

The crime of connivance!

Here, Wilson Chowdhry of AA Security gives us a personal

account of his thoughts following the SIA forum in late 2006 for approved contractors.

“Late as I was for the SIA Approved Contractor forum in November last year I was impressed none the less with the content of the well presented seminars. To paint a picture; it took me by surprise when I was sent an emailed invitation to attend the forum one month earlier, recognising the window of opportunity in respect to potential adverse and subjective criticism (at this meeting) that the SIA were leaving wide open.

Hence it was disappointing whenever far reaching questions posed to SIA representatives, during the event, were ushered aside by suggestions that certain enquiries were not in the remit of the officers in attendance and, more alarmingly, a recurring theme during questioning was the notion that the ACS team had scheduled the seminars with a limited time allocation for query resolution. It was purported that expectations of the discussion phase had been assessed on a diminutive scale, personally I felt aspects of the event were very contrived, alternatively our senior SIA officers are with all respect rather naïve.

I returned to the initial seminars which although missed had some interesting facts that deserve repetition. Of 800 applications obtained from the SIA for ACS accreditation only 400 were returned completed, 307 of these were via the Fast Track and 93 on the standard track. From these applications only 280 Approvals by company (417 by Sector) have resulted this can be broken down further as:

- 246 Fast Track
- 34 Standard

These stats are quite alarming as they would indicate that up to October 19th the date of the ACS forum I had attended, only 10% of the industry had achieved the leading benchmark in quality attainable within our industry. Furthermore, less than 10% of the industry have achieved a UKAS approved BS EN ISO 9001, BS7499 and BS7858 accreditation of their quality and operational activities, which would have permitted entry onto the fast track mechanism.

This is a frightening statistic for an industry with over 2500 live registered organisations. Especially when considering that the British standards have been in existence for decades. Why is it we should ask that British Standards have not become a common feature amongst the plethora of firms within our sector? I would suggest this is due to the lack of previous incentive, disincentive associated with cost and nonexistent stimulus of client driven minimum standards.

Solace for me, was induced by the fact that the SIA are very aware of the issue and recognise the commitment of organisations that have achieved or are working towards ACS, demonstrated by alliance specific invitation to these forums and the proposed amendments to the current SIA licensing facility. Both of which, will serve as a tool of empowerment to ACS associated organisations. This innovative and well informed scheme of inducement will become a defining strategy of the SIA in years to come I steadfastly believe. I will redress this topic later in the article, at this stage I will detail the holistic changes that will impact on the current SIA licensing process.

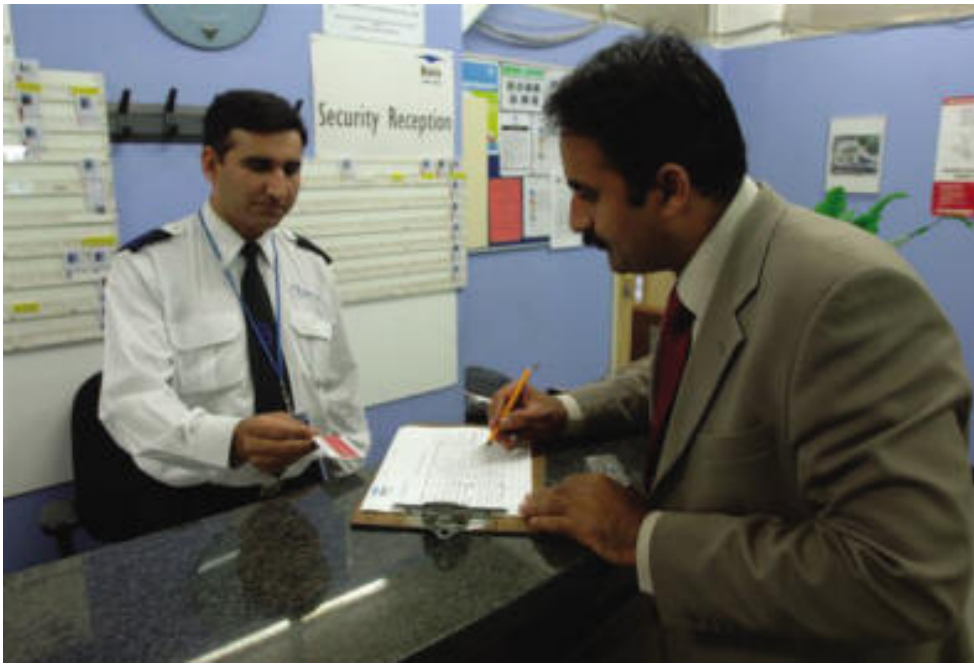
During the event I was soothed by the emollient fusillade of beneficial improvements that were detailed during the seminar by Ian Maxwell from the SIA. He explained the complication reducing schemes that have been devised by the MIB (Men in Black) such as an automatic reminder letter sent to individuals three months before expiry of their current licences. I had assumed such practices would be a typical standard, however, confirmation of such a process is always a valuable effort. He spoke of there being “no need to re-supply ID documents on application unless there are changes to address,

name, etc.”

Another improvement included the introduction of blank application forms that would be available to training providers and security companies in bulk and on request. Mr Maxwell also described on-line application and payment in a high-tech e-licensing scheme, coupled with a tracking facility for pending license application status which would be available both online and via the SIA call centre. These processes would improve the efficiency of the process of applications for individuals and are highly commendable solutions, demonstrating the SIA's ability to provide dynamic solutions to many issues arising in the nascent phase of the licensing remit.

