



Starting & Developing a  
Career in  
**Facilities Management**

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# ➤ Starting And Developing A Career In Facilities Management



**The role of the Facilities Manager is to ensure that the physical environment is always consistent with the needs of the business. That means ensuring that the amount, location and configuration of working spaces is optimised for current and future functions, staff numbers and business processes.**

The Facilities Manager must also ensure absolute compliance with numerous regulations and laws, including the Health & Safety at Work Act (HSWA), environmental legislation and various industry-specific rules. Keeping facilities safe – i.e. ensuring the safety of staff and visitors to the premises – is a key role of a Facilities Manager.

This means that Facilities Management is an enormous sector, and the term can include an almost infinite number of roles, job titles and management levels. Success in the industry will depend on your ability to remain competitive in the marketplace, and getting started requires you to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the principles behind Facilities Management.

A career in Facilities Management will take candidates down different paths depending on their speciality, experience, qualifications and ability – this guide is for those looking to start out in the sector, as well as more experienced workers looking to develop their career.

## How The Work Is Done



Generally, Facilities Management is considered a “supporting” role rather than a leading one. That means that its function is to ensure the business does its job well, rather than deciding what the business does. At a very senior level, some Facilities Management staff may have a strategic role – they could be tasked with procuring new properties or planning developments in relation to the wider goals of the business, but for most Facilities Management workers, day-to-day duties involve maintaining and optimising the existing facilities.

The term “Facilities Management” applies to a vast number of roles. It’s unusual for one individual to be solely responsible for all aspects of facilities management. Even when there is an employee with the title “Facilities Manager”, he or she will usually be part of a network of people who either occupy Facilities Management roles or who have some Facilities Management duties in addition to their ordinary workload.

As a result, the number of people working in Facilities Management roles will depend on the size and complexity of the business, and the nature of the facilities necessary to run it. A large organisation with multiple sites could have a Facilities Manager responsible for all premises, with an individual manager – a “Person in Command” - for each individual site. This person will be responsible for the day-to-day running of the premises, including the legal and environmental compliance.

## > Education

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**Success in Facilities Management is unlikely to depend entirely on your academic achievements. Many senior Facilities Managers currently working do not have formal Facilities Management qualifications. Instead, their ability to perform in the sector stems from skills acquired elsewhere – many successful Facilities Managers have qualifications and experience in related sectors.**

One of the reasons for this, however, is that Facilities Management is a relatively young industry and the Facilities Managers in positions of seniority did not have the opportunity to train initially in the sector. A qualification in Facilities Management is a good starting point for new candidates and will be useful when applying for roles later in your career.

While skills and abilities can be attained simply as a result of experience, the ability to show these capabilities to prospective employers is made far easier when your qualifications prove it. Training is available at almost all levels and can help form the foundation on which a comprehensive understanding of Facilities Management issues is built.

Qualifications are also useful to experienced Facilities Management staff, as they enable candidates to stay up-to-date with technological, legislative and best practice developments.

## Foundation Degrees And Diplomas



A job seeker looking to join the industry could begin with a foundation degree in facilities management. These courses are available all over the UK and usually allow for fairly flexible study methods, including distance learning. The benefit of attaining a foundation degree in facilities management is that it lets your future employers know that you have some knowledge and understanding of the industry already.

A Higher National Diploma (HND), a level up from a foundation degree, is worth two years of a three-year university course. Either a foundation degree of an HND in Facilities Management or a related subject, in conjunction with relevant work experience, will make the candidate a strong contender when applying for jobs.

## Degrees And Postgraduate Degrees



Degree courses are available in facilities management. These aren't as widespread as foundation degrees or HNDs, but they provide a more comprehensive level of tuition as they generally take three years to complete.

Many candidates chose to undertake a relevant degree and then specialise in facilities management for their masters degree. Relevant subjects include surveying, hospitality, project management, accountancy and logistics, all of which help build knowledge and cultivate skills that are useful in a Facilities Management career.

Some degrees or postgraduate degrees can be undertaken part-time or via distance learning. For candidates who wish to become senior within their current organisation, or for those looking to join a larger organisation in a role with additional responsibilities, successful completion of these wide-ranging but specialist courses will help during applications.

## Specialised Qualifications



The British Institute of Facilities Management offers qualifications for Facilities Management staff at all levels. These range from BIFM Level 2, which is the equivalent of GCSE-level qualifications, all the way to BIFM level 7, which is for senior and strategic Facilities Management staff and is the equivalent of a masters degree.

BIFM Level 2 is tailored to school leavers who are new to the sector. Consisting of a range of mandatory and optional units, a BIFM Level 2 qualification will provide a basic introduction to the main principles behind Facilities Management and will allow the candidate to demonstrate this knowledge when applying for jobs.

