

## THE UK COVID-19 INQUIRY

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### MODULE 9

#### SUBMISSIONS ON BEHALF OF TRADES UNION CONGRESS FOR PRELIMINARY HEARING, 23 October 2024

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1. These are the submissions of the Trades Union Congress (the “TUC”) for the preliminary hearing on 23 October 2024 in module 9 of the Inquiry. The TUC brings together over 5 million working people who belong to its 48 affiliated unions. In this Inquiry, the TUC is working in partnership with TUC Cymru, the Scottish TUC, and the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trades Unions.
2. This written submission gives a brief overview of the role of the TUC in matters to which this module relates and makes some short observations on the matters considered at the preliminary hearing.

#### **Overview of the role of the TUC and its sister organisations (relating to module 9)**

3. The TUC and its affiliated unions frequently engaged with government in relation to economic interventions, through union roundtables and ad hoc meetings with senior government ministers at both HM Treasury and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.
4. On 18 March 2020, the TUC published a report ‘*Protecting workers’ jobs and livelihoods – the economic response to the coronavirus*’. On 19 March 2020, the TUC met with HM Treasury to discuss and negotiate details on worker and business support, which was followed by a meeting between the Chancellor, the TUC, the Confederation of British Industry (‘CBI’), the Federation of Small Businesses and the British Chamber of Commerce at the Treasury. A further telephone call between Rishi Sunak and Frances O’Grady took place on 20 March 2020, where the Chancellor fed back

some key principles agreed regarding a wage subsidy scheme, details of which were announced in a press conference later that day on the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme ('CJRS').

5. A similar process was undertaken as part of the development and launch of the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme ('SEISS'), with meetings taking place with Treasury officials and telephone discussions between the Chancellor and Frances O'Grady on 24, 25 and 26 March 2020.
6. On 25 March 2020 there was the first of a series of weekly meetings of unions representing members in key private sector industries with the Business Minister Paul Scully. These meetings included the TUC, UNISON, Unite, GMB, Prospect, CWU, Usdaw, Community and Accord. The meetings were the key mechanism through the pandemic for enabling the Minister to update unions on key government decisions around business support. These meetings took place on a weekly basis from March 2020 to August 2020, moving to monthly thereafter until May 2022.
7. Contact between the TUC and the Treasury was maintained throughout 2020 and into 2021. Further telephone discussions and meetings took place between the TUC and the Chancellor, for example:
  - (a) 1 May 2020 – to discuss the government's response to the coronavirus pandemic;
  - (b) 28 May 2020 – regarding the future of the CJRS;
  - (c) 7 July 2020 – ahead of the Summer Statement, covering the Plan for Jobs that included the Job Retention Bonus, 'Eat Out to Help Out' and the launch of 'Kickstart';
  - (d) 7 September 2020 – regarding the future of CJRS, Kickstart and other upskilling and employment support measures; and
  - (e) 24 September 2020 – joint meeting and photo call with CBI on the launch of the Job Support Scheme.

8. The Chancellor also hosted four roundtables with trade union participation, relating to the future of the CJRS and SEISS,<sup>4</sup> and support for businesses, including through reform of the Job Support Scheme.<sup>5</sup>
9. The TUC's sister organisations played a similar role. From the early stages of the pandemic, the STUC met and worked with Scottish Government officials in addressing the issue of sick pay, which was of particular concern in social care, hospitality and retail where workers were likely to be on lower wages and had higher exposure to risk. Following a meeting between the STUC and Jeanne Freeman, Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport, and Jason Leitch, Scottish Government National Clinical Director, the Social Care Support Fund was introduced, separate and in addition to the Self-Isolation Support Grant.<sup>6</sup>
10. Similarly, TUC Cymru engaged extensively with the Welsh Government in regard to sick pay. The Covid-19 Statutory Sick Pay Enhancement Scheme, introduced in November 2020, was an important form of support for social care workers and arose out of consultation with TUC Cymru and its affiliate unions.<sup>7</sup>
11. Furthermore, in Northern Ireland, alongside employers/businesses and statutory bodies, NIC- ICTU and specific affiliate unions were members of the Strategic Engagement Forum (the '**Forum**'), a "*multi-stakeholder forum to advise the Executive on how best to manage the challenge of Covid-19 as it applies to the NI Economy/Labour Market; and to be the primary conduit for the Executive to consult on new approaches in response to emerging pressures*".<sup>8</sup> The Forum considered and provided feedback on the Covid-19 Job Retention Scheme, and NIC- ICTU commissioned research from the Nevin Economic Research Institute on the Treasury's proposals.<sup>9</sup>
12. This module will no doubt consider the extent to which these mechanisms for collaboration between government and its partner organisations were effective.

### **Scope of the module**

13. The TUC is content with the identified scope. We understand the scope to be sufficiently broad to include economic intervention across the whole range of sectors,

as appears to be reflected in the variety of organisations who have received questionnaires.

14. It is noted that there is some overlap with module 7 (on test, trace and self-isolate). In particular, the module 7 outline of scope identifies that the module will consider the *“financial and practical support to those required to isolate”*. The module 9 scope indicates that consideration will be given to the broad range of economic interventions taken by government *“such as ... benefits and sick pay and support for vulnerable people.”* Sick pay clearly forms part of the financial support available to (some of those) required to self-isolate. We presume that financial support for self-isolation will be considered fully in module 7, and that learning will be taken forward, in its broader context, in module 9.

#### Questionnaires / Rule 9s

15. The TUC anticipates receiving a Rule 9 request. Included with these submissions at Annex 1, we set out a list of further possible recipients of Rule 9 requests, which the TUC suggests would be well placed to assist this module.

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11 October 2024

## Annex 1

- British Frozen Foods Association
- British Security Industry Association
- Ceramics UK
- Chemical Industries Association
- Confederation of Paper Industries
- Energy Networks Association
- Energy UK
- Glass and Glazing Federation
- Local Government Association
- Mineral Products Association
- Water UK
- Universities UK
- The University and College Employers Association
- The Association of Colleges (English FE Colleges)
- Government Property Agency
- Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
- HM Prison and Probation Service
- Renewable UK
- Offshore Energy UK
- Society of Motor Manufacturers & Traders
- BEAMA (UK Trade Association)