

2023 TRENDS REPORT



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SUMMARY

FOREWORD

Over the past three years, the cleaning sector has witnessed meaningful change. It was thrown into the spotlight during the pandemic, proudly and professionally taking a frontline position as it played a critical role in cleaning and sanitation practices. This not only served to demonstrate the importance of the cleaning and hygiene industry but its frontline role in safeguarding and protecting the public. During this time, consumers and business owners also developed a growing appreciation for its part in keeping people and places safe.

Today, while the pandemic has largely taken a backseat, new challenges are presenting themselves to business owners as well as the cleaning and hygiene operatives working in the sector. The emergence of the 'twindemic' which refers to a growing flu epidemic coupled with new waves of COVID-19 variants, demonstrates the continued importance of enhanced cleaning regimes. However, the transition into the rhythm of the 'new normal' comes with wider business difficulties, from rising energy prices to supply chain disruptions and a cost-of-living crisis.

The Cleaning Show 2023 Trends Report is the result of insights from leading experts at the forefront of the industry. Their insights and predictions are supported by the trends due to be represented at this year's The Cleaning Show, which returns to London from 14-16 March 2023.

We believe it is these trends that will impact the industry now, next and in the future. While there may be uncertainty currently impacting business owner decisions, we are excited to explore how the current challenges are driving innovation and change within this exciting and highly valuable industry.



PAUL SWEENEY
EVENT DIRECTOR



The Cleaning Show returns to ExCeL, London from 14-16 March 2023 to demonstrate the very latest advancements in cleaning technologies and provide unmissable learning and sourcing opportunities for the cleaning and hygiene sector, which together with the waste industry is one of the biggest sectors in the UK, worth nearly £59bn and employing 1.47m people.

The show, organised by the British Cleaning Council and Quartz Business Media, is set to attract more than 100 cleaning suppliers, with the likes of Jangro, Numatic, Makita UK, Karcher UK, Nilfisk and SC Johnson Professional among those confirmed to exhibit.

Registration for The Cleaning Show 2023 is now open. To register for your free pass to attend and to find out more about this year's event, visit:

<https://cleaningshow.co.uk/london/>

RECRUITMENT AND THE RESOURCE CHALLENGE

It is widely recognised that the UK is struggling with the worst staff shortage since the late 1990s, amid a perfect storm of unique challenges. In its latest research, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) revealed that job vacancies remain at record highs, with workforce jobs rising by 97,000 in September 2022, to a new record of 36.2 million.

There are many reasons for the current recruitment crisis, from reduced migration post-Brexit to high levels of the workforce not returning to work post-pandemic, as well as competing industries that are able to offer more attractive pay, training, and benefit opportunities.

Delia Cannings, Director, Environmental Excellence Training & Development Ltd highlighted two notable shifts in the workforce during the pandemic. She explained, "First, there were lots of new entrants joining the cleaning industry through default. A lot of these were people that had never considered the industry as a career choice, but they were left with situations where they didn't have work, and agencies were offering more for these jobs. The surge of new entrants was, itself, quite heart-warming.

However, conversely, we also saw a mass exodus of staff from the industry because the Government did not recognise or give key status to our cleaning teams, who worked tirelessly through the pandemic, helped us to get into a recovery position and then limped away, fractured because the industry was broken.

So, we had new entrants coming in without training, often sent from agencies, and those existing, long-standing, experienced staff leaving in droves."

According to Jim Melvin, Chairman of the British Cleaning Council (BCC), there are currently 126,000 vacancies in the UK cleaning sector. He revealed that while the Government talks about employment figures being the best they've been since 1974 – which he admitted they are – the challenge facing business owners is that there are more jobs vacant than there are people looking for work.

Speaking about these challenges, he explained: "The £59 billion cleaning, hygiene and waste sector has been suffering from severe staff shortages for a number of reasons amongst which are a tightening of immigration rules following Brexit aligned with cleaning and hygiene professionals being incorrectly labelled as unskilled. This has made it much harder for the sector to employ workers from overseas. Many firms are struggling to recruit the staff they need, and the situation is getting worse daily. The industry is desperate for the same kind of help that other sectors – such as poultry, truck driving and fruit picking – received during the pandemic. When all of the above are put together, it should come as no surprise that staff feel socially unaccepted and leave the UK. Added to that was the fact that a number of workers left the UK to go home having not been able to see or help their families across the pandemic period."



Delia added, “The Government were making jobs like fruit picking and driving heavy goods vehicles very attractive. It was a nice trend to see new people coming into the cleaning and hygiene industry, but it was without training. We lost a lot of people because of Brexit, and more when the immigration status changed.”

