



A Year of **Impact, Progress,**
and **Collaboration**

Interview with Executive Director, Vanessa Podmore

As 2024 draws to a close, Leather Working Group Executive Vanessa Podmore reflects on both the year and her first six months with the organisation in an interview with Gaby Jesson of The Prospect Society.

Tell us more about your background and what brought you to LWG?

My background has been sourcing, production and supply chains in the fashion industry. As a shoe and handbag maker, I've worked for several international brands around the world, running supply chains and shipping goods for those businesses.

My very first job was at Clarks Shoes. I joined them in the UK as a Graduate Trainee and at the time learned about the importance of a supplier community. The community that in fact enabled their footwear business.

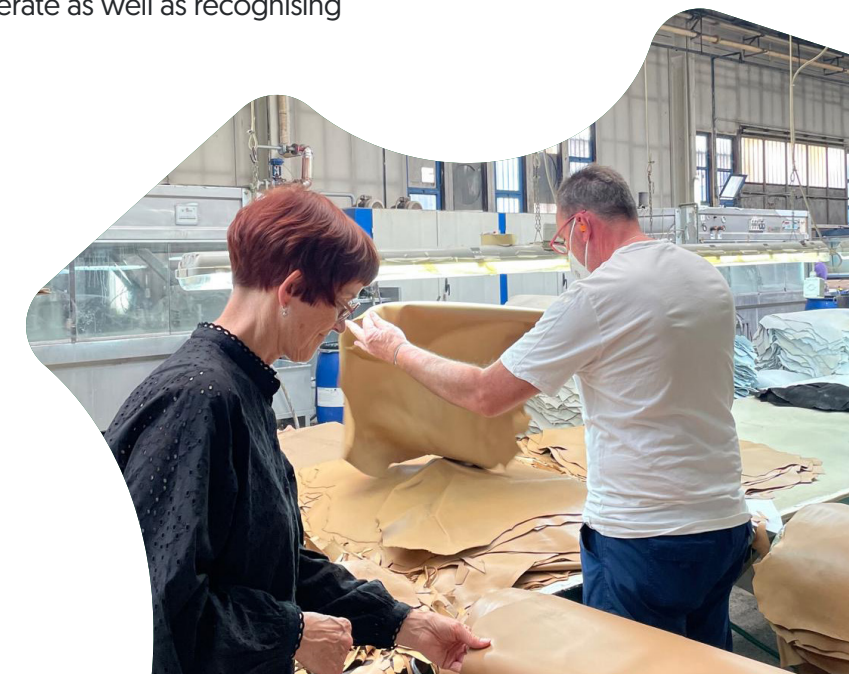
As a Trainee Shoemaker, I visited the nearby tannery, the last maker who lived locally and the insole board maker who lived close by as well. I was able to fully explore the entire supply chain which in those days was close to the centre of Clarks Operations.

“As my career developed and I worked across the world, I was always interested in understanding where my raw materials came from”

In terms of leather, I wanted to know more about the tannery, the origin of the hides and the entire supplier system.

I learned that as a Sourcing or Production Manager, the more you know about your supply chain, the better everything gets. From the quality of the goods you are shipping, the on-time deliveries and your relationships with your supply chains networks.

These are some of the reasons I am here. That exposure to and experience with supply chains and understanding the way brands operate as well as recognising the challenges they are facing.





What were your first impressions of LWG?

The impact was apparent from the outset. Firstly, the numbers. Over 2,000 tanneries around the world with LWG certification and 600 brand members. In its relatively short history, the organisation has significantly impacted behaviours in our sector.

There are few places where you can look at the work over time and see that indeed behaviours have actually been transformed.

I am also so impressed with the level of expertise within the organisation, our Board, our team and from those we can engage with outside of the organisation. By way of example, we have a Technical Subgroup. It's a small group of highly technical, highly skilled people who meet monthly and examine the technical details of what we do - from the audit process, to ensuring best practice - all on a voluntary basis.

During my first few months, I spent two days in Italy shadowing a tannery audit. I sat with our Auditor and the tannery owner and team. I was able to see first-hand the detail from the machinery to the test conditions, health and safety and team welfare. It was a proud moment to see the level of work involved.

But overwhelming, it's the team that impressed me. Absolutely brilliant, dedicated professionals with such a range of world class skills.

“There's a huge amount of history and heritage – and that needs to be continued and grown upon”

Looking ahead now – what are the plans?

The business world has many challenges right now. The regulatory landscape is changing fast, and this has and will have a huge impact on the way we work and the way our stakeholders will work in the future too.

The businesses we work with are under pressure with new science-based reporting, we need to be able to support them with that.

Additionally, there is growing demand from consumers to understand what they are buying as well as regulation and new guidance to ensure that claims around sustainability and impact are clear.

Amongst these landscape changes, we need to ensure we define our place. Whilst brands must address new practice across their diverse range of materials, we specialise in leather. So, for LWG that means being clear about that scope, from supply chain transparency to carbon footprint calculations.

