

Secretary of State for Education
The Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Department for Education
20 Great Smith St, Westminster
London SW1P 3BT

AIRTO Ltd
c/o National Physical Laboratory
Hampton Road
Teddington
Middlesex
United Kingdom
TW11 0LW

Tel: 020 8943 6600

Monday 23 March 2020

Dear Mr Williamson,

Re: AIRTO letter - March 2020 Recognising key workers in UK laboratories during Covid 19 pandemic

On behalf of AIRTO, the Association of Innovation, & Technology Organisations, we are tremendously grateful to the Her Majesty's Government for all the hard work it is doing to save lives during the Covid 19 pandemic. We recognise that the government is working under intense pressure to make the right decisions at pace for the whole country, and we are immensely thankful for all the hard work that the government and the civil service are putting into the national fight against this disease. AIRTO and its member laboratories are keen to support the government and our society during this time of unprecedented national challenge.

AIRTO represents the UK's Innovation, Research & Technology (IRT) sector (encompassing Public Sector Research Establishments, PSREs, Catapult Centres and long-established Research & Technology Organisations, RTOs), which employs more than 57,000 highly skilled people and adds an estimated £34Bn of GVA per annum to the economy. Many of our member **laboratories are involved in governmental and public service work which underpins the UK's safety and security, through providing testing services and important, unique pieces of infrastructure which are critical to the continuation of business, health and daily life in UK.** We understand that properly identifying the workers supporting these critical functions can be very difficult, because their roles may not be as immediately obvious as those in easily visible functions like the NHS or grocery stores. Some of our member organisations are concerned that there needs to be more clarity about which workers with children are **identified as a key workers entitling them where necessary to leave their children at school for the next 12 weeks.** I would like to offer AIRTO's assistance in working with you to refine the list.

AIRTO fully supports the government's action on social distancing, isolation and the actions taken to request that non-essential activity and geographical movement in the population ceases. As I am sure you will appreciate, some organisations are simply not able to request that all staff work from home, if they are going to keep their critical operations moving to support the country. **Some members are therefore very concerned that they need certain staff to be identified as key workers.** Examples of critical services which are being impeded by this issue include activities, which are going to impact directly on the population and on the UK in the months ahead include:

1. Agronomy services such as those provided by NIAB, The National Institute of Agricultural Botany – these are critical to ensuring quality crop production for farmers and the food chain. It is of paramount importance that this work continues to ensure the UK's harvest yields are protected and indeed maximised during 2020.
2. Food safety testing such as those services provided by Campden BRI – these are critical to the food industry in continuing food safety and regulatory analytical testing / positive release etc. It is of paramount importance that this work continues to ensure that the food supply chain is robust and resilient and that its members and clients are making safe and legally compliant food products.

The 'Key Worker' statement that has been released covers:

"Those involved in food production, processing, distribution, sale and delivery as well as those essential to the provision of other key goods (for example hygienic and veterinary medicines)."

This wording does not explicitly cover those staff involved in key laboratory and scientific functions such as agronomy or food testing/analysis, and we would urge the government to reconsider the statement.

There may be further examples to consider. **On behalf of our sector, I am appealing to the Department of Education to provide more clarity on this issue.** Might I ask that someone from the department to contact me in the next day or so, so that we can discuss what steps may be appropriate to resolve this issue and what AIRTO can do to assist?

Yours sincerely,



Dr Jane Gate, Executive Director, AIRTO
jane.gate@airto.co.uk Mobile: 07716 195376