

Written 10 January 2022

## 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!

### Cash Flow Is The Single Most Important Issue In My Business.

Do you agree? Most of our other clients do. In this economy **CASH IS KING** and managing your cash flow is more important than ever.



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 2022.
- 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.

We specialise in helping our clients manage their cash flow. We do this by preparing and updating detailed cash flow forecasts, using the latest and most powerful software. We can also help you negotiate or renegotiate overdraft facilities and find specific funding to help you grow!

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.

### **HMRC gives Self-Assessment taxpayers more time to ease COVID-19 pressures**

Late filing and late payment penalties are to be waived for one month for Self-Assessment taxpayers.

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) is waiving late filing and late payment penalties for Self-Assessment taxpayers for one month – giving them extra time, if they need it, to complete their 2020 to 2021 tax return and pay any tax due.

HMRC is encouraging taxpayers to file and pay on time if they can, as the department reveals that, of the 12.2 million taxpayers who need to submit their tax return by 31 January 2022, almost 6.5 million have already done so.

HMRC recognises the pressure faced this year by Self-Assessment taxpayers and their agents. COVID-19 is affecting the capacity of some agents and taxpayers to meet their obligations in time for the 31 January deadline. The penalty waivers give taxpayers who need it more time to complete and file their return online and pay the tax due without worrying about receiving a penalty.

The deadline to file and pay remains 31 January 2022. The penalty waivers will mean that:

- anyone who cannot file their return by the 31 January deadline will not receive a late filing penalty if they file online by 28 February
- anyone who cannot pay their Self-Assessment tax by the 31 January deadline will not receive a late payment penalty if they pay their tax in full, or set up a Time to Pay arrangement, by 1 April

Interest will be payable from 1 February, as usual, so it is still better to pay on time if possible.

See: [HMRC gives Self Assessment taxpayers more time to ease COVID-19 pressures - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/hmrc-gives-self-assessment-taxpayers-more-time-to-ease-covid-19-pressure)

If you cannot afford to pay your latest bill then you can set up a time to pay payment plan to spread the cost of your latest Self-Assessment bill if all the following apply:

- you owe £30,000 or less
- you do not have any other payment plans or debts with HMRC
- your tax returns are up to date
- it's less than 60 days after the payment deadline

You can choose how much to pay straight away and how much you want to pay each month. You will have to pay interest.

See: [Pay your Self Assessment tax bill - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/pay-your-self-assessment-tax-bill)

### **Self-certification period temporarily extended**

The UK Government has announced that employees in the UK can self-certify sickness absence for 28 days instead of seven. The change came into force on 17 December 2021 and applies to absences beginning on or after 10 December 2021, up to and including absences, which begin on or before 26 January 2022.

See: [Statutory Sick Pay: employee fitness to work - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/statutory-sick-pay-employee-fitness-to-work)

### **National Living Wage and National Minimum Wage rates for 2022**

The UK Government have announced the rise in the National Minimum Wage and National Living Wage from April 2022.

In full, the increases are:

- National Living Wage (23+) to increase from £8.91 to £9.50
- National Minimum Wage (21-22) to increase from £8.36 to £9.18
- National Minimum Wage (18-20) to increase £6.56 to £6.83
- National Minimum Wage (16-17) to increase £4.62 to £4.81
- Apprenticeship Wage to increase from £4.30 to £4.81

See: [UK government announces pay rise for millions of people - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-government-announces-pay-rise-for-millions-of-people)

### **Seasonal Workers visas extended until end of 2024**

The Home Office and DEFRA have announced the Seasonal Worker visa route will be extended until the end of 2024, which allows foreign workers to come to the UK for up to six months to work in the horticulture sector.

There will be 30,000 visas available in 2022, but this will be kept under review with the potential to increase by 10,000 if necessary.

The number of visas will begin to taper down from 2023.

See: [Industry given certainty around seasonal workers but told to focus on domestic workforce - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

### **UK Seafood Innovation Fund third call open**

The Seafood Innovation Fund (SIF) is now accepting third call applications. The SIF programme focuses on delivering longer term, cutting-edge innovation across the seafood sector, and helping to take innovative ideas from early-stage research to commercial viability.

The programme includes:

- primary producers
- onshore supply chains
- marine and diadromous fisheries
- marine and land-based aquaculture

The programme excludes:

- freshwater fishing
- recreational fishing

This call is open for feasibility studies only. The maximum funding available is £50,000 for projects with a duration of up to five months. Successful third call feasibility studies will be eligible to apply for larger R&D funding following completion of their projects.

Third call applications will be accepted until the extended deadline of midday on 14 January 2022.

See: [Home - Seafood Innovation Fund](#)

### **Heat Pump Ready Programme**

The Heat Pump Ready Programme, part of the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) £1 billion Net Zero Innovation Portfolio, has opened its first two streams to applications.

As a key solution for decarbonising homes, heat pumps will be critical for meeting the UK's legally binding commitment to achieve net zero by 2050. Heat Pump Ready will support the development of innovative solutions across the heat pump sector.

