

**INSIDE:** Site challenges • Financial advice • Skills card info

Summer 2020 The magazine for construction sector members

# buildingWORKER



Construction, Allied  
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# Construction in the time of Covid-19

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# buildingWORKER

Determined to stay in touch the team has produced this issue of the *buildingWORKER* electronically and I urge you to pass it on to co-workers and other Unite members.

The moment Covid-19 took hold Unite pledged three priorities – safety, jobs and pay.

The pandemic has tested members, activists and officers like never before and I would like to express gratitude to everyone who has taken up the challenge to ensure safety, jobs and pay with flying colours.

With sites closing up and down the country in March, the first test was to ensure that hundreds of thousands of construction workers were not plunged into financial misery.

Unite was central to the negotiations which helped create the government's job retention scheme (JRS), which allowed workers to be furloughed on 80 per cent of their pay. As importantly, due to our knowledge of bogus self-employment, we realised that the self-employed needed support, before they fell off a financial cliff.

The government's grant system for the self-employed was a direct result of Unite's lobbying.

Neither scheme is perfect, for example there has been a major problem with umbrella companies refusing to furlough construction workers as they did not wish to pay their holidays – nonetheless protecting pay has provided some breathing space.

Since the initial lockdown and the incremental return to work, Unite's concern has been about ensuring that workers are kept safe on sites. Safely introducing the new normal of social distancing has been a huge challenge.

Unite has represented construction workers on site safety in discussions with government and an array of organisations at the highest levels. We know unionised sites are safer sites and our union's risk assessment guidance is second to none.

The examples contained in this issue of *buildingWORKER* on pages 6-7, 8 and 10-11 demonstrate that where Unite is organised workplaces can operate safely. Critical to site safety are our workplace representatives who must be consulted on risk assessments, this is in government guidance and cannot be shrugged off by employers.

If we are to avoid a second wave of Covid-19 then these safety measures must be the norm and not exceptions.

With fewer workers on sites due to social distancing and the economy plunging, the coming months are going to be tough for the industry. That is why we are calling on government to invest in major infrastructure projects and support important initiatives such as building a new generation of nuclear power stations.

In the months ahead Unite will have your back and to those of you who have lost loved ones to this dreadful pandemic our thoughts are with you. We will get through this and we are so much stronger when we stand together.

Gail Cartmail, assistant general secretary



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for advice during the coronavirus crisis  
go to [unitetheunion.org/coronavirus](https://unitetheunion.org/coronavirus)

Front cover picture: Getty Images



# Survey shows construction Covid-19 challenges

A survey in late April and early May of over 1,500 Unite construction members found that many continued to work throughout the Covid-19 pandemic and that in the majority of cases employers are taking the necessary precautions to protect workers.

The survey found that 31 per cent of those responding continued to work as the sector did not completely shutdown.

The majority of respondents (64 per cent) also report that social distancing was being maintained on their sites.

Where social distancing was not occurring, the biggest problem concerned work areas (82 per cent), with over half also citing problems at entry and exit points as well as welfare areas.



**Unite's survey found that social distancing was being achieved on over 60 per cent**

The majority of workers had been informed and trained on new ways of working (77 per cent) and a similar number (76 per cent) also reported they were being supplied with adequate and suitable PPE.

With regards to the provision of hand sanitiser and washing facilities this

was reported as adequate on 74 per cent of sites but does mean that there is problems on a quarter of sites.

In order to protect workers and reduce overcrowding on entry to sites just over two thirds (68 per cent) of respondents said that their employer had implemented staggered start and finishing times.

## Unite raises serious concerns over construction procedures

Unite has continued to raise serious concerns about the Construction Leadership Council's (CLC) site operating procedures (SOP).

Since the beginning of the pandemic the CLC's operative procedures has acted as a template on how sites can operate in a safe manner,

Earlier versions of the operating procedures were controversial as they allowed workers to work within two metres of each other for up to 15 minutes, if no other option was available. A measure that Unite and some contractors were unhappy with.

The latest [version 5](#) of the SOP is vague and unhelpful on the supply of PPE when workers have to operate within two metres of each other stating: "workplaces should not encourage the precautionary use of extra PPE to protect against Coronavirus (Covid-19)."

This is totally the opposite of Unite's position that in the rare occasion when it is not possible to socially distance, closer working should only apply if full PPE is supplied and worn.

Unite national officer for construction Jerry Swain said: "It is essential that the information in the site

operating procedures is both clear and comprehensive as the procedures are currently written, the health of workers is being placed at risk.

