

Passion-led potential

Richard Bond, Commercial Director, shares his future growth and development plans for the Coal Authority and explains how the passion of its people has enabled its long-term success and sustainability and how this will drive its future potential.



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Q Tell us a little about yourself

A This is my first foray into the public sector, I joined a year ago. It has opened up a new world and shown me how committed the Coal Authority is about its work, knowledge and vision for the future.

The passion in the organisation is widespread and inspiring. The energy that people have for their work and the development of skills and expertise is evident across the whole of the Coal Authority. It's a truly vibrant and innovative place to work.

I have worked in various sectors, but underpinning everything I do is my experience as a Chartered Management Accountant and Member of the Chartered Institute of Marketing.

My primary focus has always been helping businesses to grow and evolve. I previously served as a Board Director for Center Parcs and was part of the team who set up Tesco Direct.

While at Centre Parcs, I led integration projects to bring new businesses into the organisation and replaced eleven legacy systems to facilitate the separation of the UK and European sides of the business.

I've spent the last ten years building a family-owned interior

design business into a national, award-winning practice and was a go-to advisor on interior design for a number of media outlets, including the BBC.

I've been fortunate to work with some fantastic charities, including the Terrance Higgins Trust and Macmillan Cancer Support, helping to develop strategic opportunities.

I helped cultivate and head the UK volunteer advisory body at Macmillan Cancer Support, comprising 120 volunteers that are heavily involved in strategic engagement with the charity; a radical move for the Third Sector.

In essence, I've spent most of my career looking at the way business operates. My focus is always what works best for the markets those companies work with - and want to work with - and what the most appropriate products are to meet these requirements - which is very much my role here.

Q What is your main focus for the Coal Authority?

A For me, one of the most exciting things we're focusing on is our commercial development to help underpin the delivery of our core services. Like a lot of people, I originally thought “isn't coal a historical issue?” So, I was surprised to find that the Coal Authority is a vibrant organisation, which continues to grow and transform to meet the needs of the



nation, and is just as relevant now as it was when it was set-up in 1994.

Britain's coal mining legacy is staggering. We need to continue to develop an operation that's large and exciting enough to retain the incredible knowledge and understanding of the intricacies of the mining sector.

We work on a daily basis with local communities, developers, other government bodies, local authorities and infrastructure customers. This is appealing for our experts as they get to continually apply, enhance and grow knowledge and understanding of this immense legacy.

By building on these opportunities, we can offer a sustainable place to work with desirable projects and opportunities. By retaining and sharing our expertise with new generations of professionals in-house, we can also understand more about the impact of our mining heritage.

All of the creative and innovative commercial projects contribute to us delivering our core requirements efficiently and cost effectively to support longevity; ensuring that Britain continues to develop harmoniously alongside its coal mining heritage.

Q How has the Coal Authority continued to evolve into different sectors?

A We hold valuable expertise and critical data on coal mining activity. Details of all of the coal mines decommissioned from 1872 onwards, when they were legally required to be mapped, are safely stored in Mansfield – alongside a wealth of information dating back as far as 1750. There is now a greater understanding of what the effects of the legacy of coal mining are, what is required of us and how our information is analysed, used and shared. Managing Britain's coal mining legacy is not a short-term job, we know we will be needed for a considerable time.

We've evolved from focusing purely on coal to managing the impacts of other types of mining too. One of the biggest developments has been our ability to engage with markets that can benefit from our expertise. This focus enables us to develop new relevant offerings to add value to a wider audience.

For me, some of the most exciting offerings include:

- Our extensive series of support programmes for Defra working collaboratively on metal mine water treatment schemes

- Incorporating work on renewable energy projects, as part of our mine water treatment schemes
- Our work with the development industry and landowners to advise on risks and preventative measures to ensure they can safely build on affected land to provide homes and jobs for the next generation
- Our growing international connections. This is an area for me to focus on in the next few years – to ultimately become the go-to authority for anyone working on or with coalfield affected land.

Building commercial opportunities and consultancy services adds to our knowledge, is stimulating for our people and helps to fund our statutory role by reducing the burden on the taxpayer. It also ensures our experts' knowledge remains fresh, relevant and regularly utilised.

The great thing about working with the Coal Authority is that you don't have to teach us about coal mining and if you come to us early enough, we can probably help you save money and time as we can potentially advise how to overcome problems before they are encountered.

Q What does innovation mean to the Coal Authority?

A Innovation is part and parcel of what we do every day but for me, there are two core sides of our developments here. Firstly, we constantly innovate to create cost savings and efficiencies. We're always conscious of our need to provide value for money, resulting in a passion-led drive for change throughout the organisation.

Obviously we spend a great deal of time on our core work. Last year we treated 122 billion litres of water, operating over 70 mine water treatment schemes, which protected and improved 350km of rivers, lakes and estuaries.

Innovation in mine water treatment is ongoing, as we develop doing things cost effectively, efficiently and ethically; last year we won the edie sustainability award for recycling and resources for our solar power based, energy use reduction innovations.

We have developed solar installations to run our water treatment pumps, generating our own electricity. We have also created stunning green developments for water treatment – taking raw mine water through the reed beds to produce crystal clear water.



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The second side to innovation at the Coal Authority is linked to our core role and looks at how we can use by-products of remediation work and turn them into revenue generating opportunities.

Excitingly, we have discovered that ochre (a by-product from mine water) is ideal for stopping some contaminants leaching into land, so it is now used to remediate affected areas. Recently, we have partnered with the fine arts market to develop the use of ochre as a specialist pigment.

There are also potential opportunities in the future in areas such as district heating schemes and water supply.

By looking at dynamic solutions and using our waste assets positively, we continue to enhance our skills, advisory expertise and cost effectiveness.

Q Tell us more about how the Coal Authority champions sustainability

A If you think about us as a repository of skill and information, from the coal mining estate data to our multi-layered and often unique expertise, then it's vital that we continue to attract and retain people who can interpret and keep that data relevant. Those people are an incredible asset to the public and need to be retained within our organisation.

The next generation won't understand mining in the same way as those who have worked here since 1994, so we are looking to keep those skills and expertise alive with ongoing knowledge transfer and management; which includes on the job training and learning gateway reviews. We are creating our 'grow our own' scheme, which focuses on developing internal talent to ensure we can provide these skills in perpetuity. We also enhance and grow expertise in related areas by providing our teams with challenging projects on a daily basis, working closely with our partners and clients.

Sustainability surrounding renewables and the environment is also essential for us: financially, as part of a wider skills development piece and to help protect and enhance the country so that we can live harmoniously in a nation with so much coal mining heritage.

Q How is the Coal Authority taking its mining legacy and turning it into an asset for the future?

A When we think about the conveyancing market, we know we need to retain and develop our knowledge asset and our skills to support and aid the property market. It's the right time to invest in environmental and water projects – especially after a long and hot summer. The coal market provided our energy in the past and we're also looking at ways to derive energy from its heritage for the future.

By using our services, whether it's mining reports, advisory services or other by-products, our customers help us to be more sustainable for the future. This is a win-win situation for our customers and the nation. Customers benefit greatly from mining experts and specialists who live and breathe their area of expertise on a daily basis, and the nation benefits through our enhanced protection and ability to deliver new innovations and creative solutions.

For me, our innovation programmes, by-product initiatives, strategic developments in how we share and present information for our customers, and our working relationships with other key organisations are incredibly exciting for the future of the Coal Authority, the public and our partners.

Richard Bond
is the Commercial Director at the Coal Authority.