

## Skills shortages in catering, cleaning and FM services

APSE (The Association for Public Service Excellence) has today launched its research report into skills shortages within Local Government in the field of catering, cleaning and caretaking / janitorial services.

Key findings of the research indicate that a staggering 94% of respondents reported shortages in labour and skills.

Within the industry there is almost a quarter (24%) of councils responding to the research who have found that they have difficulty in recruiting senior professional and managerial staff to the services of cleaning, catering and janitorial / caretaking sectors

Skills shortages within cleaning run at 34% and within Catering at 41%. There is also a high level of skills shortages amongst supervisory and service manger level running at 18%.

The research findings have indicated that an increased need to have better awareness of health and safety training and a propensity to pay a premium rather than train within the industry has created a time lag in filling posts. The average time taken to fill key posts has meant that recruitment difficulties are adding costs to the service with many posts taking over 13 weeks to fill.

81% of respondents felt that multi-skilling was essential to meet the challenge of addressing both skills shortages and recruitment problems.

Reasons for the recruitment difficulties were found to be the poor image, particularly of the cleaning industry, unsocial hours, lack of flexible working arrangements and the impact of the benefits thresholds on short hour contracts. All this has meant that jobs within cleaning and catering are not seen as attractive to prospective employees.

In addition it was found that the bureaucratic systems for recruitment of workers takes too long and is too cumbersome. At the end of the process many candidates have found alternative employment (often in the retail sector). Catering and cleaning within schools can also involve a police criminal records check which can delay an offer of a job exacerbating recruitment difficulties.

Commenting on the findings Paul O'Brien APSE Chief Executive said **"The findings of this research support what many have suspected; that we can no longer afford to put off the investment needed in skills training to support the areas within the public sector that are vital to front line services"**. Adding **"No parent would be happy sending their child to a school that is dirty or where staff have not had adequate training to prepare decent healthy school meals. These services need to be better valued by national and local politicians with recognition of the contribution that they make to our quality of life on a day to day basis"**.

Mr O'Brien continued **"If we fail to value the contribution made by those employees in often relatively low paid and part time employment the industry image will continue to decline. We have huge capacity within local government to examine more innovative ways of working including multi-**

**skilling employees and providing career pathways through making greater use of vocational qualifications in catering and cleaning. The public need to recognise also that public sector workers are not just teachers and nurses. They need to value the small army of people who oil the wheels of our schools, community centres and social services departments. This is a win-win situation for the public sector; the employees at the heart of these services are members of the local community. Better pay and training will stimulate the local economy and contribute to the overall well being of our communities. We need to grasp the nettle and stop regarding catering and cleaning staff as the poor relations of the public sector”.**

**ENDS**

### **Notes**

1. The local government workforce is made up of over 70% women. Many working in part time employment are in the service areas of catering, cleaning and facilities management.
2. Catering and Cleaning service costs in schools, town halls and other civic buildings are dominated by labour costs with a ratio of 80% labour costs of all costs of providing the service in areas like building cleaning being atypical of the service sector within local government.
3. APSE is the Association of Public Service Excellence working with over 300 local authorities throughout England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and collates detailed performance information in a range of services including catering, cleaning and facilities management.
4. The research findings apply across the four administrations
5. APSE is a not for profit organisations that campaigns for continuous improvement in the local government services
6. An APSE spokesperson is available for media interviews. Please contact Mo Baines on 1016 772 1810 to arrange
7. Visit APSE website on [www.apse.org.uk](http://www.apse.org.uk);

***Free copies of the research report, Soft FM: A Local Government Skill Shortages Report for Catering, Cleaning and Janitorial Services will be provided to APSE press contacts upon request. Contact: Mark Roden on 1616 772 1810 or Mo Baines on 07971 843515***