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BUSINESS NEWS NORTHERN IRELAND

Welcome to our round up of the latest business news for our clients. Please contact us if you want to talk about how these updates affect your business. We are here to support you!

New deals to future proof vaccine rollout in light of new variant

The UK government has signed new contracts to secure the supply of vaccine stock to future proof the country's vaccine programme.

The new contracts with Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna were accelerated in light of the new variant, as part of the ongoing efforts to ensure the government is doing everything it can while scientists across the world learn more about Omicron. These future supply deals include access to modified vaccines if they are needed to combat Omicron and future Variants of Concern, to prepare for all eventualities.



The agreements signed through the Vaccine Taskforce are building on existing partnerships with the vaccine companies and will see the government procure a total of 114 million additional doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna vaccines for 2022 and 2023. This is in addition to the 35 million additional doses of Pfizer/BioNTech ordered in August for delivery in the second half of next year, and the 60 million Novavax and 7.5 million GSK/Sanofi doses expected in 2022.

See: [Government agrees new deals to future proof vaccine rollout in light of new variant - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-agrees-new-deals-to-future-proof-vaccine-rollout-in-light-of-new-variant)

MHRA approves Xevudy (sotrovimab), a COVID-19 treatment found to cut hospitalisation and death by 79%

Another COVID-19 treatment, Xevudy (sotrovimab), has been approved by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) after it was found to be safe and

effective at reducing the risk of hospitalisation and death in people with mild to moderate COVID-19 infection who are at an increased risk of developing severe disease.

Developed by GSK and Vir Biotechnology, sotrovimab is a single monoclonal antibody. The drug works by binding to the spike protein on the outside of the COVID-19 virus. This in turn prevents the virus from attaching to and entering human cells, so that it cannot replicate in the body.

See: [MHRA approves Xevudy \(sotrovimab\), a COVID-19 treatment found to cut hospitalisation and death by 79% - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/mhra-approves-xevudy-sotrovimab-a-covid-19-treatment-found-to-cut-hospitalisation-and-death-by-79%)

Support and manage disability and health at work

Many employers are currently facing challenges in recruiting the people they need to help their business thrive. It has never been more important for those employers to keep and develop the people they already have.

It's therefore crucial that businesses have the tools they need to prevent long-term absence and avoidable job loss because of ill health or disability.

The UK Government is testing a new online service for employers which provides advice and guidance on managing health and disability in the workplace. This explains your legal obligations and good practice.



This may be particularly helpful for smaller businesses without an in-house HR function or access to an occupational health service.

By taking part, you will receive free information and guidance on disability and health-related employment issues. You could use it to help manage a current case, or simply take a look around the site to see what's useful and identify improvements.

However you choose to take part, your feedback will be vital in the future development of the service. You will make a real difference, ensuring the new service is user-friendly and meets the needs of your business and your employees.

See: [Support and manage disabled employees and employees with health conditions at work – Support and manage disabled employees and employees with health conditions at work – GOV.UK \(dwp.gov.uk\)](#)

Repaying Overclaimed CJRS Grants to HMRC

HMRC have updated their guidance on repaying Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) furlough grants that have been overclaimed by employers.

Employers, or their agents, must [use the online service](#) to get a unique payment reference number before they can pay HMRC back.

Note that HMRC may levy a penalty if employers have overclaimed a grant and have not repaid it, and must notify HMRC by the later of:

- 90 days after the date you received the grant you were not entitled to
- 90 days after the date you received the grant that you were no longer entitled to keep because your circumstances changed
- 20 October 2020

See: [Pay Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme grants back - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

The CT600 corporation tax return has also been amended to require companies to report CJRS grants received and the amount they were entitled to. The updated form also requires the company to report any overclaimed amounts already repaid using the procedure above and the balance still outstanding.

Tax Administration and Maintenance

30 November 2021 was Tax Administration and Maintenance (TAM) Day when the government published a series of consultations and tax policy updates, summarised in a command paper, together with a number of other documents outlining proposals to modernise and improve the UK tax system over the next 10 years, in particular further digitisation of the UK tax system.

See: [Tax Administration and Maintenance: Autumn 2021 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

There is still no set date for mandating Making Tax Digital (MTD) for corporation tax although it is not expected until 2026 at the earliest. HMRC have committed to providing sufficient notice of implementation following any decision to mandate MTD for corporation tax to allow businesses time to prepare.

Like MTD for corporation tax many of the proposed changes are several years away from implementation and we will keep you updated if and when the changes are introduced. One area where change is more imminent are proposed changes to R&D tax relief.

