

WHAT PRICE SECURITY?

Paula Mathers thinks it's time that some consideration is given to the pay of security personnel

Paula Mathers worked for six years as a cross-cultural psychologist for the British Government. She joined Coverguard Security in February 2016 as the company manager and was promoted to assistant director in September 2016.

Having worked in the security industry for many years now, I've been fortunate to experience many sides of the role; I've managed the staff, I've written assignment instructions and I've been the client. I've worked with building site staff all the way through to DV Cleared Officers, and the role is very different at every level. So why, as security companies, are we forced to categorise our staff into such small pigeonholes?

In previous employment, my staff were DV or SC cleared security officers working on a secure government site. DV clearance (or Developed Vetting) is a very intrusive security clearance. It takes six months to complete and vets your friends, family, finances, past from the day you were born, places you've been etc. It prevents you from having certain relationships – if your prospective partner has ever had a CCJ then you can forget that relationship; if your sister took a gap year in Russia for her language degree you can kiss goodbye to your clearance; if you have a friend who you don't even know is doing something illegal, they will find out and you're guilty by association. It is very stressful. An SC (or Security Clearance) imposes financial checks to ensure you won't be blackmailed for financial reasons, and looks at your criminal past.

The security officers were split into SC or DV. Those who were DV cleared were subject to everything I've listed above and expected to do a great deal of work. They would patrol the secure site, check all secure buildings and had to work with anything up to Top Secret Strap 3 environments. Those who were SC cleared only dealt with information up to Secret, didn't have to patrol the inside of the buildings and only had to do proof-of-presence external patrols; a much easier life. Both, however, are classed as static guards, and are paid as such. The pay for both sets of these officers is £8.75 per hour. I pay my building site security officers more than this!

When applying for a tender, security companies are now under a great deal of pressure. The market is saturated with security agencies/companies and – with company cut backs – the budget for security staff is being squeezed so tightly that there is very little breathing room. You could have an ACS score within the top 25 percent of your sector, you could treat your staff impeccably, you can even know the company you are applying to tender to inside out, but if your price is too high you won't get the job. But what is too high? What overheads does a security company have? Why can't we pay our DV staff £30 an hour like they deserve? For some reason, security officers have been pigeonholed into roles

that really don't have anything to do with their job. To name just a few, we have static guards, door supervisors and mobile patrols. How do you separate a static guard sat in an office all day/night on a risk-free site from a DV security officer on a high-risk government site? Why should they be paid the same? Why do we categorise a door supervisor working on the door of a club in a bad area of the city centre in the same way as a door supervisor working on the door of a fancy wine bar in Notting Hill? Security companies are partly to blame; we know the difference, but yet we don't educate our clients on this. We understand that to work a summer fete is much lower risk than to man the doors on a club in Central Manchester and yet if we upped our prices, we wouldn't get the job. The mentality becomes; what is worse – not to be able to provide shifts for our staff or to provide them at a lower rate of pay? It's hard because we see how much our good officers do work. We need to all club together to show our clients that there are so many different roles security staff do; so many qualifications they have to have; so much they are expected to give up in their personal lives in order to do the job we need them to do that they need to be rewarded as such. The market may be saturated with security companies, but it's down to those of us that have worked hard enough to obtain our ISO9001 and ACS certification to set the precedent. We represent the security industry as a whole and we need to promote a united front as together we can take this industry further. ●

Security guard pay needs to reflect the nature of the work being carried out