"No one should be required to work within two metres of someone else on a construction site without being issued with the appropriate PPE. It is also essential they are fully trained in the safe usage of this equipment."

- If you are requested to work within two metres of a colleague without the appropriate PPE, you should refuse to do so and speak to your shop steward or regional officer for further advice.

## Furlough extension welcomed

### Unite welcomes furlough extension but fears grow for economy

Unite welcomed the government's announcement that the job retention scheme (JRS) would be extended.

The JRS will continue until the end of October, but from July employers using the scheme will be expected to begin paying national insurance and pension contributions and then will gradually be expected to pay a proportion of the wages of the workers

who are furloughed until the scheme is wound down at the end of October.

The government has also announced an extension of the grant scheme to assist self-employed workers (which includes those working via the Construction Industry Scheme). Workers who qualify can claim a further grant worth £6,570 that is payable in August.

Under the revisions to the scheme, workers who are furloughed can return to work on short time working from July.

Len McCluskey, general secretary of Unite said: "The chancellor has listened to unions like Unite who have been calling for flexible and incremental changes to the jobs retention scheme to allow businesses to get back on their feet, protecting jobs in the process.

"Stimulating confidence and demand in the economy alongside JRS flexibility is essential. Therefore, bringing forward to 1 July, as Unite has argued, the ability to bring workers back on short-time

## Mental health challenges identified

A survey by Unite, of its workplace activists has found that concerns about mental health have increased dramatically since the lockdown began.

The survey found that just under two thirds of respondents (65 per cent) reported that they had to deal with an increase in members' mental health concerns.

The mental health challenges are a result of a variety of reasons including: loneliness and isolation, excessive work pressures, financial concerns and worries about returning to work.

Unite has produced a mental health guide for members during the pandemic.

Employers should be taking a proactive lead and should be monitoring workers mental health, as they adjust to the challenges of working during the pandemic.

Unite assistant general secretary Gail Cartmail said: "It is crucial that employers understand that mental health issues will not disappear overnight and that additional awareness and assistance remains in place for the foreseeable future.

**WORK CAN AFFECT YOUR MENTAL HEALTH**

Speak to someone before you unravel

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www.unite-theunion.org

Don't suffer in silence

If you need someone to talk to and who is willing to listen, contact your Unite rep or official.

Alternatively contact:

Mind www.mind.org.uk  
0300 123 3393 or text 86463

Samaritans www.samaritans.org  
116 123 (free calls)

CALM (Campaign against Living Miserably)  
www.thecalzone.net/about-calm/whatscalm/  
0800 585858

**Mental health concerns have increased since the pandemic began (Unite poster)**

The survey also found activists dealing with an increase in: maternity, paternity, adoption and other family leave (40 per cent), employer exploiting the isolation of members (33 per cent),

bullying (26 per cent) and disability issues (24 per cent).

- If members require more specific mental health support they should consult a specialist organisation such as Mind.

<https://www.mind.org.uk/coronavirus-we-are-here-for-you/>

# Coping with Covid-19

On 24 March when phase two of the Battersea power station development closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, there were 3,200 workers. Such numbers will not be seen again for a long time.

It re-opened on 11 May with just 500 operatives initially on site. To safely open with those numbers was itself a huge undertaking and Unite was central to ensuring it occurred.

Catching up with Unite convenor **Andy Rudd**, he explained what has gone into reopening the project.

Rudd explained how he was recalled from furlough by the principal contractor Mace to work on making the site, fit for purpose, in the 'new normal' of workplace social distancing. He is involved in daily meetings on how many workers the site can handle while social distancing is maintained and to deal with the challenges that entails.

The first major change on the site, is that workers are beginning shifts far later to stagger commuting times. Workers will arrive between 09:00-12:00 and work on staggered shifts until 21:00.

Mace has also carefully planned how workers access the site, a crucial issue and one that Unite believes where all contractors need to be proactive.

Mace have provided car parking for 800 spaces and are also providing a bespoke bus service from Vauxhall station. The

bus on which strict social distancing is expected to be adhered to is disinfected after each journey. The bus service will run between 08:30-13:00 and then between 16:30 and 20:30.

Workers returning to the site will undertake an induction which Rudd oversees. The induction room used to cater for 80 workers but in the new world of social distancing that has been reduced to just 12.

