

## **Terry Thomas**

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**From:** Maria Morgan  
**Sent:** 03 May 2023 10:27  
**To:** Terry Thomas  
**Subject:** FW: NIPSA LETTER TO EXECUTIVE MINISTERS  
**Attachments:** PPETESTING LETTER TO MINISTER.DOCX

**From:** TEO PS Ministers <PS.Ministers@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, April 7, 2020 10:33 AM  
**To:** Maria Morgan <Maria.Morgan@nipsa.org.uk>  
**Cc:** DoH Private Office <Private.Office@health-ni.gov.uk>  
**Subject:** NIPSA LETTER TO EXECUTIVE MINISTERS

Maria

Your letter of 3 April refers, attached

The First Minister and deputy First Minister are grateful to you for taking the time to outline the circumstances that have led to the situation your members find themselves in, and thank you for your efforts in support of the health service.

PPE, Testing and the day-to-day operational management of the health system in all its facets are matters for the Minister of Health, Robin Swann, MLA. It would not be appropriate for the First Minister and deputy First Minister to intervene in the responsibilities of another Executive Minister.

However, having read your letter, they have asked the Health Minister to look into the issues you have outlined.

We note that you have also written to the Health Minister, and trust he will respond in due course.

Thank you for bringing this to Ministers attention.

Kind Regards  
CCU

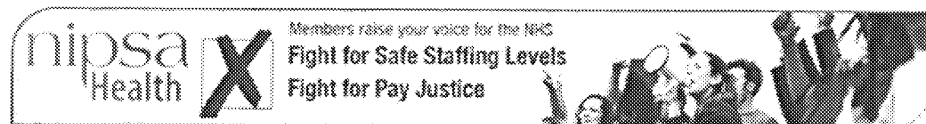
**From:** Maria Morgan [<mailto:Maria.Morgan@nipsa.org.uk>]  
**Sent:** 03 April 2020 18:25  
**To:** DoH Private Office <[Private.Office@health-ni.gov.uk](mailto:Private.Office@health-ni.gov.uk)>; TEO Info <[info@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk](mailto:info@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk)>  
**Cc:** Maria Morgan <[Maria.Morgan@nipsa.org.uk](mailto:Maria.Morgan@nipsa.org.uk)>; Seaneen Johnston <[seaneen.johnston@nipsa.org.uk](mailto:seaneen.johnston@nipsa.org.uk)>  
**Subject:** NIPSA LETTER TO EXECUTIVE MINISTERS

Please see attached letter FAO Executive Ministers.

Regards,  
Maria Morgan

**Maria Morgan**  
**Assistant Secretary**  
**NIPSA**

Phone: I&S



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**By email**

3 April 2020

First Minister, Arlene Foster MLA  
Deputy First Minister, Michelle O'Neill MLA  
Minister for Health, Robin Swann MLA

I write to you on behalf of NIPSA members working across the HSC in Hospital, Community and Voluntary sectors who provide essential health services to the public.

Over the last few months NIPSA members across all sectors have been raising growing concerns on key aspects of the strategy adopted by the Stormont Executive for dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic and what these strategies means for them.

We must register our alarm and anger at the detail provided yesterday to the Northern Ireland Assembly Health Committee, in relation to the provision of Covid-19 testing and the availability of appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) across the HSC.

NIPSA has raised these issues time and again, both collectively within the regional structures for trade unions and independently as a trade union. NIPSA members are dedicated public servants, committed to delivering quality services to the people of Northern Ireland as all HSC workers are.

While appreciation, fine words and indeed applause are deeply appreciated by all health workers they are not employed as heroes, or angels or martyrs. People do not become Social Workers, Care Workers or Nurses because they expect any of these things. It is because they want to contribute to the welfare of all our people through their work in the HSC. NIPSA members however, do expect their employers, the Department of Health and ultimately the NI Executive to provide the infrastructure needed to enable them to give of their best in the current emergency.

Excellence in clinical advice, adherence to international best practice and above all else having the right kit at the right time and in the right place are the pre-requisites for services that enable people to give their best and stay safe at this crucial period.

NIPSA had written to the Health Minister on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2020 and has raised serious concerns about PPE and Testing over the last number of weeks with the Department of Health. We also noted that on the 27<sup>th</sup> March 2020 the Finance Minister had reported in relation to PPE that a "significant order which should satisfy our supply demands" was due to come into NI

Alison Millar *General Secretary*

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from China. However, at the Health Committee the Health Minister stated that PPE supplies were on the way but referenced 'challenges' in the supply chain. That is disturbing.

