

A recruitment challenge

Staff shortages in a vital industry



Yvonne Taylor
Global Head of Cleaning
OCS Group UK

It has been widely published that the Cleaning and Hygiene industry is suffering a “severe” staff shortage, with the BCC warning “that the recruitment problems within the sector could hamper the nations recovery from Covid-19”

In January 2022 OCS took part in a survey conducted by the British Cleaning Council (BCC) along with outer service providers. Survey results indicated that vacancies have increased by 252% in a six-month period.

One of the biggest issues was employees moving to different sectors or leaving employment because they were foreign nationals returning home. The cleaning and hygiene industry has long been reliant on employees of all nationalities and overseas workers.

The impact of Brexit planned changes to immigration rules and Covid has put a large strain on our industries resources.

The scale of the problem can vary from region to region. The labour force survey published through The Office for National Statistics in 2019 indicated an average 37% of the cleaning and hygiene industry workforce were from overseas, but in fact in the London region alone that actual figure is 62%.

The cleaning and hygiene industry has proven, during the Covid-19 pandemic, that we can react and implement changes to process and procedures quickly, enabling businesses to continue operating in safe, clean environments as the return to workplaces continues to ramp up.

As an industry, we must maintain the pressure on our government to recognise the level of skill required for the role, align with the essential role that our industry provides across all business sectors. There also are things our industry can do to alleviate the staff shortage pressure.

Contact Yvonne via
yvonne.taylor@ocs.co.uk

Or visit
ocs.com/uk/services/cleaning/

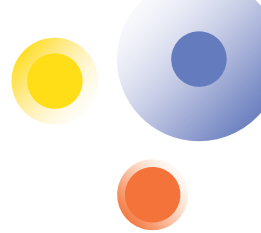
Retaining the current workforce through training, staff welfare and well-being is paramount.

Training should be a fundamental element in everybody's career. Cleaning in a home is very different to cleaning in a commercial setting, the level in which training is delivered and provided does enhance the workplace experience and contributes to saving lives.

Through my work in the industry, notably as a BICS council member, Board Director of the CSSA, Committee member of the British Services Association and as a chartered Practitioner of the Worshipful Company of Environmental Cleaners, I support the APPG (All Party Parliamentary Group) in calling for an apprentice programme for all cleaning operatives in all sectors.



Most reliable successful cleaning companies deliver an in-house training programme, but many don't have external accreditation. Most in-house training courses provide the practical skills requirement but with the added enforcement of the apprentice programme, which would provide a recognised qualification, would offer a clear recognised start to a career in cleaning. OCS as an example has the award winning IMPACT training course which provides an apprentice the opportunity to enter the workforce through to path ways of supervisor or manager level careers.



The past years have had a challenging impact on everyone's daily lives, which has led to worry and anxiety for many. As employers, the welfare of your teams is paramount to business success and there is an increase in steps being put into place to ease the concerns of employees. Some of the areas being addressed are:

- + **Workplace personalisation** – providing an environment that employees feel comfortable in will become increasingly important to ease worries and concerns. This concept covers things like information about building maintenance, personal cleaning kits, information on how to stay safe and rotational attendance days.
- + **Employee assistance helplines** – providing an employee assistance helpline with professionally qualified and trained counsellors will enable practical advice and support to be offered to help employees with issues such as illness, domestic violence, stress, bereavement, divorce, or substance misuse. This can also cover financial support through a financial well-being provider to help with money concerns or management.

Technology and the IoT can relieve some of the pressures.

Traditionally, cleaning contracts have been based on industry guidance when it comes to cleaning frequencies, for example “washrooms to be cleaned every four hours, carpets to be vacuumed daily”. However there has been some movement in some elements of cleaning recently. Pre Covid, we saw a move for carpets to be vacuumed fully once a week and spot cleaned daily, however what if that room has not been used that day, how would the cleaning operative know this? Would you still go in and spot clean?

Who knew the last two years would be spent largely working from home for the majority of us, with online tools becoming the way that we all manage our rate of productivity?

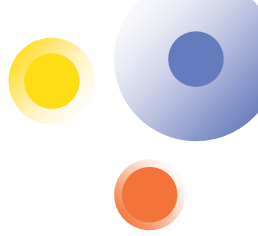


- + **Legal guidance** - providing practical and easily understood information and guidance about legal issues such as domestic problems, personal injury claims, motor related disputes, property worries and consumer rights plus information on general employment matters such as maternity or paternity leave or minimum wage can support employee well being.
- + **Employee well-being groups** - establishing groups which organise wellbeing campaigns can help staff feel engaged in the workplace.

