

# Are EU procurement rules to blame for the NHS's PPE crisis?

*Graham Andrews, owner of Hydro Project Engineering Ltd., explains how bureaucratic EU procurement requirements may have contributed to the current PPE shortage in the NHS. Why are firms' offers of help being repeatedly ignored by the British government?*

I have been watching with some interest, but also much dismay, the number of companies that have been clamouring to produce much-needed PPE, only to be rebuffed or worse ignored by those we are told desperately need these items.

The problem is not new. It is a result of EU rules on procurement that have been dogging the industry for a few years now.

For decades, suppliers of products would deal with a buying department based in the company or organisation being supplied. They would build trust and relationships with these people, as I have done with my customers for many years.

Sadly, this has all been eroded over the last few years by what we are told is 'standardisation'. We now have to register with outside 'procurement' companies not in the control of our customers. I am told that the idea is that these companies vet your procedures and ensure you are not using slave labour and are being environmentally responsible. This is claimed to make for a 'level playing field' for suppliers, and to ensure cowboy companies are excluded.

These days most if not all of my business comes from Local

Authorities, the NHS and government departments. I have had to register with the two main players in this game: ProContract in England and Wales (registered as Due North Ltd), and Public Contracts Scotland. These companies publish information regarding contracts, goods and services required by my customers in the UK. They will only accept quotes and offers from companies registered with them.

I have councils that I have supplied services to for over twenty years that insisted that we register with these organisations before we could continue to trade with them, despite us being the only company in the UK offering what they need.

I see money wasted on a daily basis – and not just small amounts. I know of a number of reliable companies that could have supplied equipment of the same standard and quality that have not been considered because they were not on the list. In a couple of cases the savings would have amounted to over 40%.

So I suspect that the companies doing their best to assist with supplying PPE at this time of emergency and need are running into the bureaucratic jobsworths saying, 'Sorry, but your company is not on our list!' This is an occurrence I see all too often, and it is a disease that has spread throughout industry as well.

The Derbyshire-based garment manufacturer David Nieper is just one company that immediately contacted the government to offer to supply PPE when the problem of shortage became known. Yet it did not receive a response. Luckily, individual NHS Trusts are taking matters into their own hands, as managing director Christopher Nieper relates:

*'[A]s soon as we knew there was a need for PPE, we offered to help the government. We haven't yet taken an order from the government, but now many entrepreneurial NHS Trusts and hospitals are taking PPE into their own hands. As it*

*stands, we're fulfilling direct orders for 10 large hospitals in Leicestershire and Derbyshire including Royal Derby Hospital, Leicester General Hospital, and Leicester Royal Infirmary. We hope to help more if possible.'*

The media is missing the mood of the people at this time – we don't want the arguments and blame that we have at the time of an election. What we need is a national effort from all that are able to assist in this time of crisis. This means we must set aside procurement formalities to get stock moving.