Children don’t even want to be train drivers any more – let alone FMs. And adults are often confused as to what the job actually is. The industry is facing a recruitment crisis, say FSI (FM Solutions) managing director John Moriarty and Facilities Recruitment Ltd (FRL) managing director John Davis.

It is ironic that at a time when FM offers more exciting and dynamic career possibilities than ever before, recruitment is the biggest challenge facing organisations looking to fill FM roles. In this respect, the changing face of FM is both its greatest asset and the root cause of a major skills shortage that all in the industry must work together to address.

In many respects, says Davis, the problem is that definitions of FM roles have been varied and filled by people with diverse specialist experience.

As the industry consolidates, these variations are being brought together. The result is that organisations need FMs with a much broader skills set.

Moriarty adds that it is clear the industry is going through a period of change that is having a considerable impact on the way FM is perceived.

“Increasingly, we find that FSI’s software is being used by people who are not necessarily FMs in the traditional sense, but step into the role from other areas of the company and bring a new portfolio of skills and experiences to it,” he says.

“This is good news for the industry, but it also highlights how much FM has taken centre stage within many organisations. That in itself creates a new era of demand for comprehensive skills sets that can take the benefits of CAFM into every aspect of FM.”

FSI and FRL have extensive experience of working together to address labour requirements on a short and long-term basis. Both companies say the need for fresh blood and significant numbers of appropriately skilled people is becoming more urgent all the time.

“The skills shortage is the biggest factor in recruitment, particularly where organisations are looking for individuals with far greater skills than the single skills base they previously had,” says Davis. “At the moment, there are as many interpretations of an FM’s role as there are people working in the industry!”

In the Navy

Traditionally, explains Davis, FMs often came from building services and maintenance backgrounds, perhaps from the marine engineering sector or the Merchant Navy. On board a ship, he points out, the head of engineering is responsible for all the services that keep the ship running. Back on dry land, a transfer to a similar role makes perfect sense.

Other streams feeding the FM sector have included property and hotel management, catering, cleaning, and construction. This scenario has served a model in which some aspects of FM – asset management, space management, environmental management, IT, cleaning and security – have taken priority, according to the nature of the employer’s organisation.

But now, says Davis, FRL increasingly finds that companies are looking for individuals who have capabilities in all areas. They want to recruit people who are experts in health and safety, and customer service, for example, in addition to the host of mainstream FM responsibilities.

“And because FM contract sizes are getting bigger, these people have to be financially astute as well,” he says. “Particularly where they are given control of large budgets and profit management.”

As Davis explains, such highly-skilled people are at a premium to begin with. Employers are forced to raise salaries in order to attract them, and a leap-frogging pattern is emerging as FM professionals are prepared to move jobs to take advantage of more lucrative offers.

The trend towards more outsourced FM contracts is also putting pressure on the industry. FM service providers need to recruit staff to fulfil newly won contracts and they, too, are compelled to offer higher salaries – often just to lure staff from their competitors.

Recent research carried out by FRL suggests that the average salary of an FM rose by more than 8% between 2004 and 2005, with the highest levels on offer in the service provider and consultancy sectors of the FM industry. An assistant FM could expect to earn around £22,400 a year in 2003, for example. By last year, that would have risen to almost £25,000. An operations director would have noticed their average salary climbing from around £58,500 to more than £86,000 in the same period.

That might be good news for incumbents and skilled FM professionals already on the merry-go-round. But as contract margins...