Consultation into reforming R&D tax relief

Following on from the Chancellor's announcement in his Autumn Budget the government are consulting on a number of future changes to R&D tax relief. These include:

- the inclusion of licence payments for datasets and cloud computing costs for data processing and software as two new categories of qualifying expenditure;
- restricting relief for the cost of carrying out R&D activity subcontracted to third parties to situations where the work is performed in the UK;
- restricting relief for the cost of employing externally provided workers to situations where the workers are paid through a UK payroll;
- ensuring that all R&D claims must be made digitally and endorsed by a named senior officer of the company.
- requiring all companies to obtain advance assurance from HMRC of R&D tax claims

See: [Consultation outcome overview: R&D Tax Reliefs: consultation - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/r-and-d-tax-reliefs-consultation)

Foreign travel insurance

UK government guidance on travel insurance has been reviewed and updated post Brexit.

If you travel internationally you should buy appropriate travel insurance before you go. If you already have a travel insurance policy, check what cover it provides for coronavirus-related events, including medical treatment and travel disruption, and any planned activities such as adventure sports. If you are choosing a new policy, make sure you check how it covers these issues.

If you do not have appropriate insurance before you travel, you could be liable for emergency expenses, including medical treatment, which may cost thousands of pounds.

See: [Foreign travel insurance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/foreign-travel-insurance)

UK-Norway trade deal update

New UK-Norway trading arrangements came into effect on the 1 December 2021.

It follows a joint deal signed in July with Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein, and will bring the UK and Norway closer, creating a new services and investment relationship with lower tariffs and exclusive duty-free quotas for UK exporters.

Cutting-edge digital provisions mean British firms exporting to Norway can now benefit from a limit on unnecessary paperwork. Electronic documents, contracts and signatures mean goods can move more easily across borders, saving exporters both time and money.

British firms looking to set up or expand operations in Norway can now transfer staff and their families for four years. Norway has stripped back residency requirements for senior

management and directors, meaning more UK talent can sit on Norwegian company boards without having to relocate. Business travellers can also enjoy more streamlined and straight-forward visa processes.

The deal also provides assurance to the UK's FinTech industry, enabling innovative FinTech firms to provide new services in Norway, without providing them elsewhere beforehand.

Underlining both countries high ambition on climate change, the deal explicitly reaffirms Norway and the UK's commitments to reaching net zero. The deal creates further opportunities for investment and job creation in the UK's green economy, including in renewables, green shipping and electric vehicles.

See: [UK-Norway deal comes into effect - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-norway-deal-comes-into-effect)

Registration opens for Space to Connect 2022

Now approaching its fifth year, Space to Connect is a day-long event that gives the opportunity to meet new companies, organisations and individuals who are innovating at the forefront of the space applications sector, as well as others new to this journey.

Up to 700 people are expected to attend the event, which will take place on 1 February 2022.

Exhibition stands will provide the opportunity for companies to showcase the work they have been doing and speak directly to guests on the day.

Space to Connect 2022 will take place online at the Queen Elizabeth II Centre, Broad Sanctuary, Westminster, London, SW1P 3EE.

See: [Space to Connect 2022 Tickets, Tue 1 Feb 2022 at 09:30 | Eventbrite](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/space-to-connect-2022-tickets-29888888888)

Safety net for Horizon Europe applicants

Successful applicants for Horizon Europe grant awards will be guaranteed funding regardless of the outcome of the UK's efforts to associate to Horizon Europe programme.

The ongoing delays in the process of formalising the association have led to uncertainty for researchers, businesses and innovators based in the UK.

To provide reassurance, the government has put in place a short-term measure to cover funding for the first wave of eligible, successful applicants to Horizon Europe, who have been unable to sign grant agreements with the EU.

The funding will be delivered through UK Research and Innovation, which will publish further details about eligibility, scope and how to apply in the coming weeks.

The government remains committed to securing UK's association to Horizon Europe. In the event that the UK is unable to associate to Horizon Europe, the funding allocated will instead go to UK government R&D programmes, including those to support international partnerships.

See: [Horizon Europe: help for UK applicants – UKRI](#)

Applications for The Small Awards UK 2022 are now open

Do you or someone you know run an inspirational small business that fits the bill for #TheSmallAwards, then apply for the 2022 Awards.

The judges will be looking for evidences of strong community engagement from small businesses whilst also looking for strong performance as an on-going business.

