

Written by 13 March 2023

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!

What can we expect from the Budget on Wednesday?

Chancellor Jeremy Hunt has made it clear that he does not have room for big tax giveaways on March 15, as forecasts for economic growth are still weak. His focus will be to continue to clamp down on double digit inflation. An economic forecast from the Office of Budget Responsibility (OBR) will be announced alongside the budget.



Mr Hunt has stated that he hopes to start the process of business tax cuts in his Autumn statement later this year, dependant on the OBR forecasts for the UK.

There are reports that the government will spend approximately £3bn to shield UK households from higher energy bills for the three months from April and that the freeze on fuel duty will continue.

With the war in Ukraine showing no signs of ending, we can also expect an increase in the Ministry of Defence budget over the next two years to buy equipment and weapons.

With government ministers struggling to reach a resolution of the series of public sector strikes, the chancellor has also made it clear that any additional money for pay deals should come from existing departmental budgets.

There is also speculation on a range of measures to incentivise employers to take on more employees and to encourage older workers back into employment, including a relaxation in pension contributions for the over 55's. Some commentators expect an announcement on raising the state pension age.

Whatever announcements are made on Wednesday we will do the analysis and get you a summary later this week, so you are fully informed of any changes.

Tax Planning opportunities ahead of the new tax year

The new tax year starts 6 April 2023, so you have limited time to consider your options and once we pass this date, the majority of the tax planning options for Income Tax and Capital Gains Tax purposes will cease unless actioned this month.

Do you fall into any of these categories?

- You have or are thinking about a change in your personal status (single, married, separating, joining or dissolving a civil partnership);
- You are thinking about selling a capital asset, such as shares or a property. From 6 April 2023 the Capital Gains Tax annual exempt amount reduces from £12,300 to £6,000;
- You or your child's other parent claims Child Benefit and the income of either parent is likely to exceed £50,000 for the first time during tax year 2022-23;
- Your annual income is approaching or above £100,000;
- You have not yet topped up your pension contributions for tax year 2022-23;
- You are self-employed with a 31 March 2023 year-end;
- You are self-employed and are thinking about the purchase of equipment or vehicles; or
- You are the director and/or shareholder of a limited company and have not yet considered voting final dividends or bonuses for 2022-23.

If you do, we can help you discuss your options ahead of the April deadline!

The above list is not comprehensive, and we specialise in helping clients with all taxes including PAYE, NIC, VAT, Corporation, Capital Gains, Income, and Inheritance tax. Please contact us now!

Taxpayers given more time for voluntary National Insurance contributions

The UK government has extended the voluntary National Insurance deadline to 31 July 2023 to give taxpayers more time to fill gaps in their National Insurance record and help increase the amount they receive in State Pension.

This comes after members of the public voiced concern over the previous deadline of 5 April 2023.

The deadline extension was announced via a Written Ministerial Statement last week and HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) is urging taxpayers to ensure they do not miss out.

Anyone with gaps in their National Insurance record from April 2006 onwards now has more time to decide whether to fill the gaps to boost their new State Pension. Any payments made will be at the lower 2022/23 tax year rates.

As part of transitional arrangements to the new State Pension, taxpayers have been able to make voluntary contributions to any incomplete years in their National Insurance record between April 2006 and April 2016, to help increase the amount they receive when they retire. And after an increase in customer contact, the government has extended the deadline to ensure people have time to make their contributions.

See: [Taxpayers given more time for voluntary National Insurance contributions - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/taxpayers-given-more-time-for-voluntary-national-insurance-contributions)

The Little Book of Net Zero

The British Standards Institution (BSI) has produced a straightforward 'how to' guide to help you start your business sustainability journey: 'The Little Book of Net Zero'.

You probably didn't think much about climate change when you started your business. But climate change affects us all, and we can all play a part in combatting it. To address this problem, the UK has set a target to achieve 'Net Zero' GHG emissions by 2050. A goal that will only be achieved with the help of businesses.

'The Little Book of Net Zero' offers UK businesses, particularly small to medium-sized enterprises, the opportunity to look at the 2050 UK government's climate goal as a win-win scenario.

Making a firm commitment to achieve net zero in your business will mean that you will:

- become more sustainable and socially responsible,
- take control of energy costs,
- improve performance, and
- become resilient.

See: [The Little Book of Net Zero | BSI \(bsigroup.com\)](#)

UK Export Academy

The UK Export Academy from the Department for Business and Trade (DBT) gives businesses the know-how to sell to customers around the world by providing an opportunity to learn from experts in international trade.

The academy is designed for businesses with different levels of exporting experience, whether you're just starting to sell internationally or looking to grow your international sales. The academy will help you to overcome common challenges that businesses can face.

What will your business get from the UK Export Academy?

