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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!

Fuel pump crisis and the looming “challenging” winter

With panic buying at the pumps, the shortage of HGV drivers, and a looming winter energy crisis many of us are running our businesses in an ever increasing level of uncertainty.



If you are concerned about the future of your business then take some time to reflect on where you are and what could happen in the next few months.. It is now vitally important for all businesses to plan ahead for a range of scenarios. Cash flow and business planning in these uncertain times may appear difficult but there are some practical steps you can take to minimise potential disruption to your business:

- Review your Budgets and set realistic and achievable targets for the remainder of 2021.
- Get your employees involved in a discussion of likely trading conditions and get their input on reducing costs and maintaining revenues.
- Review and flow chart the main processes in your business (e.g. Sales processing, order fulfilment, shipping etc.) and challenge the need for each step.
- Put extra effort into making sure your relationships with your customers are solid.
- Review your list of products and services and eliminate those that are unprofitable or not core products/services.
- Pull everyone together and explain the business strategy and get their buy-in.

Six-month cash flow template						
If you receive cash or card for sales at the point of sale, this could help with estimating cash surplus / deficit for the next 3-6 months' time.						
	Cash estimates					
	March	April	May	June	July	August
	€	€	€	€	€	€
A Cash from sales	2500	1650	900	2500	5000	800
B Cash out to suppliers	350	750	800	150	1250	750
C Employee / owner costs	450	450	450	450	450	450
D Distribution and Marketing costs	125	125	125	125	125	125
E Heat light and similar Costs	75	75	75	75	75	75
F Rent and rates	750	750	750	750	750	750
G Other	50	50	50	25	25	25
H TOTAL COSTS (Add B to G)	1800	2200	2250	1575	2675	2175
Net Cash surplus or deficit (sales less costs) A less H	700	-550	-1350	925	2325	-1375
PUJ THIS FIGURE IN SURPLUS / DEFICIT FLOW						
Bank Balance brought forward	0	700	150	-1200	-275	2050
Surplus (deficit)	700	-550	-1350	925	2325	-1375
Balance C/CF	700	150	-1200	-275	2050	675

Please talk to us about cash flow planning for the next few months, we can help with a template so you can do this yourself or work together to produce estimates for a variety of scenarios.

House price review - Office for National Statistics (ONS) latest survey released

The ONS have released their latest analysis identifying the types of areas that are seeing the fastest house price growth during the coronavirus pandemic, and who could be at risk of being priced out.

Rising house prices and private rents mean that some workers are at risk of being priced out of living in rural and coastal areas, contributing to skill shortages in the tourism and hospitality industries that their local economies rely on. Young and low paid workers in tourist hotspots are increasingly facing the prospect of being unable to afford to live there.



Despite falling from a record high in June, the average UK house price (£256,000) increased by 8.0% in July 2021 compared with the previous year.

House prices were rising at three times the national rate in some rural and coastal areas in July, such as Conwy in North Wales (25.0%), North Devon (22.5%) and Richmondshire in the Yorkshire Dales (21.4%), continuing a trend seen during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Meanwhile, the seven areas that recorded house price falls in July were all London boroughs.

House prices are increasing partly because of temporary changes to taxes paid on property purchases (including Stamp Duty in England and Northern Ireland), but they also reflect a shift in consumer preferences with growth being driven by rural and coastal areas.

Prospective home buyers are seeking more space, with prices for detached houses (9.0% growth in July) consistently rising faster than terraced houses (7.7%) or flats (6.1%).

As a result, people living in rural and coastal areas – particularly the young and those on lower incomes – are at risk of being priced out of the housing market.

This could be contributing to hospitality businesses being unable to fill vacancies, with the industry being predominant in tourist areas and containing a high proportion of young and low paid workers.

See: [Coronavirus and house price growth - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/coronavirus-and-house-price-growth)

Deadline for Covid-19 sick pay

The UK Government has updated its guidance for claims made under the Coronavirus Statutory Sick Pay Rebate Scheme. Employers can only claim back statutory sick pay paid to employees due to Covid-19 who were off work on or before 30 September 2021.

The Coronavirus Statutory Sick Pay Rebate Scheme will repay employers the Statutory Sick Pay paid to current or former employees. You must submit or amend claims on or before 31 December 2021.

