

# UFI Awards

## ExCeL London

# EXCeL LONDON

## Sustainable Development Award entry

### Societal impact through working with the NHS on Covid-19

## Background

**M**ore so than at any point in recent history, the last 18 months have required the world and its communities to come together and support one and other.

From making sacrifices to protect each other's health, to checking in on loved ones left isolated by lockdowns, so many people have given so much out of care for their neighbours, colleagues, friends, relatives and strangers.

But around the world, none have given more to protect and care for others than health workers. In the UK, fighting the pandemic has been a gruelling, relentless experience for frontline NHS staff.

And while, in the very grand scheme of things, the role played by ExCeL has been small, to have been able to support the NHS and the London community in its fight against Covid - both as a temporary hospital and as a vaccination centre - is something we're incredibly proud of.

The versatility of the venue is accustomed to transformations that deliver amazing moments, but this was a new challenge altogether. As the UK went into a full national lockdown, the NHS approached ExCeL about the possibility of the venue becoming a temporary hospital—and very quickly. Within a couple of days, the NHS, the army, ExCeL staff and dozens of contractors



were working around the clock to turn the halls into a hospital which would ease the growing burden on the NHS and buy it time to increase capacity in existing hospital wards.

In the fourth quarter of 2020, as the development of vaccinations neared their final stages, the NHS again approached ExCeL for support, with the aim of the venue becoming one of the first large scale vaccination centres, capable of welcoming thousands of people everyday for their job, part of a programme which would turn out to be a central success in the country's Covid battle.

This submission details the work involved in that partnership, in particular the role played by ExCeL, and the social impact it has had at such an extraordinary time.

## Key highlights of this submission:

- Fifty-eight ExCeL staff worked as part of a 360-strong team that built the UK's first NHS Nightingale hospital in just nine days at the end of March 2020.
- The hospital, which opened as a 500 bed facility in April, had the potential, if needed to look after 4,000 patients with 25,000 staff. Thankfully, it wasn't ever used at a level close to that.
- It was intended, as an insurance policy, to buy time to add additional capacity within mainstream hospitals. It was put on standby in May before being reopened on January 11, with 64 beds.
- On the same day, one of the UK's first largescale vaccination centres opened at ExCeL.
- Sited in the venue's North Halls, the facility is one of seven nationwide vaccine centres.

# Nature and general objectives

As the pandemic spread through Northern Europe in the first quarter of 2020, arrived in the UK and began placing a huge toll upon the NHS and its intensive care wards and hospitals, it became clear that - as mass gatherings were banned - the versatility of ExCeL had the potential to support the country's fight with the disease. After being approached by the NHS to help on March 20, the ExCeL team leant its full support to the health service, providing the facility for use first as a hospital, and later as a vaccine centre. The primary objective of the hospital was to reduce the burden on mainstream hospitals until they had increased capacity—and later to play a key role in vaccinating as many people as possible in the shortest possible period of time. It was clear that this would be the best way to support the local community and society more generally, at a time of great need.

## NHS Nightingale

Never has the versatility of ExCeL London been tested in quite the way it was during the initial response to the coronavirus crisis.

At the end of March, in just nine days, ExCeL was transformed into a hospital which - if needed - could care for 4,000 patients.

ExCeL was to be the first of a UK-wide network of Nightingale hospitals, setting the blueprint for facilities which would be built in other venues across the country.

As the country went into lockdown to suppress the spread of Covid-19, hundreds of NHS staff, army personnel and private contractors joined ExCeL staff to pitch in and construct a

temporary hospital that would be available to the health service if its existing hospitals in the capital were to become overwhelmed - as was being forecast.

Converting ExCeL's halls - which just weeks before had been hosting conferences and exhibitions - into a hospital equipped, initially, with 500 beds, complete with ventilators, oxygen feeds, sinks and IT facilities in such a short period of time was described by HRH the Prince of Wales, who formally opened the hospital, as "a spectacular and almost unbelievable feat of work in every sense".



## Timeline...

### March 21/22

The Government and planners visit ExCeL for a recce and to see if building a hospital is possible.

### March 23

The first news stories emerge that the NHS is considering turning ExCeL into a temporary coronavirus hospital.

### March 24

Matt Hancock, the Health & Social Care Secretary announces that ExCeL will become a temporary hospital

### April 3

HRH the Prince of Wales formally opens the hospital in a virtual ceremony outside the Pyramid entrance.

