

Environment Jobs Scotland: Skills for the Waste Management Sector in Scotland

Report Commissioned by
Forward Scotland

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Prepared by
Connect 3 Consultants Ltd
in association with
The Sustainable Development Research Centre

Executive Summary





Background

There have been fundamental changes in the policy and regulatory framework relating to waste management in the last few years which have had significant effects on the waste management industry. Delivering the challenging targets of the National Waste Strategy, which is driving changes in practice, will need a workforce fit for the task.

Earlier research carried out by Forward Scotland established the growth potential of the waste management sector and identified potential opportunities for the long term unemployed or those with low skill levels.

Forward Scotland commissioned Connect 3 Consultants and the Sustainable Development Research Centre to map the skills requirements of the waste management sector in Scotland. The objective of this exercise was to obtain a clearer understanding of the skills and training issues facing the sector, particularly focussing on:

- The skills base required now and in the future
- Current entry routes and career paths within the sector and possible future routes
- Current training provision and potential future needs

The Industry's Current and Anticipated Future Skill Base

The findings of the study indicate:

- The waste management sector in Scotland employs a predominantly low and semi-skilled workforce consisting of drivers, plant and machine operatives and labourers
- In most organisations this workforce is supported by a relatively small management structure
- Many of the professional skills required by the industry are contracted through specialist consultancies or the engineering manufacturers of plant. Such companies are more inclined to recruit graduates and this is also true of the support organisations such as the regulator, research institutes and training providers
- The industry's image is an issue when attracting new staff. The working conditions are considered hard and the sector has difficulty in competing in wage terms with the service sector. Terms such as 'the industry is not sexy' were widely used

There is a consensus that the skills needs of the industry are changing, driven by: legislation, new technology and the need to develop new markets.

The overall skills profile of the industry is likely to remain the same, with a heavy emphasis on drivers, plant and machine operatives and labourers. However, a higher level of new craft related skills will be needed for plant managers, plant maintenance, process engineering and technical level staff such as chemists and lab technicians. There is a general need to 'up-skill' the existing workforce, particularly in relation to improving the understanding of regulatory issues and market awareness. The sector seems to suffer from a high turnover of staff in low skills jobs, while the perceived image problem makes it difficult to attract new talent.



Training Provision and Career Paths

No clear career paths were identified within the sector. Present training provision tends to focus on practical skills such as health and safety, driving and machinery operation. The provision of waste specific training is limited.

The industry has a well-developed competency assessment framework developed by the Waste Management Industry Training and Advisory Board (WAMITAB). This could provide a means to develop the industry specific skills of the low and semi-skilled workforce. There is low uptake of this training, apart from where it is a legal requirement which suggests that training, in particular at operational level within the sector, is undervalued. This view was endorsed by a number of the consultees who believed there was a need to strengthen skills across the industry to respond effectively to changes required of it.

Conclusions

- Changes in the policy and regulatory framework are inevitably affecting the skills required by the workforce:
- To develop new technology the sector will need to attract new skills such as process engineering, analytical skills and scientific knowledge
- More professional skills will be needed to grow existing companies and manage the challenges offered by the large Public Private Partnerships
- There is a need to develop the skills of the low and semi skilled workforce at both operator and supervisor level to address the growing complexity of the industry itself

Recommendations

The following are required to support and encourage the waste management sector to improve the skills and competence of its workforce:

- Increased funding for support programmes
- Extend available NVQ/SVQ qualifications
- Undertaking more specific consultation with the industry on the adequacy of training provision and best delivery methods;
- Improved awareness of the availability of training and identifying ways to support the industry both professionally and financially in developing competence assessment frameworks
- Improving the career opportunities for young entrants, e.g. through a form of apprenticeship
- Encourage an ongoing professional development scheme
- Engage with the social economy to provide a pathway for employment
- Promotion of the quality of the employment and career potential in the sector



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