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## **Minister Launches Initiative to Bring Cutting Edge Internet Technology Developed in Galway to Local & Community Groups**

On Friday June 17<sup>th</sup>, Minister Eamon O Cuiv launched a remarkable Community Outreach programme at the Digital Enterprise Research Institute (DERI), NUI Galway.

The *Online Social Network Programme* is using the latest groundbreaking research in Internet technology to drive new ways of social inclusion and participation, in particular amongst community and marginal groupings.

The 'pilot programme' aims to enable participants to maximise the communications potential of the Internet. It has included a series of Internet training for different groups as well as the application of the latest "smart" internet technology – the Semantic Web.

The groups participating have come from across the spectrum of cosmopolitan Galway life including refugees, senior citizens, schools, residents associations and arts groups as well as the Brazilian community from Gort.

Minister Eamon O Cuiv praised the pioneering work of DERI in its efforts to give a 21<sup>st</sup> century electronic perspective to the terms 'community' and 'village'.

He went on to say, "Combining the traditional 'connectivity' and 'support' that has been the hallmark of rural Irish society from time immemorial with the modern communications systems of the World Wide Web, DERI is developing new Internet tools to allow people, both locally and internationally, to work together in a meaningful and easy-to-use accessible environment.

At present, searching through the World Wide Web can be as frustrating as looking for a needle in a haystack. DERI's research is based on simplifying the whole search process."

According to Brendan Smith the Education & Community Outreach Officer for DERI "If our community pilot programme is successful we would hope to bring the Galway initiative to the rest of the country."

Brendan adds

"The concept of building an 'Online Community Network' is to benefit all the citizens of Galway and ultimately of the whole country. But it will have particular positive repercussions for those groupings defined as 'socially excluded'. It will give

individuals, who are orientated to the home or with limited physical/geographical mobility, a wonderful opportunity of having ongoing meaningful liaisons with like-minded individuals or groupings. Yet, rather than restricting contact to people with the same exclusion issues, online social networking allows them to get in touch with others from a diverse range of backgrounds who happen to share similar hobbies or interests.

It will help bury the stigma or attitude that categorizes people as being single faceted.

It can give individuals, presently living on the periphery of society, a lifeline by creating a feeling of belonging and a sense of purpose in their current oftentimes difficult environments.”

“If exploited to its full potential, Online Social Networking would allow Galway to become a city that is ‘Accessible to All’, a underlying principle of the city’s development policies. The DERI initiative would, in a small but influential way, help the city to successfully break down some of the technological and cultural barriers limiting wider social inclusion.

“As a support mechanism, preliminary contacts have taken place with locally based multi-national corporations and other large organisations that could donate second-hand computers to community groups and their members.

“In an associated activity, DERI is also supporting four well-known local individuals in setting up and maintaining their own ‘Blogs’ or ‘web diaries’ which is one of the fastest growing phenomena of the Internet. The people chosen were drawn from the health, political, youth and cultural strata.”

DERI, funded by Science Foundation of Ireland, is at the forefront of world research into the next generation of Internet technology known as the Semantic Web.

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Notes for Editors:

The Semantic Web – the next generation of Internet technology which will allow machines to process data in a more human like and understandable way.