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Research report 95

Coming clean: the experience of cleaning operatives

Wendy Sykes, Carola Groom,
Philly Desai and John Kelly

Independent Social Research



**Equality and
Human Rights**
Commission

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Executive summary

Introduction

This report details findings from qualitative research with 93 people working in the British non-domestic cleaning industry as cleaning operatives. The study was designed to explore positive and negative experiences of work in terms of workplace and labour market freedoms, rights and entitlements. These covered: freedom of association and the right to organise and participate in collective bargaining; the right to equal pay; the right to equality and non-discrimination at work; to just and favourable remuneration; to a safe working environment, rests and leisure; the right to privacy; access to redress and the abolition of forced labour. Implicit in these are other rights on which work can have a substantial impact, such as the right to family life.

The study was funded by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) as part of a major programme of work exploring how equality and human rights are protected for vulnerable workers in the UK. It focused on four main sectors within the non-domestic cleaning industry: health, transport, office/retail and leisure and involved in-depth interviews, paired interviews and mini focus groups with operatives in eight areas across Britain: Birmingham, Cornwall, Glasgow, Inner London, Manchester, Outer London, Norfolk and Swansea. Fieldwork took place between October 2013 and January 2014.

The report pulls together legal employment obligations, to which not all employers in this study currently adhere, with good practice examples to highlight measures that could be taken to improve the situation. All the points are grounded in experiences recounted by respondents to this research. They are briefly noted in this summary.

The job and the workers

Cleaning is a fundamental activity in all types of non-domestic establishments across every sector, public and private. Cleaning operatives are employed directly by service clients, work for cleaning companies or similar contractors and, in some cases, are self-employed.

Some elements of non-domestic cleaning work are fairly standard, but others involve specialised procedures. Some jobs are highly specified while in others, operatives have more autonomy and control over what they do and how they organise their work.

The workforce is very diverse. This study included a range of people in terms of basic socio-demographic characteristics, educational attainment, previous work experience and command of spoken and written English. For some, cleaning was their main source of income while others were supplementing their household income on a part-

time basis. Most respondents were in permanent posts, but many also had experience of temporary/short-term work; some had more than one cleaning job in order to make up paid hours. Most opted for cleaning because it was easy to find work, but some felt they had few other alternatives – because of lack of skills or qualifications or language barriers. Many regarded cleaning as a staging post to something 'better'.

Respondents described a range of different routes into their current job, but word of mouth was very important with people finding out about vacancies and sometimes securing introductions through personal connections. There was a widespread perception that fewer cleaning jobs are being advertised on the open market.

Cleaners often pointed out how essential their services are to the success of every UK organisation and enterprise. But they recognised that others often hold them in low regard, and the hard work, low pay and lack of prospects means that few had a long term commitment to the industry. They often had only limited knowledge or awareness of their employment rights.

Pay and remuneration

Rates of pay varied significantly, with public sector clients paying on average slightly more than the private sector. Most people were paid by the hour, although piece rates appeared common in some areas of the leisure industry (i.e. being paid a fixed rate per task, such as per room cleaned).

Some respondents mentioned problems with being paid including, in a few cases, systematic underpayment. This could take time to sort out and result in stress, especially where management was remote and problems had to be raised via phone and email. Barriers to resolving problems could put some people off trying at all.

Low pay was a common complaint; many people received only the national minimum wage (NMW) and a few were paid below this. Rates had changed little in the last few years and failed to keep pace with increases in the cost of living. Those wholly reliant on cleaning for their income sometimes worked very long hours in order to make enough to live on. Pay conditions were perceived to be tightening further with, for example, cuts to basic rates in some jobs, abolition of overtime and weekend rates, basic hours being cut (to reduce holiday pay) and being made up through overtime hours at basic rates, and more work being squeezed into shifts.

When outsourced cleaning contracts changed hands this was often associated with worsening conditions for cleaners. This tended to affect new rather than existing staff, but some respondents thought people whose conditions were protected under Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE)

agreements could be targeted by managers looking to streamline costs. Cleaning company employees could receive different rates of pay and conditions than directly employed staff doing equivalent work who they worked alongside, for example, those operating the tills or stacking shelves in a supermarket. There was a complaint by (mostly female) hospital cleaners that they were underpaid relative to (mostly male) hospital porters.

- We recommend that the basis for pay calculations should be clearly explained, and pay slips transparent and readily understood. Systems for paying wages should be efficient, on time and accurate. There should be a ready channel to correct mistakes promptly. Payment should be by the hour and this should not translate into piece work, effectively paid at a lower overall rate, which was observed in the hospitality sector.

Rest, leisure and sickness

Work breaks were standard for shifts of a certain length, but paid breaks were uncommon and appeared to be becoming less so. Some respondents had nowhere they could comfortably take a break and felt that breaks were discouraged or skimped because of the amount of work to get through. In contrast, some spoke favourably of breaks that were not officiously timed and policed.

Holidays could be difficult to arrange because of employer reluctance and problems finding cover. Some respondents had lost their holiday entitlement because they had not taken it in the right period. Some had to find their own cover and faced restrictions on how much time they could have off in one go. A few people in permanent jobs did not get any paid leave.

Cleaning companies were often regarded as unsympathetic to illness. Most respondents had a very unsure grasp of where they stood in relation to sick leave and pay and often said they tried not to be off when they were unwell because they did not want to lose pay or risk losing their job; they were worried about either being labelled as sickly or lazy. Some operatives had gone to work in spite of being particularly unwell. A few had received what seemed clear information about procedures and practice.

- The law on breaks at work must be respected. We recommend that holiday entitlements are clearly explained with a fair and easily accessed channel for booking time off and that arrangements for taking holidays do not hinder access to holiday rights. Furthermore, employees should be given clear information about rights and arrangements for sick leave and sick pay, on recruitment and in writing. They should not be pressured to work when they are sick, and sick leave must not be unreasonably denied or hindered.

Training, health, safety and security

Training varied considerably as did the method of delivery. It ranged from being tailored to the specific needs of the job and delivered by other cleaners, to classroom as well as practical sessions. Some people would have liked more instruction in the use of chemicals and equipment, such as buffing machines used for polishing floors. There was little evidence of special training arrangements for non-English speakers and lack of training for temporary cover staff is a potential concern.

Fuller training was more typical of public sector and specialist settings like hospitals. Some respondents had acquired NVQs and other qualifications, some had also participated in wider training programmes with other staff, for example, in a hospital on how to treat patients and manage people in positive ways.

Respondents tended to have few overt concerns about health and safety at work, and did not feel unduly exposed to risks or hazards, although there were some complaints about not having enough or good enough protective clothing or equipment, or about it not being renewed or replaced when necessary.

Respondents linked some health and safety complaints to their jobs, including various skin and breathing conditions associated with cleaning products and processes, muscle or joint conditions and back pain caused or aggravated by work, broken bones from falling, needle stick injuries and glass cuts. Work-related stress was also a problem for some people.

Pregnancy was well-handled in some work settings but not in others, with some evidence of little support for pregnant workers or appropriate adjustment of their routines.

Personal concerns about security at work were often linked to common features of the cleaning industry: for example working alone in buildings or on separate floors of multi-storey blocks, travelling to and from work in the dark when streets are empty and entering empty car parks.

- Employers must abide by legal requirements in respect of pregnant employees. We recommend that appropriate health and safety training is given to cleaning operatives with, where possible, a formalised training and induction programme, and that employers ensure adequate supplies of good quality protective clothing and equipment. They should also assess what measures to take to ensure the security of, and provide reassurance to, cleaning workers.

Supervision and management

All cleaning operatives in the sample had someone to whom they were answerable at work; managers on or off site and, in many cases, a supervisor with responsibility for

a team of workers, dealing with day to day organisation and bridging the gap between cleaning staff and higher tiers of management.

Cleaning company employees were less likely to be managed by someone based at their place of work, but this was not problematic if channels of communication were good, managers easy to access and responsive. However, there were reports of the remoteness of some managers, and some respondents felt managers were not interested in hearing about or dealing with problems.

Supervisors have considerable potential to influence experiences at work. Good supervisors were highly valued, but reports from respondents suggest that some were not well trained or supported to do their job and were responsible for a fair degree of unhappiness and poor treatment of cleaning staff.

- We recommend that clear channels of communication are established between management, local supervisors and cleaning operatives, particularly in large organisation and contract cleaning situations. The selection, training and oversight of supervisors should take into account the full responsibilities involved, and the impact the role has on employees.

Grievance and redress

While some respondents – especially those in traditionally public sector settings – had been given and retained clear information about grievance procedures, others were less clear about the avenues available to them. Many would, in any case, be unwilling to use them, partly because of low expectations about what could be gained.

It was not uncommon for respondents to say that if problems arose they felt they had either to put up with them or leave. Fear of losing their job as a result of complaining was very acute for some people. There were also worries that ‘rocking the boat’ would, in some way, only make their life worse.

- Cleaning staff should have grievance and redress procedures available to them as part of standard terms and conditions, as for any group of employees. Furthermore, we recommend that employers take steps to remove barriers that inhibit their employees from gaining redress.

Dignity and respect

Respondents often made a point of saying that cleaning was honest, respectable work of which they were not ashamed, but they also thought that in the eyes of others, their job has the very lowest status and is assumed to be of negligible value.

Those who said they felt valued in their jobs or treated with friendliness and respect mentioned being invited to workplace meetings, sharing rest and catering facilities

with other staff, being greeted by name, asked about their holidays or family, and having other staff offer them a cup of tea or coffee if they were making one. These kinds of arrangements and common courtesy at work went a long way towards respondents feeling positive about their work.

Cleaners also described ways in which they are put in a special, lower category of their own by many people, including other workers: being made to feel 'invisible'; being unknown to other workers in a place they may have been cleaning for years; being more likely than other staff to be reported for taking an unauthorised break or using their mobile phone. At worst, many respondents said they were spoken to rudely, harassed and abused by other workers, customers and members of the public. Those working in public places had found themselves the target of practical 'jokes', such as deliberately messing up toilet facilities that have just been cleaned.

- We recommend that employers encourage a culture of dignity and respect for all in the workplace. They should take active steps to avoid behaviour and practice that tends to denigrate cleaning and cleaning staff.

Migrants

The cleaning industry is characterised by a high proportion of migrant workers, especially in some regions such as London. Cleaning was regarded as an important route into the jobs market, even for some migrants with marketable skills and qualifications. This was especially so for those who did not speak English well or whose qualifications were not recognised in the UK.

Migrants tended to find work through informal networks, especially 'word of mouth' exchanges between people of the same nationality. This could lead to clusters of nationalities in some workplaces which could be beneficial, but could also lead to workers from other nationalities feeling excluded or being unable to obtain work. There were reports of racial tensions in some workplaces, and of prejudice shown by some nationalities dominant in a workplace against others. This could affect well-being at work.

Some migrants commented on the general pains of migration – feeling alone in a strange country, without emotional or financial support. Awareness of their migrant status could inhibit them from voicing problems or grievances at work. Language problems could aggravate this and affect their ability to understand training and safety instructions, contracts and terms and conditions.

Migrant and non-migrant respondents sometimes expressed concerns about 'waves of migrants' ready to 'take their jobs' and undercut the going rate of pay, work conditions and formal protections. It was widely believed that new migrants will work for less pay and with less good conditions in order to gain a foothold, and that this is

a key reason why some parts of the cleaning industry will remain low paid and insecure.

- Employers, agencies and client businesses must not discriminate in the recruitment or training of workers. The law must also be respected in all other relevant matters including the NMW. We recommend that employers need to be aware of potential issues that can arise around nationality, such as language difficulties, tensions in relationships, and real or perceived favouritism or victimisation, all of which can have an impact on well-being at work (and on business efficiency).

Thematic overview

Most of the freedoms, rights and entitlements explored through the research are covered in the findings above, but a few issues remain. For example, we did not encounter any examples of workers who said they had been discriminated against or victimised due to their membership of a trade union or similar. But often conditions were not conducive to union activity, or to workers seeking out or joining an organisation to represent them. Some workers – especially migrants – thought membership of such organisations could count against them while for low paid workers, the cost of membership may be a barrier.

There were reports that some cleaning agencies (possibly smaller scale, more local operations) discriminated against prospective employees on the grounds of pregnancy and nationality. We found no indications of forced labour such as retention of documents or threats of violence or denunciation to the authorities, but it is unlikely that people in such circumstances would willingly have come forward for interview.

Some respondents spoke of issues concerning their privacy. Respondents felt they were ‘watched’ more than other categories of employee and were more likely to be suspected of laziness, poor work or time wasting. Cases were reported of identity theft allegedly by a supervisor at work and of a supervisor sharing another respondent’s health information with other workers.

Workplaces often appeared to lack a culture which promoted rights and channels for redress, or bolstered confidence in using them. Access to redress also depends on the worker’s status and relationship with an employer being clear. Contract cleaning arrangements can make this relationship both unclear and remote.

Four main overarching themes can be highlighted: the structure of the industry; management and supervision; migrant workers; and dignity and respect:

1. The industry can be divided by, for example: sector, type and size of employer and workplace establishment, public and private service client. We found few hard and fast rules about where protections are strongest or weakest although respondents in public sector settings had, on average, better pay and conditions in respect of holidays and other entitlements.
2. Supervisors in charge of day-to-day management of cleaning operatives are often in positions of power in the workplace. While many respondents appreciated their supervisors, stories also abounded in terms of favouritism, discrimination, harassment and bullying. Advice or redress can also be affected where supervisors provide the only obvious gateway to procedures.
3. Being a migrant worker can have an impact on rights and equality: language barriers can make work more difficult and even hazardous, rights and redress procedures hard to understand and access. Discrimination and harassment is sometimes evident when one nationality is dominant in a workplace. We found instances where legal rights regarding pay levels and holiday entitlement are not observed. Many migrant and non-migrant workers believe the presence of migrant workers contributes to this.
4. Derogatory attitudes towards cleaning work persist. Many respondents pointed out the anomaly that although cleaning is vital work, the people who do it are often denigrated, barely even counting as 'staff'. Denial of the right to dignity and respect at work pervaded many interviews. It is difficult to quantify the effect this has overall on respondents' assertiveness in pursuing their rights at work.

The legal obligations and measures identified to improve the situation are far from comprehensive, but serve as a basis for discussion. Any good practice guidelines should include 'hard' improvements – relating to legal requirements – and 'soft' improvements, which address the way in which rights are threatened and eroded in less clear-cut ways, such as workplace attitudes.

1. Introduction

1.1 The report

This is the report on qualitative research with cleaning operatives employed in four industrial sectors in Britain: transport, health, leisure¹ and retail/office. Ninety-three people across England, Scotland and Wales took part in the study which was conducted between October 2013 and February 2014. The research was carried out by Independent Social Research as part of a broader programme of work into the non-domestic cleaning industry initiated by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC).

1.2 Purpose of the research

The purpose of the research was to investigate in depth the experiences of workers in the non-domestic cleaning industry from an equality and human rights perspective. The framework for this approach refers to a number of workplace and labour market freedoms, rights and entitlements such as:

- Freedom of association
- The right to equal pay for equal work
- The right to organise and participate in collective bargaining
- The right to equality at work, and the right to non-discrimination
- The right to just and favourable remuneration
- The abolition of forced labour
- The right to a safe work environment
- The right to rest and leisure
- The right to privacy
- Access to redress

Implicit in these are other rights on which work can have a substantial impact, such as the right to family life. The rationale for this approach and further information about the framework can be found in the EHRC report 'The Invisible Workforce: Employment Practices in the Cleaning Sector' which covers the overall programme of work on the cleaning industry. The framework is also described in greater depth in Chapter 10 of our report. The research was designed to explore both positive and negative experiences in relation to these freedoms, entitlements and rights. The report also highlights good and bad employment practice.

¹ Excluding the hospitality sector – such as pubs, restaurants and hotels.

1.3 Background to the research

The EHRC is carrying out a major programme of work to explore how equality and human rights are protected for vulnerable workers. By focusing on specific industries, the EHRC aims to build up in-depth knowledge of how each operates. Following an inquiry into the meat and poultry processing industry² attention is now focused on the non-domestic cleaning industry which employs over 400,000 people in jobs characterised by easy entry and low pay. It is anticipated that lessons from this work will apply across a wide range of other industrial sectors where similar conditions hold.

1.4 The non-domestic cleaning industry

Close to half a million people work as non-domestic cleaning operatives carrying out a wide range of activities including:

- Standard cleaning: such as general cleaning, vacuuming, waste clearing and removal, dusting, polishing, washing and general non-specific waste management;
- Specialised cleaning: for instance high level or difficult access cleaning, builders cleans or preparation for 'snagging' (identifying and resolving new build defects), accommodation sanitising, graffiti or gum removal, bed bug eradication, 'superbug' disinfection, odour control and air management, sharps removal, floor or carpet cleaning, polishing and maintenance³;
- Window and facade cleaning: for example internal and external cleaning of windows, facades, framework, cladding and so on.

Organisations in every sector, public and private, use cleaning services in establishments such as:

- Offices/retail: high street stores and outlets, 'out of town' retail units, department stores, supermarkets, office blocks, light commercial units, warehousing and car-dealerships;
- Leisure facilities: pubs, restaurants, holiday units/parks, leisure centres, leisure destinations, gyms, cinemas;

² Equality and Human Rights Commission (2012) 'Meat and poultry processing inquiry review'. <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/legal-and-policy/inquiries-and-assessments/inquiry-into-the-meat-and-poultry-processing-sectors/>

³ MTW Research, Contract cleaning market: research and analysis UK 2013, 4th Edition, April 2013.

- Industry and manufacturing: manufacturing sites, industrial units, production facilities, processing centres;
- Education: nurseries, schools, colleges and universities both privately and publicly funded;
- Health: hospitals, hospices, primary care centres, GP practices, dental surgeries;
- Public buildings: civic centres, museums, galleries, local authority premises;
- Transport: stations, airports, vehicles and other network facilities.

According to a recent market analysis of contract cleaning, standard cleaning services dominate the market, but specialist cleaning is a significant growth area. The largest proportion of the contract market is accounted for by office/retail cleaning (around a quarter) closely followed by health (just under a quarter) with leisure (18 per cent) and transport (nine percent) in third and fourth place respectively.⁴

1.5 Research method

The sample

Ninety-three people working as cleaning operatives in four key sectors (office/retail, health, transport and leisure) took part in the research. Respondents were selected purposively to ensure a spread in terms of socio-demographic and employment-related variables. The achieved sample included adult men and women of all ages directly employed by cleaning services clients or working for cleaning companies, employment agencies or facilities management companies of different sizes. Clients included public and private sector organisations and services provided by respondents included both general and specialist cleaning. Migrants make up a substantial proportion of the workforce in the non-domestic cleaning industry (around 30 per cent)⁵ and this is reflected in the sample. A substantial minority of migrant respondents spoke little or no English and required the help of interpreters in order to take part.

Participants were recruited by locally based professional recruiters visiting work places (stations, hospitals, offices), local clubs, community centres, places of worship and food stores to 'free find' potential respondents. Recruiters also made some use of 'snowballing' methods, asking those they had already made contact with to recommend others who might be eligible for the research. Table 1 provides a simple breakdown of the sample which was drawn from eight areas across Britain:

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ UK Commission for Employment and Skills (2010) *Skills for Jobs: Today and Tomorrow – Vol.2*, <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140108090250/http://ukces.org.uk/publications/ssa-vol-2>

Birmingham, Cornwall, Glasgow, Inner London, Manchester, Outer London, Norfolk and Swansea.

Table 1: Sample composition

Gender		Age		Full/part-time		Employer		Public/ private client*		Migrant status	
Men	Women	18-49	50+	F/T	P/T	Direct	Outsourced	Public	Private	Migrant	Non-migrant
30	63	72	21	31	62	38	55	27	70	63	30

N=93

Note: * Adds to more than 93 because some respondents had more than one job.

Talking to respondents

Respondents participated either in hour long in-depth interviews, paired interviews lasting 75 minutes or mini-groups of three or four people lasting 90 minutes. Small sessions of between one and three people were used so that there would be plenty of opportunity to explore the particulars of respondents’ job and personal circumstances. Individual interviews were ideal for this, but paired interviews and mini-groups also offered less confident respondents the chance to take part with friends or others to keep them company. In some cases, migrants were paired or grouped together so that those with better spoken English could act as interpreters for the rest. Using paired interviews and mini groups allowed us to include a much larger number of respondents in the study for a given resource than would otherwise have been the case. Sessions took place in venues hired for the purpose and in cafes and community centres.

The topic guide used as a basis for interviews and groups is shown in the Appendix. It covered a wide range of subjects including: background information about respondents; why and how they got into cleaning; details of the work they do and of any training or preparation for the job; type of contract and information about their work patterns, breaks, holidays and sick leave; pay and conditions; what the work is like; relationships at work with managers, supervisors, colleagues and members of the public; options if they have problems at work; and fair and equal treatment at work.

Interviews explored respondents’ daily experiences and feelings about their job and its impact on their life outside work. As with other research that we have carried out exploring human rights issues,⁶ terms such as ‘human rights’ were avoided and

⁶ Sykes, W. and Groom, C. (2011) Older people's experiences of home care in England. Research Report No. 79. Manchester: Equality and Human Rights Commission

respondents were not asked directly to comment on their rights or their perceptions of how far these were or were not being met in the context of work. This was partly in order to avoid language that respondents might not be familiar with or that they might not be comfortable using, and to maintain a broadly based conversation without pre-judgement as to possible human rights issues. However, at the conclusion of each interview, respondents were asked what they knew about their 'rights as a worker under the law' and their responses were probed lightly.

All sessions with respondents were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Each session was summarised to an analysis framework that reflected the topic guide, the key research questions, and any unforeseen areas arising from the interviews and mini-groups. The summaries included verbatim quotations that could be used for illustrating points in the final report, and their construction was very helpful in building up a picture of individual cases. Overarching synthesis and analysis was conducted with the aid of computer software that is useful for organising and managing large volumes of qualitative data. This is a support, but not a substitute for thinking.

1.6 Structure of the report

The rest of this report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2 draws on respondents' descriptions of their jobs to paint a broad picture of what cleaning operatives do at work. The workforce is characterised, based on the achieved sample, in terms of their backgrounds, socio-demographic profile and motivations for joining the industry; and a brief description is provided of how respondents get work, their attitudes towards their jobs, and their awareness of their employment and human rights.
- The next six chapters each deal in turn with a broad set of issues:
 - Chapter 3 – Pay and remuneration;
 - Chapter 4 – Rest, leisure and sickness;
 - Chapter 5 – Training, supervision and management;
 - Chapter 6 – Health, safety and security;
 - Chapter 7 – Grievance and redress;
 - Chapter 8 – Dignity and respect.

