



Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AB

31st May 2020

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing to you about the future of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), which as you know is playing a crucial role in this pandemic.

Prospect is proud to represent staff at the HSE and to champion their expertise and dedication which helps to ensure our workplaces are safe and our workforce remains healthy.

As the economy begins to reopen, the HSE will be vital to ensuring that businesses, workers, and consumers have the confidence to return to normal levels of economic activity and lessen long-term damage of this virus.

You recognised the vital contribution of the HSE earlier this month when you told the House of Commons that “The Health and Safety Executive will be enforcing (the new workplace guidelines) and we will have spot inspections to make sure that businesses are keeping their employees safe.” I am sure your endorsement of the HSE was heard clearly and the implicit appreciation that strong approaches to health and safety are more important than ever.

As you know, the cuts to the HSE in recent years have left them in the position where they will struggle to play the role that you envisage and they would want. You have seemingly recognised that this is the role that the public and business would also expect them to deliver. An additional £14m has been made available to the HSE, however, this only replaces a fraction of the real terms cuts since 2010 and it will not be available to recruit skilled specialist staff who take a long time to train.

The current position of HSE is that they will not be undertaking physical inspections of workplaces; instead inspections will occur over the phone. Even if physical inspections were occurring, the fact that there are fewer than 500 main grade inspectors means that it is unlikely that any individual workplace would be inspected.

Polling from YouGov commissioned by Prospect demonstrates that the public expects physical inspections. 67% of the public believe that physical inspections are necessary and 52% say they would be uncomfortable returning to work if the inspection occurred over the phone.

Most worryingly, 31% of the public believe that if their employer were in breach of the government’s guidelines then nobody in their workplace would report it to the HSE.

This situation has developed over many years, but there are steps the government can take now and in the future to strengthen our health and safety provisions.

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I am asking you to consider:

- A commitment to ensure the HSE gets whatever resources it needs in the short term to keep people safe in this pandemic and to build civic confidence in the transition;
- A government-funded public information campaign encouraging workers and the public to report breaches of workplace health and safety guidance to the HSE;
- A commitment from government in this parliament to reverse the cuts to the HSE made since 2010 and substantially increase the number of inspectors.

I am sure you will agree that this pandemic has shone a spotlight on capacity gaps in essential services. Properly resourcing the HSE would be an action that signals that lessons have been learned thereby bolstering public confidence in workplace safety.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Clancy". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping 'y' at the end.

Mike Clancy

General Secretary

CC Therese Coffey MP, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions