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THE FUTURE OF FACILITIES MANAGEMENT – EDUCATORS AND PROFESSIONAL BODIES WORKING TOGETHER

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Facilities management programmes in Australia suffer from poor recruitment levels. This is in strong contrast to nearby Asian countries such as Hong Kong and Singapore where facilities management is a well-respected profession and programmes recruit in the 100’s. Facilities management seems to be more regarded as purely a technical or even a janitorial job by potential students rather than a profession that offers scope for the development and exercise of high level skills in Australia. The word “management” seems to be ignored in the minds of the general public, despite the aspirations of practitioners and researchers to reach board-level influence. Facilities management is not the only one of the built-environment professions being viewed in this way. A number of professional bodies have difficulty recruiting fresh graduates into their ranks in Australia and research suggests that low recruitment levels will lead to a moribund profession with the potential for being downgraded to quasi or para-professional status. This paper would like to stimulate debate about the future of construction professions generally, how to encourage quality graduate entrants and educate employers about the need, indeed the necessity, for requiring professional qualifications in addition to graduate or post-graduate education to ensure the highest standards and continuing development of skills and knowledge.

Keywords: facilities management, professional education.

INTRODUCTION

Facilities Management (FM) is a relatively new profession. Whilst the services it offers have been performed for many years, it has only been probably since the 1980’s that the term has been used to distinguish the skill set that facilities managers can offer. One of the dilemmas facing facilities management as a
profession is that it has something of an identity crisis. The historical roots of facilities management are in maintenance management, however there is an emerging movement to emphasise the strategic aspects of facilities management and to establish facilities management as having a direct contribution to business goals (Price 2003a). There is resistance to this direction since, for the large part, its practitioners work in operations for their respective organisations and facilities management has failed to conclusively demonstrate clear linkages between facilities and productivity or business goals and adding value (Grimshaw 2007). Add to this that facilities managers have typically entered the sector from another career such as surveying or building services, or from soft services such as human resources, financial services or even catering, while others still debate whether facilities management is a profession or simply a market (Price 2003a), and we have the ingredients for this identity crisis. Trying to promote something with no clear definition is somewhat problematic.

This lack of understanding is not solely the province of facilities management. Surveying and construction management qualifications experience the same problems of poor public recognition and comprehension of the range of skills that can be acquired and the professional career potential. Contrast this with the public’s apparent clearer perception of what an architect does. Demand by school leavers in Victoria for places on architecture courses continues to exceed supply despite a 4th degree programme (Monash University) now being offered.

Perhaps this lack of awareness of FM by the public results from its ‘newness’ as a profession, or even lack of appreciation that it is a profession, compounded by the greater diversity of roles that facilities managers can take on - employment opportunities that range from maintenance subcontracting through to working as outsourcing consultants internationally (eg Johnson Controls). The former employment probably requires apprenticeship or practical training at a vocational training college (TAFE level in Australia) and certainly doesn’t warrant professional status, whilst those involved in larger companies may decide an MBA is a more practical and useful post-graduate degree. Degree qualification is not essential for those intending to practice as a facilities manager – unlike architects. Indeed practical experience is often regarded as more valuable in
Australia – as any quick check on employment websites will confirm. These issues limit the number and quality of undergraduate degree applicants in Australia.

Given this history, where should facilities management education be situated? If we take on the premise that this is indeed a profession (see discussion below) and that those engaged in a profession should be educated to degree level, should facilities management education be in a business school, or should it be in property management/real estate/asset management, or is it a more suited to courses accredited by the professional bodies of surveying and construction, or even taught as part of architecture courses? Certainly Frank Duffy, probably responsible for bringing FM from America to the UK in the 1980’s saw FM as “an essential part of the development of a new vision of design, a new kind of architecture” (Price, 2003a, p.37, reporting Duffy’s 1987 IAM-FMG address). There is no set pattern. Universities that saw FM as an opportunity to expand offerings have set up courses in schools of architecture, design and planning, construction, property and business schools (Price, 2003b).

What does facilities management need to do to ensure it becomes a thriving profession in Australia? Recent research about professional recruitment and the ingredients for successful built environment professions suggest that tertiary education and professional bodies need to work together to ensure standards are maintained and to secure the future of the professional bodies.

