (shelves, filing cabinets)
- ▶ Printer.

For more information on equipment call Telecom Éireann's helpdesk 1800 666444

Organisations

- ▶ ETD helpline 1800 225070
www.cwu.ie
- ▶ Telecom Éireann helpline 1800 666 444 www.telecom.ie/AtHome/Products/Teleworking.html
- ▶ Telework Ireland 1800 421426
www.telework.ie
- ▶ TCA in Britain +44 1453 834874
www.tca.org.uk

Useful documents

- ▶ Telecom Éireann free brochures 1800 775 555
- ▶ The Teleworking Handbook £21 inc VAT 1800 225070
- ▶ IBEC guidelines for HR managers (free to members) 01 660 1011
- ▶ Teleworker magazine – by subscription from the TCA teleworker@compuserve.com

Learning from Europe – the Dutch experience

Kitty de Bruin is chairperson of the Dutch Telework Association, and has been involved in promoting teleworking for over ten years, mainly with her former employer Digital. She has also been involved with the Dutch association for disability, work and telework known as HTA. HTA's well-developed projects include a call centre employing visually impaired people, and a skills register. By videoconference to the Loughlinstown meeting, Kitty explained that HTA also advertises for people with disabilities who have high-



level skills and then works to get them teleworking placements. "It's quite difficult to do but so far they have placed thirty people in companies. They do this by actively selling the skills register they are compiling. There is no point in a skills register unless you have resources to sell it properly."

Despite this high level of activity on teleworking and disability, Kitty says the situation in Holland is generally as bad as in Ireland and Britain with around 80% of disabled people remaining unemployed. "We surveyed government departments recently and although we have a legal quota for disabled employment, the departments either did not know whether they had any disabled employees, or they would not fill in the questionnaire at all."

However, there is an innovative scheme whereby all employers must pay a levy towards disabled employment – from which they are exempt if they actually employ disabled people. There has also

been a recent change in the law so that employers of disabled people do not have to pay their sickness benefits – the state pays instead – if they fall ill during employment.



Previously, worries about sick pay liability were a major barrier.

During the conference, Derek Farrell of Ability Enterprises also mentioned Madrid where ONSE, the organisation for blind people, has a large commercial centre. Over 135 people are employed, split into groups carrying out telework assignments for all types of companies. They also carry out work for state organisations such as the gas company and there is work handling mailings by persons with learning disabilities. Derek also pointed out that ONSE is the richest organisations for the disabled in the world because it runs the Spanish lottery.

WWW URLs – teleworking & disability

<http://www.cwu.ie> – Communications Workers Union site with information on teleworking and archive of news items.

<http://www.eurofound.ie> – European Foundation site giving access to information on the Foundation's work and many publications.

<http://www.infosocomm.ie> – The government's Information Society Commission.

<http://www.crc.ie> – The Central Remedial Clinic.

<http://www.tca.org.uk> – British association for teleworkers, telecottages and telecentres.

<http://www.telework.ie> – Telework Ireland, Irish association for teleworkers.

<http://www.gilgordon.com> – Gil Gordon's comprehensive and excellent site on US teleworking issues.

<http://www.workingfromhome.co.uk> – British Telecom's new homeworking site.

<http://www.eclipse.co.uk> – Andrew Bibby, writer on teleworking, technology and trade union issues.

<http://www.dialspace.dial.pipex.com/tow>

[n/parade/hg54](http://www.parade/hg54) – Ursula Huws, writer on teleworking and employment issues including gender and disability.

<http://homepages.iol.ie/~dfi/index.html> – Disability Federation of Ireland.

<http://www.fusio.ie/web1/estgroup/intro.html> – Irish Council of People with Disabilities.

<http://ireland.iol.ie/infograf/dtour/> – Accessible accommodation in Ireland.

<http://www.ahead.ie/> – Association for Higher Education Access and Disability.

<http://www.eskimo.com/~jlubin/disabled/> – Jim Lubin's disability resources – a cornucopia of disability and assistive technology information.

<http://www.missouri.edu/~ccact/> - This US university centre helps people with disabilities to work with standard computing technologies. Best viewed with Netscape.

<http://www.madenta.com/> – The Madenta Internet Accessibility Center.

<http://www.abledata.com/> – the US National Institute of Disability and Rehabilitation Research.

Video links offer remote consultation possibilities

Conference sponsors PVL are specialists in the area of using video links in telemedicine – to allow remote medical consultations and assessments without the requirement to travel to special facilities. PVL supply Sony equipment providing universal communication standards, support for various medical peripherals and high-quality video and audio links. In Ireland, PVL's

vide Conferencing customers include the Mid-Western Health Board, Sligo General Hospital, University Hospital Galway, Beaumont Hospital, Waterford General Hospital and the Royal College of Surgeons. It is to be hoped that more health boards will realise the opportunities video links can provide for disabled people and that they will ensure their sites are accessible. Tel: 01 294 1300.

The European dimension

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions has been based in Ireland for over 20 years at Loughlinstown House.

The Foundation is an autonomous European Union research management body whose task is, through scientific research, to develop policy options and policy advice for the policy making bodies at European Union level and, where appropriate, to sectoral, national and other bodies who are involved in the social policy process. As part of its work the Foundation considers innovations in work practices such as teleworking, as well as effects on disabled people. Without the support of the Foundation as co-organiser it would not have been possible to stage the event. The Foundation's conference centre is fully accessible and also has facilities for translators.