Jim and Delia’s reference to the Immigration Act highlights the impact of new rules introduced in 2021 – coupled with Brexit – which resulted in many foreign nationals leaving the country. According to BCC figures, the cleaning and hygiene industry has traditionally depended on employees of all nationalities, with Labour Force Survey figures from 2020 showing that 20% of the national cleaning and hygiene industry workforce were from overseas, rising to 55% in London.

Paul Ashton, Chairman of the Cleaning & Support Services Association, explained. “Rising labour costs and a reduced labour pool is placing commercial cleaning and hygiene companies under unprecedented levels of stress. Employers are continually looking for ways to retain their employees and maintain service levels. The statistics speak for themselves and there are simply not enough people either available or prepared to work in our industry so the fight is on. We are working with our membership to help identify ways to support the fight for a reduced pool of people.

“Our industry has always relied on migrant workers, but the latest statistics for the cleaning industry are as high as 40%, whereas many other industries sit at 20%. The harsh reality, according to BCC’s research, is that some 50-60% of companies can’t fulfil the hours that they’re contractually committed to due to labour shortages. Action is needed and now.”

Kim Phillips MBE, Head of Catering & Facilities Services at Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, added: “The cost-of-living crisis has been well-publicised and significant media focus has been on employees undertaking entry-level employment which would include cleaning operatives in many areas of the industry.

“In April 2022, the living wage, which most Local Authorities pay for entry-level employment was agreed at £9.50, in April 2023 this was increased to £10.42. For most cleaning operatives, they will see a rise in hourly pay in a short timeframe of over 10%.”

The wage increase is a positive step for the recognition of a cleaning operative role and attracting new personnel into the industry. However, as Kim explains, these increases “generate potential financial trading problems for most local authority Direct Service Providers.”



Adding further insights into the realities of staff shortages, Hamid Ghadry, Facilities Services Manager, Estates & Campus Services, University of Northampton, explained: “Brexit was the starting point. It affected our industry, and more directly our own portfolio. We have 67 buildings and more than 160 cleaning operatives, and we noted a significant loss of employees. Now, people are not applying for these jobs. We’re a good employer, we offer a living wage, we train our employees, provide PPE – everything they need to do a good job, but there is still a lack of people looking for work, or turned off by the sometimes, anti-social hours.”

Meanwhile, Dominic Ponniah, CEO of Cleanology, said the company’s latest efforts to recruit had shown him that there was not enough appeal in the industry for candidates to want to join it. Speaking to [Facilitate Magazine](#), he said: “The situation was brought home to me recently when Cleanology recruited for a key management role. We interviewed a number of excellent candidates and, while they liked our sustainability, diversity, and wellbeing initiatives, I was taken aback to hear five of our applicants say, ‘I like the company, but the industry isn’t sexy enough’.”

There is a widespread consensus that recruitment is much harder today. BCC research suggests that the cleaning, waste management, landscaping and facilities management industries will generate 93,000 new jobs by 2024. However, 29% of those jobs have been classified as ‘hard to fill’.

Lorcan Mekitarian, Chairman of the Cleaning & Hygiene Suppliers Association (CHSA) suggests that the lack of cleaning and hygiene operators has been one of the biggest challenges to emerge in 2022 and was a clear “carryover from Brexit and COVID”. Meanwhile, the ramifications as a result of the labour shortage have driven a bigger push for automated cleaning systems and robotics.

In a dedicated report on the [Recruitment Challenge](#), Yvonne Taylor, Global Head of Cleaning at OCS Group UK, suggested, “As an industry, we must maintain the pressure on our government to recognise the level of skill required for the role, aligning with the essential role that our industry provides across all business sectors.”



The report also demonstrates why as an industry there is work to be done to highlight the great choice of the cleaning industry as a career. All the experts interviewed agreed; this has historically been a challenge for many operatives who do not see it as a career choice but a short-term option of employment.

One of the biggest questions the industry needs to address is why people do not consider a career in the cleaning industry, and shift the focus to promote the many, diverse opportunities available.

Highlighting the opportunities in the cleaning industry, Dominic Ponniah said, "Cleaning and facilities management is a great place to be if you are a graduate looking for higher-than-average pay and great progression opportunities. We have had cleaners and supervisors, with little spoken English, progress to become managers and directors. There is nothing 'unsexy' about that! Whereas in the fashion industry, with all its perceived glamour, unless you are like Naomi Campbell, many roles are based on low pay, long, unsociable hours and menial tasks.

