

Cleaning, hygiene and waste industry 'in recovery' after Covid-19 pandemic, says newly-published research

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New research published by the [British Cleaning Council \(BCC\)](#) shows how the cleaning, hygiene and waste sector is 'in recovery' after the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The latest figures, published today (Wednesday 13 March), show that the industry contributes nearly £59.8 billion to the economy, after a dip following the start of the pandemic. The sector remains one of the ten biggest sectors in the UK.

There are a number of positive developments for the industry to build on including the launch of the Level 2 Cleaning Hygiene Operative Apprenticeship and increased recognition for the sector post-pandemic, the 2024 research report says.

It also shows how the cleaning, hygiene and waste sector faces a 'perfect storm of severe staff shortages' and an ageing workforce.

Figures quoted in the document show that the entire sector was worth £58.9bn in 2019, but this dipped to £57bn in 2020 before increasing again in 2021. All subsectors, bar landscape service activities, saw growth in turnover in 2021 after a dip the previous year.

If occupations involved in cleaning across other industries such as public services and hospitality are included, the total number of individuals working in the industry is 1.47 million. This equates to approximately five per cent of the UK workforce.

The sector continues to grow, with a reported 75,565 businesses operating in 2023, up from 73,655 businesses operating in 2022, most of which are micro-businesses.

The launch of the Level 2 Cleaning Hygiene Operative Apprenticeship on 1 January is a 'significant development for the sector which will bring major benefits', enabling millions of pounds of Apprenticeship Levy funds paid annually by the sector to the Government to be invested in staff training instead.

Other positive developments cited in the report include the increased recognition of the important role of cleaning and hygiene staff following the Covid-19 pandemic and evidence that the public are reassured by seeing cleaning staff at work in public spaces.

The BCC's We Clean, We Care campaign also provides an opportunity to bring BCC members and the wider industry together to raise the profile of the sector and its staff.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for the Cleaning and Hygiene Industry's report Embedding Effective Hygiene For A Resilient UK report is a key asset highlighting the importance of making cleaning and hygiene a national priority.

The research report points out that the industry continues to struggle to replace staff who have left the sector in the wake of the pandemic and Brexit, with other staff having moved to new roles. There are a record number of job vacancies across the UK in a wide variety of industries, adding to the recruitment challenge, it says.

With only nine per cent of staff aged under 25 and 27 per cent aged over 55 years, the 'industry as a whole needs to continue to do more to attract younger workers into the sector. Continuing to raise the profile of the industry is vital to attract workers,' the report says.

Many in the industry would also like to see a change in public policy to allow Apprenticeship Levy funds to be used for a wider range of development opportunities, including more flexible training options, the report adds.

In the three years since the APPG for the industry was established, there has been 'minimal engagement on the part of the Government' in areas other than the apprenticeship, it says.

BCC Chair Delia Cannings said: "Our annual research report about the cleaning, hygiene and waste industry is a key document for the sector. It takes a detailed, informative and rigorous look at the industry and its sub-sectors, full of revealing statistics and facts. If you are interested in reading the report, please contact us and we will be happy to provide a free copy.

"The report highlights the essential role of the sector and its staff in keeping the nation's workplaces, hospitals, educational establishments, transport facilities and public spaces safe, clean and pleasant to use, contributing to the nation's health and wealth.

"That vital contribution to infection prevention and control became so much more visible during the Covid-19 pandemic, highlighting the importance of the sector in the wider public consciousness. The pandemic has left many of the current workforce mentally and physically exhausted - particularly those in the healthcare sector.

“The report demonstrates that the cleaning, hygiene and waste sector remains one of the ten largest in the UK, though it has been impacted by the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic and the economic shock of Brexit and is still in recovery. There are some positive developments to build on and also some issues still needing to be overcome.”

Free, digital copies of the BCC’s 2024 research report are available by emailing compsec@britishcleaningcouncil.org