

Training tomorrow's facilities managers

What skills will the next generation of facilities managers need and what qualifications and knowledge-sharing opportunities are available to help them succeed, asks **Jane Wiggins.**

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Facilities management may be a young profession – although there is some doubt that it is mature enough to be even considered a profession yet, as noted in a feature by Ruth Prickett¹ in which she states that facilities management is an embryonic industry, still finding its position in the world. So how do we square this with many people's view that the industry is still dominated by not-so-young practitioners?

According to research in 2003–04 by Kathy Oldham², the majority of facilities managers are male, over 40 and in their second career. The British Institute of Facilities Management (BIFM) continues to show a healthy growth in membership, and is often quoted as one of the fastest-growing professional bodies, with a higher-than-average retention rate. Recent analysis of the age and gender profile of BIFM members shows that the majority are in the 41 to 50 years age range. There is no record of the date of birth of 27% of members, but of the remaining 73%, nearly 80% are male. The male age profile shows that there is a steady increase in membership between the ages of 31 and 45, whereas membership tails off towards 60. Not surprisingly, the female age profile is slightly different, with a steady increase in membership in the age range of 26 to 36, decreasing slightly between 36 and 40, increasing slightly between 41 and 45 and then tailing off.

Interestingly, the analysis reveals a higher number of female student members and female associate members. This could indicate a potential increase in female membership in future years, providing, of course, that these women both stay and progress in facilities management and that the BIFM remains an attractive professional body for them to join.

WHO ARE TOMORROW'S FACILITIES MANAGERS?

Given the age profile of today's facilities managers, there is concern about the future and who will be tomorrow's facilities managers. The importance of the construction and built environment sectors to the nation's future cannot be overlooked. The sector accounts for a significant percentage of the gross domestic product, and it is vital that the younger generation is attracted into these industries. Many in

the facilities management profession experienced the skills shortage associated with the Terminal 5 project in Greater London, so imagine how the London Olympics will affect us all over the next six years and beyond. The growth of the hospitality and leisure sector, and the continued investment by Public/Private Finance Initiatives in the UK's infrastructure are additional factors to be considered.

Facilities managers' increasing remit often means that it is no longer necessary to be an engineer, architect or surveyor to be successful. Indeed, entry from other management disciplines, such as hospitality, accountancy and purchasing, highlights the importance of more general management skills. The qualities required of facilities managers in the future will include excellent communication and negotiation skills; efficient management of projects and budgets; and effective balance of conflicting needs.

ATTRACTING THE RIGHT CANDIDATES

One organisation that may help to change the demographics and attractiveness of the profession in the UK is Asset Skills, the sector's skill council, which lobbies government and industry leaders and oversees the development of a National Qualification Framework and occupational standards for facilities management. Further afield, where the problems are quite similar, the International Facility Management Association (IFMA), the US professional body, has recently launched a career brochure, outlining what facilities management is all about. This has been sent to 22,000 career counsellors in schools across the US, which have responded with offers to speak at school events and career fairs, and the IFMA is pleased with the positive response to date. The brochure outlines what a facilities manager does, the opportunities available, and how central the facilities manager's role is to businesses. The brochure also gives indicative salaries (facilities managers in the US appear to attract much higher salaries than their counterparts in the UK), and details of the qualifications needed to fast track to a successful career.

Recognising the need to get more graduates into the industry, the FMA Young Manager's Forum (see below) has produced a highly motivational video to be shown to students contemplating their career choices to try and influence them to join the facilities management industry. This group also held a half-day conference for 30 career consultants in London to promote facilities management as a career. Not surprisingly, many of the delegates had neither appreciated the existence of such a varied and rewarding career, nor its depth and breadth.

Many people become facilities managers as a second career, or as the result of a change of focus in their first career. They come from a variety of other backgrounds such as the Ministry of Defence, catering, hospitality, IT, accountancy, human resources, general office management, engineering, procurement, architecture, surveying, leisure and retail. It is this melting pot of experiences that creates such a rich and diverse workforce. They often have a recognised qualification in another discipline, for example property or building services engineering, catering or accountancy, and may not see the value of taking a specific facilities management qualification. Nevertheless, they must be competent to deal with complex problems, assume high levels of responsibility, have the ability to affect the workplaces of the future and be able to deal with all levels of an organisation and its suppliers, consultants and providers.

ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST QUALIFICATION

So do facilities managers need a special qualification to do the job, and what qualifications are available and how valid are they? The three main professional bodies, the IFMA, the BIFM and the Australian FMA, all have their own competencies and qualification programmes. Not surprisingly, there are many similarities, and it should give some comfort to aspiring facilities managers that a qualification from one of these bodies may have some currency beyond their national boundary. However, as Marcus Luck comments in a discussion paper for an Asset Skills workshop on customer skills for the facilities management sector, in such a diverse sector a one-size-fits-all training programme is unlikely to meet all employers' or employees' needs³. He identifies the lack of clear career progression paths within the sector; poor leadership and management training; negative attitudes to training; and the diversity of training needs as issues that must be tackled.

Encouraging members to become qualified, raising the standards of assessment for membership and enhancing the status of facilities management are important roles for the professional bodies. The impact of increasing legislation in the workplace, together with managers' increasing accountability for their actions, are some of the biggest concerns facing facilities managers. The ever-increasing demands of the job should be met with a requirement to demonstrate professional competency as a facilities manager.

The BIFM states in its recent annual report that those following a formal path to facilities management qualification have cited the top six advantages as:

- an increase in job opportunities;
- improved confidence and credibility;
- a broadening of their knowledge base and understanding of facilities management;
- high relevance to the job;
- networking and information-sharing opportunities; and
- new perspectives.

Yet there still appear to be few incentives for employers to recruit qualified facilities managers or to sponsor their formal qualification; or for employees to seek a qualification. According to research by Asset Skills, the nature of jobs within the facilities management sector discourages employers and employees from investing in training. While cost is seen to be the main factor in this, the culture of the facilities management industry is another important factor, with employers being perceived as unsympathetic to training needs.

Further, it is still relatively easy to acquire full membership of the BIFM by experience and suitable references rather than any academic route. Of the 10,000 or so members of the BIFM, only a very small group has progressed via the BIFM (Qual) route. Under 800 people have sat the examinations over the past eight years, although there is a steady increase each year.

It is relatively easy to get work in the sector without a formal qualification in facilities management, and that must change if the training industry and educational providers are to be stimulated to provide appropriate courses. Without potential customers, there will be slow progress in developing the range of qualifications in line with new national occupational standards. Richard Elvidge, of Options Employment, queries whether, in the light of the diversity of training and lack of standardised qualifications, it is right to reward non-qualified and qualified facilities managers equally. He calls for a competency-based salary benchmarking system to sort out the diverse and complex market in which facilities managers now compete.

It has been suggested that facilities managers need information, advice and targeted resources to draw upon, rather than a professional examination that may involve investing a very significant amount of time and money. Being a pragmatic group, many facilities managers have said they would welcome an online "toolkit" that would help them get on with their jobs and their careers. But while the industry waits for this to be developed in the UK, the more traditional university degrees are the only readily recognisable qualification.

WHAT TRAINING IS AVAILABLE?

So what are the education and training opportunities available to encourage and support young people as they start their career in facilities management?

As yet, there are no NVQs, SVQs or Modern Apprenticeships in facilities management. The lowest level is a City and Guilds Facilities Management Foundation course offered by Blue Eye Training. This course comprises six modules. Further up the qualification framework is the BTEC Higher National Certificate and Diploma in Facilities Management, accredited by Edexcel. These qualifications are benchmarked at the NQF 5 level. There are very few undergraduate courses in facilities management. On a more positive note, there are 18 higher education establishments offering postgraduate diplomas or masters degrees, with eight of these being accredited by the BIFM, and one by the IFMA too. The BIFM also has its

REFERENCES

1. Prickett R (2005), "Defining moment", Total Workplace Management, CMP Information Ltd.
2. Oldham K (2004), "A woman's place in facilities management", MSc dissertation, Leeds Metropolitan University.
3. Luck M (2005), *Facilities Management – Towards a Qualifications Strategy – A Discussion Paper*, published at www.assetskills.org/site/Portals/0/aboutas/assetskillsrep/ortdecember05.pdf.
4. Warren C M J & Heng S H K (2005), *FM Education – Are We Meeting Industry Needs?* Conference paper at the Pacific Rim Real Estate Society Conference in Melbourne.

own internal national examinations, with seven tuition providers supporting their students at Part 1, but just three at the Part 2 level. Both the IFMA and the FMA have their own qualification schemes.

Given this relatively impoverished offering to students, it is not surprising that in a survey undertaken by the Department of Trade and Industry in 2004, around 5% of the facilities management workforce had no formal qualifications. Over a quarter held a first degree in some discipline; however, only 1.4% of these had a BA/BSc in facilities management. An additional 34% held an HND/NVQ qualification and 12.5% had a masters degree.

WILL QUALIFICATIONS OPEN DOORS?