Rudd explains that while there is an awareness that meal and rest periods must be staggered there is an understanding that this must not result in workers' losing their breaks.

Where breaks will be taken has been transformed, the canteen which once seated 600 workers can now accommodate just 50-60 with individual booths being installed. An additional canteen is being built in preparation for more workers being gradually brought onto the site.

In a further move to prevent Covid-19 transmission, the site is providing free bottled water and all the plates and cutlery are one use and fully biodegradable.

Alongside floor directions and posters to ensure social distancing, workers are issued with enhanced PPE including visors.

To help ensure social distancing the supervision ratio has been reduced from 8:1 to 5:1.

Also Rudd reports that Mace has taken the sensible decision that workers need to be allowed to adapt to the new working conditions: "This is new to everyone, there will be no punishments if social distancing is compromised this is about education and helping workers."

Speaking again to Rudd in late June the site is getting increasingly busy with 1,700 operatives now working.

There are now six or seven canteens and plenty of drying rooms for the workforce.

Rudd believes the primary challenge is maintaining social distancing rules. "What is happening outside the site is making it harder to ensure social distancing, everyone seems to have become very lax outside of sites."

Also brought back from furlough early, **Paul Mooney** on the Multiplex site at Glasgow University, has been heavily involved in preparing the site for re-opening.

When I caught up with Mooney in mid-May a tremendous amount of work had been undertaken and the site was ready to re-open and was just waiting on the Scottish Parliament, lifting the ban on all non-essential construction workers taking place.

When the site closed in March there were 700 workers on the site, when fully operational again there will be only 60-70 per cent of those numbers.



**Floor markings help to ensure social distancing especially at pinchpoints**

The biometric entry system was dismantled and now upon entry workers have their temperature checked.

Hand sanitiser is provided at all key points, walkways have been widened and are cleaned regularly.

The main road on the site has become a walkway and all vehicles using it have to be accompanied by a banksman.

A one way system has been introduced into the site and there is a strict two metre social distancing rule, throughout the site but particularly in the smoking block where it is feared social distancing can easily be broken.

Another important social distancing measure is that only one person is allowed in the toilet block at a time.

Summing up the new normal and the challenges that workers face, White said: The lads have done really well. The guys are giving it their best shot.”

In order to accommodate even those numbers the site has been transformed. The biometric checks to enter the sites have been removed and the number of drying rooms increased with fewer lockers in each.

The number of toilets has also increased and additional buildings have been utilised to ensure sufficient space.

Mooney will be heavily involved in daily meetings with a representative from each company, where safety issues will be raised and dealt with.

Mooney believes that the biggest challenge will be preserving the two metre distance rule while working. “Workers need to accept that things are different and our members have got to buy into the new safety culture and take responsibility for their own safety.”

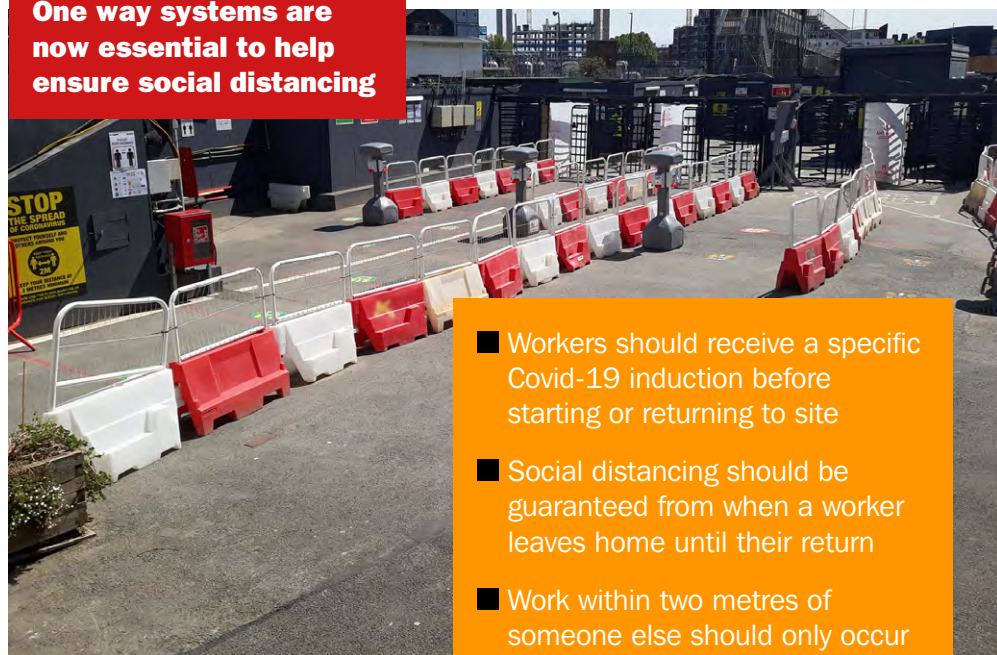
Speaking to Mooney again in late-June, the site was increasingly gearing up for a full restart and was waiting the final go ahead from the Scottish Parliament. There were around 100 workers on the site and if things went to according to plan 70 per cent of the workforce will be back on site by late July or early August.

