

Written 24 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!

Prepare your business for Making Tax Digital (MTD) for VAT

Making Tax Digital for VAT becomes mandatory for all VAT registered businesses from 1 April 2022



Businesses with a taxable turnover above £85,000 have already been required to follow Making Tax Digital, keeping digital records and filing VAT returns using compatible software since April 2019.

From 1 April 2022, all VAT registered businesses must file digitally through Making Tax Digital from 1 April 2022, regardless of turnover.

We can sign you up to MTD, although you will be responsible for meeting your VAT obligations. Those who do not join Making Tax Digital for VAT may be charged a penalty for failure to do so.

If your business has not signed up to MTD compatible bookkeeping software then please talk to us urgently about how we can help your business comply with the new law.

Submitting your tax return

If you've already sent us your information and we have submitted your return to HMRC, thank you! You don't need to do anything else other than pay any amount due.

If you have not sent us your information and (because of Coronavirus) HMRC are waiving late filing and late payment penalties for one month – giving you extra time, if you need it, to send your information to us so we can complete your tax return and submit it to them.

You will not receive a late filing penalty as long as your tax return is filed online by 28 February. Interest will be charged from 1 February on any outstanding liabilities you have not paid. You will not be charged a 5% late payment penalty if you pay your tax or make a Time to Pay arrangement by 1 April.

If you can't pay in full by 31 January because of financial difficulties, HMRC may be able to help by arranging a payment plan. Payment plans or payments in full must be in place by midnight on 1 April to avoid a late payment penalty. If you owe less than £30,000, you may be able to do this online without speaking to them. Go to GOV.UK and search 'HMRC payment plan'.

Please contact us if you need assistance.

Decisions of the Executive - relaxations to COVID restrictions

Last week the Executive agreed an approach for relaxing the measures put in place to manage the COVID-19 Omicron variant.



From 21 January:

- In hospitality settings - the requirement to be seated whilst consuming food and/or drink and for table service in premises that provide alcohol will be removed as will the rule of 6.
- In domestic settings - guidance regarding the cap on the number households meeting indoors will be removed. (A maximum number of 30 people permitted to gather will be retained in regulation.)
- On face coverings – the requirement to provide proof of exemption will be removed and the reasonable excuse of 'severe distress' will be reintroduced.
- The guidance on working from home will revert to working from home where you can with employers encouraged to facilitate this.

The Executive has also been advised by the Department of Health that the minimum self-isolation period for people testing positive for Covid-19 will be reduced to five full days, subject to negative lateral flow tests on days 5 and 6 of their isolation.

From 26 January:

Nightclubs will be permitted to open.

- Dancing and indoor standing events can resume.
- In relation to COVID-status certification – the legal requirement will continue to apply in relation to nightclubs and indoor unseated or partially seated events with 500 people or more. For other settings where COVID status certificates are currently required, guidance would strongly encourage their continued use.
- In workplaces - the requirement for offices to take reasonable measures for 2m social distancing will be removed. Guidance remains in place that risk assessments should be carried out.

From 10 February

All remaining COVID measures will be reviewed by the Executive on 10 February.

This includes:

- the legal duty on retail to take reasonable measures to reduce the risk of transmission;
- the legal requirement to wear face coverings and the associated duty on businesses to take reasonable measures to ensure compliance;
- the legal requirement for risk assessments in prescribed settings;
- the legal requirement for recording visitor information in prescribed settings;
- the remaining legal requirements in relation to Covid-status certification; and
- the guidance on the regular use of LFD testing, and in particular before meeting up with others.

See: [Decisions of the Executive - relaxations to COVID restrictions | The Executive Office \(executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/decisions-of-the-executive-relaxations-to-covid-restrictions)

Police CyberAlarm

The Police CyberAlarm is a free tool to help your business understand and monitor malicious cyber activity. Police CyberAlarm acts as a “CCTV camera” monitoring the traffic seen by your businesses’ connection to the internet. It will detect and provide regular reports of suspected malicious activity, enabling your business to minimise your vulnerabilities.

Once you become a ‘Police CyberAlarm’ member, you install a ‘CyberAlarm Virtual Server’ on your system, which will be used to collect and process traffic logs identifying suspicious activity from your firewall/internet gateway.

What are the benefits to my business?

- regular reporting
- identify your business vulnerabilities
- business information and intelligence
- helping the police help you

See: [Police CyberAlarm](https://www.police.uk/cyberalarm)

Discover 5G technology in Japan

Japan is embracing 5G and is expected to become the leading force in cellular technology by 2026. With this Innovate UK-funded Global Business Innovation Programme (GBIP), this is your chance to showcase your business to Japan's game-changing cellular technology business ecosystem, with a four-day market visit.

