



**The Professional Trades Union for Prison,
Correctional & Secure Psychiatric Workers**

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POA Circular 047/2020

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Dear Colleagues

GENERAL SECRETARY UPDATE NO:2 - COVID-19

On the 24th March 2020 I sent out my first POA Circular 37/2020 update in relation to COVID-19 after regime restrictions came into place, which are fully supported by the NEC. I stated in that Circular that I would give weekly updates and I intend to do that unless there is nothing to report.

As we now enter into the second week of regime restrictions, I wanted to thank all POA members in every workplace for the magnificent work you are doing in a professional manner in keeping the public safe and working in extremely difficult situations day in day out. I am on record as saying that we are working extremely well in a collaborative approach with respective employers, Cabinet Office Officials and with Ministers in Government and that continues.

On Thursday 26th March 2020 I spoke to the Secretary of State Mr Robert Buckland QC in a telephone conference along with the National Chairman Mark Fairhurst. There were lots of issues discussed including the lack of PPE in the workplace for our members and indeed the lack of testing for POA members and those in our care. The Minister acknowledged the issues and stated he was working extremely hard to deal with these issues of procurement and transportation to get them out on the frontline. We had a frank discussion about immediate issues in the workplace, but not only did we give our views on those major points we raised long term future aspirations of this Union to gain in terms of pension age and pay for all POA members when this crisis is under control. Those issues have not gone away nor will they be forgotten. Whilst I have been on record as saying we will work in partnership, constructively without politicising and point scoring to ensure that we are doing everything possible to safeguard our members and those in our care that should not be seen as a sign of weakness but as a sign of strength and leadership from the NEC.

A COVID-19 area has been set up on the POA Website and materials from ACAS, Public Health England, TUC, Thompsons Solicitors and Government links to Prisons are available and advice that the POA are collating and putting out via Circular. I recognise that the advice on COVID-19 is not just changing by the day but sometimes by the hour and we are doing everything we can to get information out as quickly and effectively as we can.

Our respective employers are also doing their best to engage with us and work is being turned around rapidly. We would request that our members are patient in this ever- evolving situation so that we can get the correct information out. The National Executive Committee are available to local branch committee's for advice on anything they are not sure about. When issues have been brought to our attention by concerned committee's our interventions with the Director General Phil Copple and indeed Prison Group Director's has seen those issues raised resolved satisfactorily. We will continue that work in a progressive manner to ensure everyone's safety. I am also acutely aware that our members work for a variety of different employers, so I am able to give you an update on those areas as follows;

PRIVATE SECTOR

Where our members work for SERCO, G4S, SODEXO and MITIE and where we have recognition rights letters have been written to all Chief Executives and telephone conversations have taken place between myself, other National Officials with Directors to ensure consistency of approach and to offer our assistance with advice to our members. The major issue with all these companies that need to be addressed is sick pay and the variations that the terms and conditions our members are under in relation to the different companies and differing workplaces.

I would appeal to those companies to demonstrate flexibility to terms and conditions in respect of sick pay and to ensure a moral duty of obligation which ensures our members are not forced into presenteeism because of a detriment through no fault of their own in having to self-isolate. The POA are available to discuss remedies which is consistent with the Government approach. I am also pleased to see that each company if they haven't already done so are introducing bonus payments for the workforce our members after constructive dialogue from the POA. We will continue with this partnership approach to ensure we work through any difficulties. The TUC have been extremely helpful after we made submissions on relaxing of contracts and I understand that discussions have taken place with the Chancellor to ensure no employee loses out financially. I am in constant contact with the TUC and they have been very constructive in dealing with Government Officials on a regular basis not just for the POA but all unions in every industry.

NHS- ASHWORTH, BROADMOOR, RAMPTON, CARSTAIRS (NHS SCOTLAND)

Our members at the Secure Hospitals play a pivotal part within the NHS setting whether that is in England or indeed Scotland. Clear guidance has been put out to all areas and local committee's are engaging on a daily basis with National Officials.

The Staff side Unions are engaging Nationally and as and when needed those documents which have been agreed by the NHS union staff side and employer are then disseminated to our members. Where necessary I have had dialogue with Human Resources Directors of various trusts where we have recognition rights and we are liaising with other affiliated and recognised unions.

NORTHERN IRELAND AND SCOTLAND

The Area Committee for Northern Ireland along with Ivor Dunne Chairman have been in dialogue with the Director General Ronnie Armour. A payments scheme has also been introduced in Northern Ireland and they have restricted regimes in place including no social visits. Recently the Minister for NI has spoken about releasing a limited amount of prisoners nearing the end of their sentence subject to risk assessment. The Area Committee through June Robinson and Ivor Dunne keep me updated on a regular basis.

In relation to Scotland, the Scottish National Committee continue with the important work with a shadow team as some members of the SNC have gone back to establishments to work Operationally. Andy Hogg and Phil Fairlie along with others continue a dialogue with Scottish Government and employer. They also have a restricted regime with no social visits and the Scottish Government are working on a payment scheme as well which should be launched shortly. The Justice Minister is also contemplating whether to release Prisoners who are deemed to be low risk subject to a risk assessment. I know from both Area Committee and Scottish National Committee that they are also working in a partnership approach to keeping you safe as are the local committee's in our NHS Section.

Finally, I want to thank the support staff that work for the POA as I have asked them to work in a different way as the Offices are closed and they have risen to that challenge during these difficult times to ensure that the work of the POA continues to a high standard so that our members inquiries are dealt with efficiently and effectively and that although we are now working differently the work is still getting done even although the Offices are closed which is a major challenge for the POA with limited resources. I thank my staff but above all I thank the POA membership for the magnificent work that is done on the frontline. I and other National Officials will continue to work behind the scenes with all employers wherever our members work to ensure your interests remain at the very top of the agenda.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steve Gillan', with a small flourish at the end.

STEVE GILLAN
General Secretary