

SKILLS, LEARNING AND FACILITIES MANAGEMENT

TEXT **NORMAN ROSE** - DIRECTOR GENERAL, BUSINESS SERVICES ASSOCIATION, UK

RECENTLY, SKILLS HAVE BECOME AN INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT PART OF THE BUSINESS AGENDA, AND ABOUT TIME TOO! FOR TOO LONG WE HAVE BEEN CONTENT TO SETTLE FOR A STANDARD OF TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT WHICH IS SUB-OPTIMAL TO THE PROVISION OF HIGH QUALITY SERVICES AND WHICH DOES NOT CONVEY CLEARLY ENOUGH TO OUR STAFF THAT THEY ARE OUR MOST IMPORTANT ASSET, WITHOUT WHOM WE CANNOT SATISFY OUR CLIENTS.

We in BSA have always recognised the importance of training and development but companies have often been hampered in their quest to promote this agenda by commercial considerations - particularly price. Slowly that is changing, with greater acceptance of the way staff development adds value to service provision

Within BSA, we have undertaken two major projects as part of our commitment to improving the skills base for services. First, we have supported Asset Skills, our Sector Skills Council, in preparing a bid for a National Skills Academy for our sector. If successful, this will help to address the continuing skills shortage - especially obvious as preparations for the 2012 London Olympics gather pace.

The second initiative is a groundbreaking project with PCS (the Public and Commercial Services Union) to establish a first-ever Public Services Skills Standard focused around basic skills, customer care and other statutory training such as health and safety and diversity. A first phase will focus on nine pilot sites to evaluate how the skills provision of helps service delivery, reduces staff turnover and improves customer relations.

A longer term roll-out will benefit public and private sector support staff who work in a customer-facing environment, offering greater job satisfaction and better prospects

of promotion based on a nationally recognised qualification. It will also offer better service and greater productivity in Government departments.

Ultimately, this work should become a benchmark for all providers of public services. To that end we have outlined a focus for future training towards a customer care skills standard - working towards a robust, workable skills standard for customer care in the government sector, This has generated real interest from employers, government ministers, union representatives, and skills and standards bodies.

In the UK, the recent Leitch report proposes a Commission for Employment and Skills to replace a current fragmented structure and build on the current trend for demand-led provision - addressing current employer and staff needs, with employers allowed to set the agenda in consultation with Government. Under the terms of the report, employers would be under pressure to deliver results rather than rhetoric. This looks to be especially meaningful in the public sector, where people using services are increasingly sophisticated.

BSA members - major companies committed to training and developing staff - welcome the Leitch Report's clear intention that relevant training should become the norm. However there may be some need for some element of compulsion, through a levy or other finan-



NORMAN ROSE - DIRECTOR GENERAL OF BSA

cial sanctions to ensure that all employers meet the same high standards. One way to address this would be through tax incentives for companies which train staff to recognised National Occupational Standard levels using SSC accredited training mediums. The cost to the UK Exchequer would be small compared with the potential expansion of learning and development across the economy.

A number of encouraging developments have been seen recently in response to the Leitch challenge. One of the more controversial is the launch of the high profile 'Skills Pledge' for employers, aiming to offer employees the opportunity to gain relevant basic with a platform for further training. BSA's members have been at the forefront of commitment to this initiative, but we recognise that only time will tell if the Pledge is more than just another piece of political rhetoric; does it have substance to deliver real change?

Nowhere is this more important than in relation to the 2012 Olympics. The remainder of this article will look at the importance of skills to this event by way of a short case study.

Not much attention will focus on the role of Facilities Management providers in ensuring a successful Games. Yet BSA members have been providing services to successive Olympiads for more than 30 years.

Our experience indicates that problems during the operational phase often occur when services have been procured late in the day. Ideally, the services for large scale projects such as the Olympics should be tendered as early as the design phase. For optimal functioning, even services as basic as cleaning and waste collection need to be considered when designing stadiums.

When choosing service deliverers authorities must focus on quality of service rather than the cheapest tender. This demands a well trained and motivated workforce within each successful bidder.

At BSA, our manifesto is 'skills development, skills development, skills development.' Only through our commitment to training and the value of our staff will we break through the barriers which allow us to all become superior service providers.