"But what exactly is the SIA adorning the table of the carnivorous avant-garde ACS approved security beast with?"

The SIA has also indicated that they will now return by courier, original documentation to reduce the lost mail that has obviously exceeded an unacceptable level and will assess the validity of international security qualifications in a comparability study that will adduce possible competency credits towards SIA License applications. Although this could be prone to abuse if not researched thoroughly; it would introduce a rational fairness to the current licensing remit.



But what exactly are the SIA adorning the table of the carnivorous avant-garde ACS approved security beast with? The already prevalent benefit of an allocation of 15% of staff that are able to be deployed whilst their SIA license applications are in pending, has benefited ACS companies able to expand to match demand. This aspect has now been braced by an

allocation of License Dispension Notices in excess of the 15% for discernible extenuating circumstances. This would include any significant commercial growth.

Directors that espouse the SIA ACS scheme also stand to benefit significantly from major alterations to the licensing remit that will include electronic applications by companies via a basic spreadsheet or linked to their current HR systems and internal ID checking facility waivering the requisite resubmission of original documentations at renewal stage. These two aspects would be allied to an online tracking mechanism that will when in effect provide two spreadsheets. One detailing pending license application status, while the other indicating actual license application status.

This became a hot topic at the meeting as most representatives at the forum could not comprehend why the SIA were adamant that such a mechanism would be based on a two screen data entry record. The source of the concern centring on the pending application data screen only indicating the application receipt date, confirmation of satisfactory supplementary information in unitary check boxes and a confirmation that a decision had been made. This was to be complimented by the actual license screen listing confirmed attainment of licenses.

It was suggested that correlation between the two screens would evidence

attainment or failure of an application; confirmation of a decision without an allied entry of a successful license on the second data screen would signpost failure of an applicant to achieve a license. I inquisitively probed into the validity of such presumption based on the probability of lag time. However, I was curtly advised that the infallible system would be an automated system without any significant delay. Time will tell if this whimsical response will be fulfilled, however, evidently much thought has been directed into this framework for improvement and the reputation of our industry should benefit from the work the SIA is undertaking.

I have deliberately written about these alternative features as if they are pending items within a structured framework of improvement. As this was the manner in which the mechanisms were described, yet during a recent discussion with SIA representatives it was indicated that these are only plausible concepts that require ratification. Yet I can assure you that like other individuals this factor was not explicitly implicated during the seminar. I do hope that on review all elements of this proposal are spearheaded and incorporated into the current application process design as without a doubt the suggestions are favourable.

I availed myself of the opportunity to have this direct interface with senior SIA officials and posed some testing questions that impinged on adverse factors that pervade throughout the SIA licensing remit, yet had quite clearly been overlooked during the undertaking of their strategic overview.

One question which remains unanswered is a poignant concern about the callous selection of rogue security providers; that are continuing to breach SIA legislation; by clientele that are in their awareness of this breach conniving with miscreant company. This collusion should be met with abhorrence by our sector, the SIA and central government. I have been told that the legislation does not exist to prosecute against such activity, which if not curbed will decelerate if not halt the process of regulation within our industry. If the legislation does not exist; who is better than the SIA to lobby parliament, for a review and development, of the Private Security Act 2001?

Alternatively the SIA could take a trial case to the civil courts and set a precedent under a claim against these flirtatious clients for collusion or

connivance under the proceeds of crime. I have requested feedback on this question which has thus far alluded me, however, I am sure that a response will be expedient in its delivery.

"The wheel is turning and our industry is definitely the better for licensing not many could argue with this. However, the SIA must increase the level of incentivisation"

To summarise I give due recognition to the significant commitment that has been displayed by the SIA. I commend in its entirety the interface between all stakeholders that the SIA have incorporated and championed from the outset. However, I would raise issue in respect to the transparency of information especially the pseudo nature of the proposals offered.

The wheel is turning and our industry is definitely the better for licensing not many could argue with this. However, the SIA must increase the level of incentivisation for good practice especially in respect to ACS contractors that are actively promoting compliance and subject themselves to the highest scrutiny within the industry. I am involved significantly in local politics and during one of my regular local canvassing sessions I was accosted by the owner of a local security firm, she had intimated to me that she had read a previous article I had written for a trade sector journal, and implicitly implied that I had acted in an infernal manner. When I enquired into her obviously subjective perspective, she coyly stated "You know!" I posed to her that she possibly did approve of my support for the new PSI legislation and the commissioning of the SIA. Her response was to smile and walk away! Leaving me quite confused!

I include this anecdote to highlight the apprehension to additional costs and increased regulation that exists amongst our sector. The professional organisations have settled into the sphere of regulation with consummate ease, the initial panic spurred 280 companies into entering an elite quorum of SIA partisans. It is now up to the others to match or exceed this achievement. Cost benefit analysis is the order of the day! I can confirm that my Company A.A. Security has more than doubled in turnover since the fateful day that we

achieved our ACS. Furthermore, the conniving companies still financing the rogue element within our industry, may be obtaining security on the cheap at this stage. However long term implications do not look so favourable now that this debate is out in the open!”