"Our biggest challenge is a perceived lack of glamour. But if we shout a bit louder about all the benefits, and work harder to address our shortfalls, we might find the industry becomes a more vibrant, diverse place."

WAYS THE INDUSTRY CAN ATTRACT NEW EMPLOYEES

- 1** Provide the best employment terms – not just pay, but benefits such as healthcare, life insurance, and financial services.
- 2** Investment in ongoing training and development.
- 3** Introduce flexible working opportunities, where possible, afforded by the shift in demand for more daytime cleaning.
- 4** Promote the increased use of technology, such as robotics.
- 5** Focus on the perception of the industry and the cross-industry efforts to raise the profile and perception of the industry for the future.

UPSKILLING THE INDUSTRY

Recognised as an urgent priority for the industry in 2023 and beyond, all the experts interviewed agreed that upskilling and reskilling will play a significant role in responding to current challenges, as well as ensuring the industry is equipped for the obstacles that lie ahead.

One of the biggest initiatives in this area is the proposal for an accredited, industry-wide Apprenticeship Levy training programme. The Apprenticeship Levy was launched by the Government in 2017 to create long-term sustainable funding for apprenticeships. Currently, only 2% of employers pay the Apprenticeship Levy, a small UK tax of 0.5% of their total annual pay bill. However, with no apprenticeship scheme in the cleaning sector, employers lose out on the opportunity to invest Apprenticeship Levy funds on training or 'upskilling' staff.

The Cleaning Hygiene Operative apprenticeship, sponsored by the British Cleaning Council and spearheaded by a 'trailblazer group' of industry experts, has now been approved by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) with efforts now focused on progressing this to the institute of Apprenticeships.

Speaking about these efforts, Jim Melvin, explained, "The industry has continuously stated the importance of being able to utilise the Apprenticeship Levy funding and shown overwhelming support for the idea of training and development aligned to, and with an apprenticeship for, the sector. This is a hugely important initiative, so the progress achieved to date marks a significant step forward.

"It is a prime example of the unified and collective approach that is required to ensure those working in the sector get the technical skills needed.

"It will also without a doubt assist in the removal of any 'low-skilled' perceptions that remain or that are levelled at the industry despite the fact that they are frankly uneducated and completely incorrect. It's been 18 months of hard work led by the Head of Cleaning at Sodexo UK and Ireland, Lauren Kyle and Head of End-Point Assessment and Responsible Officer at LEIA, Karen Slade, who have both done a splendid job along with all my colleagues on the Trailblazer team on behalf of the associations and companies represented."

In a report issued by the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for the cleaning and hygiene industry, its members, which includes 53 MPs and two Members of the House of Lords, outlined 11 recommendations for Government, regulators, and the industry itself. Among these recommendations, the panel agreed that "a standard qualification for cleaning should be developed within the Apprenticeship Levy to improve the quantity, quality and career prospects of people entering the cleaning industry."

Meanwhile, other recommendations included greater training budgets for cleaning staff within both public and private enterprises, while the group recommended that urgent consideration should be given to making cleaning staff eligible for the Skilled Worker Visa scheme.



Delia Cannings added: “During the pandemic, and the surge of new entrants, there was this massive rush to get people skilled, or to at least profess that they had been trained and were skilled. The difficulty many companies faced is that the Government had not put any funding in place for training and education. This has raised awareness of the need for consistency, standardisation, minimum requirements and qualifications for those who clean for a living.

“We also need to recognise that during the pandemic a number of pop-up companies appeared who became “experts” in cleaning. They did not necessarily have the correct training and were running around with Ghostbuster packs spraying toxic chemicals into the environment. The problem here is that these people didn’t need licenses to spray these chemicals in the way that you do if you’re spraying pest control chemicals. It was a pandemic-related trend that we’re now trying to counteract in the aftermath.”

Speaking about the future, [Jim Melvin](#), said: “The key message is the need to ensure that cleaning and hygiene is given top priority in the future, as was so ably demonstrated by the bravery and commitment of our cleaning and hygiene professional operatives during the pandemic. We can no longer be the last to be thought of and the first to be needed.

“The public will be healthier, happier, and safer if cleaning and hygiene is recognised as a key, frontline service with a vital role in terms of public health. But it must also be made clear that if this report is not acted on, the risk will remain, and the Government simply cannot allow that price to be paid.”