### April 7

First patient is admitted. Richce Worrall, ExCeL security, announces over tannoy that NHS Nightingale is operational.

## April 19

First patient is discharged and The Fox pub is opened as a pop-up Tesco for hospital staff.

## May 7

Last patient is discharged and operation "Hospital in a Box" begins

## January 11

The hospital is reopened with a much smaller capacity to help London hospitals. It treats non-Covid patients to keep as many beds free in main-stream hospitals for Covid patients at possible.

## March 8

The NHS announced that Nightingales are to be closed from April, with hospitals having successfully added 100,000 beds in the last year to cope with the pandemic.

## The role of ExCeL staff

ExCeL hosts 400 events per year and welcomes four million visitors through its doors. But for the venue's team, this was an unprecedented challenge, handling the requirements of many stakeholders in an urgent and rapidly changing situation. The team played its part by:

- keeping the venue and hospital secure
- attending to any issues with the building
- assisting with cleaning - particularly prior to build-up

- helping to manage signage
- arranging contracts and agreements
- engaging with local residents
- managing press/media enquiries
- helping to manage numerous vehicle movements on and off-site



The team kept track of 50,000 mentions of ExCeL in the world media, and more than 50,000 on social media



installed, inspected and maintained 260 mains cables



installed 406 sinks in the wards



dealt with 152 requests for printed signage - with some print runs up to 1300 in quantity

## Outcomes

The NHS Nightingale London at ExCeL treated 54 patients during the first wave, saved lives and bought the NHS time to substantially increase capacity within ICUs at existing London hospitals. It is good news that the Nightingale did not treat as many patients as it had prepared to. On announcing the closure of the nationwide network of Nightingales, an NHS spokesperson said: "The Nightingale Hospitals have been on hand as the ultimate insurance policy in case existing hospital capacity was overwhelmed but, as we have learned more about coronavirus, and how to successfully treat Covid, existing hospitals have adapted to significantly surge critical care capacity and even in the winter wave - which saw more than 100,000 patients with the virus admitted in a single month - there were beds available across the country. Thank you to the many NHS staff and partners who worked so hard to set the Nightingales up so swiftly, and of course the public who followed the guidance on controlling the spread of the virus and helped to prevent hospitals being overwhelmed."



## Feedback from stakeholders

The opening of the Nightingale at ExCeL attracted a lot of publicity, with around 50,000 media mentions through March to May. And there were plenty of messages of support and thanks from key stakeholders. Letters were received from the Matt Hancock, Sadiq Khan, the Mayor of London, Rokhsana Fiaz, the Mayor of Newham and there were some 500 letters and social media messages directed at staff, thanking them for their work with the NHS. Even more heartening though, was a board of messages from relatives of patients put up in the hospital itself. There were more than a dozen messages of thanks from families, aimed at all those working in the hospital.

## Key numbers

# 1<sup>st</sup>

temporary hospital to be built in a conference centre in the UK during the crisis. Others would follow later.

# 58

members of the ExCeL team worked on the project throughout .

# 9

days to build. The venue was transformed and opened after just nine days of work.

# 4000

beds. The hospital initially opened with 500 beds, but had the potential to scale up to 4,000 if necessary. This is the equivalent to 10 district hospitals.

# The vaccination centre

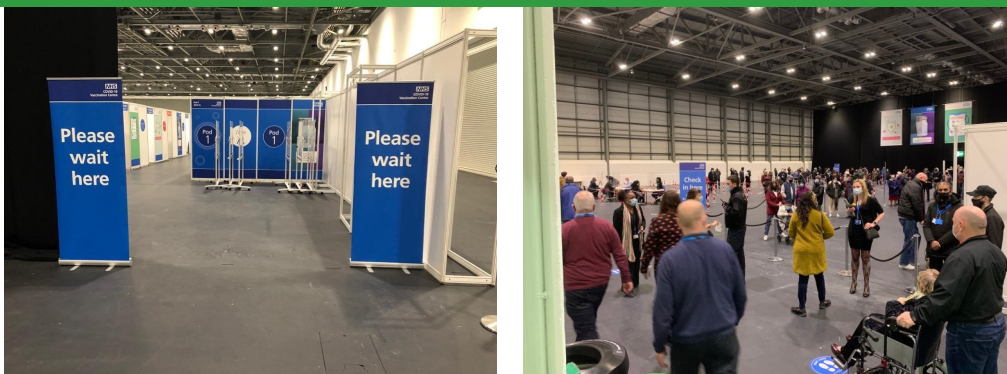
During the final months of 2020, hugely positive news about vaccine development began to emerge, with the UK's Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency approving two vaccines for rollout by the end of December. At this point, we were again approached by the NHS, which had the challenge of distributing the vaccine to as many people as possible, in the shortest amount of time. ExCeL would become the Newham Vaccination Centre, and it was announced on January 11 as one of seven nationwide vaccine centres. This would put the venue right at the heart of the UK's fight back against the virus, one which looks set to herald in a return to near normal throughout 2021.

