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Lawyer Salaries Climb in the UAE, Study Reveals

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Justin A. Connor, the acting Chairman of the DCCG.

Dubai - 23rd September 2008: Lawyer salaries in the UAE, especially in the banking and financial services sector, are clearly on the rise, climbing to an average of AED 82,000 per month for the Head of Legal, as revealed today by a study conducted by Tessera Executive Search in partnership with the Dubai Corporate Counsel Group (DCCG).

While last year's survey results showed the real estate sector paying some of the highest salaries at non-Head of Legal level, this year has seen a shift to some of the highest salaries been paid in the banking and financial services, IT and Telecoms sectors.

According to the survey, completed by 194 in-house lawyers from a wide range of organizations in the UAE, salaries of AED130,000 to AED150,000+ per month are becoming less unusual with 20% of heads of legal departments now being paid more than AED100,000 per month.

Overall, the results show that the highest paid lawyers qualified in North America, followed closely by England and Wales. At the Head of Legal level, however, an England and Wales qualification places one at the top of the pay scale, while lawyers who qualified in the Indian subcontinent remain the lowest paid on average.

"By and large, lawyers who qualified in US or Europe, including the UK, New Zealand, Australia and Canada, are paid more than those from the MENA region or the subcontinent. This year, however, the pay gap is less marked than in 2007," said Elizabeth Williams, Senior Partner & Legal Practice Head at Tessera Executive Search.

"Western-qualified, bilingual Arabic/English lawyers are still the most sought after and command the highest salaries with packages in some cases reaching AED 244,000 per month."

UAE employers pay for experience, showing a direct correlation between salary and the number of years since qualifying as a lawyer, known as Post Qualification Experience (PQE). The average salary for lawyers who qualified less than four years is AED 31,000, with the highest salary reported in this range being AED 66,000 in the banking and financial services sector. The highest salary reported for the 5-7 years PQE range is AED 94,000 per month, again in the banking and finance sector. In the 8-10 years PQE range, the highest salary reported, AED 115,000 per month, appeared in both the regional conglomerate and banking & finance sectors.

"The salary increases since last year are due in part to a significant shortage of qualified lawyers in the market and the high demand for in-house lawyers in the UAE as shown by the fact that more than 75 percent of Heads of Department plan to recruit and expand their departments, especially in Abu Dhabi with its dramatic expansion plans," said Justin A. Connor, the acting Chairman of the DCCG. He added that other drivers of pay increases include the increased cost of living and the depreciation of the US dollar, which reduce the value of compensation packages, putting further upward pressure on salaries. "We expect the war for talent to continue with salaries likely to rise even further, especially for those with applicable regional experience," he said.

Regarding job and salary satisfaction, the majority of respondents stated they are satisfied with their roles and compensation. However, 44% of them stated that they work more than 10 hours a day, which is probably why 50% report their role is stressful and 30% report it as very stressful.

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About Dubai Corporate Counsel Group ("DCCG")

Founded in June 2007, the Dubai Corporate Counsel Group ("DCCG") is the first group in-house counsel in the Middle East. Led by its 12-member Steering Committee, the DCCG has quickly established itself as a leading regional legal organisation. The DCCG has more than 75 members and has established valuable partnerships with leading international and national law firms, executive search firms and publishers. The DCCG was created by in-house counsel themselves coming together to promote the in-house practice of law in the Gulf. The DCCG is a critical part of the explosive growth of the legal sector in this exciting, dynamic and fast-developing region. For more information, visit: www.dccg.org

About Tessera Executive Search ("Tessera")

Founded in 2004, Tessera Executive Search has conducted over 400 successful MENA searches across a number of industries and functions including Legal, Oil & Gas, Real Estate & Construction, Life Sciences and the FMCG/Retail sectors. Headquartered in Dubai it reaches candidates on a global basis through its office in Canada and partnership offices in several continents. It stands out as the premium headhunter in the legal sphere in the MENA region. For more information visit www.tesseractsearch.com

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