Eberhard Köhler, Research Co-ordinator of the European Foundation, greets Minister Mary Wallace and Gerry Craddock of the CRC



AA call centre employs disabled homeworkers

The AA in Britain takes calls from motorists all over the country. Details of motorists' locations and problems have to be entered into computers and calls assigned to patrols. Since 1997, some of this work has been carried out by call centre workers from their own homes.

Originally the AA's teleworking pilot involved nine people, including four registered disabled workers. Each had an ISDN line and PC workstation installed in their home, connected to the AA's automated call distribution system which routed incoming calls to the teleworkers. "It's as if the teleworkers were sitting in a corner of the office where the supervisor can't quite see them," explains Sue Moulson, manager

of the AA's Leeds call centre. Calls can be listened to by supervisors to check the teleworkers' performances. Most people work split shifts – 7.30 am to 11 am and 4.30 pm to 8.30 pm – corresponding to the AA's busiest rush hour peaks.

Now the AA has decided to close its Leeds call centre (one of four) and offer a teleworking option to the 195 staff. Those who don't wish to telework – or don't meet the AA's teleworker selection criteria, including having a suitable home office space – will be offered work in other centres. The teleworkers' line managers will also be offered the option of working from home, with monthly team meetings taking place at a new venue in Leeds.

The costs of equipping a homeworker are significant, including tailor-made office furniture and ISDN lines. Originally the AA's interest in distributed call centre working was due to the difficulty of recruiting and retaining staff in Leeds, dubbed the "call centre capital of Britain". Other motivations included making shift times more flexible, and having backup staff temporarily available to manage peaks in demand. The pilot system included a "buddy" system where someone remaining in the office retained informal links with each of the new teleworkers.

Thanks to Andrew Bibby (www.eclipse.co.uk) and Teleworker magazine (www.tca.org.uk) for permission to adapt articles.

Take part in an innovative Internet survey and earn some money for Leonard Cheshire charity... TODAY!

I'm Alan Denbigh, executive director of the British teleworking association, TCA. The dream of working from home linked to an employer by a telephone line has huge potential for people who have difficulty working a conventional 9 to 5 day in a city-centre office. People in rural areas, carers and people with disabilities that impede their mobility or cause fatigue could all benefit in the right circumstances.



One of the new industries that illustrates this potential is the call centre sector, which has been estimated to employ over 200,000 people in the UK and is expanding fast. At present, most call-centre staff work from a single location. But in the future, it is likely that the trend will be towards a more dispersed workforce, in "virtual" call centres, made possible by advancements in ACD (Automatic Call Distribution) technology.

With sponsorship from the business communications company Mitel and the Gulbenkian Foundation, the Institute for Employment Studies, in partnership with the Telecottage Association in Britain, has embarked on a major project to look at the growth in "virtual call centres" and their potential for offering new employment opportunities to disadvantaged groups. The researchers particularly want to hear from carers and people with disabilities who may be looking for employment, **including those in the Republic of Ireland.**

The sort of questions the researchers will be asking include:

- ▶ What are your attitudes to working from home?
- ▶ What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of this form of working?
- ▶ What do you look for in a job?
- ▶ What are your skills, abilities and competences?
- ▶ What are your expectations about training, career development, employment status?
- ▶ What experience do you have with information technology?

The researchers are using the Internet to gather responses. You can find the questionnaire at www.employment-studies.co.uk/surveys/telework.html

To encourage people to make the effort to participate, for every questionnaire completed Mitel will be making a donation to the Leonard Cheshire Workability Initiative. Workability aims to break down some of the barriers placed before disabled people when they seek employment. The project will provide up to 10,000 young disabled adults in the UK with Internet-linked PCs, training through a virtual college in how to use them effectively, advice and counselling in the job search process, and one-to-one support from volunteer "buddies".

(NOTE: Call centre managers should see www.employment-studies.co.uk/surveys/vcc.html)

PLC teleservices courses

Around Ireland over 45 post leaving certificate courses in teleservices skills for call centre workers are on offer, mainly through VEC colleges. Most offer the two-year PLC International Teleservices qualification, which includes intensive language teaching and a 17-week placement abroad. Some also offer a one-year English-only qualification. There are no fees for the course, and a grant covers placement abroad, but a modest charge of around £25 is made for the NCVA certificate.

We contacted all the colleges listed in the PLC teleservices brochure distributed by the Department of Education (you can get a copy of the brochure by telephoning 01 873 4700 extension 2428 or 2432). We asked each college if they were accessible for wheelchair-users, and those which said they were have been listed below. You are advised to check in detail with the college in relation to any mobility issues, and you should also discuss with them how to ensure that any placement abroad is accessible for you.

College	Telephone	Notes
Carlow	0503 31187	Lift awaited
Cork	021 27077	
Crumlin	01 454 0662	Canteen a problem
Ballsbridge	01 668 4498	
Whitehall	01 837 6011	
Swords	01 837 1689	
Coolock	01 847 4399	Lift awaited
Blanchardstown	01 820 1488	
Greenhills	01 450 7770	
Newbridge	045 431417	
Portlaoise	0502 21480	
Limerick	061 414344	
Monaghan	047 84900	
Waterford	051 874053	
Enniscorthy	054 34185	
Bray	01 282 9668	