But with no precedent or manual for quickly building vaccine centres capable of immunising hundreds, potentially thousands, of people per day, it meant the ExCeL team had to work closely with

the NHS to configure a set up that enabled a safe, seamless flow of people.

Through late December and early January, three pods were built by the ExCeL team and its partners, complete with signage, and the potential to upscale the operation if needed. Careful consideration was given to ensure that the experience had by guests was the best it could be; Costa Coffee reopened, wheelchairs were made available for those less mobile and a team of volunteers was recruited by the NHS to help guide people through the process. As more vaccines become available and as those receiving the vaccine get younger, it is likely that ExCeL will become busier through Spring.

At the time of submission, 25 million people in the UK have already been vaccinated - fast approaching the next target of 32million by April 15.



## Outcomes

The venue opened as the Newham Vaccination Centre on January 11th and has already vaccinated thousands of Londoners. Several members of the ExCeL team worked around the clock to prepare the centre and work with the NHS to make last minute tweaks and reconfigurations. The team's innovative ideas and experience have helped the NHS team to manage the space from a message and wayfinding perspective, which has won plaudits for the managing director of the vaccination centre, from her colleagues running other centres, who have looked at the centre at ExCeL as an example of best practice.

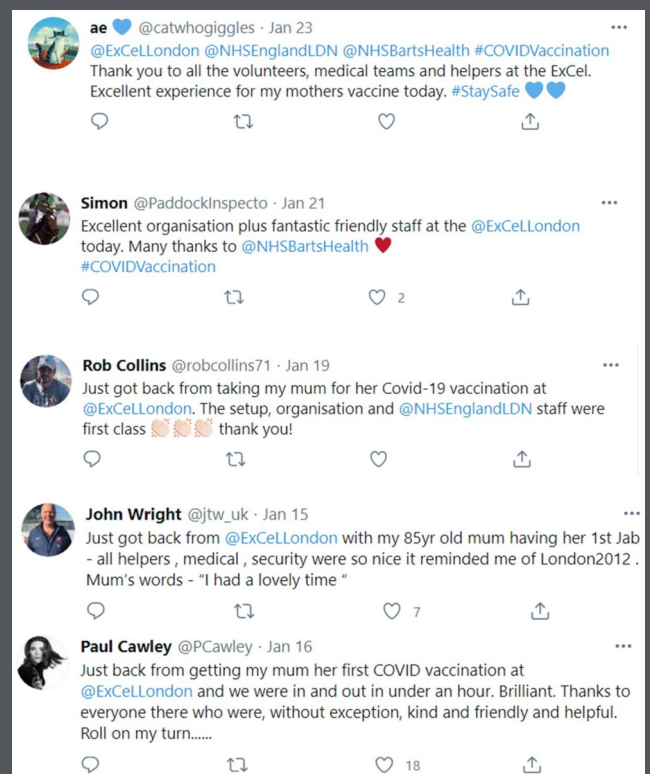
## Submission conclusion

The ExCeL team is extremely proud to have been able to support and work with the NHS throughout the pandemic, providing a facility, at rapid speed, to ease the burden on hospitals and then to be one of the first nationwide vaccination centres in the UK. There is no doubt that through both of these initiatives, lives have been saved under ExCeL's roof.

On opening the Nightingale in April 2020, HRH the Prince of Wales said: "I need hardly say that the name of this hospital could not have been more aptly chosen. Florence Nightingale, The Lady with the Lamp, brought hope and healing to thousands in their darkest hour. In this dark time, this place will be a shining light." We certainly hope that ExCeL has proved to be exactly that during the country's battle with this devastating virus - delivering enormous societal impact.

## Feedback

Below are examples of just some of the feedback published on social media by those who have visited ExCeL for a vaccine:



the NHS to configure a set up that enabled a safe, seamless flow of people.