

IOSH writes to senior Government figures with key calls for action

2 years ago



IOSH has called on the British Government to oversee greater investment in occupational health and improvements in managing mental health risks and fighting modern slavery.

The Institution has written to three senior Government figures to highlight key areas where it believes there are opportunities to grow a healthy economy which supports workers and enables businesses to thrive.

The letters were sent to Mel Stride, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Victoria Atkins, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, and Greg Hands, Minister of State for Trade Policy in the Department for Business and Trade. The latter two were appointed to their roles last month.

Investing in occupational health

Writing to Mel Stride, IOSH Chief Executive Vanessa Harwood-Whitcher highlighted the need for a prevention-first approach to psychosocial risks and the need for greater investment into occupational health.

The letter said such investment “would, in turn, prevent the workers of today becoming the economically inactive of tomorrow”. It added: “Doing so aligns with the Government’s priorities of growing the economy, cutting NHS waiting lists, and reducing debt.”

It went on to call for the revisiting of the Mental Health Act Reform Bill, which was described as “a regrettable omission” from last month’s King’s Speech. This followed recent Health and Safety Executive stats which revealed 875,000 people are suffering from work-related stress, depression or anxiety.

And it also called for progress on the Women's Health Strategy, which was presented to Parliament by the then-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on 30 August 2022 and includes specific regard to women-specific issues which can be managed and supported within a workplace context.

Both of these also featured in the letter to Victoria Atkins.

Modernising the Modern Slavery Act

Among the other asks in the letter to Mel Stride were a more proactive approach to ratifying International Labour Organization Conventions relating to OSH, along with:

- ensuring better management of asbestos risks to workers, including stronger regulation and enforcement;
- putting workers' health and safety at the heart of AI legislation and regulation;
- and updated to the Modern Slavery Act.

IOSH went into more detail on the Modern Slavery Act in its letter to Greg Hands, highlighting its omission from the King's Speech and describing it as "an area of great concern" and a "growing global scourge".

It added: "Our Modern Slavery Act should be strengthened, and it is a matter which ought to be given due consideration in discussing Trade matters, and we would welcome the opportunity to discuss this with you to consign human trafficking and modern slavery to history."

The letter to Greg Hands also said IOSH was pleased to see an emphasis on improvements to labour standards in Free Trade Agreements being signed by Britain.

It said: "We urge the monitoring of actions and improvements in labour rights throughout the implementation phases of the Free Trade Agreements and we would welcome forming part of the discussions in the implementation phases of the FTAs in specific regard to this area."

A collaborative approach

In the letters, IOSH said it would be pleased to support the Government in all of these areas, along with any others relating to OSH. It said that the 50th anniversary of the Health and Safety at Work Act in 2024 presented an opportunity to modernise legislation and continue to seek to improve standards.

Find out more

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