

Plymouth Manufacturers' Group Chairman's Review of the Year 2020

(figures rhs will correspond to the accompanying slideshow)

Following the completion of my first full year as Chair of the PMG, a year which has been 1
like no other, it is my duty as usual to present to you our *Review of the Year 2020*. This
script is accompanied by a slideshow. (Pl. note references alongside).

As I say, for reasons that are obvious, 2020 was unlike any year that has gone before in 2
our organisation's forty plus years of history. I'm going to present my review in two parts:
'pre-pandemic' and 'post-pandemic'.

Pre-pandemic
January In January, the year started normally enough as we heard that Plymouth had, once again, 3
maintained its title as the English southern city with the highest concentration of its
workforce employed in manufacturing. At 11.7 per cent it remained well ahead of its
nearest rivals Portsmouth and Luton (at 9.5% and 9.1% respectively). (Statistics courtesy
of the Centre for Cities – Cities Outlook 2020).

We also received at the beginning of the year, provisional figures released by the Office 4
for National Statistics (ONS) that revealed that Gross Value Added (GVA) from
manufacturing in Plymouth had stood firm between 2017 and 2018, despite all the
economic uncertainty surrounding Brexit. It stood at £879M just down slightly from the
previous year's total of £882M. This represents 16% of the total Plymouth economy
which is valued at £5.44Bn. This compares with manufacturing's share of the economy
nationally which is slightly less than 10%.

February The following month, on 6th February during a PMG Committee Meeting, under 'Any 5
Other Business' members, without portent, discussed in passing what contingency
planning they had (if any) for the growing coronavirus.

Later that month, the PMG held its Apprentice Jobs Fair in Plymouth Guildhall which 6
attracted over forty exhibitors and more than 900 visitors and which was considered a great
success by all concerned. This was the sixth such event and the fourth occasion that we had
partnered with local construction firms.

One innovation at this year's Jobs Fair was the awarding of prizes for PMG member 7
apprentices. Joint winners of the *Rising Star Apprentice* for 2020 were Felix Bowker from
Alderman Tooling who was studying for a level 3 mechanical manufacturing & engineering
apprenticeship with City College Plymouth and Rebecca McAllister from Plessey who was
pursuing a 5 year Plessey apprenticeship with City College Plymouth.

The winner of the *Manufacturing - Final Year Apprentice Award* for 2020 was Lewis Swatton 8
from Rittal-CSM who had completed a level 3 manufacturing & mechanical engineering
apprenticeship with City College. And last but not least, the winner of *the Business - Final
Year Apprentice Award 2020* was Laura Hamlyn who works for Princess Yachts and who
had completed a level 3 Business Administration apprenticeship with Exeter College.

Post-pandemic
March It was during the following month, that dramatic changes occurred when on 23rd March 8
the Prime Minister addressed the nation and said that due to the growing coronavirus
epidemic '*people will only be allowed to leave their home for very limited purposes*'.

As our lives changed, so did the PMG's method of operation. Face-to-face meetings had already been put on hold. A meeting of the Finance subgroup which was due to be hosted by accountants PKF Francis Clark earlier in March was first to be cancelled abruptly due to growing fears of the dangers of spreading the virus.

And so it was to continue, with no further subgroup meetings, indeed no meetings of any kind, being held in person for the rest of the year and on into the current year.

On 19th March the Secretary published the first of what was expected, initially, to be a short-lived series of covid-19 bulletins. By the end of the year, we were on edition number 16 and still counting. 9

It was during these early stages of the pandemic, that the PMG fulfilled an important role in lobbying both locally through the press and nationally through our ties with MakeUK for greater clarity in whether factories should remain open (this wasn't fully resolved until later the following month when the Secretary of State for Business eventually wrote an open letter to manufacturers recognising the critical role being played) and who it was who qualified for so-called 'key worker' status. Other issues at the time included: details about statutory sick pay and the availability of grants and an apparent lack of clarity over furloughing. 10

