



Lestercast primed to take first steps into nuclear

Investment casting specialist Lestercast is exploring opportunities in the nuclear sector after completing the Fit For Nuclear programme.

Founded in 1972, Lestercast has grown significantly since Chris Batty and Malcolm Healey acquired the business in 2001. The firm operates in over a dozen sectors from architecture to motorsports, casting precision products ranging from pump impellers for oil and gas to the 'B' on the bonnet of the Bentley Mulsanne.

Lestercast has also led investment in new capabilities and processes, including a range of rapid prototyping technologies. The firm produces parts up to 20kg from its investment casting centre in north Leicester, as well as high-volume parts of up to 150kg through a partnership with a foundry in China. Lestercast now employs 44 people with a turnover of around £8 million, with some 60 per cent of production exported.

The firm had no experience in the nuclear sector when, in early 2015, managing director Batty learned about F4N from contacts at business advisor Pera Consulting.

"We saw nuclear as a future market that was worth developing," Batty recalls. "Since taking the assessment, we've put a lot of time and effort into bringing together the different aspects that nuclear requires, which are different from what we were used to. Getting ourselves up to

speed has been a bit of an experience, but it's been worth the effort to do it."

Lestercast had already achieved quality certifications including ISO 9001 and the automotive ISO TS16949 standard, so the F4N assessment didn't provide any major challenges to the team. The first assessment scored the firm highly in operational areas such as quality management and traceability, but identified some gaps in training and health and safety to meet nuclear industry expectations.

"We won't have to have the health and safety culture you see on a nuclear plant, but we now have much more of an awareness of what nuclear culture entails," Batty notes. "It's been good to do it, and it's something we wouldn't have done unless we'd gone along this route."

The firm used team exercises to make sure that training was practical and engaging for staff and, with support from Pera, sent staff on joint training with two other companies. "They're not in our industry at all, but they were both manufacturers so we're doing a lot of the same things," Batty says. "It's opened our people's eyes – they found it really interesting to see other people's processes in a completely different kind of manufacturing."



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LesterCast continues to invest in new capabilities, and is currently fitting out a new R&D centre with rapid prototyping and corrosion testing facilities. The firm has invested heavily in additive manufacturing, allowing it to supply one-off castings without the cost of new tooling, and to support customers during the design and testing of new products.

LesterCast is also working with Castings Technology International – one of the Nuclear AMRC's sister centres – to develop techniques to improve the surface quality of complex castings by replacing the traditional wax pattern with an additively-manufactured resin form.

LesterCast's sales and engineering teams are now working to better understand where the opportunities are in nuclear for relatively small precision castings, and seeking to build relationships with sub-contractors at tier three or four.

"We don't make a final product, we make bits that go into our customers' products such as valves or instrumentation," Batty says. "Because we're so new to nuclear, we're trying to understand where LesterCast is placed within the nuclear supply chain. There's still quite a lot of hard work for us from a sales and marketing point of view to understand where our market is within nuclear, but we hope to be building our sales in this industry in the next 12 to 24 months."

With new business in nuclear and continued growth in its existing markets, Batty is aiming for a 50–60 per cent increase in turnover over the next five years.

"Nuclear is a market that's definitely going to expand in the UK over the next decade," he concludes. "And, from our experience, there are added benefits to be gained from the route we've gone through to be granted Fit For Nuclear that will help us in the other markets we supply."

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UK manufacturers get ready to bid for work in the civil nuclear supply chain.

F4N
Fit For Nuclear

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.

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