Add to that the contribution made to the Health Committee by the Chief Executive of the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust when she told the Committee that she had been informed by the HSC Business Services Organisation that a consignment of PPE destined for Northern Ireland had been "turned back". Our members are asking how can this happen at this time in what is the biggest public health emergency in a generation?

It has been known for some time that testing kits are being produced here in Northern Ireland by Randox Laboratories as part of a UK-wide contract but are being shipped out of Northern Ireland. As a result, our members, patients and clients will have to wait until supplies make their way back to Northern Ireland as part of the UK supply chain. This is ludicrous.

In the Republic of Ireland, around one-quarter of all notified positive covid-19 cases are health care workers. Our members are working in environments that see them at the frontline of this disastrous situation. Fear and stress, for themselves but particularly for their own loved ones, sit alongside their determination to deliver for the people they serve. This must be acknowledged and addressed.

Providing advice that is increasingly perceived as being divorced from international best practice of WHO/ECDC guidelines serves no one, least of all the HSC leadership we need to rely on. If workers are knowingly exposed to inappropriate levels of risk which then compromises them and the services we all rely on will, NIPSA suspects, not be a position that posterity will view kindly.

The honesty shown by the Minister for Health at yesterday's committee, while deeply alarming, would ironically be most welcome if it heralds a more honest and clear assessment from the Northern Ireland Executive about what is being done to protect workers across the HSC.

On behalf of our members we demand an immediate statement to explain openly, what the current position is with regard to testing and PPE and more importantly, what is being done to address these issues. Urgent answers are needed now from the Department of Health and Northern Ireland's political leadership; this is what is expected from those that are expected to step in harm's way for us all.

Yours sincerely

Maria Morgan  
Nipsa Assistant Secretary

01 April 2020

### URGENT COVID-19 UPDATE PPE AND TESTING

NIPSA wishes to highlight to our members that as a priority we are taking forward Testing and PPE across all forums. Further to a meeting of the NIC ICTU this morning,

Alison Millar, NIPSA General Secretary, stated:

**"The tripartite forum set up between the Trade Unions, Business and Government will meet this afternoon when the Trade Unions will set out as a priority the issue of Testing and PPE across the NI workforce, particularly in the HSC sector. A key issue is the production and supply of Testing and PPE. We plan to call on Ministers to scope the capacity of NI businesses to repurpose and produce essential equipment to address shortages".**

Maria Morgan, NIPSA Health Official, stated:

**"NIPSA and the Health Trade Unions have consistently raised these issues with The Health Minister, the Department of Health and Trust employers. At all levels within NIPSA we understand that we must make demands to protect our members working across Hospital and Community services. We will not compromise the workforce on fundamental Health and Safety issues and we will make sure workers are safe and appropriate PPE and Testing available".**

ENDS

**Alison Millar**

**General Secretary**

I&S

**Maria Morgan**

**Assistant Secretary**

NIPSA represents over 40,000 members in the Northern Ireland Civil Service, Education Authority, Health and Social Services Boards and Trusts, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Local Government and a number of other public bodies and voluntary organisations.

Alison Millar General Secretary

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**By E-mail**

Minister for Health  
Robin Swann MLA  
Castle Buildings, Stormont Estate  
BELFAST BT4 3SQ

27 March 2020

Dear Minister,

I am writing to you on behalf of NIPSA members at this time of great anxiety for us all. NIPSA appreciates the complexity of issues that you, the DOH and HSC Management colleagues are dealing with. On behalf of our union and our members, I wish to reiterate NIPSA's commitment to help and support all of the HSC staff and emergency staff working to provide services across our communities in the inevitable difficult weeks that lie ahead.

To do that safely, our members providing vital services across hospital and community services require the appropriate PPE to keep them safe at work. Our members are reporting to us, despite public assurances from Health Trusts and the DOH and yourself, that the supply of PPE remains a serious and ongoing issue. This is at all levels in the Health Services from domestic staff, to residential staff and nurses working across the HSC. There remains further concern on such matters regarding the appropriate gowns that are required and also in relation to masks and in particular the appropriate use and availability of FP3 and water resistant masks.

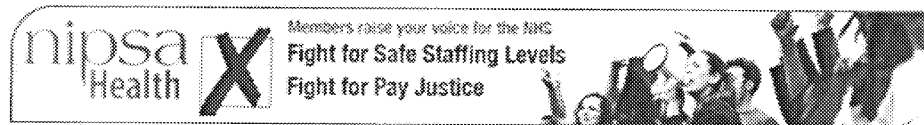
While I am aware that you will know of these concerns, and have released emergency stock to deal with the current increases in demand, NIPSA is seeking further assurances from you. This is in relation to further equipment that will be made available and that the production sought for this is from all possible parts of industry. It is imperative this remains under constant review so that our members will be given an assurance by you in your capacity as Health Minister that they can work safely to get us through his public health emergency.