ADPG RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1** Urgent consideration must be given to making cleaning staff eligible for the Skilled Worker Visa scheme.
- 2** A standard qualification for cleaning should be developed within the Apprenticeship Levy to improve the quantity, quality and career prospects of people entering the cleaning industry.
- 3** Training budgets for cleaning staff within both public and private enterprises to be adequate.
- 4** The Government should support the cleaning and hygiene industry to promote a realignment in perceptions of the industry.

TECHNOLOGY: A SUPPORTIVE ROLE

For a long time, the cleaning industry has been a predominantly manual industry. However, its digital transformation over the past decade has seen groundbreaking technologies deployed.

As Kim Phillips MBE, explains, "Since the pandemic, there is a growing recognition of cleaning activities as professional services and has resulted in an emerging sector assisted by technology."

Here, automation has led the charge, allowing cleaning contractors to improve efficiency, and better allocate staff to areas that cannot be covered by machines. Furthermore, the increased use of 'cobotics' or collaborative robots, along with sensors, IoT and new battery technologies is progressing the strides already made.

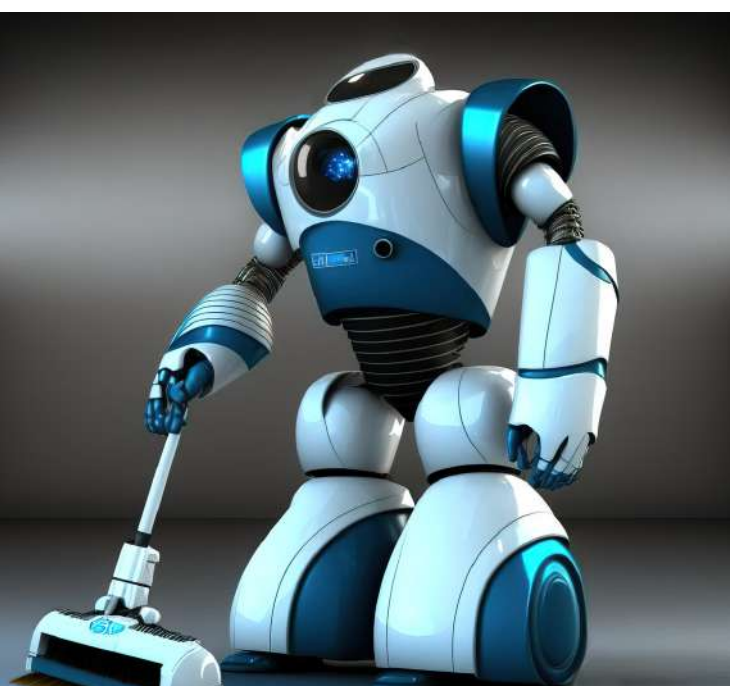
Speaking about the role of technology in the next chapter of the cleaning industries, Paul Ashton, said, "The future of cleaning has never been so exciting. Technology is having a profound impact on our industry, which could be quite intimidating for some people. The harsh reality is that if we embrace tech, we have immense opportunity to support our front-line teams with effective automation which will help address the wider resource challenge. The cleaning service of tomorrow is truly data-led, creating intelligent solutions that drive positive change and minimise our impact on planet Earth. Making informed decisions has never been easier.

"The CSSA is here to support our members on the tech journey and help them introduce state-of-the-art processes so they may evolve and succeed in the modern marketplace. The key step is to not see it as a threat, but an enhancer and use it to tackle the current challenges facing the industry."

Among the technologies identified by the experts interviewed, data-led dynamic cleaning, the evolution of robotics and autonomous cleaning, geofencing and sensor technology were all noted, along with the rise of smart buildings.

Speaking about how sensor technology is impacting the industry, Paul Ashton recalled the opportunities it provides to demonstrate a wider perspective on occupancy levels, leading to a more intelligent and dynamic approach to cleaning. "Using sensor technology to enable smart buildings, particularly in this post-pandemic climate of increased flexible working, we're able to prove how a space is being used and create cleaning solutions which meet the actual demands of each location. We can add genuine value and demonstrate a wider scope of services provided by the commercial cleaning and hygiene company of tomorrow."

This is a significant development for both the cleaning industry and its customers. Cleaning costs on a particular building are influenced by a number of issues including the use of a building; the hours of operation; hours of access for cleaning and hygiene operatives; frequencies of cleaning; and finally, the level of cleaning required. Gaining a full picture of the use case helps to accurately inform the decisions required to ensure services are fit for purpose.