Up to 15 ambitious UK businesses will be selected to explore the growth opportunities in this market, and an exclusive chance to connect with innovation collaborators, partners and those like-minded.

This initiative is relevant for businesses that focus on the diversification of the UK's 5G ecosystem, including enhanced cybersecurity, speed of deployment and a reduction in the integration barriers.

See: [Innovate UK's Global Business Innovation Programme Flyer \(ukri.org\)](https://www.ukri.org/innovation/programmes/global-business-innovation-programme/)

Hydrogen BECCS Innovation Programme

The Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) has launched a new programme to help develop innovative technologies to produce hydrogen, a clean energy source, from sustainable biomass and waste.

The Hydrogen BECCS Innovation Programme is funded through the £1 billion Net Zero Innovation Portfolio, which aims to accelerate the commercialisation of innovative clean energy technologies and processes through the 2020s and 2030s.

BECCS technology can uniquely offer the ability to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, as the CO₂ absorbed during the growth of the sustainable biomass and the organic content found in waste can then be permanently removed from the atmosphere using carbon capture technologies. Hydrogen BECCS technologies therefore have a key role to play on the UK's path to net zero emissions, providing hydrogen as a clean fuel for hard-to-decarbonise sectors such as transport and heavy industry, while also removing greenhouse gases from the atmosphere.

See: [New scheme for technologies producing hydrogen from biomass \(nibusinessinfo.co.uk\)](https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/news/new-scheme-for-technologies-producing-hydrogen-from-biomass/)

Diffuse Coastal Pollution Challenge

Geovation and the UK Hydrographic Office (UKHO) have launched a challenge to find a sustainable solution to diffuse coastal pollution.

Diffuse pollution is pollution from multiple, often unidentified sources. Diffuse pollution causes significant damage to the coastal environment. Impacts of diffuse pollution are disturbing, including eutrophication, loss of biodiversity, human health, and adverse effects to the food chain.

The main source of water quality degradation worldwide is diffuse pollution. Half of the world's population suffer from polluted water; freshwater diversity has declined by 81 per cent and 500 marine locations are now dead zones. All these issues are significant effects of diffuse coastal pollution, the ripple effect is global.

Geovation's approach is grounded in research and collaboration - working together with innovators and start-ups is key to proposing the most effective and long-term real solutions.

The challenge is open to UK residents over 18 years old and UK registered Ltd companies. Joining the challenge offers several benefits including:

- up to £5,000 for challenge winners
- a chance to collaborate with UKHO and Ordnance Survey
- PR opportunities
- getting access to the most cutting edge data

On initial registration for the challenge you will get access to the data, information and primary and secondary research Geovation and UKHO have carried out, which will help you create your solution.

You can then make a full application to the challenge - applicants will need to submit a slide deck and video. After the successful start-ups have been announced, Geovation will work with them to refine, and challenge proposed solutions. Following that, pitching will take place and the winners will be announced and awarded the cash prize.

See: [Diffuse Coastal Pollution Challenge | Geovation](#)

Driving the Electric Revolution – Building Talent for the Future 2

Innovate UK's Driving the Electric Revolution challenge, part of UK Research and Innovation, is investing up to £4.5 million in grants for projects building talent for the future.

The aim of this competition is to create and deliver course content and materials that will support skills, talent and training across Power Electronics, Machines and Drives (PEMD) manufacturing and supply chains; building awareness of PEMD and filling key gaps in the UK's workforce talent and training capabilities.

Opportunities could include but are not limited to:

- schools' engagement
- apprenticeships and internships
- upskilling and reskilling of existing workforce
- technical courses and vocational training
- undergraduate, postgraduate and continuing professional development (CPD)

This is an expression of interest (EoI) stage of a two stage competition. There is no funding at this EoI stage. If you are successful in this stage, you will be invited to apply into the full stage competition, which will open in March 2022.

See: [Competition overview - Driving the Electric Revolution – Building Talent for the Future 2: EoI - Innovation Funding Service \(apply-for-innovation-funding.service.gov.uk\)](#)

Digital Support Programme for Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon

This programme provides digital assistance and mentoring to businesses.

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council has launched the Digital Support Programme which provides digital assistance and mentoring to businesses to help increase their digital capacity.

Each successful applicant will:

- receive one-to-one mentor support from an experienced digital consultant
- undergo a detailed digital audit to identify the unique opportunities available to help them grow
- have access to webinars which will be delivered between February and September 2022 providing practical advice and guidance on how to achieve digital growth

To be eligible for this programme businesses must be able to verify the following:

- be based in Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council area
- have less than 50 employees
- have been trading for at least three months
- have potential to grow through the use of digital technology

See: [Home - Digital Mentoring Programme](#)

Sales Accelerator Programme

Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council and Newry, Mourne and Down District Council are recruiting for the Sales Accelerator Programme which helps small businesses boost sales and rebuild their customer base.

