

IJGlobal ESG Rising Star (Advisory) – Amy Cleaves

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02/11/2021

A history graduate who converted to law, Amy Cleaves cites Hollywood blockbuster *Legally Blonde* an early inspiration to become a lawyer, while her motivation to drive an ESG agenda within Hogan Lovells and its client base... well, that runs a lot deeper.

Amy is a dyed-in-the-wool Hogan Lovells lawyer having joined the firm as a trainee in early 2016, rising to associate in its London office's infrastructure, energy, resources and projects and ESG practices.

Her work focuses on advising on renewable energy projects, ESG policies, social inclusion funds, corporate governance arrangements, and how the global energy transition will affect companies.

And it was this sector focus combined with a passion for environmental, social and governance issues that won over the IJGlobal independent panel of judges who opted – thanks to two strong submissions in the Rising Star category – to open it up to two winners.

The judges glowed about Amy, saying she “has helped her clients, including the UK government and The Crown Estate, to make their organisations more sustainable and inclusive” and that she has “an intellectual curiosity and breadth of engagement that is impressive”.

Another admired Amy's submission for having a “good balance of enabling activity and practical examples of ESG leadership”.

“Amy's energy, enthusiasm and dedication to promoting ESG and driving differences came out in the submission. Far from just ‘doing her job’, she appears to be championing ESG initiatives to a level far and above what may be expected of someone at associate level,” said one judge.

Another adds: “Here again it was a close call, but Amy stood out given the extent of impact of her work, which benefits not only the clients and projects she assists, but also Hogan Lovells' own practice as well. Amy seems passionate and driven by sustainability and has been able to translate much of that into concrete positive benefits.”

Meanwhile, one judge who knows Amy says: “Having worked with her personally – to me – she perfectly fits the essence of this award. She is passionate about ESG and a clear emerging thought leader.”

Sadly, Amy was unable to attend the awards night in the BAFTA headquarters on Piccadilly, central London, as she is (happily) in the final stages of pregnancy.

Amy Cleaves

Amy studied history – a subject that fascinates her and remains close to her heart – at Warwick University, but had always intended to follow a career in law, half-joking about the movie influence.

“I had always planned to be a lawyer,” she says. “*Legally Blonde* came out at an instrumental moment in my life and it made the law seem very appealing if you have a lot to say for yourself and you like to stand up for what you believe in.”

However, after studies she did not dive straight into law: “In between finishing my studies and working at Hogan Lovells, I worked in politics for a year. I have always had a keen interest in the political process and concepts of justice within big institutions – all of which led me this direction.”



And then in 2016, her career at Hogan Lovells started: “I’ve been interested in the environmental and social responsibility of lawyers from the start, and this is a thread I managed to track through my training contract and now as an associate.”

And Amy is well aware of the influence she can wield acting for major corporates in a first-tier law firm.

“Lawyers – and corporate law firms generally – have this huge potential because they advise the biggest companies in the world on all of their critical issues and so, as an adviser, you have scope to enact change,” she says.

“There are companies out there with amazing ambitions. They use this to try and attract consumers and business opportunities. But what we can do – as lawyers – is embed and formalise that ambition, translating it from brand identity to operational reality.

“We can take ideas and drive them throughout a whole legal infrastructure and business infrastructure, because we – as Hogan Lovells – would advise any one business on their IP, their corporate governance, litigation, financing... these are all integral to a client’s ESG ambitions.

“Companies out-perform their competitors when they nail the ESG elements of their business. There is a shift from focusing on compliance to using ESG drivers to deliver long-term value.”



Amy is a United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Young Innovator and spent 10 months on an intensive course with the UN Global Compact

Amy's current work as lead associate advising on the establishment of local infrastructure for Civic and the African Union's Great Green Wall has been labelled as an 'earth fixer' project



Turning to the Hogan Lovells’ ESG practice, which Amy describes as being “truly global”, she identifies the firm’s chief executive Miguel Zaldivar as a key influence. He has made his intention that Hogan Lovells operates as a responsible business one of five key pillars of his vision for the firm.

