# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE** | **Covid-19 – Recognition of Welsh Businesses** |
| **DATE** | **23 September 2020** |
| **BY** | **Ken Skates MS, Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales** |

I would like to thank Welsh businesses for the pivotal role they have played in keeping Wales safe and in supporting the Welsh economy during the Coronavirus pandemic.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have seen businesses throughout Wales step up to the challenge of helping us all deal with Coronavirus. The efforts of Welsh business have been quite incredible. Many firms have adapted their usual ways of working, from the products they make day-to-day, to thinking innovatively about how they can protect and save lives threatened by the virus.

We have seen businesses responding to our call for help to make PPE. The "can-do" attitude among businesses in Wales has made them an essential part of the PPE supply chain during the pandemic. Wales became self-sufficient in the production of scrubs for the first time when six companies switched or expanded their production capabilities. Distillers produced much needed hand sanitiser and independent food and drink sellers kept local supply chains flowing and provided meals for frontline NHS staff. In all, over 30 companies repurposed their manufacturing to support the production of hand sanitiser, 25 companies made face visors and 30 provided decontamination services.

As the wearing of masks becomes more prevalent and compulsory in some settings, 9 companies have invested in lines to produce clinical and non-clinical grade masks.  Last month, the Life Sciences Hub Wales announced it had supported [Hardshell](https://hardshell.co.uk/), a global leader in the production of protective defensive equipment such as body armour and demining suits, to secure product certifications that will allow it to become the first in the UK to produce medical-grade face masks for use by the NHS, from a site in Cardiff. The site will be the only facility in Britain to manufacture FFP3 type respirators, which are currently imported rather than produced on home soil. Wales was also part of the UK wide ventilator challenge and I am delighted the Advanced Manufacturing and Research Centre Cymru in Broughton was adapted to support this work.

We estimate there are now five times the level of PPE stock held by NHS Wales when compared with the start of the pandemic and we are moving much closer to self-reliance for the vast majority of PPE items. Having Welsh businesses involved in production has provided a greater sense of assurance with products we can rely on, on our doorstep.

So many businesses have invested time, energy and money to ensure they can operate as safely as possible. As businesses have re-opened, they have openly engaged with us. The feedback we have received has helped us shape our advice and together with representative bodies we have produced guidelines to help sectors reopen. The precautions and measures businesses have put in place to reduce risks and make people, including employees, feel safe to return to them has been most impressive. They have shown great discretion, responsibility and flexibility, particularly in helping to shield the vulnerable or those living with them.

With the principles of the Economic Contract sitting at the heart of our Economic Resilience Fund, our resolute commitment to driving investment with a social purpose has seen an increase in commitment from businesses to the principles of the Contract, with over 4,000 now committing to the principles, up from 385 before Covid-19. Through the Economic Contract we are both signalling and securing commitment from business to move us onto a low carbon future, increase the level of skills in the economy and increase Fair Work to move away from the burden and stigma of a low skill, low wage economy.

I know our businesses will continue their excellent work in keeping Wales safe and protecting our economy over the coming months. The Welsh Government will do its upmost to support them.