

Written by 24 July 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!

### **Why cash flow management is essential right now**

Last week the Office for National Statistics (ONS) stated that the UK's rate of inflation dropped to 7.9% in the year to June, which means the rate of price rises in the UK has slowed more than expected, down from 8.7% in May - although it still remains high. Falling fuel prices contributed to the drop, while food prices rose less quickly than in June last year. Experts are predicting that the Bank of England will increase interest rates by a minimum of a quarter per cent in August as they continue with their plan to get inflation down to 2 per cent.



With increased supplier prices, continued rises in interest rates, and high annual inflation, managing your business's cash and understanding the flows is a vital tool in maintaining resilience and being able to adopt flexible strategies for success.

An example of recognising the importance of cash flows is Amazon. They recently launched a flexible financing programme that gives businesses access to funding linked to their sales, allowing them to repay as they earn. A merchant cash advance, delivered in collaboration with financing provider "YouLend" could provide a new flexible financing option for eligible UK-based businesses selling on Amazon.co.uk, which provides greater cash flow suppleness in addition to the fixed-term business

loans already offered by Amazon Lending. We expect to see more businesses adopting “elasticity” arrangements with their customers in the future.

Cash flows are a reflection of all the cash that is flowing in and out of a business. Owners can look at the direction of the cash flows for insights about the health of specific products or services and overall market patterns.

No matter how inventive or simple your business model is, you can still have problems with cash flow and here are some of our thoughts on managing the flow of cash in your business:

The first stage of understanding and predicting how funds flow is to perform a health check on your accounts. Look at your latest profit and loss statement and check that your income is sufficient to cover your expenses. If your profit is falling behind your expenses and cash flow is slowing down you might need to take action. Prepare a funds flow statement so you know where the money goes.

Next create a yearly budget, look where cash could become tight and identify months where you can save to cover off the quieter times. Look at those quieter months and think about flexible work scheduling, new products or services, or other activities to tide you over.

Finally make sure you collect your money from those who owe you quickly. Reward customer loyalty by offering early bird discounts. Set credit limits and payment terms to ensure customers follow the rules. If you take on new customers, make credit checks. Penalise late payers and request up front deposits or payment (if appropriate).

[Talk to us about preparing a funds flow statement and annual budget so that you can work on your business for maximum success!](#)

## **Working Capital Finance – can it help with cash flow?**

Working capital finance solutions can offer businesses the opportunity to improve cash flow. The world of commercial finance and asset based lending (ABL) is complex and expansive with products, terminology and contractual interpretation varying from lender-to-lender.

The Benefits of arranging Working Capital are:

- Up to 90% of outstanding invoice value can be advanced relatively quickly;
- Flexible lending – funding increases in line with your growth (UK and Export);
- Confidentiality – lenders can offer a completely confidential service – your customers need not know you have a facility in place;
- Lenders allow you to manage your funding at all times;
- Sector-specific finance is often available;
- Structured ABL – funding for management buy-outs/management buy-ins; and

- Trade Finance & Supply Chain Finance Solutions.

Specialists in this area can advise on:

- Invoice Finance - an effective way of quickly accessing a proportion of the value (up to 90%) of your invoices. Effectively a business 'sells' its invoices to the lender in return for accessing cash at the point products and services are sold. Specific sector based offerings are available, as is the ability to arrange finance for selected invoices only.
- Structured ABL - generate a higher level of funding by unlocking the maximum value tied up in the combined assets within your business, including Debtors, Inventory, Plant & Machinery and Property. Additional forms of funding can be structured in addition to this, such as top up loans in order to drive growth.
- Trade Finance - supply chain finance with various options, enabling the purchasing of goods from overseas where you are otherwise unable to obtain credit from suppliers.

Typically, you will need to ensure your management accounts are up to date and you make available current detailed lists of debtors and creditors. You might need up to date projections before an expert will consider your application.

Please talk to us about finance; our working capital finance experts have many years of experience and success in advising businesses across a wide range of sectors in obtaining working capital finance solutions.

## Find a Grant service

The Find a Grant service offers a free central place on GOV.UK for business, individuals, and organisations to find and apply for UK government grants. The Find a Grant service is an initiative being delivered by the [Government Grants Management Function](#), in Cabinet Office.



