

Mr Alister Jack MP  
Secretary of State for Scotland  
The Scotland Office  
Dover House  
Whitehall  
London  
SW1A 2AU

By email: [enquiries@ukgovscotland.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ukgovscotland.gov.uk)

24 March 2022

Dear Secretary of State,

### **Covid-19 Testing Regime**

We wish to express to you the deepest concerns of our trade union, the University and College Union Scotland (UCU Scotland) that the UK government is ending the free lateral flow device testing system next month, and will no longer support the UK-wide Covid-19 testing regime.

With cases, hospitalisations and deaths in Scotland and across the UK rising, it is very clear that this pandemic is not over by any means. Today 13,564 new infections have been identified, with 2,322 people in hospital with Covid-19.

The World Health Organisation on 23 March 2022 said that “testing, sequencing and contact tracing, also remain essential, and it’s vital that countries don’t abandon the capacities they have built over the past two years”. Yet the UK Government, in removing free access to LFD tests and ending the test and trace / test and protect regime, is doing just that.

Scotland is now seeing rates of 50 deaths a day, with enormous pressure on hospitals and NHS workers who have worked relentlessly these past two years. It is reckless in the extreme to remove asymptomatic testing just at the point when we are encouraging more people to return to in-person work, learning and socialising. We are aware from Public Health Scotland presentations to stakeholders at the Advanced Learning Covid Recovery Group that 30% of infections are asymptomatic. This is a huge number of infectious people who will not be identified once free LFD testing is removed.

As a trade union representing nine thousand academic and professional support staff in Scotland’s university sector, we are deeply alarmed at risks for the health, safety and wellbeing of students and staff. Our university sector is world-leading because staff

and students travel from all over the UK - and indeed the world - to learn, study and work in our universities. However, this mixing means they are even more vulnerable to Covid outbreaks and the potential for new variants and strains of the virus to emerge. The end of a meaningful testing regime that provides testing, tracing and sequencing of variants is a very worrying prospect.

You will no doubt be aware of a significant Covid outbreak in St Andrews University last month, which meant at one stage over one thousand students and staff were isolating. We want to keep students and staff as safe as possible so as they can participate in learning, teaching, research and knowledge exchange. Covid-19 protections, including asymptomatic testing and the test and protect regime is a fundamental to this.

We are urging you to use your influence in Cabinet to revisit the decision to end free asymptomatic testing and to ensure we have a UK-wide test and protect system which keeps students, staff and their dependents safe.

UCU Scotland has raised this matter with the Scottish Government too, and I am copying the Minister for Further Education, Higher Education, Youth Employment and Training, Jamie Hepburn MSP into this correspondence.

We look forward to hearing from you on this matter.

Yours sincerely,



Mary Senior  
Scotland Official

Cc Mr Jamie Hepburn MSP, Minister for Further Education, Higher Education, Youth Employment and Training.