See: [Check if you can claim back Statutory Sick Pay paid to employees due to coronavirus \(COVID-19\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/check-if-you-can-claim-back-statutory-sick-pay-paid-to-employees-due-to-coronavirus-covid-19)

HMRC Publish Guidance on New Penalty Regime for Late Returns

Finance Act 2021 introduced a new regime for late VAT returns that will apply to VAT periods commencing on or after 1 April 2022 and to other returns at a later date.

HMRC have now published detailed guidance on the new rules. The reforms come into effect:

- for VAT taxpayers from periods starting on or after 1 April 2022

- for taxpayers within MTD for Income Tax Self-Assessment (ITSA), from the tax year beginning 6 April 2024
- for all other ITSA taxpayers, from the tax year beginning 6 April 2025

The new regime will be a points-based system and will operate in a similar way to motoring penalties in that the points will elapse after a period of time depending on the regularity of the returns.

For details see: [Penalties for late submission - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/penalties-for-late-submission)

Tips and Gratuities should go to staff not the employer

The Government is to make it illegal for companies not to pass on tips to their employees. This comes after some major restaurant chains were accused of keeping 10% of tips given to staff.

The Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) have announced that new legislation, to be introduced within a year, would help about two million people in the hospitality industry. An updated consultation response was published on 24 September:

See: [Tipping, gratuities, cover and service charges consultation: government response \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/consultations/tipping-gratuities-cover-and-service-charges-consultation-government-response)

The current rules for taxing tips, gratuities and service charges are complex and, whilst all tips are taxable, national insurance does not currently apply where the payment is given directly to the staff member.

For current HMRC guidance on the taxation of tips, gratuities and service charges:

See: [Tips at work: Tips and tax - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/tips-at-work-tips-and-tax)

UK Stickers have now replaced GB stickers

The guidance on what UK goods vehicle operators need to do to carry out international road haulage has changed to refer to the change from GB stickers to UK stickers as UK stickers have now replaced GB stickers.

There will be new rules for transporting goods to or through Europe from 2022. These will affect you if you use vans or heavy goods vehicles (HGVs).

See: [Carry out international road haulage - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/carry-out-international-road-haulage)

Government seeks views on contingency proposals for mandatory certification

A policy proposal has been published for mandatory vaccine certification as a contingency measure under the government's Autumn and Winter Plan.

The government states it remains confident 'Plan A' will prevent the NHS from facing unsustainable pressure and certification will not be required but mandatory vaccine-only certification could potentially be introduced in certain settings as part of 'Plan B'.

The proposal for mandatory COVID certification in a Plan B scenario fulfils the commitment, set out in the Autumn and Winter Plan, to provide organisations with more detail about the proposed certification regime that would be introduced as part of Plan B.

The government invites feedback on these proposals. A call for evidence runs until 11 October.

See: [Government seeks views on contingency proposals for certification - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-seeks-views-on-contingency-proposals-for-certification)

Gift Aid Awareness Day 2021

Gift Aid is a tax relief for individuals which enables them to give the income tax or capital gains tax that they pay directly to a charity on top of their donation. In effect it adds 25p for every £1 donated to a charity. Gift Aid is an important tax relief worth £1.3 billion to the charity sector. This year's Gift Aid Awareness Day is taking place on Thursday 7 October 2021. Charity Finance Group (CFG) are asking UK-based charities, small, medium and large, to spread the "#TickTheBox" message far and wide on 7 October 2021. CFG have produced a 2021 campaign pack for use, which includes logos, posters, infographics and a banner.

See: [Charity Finance Group | Gift Aid Awareness \(cfg.org.uk\)](https://www.cfg.org.uk/gift-aid-awareness)

Allergen Labelling Changes For Prepacked For Direct Sale (PPDS) Food

On 1 October 2021, the law on allergen labelling for pre-packed for direct sale (PPDS) foods changed. This means that any food business selling PPDS foods must include full ingredients on the product label with allergenic ingredients emphasised within that list.



To help support food businesses, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) has launched a PPDS Hub featuring useful information including new labelling guidance for PPDS foods and guides that will be helpful to specific sectors including bakery, butchers, fast food and

takeaways, mobile sellers, restaurants, cafes and pubs, and schools. The guides give practical information on PPDS and how these changes could impact a food business.

