

The business case for the living wage: The story of the cleaning service at Queen Mary, University of London

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Executive Summary

This report documents the findings of a research project conducted during October and November 2008 to explore the impact of the living wage – and the move back in-house - on the costs, standards and employees involved in the cleaning service at Queen Mary, University of London.

This research involved an online questionnaire survey completed by 292 QM staff; a face-to-face interview survey completed with 73 cleaning staff (59 of whom had transferred from the contractor); additional interviews with 11 respondents; in-depth interviews with 4 managers in the Estates Department and the Chief Administrative Officer at QMUL.

Only a third of staff respondents had seen a change in the cleaning service since it moved back in-house (from 1 January 2008) but of these, 83% reported service improvements. Positive comments related to cleaning standards, the availability of cleaning staff and cleaners' behaviour.

Despite only a minority of staff noticing any changes in the service, just 4 people (1% of respondents) opposed the decision to bring the service in-house. Members of staff at QMUL endorsed the decision on the grounds of social justice, their core values and expectations of (further) improvements in the service in future.

As might be expected, the cleaners were overwhelmingly positive about their new jobs. In

this regard, cleaners highlighted the advantages of increased pay and benefits, as well as working for the College with better management and opportunities for career development.

Remarkably, however, less than half of the cleaners who were eligible to transfer to QMUL on 1 January 2008 were found to be employed in-house by May 2008. This 'fall-out' is a product of checking personal identification and immigration status. A significant number of long-serving and hard-working staff disappeared in this process.

When asked what had changed about the nature of their work since transfer, the most popular responses from cleaners were that they now worked more productively (68%), with more supervision (63%) and completed a broader range of tasks (61%).

While the real and estimated costs for the service had risen slightly above those involved in the past, these increases were marginal and the Chief Administrative Officer declared himself to be "*perfectly happy*" with the cost rises so far.

The research has revealed that the move to be a living wage employer and bring the cleaning service in-house has stimulated improvements in job quality, productivity and service delivery, with very little increase in costs. In addition, the decision has strong support in and beyond the wider community at QMUL.

1. Introduction

During the past 30 years, economic globalisation, political deregulation and subcontracted employment have conspired to erode the real and relative wages and conditions of the lowest paid staff. Cleaning has been particularly affected by the move to out-source service employment. The process of re-tendering tends to drive down wages, conditions and staffing levels. Staff can find themselves switching employer every few years and employment protection (TUPE)¹ has meant workers often find themselves doing the same job for different levels of pay and benefits to those received by their colleagues. Subcontracted cleaners are also cut adrift from the wider workplace community and lose any entitlement to annual increments or negotiated improvements in the pay and conditions of work.

Since 1997, the New Labour Government has sought to ameliorate at least some of the pain caused by low waged employment. Government has legislated to enforce new minimum standards for wages, holidays, hours and collective organisation. The National Minimum Wage (NMW), minimal holiday entitlement (20 days including bank holidays implemented as part of the Employment Relations Act (ERA) 1999), the Working Time Directive (limiting working hours to 48 a week from which employees can be asked to opt out) and the Central Arbitration Commission’s work to assist in union recognition disputes, are all part of efforts to set new minimum standards for working conditions. Government has also tried to encourage public sector organisations to include consideration of job quality and service standards in their search for ‘best value.’ However, such measures have ameliorated rather than reversed the pressure on the low paid.

Moreover, although the NMW has set a benchmark for wages, it is not related to the real cost of living. The Low Pay Commission has set the NMW at a level that the market will bear rather than at the level required to live. Recent research funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has confirmed that even a single person with no dependents, living in council housing, needs £13,400 a year before tax to afford a basic, but acceptable standard of living.² This far exceeds the income secured by having a full time job paid at the level of the NMW, and given the cost of living in a city like London, there is a wide gap between the minimum wage and the income needed to live.

In this regard, a broad-based community coalition called London Citizens launched a campaign for a London living wage in April 2001.³ London Citizens commissioned the Family Budget Unit to calculate a living wage figure for London and this has subsequently been taken up by a Living Wage Unit based within the Greater London Authority (GLA; see GLA, 2008). These living wage rates have tended to be at least £1.50 higher than the NMW (see Table 1) and there have been calls for paid sick pay (10 days a year), increased holiday entitlement (to 28 days including bank holidays) and union recognition as part of the campaign. East London’s hospitals were the first target for the campaign which has since spread to the financial services industry based at Canary Wharf and the City of London, Higher Education, the Olympics site, luxury hotels, Government Departments and the arts. Current estimates suggest that more than 6000 workers have secured wage increases as a direct result of the campaign, putting more than £30 million into the pockets of low waged Londoners.

Table 1: The National Minimum Wage and the London Living Wage 2003-2008

Year	NMW*	LLW**	Difference
2003	4.50	6.40	1.90
2004	4.85	6.50	1.65
2005	5.05	6.70	1.65
2006	5.35	7.05	1.70
2007	5.52	7.20	1.68
2008	5.73	7.45	1.72

* National Minimum Wage (NMW)

** London Living Wage (LLW)

Sources: Low Pay Commission (<http://www.lowpay.gov.uk>), the Living Wage Unit at the Greater London Authority (from 2005) and London Citizens using calculations generated by the Family Budget Unit (from 2003-2005)

To date, the living wage campaign has made ground in relation to arguments about the moral economy. It has been argued that paying a living wage complements the mission of public sector bodies to alleviate poverty, improve well being and foster community cohesion. It has also been suggested that private sector organisations will reap benefits in terms of their commitments to corporate responsibility and their profile amongst local communities and consumers. However, some campaigners have also suggested

that paying living wages will reap economic rewards. Anecdotal evidence has been presented in relation to the successful implementation of the living wage by KPMG, and the positive impact this has had on staff loyalty, performance and turnover.⁴

In the US, there has been much more debate about the extent to which living wage campaigns are an effective tool in the battle against poverty (Neumark and Adams, 2003; Pollin and Luce, 1998; Freeman, 2005), and about their impact on productivity and labour turnover rates (Schoenberger, 2000; Fairris, 2005; Reich et al., 2005). Working in Los Angeles, Fairris (2005) found lower rates of labour turnover, absenteeism and overtime rates and higher rates of training amongst 75 living wage contractors when compared to 210 similar non-living wage firms. Similarly, Reich et al (2005) found increased morale and effort, and reduced turnover, amongst staff working at San Francisco Airport following the introduction of a living wage.

To date, there has been very little published research into the impact of London's living wage. Research has been focused on the development of the campaign itself (Wills, 2004), the extent to which it might revitalise the trade union movement (Wills, 2008, 2009) and the impact of increased wages on the lives of the workers themselves (Sokol et al, 2006).

The research reported here was conducted to explore the economic impact of paying living wages to cleaners employed at Queen Mary, University of London (QMUL). Queen Mary was targeted as part of the living wage campaign in the Autumn of 2005. Following a period of deliberation (which is briefly summarised in the following section), senior managers decided to go beyond the demands of the campaign by moving most of the College's cleaning services back in-house. This report outlines research conducted to explore the impact of living wages and improved employee benefits on costs, cleaning standards, productivity and staff motivation. Following a brief history of the living wage campaign at Queen Mary, the research methodology and findings are presented below.

