

Dear Member,

Bectu places the highest priority on the safety of our members. The union has always taken a strong line on workplace hazards that threaten their wellbeing, but we are now facing perhaps the most serious and insidious threat that our working members have ever encountered.

The Covid-19 virus is imperceptible in the way it spreads. Many of those infected are asymptomatic carriers and medical advisors are still uncertain about some basic questions of immunity – even among people who have already been infected.

There are also remaining doubts on even the most basic questions such as the reliability of testing.

Our members are expressing understandably conflicting emotions. It is not only Bectu members as a group who have conflicting views among each other on this – many individuals have mixed feelings of their own about a return to work.

A very large portion were forgotten in the government's efforts to prove a safety net for workers who are losing income due to the pandemic. Many are desperate for the incomes they need to put food on the table, pay rents, mortgages and basic household bills. In some cases, these members are desperate for any means of earning money, and returning to work is one such option.

Bectu continues to urge the government to ease this demand to return to work by providing our members the same level of income protection that other sectors of the economy are receiving, and we hope members will have seen details of these efforts in previous communications from the union.

On the other hand many of the same members are also worried about what a return to work will mean – for their own health, for the health of vulnerable members of their families, and ultimately for the NHS which needs to be defended at all costs from being overwhelmed by any renewed peak in the transmission of this virus.

In addition, our members also express fears about the damage an early return to work will cause for our industry and the wider economy.

When employers begin to approach workers about any return to work, the union is engaging on three fronts to make sure that this can be done on terms that are acceptable to our members.

1) Safe Working Practices:

Bectu have already started actively consulting members on safe working practices in preparation for any return to work when it becomes appropriate.

This has included contributions to a British Film Commission (BFC) consultation for workers in 'Inward Investment' productions from most of the major London Production Division craft branches, and has been led by the Assistant Directors Branch.

Bectu has a seat on this 'Physical Production' BFC working group. This is the first and biggest UK exercise of this kind, and we expect this work to influence and inform guidance for other sectors of broadcast and film production.

This consultation is ongoing, and Bectu has channelled very significant contributions from many union branches to this working group while also acting as a channel for our colleagues in Directors UK, and our sister unions such as Equity, The Musicians Union, and The Writers Guild of Great Britain. The union has a huge impact upon the BFC Guidelines for how a safe return to work can be managed once it is appropriate.

The Union will be consulting members on the penultimate draft of the Safe Working document at three meetings that Branches have been notified about separately. These will be taking place on

Wednesday 6th of May with a final version of the document expected from the BFC shortly afterwards.

At this point, Bectu will be urging branches to create advice for members of their own departments based upon this document, along with Bectu's final submission to their consultation that was sent on the 30th April.

2) Working terms and conditions in the context of Social Distancing

In any early return to work, strong Social Distancing rules will be expected to apply. This means that there will be a possibility that workers may have to leave a production due to illness, or self-isolation in the event of illnesses among family and friends.

Bectu will be contacting employers' organisations and will be raising concerns about the necessary changes to their terms and conditions that will be needed to provide people with income protection if they have to leave work due to illness or self-isolating.

Bectu will be urging flexibility and collaboration, but also stressing that this challenge does not result in ways of working that will damage or undermine the already-precarious employment relations in our industries.

Bectu is beginning to hear from members who have been contacted about work on some productions. We are concerned about this as there are still no agreed Codes of Practice on safe working in place.

Clearly, members will make their own choices about accepting work, but now, more than ever, **it is vital that they keep Bectu informed about jobs that they are returning to** if this is the case.

The union would also like to see any safety advice that members are given, so that we can monitor how a return to work is being implemented. We will be circulating information about how we will be collecting this information in due course.

3) Indemnities and Insurances

Separately from the 'Physical Production' BFC working group, the union is being consulted about the indemnities and insurances that productions will need if they are asked to return to work before the Covid-19 crisis is over.

Members have concerns that any return to work should be treated in the same way that a production would treat work in an unusually hazardous environment, and Bectu is actively monitoring the BFC Business, Legal and Business Affairs sub-group which is looking into this issue.

If you wish to raise any issues relating to this, please email covid19@bectu.org.uk

With best wishes

Spencer MacDonald
National Secretary