- Foundation course: Build your knowledge and confidence if you're relatively new to selling internationally or interested in learning how to start. You will leave the foundation course with an export action plan tailored to your business.
- Sector faculties: Sector-specific webinars, masterclasses, and virtual missions. More experienced exporters can join sector faculties that will provide your business with information on how to operate effectively in particular foreign markets or sectors.
- Market access events: Learn about the benefits of new market opportunities, including the benefits of new free trade agreements.

See: [Home - UK Export Academy \(great.gov.uk\)](#)

UK Tradeshow Programme

The UK Tradeshow Programme offers government support to help UK businesses attend or exhibit at overseas trade shows more effectively.

UK businesses that are currently exporting can apply:

- for support to exhibit at or attend approved overseas trade shows and conferences, and
- to potentially receive grants to cover some costs.

UK businesses can also apply for support if they're thinking about exporting but are not currently doing so.

Attending or exhibiting at overseas trade shows can help you gain essential market knowledge, increase your company's brand awareness among overseas buyers, and boost business sales by securing new customers.

See: [UK Tradeshow Programme - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Bus, coach and HGV drivers - proposed reforms to training rules

Numbers of HGV, bus and coach drivers could be boosted through proposed reforms to driver training rules. Some of the proposed changes aim to help make it more affordable and more efficient for drivers to renew their qualifications or return to the industry.

The new consultation proposes reforms to the Driver Certificate of Professional Competence (DCPC), a professional qualification originally introduced by the EU, which lorry, bus, coach, and minibuss drivers are required to hold in addition to their driving licence.

The key changes include offering in parallel to the existing lengthy training format, which will be reformed, more flexibility with e-learning and a shorter 'new periodic test' which could save employees time and companies up to £460 per test in early estimates.

Reforms to training as well as the new cheaper and shorter periodic test will offer an accelerated route for former drivers to return to the sector more easily.

See: [Boost for bus, coach and HGV driver recruitment with proposed reforms to training rules - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/boost-for-bus-coach-and-hgv-driver-recruitment-with-proposed-reforms-to-training-rules)

Apply for £400 payments towards energy bills through new portal

Households without a direct relationship to an electricity supplier, such as those living in park homes and care homes, can now apply via a secure online portal to receive the support as a one-off, non-repayable lump sum under the 'alternative funding' route of the government's Energy Bills Support Scheme (EBSS AF). For those without online access, a dedicated customer helpline is available to assist eligible customers.

The UK government will never provide any links to the application portal, or directly ask individuals to apply for the £400 support. Those that require additional help when applying for support may wish to seek assistance from a family member or trusted friend.

UK Ministers are urging all eligible households to apply as soon as possible for their support, whilst also warning households to stay alert to potential scams and report them to relevant authorities where they are suspected.

To check eligibility and apply for the £400 of support, people need to search for "Apply for energy bill support if you do not get it automatically" in the search bar on GOV.UK or in an internet search engine.

See: [Help with your energy bills: If you live in a park, mobile or care home, or off the electricity grid - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/help-with-your-energy-bills-if-you-live-in-a-park-mobile-or-care-home-or-off-the-electricity-grid)

Safety net for Horizon Europe applicants extended

The government has announced another extension to the support provided to UK Horizon Europe applicants. The Horizon Europe Guarantee Scheme will now be in place to cover all Horizon Europe calls that close on or before the end of June 2023.

Eligible, successful applicants to Horizon Europe will receive the full value of their funding at their UK host institution for the lifetime of their grant.

The extension will ensure that eligible Horizon Europe awardees will continue to be guaranteed funding, supporting them to continue their important work in research and innovation.

See: [Apply for Horizon Europe guarantee funding – UKRI](#)

Digital Catapult: SONIC Labs showcase

The programme aims to support and accelerate new solution providers to enter the UK telecoms supply chain, by offering them an opportunity to test and integrate their Open RAN (Open Radio Access Networks) products and solutions.

A showcase event will take place in London on Wednesday 29 March 2023 to allow interested businesses to discover more about SONIC Labs, and its role in 5G innovation and telecoms diversification.

The event will showcase:

- the participation of vendors in SONIC Labs and the UK telecoms ecosystem, and
- the opportunities for potential end users of Open RAN products to accelerate adoption.

Participants can expect to see live demonstrations of Open RAN products in action, learn about cutting-edge telecom innovations, and network with other organisations in the telecoms space.

SONIC Labs is a joint programme from Digital Catapult and Ofcom, funded by the Department for Science, Innovation & Technology as part of their 5G supply chain diversification strategy.

This event will be of interest to:

- mobile network operators,
- vendors of Open RAN products,
- start-ups and innovators, including artificial intelligence and machine learning organisations interested in Open RAN,
- other Open RAN labs and international testbeds,
- system integrators,

- neutral hosts and private network operators, and
- potential customers for Open RAN private networks.

