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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!

Power up your business with Innovation!

Innovation has generally been recognised as essential for value creation, both for individual companies and for the UK economy. The development of new ideas, processes and technologies and their flow across different sectors is a significant driver of economic growth and productivity. Recently, innovation has also been identified as crucial to the transition of the economy away from fossil fuels and carbon-intensive business activities.



There are many factors that affect whether and how businesses innovate, for example the availability of skills and capital and government policy measures such as tax incentives.

However, none are more important than the company's own culture, capabilities, and internal systems – all of which are aspects of its governance. Unless companies are governed in a way that is conducive to innovation, they are unlikely to be able to take advantage of new opportunities.

Our most innovative clients share some key characteristics:

- they invest in activities with uncertain outcomes for which the likely commercial return is difficult to quantify and the risk of failure is higher than normal
- they have a culture which encourages flexibility, experimentation and a high level of individual decision making
- they require a longer-term time investment horizon than many other kinds of business activity

Research and Development (R & D) is the process of taking an innovative idea and transforming it into a fully-fledged product or procedure. R & D tax credits are a government incentive designed to encourage innovation across multiple industries. If you carry out R & D that aims to make an advance in science or technology, this is an opportunity for you to reduce your corporation tax bill or receive a refund from HMRC based upon the relevant costs your business dedicates to Research & Development. Recently, R & D tax credits have been the subject of additional scrutiny by HMRC, and some rates will be less generous from April 2023, but it could still be a useful tax relief for your company.

If you are looking for long term finance to support innovation then you will need to ensure your management accounts are up to date, you make available current detailed lists of debtors and creditors, and you might need up to date projections before an expert will consider your application.

Please talk to us about R & D tax credits and long-term finance, our independent experts have many years of experience and success in advising business across a wide range of sectors.

Retiring soon? – Check your entitlement to the State Pension now!

If you are planning to claim the UK state pension you should check your national insurance (NI) record before 5 April 2023. At present, voluntary contributions can be made to plug gaps back to April 2006, but this will be curtailed from April.

National insurance (NI) contributions are made by employed and self-employed individuals based on their earnings. To qualify for the maximum 'new state pension' (received by those retiring on or after 6 April 2016) a person must have 35 qualifying years of NI contributions. For part payment of the 'new state pension' a person must have contributed for at least 10 years. For those whose NI record started before 6 April 2016, different rules may apply; the number of required years of NI contributions/credits to obtain the full state pension may be higher.

If a person has not contributed enough before reaching state pension age, they may not be able to claim state pension, or receive the full state pension amount.

To help protect state pension and other benefits it may be beneficial for people to make voluntary NI contributions to top up their contribution history, potentially

increasing the amount of state pension they will receive. We recommend you take financial advice when making that decision as, amongst other factors, it requires predicting what contributions will be made before state retirement.

Normally, it is only possible to make voluntary contributions for the past six tax years. Currently there is an extension in place. Individuals can fill gaps in their NIC history from 6 April 2006 to the present date by making voluntary contributions.

From 6 April 2023, the timeframe for making voluntary contributions will revert to the normal six years. This means that in the 2023/24 tax year, it will be possible to make contributions going back to the 2017/18 tax year only.

See: [Check your national insurance record before 5 April 2023 | ICAEW](#)

Guidance for small businesses on using facial recognition technology

Facial recognition technology (FRT) identifies or otherwise recognises a person from a digital facial image. Businesses can use FRT in a variety of contexts - for example, in allowing access to devices, taking payments, or allowing entry to secure areas.

Depending on the use, FRT involves processing personal data, biometric data, and special category personal data. Such technologies can intrude on people's privacy, so businesses need to think carefully when deciding if they should implement them.

If you are a small business looking to begin using facial recognition technology, read the ICO's latest FAQ about using FRT for payment, entry, or other security systems.

The information highlights key issues to be aware of, such as:

- what you need to consider before using this technology
- when you must complete a data protection impact assessment
- how to identify and satisfy a special category condition
- what to include in your privacy notice if you use FRT

See: [Additional considerations for technologies other than CCTV | ICO](#)

Check when you must register for Plastic Packaging Tax

Plastic Packaging Tax (PPT) was introduced on 1 April 2022. If you manufacture or import 10 or more tonnes of plastic packaging within a 12-month period you must register for PPT on GOV.UK, even if your packaging contains 30% or more recycled plastic.