2. The Cleaning Services at Queen Mary, University of London

Queen Mary is part of the University of London and has premises at Charterhouse Square (Barbican), Whitechapel and Mile End. The cleaning services are divided between those covering the student residences at Mile End which remain contracted out and those servicing the rest of the College. The latter involves cleaning all the buildings occupied by the College and includes tasks such as removing rubbish, cleaning floors, surfaces and toilets. Prior to January 2008, all cleaning services were contracted out – along with window cleaning and grounds maintenance - and while there is no documentation recording when this decision was taken, the longest serving cleaners recall working for three different contractors in the past 15 years.⁵

In the summer of 2005, London Citizens asked a number of the young people working as interns on their Summer Academy to do some preliminary research into the cleaning service at QMUL. University students were being taught research and organising skills as part of their summer internship and they were sent to the campus with a generic questionnaire that was being used at a number of sites (including the City and at a number of London's luxury hotels). This survey was itself part of a joint project led by academic staff at Queen Mary and organisers at London Citizens to map the role and experiences of low paid workers in London. In this case, research to support the living wage campaign was also used as a means to launch a larger ESRC-funded project that has since documented London's emergent Migrant Division of Labour (see Evans et al, 2005; May et al, 2007; Wills et al., 2009).⁶

As part of their research assignment, London Citizens' interns heard testimony from some thirty cleaners working at QMUL. These workers were employed by a company called *KGB Office Cleaning Services*. Most worked for just two hours - between 6 and 8 every morning - for the minimum wage, minimum holiday entitlement, no sick pay, no pension and no compassionate leave. Supervisors were responsible for collecting the keys to the buildings, ordering new cleaning materials and training new staff for just a few extra pence in their pay. Staff reported having no official induction and no access to training. Turnover was reported to be high and many had little regard for the job. A number of the cleaners agreed to support

Table 2: Key milestones in the living wage campaign at QMUL

Activity	Date
Initial research into subcontracted workforce later published as part of <i>Making the City Work</i> (Evans et al., 2005)	July-September 2005
LC's request for a meeting with senior managers denied.	July 2005
KGB cleaner speaks out at LC assembly attended by up to 800 people including politicians and local officials, asking for solidarity in the campaign.	September 2005
Rally outside Queen Mary attended by 120 cleaners, students, LC members and the local MP to demand a meeting.	October 2005
Ongoing talks and a video letter including representation from KGB cleaners, the student's union, UCU, local trade unionists, the East London Mosque and the London Buddhist Centre, presented to College Council.	January-April 2006
Agreement to become the first living wage campus in the UK.	April 2006
Queen Mary given the living wage employer award at a mass and rally in praise of migrant workers held at the Catholic Cathedral in London.	May 2006
Public commitment to bring all cleaning staff in-house made at London Citizens' 10 th Anniversary Assembly in east London in front of more than 1000 people including local MPs, councillors and employers.	September 2006
London living wage (£7.20), 10 days sick pay and 28 days holiday (including 8 bank holidays) awarded to all KGB staff.	July 2007
All KGB staff move back in-house. Staff were then paid well over the living wage and full sick pay (6 months full time, 6 months part-time), 30 days holiday (excluding bank holidays), an annually negotiated pay increase and access to an employer-contribution pension scheme.	January 2008

a request for the living wage being sent to the top of the College and one cleaner gave public testament – asking for support - at a large public assembly in East London. A letter was then sent to senior managers at QMUL and following a period of negotiation, living wage commitments were eventually made (see Table 2). Indeed, College managers went further than any other group targeted by the campaign. They decided to bring the bulk of the cleaning service back in-house, granting much better wages and conditions than the campaign organizers had ever expected.

When reflecting back on the decision during interview, Dean Curtis, the Chief Administrative Officer, remarked:

We had a great opportunity not just to meet the minimum standards but ... to exceed them and be able to do that by actively reclaiming the VAT and utilising it to the benefit of the staff themselves ... At the end of the day, the combination of both the VAT and the improvements in performance and efficiency that you're expecting made it a much more viable position for us to take ... In this instance, the experimentation with services being provided by the private sector was a failure in my opinion. It was a failure in terms of the quality of service that was being delivered,

the ability of the institution to manage that external service provider, and the failure for the individuals that were being employed. In that sort of analysis you can't possibly come to any other conclusion.⁷

Managers in the Estates Department faced a number of challenges in organising the move back in-house. Having subcontracted cleaning services some time previously, the College had lost the managerial expertise required to run an in-house service and had to spend some time setting up a new in-house team. The College was assisted by outside consultants from the company *Total Support Systems*, and two of their staff acted as managers in the early stages of the new service. The decision also had considerable knock-on effects for the Human Resources Department who became responsible for communicating with existing cleaners, preparing new contracts and managing the transfer of staff. As a member of the HR staff put it during interview: *"It means more pressure on Human Resources. More staff to deal with, more recruitment, more turn-over. More disciplinary work as well. ... I am not very happy ... people here [in HR] are concerned."*

Moreover, managers at Queen Mary were never sure how many cleaners were going to turn up for work on handover day. As outlined in Table 3, only 53% of the people on KGB's staff list appeared for work as requested. In addition, a number of the cleaners who did transfer to Queen Mary (13) were subsequently found to be in violation of immigration controls and/or disappeared between January and May 2008. Even allowing for the fact that KGB may have failed to keep up-to-date staff numbers or inflated their staffing numbers in the build-up to transfer, it is clear that the move in-house has meant more than half of KGB's cleaners losing their jobs – apparently due to the increased surveillance of staff. Managers reported losing a number of very good cleaners, some of whom had been working up to 80 hours a week. As the Senior Supervisor, Isaac Oti, put it: *“Unfortunately, we lost good workers. The good workers live in fear and they want to do all the hours you can give them. They want to send money home. If you told them to sleep here, they would sleep here”*. While some left because they were working without sanction from the Home Office, others were found to be working under a false name so that they could claim benefits as well as earning at work. The cleaners remaining by May 2008 tended to be those with British or European passports or with Indefinite Leave to Remain.

Table 3: The ‘fallout’ during transfer from KGB to QM

Cleaners on the payroll of KGB	170
Cleaners who transferred on 1 Jan 2008	90
% ‘fall out’ on hand-over	47%
Subsequent (Jan-May 2008) losses	13
Total remaining (in May)	77
% ‘fall out’ by May 2008	55%

As a result, managers in the cleaning service have had to recruit a considerable number of new cleaners to work for the College. At the time of writing, there were 104 cleaners employed. While this figure is considerably lower than the number employed by KGB, staff contracts have changed and a larger number of cleaners are working for longer hours than they did in the past. As indicated in Table 4, just under a third of the workers are still employed for two hours a day and as many as 37% work for between 10 and 15 hours a week. However, the remainder now work longer hours with 13 staff working full time

and 24 working between 15 and 30 hours a week. Whereas KGB used to employ a handful of full time workers, some of whom put in as many as 60 hours a week (without overtime pay), all full timers are now limited to 35 or 38 hours of work in a week.

Table 4: Hours of work, weekly, of cleaners at QMUL

Hours	Numbers	% of total
10 hours a week	29	28
>10 up to 15 hours a week	38	37
>15 up to 20 hours a week	21	20
>20 up to 30 hours a week	3	3
Full time	13	13
Total	104	

Source: Analysis of HR records at QMUL

In May 2008, the College held an Open Day for people interested in working as a cleaner at QMUL. This event created an unprecedented and unexpected response. Despite only limited advertisement on the internet site *gumtree.com*, as many as 300 people arrived on the day. Respondents were invited to complete application forms and wait in a slow-moving queue for an interview. As many as 158 decided to wait and analysis of the data they provided (Tables 5 and 6) indicates that this population was majority female and ‘black’ with prior experience in cleaning. Interestingly, most of the Open Day applicants – as well as existing staff – come from the area around the College, but a minority of both populations travel very long distances for relatively low paying work. The first three digits of the postcodes from the home addresses supplied by cleaners and Open Day attendees show the geographical spread of this labour market and some employees are already travelling from the other side of the city (see Figure 1). This data – and the experience of the Open Day itself – suggest that there is a very large supply of potential cleaners in London and that the College will have little problem in recruiting the quality staff that they need. Moreover, as the College has control over employment decisions, managers are confident that they can select the very best staff. As Richard MacKenzie the Head of Office Services put it: *“We are being quite mercenary now about who we recruit, we need good English, NVQs, training and experience.”*

Table 5: The gender and ethnicity of potential workers attending the QM Open Day

Ethnicity	Women (no)	Women (%)	Men (no)	Men (%)	Total (no)	Total (%)
Asian	5	5	15	35	20	13
Black	80	80	32	54	112	71
Mixed	4	4	4	7	8	5
White	7	7	6	10	13	8
Unknown	3	3	2	3	5	3
Total	99	100	59	100	158	100

Source: Analysis of QM records

Table 6: The current employment of those attending the QM Open Day

Current employment	Number	% attendees
Cleaning	86	54
Hospitality (catering and other)	21	13
Care	10	6
Other	20	13
Unknown	23	14
Total	160	

The Open Day has provided a useful source of new recruits to the cleaning service since January 2008. The population of 104 cleaners at QM is now 69% female with an ethnic profile that contrasts sharply with the wider community at QMUL. As indicated in Table 7, as many as 69% of the cleaners describe themselves as ‘black’ – almost a mirror image of the proportion describing themselves as ‘white’ in the wider staff community at QMUL. Bringing the cleaning service in-house has clearly altered the ethnic profile of the wider staff community at QMUL.

