

When lives are at risk...

Designing for a safe and secure environment is crucial in the construction of new hospitals and schools. Effective risk assessment and quality solutions are literally vital, says Chris Pinder, Group Projects Manager of the British Security Industry Association (BSIA)



Like many public buildings, schools and healthcare institutions face a variety of risks from crime and antisocial behaviour. However, in many respects that is where the similarity ends as the potential consequences of security failures are far greater in an environment where people's lives and the safety of children are at stake.

No one could disagree that crime prevention in schools and hospitals must always focus on the key requirements to protect our children from harm, preserve essential healthcare resources and provide a safe environment for staff and visitors. These are daunting responsibilities, particularly for organisations struggling to maintain essential public services with limited resources and it is understandable that decisions about security spending can present difficult choices. The key, however, is not whether effective security can be afforded but whether the alternative can be tolerated.

This does not mean that security equipment and services cannot be chosen on the basis of their cost, merely that cost should never be the sole factor. The solution is surprisingly simple: compare prices only as a means of choosing between suppliers of similar integrity, professionalism and repute. It is simple because for many years the UK's leading suppliers of security have subscribed voluntarily to strict codes of practice and inspection, under the auspices of the British Security Industry Association (BSIA). All BSIA

member companies are committed - and assessed - to high quality standards, which includes providing free, no obligation quotations, based on a professional and detailed evaluation of the risks faced by their customers.

The interface between security guarding services and technology is critical, since the means to detect problems must obviously go hand-in-hand with the means to respond to them. This does not automatically imply huge costs. Broadly speaking, technology limits the need for a permanent on-site presence and in some cases does away with it altogether - school buildings, for example, can usually be well protected by alarms and cameras monitored from a remote location, combined, in some cases, with a programme of random patrol visits. Hospitals will generally warrant a permanent on-site team but effective integration with security and communications technology will limit its size - and its cost.

Most locations have unique characteristics that demand unique security solutions. Risk is influenced by such factors as the site's location, physical design and condition; including local crime trends, the number of entrances, the presence or absence of a perimeter fence, and the relative ease of access to upper windows or the roof. Identifying these conditions is the first element of risk assessment because doing so defines the scale of the problem and highlights the need to address specific issues. A range of specialists such as local authority security advisors, police crime

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reduction officers and security contractors who belong to the BSIA will provide expert guidance free of charge. This balance of public and private sector advice is a useful way for the users of security services to be confident that their resources are being spent to best effect.

Finally, never forget the importance of quality. Seek advice on security products and services and always obtain at least three competitive tenders before placing an order. Reputable suppliers belonging to the BSIA will provide written recommendations, specifications and quotations free of charge and without obligation.

The British Security Industry Association is the trade association covering all aspects of the professional security industry in the UK. Its 570+ members provide over 70% of UK security products and services and adhere to strict quality standards. For more information see www.bsia.co.uk, email info@bsia.co.uk or telephone 01905 21464.

