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Contract office cleaning in the UK has traditionally been an activity carried out during hours when office workers are not present, either early morning or late evening. This has the advantage of avoiding disruption to normal business and providing a clean working environment at the beginning of the working day. There are however disadvantages to this which has led to a growing number of businesses making the switch to a daytime cleaning operation.

Most of the advantages of daytime cleaning relate to the workforce. Cleaning companies have found it increasingly difficult to find quality employees who are willing to work unsocial hours for low wages on a part time basis. 12-15 hours a week on the national minimum wage does not constitute a "living wage". This leads to a high turnover of staff causing increased recruitment and training costs which all have to be passed on to the customer.

By switching to daytime cleaning contractors are able to employ cleaners for longer shifts, often full-time, deliver more and better training to their employees, and improve productivity by eliminating the start-up and closedown time for every employee on each shift.

The cleaners benefit from a living wage and can therefore commit to one steady job rather than juggling several part time roles and only have one work journey to pay for each day. They get better training, become more proficient, and are motivated by improved confidence and recognition. The cleaner is able to think constructively and to take personal ownership of a dedicated part of the building. Personal safety and security are improved and they get to know the people they are cleaning for and become a full part of the facilities team. All of this reduces staff turnover and management costs for the cleaning contractor who can spend less time worrying about recruitment and more time on quality and service.

The client benefits from higher productivity, a better trained, motivated and presented cleaning team and fewer cleaning complaints. This is partly a result of the increased quality and partly because users actually witness the cleaning taking place and thus appreciate it more. Security is increased as less supervision is required while actual security costs come down as do lighting and heating bills.

A successful switch to daytime cleaning requires a number of important changes the most important of which is a serious communication campaign to make certain that all users, and cleaners, understand how the new regime will operate. New cleaning schedules must be developed that take account of operational needs and recognise that some cleaning operations are noisier than others. Some of the savings need to be invested in new equipment such as cordless, low noise back pack vacuum machines. Cleaners learn to adjust the daily clean to accommodate users who are on holiday or absent, and some cleaning activities still need to be scheduled for out of hours because of their disruption potential.

The Asset Skills Cleaning and Support Services Board has produced a good practice guide to daytime cleaning available from www.assetskills.org