

Written by 7 August 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!

Taking control of your business

We were finally getting over the financial crisis when Covid struck. Russia's war in Ukraine has not only meant human suffering – it has affected the entire global economy, driving up the cost of food and energy. It adds to the hardship for those on low incomes and means serious food security risks in the world's poorest economies.

UK businesses of every size face challenges that are unprecedented and often worrying. So, what steps could you take to have more control over your future?

A business might have a great product or service but without a strategic plan to help it define, articulate, and communicate where it is going, it will be at the mercy of outside events. We encourage our clients to take some time to think long-term about their business and to establish goals or targets that they can control.



A plan starts with identifying and accessing opportunities within your market and should address how your business is going to evolve to meet the challenges of today

and in the future. The plan gives your business purpose, and it answers questions about your long-term goals.

The first step is to look at five important areas:

1. Think long term – invest time in understanding where the market is going and what this means for your customers. Short-term decisions do not help grow a business.
2. Having a good value proposition is essential – this states the relevance of your product or service, what it does and why customers need it. What is yours?
3. Expanding your reach – who is your target customer and what do you need to do to let them know you exist and that your product or service is relevant to them?
4. Growth means new people, systems and (maybe) different ways of doing things. Grow at a pace you can manage.
5. How will your marketing get your value proposition to relevant customers?

Once you have taken some time to write out your plan and where you want your business to be in (say) 2 years, the next step is to work out a marketing programme with actions to make it happen.

A marketing plan is a business document outlining your marketing strategy and tactics. It is often focused on a specific period (i.e., over the next 12 months) and covers various marketing-related details, such as costs, goals, and action steps. But like your business plan, a marketing plan is not a static document and should outline:

1. How you are going to keep existing customers happy and returning to buy more often;
2. What the goals are for getting new customers; and
3. The marketing methods you are going to use to achieve 1 and 2.

We specialise in helping our clients manage their businesses. We do this by preparing and updating detailed forecasts, using the latest and most powerful software.

Please talk to us about strategic planning, we can help with a template so you can do this yourself or work together to produce estimates for a variety of scenarios and help you take control of your business!

Filing your Self-Assessment return early

Taxpayers could take advantage of four key benefits when filing their tax return early, HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) has stated.

The Self-Assessment deadline for the 2022 to 2023 tax year is 31 January 2024. Taxpayers who file early will have more control over their financial affairs and beat the January rush.

The four benefits HMRC promote are:

- Planning: find out what you owe for the 2022 to 2023 tax year as soon as you have filed, which allows for more accurate financial planning;
- Budgeting: spread the cost of your tax bill with weekly or monthly payments using HMRC's [Budget Payment Plan](#);
- Refund: Check if you're due a refund in the [HMRC app](#) once you've filed; and
- Help: you can access a range of online guidance and information to help you file your return and get help if you are [unable to pay your bill](#) in full by the 31 January deadline. You may be able to set up a [Time to Pay](#) plan

Talk to us if you need help filling out your tax return or if you want to file early, we have considerable experience in dealing with HMRC.

Update on packaging reforms

The Extended producer responsibility (EPR) scheme has been deferred for a year until October 2025.

The UK government has stated that following engagement with industry, and in light of the pressure facing consumers and businesses in the current economic context, new rules to ensure packaging producers pay for the cost of recycling their packaging will be deferred a year from October 2024 to 2025.

The Government will use the additional year to continue to discuss the scheme's design with industry and reduce the costs of implementation wherever possible. In anticipation of EPR, producers have already started to use less packaging and adopt easier-to-recycle packaging formats, and they expect this process to continue – ensuring that costs are not then passed onto households later on.

This decision to defer producer payments has been taken jointly with the devolved administrations and will provide industry, local authorities, and waste management companies with more time to prepare to ensure the success of the scheme, helping make sure it is best designed to deliver on long term recycling goals while supporting households with the immediate challenge of high prices caused by inflation.

See: [Update on packaging reforms to help drive down inflation - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Managing work-related stress

Stress is defined by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) as 'the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them'.

Some people benefit from a certain amount of pressure as it can keep them motivated. However, when there is too much pressure it can lead to stress.

Stress is not an illness, but it can affect a person's physical and mental health.

If not properly managed, stress can cause:

- 'burnout' (physical and emotional exhaustion);
- Anxiety; and
- Depression.

Stress can increase the risk of physical illnesses. For example:

- heart disease;
- back pain;
- digestive conditions like irritable bowel syndrome; and
- skin conditions.