You must register for Plastic Packaging Tax if you:

- expect to import into the UK or manufacture in the UK 10 tonnes or more of finished plastic packaging components in the next 30 days

- have imported into the UK or manufactured in the UK 10 tonnes or more of finished plastic packaging components since 1 April 2022

This includes non-resident taxpayers who import [finished plastic packaging components](#) into the UK on their own behalf, or manufacture finished plastic packaging components in the UK.

The importer will generally be the consignee on the importation documents, unless they provide [records showing they are acting on behalf of someone who's controlling the import](#), and are using the consignee to store goods on their behalf.

If you import finished packaging components using incoterms, you should make sure you and other businesses know who is responsible for accounting for Plastic Packaging Tax. The tax becomes chargeable when the goods are imported but is accounted for quarterly in arrears rather than at the time of import.

If you are a partnership or other unincorporated body

You must register if at least one partner (or person carrying out business) will manufacture or import 10 or more tonnes of finished plastic packaging components in the next 30 days or since 1 April 2022. All members will then be joint and severally liable for Plastic Packaging Tax.

If you are a member of a business group

You can [register as a group](#). This allows for only one of the businesses to complete returns and make payments on behalf of all members of the group.

When to register

You must register for Plastic Packaging Tax within 30 days of becoming liable for it. You must pay the tax on all chargeable components from the day you're liable to register. You may need to pay a penalty if you do not.

See: [Check when you must register for Plastic Packaging Tax - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

UK announces second Global Investment Summit to create jobs in high tech sectors

Over 200 of the world's highest profile investors, CEOs and financiers are expected to come to the UK in October for a second Global Investment Summit (GIS 23).

GIS 23 will aim to raise billions of pounds of high value investment to create jobs across the UK, with a special focus on high tech sectors such as innovation, research, and development.

The event will build on the inaugural Global Investment Summit in October 2021, that brought together over 170 CEOs to showcase the UK's commitment to green investment ahead of COP26.

The 2021 Summit secured £9.7 billion of new foreign investment on the day, creating over 30,000 new jobs and supporting growth in vital sectors such as wind and hydrogen energy, sustainable homes, and carbon capture and storage.

See: [UK announces second Global Investment Summit to create jobs in high tech sectors - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-announces-second-global-investment-summit-to-create-jobs-in-high-tech-sectors)

Fishing industry - new funding to train the next generation

Training programmes to attract new recruits and improve the quality of training in the fishing, seafood, and aquaculture sectors have been awarded funding from the [£100million UK Seafood Fund](#).

Recognising industry concerns over an ageing fishing workforce and with the number of UK fishers having fallen by 1,700 over the past decade, the UK government considers it is now more important than ever to ensure entrants are equipped with the necessary skills to join the sector and understand the opportunities that are available to them.

Coinciding with National Apprenticeship Week, the seven projects include pilot courses at London's famous Billingsgate market covering technical skills such as the delivery, preparation, and cooking of seafood; practical qualifications for manning fishing boats in Cornwall; and training for school leavers in Scotland going into the seafood industry.

See: [Fishing industry nets new funding to train the next generation - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/fishing-industry-nets-new-funding-to-train-the-next-generation)

Promote equality and diversity through effective employment monitoring

The employment equality monitoring guide advises employers on how to conduct employment equality monitoring for the purpose of promoting equality of opportunity in employment. It explains what employers should consider when planning to monitor and it offers some practical suggestions, such as sample questions.

The guide outlines:

- the reasons for monitoring equality and diversity,
- a quick summary of equality monitoring law,
- an overview of how data protection laws apply to employment equality monitoring,
- a step-by-step guide to help employers design their own monitoring process, and
- a sample monitoring questionnaire.

See: [A Guide to Employment Equality Monitoring \(equalityni.org\)](https://equalityni.org/)

Belfast City Council: Meet the Buyer

Micro-enterprises, SMEs and social enterprises are encouraged to register for a free place at this event. Organisations confirmed to attend include:

- NI Water
- Belfast City Council
- Education Authority, BSO Procurement and Logistics Service
- Translink
- Belfast International Airport

This Belfast City Council event is for micro-enterprises, SMEs and social enterprises, organisations or companies employing fewer than 50 people and based in the Belfast City Council area. The event will offer:

- a unique opportunity to meet senior buyers at some of Northern Ireland's largest organisations
- an opportunity to discuss your offering and to receive signposting and advice from senior buyers on what is required to become a 'preferred supplier' to their organisation
- a better understanding about the opportunities that exist for your company within the buying organisations, as well as future contracts that might be relevant to your business
- viewpoints from key stakeholders on procurement trends, such as the importance of social value
- insights into how to approach large organisations and to better-position your business to win the right contracts – from companies that have achieved key wins and bidding success

This event is scheduled for 9.30am to 1.30pm on the 21 March at the Titanic Hotel, Belfast.