Source: Analysis of QM records

Figure 1: The geography of the labour market for cleaners at QMUL

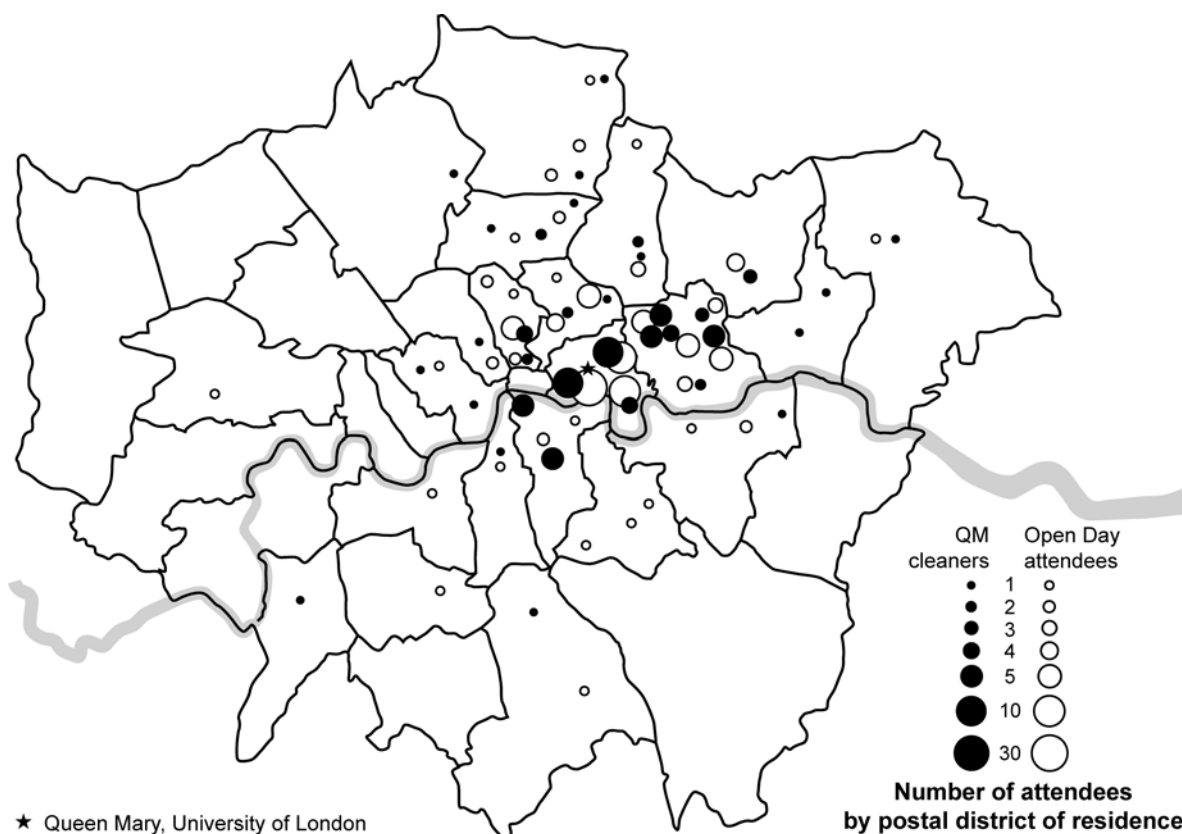


Table 7: The ethnicity of cleaners in contrast to the whole workforce (including cleaners) at QMUL

Ethnicity	All staff (numbers)	All staff (%)	All cleaners (numbers)	All cleaners (%)
Asian	277	9	2	2
Black	225	7	72	69
Chinese and Other	135	4	0	0
Mixed	60	2	5	5
White	2034	65	21	20
Info refused or unknown	312	10	4	4
Total	3108	100	104	100

Source: Analysis of HR records from QMUL

3. The research

This research was designed to explore the impact of paying living wages – and moving staff back in-house – on cleaning costs, standards, productivity and staff motivation at QMUL. As already indicated, the preliminary phase of the research involved the analysis of College records, collating data from application and ethnic monitoring forms. In addition, cleaning managers were asked about the budgets for the service over a number of years.

In order to explore changes in service standards, an on-line questionnaire survey was sent to all office-based staff at QMUL, asking about cleaning standards, relationships with cleaning staff, ideas for improvements and views about the decision to bring the service in-house. This on-line survey, set up using the services of Survey Monkey, was open from 1 October until 21 November 2008 and it attracted 292 responses from across College staff. Members of staff were notified via the in-house newsletter (*the Bulletin*) as well as via the more regular *e-bulletin*. Additional emails inviting staff participation were sent to Departmental Administrators across the College, asking for further support. The sample represents something like 10% of the staff employed at the College but sabbatical, holiday and sick leave as well as not having access to a computer increases this rate of return. The vast majority of respondents came from the Mile End Campus (78%) with much smaller representation from Charterhouse Square (11%) and Whitechapel (8%). About a third of respondents were from central services (31%), a quarter were from Science and Engineering (26%) a further quarter from Humanities and Social Sciences

(24%) and a fifth from Medicine and Dentistry (17%). In a further breakdown, just under half (40%) of respondents were academics, another 20% were support staff based in academic departments and a similar proportion were based in central services. A large number of respondents (17%) ticked the ‘other’ box to this question even though they were clearly in one of the above categories – a significant number reporting that they were in administration and technical support. However, the survey also captured 6 research students and the chaplain who were not otherwise covered. A surprisingly large proportion of respondents had started working for the College in the last 5 years (62%), a smaller group had been employed for 10 years (14%) and 24% had been with the College for more than 10 years. These survey respondents were invited to volunteer to take part in further research and a sub-set of those who volunteered were then selected for interview on the basis of their reported experiences and/or role in the College. Short interviews were conducted, recorded and transcribed with six staff, and this material has been used to further elaborate on the survey results.

The experiences and views of cleaning staff were captured in a separate questionnaire survey that was conducted through face-to-face interviews with 73 cleaning staff during October and November 2008. This survey collated responses from 59 workers who had transferred from KGB and 14 who had been newly employed since January 2008. Reflecting the distribution of cleaners themselves, the sample was split between the three sites: most working at Mile End (56%), just over a quarter from Charterhouse

Square (28%) and the remainder from Whitechapel (16%). The sample was 60% female and fairly evenly split between age groups (with 27% aged 16-30; 33% aged 31-45; 27% aged 46-60; and just 12% aged over 60). When cleaners were asked about their country of birth, they revealed an extraordinary degree of geographical diversity. As indicated in Table 10, the 73 cleaners who took part in the survey came from as many 24 different countries. While a large number of respondents were the sole representative of their country of birth, a significant number of cleaners were found to come from Somalia with other larger groups hailing from Ghana, Nigeria and the Caribbean. This chimes with other research amongst low paid workers in London identifying very significant numbers of Ghanaians and Nigerians filling these posts (Herbert et al., 2008; May et al., 2007).

