

Let's go to work

NUMBER CRUNCHING

CHAMBERS AND PARTNERS has just published its 35th annual salary survey of company secretaries. We expected to see salary stagnation this year: in fact, there has been a modest increase.

The company secretary: for the top category, the company secretary, we see an overall increase of 3.4 per cent. (For those employed by a FTSE 100 company the average salary is now £193,105; for those in a FTSE 250 company the average is £114,000). Company secretaries working for a large private company (i.e. those with a turnover exceeding £1 billion) the average salary is £107,780. Average bonuses range from £78,800 in a FTSE 100 to £30,500 in a FTSE 250. For those in a large private company, the average bonus is £23,100.

Deputy company secretaries: average salaries in this category rose by 4.6 per cent in the last year (for those in a FTSE 100 company the average salary is £95,000, and for those in FTSE 250 companies it's £73,400). The average salary for those in large private companies is £73,900. Average bonuses range from £26,100 in a FTSE 100, £7,800 in a FTSE 250 and £7,600 in the large private company.

Assistant secretaries: for assistant secretaries, salaries rose by 3.4 per cent across all categories of employer (the average salary in a FTSE 100 company is £56,400; in a FTSE 250 company it's £47,600). £46,185 is the average in a large private company (i.e. with a turnover exceeding £1 billion). Average bonuses range from £8,900 in a FTSE 100, £5,700 in a FTSE 250 and £2,400 in the large private company.

Secretarial assistants: finally, secretarial assistants received a 4 per cent increase across all categories of employer. Their average salaries are: £34,900 in a FTSE 100 company; £32,500 in a FTSE 250; and £34,333 in a large private company.

When we compare the market for company secretaries with the market for lawyers (we have been recruiting both since the early 1970s – through several severe recessions) we see that company secretaries have been less at risk in a downturn. Whole swathes of lawyers are made redundant as demand for their specialisms disappears, and while company secretarial staff are certainly not immune, they are, by contrast, less vulnerable. Their responsibilities continue, and indeed we now expect to see them being given an increasingly important role as the need for corporate governance increases.

The past six months have not been easy, but in the past two months we have already seen signs of an upturn in company secretarial vacancies.

Sonya Rayner, Chambers and Partners. To request a copy of the full 2009-2010 salary survey, please e-mail cosec@chambersandpartners.co.uk, call 020 7606 8844 or visit www.chambersandpartners.com



It's no secret that the company secretarial employment market has been difficult in recent months. However, are things finally looking up? Four specialist recruiters tell us their views.

ARE HEADS ROLLING?

I DON'T WANT TO JINX THINGS, but we've noticed a definite increase in activity since September.

It's true that redundancies hit quite hard in the early part of 2009. Companies were forced to rationalise and this resulted in numerous redundancies. In normal circumstances, where the permanent recruitment market contracts, the temporary market would usually expand. However, that didn't happen this time around. The credit crisis affected every sector of the market; budgets have been very tight and gainfully employed company secretaries have, until now, just had to bear any additional workload following redundancies by working longer hours.

The market became very client-led: as more candidates chased fewer positions, clients could afford to be very particular about fulfilling all of their preferred criteria. Salaries plateaued as supply outstripped demand. However, we are noticing more replacement roles coming through, as candidates who have, until now, been sitting tight in fear of the 'last in, first out scenario,' are feeling more confident and are willing to make a career move. Furthermore, for the first time in a long while, company secretarial departments are appointing additional professionals, rather than recruiting on a replacement-only basis, to ensure that they are well placed for the expected recovery.

Maternity cover positions have been plentiful and there is always a natural flow of positions at the newly-qualified level. Indeed, the people that have suffered the most are at the most senior levels and trainees. However, it is encouraging that, as companies are starting to budget for new headcount for 2010, the trainee level is being taken into account. Hopefully, the profession's 'new blood' will not be neglected for too much longer.