He continued, "We're able to show our clients exact building usage levels, as well as the peak activity periods in terms of timings and days of the week. Data enables us to potentially reconfigure the schedule, creating new shift patterns that enable greater recruitment success. As part of any solutions offered, we can identify opportunities to reduce their lighting and energy bills, which is especially pertinent given the current cost-of-living crisis."

"It's this intelligent approach that is expanding the traditional cleaning remit into the wider FM space and changes external opinions about the potential impact of the cleaning sector. A highlight from a recent client survey read: 'You're more like a tech company than a cleaning company.' This feels like you are the future."

The shift to using data-led intelligence is also helping to boost efficiency, productivity, and staff welfare. Take geofencing, for example. When used, it enables companies to track the movement of their employees in real-time. From a staff wellbeing perspective, this is particularly important. If a site only has one or two people in attendance, and they have a fall or accident, employers can check in on their welfare.

Another area of growth, owing to the fast-paced technological advancements converging in automation, machine learning, engineering, and artificial intelligence, is the utilisation of robotics. Predicted to grow at a CAGR of 24.6% to 2027, service robots that work collaboratively with the workforce - rather than the common misconception of robotics replacing the workforce - are helping to drive operational efficiencies.

This growth is evident by the types of well-established technology companies joining the sector. This includes Japanese robotics business, SoftBank Group. The company's robotic cleaning solutions are designed to address the gap between growing customer needs and a shrinking workforce. Meanwhile, British information services company, InfoGrid provides the technology and data that powers JLL's Dynamic Cleaning offering. Here, real-time building data is integrated into Infogrid's building intelligence platform, which then generates trends and real-time workplace usage reports.



However, there are cases where technology, such as nano-coating or surface treatments, need to be proven to truly play an effective role. Lorcan Mekitarian spoke about this in relation to the emergence of new technologies during the pandemic. He said: "Covid proved that there are huge gaps in testing regimes and claims can be very woolly and not challenged. During the pandemic, we saw fogging machines and peroxide sprays used, but there was no framework to either prove their efficiency or disprove them."

Paul Ashton offered a similar perspective, suggesting that increased governance and use of innovation to validate all aspects of service delivery from proof of presence, cleaning standards, access to data and validating training and development is required.

Thankfully, there are cases where testing such technologies is having a proven, significant impact. Speaking from his perspective as Group Chief Executive of Exclusive Services Group, Jim Melvin recalled efforts taken to deep clean Adams Park Stadium – home to the Wycombe Wanderers – ahead of an important championship game. In just nine hours, Exclusive Specialist's Services team were able to sanitise the areas required within the 10,000-capacity stadium complete with full surface e adenosine tri-phosphate (ATP) surface hygiene testing.

"In another one of the trends identified, Jim Melvin pointed to battery technology as one of the biggest emerging developments to have a significant impact on the future of the industry.

Cleaning machines all require high quality batteries to ensure performance and long autonomy. However, the cleaning industry offers significant challenges for battery manufacturers and distributors, given the often less than optimal charging conditions.

However, continued advancements in battery technology – such as increased energy density, which reduce weight and size and improve durability, mean battery-powered cleaning equipment can go further.

This is a critical development for operators when cleaning major facilities such as stadiums or airports. Furthermore, the continued development and adoption of new battery technologies will further revolutionise the cleaning industry, increasing productivity and efficiency. It enables businesses to drive ROI, focus on creating the cleanest environment possible, and build a safer and healthier work environment for employees.

However, not all are convinced that technology is making such a big difference. Delia Cannings said: "If I'm honest, I don't see that technology, such as robotics, are making any significant adjustments where I've seen them implemented. Some of the bigger contractors will do because they're showcasing their company. But they've not been trialed enough to have identified what the pitfalls might be.

"And there is a concern that they will replace people in the workforce, but they still need to be programmed, and cleaned and there are limitations on what they can do.



She continued, “Technology is a wonderful thing, and we need technology, especially when we consider things like high-powered pressure washers and steam cleaners. However, I’m not overly convinced about robotics just yet – they work in bigger environments such as airports, but where a building is predominately having a heavy footfall, I’m not sure they are the way forward.”

Furthermore, while advances in technology may be creating all new possibilities in the industry, Hamid Ghadry is quick to highlight the context in which technologies are being deployed. He explains, “while technology is important, not all tasks can be fully automated, and even where the technology is available, you need to have the capital expenditure in the first place to implement it.”

He believes that technology - when used wisely – can make a significant impact, using the example of cleaning the floors of a large open lobby or reception area. Here, just 30 minutes of automated cleaning can replace up to six hours of manual labour – driving efficiencies and job quality for operatives.