See: [SONIC Labs Showcase - Home \(force.com\)](#)

Belfast Region City Deal: Opportunities for the construction sector

The Belfast Region City Deal is a transformative programme of investment aimed at delivering inclusive economic growth for the region. Deal delivery will provide a suite of opportunities for the construction sector over the next five to 10 years, with some of the most advanced projects preparing to go to market in the year ahead.

To ensure that local businesses are aware of the opportunities that will be brought to market across the next 12 months, the city deal partners are hosting a number of events to:

- promote the construction pipeline arising from the Belfast Region City Deal capital investment programme;
- communicate the inclusive growth ambitions of the deal; and
- showcase the employability and skills support available through the Belfast Region City Deal, council, college, and university partners to help the sector respond to labour and skills challenges, including those relating to social value commitments.

See: [Belfast Region City Deal: Opportunities for the construction sector \(nibusinessinfo.co.uk\)](#)

Belfast Business Survey

Belfast City Council has partnered with Belfast Chamber to launch the latest Belfast Business Survey.

The first survey was in summer 2021. This six-monthly survey will take place until summer 2023.

The Belfast Business survey is an important business sentiment tracker to find out and understand views of businesses and how they are performing in the current climate.

It asks businesses to give feedback on:

- current trading conditions and outlook,
- staff and skills needs,
- investment decisions,
- main business challenges, and

- business location.

The survey is confidential and is open until Monday 20 March 2023.

See: [Belfast Business Survey \(belfastcity.gov.uk\)](https://belfastcity.gov.uk/belfast-business-survey)

Breaking Boundaries workshop

Belfast City Council's Breaking Boundaries workshop is designed to equip entrepreneurs with the tools needed for their future business and self-employment paths.

This workshop will be led by Ciaran May, a performance coach to athletes and the founder of Natural Resilience. There will also be a guest speaker.

The event will cover:

- confidence-building,
- instilling resilience,
- goal-setting and achieving,
- dealing with fear and self-doubt,
- guest speaker: defying odds, and
- next entrepreneurial steps.

The event will also offer you an opportunity to put workshop learning into action on the Surf Simulator and Drop Slide at Andersonstown Leisure Centre.

To attend, you must be a Belfast resident with a business idea or aptitude to start a business.

The event will be held on Thursday 16 March 2023, 9.45am to 2.45pm at the Andersonstown Leisure Centre. This is a free event.

See: [Breaking Boundaries workshop \(nibusinessinfo.co.uk\)](https://nibusinessinfo.co.uk/breaking-boundaries-workshop)

Series of events to help businesses improve process efficiency

Businesses in the north-west region are being urged to take advantage of a series of business improvement workshops hosted by Invest Northern Ireland. The workshops will demonstrate how local businesses can develop lean processes which will help them improve their competitive advantage by increasing their productivity and profitability.

The workshops will be delivered by operational excellence coaches with a wealth of commercial experience and expertise in a diverse range of manufacturing and service businesses. They also have experience in key business efficiency improvement practices, including:

- lean,
- six sigma, and
- supply chain efficiency.

All workshops are free to attend and will take place in Invest NI's North West Offices in Derry-Londonderry.

Improving Processes

Date: Thursday 16 March

Time: 10am to 1pm

[Register to attend](#)

Identifying and Quantifying Wasteful Processes

Date: Thursday 23 March

Time: 10am to 1pm

[Register to attend](#)

Organising the Workplace for Improved Workflows

Date: Thursday 20 April

Time: 10am to 1pm

[Register to attend](#)

Business Improvement Through Productive Maintenance

Date: Thursday 27 April

Time: 10am to 1pm

[Register to attend](#)

Managing Change in Your Business

Date: Thursday 4 May

Time: 10am to 1pm

[Register to attend](#)

See: [Series of events to help businesses improve process efficiency \(nibusinessinfo.co.uk\)](#)

Free workplace scheme for Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon businesses

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council has launched the free “Get Moving ABC Workplace scheme”.

Through this scheme, businesses can explore, coordinate, and plan how to motivate and support their employees to lead an active and fulfilling life, inside and outside of work.

Each participating business will have a meeting with experts who will help to identify the needs of staff members, before developing a bespoke package that will meet those needs.

Some of the activities included through this scheme are:

- becoming part of a Corporate Indoor Leisure Membership Scheme,
- support and guidance through Couch to 5K/10K,
- opportunity to enter a workplace team into a Business Games Day,
- information on how to sign your workplace up to an active travel scheme, and
- collaboration with the NI Chest, Heart and Stroke Live Well Work Well programme.

See: [Local businesses encouraged to invest in their staff with free workplace scheme - Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council \(armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk\)](https://www.armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk)