

Board support officers provide 'added value' says survey

28 July 2010: Board support officers provide added value to boards according to the results of a survey carried out by the Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators (ICSA) in partnership with the European Confederation of Directors' Associations (ecoDa). The aims of the survey were to identify the types of board support roles currently in place, the scope and influence of the roles and what professionals are doing on a day-to-day basis to promote good governance practice and influence board behaviour. 150 responses were received from across Europe, with 66% of the respondents based in the UK. The term 'board support officer' was used as a generic term in the report, as not all jurisdictions recognise the term 'company secretary'.

Board support officers have a remit which goes beyond servicing the board and its committees. They can ensure the effective use of board time so that the most relevant issues are discussed and facilitate a good alignment between board and management agendas. The role is often combined with responsibility for compliance, in-house legal advice, risk, share plans, pensions and insurance and perhaps most importantly of all, corporate governance. The Chartered Secretary qualification is the one most sought after by employers recruiting company secretaries in the UK.

According to some respondents, the failure to formalise the board support officer's role can partly be attributed to the fact that long-term benefits brought about by good corporate governance are underestimated and not well understood. A board support officer is often seen as just another bureaucratic layer, yet a significant number of responses highlighted the way in which they enhance the decision-making process of the board and keep the directors up to date on their obligations. In addition it is often perceived, that the role can be undertaken by a range of staff in other departments, with a separate board support function being seen as a costly extra.

David Wilson, ICSA's Chief Executive comments: 'The findings from the report highlight the importance of the role of the board support officer, their wide range of skills and the value they offer to their employing organisations. Given the growing importance of effective governance, companies need to do more to formalise the role of the board support officer so that they are seen as a necessity rather than a luxury'

Juan Alvarez-Vijande, Chairman of ecoDa, added that 'Despite the cultural and legislative differences in how companies are structures which affects both the understanding of and the need for a board support role, this survey provides an important starting point for reflection on the benefits that a board support can bring to companies'.

The link to the final survey report and appendices can be found [here](#)

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Editor's Notes

ICSA

The Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators (ICSA) is the professional organisation that trains and supports company secretaries and is a leading authority on corporate governance. It publishes guidance notes and best practice guides and, through its subsidiaries, provides events, information and training, boardroom performance evaluation and dedicated software. The ICSA has 36,000 members worldwide and is represented in over 70 countries.

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