For more experienced candidates who are looking to develop their career and take on management roles, BIFM Levels 3 and 4 are relevant. Equivalent to A-levels and Certificate of Higher Education respectively, these courses enable candidates to develop their skills and, again, to easily demonstrate their abilities.

BIFM Level 5 is designed for specialist Facilities Managers, and are equivalent to a foundation degree. Beyond this level, Levels 6 and 7 are essentially for senior Facilities Management staff – those with strategic input, and those occupying “Head of Estates” roles.

There are learning outcomes for each level, commensurate with the knowledge and skills required by managers at these levels. Tasks are practical and work-based. Learning can take place via any accredited centre, meaning that candidates can choose their delivery style – face-to-face tuition and evening classes are available, but distance learning (conventional or online) are also popular.

If you have undertaken a relevant degree that is accredited by the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) then you can become a chartered surveyor within the RICS Facilities Management faculty. To do this you will need to undergo two further years of structured training for your Assessment of Professional Competence.

## > Work Experience

It is always beneficial to undertake work experience to complement qualifications. For a young applicant it's an essential part of training – work experience can be obtained through a college or educational institution, or it can be applied for individually. Companies of all sizes value work experience applicants and, although you're unlikely to be paid for your time, you will make a meaningful contribution to the company you work for.

Contacting organisations' Facilities Management departments directly, outlining your skills, experience, qualifications and ambitions, is worthwhile. Take note of what you learn during your work experience placement and be prepared to explain to your interviewers how you developed your abilities when looking for paid work.

Employers generally prefer candidates who can demonstrate technical competence. In-depth knowledge of machinery, building maintenance or IT services can add enormously to the CV of someone wishing to join a Facilities Management team. In addition, a full driving licence may be essential for some roles, and experience using heavy machinery or driving large vehicles may be helpful.

## Apprenticeships

Another option available primarily to younger entrants is the apprenticeship scheme. The main benefit of becoming an apprentice is that you get paid a minimum of £2.68 per hour for the work and the training that you undertake – you'll probably earn about £100 a week based on normal working hours. You're also entitled to 20 days holiday each year.

# ➤ Health and Safety

One of the fundamental roles of the Facilities Manager is to keep staff and visitors safe when they're on the premises. As such, and with a raft of legislation governing the safety of workers, much of the Facilities Management department's responsibilities relate to various Health and Safety laws and regulations.

For both new starters and experienced workers, knowledge and understanding of health and safety principles and legislation is vital. What's just as important from an employability perspective is the ability to demonstrate this understanding. Formal qualifications are available from the two main Health and Safety training bodies – the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) and the National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health (NEBOSH). Hundreds of thousands of candidates undertake Health and Safety courses through these organisations each year, and they're available from several hundred accredited training providers around the UK.

Not all jobs will require formal health and safety qualifications, but completion of courses is an easy way of showing that you're trained and ready to work within the law. Because of their prominence within the Facilities Management sector, qualifications pertaining to any of the following pieces of legislation are likely to be useful when applying for jobs.

*Reporting of Injuries, Disease and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995*

*Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations 1996*

*Health and Safety at Work Act 1974*

*The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999*

*The Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2007*

*Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (2005)*

*The Control of Asbestos Regulations 2006*

*Electricity at Work Regulations 1999*

*Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005*



*The Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998*

*Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992*

*Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1996*

*Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992*

*Display Screen Equipment Regulations 1992*

*Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations 1992*

*H&S (First Aid) Regulations 1981*

Formal qualifications are certainly not vital for most entry-level applicants to Facilities Management roles. However, being able to show some knowledge of the above regulations, ideally from work experience, will be beneficial to candidates for roles at all levels.

Knowledge of BS OHSAS 18001 becomes relevant as applicants become more senior. This standard provides a system to identify and minimise health and safety risks, as well as ensuring that businesses comply with the law.

# > Developing Essential Skills

**Gaining skills is a process that spans an entire career, but those new to the business will benefit by starting to develop a relevant skillset. Many entrants to Facilities Management bring with them the knowledge they attained in other sectors – hospitality, event management, project management and the military all teach skills that are applicable in Facilities Management. Showing that you have mastered these abilities is an integral part of your application for a Facilities Management role, and it's essential that you maintain these skills – and can demonstrate your competence – in order to remain competitive within the industry.**

Because of the number of people and roles involved in facilities management, one of the key strengths any candidate should have is communication and interpersonal skills. Being able to efficiently and effectively communicate with all staff levels is an absolutely essential skill for a Facilities Manager to have. The Facilities Manager may also need to arbitrate between conflicting needs and priorities within the organisation. This relies heavily on communication, decision-making and reliable analysis.

