
Editorial

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The British Institute of Facilities Management Annual Conference 2008 was held on the 18th and 19th March at Keble College, Oxford.

This year's conference, with the theme 'Sustainable FM — meeting the challenge', was a vibrant and well-attended event. The programme offered a 360-degree view of sustainability: developing people and skills, protecting the environment, sustaining organisations and business, and building sustainable communities.

The programme included a good line-up of keynote speakers including the show stealing Barbara Stocking, the Director of Oxfam, who told the conference that the Third World definition of sustainability has very much a business rather than an environmental focus. James Woudhuysen, Professor of Forecasting and Innovation at De Montfort University, reminded the conference that not everyone is convinced about current policy on protecting the environment in what was billed as an 'alternative view'.

A highlight of the conference was the skill of the session chair, BBC presenter Stephen Sackur, who brought a new level of professionalism to many aspects of conference delivery.

The four parallel session slots gave delegates a choice of five different options, all mixing best practice with research and innovation. The diverse range of topics covers skills shortages, fair pay, energy management, post occupancy evaluation, flexible working and much more.

The Conference Fringe sessions included a low-emission walking tour of Oxford, a debate on carbon offsetting, Workplace Law's Dodging Bullets Live! game, a 'behind the scenes' tour of Keble College, the Women in facilities management (FM) debate, How to network and Rising FMs.

The conference left many questions unanswered but there is certainly a need to recognise some aspects of the sustainability agenda:

1. Sustainability means different things to different people. Understand that for an individual business or growing economy it means sustaining the business and noting the environmental costs and yet the global definition may be one of survival of the species.
2. We may have to respond to change as well as try to make changes that result in new ways of working.
3. There is a need to react to the damage that we have already done not merely to repair but to work around. Climate change will already have a real impact upon FM whatever we do now.
4. For years the compromise has been weighted in favour of industry over the environment. We cannot seriously expect that position to



reverse in the short term either for our own industry or for the surging economies of south-east Asia. The challenge is to find near-no cost options.

5. We need to examine investment in technology as well as process to improve sustainability.
6. The de-socialisation of the workplace is moving at a fast pace. From a physical place built on relationships, the office is fast becoming a virtual space built on nothing. This raises questions of long-term people and knowledge management. We must also ask if the very resource upon which the economy is built, labour, can be effectively regenerated and replaced in the environment that is emerging.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome Matthew Tucker, Senior Lecturer in Property and Facilities Management at Liverpool John Moores University to the Editorial Board.

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