See: [Allergen labelling changes for prepacked for direct sale \(PPDS\) food | Food Standards Agency](#)

Industrial Energy Transformation Fund Phase 2 Autumn 2021

IETF Phase 2 provides grant funding for feasibility and engineering studies, industrial energy efficiency and deep decarbonisation projects.

The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) has opened the new Industrial Energy Transformation Fund (IETF) Phase 2: Autumn 2021 competition window.

Businesses in England, Wales and Northern Ireland can bid for a share of up to £60 million in grant funding through the new competition window, which is open for applications until 6 December 2021.

See: [Industrial Energy Transformation Fund \(IETF\) Phase 2: Autumn 2021 - how to apply - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Pump priming grants for Horizon Europe proposals

Grants of up to £5,000 are now available to help UK businesses collaborate with partners in other countries to develop bids for Pillar 2 of Horizon Europe.

The funding, provided by the UK's Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, aims to develop collaborative activity between UK and EU/associated countries' entities. This activity should focus on Pillar 2 of Horizon Europe, which is Global Challenges and European Industrial Competitiveness.

The purpose of this call is not to implement the proposed projects that will be submitted to Horizon Europe, but to give the UK-based partners the resources needed to collaborate with EU organisations and stakeholders to further develop the idea and the market opportunities.

The funding can be used in a variety of ways, including feasibility studies, application advice and training, partnership building, and dedicated time to take forward an application.

Proposals are welcome:

- in all disciplines - engineering, natural sciences, medical sciences, humanities, and social sciences
- from research institutes and universities based in the UK and any other type of organisations eligible for Horizon Europe funding, including SMEs, charities and companies

The first wave of this call closes for submissions on 13 October 2021 at 17:00.

See: [Horizon Europe Pump Priming Collaboration between UK and EU Partners | The British Academy](#)

Social distancing in retail and indoor visitor attractions

Last week the Executive considered the existing regulations and has agreed to remove the legal requirement to socially distance in retail and indoor visitor attractions. They ask that those responsible for these venues, and those attending them, continue to utilise all other available mitigations such as hand sanitising, good ventilation, and using one way systems where possible. The wearing of a face covering remains a legal requirement in these settings.

The Executive has also decided to remove the requirement to socially distance in indoor seated venues such as theatres, concert halls and cinemas. For this sector they advise that additional mitigating measures are utilised, including proof of being fully vaccinated, or proof of a negative lateral flow rapid test, or proof of natural immunity from a positive PCR test undertaken in the previous 30-180 days.

See: [Statement on Executive decisions - social distancing | The Executive Office \(executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/statement-on-executive-decisions-social-distancing)

CE marking for Mechanical Engineering

This November, Invest Northern Ireland will be hosting a free, online seminar on CE marking for Mechanical Engineering.

CE marking is mandated by European Directives. UKCA marking is mandated by UK Statutory Instruments. Many products are covered by these directives and, to be placed on the European and GB market, must bear the 'CE' or 'UKCA' mark – it is a legal requirement.

After Brexit it still remains important for companies to make sure that their product technical files and Declarations of Conformity are comprehensive, up to date and clearly documented whether products are being sold to GB customers or to EU markets.

This seminar is based primarily on the Machinery Directive. It provides guidance on compliance and assists participants to determine the route that is most appropriate, cost-effective and efficient for their product.

The webinar will be presented over two half-days on Wednesday, 17 November 2021 and Thursday 18 November 2021.

See: [Webinar: CE marking for Mechanical Engineering \(nibusinessinfo.co.uk\)](https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/webinar/ce-marking-for-mechanical-engineering)

Road Safety (Safe Travel) Grant Scheme

Individuals and groups from the voluntary and community sector can apply for grants of up to £10,000 to develop and run projects aimed at improving road safety or the take up of active travel in local communities. You can only apply as an individual if you are working in partnership with a community group. The group must be involved in the application process.

To qualify, groups must be properly set up, have a bank account and be able to finish the project by 4 March 2022.

See: [Road safety grant scheme | nidirect](https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/road-safety-grant-scheme)

Practical export skills workshops

A Series of interactive one-day workshops to equip businesses with the skills to sell outside Northern Ireland are available and organised by Invest NI. The workshops offer new, emerging exporters the opportunity to develop their knowledge of exporting processes and help the more experienced exporters to refresh and update their understanding of best practice in this area.

