

Guarding

MD RETURNS WITH VIEWS

OPTIONS FOR TRAINING CASH

In our February issue, Wilson Chowdhry related how his London-based firm AA Security put in the hours preparing for the arrival of Security Industry Authority (SIA) licences for the guarding sector. Nine months on, he offers an update.

Back in February, you spoke of having your own trainers to train staff for SIA licenses - and accessing pots of Government funding for training, which is something of an art. What's out there?

From our experience, there are several possibilities open to employers and individuals. One example is the Government-funded Profit for Learning (PFL) scheme, which began as an employer training Pilot in several nominated areas, including East London. AA Security have already trained almost 100 of our own security officers using this funding, which can cover both the course costs and subsidise employee

wages while they train. Although the pilot ended in August, the good news is that it's due to go nationwide during September. Changes from the pilot are that the scheme will be coordinated by the Learning Skills Council (LSC), and instead of the SITO BJT [basic job training] and Maybo conflict management units funded during the pilot, applicants will be offered a lengthier SITO NVQ course. While this may not suit new personnel, it can be a great means of staff development. Or, Business Link is offering Training and Development Planning, provided with Reed. It works to identify a company's training needs and signposts training managers to appropriate potential sources. There are some nominal subsidies available, including the Management and Leadership Initiative. This initiative offers £1000 match-funding for one director from a company to undergo any form of training. Another option is the New Deal available to people that have been unemployed long-term, which is funded from central government via your local JobCentre Plus (JCP). Through New Deal, the training grant of £750 to employers for each recruited training aged 16 to 24, with a £60 weekly wage subsidy for full-time workers. Here, a full-time worker is anyone training or employed for 30 hours or more per week, and part-time anyone working 24 to 29 hours. For part-time workers the weekly subsidy is £40. There is no training grant available for recruits over 25, although the weekly subsidy increases to £75 for full-time employees and £50 for part-timers. For those aged 50 or above, the training grant increases to £1,200. Your only commitment as an employer to these trained recruits is to offer employment for six months. Other training which is perhaps vital for modern security officers covers administration and computer skills. For information and courses in this

area contact your local TBG [a not for profit training body, visit www.tbglearning.com]

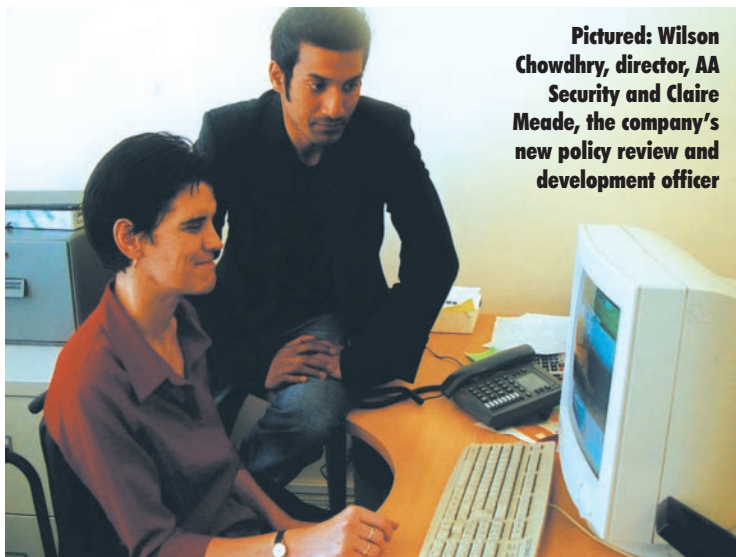
Quite apart from not all guards gaining, or wanting to apply for, SIA licences, guards in some regions are in short supply. Are non-traditional pools of labour, such as women and disabled people, a way around that?

Traditionally, yes, women and disabled people have not perhaps been seen as potential industry employees, although changing this shouldn't be seen just as a means of filling a staffing vacuum, but as an avenue to gaining committed, skilled and professional personnel. As employers, we must obviously work to Equal Opportunities and other legislation, such as the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) in recruitment practice and elsewhere. Practical steps people can take include an audit of their recruitment strategy, reviewing job descriptions and flexible working arrangements.

Playing devil's advocate, what of the argument that disabled people and women are not suited for some security tasks, that involve physical fitness and the ability to 'mix it' if necessary?