If an employer or employee spots signs of stress, it can be helpful to have an informal chat. This can help them understand how the person is feeling and what support they need. Getting help could prevent more serious problems.

Acas has released new guidance for employers to help them better manage employees' and their own stress.

See: [Causes and signs of stress: Managing work-related stress - Acas](#)

'Essentials' training for new conveyancing staff

HM Land Registry has launched a new initiative to help new conveyancing staff get to grips with the practices and processes involved in lodging high-quality applications, right from the word go.

Comprising a varied range of basic training materials, 'HM Land Registry Essentials' is a self-service training package aimed at helping new staff, as well as more experienced colleagues wanting an opportunity to refresh their knowledge.

The training package includes a mix of short videos, on-demand webinars, flowcharts, and guidance covering some of the most common issues facing new starters in the sector.

These include how to calculate certain Scale 2 fees as well hints and tips on avoiding requests for information (requisitions) relating to forms and deeds, execution, restrictions, and variations in names.

There's also an easy-to-follow look at the three parts that generally make up a title register.

See: [HM Land Registry Essentials - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/hm-land-registry-essentials)

New shipbuilding lending scheme for the UK's coastal communities

A new government scheme to help ship buyers access finance to buy UK-built vessels and upgrade existing ones has been launched. Through the Shipbuilding Credit Guarantee Scheme (SCGS) the government will act as a guarantor for lenders, unlocking credit for maritime firms.

It could help to boost the UK shipbuilding industry and drive growth in areas such as Liverpool, Plymouth, the Solent, Rosyth, Clydebank, and Belfast.

The SCGS could create new jobs and contribute to the economy, according to government estimates based on the demand for commercial shipbuilding in the UK.

The scheme also forms part of the Government's £4 billion plan to revitalise UK shipbuilding and coastal communities through the National Shipbuilding Strategy Refresh announced last year.

See: [New shipbuilding lending scheme to boost UK's coastal communities - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-shipbuilding-lending-scheme-to-boost-uk-s-coastal-communities)

The Great British Businesswoman Awards 2023

The Great British Businesswoman Awards brings together the whole Great British Businesswoman Series community to celebrate the women who are changing the face of business across the United Kingdom.

The awards showcase the business role models, advocates and mentors, as well as the inspirational women leading businesses and those ascending to new heights!

More than just an awards ceremony, the Great British Businesswoman Awards is a year-round programme of engagement, delivering touch points throughout the year to support and champion.

The awards are free to enter and the closing date to apply is 27 August 2023.

See: <https://www.greatbritishbusinesswoman.co.uk/>

The Clean Maritime Demonstration Competition

Innovate UK will work with The Department for Transport (DfT) to invest up to £34 million in innovation projects to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from shipping.

These will be to develop and deploy real-world operational demonstrations of clean maritime solutions as well as carry out innovative feasibility studies and pre-deployment trials.

The Clean Maritime Demonstration Competition (CMDc) Round 4 is part of a suite of interventions launched by the UK Shipping Office for Reducing Emissions (UK SHORE). UK SHORE aims to transform the UK into a global leader in the design and manufacturing of clean maritime technology.

Your proposal must focus on clean maritime technology. Your project must do one of the following:

- design, develop, test and deploy technology; or
- conduct a technical and economic feasibility study.

The competition closes on the 27 September.

See: [Competition overview - CMDc Round 4 – Vessel or Infrastructure demonstrations - Innovation Funding Service \(apply-for-innovation-funding.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.innovationfunding.service.gov.uk/competition-overview-cmdc-round-4-vessel-or-infrastructure-demonstrations)

New North Sea oil and gas licences

Hundreds of new oil and gas licences will be granted in a controversial decision by the UK government.

The UK government and the North Sea Transition Authority (NSTA) have announced a joint commitment to undertake future licensing rounds, which will continue to be subject to a climate compatibility test.

By adopting a more flexible application process, licences could also be offered near currently licensed areas – unlocking reserves which can be brought online faster due to existing infrastructure and previous relevant assessments.

With the independent Climate Change Committee predicting around a quarter of the UK's energy demand will still be met by oil and gas when the UK reaches net zero in 2050, the Government is taking steps to slow the rapid decline in domestic production of oil and gas, which could secure domestic energy supply and reduce reliance on hostile states.