These chapters highlight potential problems and concerns, but they also provide examples of good practice that we came across. The final summary section of each chapter pulls together good practice examples with legal employment requirements, to which not all employers currently adhere, and makes a number of recommendations which are shown in boxes. All the points are grounded in

experiences recounted by respondents to this research. Some reflect apparent good practice that already exists in places; some arise from considering less good experiences of cleaning operatives. Many are based on a combination of both. Respondents did not always give opinions on what they thought should happen at their workplace or across the cleaning industry (though many did). However we believe most or all respondents would agree with the way we have addressed the problems identified, based on what they said or implied about their experiences.

- Chapter 9 considers issues arising from the considerable numbers of migrant workers employed in the cleaning industry.
- Chapter 10 offers an overview of the findings from the research and an overall commentary on the dominant rights issues within the non-domestic cleaning industry. We conclude with a few brief comments in Chapter 11.

2. The job and the workers

2.1 Introduction

This chapter gives a flavour of what jobs are like in the non-domestic cleaning industry, and provides a description of the people who carry out the work. The ways in which people find work are discussed. Cleaning operatives' awareness of, and attitudes towards, employment and equality and human rights at work are also considered.

2.2 The employers and the job

As mentioned earlier, cleaning operatives in the sample worked directly for cleaning services clients or for cleaning companies, facilities management companies or general job agencies – large and small. Respondents provided services to private and to public sector organisations of different sizes and worked in small and large establishment settings. Many respondents had more than one job, for example, one respondent worked full-time cleaning everyday in a kitchen show room, a DIY warehouse and an office.

Non-domestic cleaning work appears to be highly differentiated. From job to job described by respondents there was considerable variation in terms of what it means to be a cleaning operative: what the work entails, the degree of technical knowhow and expertise required, the responsibility and risk associated with the job and the amount of autonomy and control that cleaning staff have.

Respondents described jobs that involved a wide range of standard tasks and activities such as:

- Hoovering, sweeping, washing and polishing floors, stairs and lifts
- Dusting and polishing desks and other hard furniture
- Emptying waste bins and baskets
- Washing up office mugs and cleaning office kitchens and appliances
- Cleaning lavatories, basins and mirrors
- Cleaning, dusting and removing cobwebs from walls, banisters, skirting boards and shelves
- Cleaning outdoor spaces, for example sweeping and hosing bin areas and car parks.

In addition, some described using special equipment or procedures, for example to deal with areas in heavy use or where there are particular concerns about general public or staff safety, hygiene and infection control or physical risks or hazards to cleaning operatives.

In some cases, the work was highly specified. This was most likely to be the case with contract cleaning jobs and jobs in certain specialist settings. For example, in hospital wards cleaning protocols were often very detailed, covering tasks, products, methods and procedures, equipment to be used, and health and safety checks to be performed.

At the other extreme, a cleaning operative employed directly by a service client and working alone, for example in a small office building, could have a high degree of autonomy in terms of the tasks performed, routine, and even which products and equipment they used.

The first case study below, illustrates some of the main daily tasks of one respondent who works in a leisure centre:

Case study 1: Cleaning job in a leisure centre (£6.50 per hour)

I have to make sure the floor is perfect, and we've got escalator; daytime is not busy; ... there's a lot of glass on the escalator, [I] turn it off and wipe it. Then I check the whole building...spray the lift, I have to shine and make sure that there's no finger marks on it and mop the floor.

...We've got a big car park and I have to check there. We've got communal compressor like you put the rubbish, if there's rubbish on the floor I have to pick them up and put them in the machine and then turn it on and make sure everything is gone. And you've got baler, it's like recycling papers, cardboards and I have to stand there for 45 minutes and make sure I put all of them in and make sure the place is tidy.

...The fire exit, people go there in the night time and that's where they do their business, they wee there, they poo there, they are sick and all that. I have to make sure that is all clean.

In case somebody put vomit on the floor then I have to sort out, or somebody put a drink the floor and people walk on it and fall, I have to wipe it quick. First I have to put a yellow sign for the people to be aware not to walk on it. ... I have to put a sign, even when it's raining, so people are aware that it's wet.

...I use the Hoover to do the offices but a wooden floor like that sweep it and use the mop. I empty bins in the offices, polishing desks and glass. Yeah, and make sure in all of them there's no dust.

2.3 The workforce

There is no easy and obvious way to characterise the respondents that participated in this study which included a diverse range in terms of age, gender, ethnicity,

nationality, educational attainment, household characteristics, previous work experience and command of spoken and written English.

For some respondents cleaning was their main source of income, and most worked or wanted to work full-time. They included respondents who thought they had few other realistic alternatives for work, for example because of lack of formal qualifications or because of language barriers. Some said they were working as cleaning operatives simply because it was relatively easy to get a job; many said they wanted to move on to something else. Part of this group was made up of migrants with high levels of educational attainment and/or previous work experience acquired in their own country.

Other respondents, mainly part-time workers, said that cleaning offered them a chance to earn money fitted in around other commitments or interests, for example family or study. They included often low-skilled British workers who had no plans to leave the industry and younger people with no long term plans to continue working as cleaning operatives.

The case studies below give some more flavour of the variety of personal backgrounds represented in the workforce, and of how cleaning jobs themselves can vary.

Case study 2: Cleaning job in a gym (pay £7.00 per hour)

A is 49, and has lived in the city all her life. She has done shop work in the past, but has been doing only cleaning jobs for some years. They suit her lifestyle. She is married with two children, and is happy to have the rest of the day to herself after finishing work.

When the kids were younger, when they were at school, it just sorted of fitted, because my kids are older now, I'm up early anyhow, it's nice to be out first thing, by the time you are coming back, it's only a few hours.

I knew somebody what worked there and they said 'why don't you call in'... they sort of take some information from you, the hours you want, and then they get in touch with you.

She works from 7am to 10am every morning in a large gym.

Also working there is C, interviewed at the same time. He is 20, and is an undergraduate student. He does just two morning shifts a week on the two days he doesn't have lectures at college, to make some more money to fund his social life:

My mate told me about it, he'd seen it online. I'm at college, I need to support having a social life, going to the pub and that. I'm not in college on Wednesday and Fridays so I'd rather be going out earning.

They do mopping, cleaning, just 'the usual cleaning work'. They enjoy the job because they have a laugh together, the people in the gym are friendly and there is a good working atmosphere. There's no real downside other than having to get up early.

Case study 3: Cleaning job in a hospital (pay £7.63 per hour)

D is 29, from Poland. He has a degree but says he found no desirable work available in Poland. His sister was already working in the UK, cleaning at a hospital, and she arranged his interview. This was a formality as all local cleaning recruitment seems to be dominated by personal or family contacts. At that time, Poles were particularly popular at the hospital, he said, for their hard working habits and tendency not to 'ask questions' (about what they were expected to do).

He worked the first four years as part of a team of cleaners, and now has special responsibility for Sterilised Services. He uses a range of equipment to keep the department to the high standard required – buffers, scrubbers, steam-cleaners etc.

He had no previous experience of cleaning and he had no ambition to be a cleaner. It was what was on offer to get away from Poland. He does not particularly enjoy it and has tried to move on several times both within and outside the hospital, but without success:

Every day is exactly the same, the same tasks to do and it isn't really nice and pleasant to be honest. I wouldn't do that in my country, never.

Case study 4: Cleaning job in holiday flats (pay £6.75 per hour)

E is 26, married with a husband in the armed forces. She trained as a mortgage advisor, but stopped that job when she had her first child. She is now studying. Meanwhile she does cleaning work for extra money to supplement the household income.

She responded to an internet advert and accepted a job cleaning holiday cottages and a gym. There was no interview, she was invited in to work immediately and only then found that the 'gym' included a number of other areas, showers, changing rooms, office, reception. She has no contract though she has asked for one; colleagues assure her that contracts are not normally available for cleaners. No checks were carried out and no references sought. No detailed terms of her employment have been set.

With one other cleaner, she cleans holiday cottages which are spread across a 200 acre site. In the evenings she cleans the gym, alone.

In the evenings I clean the gym, well it's not just the gym, I was told it was just the gym; it's the gym and then they've got like a massive shower room, dressing rooms, toilets, showers. I don't thoroughly clean these other rooms but there's now a technician room and spa, but I only have to do the floor in

there, then disabled toilets and after that I do the reception area and the office. That's meant to be in two hours and sometimes it takes me longer.

People just look down on you... It's just the way some people speak to you. I mean the people that stay where I'm cleaning are quite well off and snobby I suppose, and sometimes they don't even look at you, they don't even say Hi, and some of their cottages I've cleaned they're meant to leave it so we can clean and they don't, they'll just throw stuff everywhere because they know we're going to go in there and clean, but it makes it harder for us.

However she says she enjoys her work, particularly 'not having to think'. It has also improved her standards domestically:

I do actually (enjoy cleaning), yes. I don't have to think about it, just go there, do it and come home...I've started shining my taps at home.

Case study 5: Cleaning job in an office block (pay £6.31 per hour)

F is Sudanese, aged 26. She came to the UK alone via Belgium, nine years ago to escape the war. She has no family ties in UK and lives alone in a bed-sit. She says there are few other Sudanese in the area. She gets by in English, but sometimes struggles. She had no English when she first came, but has studied it here.

Her job is tied to a particular building housing a number of companies. She is given the key and works alone to clean the entrance, floors, desks, toilets etc. She works from 5.30 to 10.30 am and then from 5pm to 7pm. This suits her as there is some time to relax between shifts and she does not finish too late.

She does not really like the work. She says it is hard, especially using the buffing machine which makes her very tired. She spoke about her disgust at cleaning messy toilet areas.

Sometimes there is sick all over and you have to clean all the sick.

She says cleaning work is relatively easy to obtain, compared to more interesting or rewarding jobs. But it does not seem easy to progress beyond simple cleaning to less arduous management tasks. She continues to try for other types of work, but cleaning is always the most available:

I just stick there because I know the money is not too bad, it's minimum wage and I'm just doing it to pay my bills, my rent and things like that, and to survive... and I'm just doing it before I get something better... Other jobs like call centre, restaurants and things like that when you apply for the jobs they won't call you straightaway, so cleaning they like to call you immediately to come and clean, so that is why (I am a cleaner)... Next year I'm going to college to study because I can't do cleaning forever because it's not a professional job; I know you can earn money but they can't promote you for cleaning; you'll just be cleaning there for years so it's no good.

Case study 6: Cleaning job in an over ground train station (pay £6.31 per hour)

G is a 60 year old man, originally from Ghana who was then naturalised as a German citizen. He has lived and worked in the UK since 2004, is widowed with grown up children. He had some years off work with a neck injury, which still causes him pain. He was orphaned young in Ghana and so had little education, which is why he says he has always been limited in employment options:

Yeah, definitely, because naturally if you are not well educated you can't get a better job. My father died when I was two years old and I had a tough time and I know it's by the grace that I'm living here.

In Germany he first got into cleaning trains for the national rail company. He came to the UK when the company he had worked for lost that contract. In some ways he regrets the move but became settled along with his family. His previous cleaning jobs here have included street cleaning, which ended when he fell and injured his neck.

He got his current station cleaning job through a friend two years ago. The friend spoke to a supervisor who called him in to the station. He says new recruits tend to come through friendship introductions, and this affects how nationality groups build up over time.

Overall he feels the importance of cleaning, as an essential job:

Cleaning job, the people should be considered as most important people because the whole dirt, filth and everything is being done by us, but the salary is not good. We are being squeezed all the time... but without us people cannot survive, there'd be a lot of sickness in the street... So a cleaning job, as I can say, is the important job in the whole world.

On the station he says he sees 'friendly people' around, but on the other hand people who make a mess including allowing dogs to foul the station, and he is called on to clean it up. He cleans the concourse, platforms, toilets, 'every corner of the train station'. A uniform is supplied but there are sometimes delays getting items the right size. Currently he is still waiting for some winter clothing.

Manning levels were reduced by one quarter recently when the contract changed hands, going down from four cleaners per platform to three. Hours and pay have stayed the same but he has found the job noticeably harder:

Yes, it's now getting harder. I know someone who is a little bit older and because of that she left.

They don't take good care of the workers; they only give you money whatever they want, but they don't think that without us nobody can survive... The company, the employers that employ us, they are squeezing us.

2.4 Types of contract and hours

Most of the participants in this study had permanent positions as cleaning operatives. Some provided services only for one client, others for more than one. Some respondents described their jobs as permanent, but their contracts were renewed annually ("I am permanent but I think my contract is renewed every year; every April

we review and sign it.”) Other respondents were employed either on a trial or probationary basis (with the possibility of a permanent position) or on a short-term or temporary basis for a fixed period only.

Most short-term or temporary work was acquired through cleaning companies with whom respondents had zero hours arrangements. That is to say they were ‘signed up’ to cleaning companies but were paid only when they worked. Many respondents had experience of these kinds of contracts at some point, especially early on in their cleaning careers. These arrangements could suit some people but were not a first choice for most, mainly because of the lack of income security and poorer terms and conditions of employment; for example no holiday pay:

I need fixed hours so I know how much I earn at the end of the week... It is very difficult; you can't plan anything because you don't know if you stay in the job. You can't plan because you can't take contract for your phone or rent because you don't know if you earn £200 or £500. - Male, cleaning company, South Wales, migrant (Egypt)

It is nice to get a permanent job then you can plan the eating and everything. At least you have something coming to you all the time and then you can live. Of course it is good. - Male, cleaning company, London, migrant (Somalia)

The majority of respondents were in part-time employment, working for less than 30 hours a week but a substantial minority worked full-time – at least 37.5 hours a week if not more. The most usual pattern was to have a fixed number of basic hours, with extra hours for example to cover other staff absences or busy periods. Most respondents welcomed extra hours, but some said they were expected to work extra hours if required, whether or not they wanted to:

With the interview... they will be asking you, are you looking for more hours, yes or no. You definitely say ‘yes’, because if you say ‘no’ they won't give you the job. - Male, cleaning company, London, migrant (Ghana)

In this sample, most permanent cleaning operatives said their working weeks were relatively predictable. Shifts on some jobs changed on a weekly or fortnightly basis, but many respondents said they were given the chance to say which days and times they wanted or were willing to work:

You know (your shift for the next week) on Sunday, but on Friday they ask you your availability for the week and then they process everyone's (choices). Usually everyone gets the hours they really want. - Male, in-house, London, non-migrant

A number of respondents had more than one job in order to make up their hours. One respondent had three different cleaning jobs in different locations with the associated disadvantages of a long and complex working day with high travel costs:

It is not easy, going to two or three places to make up your eight hours but what can you do? If I get all the hours in the same place I will be happy. But two hours here and three hours there makes the day very long and there is too much petrol costs. - Male, cleaning company, Birmingham, migrant (Ghana)

Only two respondents said they were self-employed – two women, both of whom submit invoices for cleaning services to their client (an office in one case and a very small home-based cleaning company in the other). The understanding is that they are responsible for their own National Insurance and Tax. Both are paid in cash. A number of respondents said they aspired to being self-employed “everybody would like to be self-employed, you can earn a bit more, work in your own time”, but many thought there would also be risks outweighing the advantages:

You have to find the work yourself. It is more reliable being employed and you have other people around you more. - Female, in-house, Birmingham, non-migrant

I think you have more benefits if you are employed. Stuff is organised already, whereas if you are self-employed you have to organise everything yourself. - Female, in-house, Birmingham, non-migrant

Most respondents said they had formal written contracts, but a substantial minority said they did not, especially operatives directly employed by small service users: shops, small offices, or working for small cleaning firms. Contract documents held by respondents were not examined as part of this study, but it would appear that there was considerable variation between them in terms of what they covered and in how much detail.

As might be expected, a fair number of respondents were not actually sure what their contracts said. In some cases this was because they hadn't read them:

I don't read anything. I read maybe the first bit, I know I should. But I do it with everything, I start reading it then you get fed up... - Female, in-house, Glasgow, non-migrant

They sometimes relied on information gleaned from colleagues and from *de facto* arrangements at work. Most respondents were confident about the basic hours that they were contracted to work for and about their rate of pay. If they had not been sick, they did not necessarily know about the arrangements for sick leave.

Some people claimed never to have seen their contract though they remember signing papers. Some said they had not been given a copy to keep:

We've never had a copy, no. They are available though, we can ask for them. - Female, cleaning company, North West of England, non-migrant

Many respondents were dependent on others to help them understand contract documents, especially migrant workers with limited English.

2.5 Routes into cleaning jobs

Across the sample, perhaps the most commonly reported route into work was word of mouth. Respondents found out about vacancies and sometimes secured introductions with employers through friends, family and other personal connections:

She came to the restaurant and my husband asked her 'What are you doing now?' and she said 'I have a little company and I do cleaning, office cleaning'. He said 'My wife needs a job, do you think you can do something for her?' And she said 'OK, let me think'. And then she phoned him and told him she has something for me in the mornings. - Female, cleaning company, Manchester, migrant (Chile)

I knew somebody what worked there, and they said why don't you call in...
- Female, cleaning company, Birmingham, non-migrant

The perception was widespread that fewer vacancies reach the open market than was the case a few years ago. One supervisor in the sample working for a cleaning company said that there is currently no need to advertise posts because every cleaning operative has friends or relatives looking for work, and a recommendation from a trusted employee is perceived by employers as the easiest, lowest cost and lowest risk option for recruitment.

In some cases, cleaning operatives leaving a job would simply hand it on to someone they knew, with the employer 'rubber stamping' the arrangement. This might happen, for example, in a small office directly employing one or a small number of cleaners. In other cases, candidates might be required to provide a CV and proof of their eligibility to work in the UK, as well as undergo an interview. But this too was often described as a formality.

Other reported ways in which respondents had found jobs included: advertisements found on-line, in the press or on notice boards; job centres; and speculative enquiries with cleaning companies or service clients. Two migrant workers had responded to advertisements in their country of origin and had paid fees to an agent to handle their papers and find them work.

2.6 Attitudes to cleaning

Respondents often described their work as 'honest'. They also said it was not difficult to learn, and that this was an advantage; many valued the cleaning industry as being relatively easy to 'get into'. Some people said they liked cleaning, were good at it and got satisfaction from the difference they could make in the work place. A few respondents said that they valued cleaning work for being mentally undemanding.

However, cleaning was also seen by most respondents as being hard work; physically demanding and, of course, dirty (sometimes 'disgusting'). They often thought that they were doing work that others would regard as 'beneath them', even if they personally did not feel demeaned by it.

Some respondents said that cleaning services are wrongly under-valued and belittled; that without them all other industries would ultimately be unable to operate:

It's like I said, without the cleaners and the porters there wouldn't be no-one running in the hospital. - Female, cleaning company, Manchester, non-migrant

But in spite of this, cleaning was not a 'job of choice' for many respondents, mainly because of its low status, low pay and apparent lack of prospects.

As described in section 2.3, most people had found their way into cleaning because they felt it was one of the few options open to them. Few had a long-term commitment to the industry; more commonly respondents described it as a 'stop gap', even if they could not see a clear route out and, in some cases, even if they had been working as a cleaning operative for some time.

2.7 Awareness of and attitudes towards 'rights' at work

In the course of the interviews with cleaning operatives, we came across many examples of people who were broadly content with their current jobs and some cases of people who were quite unhappy. But on the whole, respondents' attitudes to their current jobs are best characterised as stoical and largely uncomplaining; conditioned perhaps by their low expectations of the industry set against a backdrop of perceived limited choices. Respondents often said that they felt they had either to endure any problems they encountered at work or leave:

I need my job, so it's a case of if I don't like it I can lump it and it's a case if we don't like doing the job somebody else will do it. - Female, in-house, Glasgow, non-migrant

It was unusual for respondents to frame these issues in terms of perceived employment, equality or human 'rights' and, indeed, there was often only limited

knowledge or awareness of what these might be. This is discussed more fully in the final concluding chapter (See Chapter 10)

2.8 Summary

Cleaning is a fundamental activity in all types of non-domestic establishment across every sector, public and private. Cleaning operatives are employed directly by service clients, work for cleaning companies or similar contractors and, in some cases, are self-employed. Some elements of non-domestic cleaning work are fairly standard, but others involve specialised procedures. Some jobs are highly specified while in others, operatives have more autonomy and control over what they do and how they organise their work.

The workforce in the non-domestic cleaning industry is highly varied. This study included a diverse range in terms of basic socio-demographic characteristics, educational attainment, previous work experience and command of spoken and written English. For some, cleaning was their main source of income, most of whom worked or wanted to work full-time; while others were supplementing their household income on a part-time basis to fit in with other commitments. Most opted for cleaning because it was easy to find work, but some felt they had few other alternatives – often because of lack of skills or qualifications or language barriers. Many said they regarded cleaning as a staging post to something ‘better’.

Most respondents were in permanent posts, valued for security of income, but many also had experience of temporary/short-term work. Some had more than one cleaning job in order to make up paid hours.

Respondents described a range of different routes into their current job, but word of mouth was very important with people finding out about vacancies and sometimes securing introductions through personal connections. There was a widespread perception that fewer cleaning jobs are being advertised on the open market.

Operatives often pointed out how essential their services are to the success of every UK organisation and enterprise. But they recognised that others often hold them in low regard, and the hard work, low pay and lack of prospects means that few had a long term commitment to the industry.

Respondents seldom framed any problems they encountered at work in terms of equality or human rights – indeed, there seemed often only limited knowledge or awareness of what these might be.

3. Pay and remuneration

3.1 Introduction

This chapter covers issues to do with pay and remuneration in the cleaning industry. It describes reported rates of pay and deals with the question of low pay, in-work poverty and experiences of worsening conditions of pay. Sections 3.5 and 3.6 highlight respectively some questions about fair treatment in relation to pay and about procedures for getting paid. The final section summarises the chapter findings and outlines points about possible good practice in relation to pay, together with illustrations and examples.

3.2 Rates of pay

The vast majority of cleaning operatives who took part in this study were paid by the hour, either fortnightly or monthly directly into a bank account. In the leisure industry, a few respondents cleaning caravans or holiday chalets said they were paid piece rates – per caravan for example. We interviewed three respondents with experience of hotel cleaning; they said they had an hourly rate but this was notional, in practice it was dependent on getting through a set number of rooms, unrealistic in their supposed hours. A small number of respondents employed by small cleaning companies or private sector service users were paid cash in hand.