The programme will commence in early March 2022 and will run until July 2022.

Programme support is open to businesses that:

- are located in either the Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council or the Newry or Mourne and Down District Council area
- have been trading for more than six months
- employ less than 50 people
- have both sales growth and job creation potential

See: [Sales Accelerator Programme \(nibusinessinfo.co.uk\)](#)

Creative Industries Seed Fund opens for applications

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland, in collaboration with Future Screens NI, has opened a new funding programme to help develop partnerships that will use the arts within new and emerging digital, immersive technologies.

The programme aims to assist arts organisations, entrepreneurs, and creative businesses to undertake projects that contribute to the growth of the creative industries and unlock future income generation.

Eligible applications must be partnerships between an arts organisation or artist and a creative business or academia. Proposals must use new and emerging technology to:

- advance artistic practice to enhance the experience of arts audiences
- create new digital artistic products
- allow for digital distribution of existing arts products or services

The fund is open for online applications until 12 noon on Monday 28 February 2022.

See: [Creative Industries Seed Fund | Arts Council of Northern Ireland \(artscouncil-ni.org\)](https://www.artscouncil-ni.org/creative-industries-seed-fund)

Digital Evolution Awards for arts organisations

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland has opened a new funding programme to help upskill Northern Ireland arts organisation in the use of digital technology and to enable creation of digital arts.

The programme aims to support those arts organisations who are making digital art for the first time or are working with digital or immersive technology which they have not used previously.

Examples of the types of project that this scheme will support include:

- creation of a virtual environment or augmented reality environment, such as augmented reality visual arts or sound overlay on venues or geographical spaces
- using technology, such as 3D rendering and printing, to create artwork digitally which can either exist digitally or be manufactured into 3D physical objects
- using technology to translate data into artistic content - for example algorithms that create music or visual content from data input
- app development for the delivery of artistic content - this could include gamification or making an artistic experience for consumption on digital devices (this does not include streaming of filmed / recorded performances)
- piloting new forms of support to individual artists or organisations that results in the creation of digital art

See: [Organisations Digital Evolution Awards | Arts Council of Northern Ireland \(artscouncil-ni.org\)](https://www.artscouncil-ni.org/organisations-digital-evolution-awards)

Innovation Vouchers: January 2022 call

The next Innovation Voucher Programme call opens Monday 24 January 2022 and closes at 15:00 on Friday 11 February 2022

Businesses can apply for a £5,000 Innovation Voucher to work with a public sector knowledge provider on an innovation project.

The voucher allows you to access the skills and expertise of universities, colleges or Institutes of Technology in NI and ROI to help you create or improve products and services.

Typical projects supported through Innovation Vouchers include:

- helping to create or improve products, services or processes
- access to specialist expertise on new materials
- tapping into research and scientific expertise

You can use vouchers to resolve a specific business issue, particularly if you don't have the expertise, technology or facilities to deal with it.

See: [Innovation Vouchers | Funding to develop & grow | Invest NI](#)

Free training for creative and cultural businesses in NI

Free training to help shape fair work opportunities across the creative and cultural sectors.

Tailored specifically for Northern Ireland's cultural sector, this training is designed to empower employers to adopt inclusive and lawful recruitment practices which both support sector growth and develop a more diverse range of talent.

Supported by Arts Council NI and based on Creative & Cultural Skills core package of Fair Access Sector Support, these online training sessions will take place from January to March and will be led by a UK-wide team of experts.

See: [Free training for creative and cultural businesses in NI \(nibusinessinfo.co.uk\)](#)

Economic Recovery Innovation Grant

A new £4 million innovation grant for SMEs has opened for applications. Invest Northern Ireland (Invest NI) has launched the Economic Recovery Innovation Grant (ERIG) to support small and medium-sized businesses to develop and implement innovative projects.

ERIG will provide up to £5,000 (taxable) to help businesses develop new, or improve existing products, services or processes through innovation. The grant will support eligible costs, including:

- testing and developing new products or processes
- equipment
- skills development
- marketing
- consultancy

ERIG is open to any business that can demonstrate it meets all the eligibility criteria outlined in the [scheme guidance \(PDF, 268K\)](#).

Before you start the application process, you should familiarise yourself with the [Frequently Asked Questions](#)

See: [Economic Recovery Innovation Grant \(nibusinessinfo.co.uk\)](#)