Case study

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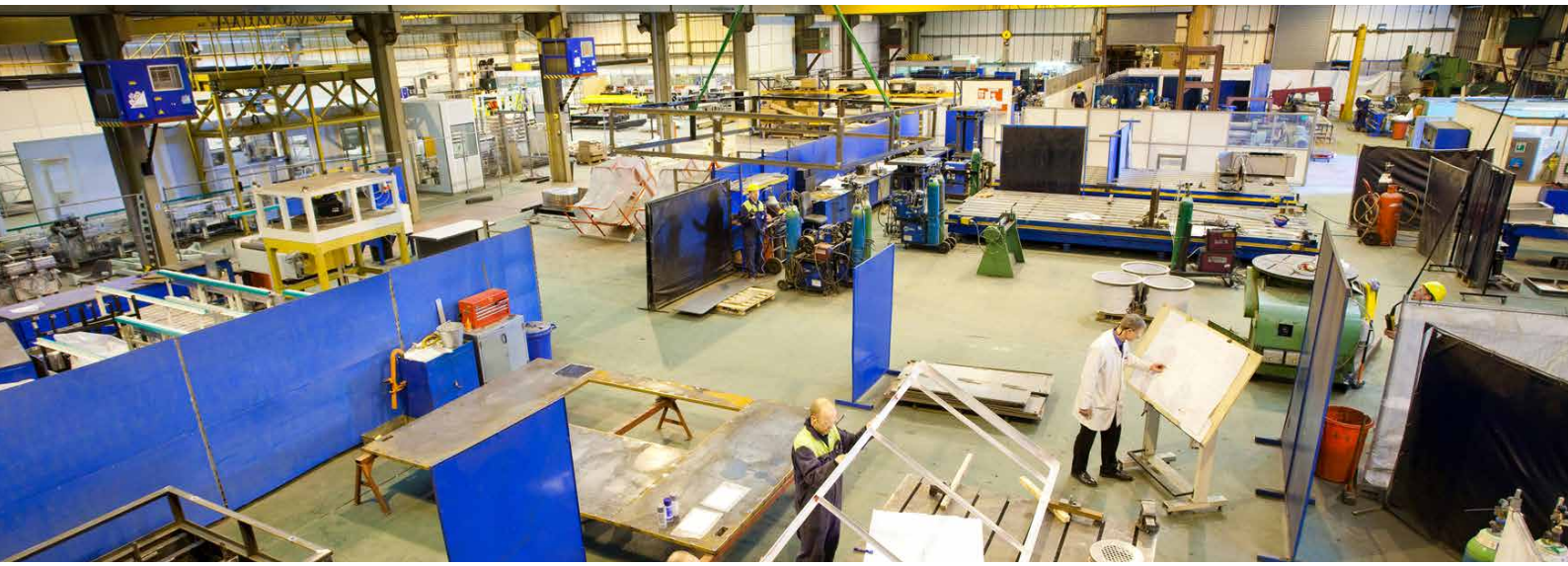

NIS targets new growth

Integrated engineering specialist NIS Ltd is transforming its business with support from the Civil Nuclear Sharing in Growth programme.

Based in Chorley, Lancashire, NIS was founded in 1983 to provide bespoke engineering and fabrication services for a range of demanding markets. **"We've been servicing the nuclear industry since then,"** says Richard Penrose, NIS managing director. **"We provide design and manufacture services into nuclear and also some industrial clients, for special purpose bespoke equipment."**

The bulk of the firm's operations are now in the nuclear decommissioning market, providing one-off and short-run products including fuel flasks, pressure vessels, transport bogeys, fuel fabrication cells and containment gloveboxes for clients across the NDA estate.

Including defence, the nuclear sector now accounts for around 70 per cent of NIS Ltd's £12 million annual turnover. **"We've got a long heritage in nuclear,"** says Gill Marsden, business development director. **"I can't think of a major Sellafield project in the last 10 years that we haven't manufactured something for."**

To consolidate its position and explore new opportunities, NIS joined the Civil Nuclear Sharing in Growth (CNSIG) programme in early 2014. One of the main reasons was to get ready for the opportunities in the UK's new build programme.

"No one in the UK has done nuclear new build in this generation," Marsden notes. **"We felt it was the best way to ensure that what we were doing, and the standards we were working to, were ready to comply with the new build requirements."**

The team also saw an opportunity to change the company's culture. **"Because of the bespoke nature of what we've done, whenever we'd looked at lean manufacturing, we felt it didn't apply to us because we weren't making hundreds of something,"** Marsden says. **"This programme allowed us to take those principles of volume production and apply them to bespoke projects."**

The improvements made with CNSIG support can be seen across NIS's factory. The firm operates around 5,000m^2 of production space at its Chorley site, including a dedicated workshop for stainless steel with a 20 tonne crane and large plasma welding machine.

Process improvement has been driven by the introduction of 5S methods and visual management tools, with streamlined processes cutting the time spent handling incoming goods and kitting-up for new projects.

"It's been fairly transformational – visually, the work areas are much more defined," says Marsden. **"We've now all got the thirst for it and realised there's so much more we can do. We're now working with some of the other CNSIG participants to look at embracing some of the things they've done on visual management."**

"We believe that we can now more efficiently deliver greater assurance of our products and services than our traditional competitors."

NIS has also introduced new machining and robot welding capabilities, and worked with the CNSIG team to first achieve the ISO 3834 and EN 1090 welding quality accreditations, and then ensure that the new automated processes comply with those standards.

CNSIG also supported training for NIS's 150-strong workforce in areas such as lean workshops, business improvement techniques, human performance and leadership, and the Triple Bar Nuclear Manufacturing course.

NIS is committed to four core values, which it summarises as respect, commit, protect, and inspire, but the team say that the CNSIG training and other initiatives have emphasised how those values can help differentiate the company.

"One of the biggest game changers is the realisation of how important our values are to us," says Marsden. **"We've always been a values-based business, but learning the value of our values for all of us has been really eye-opening."**

As NIS enters its final year of CNSIG support, the team are consolidating everything they've learnt over the programme and preparing for new opportunities in the nuclear sector.

"It's been an extremely valuable and testing process that we've been through," Penrose says. **"You have to be extremely brave, and also be prepared to accept that people might see you baring all as an organisation. You need to accept the criticism and take it as a positive, because the only reason you get criticism is because people care."**

The team are now aiming to grow their market share, and are already developing new international contracts and new relationships in the new build market.

"We believe that we can now more efficiently deliver greater assurance of our products and services than our traditional competitors," Marsden says. **"In five years' time, I'd like to think we're well established in the UK nuclear new build programme, and I'd like to see us established in a number of international decommissioning projects.**

"The only reason we got on the CNSIG programme in the first place is because we were good. It's been about turning that good into excellent."

www.nisltd.com
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The **Civil Nuclear Sharing in Growth** (CNSIG) programme aims to develop the UK manufacturing supply chain for civil nuclear new build, operations and decommissioning. It includes a four-year programme of high-intensity support for 10 key suppliers.

The programme is part-funded by government through the Regional Growth Fund, and supported by industry leaders including Rolls-Royce.

Find out more: **namrc.co.uk/services/sig**

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