

Rt Hon Nicola Sturgeon MSP
First Minister of Scotland
Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

27th July 2021

Dear First Minister,

I am writing to express the STUC's deep concerns around the announcement of changes to self-isolation rules for essential workers, our concerns relate to both the lack of adequate consultation on the issue and the nature of the change itself.

Our affiliates met with the Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work on Thursday 22nd July. As you will be aware, we have met frequently and regularly during the past 16 months. Meetings have enabled us to raise strategic issues relating to COVID response and for the Government to make us aware of issues on which you wish to consult. Whilst reference was made at that meeting to a 'yet to be signed off exemption from isolation for double vaccinated people' our unions expected there to be ongoing consultation where this had started and the initiation of consultation where it had not.

It was disappointing therefore to learn on Friday of this announcement without any substantive discussion on an issue which affects our members across a whole range of sectors.

We have now consulted with unions across a range of sectors and there is a high level of dissatisfaction in relation to the manner and content of the announcement. As you will be aware, this has been reflected in media coverage.

In the health sector, unions had made clear their concerns about the proposals and had been led to believe that further consultation and negotiation would take place prior to the announcement. Equally, we have not yet spoken to any union

in any other sector that considers themselves to have been adequately consulted and there is a high level of uncertainty as to which sectors will be affected and when.

In terms of the content of the 'scheme' we are concerned that given the potential for vaccinated workers to carry and spread the virus, and the 48 hours minimum for the virus to be detected through a test, means there is a potential for staff to be asymptomatic without knowing they are positive for a period of time. This increases the risk of the spread of infection at a critical time.

There is a significant risk that those in a workplace which has successfully achieved an exemption will be placed under unacceptable indirect pressure to return to work irrespective of their own concerns. This situation will be even more challenging for those in non-unionised workplaces.

Given that the scheme has now been announced we would urge you to supplement the announcement making clear that workers should be consulted by the employer prior to any application for an exemption and that the views of the workers – through their union where there is union membership – should be included as a factor when the Government decides whether to grant an exemption.

Equally we require ongoing consultation in all potentially affected sectors with all the unions with membership in that sector.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rozanne Foyer', written in a cursive style.

Rozanne Foyer
General Secretary
Scottish Trades Union Congress

