

14 March 2020

Dear Mark,

Wales TUC immediate priorities in response to Coronavirus

We were grateful for the chance to participate in a conference call with the Minister for Health and Social Care and Minister for Housing and Local Government on 12 March 2020. After communicating key messages with our affiliates, we would like to share the following immediate priorities:

Personal protection equipment

- Welsh Government must provide adequate personal protection equipment (PPE) to all those working in health and care settings – regardless of whether they are in the directly employed public sector or not. No health or social care worker should be at a disadvantage and we are not confident that all non-public sector employers can be relied on to provide adequate PPE for their workforce. If this is not possible, decisions must be taken based on risk rather than who their employer is – there is no reason why a community nurse should receive PPE over a domiciliary care worker, for example, if they will be facing the same level of risk.
- Welsh Government must assess the needs of other public service providers (again, whether public sector or outsourced) in relation to the risk faced by the workforce, in consultation with unions, employers and the HSE. This includes those working in public transport, education and public-facing local government roles.

Workforce guidance

- Any guidance issued in relation to the devolved public workforce should be issued via all possible channels, including the Workforce Partnership Council and sectoral social partnership arrangements, so that trade unions can reinforce any messages and ensure that guidance is being complied with.
- We believe that government should also look to produce specific guidance for those workers in a health and social care setting (including where this is non-public sector) so that the risk to both patients and workers is minimised.
- Linked to this, government should work with the Wales TUC to establish key sector contacts to maintain the necessary input from workforce representatives.

- Welsh Government should also be directing workers and employers to the [Acas guidance on coronavirus](#) as we are very concerned that there will be a sharp rise in non-compliance with employment law and contractual terms during the next few months.
- The TUC Guidance for unions reps and workers dealing with Coronavirus (<https://www.tuc.org.uk/resource/covid-19-coronavirus-guidance-unions>) should be circulated through the WPC and wider sectoral arrangements .

Measures for those at risk of hardship

- The TUC estimates that around 90,000 in workers in Wales are not eligible for Statutory Sick Pay. We believe this is a conservative estimate of the number of people who may not receive even minimum payments if they are forced to take time of work in order to comply with advice around how to manage the spread of coronavirus.
- We have particular concerns around employers such as Amazon who have offered workers two weeks sick pay on the basis they can prove they have coronavirus. Given government is not testing everyone with immediate effect and the possibility of the self-isolation period set to extend, where does this leave workers and families, particularly those needing childcare if schools close.
- We would urge Welsh Government to continue putting pressure on the UK Government to provide clarity and certainty on what Welsh Government can do in relation to hardship payments and the amount of funding Wales will receive as a consequential.
- We would also like to know if we can promote the Emergency Assistance Payment as a source of support to those who are experiencing extreme hardship because of work absence linked to the coronavirus as this may be an important interim measure until a proper hardship scheme can be established.
- Similarly, we are very concerned about those who rely on non-financial forms of support such as food banks and free school meals, and the impact that isolation measures may have. No one should be placed at greater risk because they rely on such services, and we would ask that the necessary contingency measures are put in place to support families in these circumstances.

Additionally, please let us know if there is information you would like us to communicate with our affiliates or if there is any other way we can support government to respond.

Yours sincerely,

Personal Data

Shavanah Taj
General Secretary