During this time, the cleaning industry has shown it can adapt to ensure we are creating a safe environment, providing reassurance for our customers and their end users. However, we need to plan now for the future and that does mean imparting all forms of data technology.

In the face of uncertainty, there's a counterintuitive but convincing argument for investing in technology to improve internal processes and revamp your portfolio of products and services. But simply buying or implementing technology won't give you an advantage. You must use it to transform your business so you can “accelerate through the turn.”

The parallel in business is that in the face of heightened and rising uncertainty, the steps you take now will have a big impact on your ability to withstand whatever may come. The right approach could set you up to pull ahead of your competitors. And to do this, the line you want to pick is digital.



Automation is a way in which you can streamline your staffing structure.

You need to look at roles and processes with an eye toward automating everything you possibly can. You might be able to get a head start on some of this work if you already have the tech to make it happen. Otherwise, be ready to act once you do have the tech. Algorithms should handle any routine, repetitive steps that don't require judgment calls or discretion.

Not only will this lead to more efficient and less costly work (bots don't take breaks), but it will also generate more accurate data that you can begin to aggregate and use to generate insights. Even more importantly, increased efficiency will free up capital that can be reallocated to other areas, such as new business offerings and investments in innovation.

Upskill your people.

As the business leader, you should set the overarching direction and goals for training, and provide the time, tools, and resources for people to learn and apply new skills. From this starting point, employees should take the lead in their own upskilling by innovating, building, sharing, and test-driving solutions. And because employees will be directly engaged in developing solutions, they'll also be more motivated and excited to share their ideas. That enthusiasm will get other people invested, and change will spread quickly throughout the organization — ultimately helping everyone improve.

Build your ability to capitalise on data.

You need to build the right capabilities to collect, aggregate, and clean up and standardise data. Many organisations have a wealth of data, but they're unable to make sense of it because it's unstructured and sitting in unlinked databases. More important, you need to synthesise the data so that it's translated into clear insights and actionable steps that people can take on a day-to-day basis.

An ancillary advantage of improving how you handle and manage data is that you'll be better equipped to acquire and integrate other businesses. As uncertainty persists, it's likely there will be plenty of companies ripe for the picking, as less digitally enabled companies run into problems and become attractive takeover targets.

The future of cleaning lies in working smarter not harder, carrying out cleaning work is physically demanding with largely repetitive tasks. The market for autonomous robots is growing with all the main manufacturers either having robots in their armoury or at least developing one.

Based on market research that was published by the BCC in 2021 only 5% of people working in the cleaning industry were aged under 25, with 29% of our workforce over the age of 55. This clearly shows we have an ageing workforce and if action is not taken to introduce younger people into our industry, then we will need to rely on robotic automation to deliver cleaning services.

The need to embrace robotics can be costly so ensuring you get the most benefits out of your investment is pivotal to drive efficiencies. By having robots as part of a solution it can increase productivity, improve retention of a vital workforce, and can improve health and safety. By no means should we sell the use of robots to reduce labour, they need to become an integral part of the cleaning team, like I have said they are ideal to take on the repetitive and physically demanding tasks to remove the strain on an ageing workforce therefore moving the human workforce to do the more detailed tasks that create a bigger impact.



The robots of today also have a large impact on the environment by using approx. 50% less water and the technology in new age batteries also allow longer runtime and reduce the recharge time saving of up to 60%.

Most robots come integrated with a fully functional telemetry system and this data is valuable not only for ensuring their optimum performance but to improve productivity and deliver a consistent service. This can also assist sales teams in choosing the right solution for bids that require more advanced technology and helps cleaning teams to increase efficiency, optimise operations times, reduce expenses, minimise the fleet size and to play a pivotal role in health and safety and provide a consistent delivery.

Robotic technology can enhance a company's brand by positioning them as an industry leader and it highlights their desire to improve process, increase sustainable practices and streamline operations.

In summary, as an industry we have work to do in highlighting the great choice of cleaning as a career path, show the true opportunities for management positions as well as the constant updates of technology, where reviewing data analytics of robot's schedules and routines will become main stay.