

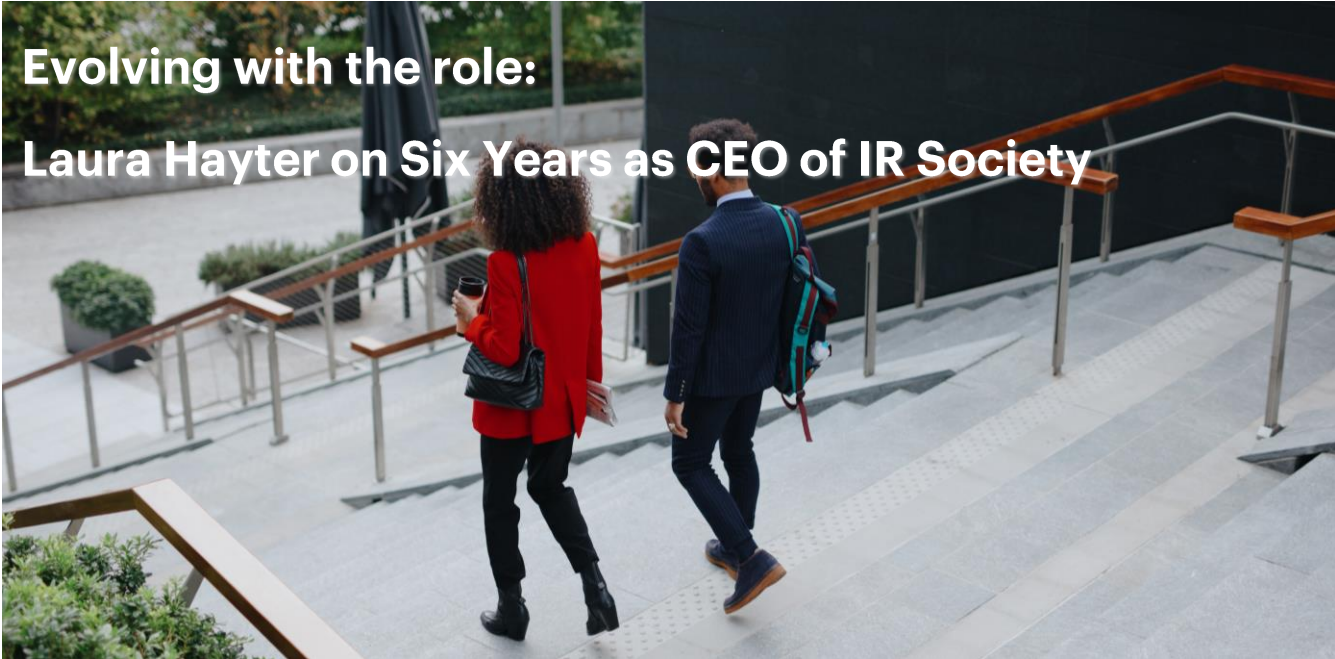
# INVESTOR RELATIONS

## INSIGHT



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## Evolving with the role: Laura Hayter on Six Years as CEO of IR Society

**As she steps down after six years as CEO of The Investor Relations Society, Laura Hayter reflects on the evolving role of IR, shares insights on regulation, technology, professional development and outlines what is next for her and the industry.**

### **What have been the most meaningful milestones or changes during your time as CEO?**

I've been with the Society for over 14 years, including six years as CEO. During that time, I've witnessed a highly engaged and generous community, one that consistently gives back to support and promote the profession. We've faced some challenging periods, particularly during my tenure as CEO, but it's been impressive and exciting to see how the role of the Society has evolved, and how investor relations has become more professional and strategic.

### **What were the biggest challenges you faced leading the society?**

One of the biggest challenges we've faced as an organisation has been adapting to external market factors, particularly around regulation, such as those stemming from Brexit, including MiFID which has had an impact on the role of investor relations. Then came the pandemic, which brought a different kind of challenge: maintaining member engagement

without the ability to meet in person, while still delivering on all our planned activities and delivering value for our members. For example, we had our annual conference scheduled for June but had to pivot quickly when the pandemic hit. That meant being agile, moving events online, developing e-learning resources, and ensuring we kept communication flowing with our members. Despite the disruption, we managed it well, and the Society remained financially stable with steady membership numbers. We were very fortunate in that regard.

### **How has the role of IR professionals changed in the past decade?**

Investor relations professionals today are required to engage with a much broader range of stakeholders. Externally, this is driven in part by an increasing number of regulatory changes, not only in the traditional investor relations space, but also in the area of governance and sustainability. These developments have required IR professionals to upskill significantly. At the same time, the role itself has grown in both stature and visibility. In-house IR officers now have a greater profile internally, which means they're interacting with a wider range of internal stakeholders and often have a more direct relationship with the board as well.

