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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!

Covid-19 update

The Health Minister has launched a new 'Pharmacy Collect' service which enables people to collect rapid COVID-19 tests from selected community pharmacies. To date 420 of pharmacies in Northern Ireland have signed up for the scheme. Rapid tests are available for anyone who requires them. All results should be reported. Where someone receives a positive test, they should immediately self-isolate and book a confirmatory PCR test.

Mobile vaccination clinics are continuing to deliver first doses. Vaccination is also available by appointment for the Moderna vaccine at around 50 participating community pharmacies. More pharmacies will be joining the programme. Further details on pharmacy bookings are available on the [Health and Care NI website](#)

Back to school - Remind employees about HMRC support with childcare costs!



With children starting to go back to schools and nurseries in September, and more employees going back to work full time due to the withdrawal of CJRS support, they may need to start thinking about childcare. HMRC have issued a reminder that there is support available for families towards their childcare costs. If they haven't already done so they should set up a "Tax-Free" Childcare Account to help pay towards the cost of childminders, breakfast and after school clubs, nursery fees and approved play schemes. For every £8 an eligible family pay into the special account the government adds £2, up to £2,000 a year, or up to £4,000 a year if a child is disabled.

The scheme is available to parents or carers who have children aged up to 11, or 17 if their child is disabled. Parents can get Tax-Free Childcare in addition to 30 hours free childcare if they are eligible for both. If the employee or their partner have an expected 'adjusted net income' over £100,000 in the current tax year they will not be eligible. This includes any bonuses they expect to get.

For more details see: [HMRC can help with childcare costs as children head back to school - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/hmrc-can-help-with-childcare-costs-as-children-head-back-to-school)

Intellectual Property renewal service goes digital

A new digital renewals service that reduces bulk renewal time for IP rights from 5 days to 5 minutes has now been opened up to all customers by the Intellectual Property Office (IPO).

Customers who need to renew a registered design can do so online. Customers can also renew up to 1,500 IP rights - including combinations of patents, trademarks and designs - in a single digital transaction. The IPO say that they will bring forward these design principles to their One IPO Transformation Programme, which will provide a single, integrated system for all registered IP rights.

See: [Renew a patent, trade mark or registered design - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/renew-a-patent-trade-mark-or-registered-design)

Queen's Awards for Enterprise 2021

The Queen's Awards for Enterprise are the most prestigious awards for UK businesses of all sizes and sectors. The awards can provide:

- excellent marketing opportunities and press coverage
- worldwide recognition as an outstanding British company
- increased turnover and international trade
- a boost to staff morale, and also to partners and stakeholders

The awards are a self-nominating process and are free to enter. The application period is currently open and will close on 8 September 2021.

See: [The Queen's Awards for Enterprise - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/the-queen-s-awards-for-enterprise)

Digital Leaders 100 Awards

These awards celebrate the individuals and organisations from the public, private and non-profit sectors who are demonstrating a pioneering and sustainable approach to digital transformation in the UK.

The categories are:

- Digital Leader

- Young Digital
- Digital SME
- AI Innovation
- Digital Skills or Talent Initiative
- Big Data Innovation
- Digital Public Service Innovation
- Geospatial Innovation
- 5G Innovation
- HealthTech Innovation

You can nominate yourself or your organisation in any relevant category, entries and nominations close at midday on Friday 10 September 2021.

See: [Digital Leaders 100 \(digileaders100.com\)](https://digileaders100.com)

Managing drug and alcohol misuse at work

Employers have a legal duty to protect employees' health, safety and welfare. Understanding the signs of drug and alcohol misuse (or abuse) will help you manage health and safety risk in your workplace. The Health and Safety Executive website has [step-by-step guidance](#) to help you manage drug and alcohol misuse at work. This includes advice on how to [develop a drugs and alcohol policy](#) and what you can do to [support your employees](#)

See: [Managing drug and alcohol misuse at work - Overview - HSE](#)

ICO consultation on data transferred outside of the UK

The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) is seeking responses on their draft international data transfer agreement (IDTA) and guidance, which replace Standard Contractual Clauses (SCCs).

The ICO's IDTA and associated documents form part of a wider UK package to assist international transfers, including supporting the government's approach to [new adequacy assessments](#) of third countries.

The consultation is split into three sections:

- proposal and plans for updates to guidance on international transfers
- transfer risk assessments
- the international data transfer agreement

The ICO is also asking for views on any relevant privacy rights, legal, economic or policy considerations and implications. Your responses will help them understand the practical impact of their proposed approaches on your organisations.

