



TP Group on track to double nuclear business

TP Group's Advanced Manufacturing Centre in Manchester is winning major nuclear contracts after securing Fit For Nuclear status and investing in new capabilities.

An extended contract with Baker Hughes GE, worth around £6.4 million, came as the company renewed its F4N status following a comprehensive re-assessment of its operations.

TP Group's heat exchanger factory in Dukinfield was originally granted F4N in 2015. Under its former brand of Hunt Thermal Technologies, the business then aimed to improve its production performance and grow in nuclear.

The company secured a £1.5 million nuclear contract from Baker Hughes in late 2016. Fulfilling the contract required investment in new machining capabilities, and TP Group worked with the Nuclear AMRC and its member company TW Ward to identify the best machines for the job.

Darren Sadler joined the company in early 2017 to lead engineering operations and manage development of the group's Advanced Manufacturing Centre, which officially opened in February 2018.

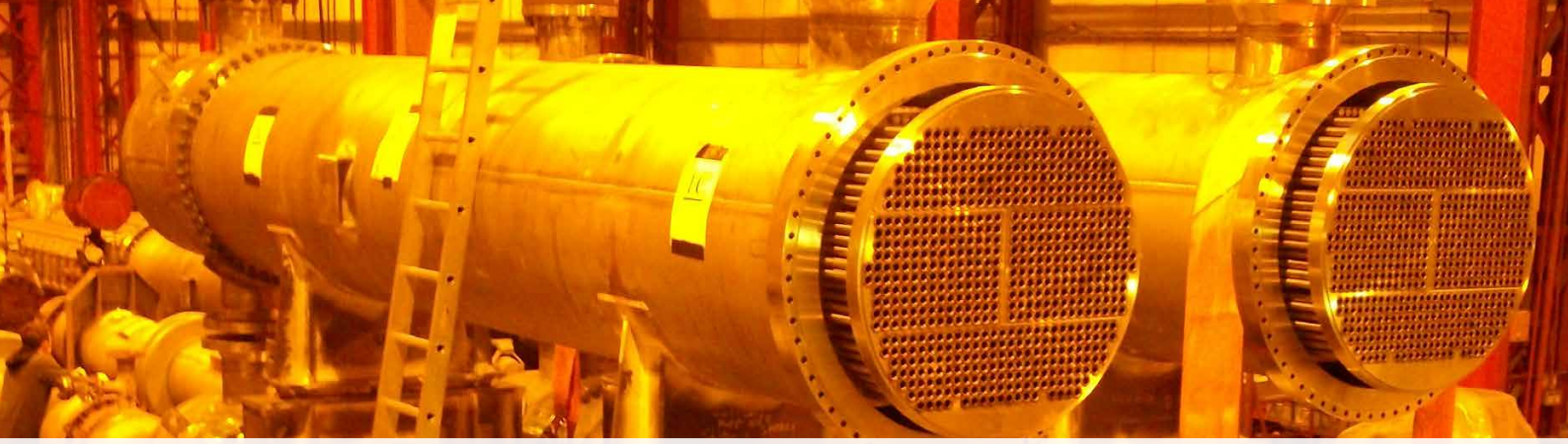
"As people started to hear that we have these machines, we have seen new work from other companies working in nuclear and other sectors," Sadler says. "We've become known as a good source of one-off components where tolerances and

quality are critical. We're also doing a lot more work in-house because of the machines and approvals we've now got."

While some of the new work is for other kinds of component, the company continues to focus on heat exchangers and thermal systems for increasingly demanding applications. *"Nuclear is a highly demanding industry. We've not just moved from heat exchangers for oil & gas to heat exchangers for nuclear – it's several levels up in terms of quality," Sadler notes. "It's moved from tolerances of 2mm to tolerances of 0.2mm. The requirement in machining capability is significant to get us to the point where we can offer what the customer is asking for."*

The F4N badge is granted for a period of three years, and TP Group came up for renewal shortly after opening its Advanced Manufacturing Centre. The team who had managed the original granting had since left the business, and responsibility fell to Sadler and new colleague Phil Carter from the business development team.

F4N advisor John Olver eased the new team's journey to re-granting, helping them ensure that all aspects of operations met the latest F4N standards.



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“The new forward-thinking management team really grasped the opportunities of their F4N renewal to undertake a root and branch review of all the business processes and procedures,” Olver says. “Crucially, they made improving communication at all levels a key priority, and their explanations of the need for change and continuous improvement ensured an enthusiastic response from what had previously been a fairly traditional workforce. TP Group is a great company which is seeing strong growth in nuclear, and creating much-needed skilled jobs.”

The team say that Olver brought a wealth of experience to the assessment. *“It was like it started again from scratch, but John’s input was a massive help,”* Sadler says. *“He’s seen it all before, and he’s very thorough with what he sees when he walks around. The people here soon started to understand where John was coming from.”*

Around a tenth of revenue at the Dukinfield site now comes from nuclear, including ongoing work for EDF Energy’s operational reactors.

The company is aiming to further increase its footprint in nuclear, says Carter, while continuing to serve its core market in the resurgent oil & gas sector. *“We aim to double what we’re doing in nuclear over the next three to five years,”* he says. *“There is more money in nuclear once your infrastructure is in place, but it’s such a slow process compared with oil & gas. We’re talking to customers about orders that may come in seven years.”*

The new contract from Baker Hughes, announced in January, 2019 will be delivered over the next five years. The long-term nature of nuclear contracts does help the business

plan and develop its staff, and TP Group is currently recruiting an additional 15–20 people to the 60-strong team at Dukinfield.

“That is down to nuclear projects,” Sadler notes. *“When you’ve got work beyond 12 months, you can plan a lot further ahead, and that allows more stability in staff.”*

The company has now joined the National Skills Academy for Nuclear to ensure that all the team are suitably qualified to build on the company’s renewed F4N status.

“We are seeing customers asking for F4N – it’s like a prerequisite for a lot of things we’re seeing,” Sadler says. *“It’s all about what we do on the nuclear side, but if we get that right we can float it out to other areas. Oil & gas is becoming a lot stricter and more critical in documentation and materials. Process is everything, and that’s one of the things that John says a lot – that things have to be right, not just looking right.”*

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April 2019

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




Hundreds of companies have completed the online F4N assessment, with most receiving ongoing support and development from the F4N team of nuclear specialists and experienced industrial advisors.

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