Commissioner Máire Geoghegan-Quinn launches €9 million EU and Irish funded research project in Dublin

Embargo to 1pm, 15th May

“The research is into Assistive Technologies, and will contribute to assisting people with Autism and Intellectual Disability”

(Launch to commence at 1200 at: Daughters of Charity Disability Services, St Joseph’s Centre, Clonsilla, Dublin 15 – see programme below)

EU Commissioner Máire Geoghegan-Quinn today (15 May 2014) launched a major Irish-led EU research programme in Autism and Intellectual Disability. The research is co-funded (9 million euro in total) by the EU Marie Curie ASSISTID Cofund and the Irish charity RESPECT. This wide ranging research project in this specific field is the first of its kind in Europe.

The programme will promote research into the development and application of assistive technologies to enhance the quality of life of people with intellectual disabilities and autism, their carers and families. ASSISTID is the first structured research programme of its kind in Europe and the most significant investment into assistive technologies research to date.

Assistive Technologies refers to practical tools that can support the functional needs of people who experience difficulties associated with disability or ageing. For people with autism or intellectual disabilities, assistive technologies can transform their lives and allow them to complete everyday tasks which could otherwise be impossible. The National Disability Authority Ireland (NDA) report from 2012 stated that ‘Assistive Technologies is centrally important for disability policy as it is one of the more concrete ways that the barriers to participation in society can be overcome for people with disabilities’.

The ASSISTID programme which will fund 40 post-doctoral fellows is co-funded by the European Commission and the charity RESPECT, and is coordinated by the DOCTRID Research Institute. The DOCTRID Research Institute includes the Daughters of Charity Disability Support Services, all of the universities on the island of Ireland, RCSI (Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland), Dublin and Tralee Institutes of Technology - and the US universities Michigan State University and the University of Massachusetts. This is the first time that all of the universities on the island of Ireland have joined together in an EU funded research consortium.
Speaking at the launch today, Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn remarked that - “ASSISTID is a unique partnership of Irish and USA universities and the disability services which will support research and technologies to improve the quality of life of people with autism and intellectual disabilities. This is the kind of research we will continue to support under Horizon 2020, the new EU research and innovation programme.”

Professor Brian Harvey, RCSI, who will lead the research on behalf of the DOCTRID Research Institute, said today, “This research programme can be readily described as groundbreaking. We now have an opportunity to pool the resources of Irish universities, with academics from the US in the very best interests of people with autism and other disabilities - and we are in a position to do this with the assistance of EU and Irish funding and the support of the Daughters of Charity Services. This is a significant team effort which I have no doubt will reap dividends for people with disability all around the world”

Professor Harvey continued, “The €9M ASSISTID EU programme brings scientists, engineers and health care professionals together with carers and families to develop technology solutions to enable people with disabilities to communicate, learn, work, play, and function more easily in the world.

ASSISTID projects will develop and test assistive technologies to improve the quality of life for people with Intellectual Disability (ID) and autism through enhanced communication, social inclusiveness and independent living”.

(See Note 2 to Editors below - some examples of applications and outcomes of ASSISTID projects)

Also in attendance and speaking at today launch were, Mr Dermot Desmond, Chairman of the charity RESPECT and Sr Goretti Butler, Provincial Daughters of Charity (DOC).

The DOC Disability Support Service provide supports to over 2,500 people with an intellectual disability in a variety of community based and specialist centre’s across Ireland. Their vision is to allow people with intellectual disabilities and autism to achieve their full potential in a person-centered, socially inclusive manner within their communities. By establishing DOCTRID in 2010, the DOC paved the way for cutting edge research into intellectual disabilities and autism which will benefit communities throughout Europe.

Through DOCTRID and the EU Marie Curie ASSISTID Cofund programme, Ireland will become a major international hub for assistive technology research and its applications for people with intellectual disability or autism.
ASSISTID will bring people with intellectual disabilities and autism and their carers together with engineers, computer scientists, behavioral psychologists, and occupational therapists to develop practical solutions to improve the quality of life for the individual.