The experiences of Rudd and Mooney are mirrored by Unite’s Chris White

the senior steward on the mechanical and electrical project at the Keadby power station project in North Lincolnshire.

The project was in its infancy when it was temporarily halted during the pandemic. When work resumed there will now be a maximum of 180 workers, previously it was expected the figure would be double that.

**One way systems are now essential to help ensure social distancing**



- Workers should receive a specific Covid-19 induction before starting or returning to site
- Social distancing should be guaranteed from when a worker leaves home until their return
- Work within two metres of someone else should only occur as a last resort and only if full PPE is provided free of charge
- [Risk assessments should be available for all tasks and should be updated as required, Unite has provided detailed advice](#)

White says the Keadby site “was ahead of the curve” in enforcing social distancing.

# Hinkley: Staying open, staying safe

At the height of the Covid-19 pandemic most major construction sites closed, and gradually re-opened at a later date.

One site which remained continuously open was Hinkley Point. It was a tough decision but one supported by the majority of the workforce. As Unite senior steward **Jonathan Davies** said: "The easy decision was to close down."

However the fear was that, on the largest construction site in the UK, a prolonged closure and delay would be so expensive that the site might never re-open. Which would have been a disaster for the economic prospects of the South West and for the future of new nuclear power projects in the UK.

Having taken the decision to carry on working the challenge was how to keep workers safe and ensure social distancing at all times.

Unite has worked closely with the client EDF, to achieve this with the principal contractors playing a less prominent role. Unite convenor Malcolm Davies has had weekly meetings with all the senior management at the site.

At the beginning of March there were 4,500 workers on Hinkley Point, that number was reduced to 2,000, although that has now increased.

All workers with Bouygues were furloughed as were 90 per cent of those employed by Kier/Bam. With regards to the largest contractor BYLOR, workers were initially given the option if they wished to be furloughed.

Since then there has been some rotation with workers being furloughed on and off the project.

Some workers opted to stay at Hinkley, effectively isolating from their families while local workers and some others have returned home at weekends when not working.

Initially the biggest challenge with regards to social distancing was with clocking in and out and travelling on the buses which is the only way to access and traverse the site.

EDF has dramatically increased the number of buses on the site with 61 buses operational, only operating at 25 per cent of their maximum

capacity with the driver being fully screened off.

With regards to pinch points such as clocking in and the park and ride scheme, not only were clear markings placed on the floor but Unite safety reps played a key role in ensuring that social distancing was maintained at all times.

Action has also been taken to segregate the canteen to ensure that social distancing is maintained and catering staff protected.

Jonathan Davies said ensuring safety "has not been easy".

He also says that now the social distancing measures have bedded in the primary challenge is with "people onsite doing the physical work."

Despite the challenges Jonathan reports that there has been a positive reaction from the vast majority of the workforce. "Most people have been on board and have got on with it. Taking the mentality that they are lucky enough to be in work."



**The Hinkley Point project continued to operate throughout the lockdown**

# THE SHREWSBURY PICKETS' APPEAL CASE HEARD



**LEFT: Terry Renshaw with Unite general secretary Len McCluskey**

**RIGHT: Shrewsbury Pickets John McKinsie Jones (left) and Kevin Butcher hear the news their case will be referred to the Court of Appeal**



Wednesday 4 March 2020 was a momentous day in the 14 year campaign for justice for the Shrewsbury pickets. The Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC) finally announced that it would refer the pickets' convictions to the Court of Appeal.

The CCRC's announcement came 46 years after we were put on trial following the end of the national building workers strike in 1972. Twenty-four members of the T&G and UCATT (now both part of Unite) from North Wales were charged with various alleged picketing offences arising from the strike between June and September 1972.

Six went to prison, most notably the late **Des Warren** who got three years. Sixteen others including myself got suspended prison sentences.