Table 10: The country of birth of cleaners surveyed for this research

Country of birth	Number	% of those surveyed
Somalia	17	24
Ghana	13	18
Nigeria	9	13
Jamaica	5	7
UK	4	6
Bolivia	3	4
Montserrat	2	3
Morocco	2	3
Philippines	2	3
Bangladesh	1	<1
Barbados	1	<1
Colombia	1	<1
Congo	1	<1
Dominica	1	<1
Ecuador	1	<1
France	1	<1
Grenada	1	<1
Ivory Coast	1	<1
Madeira, Portugal	1	<1
Romania	1	<1
St Luica	1	<1
St Vincent	1	<1
The Netherlands	1	<1
(2 missing data)	71	

As might be expected in light of these results, when asked about their ethnicity, most cleaners described themselves as ‘black’ – more than half being ‘black

African’ (39 or 56% of the sample, reflecting those born in Africa as well as a number of European-born cleaners of African parentage) with a further fifth being ‘black Caribbean’ (12 cleaners or 17% of the sample). Just three respondents (4% of the sample) described themselves as ‘white British.’

This survey explored cleaners’ views about the move in-house, changes in the job, the new terms and conditions of work, their attitudes towards Queen Mary and their plans for the future. The research team held a prior meeting with supervisors from the cleaning service to explain the nature of the research and to make arrangements to visit the staff. Researchers then made a number of early-morning visits to meet cleaners at each site and conducted the survey during work time. Those cleaners who were not present at the time of these visits – due to sickness or annual leave – were not included in the research. All respondents were asked if they were willing to take part in a further interview to discuss these issues more fully and a sub-set were then approached to take part. Possible respondents were selected on the basis of having worked for KGB and their answers in the survey, while also ensuring a cross-section of workplaces and ethnicities were covered. Short face-to-face interviews were conducted, recorded and transcribed with five cleaners and this material has been use to further elaborate on the survey results.

In addition, the research sought to capture the views of a number of senior staff at QMUL. Four managers from the Estates Department were asked to assess the decision almost one year on and the Chief Administrative Officer was asked about the financial implications and the reputational aspects of the move back in-house. Transcripts from these interviews have been useful in making a fuller evaluation of the new cleaning service.

In all cases, survey respondents were guaranteed full anonymity. In accordance with the guidelines established by the QM Research Ethics Committee, the survey was explained to all participants prior to their taking part. All interviewees were given an information sheet and asked to give their consent to their interview being recorded, transcribed and stored. Senior managers at the College were also asked about being named in this report prior to the start of the interview. Where agreed, some of these respondents have been named and their attributed quotations have been checked prior to publication. In all other cases, confidentiality has been upheld.

4. The costs of the service

The costs of paying a living wage are often cited as a significant barrier to its implementation. Dire predictions of escalating costs also tend to be made in relation to any anticipated move of a service in-house. Financial data from Queen Mary thus present some rather unexpected findings in relation to costs. As indicated in Figure 2, thus far at least, the in-house service has cost only slightly more than the service provided by KGB including the start-up costs of the move back in-house. Indeed, when looked at over a two year period, the expected budget for 2008/9 is very similar to the amount of money that was spent on services from KGB in 2006/7. Managers report that fewer staff, better supervision and higher productivity have reduced the predicted escalation of costs. Dean Curtis, the Chief Administrative Officer reported feeling “*perfectly happy*” and “*completely relaxed*” about the slight increase in costs, arguing that this was what “*we expected*.”

Prior to the move back in-house, a number of managers had been particularly concerned about the potential costs of the new benefits being paid to cleaners after the process of transfer. Given that most cleaning jobs do not have any kind of paid sick leave attached, some managers were particularly concerned about the scope for cleaners to abuse sickness as a way of being paid for staying at home. For Richard Mackenzie, Head of Office Services, who managed the liaison with KGB at the time of the transfer, this could be further compounded by employee protection that makes it very difficult to sack staff for violation of the sickness regime: “*All the people who come to work in my Department come to work to earn a living. If you have a bad egg, you need to get rid of them. It’s like the sickness, if people see someone getting away with being sick every week, the natural reaction is to say, well, if they are getting away with it, I’m going to do it. We have no deterrent.*”

Figure 2: The cost of cleaning at QMUL

1 August 2006 to end July 2007:	£2,119,00 for services from KGB
1 August 2007 to end July 2008:	£2,850,000 in total (as below)
5 months KGB	£850,000 for 5 months service from KGB (excluding special cleaning)
7 months QM service	Up to £1.3 million for staff and £700,000 for non staff (including £250,000 start-up costs for consultants, equipment and uniforms)
1 August 2008 to end July 2009:	£2,197,000 budget includes 4% pay rise and annual increment for staff

Data collected between 1 January and 30 June 2008 indicated that cleaners were taking less sick leave than their colleagues on the rest of the campus. In this period, cleaners took an average of 4 days sick leave per head in contrast with an average of 6 days per head for the whole workforce employed at QMUL. However, at the time of the research, all the managers interviewed reported an increasing problem with sickness. As Isaac Oti, the Senior Supervisor, remarked: “*In the first six months people didn’t take leave but now that they know they have the same terms and conditions as everyone else, the*

sickness is going up. Up to 15 people are being sick a lot. When they do this it impacts on everyone else, the morale goes down.” Managers are attempting to deal with this through the judicious use of back-to-work interviews and referrals to occupational health. In addition, they have recruited a small pool of living wage agency workers who can cover for the absence caused by sickness and increased holiday entitlement. As the General Services Manager put it: “*we’ve obviously identified the problems that come with an in-house service, but we’re ready for next year now and we know how to bridge the gaps.*”

5. The service-users' perspective

The impact of the move back in-house

In the on-line survey of staff, participants were asked if they knew that the cleaning service had moved back in-house. Despite the fact that an article about the decision was published in the issue of College newsletter (*the Bulletin*) at the time of the survey, only 50% (136 from the 270 people who answered the question) answered in the affirmative. This lack of awareness may have impacted on people's views about any perceived changes in the cleaning service. It is possible that they would be less likely to notice any changes in the service encountered if they were not aware the service had changed. This said, however, more than a third of respondents (37%) had noticed changes in the service since it was brought back in-house and just under half of all respondents (45%) reported not seeing a change.

Of those who had noticed a change in the service since 1 January 2008, respondents were overwhelming positive about the new service. As indicated in Table 11, as many as 83% of the 106 respondents said that the service had improved in some way.

Table 11: If you have noticed a change in the cleaning service since it moved back in-house, how has the service changed?

Nature of the change	Number	% of respondents
Improved a lot	27	25
Improved	61	58
Deteriorated	13	12
Deteriorated a lot	5	5
Total	106	

When asked to provide further information about these observed changes in the nature of the cleaning provision, staff gave a wide number of responses. Those listed below comprise a representative selection of the strongly positive comments. Respondents were appreciative of having more visible and available staff; of higher service standards in different areas of the College; and of perceived changes in cleaners' behaviour.

On the visibility and availability of staff:

- *I just find the cleaners incredibly helpful and pleasant.*

- *I always see a cleaner in our building whereas before I never saw them.*
- *I am more aware of cleaning staff and often see them cleaning around the building during the day. I never saw anyone when QM used the contractors.*
- *It is nice to see cleaners during the day.*
- *It's easier to get in touch if something has been missed and they are really helpful and willing to sort it out.*
- *Staff are available during office hours and will do special jobs if needed, especially when building work is going on.*
- *Staff are more responsive and more interested. There is a better level of supervision.*
- *Staff now look good in their uniforms and they look happier in their work.*

On the cleaning standards:

- *Before, mostly just the bins were emptied.*
- *Before, the cleaners used not to vacuum the floor, but now they do.*
- *There used to be huge collections of dust under things/behind things and these have now gone.*
- *Better stair cleaning, better clearing of rubbish.*
- *Corridors are cleaner, polished and smelling clean.*
- *I've noticed that the common areas are cleaner.*
- *The communal areas are so much cleaner. There is now a shine on the flooring. The cleaners are friendly and now they are in-house you get to recognise them and they you.*
- *I have noticed that cleaning staff also take care of communal social areas in the lab, including cleaning the sink, cups etc in our kitchen – this is very much appreciated and creates a warm welcome for staff in the morning.*
- *I noticed ... that one of the ladies was cleaning the glass of the door at the entrance to the centre which I think is very important when people come and visit. I noticed there was an improvement.*
- *I have noticed more frequent cleaning of toilets during the day.*
- *The toilets in particular have been improved from the previous awful state.*
- *Toilets in the Queen's Building are cleaner than they used to be.*
- *The attached bathroom in my office was cleaned*

completely for the first time. It was fine before but never properly cleaned.