See: [ICO consults on how organisations can continue to protect people's personal data when it's transferred outside of the UK | ICO](#)

EU delay when traders must start to use new Export Health Certificates

The date for using the new Animal Health Regulation (AHR) EHCs has been pushed back to 15 January 2022. The EU has voted to delay when traders must start to use the new Export Health Certificates (EHCs) for goods moved to Northern Ireland or exported to the EU from GB.

The new Animal Health Regulation (AHR) EHCs were due to be used from 21 August 2021 however the date has now been pushed back by the EU to 15 January 2022. This includes EHCs for all products of animal origin, live animals, germinal products and composite products.

All existing and most of the new AHR EHCs are available and traders can decide which ones they wish to use until 15 January 2022. A small number of new EHCs have been removed from EHC Online for now. This is because the EU will be amending some EHCs, and some are subject to ongoing discussions with the EU regarding GB's disease freedom status.

You should continue to use the existing EHCs for these products until the new certificates are made available again. They will be available in advance of 15 January 2022.

See: [EU delay when traders must start to use new Export Health Certificates \(nibusinessinfo.co.uk\)](#)

Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 2021

Grant applications from rural micro-businesses will re-open for applications from rural businesses in the Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council and Belfast City Council areas.

Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council (LCCC) has announced the second call of that Rural Business Development Grant Scheme for rural micro-businesses in that area. This scheme is also open to eligible businesses in rural areas of Belfast City Council.

The original [Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 2021](#) closed to applications from businesses on 30 July 2021. This one-week extension for Lisburn & Castlereagh and Belfast City Council businesses will run from Friday 10 September 2021 to 12 noon on Friday 17 September.

This grant scheme is part of the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Programme funded by the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA). It offers capital grants of up to £4,999.

For this second round of the scheme, LCCC will administer grant applications from the rural areas of Belfast City Council in addition to its own. Those who have previously benefited from grant assistance under this scheme cannot apply.

Eligible applications must be from existing micro-businesses with less than 10 full-time employees. The total capital costs of the projects must be between £1,000 and £20,000. The capital grants are capped at £4,999 at a match-funding rate of 50% from DAERA and 50% from participating businesses. The minimum grant awarded will be £500.

See: [Council calls for grant applications from rural micro-businesses \(nibusinessinfo.co.uk\)](https://nibusinessinfo.co.uk)

Place-based Climate Action Network (PCAN) Fund now open for applications

This fund aims to stimulate wide engagement in place-based climate action. The third and final round of the PCAN Fund has launched. £135,000 is available to fund five to seven projects, worth £5,000 to £35,000 each.

Proposals may be submitted for a one-year PCAN Fellowship (early career researchers) or the project call. The call is for projects that address the following issues (other innovative proposals on place-based climate action in the UK will also be considered):

- evaluating the impact of climate commissions
- delivering climate action at the local level
- exploring the co-benefits of climate action
- place-based climate action in rural areas

Applications are invited from both practitioners (policymakers, businesses, NGOs, etc) and academic researchers. Applications that are co-produced by researchers and research users are particularly encouraged. The fund is open to the UK research and climate change community, including members of the PCAN network (but not core members of the PCAN team).

The deadline for applications is 28 September 2021 and projects can start in or before spring 2022 and must be completed by November 2023.

See: [PCAN Fund | Place Based Climate Action Network \(pcancities.org.uk\)](https://pcancities.org.uk)

Tourism Website Development Programme 2021-22

The Website Development Programme aims to provide support to experience providers to develop or enhance their websites and digital presence; through the provision of a digital audit and website development plan - that will then be used to support business recovery and growth.

The digital audit and website development plan will look at a wide range of support, including:

- search engine optimisation
- booking engine development
- optimisation of mobile and smartphone platforms
- creating the right content
- tactics to capture sales

The programme is open to existing experience providers based in Northern Ireland, across the public, private and voluntary sectors. The focus is on experience providers only and other types of business, such as accommodation providers and events, are ineligible.

The programme is now open for expressions of interest, [apply online](#) by Wednesday 8 September 2021 at 15:00.

See: [website-development-programme-2021-22-guidelines.pdf \(tourismni.com\)](#)

Fully funded postgraduate learning

Skill Up - The Flexible Skills Fund is supporting a range of online learning to upskill and reskill people in economic priority sectors.

The Open University in Northern Ireland, in partnership with the Department for the Economy, is offering a limited number of fully funded postgraduate modules and microcredential courses to help you reskill and upskill into areas where job growth is expected.

All courses are largely delivered online, allowing you to fit study around your life, from the experts in distance learning.

What you can study:

Opportunities are available to study postgraduate modules as well as microcredentials. A module can go towards a postgraduate certificate or diploma or be the first step towards a master's degree. Microcredentials are online professional development short courses that allow you to quickly build in-demand career skills and knowledge.

See: [Skill Up with fully funded postgraduate learning \(nibusinessinfo.co.uk\)](#)