

Fergus Ewing MSP  
Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy and Tourism  
The Scottish Government  
St Andrew's House  
Regent Road  
Edinburgh  
EH1 3DG

18 March 2020

Dear Fergus,

### **Closure of schools – need for childcare for the food and drink supply chain**

Thanks for all the hard work that you and your officials are doing at this stretching time. I am writing to ask that you designate food and drink supply chain and manufacturing workers as essential for the purpose of prioritising available school and childcare places.

As directed by our members, the most pressing concern FDF Scotland has at the moment is around the impact of school closures on our essential workforce and as a result on our food security. Our food and drink manufacturers are keeping the nation fed in the most challenging of circumstances and we must do all we can to support them to continue to do so.

With the decisions taken today to close schools, food and drink manufacturers are deeply concerned about how they will maintain essential production in the coming weeks and protect their staff. We have surveyed our members over the last few days and over 8 in 10 said that their key concern was maintaining production levels if a substantial number of staff are not available for work. This has now become even more acute.

Unlike food retail and hospitality, many of our production and technical roles in factories rely on specific skills – workers cannot be easily moved either for reasons of geography or ability. In some factories, agency workers had already been in short supply before the pandemic and the efficient, cost-effective nature of our supply chains means there is little flexibility.

I am therefore asking for you to designate the food and drink manufacturing employees in factories – and the supply chain that supports them - as essential for the purposes of prioritising available school and childcare places. We will be happy to work with you on what that should look like, and also to support new ideas from businesses – such as childcare facilities on their premises when that is possible and appropriate.

I attached the full details of our survey (UK level but with 34% of respondents having Scottish factories) and would be delighted to expand further on this with you or colleagues.

Yours,

**David Thomson**

**CEO, FDF Scotland**