

TALENT PROFILE: COMPANY SECRETARY

by Scott Harrison - Managing Partner, Aquis Search

As you are aware, recruiting a great company secretary can be a challenging exercise and it seems like the Hong Kong Institute of Company Secretaries (HKICS) agrees, having recently asserted there is a shortage of suitably qualified candidates in the Hong Kong market. The company secretary sits at the heart of the corporate governance operations of any organisation whatever its structure, and the position comes with a level of influence and importance quite unlike other roles. As a result, company secretaries have a broad skill set with responsibilities that can extend across the entire corporate governance framework for any business.

The demand for company secretaries remains strong primarily due to Hong Kong's standing as a global financial centre, an increased demand from new Chinese financial institutions and commercial enterprises entering or listing in Hong Kong, and an increasingly rigorous regulatory landscape. The number of HKICS accredited company secretaries has grown steadily but until demand matches supply, organisations should be encouraged to focus on training junior professionals and retaining their senior staff.

When recruiting a company secretary, the list of requirements is often long and can incorporate both the technical skills and understanding of the latest corporate governance and compliance regulations and the soft skills needed to interact with the most senior members of an organisation. Knowledge of Hong Kong Listing Rules, Securities and Futures Ordinance, Companies Ordinance and other overseas regulatory requirements is often essential. Personal attributes and soft skills including excellent communication and presentation skills are crucial especially at the senior level. Those professionals with strong drafting skills can also rise through the ranks faster given the writing requirements within the role thus often a legal education and training can be advantageous.

Talent within the financial services sector tends to move mostly from within the industry and poaching from rival institutions can trigger a musical chairs scenario. Given the compensation on offer within the financial services industry, we have seen many highly skilled company secretaries lured across from other industries. At the mid and junior end of the market, the channels to market widen and one can consider a wider pool of talent including those from the major consulting firms and even law firms. When searching for junior talent often the consulting firms are the first place to look, unlike a search for senior candidates which can be quite open as the talent pool is more disparate. Junior candidates are often motivated by generic factors such as the size of the platform, training and the remuneration on offer.

The diversity of education and training make hiring a company secretary a unique experience. Professionals come from a range of backgrounds including legal, compliance or finance and business, all of which generally reflects the wide range of skills and experience that can be leveraged in a company secretary role. Interestingly not all mandates are looking for applicants that are HKICS qualified and accredited, but the trend for Mandarin language skills is noticeable.

Overall, there is demand for talent at all levels reflecting both new and replacement positions. This is a very positive time for senior professionals to capitalise on their experience and it is a great choice for someone entering the industry.



About the Author



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Scott Harrison is a Co-founder and Managing Partner of Aquis Search. He recruits mid and senior level governance positions across the financial services, commerce and professional services markets.

Within Aquis Search he works closely with an established management team that delivers recruitment solutions across legal, risk, compliance, finance and accounting, human resources and support functions. He also recruits senior level governance roles across both traditional industries and within the financial services community.

Scott began his recruitment career in Sydney in 2000 before moving to Hong Kong in 2003. He is passionate about the delivery of leading recruitment solutions and best practice for clients across Asia. He began his career in management consulting before embarking on a recruitment career in 2000. He holds a Bachelor of Arts (Macquarie University) and a Masters in Applied Psychology and was previously admitted to the NSW Board of Psychology.

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