

24 November 2020

An Tánaiste, Leo Varadkar, TD,  
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment,  
Kildare Street,  
Dublin 2.

**Ref: Framework for return to office plans and employer engagement in vaccine rollout**

Dear Tánaiste,

I am writing to you in relation to changes required to the Covid Framework in order to support return to office planning by businesses for 2021 and also to address the role of employers in the vaccine rollout strategy.

You will be aware from our previous correspondence and discussions that the lack of a reasonable framework to support a meaningful and safe return to office activity remains a key frustration for business. Ibec members are particularly concerned about the broad organisational impacts of full remote working in relation to issues such as organisational culture; staff training and development, particularly around induction; collaboration and innovation. The prolonged nature of the disruption is now taking its toll on business performance and employee well-being. In addition, we are also deeply concerned about the economic and employment consequences of the current Covid Framework for the 'office economy' of support businesses across a range of sectors such as hospitality, retail and other service providers.

The existing Covid Framework means that it is very difficult for employers to plan for return to office in early 2021. Even if virus rates reduce substantially over the coming weeks and months and we enter Level 2 or reach Level 1, the guidance requires for employees to 'work from home if possible' at Level 1 and the advice on the use of public transport at Level 2 are particularly restrictive.

We are therefore requesting that the review of restrictions which Government is conducting this week includes the existing guidance on work and public transport, with a view to facilitating a meaningful return to office activity in early 2021.

Ibec is also keen to engage with Government on the work of the high-level taskforce overseeing the vaccine rollout. In particular, we believe that there is a range of workplace issues which needs to be considered in the context of the vaccine rollout strategy and ask that these should be coordinated through the existing Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF). Ibec is already receiving a high volume of queries from employers in relation to vaccine issues in the workplace and we believe early collaboration by Government with business and coordination on communications would help support the vaccine rollout programme.

I would welcome an early engagement with you on these important workplace issues.

Yours sincerely,



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Danny McCoy  
Ibec CEO

Cc: Dr Orlaigh Quinn, Secretary General, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment