



Seven in ten filing their tax online

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SEVEN in 10 income tax returns for the self-assessed are now filed on-line but businesses can do better in making VAT returns electronically, according to the chairman of the Revenue Commissioners Josephine Feehily.

Ireland's most senior civil servant, Ms Feehily is a native of Limerick and was the keynote speaker at the 10th European Conference on eGovernment at the University of Limerick.

Hosted by the UL-based National Centre for Taxation Studies and the Revenue Commissioners, the event attracted top civil servants, taxation and eGovernment experts from across the globe.

Ms Feehily said that since launching 10 years ago, Revenue's on-line service and general use of ICT had become the "envy of tax administrations" in Europe.

Of the 800,000 self-assessed, including landlords and the self-employed, 71 per cent were filing income tax returns on-line, Ms Feehily said.

But it was a frustration to Revenue that companies who otherwise made use of technology were not filing VAT returns on-line.

"Businesses when they are doing their corporation tax use practitioners to do it on-line and quite often the VAT is done in-house in an invoicing unit for small businesses. VAT forms are very easy to complete but we feel that businesses, if they are in for corporation tax, then there's no reason why they shouldn't likewise be in there for VAT."

The Croke Park public sector agreement recognised the need for greater efficiency with reduced resources, and "services on-line will be the norm," Ms Feehily added.

And while she favours making it mandatory to file certain business taxes on-line, she said Revenue must recognise the diversity of its customer base and could not compel, say, pensioners to abandon paper returns.

Revenue would continue to be at the leading edge of eGovernment, she said. It has already launched an iPhone app and was plan-

ning others and was also making greater use of text messaging.

Another speaker at the two-day conference was Catriona Crowe of the National Archives, who explained its digitisation of population records. Records of every household in Limerick city and county in 1901 and 1911 are now available on-line - www.census.nationalarchives.ie - with more to come.

A similar digitisation project has been completed by the Property Registration Authority, with Michael Treacy explaining how people can now check property records and ownership on its website, and would no longer have to dust down deeds at the Land Registry.

Over 80 papers were presented at the conference by specialists from North and South America, Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Europe.

Sue Nugus, Academic Conferences International, noted that almost every country at the World Cup was represented, but brandished a vuvuzela, warning speakers they knew what would happen if they went on too long.



Josephine Feehily is keen for everyone to file tax returns online but is conscious of Revenue's broad client base