Rates of pay varied across the sample from £5.00 to £9.00 per hour, with the majority reporting hourly rates of between £6.19 and £7.00. Cleaning company employees working on more than one contract usually reported a different rate of pay for each job. The range of pay for respondents cleaning for private sector clients was between £5.00 and £7.50 per hour; for participants providing services to public sector clients the range was slightly higher between £6.30 (minimum wage) and £9.00. Rates were generally below the current Living Wage of £7.65 per hour for the UK (£8.80 in London); at or close to the National Minimum Wage. This was widely regarded as 'normal' or 'standard' for the cleaning industry, but not necessarily either acceptable or fair:

They just give us the minimum wage; no matter what you do you get the minimum wage so I don't think it's a fair pay; to where I work anyway I don't think it's a fair pay. - Male, cleaning company, Glasgow, migrant (Nigeria)

According to the work we do, it's little. But before you take up the job they tell you, it's upon you take up the job or look for another job. - Female, in-house, Swansea, migrant (Uganda)

3.3 Low pay

Rates of pay were said to have changed little over the years compared with the cost of living, going up only with statutory increases in the National Minimum Wage:

I did ask my manager, is this money going to stay like that forever? And he just laughed. I did ask him. Because of the money, if I did not do a lot (of hours) I'm not going to survive. - Female, cleaning company, London, migrant (Liberia)

Low pay was the issue most often raised by respondents in interviews. Those wholly reliant on their income from cleaning often said that they found it hard to make ends meet; that there was no leeway, safety net or margin after paying bills and other essential outgoings:

After the tax, Oyster, there's nothing for me... I need to pay my bills. I need more money, not more job. - Female, cleaning company, London, migrant (Brazil)

It's difficult to save, very difficult because even when the weather is changing you have to buy the clothes for them. Yesterday the boy go to school, he forgets his coat, somebody take the coat, and all night I was like you know, and the coat costs £45, so I think about all these things you know, I have to. **Do you worry about what would happen if you couldn't work?** That's the point, yeah. It's a big problem. Everything I'm doing there I watch my back; I make sure I'm doing the right thing. **So you're quite careful of yourself?** Very, very careful. - Female, cleaning company, London, migrant (Liberia)

Fifteen years ago, when I paid rent it's £80, now you pay nearly £200 a week, it's very hard. I used to read newspapers, and London Mayor, Boris Johnson said the minimum wage can go up, it should go up because life is so hard for us cleaners.- Male, cleaning company, London, migrant (Portugal)

Some people complained less only because their wages were seen as 'topping up' their household income, rather than being necessary for the essentials of life:

I won't put it towards the shopping or anything; it'll be treats for the children as well, or once in a while I might go out for a meal where normally I wouldn't be able to have done that, so it's like little treats for me or the kids, it's more that's what I'm working for really. - Female, in-house, Manchester, non-migrant

One respondent had been made supervisor of his small team some years before at a higher rate, but since then his pay had not gone up at all while his team on minimum wage were catching up with him:

Now the basic salary is £6.32 – the difference in my salary and the other cleaning staff is 18p – and that's it. I asked my manager, what happened

with my salary, the basic is coming up but my salary is back ... Two years ago, the manager is ... saying 'I will pay you £8'. But never. No. They've changed their mind; it's coming from the big boss. I asked the Area Manager about my salary and he say, 'I'm sorry about that'. 'Can you check in the head office for me', and he say all right. But now their salary is £6.32 and my salary is £6.50 and that's it but the responsibility is too much for me. - Male, cleaning company, London, migrant (Bolivia)

Only a few respondents in the sample were paid piece rates. Some who cleaned caravans found employers to be reasonable about paying more if there was evidence that units required more time than usual. However one respondent went into detail about a job for a hotel, working for a contract cleaning company. She was told she would be paid £6.19 an hour but later found that the rate applied only if she could finish four rooms in an hour. In practice the speed with which she could clean depended on the type of room (single, double, family), how dirty it was and if it was a daily clean or a check-out changeover clean. She said the easiest room would take about 30 minutes and the hardest about 45 minutes. Her pay slip recorded her hours as finishing at the agreed time of 2.00pm but in practice she had little choice but to work as many hours as necessary to finish the rooms.

Unrealistic piece rate targets that meant an effective hourly rate well below the National Minimum Wage was, allegedly, a particular issue in the hospitality industry. This was the view of respondents in the sample who had experience of hotel work but was also a more widely held opinion.

Most respondents were on contracts for set hours, with overtime available sometimes. A few had had experience of "zero hours" contracts and had moved to permanent set hours status, generally with different employers, when they could. The reasons were to do with job and particularly income security, as for one worker in Swansea who said that with zero hours, you never know what you will be earning, and generally it is not much – he had never had more than £500 a month on zero hours, which did not cover his living costs.

Though low pay was frequently lamented by respondents, there was little expectation of a change in the situation; partly because of the current economic climate but also because of the perceived low status and value of the work. Within the industry, the main options for increasing income were seen to be finding a cleaning job offering more money or getting more hours through extra jobs, longer shifts or overtime working. Some respondents said they worked over 45 hours a week in order to make ends meet:

I have to do 48 hours a week, because... my husband has to take (the children) to school and pick them up again... so if me and my partner (cannot both) do job...Because the money is not enough so if I don't do a

lot it's going to be difficult. - Female, cleaning company, London, migrant (Liberia)

3.4 Worsening conditions of pay

Respondents appeared stoical about low levels of pay overall, but were less sanguine about the perceived tightening up of pay conditions across the industry. Examples of this provided by participants included:

- Basic rates of pay going down in some jobs;
- Overtime and weekend rates being abolished
- Overtime being allocated to temporary or 'bank' staff not eligible for higher rates (and therefore not available for permanent staff);
- Paid breaks abolished;
- Shift patterns rearranged to reduce statutory breaks;
- Basic contract hours cut in order to reduce the holiday pay bill, and hours over this paid at standard rather than enhanced rates;
- More work being 'squeezed' into shifts, shift lengths being reduced without a concomitant reduction in the work to be done and staff expected to set up for work before the start of their shift and put away equipment after the end of their shift;
- Wages paid monthly, changed from fortnightly, with negative impacts on low paid workers in terms of cash flow.

We probably stay an extra 15-20 minutes every day, so when you work it out it's quite a bit of unpaid work... They stated that we weren't allowed to put our stuff away, like when I was on evenings and worked till 8pm, when we was with [previous company] we finished at 7.50pm to put our equipment away and set it up for the next day and then you're at the clock for clocking out at 8pm, you get paid to 8pm. - Female, cleaning company, Manchester, non-migrant

There is some places where the cleaners is supposed to be two or three but maybe just one person doing it. Maybe the (cleaning company) just want to take the contracts... I feel so sad, because the work is too difficult and you can't even complain because you don't want to be sacked... It isn't hard for them, they don't care... - Female, cleaning company, Glasgow, migrant (Nigeria)

My wage paid the rent and different things like that, so then you'd be behind with your rent. They said they'd do like a loan thing where you can borrow money off the company because we used to get paid fortnightly, so then the transaction went to monthly and people were like – you don't understand, we've got no money to live on, we can't go a full month. - Female, cleaning company, Manchester, non-migrant

The availability of overtime, and particularly overtime paid at a higher rate, was mentioned favourably by those who had it, often as being the only thing that made their overall pay acceptable. Where respondents had experienced these conditions being taken away, this was an especial loss and grievance.

The old staff were getting anxious because the new staff were getting more hours 'coz they weren't contracted, they were on bank, so they were getting more hours and none of the old staff were offered it. - Female, cleaning company, Manchester, non-migrant

One Manchester supermarket cleaner had found that, with a recent change of cleaning contractor, both his basic hours were cut and that overtime and bank holiday rates were abolished and cut back to basic rate. This meant he worked the same hours as before for less pay, and in addition he got much less holiday pay.

Both respondents in a paired interview in Birmingham expressed the feeling that economic conditions as well as changes to their contracts combined to make them worse off:

Back in the days, no-one wanted to do weekends, but now because work is hard to get, people are going to say yes (so they don't have to pay overtime). - Male, cleaning company, Birmingham, migrant (Jamaica)

Now they are saying you are going to have to work weekends and it's the same hourly rate. - Female, cleaning company, Birmingham, migrant (Jamaica)

Changes like those listed above were associated with outsourced cleaning contracts changing hands. They mainly affected new, rather than existing, employees – but this was not always the case. Some respondents said that protection for existing employees was time limited, for example for a 12 month period after a cleaning contract had been awarded. Some felt that protected conditions could be a double-edged sword if managers or supervisors wanted to streamline costs further and started looking for excuses to 'let go' of more costly workers. These fears were voiced in different ways, most often by those working in stations and hospitals: large, traditionally "public sector" settings, where they might have experienced several changes of contractor and be aware of different groups of employees on different rates according to when they joined.

3.5 Fair treatment

Features of the contract cleaning industry covered by this study raise issues of fair treatment, or perceptions of fair treatment, in relation to pay.

First, people employed by the same cleaning company often work for different hourly rates depending on which client they provide services to, even if there is little difference between them in terms of the work they actually do:

It depends on the contracts, how much they pay the company; some places are showrooms, some places are like offices, it depends on how much they pay. Some of the cleaners they get more money than other places; some places is minimum wage, some places are above minimum wage. - Male, cleaning company, London, migrant (Ghana)

Second, cleaning operatives with contracts protected under TUPE agreements may have different (often better) pay and conditions than others whose contracts post-date the transfer of a cleaning contract from one cleaning company to another:

All people on different pay and people that have been there a bit longer are on more money than you. - Female, cleaning company, Manchester, non-migrant

Finally, cleaning company employees may find that (again, often better) pay conditions apply to categories of staff employed directly by the cleaning service client. For example, in a supermarket people working on check out or stacking shelves may be entitled to higher rates for over-time and weekend/holiday working than cleaning company operatives. Or cleaning company operatives may not be eligible for 'travel perks' that are available to other staff employed by a station.

3.6 Getting paid

Most respondents said they received payslips detailing what they had been paid and any deductions. One respondent said she found her payslips confusing and her rate of pay unpredictable:

Every month it is different, I have asked and she has said, our accountants are really trained to do their work, they are very brilliant, but I am asking why am I doing the same hours, yet my payments are not the same every month. - Female, in-house, Swansea, migrant (Uganda)

Respondents tended to check their payslips carefully, because for low paid workers even a small under-payment can have a big impact on cash flow. If they found discrepancies in their pay they usually had to wait a fortnight or a month for the situation to be rectified in the following pay round. Occasional errors were a commonplace experience, but a small number of respondents said that they thought they were regularly underpaid:

It's no good really that's because in this country everything's planned – when you pay out something so you need that to be on time. But it happens sometimes.... maybe happen only to you or another person. They made mistake. - Male, cleaning company, London, migrant (Somalia)

Delays in paying wages caused problems for some, as well as underpayments in themselves:

This company is not very fair, all the time you are waiting one week, two weeks, three weeks, for your money. All the time you are phoning them... If you call for office, nobody answer you because everyone have problem for money. My manager says its problem for bank. I say why you say every month is problem for bank? - Female, cleaning company, South Wales, migrant (Poland)

Sorting out problems of pay could be time-consuming and stressful. Cleaning company employees, especially those working for larger organisations, did not necessarily know who they should contact or how. They often had to settle for explaining their problem remotely by phone or email rather than face to face. Some respondents gave up trying to get problems with pay rectified because of the hassle involved. They also did not want to risk their job by acquiring a reputation as a 'trouble maker':

In my working place, it happens all the time. You work so-so hours a week and they want to pay you, they take one, two or three hours away, and you go to the office and complain... 'We'll sort it out, we'll sort it out'... Then it's going to go on your next payday. Sometimes they don't pay you anymore; it's happened to me several times. You keep going to them for that hours, then you'll be scared maybe you are troubling, then they'll tell you to stop the job, so you just let it go. It's happened to me several times. - Male, cleaning company, Glasgow, migrant (Nigeria)

...like when you do 48 hours, for example if you're supposed to get £800 they'd pay you £600, and then you call the office – why are you not paying – and you call them and it's like they don't care, 'Don't worry, they'll pay you next month'... The next payment, when they pay you, it's short again, so every time you open your payslip it's like ... whether you're short or not you have just be quiet and take it, something like that. **Are you saying that sometimes you just took it, just put up with it?** Yeah, because... they don't want to listen to you, there's nothing you can do. And when you go and talk, try to raise your voice, you lose your job. - Female, cleaning company, London, migrant (Liberia)

Another worker had left a supermarket cleaning job after one month and found another, because she found she was not paid for a large proportion of the hours she worked and could not seem to get it fixed.

These cases were the exception rather than the rule. Other interviews revealed strange, unreliable and unsatisfactory arrangements for the actual payment of cleaning operatives. For example, it could depend on the boss coming back from holiday or another employee getting cash out of their own bank account.

3.7 Summary and recommendations

Rates of pay varied significantly, with public sector clients paying on average slightly more than the private sector. Most people were paid by the hour, although piece rates appeared common in some areas of the leisure industry.

Some respondents mentioned problems with being paid including, in a few cases, systematic underpayment. This took time to sort out and could result in stress, especially where management was remote and problems had to be raised via phone and email. Barriers to resolving problems could put some people off trying at all.

The basis for pay calculations should be clearly explained, and pay slips should be transparent and readily understood. Systems for paying wages should be efficient, on time and accurate. There should be a ready channel to correct mistakes promptly. These are important factors for employees, and having a regular payslip, that sets out clearly the basis for pay and deductions, is important because it enables discrepancies to be spotted and addressed.

Payment should be by the hour, and this should not translate in practice into piece work effectively paid at a lower overall rate.

Low pay was a common complaint. Rates were mostly below the National Living Wage; many people received only the national minimum wage and a few were paid below this. Rates were said to have changed little in the last few years and to have failed to keep pace with increases in the cost of living. Those wholly reliant on cleaning for their income sometimes worked very long hours in order to make enough to live on. Pay conditions were perceived to be tightening further with basic rates being cut in some jobs and other savings to employers being secured, for example, through the abolition of overtime and weekend rates, basic hours being cut (to reduce holiday pay) and being made up through overtime hours at basic rates, and more work being squeezed into shifts.

Overall remuneration, together with pressures to do “more for less”, amount to a big and complex issue for the industry. It has serious consequences for operatives trying to secure a reasonable income and meet their basic needs.

Where cleaning staff are contracted for a low number of standard hours, this should be on the basis that these are the expected hours.

“Overtime” should be voluntary, fairly distributed and wherever possible paid at a higher than standard rate.

When outsourced cleaning contracts changed hands this was often associated with worsening conditions for cleaners. This tended to affect new rather than existing staff, but some respondents thought people whose conditions were protected under TUPE agreements could be targeted by managers looking to streamline costs further. This raised issues of fairness, for example, when cleaning company employees doing equivalent work but employed on different contracts received different rates for the job; and when they had different (worse) pay conditions than directly employed staff who they worked alongside, for example, those operating the tills or stacking shelves in a supermarket.

4. Rest, leisure and sickness

4.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses arrangements at work for breaks, holidays and sickness. It outlines the range of situations described by respondents and, once again, draws out the implications of these for cleaning operatives in the sample. Some examples of, and suggestions for, good practice are set out in the final section.

4.2 Breaks at work

Breaks at work are important, especially for physically demanding jobs such as cleaning. Most respondents said they were entitled to short breaks, typically 15 to 30 minutes every four to five hours. Respondents working shifts of less than four hours were seldom entitled to take breaks. In some cases breaks were paid, in others they were not.

Some respondents said that pay for breaks had been stopped with the takeover of cleaning contracts, or that their shift patterns had been re-arranged to cut out the need for breaks, or that the qualifying number of hours for breaks had been increased:

Whereas with (the old contract cleaning company) you used to get 15 minutes and paid, and you still clocked out after your four hours, with these you are not allowed. Apparently you are not entitled to a break under four hours. - Female, cleaning company, Manchester, non-migrant

Some respondents said there was nowhere at work where they could comfortably take breaks. Others said they had too much work to get through to take the breaks they were entitled to, or that they cut their breaks short for the same reason. A few respondents said that they were actively discouraged from taking breaks and that there was constant pressure at work for them to be busy the whole time.

4.3 Holidays

Most respondents on permanent contracts said their contracts included a set number of days of paid holiday each year, generally 28 days for people working full-time. These sometimes included bank holidays. Some respondents in part-time jobs said they were paid only for the hours they worked, mainly those working directly for smaller service clients. It is, however, a legal requirement that all employees, including those working part time, receive at least the statutory minimum paid holiday.

Some employers allegedly discouraged cleaning operatives from taking holidays:

When you are going on holiday, if they can't find anyone to cover, they don't want to give you holiday. - Male, cleaning company, Birmingham, migrant (Jamaica)

Some respondents said they had problems trying to book holidays and a few respondents said that this had resulted in them losing paid holiday to which they were entitled, without receiving pay in lieu:

Whenever you phone up to book your holidays, it's always a problem. You are supposed to get holidays by rights, but they say they can't find anyone to cover. But they still won't pay you for holidays, they say 'I will get back to you' until the holiday (entitlement) has run out. Then they say 'the holiday has passed, you let your holiday go'. - Male, cleaning company, Birmingham, migrant (Jamaica)

Some respondents said that it was up to them to find cover if they wanted to take their entitlement to holiday leave:

It's your responsibility to find somebody else to cover for you, but it's not up to us to sort it out...Really we should just have a holiday and go. - Female, cleaning company, Cornwall, non-migrant

A few respondents said that there were restrictions on the number of consecutive holiday days that could be taken in one go – often one week maximum. Some migrants in the sample said that this meant trips to their home country to see family were not viable because short visits did not justify the cost of travel:

They have a limit; they don't like if you're going to Africa you need more days there, and unless you send them a letter for them to approve before you can't take that. - Male, cleaning company, London, migrant (Germany)

Too many people after two or three years they need to go and see family back home, so only two weeks is not enough. I will pay £600-700 only for short holiday. - Male, cleaning company, Manchester, migrant (Eritrea)

4.4 Sick leave

Some respondents said there were arrangements in place at work to get paid if they were sick; either company arrangements or Statutory Sick Pay. Others said that there were no such arrangements. However, as mentioned in section 2.4, respondents were often unclear about what would happen if they were sick. They did not know what they were entitled to and had not tried to find out:

I don't know about sick leave, I just wasn't aware. - Female, in-house, Glasgow, migrant (Sierra Leone)

Many respondents said they avoided being 'off sick' because they did not want to lose pay. But they also did not want to be labelled as someone who was sickly or took time off if they were ill, and possibly jeopardise their job:

I have two sicknesses when I am sick; If I got sick tonight, I have to also (be) sick (with worry) (about losing) my job. - Male, cleaning company, London, migrant (Somalia)

Are you saying you don't get paid if you're ill? That it, yeah... that's what they make me sign, no sick. **What happens to your income if you're sick?** They don't pay me. **Do you ever go into work when you're sick?** Yes, I have to. **Tell me about the most recent time that happened?** It was very difficult because if you get flu and you can't move your body, and if you tell them that you are sick, they noticed that you are sick, that's the time they put a camera on you and make sure that you are not sitting down; you have to keep it to yourself. - Female, cleaning company, London, migrant (Liberia)

This use of CCTV, to check what a sick employee is doing, is also a privacy issue.

Cleaning companies in particular were not regarded as sympathetic to workers being off sick:

When you phone her, the contract manager, she have proper attitude. 'Why are you phoning me? You shouldn't be phoning me.' If I tell her I can't make it in she have proper attitude! - Male, cleaning company, Birmingham, migrant (Jamaica)

I know if I was off for more than three weeks, I won't have a job. - Female, in-house, Glasgow, non-migrant

Some respondents said that if they took time off, they were made to feel as though they were shirking or taking a 'sickie':

She doesn't trust you if you are sick, sometimes she gives like you are lying. The way she talks, it is very hard. It's like when you are sick you are lying... I had a gall stone, I was having ultrasound – all that. Still she say to me 'you are lying, you are not sick'. - Male, cleaning company, London, migrant (Somalia)

Many said that even if they were ill they still struggled to get into work, or took as little time off as possible:

You have to force yourself... - Male, cleaning company, London, migrant (Somalia)

A number of participants gave accounts of episodes when they gone to work in spite of being particularly unwell:

Sometimes when you ring up and say you're ill and they can't get anyone to cover you, you've got to come in. Or if I am at work and I am ill I've got to stay there. I can't just go home because there is no one to cover me until my shift ends. So I have been at [the supermarket where I worked] ill and they wouldn't let me go home... When I was ill at work, I got hold of

my manager at [the cleaning company] to find someone else to cover, and he couldn't find anyone to cover, so I couldn't go. I actually had food poisoning at the time and as soon as I left I threw up outside. They couldn't let me go home... but I didn't do anything... I just sat in the staff canteen. - Female, cleaning company, Cornwall, non-migrant

One respondent said that she had rung the company on an occasion when she was 'very, very sick' and had been told she had to work because she had not given advance notice of her illness:

'You must come to work otherwise you are going to get a letter from the company, and the third letter – sack'. She said you must phone us 24 hours before. - Female, cleaning company, London, migrant (Portugal)

4.5 Summary and recommendations

Work breaks were standard for shifts of a certain length, but paid breaks were uncommon and appeared to be becoming even less so. Some respondents had nowhere they could comfortably take a break and the impression was often given that breaks were discouraged or skimped because of the amount of work to get through. In contrast, others spoke favourably of breaks that were not unnecessarily and officiously timed and policed – though they accepted that if a worker was to take advantage they should be dealt with perhaps with a “quiet word”.

The law on breaks at work must be respected. In addition employers should bear in mind the benefits for morale and loyalty of good break arrangements and how important they are given the physically demanding nature of the job.

Some respondents said that holidays could also be difficult to arrange because of employer reluctance and problems finding cover. In some cases, respondents said they had lost their holiday entitlement because they had not taken it in the right period. Some had to find their own cover if they wanted to go on holiday and some said there were restrictions on how long they could have off in one go. A few people in permanent jobs did not get any paid leave.

