

# Sarah Cole: increasing female representation in the sector



In advance of presenting her experiences in the commercial moving industry at this month's Young Movers Event in Brighton, *Sarah Cole, Managing Director of Universal Commercial Relocation*, sets out her ambitions for more women to become involved in management and leadership roles in the removals industry.



➔ Sarah receiving the Commercial Mover of the Year award at the 2019 BAR Annual Conference in Stafford-upon-Avon

**R&S: What made you start in the industry?**

**Sarah Cole:** After leaving university I spent 10 years practising as a commercial property solicitor in London. In 2001 I joined the family business, Universal, as its in-house Legal & Quality Manager, a role which involved managing all property and legal matters as well as overseeing compliance and quality assurance. It was a welcome change in career direction which still allowed me to apply my legal training.

I became a director of the company in 2012, and in 2014 Managing Director of the Universal Group, which consists of Universal Commercial Relocation and Information Storage Solutions, a provider of document storage and destruction services. The Universal Group was founded in 1979 and I've now been there for 18 years.

**R&S: What training have you received along the way?**

**SC:** As a solicitor I received my first insight into the corporate world, and I was trained in areas such as contract negotiation, account management, customer service and compliance. These all proved to be hugely useful transferable skills when I joined the commercial relocation industry.

Additionally, in 2013 I received the Level 5 Diploma in Leadership and Management Skills after completing a comprehensive course on management performance and leadership capability. I also became a Fleet Operator Recognition Scheme (FORS) Practitioner in 2012, which has given me the knowledge to manage an efficient and environmentally sustainable fleet.

**R&S: What would be your advice to a woman thinking of taking a position in the industry?**

**SC:** Because the moving industry is often perceived to be male-dominated, a woman entering the job market may not readily consider it an option. From my personal experience of working within corporate relocation, however, I've found it to be a varied, exciting and challenging sector.

I think the industry undersells itself in terms of the expertise and professionalism that companies such as those in the Commercial Moving Group bring to a project, as well as the opportunities for advancement within the sector. We work with clients in the fields of government, finance and legal and professional services on complex, time-sensitive projects in high-end office environments. On top of delivering the move itself we provide myriad additional services including file mapping, furniture installation and environmental clearance, all of which provide fantastic opportunities for developing personal skills.

An increasing number of women are entering our client market in the real estate, workplace and facilities management and building performance sectors, so we're working alongside female clients more and more often.

**R&S: Is there anything the BAR can do to help take women forward in the industry?**

**SC:** Universal had been a BAR Member for decades before it began to actively participate in the Association. After reading R&S I was keen to get more involved, my perception being that there were very few women involved in the councils.

I took a particular interest in the CMG and was welcomed from the very start. I acted as Deputy Chair of the CMG Council from 2013 to 2015 before taking on the role of Chairman from 2015 to 2017. I'm still the only woman on the council (alongside eight excellent male counterparts), and we all would welcome more women coming forward to participate.

Having attended the BAR Annual Conferences over the last few years, I've noticed that women are often spearheading the operations behind the companies that win the BAR's annual industry competitions. I'd like for that representation to be mirrored on the BAR's councils so that we can raise the profile of the industry among the young women who are entering it with ambitions of taking on management and leadership roles.

It would also be great to see more women attend the CMG's Annual Seminar taking place this month (see page 30) because it's a fantastic opportunity for networking, gaining insight into the future of the market and learning more about the group itself.

Finally, I'm very much looking forward to meeting delegates and presenting at the upcoming Young Movers Event. It's fantastic to see an increasing number of women in the industry joining the YMGC, the next generation of female directors and BAR councillors no doubt among them.

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