

Written by 13 March 2023

## **Business News Scotland**

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 \(force.com\)](#)

### **The Great British Entrepreneur of the Year awards**

The Great British Entrepreneur Awards are now open for entries.

This year's categories include:

- Creative Entrepreneur of the Year,
- Disruptor of the Year,
- Entrepreneur for Good Award,
- Family Business Entrepreneur of the Year,
- Food & Drink Entrepreneur of the Year,
- Health & Beauty Entrepreneur of the Year,
- Scale-Up Entrepreneur of the Year,
- Service Entrepreneur of the Year,
- Small Business Entrepreneur of the Year,
- Start-Up Entrepreneur of the Year,
- Sustainability Entrepreneur of the Year,
- Young Entrepreneur of the Year, and
- Great British Entrepreneur of the Year.

See: [Home - The Great British Entrepreneur Awards & Community](#)

### **Vehicle tester and traffic examiner strike: March 2023**

Some Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) staff who are members of the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) and Prospect unions are planning to take industrial action during March 2023.

It's part of national industrial action by the PCS and Prospect unions over pay, pensions, jobs and redundancy terms.

When the strikes will be held:

Strikes will affect different parts of Great Britain at different times.

<b>Dates</b>	<b>Areas affected</b>	<b>Unions taking strike action</b>
Wednesday 15 March	All areas of Great Britain	PCS and Prospect
Monday 20 March and Tuesday 21 March	East of England, East Midlands, West Midlands, and parts of London	PCS
Thursday 23 March and Friday 24 March	North-west England and Yorkshire and the Humber	PCS
Monday 27 March and Tuesday 28 March	North-east England and Scotland	PCS

The strike action on Wednesday 15 March 2023 is likely to affect vehicle services, including:

- MOTs for heavy goods vehicles (HGVs), buses and trailers,
- MOT demonstration tests (specialist tests for people qualifying as an MOT tester), and
- vehicle approval tests.

DVSA does not expect the strike action on other days to affect MOTs for HGVs, buses, and trailers, but will not know for certain until the strike action takes place.

#### MOTs for cars, vans, and motorcycles

MOTs for cars, vans, and motorcycles are not affected by the strike action. They will be taking place as planned.

#### Services for MOT testers

If you're an MOT tester with an [MOT demonstration test](#) booked on the dates of the strike action, you should still go for your appointment, unless DVSA contacts you to tell you not to go.

Not all vehicle examiners are union members, and even if they are, they might choose not to take part in the industrial action.

DVSA will automatically rearrange your demonstration test if it cannot go ahead because of the industrial action.

#### MOTs for HGVs, buses, and trailers

You should go to your MOT appointment as planned.



See: [Vehicle tester and traffic examiner strike: March 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

### **New climate change hub launched for forestry sector**

The Climate Change Hub - which centralises the latest resources, information, and guidance on climate change adaptation to support landowners, woodland managers, and forestry practitioners in addressing climate change threats was launched by Defra, Forest Research, Scottish Forestry, and Welsh Government recently.

Forest Research centralises and distils the latest information and UKFS (United Kingdom Forestry Standard) guidance on climate change adaptation to encourage uptake of adaptive practice by forest and woodland owners and managers. It provides concise information about risks from the changing climate, how to identify suitable adaptation measures and examples of how other managers are implementing adaptive practice.

There is no single recommended approach to climate change adaptation, as each woodland has different objectives and conditions. To enable managers to make informed decisions for their own woodlands, the Climate Change Hub also includes detailed guidance through the decision-making process, step-by-step, including information about the online tools available to support risk management and species choice.

See: [New climate change hub launched for forestry sector - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

### **East Renfrewshire Council SBA Get to Zero Grant**

The SBA Get to Zero Grant provides funding for businesses in East Renfrewshire that wish to diversify and invest in sustainable measures to help their business become more efficient, in order to reduce carbon emissions and energy loss. Businesses can receive a grant of up to £5,000.

Measures could include:

- low energy heating and lighting systems,
- improved insulation for roof and building,
- solar, ground or air source heat or solar thermal technology,
- waste management or recycling, and
- equipment that demonstrates a significant energy saving through its installation.

This grant part-funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Local Discretionary Funds.

See: [Business development grants 2022 to 2023 - East Renfrewshire Council](https://www.eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk)

## Deposit Return Scheme - Frequently Asked Questions

Zero Waste Scotland has compiled a list of frequently asked questions (FAQS) to help answer your questions about Scotland's Deposit Return Scheme. A deposit return scheme works by charging anyone who buys a drink a small deposit for the bottle or can that it comes in. They get this money back when they return the bottle or can to a collection point to be recycled. The scheme will go live for consumers on 16 August 2023.

The FAQs include information on:

- what the scheme is,
- why Scotland is introducing the scheme,
- how the scheme works,
- what drinks will and won't be included in the scheme,
- the role of drinks producers in the scheme and how they can register, and
- the role of retailers and hospitality businesses.

See: [Frequently Asked Questions | Deposit Return Scheme \(zerowastescotland.org.uk\)](https://zerowastescotland.org.uk)

## Lighting fast track assessment

If you're a small or medium-sized enterprise (SME) in Scotland and are interested in exploring the benefits that upgraded, energy-efficient lighting could offer your business, Business Energy Scotland advisers can provide you with a free, impartial lighting assessment.

The assessment will provide a detailed report that shows how much you could save by upgrading to modern, energy-efficient lighting.

You can also use your results to apply for the Scottish Government's SME Loan Scheme. This scheme offers interest-free loans of between £1,000 and £100,000 to eligible small and medium-sized enterprises, including charities, to help them upgrade to energy-efficient lighting. The loans come with cashback grants of up to £20,000.

This is a free service.

See: [Lighting fast track assessment \(findbusinesssupport.gov.scot\)](https://findbusinesssupport.gov.scot)