**For Picture Editors:** Pictures by 2pm from Paul Sherwood Photography

Easts

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Prof Brian Harvey, RCSI, available for interviews, 087- 2300766

Alicia O'Rourke, Research Liaison Officer, The European Commission Representation in Ireland European Union House Tel: + 353 (0) 1 6341 107

**Note to Editors 1:** The ASSISTID Award of €9M is co-funded by the European Commission Marie Curie Cofund programme, and the charity RESPECT, and is coordinated by the DOCTRID Research Institute. The DOCTRID Research Institute includes the Daughters of Charity Disability Support Services, all of the universities on the island of Ireland, RCSI (Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland), Dublin and Tralee Institutes of Technology - and the US universities Michigan State University and the University of Massachusetts. This is the first time that all of the universities on the island of Ireland have joined together in an EU funded research consortium.

**Note to Editors 2.** Outcomes of EU Marie Curie COFUND ASSISTID Research Programme

**Communication and Social Inclusiveness.** Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) encompasses additional non-verbal means of communication which people with ID and autism often require due to speech difficulties and cognitive impairment. iPhone and iPad applications will be developed to allow people with limited speech to communicate via pictures and speech generating programmes. Computer facial recognition software can teach people with autism how to recognize facial expressions, develop distinctions between faces and objects, and assign labels to various facial expressions.

Active participation in social activities for example through art, music and games is a crucial way for people with ID and autism to express themselves, develop friendships and build self-esteem. Eye Gaze control is a technology which allows people with limited mobility to control their environment and communications by tracking and moving objects with their eye gaze on a computer screen. This technology also allows people of all ages to play computer games and express their creativity through various computer programmes allowing inclusion with their parents, teachers and friends.

**Independent Living.** Technology can be used to enhance people’s homes and allow them to live independently in community or home-based
environments. Smart Homes have a range of sensors installed to control automatic lighting and temperature based on room occupancy. Night time wandering and time out of bed can be monitored via sensors in doorframes and furniture, as can the proportion of time spent in various rooms in the house. Data can be uploaded to a central system to allow carers to identify patterns in the users behavior, possibly identifying deteriorations in mobility at an earlier stage or a decline in overall good health. Audio prompting devices may be used to assist people to complete a task or to follow a certain sequence of steps from start to finish in such activities as making a bed, locking the front door or taking medication.

ASSISTID will employ 40 experienced post-doctoral researchers and is the largest research programme of its kind in Europe.

Launch Programme, 15 May 2014:

12:00-12:30 Guests arrive at St Josephs Centre, Clonsilla. Commissioner greeted by welcoming party:

Mr Dermot Desmond  (Chairman of RESPECT)
Sr Goretti Butler (Provincial Daughters of Charity / Chairperson of the Board of Directors of the Daughters of Charity Disability Support Services)
Mr. Michael Horgan (Chairman of DOCTRID and Chairman of the Health and Safety Authority Board)
Prof Brian Harvey (Director of Research DOCTRID)
Prof Michael Leahy  (Director of the Office of Rehabilitation and Disability Studies, Michigan State University / DOCTRID research board member)

12.30 Welcome by Mr. Denis Cronin, CEO Daughters of Charity Services - and video introduction to the programme
12:45 Address from Commissioner Máire Geoghegan-Quinn
13.00 Replies from
Mr. Dermot Desmond on behalf of RESPECT
Sr Goretti Butler on behalf of the Daughters of Charity & the Daughters of Charity Disability Service)
Prof Brian Harvey & Prof Michael Leahy on behalf of DOCTRID
13.20 Signing of MOUs -
between DOCTRID and Dublin Institute of Technology
between DOCTRID and Institute of Technology Tralee
Mr. Dermot Desmond / Sr Zoe Kileen / Sr Goretti Butler signing on behalf of RESPECT

Prof Brian Norton on behalf of DIT

Dr Oliver Murphy on behalf of IIT

13.30 Final remarks from Mr. Michael Horgan – Chairperson DOCTRID Research Board