



Department for
Business, Energy
& Industrial Strategy

Rachel Reeves MP/ BEIS Select Committee
Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee
House of Commons
London
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The Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP
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Dear Select Committee Member,

I am writing in response to two letters, dated 24th March, from Rachel Reeves MP as former BEIS Select Committee Chair and for the attention of the BEIS Select Committee as a whole.

I appreciate your support on the steps Government has taken to protect the public, and for all the work your Committee has done to bring to my attention the feedback that you have raised. It is crucial that as we continue to tackle this global pandemic we take stock of our response, continue to follow a science-based approach and develop our support for business and employees accordingly. The response to both your letters is set out below, starting with Government support for the self-employed.

On the 26th March, the Chancellor announced the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme, continuing our unprecedented support to protect businesses and individuals. Under this scheme, the self-employed can receive up to £2,500 per month in grants for at least 3 months, bringing parity with the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, as announced last week.

Millions of people across the UK could benefit from this scheme, with those eligible receiving a cash grant worth 80% of their average monthly trading profit over the last three years. This covers 95% of people who receive the majority of their income from self-employment.

You raised a query about the rate of Statutory Sick Pay for people who are sick or self-isolating, which could be for prolonged periods. Whilst an employee is sick, they have the right to Statutory Sick Pay, or an enhanced sick pay if their employer offers it. If an employee is no longer sick or is self-isolating and no longer receiving Statutory Sick Pay, with their agreement, they can be furloughed on 80% of their salary, up to a cap of £2500 a month.

I was disappointed to read in your letter that people did not feel they were being adequately supported by their employers. The single most important action we can all take in fighting coronavirus is to stay at home in order to protect the NHS and save lives. Government's messaging on homeworking could not be clearer: employers should take every possible step to facilitate their employees to work from home, including providing suitable IT and equipment to enable remote working.

Sometimes this will not be possible, as not everyone can work from home. Certain jobs require people to travel to, from and for their work, for instance if they operate machinery, work in construction or manufacturing, or are delivering front line

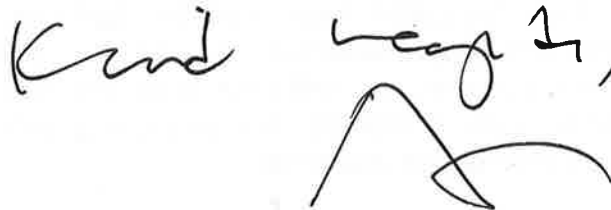
services. If this is the case and people cannot work from home then they can still travel for work purposes, provided they are not showing coronavirus symptoms and neither they nor any of their household are self-isolating. This is consistent with advice from the Chief Medical Officer.

Employers who have people in their offices or onsite should ensure that employees are able to follow Public Health England guidelines; including, where possible, maintaining a 2 metre distance from others and washing their hands with soap and water often for at least 20 seconds (or using hand sanitiser gel if soap and water is not available).

We have been very clear which businesses should close, and where we are not requiring others to do so; indeed, it is important for business to carry on. We have also been providing specific guidance for sectors, such as this guidance published for the food sector: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-food-businesses/guidance-for-food-businesses-on-coronavirus-covid-19>.

Thank you again for writing, and for your commitment to ensure that people are supported, and lives and jobs are protected during this time.

Separately, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your letter dated 25th February congratulating me on my appointment and noting the key role the UK will play as President of COP26, which as you will be aware has now been postponed to 2021. I will respond in full on the topic of COP26 in due course.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alok Sharma', with a stylized flourish below it.

THE RT HON ALOK SHARMA MP
Secretary of State for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy