

## Inside Dun Laoghaire's unique Digital HQ

**“Welcome to a unique digital initiative in the heart of Dun Laoghaire town!” This was how DigitalHQ clg project director, Eoin Costello, greeted the judges of the National Enterprise Town awards during their visit to the facility on 2 October 2019.**

The judges, Martina Maloney, Kevin Twomey and Katrina Murphy, were visiting the town as part of the assessment process for the annual National Enterprise Town Awards.

They had [an action packed itinerary](#) which saw them visit a number of key projects in Dun Laoghaire Town.

At stop #5 on their itinerary the judges spent time visiting the [DigitalHQ](#) clg (company limited by guarantee) initiative above the Bank of Ireland branch in the centre of Dun Laoghaire.

DigitalHQ is a not-for-profit digital growth hub. It uses a sharing economy model whereby donations of unused office space in the town centre provides the incubation space membership fees used to provide events, training & digital services to local small businesses and the town as a whole.

The DigitalHQ digital growth hub model functions at three, mutually reinforcing, levels:

### 1. Incubation space

Members can avail of private office space or shared coworking space while benefiting from free services such as mentoring, meeting rooms and printing. Typical members include freelancers, startups, social enterprises and small businesses that are seeking to grow via digital enablement.

### 2. Networking and events

DigitalHQ operates the [Digital Dun Laoghaire](#) events programme (which has run over 28 events with a total attendance to date of approximately 1,150 business people).

### 3. Showcasing and promotion

DigitalHQ manages the [Dun Laoghaire Town website](#) (approximately 150,000 page impressions per annum) featuring a comprehensive events calendar and deals section for use by businesses and the community in the town as a way of reaching a larger audience. This is complemented by the significant reach of the website's following on social media comprising 12,723 Facebook followers, 3,942 Twitter followers and 2,310 Instagram followers.

On the day of the visit there were a number of activities in progress in DigitalHQ which gave the judges a first hand opportunity to see how the facility helps the town and its business community.

### **Digital Dun Laoghaire BREXIT Briefing**

<https://twitter.com/DigitalDLT/status/1178671591011602432>

After a group photo with members of DigitalHQ on the steps of the entrance the judges headed to the top floor to the DigitalHQ Community Space where a Digital Dun Laoghaire Brexit Briefing for local businesses was taking place. The guest speakers included Clodagh Whelan (DLR LEO), Lee Evans (Bank of Ireland) and Pat Scanlan (DigiTorc).

The DLR LEO's speaker cautioned attendees to avoid taking the ostrich approach to Brexit. She recommended assessing the risks for business with the Brexit Self assessment Scorecard and Brexit Checklist on: <http://www.prepareforbrexit.com/>.

She also recommended checking out the [wide range of Brexit supports that are available to business from the Local Enterprise Office DLR and other agencies.](#)

Next up DigiTorc's Pat Scanlan advised attendees that Brexit means the assumption one can transfer personal data to the UK is no longer valid and that it is up to each organisation to put customized safeguards in place. He recommended the [InterTradeIreland Brexit: Planning Voucher](#) which provides advice and support worth £2,000/€2,250.

On leaving the briefing they met attendees Cllr Jim Gildea and former Councillor Patricia Stewart who shared their enthusiasm for how Digital Dun Laoghaire is creating a positive impact in, and beyond, the town.

As part of its work in helping provide resources to small businesses beyond the town itself, [all resources from the Digital Dun Laoghaire events are made available online](#) under a range of topics such as how to Get More Business From the Web, Make Your Company Investor Ready and many other here -

### **DigitalHQ Focus Group on digitally enabling small businesses**

Each DigitalHQ member provides a voluntary one-hour per month of mentoring/facilitation time as part of their membership, accordingly Adam Swift of Clear Strategy kindly facilitated a DigitalHQ focus group in the meeting room on the first floor which took place on the day of the judges visit.

The objective of the focus group was to inform DigitalHQ's work plan for 2020. The meeting saw Ena Coleman (Enterprise Ireland), Alan Finneran (IE Domain Registry), Catherine Butler Weir (Microsoft), Eoin Roche (DLR LEO) and local business owners contribute practical ideas on how small, independent local businesses can be best supported in increasing footfall and sales through digital.

### **Shared co-working room - meeting the members**

On leaving this meeting the Judges proceeded to one of the shared coworking rooms where they met with members Ron McNamara (Driver Focus), Bárbara Pérez García ( CubaUnique.com ) and Ciaran Hudson (JNC Consulting).

When asked by the Judges why the members had chosen DigitalHQ Ron said he felt it is a perfect fit for his business - a great location, business hours accessibility, office and meeting room facilities and of course, value for money. Also, as a small business owner, for him it is important to connect with other members to share experiences, attend various meetups and support the local economy and community.

Bárbara Pérez García, CEO of the Spanish travel agency <http://www.cubaunique.com/>, had recently moved to Ireland and told the judges she had chosen DigitalHQ for work because of its

location, facilities and also to make contacts in the region to continue developing her business in English speaking countries.

On the way down the stairs the Judges asked Eoin Costello about plans for the next twelve months for DigitalHQ. He mentioned that there are two key objectives, to continue improving the range of digital services DigitalHQ provides to small business and secondly to start examining other locations that might benefit from the DigitalHQ model.

Eoin commended Bank of Ireland for taking the initiative in showing how unused office space in towns can be converted to incubation space with all proceeds going to the benefit of digitally enabling traditional businesses, he feels that it is a scalable model that could benefit many towns across the country.

***Main image at top: Judges meet members of DigitalHQ. Image: Darren Kinsella, Southside People***

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