Closely linked to this is efficient delegation. Understanding how to manage complex workloads, often against tight deadlines, is a key element of Facilities Management. This includes contracting resources and obtaining advice, much of which may come from external sources. For example, a Facilities Manager may carry out a fire hazard inspection and complete a risk assessment, but would seek an annual detailed inspection from a specialist (such as the fire brigade).

The Facilities Management regime may have to operate at every level, from ensuring that the stairwell is clean to liaising with the Health and Safety Executive, to presenting a board paper on the capital cost of building a new factory. The Facilities Manager must be capable of both managing individuals in his team to deliver at all of these levels, and switching his or her attention between the levels. The board director who approved your CAPEX plan in the morning will complain about waste paper in the car park in the afternoon.

Most stakeholders expect to be a net recipient of Facilities Management support. That means that their office needs to work like clockwork but must also be able to accommodate a headcount increase; the staff must be safe but fire drills mustn't interfere with workflow. Department managers

do not want to come to your meetings or copy you in on their two-year plan. So in addition to the essential technical and communicative skills, you need to be able to build an understanding of your colleagues' needs and agendas, building mutual trust and a sense of shared objectives. This ability is probably the most important to those candidates who are experienced and wish to develop their career – showing that you're able to provide comprehensive Facilities Management support is a straightforward route to success.

Technical knowledge relating to building services will be important for most roles. Candidates who can show that they're comfortable and competent at managing the maintenance of a building will be looked on favourably. Work experience is a key way of developing these skills, and it's often through related careers that applicants gain valuable hands-on skills.

Students intending to pursue a career in facilities management may wish to take on relevant responsibilities at university. Most universities have schemes whereby a student is responsible for some facilities management duties in halls – being a contact for the Facilities Management department will provide some experience that could help with job applications.

Building these skills will take time, but being able to demonstrate an aptitude for them will work to your benefit at interview, whether you are a newcomer to Facilities Management or an experienced worker looking for new opportunities.

## Demonstrating Competence



Your success in the industry will depend largely on your ability to show prospective employers that you are suitable for the roles you're applying for. Depending on the seniority of the position and the your career stage, this could be anything from top-level qualifications to being able to show your knowledge at interview.

One of the main areas in which candidates are expected to have some understanding is health and safety. Facilities Managers are often responsible for staff who are on the "front line" of health and safety – those workers whose use of machinery, chemicals and vehicles requires more regulation than ordinary office activities.

While the Facilities Manager may have day-to-day health and safety responsibilities, it is the company directors who will be held accountable if an incident takes place. The death or injury of a member of staff may result in a director being taken to court or even imprisoned.

New recruits will benefit from demonstrating knowledge of the main legislation that governs health and safety. This includes the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 and its updates, which forms the backbone of health and safety law in the UK, and the Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999. Candidates that show strong knowledge of these requirements will be looked on favourably by employers.

Larger organisations, and businesses wishing to operate internationally or in the public sector, usually maintain their health and safety compliance using documentation and processes conforming to BS OHSAS 18001. This is a British Standard for health and safety management systems that helps companies develop and implement demonstrable health and safety performance. Knowledge of this is advantageous at all levels, but those applying for more senior roles may be expected to have undergone formal training.

## Continued Personal Development



The more senior the position in Facilities Management, the more important it becomes to have certain knowledge that isn't necessarily relevant at junior or entry-level roles.

Setting and working to Service Level Agreements (SLAs) or Operational-Level Agreements (OLAs) becomes a key element of a senior Facilities Management worker's role. These agreements address the relationship between the Facilities Management department and the rest of the organisation, and may provide metrics by which the department and its workers are evaluated.

Working within formal systems and processes will be part of any Facilities Management worker's role, but as the employee develops and attains seniority, it's essential to have some knowledge of ISO 18001 for Health & Safety, and ISO 14001 for Environment. While workers at all levels will undertake procedures relating to these standards, senior staff will need to be able to present evidence for maintaining accreditations for these and any other standards relevant to the particular business.

Budget management becomes increasingly important with seniority in the sector. As Facilities Management fulfils a support role, it is not usually revenue-earning in itself (apart from businesses specialising in the field). As such, the contribution to the business relies on you being able to provide an efficient and good-value service to your in-house "customers" while firmly controlling your in-house and supplier/contractor costs. Demonstrating that you have experience in managing budgets will become increasingly important as you become more senior.

For senior positions involving significant programmes of change, such as relocations and major re-works of premises, project management skills become essential. For these roles, knowledge of formal project management methods such as Prince 2 are very useful – both to get the job and to do it. Senior Facilities Management staff or those hoping to fill senior roles would benefit from undertaking these courses privately if they are not offered by employers.

## Understanding Business



The more senior the Facilities Management employee, the greater understanding of the wider organisation is required. Given that many business premises are multi-functional – i.e. they include an office, a warehouse, a call centre, an IT centre, a factory, a yard etc – and fulfil the needs of several business functions, the Facilities Manager must maintain awareness and alignment with the overall business.

