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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!

Self-Assessment: Paper submission deadline looming!

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) is reminding Self-Assessment tax payers to check that they have the correct information in order to complete their tax return.



This year, tax payers will also have to declare if they received any grants or payments from COVID-19 support schemes up to 5 April 2021 as these are taxable, including:

- Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS)
- Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS)
- Other COVID-19 grants and support payments such as self-isolation payments, local authority grants and those for the Eat Out to Help Out scheme

The deadline for 2020/21 tax returns is:

- 31 October 2021 for those completed on paper forms
- 31 January 2022 for online returns

You can file your return before the January deadline but still have until 31 January 2022 to pay.

Please contact us about helping you file your 2020/21 return before the deadline or if you have any questions about grants or payments received.

Tax reporting rules for digital platforms

The UK Government is consulting on the implementation of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Model Reporting Rules for Digital Platforms, which require digital platforms to report details of the income of sellers on their platform to the tax authority and also to the sellers.

From January 2023, these rules will require platforms to report information about the income of sellers providing goods and services to help sellers get their tax right and to enable HMRC to detect and tackle non-compliance.

The UK Government invites comments from digital platforms that facilitate the provision of services, such as taxi and private hire services, food delivery services, freelance work and letting of accommodation, as well as those that facilitate the sale of goods and transport rental. They also welcome views from organisations or bodies that represent platforms or businesses in the sharing or gig economy.

This consultation will also be of interest to individuals and companies who provide such services using digital platforms.

The consultation closes on 22 October 2021.

See: [Reporting rules for digital platforms - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/reporting-rules-for-digital-platforms)

HMRC Webinars - National Minimum Wage - Elements of Pay

In this 1 hour webinar, HMRC look at the many different elements making up minimum wage pay. They will cover what does and doesn't count towards a worker's pay - discussing in depth things like deductions, payments and their effect on your employees entitlement. They will look at some common areas where things can go wrong, and what you as an employer can do to recognise and fix them.

See: [Registration \(gotowebinar.com\)](https://www.gotowebinar.com/webinars/hmrc-national-minimum-wage-elements-of-pay)

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) spot checks on businesses

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is continuing to carry out spot checks and inspections on all types of businesses, in all areas, to ensure they are working safely to reduce the risk of COVID.

During the spot checks, HSE provides advice and guidance to manage risk and protect workers, customers and visitors. However, where some businesses are not managing this, HSE will take immediate action.

This can range from providing specific advice, issuing enforcement notices, and stopping certain work practices until they are made safe. Where businesses fail to comply, this could lead to prosecution.

See: [Working safely during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic \(hse.gov.uk\)](https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/working-safely-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic)

Brexit - Full customs controls will be introduced as planned on 1 January 2022

From 1 January 2022, when full customs controls are introduced, the option to delay declarations without an authorisation from HMRC will no longer apply. You will need to choose to make full customs declarations when you import goods or to be authorised to make simplified declarations. You may want to use an intermediary to help you, but if you choose to make your own customs declarations you will need to start preparing now.

See: [Brexit: guidance for businesses - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/brexit-guidance-for-businesses)

New service launched to report UK internal market issues

The Office for the Internal Market (OIM) is a newly created function and is part of the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA).

OIM is calling on businesses to report any issues relating to trading across different areas of the UK. OIM has been tasked with supporting the effective operation of the UK internal market using its economic and technical expertise, following the UK's departure from the European Union. It will provide reports to the Northern Ireland Executive, the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government and UK Government.

To help fulfil this role, the OIM has created a new digital reporting service, through which businesses can share their experience of how the UK internal market is working.

For example, this could include issues relating to trading across all four nations, such as if producers from one part of the UK are paying more to meet the product standards in another part of the UK in order to sell there. It could also include difficulties in using certain professional qualifications awarded in one part of the UK in different parts of the UK.

The information provided will contribute to the first State of the UK Internal Market report, planned for Spring 2022, as well as providing intelligence for any discretionary reviews that the OIM decides to carry out.

Governments can also seek advice or reports on the impact that rules and requirements are having – or may have – on the internal market. In addition, the OIM will look at changes to the operation of the internal market over time.

See: [Report a UK Internal Market issue - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/report-a-uk-internal-market-issue)

Recruiting Prison Leavers: Employers Summit 2021

The Ministry of Justice will host a free interactive virtual event supporting businesses from all sectors that are interested in recruiting prison leavers.

Hear first-hand from leading businesses already benefitting from recruiting prison leavers, including Timpson, Greene King and Greggs.

The headline session will cover filling your skills gaps by recruiting from prison, followed by three workshops covering diversity and inclusion, prison logistics, and corporate social responsibility.

The event takes place on 21 October 2021.