The campaign wants to pay tribute to **Len McCluskey** and Unite members for their tremendous support over the years. You gave us the confidence to continue with our case, particularly when we had to challenge the CCRC in court with a judicial review.

Together with my fellow pickets, **John McKinsie Jones**, **Michael Pierce**, **Bernard Williams**, **Malcolm Clee** and **Kevin Butcher** and the families of the late **Des Warren** and **Ken O'Shea**, we never lost heart even though we had many setbacks.

Our applications to the CCRC were submitted on 3 April 2012. It clearly demonstrated that there had been an abuse of process in the trials at Shrewsbury. Despite this, in 2017 the CCRC refused to refer our cases to the Court of Appeal. After taking legal advice we challenged its decision by way of a judicial review.

The CCRC defended the case right up to the day of the hearing, 30 April 2019. It then conceded halfway through, whilst our QC was still presenting our case to the two judges.

The CCRC agreed to withdraw its original decision and re-examine our case. Ten months later it announced that it will refer our convictions back to the Court of Appeal. We now have the chance to overturn this miscarriage of justice.

When the CCRC made its announcement in March 2020 it invited other pickets to apply. The families of four deceased pickets approached the Shrewsbury 24 Campaign and our lawyers submitted their names. The CCRC recently agreed to include them with the original eight. Two other pickets who withdrew from the case in 2017, **Ricky Tomlinson** and **Arthur Murray**, resubmitted their applications independently of the campaign on the back of our success in March and have had them accepted by the CCRC.

The Court of Appeal hearing should hopefully be listed later this year. The pickets, with our families and the campaign members, look forward to attending the hearing.

Please continue to support us, we are nearly there. Full details about the strike, trials and our campaign for justice can be found on our website: [www.shrewsbury24campaign.org.uk](http://www.shrewsbury24campaign.org.uk)

# Housing maintenance: MEETING THE CHALLENGE

The housing maintenance sector has been profoundly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

As well as the challenge of ensuring workers' social distance there is the greater problem of working in occupied properties and not contaminating/being contaminated by tenants.

Many organisations have stepped up to ensure workers and tenants are protected but others have been failing.

One example of poor practice was highlighted by Unite in April regarding workers employed by Mears in Kent and Sussex.

The workers were designated as 'key workers' and Mears expected them to continue to undertake routine maintenance work and work on void (empty) properties. Workers reported that social distancing was impossible.

Unite made representations that only emergency repairs should be undertaken and workers could be furloughed, a suggestion Mears rejected.

While Mears is a clear example of bad practice there have been many examples of good practice.

Unite convenor **Neil Tasker** gives a positive account of the measures taken by Southwark council on its housing maintenance contracts.

At the beginning of the pandemic, standard repairs and maintenance work as well as work on void (empty) properties ceased immediately. All work in the communal areas of properties was cancelled. Only emergency repair work continued to be undertaken.

At any one time 80 per cent of operatives were furloughed (there has been rotation). The workers who were furloughed received full average pay.

The vast majority of office staff and planners are working from home with only a maximum of five per cent of staff being in the office.

As well as emergency repair work, the operatives have also been undertaking crucial food deliveries to local residents who have been forced to self-isolate or are shielding.

In total by early June, over 12,000 food deliveries have been made by Southwark housing maintenance workers to vulnerable local residents.

Tasker is also keen to stress that Unite has been fully consulted throughout the process and has had regular meetings with senior management at Southwark and genuine input. "Risk assessments have changed due to union and operative input."

Recently, he has been engaged in in-depth discussions and helping to compile risk assessments to allow void work to begin again in a safe manner.

Speaking about the recent weeks Tasker says: "It has been quite hard to fault" (Southwark's response) but "You have to think on your feet" and there "has been huge behavioural change."

**Andy Wilson**, Unite's senior rep at East Ayrshire council concurs with Tasker in that his council has treated workers well during the lockdown.

The council is primarily only undertaking emergency work and some limited work on void properties.

One area of concern that Wilson identifies is that as the landlord the council has had to continue to monitor and check gas boilers under the GasSafe regulations that were not relaxed.

Due to the reduction in work much of the workforce has been furloughed on full pay.

The council has also decided not to undertake any capital work on installing new kitchen and bathrooms this year and will instead concentrate on outside work.

As Wilson says: “The priority is to get back into work but safely.”

