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Steria – Institut de France Foundation Grant: the virtual keyboard for motor-disabled persons, led by IT students from In'Tech INFO (esiea Group), is now up and running.

The CVK (Custom Virtual Keyboard) student project, which benefited in 2004 from the first Steria – Institut de France Foundation grant, came about via the partnership between the Raymond Poincaré hospital in Garches (near Paris), a specialist rehabilitation centre for motor-disabled persons, and the school of IT engineering In'Tech INFO (esiea Group). The virtual keyboard provides assistance for persons who are unable to use a regular keyboard, by providing alternative means of writing. CVK can be downloaded free of charge at www.cvk.fr; it can then be customised and configured for the user's computer. Furthermore, CVK is Open Source, which will allow software developers to enhance the keyboard.

CVK: flexible and free of charge

IT provides handicapped persons with access to information, communication with others and greater autonomy. However, not all those who suffer from a disability can use standard interfaces (keyboard/mouse) or afford to buy the necessary special equipment. In an effort to make up for these disadvantages and by adapting to the degree and type of motor disability, the students from In'Tech INFO, following a request by the ICT team at the Garches hospital and with help from the Steria – Institut de France Foundation, have created a virtual keyboard that can be fully customised. The application displays a keyboard on the computer screen and, through the use of a mouse and/or contactors (switches), allows the user to click on a character as if it were a key on a keyboard. What is new about this project is its availability in Open Source, which makes it possible to keep the project alive by modifying it, adding new functions or providing translations into other languages, options not offered by most virtual keyboards today.

“Nicolas Biard, an occupational therapist at the Raymond Poincaré hospital in Garches, states: “This technological project, which has always meant a lot to us, has now been made a reality. What’s more, this was achieved through cooperation with IT students. We have been able to test the keyboard with various motor-disabled patients (tetraplegics, patients whose upper limbs are paralysed and people suffering from myopathy, amongst others) and, in particular, assess the possibility of configuring it specifically in accordance with the disability and profile of each user: children, adults or elderly patients. Also important for us is the fact that the keyboard will allow us to experiment with new functions that do not exist on any other keyboard currently available on the market. For the moment CVK is just the first stage; more changes are expected in the near future.”

The keyboard is now available at www.cvk.fr. On-line support and a forum allow users to help one another and exchange views on the application. The goal of the keyboard's designers is to make this a dynamic solution that can be constantly updated and improved, a possibility that was confirmed during the recent test phase at the hospital in Garches (e.g. options to recentre the cursor or scroll up and down automatically, etc.)

A positive result for the first project to have won the Steria – Institut de France Foundation grant

The Steria – Institut de France Foundation Grant supports student projects that use information technology to help people in need. It allows students to carry out charitable, concrete and innovative projects while benefiting from the support and guidance of Steria personnel. For the CVK project, the Steria – Institut de France Foundation gave students from In'Tech INFO a grant of €6,000 towards the application development process and also provided technical and legal assistance.

"My role was to advise the students on the initial specifications, support them in the coordination of the project and provide functional expertise," says Philippe Ramoul, a project sponsor with Steria. "As a Foundation volunteer, this project has brought me much personal satisfaction and I am proud to have contributed to it. I hope to continue to participate in future versions of CVK."

"The Steria Foundation's support made us feel confident about rolling out CVK, both from a legal point of view and in terms of the project structure. Working with the occupational therapists enabled us to put our technical and IT skills into practice on a project of social value," said Alexandre Falaise, a student at In'Tech INFO and CVK project leader.

For more information, log on to www.fondationsteria.org

About In'Tech INFO

In'Tech INFO is a private institute of technology that was founded in 2002. It is an IT school created by the esiea Group, offering students innovative teaching methods and a wide range of courses. With customised training courses (Projet Personnel de Formation) and pragmatic, project-oriented teaching methods, the school produces IT professionals and experts in the latest technologies.

About Steria www.steria.com

Extensive expertise in its three core businesses of consulting, systems integration and managed services has made Steria a leading end-to-end IT services provider for companies and public authorities throughout Europe. With a revenue of €1.2 billion and 9,000 employees, Steria is one of the top ten European IT services companies.

Understanding the challenges facing its customers enables Steria to design business-specific solutions with high added value in all of its fields of expertise – the public sector and healthcare, banking/insurance, telecommunications and utilities/transport/manufacturing – as well as innovative technological solutions.

Based on over 35 years' experience in managing large-scale projects, an exceptional ability to respond and an industrial approach to business, Steria has developed a result-based culture with a commitment to service quality and customer satisfaction.

Steria's employees, who hold 24% of the Group's capital, draw on its core values of simplicity, creativity, independence, respect and openness to transform the latest technology into innovative services – enabling Steria to help its customers achieve and maintain a competitive advantage – and into charitable projects via the Steria - Institut de France Foundation.

Steria is listed on Euronext Paris, Eurolist (Compartment B).

About the Institut de France (www.institut-de-france.fr)

The Institut de France groups together five academies: the Académie Française, the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, the Académie des Sciences, the Académie des Beaux-Arts and the Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques. It was founded on 25 October 1795 and is currently chaired by Gabriel de Broglie.

Press Contacts

Steria Group Press Office

Isabelle Grangé
Tel.: +33 1 34 88 64 44
e-mail: isabelle.grange@steria.com

Institut de France

Nathalie Darzac
Tel.: +33 1 44 41 43 40
e-mail: com@institut-de-france.fr

TBWA\CORPORATE

Maxence Naouri
Tel.: +33 1 49 09 26 95
e-mail: maxence.naouri@tbwa-corporate.com

In'Tech INFO

Magali Benhaim
Tel.: +33 1 55 43 23 36
e-mail: benhaim@intechinfo.esiea.fr