

BUSINESSHQ

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Need for speed puts enterprise on frontline of Covid-19 response

By Victoria Masterson



SPEED will forever be a defining theme of 2020.

One World **Health** Organisation statistic certain to be repeated in history books is that it took more than three months to reach the first 100,000 confirmed cases worldwide of Covid-19. But less than one week for the number to double from 500,000 to a million.

In response, hospitals have been created in days instead of months or years. The first 1,000-bed hospital in Wuhan was built in just eight days as part of China's efforts to fight the **coronavirus**.

In **Scotland**, construction of the new NHS Louisa Jordan at Glasgow's Scottish Event Campus (SEC) is being completed, just two weeks after work began. Speaking to BBC Scotland's Good Morning Scotland programme earlier this month, the Scottish Government's national clinical director, Jason Leitch, said he was astonished by the speed of development, not just at the Louisa Jordan, but across the whole health and social care system.

"We've redesigned the Scottish national health service in three weeks," Mr Leitch said. "We've doubled intensive care in two weeks."

More than 400 contractors have been working alongside nearly 150 NHS Scotland clinicians and operational staff to establish the new hospital. The main contractors involved in the construction are Balfour Beatty, GRAHAM, Kier Group and Robertson Group.

The Nightingale hospitals are a bright spot for the construction industry. The sector is predicted to decline in Scotland by up to 50% if restrictions similar to those currently in force continue for a three-month period, according to the Fraser of Allander Institute at the University of Strathclyde. Across Scotland, the research unit is also predicting a sharp drop in GDP of between 20 and 25%.

This is trumped by the huge 35% drop in UK output predicted this week by the government's Office for Budget Responsibility – if the lockdown lasts three months followed by a partial lifting for three months. The hope is that the rapid decline will be followed by a rapid bounceback.

Royal Bank of Scotland also warned this week that private sector **business** activity across Scotland in March had dropped at its fastest rate in the 22-year history of its Purchasing Managers' Index.

The speed of decline in economic data has made grim reading since the pandemic began.

But the speed of innovation – and collaboration – has also been remarkable. One of the latest announcements involves the alliance of big tech rivals Apple and Google to develop contact-tracing apps for those infected with coronavirus.

“All of us at Apple and Google believe there has never been a more important moment to work together to solve one of the world's most pressing problems,” the partners said in a statement on Good Friday.

On the same day, at the daily Downing Street press briefing, UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock was telling the nation: “Going into this crisis, we didn't have a domestic PPE (personal protective equipment) manufacturing industry, so we've created one.”

He thanked **companies** including Burberry, Rolls-Royce, McLaren, Ineos and Diageo, who are creating gowns, visors and hand sanitiser

Last week Mr Hancock also announced the creation of three new ‘Lighthouse’ mega-labs, including one in Glasgow, to be opened within a fortnight. These will “dramatically” increase the number of coronavirus tests that can take place, to help reach the government's target of 100,000 tests a day by the end of April.

At the launch of the first lab in Milton Keynes, the UK's national testing co-ordinator, Professor John Newton, said: “The progress made to increase coronavirus testing across the UK in just a matter of weeks is truly remarkable. I am proud to see the country pulling together in unprecedented times to achieve unprecedented things. The Lighthouse Labs will be the largest network of diagnostic labs in British history.”

In Scotland, engineering firm Plexus and defence specialist Raytheon UK are helping to produce 10,000 ventilators for the NHS in an initiative led by engineering services group Babcock International. The move will involve manufacturing facilities in Kelso, Livingston and Glenrothes in response to the UK government's request for help from industry.

Scottish minister for trade, investment and innovation, Ivan McKee, said of the initiative: “Ventilators are hugely complex devices that normally require time to be designed and tested, so the speed with which Plexus and Raytheon UK, as part of the Babcock supply chain, have responded to push forward sizeable production is commendable. They and their staff are working round the clock and are a credit to Scottish manufacturing.”

At other facilities around Scotland, Scotch whisky distillers are switching from drinks production to supply the NHS with 50 million litres of hand sanitiser over the next two months.

North sea firms are also looking at how their technology could be used to help produce breathing apparatus and life support equipment, according to industry body Subsea UK.

Outwith the race to supply PPE, ‘business as usual’ has rapidly evolved into new ways of working. Like Business Gateway offering its support via virtual appointments, online workshops and video calls with advisers. Or Edinburgh-based events business FutureX Innovation launching Impact Summit Online as a new virtual forum.

“We must still come together; to share ideas, foster community, learn from and help each other – even if we can't do so physically,” the organisers said.

Scotland's legacy of invention is apocryphal and has given the world the telephone, television, penicillin, anaesthetic and modern economics – to name a few.