A bit closer to home, she cites Adrian Walker – a well-known figure in the infra/energy community, who now heads the global ESG practice – as a mentor, alongside Susan Bright, global head of responsible business.

Working closely with Adrian and Susan, Amy says that ESG has become a “lens through which we are advising all our clients”, but particularly those in the infrastructure and energy space. And, according to Amy, ESG is more business critical in the infra/energy arena than other sectors as problems come home to roost a good deal faster.

“We act for a huge number of renewable energy companies and our approach to ESG provides a more holistic view to legal issues,” she says.

“This has really helped certain clients because when we are talking about a contractual mechanism, what we’re interested in is not just putting words on a page.

“It goes beyond contractual requirements; it is thinking about the governance that sits behind that and trying to ensure that what you are creating is an ecosystem within a business where ESG is embedded into decision making, reporting and customer relationships.

“It is more broadly advisory than purely legal.”

And it was this embedded approach to ESG that won over the IJGlobal judging panel.

From the submission

In the submission, the notion of nominating Amy for a Rising Star award was deemed by Hogan Lovells colleagues to be a “slam dunk”.

It reads: “She embodies ESG and is truly a rising star in this category. Amy is an ambitious innovator and a driving force behind the firm’s growing ESG practice, which draws on the full scope of our global practice and sector capabilities to drive long-term profits and maximize positive impact for clients. She delivers on Hogan Lovells’ mission to help clients use the law to build a better and more sustainable business and world.”

The Hogan Lovells marketing machine says Amy has “brought energy and enthusiasm” to her work and has driven internal culture change particularly in the areas of diversity and inclusion and responsible business practices.

“Her main areas of interest encompass gender equality and addressing climate change – and the interrelation between these two critical

issues,” the submission reads.

“She takes an active role in and is a long-standing member of our Breaking Barriers gender equality committee and sits on the firm's global ESG and Social Enterprise Boards where she champions issues surrounding sustainability and ethics.

“Amy is a prominent voice on these issues and has arranged and delivered training internally and to clients on the impact of gender stereotyping, women being interrupted and why the United Nations SDGs are critical for the sustainability of corporate law firms.”

Amy is viewed within Hogan Lovells as a pioneer and she is renowned for her work on gender lens investing and social enterprises such as Lionesses of Africa, which focused on female education and empowerment in Africa to deliver outcomes and changes that align with her core beliefs.

The submission reads: “Amy champions internal sustainability efforts and the integration of the SDGs into Hogan Lovells' working practices. Her client work relating to energy transition, biodiversity and climate change is core to her practice and to her personal values.

“Her current work as lead associate advising on the establishment of local infrastructure for Civic and the African Union's Great Green Wall has been labelled as an ‘earth fixer’ project. The client's mission is to restore Africa's degraded landscapes and transform millions of lives in one of the world's poorest regions, the Sahel. Once complete, the Wall will be the largest living structure on the planet – 8,000km stretching across the entire width of the continent.”

Amy is a United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Young Innovator and spent 10 months on an intensive course with the UN Global Compact being trained on innovation within large business to deliver the SDGs. In 2020, she spoke at the 2020 UN Global Compact Leaders' Summit about the role law firms must play in addressing climate change and other ESG issues.

As a founding member of Hogan Lovells' Business Integrity Group (BiG), Amy specified and built an app that puts ESG into every aspect of a client's legal infrastructure. Using the app, clients can take simple steps to consider how their business models and legal frameworks can optimise ESG potential and mitigate risk. Using its “nose-to-tail” ESG 360° Assessment tool developed by Amy and other members of the BiG team, Amy advises clients on how to enshrine purpose, mitigate risk and ensure their ESG commitments drive sustainable, profitable growth and competitive advantage.

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