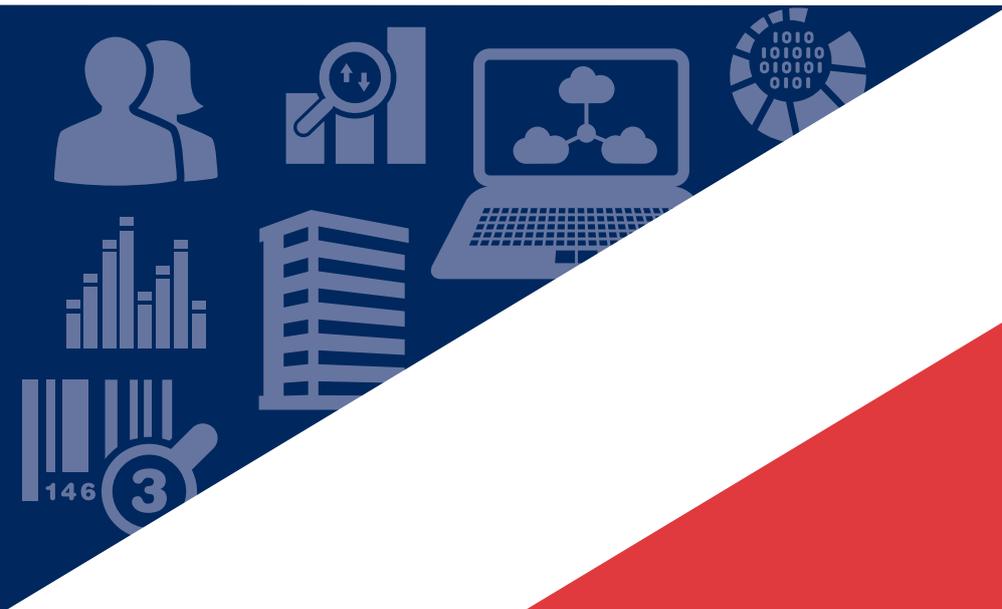




# GS1: WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR FACILITIES MANAGEMENT?





## 1. What is GS1?

GS1 is a global not-for-profit organisation responsible for developing the most widely used data capture systems in the world including the bar code. This is also the organisation behind the QR code and the RFID tag. The standards that underpin GS1 systems and products help to improve the efficiency, safety and visibility of information exchange across multiple sectors.

GS1 standards create a common foundation for business by uniquely identifying, accurately capturing and automatically sharing vital information about products, locations, assets and more. Identification is at the heart of the GS1 system, providing for a unique code to be assigned to any physical item, a piece of furniture or equipment, for example, or a location. A bar code or radio-frequency identification (RFID) tag is fixed to that item and readers, printers and other hardware and software components can capture the unique data using standards defined by GS1.

In essence, GS1 systems and products provide a standardised approach to information exchange that support management within individual organisations and communication between organisations and their advisors, customers and suppliers.

Though ‘the man in the street’ would very likely have no clue who or what GS1 is, its products are virtually everywhere, ranging from the local shop to state-of-the-art healthcare facilities.

## 2. GS1 in healthcare

Healthcare is a prime example of demanding, dynamic environments where asset information and management is critical. The ability to know what and where assets are, how they are being used and, importantly, how they are being monitored and maintained is vital to the provision of high-quality, cost-effective service delivery. This requirement was highlighted explicitly in the 2016 Carter Review.

Lord Carter’s report set out how non-specialist acute NHS trusts can reduce variation in productivity and efficiency across every area in hospital operations, potentially saving the NHS £5 billion each year by 2020/21.

The Carter Review recommended that trusts “improve their use of modern technology”. Specifically, the report stressed the importance of recording and reporting data accurately, as a more open and integrated approach to performance management is pursued across the NHS. Among the findings, the Carter Review found that areas like sickness absence could be improved by implementing a “common definition and improved collection of data”.

The report also cited several related problem areas, including the continued use of outdated and inefficient paper-based administrative practices, and called for performance improvements around administrative costs, procurement procedures and floorspace utilisation.

Lord Carter estimated that a 1% improvement in staff productivity would save the NHS £280 million a year. In support of that goal, it can be said that all of the points above can be addressed, directly or indirectly, via improved data collection, management and reporting.

GS1 has a specific focus on the healthcare sector, setting out its mission this way - “to increase patient safety, supply chain security and efficiency, traceability and accurate data synchronisation”. The organisation is working towards a future where the healthcare sector integrates its standards into processes for all relevant items, locations and people to drive patient safety and improvement in supply chain efficiency.

