

**INVESTIGATION OF THE ADEQUACY OF SPECIAL
SEATING SERVICE PROVISION IN IRELAND**

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Appendix B

Below is an extract from section three from Cullen *et al.* (2012). Section three of the document looks at the AT provision system in Ireland, with section 3.1.2 looking at NGO services, and specifically Enable Ireland and the Central Remedial Clinic, two of the primary organisations involved in the provision of AT:

Services

Assistive technology provision in Ireland involves a combination of HSE and NGO services. The HSE provides 'aids and appliances' services as well as working closely with, and funding, NGOs that provide assistive technology services. In general, HSE 'outsourcing' to NGOs is funded at regional level and service arrangements are in place with the main NGOs at regional level. Funding is generally allocated as a block grant and funding for AT is not ring-fenced within this. At local level, the relationship between the HSE and NGOs in relation to AT can take a variety of forms and varies across organisations and areas. The roles of the NGOs are described in more detail in a later section...

NGO services

The NGO sector plays a central role within the mixed economy of welfare that characterises Ireland's health and social care systems. NGOs work in partnership with formal structures and service providers to provide AT, but they also complement these structures in terms of their own activities. The sector consists of many different organisations, each with varying roles and a varying degree of involvement in AT provision. As part of the study, many of these were contacted for further information about their AT services and issues that arise for them in this area. The focus was on the NGOs with formalised roles within the AT provision system as well as others that were identified as conducting at least some relevant activity relating to AT provision.¹

NGOs with formal roles

There are a number of key organisations that have particular expertise and play a substantial role in the provision of AT. These are: the Central Remedial Clinic (CRC), Enable Ireland, the National Council for the Blind of Ireland (NCBI), and DeafHear. These organisations have formal roles in the provision of AT on behalf of or in cooperation with the HSE. They are also the NGOs most frequently used for AT-related services by those registered in the National Physical and Sensory Disability Database.² The CRC also has a role with regard to the provision of AT services for the Department of Education and Skills. Modes of cooperation with and funding from the HSE vary across the NGOs and in different parts of the country.

Central Remedial Clinic (CRC)

The Assistive Technology and Specialised Seating (ATSS) department at the Central Remedial Clinic provides assessment and recommendations in all areas of assistive technology and specialist seating to children and adults with physical disabilities throughout Ireland. This includes the design and manufacture of customised seating and mobility equipment as well as providing off-the-shelf AT equipment. The ATSS operates through four centres (Clontarf, Clondalkin, Limerick and Waterford), providing specialist AT services which are outside the expertise of the client's local support team e.g. local HSE community services or Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) within the client's local educational services.

The ATSS department assesses, reviews and makes prescriptions for the provision of specialised seating, including power mobility, and provides recommendations in all other areas of augmented and alternative communication, environmental control units, and educational and computer access. Most evaluations are for high tech equipment as more low-tech evaluations tend to be conducted by the local services, although low tech solutions may be found or could be part of the overall solution. In the area of

¹ For the NGOs most active in the AT area the approach involved completion of an information template through interview and/or self-completion, supplemented by additional documentary information where available.

² based on statistics provided by HRB of the agencies that were reported to be used for 'assistive technology/client technical services' in the database in 2009

specialised seating, the full spectrum of devices and solutions is considered. The ATSS also provides a loan facility whereby AT equipment such as educational technology and computer access solutions are loaned out for trial to other organisations. The specialised seating service has a range of chairs for demonstration in the main centres and ATSS technicians provide support in the trial of equipment. The service offers consultation and information on AT to local teams and provides tailored training and education in all aspects of AT on request.

The ATSS department receives referrals for AT from professionals in health care or education e.g. a GP, OT, physiotherapist, teacher, SENO. Self-referrals are also accepted. Adults who are entitled will mostly be referred via their GP or a hospital clinic. When referred to the CRC, assessment is provided to the client by a team of AT advisors, including OTs, speech and language therapists, physiotherapists, engineers, and technicians. CRC request that the client's carers and local support team, where possible, attend the assessment. Clients are given an opportunity to trial the equipment for 2-3 weeks before the final recommendation is made.

Enable Ireland

Assistive Technology (AT) provision is an integral part of many of the services provided by Enable Ireland to people with physical and multiple disabilities. These services are provided to children and adults across Ireland through centres in fourteen counties. Enable Ireland also provides specialist support AT services through its SeatTech and National Assistive Technology Training services. The SeatTech service provides posture management and seated mobility solutions to clients referred from within Enable Ireland or from the HSE. This includes custom manufactured seating for people with complex needs. SeatTech also provides information and training on posture and mobility to other service providers. The service accommodates Enable Ireland clients from within the Eastern region (Dublin, Kildare and Wicklow) and also provides a service to Enable Ireland and St John of God services in Kerry. SeatTech has also formed a partnership with the HSE (The Wheelchair and Seat Service Partnership) which incorporates the HSE areas of Dun Laoghaire, Dublin South East and Wicklow.

The National Assistive Technology Training Service provides customised training on a range of electronic assistive technologies including augmentative and alternative communication devices, smart home technologies, and computer access to a wide range of stakeholders. These include Enable Ireland staff, expert and emerging AT service users, and professional and adult users of AT across the public and private sectors, encompassing education, employment and independent living. Training is delivered either on-site or in client locations. The service provides both face to face and remote AT assessment support to local Enable Ireland teams. Enable Ireland's National AT Training Service also delivers a Workplace Assessment Service, targeting employers and employees. Its primary objective is to prevent the acquisition of work related injury through the provision of appropriate assistive technology, as well as the delivery of customised AT solutions to employees with disabilities. This is a fee-based service.

In Enable Ireland, clients with AT needs are identified through referral from professional therapists who are either internal or external (e.g. HSE, other NGOs) to the organisation. Clients are assessed by the SeatTech team which can include an occupational therapist, a physiotherapist, a clinical engineer and an engineering technician. SeatTech requests that the client's primary therapist(s) is present at the assessment and there are agreed protocols with the HSE in relation to home assessments being carried out in advance of the SeatTech assessment. Information on the client's home setting helps to enhance and maximise the assessment carried out by the SeatTech team. Because some of the AT equipment provided is manufactured or adapted to specification, clients may have a number of appointments in the assessment process. In terms of choosing a solution, wherever possible, SeatTech try to give clients a trial with equipment to see if it is suitable for their needs. Where a piece of equipment is customised and cannot be tried out, clients will have a number of fittings. This helps to ensure that the equipment is appropriate to their needs. Clients receive training on the use of their equipment when it is issued to them. Where possible, additional wheelchair mobility training is provided by the client's primary therapist or other relevant personnel when required.