

A conversation with Head of Sustainability Paul Akehurst

In April 2022, we welcomed our new Head of Sustainability, Paul Akehurst. In this Q&A, Paul shares insights into how he was inspired to pursue a career in sustainability, the areas of sustainable improvement he feels most encouraged by, and strategies for organizations to drive sustainable growth.

Can you tell us about your background and how you got into sustainability?

After earning a degree in physics and environmental science, I became a building design engineer, working on energy efficiency. Since then, I've steadily broadened into sustainability by tackling waste and resources and assessing corporate environmental and social impacts.

What do you think Hogan Lovells is doing right in terms of sustainability?

Hogan Lovells is taking a holistic approach, making sustainability integral to its business as one of its five strategic priorities. It influences both our own operations through an extensive Responsible Business programme, but also those of our clients through expanding ESG related commissions. Hogan Lovells is also taking a strong position to make significant change, such as influencing the construction of a new Net Zero Carbon building in central London.

What do you see as the biggest challenges organizations face to overcome the climate crisis and drive sustainable growth?

Despite the recent global recognition and acceptance that the climate is changing, and the "pledges" being made by governments and corporate leaders, it is still perceived as "someone else's problem." Sustainability has also traditionally been seen as "doing without," whereas in reality it is about understanding the impacts of our actions and "getting the balance right." We may all have to make some different

choices but these can be based on better information and are not necessarily negative.

However, whilst we can all contribute, sustainability is also often something that we can't do on our own.

Another challenge is the need to work in partnership and collaboration with other organisations, and each other. Much of what we already do in sustainability is about contributing to communities, but we also need direct support from the likes of landlords and our suppliers.

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What are some emerging trends in sustainability that you're excited about?

The most exciting trend in sustainability is simply that it is rapidly gaining in credibility. For many years, organisations have 'dabbled' or paid lip-service to both economic and social impacts, often being an after-thought or "nice-to-have." Now they are emerging as powerful business drivers.



But one specific trend that I find particularly exciting is the innovation around the use of resources; further disaggregation of waste streams and repurposing materials to provide the raw materials for new products. The circular economy may be a simple concept but it is still very rewarding when you can identify practical synergies that avoid using the earth's natural resources.

What are key lessons from your previous experience that can enhance sustainable commitments?

In my experience, it is absolutely crucial that the commitment to sustainable development starts at the top of the organization, which we clearly have at our firm. This commitment percolates through the organization and puts sustainability near the top of the agenda, rather than as an afterthought.

However, change is often delivered at a local level and by all of us. Our recent regional roadshows have demonstrated plenty of interest and willingness to make changes, particularly on aspects such as waste, plastic in particular, and travel. It's important to share ideas across our offices and regions. We can build on this and encourage everyone to think about how their day-to-day activities have an environmental or social impact.

As we roll-out a new online data platform, designed to record and measure our sustainable actions, we will be able to provide

everyone with much more information on our performance and feedback on how effective the different ideas and contributions are. We will also be working closely with landlords to work in partnership with the building operators as well as leveraging our existing Environmental, Social & Governance knowledge.

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What word of advice or encouragement would you give to an organization that is in the beginning stage of becoming carbon neutral?

Don't be afraid to challenge the industry. The recognition that we all need to do something about the climate is so much stronger now than it has ever been there is a real impetus across society. There remains many situations where our complacency needs to be challenged but equally, there are an increasing number of people (and organisations) who now want to do deliver change – they may therefore welcome the challenge.

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