See: [Recruiting Prison Leavers | Employers Summit 2021 \(seewhatsontheinside.com\)](https://www.seewhatsontheinside.com)

Funding for development of Service Robotics facilities

Apply for a share of up to £500,000 to develop your vision for the UK's next generation Service Robotics facilities.



Innovate UK, part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), is funding a Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI) competition to support the development of the UK's National Robotics Proving Ground facilities.

The facilities would aim to accelerate the development and adoption of a new generation of service robotics. There are a wide variety of ways in which such facilities could be delivered across different locations in the UK.

This competition gives organisations an opportunity to develop and share their visions for how such a facility could be realised, and what its technical capabilities would need to be.

The aim of the competition is to develop:

- initial operating concepts
- system architectures
- specifications
- visualisations
- supporting systems and equipment
- challenge prize competitions
- other novel ideas

The outputs from this short competition will inform UKRI what type of facilities can be developed with capital infrastructure funding and the scale of the funding required.

To be eligible, your proposal must be for a project that delivers a short technical feasibility study working towards one or more of this competition's specific themes. All deliverables must be completed by 31 March 2022. The competition is open and closes for applications 10 November 2021.

See: [Competition overview - SBRI UK National Robotics Proving Ground: Feasibility studies - Innovation Funding Service \(apply-for-innovation-funding.service.gov.uk\)](#)

New Tax Checks to Renew Licences for Taxi, Private Hire and Scrap Metal Businesses

From April 2022, the rules are changing for individuals, companies or any type of partnership applying for a licence for a:

- taxi driver
- private hire driver
- private hire vehicle operator
- scrap metal site
- scrap metal collector

In order to obtain or renew a licence the trader must carry out a tax check. This cannot be done by a tax agent or adviser on behalf of the business. The tax check will ask questions about the payment of tax that is due on income from the licensed trade.

After completion of the tax check the trader will be given a 9-character tax check code which will need to be provided to the licensing authority to support the application.

Businesses affected will need to set up a Government Gateway user ID and password, if they do not already have one, in order to complete the tax check. Precise details of the tax check are yet to be published but it is likely to require that the trader is registered with HMRC.

See: [Changes for taxi, private hire or scrap metal licence applications from April 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) update

The coronavirus job retention scheme (CJRS) closed on 30 September 2021 and HMRC have updated their guidance on how to deal with under and over-claimed amounts made in error for earlier periods. Note that claims for September 2021 should have been made by 14 October 2021 unless there is a reasonable excuse for a late claim.

There was particular uncertainty about whether under claims could be set off against overclaimed amounts. The latest guidance states that the off-set can only be made where the under claim and overclaim arise within the same claim period.

The updated guidance reminds employers that if they have overclaimed a grant and have not repaid it, they must notify HMRC by the latest 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

If they do not do this, they may be liable to a penalty. HMRC have stated that they will not be actively looking for innocent errors in their compliance approach.

See: [Pay Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme grants back - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/pay-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme-grants-back)

Tell HMRC about an option to tax land and buildings

To help businesses during COVID-19 HMRC made a temporary change to the time limit for notifying an option. The change applied to decisions made between 15 February 2020 and 31 July 2021. This temporary change ended on 31 July 2021.

HMRC also allowed options to be signed electronically subject to providing supplementary evidence. This change has now been made permanent.

Check the [changes to the time limit and how you notify an option](#) to tax land and buildings.

Form VAT1614A has now been updated. You should only complete this form to notify HMRC of your decision to opt to tax land and or buildings.

See: [Tell HMRC about an option to tax land and buildings - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/tell-hmrc-about-an-option-to-tax-land-and-buildings)

Apply for the Industrial Fuel Switching competition

The competition is looking for projects that will help industry switch to lower carbon fuels. Applications for Phase 1 (Feasibility Studies) are now open.

The £55 million Industrial Fuel Switching competition will support innovation in the development of pre-commercial fuel switch and fuel switch enabling technology for the industrial sector, to help industry switch from high to lower carbon fuels. Funding will be awarded through Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI) contracts, providing 100% funding for pre-commercial solutions.

There are 2 phases to the competition:

- **Phase 1 – Feasibility:** funding for feasibility studies into fuel switch and fuel switch enabling solutions, with £50,000 to £300,000 available per project
- **Phase 2 – Demonstration:** funding for projects to demonstrate fuel switch and fuel switch enabling solutions, with £1 million to £6 million available per project

The competition will support fuel switch and fuel switch enabling technologies at Technology Readiness (TRL) Level 4 to 7 at the start of the project.

Funding is divided into 3 Lots:

- fuel switch and fuel switch enabling technologies for hydrogen.

- fuel switch and fuel switch enabling technologies for electrification
- fuel switch and fuel switch enabling technologies for biomass, wastes, and other net zero compatible fuels

See: [Apply for the Industrial Fuel Switching competition - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/industrial-fuel-switching-competition)

Coronavirus regulations set to change for hospitality premises and indoor venues

The Northern Ireland Executive has agreed a number of relaxations to the current coronavirus restrictions for the hospitality sector and indoor venues. On 14 October the requirement for audience members to be seated when watching performances in indoor venues was removed.