When it comes to selection, a professionally qualified facilities manager who has put in the effort to develop and extend their knowledge, obtaining qualifications whilst still working full time, demonstrates a keen interest in the profession. Rebecca Bradley, chair of the BIFM's student committee, and a member of the FMA's young managers committee, comments that it shows prospective employers that the person can work hard, is open to new ideas, and may be more likely to make things happen and make a difference at work.

However, a recent research paper by Clive Warren and Sherman Heng investigating the relevance of facilities management education concludes that there is a lack of key business skills training in the higher educational offerings⁴. The research examined higher education courses in the US, UK and Australia, using a matrix to plot course content against the competencies defined by the leading professional bodies.

Good commercial and customer service skills are perhaps the most important area for facilities managers of the future to concentrate their development and educational efforts. Recent research indicates that a 12.4% profit increase can be achieved if customers experience good service, and that 85% of services are no longer differentiated by the physical aspects of that service – it is the personal aspects of customer care that now matter. In addition, 71% of senior executives consider that the “customer experience” is the battleground for survival and competitive advantage.

Some of the leading facilities management providers and consultants take a similar view and are now recruiting quality graduates with commercial and customer skills, rather than the classic facilities management skills of surveying, architecture or engineering. It is easier to train the former group in facilities management, than train the latter group in the commercial and business skills that are a basic requirement in today's competitive market.

Will facilities management qualifications open doors? The FMA Young Manager of the Year Award has been in place for eight years, and each year it gets tougher to be shortlisted and be selected as winner. The competition is part of the annual *Premises and Facilities Management* awards each autumn. The award is based

on achievement, and is open to facilities managers under the age of 30. Peter Middup, *PFM's* publisher, comments that it is now unlikely that unqualified facilities managers will get into the shortlisting.

SUPPORTING YOUNG FACILITIES MANAGERS

A few years ago, previous runners-up for the award were asked for their views on the industry, and as a result the FMA Young Managers Forum was formed. Previous award winners and finalists form the core membership. Its members are the senior managers of the future; they recognise the need for innovation and evolution within our sector. They meet regularly to propagate ideas and champion initiatives that will affect the industry in the future.

The newly elected chair, Jason Cousins, sees this group's role as providing networking and knowledge-sharing opportunities, with visits and/or speakers every two months. He also recognises that the profession needs to be promoted to ensure young, talented facilities managers continue to enter the industry.

Cousins qualified at North East Surrey College of Technology with an undergraduate degree in facilities management and is one of a few facilities managers with a BSc (Hons) in the subject. The age limit for the forum is set at 35, and it is aimed at nurturing the aspiring senior facilities managers of the future. Cousins comments that young facilities managers need practical solutions on operational subjects, rather than top-heavy management theory or strategic information. The forum organised a Kick Start Event last November at Vertigo, at the top of London's Tower 42, which attracted over 40 new faces who came to socialise and hear presentations on security and training. A second event was organised in January, again in central London.

Another recent initiative has been the virtual network on the BIFM website. This was created in October last year, after a new member complained that BIFM events were inappropriate for younger members and were dominated by perceived “old-timers”. In particular, there was concern at the lack of real networking opportunities for young facilities managers at the recent BIFM annual conference. Jason Choy, 29, who qualified in facilities management in his native Australia via the FMA, believes that the conference is poorly attended by younger members due to cost, time and the lack of focus in the conference content on younger facilities managers, who have different learning and networking needs. The virtual network has attracted high levels of interest, and a fringe event at the next BIFM conference in Oxford, hosted by the Fellows Forum, will provide a platform for engaging with the younger members.

GAINING RECOGNITION

It seems that the future of facilities management excellence is safely in the hands of the next generation. It is to be hoped that tomorrow's facilities managers will demand the appropriate recognition with a standard or benchmark of competence to ensure credibility among other professionals.

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INFORMATION

IFMA Career
Brochure
[www.ifma.org/
career/
ifma_career.pdf](http://www.ifma.org/career/ifma_career.pdf)

Blue Eye Training
[www.blue-eye-
training.co.uk](http://www.blue-eye-training.co.uk)

Edexcel BTEC Higher
National Certificate
and Diploma
in Facilities
Management
[www.edexcel.
org.uk/quals
/hn/facilities/hnc/
facilitiesmgt](http://www.edexcel.org.uk/quals/hn/facilities/hnc/facilitiesmgt)

PFM Annual Awards
[www.pfmonthenet.
net](http://www.pfmonthenet.net)

FMA Young
Managers Forum
[www.fmassociation.
org.uk/index.php?
p=young](http://www.fmassociation.org.uk/index.php?p=young)

BIFM Young
FMs Forum
[www.bifm.org.
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