

GS/HM

9 March 2020

Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP  
Chancellor of the Exchequer  
HM Treasury  
1 Horse Guards Road  
London  
SW1A 2HQ



SCOTTISH TRADES UNION CONGRESS

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Dear Chancellor

## COVID-19

COVID-19 is a clear 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 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.

It is essential that employers:

- continue to pay 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; and



- 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.

The budget on 11 March provides an opportunity for the UK Government to take decisive action. The challenges that exist for workers should be tackled and the UK Government should recognise the weakness of the law in this area, particularly for those on precarious contracts. I would, therefore, like to encourage you to:

- Put clear fair work conditions around all support to business that is offered.
- Raise the level of statutory sick-pay to the equivalent of the national living wage and remove the earnings threshold.
- Require sick pay to be paid based on workers' normal (rather than contracted) working hours, supporting workers on zero hours contracts.
- Provide crisis funding that can be paid directly to workers who face financial difficulties as a result of COVID-19.
- Provide additional funding to support public health, NHS and social care services to deal with the crisis.
- Ensure that Universal Credit rules do not undermine public health objectives.

I hope that you will consider these issues with the highest priority in the budget on 11 March.

Please note that I have also copied this letter to Alister Jack MP, Secretary of State for Scotland.

Yours sincerely

**Personal Data**

**Name Redacted**

General Secretary

Cc Alister Jack, MP Secretary of State for Scotland