THE BIGGEST 2023 TECHNOLOGY TRENDS:

- 1** SENSOR TECHNOLOGY
- 2** DATA-LED DYNAMIC CLEANING
- 3** ROBOTICS AND AUTONOMOUS CLEANING
- 4** GEOFENCING
- 5** BATTERY TECHNOLOGY

FOSTERING SUSTAINABILITY

Business owners are faced with the continual challenge of understanding and navigating the complexities of environmental sustainability, while managing and growing a business in an increasingly difficult climate.

As Delia Cannings explained, “everybody has a duty of care to demonstrate that they are adhering to the sustainability agenda and some are, but some aren’t.”

As part of its remit to help the industry prosper, maintain, and enhance standards on quality, ethics and sustainability, the Cleaning & Hygiene Suppliers Association formally launched its ‘Roadmap to Sustainability’ in 2022, built on five pillars: product, packaging, transportation, social values and corporate environmental impact.

Speaking about the initiative, Lorcan Mekitarian said: “Sustainability is one of the biggest issues facing our sector and it is one of the most complex. Identifying the best way forward and making the right environmentally and ethically sustainable choices is challenging. It’s particularly tough when set in the context of day-to-day commercial pressures and the current huge escalation in the cost of energy.

“Our approach isn’t a one size fits all, but the five pillars provide our members with the building blocks to focus on what’s attainable. For example, zero waste to landfill. Looking ahead, it is important for suppliers to understand the impact of new legislations, such as Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) policies and the impact this had on the packaging used by chemical suppliers.”

Adding to the debate, Jim Melvin highlighted the efforts made by his own team at The Exclusive Services Group to focus on its own performance and carbon footprint. “We have reduced virtually all our packaging – and product basket numbers. We had over 100 products; we now have just over 30.

“But, it’s more important than just our product line, it has become part of the culture. We invested in specialist knowledge and employed a Sustainability and Environmental Expert to help us answer such questions as to what our strategy was going to be? What was it going to look like? And how were we going to get to net zero?

“We’ve completed scope one and two – now our biggest concern is the fleet used within our organisation as we transition to electric vehicles (EV) and hybrids. The next challenge is scope three, where it becomes more complex. That is indirect value chain emissions. In other words, what is your effect on a client’s premises and how do you measure that?”

Electric vehicles were also recognised by Paul Ashton, who spoke about the use of EV vehicles at Birkin Group. “46% of our fleet are fully electric, with four high-speed charge points installed at our Gray’s office for easy access to our operational team,” explained Paul Ashton.

"It's been a big change for the team but they've embraced the opportunity to go green and are keen to be at the forefront. Everyone we speak to is trying to go electric, so it's great to see a genuine commitment to reducing carbon in that way."

He also highlighted how responsible purchasing is creating a positive shift within the industry. "It's great to see so many industry leaders making purchasing decisions based on more than just price", he explained. Today, supporting waste management initiatives and the zero-to-landfill commitment, cutting back emissions from vehicles, reducing the impact of cleaning products and ensuring environmental awareness is driving change.

In addition to the technologies helping to drive sustainability, there is a growing discussion about the use of chemicals, leading to product innovations in chemical-free, natural, and biodegradable products.

