

Scotland should review workplace health and safety measures in light of pandemic, says expert

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An occupational health expert is calling for a major review of workplace health and safety in Scotland following "failings" revealed by the

COVID-19 pandemic.

In a new report, Professor Andrew Watterson, of the University of Stirling's Faculty of Health Sciences and Sport, says current policies on [health](#) and [safety](#)—the power for which lies with the UK Government—are not fit for practice. He also makes a number of recommendations to protect employees—including the creation of a new independent health and safety body for Scotland.

The research, carried out on behalf of think-tank the Jimmy Reid Foundation, outlines the case for new principles, policies and practices based on three themes:

- The challenges to workplace health and safety in Scotland during the pandemic;
- How those challenges relate to past failures and missed opportunities in the UK and Scotland on workplace health and safety prior to 2020; and
- The future of workplace health and safety in a devolved or independent Scotland.

Professor Watterson, head of the Occupational and Environmental Research Group at Stirling, said: "The challenges presented by COVID-19 have revealed many failings in the way the UK has addressed [worker](#) health and [public health](#): the two cannot be divided. Scotland has faced the pandemic challenge far better than the UK Government. It is critical that it now builds on its work post-pandemic and improves worker health and safety through a range of measures involving health, social and economic policy changes, and with recovery plans that create healthy and safe jobs across Scotland in a radical Green New Deal."

In the paper, Professor Watterson, makes the following recommendations:

- Scotland needs an independent, properly resourced and staffed [occupational health](#) and safety body with effective representation at board level for workers and their unions, employers, local authorities and communities. Safeguarding the workforce also safeguards communities, public health and the economy from the damage done by occupational illnesses and injuries.
- A Scottish Occupational Health Service Agency (SOHSA) should be developed and mainstreamed within NHS Scotland to end the employer driven, free market delivery of occupational health interventions deeply distrusted by workers and unions.
- Worker health and safety should be based on effective and coherent principles, policies and practices geared to prevention. This is currently often missing or marginalized in a deregulatory climate that highlights 'flexibility, proportionate and common-sense action', which is a code for inaction.
- Worker health and safety should never be neglected in pandemic planning by public health bodies lacking expertise and autonomy and unable to effectively safeguard all workers
- Unlike the UK, the Scottish Government should adopt, in a devolved or independent state, all International Labor Organization conventions on occupational health and effective precautionary principles.

Professor Gregor Gall, Director of the Jimmy Reid Foundation, said: "The Foundation very much welcomes Professor Watterson's valuable contribution to not only critically analyzing the state of play of occupational health and safety in Scotland in the period of the pandemic, but also by setting out a number of key recommendations which would significantly enhance the health and wellbeing of workers in Scotland. After all, we are constantly told by employers that workers are their most valuable asset. It is time this perspective was realized and Professor Watterson has provided the recommendations which would allow this to happen."

Provided by University of Stirling

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