The Heat Pump Ready Programme is split into three separate delivery streams:

- Stream 1 - solutions for high-density heat pump deployment. Up to £30 million of Small Business Research Initiative funding from spring 2022. See: [Heat Pump Ready Programme: apply for Stream 1 opportunities - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- Stream 2 - developing tools and technology. Up to £25 million of grant funding for projects to overcome barriers to heat pump deployment, beginning spring 2022. See:

[Heat Pump Ready Programme: apply for Stream 2 opportunities - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/heat-pump-ready-programme-apply-for-stream-2-opportunities)  
([www.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk))

- Stream 3 - trial support and learning. Up to £5 million contract from spring 2022 - Stream 3 is not yet open to applications.

### **Defence Innovations Loan applications**

The Defence and Security Accelerator (DASA) launched Defence Innovation Loans in 2021 to offer small and medium-sized businesses affordable funds to help commercialise their innovations. The scheme was run in cycles; the last of these closed on 5 January 2022.

After internal review, DASA has decided to tweak the format of the scheme to keep Defence Innovation Loans continuously open for proposals.

The changes mean innovators can now apply for Defence Innovation Loans at any time and can expect an initial outcome response within seven weeks rather than having to wait until the end of a cycle to receive feedback.

This new format is a pilot that will be reviewed and will end on 16 March 2022. Depending on the outcome of the pilot, DASA might change the scheme format again, e.g. return to cycle-based assessment periods.

The levels of available funding have not changed. You can apply for a loan between £250,000 and £1.6 million with a below market interest rate of 7.4 per cent per annum. This loan can cover up to 100 per cent of eligible project costs to aid the commercialisation of the solution and the overall term of the loan must not exceed seven years.

The applicant criteria for Defence Innovation Loans also remains the same. To apply, you must:

- be a UK registered SME
- intend to exploit the results in the UK or overseas to make a significant and positive impact on the UK economy and/or productivity
- give evidence that your business is suitable to take on a loan

Only SMEs are eligible to apply for Defence Innovation Loans. Individuals, academic institutions, research organisations and large companies are not eligible.

See: [Competition Document: Defence Innovation Loan - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/competition-document-defence-innovation-loan) ([www.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk))

### **Recovery Loan Scheme extended.**

Applications for this loan have been extended and are now open until 30 June 2022.

Launched on 6 April 2021, the Recovery Loan Scheme (RLS) provides financial support to businesses across the UK as they recover and grow following the coronavirus pandemic.

You can apply to the scheme if Covid-19 has affected your business. You can use the finance for any legitimate business purpose – including managing cashflow, investment and

growth. However, you must be able to afford to take out additional debt finance for these purposes.

If your business has already borrowed from any of the other coronavirus loan schemes – namely:

- the Bounce Back Loan Scheme (BLS)
- the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS)
- the Coronavirus Large Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CLBILS)

RLS is still open to you, although the amount you have borrowed under an existing scheme may in certain circumstances limit the amount you may borrow under RLS.

At Autumn Budget 2021, the government announced that the Recovery Loan Scheme will be extended by six months to 30 June 2022, with the following changes applying from 1 January 2022:

- The scheme will only be open to businesses with a turnover not exceeding £45m per annum
- The maximum amount of finance available will be £2 million per business (maximum amount per Group limited to £6m)
- The guaranteed coverage that the government will provide to lenders will be reduced to 70%

See: [Recovery Loan Scheme - British Business Bank \(british-business-bank.co.uk\)](https://www.british-business-bank.co.uk/recovery-loan-scheme)

### **New laws to strengthen national security**

From 4 January 2022, the government is able to scrutinise and intervene in certain acquisitions that could harm the UK's national security.

The National Security and Investment (NSI) Act – the biggest shake-up of the UK's national security regime for 20 years – commenced on the 4 January 2022.

The government is now able to scrutinise and intervene in certain acquisitions made by anyone, including businesses and investors, that could harm the UK's national security.

The government will also be able to impose certain conditions on an acquisition or, if necessary, unwind or block it – although it is expected this will happen rarely and the vast majority of deals will require no intervention and be able to proceed without delay.

See: [New laws to strengthen national security come into effect - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/new-laws-to-strengthen-national-security)

### **Grant funding and mentoring support for female entrepreneurs**

Techstart Ventures and Women in Business have partnered together to invite females across Northern Ireland, with an innovative business idea, to apply for a grant of up to £35,000 to help kickstart their business.

Whether you are an individual with an exciting, novel idea or an established business looking to explore a new product or market, you could receive a grant to support your innovation. Successful applicants will also receive a business mentor through the Women in Business mentoring programme.

