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# Workplace

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## Student sought for best practice analysis

RealService launches PhD to investigate link between customer service and property performance. **Hardeep Sandher** reports

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A global search has begun to find a PhD student to carry out research that would help the property industry better understand the link between customer service and property performance.

The three-year project will be funded by the Lord Samuel of Wych Cross Memorial Trust Award, in addition to industry contributions from customer service specialist RealService and the RealService best practice group.

The trust was set up in 1989 in memory of Lord Samuel, Land Securities' founder and chairman from 1944 to 1987, to provide real estate students with funding for industry-related study. It is administered by the British Property Federation.

The Lord Samuel Memorial Trust and RealService Research Doctorate will be supervised by the School of Real Estate and Planning at Henley Business School, which is part of the University of Reading. Land Securities' group chief executive Francis Salway will act as a mentor to the PhD student.

On finding a suitable candidate, it is hoped research could start in early 2012.

The idea of establishing a PhD was the brainchild of Howard Morgan, founder and managing director of RealService and *Property Week* contributor, and Roger Gibbard, head of the School of Real Estate and Planning.

The RealService best practice group aims to improve customer service to occupiers through benchmarking and the sharing of best practice to better understand the link between improved customer service and performance.

"The last 10 years has witnessed a mini-revolution in the world of property with the emergence of a group of 'pioneers' and 'early adopters', including the likes of LandSecs, who have fully embraced the notion that treating tenants as valued customers makes good business sense," says Morgan.

"However, there is no easy way for City analysts to measure the impact of customer service investment on financial performance. We hope the project will provide hard objective and quantitative evidence and a clear business case for investing in customer service." ■



**Date: 30 November 2011**

**News Release**

## **Property industry to fund pioneering PhD research to explore customer service and property performance link**

Funding has been secured and a global search launched for a PhD student to carry out pioneering research to help the property industry better understand the link between customer service and property performance.

Sponsorship for the three-year project will come from the Lord Samuel of Wych Cross Memorial Trust Award, together with industry contributions from RealService Ltd and the RealService Best Practice Group (RSBPG).

The Trust was set up in 1989 to remember Lord Samuel of Wych Cross, founder of Land Securities and Chairman from 1944 to 1987 and provides real estate students with funding for industry-related study. The Trust is administered by the British Property Federation (BPF).

The Lord Samuel Memorial Trust and RealService Research Doctorate will be supervised by the world renowned School of Real Estate & Planning at Henley Business School, part of the University of Reading.

The School, the largest in the UK for teaching and research in real estate and planning, has launched a global search for a suitable candidate with a view to the research starting in early 2012.

The link between Land Securities' founder and the business today will be ensured through the personal involvement of Group Chief Executive Francis Salway as a mentor to the PhD student during the project.

The idea of establishing a PhD was the brainchild of Howard Morgan, founder and Managing Director of RealService Ltd - international real estate customer service specialists – and Roger Gibbard, Head of School Real Estate & Planning.

Further sponsorship comes from the RealService Best Practice Group (RSBPG), a not for profit organisation made up of some of the UK's largest and most influential property owners, managers and investors and supported by the BPF.

The research study is seen as perfect fit for the RSBPG whose mission is to improve customer service to occupiers through benchmarking and the sharing of best practice, and in so doing gain a better understanding of the link between improved customer service and performance.

Morgan says: "The last 10 years has witnessed a mini revolution in the world of property with the emergence of a group of 'pioneers' and 'early-adopters' - including the likes of Land Securities – who have fully embraced the notion that treating tenants as valued customers makes good business sense in terms of faster leasing, stronger retention and industry recognition.

“However, at present there is no easy way for City analysts to measure the impact of customer service investment on financial performance. We hope the project will provide hard objective and quantitative evidence and a clear business case for investing in customer service.”

Liz Peace, BPF Chief Executive says: “Intuitively you would think that organisations delivering customer excellence would also deliver excellent financial performance. In our industry, however, there has been little research to back that hypothesis. We are therefore delighted that various organisations, including the Lord Samuel Trust, have come together to fund what will be a ground-breaking Phd project, and to prove to any doubters that excellent customer service is good for your bottom line.”

Francis Salway, Land Securities Group Chief Executive says: “There is a large body of academic research on the relationship between property asset characteristics and financial performance. We welcome this new research into potential links between customer service and financial performance in the property sector.”