- *The buildings are much cleaner. You see cleaners around more. The air sometimes smells of cleaning products!*
- *My office is a lot cleaner and cleaning staff are very responsive to my occasional requests.*
- *There is evidence of cleaning activity both around my desk and more importantly, on my floor.*
- *My office seems to get cleaned more frequently.*
- *Whoever cleans my office does so with respect to the premises and appears to have him or her-self a real sense of cleanliness and organisation. This definitely wasn't the case previously.*
- *My office is now actually cleaned rather than merely having the bin emptied. The common areas seem cleaner. There is a greater presence of cleaners doing the job.*

Perceptions of cleaners' behaviour:

- *Cleaners no longer use my kettle to make tea and the standards of cleanliness are much higher.*
- *Less problems with doors left unlocked and no cleaners in site.*
- *I no longer have things stolen from my office and everything is left neat and tidy. More attention to detail.*
- *Cleaning staff seem to take more pride in their work and take responsibility for what they are doing.*

In this regard, managers of the service also reported a major decline in the number of complaints they received. As the Chief Administrative Officer remarked: *"As an institution we have a fairly strong tendency to complain and the number of complaints has been so few and far between. I actually think that is a very good indicator of the improvement [in service]."*

A small group of respondents made a number of negative responses about changes in the cleaning service. Some of these respondents had very long running dissatisfactions with cleaning at Queen Mary but in addition, some made reference to the move back in-house, saying that their expectations of an improved service were not being realised. Complaints included lack of basic cleaning, poor security and noise during the day. Comments made

by those whose expectations of the move back in-house had not been realised included:

- *I would have thought that, with the cleaners now being in-house, there would be an improvement but sadly, this has not happened. My office recently had some work done to it and the carpet was left un-vacuumed for nearly two weeks and the stairs are an abomination.*
- *The cleaners sometimes pretend they have cleaned. My computer and screen are pushed back on my desk every day but the coffee circles from my cup do not disappear.*
- *I haven't seen a cleaner in our office or lab for MONTHS. The stairwells are full of dead moths. There was a dead cockroach by the water cooler on our floor for several weeks.*
- *This service no longer works. Every other day for the last six months I have had to empty all of the waste bins in our department's large teaching lab myself ... and not just me. The other day I ran into a professor doing it.*
- *We have a variable and inconsistent service.*
- *A number of colleagues are complaining as the cleaners are not coming in at night but during the day, Hoover noise and such like interferes with concentration and hearing telephone calls.*
- *Doors remain unlocked after the cleaners leave in the morning. I am very unhappy about this.*

These comments reflect the uneven performance of the cleaning service. It is clear that the move back in-house has not stimulated improvements across the whole service, and in some areas, staffing levels and supervision have not been sufficient to sustain a good service. Managers are currently aware of these issues and have are trying to improve the training and leadership development of cleaning supervisors as a way to raise service standards. As Richard MacKenzie, the Head of Office Services, put it: *"We inherited the supervisors and under TUPE, we had to transfer them into the supervisor role and that's where we have got problems at the moment. Our supervisors have never had any real formal training. They struggle in as far as they are not used to supervising."* Echoing this, the General Services Manger, remarked:

We inherited the supervisors because of TUPE, and it became apparent that they've actually never supervised. We realise we've got some big

issues there and we are having to performance manage in line with HR policy and procedures in order to get them to the standard that we want them to be. It is very difficult for them to understand that they now have more of a responsibility, we rely heavily on them to make sure that staff are in, have done their job, you know, the basics. It's hard for the majority of the supervisors we inherited to understand that's their job now. You know they did get this pay rise because they came in-house but there are actually duties that come with that.

Working for KGB, supervisors had no experience of line management, probation or appraisal. As Isaac Oti, the Senior Supervisor, put it: *"I am struggling to get them to understand everything. Let's say probation or appraisals, they haven't done that before. If you start doing appraisal they think it is personal. Nobody has done this before so they take it personally. I have to coach them into their jobs."*

In this regard, managers are trying to improve cleaning standards through tighter management systems and training for staff. All cleaners (bar six who did not have the English language proficiency required and were referred for ESOL classes instead) have been taking NVQs in cleaning, bring trained and assessed by Lewisham College. This involves cleaners in one-to-one and group sessions, learning about cleaning equipment, chemicals and systems of colour coding to ensure that germs are not transmitted from the toilets to other surfaces. It is hoped this accreditation will help to instil a new work culture amongst cleaning staff. As the General Services Manager explained: *"It's surprised me that ... a lot of the staff haven't shown the can-do attitude, you know, it's very much like: 'we're in-house, we're getting a better salary, don't expect much more from us.' That's the impression you get... a lot of the staff have still got a no-care attitude."* In response, managers are providing training, developing the supervisory role and raising service standards, but as yet, this has only begun.

Given this context, it is not surprising that a significant number of staff recognised that although things might have improved with the move back in-house, there was still a long way to go before the College was as clean as it could or it should be. As these comments attest, respondents were concerned about years of neglect, current staffing levels and the need to maintain the good quality supervision of staff:

- *Cleaners are now more visible but years of accumulated grime will require deep cleaning rather than regular sweeps with a mop.*
- *Our cleaner does an excellent job but they are hampered by the scale of it ... the Fogg Building is too large for one person to look after. I have seen she cleans brilliantly and the next minute contractors make the job dirty again.*
- *We only have one cleaner in the morning and one in the evening to empty the rubbish bins but there is not enough time to dust and clean everywhere. It is too big a building for one cleaner in the morning.*
- *When one cleaner has the whole building to do it can't possibly be done to expected requirements so a lot of things get overlooked and this is noticeable over time.*
- *In general coverage is better, but there are still too many gaps. Supervision seems to be lacking.*
- *Well, it started off well with things like stairwells being cleaned but now I'm spotting things like dusty walls, spiders webs on the stair posts, floors left un-hoovered for a number of days, bins unemptied ...*
- *There used to be a scummy bit in the office toilet which is now cleaned. However, most of the problems still remain eg. areas in the kitchen/desks are not cleaned if there is anything on them (even though it is relatively few items and it is filthy).*

One respondent also argued that the rest of the College community needed to take more responsibility for keeping premises tidy and clean. Despite notices on the walls reminding students not to eat in lecture rooms and the number of rubbish bins around campus, many were argued to take little responsibility for their own waste. As this person suggested: *[There are] "more visible staff with more pride in [their] work. However, students and academics need to make more of an effort to dispose of litter when they are teaching. Many teaching rooms look like a rubbish dump when you walk into them in the afternoons."*

The desire for further improvements

As might be expected, QM staff were unequivocal about the need for further improvements in cleaning provision. Even those who were most positive about the move back in-house identified areas for improvement in future. Indeed, as many as 89% of the 284 people who answered this question did so in the affirmative. When asked for further clarification

about the areas that most needed more work, respondents highlighted office cleaning and toilets as their most important concerns (see Table 12).

Table 12: Which areas require improvement?

