



Ken Abraham of Omnitech with Derek Devlin, a potential student at the launch of the THINK project

Project could allow disabled to become home workers

ACCESS to employment and training for some of the disabled within the Highlands and Islands community is set to be boosted with the launch of a new technology programme.

The Think project (Towards Handicap Integration Negotiating Knowledge) aims to set up a profitable business, allowing disabled people to use their skills and abilities to undertake a wide variety of computer-based tasks as home-based teleworkers.

The project, based on a successful European pilot run in Portugal, is being developed for the Highlands and Islands by a wide-ranging partnership involving public bodies and the private sector. It will involve a total of 30 students, each of whom will be provided with the computing, software and communications infrastructure to undertake their training and it is hoped that 20 of these will get full-time employment at the end of their course.

The students will be taken on in three waves of 10, from the Inverness area initially and throughout the Highlands and Islands in later stages.

Each student will undertake an eight week initial preparation course covering subjects such as teamworking, communi-

Two thirds of students should gain employment from course

cations, stress management and project and quality management. This will be followed by further study under the Training for Work programme and if necessary, more specialised training to allow the students to carry out specialised work. The type of work which will be sought includes: helpdesk functions; transcription and translation; web design; marketing and computer programming.

Amongst the partner organisations are Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) – who manage the Training for Work programme and are also supplying business development support, and Omnitech Ltd – who are the main project managers and who are also providing specialised IT

training.

Ken Abraham of Omnitech said: "The new information technology which has become so common today should offer a platform for equal opportunities in both a social and work setting, and can overcome some of the other issues that create barriers for disabled people. This project is an attempt to work together, building on this platform, to make the most of the opportunities it offers."

HIE's head of knowledge economy Calum Davidson said: "This project promotes social inclusion, enabling disabled people to access high quality training and employment opportunities, and their skills will contribute to the wider economic development in the area."

"It may also be a pilot project in another sense – one of the potential employment opportunities for these trainees would be working together, but from home, as part of a 'virtual call centre' – linked by the telecommunications infrastructure. If this develops, and proves a success, it may be a model we could apply elsewhere."

A freephone number has been established for anyone interested in more information about the Think project: 0800 027 3838. The contact email address is: