

A universal tongue

Dublin City University is leading a new centre, in collaboration with university and industry partners, which is destined to advance the age of language and content management technologies globally

A NEW Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) Centre for Science, Engineering & Technology (CSET) dedicated to next-generation localisation, led by Dublin City University (DCU), started last December.

Ireland already has a substantial global footprint in the localisation industry – the process of adapting digital content, download manuals, software and other materials, to different languages and cultures.

Headed by Professor Josef van Genabith, the five-year research programme is expected to transform this important sector of Ireland's global software business, as well as act as a key driver of the global content distribution industry.

DCU is collaborating on the project with University College Dublin, University of Limerick and Trinity College Dublin. Its industry partners are IBM, Microsoft, Symantec, Dai Nippon Printing, and Idiom Technologies, as well as Irish companies Alchemy Software Development, VistaTec, SpeechStorm and Traslan.

SFI has awarded €16.8m to the project and the industry partners are contributing €13.6m in materials, research services and additional funding. About 100 people will work at the CSET for the five-year period.

Industry partners will send engineers to work with the researchers, for example, for one day a week, while students will also spend time in industry-partner labs.

The CSET is focused on improving automatic translation tools and integrating these programmes into translators' workflows. Genabith uses the analogy of an engineer regularly using

a pocket calculator. "An automatic translation tool is an aid to translators' everyday work. It doesn't make them redundant; it just helps them do their job more efficiently and competitively," he says.

According to van Genabith, it's fair to say localisation as an industrial process was developed in Ireland 20-25 years ago.

"There is a uniquely high concentration of localisation industry in this country. In the past couple of years, we have

'Over the five years, we aim to come up with the blueprint for the next-generation localisation factory'

been under pressure from low-cost economies, such as the former Eastern Bloc countries, China and India. Some of the more labour-intensive localisation work has been outsourced to these countries," he says.

As with other industries of the economy, there is a drive within Ireland to move localisation up the value chain and develop ideas to help automate localisation more than it has already been.

"Ireland has a unique



Professor Josef van Genabith, head of CSET

concentration of university- and industry-based research and development expertise in language technologies, machine translation, speech processing, digital content management and localisation. The research centre is going to pool that expertise and develop the next generation of language and content management technologies to support and develop the localisation industry," says van Genabith.

"Over the five years, we aim to come up with the blueprint for the next-generation localisation factory – a virtual factory where people all over the globe could log in and submit translation requests. We will develop the expertise and will be able to market it. In this way, we will move localisation in Ireland up the value chain."

There are now eight CSETs

around the country – five in the information and communications technology area and three in the biotechnology domain. Their aim is to help link scientists and engineers in partnerships across academia and industry to address crucial research questions, foster the development of new and existing Irish-based technology companies, attract industry that could make an important contribution to Ireland and its economy and expand educational and career opportunities in Ireland in science and engineering.

CSETs must exhibit outstanding research quality, intellectual breadth, active collaboration, flexibility in responding to new research opportunities, and integration of research and education in the fields that SFI supports. Grants normally range from €1m to €5m per year for up to five years.