The categories are:

- High Street Hero – best high street business
- Bricks and Clicks Award – best multi-channel small business
- Legacy Award – best family business
- Supply Chain Champion – best B2B business
- New Kid On The Block – best business start-up (less than 18 months)
- Digital Star – best digital only business
- Heart Of Gold – the business that contributes most to their community
- At Your Service – best small service business
- Sole to Sole – best self-employed small business owner
- Mission Possible – best social enterprise business
- Small Business of the Year Award – best overall small business

Entries close at midnight on 28 February 2022

See: [The Small Awards](#)

Minimum standards for private sector providers of COVID-19 testing

There are revised minimum standards for private providers of COVID-19 to reflect travel testing changes that came into force from 30 November.

See: [Minimum standards for private sector providers of COVID-19 testing - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Business directory for social enterprises

The NI Social Enterprise Database has been commissioned by the Department for the Economy (DfE). It is vital all social enterprises are listed, so that all sectors are aware of the many businesses to procure from. Being part of this business directory will enable your

social enterprise business to be provided with a platform which will bring you to the attention of decision makers across all sectors.

You can complete a simple online form to get your social enterprise listed on the NI Social Enterprise Database.

See: [Buy social | Find Social Enterprises | Locator map \(socialenterpriseni.org\)](#)

Coronavirus: Business closures and restrictions in Northern Ireland

Changes have been made to the Health protection measures to help reduce the rate of transmission of COVID-19 and place restrictions on businesses and services.

A summary of what you can and cannot do can be found here: [Coronavirus: Business closures and restrictions in Northern Ireland \(nibusinessinfo.co.uk\)](#)

Southern Regional Data Innovation Hub

The Data Innovation Hub aims to support innovation projects that respond and offer innovative approaches to local challenges and needs.

Public and private sector stakeholders will work together to identify and support up to six projects that harness the potential of data-driven innovation to respond to social and economic challenges. The Data Innovation Hub, based in Craigavon, provides a dedicated Digital Innovation facility for a wide range of companies across the region.

The Hub is founded on a partnership model with local organisations including the local councils in Armagh, Banbridge, & Craigavon, Newry & Mourne along with support from the Southern Regional College, Southern Health and Social Services Trust, HSC Innovations, and the Medicines Optimisation Innovation Centre.

A successful project will have access to the following services which has been valued at £100,000 as part of the programme:

- six months access to a team of Software Developers and Data Scientists
- desk space at Bleary Innovation Hub
- Data Innovation Hub Co-Design Workshop
- industry mentoring
- education and skills development
- up to £15,000 of project funding which can be utilised for anything required to support the project
- equipment
- buy time from subject matter experts

See: [Southern Regional Data Innovation Hub \(nibusinessinfo.co.uk\)](#)

Covid certification system introduced to some business settings

The Department for Health has introduced a Covid certification scheme in Northern Ireland, intended to reduce the number of infected people in high-risk settings.

Premises covered by the regulations will be required to comply from 29 November 2021, but there will be a grace period without any enforcement to 13 December 2021. This will facilitate a bedding-in of the regulations, following feedback during engagement with the retail, hospitality, tourism and events sectors.

Covid certification will be required at the following settings:

- indoor events (where some or all of the audience are not normally seated) with 500 or more attendees
- outdoor events (where some or all of the audience are not normally seated) with 4,000 or more attendees
- events where more than 10,000 people will be present, regardless of whether or not they will be seated
- nightclubs
- licensed hospitality premises and unlicensed premises for the duration of the time when they are operating under an occasional licence, or when bring-your-own alcohol is consumed
- cinemas, theatres and conference halls

Under the regulations, a person may produce evidence of their Covid status through:

- certification in paper or electronic form that they have completed a course of doses of an authorised vaccine with the final dose having been received at least 14 days before the relevant time
- certification by text or email through the NHS COVID-19 reporting app of a negative result of a lateral flow device test or a negative result of an on-site lateral flow device test, in each case taken within 48 hours before the relevant time
- a valid notification of a positive result of a PCR test taken no earlier than 30 days, and no later than 180 days, before the relevant time
- confirmation in writing of their participation (current or past) in a clinical trial for vaccination against coronavirus from the organiser of that trial
- evidence provided through the Northern Ireland Covid Certification process for medical exemption from vaccination

See: [Update on Covid certification scheme | Department of Health \(health-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/news/2021/11/24/covid-certification-scheme)

All Island Strategic Rail Review consultation

The Department for Infrastructure and the Irish Department for Transport have jointly published a consultation paper on the All Island Strategic Rail Review and are seeking feedback from the public and interested stakeholders.

The Review, which was launched in April 2021, is considering how the rail network on the island of Ireland can improve to promote sustainable connectivity into, and between, the major cities, enhance regional accessibility and support balanced regional development.

