

Leaving Lockdown

The STUC is clear that when the time is right lockdown must be eased and we must begin to open up the economy. However, we must be certain that lives will not be put at risk by relaxing measures too early, and when action is taken, it must be measured and proportionate and place the protection of life ahead of economic interests.

Health and Safety and wider public health requirements cannot be weighed against the economic needs of businesses. It continues to be a fundamental principle that if work cannot be undertaken safely, it should not be undertaken at all.

Employers must only restart when new cases of the virus are sufficiently under control to warrant looser public health measures **and** safe working practices are agreed which means physical distancing can be maintained in all shared space in the workplace. Employers must also have in place a clear plan of how workers will travel to and from work safely.

The Scottish Government must also take steps to ensure that the policy of test, trace, isolate can be effectively applied. It must also carefully plan for having greater numbers of people at work and traveling to work and offer clear guidance on meetings and events and to public transport operators on maintaining social distance.

It is essential that preparations are undertaken now before any restart of the economy takes place. This means;

1. Capacity for greater testing and a return to contact tracing

Testing has a key role to play in ensuring that the economy can safely function going forward. We cannot begin the restart phase until effective processes for testing and contact tracing are established. This must include:

- greater emphasis on routine testing for key workers;
- a return to community testing;
- a return to contact tracing;
- genuine access to testing.

It must be recognised that to implement these principles effectively greater capacity is needed in both testing and contact tracing. At present testing is not fit for purpose with key workers struggling to access tests, no

community testing carried out and testing centres often difficult or impossible to get to for many workers.

2. Capacity to supply PPE to non-essential workplaces

There have been clear issues with supply and distribution of PPE for key workers. Yet more PPE will be needed as non-essential workplaces begin to return to operation. There must be:

- Sufficient supply of PPE to supply non-essential workplaces in addition to key workers.
- No disruption of supply chains supporting PPE for key workers.
- Assessment of the PPE needed undertaken on a sectoral basis prior to reopening workplaces.

There must be certainty that sufficient PPE is available for all workers before the restart phase can begin.

3. Sectoral Guidance needs to be agreed between unions and employers

Physical distancing will play a role in workplaces for the foreseeable future. This represents a large change to working practice for the majority of workers. It is absolutely essential that health and safety requirements are prioritised. This will protect workers, but it will also protect the economy and guard against the need of future lockdowns.

It is vital that unions and employers, supported by the Scottish Government work together to prepare guidance sector by sector which takes a clear health and safety approach. This guidance must be in place prior to any restart of the economy and should clearly set out Fair Work and safe working practices within each sector.

4. Effective enforcement measures must be in place.

Effective enforcement of physical distancing rules is absolutely essential. Local authorities through environmental health officers and the Health and Safety Executive are best placed to lead enforcement activity. However, the capacity for inspection has been fundamentally undermined by 10 years of austerity.

It is therefore essential to maximise the effectiveness and the capacity of these vital institutions. There must be:

- The creation of a national enforcement forum to provide oversight of health and safety and rapid response to issues across the economy. This forum should include the Scottish Government, local authorities, environmental health officers, the HSE, the police and trade unions.
 - There should be greater support for the role of union health and safety reps in the workplace. Steps should also be taken to empower union health and safety reps to support inspection work across high risk sectors, like manufacturing, agriculture and construction.
 - The Scottish Government should set up a whistle blowing helpline to ensure that every worker in every sector can raise instances of bad practice and know that this will reach the appropriate enforcement agency and be acted upon.
 - Action must be taken now to enhance the capacity and number of environmental health officers to support a higher level of inspections. This includes:
 - bringing back retired officers as was done during the Commonwealth games in Glasgow.
 - making funding available to support a greater number of inspectors going forward, through funding for training courses and a higher level of resourcing for local authorities.
5. A continuation of the job retention scheme and other support for those who cannot work.

Coming out of lockdown is likely to be phased. There will be some sectors which must stay closed, while others may open then be forced to close again. There will also be workers who are shielding and therefore unable to return to work.

It is essential to:

- maintain the incomes of all those who cannot work throughout this crisis.
- create more flexible Government support packages for workers which can underpin short hour working or transitions between work and furlough while maintaining income levels.