

Written 29 November 2021

BUSINESS NEWS ENGLAND

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!

Omicron variant - New safety measures announced

It is expected that Parliament will endorse the weekend Government announcements on new safety measures for the Omicron variant and from Tuesday 30 December face masks will be compulsory in shops and on public transport in England, and UK arrivals are expected to have to take PCR tests.

The measures will be reviewed in three weeks.



Last week South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Eswatini, Zimbabwe and Namibia, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Angola were added to the [travel red list](#).

People aged 40 to 49 can now get a booster vaccine 6 months after their second dose and all young people aged 16 and 17 can now get their second vaccine dose from 12 weeks after their first one. All young people aged 12 to 15 can now get their first vaccine dose. [Book your vaccination appointment online](#) or [find a walk-in clinic](#).

See: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance and support - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Job vacancies booming and applicants now call the shots!

In their recent labour market review, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) show that in October there were 29.3 million employees, up 160,000 on the revised September 2021.

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It is possible that those made redundant at the end of the furlough scheme will be included in the RTI data for a few further months, while they work out their notice period. However, responses to the ONS business survey suggest that the numbers made redundant were likely to be a small share of those still on furlough at the end of September 2021.

The number of job vacancies in August to October 2021 continued to rise to a new record of 1,172,000, an increase of 388,000 from the pre-coronavirus pandemic January to March 2020 level, with 15 of the 18 industry sectors showing record highs. Both single month vacancies and Adzuna's online job advert estimates reached record levels of vacancy numbers in October 2021.



There are a number of actions you can take to make your business attractive to new staff. In addition to reviewing your pay and conditions to be as competitive as possible, these include:

- Tasking recruitment as a permanent process;
- Regularly asking existing staff, customers and suppliers for introductions;
- Offering incentives for referrals;
- Make sure you are running constant online social media and local advertisements;
- Embracing flexibility in hours and location in your business;
- Introducing a “Golden Hello” and loyalty bonuses for length of service (typically one to three years);
- Advertising testimonials from existing staff;
- Using government initiatives for apprentices;
- Make your company and the job sound as attractive as possible by outlining the position to sound prestigious and challenging. These two factors are big incentives for bright potential candidates;
- Knowing that job satisfaction comes from feeling respected and having the opportunity to learn new things and excel in the face of obstacles when advertising the role; and

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- Convey your businesses personality so potential employees get a feel for what it would be like to work for you;

Recruiting new employees is tough just now so be different! For example, some employers are now offering “Wellbeing leave” in addition to the usual holiday package. If you want to recruit more you have to get serious about the process and be on it 24/7, 365!

Useful guidance on the procedures for recruitment can be seen in the ACAS guide “Recruiting staff” which can be seen here: [Recruiting staff \(acas.org.uk\)](https://www.acas.org.uk/recruiting-staff)

Reimbursing Fuel for Company cars from 1 December 2021

As the result of recent increases in fuel prices, HMRC have increased the advisory fuel rates that apply for the reimbursement of employees' private fuel for their company cars. The same rates apply when the employer reimburses employees for fuel used for business journeys in their company car.

The new rates apply from 1 December 2021, but you can continue to use the previous rates for up to 1 month from the date the new rates apply. Note that the electric car reimbursement rate also increases from 4p to 5p a mile.

Where there has been a change, the previous rate is shown in brackets: -

Engine Size	Petrol	Diesel	LPG
1400cc or less	13p (12p)		9p (7p)
1600cc or less		11p (10p)	
1401cc to 2000cc	15p (14p)		10p (8p)
1601 to 2000cc		13p (12p)	
Over 2000cc	22p (20p)	16p (15p)	15p (12p)

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Note that for hybrid cars you must use the petrol or diesel rate which may differ significantly from the actual fuel costs. The advisory electricity rate for fully electric cars is 5 pence per mile (was 4p).

Employees should carefully consider whether it is advantageous having private fuel provided for their company car. Remember that the P11d benefit for having private fuel provided for a company car in 2021/22 is £24,600 multiplied by the CO2 emissions percentage for that vehicle, rising to £25,300 for 2022/23.

For example, a director driving a Mercedes Benz E200 saloon company car (CO2 emissions 169g per km) would be assessed on $37\% \times £24,600 = £9,102$ for 2021/22. If they are a higher rate taxpayer that would mean £3,641 tax. That is an awful lot of private fuel!

On top of that there would be 13.8% Class 1A NIC payable by the employer = £1,256 (15.05% next year = £1,409).

Made Smarter Innovation: Sustainable Smart Factory

UK registered businesses and organisations can apply for a share of up to £20m for digital innovation projects that will improve the resource efficiency and energy efficiency of manufacturing processes in factories. The Competition closes 26 January 2022.

The Made Smarter Innovation programme, delivered by Innovate UK, part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), has launched a new collaborative research and development competition focusing on sustainable smart factories. The £20 million Sustainable Smart Factory competition presents an opportunity to launch a wide range of projects that bring a significant benefit to the planet, helping to achieve net zero.

Consortiums of UK registered business and organisations can apply for a share of up to £20 million for digital innovation projects that will reduce the carbon emissions of manufacturing processes in factories. The aim of the competition is to support the development of digital innovations to improve the sustainability of manufacturing processes, resulting in either reduced material or reduced energy consumption.

