

GREEN CHAMPIONS

A SHINEY FUTURE FOR SUSTAINABLE HEALTHCARE

Looking for ways to showcase some of the laboratories leading the way in clinical laboratory sustainability, the Green Champions group are pleased to present this question-and-answer interview with Joanne Hall, Deputy Operations Manager for Blood Sciences, and Blood Sciences Sustainability lead at Newcastle Laboratories. For those of you that are just taking your first steps into sustainability, Joanne's words will hopefully inspire you to act!

**ANNA SANDERS
AND ALISON JONES
FROM THE GREEN
CHAMPIONS GROUP**

What was your journey into laboratory sustainability?

In 2019, Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust was the first healthcare organisation in the world to declare a climate emergency and committed to being Net Zero Carbon by 2040. The Trust created the 'Sustainable Healthcare In NEwcastle' (SHINE) brand; and in 2020 it published its Climate Emergency Strategy. The Trust has a network of green champions, of which I am one, and as the Trust began to develop a strategy for embedding sustainability across the organisation, the green champions became more involved. My personal sustainability journey started a little earlier; I was already doing small things to help the planet at home, and had an interest in sustainability, and then in 2018, when I was a section leader in our sample reception area, the number of specimen bags being used and discarded was troubling me. In order to try and address this I started a project to introduce reusable specimen transport boxes to reduce and potentially eradicate single use plastics used to transport specimens. I ran a small pilot and it was very successful. The Trust had established a climate emergency action fund by this point, and so I applied for funding, and was successful! This funding allowed us to roll out the project to all areas in the Trust. We are in the process of rolling it out to all our GP practices now too. I have since completed a sustainability course that our Trust runs which is IEMA certified (Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment) to become a Sustainability Ambassador. Since then, I have been the Blood Sciences Sustainability Lead, and now work with the rest of the directorate

sustainability team to promote sustainability and work together on sustainability projects.

How is lab sustainability managed and what is your lab networks' approach to laboratory sustainability?

As a Sustainability Ambassador I was made aware of the Trusts model for sustainability which set out sustainability aims for the directorates in the Trust. These include having: a directorate specific sustainability statement; a named individual responsible for sustainability; and a sustainability working group that meets regularly to take forward improvements. The group identifies and records areas for improving the directorate's sustainability impacts, creates action plans and monitors progress and reports and shares successes to inspire others.

My Department (Blood Sciences) sits within Integrated Laboratory Medicine along with Microbiology/Virology, Genetics, Cellular Pathology and the Innovations Hub. As individual departments we were already conducting sustainability projects in our

own areas, but we came together as a directorate group. Our directorate manager became the named individual responsible for sustainability within the directorate and we set up monthly sustainability meetings, inviting the green champions to come together from across the directorate. Together we developed a directorate sustainability statement and started a project log. We have a combined log for projects that we are working on across all departments and then an individual log for projects that are department specific. We meet regularly within our own departments to drive our own projects forward and then monthly as a directorate group to share learning and ensure joint project actions are completed. We also held sustainability launch events across the three different hospitals to share our progress and learning with the rest of our teams. We have also completed the bronze award for the Laboratory Efficiency Assessment Framework (LEAF), which are standards set by UCL, and are currently working towards the silver award.

Joanne Hall presenting at the recent sustainability launch event



What advice can you give other labs on how to start, and how to engage people?

I think the main advice would be to start small, bring together the people in the lab who already have an interest in sustainability and meet regularly to share ideas, put together an action log and celebrate the improvements you make as a group. At our launch events we explained what the climate emergency was and the impact that our laboratory work has on the environment. We then went on to demonstrate projects that we had conducted and the environmental benefits they had. Following the launch events we had more people in the directorate sign up to be green champions and our group continues to grow. It is hard to find the time for extra work and projects around your regular day job, so it is important to keep the meetings short, but to meet regularly and to keep sharing the progress you are making. I think it also good to reach out to your Trust's sustainability team, most Trusts have one now, they can support with advice and connect you up with others to move projects forward and share ideas.

What were your early 'quick wins' that might inspire others to get started?

A lot of our early wins were around reducing waste. One of our green champions introduced a process for automatically turning PCs off after periods without use, we also reviewed other equipment that could be turned off out of hours. We have moved to electronic HR processes across the directorate and introduced electronic PDP files for staff. We have also introduced electronic processes for referral work and reduced the number of reports being printed where possible. We also take part in manufacturer recycle schemes and have also reviewed our fridges and freezers to ensure we are not under using them, consolidating contents where possible to reduce the numbers in use. LEAF, or one of

the other sustainability frameworks that are available, can give a good starting point if you are unsure where to begin.

Have any of your projects been particularly challenging?

The transport box project was quite challenging as it required financial input and a lot of communication and engagement with all clinical areas, as well as with infection control. The logistics of introducing them to our GP practices has been particularly complicated as there are a large number of GPs across a wide geographical area, and we have had to work closely with the courier company and the Trust transport team. Also, some of the ideas we came up with as a group have not been able to be taken forward due to waste management or governance reasons and so you then have to explore other options.

As a lab network that has been engaged in sustainability activities for a long time now, what are the changes you are most proud of, or that you think have had the biggest impact?

As a lab network, the production and implementation of the pathology's sustainability strategy has been key and is pioneering both within the Trust and outside of it. It demonstrates a real buy in at all levels of staff, everybody has a voice at the table and any idea can be considered.

This, and holding our launch events, has probably had the biggest impact, as they have helped to implement and move our projects forward and embed sustainability into our everyday laboratory activities. We now consider sustainability whenever we are looking for new equipment, we re-use or re-purpose where possible and we look at our processes to eliminate waste. Sustainability is now discussed and considered at many of our departmental meetings. But in terms of individual projects, the specimen transport box project and the program to shut down PCs, which is possibly being rolled out

across the Trust, have had the biggest impact.

What projects are you currently working on?

Projects that we are currently working on include: an adapter to fit into the specimen transport boxes for universals, rolling out more engagement events across the directorate, working towards the LEAF silver award, recycling external quality control packaging, recycling ice packs, engaging with suppliers to reduce excessive packaging, using rechargeable batteries and using washable visitors lab coats rather than disposable ones.

You mentioned that you have achieved bronze certification with LEAF and are now working towards silver. What advantages do you think come with joining a certification programme like LEAF, or the EFLM and MyGreenLab schemes?

They are a good place to start if you are not sure where to begin, and a lot of them are quick wins, which boosts confidence and

engagement. It is also keeping an eye to the future where sustainability accreditation may become a requirement of UKAS or MHRA for example.

Have you managed to tap into any additional funding sources to support any of their green initiatives, or have any suggestions on this?

I utilised our Trust's climate emergency action fund, which provides small amounts of money to get sustainability projects off the ground, which is quite often one of the main barriers. We have not accessed any other funding sources yet, but I know there are more funding sources for green initiatives being offered externally.

A huge thank you to Joanne for taking the time to answer our questions. We in the Green Champions Team hope that you have found Joanne's answers inspiring, and if you want to find out more, we encourage you to either contact us directly, or head over to the [Green Champions space on the Association for Laboratory Medicine website](#) for links.



Laura Middlemass from the Trust sustainability team



Michelle McCluskey from Roche Diagnostics also presented at the recent sustainability launch event