

**For immediate release**

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**Sligo a major contributor to the West of Ireland digital powerhouse, says Irish internet leader at Digital Town event**

- **Sligo is Digital Town 2019, proudly promoted by IE Domain Registry: celebration event is open to public at The Model Gallery on Monday 14 October, which includes speaker panel moderated by broadcaster Bobby Kerr**
- **Sligo commended for its digital programmes and spaces, including The Building Block and Landing Space co-working hubs, IT Sligo, establishment of North West Tech Cluster and town infrastructure upgrades to include 5G broadband infrastructure**
- **IE Domain Registry CEO says Irish towns that invest in digital infrastructure enjoy “more revenue”, “more jobs”, and “better access to public and private services”**
- **Keynote speaker Phil Prentice says towns that lack state-of-the-art digital infrastructure should nevertheless maximise use of their existing assets: “While it’s always preferable to have high-speed broadband, a town can digitalise what it has. That often starts with addressing the ‘understanding’ gap.”**

**Sligo Town is fast becoming the West of Ireland’s ‘digital powerhouse’, according to David Curtin, Chief Executive of IE Domain Registry, the company that manages and maintains Ireland’s country domain name, .ie.**

Sligo was chosen as Ireland’s 2019 Digital Town for its achievements in community and commercial digitalisation, and its continued commitment to digital projects.

Sligo’s openness to digital technology, evident in its ability to attract investment of €225m to build infrastructure capable of 5G broadband, establishment of the North West Tech Cluster, innovation and education supports for SMEs at IT Sligo and its creation of digital spaces, such as The Building Block and The Landing Space, has attracted indigenous and international investment, increased revenues for high street shops\*, facilitated new ways of learning at Sligo schools\*\*, and made interacting with and using public services more efficient for citizens. Sligo is also treading new ground in attracting highly specialised tech companies like Overstock, LiveTiles and Abtran to the West.

Sligo’s digital capabilities have connected the town to Ireland’s growing network of regional digital hubs, many of whom are following the pioneering example set by the Ludgate Hub in Skibbereen. Their digital infrastructure has kept professionals, and their salaries and families, in the local areas, and made Ireland’s regions viable places for long-term commercial investment.

“Digital technology is empowering. For local businesses, it can help them generate more revenue, streamline their operations, and connect to new markets. For the local community, it can mean better access to public and private services, less isolation for people who live in remote locations, more opportunities for education, and more jobs,” said Mr Curtin.

“Sligo has invested in its digital infrastructure to great effect. To take just one example, the Building Block co-working space, which acts like a magnet for Irish and international companies and provides a space for remote workers who would otherwise have to commute to another town or city.

“With continued commitment to these initiatives and programmes, Sligo will remain a digital powerhouse for the West of Ireland, contributing economically and socially to its development.”

Head of Sligo County Council, Mr Ciarán Hayes comments: “Over the last number of years Sligo has made significant advances in moving online. We are particularly proud of our recent investments in the town, which include a €225m upgrade of infrastructure inclusive of infrastructure capable of hosting 5G broadband, and enhancement of the public realm to include free public Wi-Fi. This cements our commitment to digital transformation and providing top-class facilities for businesses and citizens.”

While Sligo is pushing ahead, Connacht as a whole is not without its challenges. According to IE Domain Registry’s upcoming Digital Health Index report, as many as 4 in 10 (39%) Connacht-Ulster SMEs rate their internet connection as ‘average’, ‘poor’, or ‘very poor’. Just under two-thirds of Connacht-Ulster SMEs do not have any confidence in the government’s ability to deliver the National Broadband Plan in its current form.

Phil Prentice, Chief Officer of the Scotland’s Towns Partnership, is the keynote speaker at the Digital Town event in Sligo.

“A town does not need an elaborate infrastructure to be digital, and it’s far better to do something than nothing at all.” said Mr Prentice.

“While it’s always preferable to have high-speed broadband, a town can digitalise what it has. That often starts with addressing the ‘understanding’ gap.

“Businesses and citizens frequently fail to grasp how their lives can be simplified or made more efficient or cost-effective by using digital technology. They harbour misconceptions and can overstate what’s required to ‘become’ digital.”

Mr Curtin agrees: “IE Domain Registry reports have shown that the vast majority of SMEs don’t do more online because of concerns about investments of time, money, and skills.

“But the reality is different now. Access to digital technology has been vastly improved over the last decade; it’s easier, faster and more affordable than ever before to get online, communicate with customers, and start selling products and services.

“Waiting for the National Broadband Plan to create or implement the perfect digitalisation strategy is the wrong approach. Irish towns should instead focus on bridging the understanding gap: help local businesses and community organisations understand and

use digital technologies by focusing investment in skills training and education programmes. That way, they will see a much quicker social and economic returns on their investment.”

Mr Curtin will open the Digital Town event at The Model Gallery this morning, 14 October, at 8am. Mr Prentice, Chief Officer of the Scotland’s Towns Partnership, in addition to his keynote address, will join a panel of speakers at the event.

The panel, moderated by broadcaster **Bobby Kerr**, will include **Ciarán Hayes**, CEO of Sligo County Council; **Brendan McCormack**, President of IT Sligo; **David Kenny**, Chair of Tech North West and Vice President of Software Development at Overstock; **Oonagh McCutcheon**, Customer Operations Manager at IE Domain Registry; and **Conor McCarthy**, President of the Sligo Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

**ENDS**

#### **Notes to editor**

\*SME Digital Health Index Connacht factsheet - [https://www.iedr.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/IE-Domain-Registry-SME-Digital-Health-Index-2018-Facts-Connacht.pdf?mc\\_cid=c4d85cae8d&mc\\_eid=%5bUNIQID%5d](https://www.iedr.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/IE-Domain-Registry-SME-Digital-Health-Index-2018-Facts-Connacht.pdf?mc_cid=c4d85cae8d&mc_eid=%5bUNIQID%5d)

\*\*Digital Schools of Distinction - <https://www.digitalschools.ie/map-digital-schools-distinction/>

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#### **About IE Domain Registry**

IE Domain Registry is the national registry for .ie domain names and is responsible for the management and administration of Ireland’s official internet domain, .ie, in the interest of the Irish and global internet communities. It operates the domain name system (DNS) for the .ie namespace, facilitates an independent [dispute resolution service](#) and operates a public WHOIS lookup service for .ie domains.

The company’s mission is to provide unique, identifiably Irish domain names, along with registry and related services to the local and international internet community. Policy development for the .ie namespace follows a bottom-up, consensus-driven approach, through its multi-stakeholder Policy Advisory Committee. Currently, there are over 273,000 registered .ie domain names.



It is committed to being a digital advocate for the SME community. Through the [OPTIMISE Programme](#) and stakeholder engagement initiatives such as [Digital Town](#), the company works with, and supports, SMEs to improve their online presence and e-commerce capabilities.

IE Domain Registry produces fact-based research for the business community and policymakers, such as the annual [SME Digital Health Index](#), which provides key insights into the digital health of SMEs.

The company is focused on providing excellence in customer service through its ongoing customer experience (CX) innovation and improvement programmes. Since March 2018, it is [easier and faster](#) to register a .ie domain name.

Based in Dun Laoghaire, Co Dublin, IE Domain Registry employs 22 people.

[www.iedr.ie](http://www.iedr.ie)