From Sunday 31 October the following relaxations will be permitted, with mitigations in place:

- People can move around hospitality premises and indoor venues, including being able to stand to have a drink and eat food.
- The restriction on indoor dancing will be lifted.
- The need to maintain social distancing in hospitality settings, such as pubs and restaurants will move to guidance. Whilst the legal requirement for social distancing will now be removed, people are asked to keep close face-to-face contact to a minimum at all times.
- Nightclubs will be permitted to reopen.

Over the next few weeks, further work will be carried out with the sectors to prepare for appropriate mitigations to be put in place in advance of these regulations being lifted.

See: [Coronavirus: Forthcoming relaxations for hospitality and indoor venues \(nibusinessinfo.co.uk\)](https://nibusinessinfo.co.uk/news/coronavirus-relaxations-hospitality-indoor-venues)

Hybrid working guidance for employers

As the pandemic situation continues to change and public health restrictions begin to ease, more organisations may be looking at bringing staff back to the workplace. This practical guide offers support to employers considering introducing a mix of home working or remote working and office based working through a hybrid approach. The guidance sets out the advantages and disadvantages for employers to take on board before introducing a hybrid working policy in their organisation.

This guidance also outlines the practicalities of introducing hybrid working including:

- Legal implications of hybrid working
- Insurance requirements
- Data protection and confidentiality

- Mileage and travel expenses
- Health and safety
- Staff wellbeing
- Technology and equipment
- Training and development for line managers
- Performance management
- Fairness and inclusion
- Employee career development

The guidance also includes a sample hybrid working policy template that employers can adapt and use for their organisation. There is also a frequently asked questions section that should help answer any queries employers may have when introducing hybrid working.

See: [Practical Guide to Hybrid Working - LRA - October 2021 | Labour Relations Agency - Official](#)

Maritime and Fisheries Fund open

The Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) has launched a grants support scheme for local fishing businesses worth £1.9 million.

The Maritime and Fisheries Fund for Northern Ireland replaces the now fully-committed European Maritime and Fisheries Fund. Financial (EMFF) support totalling £1.9 million for fishing and aquaculture stakeholders is available up to 31 March 2022.

The new funding is designed to deliver benefits to fishermen, processing and aquaculture businesses, port authorities, inland fishers and stakeholders with environmental interests.

Currently there are five grant areas which you can apply for:

- investment on board fishing vessels
- fishing vessel energy improvements and re-engining
- aquaculture, processing and marketing
- investments to shore based facilities
- partnership, information sharing, advisory services, job creation and training

Stakeholders are encouraged to engage with DAERA promptly in order that applications can be submitted as soon as possible, as this funding must be utilised by 31 March 2022.

See: [Maritime and Fisheries Fund \(NI\) 2021-2022 | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs \(daera-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

BEYOND 2021 conference in Belfast and online

Now in its fourth year, BEYOND is an annual conference where thinkers, makers, investors and researchers across the creative industries come together to explore the relationship between creative research and business innovation.

The conference will take place on 20 and 21 October this year. It will explore questions and ideas around the theme of Creative Places, looking at how the creative industries are forming the heart of new vibrant cultural and creative economies.

This year's conference will take place in a hybrid fashion. The two day programme will offer live events at Belfast's Titanic Hotel alongside live and catch-up sessions online, featuring 40+ expert speakers with:

- keynotes
- panel discussions
- think pieces and provocations
- Q&As

There will also be two exhibitions showcasing UK excellence in research-driven creative innovation:

- the [Immersive Futures Lab](#) is a digital showcase for creative projects that demonstrate innovative ideas, new types of content and novel uses of technologies, including early-stage prototypes using virtual reality, haptics, spatial audio and more
- the [Poster Exhibition](#) is a chance for Doctoral Candidates and Early Career Researchers to show their work centred on the theme of place

In addition, a variety of exclusive activities will take place on 19 and 22 October in Belfast, giving you a chance to join location-based immersive experiences, view the new Screen and Media Innovation Lab facilities, attend networking and VIP receptions, and more.

See: [Schedule - Beyond Conference](#)

Get ready for the Plastic Packaging Tax

The Plastic Packaging Tax will be implemented in the UK from 1 April 2022.

Invest Northern Ireland along with the College of Agriculture Food and Rural Enterprise and the Northern Ireland Food and Drinks Association are actively encouraging collaboration by running a series of webinars entitled 'The Future of Food Packaging'. The next webinar will focus on the implementation of the Plastic Packaging Tax.

This free webinar will take place on 22 October 2021 at 10:00 - 11:30.

See: [Registration \(gotowebinar.com\)](#)