How are you addressing these new demands?

A good example is the newly emerging EU Deforestation Legislation. Across both in person events and educational webinars this year, we have focused on sharing what it means for our stakeholders and the potential upcoming impact.

In addition, we have just published our own Life Cycle Assessment on the impact of leather. This is hugely beneficial for our members and stakeholders who now have information that helps clarify best practice processes and pursue new conversations on the manufacture and making of their leather products.

A significant milestone has also been our contribution to the Higg MSI. This is a report that analyses and shares the impact of many materials and in the case of leather, the impact assessment had been unchanged for some years. LWG and Leather Naturally had both been working with Spin360 on our individual LCA Reports and collaboratively shared our findings which contributed to a Higg Index reassessment of bovine leather.

“The analysis was somewhere in the region of a 60% reduction in the environmental impact of leather, compared to previous assessments. This is clearly significant and has been highly beneficial to our stakeholder groups”

How much does collaboration contribute to the way LWG works?

Collaboration is at the heart of our organisation. Over 19 years ago, one of our first collaboration partners was the World Wildlife Fund and that continues to this day, including the work we do with both them and Textile Exchange on the Deforestation Free Call to Action for Leather. As well as the Leather Naturally collaboration, other partners in 2024 have included ZDHC [Zero Discharge of Hazardous Chemicals] and UNIDO on the topic of establishing harmonised guidelines for leather LCA and the European Traceability Cluster.

And as important is the collaboration we have with volunteers across the stakeholder community, who give their time and expertise, so we stay on track and ahead of developments affecting our sector. For example, this year we established Technical Task Teams that are collaborating with us on the development of the next evolution of the LWG Audit Standard, which is being designed to be accessible and publicly available. Unsurprisingly there are a huge number of factors to be considered when developing this against the backdrop of changing reporting and traceability requirements, making this work invaluable in shaping the future. As we move into 2025 the results of this work will be shared for public consultation and developed further according to feedback and pilot studies.

“Ultimately this Standard will show our commitment to continuous improvement in the leather sector. We are facing a changing landscape and need to ensure we continue to evolve and deliver on our vision, reducing the impact of leather and making sure we give all the right tools to our stakeholders”

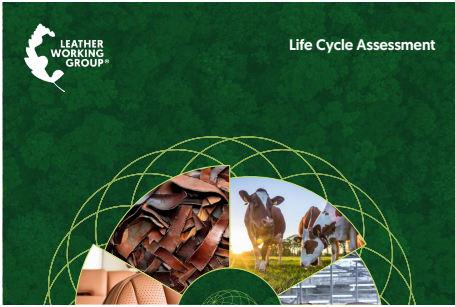


2024 Highlights



New sustainability system

In September, LWG presented the next evolution of the Audit Standard to its stakeholders, including the creation expert technical advisory teams and the process of wider public consultation and feedback that will take place in 2025. This includes project focus on deforestation due diligence, measuring carbon footprint and Chain of Custody. **Missed the presentation? Log into the [user area](#) on the website and find the follow-up webinar recording in Resources / Past Events.**



LWG LCA published

The LWG LCA report was [published](#), providing a detailed assessment of leather production, that analyses 50 products across six categories, including chrome - and glutaraldehyde-tanned leathers for footwear, furniture, leather goods, and automotive upholstery. **The report is exclusive to LWG stakeholders and can be found in the [user area](#) of the website.**



New leather dataset for Higg MSI

Leather Working Group [LWG] and Leather Naturally [announced](#) that the combined dataset from their LCA studies was adopted as the new bovine leather average in the Higg MSI, cutting leather's GWP score by 60%.



Collaboration

Collaboration with like-minded initiatives is key to LWG's strategy and in 2024 we worked across the industry in several initiatives with a purpose to enable alignment, reduce duplication, optimise resources and shares expertise. Collaboration partners included, [World Wildlife Fund](#), [Textile Exchange](#), [European Traceability Cluster](#), National Wildlife Federation, Afi Conservation International, Global Roundtable for Sustainable Beef, Consumer Goods Forum, [ZDHC](#), UNIDO and [Leather Naturally](#).



Stakeholder sessions

8 stakeholder meetings / webinars
12 expert guest speakers
1000+ attendees

Together with Lifecycle Assessment and the LWG Audit Standard update, Deforestation was a key focus in 2024 and LWG hosted several webinars and in-person presentations design to share knowledge and prompt discussion. All webinars and meeting decks can be found in the resources section of the LWG [user area](#) on the website.



Save the date 2025

APLF 12-14 March 2025
Please visit the LWG lounge on the third floor of the show.

APLF 14th March 2025
09.00-11.00 Stakeholder meeting, registration will open in January 2025.

Lineapelle September 2025
LWG celebrates its 20th anniversary in 2025, join us to mark the occasion at Lineapelle in September 2025, date to be announced in February 2025.

2,000+
LWG Certified Suppliers

600+
Brands

60+
Countries

