



This *Focus On...* paper explores the issues facing the cleaning industry and the role qualifications are playing in developing professionalism.

### The industry's role in the UK economy

In recent years, many businesses have recognised that providing a clean, safe and welcoming environment for their workforce, customers and visitors is vital for the wellbeing of building occupants, maintaining the value of property and developing a good reputation (CSSA, 2012; Lewin, 2012). Cleaning has therefore become a priority service area, with the UK cleaning industry generating an annual turnover of £4.7 billion in 2011 and forecast to experience 3% growth after 2012 (CSSA, 2012).

However, managing this vital service in-house has become less popular as the current economic climate reduces the resources available to effectively manage these services (Pennycook, 2013). The significant economic challenges currently affecting UK businesses include high rates of unemployment, welfare reform, budget constraints, austerity measures and limited access to finance for businesses (FM World, 2013).

These market pressures have created a cost focused culture where rising client demands for services that maintain standards but cost less has led to concerns that service provision within the cleaning industry is “shifting its focus from more traditional values, such as quality and customer service, to a commoditised service market where clients are provided with inflexible service products that only meet minimum standards” (Asset Skills, 2011).

These concerns have arisen in response to a shift away from the traditional use of single purpose contracts handled by a single provider, to many organisations adopting an integrated service approach, where one company provides a variety of services to reduce overall costs through economies of scale (Hurst, 2012).

The popularity of bundled service contracts has placed pressure on specialist cleaning contractors to move into new areas of activity and develop the skills of their workforce so they can supply services that are tailored to their customers' needs (Asset Skills, 2011).

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A recent survey by MTW Research indicates that 60% of UK contract cleaning companies experienced growth in the last 12 months by diversifying their service offer to include specialist cleaning in order to boost revenue or offering services which are more closely aligned with the client's corporate aims and objectives (Cleaning Hygiene Today, 2013).

Despite this growth, low profit margins remain a significant challenge for cleaning employers as evidence suggests that profit margin erosion has grown in recent years and, as a result, debt has risen by £1.6 billion in the last six years (Cleaning Hygiene Today, 2013).

This has had a knock-on effect on the sales of new cleaning equipment as according to Plimsoll (2013) profit margins have fallen to 5.4% of sales and 214 of the UK's top 676 cleaning equipment and materials companies are now running at a loss.

However, evidence suggests that the overall number of start-up companies has continued to rise and this is likely to boost demand for entry level cleaning equipment and supplies (Cleaning Hygiene Today, 2013).

The CSSA (2012) argue that the cleaning industry has the potential to play a greater role in the UK economic recovery if the Government were willing to invest more in NHS, school and transport network cleaning activities to reduce the costs of absenteeism and health care to the economy, while creating additional jobs.

### The Living Wage

The living wage currently stands at £8.55 an hour in London and £7.45 outside the capital, but according to recent research only 45,000 of the 5 million low-paid workers in the UK (one in five of all employees) have secured a higher wage as a result of a living wage initiative (Pennycook, 2013).

This is a significant issue for the cleaning industry as many cleaning occupations are characterised by low paid, part-time work. However, the issue for many employers in the industry is that with customers demanding high service standards at a lower cost contract margins do not support a rise in employee wages (European Cleaning Journal, 2013).

Other issues highlighted during the living wage campaign include the public expectation that cleaners should be paid less than those

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employed in other occupations and the government's argument that the UK remains a high wage economy despite the gap between wages and the price of consumer goods (European Cleaning Journal, 2013).

### Meeting Changing Customer Demands

The cleaning industry is characterised by high levels of competition so cleaning companies will often look to differentiate their services through the provision of an excellent service that builds strong customer relationships and enhances the company brand (Baker, 2012).

This is particularly important for professional cleaning companies that provide a variety of speciality services that may not be available with an in-house cleaning team, or companies providing a range of FM support services (Lewin, 2012). Industry experts suggest that to meet changing customer demands cleaning companies will have to:

- Effectively manage of workloads and the selection of cleaning products that will secure long-term cost savings (Baker, 2012).
- Provide high quality services that fit their customer's organisational and corporate culture – for example, an environmental policy statement could win a tender (Cleaning Hygiene Today, 2013).
- Ensure that employees have been trained to offer a quality service because they will have the skills and knowledge to

undertake the duties associated with their job role (Baker, 2012).

- Take advantage of industry trends towards sustainable service solutions to differentiate their service and attract clients that prioritise corporate social responsibility (Baker, 2012).

### Skills Implications

To achieve these changes to service provision, employers can take advantage of the qualifications offered by WAMITAB.

We are pleased to provide cleaning and street cleansing qualifications, apprenticeships, training programmes and routes to industry to a wide range of organisations across all sectors. The qualifications we offer include:

- Practical Cleaning Skills Qualification Suite
- Passenger Transport Cleaning
- Employability Programme
- WAMITAB Level 1 Certificate in Cleaning and Support Services
- WAMITAB Level 2 Award in Cleaning Principles
- WAMITAB Level 2 Certificate in Cleaning and Support Services
- WAMITAB Level 2 Certificate in Cleaning Principles
- WAMITAB Level 3 Certificate in Cleaning Service Supervision
- WAMITAB Level 3 Diploma in Cleaning Supervision Skills

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WAMITAB recognises the link between business success and an effective workforce that is able to operate productively, while complying with policy and legislation.

To support employers, WAMITAB provide qualifications that combine a number of units to develop a dedicated programme that will support individuals employed at operative to management level as they develop the skills, knowledge and attributes to address the resource efficiency of their business.

### About Us

WAMITAB is an awarding organisation and charity that develops qualifications for those working in cleaning, street cleansing, facilities management, resource management, recycling and parking from operative to management level.

By qualifying the workforce, we aim to embed a culture of safety and progression, making the industry more attractive as a career.

If you would like further information on our wide range of facilities management qualifications, training and apprenticeships follow us on our social media channels and visit [www.wamitab.org.uk](http://www.wamitab.org.uk).

### Bibliography

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This paper has been written and produced by the Project Team at WAMITAB.