As with any industry, some positions require specific capabilities. While it may be practically very difficult for a wheelchair user to work in the role of door supervisor, the same would not be true of reception duties or access control. More specifically, the protocols and legal requirements include a mandatory one for female officers to search women. Taking this into account, AA Security has a female member of staff on our training team. This aside, so-called 'non-traditional' employees are potential wealth of talent that perhaps have been largely overlooked. As part of our commitment to equality and diversity, we have been working with the support of its local JobCentre plus to obtain the positive about disabled people logo - 'two ticks' symbol. As part of this, we recently posted a vacancy open to both disabled and non-disabled people. The standard of applicants was very high, with some candidates schooled to graduate-level and above. One such individual joined

Pictured: Wilson Chowdhry, director, AA Security and Claire Meade, the company's new policy review and development officer



Go to page 43

CONTINUED ... FROM PAGE 42

Left to right, Wilson Chowdhry, director, AA Security; Claire Meade; Jane Coomber, disability employment advisor, Barking and Dagenham; Redbridge councillor Simon Green; and Catrina Roy, disability employment advisor, Ilford

Photos courtesy of AA Security



our management team this month, as our first disabled person, and the first wheelchair-user, to join our staff. Ability, not disability is the issue and many practical considerations, such as specialist computer equipment or even alterations to premises can be covered by the Access to Work (ATW) scheme. Also operated through JobCentre Plus, this can fund up to 100 per cent of the related costs for recruiting and retaining disabled people, or up to 80pc of costs for disabled people already on staff. However, as we have found, with the benefit of mobile working communications, a flexible approach is sometimes all that is required to benefit from skilled and experienced individuals.

In the August issue, we reported a

guarding MD saying that the SIA's 'voluntary' Approved Contractor Scheme (ACS) for guarding companies was in effect compulsory, because guard firms would have to be approved to deploy new guards while the guard's SIA licence application went through. What's your take on the Approved Contractor Scheme?

I do sympathise with the reported comments of that MD. The Approved Contractor Scheme has been devised in partnership and consultation with security companies of all sizes and some of the leading voices in the industry, among them the BSIA, The Security Institute, The Security Watchdog, ACPO and British Standards. There are fundamental differences here to previous

accreditations, including a greater emphasis on continual professional development, specifically for personnel in each perspective company, accountability, and growth strategies. Another is the focus on the development of a stronger emphasis on company ethics, and the social, economic and environmental effect of companies on the community – otherwise known as sustainable development. That said, because the membership is only a fraction of what BSIA charge, and the ACS arguably complements the customer-specific policy offered by the Security Watchdog. This begs the question whether combined Security Watchdog and ACS accreditation represents a more profitable and productive option. □

About the writer: AA Security is an Essex-based guarding firm, and a member of the Security Watchdog

G4S admits SIA backlog concerns

Group 4 Securicor in its latest financial results admits it had concerns that a backlog may force the SIA to delay the deadline for guard licences.

The firm said it was encouraged that the Security Industry Authority has stated that it intends to meet the March 20 licence deadline. While the firm spoke of good overall manned guarding results in Europe, UK organic growth was 'slightly negative', which the firm put down to the merger of Group 4 and Securicor. The interim results for January to June 2005 said of UK guarding: "Strong focus on customers has maintained the retention rate

at around 90 per cent for the last six months but new business has been below expectations, with customers delaying buying decisions pending the market impact of the new licensing legislation." The firm adds that it is confident of achieving the SIA target of 45 per cent of staff to be licensed by the end of September, as required for approved contractor status. Nick Buckles, Group Chief Executive, said: "The integration of the merging businesses has been completed significantly ahead of schedule and ahead of our targeted £30m annual synergies, thanks to the substantial planning exercise that took place prior to the merger and the hard work and determination of our managers and staff to deliver on their commitments." As for the firm's justice services - prisons and electronic tagging of offenders - the results speak of a 'lack of growth in the UK'. As for cash in transit, the firm has started a Abbey cash centre contract and integrated its London cash processing into a newly acquired cash centre in Harlow, taken on with the Abbey contract. □



HAPPY

'Cindy is a real expert; she has five years' experience.' - The commentary on the Channel 4 Dispatches documentary *Secrets of the Shoplifters*, on a shop thief who was filmed 'at work'.