It is an innovative pilot that seeks to make it simpler, faster and fairer for civil society organisations and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) across the UK to find and apply for funding. Their goal for this service is to modernise grant-making.

You can use this service to:

- access UK government grant funding;
- search and filter to find a grant that matches your needs;
- find out if you are eligible to apply for a grant; and
- find out how to apply for a grant.

See: [Home - Find a grant \(find-government-grants.service.gov.uk\)](https://find-government-grants.service.gov.uk)

### **What is Fair Trade?**

Farming is the largest employer in the world but millions of people who live and work on smallholder farms don't earn enough to provide for either themselves or their families.

It's often these communities who are most affected by climate change despite having done the least to contribute to it.

Fair Trade is a global movement that puts people and the planet before profit. When producers receive a fair price for their goods it leads to an improved working environment and a better quality of life for them and their families. Fair Trade takes a holistic approach by connecting producers and consumers through making supply chains more transparent and providing better choices for shopping responsibly. Justice, equity, and sustainable development should be at the heart of equal trade structures and Fair Trade is a partnership for change and development through trade.



Fairtrade as one word is a set of social, economic and environmental, standards for companies and the farmers and workers who produce goods like bananas, coffee, and chocolate. When you buy Fairtrade, you're supporting a system that guarantees that producers receive better prices and fair terms of trade. This helps farmers and workers to invest in economic, social and environmental projects of their own choice which can help relieve the effects of climate change and benefit people worldwide.

See: [Home - Fairtrade Foundation](https://www.fairtrade.org.uk)

### **The New “Business Council” – Will it make a difference?**

A new business council has been appointed by the UK Prime Minister to report from the business frontlines and to encourage stability and growth in the UK economy.

Fourteen business leaders, from a range of sectors across the UK economy, join the Prime Minister's new Business Council. Chief Executives from AstraZeneca, NatWest Group and BAE Systems are among the fourteen business leaders joining the council, alongside SSE, Google Deepmind, Sainsbury's and Vodafone. Other companies represented on the council include GSK, Aviva, Shell, Sage, Taylor Wimpey, Diageo and Barclays.

These leaders are recognised as trusted experts in their respective fields and are in charge of some of the country's biggest employers in strategically important industries for UK growth, from construction, life-sciences and tech, to financial services and energy.

Together, they employ around 330,000 people across the country, with an even greater reach throughout their supply chain and a presence globally too.

The newly appointed Business Council will be a forum to bring a real-world perspective on how the current economic climate is impacting business and how government and industry can work together to boost investment and innovation, drive productivity and create highly skilled jobs.

Only time will tell if the UK government listens to the appointed business leaders. Certainly, encouraging investment, removing barriers to trade, and encouraging new opportunities would be welcomed by all businesses.

See: [Major business leaders join PM's new Business Council to turbocharge economic growth - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/major-business-leaders-join-pm-s-new-business-council-to-turbocharge-economic-growth)

## **EU Settlement Scheme enhancements confirmed**

From September 2023 people with pre-settled status under the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) will automatically have their status extended by 2 years before it expires if they have not obtained settled status.

The process will be automated by the Home Office and reflected in the person's digital status. They will be notified of the extension directly. This will ensure that nobody loses their immigration status if they do not apply to switch from pre-settled to settled status.

The Home Office also intends to take steps to automatically convert as many eligible pre-settled status holders as possible to settled status once they are eligible for it, without them needing to make an application. During 2024, automated checks of pre-settled status will establish their ongoing continuous residence in the UK.

See: [EU Settlement Scheme enhancements confirmed - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/eu-settlement-scheme-enhancements-confirmed)

## Plastic Packaging Tax (PPT) Reminder

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 need to register for PPT if either of the following apply:

- you expect to manufacture or import 10 or more tonnes in the next 30 days (the 'forward look' test); or
- you have manufactured or imported 10 or more tonnes of plastic packaging since 1 April 2022 (the 'backward look' test).

Once you are registered for PPT, you will need to submit a return to HMRC, 4 times a year.

Your return must cover an accounting period.

The 2023 to 2024 accounting periods are:

- 1 April to 30 June 2023,
- 1 July to 30 September 2023,
- 1 October to 31 December 2023, and
- 1 January to 31 March 2024.