The NSTA – responsible for regulating the oil, gas, and carbon storage industries – is currently running the 33rd offshore oil and gas licensing round. They expect the first of the new licences to be awarded in the autumn, with the round expected to award over 100 licences in total.

This comes as a new analysis released by the NSTA shows that the carbon footprint of domestic gas production is around one-quarter of the carbon footprint of imported liquified natural gas.

See: [Hundreds of new North Sea oil and gas licences to boost British energy independence and grow the economy: 31 July 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/hundreds-of-new-north-sea-oil-and-gas-licences-to-boost-british-energy-independence-and-grow-the-economy)

Extension of CE mark recognition for businesses

The Department for Business and Trade has climbed down over the new UKCA marking system and announced an indefinite extension to the use of CE marking for UK businesses.

Businesses have repeatedly warned that the copycat UK quality assurance mark would create unnecessary burdens for the industry by creating dual EU and UK certification regimes.

This comes as part of a wider package of smarter regulations designed to ease business burdens and help grow the economy by cutting barriers and red tape. Following extensive engagement with industry, British firms will be able to continue the use of CE marking alongside UKCA.

The Business Secretary acted urgently on this issue, to prevent a cliff-edge moment in December 2024 when UKCA was set for entry. This intervention will ensure businesses no longer face uncertainty over the regulations and can cut back on unnecessary costs, freeing them up to focus on innovation and growth.

The extension will provide businesses with flexibility and choice to use either the UKCA or CE approach to sell products in Great Britain.

See: [UK Government announces extension of CE mark recognition for businesses - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-government-announces-extension-of-ce-mark-recognition-for-businesses)

Plastic bag use falls by more than 98% after charge introduction

More than 7 billion plastic bags have been prevented from blighting our streets and countryside thanks to the single-use carrier bag charge, new figures announced last month show.

A 5p charge was first introduced in supermarkets in 2015. Since then, usage at the main retailers – Asda, Marks and Spencer, Morrisons, Sainsbury's, The Co-operative Group, Tesco and Waitrose – has dropped by more than 98%.

The average person in England now buys just two single-use carrier bags a year from these businesses, compared with around 140 in 2014 before the charge was introduced.

The number of single-use carrier bags reported as sold by the main retailers was 133 million in 2022/23, down from 197 million in 2021/2022, representing a reduction of 33%. This is a huge drop from the 7.6 billion used in 2014.

In 2021, the charge was [increased to 10p and extended to all businesses](#). This has helped bring the number of bags used down by more than 35% from 627 million in 2019/20 to 406 million in 2022/23.

Meanwhile, retailers have voluntarily donated more than £206 million from the proceeds to good causes in education, arts, heritage, sports, environment, health and charity or volunteering sectors since the charge's introduction.

See: [Plastic bag use falls by more than 98% after charge introduction - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Alcohol Duty Reform

The changes to the Alcohol Duty structure and the new reliefs took effect on 1 August 2023. These include:

- A new alcohol Duty system: standardised Alcohol Duty bands for all types of alcoholic products. There are new duty rates based on alcohol by volume (ABV) for all products;
- A Small Producer Relief: which reforms and extends the relief previously enjoyed by small breweries, to producers of all alcoholic products under 8.5% ABV;
- A reduced rate for draught products also known as Draught Relief, which reduces the tax due on draught alcoholic products under 8.5% ABV, packaged in containers of at least 20 litres, and designed to connect to a qualifying dispense system; and
- Transitional arrangements for producers and importers of some wine products: to help them with moving to the new method of working out the duty on their products. This allows businesses to use an 'assumed strength' of 12.5% ABV when working out the duty for wines with an ABV between 11.5% and 14.5% ABV. This measure is in place for 18 months, from 1 August 2023 until 1 February 2025.

See: [Alcohol Duty from 1 August 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Bricks or Sticks small business development programme

The Bricks or Sticks workshop series is aimed at new and existing business owners and will be facilitated by Brian Moran, Founder of the Small Business Edge podcast and Jocelyn Ring, a branding and leadership expert.

The series is designed to help business owners build solid foundations for their companies and is being supported by Invest Northern Ireland, the Innovation Factory, and the Belfast International Homecoming.

The series aims to help 25 Belfast business owners achieve their own goals. The workshop is broken into themes that are the foundations of every business, regardless of the size of your company.

The themes include:

- How to navigate forks and obstacles in the road;
- Changing your mindset to gain better control of your time; and
- How to build your internal and external brand.

