Guest Editorial

Security manned guarding and the hidden outcomes of the UK's opt-outs from the EU's maximum working week legislation

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Following Professor Pitt's outline editorial on security in the last issue, I am delighted to have been asked to comment on security from the industry perspective.

The security industry, and in particular manned guarding services, has never been an exciting sector but in the 'new norm' of heightened security awareness manned guarding services play an ever increasing role in protecting people, assets and reputations.

With the introduction of Licensing for security staff in England in 2006, Scotland in 2007 and Northern Ireland in 2009, you might be forgiven for thinking that all is well. Undoubtedly, a large number of undesirables no longer work as security staff, having either melted away or having failed the now required criminality checks.

But this Licensing activity hides a deep-rooted fault within the manned guarding sector, which is that the working practices for individuals remain, frankly, Victorian. This is because the UK allows security staff to opt-out of the EU's Working Time Directive Maximum Working Week (48 hours) and the effects of this go largely unseen because security staff are usually out-sourced and they work at nights and during the weekend when the majority of us are at home.

To a security officer, this translates as an average 60 hour week or more (the opt-out allows staff to work up to 72 hours per week!), worked over a mixture of days, nights and weekends for 48 weeks a year, at a pay rate not much over minimum wage (£5.73 per hour) and with nothing more than a 4-day basic job training course.

What you get is an industry characterised by low pay, long hours, a lack of training, high staff turnover and, hardly surprisingly, poor service levels. Many organisations purchasing manned guarding services often regard it as a grudge spend and buy on lowest possible price, perpetuating the 'poor service' cycle and this is not helped by an industry that is unwilling to collectively raise its own standards.

But consider for a moment some of the implications, would you let your own staff work unremitting 60 hour weeks? If your organisation has a bold corporate responsibility policy have you turned a blind eye to the

working practices of your sub-contractors? Are long hours compatible with the H&S requirements on your site and it's worth remembering that both the employer and the company that employed them could, under the new Corporate Manslaughter legislation, both be jointly liable in the event of a serious accident.

Wilson James is the only security company to work exclusively within the spirit of the EU's Maximum Working Week. This means that our staff work an average 42/48 hour week on significantly improved rates of pay and our commitment to training means that all staff receive refresher and developmental training every year.

This more modern approach delivers several benefits to our customers; a more settled, loyal and motivated workforce, a positive environment where money can be invested in training and development without the fear that staff will take the training and leave, the opportunity to employ fewer security staff if they are better able to use new technologies, a more professional response to emergencies and of course the opportunity to ask a revitalised security team to take on further, more taxing responsibilities.

In short, we look to transform the grudge purchase, poor skills and low output culture to a service delivering a positive and professional contribution to the overall success of the facilities team.

Wilson James is an award winning security company providing added value security services. The company was established 10 years ago, employs 1900 staff and turns over £70 million pa, www.wilsonjames.co.uk.

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