You must submit the return and pay any tax due no later than the last working day of the month, following the end of the accounting period you are reporting.

The deadlines to submit returns and pay any tax for the 2023 to 2024 accounting periods are:

- 1 April to 30 June 2023 – deadline is Monday 31 July 2023,
- 1 July to 30 September 2023 – deadline is Tuesday 31 October 2023,
- 1 October to 31 December 2023 – deadline is Wednesday 31 January 2024, and
- 1 January to 31 March 2024 – deadline is Tuesday 30 April 2024.

See: [Plastic Packaging Tax - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/plastic-packaging-tax)

## Innovate UK – new funding opportunities

UK registered organisations can apply for a share of up to £25 million for game-changing and commercially viable research and development innovations that can significantly impact the UK economy. The closing date to apply is 27 September 2023. To find out more and apply: [Innovate UK smart grants: June 2023 – UKRI](#)

[Ofgem round 3: call for ideas](#)

UK registered organisations can apply for a share of up to £450 million to deliver net zero at the lowest cost to consumers and support innovative businesses to grow and scale. There is no closing date for this opportunity. To find out more and apply: [Ofgem round three: call for ideas – UKRI](#)

#### Industrial decarbonisation: local plans

UK registered organisations can apply for a share of up to £5 million to develop strategic plans for place-based industrial decarbonisation. The closing date to apply is 2 August 2023. To find out more and apply: [Industrial decarbonisation: local industrial decarbonisation plans – UKRI](#)

#### Innovative technologies: nucleic acid medicines manufacture round 2

UK registered organisations can apply for a share of up to £5 million for manufacturing innovation for nucleic acid medicines. The closing date to apply is 19 July 2023. To find out more and apply: [Innovative technologies: nucleic acid medicines manufacture round two – UKRI](#)

#### Engineering biology collaborative R&D round 2

UK registered businesses can apply for a share of up to £6.7 million to develop engineering biology technologies, processes, products and services as a solution to societal challenges. The closing date to apply is 26 July 2023. To find out more and apply: [Engineering biology collaborative R&D round two – UKRI](#)

### **Women in Engineering Grant 2023**

If you a female leader of an enterprise within UK engineering and are looking for funding to take your organisation to the next level, then check out this grant from manufacturing specialist Get It Made. They have announced a new grant, which aims to support female-led engineering enterprises and help encourage the next generation of women in UK engineering. The manufacturing grant consists of £5,000 (excluding VAT) that can be used when ordering any of Get It Made's manufacturing services.

Applications close at midnight on 31 July 2023.

See: [Women in Engineering Grant 2023 | Engineering Grants | Get It Made \(get-it-made.co.uk\)](#)

### **Healthcare innovation funding opportunity for SMEs**

SMEs developing medical equipment can apply for health and social care research funding from the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) through the Invention for Innovation (i4i) Programme.

The Connect stream of the i4i Programme aims to help businesses reach the next stage in the development process to apply for further funding, in particular for an i4i Product Development Award.

Your business must be developing medical devices in vitro diagnostics and high-impact patient-focused digital health technologies for use in the NHS or social care system.

The minimum entry point is experimental proof-of-concept or laboratory-validated technology. However, you may submit proposals to progress innovations at any stage of the research and development pathway leading to implementation.

[Apply to the Connect stream](#) of the i4i Programme.

This i4i Programme is one of the health and social care research funding schemes available to researchers in this field and, in some cases, Northern Ireland-based SMEs.

Other funding schemes available from Autumn 2023, include:

- The Evidence Synthesis programme,
- Research for Social Care,
- Programme Grants for Applied Research programme, and
- Programme Development Grants.

See: [Invention for Innovation | NIHR](#)

### **Latest employer webinars from the Labour Relations Agency**

The Labour Relations Agency (LRA) is hosting a number of webinars to help employers deal with workplace challenges. We have outlined details of the latest online events below. The events would be beneficial for employers, managers, and human resources (HR) practitioners. The webinars are free to attend.