The GS1 principles that work to facilitate quality data, financial and time savings, traceability and enhanced management for better business and service outcomes are ideally suited to the complex environments found in healthcare, potentially touching every aspect of operation. The ability to ensure that critical supplies and equipment are where they should be, when they should

**In essence, GS1 systems and products provide a standardised approach to information exchange**



be and ready for use can literally make the difference between life and death. The wider physical environment where facilities management operates is likely to be simply taken for granted, but is no less critical to positive outcomes. FM systems that link in to GS1 systems and standards provide the means to handle this hierarchy of data with the efficiency and effectiveness required by healthcare organisations.

The importance of this data is now being recognised by key groups. In 2014, the Department of Health mandated that all NHS trusts in England adopt GS1 standards and all suppliers to the trusts become GS1 compliant by 2019/20.

### 3. GS1 in other sectors

The same principles that make GS1 systems and products highly relevant in healthcare environments make them equally applicable in every other sector where recording and management of asset data is critical to successful outcomes.

Bar codes have been in use in many workplace settings for some years, including offices, enabling facilities teams to track furniture and equipment – for example, in environments that experience regular change or where high-value equipment needs to move frequently from place to place.

**All of this underlines the point that facilities managers are increasingly the custodians of building and property data, with FM continuing to evolve its role as a key strategic discipline for organisations of all types**

Some industries are using tagging technology in ways that could hold important lessons for the FM sector. Retailers and wholesalers, for example, are using bar codes to improve inventory and logistics management. Meanwhile, the foodservice sector is relying on tagging technology to align the entire chain of manufacturers, distributors and operators on important areas such as food safety, sourcing and transparency.

In a sense, for managing equipment in particular, RFID tags are a ‘next generation’ solution enabling tracking without the close-quarters scanning used with bar codes. RFID is deployed in systems that track security patrols or lone workers, where check-ins and audit trails are required for safety purposes or, more broadly, for monitoring service delivery. The technology is also used to warn when an item is leaving an area. Alarms within shops are a familiar example, but the same principle can be applied to prevent items from leaving the workplace where business critical items need to remain in set areas and not be borrowed by other teams.

Fundamentally, these code and tag ‘hard’ reference points contribute to meeting one of the key goals characteristic of FM service delivery: consistent quality that is fully in line with the requirements of the contract or other guiding specification and, importantly, service delivery that can be demonstrated through accurate, real-time data. The ability to monitor assets – whether in the context of managing the workplace to enhance efficiency and cost-effectiveness in the utilisation of space or managing building plant to optimise operation and maintenance - is central to this.

All of this underlines the point that facilities managers are increasingly the custodians of building and property data, with FM continuing to evolve its role as a key strategic discipline for organisations of all types.

And it seems highly likely that the ability to evidence performance in line with organisational requirements will become increasingly important, too, regardless of the sector or specific environment, as recognised standards extend throughout the facilities management industry. Two ISO standards for FM practice have already been published. A third is in preparation, and more are planned.

Each system that helps to collect and store data has its own advantages. Bar code readers, which require a human being to scan assets individually, can hold inventory and pricing information. They are cheap

to use and reduce the level of manual data entry. QR codes can store text, binary, image or URL data. They are easily scannable from a variety of angles with either bar code-scanning apps or phone cameras. RFID tags do not require line of sight for readings, so inventory can be performed in an efficient manner. Radio waves from the reader are strong enough that the tag responds regardless of location.

## **> 4. CAFM and GS1**

FM's evolving requirements have led to the creation of computer-aided facilities management (CAFM) systems which combine property management, asset tracking, maintenance planning, document control and even help desk and room booking functionality.

CAFM systems built on reliable, accurate, real-time information – including that drawn from GS1 applications – underpin operational efficiency and cost-effective use of resources, as well as consistency in planning and decision-making. In dynamic environments, such as those found in the healthcare sector, CAFM can make a quick and ongoing impact on cost control, management of space and overall efficiency of operation, contributing directly to meeting any targets set, as well as supporting the quality of service delivered to patients.

The pairing of CAFM and GS1 applications is a highly effective recipe for addressing many of the challenges set out in the Carter Review.

### **Peer review**

This Quick Start Guide has been Peer Reviewed by Paul Thomas, Principal Consultant, Turner & Townsend.

### **Supporter information**

This Quick Start Guide has been supported by CAFM Explorer who can be contacted at:

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## **About BIFM**

The British Institute of Facilities Management (BIFM) is the professional body for Facilities Management (FM). Founded in 1993, we promote excellence in facilities management for the benefit of practitioners, the economy and society. Supporting and representing over 17,000 members around the world, both individual FM professionals and organisations, and thousands more through qualifications and training. We promote and embed professional standards in facilities management. Committed to advancing the facilities management profession we provide a suite of membership, qualifications, training and networking services designed to support facilities management practitioners in performing to the best of their ability.

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