



November 29<sup>th</sup> 2004

INNOVATIVE SYSTEM BENEFITS STUDENTS WITH  
AGORAPHOBIA AND HOUSEBOUND BY ILLNESS

The Minister for Social Affairs, Séamus Brennan T.D., today (Monday, 29<sup>th</sup> November 2004) announced a special grant of almost 70,000 for the Open Learning Centre in Coláiste Íde in Finglas, Dublin.

The grant is to allow for the expansion of the “Wireless Project”, an innovative system that provides educational opportunities to students suffering from Agoraphobia and those who are housebound due to illness.

Minister Brennan announced the special grant of EUR69, 800 to the City of Dublin VEC (CDVEC) at a ceremony in Coláiste Íde at which he presented certificates to students who have completed the “Wireless Project-Education through Distance Learning” course. The award will be used to purchase Web cam cameras, two way radio links, computers and antenna and mast equipment.

The Coláiste Íde Open Learning Centre, established in 1994, provides flexible learning facilities for those who, for whatever reason, cannot access such facilities in a traditional mode. The use of computer technology enable the Centre to provide courses delivered using an IT-based platform containing all relevant course material supported through the provision of centre-based Facilitators.



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The Centre also delivers taught programmes to outreach centres within the area using portable technology and has initiated a very successful “computers on wheels” course aimed at marginalised groups.

Since its foundation, the Centre has had an average 395 students attending courses annually. The students are from a range of different backgrounds, including lone parent, house parent, unemployed, students with a disability, the elderly and early school leavers. In addition it provides opportunities for a significant number of students with Agoraphobia.

In the current year there are in excess of 880 full-time and over 600 part-time students.

Minister Brennan said: “Coláiste Íde has continually positioned itself to deliver the best education possible to the widest number of students. In many of these cases students have difficulty in attending or accessing the college or its outreach centres.

However, ever ready to accept a challenge, the staff of Coláiste Íde has taken advantage of wireless technology to provide access for many of these students. It is a tribute to the College that it has persisted and harnessed the use of this type of technology, placed it in users’ homes and developed access routes to education services at a minimal cost to



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marginalized students who otherwise would be housebound and isolated.”

“The success of this approach is evident here today in the 12 students receiving certificates. They have worked successfully through a combination of remote access via wireless and class attendance to achieve success.”

Minister Brennan urged Coláiste Íde to continue to develop and expand the opening learning initiative. “I am particularly keen to see the extension of these types of accessible courses to the elderly. I know the College already has a growing ‘Silver Surfers Club’ and intends reaching out to more senior citizens in the future. This type of service is the way forward and also the way to challenge the misconception too many people have that the elderly are unable, reluctant, or indeed afraid, to use computers. I know that nothing could be further from the truth and that more and more elderly are embracing the latest technology.”

**ENDS**