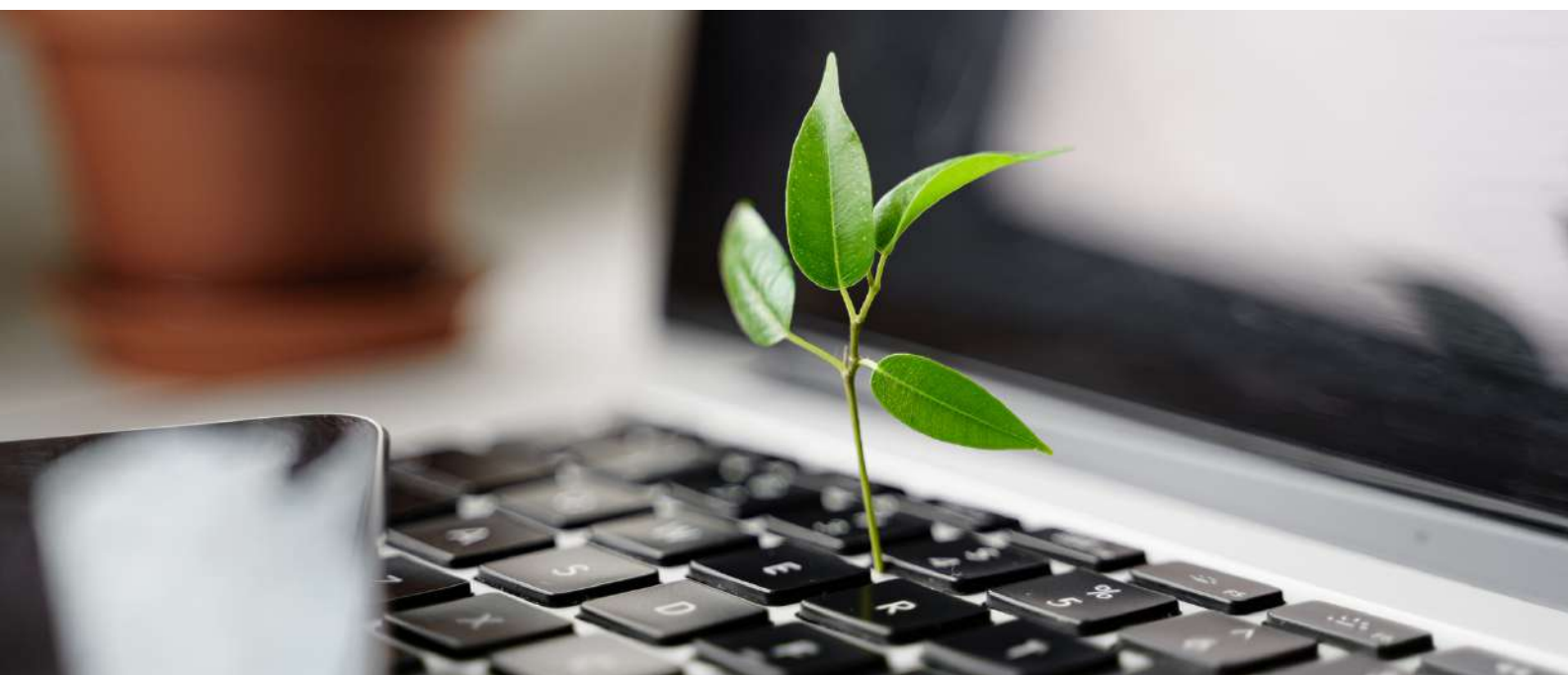
Speaking about the University of Northampton's efforts to meet its targets, such as Net Zero Carbon by 2030, Hamid Ghadry said, "For most organisations, especially those in the public sector like Higher Education, sustainability is a high priority. Our own mission and values have been set that by 2030, all practices should emit no carbon. Any suppliers responding to tenders must consider this, while any cleaning products used must be green, eco-friendly, and independently verified. Any containers are recycled – it's all part of a good procurement practice. However, this needs to be embraced across all organisations and sectors, while verification is key to avoid greenwashing."

However, one concern that has emerged with the increased use of 'green' products is their efficacy. While a shift to using eco-friendly and antiviral products will remain paramount, proving their role in providing sustainable yet Covid-safe hygienic workplaces will be a top priority.

"There is definitely a drive and appetite for natural ingredients," explains Ashton. "But there is a wider piece about the science. We can reduce our impact by using locally sourced ingredients and manufacturers, as well as addressing how we distribute and recycle our products. While there is definitely a focus on a more natural approach, and actually the choice of products is certainly expanding, there is still a peace around greenwashing to be addressed."

Paul Ashton added: "Greenwashing is something that we all need to be aware of and look for the signs of where false claims are being made. How do we know the claims made by certain products is true? The more awareness we can generate, and look to create a consistent standard to work collaboratively towards, we will be able to identify warning signs, hold each other to account and help remove greenwashing altogether.

"At the CSSA, we have engaged with Professor Rob Holdaway, a leading independent consultant to conduct in-depth analysis and create an ESG maturity matrix for our industry to help our members understand the baseline and recognise best practice in action."





Delia Cannings agrees, "From a sustainability point of view, we're not there. We like to think we are, and we talk a good job. We put it on every slide, and tick every box, but are we doing it? No, it's not fully embedded in my opinion. In my role, I go from site to site assessing what people are doing, and I see the tick boxes as opposed to the actual action. From a cleaning point of view, we've seen the introduction of biodegradable cleaning cloths and mop heads, but there is still more research and development needed because they're not currently durable enough to sustain hard usage."

She continued, "What's important is that the information on how we can be sustainable and environmentally friendly needs to be cascaded down. It's about helping and informing the operators, the people that are doing the work need training and education on what they need to be doing and how they can contribute in a massive way by adhering to specific routines and using specific technologies and methodologies."