April

In April the PMG opened a Zoom account and that heralded the phenomenon of the virtual meeting. Whilst subgroup meetings were put on-hold, the group meetings of our larger members and Network members continued in their new virtual format. In fact, such was the desire to share information, these meetings were held more frequently than usual and with a greater number of attendees. 11

Our new style bulletins provided invaluable business information regarding frequent government announcements and published stories of members' support to the NHS locally; the efforts of several firms to assist with the production of PPE and even to help design and build ventilators for UK. Through their primary businesses, several members were engaged in critical support in a variety of ways, including direct to the health & medical sector or to supermarkets or to data centres that were having to manage a surge in remote home working. 12

Despite the adverse conditions, we kept up our support to schools and in April, as befitting the times, this year's *Young Enterprise* company that won the PMG-sponsored Quality Award received notice of their success by video conference. Stephanie Anderson, *Young Enterprise* Area Manager for Plymouth, West Devon & Cornwall made the award on the PMG's behalf to Phoenix who were behind an initiative entitled '*Footsteps of food*' and an interactive recipe book carefully designed to inspire young children to learn about the journey of the food they eat from our planet to their plate! 13

Throughout the period of the pandemic, the PMG has been a core member of a triumvirate of local business representative bodies that have been working closely with the Leader of the City Council in preparing an economic recovery plan known as '*Resurgam*', Latin for '*I shall rise again*'. The word is synonymous with Plymouth's wartime struggle when it appeared on a wooden sign over the bombed out St Andrew's Church during the Blitz. 14

May In May, members received a presentation from Stephen Phipson, CEO of Make UK. As lead of one of five national groups, Stephen was (and still is) regularly talking with Ministers, including the Business Secretary and was able to give an insight to the numerous support packages that had been put in place 15

June In June, members joined the University of Plymouth online in an engagement workshop and partnering forum to view and discuss the proposed *Engineering Design Facility*. The new facility represents a £50m investment by the University that will drive leading-edge innovation in the 4th industrial revolution. This was one example of the many ways in which members continued to collaborate with the University throughout the year, albeit slightly more muted than we would have envisaged some eight months earlier when both parties signed a Partnership Bond with one another. 16

Also during June, the PMG conducted a survey of members to help inform our work with the Local Authority in planning a local response to the economic crisis resulting from the pandemic. The results of the wide-ranging enquiry revealed that over three-quarters of all firms had furloughed staff and over half of those firms expected to go on to incur redundancies with 10% being the most likely proportion to be lost. Apprentice recruitment was considered likely to be a casualty of the pandemic in all but the largest of member firms. Nevertheless, the vast majority stayed open and the wheels of industry continued to turn.

August/
November As the year wore on, the focus returned once again to Brexit or to be more precise the end of the transition period which was 31st December. Our subgroups began to re-engage in virtual form and we held meetings in August and again in November when a PMG record of 48 people attended a Zoom session. 17

October In October, we officially launched our new interactive map website initiative- www.PlymouthMakes.co.uk Created for young people, their families, and teachers, the website showcases some of our manufacturing members and the amazing products they make. Visitors can find information about the local manufacturing industry, the exciting apprenticeships available, latest news and real-life career stories, and even have educational fun with quizzes and worksheets in our evolving learning resources section. 18

Covid-19 saw a number of annual PMG events either curtailed or completely cancelled. These included the regular *Year in Industry* competition; our summer conference and the *Christmas Lecture*. Hopefully, all will return again in 2021, although events in the short term such as the Jobs Fair is inevitably going to be held virtually.

In conclusion, whilst we've experienced a year like no other, the PMG has hopefully proven its worth. We've kept members informed at a critical time; discussed matters of concern and represented our sector's interest. We've continued to plough on with our work with schools and have collaborated with the local authority and the LEP. We've played our part.

Stay positive and may all your tests remain negative. 19

Mike Snaith
PMG Chair