

Having it all

Non-executive director Dr Suzy Walton explains how the Chartered Director qualification helps her to manage a highly diverse work life

With a career that's spanned acting on the West End stage, producing and presenting for Sky News, the BBC and LBC Radio and working as a senior civil servant in Whitehall, it's little wonder Suzy Walton describes her work life as "a touch schizophrenic".

Currently a full-time non-executive director (NED), Walton continues to pursue a plural career. She sits on the boards of Birmingham Children's Hospital, the University of Westminster, the Internet Watch Foundation, and Combat Stress, which treats war veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder. She is also a member of the government's Science Advisory Council, the Ethics Group of the National DNA Database and the National Specialist Commissioning Group, which oversees a healthcare budget for people with rare conditions.

Before becoming a full-time NED in 2008, Walton was a senior civil servant and spent twelve years in Whitehall, working variously as a scientist, a military psychologist and in the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit and the Cabinet Office. (The West End stint, when Walton was 16, was a brief foray into performing that happened "very much by luck, not by design".)

Walton became a Chartered Director in 2008, as she wanted to have a recognised business qualification for her roles as a NED. Her move from government was prompted by the desire to see changes in public services happen faster, having become "a bit frustrated" with the complications of Whitehall policy-making. "I feel very driven to try and make public services as best as possible," she says. "Most of the things I do in some way or another relate to a public service."

But she says her crossover from a government role was initially met with negative preconceptions from others.

"I think there's a view among people in business that Whitehall people are a little bit in their ivory towers – great on strategy, but they don't actually run businesses," she says. "I found also that Whitehall thinks



the business world is very different. In fact the reality is that Whitehall runs public services, which are very large businesses - the average NHS Trust is the size of a FTSE 250 company. The similarities between the sectors are enormous and the skills from each are completely transferable."

"I simply could not do what I do now without the Chartered Director qualification"

Although Walton says she found the Chartered Director training even harder than her PhD, she believes it has been invaluable to her current work.

"I simply could not do what I do now without the qualification," she says. "As well as all the main boards I sit on I also chair or am a member of board sub-committees. I chair a remuneration committee, an HR committee, a medical services committee and I sit on many others, including several audit committees. These responsibilities fall in completely different functional areas but because of my Chartered Director training I am able

to apply myself across the whole remit of board responsibilities."

Having achieved Chartered Director status, Walton is a keen advocate for the training. "It is without a doubt the most useful qualification I have done," she says. "I see it as an MBA for the boardroom." She now sits on the Chartered Director Committee and is a professional reviewer for candidates coming through for the final stages of their Chartered Director qualification.

As for the future, although Walton has four children (with a fifth due this summer), she has no plans to decrease her workload. "Opportunities always appear," she says. "I've more than a full-time job at the moment with all the work I do, but if something wonderful comes up where I think I could be of use then I would always look to see if I could do it."

And what would she say now to her earlier detractors? "Well, the irony is that Whitehall's just down the road from Pall Mall – these are not two separate worlds," she says. "Having crossed the bridge, I would say that good corporate governance is absolutely applicable in every sector."

For more information about the Chartered Director qualification please contact:

T: +44 (0)20 7766 2601