



Senior Pattern Cutting Technician Kim Smith - a member of the Northumbria University team involved in producing thousands of NHS scrubs and gowns (credit: Justin Marshall)

Apr 23, 2020 09:00 BST

Northumbria University supports NHS by producing thousands of clinical gowns

Thousands of much needed clinical gowns and scrubs are being produced by a team of volunteers at Northumbria University's School of Design, for use by NHS staff across the North East.

The University has teamed up with Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust to find a solution to the current shortage of hospital gowns needed by staff treating Covid-19 patients.

The School of Design is the base for Northumbria University's Fashion degree programmes and home to a range of industry standard facilities, including over 60 professional grade sewing machines and pattern cutting tools.

With the campus currently closed to students due to the Covid-19 outbreak, Northumbria staff have been in discussions with the NHS to find ways of utilising the University's spaces and facilities, while observing social distancing and safe working, to contribute to the fight against Coronavirus.

Over the coming weeks Northumbria's skilled Fashion Design technicians and academics will work alongside Northumbria Healthcare staff and volunteers, all of who have previous experience of working in textile industry, to make clinical gowns from NHS approved PPE patterns.

With 3,000 metres of the specialist material required sourced and delivered by the NHS last week, a team of pattern cutters have been hard at work cutting the material to size. The pieces are then being sewn together by volunteer machinists working alongside, and overseen by, Northumbria's design technicians.

Just four days after setting up production last week, and after one day of sewing, the first sets of scrubs were collected on last Friday morning (17 April), with some delivered to St Oswald's Hospice in Newcastle and the rest going to Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust.

The Northumbria team have also digitised the pattern for the gowns and shared this with other potential manufacturers across the country, making it easier for others to help with the production of the gowns and scrubs.

The safety of the volunteers is key, with stringent risk assessments carried out to ensure the health of those taking part is protected and the two-metre rule strictly adhered to.

The effort is one of a number of initiatives coordinated by Northumbria in partnership with local NHS Trusts, with the aim of harnessing the University's facilities and expertise to support the NHS.

As Professor Andrew Wathey, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive of Northumbria University explains: "In response to the national fight against

Covid-19, here at Northumbria we have been exploring ways to use both our world-class teaching and research facilities, and the skills and experience of our colleagues.

“Through our links with Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust we identified the opportunity to provide much needed protective equipment for NHS frontline staff using the skills, experience and leadership of our design staff and the use of our School of Design facilities.

“The response from colleagues across the University over the past few weeks has been extraordinary and this is an excellent example of the University working at pace in innovative ways to really make a difference.”

Dr Heather Robson is the Head of Northumbria University’s School of Design and has coordinated the University’s involvement. She added: “We’re so pleased that the facilities we have here at Northumbria and the skills of our staff are going to be used in such a direct way.” “This is going to have an immediate impact – the first 3,000 metres of material will make around 1,500 clinical gowns which will go straight to those staff who need it right here in the North East.”

Executive director of finance at Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, Paul Dunn, said: “We are absolutely delighted to be working in partnership with Northumbria University and would like to thank them for all they are doing. Their innovative approach and can-do attitude has been second to none.

“We are receiving PPE through the national NHS supply chain all the time but this extra support is vital to keeping stocks flowing as we use thousands of pieces of equipment every day across the region.

“I would like to pay tribute to many other business and organisations which have supported us during these difficult times. We have been overwhelmed and so touched by this and it’s making a real impact. It’s true what people say – we really are a region that sticks together through the toughest times.

“We hope this also has the added benefit of supporting our local economy - something we all feel passionately about. Ensuring as much local production as possible is important now and for the future.”

In another example of regional collaboration, Team Valley-based luxury curtain manufacturer Jeffrey Carr Ltd has also joined forces with Northumbria University and Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust in the effort to produce gowns and scrubs.

With 460 metres of Northumbria's original batch of 3,000 metres delivered to Jeffrey Carr's Team Valley-based workshop last week, the company's team of experienced machinists have set to work making sets of scrubs in three different sizes. The first batch of around 250 sets is due to be completed and collected this week.

Business and organisations who are able to supply or donate PPE can contact the region's central PPE hub by emailing ngccg.ppe@nhs.net or visiting nhsjoinourjourney.org.uk/key-documents-and-briefings/ppe/

Find out more about Northumbria University's [School of Design](#).

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