

**ECONOMY, ENERGY AND FAIR WORK COMMITTEE****COVID-19 – impact on Scotland’s businesses, workers and economy****SUBMISSION FROM****G75 Media**

To put my following comments into perspective, I run a small business which is not eligible for any financial support, but I have accepted a drop in my income as being necessary to buy the NHS time to increase its ICU capacity and recruit more staff. To fully utilise the additional free time my loss of business has created, I have registered as a volunteer with NHS Lanarkshire. My parents are self-isolating for 12 weeks since they are deemed to be vulnerable, and my household has recently had a virus which seemed to accurately mirror the various definitions of Covid-19, from duration to symptoms.

I am not blasé about the virulence, impact or threat posed by Covid-19. However, I also believe the damage which is being done to our economy and wider society by the lockdown could ultimately prove to be more costly still. For a variety of reasons, I feel it is imperative that the lockdown is lifted at the earliest possible opportunity, particularly in Scotland where our population is more rurally dispersed than in Coronavirus hotspots like London.

We have all seen news reports such as the one warning that 20 per cent of small businesses will fail by the end of April. This would be catastrophic to Scotland’s economy – irreplaceable businesses lost, high streets decimated, tradespeople no longer able to provide key services, and waiting times for almost everything lengthening. Entire swathes of the population could end up out of work with no jobs to return to, losing their homes, falling into debt, driven to depression and worse. These and myriad other consequences of a protracted lockdown could take decades to fully repair – every day the lockdown continues in its current form embeds the damage more deeply into the fabric of our economy and our society.

I already know people who have lost their jobs, family businesses which have failed, and relationships which are disintegrating under the strain of economic hardship and enforced isolation. My young son is really struggling with the loss of his entire world outside the family home, unable even to travel short distances to see close relatives who have no health issues and believe like us that they have already fought off Covid-19. Other friends report their young children are becoming destructive, violent or depressed as the lockdown drags on. I fear the mental and emotional damage of a persistent lockdown on our children could last for many years, manifesting in everything from anxiety and depression to indiscipline when school resumes and routine is reimpose. And since the closure of schools has been described by experts as offering small benefits at a substantial cost, I feel the re-establishment of partial schooling (maybe 2.5 days a week per child, with separate exits and entrances at each campus alongside social distancing at drop-off and collection) should be undertaken when the Easter fortnight is over.

Even small decisions have had a big effect. I find it hard to believe that climbing frames and see-saws pose a sufficiently high risk of infection transmission to justify their continuing closure, and the resultant loss of outdoor amenities for families without gardens of their own. For a family like ours that doesn’t live within walking distance of a park, being unable to drive to a park has been detrimental to our individual and collective mental and physical health. The lockdown has created a society whose ability to exercise depends on each family’s property type and its proximity to a park – a particularly unfair postcode lottery.

I appreciate that the epidemiological evidence in favour of a lockdown has hitherto outweighed every other consideration. And I know the last three weeks have allowed Nightingale hospitals to be opened, NHS staff levels to be bolstered and a volunteer army to be recruited – though I have been disappointed to see Scotland failing to follow England’s lead in establishing a national volunteer recruitment scheme. Yet now that the NHS has been given time to prepare and expand ICU capacity, it is imperative that the mental, physical, social, economic and academic consequences of the lockdown are treated as the greater priority. It is hard to believe that the benefits of extending the lockdown in Scotland beyond mid-April will continue to outweigh the drawbacks, since the ramifications of a lengthy lockdown could persist into the 2030s, in more ways than could possibly be listed in this email.

**Neil Cumins**  
**Director, G75 Media**