See: [Practical export skills workshops \(nibusinessinfo.co.uk\)](https://nibusinessinfo.co.uk)

Business and academia prosperity partnership: fifth round

Apply for funding to support an established research partnership between business and academic institutions. The Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) Prosperity Partnerships funding opportunity aims to fund business-led research that arises from an industrial need, with the work being co-delivered between the business and academic partners.

The opportunity is aimed at supporting excellent, world leading fundamental research which has clear benefit to the businesses involved, resulting in accelerated impact arising from the new knowledge, innovations, or technologies.

See: [Business and academia prosperity partnership: fifth round \(nibusinessinfo.co.uk\)](https://nibusinessinfo.co.uk)

NI Apprenticeship Awards 2022

The Northern Ireland Apprenticeship Awards 2022 will recognise and reward excellence in apprenticeships from apprentices, employers and training providers. The awards are about showcasing the very best within the Department of the Economy's (DfE) apprenticeship programmes and the opportunities available.

Applications are now open for the four award categories:

- Apprentice of the Year (Levels 2-3)
- Higher Level Apprentice of the Year (Level 4+)
- Large Employer Award (employers with more than 250 employees)
- Small Medium Enterprises Award (employers with fewer than 250 employees)

Apprentices, employers and training providers are encouraged to enter the awards. The deadline for applications is 12 noon on Friday 29 October 2021.

See: [Northern Ireland Apprenticeship Awards 2022 | Department for the Economy \(economy-ni.gov.uk\)](https://economy-ni.gov.uk)

Apply for Co-Founders 2022

The Co-Founders Programme can help turn your side project in to a start-up or you can join others to progress their idea. Catalyst's Co-Founders is a unique entrepreneurship programme that helps you form a team with like-minded individuals, build creative confidence and develop a product that customers really want.

The programme has a two phased approach. Phase 1 (Co-Founders Core) focuses on co-founding a start-up team and validating your team's start-up idea. It's a competitive process and if successful you will graduate onto phase two of the programme (Co-Founders+), which focuses on accelerating your start-up journey.

See: [Co-Founders - Start-up Programme 2022 - We Are Catalyst](#)

COVID-19 vaccinations and restrictions: Guidance for businesses

There is now Equality Commission guidance to help employers and service providers comply with anti-discrimination law if considering restrictions to those not vaccinated for COVID-19.

Whether discretionary 'no job, no job' or 'no job, no entry' policies are lawful is a question that should be considered from several legal perspectives, such as data protection law, human rights law and, from the Equality Commission's perspective, anti-discrimination law.

The Equality Commission has published two new guides to help businesses stay on the right side of anti-discrimination law.

In this guidance the Equality Commission examines the anti-discrimination law perspective if employers were considering restrictions to jobs based on whether someone has received their COVID-19 vaccinations.

See: [COVID-19 vaccinations and restrictions: Guidance for businesses \(nibusinessinfo.co.uk\)](#)

20 high quality training places on Assured Skills Academy with Version 1

Economy Minister Gordon Lyons has announced 20 training places on a new Assured Skills Academy with IT services provider Version 1. Successful applicants to the Assured Skills Academy will receive eight weeks of industry-relevant pre-employment training at Belfast Met. Completing the Academy guarantees an interview for a role with Version 1 in Belfast.

The Assured Skills Academy is the second in a series of six following the announcement in June that the company is creating 180 jobs.

See: [Lyons announces 20 high quality training places on Assured Skills Academy with Version 1 | Department for the Economy \(economy-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

New £750k investment in Rural Micro Capital Grant Scheme

A new £750k tranche of the Rural Micro Capital Grant Scheme (RMCGS) opened for applications on Friday 1 October 2021.

The key aim of RMCGS 2021 is to provide small capital grants of between £200 and £1,500 to rural community-led, voluntary organisations for projects tackling issues of local poverty and/or social isolation. The Scheme is funded from DAERA's Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Programme.

See: [Poots announces new £750k investment in Rural Micro Capital Grant Scheme | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs \(daera-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

ASOS to create over 180 jobs in Northern Ireland with new Tech Hub

ASOS, one of the world's leading online fashion retailers, is to invest £14million in a new Tech Hub in Belfast and create 184 new jobs over the next three years.

See: [ASOS to create over 180 jobs in Northern Ireland with new Tech Hub | Department for the Economy \(economy-ni.gov.uk\)](#)