Belfast startups thrive on back of region's skills and talent pool

- New digital tech businesses in Northern Ireland capital grow by 143% between 2011 and 2016
- Turnover of digital sector in and around Belfast[1] climbs to £875m
- Digital tech jobs reach 8,970 in 2017
- Digital tech turnover per employee is £98K

Belfast, 26 July 2018

Belfast has become home to a thriving tech startup cluster, thanks in large part to its highly skilled and educated population. Research from Tech Nation 2018 shows that the number of digital businesses born in the region has accelerated by 143% between 2011 and 2016. A total of 97 digital tech businesses were born in the city in 2016.

Belfast now has the highest density of fibre in Europe and its low cost of living and great universities and colleges continue to attract startup tech companies to base themselves here. A year ago Ormeau Baths, a new co-working space and tech community, opened its doors in an historic former bathhouse in the heart of Belfast. The campus helps the brightest and best tech startups to access new networks, funding and expertise.

Aspiring Northern Ireland technology innovators will receive further support after InvestNI appointed Ignite 100 to run and operate Propel, its pre-accelerator programme offering workshops, tutorials, networking opportunities, mentoring, financial support and access to investment, until 2022. Propel is supporting a wide range of companies including Neon, which is developing immersive technologies to treat pain, and is the only accelerator of its kind running in Northern Ireland.

Tech Nation on Tour arrives at Ormeau Baths in Belfast on 26 July and will see entrepreneurs, founders and tech ecosystem experts assemble to debate the opportunities for developing startups in Belfast and the surrounding area. Data on Belfast will be presented by Tech Nation's insights team which will feed into a discussion on the challenges faced by local entrepreneurs and startups. The event will be held at Ormeau Baths. The panel discussion will be moderated by Tom Gray, of Kainos and will include Irene McAleese, co-founder of See.sense, the company based in nearby Newtownards, which uses Artificial Intelligence to create intelligent bike lights, and Jon Bradford, non-executive director of co-working space provider Central Working.

Gerard Grech, chief executive at Tech Nation, said: "Belfast is one of the most exciting tech clusters in the country right now, with strong connections to the area's transport manufacturing and service heritage. There is a fantastic talent pool here, as well as lower

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[1] Belfast refers to the corresponding Office for National Statistics Travel to Work Area (TTWA), which include surrounding areas that form Belfast's labour market. TTWAs are calculated using 2011 Census data, and are small regions where at least 70% of people both live and work.

cost of living and our Tech Nation survey showed that the best things about the area are considered access to funding, a helpful tech community and the proximity of large companies."

Irene McAleese, co-founder of see.sense, said: "We moved to NI specifically to start our business because we knew that there is a great education system here and therefore a great pool of talent. When we got here we were pleasantly surprised to find the fantastic support and ecosystem that exists for startups. We have benefited from funding schemes including InvestNI and from Catalyst and from InterTrade Ireland which have all helped us develop as a business."

Tom Gray, CTO, Kainos and director, Digital Catapult, in Belfast, said: "Belfast has great digital talent and a strong ecosystem of its own. However to make the most of what is here, companies need to connect with their counterparts across the UK and it is great to see Tech Nation here and encouraging just that. Pulling together and working with peers and ecosystem partners can help everyone be more productive, and ultimately more successful."