	Number	% of survey respondents
Cleaning carpets/floors in offices	168	58
Cleaning office surfaces	157	54
Cleaning toilets	142	49
Cleaning exterior glass/windows	94	32
Cleaning surfaces in communal areas	90	31
Cleaning interior glass/windows	88	30
Removing waste	88	30
Cleaning carpets/floors in communal areas	85	29
Cleaning stairwells	71	24
Cleaning teaching rooms	55	19
Other ideas*	29	10
Total survey respondents (292)		

*see endnote⁸ for more information

When asked to elaborate further about their ideas for improvements in the service, many respondents reiterated the need for more basic cleaning while others made comments about the organisation of the service itself. Some felt that they needed improved channels of communication, others highlighted the need for more supervision, and others, the need for increased numbers of staff as outlined in the three sections below:

Comments regarding the cleaning:

- *I'd like to see the toilets and sinks more thoroughly cleaned; my office hoovered more frequently (e.g. once a week at least); and my office carpet shampooed at least once a year.*
- *The lab floor has to be wiped properly once a week.*
- *Please fill all the soap dispensers in Francis Bancroft!*
- *The persistent problem is the toilets, the frequency with which these are cleaned needs to be increased, particularly on days when the College is hosting*

special events (i.e. the toilets in the Queens Building were not properly maintained during graduation).

- *There is always room for improvement. This is a very dusty site so periodic cleaning of surfaces would be good.*
- *Vacuuming office floors would be a great start. A lot of us are sneezing as soon as we get in.*

Suggestions for improved communication and organisation⁹:

- *More supervision/checking so that problems don't arise in the first place.*
- *More communication is needed because it seems like bad communication causes the problems.*
- *Better coordination with the ongoing construction work in the building.*
- *Staff should be informed how important it is to lock office doors after they have been cleaned in the morning.*
- *There are some areas where staff are too keen – like changing bin bags when there's only a couple of crisp wrappers in them.*
- *There is no reason why cleaners have to come in so early. We could accommodate cleaning during the 9-5 day.*

The need for more staff:

- *She should have help, the job she does is slavery!*
- *I don't see how one person in the morning and one person in the afternoon is meant to clean a whole library on their own. Of course everything won't be cleaned properly then as they are only capable of so much.*
- *Given the time/staff constraints, I doubt they could do any more given the area they have to clean.*
- *It's not reasonable to expect them to improve without an increase in their hours also.*
- *At times, I feel too much is expected of too few people. Because of lack of staff numbers, the quality of service sometimes suffers.*
- *The College [should] really value these people (and others like them).*

Others recognised the cost of any improved levels of service. As this respondent put it: *“of course more could be done; but at greater expense to the College.”*

Likewise, another respondent declared: *“There’s always room for improvement but QM are already paying more for cleaning than before the service was brought in-house so there is a limit to what we can reasonably expect.”*

Interactions with cleaners

Participants were also asked about their interactions with cleaning staff at the College and unexpectedly large numbers reported regular contact. As many as 58% of respondents (169 of the 290 people who answered the question) reported that they interacted with cleaners. However, of these, the majority (52%) had just occasional contact and only a quarter met every day. When asked to elaborate, it was clear that staff who arrived early in the morning were most likely to develop a relationship with cleaning staff. As these respondents explained:

- *I arrive earlier at QM this year and the cleaners (who start work at 5am) are still here. They are invisible to most academics. Meeting them makes a difference.*
- *I speak to our cleaners every day as I’m in early in the morning. They appear to be busier than our contract cleaners. It would be nice for people to thank you to them for doing a difficult job.*

Other respondents reported exchanging pleasantries when they saw cleaners around the College, holding doors open for them or passing them in the corridor. People reported the cleaners being *“friendly and polite”* or *“pleasant and cooperative.”* Although a number also said that poor English language skills made it difficult to do more than say hello, others were very positive about their exchange – even if it was generally little more than ‘hello’. A number of respondents also reported finding the cleaners particularly helpful, going beyond their normal brief to assist. As this person explained: *“Our building cleaner is always cheerful and helpful. He once offered to help out with cleaning a large room at short notice even though this wasn’t part of his remit that day.”*

When asked to rate the quality of their interactions with cleaning staff, the vast majority of people who answered the question were positive (see Table 13).

Table 13: How do you rate the quality of your interaction with the cleaning staff?

	Number	% of respondents
Excellent	28	15
Good	81	43
Average	55	29
Poor	15	8
Unsatisfactory	8	4
Total	187	

The survey also revealed considerable enthusiasm for knowing more about the people who were cleaning for them. Most of those who answered the question (51%) said that they would like to know more about ‘their’ cleaner and comments included:

- *If I knew who they were, I could pin point areas that need attention.*
- *Maybe if I knew the person that cleaned my office, I could let them know that I actually want my desk cleaned!*
- *Knowing the individual could lead to improved relationships between cleaner and staff who occupy the area being cleaned.*
- *I would like to encourage them when the job is done well and ask for other things to be done, but I do not know their remit.*
- *They are colleagues, it would be nice to know who they are.*
- *It’s always helpful to know who is doing the work. It makes you more empathetic and understanding. You could know why something has not been done. It’s always easy to blame somebody; you have no idea who they are. It would make the relationship more constructive.*
- *It would be nice to put a face to the role. My mum’s a cleaner and has a great rapport with all the staff at the office she cleans. They have a great deal of respect for her and do not ‘just leave stuff for the cleaner.’ She feels valued and takes great pride.*

In addition, one respondent felt it would be useful to have a clearer system for making requests about the cleaning service. While they didn’t want to know who the cleaners were, they did want a *“clear method to put in requests, complaints etc.”*

Support for the move back in-house

Despite only a third of survey respondents registering a clear view that service standards had actually improved, the survey revealed remarkable high levels of support for the decision itself. As outlined in Table 14, as many as 71% of respondents clearly supported the decision and while as many as a quarter of respondents reported being unsure about the decision, only 1% declared their opposition to the move back in-house. Staff clearly supported what might have been regarded as a risky and costly adventure.

Table 14: Do you support the decision to bring the cleaning service back in-house?

	Number	% of respondents
Yes	194	71
Don't know	71	26
No	4	1
Other	6	2
Total	275	

When asked to elaborate, staff gave a very wide range of responses in support of their view. In the main, however, it is significant that these responses often had little to do with the issue of cleaning standards. Staff often supported the decision because they felt it was ‘right.’ They reported that it reflected their own feelings about the social and economic injustices associated with low pay and poor quality work. Moreover, for some, it resolved their particular concerns about subcontracted employment. As this person put it: “Contract work has lots of disadvantages, and most important is the exploitation of staff but the results weren't good either.” Likewise, another remarked: “Dodgy contractors have a terrible record of treating their workers appallingly, especially cleaning contractors. Bringing the cleaners back isn't the magic solution to end their exploitation, but it is a good start.” Another respondent declared: “In principle, I oppose the contracting out of cleaning and security services from large organisations such as universities.”

Other comments relating to issues of social justice included:

- All staff deserve job security and a living wage.
- It is one of the least valued but most important jobs. They should be paid well.

- Everyone needs secure employment and a wage to manage their existence.
- We need to build relationships with the cleaning team and treat them with respect as part of an essential service to the university. They need to be encouraged to feel pride in their job and the contribution they make.
- I support all efforts to improve the pay and conditions for staff.
- If this improves the cleaning staff wages, working conditions and gives them more security that has to be good.
- It's the best way we can ensure good terms and conditions for everyone who works on campus. Good working conditions for all make for a good working environment for all.
- I've been saying we should do it for more than 20 years!

A number of respondents also highlighted the increased control, accountability and involvement that could come from in-house employment. As these comments suggest:

- In-house is better. You can have control of who you hire and you know the people.
- I absolutely support the decision. The cleaners' employment rights have been significantly improved and the relocation will hopefully bring about greater accountability.
- I think it is important to keep services in house as it allows for more flexibility in improving and changing the service.
- I assume it gives us more control over the service.
- It is easier to monitor.
- If staff are employed by the College directly then service improvements and staff development can be dealt with directly.
- I think it helps with loyalty, appreciation, pride.
- I think staff directly employed are better motivated as they are getting better terms and conditions.
- I assume that the cleaners are better paid as money doesn't go to a contractor and they get to know people/colleagues/environment in which they work.
- If it's in-house the individuals see themselves more as part of the team rather than employed just to clean another location for another company.