With regards to emergency repairs, there is a group of workers who have volunteered to do such work when tenants are displaying Covid systems, they have been fully trained and wear the appropriate PPE.

Wilson reports that one issue has been regarding mental health, with some workers asking directly to return to work as they could not bear to be at home for any longer, issues that the employer has dealt with sympathetically. As Wilson explains with the lockdown rules in Scotland has been especially strict: “It is a long time to be sitting in the house when you can’t do anything.”

Workers suffering mental health issues is very common and the Unite has produced information to assist reps and workers deal with the challenge.

While in general, Unite and the council have worked closely together there remains area of disagreement. Unite is insisting that there should only be one person in a works van at any one time and the council’s risk assessment indicating otherwise.

Unite has agreed with the council that while it is preferred workers take their holiday as normal due to the restrictions on movement, 10 days can be carried forward to next year

One note of worry regards apprentices, under the current rules apprentices whose work and training has been heavily interrupted may have to repeat a year as a result the council will not be recruiting a new intake of apprentices this year.

Andy Jones one of Unite’s convenors on the Leeds housing maintenance contract explains that when the pandemic started, Unite was key to ensuring that responsive maintenance work was stopped as the council’s decision making “was a bit slow”.

Since then the relationship has been much smoother. A triage system has been set up on emergency repairs and only if it is a genuine emergency is it undertaken and then only if full PPE is available.

As Jones explains: “The priority with PPE is that it goes to care homes. If we haven’t got it we don’t do the job.”

For instance there has been agreement that work has continued on void properties to assist with housing homeless people, with these homes being prepared to a “habitable” standard rather than the usual “lettable standard”

Around 100 employees have been sent home on full pay, although there has been flexible deployment with some craftworkers being asked to work at household waste sites when these re-opened.

When I spoke with Jones in June, discussions have begun about a return to work but nothing has been agreed on non-essential maintenance or standard void work. “They [management] want to get things up and running.”

Jones is full of praise for his members: “I haven’t had that many issues raised, workers have got on with it.”



**Southwark housing maintenance workers have been undertaking food deliveries to vulnerable resident**

- Check the up-to-date risk assessment for all tasks. Unite has produced a detailed guide
- Ensure that social distancing occurs at all times including in vehicles
- Emergency repairs in a tenants home should only be undertaken if full PPE is supplied and training has been provided on its usage
- If you are unsure about any issue check with you safety rep or shop steward first.

**Leeds housing maintenance workers have adapted well to the new challenges**



# SKILLS CARDS – Construction and allied trades card schemes, HS&E assessments and skills competency certifications

Many construction industry and allied trades card, skills and certification scheme bodies upon which Unite members are registered and the union participates, have temporarily extended and relaxed criteria for a number of refresher, renewal and expiry requirements due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The following information was up to date in late Spring. Measures are subject to ongoing review as the situation unfolds and policies are adapted to meet the challenges ahead. Please follow the relevant links below for current details of the actions being taken by your relevant scheme provider.

## **CompEx**

Three months Certification Extension Process applies to certificates with expiry dates from 17 March 2020 until 30 June 2020, or to those candidates who are due to re-sit any refresher assessments. [Read more](#)

## **CCNSG/ACE/ECITB (Engineering Construction Industry Board)**

ECITB have enabled a temporary extension of the grace period for renewal to six months for anyone due to attend a CCNSG course after 16 March 2020. ACE card renewal period extended from three months after the card expires to six months. [Read more here](#) and [here](#), and for [ACE here](#)

## **CISRS (Construction Industry Scaffolders Record Scheme) (CSCS partner)**

Industry requested to use discretion towards recently expired cards, which can be accepted during this period, the situation for both cards and CPD will be subject to regular review. [Read more here](#) and [here](#)

## **CITB (Construction Industry Training Board) HS&E tests**

Temporary suspension of testing throughout the Independent Test Centre network. Availability of remote learning and free of charge resources for in-house interim HS&E testing where required. [Read more here](#) and select 'HS&E Test'

## **CCDO (Certification of Competence of Demolition Operatives) (CSCS partner)**

Industry requested to use discretion towards recently expired cards. Card renewal period extended from six months after the card expires to 12 months, three month virtual card available for cardholders with recently expired cards. [Read more](#)

## **CPCS (Construction Plant Certification Scheme) (CSCS partner)**

Industry requested to use discretion towards recently expired cards. Card renewal period extended from six months after the card expires to 12 months. Temporary 12 month card introduced for CPCS card holders who cannot take the HS&E test. [Read more](#)

