

GS/HM

12 March 2020

Kate Forbes MSP  
Cabinet Secretary for Finance  
St. Andrew's House  
Regent Road  
Edinburgh  
EH1 3DG



Dear Cabinet Secretary

### **COVID-19 and Business Support Funding**

COVID-19 is a public health emergency. Trade Unions in Scotland are concerned that legitimate public health objectives will be undermined if employers do not recognise the scale and the seriousness of the crisis and take appropriate steps. High cleaning standards and a consistent and fair approach towards paid time off, form the core of an effective response from employers and employers should fully engage with unions in their workplace.

While it is positive that the coronavirus response has considered issues around support for business, it is essential fair work outcomes are also achieved. All business support should be conditional on fair work principles with a focus on maintaining jobs and income levels to prevent poverty and widening inequality that will be damaging in the both the short and long term. Consideration must also be given to precarious workers and those with no access to sick pay. Without these issues being effectively tackled public health objectives could be undermined by workers being unable to follow public health advice due to severe financial hardship.

The STUC believes that employers in receipt of Government support must commit to:

- continue to provide full pay to workers who are off sick or self-isolating.
- relax the rules on doctors' notes, recognising the scale of the crisis and the increasing pressure providing documentation places on health services.

- discount sick leave during the COVID-19 crisis from the normal sickness absence policy so that workers are not disciplined or dismissed for meeting public health guidance.
- pay workers based on normal (rather than contracted) working hours, supporting workers on zero hours contracts.
- provide paid carers leave for workers who are unable to attend work due to caring responsibilities during the COVID-19 emergency.

The UK budget on 11 March offered some additional support to self-employed workers and workers under the threshold for sick pay. The STUC is deeply concerned about the reliance on a benefits system that is not fit for purpose and which offers too low a payment of £73.10 per week. Statutory sick pay (SSP) is also too low with workers being expected to live on £94.24 per week. Workers dependent on these systems will be faced with financial hardship which in turn poses a clear public health risk.

The Scottish Government must therefore take urgent action to:

- put fair work conditions around all support to business that is offered, in line with the recommendations above.
- use the Scottish Government's benefit powers to top up workers' incomes to the level of the living wage for workers reliant on SSP and those carved out of SSP who will be dependent on universal credit.

Given the urgency of these issues I hope that we can hold an early meeting to discuss the matters raised above. To set up a mutually convenient time to meet please contact Name Redacted on:

Name [@stuc.org.uk](mailto:stuc.org.uk)

Yours Sincerely

Personal Data

Grahame Smith  
General Secretary