**THE REQUIREMENTS OF A PROFESSION**

How are professional standards maintained? Most discussions about the ideology of a profession agree that an essential ingredient is the possession of a defined body of specialist knowledge such that these ‘experts’ can provide services to the general public, who can rely on their expertise (not being adequately knowledgeable themselves) (Eraut, 1994). Embedded in this is the idea that this expertise has been acquired both through education and practice (developing competency), and that there is a moral duty of care usually enshrined in codes of conduct and requiring ethical practice that is enforced by the professional body.
itself. Professional status can also give protection against unqualified competition and attract greater social status and remuneration (Eraut, 1994).

Does FM meet these criteria? Certainly the International Facilities Management Association (IFMA) has established a defined body of competencies that can be viewed on its website, has a Professional Code of Conduct, and regulates routes to qualification setting its own examinations. The Facilities Management Association of Australia (FMAA) has recently recognised the Chartered Facility Manager (CFM) route to qualification offered by IFMA. Does FM therefore need degree qualified entrants? Which came first – the profession or the education?

THE VALUE OF A DEGREE

Eraut (1994) reports that in Britain, the professions developed in advance of university education, whilst in France and the USA, universities set up professional schools that preceded the setting up of professional associations. It would appear professional bodies can develop from both practice and education. In the UK, professional bodies set their own examinations for many years (e.g. the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors). For the last 20 years and more, accredited degree programmes have now become the only route to qualification.

With the increasing cost of degree programmes, potential students are understandably wary of undertaking study where they commit to high levels of debt. However, data suggests that first degree level qualification will guarantee higher income levels over a graduate’s working life - 2.4 times that of a high school dropout and 3.9 times higher with a PhD (US Census Bureau, 2006). The Australian government recognises the importance of its higher education system as being central to Australia’s economic and social progress:

To be globally competitive and to secure the high skilled jobs of the future, Australia needs an outstanding, internationally competitive higher education system with increased participation and higher attainment levels. Australia also needs a quality higher education system to sustain

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1 http://www.ifma.org/learning/fm_credentials/index.cfm
The international education industry which is Australia’s third largest export. (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009 p6).

The Australian government’s ambitious agenda for higher education is to encourage increasing participation in higher education aiming to increase current levels of bachelor level graduates from 32% of the population aged 25-34 years old to 40% by 2025. With this agenda and appropriate additional funding, there is the potential to attract larger numbers into the built environment and facilities management programs of study – but only if the relevance of degree level qualification is made clear.

One area with potential to increase awareness is to start early – making sure school children have a better idea about the production of the built environment. In the UK a new Diploma in Construction and the Built Environment is being introduced into the secondary school curriculum from 2011. It offers a bridge between academic and vocational courses of study, and practical experience linking schools, colleges of further education and employers. Students will take a series of compulsory and optional elements. One of the compulsory elements covers "The value and use of the built environment including maintenance and management requirements and how built structures affect the community that uses them."

The diploma will be set within the national qualifications framework which has introduced a Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF). These QCF units are now the basic building blocks for qualifications.

![Figure 1: The ‘ladder of achievement’ - UK routes to FM qualification (Fenwick, 2008).](image)
The British Institute of Facilities Management (BIFM) aims to provide opportunities for Awards, Certificates and Diplomas at Levels 4, 5 and 6. Figure 1 illustrates the routes to qualification and a hierarchy of awards for facilities managers. Introducing built environment units to schoolchildren is a step in the right direction for creating awareness of facilities management and built environment professions as a future degree and career choice. Australia needs something akin to this in its school curriculum.

THE VALUE OF A PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATION

Australia has a relatively youthful professional culture in the built environment. It appears to have a cultural preference for experience in building rather than education and professional membership. A search through jobs advertised for built environment vacancies evidences few requiring tertiary education let alone membership of a profession. Indeed, research results indicate that only 10% of students on built environment courses believe that Australian employers would expect them to become professionally qualified (Wilkinson and Warren 2007). Other countries have a very different culture. Hong Kong and Singapore, for example, have such a high regard for professional and educational qualifications, that professional courses such as Facilities Management attract 100’s of students and students happily enrol in several professional bodies after graduation – their business cards exhibit long lists of letters for professional memberships and educational attainment. Professional membership is seen to give higher social status and increased earning potential.

Does it matter if education and professional membership in the built environment professions are not highly valued in Australia? Do we receive the highest standards of service and output regardless? Not necessarily. We are living in a world with a constantly expanding knowledge base. We need people who are increasingly specialised and competent, keeping up-to-date with developments, able to deliver quality service. Professional bodies provide opportunities for professionals to keep up-to-date. They offer many valuable services to their members – reports and relevant research information; networking opportunities to communicate with colleagues worldwide about issues, concerns and best practices specific to an area of practice. We need professional bodies to set and maintain
standards of professional practice and to require their members to undertake continuing education.

