

# Putting values into action: creating an ethical supply chain

📅 08 February 2023    👤 Jo Scott

We sat down with Jo Scott, our Procurement Manager, to learn how she ensures Browne Jacobson maintains an ethical supply chain and how working at Browne Jacobson has supported her important volunteer work in search and rescue.

Jo joined Browne Jacobson a year ago as our first Procurement Manager, which was also her first role in the legal sector. “I chose to move to the legal sector because it seems to be ahead of the curve when it comes to ESG matters. There is a high bar for these issues because a law firm’s success depends on its reputation,” Jo explains.

Her first impression of Browne Jacobson was to be surprised by the importance placed on the ethical sustainability requirements of the role. “Everyone I spoke to during the recruitment process was focused on the ESG aspect of procurement and supply chain management, rather than solely budgetary matters,” she said. “I’ve found that managing budgets and supply chains as a way of ensuring value tends to be what most people associate with procurement, so this struck me as a firm determined to do things differently.”

In her role, Jo is in charge of ensuring that Browne Jacobson’s non-chargeable supply chain is ethical and matches our values as a firm. “I ask questions about our suppliers and make sure we are aware of the direct and indirect impact of our supply chain. For example, if we deal with a local supplier this can have a positive effect on the local community – we need to look at this wider picture of the decisions we make, understand how deep our supply chains go and the impact of this,” Jo explains.

This can create challenges when it comes to balancing different aspects within our ESG commitments. “Not every decision can be data driven – ethical choices have to be made and there are certain thresholds we will not go underneath. For example, we shouldn’t prioritise a local supplier over another if they don’t pay the living wage, or choose a supplier which might have zero carbon footprint but is at a higher risk of ties to modern slavery.”

One year on from joining the firm, Jo is most proud of creating and implementing our new due diligence process. This is a platform-based risk assessment process which allows the firm to ask all suppliers the same questions, to consistently investigate performance on areas such as sustainability, labour and human rights. “Our system ensures that if there was anything to uncover, we would have all the necessary data to identify it and be able to make informed decisions,” says Jo.

Crucially, this means that Browne Jacobson can have increasing confidence that it is making ethically-based decisions in relation to its supply chain and the data is available to demonstrate this. Potential clients often ask for supply chain data, for example if Browne Jacobson’s suppliers are accredited living wage providers or if they have an environmental management system. “We couldn’t show that data before, but now we can confidently tell our clients that we’re doing the right thing.”

Jo often supports teams with responding to client enquiries about our ESG risks and how we manage them. This process is increasingly important across our client base, from the public sector to financial services, as concern about ESG matters grows, from greenwashing to modern slavery. “We recognise that our supply chain is an extension of us and it has to represent our values,” Jo says. “We can now hand-on-heart say that we are asking the right questions, and taking notice of the answers.”

A particular issue that the new risk assessment process is designed to prevent is modern slavery. “The risk of modern slavery in our supply chain is low given the type of services and products we’re buying, but this doesn’t mean that we can sit back and do nothing,” Jo

explains. Our initial risk assessment for all potential suppliers includes an assessment for modern slavery risk. “Right from the start we ask the questions and if we see a higher risk, we ask suppliers to go through an enhanced modern slavery due diligence process.” In addition, Jo and her team are developing an e-learning package, that will be available to everyone across the firm, that will be designed to raise the level of general awareness of modern slavery risks.

Jo has been balancing her work in procurement with volunteering in search and rescue for over nine years. She is a search technician and manager and the Chair of Nottinghamshire Search and Rescue, where she works with the police to organise search teams of volunteers to look for missing people, often vulnerable people living with dementia, feeling suicidal, or living with other high-risk conditions. “I’ve always been engaged in volunteering work – I want to do something that makes a difference,” Jo explains.

The flexibility Browne Jacobson gives Jo in her role is key for her volunteering work. Flexi-time is important when required, enabling Jo to manage her start and finish times if needed. “Whenever there is an urgent search, for example when it involves a suicidal person or a child, I contact my manager to ask if I can leave the office to participate and adjust my working pattern to accommodate the search, and she has never said no. I’ll arrange to leave earlier and make up the time later, or use annual leave to be available to join time-critical searches for very high risk people,” says Jo. “I think the firm really supports and encourages all of its people to do the things that matter and make a difference both in and outside of the workplace.”

A few years ago, Jo’s Search and Rescue team started using low-spec drones to help with searches, but they were limited to use over small ranges and during daylight hours. “In an urgent search the ability to deploy at all hours and keep searching rather than wait for daylight can be the difference,” Jo tells us. Her team were fundraising to upgrade their drones to a higher spec when Jo saw an email about applications for the Browne Jacobson Charitable Trust Foundation, which meets three times a year to provide donations to local charities and causes near to the firm’s offices.

Jo applied for funding for a thermal imaging drone, which was granted. “This drone allows us to operate 24 hours a day and search large areas in dangerous environments such as riverbanks, so that we can clear large amounts of space quickly by looking for a person’s heat signal – this ability is a huge asset. Browne Jacobson’s help has made a huge difference to our ability to save lives.”

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