



A&P Falmouth sets course for new markets in nuclear

A&P Falmouth is targeting fabrication opportunities at Hinkley Point after being granted Fit For Nuclear.

A&P Falmouth in Cornwall is the UK's largest ship-repair complex, and one of the world's largest natural deep-water harbours. It is part of A&P Group, which operates seven dry docks at four locations around England.

As well as working on ships of up to 100,000 tonnes, the facility produces large fabrications for the oil and gas and offshore renewables sectors. It is also home to one of the UK's most comprehensive machine shops, capable of working on large components such as shafts of up to 12 metres. The company has over 270 full-time employees, and can have several hundred sub-contractors on site at busy times.

While A&P's North-East facilities have worked on the submarines programme, the group hasn't previously worked in civil nuclear. With the new build programme kicking off at Hinkley Point C in Somerset, the Falmouth team saw the opportunity to enter a new market.

"We see opportunities to provide large volumes of carbon steel fabrications for secondary support structures, gantries,

walkways, electrical and pipe supports," says Steve Jones, managing director for operations and site director. "These are the kind of structures we've been fabricating for a long time."

Group HSEQ director Kevin Peart worked with F4N industrial advisors Mark Knowlton and Stuart Hughes to take the Falmouth facility through the journey from assessment to granting. With A&P's extensive experience in highly regulated and quality focused industries, the journey was a smooth one.

"The F4N process has blended very well with our integrated management system, which is certified to ISO 9001 and 14001," Peart notes. "We found that F4N has allowed us to measure all the good work we've done already. We get audited by an awful lot of external organisations, and going through the F4N process has helped us improve a lot of our internal procedures on the design and risk side."

F4N also helped the team develop its already high health and safety standards to meet the expectations of nuclear customers, with investment in training across the organisation.



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“The safety culture was relatively straightforward because of work we’d already done,” says Peart. “We had an internal programme dealing with behavioural safety, and the training we’ve had on nuclear safety culture has fitted in really well with what we’re doing.”

The programme also supported a major overhaul of the fabrication workshop, with improvements to the working environment and electronic communication boards to share news and strategic information with staff. The firm also brought in external trainers to embed 6S lean manufacturing principles in its day-to-day work.

“On the first course, we had about 40 people from senior directors to shopfloor operators,” Peart says. “It was very clear to everyone what the 6S approach is, and we’ve embraced that, setting up things like cleaning stations throughout the fabrication shop and improving lighting. It’s given everyone a positive feeling.”

Hughes agrees that A&P’s F4N journey has made a clear difference to the site and the workforce. “When I first visited the Falmouth site in September 2018, I could see there were good foundations to build on, with manufacturing facilities and capabilities that are not common in the South West and were likely to be of interest to the new nuclear build team at Hinkley Point C,” he says. “The workshop was an area of concern, though – with a long history, it was dark and in need of some TLC. The company’s F4N champions have done an excellent job in transforming not only the appearance of the workshop area, but also the engagement of the staff.”

A&P Falmouth was granted F4N in October 2019, and is now engaged with a number of EDF Energy’s top-tier suppliers for Hinkley Point C. The team have recently provided weld inspection and rectification services on a jetty for the site, and are confident of their ability to secure larger work packages.

“It’s an industry that really requires the highest standards of quality and health and safety, and we understand that,” says Jones. “The next step is to ensure that we fully establish ourselves within the industry.”

The firm’s F4N journey also puts it in a better position to serve other sectors, Peart notes: “We’re always working with gas and oil and renewables sectors, and they also require a good standard of quality and health and safety. I definitely think F4N is improving those standards.”

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