Case study

F4N
Fit For Nuclear

NUCLEAR AMRC
ADVANCED MANUFACTURING RESEARCH CENTRE

Hunt Thermal
ready for expansion

Heat exchanger specialist Hunt Thermal Technologies is developing new markets after driving business improvements with the Fit For Nuclear programme.

Based in Dukinfield, Greater Manchester, Hunt Thermal has decades of experience in producing complex heat transfer equipment and related fabrications from demanding metals.

In 2012, the business was acquired by Corac (now TP Group), an AIM-listed engineering group focusing on global energy and security markets. The following year, Corac brought in a new management team for Hunt Thermal led by managing director Neville Vickery.

"Coming into this business, it had been pretty neglected from a business improvement point of view," Vickery recalls. **"There were things which we'd started to do, but the joy of Fit For Nuclear was it pulled things together for us. It gave us the stimulus to really look at where we were and where we need to be."**

Hunt Thermal's F4N journey was led by the new business development manager, Stephen Fox. **"When we first looked at F4N, it looked very complicated and demanding, but after a few conversations with Martin Ride at the Nuclear AMRC it all fell into place,"** he says. **"It was very well supported, and was a very good sense check that we were going in the right direction."**

The results from the initial assessment and site visit were pleasingly positive. **"We were surprised, in that we didn't think we'd do as well as we did,"** says Vickery. **"We had been looking at things in a piecemeal way, but when we pulled it all together in one document we found we were better than we thought we were."**

Hunt Thermal scored extremely well in areas such as health and safety, but the assessment highlighted room for improvement in other areas such as employee engagement.

"A couple of areas that were highlighted, we'd already started some improvement initiatives," Fox notes. **"It was nice that Martin and the team saw the same things that required bringing up to speed."**

The team has driven significant changes in Hunt Thermal's workshops to improve performance, including creating specific areas for common tasks such as grinding and welding, and consolidating equipment to improve workflow.

"Over the last year, we've seen measurable productivity improvements and huge improvements in on-time delivery," Vickery says. **"We're getting repeat orders from customers where we might not have the cost edge but they know we're more than capable of delivering on time. That's part of the improvements in the business that F4N has helped to drive."**

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Vickery's team also made organisational changes, and brought previously outsourced work back in-house. The group acquired a small laser-cutting and steel fabrications business to bolster its supply chain, and is now applying the lessons of F4N to that business. **"It's not a direct supplier into nuclear, but it makes sense to align the same business principles to it,"** Vickery says.

Hunt Thermal had previously carried out nuclear work for customers such as EDF Energy and Sellafield, but the sector hadn't been a strategic focus. F4N helped the team build new knowledge and contacts in civil nuclear, as well as supporting the firm's growth ambitions in other industries.

"We didn't see the nuclear industry as a golden pot at the end of the rainbow, but it's an industry we want to play in because of where we are in the market – exotic metallurgy, in-house design and high-end heat exchanger and vessel manufacture," says Fox. **"We want to become a serious and recognised player in the nuclear game, and the contacts we've made with Rolls-Royce and other Tier One suppliers have been very valuable. F4N gives us the credibility to open that initial door with customers."**

The firm is also diversifying into other process sectors, and expanding its capabilities in design, welding and project management into other high-integrity fabrications.

"We're certainly not walking away from heat exchangers, but we're not just going to be making heat exchangers for the next 50 years," Vickery says.

With support from the F4N programme, the new team has successfully changed the direction of Hunt Thermal, Fox concludes. **"There's no fear in exploring new partnerships,"** he says. **"The ethos of Fit For Nuclear really promotes that for UK industry. You shouldn't be afraid of talking with new partners – we can all work together and make some money."**

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

F4N
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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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