

## The Fog of FM Qualifications

The Noughties are over and it's time for all in the FM sector to look forward to the future with new and improved optimism.

In the spirit of this new optimism the BIFM has recently announced a brand new set of qualifications in facilities management, designed and developed following significant research.

Most FM students who will sit the new professional qualifications will already be working in the facilities management field and most will be, or on their way to being, high-flying individuals. So why do some in the industry feel the need for further professional certification?

It may boil down to the sector [all £117 billion or so of it] still being frustratingly unrecognised as an independent industry within the higher echelons of power, specifically, in some (but not all) FTSE board rooms or in central government. Because of this lack of recognition (and a lack of structure), many involved in the FM industry have felt the need to demonstrate a universal standard in terms of competence and to 'uphold the integrity of FM as a profession', or to make it easier for others – such as employers – to determine or establish the competence of individuals. After all, FM in the last decade has developed into something which is far greater and much more complex than ever before.

In my opinion, there is a useful process of up-skilling and education within some of the professional qualifications on offer (and certainly within some of the other courses and training available in the industry). For example, for an individual to progress from a single-service soft service background and take on the full multi-service FM role, a course in understanding building services must prove invaluable.

You could argue that for the individual employee the additional benefit of taking a professional qualification may be to increase one's market value, leading to pay rises either within their existing role or when looking for a new position elsewhere.

The new decade has certainly brought its challenges to the job market, with high numbers of unemployed and some others fearing redundancy resulting in greater competition for jobs than ever before.

With this increased pressure in the market and the increased awareness of available qualifications, one concern I have is a growing number of fraudulent applications – we saw this increase by 50% in 2009 compared to 2008, mainly with applicants taking it upon themselves to make up qualifications and/or experience to get to interview stage. Fortunately, an honest and solid applicant will always be preferred to a dishonest 'star': integrity is still considered to be a significant factor by all good quality employers.

Once at interview stage, it is a fact in our experience that less than 10% of interviewers believe that professional qualifications in facilities management reliably indicate future performance in the job. Much more weight is put on strengths such as relevant achievements, capability and attitude, and appreciation of what is required to make a difference in the role, rather having the emphasis on formal qualifications, which are perceived as 'nice to have' rather than obligatory.

This does not, however, mean that you should not bother with training, self-improvement and striving for new professional FM or even academic qualifications, which are helpful for personal growth and for increasing your range and depth of capabilities. Any type of legitimate FM/property-related certification shows to me that the applicant at least has the motivation to learn more about his or her chosen field. And when applicants are compared against similarly experienced individuals, qualifications are indeed a deciding factor. If you aspire for the 'Top Job', an FM MSc or appropriate building industry degree or diploma can make all the difference.

When selecting candidates for jobs in FM, skills and experience are often analysed first. If you have the qualifications and not enough relevant experience then I'm afraid you may not be considered for the role. FM is a practical discipline where much more weight is put on an individual's contract management skills, awareness of maintenance requirements, health & safety, budget management, negotiation and customer service skills. The one exception to the rule is health & safety. Any practising FM who does not have a recognised H&S qualification is potentially putting lives at risk. This is becoming a requirement, rather than a 'nice to have'. IOSH is an absolute minimum, but in my opinion, candidates should be aiming for the NEBOSH above any other courses on offer.

Facilities management continues to evolve as a discipline. There is an increased awareness of it generally, but as a career path it is still often hidden or perceived to be confusing, particularly by those on the periphery – let alone those outside peering in. According to the National Database of Accredited Qualifications, there are now 83 FM-related accredited options. Let's hope steps taken by the industry this year go some way to clearing the fog!

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