#### Handling discipline and dismissal webinar

Date: Tuesday 8 August 2023

Time: 10:30am to 11:30am

Venue: Online

[Register to attend](#)

#### Conducting employment investigations webinar

Date: Tuesday 22 August 2023

Time: 10:30am to 12pm

Venue: Online

[Register to attend](#)

#### The essentials of employment law webinar



Date: Tuesday 29 August 2023

Time: 10:30am to 12pm

Venue: Online

[Register to attend](#)

See: [Events | Labour Relations Agency - Official \(Ira.org.uk\)](#)

## **Arts & Business NI Awards now open**

Applications are now open for the Arts & Business NI Awards which celebrate creative partnerships between arts organisations and businesses throughout Northern Ireland.

Arts & Business NI is encouraging entries from business and arts partnerships of all sizes, which took place between 1 June 2022 and 31 July 2023. The awards are free to enter.

This year, there are five categories open for entries including:

- Creative Community Engagement Award,
- Creative Workplace Award,
- Creative Communications Award,
- Leaders on Arts Boards Award, and
- Commitment to Diversity Award.

The deadline for applications is Monday 4 September 2023.

See: [Arts & Business NI Awards, in partnership with Fores... \(artsandbusinessni.org.uk\)](#)

## **Operational Excellence Workshop Series - Ballymena**

Invest Northern Ireland's Operational Excellence Workshop Series gives Northern Ireland businesses access to expert insight from operational excellence coaches who are experienced in efficiency improvement practices including lean, six sigma, and supply chain efficiency.

The operational excellence coaches also have a wealth of commercial experience and expertise in a diverse range of manufacturing and service businesses.

In partnership with Mid and East Antrim Borough Council, the free series of workshops, held in Ballymena, will focus on improving operational efficiencies. Each workshop will cover a different theme and will provide an opportunity for tailored advice and networking.

[Operational Excellence | Improving Processes & Visual Management](#)

Date: Thursday 24 August 2023  
Time: 9:30am to 1pm  
Venue: Ecos Centre, Ballymena  
Cost: Free

[Register for this workshop.](#)

Operational Excellence | Identifying & Quantifying Wasteful Processes

Date: Thursday 31 August 2023  
Time: 9:30am to 1pm  
Venue: Ecos Centre, Ballymena  
Cost: Free

[Register for this workshop.](#)

Operational Excellence | Organising the Workplace for Improved Workflows

Date: Thursday 7 September 2023  
Time: 9:30am to 1pm  
Venue: Ecos Centre, Ballymena  
Cost: Free

[Register for this workshop.](#)

Operational Excellence | Make Value Flow

Date: Thursday 14 September 2023  
Time: 9:30am to 1pm  
Venue: Ecos Centre, Ballymena  
Cost: Free

[Register for this workshop.](#)

Operational Excellence | Managing Change in Your Business

Date: Thursday 21 September 2023  
Time: 9:30am to 1pm  
Venue: Ecos Centre, Ballymena  
Cost: Free

[Register for this workshop.](#)

### **Pipeline Investment Fund for Belfast music venues**

As part of Belfast City Council's music strategy [Music Matters](#), it has committed £20,000 to Music Venue Trust's [Pipeline Investment Fund](#).

Grassroots music venues in Belfast can apply for grants of up to £5,000 through this initiative to be used for:

- sound,

- lighting,
- access,
- ventilation,
- minor building alterations,
- staff training,
- diversifying workforces,
- succession planning,
- skills development, and
- strengthening local community ties.

Applications are open until Friday 25 August 2023.

See: [Culture: Belfast music \(belfastcity.gov.uk\)](https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/culture)

### **Workshops to help employers support older workers**

Business in the Community are hosting a number of online workshops over the next few months as part of their Age-Inclusiveness Learning Network. The network brings professionals with an interest in age inclusion together online, to hear and share best practices, share learning, network, and hear from a topic expert speaker covering issues such as menopause, recruitment, retirement, pensions and savings, and positive aging.

#### Preparation for Retirement

Date: Wednesday 19 July 2023

Time: 11am to 12:30pm

Venue: Online

Cost: Free

[Register to attend](#)

#### Caring for Carers

Date: Wednesday 23 August 2023

Time: 11am to 12:30pm

Venue: Online

Cost: Free

[Register to attend](#)

#### Age-Inclusive Recruitment

Date: Wednesday 20 September 2023

Time: 11am to 12:30pm

Venue: Online

Cost: Free

[Register to attend](#)