

Facilities Management from A to Z

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Grounds Maintenance

Grounds Maintenance is one of the facilities services that is frequently overlooked but which can have a significant influence on the perception that visitors and staff have of an organisation before they have even entered the premises.

With corporate reputation and impact on the environment becoming increasingly important, the grounds maintenance function has an important role to play in maintaining an aesthetically pleasing landscape that is both functional and complementary to the site and local environment throughout the year. Access must be maintained regardless of weather conditions, a positive image presented to visitors and passers-by and a safe and environmentally sound care regime implemented for both natural and man-made exterior landscaping.

The scope of the grounds maintenance service will depend heavily on the nature of the site but would normally include both planned and reactive horticulture services for external areas including trees and shrubs, grassed areas and flower beds. These may have been planted for purely decorative reasons or form part of the site security plan.

In addition to the “gardening” aspect of the service, grounds maintenance often also incorporates care of hard landscaping such as car parks and paved areas, signage and lighting, boundary fences and street furniture, gutters and drains. It is also increasingly common for external landscape gardening companies to offer internal planting and floristry services alongside traditional external grounds maintenance provision.

Service specifications for ground maintenance should incorporate frequencies of routine activities, along with response times and service levels. Risk assessments are important given the nature of the equipment and chemicals often used by landscape contractors.

Choosing a grounds maintenance service provider can be difficult. The industry is dominated by small firms. The European Landscape Contractors Associations annual survey shows over 13,000 contractors in the UK with more than 50% employing fewer than 10 people.

According to Lantra, the sector skills council for the environmental and land based sector the landscape industry contributes £3 billion to the UK’s Gross Domestic Product with over 8,000 businesses in the UK, employing nearly 140,000 people. The current image of the industry often has a negative effect on the perception of skills, jobs and career opportunities. One of the greatest concerns is the lack of people choosing a career in the industry and the lack of understanding of the diversity of roles available. These issues affect its recognition with government, potential recruits, and potential customers.

Useful sources of information on the UK grounds maintenance industry are:

Lantra - Sector Skills Council www.lantra.co.uk

British Association of Landscape Industries www.bali.co.uk

Institute of Groundsmanship www.ioq.org

European Landscape Contractors Association www.elca.info/en