Our role has changed in recent months. We're needing to get under the skin of our clients' businesses and work with them to devise bespoke job specifications to meet their needs and attract the most suitable candidates. With the increase in candidates on the market too, we're having to work harder to select the most suitable candidates from a much larger pool of talent. But this is where we do add value, and it is hugely rewarding to get this client-candidate match right.

Jon Moores, Associate Director, EJ Company Secretarial. Jon can be contacted on 020 7400 2042, jonm@ejgroup.co.uk or www.linkedin.com/in/jonmoores.

EVERY DARK CLOUD...

ALL THE PROFESSIONAL SERVICES SECTORS have been badly hit by the current economic climate. However, the view at CSS is that, while the short-term impact on Chartered Secretaries has been much the same as for other disciplines, the prognosis for recovery is much more positive, both in terms of timeframe and sustainability.

When recession hits, there are the inevitable immediate reactions of headcount reductions and budget-cutting. We are still feeling the effects of these exercises, but the underlying issues that led to this state of affairs also have to be addressed. As we all know, one of the key factors that precipitated the credit crunch was the failure of existing legislation to deliver meaningful corporate governance and, in order to rectify this, there is an urgent requirement for new, enhanced procedures and processes. There can be little question that the company secretary's role will be anything less than pivotal in the development and roll-out of the anticipated complex and far-reaching changes, and this can only be a good thing in raising the profile and influence of the discipline at the highest levels – and ultimately driving up resourcing demand throughout the ranks.

I am confident that this will lead to plenty of diverse new openings for appropriately-qualified individuals and the long-overdue recognition and reward that company secretarial professionals deserve. The CSS team is already working alongside clients who are actively planning the growth of their teams to meet future demands.

The immediate months ahead are likely to continue to be a very challenging time all round, but we are focusing our thoughts and efforts on a positive future for the profession, which should deliver wide-ranging opportunities, enhanced status and key commercial influence through all sectors of the business arena.

Caroline Evans, Director, CSS. Caroline can be contacted on css@blt.co.uk or at www.companysecretarial.com.

THE BIG FREEZE

HAVING BEEN IN THIS BUSINESS for well over 20 years I have seen the company secretarial market survive and even thrive in previous recessions: so, I was keen to see how it was faring this time. Having completed a snapshot survey of the salaries and bonuses of 420 people over two weeks in September, I had all the figures I needed, but not the underlying reasons for the findings. So, one morning last month I picked up the phone and began some additional research.

Consensus is usually hard to come by, but not on this occasion. I spoke to a large number of organisations and they all say the same thing: pay at the top level has been frozen. Indeed, many organisations have frozen salaries at other levels too, introducing various criteria to decide who gets an increase and who does not. Determining the level at which salaries are frozen has, to a large degree, been dependent upon the health of the organisation.

Bonus structures have survived pretty much intact for the company secretarial profession this year. Eligibility and performance criteria have remained the same but, with the majority being related to the performance of the company, payouts have been extremely variable. Across all levels of the profession, the data shows a reduction in bonuses paid this year. However, those fortunate enough to work within an organisation meeting all its targets often received 100 per cent of their entitlement.

It must be remembered, however, that performance criteria for bonuses will have been set some time ago while the economy was a little more stable. The general consensus is that when new targets are set for the coming year they will be considerably reduced – or not set at all – as the expectation that any targets will be met is very low.

Many are commenting that bonuses are being used to overcome potential staffing issues caused by pay freezes. Discretionary bonuses, not part of any scheme, are being given in lieu of a pay increase, particularly at the Assistant Secretary and Secretarial Assistant level, both to reward and retain staff. Many department heads fear that if they lose a member of staff in this current climate they may not be allowed to recruit another.

Staff are generally accepting of the current policy of either no or minimal increase and any bonus payments were greeted with gratitude in most cases. At the end of the day, company secretaries more than most are aware of the problems facing their organisation and recognise that by keeping costs down they stand more chance of keeping their jobs.

Fiona Boxall, Boxall Wallace Wells. To request a copy of the full salary survey, please visit www.bwwrecruitment.com.