New professions develop as the need for specialisation increases. The need to make their claim to a particular knowledge base (and thus their right to autonomy) has led newer professions to move their training into the higher education sector. Construction-related degree programs have had only a recent association with accreditation by professional bodies. In the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} century, professional associations set their own examinations – the examination system invoking recognition of the merit of the profession (Sutherland 2001).

A healthy, thriving profession needs a constant inflow of new members, to be dynamic, relevant, and offering value to its members. Professions need to be able to change to reflect changing social and technical requirements, and they must increase their attractiveness to students and young graduates. Research evidence (Zillante 2008) identifies a number of essential features of a successful professional body: it has a high proportion of its members with degree level educational qualifications together with a structured approach to increasing the attractiveness of the professional body to students and young graduates. It also has a pathway culture for those members who do not possess degrees to study towards obtaining a degree. It has procedures for accreditation and recognition of education programs and can assess and accommodate international qualifications. Those organisations without those features are likely to become quasi-professional with reduced status (Zillante 2008). The problem comes in attracting students to undertake degree level training for relatively new professions when they may not have long been distinguished as a separate profession, or in the case of Australia, where professional memberships are not regarded as essential (Wilkinson and Warren 2007).

\textbf{WORKING TOGETHER}

Professions need “new blood” - ie graduates becoming members. Professional bodies need to work with tertiary education providers to ensure that degree programs are approved and accredited. Educators are happy to work with professional bodies to guarantee the quality and rigour of undergraduate courses,
thus ensuring that content is relevant and up-to-date. Educators also believe that it is a good “selling point” attracting good quality students – but is it? Recent research (Wilkinson and Warren 2007) has found that the voluntary uptake of professional membership by new graduates from Australian Universities is extremely low – for example, in their survey not one single student of Melbourne University, with a degree exempting them from the professional examinations, decided to enrol as a member of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS). The RICS offers internationally recognised qualifications in 16 faculties that include Facilities Management, Building Surveying, Project Management, Commercial Property, Construction Management and Quantity Surveying – all highly relevant to future careers in the built environment and facilities management. Surely students would want a profession, a good career path?

Where students do see value and necessity, they will join a profession and undertake accreditation and competency assessments. For example, graduates from architecture programs will happily sign up for relatively low-paid positions when they are guaranteed that, when they have completed their “apprenticeship”, they can join the association and become a registered practitioner themselves. Why does this happen? Because to use the title of ‘architect’ or offer services to the public as an architect, they are legally required to be registered with a State or Territory Architects’ Board. They cannot practice as an architect without a minimum 2 years recognised post-graduate practice of their profession. Should Facility Managers be looking to establish professional qualifications that are equally valued? This is certainly happening with the use of the Certified Facility Manager (CFM) credential internationally, instituted by the International Facility Management Association (IFMA), which has rigorous standards and examinations for entry. As a consequence of the recognised value of the qualification, Chartered or Certified status can increase an individual’s marketability and salary potential. Should registration with a professional body be a pre-requisite to practice in the built environment professions, as for architecture?

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2 On average CFM’s earn 18% more than non-certified facility managers in the USA. http://www.ifma.org/learning/fm_credentials/forms/CFM_brochure08.pdf
CONCLUSIONS

If facilities management is to achieve growth and recognition as a profession, it needs to attract graduates and it needs to have pathways to help non-graduate practitioners get qualifications. Facilities management as a potential career choice amongst students is relatively poorly recognised in Australia, and yet there are numerous highly paid vacancies for experienced facility managers. There is a mismatch here – demand without upcoming supply. The built environment professions generally need to raise their profile and attractiveness. The professions need to encourage employers to specify employment opportunities that require membership of a professional body.

It takes time for any new profession to build public awareness, acceptance and demand for their expert services. The future of facilities management as a profession needs to be in partnership with universities. Universities can undertake school visits and advertise programs which would be assisted by the professional body working to make the public aware of the benefits of using a qualified person for the task – and generally raising the profile of the profession. Marketing is becoming an essential requirement. The facilities management profession in Australia needs to take an equal responsibility in helping to generate employer demand for qualification and membership. They also need to look at creating membership tiers that recognise different levels of competence and reward the most expert – such as the certification or chartered status of other professions. A low-profile professional body that is not attracting graduates will not survive. It needs to have influence in the top levels of government, and appropriate introduction into school’s curricula – thus placing it within a structure that encourages aspirations to the highest levels of education and professionalism.

REFERENCES


