

Inpute based solution plays part in Department of Social and Family Affairs award



The Department of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA) recently won a prestigious Taoiseach's Public Service Excellence Award in Dublin for successfully streamlining its Child Benefit Customer Certification procedures. A key element of the project entailed the use of a powerful OCR/ICR (handwriting reading) solution provided by Inpute Technologies.

"Inpute's solution integrates perfectly to enhancements made to our existing backend IT system," says Stephen Coughlan, Assistant Principal of the Department's Document Record and Information Management (DRIM) Unit. *'We wouldn't have won the award without it.'*

Before implementing their Child Benefit Initiative, the DSFA faced substantial logjams in the processing of Child Benefit Certification applications. The biggest difficulty was that every child reaching age 16 must have a certificate signed and stamped by their school or college to continue receiving Child Benefit (payable up to age 19 for children in continuing education). This means that at the beginning of each school year the DSFA issues around 65,000 certificates, which flood back into the Department over the space of a few weeks, with a further 5,000 arriving each month throughout the year as students reach age 16. This mountain of paperwork presented an overwhelming challenge, with each form taking between two and six weeks to process via manual entry to the backend IT system.

Through a structured competitive tender process, Inpute Technologies was chosen to provide a scanning and data capture solution. Inpute's system uses *Autonomy Cardiff Teleform* software to capture and index all data from handwritten forms, and import it directly into the relevant electronic workflow stream. The result? What used to take up to six weeks is now usually achieved in a single day. Now, eighty percent of certificates submitted trigger an extension of Child Benefit payment without intervention of a DSFA officer. In the case of incomplete or incorrect forms, these are routed electronically for officer review, with all submitted documentation retained online to expedite extension of payment and for query handling.

All of this not only improves customer service dramatically, but it also saves staff time and taxpayers' money.

Summary

- Public Service Excellence Award for Department of Social and Family Affairs Customer Certificate initiative
- Two to six weeks processing time to extend Child Benefit cut back to two days
- Savings in terms of staff time and taxpayer's funds, as well as dramatic improvements in customer service

Although the Taoiseach's Public Service Excellence award was specifically for the Department's Customer Certificate initiative, and implemented initially for Child Benefit payment extensions, departmental efficiency in other areas has also been enhanced, including Child Benefit certification of residency/employment for non-nationals and certification of continuing eligibility for State Pension Contributory payments. Also, images and data are now being captured via TeleForm from Household Benefits (HHB) application forms, automatically setting up claims for the relevant allowances on the backend IT system without the need for officer intervention.

Mr Chris Howard, Managing Director of Inpute Technologies commented:

We are delighted that the Department of Social and Family Affairs Record and Information Management Unit has received such high level recognition for its Customer Certificate Initiative and we congratulate the Department on receiving this Public Service Excellence Award. Inpute Technologies is working with many public sector organisations. It is clear that the current difficult economic climate has put the spotlight on IT systems and solutions which can deliver value to the bottom line in terms of reduced costs and efficiency. This award winning project, using *Cardiff TeleForm* software, is a good example of technology delivering such direct and measurable benefits.

Inpute Technologies are based in Ireland and specialise in the design and implementation of solutions that streamline the capture, validation, processing and retrieval of data from both paper and electronic files. Clients included local and international enterprises as well as government departments and agencies. More information on Inpute can be found on their website; www.inpute.com

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