See: [Belfast City Council: Meet the Buyer \(nibusinessinfo.co.uk\)](https://nibusinessinfo.co.uk)

Consultation: Corporate Performance Plan for Antrim and Newtownabbey

Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council has launched its draft Corporate Performance and Improvement Plan for 2023-24 and is welcoming feedback from residents and businesses on the priorities which have been identified in the plan.

The plan sets out six Performance Improvement Targets for 2023-24, alongside a range of Corporate Performance Indicators.

See: [Corporate Performance and Improvement Plan 2023 - 24 \(Draft for Consultation\) - Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council - Citizen Space](#)

Sales Accelerator Programme: Opportunity Export event

Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council and Newry, Mourne and Down District Council are organising the 'Opportunity Export' event on 4 April 2023 at Lagan Valley Island, Lisburn. This event will mark the end of the Sales Accelerator Programme and highlight export opportunities.

You will get an insight into the export journeys of:

- David Ausdahl of Lowden Guitars in the NMDDC Region (NI Export Champion)
- Conor Brogan of Arcus Systems in the LCCC Region (Past programme participant)

Both of these high-profile local exporters will tell their story and highlight how they have found export success.

There will also be an in-depth panel discussion with:

- Alan Lowry of Environmental Street Furniture (NI Export Champion)
- Patricia O'Hagan of Core Systems (NI Export Champion)
- Deepak Sampson of Ethelcare (Past programme Participant)
- Shane McCarthy of Two Stacks Whiskey

This panel discussion will explore the export opportunities available to Micro and SME Businesses in Northern Ireland. You will also hear from representatives of Invest Northern Ireland and InterTradeIreland about the different supports that they have available to help early stage exporters.

This free event will be held on the 4 April 09.30am to 13.30pm at Lagan Valley Island, Lisburn.

See: [Sales Accelerator Programme: Opportunity Export event \(nibusinessinfo.co.uk\)](https://nibusinessinfo.co.uk)

Sales and digital marketing bootcamp for Newry, Mourne and Down

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council has launched a new short-term programme called Sales and Digital Marketing Bootcamp, delivered through the NMD Business Growth Programme.

This six-week bootcamp, which aims to transform how local SMEs sell and interact online, provides up to two days one-to-one mentoring support and four workshops covering:

- Introduction to effective sales and marketing
- Website and SEO fundamentals
- Making the most of your social media

- Introduction to paid online advertising

See: [New Sales and Digital Marketing Programme Launched for Local Busines \(newrymournedown.org\)](https://www.newrymournedown.org)

Shopfront makeovers for Lisburn and Castlereagh rural businesses

Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council is giving eligible businesses the opportunity to apply for funding so they can refresh their signage and facades through the Rural Shopfront Scheme.

The aim is to improve the appearance and condition of commercial shopfronts and create more attractive places for people to live, work and visit.

The Rural Shopfront Scheme is open to businesses situated in small settlements across the Lisburn Castlereagh area including Aghalee, Annahilt, Dromara, Drumbeg, Glenavy, Upper and Lower Ballinderry, Maghaberry, Milltown and Moneyreagh.

Successful applicants will receive a grant of up to 80% of the overall costs, up to a maximum of £12,500 (ex VAT). You must demonstrate your contribution of a minimum 20% of the overall costs (ex VAT) has been paid.

See: [Rural Shop Front Scheme \(lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk\)](https://lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk)

Focus on Food Conference 2023

Food, drink and hospitality make a significant contribution to the economy and culture of Northern Ireland. The industry shapes the experience for many, drives economic activity and stimulates national and international tourism.

Key topics include:

- nurturing talent
- sustainability best practice
- what makes a great food destination
- new voices: finding success in a competitive world
- how to engage with Belfast's newly established Food and Drink Network

Who should attend Focus on Food 2023?

Anyone working or studying in the hospitality and tourism industries including chefs, restaurateurs, front of house staff, hoteliers, producers, farmers, distributors, food tourism professionals, students, and venue managers.

The conference will be held on Tuesday 28 March 2023, 9am to 4:30pm at the ICC Belfast, 2 Lanyon Place Belfast, BT1 3WH. The cost is: £33.22 / Student ticket: £11.55.

See: [Focus on Food Conference Tickets, Tue 28 Mar 2023 at 09:00 | Eventbrite](#)