

£110,000 to study new work innovation

EXPERTS in Luton have been awarded £110,000 to investigate how innovation services can be made more widely available – especially for those people who find it difficult to meet traditional work patterns.

Women raising families and older people provide two examples of groups who find it difficult to meet traditional expectations.

The Luton and Dunstable Innovation Centre in Adelaide Road, Luton, will study a range of technologies to identify an effective combination of IT hardware and software that can be used to support groups and individuals who want to establish their own businesses.

The Innovation Centre won the funding for a project called DEVICES (Delivering Effective Virtual Interaction for Community Enterprise).

The two-year project starts in April but centre staff are already laying the groundwork. Manager Mike Anstey said: "We are keen to hear from anyone in the Luton area who may be interested in being involved once the project starts."

Mike Anstey will run the project with colleagues Lynette Warren and Sarah Leeming, with support from one of the centre's 'virtual tenants', a website builder and researcher based in Cambridge.

The centre has two other virtual tenants, Prabir Sen,

who runs a software company in Calcutta, and Thomas Bailey, a web entrepreneur currently working in Moscow.

Like the centre's full time and part time occupants, virtual tenants pay a monthly fee for access to the organisation's expertise and contacts.

Sarah Leeming said: "We are very keen to develop more of these tenancies for people with IT driven businesses. We are experimenting with webcam connections and Microsoft's Instant Messenger products which allow the user to send documents over the internet.

"Instant Messenger could be of use to people running home based businesses and it is just one of a number of software options which we will be investigating in the months ahead."

The innovation centre anticipates recruiting another member of staff shortly to cope with increasing workload.

At the end of last year it won substantial funding for the Cambridge Luton Innovation Project (CLIP) in which it will work with St John's Innovation Centre, Cambridge, to identify schemes which will assist with the incubation of knowledge based businesses in Luton.

Anyone seeking more information about the DEVICES project should contact the innovation centre on 01582 743700 or e-mail innovationcentre@luton.ac.uk