#### Eligibility criteria

- Applicants must be a sole trader, partnership or limited company to apply. Applications from community interest companies and social enterprises will not be considered.
- You (i.e. sole trader, partnership, limited company) must have an innovative business idea.
- You must be resident in Northern Ireland, and if the principal applicant is applying through a limited company then the company must be registered in Northern Ireland, with the principal applicant being the majority shareholder in the limited company. (Please note that Techstart may ask for a copy of a recent utility bill for proof of address).
- If you are applying for some of the grant to cover the employment costs of people promoting the project, then the application must be made by a limited company.
- For independent third-party costs, at the application stage, you must identify your proposed supplier. If your proposed supplier has provided you with a quotation, you should append it to your application.
- Successful applicants will be required to provide formal quotations from the proposed suppliers in advance of a letter of offer being issued.
- Up to 30 per cent of the grant awarded is available to cover the employment costs of the people promoting the project with a set daily rate of £200. For such costs to be approved, your application must clearly detail what work will be done during the proof of concept project under these costs and what the output will be. Please note that administration time, project management time and similar overhead activities will not be eligible activities to be covered within employment costs.

See: [Female Founders Funding Opportunity | Techstart Ventures Grants Northern Ireland \(techstartgrants.com\)](https://techstartgrants.com)

#### **Free Belfast City Council workshops for local businesses**

Belfast City Council is hosting some free online workshops for Belfast businesses to help them start 2022 on a positive note.

##### Practical Growth Planning for 2022

Learn how to plan practically for your business and acquire the skills and the confidence to develop a sensible 'road-map' for your business for 2022.

Date: Thursday 13 January 2022, 09:30 - 12:30

### Sources of Support for Belfast Based Businesses Seeking to Innovate

Hear from Invest Northern Ireland, InterTradeIreland, Belfast Met, Catalyst and the Innovation Factory to hear about the free and funded supports they have on offer, whether you are a tech start-up or an established manufacturing business.

Date: Wednesday 19 January 2022, 09:30 - 13:00

### Introduction to Tendering

During this workshop, you will gain an understanding of the public sector and how it procures and how to identify the right opportunities for your business.

Date: Tuesday 8 February 2022, 09:30 - 12:30

These events are aimed at SMEs, micro enterprises and social enterprises based in the Belfast City Council area and employing fewer than 50 people.

See: [Free Belfast City Council workshops for local businesses \(nibusinessinfo.co.uk\)](https://nibusinessinfo.co.uk)

### **Consultation on Future Agricultural Policy Proposals**

Views are sought on high level policy proposals to achieve the four key outcomes of the Future agricultural Policy Framework Portfolio

The Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) has published a Consultation on the Future Agricultural Policy Proposals for Northern Ireland. This emerges from the already published [Future Agricultural Policy Framework Portfolio](#). The Framework charts the way forward for a future agricultural policy which better meets Northern Ireland's needs.

DAERA wants to hear your views on the range of associated policy proposals that are being developed to achieve its four key outcomes of:

- increased productivity
- environmental sustainability
- improved resilience
- an effective functioning supply chain

Responses to the consultation will help redefine agricultural policy, and target support to meet local priorities and needs more effectively, to develop a future sustainable agricultural industry.

See: [Consultation on Future Agricultural Policy Proposals for Northern Ireland | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs \(daera-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

## **Coronavirus: Apprenticeship Recovery Package**

The Department for the Economy (DfE) has developed an Apprenticeship Recovery Package for Northern Ireland that will channel financial support to local businesses to help the apprenticeship system respond to the impact of the COVID-19 crisis.

The Apprenticeship Recovery Package includes short term interventions that are targeted to reduce significant longer-term economic impacts. These interventions will reduce unemployment and ensure that employers continue to have access to people with the skills and qualifications needed to maintain productivity, to grow their businesses and to assist in closing the skills gap, ensuring that more people have a pathway to better-paying jobs.

As an employer, you may have had to furlough an apprentice under the terms of the UK Government Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. DfE will provide incentive payments to help you return your apprentice(s) from furlough, retain them and for successful completion of their apprenticeship.

The total amount payable under the scheme will be a maximum of £3,700 per apprentice with distribution as follows:

- Return - £500 per returned furloughed apprentice payable for the first full month of paid apprenticeship between 1 November 2020 and 31 October 2021.
- Retain – maximum of £2,000 available: £500 per month for up to 4 consecutive months of paid apprenticeship following the 'return' month between 1 December 2020 and 31 March 2022.
- Result - £1,200 for successful completion of all apprenticeship components by a returned furloughed apprentice

This scheme is open to employers participating in the DfE-funded ApprenticeshipsNI or Higher Level Apprenticeship programmes, who return their furloughed apprentices furloughed via the UK Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to work.

See: [Coronavirus: Apprenticeship Return, Retain and Result Scheme \(nibusinessinfo.co.uk\)](https://nibusinessinfo.co.uk)

## **Energy efficiency business survey**

Invest Northern Ireland is working with the Department for the Economy to undertake a review to understand business needs in relation to energy efficiency.

Energy efficiency is the practice of using less energy to deliver the same amount of useful output, offering a range of economic and environmental benefits such as increased competitiveness through cost and carbon savings.

To inform future policy, Invest NI is keen to understand the adoption of energy efficiency measures by businesses, both past and present, and its requirements for support to implement these measures moving forward.

The survey should take no longer than 10 minutes to complete. The deadline for responses has been extended to Monday 24 January.

See: [Energy efficiency business survey \(nibusinessinfo.co.uk\)](http://nibusinessinfo.co.uk)