- *I feel that a closer relationship between the cleaning service employees and the institution they work with can improve the overall quality of the service. Plus, these workers can feel a stronger sense of belonging with QMUL.*

In contrast, other respondents were rather more cautious, reporting that they were inclined to support the move in-house in exchange for improvements in service. These respondents expected the move back in-house to deliver a ‘win-win’ situation for the cleaners and the wider college community as these comments suggest:

- *I think cleaners are entitled to the same benefits as all staff, but this has to come with better service and standards.*
- *If it helps us prioritise the cleaning services, then it will be useful.*
- *If it results in better results (cleaner facilities) and better pay and conditions for the cleaners, I’m all for it.*
- *I assume they’ll get better conditions of employment being employed by QM rather than a cleaning service, and we should get better continuity and control.*
- *I hope staff will be better paid with better benefits and will feel more valued and hopefully, will do a better job.*
- *I hope that an in-house service would be more conscientious.*
- *[Yes] assuming this has improved conditions for staff and improved the terms of the cleaning contract.*

There were, however, others who did not have a clear view. As this respondent put it: *“if the cleaners do a good job, and are treated and paid fairly, I do not care whether they are in-house or not.”* Likewise, another declared: *“Whatever seems to work best for the money should be the only concern.”*

A minority of respondents also expressed more concrete concerns about the costs and control of the service itself. These respondents were particularly concerned that subcontracting had provided a useful lever to keep down costs and improve standards for the College:

- *Although conditions may be better for the cleaners, the ability to enforce standards I feel is greatly*

reduced.

- *Hiring contractors and making them bid for contracts keeps the level of cleanliness high.*
- *[I don’t support the decision and] was very worried about the financial implications of employing staff at much higher wage costs, and giving them paid holiday and sick pay.*

On balance, the research indicated that while most staff at Queen Mary are positive about the move back in house, a sizeable number remain to be convinced about the pay-off in cleaning standards. The next few years will be critical in maintaining and improving the level of service, honouring the goodwill that exists.

6. The cleaners’ perspective

As expected, the survey of cleaners found that as many as 89% of the cleaners who had transferred from KGB, rated the College as a better employer (see Table 15). Just two respondents (4%) reported that their new employer was worse and at the time of the survey, these individuals were particularly affected by staff absences and/or sickness that meant they were having to work much harder than they’d done in the past.

Table 15: How do you rate Queen Mary as an employer compared to your previous job with KGB?

	Number	%
Much better	31	56
Better	18	33
No different	4	7
Worse	2	4
Total	55	100

When asked about the key factors that explained their view, cleaners were asked to choose from the list of options specified in Table 16. As is clear, transferred staff particularly welcomed the increases in pay, improved benefits and new management, and they were extremely positive about the new terms and conditions of work. Additional comments included four respondents who were pleased to have access to training and two cleaners who reported that their supervisors were now more respectful to them. Less positive comments included those made

by one cleaner who reported that “KGB did not look at documents” referring to the issue of immigration control, and another who reported that conditions had deteriorated due to staff shortages in the run up to this research.

Table 16: Cleaners’ justifications for their evaluation of the two employers

Explanatory factors	Number	% of ex-KGB respondents (59)
Pay	55	93
Benefits (sick pay, pension, holidays)	52	88
Management	47	80
The employer	47	80
Opportunities for career development	42	71
Employment security	42	71
Working conditions	42	71
Workload	34	58
Other	5	8

Overall, the research identified that cleaners were overwhelmingly positive about and the transfer from KGB. In this regard, a number of cleaners reported particular appreciation for the pension with one saying: “I have joined the pension scheme, so you know you have a pension and you know when the time comes and you are leaving the job you have something to fall back on, it’s a good scheme.” Likewise, another cleaner reported being especially happy with the holiday that allowed him more time with his family: “I go on holiday and I enjoy the holiday, not like before. Now I got more time to enjoy with my family. I go to Colombia in the summer. I look forward to going because of the benefits [QM] has given to me. The children enjoy very much.” Another similarly commented on the holiday saying: “It’s made a lot of difference; you want to spend some quality time with your family, so one month I think is good.”

A number of respondents also reported that they now felt cared for by their employer. The payment of sick pay and the provision of training were particularly important in this respect:

It has made a difference you know when you are entitled to a sick pay. When you are sick

you know you can’t go to work yet there is something for you. I would ...[try] to give even more to the job you are doing because you know these people care a lot for you because they even pick up when you are sick. When you are not sick and you are able to do the job it gives you motivation ‘cos you know they care for you unlike people who don’t care for you. When you get trained it’s like an investment in you, so when you get trained, people are investing in you. When you get trained you know more about the job so you perform better. The company gains by you knowing more about the job ... you do a better job for them.

The vast majority of respondents (75%) also said that the transfer had impacted on their work, highlighting increased productivity, tighter supervision and the completion of a broader range of tasks (see Table 17). As many as 68% of respondents said that they now work more productively, a further 63% reported more supervision and 61% said that they did a broader range of tasks. This would suggest that the move in-house has improved productivity and it reflects the views of a minority of College staff, reported in section 5, that the service standard is higher. Interviews with cleaners highlighted significant improvements in the quality of equipment provided for cleaning. One cleaner said: “Before there was just a mop and useless stuff, [now] you have useful machines. They give you training as well.” Another remarked: “[Now] we are using better resources, better materials, chemicals ... It’s much easier to work.”

Table 17: Tell us more about the changes in work since the transfer

Changes	Number	% of ex-KGB respondents (59)
We work more productively	40	68
There is more supervision	37	63
We do a broader range of tasks	36	61
We work harder	18	31
The work is easier	15	25
There is less supervision	5	8
We work less productively	0	0
We do a narrower range of tasks	0	0
Other	1	2

While these findings are very positive, it is also important to note a more mixed response in relation to changes in the level of exertion at work. While a quarter of respondents reported that the work was now easier, slightly more (almost a third) reported that it was harder. This may reflect the experiences of those who are now more closely supervised as well as those who are finding it easier to work in the new environment. In this regard, one cleaner reported that “*the training makes the work easier.*” Another was particularly disgruntled at having to cover for absent colleagues under the new regime and this had increased her workload compared to that experienced under KGB. When colleagues were sick, it created ill-feeling amongst those who have to cover and a number of respondents raised this in the research. As one cleaner put it, abuse of the sickness “*is like stealing. I cover for some of these people because they stay at home being paid. It’s not fair really. The management should check if people are sick or not ... a doctor will say if they are sick or not.*”

As many as 14 of the 73 respondents were found to be newly employed since January 2008. Most of these cleaners had secured work after being told about the job by a personal contact (6 from 14 or 43%) with the remainder seeing an advertisement on *gumtree.com* and/or coming to the College Open Day. These individuals came to the College from a wide variety of different workplaces including Hackney and Newham Councils, Deutsche Bank, Stansted Airport and Royal Mail, having worked both in-house and for sub-contracted cleaning companies such as ISS, OCS and Blue Diamond. Just over a third had worked in hospitality, a similar number had been employed in cleaning and the remainder had been in care and postal services. These workers were also asked to compare their new job at Queen Mary with this previous job, and as indicated in Table 18, just over half reported that their new job was better than their previous one. However, almost a quarter felt they

Table 18: How does working at QMUL compare to your previous job?

	Number	% of QMUL-only respondents
A lot better	3	23
Better	5	38
About the same	2	15
Other (can’t compare)	3	23
Total	13	

couldn’t compare and of these workers, one had been employed in a very different sector in a managerial post in the Philippines, another had worked in a Gentleman’s Club and another had worked for Royal Mail.