The innovations that emerge from the battle to beat Covid-19 may not be as headline-grabbing or enduring. But, collectively, every breakthrough – however quiet and unseen – will help to make a decisive difference –

quickly.

To quote Scotland's national clinical director Jason Leitch again (speaking on the 3rd of April): "Yesterday, the medical physics department in [NHS] Greater Glasgow and Clyde converted 100 anaesthetic machines into ventilators. That sounds as though that would be a simple thing, like plumbing in a washing machine. It is not. It's a very complex engineering endeavour. So everybody has stepped up here – and I'm hugely grateful to all of them."

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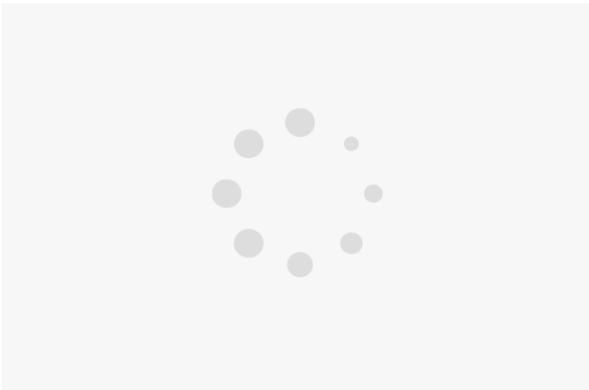


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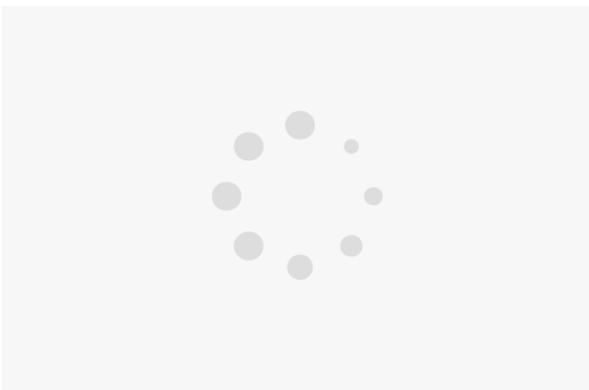


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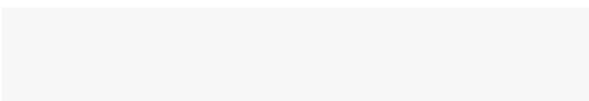
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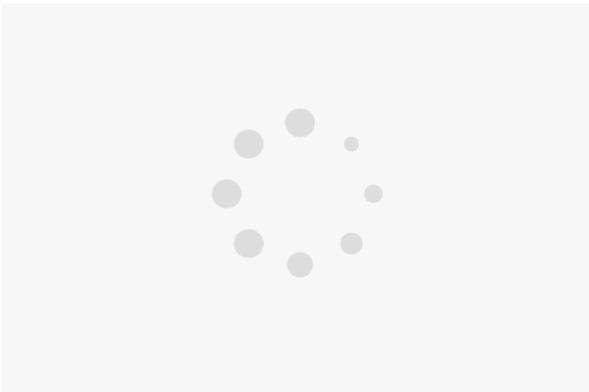


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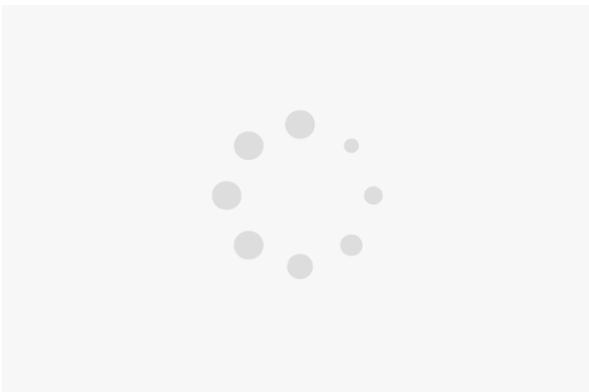
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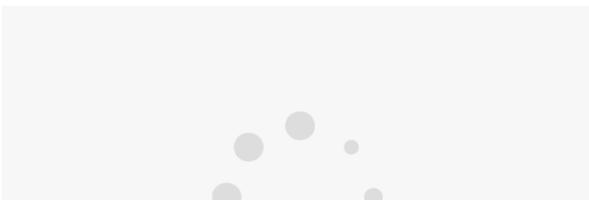


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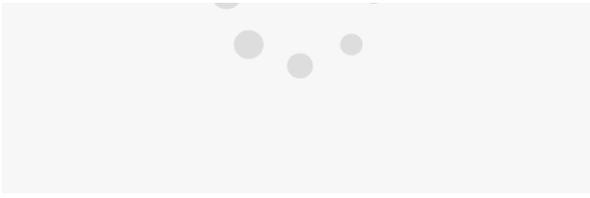


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