The right to paid holidays must be respected however few the hours of work, and holiday entitlements should be clearly explained. There should be a fair and easily accessed channel for booking holiday time. Employee preferences over when they take holidays should be flexibly accommodated as far as possible.

Arrangements for taking holidays should not hinder access to holiday rights. For example, it should not normally be the employee's responsibility to arrange their own cover.

Knowledge of the arrangements at work for sick leave was generally weak. Most respondents had a very unsure grasp of where they stood in relation to sick leave and pay and often said they tried not to be off when they were unwell because they did not want to lose pay. Cleaning companies were often regarded as unsympathetic to illness and some respondents said they did not want to risk losing their job by being off work; they were worried about either being labelled as sickly or lazy. Some operatives had gone to work in spite of being particularly unwell. A few had received what seemed clear information about procedures and practice, for example, the stage at which sick notes were required, and the various systems of sick pay and benefit.

Employees should be given clear information about rights and arrangements for sick leave and sick pay, on recruitment and in writing.

Employees should not be pressured to work when they are sick, and sick leave must not be unreasonably denied or hindered. As for holidays, it should not be the employee's responsibility to arrange their own cover.

5. Training, health, safety and security

5.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the training given to cleaning operatives in the sample and how respondents felt about it. It also deals with some linked issues that were raised to do with health, safety and security at work. Good practice examples and suggestions are outlined in the final section.

5.2 Training and professional development

As might be expected, the amount and type of training respondents said they received varied considerably, as did the method of delivery. Where cleaning services had been outsourced, both client organisations and cleaning companies might contribute elements to the overall package of training and instruction, though it was difficult to explore this in detail through the interviews.

At its most basic, training was specific to the actual job and was delivered by other operatives already doing the work. For example, respondents were given a tour of the premises, told what to clean, shown where equipment was stored and what to use for which tasks and then left to it. This would be fairly typical in small office settings, for example with cleaning operatives directly employed by the client. Training of this kind might be quite brief but with the opportunity usually available to work alongside colleagues and ask further questions if necessary:

All they did was, when I got there someone who was working there already just sort of told me. There was no proper training. - Female, cleaning company, Birmingham, migrant (Rep of Ireland)

For the casino I wouldn't say there was training for cleaning; the only training we ever had was what chemicals to use... The induction was very, very short... We didn't have one of the staff members showing us, it was like 'Have you done cleaning before? Yes? You've got the job, when can you start'. - Female, in-house and cleaning company, Glasgow, migrant (Kenya)

At the other extreme, training was described as comprehensive, covering general cleaning processes and methods, as well as specialist procedures and subjects like hygiene and health and safety. This could be delivered in classroom settings over some days, as well as through supervised practical sessions, and regularly refreshed. Cleaning operatives might be required to demonstrate that they had worked through and were familiar with the contents of training booklets. In some cases, especially in the health sector, training could lead to NVQs and similar qualifications. In general, fuller training appeared typically to be offered in hospital and other public sector settings:

They did NVQ training with us, so we got NVQ Level 1 and 2 in cleaning for the hospital. They called it a deep clean course where you went into theatres... It's a completely different level of cleaning and you had to do absolutely everything, top to bottom, walls and everything. So you are trained in there and then you go to an area. Each area has different cleaning, like on a ward you do different things than you would in a clinic... You have your set base cleaning which is you get taught everything you need to know, but then each area has its own criteria which you have to follow. - Female, cleaning company, Manchester, non-migrant

Another respondent working in a hospital had participated in wider training given to all staff about how to treat patients. It covered equality, identity, how patients would like to be treated and privacy for patients. She said she also received newsletters, staff up-dates and corporate information and:

We get a 'We Will' thing. It is just what we, as staff, will do. Like, 'we will treat you with respect'. I feel quite good. I look at them and I think 'Yes!' We get little badges with 'We Will' on. - Female, in-house, Birmingham, non-migrant

Few cleaning operatives in the sample complained about lack of training or feeling that they had not been adequately prepared to do the work. On the other hand, there was a widespread sense that much about general cleaning work could be learned on the job, that it wasn't 'rocket science' and, for many female respondents in particular, that it was simply an extension of what they did at home:

No (training) but it's not really rocket science, get in the coach and clean it. - Female, in-house, Cornwall, non-migrant

Some respondents seemed slightly embarrassed to be talking about training in the context of general cleaning.

But not everyone was of this view. For example, one respondent said it was important that they were shown properly what to do because they could lose their job if they failed to do the work to an acceptable standard:

If you give me some job with machine... it's better show me first and after I use it. I lost job if I no do it good, if I no do a proper job. - Male, cleaning company, Glasgow, migrant (Czech Republic)

Another respondent said that they had not had enough training in the use of various cleaning products and equipment:

Better training should be provided because they just think – just cleaning, so everyone knows what to do. But... because you are using the chemicals as well... you should be trained and shown how to use equipment and the liquids because they may be dangerous... I always tell

my boss, if they hire a new person they need a proper training because you are using bleach, you are using disinfectant, you use really dangerous things. - Female, cleaning company, Glasgow, migrant (Poland)

Across the sample, there was little evidence of special training arrangements for respondents who did not speak or understand English well. They often seemed reliant on being shown or helped out by others at work who could speak their language.

Training of temporary or cover staff is a possible cause for concern. A recent migrant from Lithuania covering for a cleaner at a gym said gym staff simply showed her the cleaning cupboard and left her to sort out which products and equipment to use in different areas of the gym (e.g. swimming pool, lavatories and changing area).

5.3 Health and safety at work

Health and safety concerns at work did not feature prominently in a lot of respondent narratives about work. Respondents tended to say that they did not feel particularly exposed to risk or hazard, though they recognised that safety procedures, and adherence to them, were important for certain aspects of their job such as lifting heavy objects, handling machinery and handling chemicals:

You have to be very, very careful. The chemicals have got a big sign there with the cross and everything saying 'Poison', and you have to be very careful – especially for cleaning toilets. You know the liquids that are there are poisonous and they would harm the skin, so you have to cover your hands. - Female, cleaning company, Glasgow, non-migrant

Respondents carrying out standard cleaning task in offices, for instance, often seemed inclined to regard their work as an extension of the kind of cleaning they did at home. They saw the tasks as relatively harmless and the environment as essentially benign. But this was not always the case, for example some respondents said their employers expected them to do risky jobs they were unhappy about such as unblocking toilets without proper equipment or protective clothing and dealing with a bag of hypodermic syringes left in a car park. Some said they were expected to use buffing machines that they had not been shown properly how to operate and which were exhausting as a consequence:

The only thing was this buffing machine. I would have some concerns about that... I don't know if it is dangerous; nothing happened to me... not anybody that I know. But maybe at some point. - Female, cleaning company, Glasgow, migrant (Poland)

Cleaning operatives with more complex and demanding jobs, carrying out specialist cleaning services for example, in hospitals, recognised a potentially higher level of personal health and safety risk. In most cases, these operatives had received more

structured, extensive and in-depth training and felt that they were well-trained and equipped to carry out their work safely.

Some respondents who had been working in the cleaning industry for a long time said that health and safety awareness, training and procedures had improved:

Lots of things have changed. I used to work at (X hospital) ... and your cleaning regime was your mop, pail, bucket and nothing else in particular. But nowadays you've got your colour coding – red cloths, green cloths, yellow cloths, red buckets, blue buckets and everything is different for different areas and different types of cleaning. - Female, in-house, Glasgow, non-migrant

Some said they had acquired health and safety awareness in certain jobs that had made them more aware of risks being run at other workplaces. For example, one respondent who had been trained at a hospital said she was very aware that in her current job cleaning for a bus company, the same mops were being used for offices, toilets and vehicles.

In most cases, respondents said they were provided with necessary protective clothing, gloves and masks, although some complained about its quality or that it was not renewed often enough. In a few cases, respondents said they had not been given appropriate equipment or had bought their own in order to get the level of protection they wanted:

The manager he say we need plastic glasses. Where are our glasses? We said OK, but where is it? We wait for the delivery but nothing, nothing... - Male, cleaning company, London, migrant (Bolivia)

The most common health complaints that respondents linked to their job were skin and breathing problems brought on, or exacerbated by, cleaning products. Some respondents had complained to management. One cleaning company employee said that she had received the stock response that the products in use were bought in bulk to supply all company contracts and that she had no alternative but to continue using them.

On the other hand, there were also cases where cleaning operatives had decided that the products supplied to them were not 'good enough' for the job and they had been able to persuade their employer to buy potentially more hazardous alternatives. For example, a respondent who was the only operative cleaning a small block of private offices said she had insisted on using bleach; which many cleaning companies avoid because of the health risks associated with chlorine inhalation.

Other than dermatological and respiratory complaints, respondents reported various injuries they said had been sustained at or made worse through work. These

included: needle stick injuries in health settings; glass cuts, back strain, aggravated arthritis and joint problems, broken ribs and bruising:

I had an accident at work when I was doing the doors as you come in to (Supermarket X). Instead of stopping the (automatic sliding) doors I had to do them while they were moving. They expect you to do that. As the doors slide back I got my arm trapped. I had two bruises and if I hadn't got my arm out it would have been broken. - Female, cleaning company, Cornwall, non-migrant

Certain kinds of injuries and certain kinds of work settings seemed more likely to be associated with higher levels of support for cleaning operatives with injuries. For example, needle stick injuries were reported to management and taken very seriously. There were set procedures to deal with them and, in both instances in this study, these seem to have been applied.

Conversely, some respondents said they had reported incidents or health conditions and that the situation had been badly managed or apparently ignored by management:

I had one night off (after hurting her back emptying bins) because it was hurting so much. I was told there was going to be an investigation into it, or health and safety were going to come and have a look, but I never heard anything back from it. - Female, in-house, Birmingham, non-migrant

One respondent said that a colleague was too short to clean the ceilings in shower rooms without standing on a chair. He had tried to explain to management on his colleague's behalf that the practice was not safe and could lead to an accident. He said he was told that if the job was not done as specified they could always find another cleaner. As a result, the respondent now cleans the ceilings for his colleague:

There is no security in the job... It is easy for the cleaning company to say 'OK, if you can't work I'll put other people'. - Male, cleaning company, London, migrant (Bolivia)

And some not only did not report injuries to management, they tried actively to conceal them for fear of losing hours or even their job. Rightly or wrongly, they did not feel that their situation would be regarded sympathetically and they thought it could even be held against them.

Apart from injuries and aggravated physical conditions, it would appear that work was a considerable source of stress for some respondents. This could be because of general anxiety about the security of their job or their income, heavy workloads and pressure to get work done or because of relationships at work – for example with supervisors or colleagues. Two respondents interviewed together said they were

sometimes very anxious about the hospital environment they worked in; the information they had received about infection control had made them very nervous about the risks to which they were exposing themselves and their families:

TB... It's the spores; they're saying that we've got to put on all this PPE to go into this room, but if the spores are on the floor and you stand on it, it's then on your shoe and you are walking it round the hospital, you are walking it home with you. - Female, cleaning company, Manchester, non-migrant

5.4 Pregnancy

Respondents who had experience of becoming pregnant while having a job in cleaning reported varying levels of support. Some worked in settings where policies were clear and well implemented, their work was assessed and adjusted as appropriate, maternity leave was dealt with smoothly, and supervisors and colleagues were also supportive and considerate. Others complained that the experience was much less satisfactory.

One respondent was working at a cinema complex when she became pregnant. Her shifts were early in the day and she was experiencing morning sickness. She also wanted to avoid heavy lifting, handling chemicals and areas such as toilets where she worried about risks of infection. She was able to ask about these things, but was advised to make her own arrangements to swap duties with others if she could. She felt there should have been an established process but there was not. Moreover, she got the message that if she was pregnant and could not do the job, then she was the problem:

I work at 4.30am and when you are pregnant and you have sickness and it make me more sickness, so it was difficult when I was pregnant for this sort of job. I felt really ridiculous and unsafe because they don't really care, they not treat me real well and I am really unhappy at that time. They don't care about if you are carrying the heavy things.. I work eight months because I want the money, was really quite difficult and I was really unhappy with the company at that time... You can get an infection... and because I was pregnant as well and I was scared and I ask not to clean any more toilets, and sometimes the managers don't understand the point. - Female, cleaning company, London, migrant (Brazil)

One respondent, even though she worked in a hospital with strict procedures and policies for most things, said when it came to her own pregnancy she was not well treated. She knew that pregnant workers should have full safety assessment but none was carried out for her. In one instance her supervisor directed her to work on a ward knowing both that she was pregnant and that norovirus was present on the ward:

They tried putting me on a ward with norovirus and knowing I was pregnant it was the housekeeper of the ward who told me to go off the ward... She said to me 'what are you doing on here, you can't be on here'. But my supervisor sent me knowing that that virus was on there. - Female, cleaning company, Manchester, non-migrant

When she developed complications in her pregnancy she was taken off working on the wards, but moved to tasks with more lifting of things like vacuum cleaners up and down external stairways.

When respondents without direct experience themselves were asked what they knew about how pregnancy of a cleaning operative was treated in their workplace, again views varied. Some said they knew operatives who had been given modified duties, supported through and after leave and so on. One commented that people on zero hours cannot get work when they are pregnant. Another said that pregnant women would not have much chance of getting work with some of the cleaning agencies.

5.5 Security

As with health and safety, concerns about personal security were not prominent among the issues raised generally by respondents. However, perceptions of security were clearly linked to some features of work that are standard in many cleaning jobs.

For example, some respondents did not like working alone in buildings or, for example, on one of the higher floors in a block. They worried about possible assailants or felt generally 'spooked'; they worried about being injured with no-one around to help:

I don't like working on the flats, it's another part of the hospital if people like doctors need somewhere to stay. It's not nice being there on your own, no-one is around. It's a bit creepy. It's during the day but it's a bit creepy because there is no-one around. - Female, in-house, Birmingham, non-migrant

You worry if you work as one person there and big machine, and you are scared. - Male, cleaning company, Glasgow, migrant (Czech Republic)

And they worried about being blamed for any theft or damage:

There should be two people in the premises minimum; when you are left alone if something happens or something is missing for example, I will be the one accused. - Female, cleaning company, Glasgow, migrant (Poland)

Some respondents also said they were nervous about travelling to and from work at night when the streets are empty, and about working in car park areas after work and at weekends when there is no-one around:

If it is very late at night I always say 'Can somebody drop me back or drop me to the nearest underground or bus stop. It is not a safe city at night and some parts are pretty bad. - Female, cleaning company, Glasgow, non-migrant

I can't even see my car when I leave work. There is nothing there; there are no lights, nothing... Yeah I do feel at risk. - Female, in-house, Cornwall, non-migrant

5.6 Summary and recommendations

Training varied considerably as did the method of delivery. At its most basic, it was tailored to the specific needs of the job and delivered by other operatives already familiar with the work. At the other end of the spectrum, training could entail classroom as well as practical sessions; theory as well as hands on instruction.

Fuller training was more typical of public sector and specialist settings like hospitals. Some respondents had acquired NVQs and other qualifications although they may have been surprised at first, "I thought what, you need an NVQ to clean!". They showed understanding of the specialist knowledge and routines they had to apply, and why, and of the importance and value of their work. Some had also participated in wider training programmes along with other staff – for example, in a hospital on how to treat patients and manage people in positive ways. Many cleaning operatives interact with the public during their work, and respondents variously said they got satisfaction from giving advice and directions, or wished they had first aid training.

There were few complaints about lack of training, but some people would have liked more instruction in the use of chemicals and equipment such as buffing machines. There was little evidence of special training arrangements for non-English speakers and lack of training for temporary cover staff is a potential concern.

Appropriate health and safety training must be given to cleaning operatives. This may cover how to prepare and handle chemicals, including when to use protective clothing and equipment. Other possible hazards should not be ignored, including dangers posed by infection, stress, and the handling and use of equipment and machines. Where language may be a barrier, employers should ensure steps are taken to overcome this.

Where possible, a formalised training and induction programme, appropriate to the work and setting, should be considered. An induction tour of the whole site can give a sense of being welcomed and involved in the wider enterprise, as well as being practically useful. Regular ongoing training sessions, however brief, seem to foster a sense of responsibility and to be valued by employees.

Training that is not limited to issues around cleaning should be considered, for example, on how to interact with members of the public in a positive manner or first aid training.

Respondents tended to have few overt concerns about health and safety at work, and did not feel unduly exposed to risk or hazard, although there were some complaints about not having enough or good enough protective clothing or equipment, or about it not being renewed or replaced when necessary. Generally, operatives were more likely to recognise health and safety risks where they had received appropriate training in risk management and reduction.

Employers must ensure adequate supplies of good quality protective clothing and equipment. There should be flexibility about which chemicals are supplied and used which take the individual needs and welfare of cleaners into account, for example, when one company switched to less harsh chemicals for cleaning.

Health and safety complaints linked by respondents to their jobs included various dermatological and respiratory conditions associated with cleaning products and processes, muscular-skeletal conditions and back pain caused or aggravated by work, broken bones from falling, needle stick injuries and glass cuts. Work-related stress was also a problem for some people.

Pregnancy was well-handled in some work settings but the experience of being pregnant at work was less satisfactory elsewhere, with little support for pregnant workers or appropriate adjustment of their routines.

Pregnant employees are protected by law. Legal requirements cover non-discrimination as well as support and health protection when in work. There should be a clear policy which employees are able to consult and call on if they become pregnant.

Personal concerns about security at work were often linked to common features in the cleaning industry: for example, working alone in buildings or on separate floors of multi-storey blocks, travelling to and from work in the dark when streets are empty and entering empty car parks.

Employers should assess what measures to take to ensure the security of, and provide reassurance to, cleaning operatives.

A few respondents spoke of how employees were treated if they suffered sickness or injury at work. Injuries tended to be treated with due concern and recorded properly but sickness was not necessarily treated in the same way, as noted in the previous chapter. In addition, stress related illness may be a significant and hidden issue in the cleaning industry.

If employees are sick or injured, this should be managed sensitively, putting the needs of the employee first. Management should have sufficient channels and oversight to alert them to instances of employee harassment or poor supervision behaviour. The next chapter discusses this further.

6. Supervision and management

6.1 Introduction

This chapter covers respondent descriptions of the management structures in place to support the work they do – what these are, how they operate and relationships between managers and cleaning operatives. Some examples of, and suggestions for, good practice are set out in the final section.

6.2 Supervision and management structures

All cleaning operatives in the sample had people to whom they were answerable at work. The most common arrangement described by respondents employed directly by service clients was to have a manager based on site and, in larger organisations with more cleaning staff, a supervisor as well.

Although cleaning company managers were on site for some larger cleaning contracts, operatives employed by cleaning companies often worked with no one in charge or with an onsite supervisor – with their manager based elsewhere:

Somebody comes out from the company every now and then (without prior notification). They tell us if they are using some new sort of product. There are papers with specs, what we have to follow, on the walls but there is no one in charge. - Female, cleaning company, Birmingham, migrant (Rep of Ireland)

Some respondents rarely saw their manager but said that channels of communication were nonetheless good. They reported: being able to get hold of their manager easily as needed by text, phone or email; and that their manager was responsive in dealing both with practical requests, for example for more cleaning materials or protective clothing, and with more complex issues, for example clients pressing extra-contractual tasks onto cleaning company operatives.

Other respondents complained about the remoteness of management. They said they seldom saw their manager, or that their manager was based elsewhere and it was difficult to make contact with them: they didn't return calls, were not available when you needed them and took a long time to respond to requests.

Less confident or assertive respondents were more likely to be put off trying, including people who felt their lack of English speaking skills were a barrier. Some felt their managers were not really interested in hearing about or dealing with problems, and were as likely to want to replace staff as to sort out difficulties.

Respondents working for cleaning companies often had contact with client organisation managers in the course of their work. Most were confident that they did

not officially report to client managers. However, the line could be difficult to negotiate in some cases. For example, if client managers asked or insisted that they did certain tasks that were not officially part of their brief:

If (Company X) want something doing they'll ring us, whether it is to mop up sick or clean a freezer out. We're not allowed (by the cleaning company) to clean the freezers, we're not meant to, but if (Company X) ring up and say can you come and clean the freezers, they'll ask (one of the cleaners)... they know will do it. - Female, cleaning company, South West of England, non-migrant

In a few cases, respondents said client managers had been helpful to them in contacting or making a case to their own cleaning company manager:

With X company, if the (client) manager don't call, they (cleaning company manager) don't come. - Male, cleaning company, Birmingham, migrant (Jamaica)

6.3 The significance of supervisors

In many jobs, the main person that cleaning operatives reported to on a day to day basis was a supervisor responsible usually for teams of workers. Supervisors may form the main bridge between cleaning operatives and higher tiers of management and it was recognised that they have considerable potential to influence how a job works out:

I find a supervisor can make or break a job; can actually make you hate or like it. Supervisors can be very intimidating and they can have a wee clique. We had a supervisor (here) who was just horrible and would pick faults with the least wee things and that aggravated (other relationships); people would be nit-picking each other and she'd walk away and leave everyone squabbling. It was terrible. But she disappeared and someone else came in and it's a tremendous difference. She goes with the flow and so long as everyone does their job she leaves them alone. -Female, in-house, Glasgow, non-migrant

Some variation in supervisor roles and responsibilities was apparent in the descriptions provided by the sample of respondents, which included a small number of supervisors. But a 'typical' supervisor was someone who had been promoted to team leader on the strength, for example, of the quality of their work, length of service, reliability or even nationality and language skills. Supervisors might work alongside their teams as well as have a range of other responsibilities including allocating work (shifts, work areas, duties, and overtime), overseeing and checking the quality of work, and effective responsibility for hiring and firing. In some cases, therefore, they had a lot of power over the working lives of cleaning operatives.

Many cleaning operatives in the sample spoke highly of their supervisors. They were available to handle day to day organisation and problems and reportedly did the job well:

Our supervisor does come down to see us, she asks are you alright? Any problems? She is very helpful. She wants to know what you are lacking, what you need, if you are comfortable, if it is your leave to tell you how many days you have got left. She is there daily. She is a working supervisor. - Male, in-house, Swansea, migrant (Uganda)

There are two supervisors, they are alright. They don't treat people differently. They treat them the same. They don't choose someone over someone else. They come and check your work and talk to you if you have problems. - Female, in-house, Birmingham, non-migrant

Respondents appreciated good supervision practices when they experienced them: a supervisor who checked that you had what you needed, and asked whether there were any problems; a supervisor who was there daily, and checked different people's holiday and shift requirements. Other than dealing with these aspects, respondents made positive mention of supervision that was "light touch" as long as the job was being done well and properly.

