

## **Wales TUC: Principles for Easing Lockdown**

---

### **1. Sectoral guidance needs to be agreed between unions and employers, and issued under the Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (Wales) Regulations 2020**

The UK Government has already issued eight guides covering different types of work. We would like to see sectoral social partnership groups established immediately to consider whether these guides are sufficient for workplaces which have remained open and are set to open in Wales, along with areas where we believe further guidance needs to be issued.

We would also like these sectoral groups to review guidance and guidance notes already issued by the Welsh Government, such as the [employers and businesses guidance note](#). This work should be coordinated via the Social Partnership Council to ensure that there is coordination and the rapid sharing of best practice, including between the public and private sectors.

In addition to the sectoral social partnership arrangements which are already functioning in sectors such as health, education and transports, we believe that sectoral groups need to be established first to explore guidance for:

- Social care (outside the public sector)
- Manufacturing
- Retail, distribution and delivering
- Communications, utilities and financial services
- Food production and processing
- Culture and creative industries

We would also like those groups that are already established – such as education – to consider how guidance could be extended to related fields in the private sector, such as privately-run nurseries.

While we know Welsh Government is already considering the equalities impact of the pandemic, we would also like a sub-group of the SPC to consider the necessary return to work measures to protect vulnerable workers, including BAME, pregnant and disabled workers and review the outputs of each of the sectoral groups in relation to this.

We appreciate that much of this work may only require considering and agreeing to implement UK Government guidance, but as part of the commitment to social partnership it is important that we approach the work in this way to provide the workforce with confidence that their government is doing all it can to ensure that they can work safely.

### **2. PPE supply**

There have been clear issues with supply and distribution of PPE for key workers, and risk assessments will identify further PPE (and other forms of protective equipment such as screens) needs as other workplaces reopen.

There must be:

- Assurances of sufficient supply of PPE to non-essential workplaces in addition to key workers. Welsh Government must work with social partners to ensure there is confidence in this.
- No disruption of supply chains supporting PPE for key workers.
- Assessment of PPE needs undertaken on a sectoral basis prior to reopening workplaces, based on modelling work. We understand that Welsh Government has commissioned some modelling work already which should be made available to social partners via the sectoral groups.
- Support for employers to understand how to access the necessary PPE, fitting of PPE and how to train their staff on the appropriate use.

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

### **3. Capacity for greater testing, a comprehensive testing strategy and a return to contact tracing**

Testing has a key role to play in ensuring that people are confident to return or remain in work. We cannot begin the restart phase until the testing regime is delivering against Welsh Government strategy, and that this is endorsed by social partners. This must include:

- greater emphasis on routine testing for *all* key workers;
- a return to community testing;
- a return to contact tracing;
- inclusive access to testing
- a worker-focussed approach to the testing strategy, including in relation to awareness of testing access

We are particularly concerned by the very low numbers of key workers outside health and social care who are being tested. We would welcome an urgent review of the communications approach around this, including using social partners' networks to disseminate information. We would also like the information that is shared with employers about testing to be made available publicly, so that workers can feel confident that their employer is following the recommended approach.

We would also urge Welsh Government to review the key worker testing strategy in light of the recently published ONS data on occupation, ethnicity and coronavirus-related deaths, and to bring social partners into this discussion to understand how we can reach key workers in the private sector in particular (as there are alarmingly low rates of key workers in the private sector accessing testing).

### **4. Coordinated and proactive enforcement activity must be in place**

Welsh Government has led the way in protecting the workforce by placing the two metre social distancing rule on a statutory footing. We understand that the intention behind this is

for this to be achieved primarily through workforce and employer relationships, and that statutory enforcement is a last resort.

We're confident that the two metre law and other health and safety measures are being applied and monitored in unionised workplaces, but we continue to have serious concerns about the health and safety of workers in organisations where no union recognition exists. Trades unions are hearing from members in these workplaces who are concerned that effective social distancing is not being facilitated by the employer, working from home is not permitted and adequate PPE is not provided.

We agree that social distancing and other health and safety measures are best achieved and sustained in partnership between trades unions and employers. However, where workplaces are not unionised, we cannot expect individual workers to raise these issues with their employer as this fails to respect the workplace power dynamic in many non-unionised organisations.

A proactive and coordinated enforcement regime is therefore essential to protect workers in non-unionised workplaces. We therefore expect the following steps to be taken to raise health and safety standards in Welsh workplaces:

- The creation of a national forum of social partners and relevant enforcement agencies, to coordinate the enforcement strategy, share intelligence and establish a training programme on risk assessments and practices.
- Additional investment in local authority environmental health services to enforce the two metre social distancing legislation, including exploring urgent action to increase capacity such as bringing back retired officers.
- Greater support for the role of trade union health and safety reps, including empowering union health and safety reps to support inspection work through a roving health and safety rep model.

## **5. Maximising the opportunities stemming from the Job Retention Scheme**

The Job Retention Scheme is the most significant form of support for employers and workers during this crisis. Welsh Government should work with social partners to:

- Maximise take up, ensuring that everything is done to reach agency and zero hours contract workers, including using mechanisms such as the Economic Resilience Fund.
- Provide a more extensive range of training opportunities for furloughed workers, including Personal Learning Accounts, with links to the Wales Union Learning Fund.
- Explore a redeployment scheme for furloughed workers with social partners, to address skills shortages and meet the needs of furloughed workers who may be struggling without their usual work patterns.
- Explore opportunities for creating new apprenticeship schemes for young workers focussed on creation of fairer work, greener economy and just transition for Wales.