

## The Olympic shortfall



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**It is estimated that there will be a massive shortfall in the number of security officers available to meet the demands of the 2012 Olympics. How can the industry attract around 5000 more guards to solve the problem and do you think they will?**

"Guard" to "Event Ambassador". Providing training for the 2012 Event Ambassadors, could perhaps count towards a young person's vocational training. Training would include first aid, evacuation procedures, responsibilities of first responders and fire fighting. If we then added investigations, counter surveillance and forensic protection, we might also get enquiries from our Ambassadors for relevant blue light careers.

All of this will be impractical if we, the professional sector, are still in 2012 delivering service and people on the minimum rates of pay!



### Jonathan Levine - Axis Security

There will indeed be a significant shortfall in the number of security officers available and for good reason. Most of the better officers are already gainfully employed and to suggest that any of them could be 'lifted' from existing contracts to make room for such an event is not really practical.

What you are left with, therefore, is the prospect of finding at least an additional 5,000 officers at a time when quality guards are in very short supply. You also have the issue of making sure that all of these 5,000 are properly vetted - which is in itself a logistical nightmare - and having been vetted, they need to be licensed and then trained. (Given the government's track record to date, that could still be fraught with issues, even in four years time!)

And if that doesn't sound problematic enough, we estimate that the actual number of security officers required, when you take into account the security needed not just at the individual sporting venues, but also at the associated Olympic villages that will be created, will be closer to 10,000 - so double the issue.

Of course it would be naive to think that planning for such an eventuality isn't already underway. I am quite sure that conversations have already taken place between government and some of the major providers. Indeed there have already been lists published of 'preferred' suppliers - even though they did come as a surprise to some of those who had been 'selected!' The fact is though that this is still a major headache, however big your business. Given that there are something like 40,000 security officers in London currently, you are looking to increase that number by more than 20%.

The devil, though, will be in the detail. Within the security officer 'brief' will be the lower tier, lower paid officers required for protecting construction sites through to the higher calibre, better paid officers who will take responsibility for those buildings once they have opened. The brief will also be for more 'stewards', rather than security officers per se, and so those businesses with a stewarding focus may well have a good business opportunity.

I could certainly see a requirement, and indeed a



### Peter French - SSR

For the Olympics you have to develop an approach to a security culture that balances volunteers and paid workers to cover the functions of security, supervised by technology. The most direct option is for SSR to ship in 8,000 trained event staff from outside of the UK. All we need to offer are campsite facilities and arrange for SIA dispensation for them. Either way, this would provide security for the Games, without delivering the legacy of social interoperability.

With such an iconic event we need originality as well as social accountability. The nature of the Games since World War II has been a celebration of nations. Whilst the Olympic committee might wish to distance themselves from the terrorists of Munich and Atlanta, or the politics of Montreal and Moscow these Games demonstrated that the brand of the four rings is something to be used by those with a cause. In the past 12 years we have heard greater emphasis on social responsibility, leaving a social legacy, which might not be the outcomes that the peoples of Sydney and Athens will recount. London has that opportunity.

The most certain way of developing a legacy for the local community, whilst providing a reliable security force for the Games, is to form social contracts with London Schools. Investment should be given to schools to create cadet forces for their students. To equip them and engage with young adults who might otherwise be on the streets. The social contract would be an agreement to vocationally train security skills to students, developing an esprit de corps and create a vision which makes them wish to stay out of trouble and be part of the UK celebration in 2012.

With a current cadet force of approximately 2,000 in London, to develop 8,000 young people from a City of 8,000,000 would be relatively easy to organise. The BSIA could provide oxygen to the initiative. Manned guarding companies might provide, without cost, trainers to work with the cadet forces. We could introduce a generation to the world of security.

We might need to re-label the security tags from

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desire, to attract former policemen or the military to support the games while they are on. They should, in theory at least, be far easier to vet, and have levels of training that would be particularly beneficial. Controlling and co-ordinating the effort, however, will be the biggest challenge. And with many nations no doubt wanting (and indeed demanding) to bring their own security teams, there will be a great deal to co-ordinate!



#### Alex Carmichael – BSIA

A failure of the private security industry to supply the requisite number of security and stewarding staff to major Games around the world appears to be a shared

experience and is one which we must plan to avoid for 2012. The reasons for the shortfall are usually a result of an over-estimation of the private security industry's ability to supply at Games time, poor and untimely planning, and late procurement. The BSIA recognised this potential issue in 2006 and last year a working group of major security and stewarding companies was formed under the BSIA's leadership to make a more informed prediction of the requirement at Games time. This work was completed earlier this year and presented to the Games' organisers - LOCOG.

The BSIA is currently leading work on a plan which will make available to the chosen 2012 security provider, the required number of trained and licensed security officers and stewards at Games time. This plan includes a concept of a new and unique partnership with the further education sector. Although at an early stage of planning, this concept looks very promising and should have a great legacy for the participants and our industry in general.



#### Richard Bailey – Advance Security

It goes without saying that the Olympics presents a huge challenge for the security industry – the planning required to ensure the smooth running of training, background checks, manning the site and manoeuvring spectators is on a scale that we've rarely seen before, however there's no doubt that the event will also provide a fantastic shop window to promote the quality of security provision in the UK. It's therefore vital that we, as security providers, support the Games and consider it an opportunity.

Our concern however, is not so much from where we will attract the additional 5000 guards to meet the demands of the Olympics, but the potential for the event to suck the industry dry of its manpower elsewhere.

We need to take a step back and consider the wider impact on sensitive sites located near to the Games, including the City of London. Not only will the event itself require a huge injection of personnel, but many current customers of the industry will also wish to recruit additional cover – and if the short term contracts on offer at the Olympic site match the higher rates of pay awarded to construction contractors working to deliver the event, they will struggle to do so.

And when we say 'short term' it's important to remember that we're not just talking about the four weeks of the Olympics and Paralympics themselves; there's a potential three to six month black hole to be filled, covering the end of construction, training camps, the athletes' village, travel routes. Our clients in London

are already beginning to pre-assess the impact on their security rosters, and not just the additional personnel they may struggle to recruit, but those existing staff who may be tempted by the offers on the table from the successful Olympic security bidders.

We don't expect a single supplier to deliver all of the required security provision and this presents a great opportunity for a range of companies to combine forces to not only ensure the safety of the Games, but the wider commercial and public arena during 2012.

However, with the need for different suppliers to work together comes an inherent competition for skilled recruits, so it is vital that the industry finds a way of agreeing pay rates across the board to ensure a level playing field for companies operating at the Olympics and elsewhere in the City.

With regard to the issue of recruitment generally, Advance has employed from a variety of industries and backgrounds over recent months and we have found that the mix of experience and skills that this has allowed us to tap into has brought a new perspective to our business. Although the training and experience ex-police officers and military personnel bring provides obvious benefits, we don't think that the industry should shy away from pitching elsewhere.

Indeed, the current economic climate, despite its difficult consequences for many sectors, may provide an opportunity for the security industry. There are many skilled construction workers for example who are currently facing redundancy, who have the potential to make excellent security officers, so it's important for us to broaden our net and make security an attractive career across the broader economy.

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**Were the fun and games that surrounded this year's Olympic torch procession in London an indication of things to come?**



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