Unite construction plant members' attention is drawn to the union's concerns regarding the temporary CPCS card. [Read more](#)

## CSCS (Construction Skills Certification Scheme)

Industry requested to use discretion towards recently expired cards. CSCS has extended the grace period for card renewals from six months after the card expires to 12 months. This means that the card can be renewed, once the CITB HS&E test has been passed, up to one year from the card's expiry date. [Read more](#)

**CSCS affiliated partner schemes:** [Read more](#)

## CSR (Construction Skills Register – Northern Ireland) (CSCS partner)

Industry requested to use discretion towards recently expired cards. Renewal period of supervisor, manager & plant cards extended by three months after expiry. [Read more](#)

## ECS (Electrotechnical Certification Scheme) (JIB and SJIB) (CSCS partner)

- JIB ECS (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) cards expiring in March, April and May extended by three months with ongoing review. [Read more here](#) and [here](#)
- SJIB ECS (Scotland) HS&E tests temporarily suspended. [Read more](#). Cards which expired between 31 October 2019 and 31 March 2020 extended to 31 October 2020. Cards which expired between 1 April 2020 and 31 October 2020 extended to 31 December 2020. [Read more](#)
- Learn with Unite JIB ECS tests temporarily suspended. [Read more](#)

## Engineering Services SKILLcard (CSCS partner) BESA/HVAC

Industry requested to use discretion towards recently expired cards. BESA employers' association advises that sites should accept expired SKILLcards during Covid-19 crisis. [Read more](#)

## Gas Safe Register

Detailed guidance issued regarding expiry of ACS certification. HSE will permit registered gas engineers to remain on the register for an additional period during the peak of the Coronavirus measures subject to meeting strict criteria to maintain consumer safety. [Read more](#)



## NPORS (National Plant Operators Registration Scheme) (CSCS partner)

Card expiry date can be extended by six months. New date will be shown electronically. Replacement cards displaying new expiry date will be issued on request free of charge. [Read more](#)

## Plumbing JIB-PMES (CSCS partner)

Three month card renewal period after card expires introduced. Temporary grace period for all JIB-PMES CSCS registration cards with an expiry date after 29 February 2020. [Read more](#)

## Sentinel (Network Rail)

Sentinel railway competences and medical certificates temporarily extended by 4 months. The extension period is effective from 23 March 2020. [Read more](#)

## SICCS (Shopfitting and Interior Contracting Card Scheme) (CSCS Partner)

As per CSCS. [Read more](#)

## TICA Skill Card (CSCS partner)

Industry requested to use discretion towards recently expired cards. Expired card acceptance, renewal grace period of six months after card expiry, and guidance for new applicants announced. [Read more](#)



# Tax Refunds and Covid-19: Your Questions Answered

This is a difficult and worrying time. The Covid-19 pandemic has turned the country and the economy on their heads, and we are all looking for some certainty. Now more than ever, it's critical to make sure you are getting everything you are owed from HMRC. Here are the top questions we are hearing from RIFT construction customers.

## Can I claim a tax refund while on furlough?

Yes. The fact that you are or have been on furlough doesn't disqualify you from a single penny of the refunds owed. The money you are claiming back now comes from the work related travel and expenses you had in the previous tax year. If you haven't made a claim in a while, you could still be owed tax refunds dating for four tax years.

## Can I claim a refund if I was made redundant or lost my job due to Covid-19?

Yes. Losing your job part way through a tax year doesn't prevent you claiming back what you are owed. Also, when you pay your tax through PAYE your payments are calculated on the assumption that you'll be earning steadily throughout the year. When your income suddenly drops because of redundancy, the payments you've already had taken from your pay will probably have been too high. This means you will be owed a refund.

## Can I still claim a CIS refund if I applied for a government loan scheme?

Again, yes. Any money received from The Self Employment Income Support Scheme will be treated as taxable income on your self-assessment. Whether or not you get a government loan to see you through the Covid-19 outbreak, the rules

covering CIS tax refunds are the same as before. Paying tax under CIS can mean you're not getting the full benefit of your tax-free personal allowance so you should always make your claim.

## What happens to my refund if my company went into liquidation?

If you're working a PAYE job and your employer goes out of business, you are still entitled to your tax refund. As long as you've got all the details for your claim, there's nothing to stop you getting back a refund. If you haven't, RIFT can even help chase down the information.