Supervisors or managers who supported cleaning staff against difficult or abusive customers or patients were appreciated, as were those who advocated for the cleaning staff, for example, if client staff were making a mess or expecting cleaners to do more than was their job.

However, there were also many accounts from cleaning operatives across the sample of supervisors who adversely affected their daily experience of work, for example, through abuse of their position, showing preference for individuals or for groups of nationals and for victimising others, using inappropriate methods of criticism or reward and failing to respect workers' rights to privacy, dignity and respect (see also Chapter 8). Some cleaning operatives said they felt powerless to challenge supervisors for fear of losing their job. Some felt their job was already precarious and that their supervisor was looking for an excuse to get rid of them:

It is just silly little things, some people get treated better, like somebody will get extra overtime or somebody will get this 'cos they are close to the supervisor and they're good friends with such a body. And then you get the people who work their arses off and don't get nothing for it because they're not in anybody's little group. - Female, cleaning company, Manchester, non-migrant

She has got no experience of cleaning or anything (supervisor). She has never done it. She is one of these, if she can't find anything wrong she will

dig deeper. But it gets to a point where it's silly little things. Then if an issue is found it goes 'on the wall' as a matter to be corrected. - Female, cleaning company, Manchester, non-migrant

One respondent said that his previous supervisor never said hello or greeted him, and that he picked on him and made difficulties for him at work. He had also been made to run personal errands for the supervisor, like doing his shopping or getting his lunch, which he felt he had no choice over because his life would be more difficult if he refused. As a foreigner he felt vulnerable and unable to make a convincing case to his manager:

Sometimes he use me for different jobs. Sometimes he ask me to buy something from the town or go to McDonalds. I say 'yes' because if no he will turn round and be funny with me about cleaning. - Male, cleaning company, Swansea, migrant (Egypt)

Respondents acknowledge that it is part of the supervisor's job to oversee their work and criticise or advise if necessary. A particular grievance is when this is done in a rude or shouting manner, and/or in the presence of other workers or members of the public. This impacts particularly on their sense of dignity and respect, a broader issue also considered in Chapter 9 (Dignity and Respect).

The assistant manager that's still with us actually, I was mopping it and I had two signs up but people move them, and she come on the ward and she said, 'Get them signs up right now', and spoke to me like I was a child. So I said people are moving them. She said well you should put them back. I said I'd be doing it all day to be fair. And she started shouting that bad I cried in the middle of me day, and that was in front of patients. - Female, cleaning company, Manchester, non-migrant

A station worker was upset over many incidents with his supervisor, particularly when she doubted his honesty over needing to go to a hospital appointment, and did so in a shouting manner in the presence of many other workers.

Last week she talk to me in front of people, treating me very bad...When we come out they say to me – why you listen like this, you're supposed to say this. But I just keep quiet... I didn't tell her it's hurting me what you're telling me... If you've made a mistake... talk privately, but if you're blaming someone and just saying all that. And we are changing the shift, we're not only one shift, the other one maybe they're hearing what she is saying to you and it's embarrassing... maybe, 16 persons listening... about more than 15 or 20 minutes insulting.... and the night shift was changing and everyone looking at me and she was saying a lot of words. - Male, cleaning company, London, migrant (Somalia)

One respondent who had worked in hotels spoke of supervisors who were so determined to make the cleaners feel bad, they used a translation 'app' on a phone to find particular derogatory words in Spanish so they would be understood.

It is not possible to determine from this research whether this kind of behaviour happens more to cleaners than other groups of workers, but there were a number of incidents broadly about public dressing-down and humiliating treatment reported in the interviews. Respondents themselves draw the conclusion that cleaners are somehow seen as 'fair game' for a style of management or supervision that other workers do not expect to receive in a modern day working environment.

One respondent believed his supervisor discriminated against him and that racism was the cause:

You are working in a team and every five minutes the person you are working with goes out to smoke...and then two or three of them, they go and smoke. And if I try and do the same thing, I am told off for it 'You are not supposed to do that'. Where you see your colleagues doing the same thing and no-one talk to them. - Male, cleaning company, Glasgow, migrant (Nigeria)

Another respondent, interviewed with her mother (another cleaning operative) as well as an interpreter, described being sexually harassed by her supervisor:

R1: The supervisor of the company every night at 2.00am used to give a lift to her (R2) to do the work because they do the same job. And he wants to take advantage. And one time he just told her I don't want you any more doing this job. I don't want to give you lift anymore. Because he want to take advantage. **Are you fairly clear that that is why he said he didn't want you working there anymore?** R2: Yes... **Did you complain about him?** R1: If she complain he say 'no proof'. So what can we do? - Female, cleaning company, London, migrant (Portugal)

There was little scope in this study to explore the kind and amount of training and support provided to supervisors, but the oblique message from evidence supplied by respondents is that it is patchy. We found isolated instances of management having stepped in to investigate and deal with poor or inappropriate supervisor behaviour.

One respondent complained that a supervisor disclosed confidential information about her, relating to her health, to the supervisor's "clique" of friends in the workforce, infringing her right to privacy.

The small number of supervisors included in the sample offered some insights into the job. They were reportedly often paid little more than ordinary cleaning operatives but they said the job carried many more responsibilities. The job was seen by some

as a cost-effective way for cleaning companies to keep management costs down, but in some cases supervisors were untrained and in other ways not supported to do the job well. While some cleaning operatives aspired to the role of supervisor, others saw little advantage in the promotion:

From time to time I think when they need a supervisor they can always ask or announce or tell people if you wish or want to apply, then you can go for it. But some people still prefer to be cleaner because the supervisor job can be very hectic as well; you've got a lot of people to manage and not everybody like to manage people. - Male, cleaning company, London, migrant (Nigeria)

Case study 7: Cleaning supervisor (pay £7.00 per hour)

H is from Ecuador, where she formerly worked as a nursing assistant. She is a single mother, with one teenage child.

She has been at her current work for three years. She has two jobs, one for two and a half hours a day and one two hours a day. At one of them she is the supervisor for the cleaning company on the premises, a bank. She was made supervisor because of her experience, but also because she was able to speak both Spanish and English. "I need to speak to my manager, and also the manager of the building." She also does her share of the cleaning. For being supervisor she gets about 25p an hour extra, but her hourly rate is still only £7.

Over the last three years she has felt the oversupply of people looking for work. If one person left her team, tens of their friends would be calling her as supervisor at all hours to ask for the job. Cleaning companies never have to advertise jobs at the moment. Being a supervisor means she also has to check the whole building, the work, the supplies. If anyone needs help or anything is wrong it is down to her, there is no cleaning company management ever on site.

She got no training in how to do this. "I was reading on the internet for myself how to do it!" The responsibility is "too much." She thinks she needed more training. "How I need to treat people, what to do when something happens." Also how to deal with people getting angry. "I'm only a supervisor, I didn't get the contract. It's a huge responsibility I have in that building." She asked for training, they gave her a book to read mostly on health and safety.

She describes difficult situations she has had to deal with. One day the toilets were blocked and soiled water was coming up through the sinks and onto the kitchen floor. Once a cleaner kicked and damaged a wall in frustration when the Hoover wasn't working; she had to account for this to everyone. A new cleaner's payment was delayed; the manager for once stopped by to check things she said 'this is the guy you've not been paying, you need to sort it out'... One woman cleaner worked for her briefly but took against her and was telling her how to do the job, using bad words. But mostly the team gets on well: "They help me, we are friendly."

When companies win new contracts she thinks few manage it well on a human level. Most companies just want to get the old staff out and their own ones in. "It depends on the manager and the supervisor, how good or bad they are with people." She left a previous supervising job (cleaning at a retail company) after a new cleaning company took over. Their manager told her on the first day, "What are you doing here? You're not coming to work with me... I am going to have another supervisor." He drove out the people who were from the previous cleaning company, using bullying supervisors after she left. It happens a lot that new companies do not understand or care about the needs of existing employees, she says. A cleaning company that took over one contract where she was a supervisor employed young and inexperienced managers who relied heavily on her to show them the ropes.

She says that once companies have the contract and have put the cleaners in place they are not that bothered. "All companies are like that. They took the contract, and the managers disappear. You need this and this, the payments are not through properly for someone, you need to check and everything..." They give the responsibility to a supervisor they pay a tiny bit extra for, and that's it.

She gets no pay if she is sick and no paid holidays, just an allowance of days they are expected to take. Recently this has gone up from 20 to 28 days a year, but bank holidays which used to be paid are now unpaid. When it changed she complained on behalf of all the cleaners but with no result. "I said I don't need all these holidays, I want to get paid bank holidays."

She has never thought of a union. "No never, not just as a cleaner." She does not think she is treated fairly at work. "No, we need to find things out for ourselves, the companies never explain things to us when they get the contracts." If she could change anything at work, it would be: "To help the people to get the right payments, the right holidays. Or if they are ill, they pay them."

6.4 Summary and recommendations

All cleaning operatives in the sample had someone to whom they were answerable at work; managers on or off site and, in many cases, a supervisor with responsibility for a team of workers, dealing with day to day organisation and bridging the gap between cleaning operatives and higher tiers of management. Cleaning operatives valued a manager who listened and gave positive feedback and advice, and kept cleaning staff informed of plans and developments. Some had and appreciated regular meetings to raise issues with management.

Cleaning company employees were less likely to be managed by someone based at their place of work, but this was not problematic if channels of communication were good, and managers were easy to access and responsive. However, there were reports of the remoteness of some managers, and some respondents felt managers were not interested in hearing about or dealing with problems. Respondents who had some supervision responsibility said that having regular face to face interactions with management, to help sort out supplies needs for example, made the job a lot better.

Clear channels of communication should be established between management, local supervisors and cleaning operatives, especially in large organisational structures and contract cleaning arrangements. Management should have effective oversight on how work is supervised and carried out. Cleaning operatives should be able to contact management when they need to. If they are managed day to day entirely by local management and supervisors, there should be a genuinely accessible channel to raise issues they may have with those personnel.

Different sections of this report illustrate how big an effect those at supervisor or local manager level have on the working lives of cleaning staff and how much of the reported bad experience of cleaning work relates in one way or another to supervision practices and individual supervisors. Typically, supervisors were operatives who had been promoted to team leader, who might work alongside their teams as well as have a range of other responsibilities, including allocation of work, quality checking and hiring and firing. Good supervisors were highly valued, but reports suggested that some were not well trained or supported to do their job and were responsible for a fair degree of unhappiness and poor treatment of cleaning operatives at work.

The selection, training and oversight of supervisors should take into account the full responsibilities involved, and the impact the role has on employees. Many supervisors in the industry have power and responsibilities that require training in fair processes for recruitment, non-discrimination, how to manage people including how to deliver criticism as well as support. They should be selected and enabled to do the job of supervision fairly, respecting the rights and privacy of others. In carrying out their roles they should have sufficient management support, and be subject to appraisal and oversight to ensure good practice is followed.

Any guidelines for good employment practice in the cleaning industry should address the issue of supervision and supervisors, and set out clear principles as well as suggestions for detailed processes.

7. Grievance and redress

7.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with how far respondents felt able to air grievances at work and have them addressed. It looks at systems and channels for complaint and negotiation, and at the scope cleaning operatives in the sample felt they had to seek help. Again, some examples of, and suggestions for, good practice are set out in the final section.

7.2 Grievances

Respondents were not asked to enumerate specific grievances they had at work. However, as various subject areas were covered – such as the description of their work, health and safety issues, hours, pay, break and holiday arrangements, and relationships at work – many interviews identified complaints of some kind. For some, these were isolated issues in a work situation with which they were broadly satisfied. For others, it was clear that their working life was a major and pervading source of stress.

Grievances ranged widely as to type and importance to the employee concerned. Many complaints concerned workplace changes to worse conditions, especially affecting pay, overtime, the effective job description (through reduced manning levels), holidays, hours and shift patterns and breaks. Some respondents complained that better conditions were available to certain workers through unfair favouritism, usually exercised by a local supervisor. Some lamented their lack of promotion, or of access to training that would enable that.

The section on pay has indicated the issue of discrepancies between the hours respondents have actually worked and the amount shown in their pay – caused by poor timesheet recording or otherwise. A few respondents mentioned discrepancies between information they were given on recruitment and what they found in practice, for example, on the effective pay level (if this was dependent on getting through a certain number of tasks) or the amount and type of cleaning involved.

A large issue for many, and one which can be particularly intractable and difficult to frame as a specific grievance or complaint, is finding themselves subject to oppressive and officious management and supervisory behaviour. A few instances of this seemed to count clearly as bullying and harassment, including victimisation of particular individuals. There were more isolated allegations that poor treatment was based on underlying (if unvoiced) discrimination on the grounds of race or nationality.

Other more specific complaints often concerned such matters as poor quality protective equipment, or delays in supplying protective clothing and equipment, or health problems and injuries from using cleaning chemicals.

7.3 Redress

Respondents were asked towards the end of interviews what routes were open to them to “address problems”, often making reference to problems that had come up in the discussion. Those in traditionally public sector settings were most likely to have been given and to have retained clear information about grievance procedures. Many were confident they would be able to rely on such procedures if necessary, and some had done so over specific issues:

If it's the staff, you are always entitled to speak to them. Even if it's the area manager, you can say you did this and I am not happy about it. If it's to do with the whole company you can always take it to the union. All that information is provided to you so know what you are doing. - Male, cleaning company, Birmingham, migrant (Belgium)

I would tell the management, straight. I would call them, if I was not happy about something, I would make a complaint. - Male, cleaning company, Birmingham, migrant (Ghana)

In one or two interviews with operatives working in large settings, there were accounts of higher management stepping in to investigate when local supervisors and styles of behaviour had caused upset among the workforce. It was not clear how the unsatisfactory situation had come to their attention.

Some individuals, even in those settings, nevertheless found in practice they were unable to have their grievances redressed, or were inhibited from seeking redress, for various reasons (see section 7.5 below). Many respondents had low expectations and were more likely to put up with problems than seek redress:

Nobody would really go and complain. I just put my head down, I need my job for my child so I just go to work and put my head down and do my work and try and get home in time for picking her up. - Female, in-house, Glasgow, non-migrant

Other than in public sector setting, it was more common for respondents to assume that their first (and possibly only) internal route to redress was via their immediate supervisor or manager. Many had not chosen to do this, some had not felt any need. Many did not think they would get anywhere even if they knew who to complain to. There were, however, numerous instances where respondents had taken up a specific issue in this way, with mixed results.

She complained one time, the supervisor was upset and said you can resign your job if you don't clean toilet... - Female, cleaning company, London, migrant (Lithuania)

Some of those working for cleaning companies said they would be more likely to take an issue to someone representing the client at their workplace, and rely on them to advocate for them with their actual employing company, if necessary. The relationship with the client manager was sometimes felt to be better, and certainly more accessible, than that with even the local supervisor or area manager of the cleaning company.

A significant number of respondents could not think of any routes available to them within work to address problems.

7.4 Other options and channels for help

Many respondents thought the only positive action for someone who was very unhappy at work was to leave the job.

I'm looking for another job; I don't think I'm happy about the job anymore... I don't think it's worth it (to appeal to senior management about a specific dispute over timing). - Male, in-house, Glasgow, migrant (Nigeria)

As mentioned, some thought of possible internal routes to seek redress, but often with no clear sense that these could work. Other than routes to address problems that followed internal lines of management and communication, the most frequent options mentioned by respondents were: Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB), a trade union (this was much more likely to be suggested in public sector settings), or the employment tribunal. A few mentioned more specific options for them, such as a local advice organisation, or finding a solicitor. Others said they would go online to seek advice in a general way:

With a union, if you are not paid properly, or you get into arguments and it's going too far, you don't have to talk to the manager, you leave the union to do that. - Male, cleaning company, Birmingham, migrant (Jamaica)

Some mentioned these routes as a further or last resort if taking the grievance up with management failed. Others saw them as their only possible resort, because they could not see any realistic way to take up issues internally – but again, many who failed to see internal routes for help also could not envisage or think of any external options.

Most references to options for getting outside help were theoretical knowledge. We heard no clear examples of people successfully using the routes described to help with problems directly related to their employment as cleaners.

In a general way, some were currently hoping that a union would be successful in improving conditions, generally where a union had recently been active in listening to problems voiced at their workplace and recruiting members. Others believed that unions had a valuable role in upholding the position of workers generally but not in specific cases such as theirs. Still others doubted the value of unions at all, or at least in the cleaning industry. Some, particularly among migrant workers, had no knowledge about their existence in this country.

CAB generally had a good image, including among those who had taken problems to them (whether or not employment-related). But again, there was little confidence that in practice they could help with the kinds of situations and problems faced by cleaning operatives.

7.5 Inhibiting factors

A serious but not uncommon inhibiting factor to seeking any form of redress, or even voicing a grievance or repeatedly doing so, was fear of losing one's job. Fear of losing their job was very acute for some respondents who said they did everything in their power to keep on the right side of management.

You're doing a cleaning job that you're not even sure of your job, so tomorrow they can tell you that your job is finished. So why are you going to fight with somebody that is helping you out, giving you a job that you're going to fight him? So sometime you have an issue that they don't solve it for you, who are you going to talk to? So you just let it go. - Male, in-house, Glasgow, migrant (Nigeria)

I could go to CAB but all I would do is start up trouble for myself, lose my job and I wouldn't be able to go and get any help to fight for anything like that, to get help to stand up to my employer. - Female, in-house, Glasgow, non-migrant

She not discuss about that or complain because she's afraid they'll sack her from the job and she don't want to get any conflict with supervisor.... - Female, cleaning company, London, migrant (Lithuania)

In combination with this, or on its own, is the fear for some that if they "rock the boat" it will in some way make their life in the job worse. Alternatively, they might feel that the only form of solution likely to be offered would not be one they wanted – such as being moved from the workplace they knew.

She's manager but we have Area Manager. I didn't do it yet because it's like I'm just a bit scared, she's a bit bad person, it's like hard... So me, it was this station I was getting used to and I don't want to go other station and I don't want go to lose a job. - Male, cleaning company, London, migrant (Somalia)

Lack of knowledge of routes and options to obtain redress is a serious inhibiting factor for many cleaning operatives. If they are in small scale employment they may not have any information about grievance processes; it may not have occurred to anyone that such information and processes should be set out "just" for a cleaner.

Many, even working for large companies in a sector with a lot of local recruitment and high turnover of staff, never get any sense of what could be called normal employment protections including grievance procedures. Others, for example in public sector settings, feel the processes are in place in theory, but that they have to negotiate a tangled web of local friendships and loyalties to find the right person at the right moment.

One hospital cleaner said that her union rep was a friend of the supervisor she was having problems with, so that route for seeking help was "out" for the moment. Two cleaners in a different hospital had access to local managers of the cleaning company, but said the company's office at the hospital had several staff in it:

R2: I think it's whoever answers the phone to be honest. I ring [company], our office is based in the hospital. R1: There's quite a few people that are in there. You know who to go to in there and who not to go to. - Female, cleaning company, Manchester, non-migrant

Those who were employed by cleaning companies, in particular, often described a lack of effective access or communication lines to levels of management where decisions are taken; their local supervisor or manager might or might not express themselves as sympathetic but would say that matters complained of were "out of their hands".

Is there any chance for you to talk to them? When you're told whatever they have planned is what they have said... When the manager comes in and whatever he tells us is from the company; whatever he tells me it's not what he's saying, the company have said it. - Male, cleaning company, London, migrant (Germany)

Most never saw any higher management, some had no idea how big their employer was or where it had its head office, and had no address or telephone number for anyone above local supervisor level. One cleaner described a bad period working for a contract cleaner in hotels, and said there was no phone number and no possible

way to contact anyone higher up in the company that employed her, and her problems were all with the oppressive supervisors she and the others worked under.

They couldn't complain, they were basically slaves. - Female, cleaning company, Greater London, migrant (Argentina)

Some operatives accepted that very large companies would have policies, such as over which cleaning chemicals they used, that could not or would not be changed just in their case:

They were remind second time and she's still without mask and without glass [goggles], just the gloves... Only for her he won't change chemical, because every people in company use the same chemical, only some protection. - Female, cleaning company, London, migrant (Lithuania)

When invited to consider one or another outside option for advice and redress, some expressed the sense that some routes were not for low paid, low status workers like themselves. Unions fell in this category for some, partly because their low income meant the decision to join made less sense for them:

That (joining a union) is when you have a good job and then you can, and you have a qualification but not today. - Male, in-house, Glasgow, migrant (Nigeria)

A few migrants expressed a lack of confidence about using redress procedures, including unions, because of their position as people with little experience or standing in the country. Those without a local community of their nationality to turn to for advice and support were more likely to feel this way:

I know about CAB, but I never take it further, I come to this country to have better life and help my family. I don't come to make a problem and think about racism or whatever; I try to resolve it in my job... I do my job and I try not to mix much with these people... if I complain or report these people, he will make it harder for me. - Male, cleaning company, Swansea, migrant (Egypt)

One highly articulate respondent summed up the issues facing many of her co-workers in the industry:

Talking about injuries; if I had things like that I know I would go to the solicitor's office right away and I've got friends in solicitor's office, because I used to work with them. If I had any issue related to Employment Law, I would right away go to the CAB. But the thing is, half of the people working there in that industry they don't actually know about CAB... Cleaners and low skilled employees (are vulnerable) because first of all they're not aware of their rights, they're not members of trade unions and

mostly they work on a temporary basis... I'm sure they can join a trade union and be protected, but I don't how reliable they would be to be in a trade union if you are a cleaner and if it's worth it, and if they would like to pay money to trade unions because you pay a monthly fee for that. - Female, cleaning company, Glasgow, migrant (Poland)

7.6 Summary and recommendations

Respondents were not asked to enumerate specific grievances but many interviews identified complaints of some kind, covered elsewhere in this report.

There are significant structural and cultural factors in the cleaning industry that can inhibit access to redress for employee problems. While some respondents, especially those in traditionally public sector settings, had been given and retained clear information about grievance procedures, others were less clear about the avenues available to them and many would, in any case, be inhibited from using them, partly because of low expectations about what could be gained. Procedures cited with the most approval were where respondents had not just been handed them in literature, but had heard the messages reinforced during induction or training.

It was not uncommon for respondents to say that if problems arose they felt they had either to put up with them or leave. Fear of losing their job as a result of complaining was very acute for some people. There were also worries that 'rocking the boat' would in some way only make their life worse.

