

Key points made by the trade union side at first Forum meeting on 30th March 2020

The following represents the key points made by the trade union side at the above meeting.

- The critical issue is twofold, the safety of those at work and the protection of incomes for those who have been laid off or will be furloughed.
- Need to ensure that we adhere to the highest standards of health and safety, it is not good enough being merely 'pragmatic' there can be no room for complacency and compromising the safety of any workers and by extension their family and wider community. We need the full public health advice to be followed at work, when it comes to social distancing, proper and appropriate PPE gear for the given setting and every employment must adhere to the best practice.
- If certain workplaces need to be reconfigured to adhere to the above then they must, if for some reason they cannot, then they should close. The safety, welfare and well-being of workers cannot be compromised.
- We must also consider the mental health impact on workers.
- We need a process of robust enforcement for employments that flout the safety standards required of all of us. We need a process whereby workers can raise concerns to the appropriate forum and they receive a timely unambiguous response/action that fully addresses their concerns consistently.
- There is a real issue of public confidence and we are way behind other jurisdictions on testing. One way to address this is to have more testing particular for all relevant frontline workers in the 'essential' services.

- There needs to be a shared understanding by what we all mean (particularly our government) as to what is an essential service.
- The terms of reference must be altered to reflect the fact that the forum must address the issue of workers' incomes and also the link between pay and benefits (when some workers hours fluctuate). The schemes announced by the Chancellor will be on stream during the month of April and there will no doubt be problems and issues over their implementation. It's crucial therefore, that the terms of reference are extended so the forum can address this issue and make swift recommendations to government on this issue of workers' income.
- As this is a tripartite body of the trade union movement, business and the state/government, the terms of reference have to alter to ensure that the 2 Ministers from TEO are active participants representing the face of government and no mere observers.
- We also believe that other departments such as Communities, Health etc. should participate if and when required as we need to see a whole of government approach to this crisis.
- Should industrial tension arise in the workplace, employers should engage directly with unions. Where workers are not unionised they should be and this should be facilitated.