



Abbey Forged Products targets nuclear opportunities

Specialist forgemaster Abbey Forged Products is targeting opportunities in new markets after completing the Fit For Nuclear programme.

Founded in 1982 to supply stainless steel bar and forgings on short lead times, the family-owned business acquired additional forging, machining and heat treatment facilities in 2004. From its integrated manufacturing facilities deep in the woods on the outskirts of Sheffield, Abbey rapidly established itself as a leading supplier to the oil and gas industries, providing forgings up to 1800kg on often demanding schedules.

“Our USP is our short lead times,” says business development manager Lee Thomas. “We keep extensive stock so we’re not waiting on a third party – all operations are carried out on site, from forging billet right the way through to a finished product. We do lead times as fast as seven days for forged products. We don’t think there’s anyone else offering that kind of service in the UK.”

But with low oil prices forcing a major slowdown in the oil and gas sector, Abbey’s management team looked to diversify into other high-value markets. “We have supplied to the nuclear sector in our history, but the oil and gas took over,” notes managing director Jackie Neal. “We were sufficiently busy with that not to pursue other sectors.”

The team were aware of the Fit For Nuclear programme and started talking to the Nuclear AMRC in late 2015, taking the

assessment in February 2016. They were able to draw on their previous experience of driving business improvements to rapidly progress their F4N journey, with an action plan created and introduced in around two months.

“It was a fairly quick process, which fitted in line with where we were at,” says quality manager Alan Oldale. “We’ve used it as a platform to raise the culture and best practice on the site.”

“A lot of our efforts over the past couple of years were focused on manufacturing excellence, but F4N combines the business excellence side as well. It helped us understand that we are doing the right thing, and benchmarked us against the direction we were going.”

Thanks to the team’s established focus on manufacturing excellence, the F4N assessment didn’t identify any major gaps in Abbey’s operations. “It’s allowed fine tuning of what was already in process,” Thomas says.

The F4N advisors did identify opportunities for new quality tools and additional training, which have been embraced by the firm’s 200-plus workforce.





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“Engagement has been very good at all levels,” notes Oldale. “From the strategic approach right down to projects, the buy-in has been immense. The action plans and opportunities for improvement all made it easy to deliver, so it was a good process for us.”

F4N has also helped the team focus on its capabilities for supplying critical components to other high-value sectors.

“We’ve had a domino effect – we’ve just about completed our SC21 approval, and are probably two-thirds of the way down the AS9100 route for aerospace,” says Steve Savage, strategic operations manager. “It gives us the agility to be able to respond to whatever requests come in.”

While new nuclear orders are unlikely to be a major source of work in the short term, Abbey is already seeing enquiries for the longer term.

“We have started selling the fact that we’re Fit For Nuclear, and there has been interest from customers who are in the nuclear sector,” Thomas says.

“It’s good that we’re involved now and we can start formulating relationships through the Nuclear AMRC, meeting buyers and introducing our capabilities. When that work does start to filter down to the market, we will be well positioned rather than trying to jump in at the last minute.”

“Nobody expects it to happen overnight, but we just have to work away at it,” Neal concludes. “We’ve got a culture here that we want to move forwards all the time and improve, and F4N is part of that journey.”

abbeyforgedproducts.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 was developed by the Nuclear AMRC and its leading industrial partners, and has been extensively developed and expanded to meet industry demand. The free service lets UK manufacturers measure their operations against the standards required to supply the nuclear industry, and take the necessary steps to close any gaps.

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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