## I changed employers or employment status because of the pandemic. Can I still claim a refund?

When you change employers, you still keep your entitlement to a yearly tax refund. As long as you've got records to back up your claim, switching employers won't stop you getting what's owed.

When you change your employment status, your tax situation changes with it. Moving from PAYE work to self-employment, for instance, means you settle up with HMRC through the self-assessment system instead. However, anything the taxman still owed you from your PAYE days is still yours to claim.

The bottom line is that there's no reason for the Covid-19 pandemic to stop you claiming the tax refunds you deserve. Get in touch with RIFT to find out how much you could claim.

[Rift has specific webpages for Unite members.](#)

Or call 01233 653974.

**Construction workers can achieve considerable refunds by using Rift's service**

This page is a counterpoint to the mainstream media and reviews important pieces of work for Unite members.

## Book

### The Plague by Albert Camus

Jan van der Crabben



Rats are the first creatures affected by the plague

Given our recent experiences there is little surprise that Camus' classic *The Plague* has once again become required reading.

The novel is set in an Algerian port town shortly after the Second World War and details how the inhabitants cope

with the challenges of lockdown due to an outbreak of the bubonic plague.

The early part of the novel which details grippingly how the plague takes root in the town is genuinely chilling. As huge numbers of rats emerge from their hiding places and start to die, this is met with mild interest but primarily annoyance by the town's residents. The reader knows this is a precursor to far worse, causing me an involuntary shudder.

The novel then develops through the various stages of the plague until at the conclusion of the novel the survivors are released from their self-made prison.

There has been some suggestion that Camus wrote *The Plague* as an allegory, about the French resistance to the Nazi occupation, an event where he had personal experience. However if you read it as an allegory or as a straight story there is a great deal to be gained and it is interesting to compare our own experiences of the current pandemic to how the characters in the novel react.

Stephen James

## Film

### The Mule directed by Clint Eastwood

The DVD of *The Mule* produced and directed by Clint Eastwood has been available for quite a while but to be honest, my wife wasn't keen on purchasing it due to the 'drug aspect' which is integral to the film.

I think it's one of the best things Eastwood has directed since *Gran Torino*.

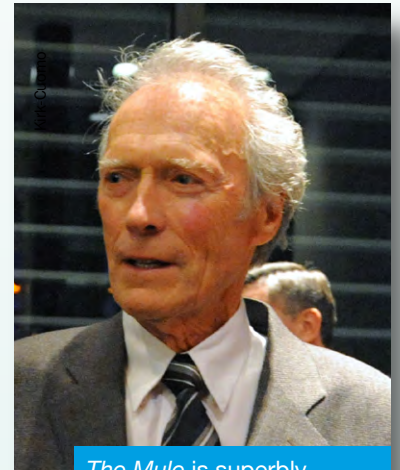
An ageing man distanced from his family loses his business and his livelihood; he eventually is allowed back into the family fold and regains a livelihood via criminal activity, which ultimately is his downfall.

Eastwood handles the moralistic aspect as well as can be expected as this is based on a true story, but the beauty of the film is the interplay between Eastwood as the main character and his estranged wife. This runs parallel with his unintended proximity with the drug enforcement agent played by Bradley Cooper.

Eastwood allows his fellow actors to take centre stage throughout, while he assumes a lesser role as the script and direction dictates.

After you get used to seeing him older, the actor we all know and love from decades of film and television eases into the saddle once more and we all enjoy the movie. Long may he continue as one of the great directors of all time.

Donald McArthur



The Mule is superbly directed by Clint Eastwood

EinA: Kirk-Cuomo

### Your Recommendations

Unite members are encouraged to send ideas for future recommendations. We will cover film, television, DVDs and books. The only stipulation is a recommendation needs to be easily available. If you would like to write your own reviews please do but keep your contributions to 250 words. Send recommendations and reviews to [barckley.sumner@unitetheunion.org](mailto:barckley.sumner@unitetheunion.org)

# Don't miss out!

Get Your *buildingWORKER* every quarter

*buildingWORKER* is the magazine for all Unite construction workers. In order to keep up to date with what is happening in your industry and your union you need to opt in to receive future editions.

Opting in to receive the *buildingWORKER* is quick and simple.

To receive *buildingWORKER* for free, four times a year. You just need to contact your regional office by email, phone or in writing.

Also by contacting the regional office you can update your address, notify a change of employer and request receiving free copies of *uniteWORKS* (Unite's award winning magazine) and *Landworker* (the magazine for rural workers).

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