The way the industry responded to the coronavirus crisis should give us all reason for optimism for the future, according to Ewen Rose.

The champion of industry reform Dame Judith Hackitt believes our sector should take inspiration from the way it has responded to the COVID-19 emergency. She said it had demonstrated it was capable of making the changes it must to improve building safety and quality.

The chair of the Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety commissioned by the government in the wake of the Grenfell fire disaster said the sector had demonstrated it was “capable of massive change at pace” and had been able to dump old practices quickly “without compromising safety or quality”.

Dame Judith was the guest presenter on one of BESAs daily webinars where she urged everyone to emulate the methods used to deliver vital projects for the NHS and other essential services where “collaboration and co-operation replaced fragmentation and adversarial behaviour”.

It was collaboration between engineers and military planners that enabled the transformation of the Excel exhibition centre in London into the 4,000 bed Nightingale Hospital in just 10 days; while 60 Ghurkhas helped to convert Birmingham’s NEC into a similar facility in less than two weeks. Several other NHS projects have been accelerated with Laing O’Rourke completing work on a new super hospital in Wales over a year early.

GUARD OF HONOUR

In a wonderful role reversal, it was NHS staff doing the clapping when they formed a guard of honour for the contractors who delivered a 300-bed emergency coronavirus hospital in Glasgow in under two weeks. The 400-strong team overseen by contractors Balfour Beatty, Graham, Kier and Robertson converted the Scottish Events Campus (SEC) into the NHS Louisa Jordan Hospital.

Scottish Health Secretary Jeane Freeman said everyone who worked on the £43m project was “an inspiration to us all”.

BESA affiliate member BSS also went the extra mile to support that project. Its Glasgow branch received an urgent order from the hospital team for three pumps on the Thursday before the Easter weekend. These were due on site the following morning (Good Friday), but the holiday weekend meant it was impossible to guarantee delivery via the usual routes.

So, BSS regional sales director Craig Graham contacted the supplier and they arranged to meet halfway between Glasgow and Sunderland to collect the pumps. Craig then delivered to the NHS site first thing on the Friday morning, thus avoiding any delay to this critical install. “Definitely a Good Friday,” according to BSS.

Bristol-based Priddy Engineering Services played a key part in the delivery of their home city’s 350-bed NHS Nightingale Hospital, which
was opened by Prince Edward on the University of the West of England Frenchay campus just three weeks after work began.

Priddy managing director Andrew Blunsdon was contacted by main contractor Kier to help out as the speed and size of the project was proving a major challenge.

“I drove straight to the site with a handful of people and started to look at what could be done,” said Andrew. “At this stage, we had no brief no design and no formal approval to start anything just a desire to deliver a facility in Bristol that would support the NHS in the area.

“We rose to the challenge and provided around 30 electricians and pipfitters to help deliver the services.”

Priddy was heavily involved with the infrastructure including key electrical works and provided a team of site supervisors to help the main contractor manage the whole process.

“We turned an exhibition hall into a critical care bed hospital including full intensive care facilities at the bed head: oxygen vacuum and suction nurse call examination lights with full functionality,” recalls Andrew. “We also delivered power, data, nursing stations, new external medical gasses, refrigerated areas for mortuary, sluice and other support rooms and UPS battery back-up generators.

“It’s amazing what the construction industry can do when there is no bureaucracy,” he adds.

The company’s contracts manager Martyn Stephens said the combined effort was better than anything else he had witnessed during his 35 years in the industry.

GREATER RECOGNITION

The company makes the excellent point that ventilation and ductwork cleaning engineers might not meet the public’s definition of key workers, but they deserve greater recognition for the crucial role they are playing in the battle against the virus.

“Hygiene is paramount in hospitals and although the NHS cleaning staff are doing everything they can to ensure the wards and operating theatres are clean – there are some areas which require expert cleaning such as ventilation systems,” the company says.

To disinfect the systems, System Hygienics uses a ‘fogging’ process to disinfect the area using a purogene solution. This ensures that the virus is suppressed so it can’t reproduce inside the ventilation system. Owner and md, Mark Poultnsey, thanked the engineers who had put themselves at risk to carry out this work.

“The chance to help our NHS and contribute to saving lives has given us a real sense of purpose,” he said. “We feel incredibly humbled to enable the NHS to continue their services and give them the assurance they need. I am so very proud of our team. It’s a difficult time for all, so the fact they are putting themselves at risk to help others is phenomenal,” he said.

Interserve Construction was the principal contractor on NHS Nightingale Hospital, Birmingham and worked alongside the Ghurkas. Strategic account director Colin Hamilton said it was “an astonishing achievement” to deliver two million square feet of floor space, 64 miles of electrical cable and have 400 employees working over 86,000 hours – sometimes 16 hours a day.

“I am so pleased to be involved in an important and monumental undertaking, the likes of which I have never seen in my 31 years at Interserve,” says Colin. “The thanks >>

Andrew Blunsdon
Priddy Managing Director
“Our kitchen extract fire risk control cleaning service has virtually ground to a halt, due to the fact that most restaurants are not trading and, therefore, there is no grease/fire risk to be controlled,” said managing director Gary Nicholls.

Keeping medical staff safe has been a major pre-occupation and Kent-based Farmwood M&E was able to help out by donating a Radic8 clean air unit to Royal Southants Hospital in Southampton. According to Dr Geoff Higenbottam, this has been crucial in keeping his specialist clinic operating.

VIRAL LOAD

“Thanks to the installation of our clean air tech device, we are reducing the possible viral load in our working space and, in turn, limiting the risk of cross infection in an area where multiple consultants work in close proximity,” said Dr Higenbottam.

“If there was any cross infection of our consultants that would result in an immediate reduction in service provision for our patients.”

Nathan Wood is managing director of Farmwood and chair of the BESA Health & Wellbeing in Buildings group (see pages 4 and 5). He also happens to be Dr Higenbottam’s cousin!

Members have also been finding innovative ways to diversify and put their expertise to wider use. For example, Essex-based Swiftclean saw its business hit hard by the closure of the restaurant sector.

“Swiftclean is also addressing growing concern about the risk of legionella bacteria build-up in the water systems of empty or partially-occupied commercial buildings.

“The number of people who are now working from home combined with rising ambient temperatures as we move from spring to summer will substantially increase the risk of legionnaires’ disease, which typically has a 12% fatality rate,” said Gary.

“We received several enquiries and orders for general ventilation system cleaning in the NHS, particularly where Covid19 wards were being created,” said Gary.

BESA also compiled a list of members able to provide essential work to the NHS at short notice. Visit www.theBESA.com/covid19 for details.