

Facilities Management recognition within the UK and the SIC Code 2008

As many in the facilities management world within the UK, and in particular those that have been intimately involved with the British Institute of Facilities Management (BIFM) since its establishment in 1993, the establishment of a new professional discipline does not just happen. It develops over a considerable period of time; has to achieve its objectives through interfacing with many different and disparate organisations; is reliant upon many individuals in order to establish itself as credible get itself 'on the map'. With the arrival of a Standard Industrial Classification of Economic Activities Code (SIC) for facilities management it might interest many of you to gain a better understanding regarding the journey that has been undertaken to get to where we are today as well as the significance of this milestone and what it all means going forward.

The basis and recognition of any profession starts with education and this indeed was the focus in the early years of BIFM and its predecessors the IFM and AFM. This fact was also recently recognised as demonstrated through the recent Global FM International Workshop held alongside the BIFM National Conference in Oxford in March on the topic of Education. When facilities management associations were polled as to what their top priorities were in terms of facilities management developing as a profession, education was the number 1 'hot topic'. The BIFM in its early years therefore quite rightly focused upon the development a solid foundation the product of which was the BIFM Qualification and the associated competencies. In many respects the BIFM has led the way within the UK, and farther afield, in this regard but of course it had to also focus on a number of other such initiatives to substantiate the importance and value of facilities management to the economy as a whole.

Over the period since 1993 a considerable number of initiatives have been developed in order to further the understanding and awareness of what we do and the potential we offer as a distinct professional discipline. Other similar initiatives included the accreditation scheme with all of the UK Universities offering facilities management degrees or modules; our involvement and the development of the facilities management perspective via Asset Skills and the work that is being done to develop a structured approach to vocational skills; the involvement and contribution towards the development of British and European Standards in facilities management in order that within Europe at least we try to utilise a common understanding if not a common language; our involvement and contribution towards the development of facilities management within organisations such as Euro FM and Global FM; and the ongoing restatement and alignment of the BIFM Qualification and competencies; to name but a few.

One additional area which the BIFM Board considered to be important was to gain Government recognition of our role as a professional discipline through the establishment of a SIC Code for facilities management. A major revision of the UK Standard Industrial Classification of Economic Activities was announced in 2002, being due for completion in 2008, and it was therefore decided to take advantage of the revision and as a result BIFM entered into discussions with the ONS to do so.

A Standard Industrial Classification was first introduced into the United Kingdom in 1948 for use in classifying business establishments and other statistical units by the type of economic activity in which they are engaged. ONS gather statistics from all employers to capture vital information regarding working patterns in the UK and what SIC codes categories workers fall under. This essential data is issued by ONS to government to help the planning of the economy and tracking of social trends.

The United Kingdom SIC is used to classify business establishments and other standard units by the type of economic activity in which they are engaged. It provides a framework for the collection, tabulation, presentation and analysis of data and its use promotes uniformity. In addition, it can be used for administrative purposes and by non-government bodies as a convenient way of classifying industrial activities into a common structure.

Without this code ONS firstly does not recognise that you exist (as a distinct discipline) and therefore cannot provide Government or any other interested party with data associated with the sector.

The system is identical to the EUROSTAT System NACE at the four digit class level and the United Nations system ISIC at the two digit Divisional level.

The BIFM Executive, led by CEO Ian Fielder, met with the ONS and submitted a proposal, working closely with the Asset Skills Council to influence the revision of the SIC and to include reference to facilities management. Following many meetings and revisions they were successful in persuading ONS to introduce a new facilities management class, 81.10. This class is described as follows:

81.10 Combined facilities support activities

This class includes the provision of a combination of support services within a client's facilities. These services include general interior cleaning, maintenance, trash disposal, guard and security, mail routing, reception, laundry and related services to support operations within facilities. These support activities are performed by operating staff who are not involved with or responsible for the core business or activities of the client.

Whilst such definitions will always be potentially flawed, depending upon which perspective you view them, the fact that such a classification exists is significant. As a discipline and a sector we now officially exist! Because we now officially exist we have an opportunity to record the fact that as a sector we have a considerable part to play in the success and efficiency of the health and wellbeing of the UK economy. The fact that we now exist in a similar context within Europe equally offers advantages in terms of any measurement and communication at this level.

BIFM is delighted, along with the Asset Skills Council, that facilities management has been recognised and the use of SIC code 81.10 will help gather accurate information that can be used across the sector.

It is interesting to note that to achieve such recognition, which is arguably critical for the future of facilities management as a profession, it is important that we are involved with the development of facilities management in all its facets and that we recognise that to ultimately succeed your Board in BIFM has recognised the importance of engaging with the community as whole across all boundaries within the UK and Internationally.

Some examples of the benefits of such a strategy can be illustrated by two specific developments:

1. CEN TC 348 is the facilities management standards committee that operates across Europe working on the development of European standards. When accepted through this committee they become BS Standards and are applicable across all counties in the EU plus some others.

During the discussions with ONS to achieve the SIC code one direct influence on them was the fact that we already had two standards in facilities management that were recognised across Europe i.e. BS EN 15221-1 Terms and Definitions and BS EN 15221-2 Guidance on How to Prepare Facility Management Agreements. This demonstrates the indirect 'value' that can be achieved through such initiatives.

2. One of the many strengths of BIFM has been its examinations and qualification process which has continued to attract a growing number of candidates year on year and is greatly respected throughout the world. The BIFM Board recently endorsed, through its Medium Term Business Strategy an application to gain recognition by the Qualification and Curriculum Authority (QCA) as an Awarding Body. The QCA is responsible for the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) which sets out the levels at which qualifications can be recognised within the UK.

BIFM has commenced the development of entry level qualification through its partnership with the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM). It is also working with Asset Skills to develop the new Schools Diploma programme aimed to bridge the gap between vocational and academic qualifications focused upon children aged 14 to 19. They will be able to take specific subjects, including a Diploma in the Built Environment which will be launched in September 2008.

A complete pathway for the FM career professional is no longer a dream but a reality and can be achieved through a complete blend of knowledge and experience in facilities management, and through the achievement of the SIC code such career prospects will become increasingly recognised.

All these initiatives represents an incremental step to the overall recognition by Industry, Commerce and Government that facilities management not only exists but has a significant part to play in the overall effectiveness of our economy and the resultant GDP of the UK.

We have come a long way since the humble beginnings of BIFM in 1993 and achieved much. To those who have contributed to our development on the journey a hearty congratulations and well done!

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