

ICSA Member case studies



Graham Staples

Head of Compliance and Company Secretary at Schroders plc

What are the main responsibilities of your job?

- Governance for the Group, its subsidiaries and the funds we manage
- Regulatory compliance for the Group and its subsidiaries
- Companies Act compliance
- Acquisitions
- Share capital
- Liaising with principal shareholder
- Board evaluation and training
- Share plan issues

What is a typical working day for you?

This depends on where we are in the yearly cycle but as we're a global company, the first thing I do every day is check what has come in overnight from the Far East and the US. I then look at the press cuttings to see if anything's been said about the funds and corporate side. I am particularly interested in any press comments on our acquisition strategy as we are often linked to bids for other companies. Many of these rumours are false! I'm often involved in meetings relating to my principal responsibilities. These can cover such topics as insider list policies, big compliance issues, acquisitions, how to mitigate tax for employees and various aspects of governance. During the run up to board meetings, I deal with many board issues such as finalising papers, briefing the chairman and the non-executive directors and liaising with those due to make a presentation to the board.

What skills and qualities are required for your role?

As well as pragmatism, diplomacy and common sense, the ability to take a broad view. If a proposal is put forward, the decision-makers will cover the theory but the company secretary needs to be able to make the idea work in practice and explain any possible pitfalls. You also need to know your business as otherwise you can't be pragmatic.

Which elements of your role do you most enjoy?

Knowing where the company is going strategically and being able to make a contribution to that strategy.

Which elements of your role do you least enjoy?

Writing minutes!

How do you see your career developing?

My particular goal has been to make the most of the opportunities I have and to expand the remit of the secretariat into any other areas where I believe we can add value. Earlier this year I was offered the opportunity to take up the role of head of compliance so this ambition has been fulfilled, for the moment at least.

What is your educational/training background?

Law graduate from Leeds University.

How has your training helped you carry out your role?

As well as being my bedrock of credibility, it's given me the technical grounding I need in order to acquire a core of specialist knowledge.

What made you decide to become a Chartered Secretary?

I was working in a joint company secretary and compliance department and one of the company secretaries was coming up to retirement. It was suggested that I trained for the role as part of the succession planning. I completed my exams in a year and have not looked back since. →

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What do you think are the particular benefits of becoming a Chartered Secretary?

Being at the centre of business and close to the strategic issues are the particular benefits that I value. Being asked for your advice as a professional by the people who run your business is very rewarding. I've met a lot of interesting people during my career and have learned a lot from them.

Would you recommend the ICSA qualification to others?

If you want to be a company secretary or a governance professional, it's essential.

What advice would you offer to a graduate?

Today's graduate needs to do their utmost to differentiate themselves from the rest of the graduate market. If you want to be a Chartered Secretary, then go for it but it's that mark of credibility that matters. I'd recommend getting a professional qualification fairly quickly and using that as a lever to further your career. Attitude and application are key and so is the ability to build relationships. It's important also to get to know and understand your business early on – you will soon become indispensable.

Is there any other information you consider relevant?

Company secretaries used to just take the minutes but today it's a much more value added role. You have the opportunity to drive the agenda. ■