Weekly videos and workbooks will be sent to attendees on Mondays (4, 11 and 18 September). On Thursdays (7, 14, and 21 September), there will be a one-hour interactive discussion with attendees on the work they completed that week.

On 29 September, there will be an in-person workshop for attendees to review everything they learned.

See: [Bricks or Sticks | Aisling Events \(aisling-events.com\)](https://aisling-events.com)

UK Export Academy webinars

Listed below are upcoming UK Export Academy webinars to help business owners and entrepreneurs across Northern Ireland boost their exporting skills and sell their goods and services to new markets worldwide.

The UK Export Academy is delivered in various stages depending on your skill level. These include essentials modules, masterclasses, market events and sector-specific masterclasses.

Essentials

Build your knowledge and confidence if you're relatively new to selling internationally or interested in learning how to start. These webinars offer a step-by-step guide to becoming an exporter.

[7 Aug - Start your journey with the UK Export Academy](#)

[9 Aug - How to sell your services overseas \(Part 1\)](#)

[11 Aug - How to sell your services overseas \(Part 2\)](#)

[11 Aug - Start your journey with the UK Export Academy](#)

[22 Aug - An introduction to exporting \(Part 1\)](#)

[22 Aug - Getting your exports from A to B \(Part 2\)](#)

Masterclasses

Already have a good understanding of the export basics? Attend these masterclasses to broaden your knowledge.

[30 Aug - Sales and marketing: Creating impactful value propositions to help you succeed overseas](#)

Sector events

Gain insight into the different markets overseas.

[10 Aug - Creative Industries: An Introduction to the Experience Economy](#)

[22 Aug - How to access the German Life Sciences sector](#)

See: [Latest UK Export Academy webinars \(nibusinessinfo.co.uk\)](#)

Employers encouraged to exhibit at Derry City and Strabane Job Fair

Local employers who are looking to recruit staff this summer and autumn are encouraged to register to exhibit at the Derry City and Strabane Job Fair.

The Derry City and Strabane Labour Market Partnership and the Cross Border Partnership for Employment Services are hosting the event. It will take place in the City Hotel Derry from 11am to 3pm on Tuesday 12 September 2023.

The closing date for exhibitor applications is Friday 11 August 2023.

See: [Employers encouraged to exhibit at Derry City and Strabane Job Fair \(nibusinessinfo.co.uk\)](#)

Energy efficiency and related areas of the Building Regulations consultation

The Department of Finance has launched a consultation discussion document on the energy efficiency requirements and other related areas of the Building Regulations, such as ventilation, overheating risks in dwellings, and electric vehicle charging infrastructure at buildings.

The potential changes discussed in the consultation would support the 2021 Energy Strategy – ‘The Path to Net Zero Energy’ which aims to significantly improve the energy and emissions performance of new homes and buildings.

Options in the discussion document include potential next steps which could make conventional oil boilers unsuitable in most new builds, due to their emissions, and moves towards low-carbon heating solutions. The consultation also considers improved fabric standards and renewables in buildings, as well as reviewing wider

issues, such as embodied carbon in materials and the assumptions used in building energy assessments.

The consultation period runs until Wednesday 15 November 2023.

See: [Energy efficiency and related areas of the Building Regulations consultation \(nibusinessinfo.co.uk\)](https://nibusinessinfo.co.uk)

Grey to Green Demonstrator Project for Belfast

As part of Belfast City Council's [A Bolder Vision for Belfast](#), expressions of interest are invited from Belfast-based SMEs, community groups, and schools with the expertise and capability to undertake a city centre demonstrator project.

The project, which will provide capital support of up to £50,000, should focus on urban farming, social gardening, or community food growing initiatives, with the possibility of using a council-owned site, subject to approval.

If a project is awarded a grant, the applicant will be responsible for regular maintenance of the greening infrastructure and ongoing capital costs after the project is complete.

Applicants will need to provide details on their project location, their proposal, including the proposed method of community engagement, and anticipated outcomes, as well as how the project aligns with the fund criteria.

Fund criteria:

- City centre location,
- Help combat pollution and improve air quality,
- Sustainable,
- Pollinators and native species,
- Introduction of wildlife,
- Visible to the public, and
- Innovative and deliverable.

Projects must be completed by Thursday 29 February 2024.

The closing date for returning an expression of interest is Monday 21 August 2023.

See: [Grey to green city centre fund \(belfastcity.gov.uk\)](https://belfastcity.gov.uk)