

# ICSA Member case studies

## Secretariat Team

Marks & Spencer Group plc



### What is your current role?

From left to right:

Lesley Brownnett – Deputy Secretary  
Anthony Clarke – Assistant Company Secretary  
Paul Rolling – Secretariat Assistant  
Andrew Green – Assistant Company Secretary  
Amanda Mellor – Group Secretary

### What other roles have you held prior to your current one?

Amanda joined Marks & Spencer (M&S) in 2004 as Head of Investor Relations and was appointed Group Secretary and Head of Governance in 2009. Her previous roles include Director of Corporate Relations at Arcadia Group plc and over ten years working in investment banking.

Lesley was appointed Deputy Secretary in 2002 having previously been Assistant Company Secretary in 1997 and Assistant to the Company Secretary in 1991. She has worked with M&S for nearly 30 years in a variety of head office roles including five years in HR management.

Anthony and Andrew joined M&S in 2005 as Company Secretarial Assistants and were appointed Assistant Company Secretaries in 2007. Paul joined M&S in 2010 as Secretariat Assistant. Before joining M&S, Anthony worked with the investor relations specialists, Makinson Cowell, Andrew worked with the in-house secretariat team at the law firm Hogan Lovells, and Paul worked in the public sector as an assistant finance officer.

### What are the main responsibilities of your job?

We work in the Corporate Governance Group at M&S which supports the business with governance that is meaningful, relevant and focused on improving the business, both in the UK and overseas. As a team we cover three key areas:

- **Corporate governance** – promoting best practice by keeping directors and colleagues informed to ensure compliance with changing statutory, regulatory and governance requirements and encouraging everyone in the business to do the right thing, the right way.
- **Board effectiveness** – making sure the board, committees and subsidiary companies operate efficiently and that directors receive the necessary information and support for effective decision-making and sustainable business success.
- **Shareholder relations** – creating a forum of open dialogue with institutional investors on governance and board matters and giving our shareholders the very best service by keeping them informed (London Stock Exchange announcements, annual report and website), welcoming them to our AGM (up to 2,000 people attend), paying dividends (twice-yearly) and rewarding them as customers (annual shareholder vouchers).

### What is a typical working day for you?

There's no such thing as a typical working day! Our main workload will focus on the next big event in our corporate calendar, for example assisting the chairman and chief executive with their governance and business priorities, drafting and co-ordinating board/committee agendas and papers, working with our colleagues in finance and communications on the annual report and project managing shareholder activity with our corporate colleagues and registrars. We also respond to day-to-day queries from shareholders and business needs from our directors which adds plenty of variety and challenge.



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### What skills and qualities are required for your role?

The wide and varied role of a Chartered Secretary requires us to develop a range of skills and qualities including being trusted advisors to the board and senior management, communicating clearly at all levels (face-to-face, by phone and in writing), having good project management and organisational skills, being professional, diplomatic and tolerant in all sorts of situations, maintaining confidentiality at all times, and having common sense as well as a good sense of humour.

### Which elements of your role do you most enjoy?

We work in a small team in a high profile FTSE 100 company so we enjoy being constantly challenged, advising directors and colleagues on the best way of getting things done, responding to business needs and solving problems, completing a major task as part of a corporate team, working with all sorts of people who bring different skills and experience, e.g. registrars, lawyers, accountants and auditors, always having something new to learn or someone new to work with and doing things we never thought we could!

### Which elements of your role do you least enjoy?

Administrative tasks that are time-consuming and add little value – that's why we always look for new and innovative ways of doing things, throwing out old systems and processes.

### How do you see your career developing?

Extending our current roles by taking on new tasks within the secretariat team, Corporate Governance Group or wider business, by assisting with corporate actions. Continuing to develop and learn on the job, through our network of other Chartered Secretaries and Membership of ICSA. And when the opportunity presents itself, gaining promotion to the next level, be that assistant company secretary, deputy secretary or company secretary over a long professional career.

### What advice would you offer to a graduate or a current student studying the scheme?

Most importantly, apply the technical skills learnt through study in your day-to-day activities. Absorb knowledge and skills working alongside experienced Chartered Secretaries and other business professionals. Always seek opportunities to develop yourself by getting involved, be a good team player, develop a solid network and put yourself forward for business projects, secondment to other areas and development courses.

### Is there any other information you consider relevant?

To continue to be good at what you do you must never stop learning – read lots, for example, *FT*, business journals and ICSA's *Chartered Secretary* magazine alongside legal briefings.

### How has your training helped you carry out your role?

It gets you off to a good start with a solid foundation from which to do the job and a confidence to progress. We work in a world that is continually evolving with new legislation (e.g. Companies Act 2006), regulation (e.g. Disclosure and Transparency Rules) and best practice (e.g. UK Corporate Governance Code and ICSA guidance).

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

A very rewarding career at the heart of the organisation, alongside other professionals working on very interesting and challenging projects.

### What made you decide to become a Chartered Secretary?

Gaining an all-round qualification that covers law, finance, business and governance with good long-term career prospects.

### Would you recommend the ICSA qualification to others?

Certainly! ■