BIGGEST FACTORS IMPACTING SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

- 1** ZERO TO LANDFILL COMMITMENT
- 2** CUTTING BACK EMISSIONS
- 3** INCREASED USE OF EV AND HYBRID EMISSIONS
- 4** REDUCING THE IMPACT OF CLEANING PRODUCTS
- 5** USE OF IOT SENSOR TECHNOLOGY TO DRIVE EFFICIENCY
- 6** CREATE A CULTURE OF ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

A PERCEPTION PROBLEM

Unfortunately, there are far too many examples of how cleaning and hygiene operators are overlooked, with a perception that the industry is unskilled, uneducated, and unintelligent. It is also perceived as a 'dirty' job due to its nature, something which the industry is working hard to overturn, but changing public perception is not easily done.

"There are several ways we can start to shift the perception of the industry," says Jim Melvin. "For one, I'm adamant our staff should have been recognised as frontline workers, not key workers. We should also seek to increase cultural and social acceptance and perhaps start by removing the title of cleaners, as they are cleaning and hygiene operatives. The outstanding important thing remains progression – of our people, and the culture of the industry.

"To do this, a collective strategy is needed because of the huge diversity of the industry. Whether you're involved in contract cleaning and hygiene, machinery, chemical manufacturing, maintaining toilets or collecting wheelie bins – all these things fall within the cleaning and hygiene industry. Healthcare also plays significantly into this. But there are two strategies needed – one for the short term, and a second long-term piece. The long-term strategy must address how we continue to develop the industry in terms of achieving continuous improvement, a focus on innovation and sustainability and creating an environmentally strong, professionally skilled workforce in which young people see the industry as a career development opportunity and recognise the innovative use of technology and forward thinking."





Hamid Ghadry believes that the pandemic offered the industry its 15 minutes of fame, when cleaning and hygiene operators were called to help make everything safe through sanitisation and disinfection, but have since taken a backseat, stepping back into the shadows.

He explains, "In the eyes of people from outside of the industry, the perception of the sector is that it's not critical, and we're not frontline workers, but rest assured our efforts are vital."

Paul Ashton adds: "Partnerships and collaboration are a key priority for the industry, and the wider education piece that is required. We saw how valued the cleaning industry was during the pandemic.

"Now, we need to address how we professionalise it. It's always been there, and people within the industry know it. Now, it's the turn of the industry to be formally recognised by the Government. With the developments we're seeing in sensor technology, robotics and more – we're on the cusp of the next chapter of the industry and truly showing how we are most definitely not, nor should we have been considered a low-skilled industry."

STEPS TO ENHANCE THE PERCEPTION OF THE INDUSTRY

- 1** Progress the Cleaning Hygiene Operative apprenticeship
- 2** Focus on upskilling and raise awareness of the knowledge and skills necessary to excel
- 3** Build collaborations, giving new sectors a view of the opportunities available
- 4** Be a cheerleader for the industry
- 5** promote and market your green and/or sustainable initiatives
- 6** Keep pressure on the Government and APPG and advocate for the industry.

SUMMARY

Unfortunately, there are far too many examples of how cleaning and hygiene operators are overlooked, with a perception that the industry is unskilled, uneducated, and unintelligent. It is also perceived as a 'dirty' job due to its nature, something which the industry is working hard to overturn, but changing public perception is not easily done.

The pandemic, or as previously mentioned, 'twindemic,' has had a huge psychological impact on how the public views the cleaning industry. Once the 'invisible workforce,' cleaning and hygiene operatives are now recognised for playing a central role in getting the public back to work – making offices and public spaces safe for occupation. Today, more than ever, leaders within the sector are looking to capitalise and build on this awareness, helping to catapult the industry to new heights.

So, what does the future of the industry look like? What trends will hold strong and drive tangible change within the industry? As outlined by the industry's foremost change makers, technology will remain, and will continue to diversify and evolve the industry. As outlined by Paul Ashton, the cleaning industry has not been 'mops and buckets' for some time and the rhetoric must change. The impact of technology is driving significant change so it's critical that we receive the external recognition needed to enable learning and development to support our front-line teams. Cleaning operators are a fundamental aspect of any built environment, and the ability to truly support them with leading technologies has never been more accessible. We have a duty to seize the moment and ensure the industry makes the most of the opportunities ahead.

A hopeful outlook

Despite the challenges of the economic climate, the outlook for the cleaning industry is positive. The industry has demonstrated how it can change and adapt, and as we look to the future, we are confident that there are many reasons for hope.



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