As for any group of employees, cleaning operatives should have grievance and redress procedures available to them as part of standard terms and conditions. Employers within the cleaning industry should ensure these procedures are effective and well communicated.

Where possible, employers should take steps to counteract barriers to redress. These might involve pro-actively ascertaining if employees are having problems and/or having confidential helplines. The recommendations about lines of communication, in the chapter on Supervision and Management, are also relevant here.

8. Dignity and respect

8.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with a theme that runs through much of this report's findings and examples. Respondents often made a point of saying cleaning was honest, respectable work of which they were not ashamed:

I couldn't be any prouder than I am, or probably when I was in engineering. Personally myself I give 100% no matter what job I do. I've pride in me work... A lot of people, it doesn't matter who you are, somebody's always out there turning up their noses but that don't bother me... At the moment I'm very happy with my job. I'm from a working background; I've been down here, up there, down here again, up there – so all my life I've been up and down and that is what life is all about. I mean unless you're born with a silver spoon in your mouth... - Male, in-house, Manchester, non-migrant

At the moment I need this job; I always said money don't smell... Cleaner is very important job because I clean, I clean your mess and I am a good person... - Female, in-house, Norfolk, migrant (Poland)

The reason they may have to make an effort to maintain that view lies in the attitudes of others: employers, colleagues and members of the public. "Cleaners" is often used unthinkingly to indicate a job that is the lowest status imaginable, that no one would want to do if they could help it, that does not deserve respect and is assumed to be of negligible value. These attitudes directly harm the well-being of many respondents. They also help to explain why cleaning operatives are vulnerable to other forms of poor treatment at work.

8.2 What 'dignity and respect' means

Respondents who felt valued in their cleaning jobs mentioned: being invited to workplace meetings with other staff; being treated by the rest of the workforce as an equal, "like a worker, not a cleaner"; and sharing catering and rest facilities with other staff including managers. These counted heavily towards respondents feeling positive about their jobs. However, many described ways they were reminded that cleaning operatives are put in a special, lower category of worker by many people, including other workers:

People do think that you are just a cleaner, that you don't need lots of qualifications to do a cleaning job. They talk to you differently from how they talk to other people... - Female, in-house, Swansea, non-migrant

There is quite a thing at work that we are the cleaners and we are the bottom... But that's kind of what our job is like, you come on, get your head down and do it, and you go again... Even somebody saying hello just

makes you feel part of the team. - Female, in-house, Birmingham, non-migrant

Cleaning is generally perceived to be a very low status job. Three friends who work in small informal settings as cleaners spoke about the ways they get job satisfaction, but still felt the wider societal view of cleaning as low status, perhaps especially in their own community of people originally from Pakistan:

R3: It gives you job satisfaction... And they actually notice when it's clean don't they; they tell you you've done a good job on the kitchen, and that's satisfaction then... Sometimes people think it's like derogatory – 'You're only a cleaner, what do you know?' You know that kind of negative connotation.

R1: It's like they put you down, don't they.

R1: Yeah, because like my mum for example, she'll say I work in a community centre; she's not said I'm a cleaner.

R3: People say my son's a doctor - you're not going to say my daughter's a cleaner.

R2: If you think about our children, I wouldn't like my child to be a cleaner of, like you say a big company; I prefer them to go in a different line, I wouldn't say professional; I won't say all of us are doctors or whatever... - Female, in-house, Manchester, non-migrant

At work, cleaning operatives often feel 'invisible'. One respondent described going to a leisure centre to clean as directed by the company that recruited her, giving her name at reception and being met with a blank look. Particularly if they work for contract cleaners or facilities management companies, or on temporary jobs for an agency, they may work at clients' premises where no one ever knows their name, and where they are hardly acknowledged even if their hours overlap with other workers:

The attitude, you are cleaning and people just walk inside it when you are mopping and they don't say excuse me. Or you just wash up and people ... throw down their cups and plates. You feel bad. They look at you with scorn, they don't even say excuse or hello. - Female, cleaning company, Birmingham, migrant (Jamaica)

One respondent who had worked at a gym for many years, and been made cleaning supervisor, found that when he came back after a two week holiday the gym had a new manager who had no idea who he was, and was almost ready to believe the replacement supervisor from the contract cleaning company who was claiming to be a permanent appointee. Fortunately the other cleaners spoke up on his behalf but he found the incident humiliating and hurtful:

I took my holiday for two weeks and I came back today but the other guy is in my work but I don't know what happened... The manager say, 'I don't know who is it?' But the old people I'm working a long time in this place say, 'He's very good'. So the manager say, 'Don't worry I will speak to the guy'. - Male, cleaning company, London, migrant (Bolivia)

Respondents reported that they feel they 'get away' with less than other workers. Many or most work in settings with other groups of workers. In different ways they can be made to feel that they are at the bottom of the status ladder: they say they are more likely to be reported or regarded critically for using their phones, having a cigarette, or taking a break:

If I have finish toilet, if I have finished the laundry I think maybe I go for 10-15 minutes and people see at the moment 'She has break". But people didn't see how I clean very bad toilet, it's stinky, sometimes stuck, and sometimes it's very bad, it's very bad smell... - Female, in-house, Norfolk, migrant (Poland)

[Client supermarket] are meant to work with us but sometimes they work against us. They don't have no respect for the cleaners, [client] staff – it's not the staff but the managers have got no respect for the cleaners, it's the [client] managers... They look down on you... They're rude and they don't say please and thank you; they expect you to do stuff that they won't do themselves. Like clean the toilet without gloves on; they wouldn't do that. Or break time they'll watch you go in and have your break and they'll watch you go out. - Female, cleaning company, Cornwall, non-migrant

One respondent said that as a cleaner "everyone is your boss". Others used similar terms to describe how it was not only your supervisor or line manager who felt able to tell them what to do at work on a day to day basis. The client manager of those working for contract cleaners might give them additional tasks, but also any other grades of staff felt entitled to do so:

We feel like more pressure from the client, for example the client say, 'Can you do this for me?' – they ask you the things not just my manager... 'I want this room cleaned now, I want this room etc.'. And we feel pressure from them both, like from the company and from the client, because the client pays the company... it's like a circle and they feel like pressure from both sides... everyone can say, even the security can say to me, 'Can you go to that room and clean.' - Female, cleaning company, London, migrant (Brazil)

The respondent who was the supervisor cleaner in a gym told of how one of his team was reported by the receptionist for using her phone; the cleaners are supposed to leave their phones in their lockers when they work. As supervisor he became involved. The cleaner said she had taken just one text from one of her children, and he defended her to the management. He was one of the respondents with

professional qualifications from his home country, in his case in law, and he commented that he reacted as a lawyer might. He pointed out the receptionist used her own mobile phone a lot for personal calls during the day, and also that it was not the receptionist's job to report on another worker just because they were a cleaner:

That's right, why. We are cleaners, but it doesn't matter. You're working at reception it's good for you but it's a job. The cleaning is a job. Who will clean, will you clean? No. You need a cleaner, it's a job. - Male, cleaning company, London, migrant (Bolivia)

At worst respondents say they are looked down on, spoken to rudely, treated differently and worse than others, harassed and abused. This can be by other workers, supervisors, or members of the public. Some respondents clearly felt hurt, rejected, isolated and unhappy because of the way they were treated by others. Some supervisor behaviour has been discussed in Chapter 6 (Management and Supervision). One respondent described the impact it had on him:

I have some problems with my supervisor and I talk with my manager, but I can't win... if I go [leave work] early five minutes, he report me and put me in trouble because I am cleaner. When I go home I feel stressed, I can't breathe... when I explain to my manager in my English, he doesn't understand me... couple of times this person he bully me, when I go home I can't sleep, I'm so stressed, I need a cry. - Male, cleaning company, Swansea, migrant (Egypt)

A few respondents working in public settings like shopping centres or stations had experienced direct harassment and abuse from members of the public. Within the wider society the belief that cleaning work is somehow shameful is quite ingrained, and these respondents find it acted out towards them. One station worker said members of the public sometimes gratuitously insulted him for being a cleaner; most of the other staff were not so bad, but altogether, people's unjustified attitude towards cleaning was emotionally oppressive:

Sometimes somebody will see you and speak – 'Go and find a good job'... So it all needs patience... [Among the staff] there's a division but still we are working together, and so it depends – some are really kind and good and then some knows how to talk to us as a cleaner. Definitely if you're a cleaner people don't respect you. The way some people will talk to you is really, really sad... I feel really sad, but it's part of human life. - Male, cleaning company, London, migrant (Germany)

Another worker spoke of children taking delight in making a disgusting mess in the toilets just after he had cleaned them.

I do my job very, very clean, I do my job in the toilet, five kids go and make it dirty, laugh at you, they take advantage if you are cleaner, a foreigner. They see you are cleaner, wait you go out for five minutes, when you come back you see a surprise! - Male, cleaning company, Swansea, migrant (Egypt)

There is a complex interplay between attitudes to migrant workers and attitudes to cleaning work. This is referred to in more detail in Chapter 9 (Migrants). In one paired interview, both respondents were migrants as were many of the other workers in the local factories. The exchange began with the second respondent making fun of people who think they are too clever to apply for a cleaning job; she and her friendly supervisor jokingly referred to themselves as “stupid cleaners”. This prompted the first respondent to say in fact she did feel “stupid” because of her job:

R1: But I feel I am cleaner, I am stupid. - Female, in-house (previously with cleaning company), Norfolk, migrant (Latvia)

The second respondent, trying to buck her up out of this, said that in “Poland, Russia, Lithuania” cleaning work was in fact done by an underclass of people with no education and often with alcohol problems. Here that is not the case, she mentioned her supervisor who is English and is smart with a good family and not a drinker and so on. The first respondent commented that the problem was the factory where she worked had many migrant workers – the implication being that they brought with them a stereotyped view of cleaners and looked down on her accordingly. She spoke of the way she is made to feel by the other workers. She was reluctant to pin down specific instances of bad behaviour, or to attribute it to discrimination or any other cause, but the cumulative effect was clearly wearing for her:

R1: No, they not say bad but sometimes I feel, not discrimination, but it's joke, some joke. **Not respected maybe?** Yeah. **Are they able to help at all if you have a problem?** Yes, I believe my manager help me if I need help... You know sometimes I not tell too much. I do my job and do well. I tell about my problem only you. **Is there a reason why you don't tell?** I live with my daughter and with my son, they are the younger generation and I'm mum; I need to be every day stronger. I can't show that I sometimes have problem. – Females, in-house, Norfolk, migrants (Latvia and Poland)

At the beginning of this chapter reference was made to the telling distinction that is often casually made between “cleaners” and “staff”, or “cleaners” and “workers”. The research supplied many examples of practical ways in which this distinction can be either underlined or challenged. The examples also show ways, big and small, in which dignity and respect is accorded or denied to cleaning operatives.

Respondents mentioned getting satisfaction from such things as helping with some photocopying, or giving directions to the public. Conversely, some respondents were particularly upset about being told not to stray outside their strict role of cleaning: not to interact with the public, even to respond to requests for directions or advice. One respondent said the new cleaning contractor at the hospital where she worked had issued written instructions that cleaning operatives were not allowed to speak to the public.

Practices about who made tea and coffee for whom, and which workers were routinely included or excluded in this, were noticed too by respondents:

Talking, smiling, they see you as a good worker, so they respect you, they say, job well done, they try to make you feel good. They say, come and have a cup of coffee and sit down with me. - Male, cleaning company, Birmingham, migrant (Jamaica)

Where I work now, if they are having a cup of tea, they say, would you like a cup. Not you waiting on them, they are asking you. It makes me feel very comfortable, like I am appreciated. - Female, in-house, Cornwall, non-migrant

Experience of small gestures such as a supervisor reminding you to take a break, a client sending out a letter of praise for a special clean or a card at the end of the year were highlighted in interviews.

Many respondents had some uniform items supplied as part of their job. Particularly in workplaces where they are in contact with the public, respondents commented on the effect this has on their perceptions of their own status, and the perceptions of others about them. One respondent said a change of contractor meant his uniform changed from one that was not very distinguishable from the standard one for all London Underground workers to one that made the cleaning workers stand out as different:

We used to have good uniform, because the rules and regulations of the Underground says that everybody working in the Underground have to have one certain type... But last year the company decided to change the cleaner's uniform. But being who we are, cleaners, we don't have that voice; you can't say no, why would you change this uniform... Even at the back of the shirt we're wearing now they write it, CLEANING... Very, very brightly coloured. You can't hide who you are. – Male, cleaning company, London, migrant (Nigeria)

Another worker at an overground station, when asked about the good things about his job at the beginning of his interview, almost immediately mentioned his uniform:

We have proper like gloves, hat, jacket – uniform... only the names the vest we're taking is the difference the names, but if you come regular like

you'd think I'm working Network or just working in customer service there's no difference... Yea, it's like you're wearing like staff, and we're wearing shirts, not suits but a shirt and tie and jacket and everything. - Male, cleaning company, London, migrant (Somalia)

8.3 Summary and recommendations

Respondents often made a point of saying that cleaning was honest respectable work of which they were not ashamed, but they also thought that in the eyes of others, their job has the very lowest status and is assumed to be of negligible value.

Those who said they were valued in their jobs or treated with friendliness and respect mentioned being invited to workplace meetings, sharing rest and catering facilities with other staff, being greeted by name, asked about their holidays or family, and (especially, across numerous interviews) having other staff offer them a cup of tea or coffee if they were making one. A culture of friendliness and respect between staff, and between management and workers and, where applicable, client staff and cleaning staff, tended also to be reflected in the behaviour of others such as customers, patients and members of the public towards cleaning staff. These kinds of arrangements and common courtesy at work went a long way towards respondents feeling positive about their work.

Respondents who said they felt themselves regarded as equal to other workers at their workplace tended also to say that teamwork was encouraged, that they could get help with difficult parts of the job and that when they first started they were able to rely on colleagues to give them support, help and advice. Equal treatment in practice sometimes meant a lack of stark signifiers of difference such as in uniform, or being allowed to help others with non-cleaning tasks, where this was the natural thing to do.

Cleaners also described ways in which they are put in a special, lower category of their own by many people, including other workers: being made to feel 'invisible'; being unknown to other workers in a place they may have been cleaning for years; being more likely than other staff to be reported for taking an unauthorised break or using their mobile phone. At worst, many respondents said they were spoken to rudely, harassed and abused by other workers, customers and members of the public. Those working in public places had found themselves the target of practical 'jokes', such as deliberately messing up toilet facilities that have just been cleaned.

In the cleaning industry, "key jobs" has a special meaning: literally being entrusted with keys to premises because you have to be the first or only person there at night or in the early morning. Some respondents who had such jobs felt pleased at the mark of trust. Showing trust in workers who have earned it, just to do a good job

without close regular supervision, is often cited by respondents as good employment practice.

Employers should encourage a culture of dignity and respect for all in the workplace. They should avoid behaviour and practice that tends to denigrate cleaning and cleaning operatives compared with other tasks and workers. They should consider positive ways to foster good relations, understanding and respect between different groups of employees. These principles are particularly needed in the cleaning industry in view of persistent views held about cleaning across society, and the effects these can have on the rights and well-being of cleaning operatives.

9. Migrants

9.1 Introduction

The cleaning industry is characterised by a high proportion of migrants in the workforce. The proportion varies by region and is particularly high in London. The sample for this qualitative research was purposively selected to include a number of established and recent migrants. “Migrants” in this report means those who had come into the country as adults and found work here, and was irrespective of particular ethnic or national identity. The “non-migrant” group included some who were born elsewhere but had lived here since childhood.

This chapter highlights findings across the topics in this research that relate particularly to the migrants who were interviewed. Some observations by non-migrant respondents are also relevant.

The background to the project is a wider focus on the experiences of “vulnerable workers” and on their human rights in particular. In looking at migrant workers within the group of cleaning workers, the purpose is to consider: whether and in what ways being a migrant worker in the cleaning industry adds to vulnerability to rights abuses; and what if any effect the existence of significant numbers of migrant workers has on the position and vulnerability of cleaning workers as a whole.

9.2 Migrants’ recruitment into cleaning jobs

Respondents said they took cleaning jobs, either when they first came to this country or in some cases after working here in other low-skilled jobs, because entry requirements were low. This was important because even migrants with qualifications found these often were not recognised in the jobs market here. A number of migrant respondents were graduates and some had held professional jobs in their country of origin. Others had little behind them in the way of educational achievement, sometimes because of lack of opportunity in their country of birth. Moreover whatever their skills and education, some did not have good English and in most cleaning jobs this did not matter: they would not have to handle paperwork or interact with people that much.

I’m a Graphic Designer, so in Chile I was working in the marketing department in (publication). **Why did you go into cleaning here?** Because at that time my English was bad. - Female, cleaning company, Manchester, migrant (Chile)

[Interpreter] She says she likes it because that’s the only one she can do for now, because considering her education and background that’s a good thing for her, because she wouldn’t have to do any paperwork regarding

cleaning apart from signing, so she likes it. - Female, cleaning company, London, migrant (Ghana)

There were mixed accounts of how easy or difficult it was to find a first cleaning job, but most had done so without too much delay:

Other jobs like call centre, restaurants and things like that when you apply for the jobs they won't call you straightaway, so cleaning they like to call you immediately to come and clean, so that is why (I am a cleaner). - Female, cleaning company, Glasgow, migrant (Sudan)

One respondent said part of the reason migrants were strongly represented in cleaning jobs and were able to find these jobs was that they were more willing than most non-migrants to undertake this kind of work:

I think because – this is going to sound awful – but I think some English people or British they don't want to do that kind of job, and there's nobody else that can do it, and the immigrant they need work, they come here to work. - Female, cleaning company, Manchester, migrant (Chile)

Jobs were obtained very often through a personal contact of some kind alerting them to a specific job vacancy, perhaps "putting in a good word" for them or, in some cases, just pointing them to the office of a cleaning company. Only a minority responded to an advertisement to find their job.

For migrants, the informal networks by which recruitment to the cleaning industry takes place vary. We spoke to one respondent who was recruited abroad and paid a fee to be brought here, placed in a job and in pre-arranged accommodation. She was disappointed with her work conditions and the accommodation, but made little of this in the interview as in the event she quickly found replacements for both. She said the fee was supposed to cover "help with the paperwork" connected with her migration, but was unclear what this paperwork was – she was an EU citizen.

Another form of exploitation operating through informal recruitment practices was described in an interview with two sisters who came from the Dominican Republic. They were advised that a particular man would give them work and he could be found at a certain time of the morning at a given location at a London main line station. He worked for a cleaning company cleaning schools, and employed them but apparently "off the books", paying them via someone else's pay slip for long hours at well below minimum wage. He took copies of their status documents but they never received written employment terms or contracts in return.

The above were two exceptional examples in the interviews. The more normal picture of an informal migrant recruitment network takes the form of jobs being

discovered by “word of mouth” as soon as or before they become available. If someone is known to be leaving a place of work, one of the existing workers will tell someone who they know is looking for a job: that person is introduced to the supervisor or local manager and usually the recruitment goes through smoothly. These word of mouth exchanges are very often between people of the same nationality, so clusters of particular groups build up over time in some workplaces. This process has obvious benefits for those who get the jobs concerned, including that they may then be in a group of colleagues who speak their language and can offer further social and practical support - especially valuable to new migrants and those who do not speak English:

Well definitely, now to get a job I got through a friend, because when you go to the JobCentre it's hard to get it... If I'm Ghanaian or African, if when a friend of mine then I just push him... They call a brother or a friend and then they push him in. - Male, cleaning company, London, migrant (Germany)

Migrant respondents said the checking and copying of their migrant status documents on recruitment was a normal part of the process, especially if they were being employed by a large organisation or a cleaning company. These checks were accepted as routine, ubiquitous, and fairly administered from their point of view.

9.3 Tensions

When clusters of nationals form in a workplace this can make others feel excluded and outnumbered, if they are in a small minority. The process described, through which clusters tend to form, is not usually the result of prejudice on anyone's part. However the effects can be very pronounced, and arguably the process is institutionally unfair to others who do not get the chance to apply for the jobs:

[Interpreter] [She] feels like the less one, she feels different because all the people they speak Spanish, they're from the same country and a little bit ignore her; they try and be polite but they prefer person from their own country, they don't say nothing personal. ...But she actually don't care much; she do her job. - Female, cleaning company, London, migrant (Lithuania)

A non-migrant worker in Glasgow voiced the belief that their company was marginalizing local people in favour of migrants willing to work more cheaply and to increasing demands; while another non-migrant respondent also in the Glasgow area said that some customers specified they did not want migrant workers, and cleaning companies went along with this.

Some respondents said they believed cleaning companies, or sometimes local offices or management, favoured particular nationals. In a small number of cases, respondents said they had bad experience of local supervisors and management who took this further and tried to keep out or drive out other groups:

And now we have another problem because it's just me and two more colleagues from Brazil and Portugal, and now it's eighteen people from Columbia and they try to remove the last one. And the two girls coming from Jamaica and they have a fight with her... because they try to take everyone and leave just Columbians and I'm not really happy with this. ... They feel like – I don't like you because you are Brazilian or you are Portuguese or you are from Jamaica and I don't think you're working very well. They think they're working better than everyone. - Female, cleaning company, London, migrant (Brazil)

One respondent reported that in his area, the majority of local employment agencies were now set up by and for one group of nationals or another, making it hard for anyone else to find work.

Other interviews included reports of racial prejudice, for example about which nationals were laziest and dirtiest. One respondent described the local office of the cleaning company she works for being manned by Brazilian managers who allegedly looked down on the cleaning workforce in general and on Portuguese people like herself in particular:

[Interpreter] Sometimes Brazilian and Portuguese don't go. "Portuguese cleaners are rubbish." They treat them like rubbish; very rude and unhelpful... Is a person who's in front of the office... They treat cleaners like rubbish... In the beginning when she went there she felt like – they speak Portuguese but with cleaners they try to speak English between each other at the front desk... But because she understands a little bit of English she knew what they said and how they treat people... She] says she understands; they speak English between them because maybe they think she didn't understand everything but she understands. - Female, cleaning company, London, migrant (Portugal)

Some non-migrants reported experience of colleagues who in their view 'played the race card' to deflect any criticism and get an easier life at work.

