

Case study: Longford: getting into ICT; a territorial approach to demand (Ireland) -- 1998

As one aspect of a concerted programme to get ICT into Longford, links were forged with the Longford Diaspora and many suggestions for the application of ICT in Longford were made by emigrants. Contact was established with the owner of *Vision Computing* (the largest indigenous ICT consultancy company), himself a Longfordman. Having noticed the Longford website on the Internet he became involved in the drive to bring ICT to Longford. He was interested in backing a software company which would work in conjunction with his existing company and was anxious to base it in a rural setting. Two of the people involved in both the Internet cooperative and the programme taskforce believed that Longford was the ideal site for a location-independent company and were prepared to commit themselves to the endeavour.

The three joined forces and set about realising the vision of a software company operating from Longford and on January 5th 1998 the company, *Longview Technologies*, was launched. Initially there were 10 employees, but by April this had grown to 16 and it is expected that the number employed will increase to 35 by the end of 1998 and ultimately to between 100 and 300. The company is developing along three strands which are key to its rapid success:

- the provision of cost-competitive, high-quality software. Longford's low-cost base with regard to property and rental prices combined with a high quality of life in the rural atmosphere and the town's accessibility from all over the Irish Midlands offer a competitive advantage. The involvement of *Vision Computing* provides quality assurance and recognition within this competitive sector since *Vision* is identified as an authority in the field of Software Process Improvement.
- the employment of personnel whose skills are being honed to the specific needs of the company's customer-base. *Longview Technologies* has a deliberate policy of enhancing employee skills by providing ongoing training in accordance with market requirements. Adaptability is a trait valued in the company since employees often telework from various locations, for example by frequently travelling to work on-site with customers or in *Vision's* sister companies in Belfast and Aberdeen.
- the setting-up of a recognised training course for non-graduate programmers. Consultation is ongoing with bodies such as the National Council for Vocational Awards, and in September 1998 the first group of 10-20 trainees began a 100-hour course. Such a course will make available a pool of highly-skilled workers with training appropriate to current market trends. The long-term ambition for this strand of the company's development is to extend the training opportunity to those programmers who have been out of the workforce for family reasons and who wish to return to the jobs market.

As a new enterprise, *Longview Technology's* organisational culture is horizontal and workers are developing a wide and flexible array of skills for both teleworking and more traditional work arrangements. The company is proud of its community-based ethos and the positive image of Longford which it is promoting. It is also aware of the competitive climate in the software industry and the ever-changing demands of the market, but is confident of continued success and expansion.

The report and background research on getting ICT into Longford (which covered the three-pronged campaign of the task force to look at using ICT in various local services, the setting up of *Longview Technologies* and various other projects for spreading ICT around the county) was professionally produced and printed. The various costs incurred amounted to 46,000 ECU. This figure included the voluntary labour but did not reflect the enormous input of the Chamber of Commerce which provided administrative support, etc. LEADER allocated 80% to the project. It was a condition of the grant-aid that LEADER be the sole funding agency.