

Get on course

Jane Wiggins, chair of the BIFM Education Sector Forum, asks: are you a competent facilities manager?

Competency self-assessment: questions to ask yourself

- Answer honestly to help measure your level of practical experience and identify gaps in your knowledge...
- > Have I performed this function?
 - > Have I managed this function?
 - > How many people were involved with this project?
 - > How many of these people reported to me?
 - > What was the budgeted amount for this project?
 - > Did I prepare the budget?
 - > Did I maintain the budget?
 - > How many employees were affected?
 - > How many square metres were involved?
 - > Have I done this for more than one company, or in more than one environment?

Managers need the right knowledge, skills, and experience to progress in their career as a competent facilities management professional. Yet during a recent meeting hosted by Asset Skills, the new sector skills council looking after the training and development needs of the property, cleaning, and facilities management sector, many FMs revealed that they had no awareness of the competencies established by the professional associations BIFM and IFMA.

Individuals may enter FM as technical experts or from a variety of general management disciplines, such as procurement, HR, logistics, hospitality, IT, operations, and engineering. Others may come into the industry from a strategic business overview, such as estate management, others via construction. As managers move up the career ladder, knowledge across a wider range of subjects is required. Knowledge could be described in two broad areas: strategic and leadership management, or technical and operational.

Facilities management is such a diverse, all-encompassing role that it may at seem an overwhelming task to identify which subjects or topics are essential to become competent. It all depends on your background and in which direction you wish your career to develop. Those with a technical background may seek further skills in business and customer management, while those with a customer-services background may require a more technical awareness of buildings. The three major professional bodies representing FMs (BIFM, IFMA and RICS) all seem to agree that a mixture of general management expertise and specialist knowledge is required to be qualified and competent.

A FM needs to learn more to ...

- gain a competitive edge in today's business environment
- ensure you have a broad mix of managerial and specialist expertise
- increase personal confidence and professionalism
- consolidate knowledge, even for experienced FMs
- keep up to date with ever-changing operational issues
- provide innovation solutions to add value in the workplace
- be prepared for the next challenge
- take ownership of personal career development.

What does a FM need to know?

Using the BIFM or IFMA set of competencies is a good starting point for a FM to check their level of knowledge and experience, and to use the list of competencies as a development framework.

For FMs seeking a formal professional qualification, the BIFM Qualification or IFMA CFM award are both recognised as a significant demonstration of an individual's competency in both knowledge and practical ability. This contrasts with academic qualifications confirming the knowledge or theory of a subject. The issue for employers is that FM is a practical subject, a view shared by David Wilson, vice president of IFMA UK Chapter, who says 'to be a good facilities manager is actually a lot of experiential learning, not a lot of formal learning.'

The current BIFM competency list reflects a rounded view of facilities management, with a focus on the service delivery responsibilities of the profession. Says FM guru Martin Pickard, president of the IFMA UK Chapter: 'Two-thirds of the FM competencies are not technical stuff... they are management skills, personal effectiveness skills, and communications skills.'

So where can you turn for help to fill in the gaps in your knowledge? Short courses on specific areas do the job in particular elements of FM. Examples include BIFM training, Mid Career College, and CIBSE training courses. Universities and FE colleges also provide a variety of academic courses on the built environment and facilities management. There are also a number of private providers, such as BPP Malpas, offering BIFM examination study programmes. A list of providers is available on the BIFM website (see box at the foot of this article).

Ultimately, it's down to personal choice as to which route you follow to become competent. Time, cost, location, reputation, delivery style, and contents are factors to be considered in selecting a course of study in your quest to seek recognition as a professional and competent FM **fmx**

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For more information, log on to www.malpas.co.uk; www.bifm.com; www.ifma.org; www.assetskills.org