Some respondents said their well-being at work was affected by racial tensions exacerbated by job insecurity and prejudice. A small number of (black) migrants said they encountered racism at work from white British colleagues and managers; in this sample of respondents, this was reported more in predominantly white provincial areas. One respondent drew a direct comparison in this respect between Glasgow and London. In Glasgow he reported issues of not getting jobs he felt he should

have, and once at work being less favourably treated than non-migrants, disciplined for more trivial offences and turned down for training and promotion:

In London, I was working in the day surgery, I was the one that bring the instruments that they use, we are assisting the nurses and everything... so it's a different ball game there. Then when I came to Glasgow I noticed that you apply for the same job here which you have experience and everything but you never get the job... You get more opportunities there than here on account of race issue. - Male, cleaning company, Glasgow, migrant (Nigeria)

Other respondents spoke of a more diffuse sense that they were not welcome:

They didn't like me. The difference between my culture and the English people is that we really like to work hard and we don't care about how many hours and how high is our salary and things like that, just to have a job and we are happy. They wasn't really happy of this because they have their own system of work, little bit of chat, little bit of work and stuff like that. - Male, in-house, Cornwall, migrant (Polish)

It is not clear how these issues are being addressed in workplaces, if at all.

9.4 Stresses and vulnerability

Some migrant respondents had a good education, professional qualifications, and hopes of advancement. Among this group some had become frustrated, finding themselves "stuck" even for years in cleaning work. One spoke of having left cleaning to work as a volunteer and trainee in a school, but leaving that position when she was racially taunted by the children and not supported by the head. When she spoke of then finding only another cleaning job, very poorly paid, she became briefly upset:

I don't like it. I think I'm better than that... Of course it's not [ideal], but there's nothing for the moment. - Female, cleaning company, Manchester, migrant (Chile)

Many referred to steps they were taking to improve alternative employment prospects, such as study and training, voluntary work, and striving to improve their English where they could. A regret about cleaning work for many was that it did not provide much opportunity to improve their English language skills.

Other migrant respondents had low educational achievement, often stemming from poor provision in their childhood, and were more fatalistic in their view that cleaning was their best or only option for the foreseeable future:

Yeah, definitely, because naturally if you are not well educated you can't get a better job. My father died when I was two years old and I had a tough time and I know it's by the grace that I'm living here... I couldn't get

a good education so definitely I will not get a better job, so I just do whatever God gives me. - Male, cleaning company, London, migrant (Germany)

Others were in-between the high achievers and those hampered by lack of education or educational ability: they did not look too far ahead but hoped step by step to work their way into better jobs and better security for themselves and their family:

I just stick there because I know the money is not too bad, it's minimum wage and I'm just doing to pay my bills, my rent and things like that, and to survive... and I'm just doing it before I get something better. - Female, cleaning company, Glasgow, migrant (Sudan)

Interviews sometimes brought comments from migrants about the general pains of migration – feeling alone in a strange country, without emotional or financial support, cold, and on top of that finding only hard low-paid work to do..

At first it was a very bad experience, I was feeling very lonely, homesick and alone because my husband work very long hours, six days a week, so I was feeling very alone and depressed. But now, I'm a big girl, so I have to endure it. But at first it was not so good, and also the weather is so cold, so windy, the rain, the snow. - Female, cleaning company, Manchester, migrant (Chile)

I go to factory and I stay eight hours and make no talk, no nothing, just faster, faster, and very cold, very loud... I go home I cry, I said oh no, it's fed up for me, it was very hard and I didn't speak English, I was very sad, very confused. - Female, in-house, Norfolk, migrant (Poland)

One respondent described what she called “the worst time of her life”, when she was dismissed from a hotel cleaning job and had no money to pay the rent at the hostel where she and her husband had been staying. They both had to sleep in the park that night, with no work, no home and separated from their children whom they had left behind in Spain.

Allegations of discrimination have been touched on. None of the respondents expect favourable treatment from anyone because they are migrants. However, if they come across other migrants they expect some sympathy and understanding for their general position. Sometimes they do encounter this as through the networks for getting jobs already described. Once in work they may find friendship, cohesiveness and support from colleagues who are also migrants and possibly fellow nationals:

I work with other persons, it's two or three and we start talking so it's nice and also they're immigrants, so we understand experiences. - Female, cleaning company, Manchester, migrant (Chile)

Because of this expected common understanding, some respondents were particularly hurt if migrant supervisors had behaved badly to them. The three hotel cleaners who were interviewed through interpreters all expressed this sentiment. One had tried to reason with a supervisor - who was harassing and belittling her - that she should show more understanding, she was a “migrant like us”. Another said whenever she passes the hotel where she used to work she gets a horrible feeling, especially because the people supervising were also migrants. She wondered why they treated people so badly when they must know the workers’ situations. She gave two quotes from the supervisors, one being when she disputed the hours shown on her payslip and was told: “You’re so uneducated you don’t know how to count”. On another occasion when she tried to complain she was told this was because she was no longer a desperate new migrant: “Now that your belly is full you don’t want to work”.

Other migrants did not complain of discrimination or bad treatment but lamented feeling isolated, if they were in the minority or the only one among other groups of migrants. In these circumstances language can be a particular barrier between work colleagues. However a mix of nationalities is sometimes seen by migrant respondents themselves as making a better atmosphere than a preponderance of one migrant nationality with a few ‘outsiders’.

Language difficulties can impact on the ability to understand training and safety instructions, contracts and terms and conditions. Language problems, combined with the sense of insecurity from being a migrant, were also reported to inhibit respondents from voicing problems or grievances. Some felt they would be too hampered to “fight their corner” with management in a dispute with a supervisor, for example.

Again, it is not clear how well employers are meeting the challenge of having non-English speaking employees.

Migrant status in itself is on the mind of many respondents. They feel it means they have to be careful, not rock the boat, not risk losing their job:

It is easy to be sacked because they put you there and they are the boss so you have to do what they want you to do... - Female, cleaning company, Glasgow, migrant (Nigeria)

This was less of a concern for EU migrants but, on the other hand, if they became too downhearted, they were also more likely to countenance going back to their country of origin rather than pushing for better treatment here. A small number of

respondents from the EU were actively considering going back. These included an older respondent who said he would go back to Germany finally, or better still to Ghana his country of birth if he could see a way to live there securely in retirement. A young woman from Lithuania said she and her husband had “tried” London to see if they could have a better life here but, weighing many factors, they were thinking of going back.

9.5 Effect of migrants on cleaning work as a whole

Migrants and non-migrants voiced anxiety about successive waves of migrant workers each ‘leaner and hungrier’ than the last ready to take their jobs. Migrant workers were aware of differing layers of security in terms of differing migrant status. A few mentioned the existence of a layer of “illegals” at the very bottom, vulnerable to extremely poor treatment and with no bargaining power at all. All of our respondents said they were legally able to work here - though one said at first he had worked as an “illegal” for a period:

I am an engineer, from Jamaica. But when I come to this country I didn't have no papers at all, illegal immigrant, so you have to work, work, work. - Male, cleaning company, Birmingham, migrant (Jamaica)

However many respondents said the “layers below” can always operate to reduce the “going rate” of pay, of work conditions and formal protections. One respondent worked for below minimum wage, but she had heard of illegal migrants cleaning restaurants nearby who were treated even worse:

Of course I think that [the agency manager] is receiving a little bit more, but for being an immigrant sometimes life is tough and have to be like that. - Female, cleaning company, Manchester, migrant (Chile)

She described the prescribed processes she had gone through to get the papers that mean she has the right to stay and work here:

I'm too scared to be kind of illegal – no way... I met this Chilean in Manchester, he has a restaurant but now he's back in Chile, but he was hiring lots of illegals because he pay so little. **So, much less than you're getting now?** Much. And they couldn't complain because they were illegal so it was a vicious circle...Yeah, they look for those people I think...Yeah. And I remember there was a Mexican and a few from Mongolia in that restaurant, and the owners they're asking the Mongolians do you have more people that want to work. - Female, cleaning company, Manchester, migrant (Chile)

Two former hotel cleaners said that in one hotel, different cleaners were paid at different rates. Those who got more included longer term employees, but other workers were paid much less including themselves and also anyone who did not have proper migrant status documents – they said many did not have such

documents. The respondents were clear that an informal different scale operated based on these factors as well as how good a relationship the employee had with the supervisors, one of whom “made the contracts” and worked in a more direct relationship with the cleaning company. It would be difficult to check the actual rates paid or substantiate that such a deliberate system was going on, as they all worked longer hours than were shown in their contracts or payslips in order to meet their room quotas.

Migrants and non-migrants alike expressed the view that migrants will work for less, and with less good conditions, to gain a foothold in the hope of progressing - or not to lose the level of income and security they have, however low and precarious. They believe these factors are part of the reason why large parts of the cleaning industry are, and will probably remain, low paid and insecure, and the full range of employment rights and protections will not always be there in practice for workers – including the minimum wage, written contracts, permanent employee status, holiday pay, and access to grievance procedures.

9.6 Summary and recommendations

The cleaning industry is characterised by a high proportion of migrant workers, especially in some regions such as London. Cleaning was regarded as an important route into the jobs market, even for some migrants with marketable skills and qualifications whose qualifications were not recognised in the UK or who did not speak English well enough. Respondents often said that being unable to speak English did not matter in most cleaning jobs as they would not interact with people or handle paperwork.

Migrants tended to find work through informal networks, especially ‘word of mouth’ exchanges between people of the same nationality (see also Section 2.5). This could lead to clusters of particular groups in some workplaces which could be beneficial but could also lead to workers outside the group feeling excluded, and to institutional unfairness for other nationals who do not get the chance of work.

Employers, agencies and client businesses must not practice discrimination in the recruitment or training of groups of workers. The law must also be respected in all other relevant matters including the National Minimum Wage.

There were reports of racial tensions in some workplaces, and of prejudice exercised by some groups dominant in a workplace against others. This could affect well-being at work.

Employers need to be aware of issues that can arise from having different national groups in a workforce such as language difficulties, tensions in relationships, and real or perceived favouritism or victimisation, which all have a potential impact on well-being at work (and on business efficiency). Employers may need to take pro-active approaches to investigate what the problems are (for example if they are arising between supervisors and other workers), and to address them.

Some migrants commented on the general pains of migration – feeling alone in a strange country, without emotional or financial support. Awareness of their migrant status could inhibit them from voicing problems or grievances at work. Language problems could aggravate this and affect their ability to understand training and safety instructions, contracts and terms and conditions.

Migrants and non-migrant respondents sometimes expressed concerns about waves of migrants ready to ‘take their jobs’ and undercut the going rate of pay, work conditions and formal protections. It was widely believed that new migrants will work for less and with less good conditions in order to gain a foothold, and that this is a key reason why some parts of the cleaning industry will remain low paid and insecure.

10. Thematic overview

10.1 Introduction

This study explored the experiences of people working in the non-domestic cleaning industry, with a particular focus on certain freedoms, rights and entitlements; this chapter discusses each of these areas in turn, in terms of the findings from this research. Specific rights breaches can be identified in some of the respondents' stories while more general points can be made about some of the rights.

The research also supplied insights into the industry and the working lives of cleaning operatives. The second part of this chapter briefly examines a number of over-arching themes, drawing links between these themes and workers' rights and vulnerability in a broad sense. This analysis may inform future initiatives to protect the rights and improve the working lives of cleaning operatives.

10.2 Rights framework

Freedom of association

Freedom of association concerns the right of workers to join organisations to promote their interests. We did not encounter any examples of workers who said they had been discriminated against or victimised because of their membership of a trade union or similar organisation. But union membership tended to be found to any degree only among respondents working in public sector settings where there was more likely to be an established culture of unionisation, union representatives on site and more or less routine invitations made to new staff members to join up.

Often, conditions were not very conducive to union activity or to workers' seeking out or joining an association or union to represent them. For example, many operatives work in physical isolation or in small groups. They do not always know much about unions, what they do or how to get in touch with one, and some respondents worry about what their employer will think and if they will be regarded as a 'trouble maker':

[Interpreter:] My mother is not that kind of person. She work in her own place, people separate, she see no other staff. My mother don't like conflict. - Female, cleaning company, London, migrant (Lithuania)

Some workers, especially some groups of migrants, thought employers would regard unions as controversial organisations and this deterred them from considering membership. For example, one respondent said he wanted to be able to resolve any problems by dealing directly with his manager. He said he did not come to this country to get into disputes and thought joining a union might put his job at risk and make life more difficult at work. Some respondents said that the cost of joining a union was a barrier to membership.

Right to equal pay for equal work

The right to equal pay relates to the pay of men and women for the same work or work of equal value. We found no overt cases of different pay treatment of men and women. However, many respondents felt cleaning work in general was undervalued and a few argued that as a consequence, they were underpaid relative to others doing work of equal value. This was a complaint made by (mostly female) hospital cleaning operatives about the better paid (mostly male) hospital porters.

Traditional views of work roles persisted in some settings, so that cleaning tasks outdoors or on factory floors were seen as “men’s work”. The respondents themselves generally accepted this, and it was difficult to pin down whether any formal recruitment barriers or pay differentials were in place.

Right to organise and participate in collective bargaining

Collective bargaining refers to workers negotiating with others to reach agreements about pay and conditions. It is related to freedom of association and, as indicated above, although we found no examples of outright prohibition on collective bargaining, the same wider factors inhibit such bargaining in practice. Indeed, many of our respondents would find it hard to imagine being in a position to bargain over their pay or conditions, as opposed to simply accepting them or leaving the job.

A few respondents referred to regular formalised meetings between the workforce of which they were part and higher management. These provided some advance notice of changes rather than two-way consultation for the most part; their main benefit was as a forum to air grievances. The majority of respondents had no opportunities of this kind to meet with management.

Right to equality at work/Right to non-discrimination

There are conditions in the non-domestic cleaning industry that raise concerns about equality and non-discrimination. These include the importance of supervisors and lower-level line managers - who were often reported to show favouritism in matters such as the allocation of tasks and training opportunities, or to harass people they did not like, sometimes on the basis of nationality. The prevalence of word of mouth recruitment, and the clustering of employees of one or two national backgrounds that often develops because of this, is a related concern. Many respondents had encountered attitudes among supervisors or local managers that denigrated one group, or praised another, for supposed reasons of skills and work ethic. Small local recruitment agencies were reported that operate mainly or entirely for and with one national group. One respondent reported that client organisations were able to specify to cleaning companies that they did not want particular ethnic groups employed.

Despite this, the majority of respondents, probed about their impression of recruitment criteria in particular, felt their workplaces were non-discriminating in relation to equality characteristics such as gender, age, religion, ethnic and national origin. Some respondents with long term health problems were able to do the work although it is manual in nature, and had found their employers did not discriminate against them on this ground.

Isolated comments made by respondents raised the issue of agencies. Getting “on the books” for work via an agency (which may be small-scale and local) seems to be an area where there is a possible risk of rights infringement. For example, we came across suggestions of discrimination by agencies on the grounds of pregnancy and nationality.

Right to just and favourable remuneration

Most respondents were paid at or just above the NMW but a number were paid below this rate. These tended to be direct employees, working in small scale settings for a few hours a week without any formal protections, including any written contract. In one case, the employment was through a very small agency which also managed the payment of wages. Low pay, and a lack of opportunities to increase hours or get overtime, was a typical complaint.

Respondents who worked in larger organisations, or for cleaning contractors, generally received reasonably clear pay slips. However, many respondents had experienced delays and discrepancies in the payment of their wages. Some found it difficult or impossible to get these rectified.

Remuneration was adversely affected by practices including: not paying for essential time spent setting up and clearing away equipment; not paying for breaks; paying overtime at standard rates; and reducing standard hours to reduce holiday pay. Respondents who had experienced zero hours and agency work said this did not provide them with enough income to live on. Also, the few who had worked in hotels said effective “piece work” practices in that sector often meant cleaning operatives were paid below the NMW.

We found no examples of recruitment fees being charged nor of ongoing illegitimate deductions from wages. However, some respondents had to pay at the outset for uniform items, CRB checks and/or identity badges.

Abolition of forced labour

We found no obvious indications of forced labour such as retention of documents or threats of violence or denunciation to the authorities. One respondent was brought to this country with assurances about standards of accommodation and work available

which proved false, but once here was under no compulsion to stay either in the job or accommodation. There were some cases of overtime and bank holiday working being presented or perceived as compulsory.

Right to a safe work environment

Many respondents reported health hazards from their work. Chemicals were frequently associated with minor to moderate problems including coughs, skin reactions and splash burns. Other hazards included slips and falls, and biohazards in hospitals. Respondents complained of employers who refused to negotiate a change of role or of chemicals etc. for affected workers. Some had experienced poor quality protection equipment, or supplies of equipment not being forthcoming in spite of requests and promises.

Respondents who were pregnant had been able to take maternity leave and return to work, but a proportion complained of having had no risk assessment while at work, being instructed to do tasks they felt put them at risk, and being treated without due sympathy and consideration over needs related to their pregnancy.

Many respondents received formal safety instruction, especially those who worked in large organisations or for large contractors, though in smaller settings. We found instances where employers had made individual allowances on health and safety grounds: changing the duties of pregnant workers, providing non-latex gloves to avoid an allergic reaction and so on.

Under the broader picture of a safe work environment, work-related stress was a clear factor in the lives of many respondents. This often concerned general matters such as inadequate income and job insecurity. In a smaller number of cases it was linked to behaviours at work especially from individual managers and supervisors. Some oppressive and bullying behaviour reached the point of harming the health and well-being of respondents.

One respondent had experienced sexual harassment from a supervisor who expected sexual favours in exchange for lifts to and from work at night.

Uncertainty over sick leave entitlements and procedures meant many respondents worked when they were unwell. Some reported being told by line managers or supervisors they were lying if they said they were sick, or they had to give a day's notice to take time off sick.

Right to rest and leisure

Rest and leisure covers working hours, overtime and holidays and there are specific legal requirements on rest and holidays. The few respondents we saw from the hotel

sector were the only ones whose total hours, and days off entitlement per week or fortnight, appeared to be in breach of what is required. This partly arose because of doing extra work to clean a required number of rooms.

There was evidence that rest breaks have been curtailed in some places, getting round the regulations by changing shift patterns. Furthermore, many cleaning operatives work split shifts, or at more than one job. This can restrict their chance to rest; one for example, in a single employment, did not get the minimum 11 hours rest between working days.

There was little evidence that respondents were aware of their rights in detail around rest and leisure.

Most who had contracts and worked for organisations of any size had paid holidays that appeared compliant with regulations. In practice, some reported that taking holidays was made difficult by their managers, or they were required to find their own cover. One reported that his holiday pay was greatly reduced because his notional hours had been reduced – though he still worked the same hours all at his standard hourly rate. Other respondents said that they received no paid holidays, and many of these appeared to accept this as “the norm” for cleaning work in smaller or less formal environments.

Right to privacy

In the world of work, the right to privacy covers the way employers use, store and protect the personal information they gather from employees. It also covers the use of CCTV in the workplace, and the circumstances in which employees may be subject to search procedures.

Respondents expected to give personal information on recruitment, including offering documents about their migrant status where relevant for the employer to take and keep copies. Two respondents found their identity had been stolen and it appeared that other migrants may have been working using their details (affecting their own tax liability). One suspected this was done via an unscrupulous supervisor who had recruited her to her first job in the UK. Another respondent complained that a supervisor shared some of her personal health information with other employees.

Respondents accepted the fact that most of them were monitored by CCTV at work. Mostly they did not give it a thought; some felt it made them safer. One said she would not like to work alone because if anything went missing she would be the one suspected. Yet the general sense from some respondents was that they were “watched” more than other employees, and by more groups of colleagues. They felt that cleaners were overseen by everyone else and were liable to be accused, if not of

dishonesty, then certainly of laziness, poor work or time-wasting, on the least pretence. The stress and upset this caused them may have been in part, because they felt denied an equal right to privacy with everyone else.

No respondents reported intrusive personal searches. One was accused of theft: she said a supervisor who wanted her to be sacked had planted items on her hotel cleaning trolley.

Access to redress

Only a minority of respondents made reference to set procedures, including alternative channels if grievances were with an immediate supervisor/manager when questioned about what routes were available to address problems at work. Among that minority, some still felt inhibited from using the channels available.

A substantial number of respondents said it would not be a problem to raise issues with their supervisor/manager. Some had done so, but generally these had not been serious issues such as a bad relationship with a particular supervisor.

The most common view among respondents with serious problems at work was that they had to put up with them or leave their job. Several reported instances where they had complained about an aspect of their work only to get a response from the supervisor or manager that indicated: if they did not like it, someone who was prepared to do their job instead could easily be found. This was sometimes implied or said indirectly. There were no reports of specific threats of reprisals, such as the sack, for raising serious concerns but serious concerns were generally not raised. The overall sense of job insecurity and powerlessness probably means specific threats are not necessary to ward off complaints whereas in most cases, the general sense of economic reality is an effective block on individual negotiations for improved pay and conditions.

It is possible that many of our respondents had grievance and redress procedures technically available to them, but were not aware of them. The isolation of many cleaning operatives has been referred to already while many interviews painted a picture of workplaces without a strong culture promoting rights and channels for redress, or bolstering confidence in using them. Some respondents described making significant efforts to find a phone number for anyone in their employing organisation, for example, and then being surprised to learn where the company was located.

Access to redress at work also depends on the worker's status and relationship with the employer being clear. Many employment rights depend on someone being "an employee" though this status itself is not clearly defined in the law. A cleaning

contractor employer can seem remote from the cleaning operative who spends their working shifts alone or with the client company personnel, although most cleaning contractors in this research do follow formal procedures for issuing contracts of employment, pay slips and so on – which means operatives working for them have a clear employment status.

Some cleaning operatives we spoke to had never had a written contract or terms and conditions. In contrast, most said they were “permanent employees” though sometimes not with great certainty. Those who were certain tended to value the status; they had at least a general sense that it gave them greater rights and security. At least two were self-employed, they said; they knew this meant they had no paid holidays for example, and had to pay their own National Insurance. Yet their work hours and tasks were set by the client, and in other ways their situation seemed more like employment than self-employment.

10.3 Overarching themes – impact on rights and equality

Structure of the industry

The non-domestic cleaning industry can be divided in various ways, for example by sector (such as health, education, retail, transport or leisure) or by size (large or small enterprises and/or workplaces). A significant division is between direct employment by the client of cleaning services, and employment via a cleaning contractor or through an agency. Cleaning contractors in turn can be small organisations, but some are vast multinationals. A further traditional division is between public and private. We found few, if any, cleaning operatives who were public sector employees; however many continue to work, albeit via private cleaning contractors, in traditionally public sector settings such as schools and hospitals, with rail stations also having some of the same characteristics. Those who rely on cleaning work to supply their main household income appear to be in a worse position than those who use it to supplement other sources of support.

