



R-Tech proves its mettle

Specialist materials testing consultancy R-Tech Materials is winning new work in nuclear new build after being granted Fit For Nuclear.

Based near Port Talbot in South Wales, R-Tech boasts a wide range of mechanical testing equipment, capable of analysing the characteristics of materials from the thickness of a human hair up to a 50mm diameter bar of reinforcing steel.

Founded in 2002, the family-run company serves a range of industries including construction, oil & gas, petrochemical, power and marine. With Hinkley Point a short distance across the Bristol Channel, the firm started looking at consolidating its offering to the nuclear sector in late 2017.

"We found about the F4N programme through the Welsh Nuclear Forum," recalls R-Tech director Ben Franks. "We felt that this was a great opportunity for us to benchmark the current state of the business with respect to the expected standards of the nuclear supply chain, and to use this as a way to drive positive change in the business."

Although the firm had extensive experience of working in safety-critical industries, the management were aware of the need to up their game in some key aspects, including securing ISO certification for a new integrated management system.

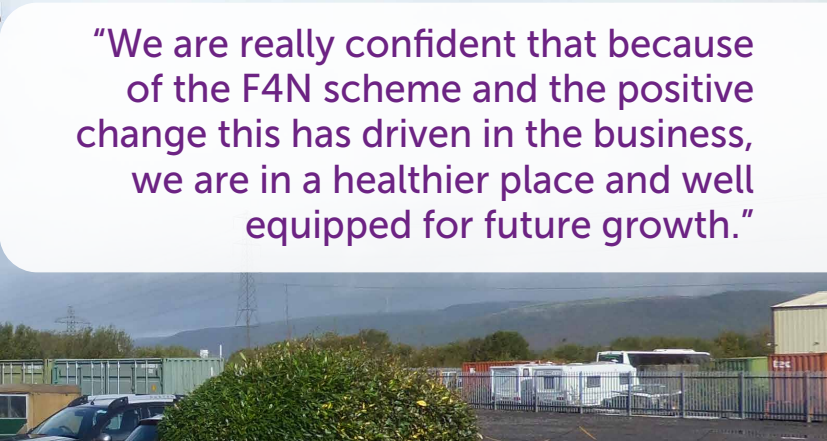
"We were also going through a restructuring of our management

team, so it was a propitious time for us to use F4N to drive a lot of positive change in the business," Franks notes.

The F4N assessment was originally designed for manufacturing companies but Franks found that, with a few exceptions, its questions still hit the mark. *"Most of the initial assessment was relevant to our business and would be for many service orientated businesses,"* he says. *"When we first sat down with the self-assessment, we scored ourselves pretty low, to the point where we asked ourselves whether the scheme was a good fit for us."*

F4N industrial advisor Huw Jenkins encouraged the team to keep going, and his on-site assessment gave a significantly higher score.

"Though essentially a service business, the core operations and processes are similar to those of a manufacturer so it was relatively straightforward to contextualise the requirements of the F4N excellence model," Jenkins says. *"It's been a pleasure to work with the directors who were fully committed to the programme from the start, leading steady and significant progress in a relatively short period of time."*



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The main areas for development were around people excellence and safety culture. **“We were already in the early stages of a project to overhaul our people management processes and the F4N framework helped us to work this through effectively,”** Franks says.

“Whilst we had always considered our health and safety record in the business to be pretty good, the standards set by the nuclear industry and the processes demanded for the ISO 45001 accreditation required a large piece of work and a lot of attention to detail to get it right.

“It has been to the benefit of the business to invest the time, energy and money in these areas, and we are glad that the F4N set down the challenge for us to do this.”

Support from F4N also helped R-Tech certify its new management system to ISO 45001, 14001 and 9001. **“These accreditations are vital for us to develop further work with our major consultancy clients,”** Franks says. **“We are already seeing the benefit of this in some of the site-based assessment projects we have been involved with in the petrochemical and power sectors, and we are expanding this part of our activities.”**

R-Tech is now providing independent testing for reinforcing steel suppliers to Bylor, the joint venture which is leading civil engineering work at Hinkley Point C, and is pursuing other opportunities on the project.

Franks was also targeting opportunities at the Wylfa Newydd project on Anglesey, until developer Horizon Nuclear Power suspended the project in early 2019. **“This has significantly impacted the opportunities for our business in the nuclear sector, and means that realistically there are no new opportunities for us to be aiming at for the time being,”** he says. **“We hope that this will change, and our F4N status will**

provide us with a competitive advantage for future nuclear opportunities.

“If Wylfa Newydd goes ahead, then we would expect to be well placed to offer testing services during the civil construction phase, as for Hinkley Point C. The same would apply at Bradwell, or any other proposed nuclear new build projects.”

R-Tech has also tested specialist connectors for nuclear waste storage facilities, and recently completed a research project supported by EDF Energy to model degradation processes in stainless steel components within the boilers of the UK’s current AGR fleet. **“EDF were very complimentary about the quality of our work in this area, and we are hopeful that this will unlock further R&D and plant assessment activity with them in the future,”** says Franks.

“We are really confident that because of the F4N scheme and the positive change this has driven in the business, we are in a healthier place and well equipped for future growth, both in the nuclear and non-nuclear sectors in which we operate.”

www.r-techmaterials.com
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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.

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



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