Joe Chambers, Chief Executive of Soho Housing and RSBPG Steering Group member says: “The key for us is to understand to what extent great customer service gives us a competitive edge when managing for others and whether our buildings can be made to generate better returns if customers are delighted. Some independent verification in this area would move our business and the property sector forward significantly.”

Roger Gibbard, Head of the School Real Estate & Planning, Henley Business School at the University of Reading says: “We are delighted to be partnering Lord Samuel of Wych Cross Memorial Trust Award, RealService Ltd and the RealService Best Practice Group (RSBPG) in this initiative. This doctoral study into the importance of customer service demonstrates Reading’s position at the cutting-edge of influential research for the property industry, and we look forward to sharing the outcomes in due course.”

## **Ends**

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## **Notes to Editor**

### **Sponsors**

#### **1: Lord Samuel of Wych Cross Memorial Trust:**

The Lord Samuel of Wych Cross Memorial Trust was set up in 1989 to remember Lord Samuel of Wych Cross, founder of Land Securities and Chairman from 1944 to 1987 and provides real estate students with funding for industry-related study.

The Trust is administered by the British Property Federation (BPF), which is a membership organisation devoted to representing the interests of all those involved in property ownership and investment.

It aims to create the conditions in which the property industry can grow and thrive, for the benefit of its members and of the economy as a whole. Membership includes the biggest companies in the property industry - property developers and owners, institutions, fund managers, investment banks and professional organisations.

For more information visit: [www.bpf.org.uk](http://www.bpf.org.uk)

#### **2: RealService Ltd**

RealService is a London-based consulting business that specialises in real estate customer service. The company has a large international client base including some of the biggest and most influential names in the real estate industry. These include British Land, Land Securities, SEGRO and Capital Shopping Centres.

RealService's research, training and management consultancy services enable clients to secure lasting improvements in the 3 R's of real estate - revenue, retention and reputation- through the adoption of customer service strategies.

In 2004, RealService Ltd together with the active support of the BPF and encouragement of Land Securities, Grosvenor and the Crown Estate founded the RealService Best Practice Group (RSBPG), a benchmarking group dedicated to helping the real estate industry improve customer service and generate improved property performance. RealService provides strategic advice and the secretariat for the RSBPG.

For more information visit: [www.real-service.co.uk](http://www.real-service.co.uk)

### **3: RealService Best Practice Group (RSBPG)**

RSBPG is a not for profit organisation funded by membership fees and sponsorships.

Members represent a cross section of the property industry. They include public and private property companies, property investment managers, major public companies and property management companies.

The RSBPG's mission is to improve customer service to occupiers through benchmarking and the sharing of best practice, and in so doing gain a better understanding of the link between improved customer service and performance.

The RSBPG's benchmarking programme enables members to confidentially compare their customer service performance with best practice.

#### **Members of RSBPG include -**

Ashville Properties Limited	Gatwick Airport
Broadgate Estates	GVA
Cadogan	MAG Developments
Capital Shopping Centres PLC	Marchday Group Plc
CityWest Homes Ltd.	PRUPIM
DTZ	SEGRO
EMCOR	Soho Housing Association
HighCross Strategic Advisers Ltd	Stow Securities
Lambert Smith Hampton	The British Land Company PLC
Land Securities	The Portman Estate

For more information visit: [www.rsbsp.com](http://www.rsbsp.com)



**University of Reading  
Henley Business School**

**School of Real Estate & Planning**

**Research Studentship in Real Estate Customer Service and Property Performance**

Applications are invited from suitably qualified candidates for a PhD studentship, to specifically research the relationship between customer service and property performance.

This studentship is funded by the Lord Samuel of Wych Cross Memorial Trust, with industry contributions from RealService Ltd and the RealService Best Practice Group.

The study will explore whether customer focus and operational excellence in the landlord and tenant relationship can add value at the asset and enterprise level.

Applicants should have a relevant Masters degree, or exceptionally a First Class undergraduate degree in a cognate subject.

The studentship will support the payment of fees and a stipend with an annual value of approximately £18,000. It will be for one year in the first instance, extending to three years, subject to satisfactory progress.

An application form and further particulars may be found at <http://tinyurl.com/repwych>

For further informal information please email the School's Postgraduate Research Director, Professor Peter Byrne; [p.j.byrne@reading.ac.uk](mailto:p.j.byrne@reading.ac.uk) or Dr. Victoria Edwards; [v.m.edwards@reading.ac.uk](mailto:v.m.edwards@reading.ac.uk).

The closing date for applications is 31 January 2012.  
Please note that shortlisted candidates may be called for interview.