In terms of human rights and equality, our research shows few hard and fast rules about where protections are strongest and where they are weak within this structure.

It cannot be said, for example, that either direct employment or employment by a cleaning contractor is better or worse for rights and equality. This report has mentioned issues in contract cleaning around relationships, communication and access to redress whereas contracts and pay slips were generally provided. Most respondents had no awareness of any way of effectively negotiating their employment terms and conditions, collectively or otherwise, and changes tended to be notified to them rather than discussed with them. A sense of powerlessness was common among respondents, not only those working for cleaning contractors.

However a remote and “arm’s length” structure, and the realities of contract tendering processes to which cleaning operatives are not party – the company tendering may not yet be their employer – may entrench this occupational powerlessness even more.

Direct employment, and employment in smaller settings, can be characterised by informality. Usually this is unproblematic for the employee and even valued but for those who do have serious problems at work, realising employment rights and forms of redress can be extremely difficult.

The respondents in public sector settings, in this research, on average had better remuneration and better conditions in some respects such as holiday entitlements. However, many of them worried that these advantages were under threat or being eroded through successive re-lettings of contracts and a squeeze on costs. They were more likely to be members of a union or to be aware of union involvement in negotiating their terms and conditions although, even here, some reported being inhibited from raising concerns or getting redress, for example when their relationship with a supervisor was at the core of the issue.

Management and supervision

Supervisors can play a key role in the lives of cleaning operatives which, in some cases, has a significant bearing on rights and equality. Supervisors may be the only face of the remote employing organisation, with effective powers over recruitment and allocation of shifts, tasks, and overtime. The research found instances of favouritism and discrimination, harassment and bullying.

Supervisors or local managers are also, in many instances, the only obvious gateway to advice or redress procedures. This can and does mean that redress is sometimes not accessible. Access to higher management was unheard of for many respondents: regular forums for meeting anyone above the local team were the exception. We did, however, hear of one case of management stepping in to investigate and take action about local supervisors whose style and behaviour had caused complaints.

In contrast, management and supervision had little impact on the day to day work of some respondents. They said cleaning was a straightforward task, they did it well, and either no one supervised them or supervisors never had cause to bother them.

Migrant workers

Cleaning work is often perceived as work at the bottom of the pay and status scale. A relatively high proportion of cleaning operatives are migrant workers (around 30 per

cent)⁷. In some areas like London the proportion is particularly high, while in some other locations migrant workers remain the fairly isolated exception.

Being a migrant worker can have impacts on rights and equality. Language barriers can make work more difficult and even hazardous, and make rights and redress procedures hard to understand and access. Where clusters of one group build up there is scope for discrimination against others, through word of mouth recruitment or sometimes through direct harassment and disparagement of some groups of workers. Respondents who were in a small minority or the only migrant at their workplace were more likely to report instances of being resented or discriminated against on the grounds of their nationality or race.

Respondents to this research believed that migrant workers could also depress rights and remuneration in the cleaning industry overall. This was phrased in different ways, through migrant workers being “more willing” to work hard for low pay and in poor conditions, to them being unaware of laws and bodies that should protect them, and to there being - in some localities and settings - a hierarchy of working conditions, with the most insecure and “desperate” workers being those who were not able to work legally (and who by definition did not have access to any employment rights). None of our respondents were in this position of working illegally themselves.

This research does not supply evidence on whether beliefs are correct about the impact of migrant workers on pay and conditions – at the “pinch point” of work at or near the bottom of the scale. However, it is clear that the non-domestic cleaning sector includes some work that does not observe rights ranging from the NMW and paid holiday entitlement to access to redress. It is also clear that many migrant as well as non-migrant workers believe the presence of migrant workers contributes to this. If the process is as suggested, it depends on there being not only “desperate migrants” but also employers prepared to break the law and exploit them.

Dignity and respect

Many respondents described behaviour and attitudes – among supervisors, other groups of workers, and the public – which denigrated or degraded them because of the work they do. This could be verbal, or in expressions or behaviour, or in systems such as those determining the clothing different workers wear. Cleaning operatives saw it as normal to be excluded from workplace staff meetings or canteen privileges, and worthy of comment when they were included in these.

⁷ UK Commission for Employment and Skills (2010) *Skills for Jobs: Today and Tomorrow – Vol.2*, <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140108090250/http://ukces.org.uk/publications/nssa-vol-2>

It is clear that unthinking attitudes about cleaning work persist. Cleaning workers are put in a special category almost, barely even counting as “workers” or “staff” like other groups within any given enterprise. Many respondents pointed out the anomaly: cleaning is an essential task in most settings, one on which all other functions depend to some degree.

A “right” to dignity tends to be spoken of in care settings, not among employment rights. However, the issue of dignity and respect pervades a lot of the interviews in this research. It is impossible to quantify its effects but it does seem to have a bearing on why operatives do not feel secure enough to seek redress for problems, for example. Low pay and pay shortfalls are experienced as hard in themselves but also as indicating a lack of respect, to the extent that the obligation to pay them properly seems not to be regarded as strictly as for other employees. We spoke to a few individuals whose health and well-being suffered mainly through the impact of attitudes shown them at work: being shouted at in public, sneered at, or told what to do by one and all. Many other respondents said they were well and equally treated, but the level of appreciation they expressed for this basic good behaviour was telling.

11. Conclusion

Non-domestic cleaning is an ubiquitous and fundamental activity. It penetrates every sector of the economy: every industrial and professional setting, public or private. Cleaning is the reason that establishments are well-presented, comfortable to be in and to work in, able to function, hygienic and free from health and safety hazards. Cleaning requires perseverance and thoroughness to do properly. It is repetitive, often relentless and time-pressured. Parts are unpleasant, but have to be done.

Non-domestic cleaning often goes unnoticed by those not involved in carrying it out. Much of it is unseen, happening outside normal work hours or in the night, or as “deep cleans” when workplaces shut down and other staff are on holiday.

Most of the cleaning operatives we spoke to took a matter-of-fact approach to their work. Their personal circumstances, reasons for doing the work, experiences, and ambitions, were wide ranging. Many were reasonably happy in their work, or were able to face any issues with resilience.

When all the interviews were compared and analysed, some general themes emerged strongly: such as around pay and pay structures and systems; job insecurity; management and supervision; low status, isolation and powerlessness experienced in various guises; and poor access to redress or grievance procedures.

It remains a challenge to pinpoint practical steps that will secure the rights and improve the well-being of cleaning operatives. The workforce itself is not concentrated in one sector or place, or with one type or grouping of employer. Yet the growth of contract cleaning means there is one group of employers responsible for a large number of people doing cleaning work. This makes it logical to engage first with contract cleaning companies in any effort to standardise good employment practices for cleaning operatives.

Most of the chapters in this report conclude with comments on good practice, citing both instances of good practice that can act as models, and examples of where bad practice illustrates the need for change. The nature and scope of this research means these recommendations are tentative in places, and far from comprehensive. However they provide a useful starting point for discussion and reflection.

Any good practice guidelines should indicate “hard” and “soft” improvements. The employment of cleaning operatives should meet the requirements of law, which is the most obvious “hard” improvement. However, the research confirms that rights are threatened and eroded in less clear-cut ways, and these can be combated only with the help of improvements in “soft” areas such as workplace attitudes to different groups of workers.

Appendix Topic guide

Instructions for researchers

This topic guide provides a template for interviews, friendship pairs and mini-groups. There is logic behind the order of the sections and suggested questions and probes, but in some sessions it may make more sense to approach the issues differently.

Key reminders:

- Collecting factual information from respondents is important in order to establish context, but it is critical that we focus on respondents' experiences, views and feelings and on the impact of working arrangements and conditions on their lives in general;
- We want to hear from respondents in their own words, so encourage them to spell everything out verbally;
- We are interested in illustrations and specific examples, so ask for these and probe for detail. They can include instances that have happened to them; that they have witnessed personally; that they have heard about; and that are "common knowledge" among workers in the industry. But make sure that it is clear which of these categories examples and illustrations fall into;
- We are interested in positive as well as negative experiences;
- The language of human rights can be unhelpful and distracting. A simpler sense of "your rights" is readily used by most people, but discussion even in these terms may be more fruitful if raised towards the end of the session.

Introduction

As you know, the Equality and Human Rights Commission is carrying out research to find out about the experiences of people working in the cleaning industry. They have commissioned a group of four independent researchers to talk in some depth to around 100 people working in different parts of the UK Including England, Scotland and Wales.

The interview/group will be informal and conversational and will last about (60/75/90 minutes). Of course there are no right or wrong answers. With your permission, I would like to use my digital recorder to make sure that I don't miss any important information. As we have already promised, your interview will be kept confidential and anonymous. Your name will not be attached to the recording and it will not be possible for anyone to link what you say to you personally.

OBTAIN CONSENT.

Background information and warm up

Perhaps I could begin by asking you to tell me a little bit about yourself:

Stem question	Suggested probes and follow-up questions	Rights domain
Are you from this area?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where are they from? • What brought them to this area? • How long have they been here? • Non-British citizens/migrants – probe how long they have been in the UK. • Are there other people from their country living in the area who they see/mix with? 	
Do you live alone or with others?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who do they live with? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If with children, ask how many and their ages? ○ If there is a partner, ask if they are working and what they do. 	
Can I ask where you are currently working as a cleaner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Probe for details of where they work, in what sort of setting, and how long they have been doing this job. • Clarify what sort of organisation benefits from the cleaning services they provide – the <u>end consumer</u>. • Is this their first job of this sort, or have they done other similar work in the past? • Obtain brief history and make a note of details for possible future reference. 	
Why the cleaning industry? How did you first get into cleaning work?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Probe for relevant personal 'background' story. • Proactive choice or default option? • Probe for reasons why they are working in the cleaning industry. • From their perspective, what are the positive sides to the kind of work they do (if anything)? • What are the negative sides? • Do they feel they have any other realistic choices? Why/not? 	

Main interview

Stem question	Suggested probes and follow-up questions	Rights domain
<p>Can you describe your cleaning job to me? (ASK ABOUT ALL CLEANING JOBS THEY MAY HAVE)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does it involve (in detail)? • What kind of place do they clean and what exactly do they have to clean? • What cleaning products and equipment do they use? • Do they work alone or with others? • If a team/group of colleagues is it a regular group or does it vary a lot? • Is there a good atmosphere among the people at work or not? Probe for details. • Are they supervised? By who? • What is it like as a job? Is it particularly hard/easy? • Is there anything they particularly like/dislike about the work? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For dislikes, probe whether they see them as ‘just part of the job’ or if something could/should be done to make it better? ○ Probe details of what could/should be done and by whom? • Have they ever made suggestions for improvements and why/not? • How well does the job fit in with their non-work life – their family and/or other commitments? • How far do they feel they have any power to change aspects that are problematic? 	<p>Right to rest and leisure</p> <p>Access to redress</p>
<p>What kind of training or preparation did you have for your job?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When they started the job, did someone show them what to do? • Probe for details of any training they received – on or off job? • Ask about any specific training they got, covering: use of cleaning materials; use of cleaning equipment; the areas/facilities they clean. Did they expect more training than they got? Why/not? • Are there any aspects of the work they feel they haven’t had enough training in? Probe for details? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What do they think the potential consequences could be? • Have they asked for more/better training? Why/not? 	
<p>Is everything that you need to do the job provided for you?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask about clothing, equipment and cleaning materials; what are the arrangements for these and how do they feel about them? 	
<p>Tell me about how and when</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Probe for details. 	

<p>you got this job?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask why they went about it the way they did. • Establish if they applied directly to the organisation where they are cleaning, or to an agency who found the work for them or to a contract cleaning company or similar? • Did they have to pay any money to a recruitment agency for their job? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Or payment in kind / gifts? • How did they hear about it? • Were they actively looking for work at the time? • What was the recruitment process? • Was the job advertised for anyone to see and apply for? • Did they have to have an interview? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Who was that with? • Did they get all the information they needed before starting work about what they would be doing and the working arrangements pay and conditions? • Do they think that their employer was looking for particular kinds of people for the job – what sort of people? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What makes you think that? ○ Was it something mentioned by the agency/in the advertisement /in the interview? • Probe for any evidence of discrimination by nationality/language, gender, age, health/disability status. • When they were being recruited, were any checks made on them, for example asking for documents? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How was this handled? ○ As far as they know was everyone treated the same? • Are any of their documents kept by an agency/employer? • When they need documents from their employer can they get them? Eg P45, P60, record of hours worked (for benefits)? Have they ever found this a problem after leaving a job? What happened? • Was their nationality/migrant status a factor at all? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What was said or understood about that? • If they were recruited abroad, probe for details including how travel here was 	<p>Right to equality at work</p> <p>Non-discrimination</p> <p>Abolition of forced labour</p>
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	<p>arranged, and if they have to “pay that off”?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did the recruitment affect them personally? 	
<p>Are you self-employed or an employee?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If they say ‘<u>self-employed</u>’, ask if they are free to work for more than one client and if they try and find their own sources of work? • Can they turn down work that is offered without fear of/actual sanctions? • Do they handle their own National Insurance and Tax? • Did they ‘choose’ to be self-employed, or is that a condition of the job? • Are there any advantages or disadvantages from their point of view? • If ‘<u>employed</u>’, ask who their employer is. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How big is the employer? ○ How many cleaners does it employ? ○ Does their employer like to have certain kinds of people working for them? What kinds? • Why is that? How are they affected personally if at all? 	<p>Right to equality at work</p> <p>Non-discrimination</p>
<p>Is the job temporary or permanent? Full or part-time? Permanent or temporary short-term? Set hours/ “zero hours”/other?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Probe for details, including any reasons for the arrangement. • Was this their choice or the employer’s? • Why did they want it that way? • What does it mean (do they think) if they are counted as “permanent”, “temporary”, “casual”, “zero hours” (as applicable)? • Does the nature of the work make the arrangement necessary or is there another reason? • How does the arrangement affect them? 	
<p>Can you explain your pattern of hours and days work each week?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How predictable is their working pattern? • How far in advance do they know how much they are going to be working and when? • Do they know where they will be working next week and what they will be asked to do? • How far do they feel they have a say in any of this (how much work, where, when etc)? • Is that a problem or not? In what way? • How do they feel about the pattern of working hours? • How does it affect them? 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the advantages if any? • What do they see as the drawbacks or disadvantages if any? • How would they describe the amount of work they do – hours and shifts? • Is it too much or too little? • Have they ever asked to change this? Why/not? • With what result? • If they have turned down hours / work previously has this led to any reprisals? • Did they sign anything agreeing to work above maximum legal hours? Why? 	
Do you get rest breaks at work? And what about paid holidays? And sick leave?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How many and when? • Do they have access to clean toilets at work and to clean water? • Are paid holidays part of their terms and conditions? • How much paid holiday do they get? • How does the holiday and holiday pay system work? • Can they take holidays when they want or don't they have a choice about this? • Do they get public holidays? • How do things work when they are sick? • Do they get paid sick leave? • How happy do they feel with the current arrangements for breaks at work, holidays/leave and for people when they are sick? • Do they feel able to take time off if they are unwell/injured or because of a family emergency? • What good or bad experiences if any have they had with any of these things? 	<p>Right to rest and leisure</p> <p>Right to a safe work environment</p>
Can you tell me about the basis on which you are paid?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are they paid by the hour or for work they do, for example by the room? • Did they know when they started the job what the basis would be? • What is their rate of pay before any deductions? • Do they get paid on a weekly or some other basis? • How is the payment made? • Is it always on time and in full - so they know what they will be getting and when? • What sort of problems have they/do they have (if any) about getting paid in full and on time? • Do they feel they have any power to do anything about this? What? Why/not? 	<p>Right to just and favourable remuneration</p> <p>Right to equality at work</p> <p>Equal pay for equal work</p> <p>Non-discrimination</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do they get a payslip? • Does it show them what work they are being paid for? • How are their hours recorded (proper time sheets etc) – is it clear and fair? • Are deductions made for tax and National Insurance? • Are other deductions ever made? • Do they know what these are for? • Have they ever been explained? • Have they ever asked about them? Why/not? • Do they have any choice about deductions (other than tax & NI) that are made from their pay – for example for agency fees/commission, clothing and equipment, accommodation, travel and so on? • If deductions are made for accommodation/accommodation makes up part of the remuneration package, can they make other arrangements if they want? • If the accommodation is supplied, what is it like? • Have they ever been ‘threatened’ with deductions for any other reason? • Taking everything into account, how do they describe the level of pay they take home for the work that they do? • How far does it cover their basic outgoings? • Do people who do similar work get similar pay or do some groups get different treatment? Probe for details. • How do they feel about this? • If they are adversely affected, have they ever complained? Why/not? What happened? 	<p>Abolition of forced labour</p> <p>Access to redress</p> <p>Right to privacy</p>
<p>Were you given a written statement with your pay and conditions for you to keep for this job?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How was this done? • Is it in a language they understand? • Were they given help to understand? • How clear were/are they about the important things such as: who employs them, who is in charge of their work, who pays them, what their hours and shifts are, what their rest breaks are and their holiday entitlement and sick leave, how much they are paid and overtime and any choice they have about this? • What about tax and national insurance, was that explained? • How was that done? 	<p>Access to redress</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do they get a pay slip when they are paid? • What does it show and how far do they understand it? • How do they feel about the information they have? • Have they ever asked for anything to be explained to them? • What happened? • Did they sign anything they didn't understand? Why? 	
<p>We covered this a little bit earlier on, but is the work you are expected to do reasonable?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do they ever find the work too hard or difficult? Probe for detail? • Do they feel their work is safe? • Have they ever had any accidents or been injured at work? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What happened? ○ Did they report it? ○ How was it dealt with? ○ Were they happy with how it was dealt with? Why(not)? • Are there risks and problems or hazards or dangers? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What are they? • Have they had any instructions about handling any of these risks or hazards (e.g. chemicals)? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How good was it? • Are they issued with safety clothing and equipment? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is it good quality? • Have they ever felt physically at risk at work? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Or getting around at work? ○ Or travelling to and from work? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What happened? • Have they ever been made ill because of work, including stress? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How did that come about? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Did they get help? • Probe for details/ Find out if they felt able to talk about this or ask for help from work? Why/not? • Have they any experience of working while pregnant? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How if at all was this taken into account at work? ○ Could they attend appointments? 	<p>Right to a safe work environment/ Right to equality at work/ Access to redress/ Freedom of association/ Right to organise or participate in collective bargaining</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Were they able to keep their job? ○ What about maternity leave? ● Do they feel that people at work who get pregnant are helped to manage this safely? ● Do they ever feel that they are under pressure to put themselves at risk or be unsafe? ● Do they feel they could complain or draw attention to risks at work? ● What do they think would happen if they did? 	
<p>What are relationships like at work?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What are relationships like with work managers? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Probe for the different relationships. ● How are they treated? Probe for examples. ● How much do they feel respected at work? In what ways? ● Who respects, understands and appreciates what they do? ● How is work checked and monitored? ● How far do they feel this is done fairly? ● Probe for use of CCTV and other checks – especially covert checks. Is work organised and handed out fairly? Probe for examples? ● Are some people treated better or worse than others? Who/in what way? ● Is language/nationality ever an issue at work? In what way? ● Do they ever feel under unfair pressure? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Probe for examples (possibilities could be to do certain kinds of work or overtime). ● Can they leave employment freely if they want to? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Or what could happen? ○ Would there be a penalty or other problem? ● How do they get on with colleagues at work? ● What are <i>other</i> people like who they come across at work? ● Are there problems ever and if so what are they about? ● If they work alone, what is that like? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What problems if any does it make for them? ● What do they think are their chances for getting on in this job or from this job? ● Are chances to get on available to everyone in an equal and fair way? 	<p>Right to equality at work/ Access to redress/ Freedom of association/ Right to organise or participate in collective bargaining/ Right to privacy/ Abolition of forced labour/ Non-discrimination</p>

<p>What are your options if you ever have a problem at or with work?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who, if anyone, do (or would) they go to if they have/had a problem at work? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Probe for details of their roles and responsibilities? • Are they the person they are <i>supposed</i> to go to or the person they <i>choose</i> to go to? Why? • Where/who else would they go to. Probe for details. • Ask <i>if they</i> would consider advice agencies (which ones) or unions (which ones). Why/not? • Are there any informal sources of support? Who/where? • If they have raised problems at work, what were they and how did they go? • How far can/do people at work join trade unions or associations? • How far do they feel that problems and complaints are/would be handled fairly at work? 	<p>Access to redress/ Freedom of association/ Right to organise or participate in collective bargaining /</p>
<p>Do you think people are treated fairly at work?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are people ever treated differently at work because of who they are- for example their age, sex, nationality, disability or if they are pregnant or sick or have children to look after? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Has this ever happened to them? • Have they ever witnessed employees being ill-treated – for example bullied, assaulted, abused racially or sexually or in some other way, or threatened? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Has this happened to them? • Has their migration status ever been used as a way to threaten them or make them do something? 	<p>Right to equality at work/ Non-discrimination/ Right to a safe work environment/ Abolition of forced labour</p>
<p>What do you know about your rights as a worker under the law?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Probe as necessary. • Where do they have that information from? • Do they think that they have these rights now in their current job? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What makes them say that? • What would they change about their current work if they could (if anything)? • Probe for details. What are the most important aspects they would like to change? 	

THANK RESPONDENT FOR TAKING PART. MAKE PAYMENT AND OBTAINED SIGNED RECEIPT. ASK IF THEY WOULD BE WILLING TO BE CONTACTED DIRECTLY BY THE EHRC ABOUT ANY ASPECTS OF THEIR CASE THAT ARE OF SPECIFIC INTEREST. IF YES, ASK THEM TO SIGN AGREEMENT TO BEING RECONTACTED.

This report details findings from qualitative research with 93 people working in the British non-domestic cleaning industry as cleaning operatives. The study was designed to explore positive and negative experiences of work in terms of workplace and labour market freedoms, rights and entitlements. It focused on four main sectors within the industry: health, transport, office/retail and leisure and involved in-depth interviews, paired interviews and mini focus groups in eight areas across Britain. The report also pulls together good practice examples with legal employment requirements to highlight measures to improve the situation.