Applications are encouraged from consortiums comprising a mix of manufacturing and technology development capabilities working together on innovative developments or novel applications of digital technologies. Projects can:

- range from £1 million to £8 million
- run for up to two years
- tackle themes such as reducing in-process material losses, better sequencing manufacturing operations to reduce energy consumption

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See: [Competition overview - Made Smarter Innovation: Sustainable Smart Factory - Innovation Funding Service \(apply-for-innovation-funding.service.gov.uk\)](#)

Start Up Energy Transition Award 2022

The Start Up Energy Transition (SET) Award is an international competition for startups and young companies worldwide who are working on ideas affecting global energy transition and climate change.

In the last four years, the award has received more than 2,300 applications from 102 countries. SET is powered by the German Energy Agency (dena), in cooperation with the World Energy Council.

The five categories of the fifth round of the SET Award cover the entire clean energy spectrum:

- Clean Energy Generation
- Demand-side Innovation
- Energy Distribution and Storage
- Smart Mobility & Transportation
- Quality Energy Access & SDG-7

Benefits of participating and prizes in the SET Award 2022 include:

- joining the global platform of innovation leaders
- the top 100 ranked applicants will be featured to stakeholders across the globe, and also receive a free ticket to the SET Tech Festival
- 15 finalists will receive return flights to Berlin and accommodation for 2 representatives of the start-up to attend the SET Tech Festival
- category winners will receive up to €10,000 prize money

The closing date for applications is 31 January 2022.

See: [SET Award - Start Up Energy Transition \(startup-energy-transition.com\)](#)

Working Minds campaign launches

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) are calling for a culture change across Britain's workplaces where recognising and responding to the signs of stress becomes as routine as managing workplace safety.

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Work-related stress is now the number one cause of employee sickness absence, with major factors causing work-related stress including workload pressures - tight deadlines, too much responsibility and a lack of managerial support. Employers, particularly smaller ones, are not aware of their legal duties or how to spot the signs of stress.

Working Minds raises awareness about how to recognise and respond to the signs of stress and reminds employers of their legal duty to protect workers and support good mental health to help people to stay well. The organisation also provides small businesses with relevant information and practical tools.

See: [Working Minds - Work Right to keep Britain safe \(campaign.gov.uk\)](https://campaign.gov.uk)

HMRC webinars - November and December 2021

There are a number of webinars available this November and December from HMRC that will help [employers with payroll](#), give the [self-employed an understanding of key taxes](#) that affect them and help those [individuals and businesses trading outside Northern Ireland](#) get to grips with import and export procedures. The webinars are free and last around an hour.

See: [HMRC videos, webinars and email alerts - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

SBC late payments survey

The Office of the Small Business Commissioner (SBC) has a remit across late payments and changing the culture of late payments in the UK. Small firms complain about late payments as one of their top concerns and cite them as the reason they are in debt.

The SBC would like to hear from small businesses to get a clearer picture, if possible, of how small firm growth and productivity is being held back by poor payment practices.

The survey closes on 15 December 2021.

See: [SBC late payments survey - Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy - Citizen Space](#)

New laws and code to resolve remaining COVID-19 commercial rent debts

New laws and a Code of Practice are being introduced to resolve the remaining commercial rent debts accrued because of the pandemic.

The Code sets out that, in the first instance, tenants unable to pay in full should negotiate with their landlord in the expectation that the landlord waives some or all rent arrears where they are able to do so.

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From 25 March 2022, new laws introduced in the Commercial Rent (Coronavirus) Bill will establish a legally-binding arbitration process for commercial landlords and tenants who have not already reached an agreement, following the principles in the Code of Practice.

The Bill will apply to commercial rent debts related to the mandated closure of certain businesses such as pubs, gyms and restaurants during the pandemic. Debts accrued at other times will not be in scope.

These laws will come into force in England and Wales, and Northern Ireland will have a power in the Bill to introduce similar legislation.

See: [New laws and code to resolve remaining COVID-19 commercial rent debts - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-laws-and-code-to-resolve-remaining-covid-19-commercial-rent-debts)

New requirements for importing animal and plant goods from 1 January 2022

From 1 January 2022, pre-notification will be required for imports to Great Britain of most products of animal origin, animal by-products, high-risk food not of animal origin and regulated plants and plant products from the EU.

Businesses (or a representative acting on their behalf) importing these goods from the EU may be required to pre-notify authorities on the relevant IT system that their consignment will be entering Great Britain.

See: [Import or move food and drink from the EU and Northern Ireland to Great Britain - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/import-or-move-food-and-drink-from-the-eu-and-northern-ireland-to-great-britain)

Plan It With Purpose: achieve your sustainability goals

Enterprise Nation is partnering with Aviva and Smart Energy GB to help businesses implement sustainable best practices that deliver a positive impact on the planet, society, and the economy.

The programme has been designed to support small and medium businesses and business owners by increasing their understanding of environmental and social issues in the UK, showcasing relatable role models, building sustainable ventures, plus encouraging change through tailored resources, action plans and recommendations.

See: [Plan it with purpose | Enterprise Nation](https://www.enterprise-nation.com/plan-it-with-purpose)

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