Some Facilities managers may also be responsible for developing premises, procuring new property, relocation, expansion and refurbishment. This requires all the normal Facilities Management skills, in addition to strong planning and the ability to engage with an internal “customer”. Just as importantly, an acute knowledge of the long-term business goals is required – a Facilities Manager in such a senior and strategic role will be expected to show advanced contract management skills and financial control expertise.

Staying engaged with the needs of the business is likely to be useful for Facilities Management workers at all levels. But it’s especially important for those seeking to advance in their career and to take on more responsibilities, for which knowledge of the wider goals and objectives of the business is vital.

## > Finding And Getting Jobs

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**FM World has a job listings section, as does the BIFM website. Many non-specific job sites and search engines list Facilities Management vacancies.**

Networking is an integral element of an industry as young and agile as Facilities Management. Most industry events have allocated times between sessions in which professionals within the industry can confer and share information, as well as make contacts – the ability to develop meaningful business relationships throughout the sector will become deeply advantageous as your career grows.

Not all networking is conducted face-to-face – social media brings Facilities Management workers in touch with the voices of the industry, as well as enabling professionals to connect individually. As a young and energetic sector, Facilities Management and its people are in a strong position to utilise social media to its full potential.

Applications for Facilities Management roles may be via an online form, which will ask you for specific details. But if the application is of the CV and covering letter variety, it's useful to have an idea of what experiences will be relevant for the CV.

It's here that you can show your communication skills, for example by mentioning situations or roles that have involved communicating with a wide range of people. This can be liaising with government agencies or local authorities, or communicating effectively in-house.

Your experience working within any sort of estates, facilities or buildings management context will be valuable. Jobs that aren't management-related, for example engineering or machine operation, demonstrate your technical competence and knowledge of "front-line" operations.

Organisation and planning within relevant sectors, such as reception provision, archiving, postal services, security and waste disposal are all relevant skills. Any role in which a candidate has been responsible for a process, especially one with clear measurement objectives, will strengthen an application.

Cleaning and catering experience – especially if the candidate has attained qualifications – are valuable additions to a CV. Many applicants enter Facilities Management from hospitality-related fields.

# ➤ What A Career In Facilities Management Might Look Like

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**To give candidates an idea of how a career in Facilities Management could progress, it's helpful to consider the various job roles and stages that a Facilities Management worker might go through.**

Starting at an operations level, an ambitious Facilities Management professional might apply for support roles such as security, facilities assistant, office admin or an “on-the-ground” position. This is broadly in line with BIFM Level 2 qualifications or apprenticeships. With Level 3 qualifications, the candidate could apply for supervisory jobs – these might be within office management, technician or co-ordinator roles.

Taking on management responsibilities, and in line with BIFM Levels 4 and 5, candidates may have attained the experience and knowledge necessary for a premises manager or facilities area manager job.

Beyond this level of responsibility, at the senior or strategic level, qualifications like BIFM Level 6 or 7 are a good investment, as are certifications like Prince 2. At this point, the Facilities Management professional will be in a leading role, possibly as a Head of FM in a large multi-site organisation. According to research undertaken by FM World, professionals at this level can expect to be earning £60,000 to £90,000.



## ➤ Where To Go For More



The British Institute for Facilities Management is one of the main organisations relevant to the Facilities Management sector. Now in its third decade, BIFM is the professional body for the industry and supports 14,000 members worldwide. Membership of the British Institute of Facilities Management brings with it the potential for networking and continued personal development (CPD) opportunities.

<http://www.bifm.org.uk>

FM World is the official fortnightly magazine of BIFM. Now in its tenth year, it is sent to BIFM members and others by subscription. For those seeking a career in Facilities Management, FM World is a good investment – it's an easy way to keep knowledge current and to read analysis, news and announcements relevant to the industry.

The website, [fm-world.co.uk](http://fm-world.co.uk), is free to access and contains a vast amount of news and comment.

The International Facility Management Association has a membership base of 24,000, which is collectively responsible for about \$100bn of spending worldwide.

<http://www.ifma.org/>

The Institute of Leadership and Management is the country's largest leadership institute, providing world-renowned qualifications and membership to about 25,000 managers.

[www.i-l-m.com](http://www.i-l-m.com)

## > Conclusion

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**Facilities Management is an enormous and growing sector, and one that is forced to evolve with the ever-changing legislative landscape that governs it. Your success within the industry will depend primarily on your competence, but also on your aptitude for staying up-to-date and constantly building your expertise.**

It isn't just candidates at the beginning of their career who are in competition – vacancies of all seniority will attract many well-qualified applicants. Your knowledge, skills and experience – and your ability to demonstrate them – will define your success within this new and exciting industry.



# A FINE POSITION TO BE IN



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