We've faced challenging periods, but it's been exciting to see IR grow in stature and professionalism

## The CIR has become a global benchmark, supporting professionalisation of IR

### **What do you view as the current key challenges for IR professionals, particularly in a time of volatile markets?**

There are broader capital markets challenges at play, including the attractiveness of the UK as a listing destination and the cost of being a publicly listed company may be a challenge for smaller companies. Liquidity is another key concern, particularly when it comes to attracting and maintaining the right shareholder base. That's a core challenge for investor relations professionals: ensuring they're targeting and engaging with the right audience. Combined with ongoing regulatory changes, these factors have led some to question whether being listed is still the right path. Personally, I believe it absolutely is—we just need to see more investment into UK equities to support that position.

### **What role does AI now play in IR strategies?**

Similar to what we have seen with sustainability, we have seen the exponential growth of AI over the past few years but it is still very much a work in progress for many as they assess both the risks and opportunities. A lot of IROs are using it to support their work, helping to distil information and improve efficiency within their teams. Tools like Copilot, ChatGPT, or even proprietary in-house systems are being explored. However, AI will never replace the human element, which is so fundamental to investor relations. The ability to speak with people face to face, to build relationships, and to apply human judgment is essential. While AI can enhance the process, it can't replicate the personal connection that's at the heart of effective engagement with investors and stakeholders.

### **How does IR in the UK compare to other global markets?**

I think, at a macro level, investor relations professionals around the world are broadly focused on the same key issues, including big themes like sustainability. These topics are common across the global IR community. However, there are important differences in regulatory standards. For example, the UK, US, and continental

Europe each operate under distinct frameworks, with EU regulations not necessarily applying to UK-listed companies. Despite these differences, I believe IR professionals everywhere share the same fundamental goals and aspirations.

### **You worked on initiatives such as the DELIVER leadership programme and the global rollout of the Certificate in IR (CIR) qualification. How have these shaped IR career paths?**

The CIR is a fantastic qualification, not just for our UK members, but also for a growing number of international professionals. It's widely regarded as a foundational requirement for operating effectively as an investor relations officer. The CIR provides a solid grounding across all key areas of the role, including accounting, regulation, best practices, and UK company law from an IR perspective.

We've been fortunate to license the qualification to several international associations such as the Middle East, Hong Kong, Indonesia and other European countries, some of which adapt elements, such as the regulation section to align with their local frameworks. This has significantly supported the professionalisation of investor relations globally. In some markets, not only is it mandated that listed companies have a dedicated IR professional, but that the individual holds a relevant qualification. The CIR has become a strong example of setting global standards in the profession.

At a senior level, our Deliver programme, supports aspiring senior leaders who are looking to take the next step—whether that's within investor relations or into broader roles such as strategy, corporate affairs, the CFO, or even the CEO role. It's a leadership programme designed to build essential skills: from leading a team and raising one's profile with the board, to mastering stakeholder communication. It also provides a valuable opportunity to connect with and learn from other IR professionals.

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My passion lies in career development, and now I want to give back something to the community through coaching and mentoring

**When you look back on your legacy at the Investor Relations Society, what would you most like to be remembered for?**

I think it's all about advancing the recognition and professionalisation of the investor relations role, primarily through education, career development, and building a strong community and network. Personally, I'm very passionate about building a community, supporting career development, through coaching, mentoring and education, and it's an area I intend to stay actively involved in.

**What would you like your successor to focus on?**

There's always more work to be done, as a professional body representing the views of our members, where regulation and market dynamics are constantly changing. New initiatives include delivering an enhanced membership experience through the rollout of a new CRM system in the coming months, and we are looking to expand our professional development resources, particularly through e-learning and ensuring everything we offer remains relevant and up to date for our members.

There isn't a single issue the next leader should focus on, but rather an ongoing effort to support a growing and evolving community. As the role and profile of the IRO continues to grow, new tools and resources are emerging all the time. The key is that as a Society we stay responsive to these changes, continue to keep our members up to date with the latest issues affecting investor relations practitioners, and deliver them the best possible value.

**Finally, what is next for you personally, do you plan to stay connected to the IR world in some way?**

As I've touched on throughout, my passion lies in helping other advance their careers through networking, mentoring and learning new skills. I'm now taking some time out to pursue a coaching qualification, with the goal of giving back to the investor relations community. I hope to support others in their career journeys, whether through volunteering with professional bodies or working in other regions or areas. I also plan to take on a few consulting projects, so it's an exciting next chapter. Watch this space!

## Meet the expert

Laura is CEO at The Investor Relations Society. Formerly Head of Policy and Communications, Laura took on the role of CEO in 2019 and has been with the Society for over 13 years. Laura has been part of the IR community since 2001, and among other roles, she was formerly a director at the IR consultancy, Taylor Rafferty, providing IR advisory services to blue chip clients, both in London and New York. Laura's particular interests within IR are around career progression, mentoring and professional development. She graduated from the University of Leeds, with an honours degree in German and management studies.





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