

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Further Supports

Organisations/Services

See the section 'Addresses and Web Links' in The Library for contact details of organisations mentioned here.

Southern Contacts

The National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE) is an Irish government agency under the Department of Education and Skills established to implement the government's policy on the integration of ICT in teaching and learning in Irish schools. It provides advice, support and information on the use of ICT in education. The special needs staff work closely with the ICT advisors based in local education centres to provide the following supports in relation to special needs and ICT:

- Special needs technology information and advice
- Training. The NCTE designs and funds provision of a range of ICT courses including a 20-hour specialised course on ICT and learning support as well as opportunities for ICT training through support groups. Contact the local education centre for more information.
- Information regarding ICT grants
- Support/management of innovative projects
- Identification and evaluation of relevant software and interactive content

Education Centres / ICT Advisor Service: ICT advisors are normally the first point of contact for schools in relation to ICT in education. They are located in each of the 21 full-time education centres around Ireland and play a key role in supporting the use of ICT in schools in their area. ICT advisors provide advice on the integration of ICT in the curriculum and facilitate local delivery of NCTE training courses and NCTE funded support groups. ICT Advisor contact details are available via the NCTE website.

Special Needs and IT Advice Service of the Department of Education and Science offers advice and information on the use of ICT in the education of pupils with special needs.

Northern Contacts

The British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (Becta) is a public body which promotes the use of ICT to improve and transform learning, teaching and leadership in

education. Its strategic objectives are as follows:

- To provide leadership and expert advice to the UK Education Departments, their agencies and initiatives in support of their ICT policy development
- To provide and promote a comprehensive national source of practical advice and support to schools, colleges and education authorities
- To develop technical and educational standards for ICT use in education and provide information to users and policy makers on progress towards them
- To study the evolution of technology and evaluate and assess the educational use of both established and emerging technologies
- To continue to develop Becta as an effective customer-focused organisation with efficient systems and creative, expert staff.

The **Curriculum and Advisory Service** of the five **Education and Library Boards** is usually the best place to seek out details of locally available expertise on ICT in education, together with information on training and other supports available to schools in their area. The five Boards are:

Belfast Education and Library Board

North Eastern Education and Library Board

South Eastern Education and Library Board

Southern Education and Library Board

Western Education and Library Board

Web-based Resources

One of the easiest ways to access information on ICT and special needs is through the World Wide Web. Some key web links are listed below.

See the section 'Addresses and Web Links' in The Library to access websites mentioned here.

The **NCTE** website provides ICT information and advice as well as offering information on the core activities of the NCTE. See, in particular, the Special Needs and ICT section.

The **Becta** website provides ICT information and advice as well as offering information on the core activities of Becta. See, in particular, the SEN and Inclusion section.

The **Inclusion** website provides a free catalogue of resources for teaching professionals, learners, parents and carers. Resources include publications, software, hardware, guidance and links to other organisations to aid independent living and learning.

Nine Connect, Northern Ireland's National Grid for Learning web-site and virtual teachers' centre, offers a basket of services which includes filtered Email, Web-conferencing, the electronic exchange of information as well as access to educational resources.

Scoilnet, the South's official web portal for first and second level schools, contains a pool of curricular resources, information and advice developed by teachers for teachers on all aspects of education including special needs.

On line discussion groups / Mailing lists / Chat rooms

On-line discussion groups, mailing lists and chat rooms are a great source of advice and support for teachers of students with special needs (e.g., Becta's SENCo forum). As well as offering teachers the opportunity to share experiences, resources and expertise, discussion groups and mailing lists can provide access to up-to-date development in the areas of special needs.

Selecting and Purchasing ICT

Many people need support when it comes to selecting and purchasing ICT. The above organisations and websites may be able to offer some assistance in this regard.

For an overview of software/hardware to support students with learning difficulties as well as information about matching technology and students: See the section 'ICT in Schools' in Dyslexia in Schools.

Certain sections of the NCTE and Becta websites include information and advice on ICT planning, purchasing and details of different technologies.

Note: While suppliers are a good source of information and know their products, be aware that they have a vested interest. Look out for the following:

- Beneficial sales agreement including free trial period, option to return or exchange goods if not satisfied, etc.
- Good warranty
- Good customer service and support, e.g., demonstration disks, technical assistance and training.

Source URL: <http://www.sess.ie/node/866>