The vast majority of the cleaners surveyed reported that they liked their current job and enjoyed working for Queen Mary. As indicated in Table 19, as many as 96% liked their job and 100% liked working for Queen Mary. Moreover, while 40% gave the highest score for their job, this rose to 60% in relation to the College, suggesting that the cleaners valued the College rather more than their particular job. The following comments made by one of the cleaners illustrates their genuine pleasure in working for QMUL:

I don’t find anything negative, I’m happy with Queen Mary. Everything is good. They’re always giving us opportunities. Now we can get certificates and NVQ ... Compared with other jobs this is the best one. The best job I have since I moved to this country and the benefits and everything.

When asked about their relationships with the non-cleaning staff at Queen Mary, most were again, very positive (see Table 20). Indeed, the only negative

Table 19: Do you like your current job and working for Queen Mary?

	Current job	% of all respondents	Queen Mary	% of all respondents
Yes (a lot)	29	40	41	60
Yes (most of the time)	41	56	27	40
Other	2	3	0	0
No	0	0	0	0
Total	72		68	

assessment came from a cleaner who said that she never saw the staff who worked in the building because she started so early.

Table 20: How would you rate your relationships with the non-cleaning staff at Queen Mary?

	Number	% of all respondents
Excellent	23	32
Good	33	46
Average	14	20
Poor	0	0
Very poor	1	1
Total	71	

When asked about their plans for the future, many cleaners were keen to increase their hours and move to full time. Moreover, as indicated in Table 21, the most popular choices were to stay in cleaning at this level and/or to move up the management ladder. It is significant that as many as 43% of those who had joined Queen Mary since January affirmed the latter option in comparison to 29% of those who used to work for KGB. This suggests that the new appointees were more aspirational than those who had transferred from KGB and it is likely that many will opt for in-house training in future. A number of cleaners also made comments about their future plans for employment. A significant number reported their desire to carry on studying while others had aspirations to move into different kinds of work at QMUL. These cleaners included one who would like to work in security; another who said *“I want to grow with QM vision and be part of it. I am very good in office works not only cleaning;”* another who wanted *“to work in QM, as a graphic designer or in computers;”* and another who wanted to work as an engineer. One interviewee expressed his desire to *“move up and be a manager in the QM cleaning service.”* Other cleaners aspired to move into the health service (as midwives or nurses), into computers, science or driving.

Cleaners were asked if they had other employment outside the College, and only 20% of respondents (14 individuals) affirmed that they did. These jobs included work with large contract cleaners such as JPM and Lancaster in workplaces such as schools, hospitals and care homes. Non-cleaning jobs included posts as administrators, carers, childcare assistants,

Table 21: What are your plans for the future?

	Number	% of all respondents
Stay in cleaning at this level	23	32
Stay in cleaning but move up the management ladder	23	32
Move to another service sector job	19	27
Move to a non-service sector job	2	3
Retire	2	3
Other	2	3
Total	71	

nursing assistants, drivers and waitresses. However, if these figures are correct, it suggests that most of the cleaners at QMUL have no source of pay other than that gained from their employment at QMUL.

Conclusions

This research has identified a clear link between the move back in-house, the improvement in the pay, conditions and supervision of cleaning staff, and service standards at QMUL. Most obviously, the cleaning jobs have themselves been transformed from jobs paid at the minimum wage, with minimal benefits, to jobs that now represent the best of the sector in London. As might be expected, a good number of the staff working at QMUL (about a third) reported noticing improvements in the cleaning service since the move back in-house, but many more (almost three quarters) reported that they supported the decision itself. Many reported feeling that the decision to pay a living wage and bring the service in-house was the right thing to do, enhancing the reputation of the College as a good employer. Indeed, Dean Curtis, Chief Administrative Officer remarked that the decision: *“makes us feel significantly better about the way that we can represent our institution to a number of local bodies and nationally.”* Another respondent similarly argued that because QMUL is *“located in an area of deprivation. The cleaners live in the local area and the decision has an impact on the local community. QM has to take a high moral standing because of the nature of what we do. If we are not going to do something like that, who is? I*

think it's very important that the University takes the lead in [this]. It's the right thing." Many of the research participants echoed this heart-felt support.

As would be expected, however, the research also identified some teething problems with the move back in-house. Such issues included the staff 'fall-out' associated with more careful employment procedures and the issue of immigration control; the need to induct the cleaning staff into a new workplace culture – with enhanced expectations - at QMUL; the transfer of supervisory staff who had never operated or been trained as supervisors while working for the contractor; the need to manage workload in the context of staff absences due to sick leave and enhanced holiday entitlement; and the need to manage the expectations of the wider College community. Managers are cognisant of these issues and have been implementing new training programmes for all cleaners as well as tightening up on supervision and performance management to ensure further service improvements are made.

Moreover, the College now has the opportunity to re-develop the expertise it needs to manage the service in-house. As the Head of Operations for the Estates Department put it during interview:

Without a shadow of a doubt, at a grassroots level, we as a university have not got the infrastructure to maintain the built environment that we have got ... We haven't got the individuals to bring on, we haven't got the individuals to train, and we haven't got the individuals to teach. They are the essential criteria for success. It's about being able to train individuals that are enthusiastic in what they're doing, that do the job for you ... and then get them to teach the new ones coming on and keep the perpetuation going ... I want a team of professional people that understand fully what we have got and what we're supposed to be doing and how we're going to perpetuate that.

Now that the College has taken responsibility for the cleaning service there is scope to change the way things are done and improve things for the long term. This research suggests that the QM experience of bringing cleaning back in-house has been a very positive one: for the college's profile, for service

standards, for managerial control and for the cleaners themselves. Furthermore, it has not negatively impacted on costs. The living wage – and in this case, the move back in-house – have brought economic benefits to the College in terms of service standards and employee control. The research has identified very real business gains from paying living wages and moving the service back in-house at QMUL.

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based in Baltimore that has subsequently spread across the cities and counties of America (Luce, 2004). For more information about this campaign in London see Wills (2004; 2008) and Jamoul and Wills (2008).

4 Presentation made by Ian Tew, Head of Workplace, KPMG, at the *JustShare* debate, London, 23 September 2008.

5 These long-serving staff were first employed by *OCS*, before the contract shifted to *Victoria Medical* and then *KGB*.

6 The final report produced to summarise the research and findings from this successful ESRC-funded project can be found at [esrc.ac.uk](http://www.esrc.ac.uk) with further information available from:
<http://www.geog.qmul.ac.uk/globalcities/index.html>.

7 Value Added Tax (VAT) is paid on services that are purchased from an external provider. Once the service was provided in-house the College no longer had to pay VAT at 17.5% on the price of the service.

8 Ideas given for other areas for improvement included:
The recycling of rubbish (raised by many respondents). Indeed, the survey revealed almost unanimous support for increased recycling at the College. As many as 95% of respondents declared their support for more recycling and 94% said that they were prepared to put recyclable waste in a special bag and empty it into a special rubbish bin located near their office. Were it to be implemented, this would reduce some of the workload of cleaners, freeing them up to do a wider range of cleaning activities.
Cleaning ceiling lights.
Cleaning lifts.
Dusting computers.
Cleaning office equipment – not just the desk – such as chairs, lights etc
Cleaning kitchens (also raised by a number of respondents).
Cleaning skirting boards.
Cleaning the showers.
Cleaning the whiteboards and blackboards in teaching rooms.

9 Such comments further highlighted the need to institute the cleaning service into wider systems of management and communication at QMUL. As an example, very few respondents knew about the helpline they could ring in the event of needing emergency cleaning services (just 20% of respondents).

¹ TUPE stands for the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) regulations. These regulations ensure that subcontracting does not erode the pay and conditions of staff when they move from one employer to another. However, TUPE does not prevent a subcontractor from hiring new staff on inferior terms and conditions of work, giving rise to the two-tier workforce which has been common in public sector employment (see Wills, 2009).

² www.minimumincomestandard.org

³ The campaign was 'borrowed' from a sister-organisation

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