I look forward to hearing from you

Yours sincerely

**Personal Data**

**Maria Morgan  
Assistant Secretary**



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FROM THE MINISTER OF HEALTH



Ms Maria Morgan  
Assistant Secretary, NIPSA

By email [Maria.Morgan@nipsa.org.uk](mailto:Maria.Morgan@nipsa.org.uk)

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Your Ref:  
Our Ref: **I&S**  
Date: 14<sup>th</sup> April 2020

Dear *Maria,*

**COVID-19 – SUPPLIES AND TESTING**

Thank you for your letter of 3 April 2020 to the First Minister, deputy First Minister and myself, raising very real concerns you have and those of your members who are working in the healthcare sector in Northern Ireland. You also wrote separately to me on 27 March 2020. The First and deputy First Ministers have both asked me to acknowledge the letter to them and, along with myself, to reassure you that we are very much taking these matters very seriously and that we are working hard to ensure the health service in Northern Ireland gets the support it deserves at this time.

Your letter focuses on particular issues relating to PPE supply and testing of health workers and their families. I welcome the opportunity to update you on the work which is being done to ensure the equipment and testing are available at the right time for those priority people. I hope you were somewhat reassured last week with the substantial deliveries from England as part of a more coordinated national approach to PPE Supplies. 5 million plus items were delivered and are being delivered to the Trusts for distribution to all relevant organisations in their catchment areas. This is a welcome boost and ensure that we have sufficient stocks in the system. I can reassure you also that my officials in Business Services Organisation are working on new contracts and supplies to ensure the stock levels are managed throughout the pandemic for the benefit of all in Northern Ireland. BSO has the support of Construction and Procurement Delivery in Department of Finance, which is coordinating all offers of help and triaging them to ensure BSO can focus on those which will deliver the best result for our PPE supply management.





The latest PPE guidance was issued by the UK Government on 2 April 2020 and this was based on the very best international guidance available and endorsed by all leading clinicians in the 4 nations before being released. I would encourage you to ask your members to familiarise themselves with this guidance which is available on [www.health-ni.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.health-ni.gov.uk/coronavirus).

You also mentioned the ship which was reportedly turned back, on its way from Norway. I can assure you that firstly no person in my Department or indeed the Executive had any involvement in this and as we understand this incident happened with the ship on its way to Norway before it travelled on to Ireland. The ship has since delivered supplies and BSO were delivered over 14,000 masks. There were not 60,000 masks on the container as reported. Further supplies of masks are continuing to arrive with BSO for onward distribution to Trusts.

Turning to testing, I am pleased that there is now extensive testing of health care workers or symptomatic members of the family household.

I have established an Expert Advisory Group on testing, and it has already published a Testing Strategy for Northern Ireland. The Testing Strategy sets out the priority groups for testing (based on the Interim Protocol for Testing) which was first circulated by the Department on 17 March (note the latest iteration was circulated 28 March). Clearly the overall priority for testing remains those patients admitted to hospitals who are clinically unwell. However we are now also very focussed on providing testing to key health and care workers (HCWs) who are symptomatic and those who are currently isolating as a member of their household.

The Testing Strategy also sets out plans for significant scale up testing of HCWs, which will be achieved through a national initiative involving a number of large commercial companies which is being led by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC). The first testing centre arising from this national initiative was opened at the SSE Arena, Belfast on 4 April, and there are plans to open a further centre in the northwest in the coming days.

We will continue to increase the number of HCWs tested as capacity increases. This will allow us to continue to support our essential health and care staff and to focus our resources effectively as we work together to address the challenges this pandemic presents.

Clearly these are challenging and worrying times for everyone, particularly families of patients currently in care and for those selfless staff whose vocation is to help throughout the health care sector in Northern Ireland. The First and deputy First Ministers join me in expressing our sincere thanks to all NIPSA members working tirelessly in the healthcare sector, along with everyone else to deliver a confident service to all in Northern Ireland through this pandemic. I can assure you that the priority is safety and ensuring that the infrastructure is in place to provide the support and equipment needed.

Thank you again for raising these concerns as it is important that I get a real sense of issues on the front line, but I hope I have given you comfort in that every effort is being made by my officials and the Executive to support the NI health service respond to Covid-19.

Yours sincerely

PD

**Robin Swann MLA**  
Minister of Health