The Review is looking at how the railways are used, how they could be used in future and how the network can evolve to serve the people on the island of Ireland and achieve policy goals.

See: [A consultation paper on the All Island Strategic Rail Review | Department for Infrastructure \(infrastructure-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

Exporting Founders programme

Whether you have started your business or not, if you would like an insight into the requirements and realities of cross-border and international trade, then this programme could be valuable.

Through a series of practical workshops, learning and panels, we are bringing together a host of industry experts to equip you with the skills, knowledge and connections to demystify cross-border trade and to help you export and sell globally.

See: [Exporting Founders](#)

Energy efficiency business survey

Business views sought on past and present energy efficiency interventions and future support needs.

Invest Northern Ireland is working with the Department for the Economy to undertake a review to better understand business' needs in relation to energy efficiency.

Energy efficiency is the practice of using less energy to deliver the same amount of useful output, offering a range of economic and environmental benefits such as increased competitiveness through cost and carbon savings.

In order to inform future policy, Invest NI is keen to gain an understanding of the adoption of energy efficiency measures by businesses, both past and present, and its requirements for support to implement these measures moving forward.

The survey will remain open until Wednesday 22 December 2021.

See: [Understanding Business' Needs in Relation to Energy Efficiency \(clickdimensions.com\)](#)

National Tourism Events Sponsorship Scheme for 2022/23

Tourism NI's National Tourism Events Sponsorship Scheme for 2022/23 is now open for applications. Tourism events showcase Northern Ireland's regions and destinations, allowing visitors to get closer to authentic people, places and personality. These events cover a wide range of themes and areas such as activities, music, culture, food, art, and theatre.

The National Tourism Events Sponsorship Scheme is open to eligible events taking place between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023.

Successful applicants will be issued with a Sponsorship Agreement. The agreement will include a tailored benefits package for Tourism NI. Sponsorship awards are available from Tourism NI of between £6,000 and £30,000. The final Tourism NI sponsorship award will not exceed 50 per cent of total event costs.

The scheme is an Open Call process and applications will be evaluated on a competitive basis.

See: [Portal homepage - Tourism NI \(flexigrant.com\)](https://flexigrant.com)

Going Dutch export programme

Going Dutch is an early stage exporter programme designed to help Northern Ireland companies develop the necessary skills, knowledge and confidence to export beyond the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain.

The Netherlands is a good starter market for new and inexperienced exporters. Its proximity, relative ease of access, trading culture and acceptance of English as a business language make it the ideal starter market for exporting into Europe.

The programme includes one-to-one business support and mentoring, tailored market research, group workshops, in-market group visit to the Netherlands to meet with pre-qualified potential Dutch partners, follow-up assistance and support for five further individual visits.

Going Dutch is designed for Invest NI customers who have:

- Less than 75 employees in the business
- Limited or no experience selling outside of Great Britain and Republic of Ireland
- Identified commercial reasons to explore export opportunities in the market
- A suitable product or tradeable service that is adaptable for export
- Financial stability and resources to develop and maintain an export market

The Going Dutch exporter programme is open to Invest NI customers. If you are interested in finding out more about the programme, [register for the Information Seminar](#) on Tuesday 18 January 2022.

See: [Going Dutch export programme \(nibusinessinfo.co.uk\)](https://nibusinessinfo.co.uk)

Fermanagh and Omagh Digital Support Programme

Fermanagh & Omagh District Council's Digital Support Programme is designed to give businesses expert advice and support with one-to-one mentoring and workshops, so they can then develop their digital skills within their industry.

The programme aims to enhance digital capabilities and develop knowledge in new and existing platforms including social media management and advertising, SEO, PPC and website optimisation.

See: [Home - Digital Support Programme](#)

UK Government tightens travel rules again

In what is now becoming a weekly event the government has added Nigeria to the travel red list from today 6 December. Currently, the majority of cases in the UK have links to overseas travel from South Africa and Nigeria, and over the past week, 21 Omicron cases reported originate from Nigeria.

A temporary travel ban will therefore be introduced for all non-UK and non-Irish citizens and residents who have been in Nigeria in the last 10 days, meaning they will be refused entry into the UK. This does not apply to those who have stayed airside and only transited through Nigeria while changing flights.

People over 12 travelling to the UK from any country from 7 December will need to take pre-departure test (LFD or PCR) as close as possible to departure and not more than 48 hours before travel to slow the importation of the new Omicron variant. A negative test is required to travel.

The government states these are temporary measures that have been introduced to prevent further Omicron cases from entering the UK and will be examined at the three-week review point on 20 December.

See: [Tests required before travel to UK and Nigeria added to red list - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)