



Colston Engineering drives change with F4N

Colston's new managing director used the Fit For Nuclear programme to make sure the business is ready for coming opportunities.

Based in Chippenham, Wiltshire, Colston Engineering is a long-established engineering subcontractor serving clients in transport, defence and civil nuclear.

"Colston has been a jobbing engineering shop for a long time, so it's picked up what's come in," says Matthew Heaton, who joined as MD in autumn 2013. "We haven't really exploited it, but if a nuclear flask comes through the door, we can do that."

The company has worked with civil nuclear clients including Babcock, BNFL and Revis for some 20 years. Heaton realised the sector's growth opportunities after a meeting with John Ruddleston of the Manufacturing Advisory Service.

"John came down, had a walk around, and said we should think about Fit For Nuclear," Heaton recalls. "He explained how the market was going to grow and what the market was.

"F4N seemed to fit the capabilities we had, and there were a lot of management things in there that I wanted to do anyway, so it was handy as a tool to drive change through the organisation."

The initial online assessment was pretty straightforward, Heaton says. "I'd filled some similar things out before, so had a good idea of what it was looking for. I thought we'd be as honest as we possibly could with it, because there wasn't any point being otherwise. It said we were in the right ballpark, but needed to do some work."

The main areas identified for development were around skills and training.

"We were the classic small engineering company – everyone does everything, but no one had much formal training, particularly in management training," Heaton notes. "There was also a gap in how we cascaded down company objectives to each department and individual objectives for people."

The company was able to access external funding to support management and shopfloor supervisory training, and Heaton introduced regular meetings to drive improvements and make sure that all of Colston's 30-strong workforce were on board.



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"On any improvement programme, people do wonder why you're doing things, but if you don't do it you won't have a tomorrow," Heaton notes. "People did understand why we were doing this, that nuclear is a key market for growth, so it was important we were aligning ourselves with what the customer base is looking for."

Colston completed its F4N action plan in spring 2015, and is taking further steps identified by Nuclear AMRC supply chain specialist Martin Ride.

"Martin's audit gave us the next level to go for, to align ourselves with what guys like Alstom are going to require," Heaton says. "It's making sure these guys know who we are, and being involved in all the major programmes that are going on. We want to increase our customer base, and let people know that we're here and what we can do."

With Hinkley Point only 40 miles down the road, Colston is well positioned for supporting EDF's new build. Heaton is also working with the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority, and participating in its SME mentoring scheme.

"Colston is a great example of an established UK manufacturing business wanting to further develop in nuclear," Ride notes. "Matthew has made tremendous use of the F4N programme to drive improvement plans into the business, and to do much more."

F4N has been the big driver for change, Heaton says, by helping his team focus on the steps they needed to take to drive improvements and achieve the goal of doubling turnover in the next five years.

"It certainly got us moving faster and doing the right things – the things we probably wouldn't have done if we weren't incentivised to do it," he concludes. "Fit For Nuclear has really made us think about what we do, and what we're good at doing."

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Fit For Nuclear (F4N) helps UK manufacturers get ready to bid for work in the civil nuclear supply chain.

F4N
Fit For Nuclear

F4N was developed by the Nuclear AMRC with leading industrial partners, and is delivered in partnership with the Manufacturing Advisory Service, part of the government-backed Business Growth Service.

F4N also offers grants to companies based in England for business improvement or R&D projects.

Begin your F4N journey: namrc.co.uk/services/f4n



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