Employment in Financial Services

Contributing Editor

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03. What documents should be put in place when engaging employees within the financial services industry? Are any particular contractual documents required?

Netherlands

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All employees must provide identity documentation and required diplomas to the financial services sector employer (including relevant Wft diploma(s), see question 4).

Before entering into an employment agreement, almost all financial services sector companies require a certificate of conduct (VOG). A VOG is a document by which the Dutch minister of legal protection declares that a candidate's (judicial) past does not constitute an obstacle to fulfilling a specific task or position. When assessing a VOG application, the Dutch minister of legal protection checks whether a candidate has criminal offences to his name that pose a risk to the position or purpose for which he is applying for the VOG.

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Singapore

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Reference checks, declarations and other documentation to ensure that the employee is a fit and proper person should be requested. In addition, notices to MAS or MAS' approval may be required for more senior roles (see question 2).

There should also be an employment contract in place, addressing matters such as individual licences (where required) and continued compliance with all applicable MAS guidelines, notices, advisories and regulations. In drafting these contracts, FIs should take into account MAS' Guidelines and Advisories, including the Guidelines on Fit and Proper Criteria, Individual Accountability and Conduct, and (where

relevant) Risk Management Practices – Board and Senior Management. Robust confidentiality obligations and other restrictive covenants are also commonplace.

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04. Do any categories of employee need to have special certification in order to undertake duties for financial services employers? If so, what are the requirements that apply?

Netherlands

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According to Dutch law, financial services sector companies must guarantee the quality of their services. This means, among other things, that they must have skilled employees for the subjects on which they advise. After all, the consumer must be able to trust that an employee has the right knowledge and skills to provide appropriate advice.

Therefore, all financial services sector employees with substantive customer contact must have up-to-date professional competence at all times. This means that employees must be skilled, aware of current developments in their field, and can apply these in their work. The obligation to maintain up-to-date professional competence at all times is an open standard. Financial services companies may, therefore, decide for themselves how to implement this standard.

There is, however, a mandatory Wft diploma requirement for employees who provide financial advice. Which products and services an employee may provide advice on depends on the specific Wft diplomas he or she has obtained (after passing an exam). A Wft diploma is valid for a definite period (with a maximum of three years). To renew a Wft diploma, an employee must pass a new exam.

Furthermore, all candidates who will (co-)determine the policy of a financial services company must also be assessed by local authorities and will be tested for reliability and suitability.

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Representatives, senior management employees and other office holders may require MAS' approval prior to an appointment or assuming an office (see question 2).

In particular, MAS must be notified of the appointment of representatives providing financial advisory services under the Financial Advisers Act 2001 or carrying out regulated activities under the Securities and Futures Act 2001 (dealing in capital markets products, advising on corporate finance, fund and REIT management, product financing, providing credit ratings or custodial services). With some exceptions, they must be at least 21 years old, satisfy minimum academic qualification requirements, and complete prescribed modules of the Capital Markets and Financial Advisory Services examinations.

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05. Do any categories of employee have enhanced responsibilities under the applicable regulatory regime?

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The reliability, propriety and fitness of (supervisory) directors and executives in the financial services sector, as well as employees in an integrity-sensitive position, must be “beyond doubt”. This is also assessed by local authorities.

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Employees who are managers and executives or above generally have enhanced responsibilities, particularly regarding corporate governance.

MAS’ Guidelines on Individual Accountability and Conduct provide that senior managers (ie, those principally responsible for day-to-day management) should be clearly identified, fit and proper for their roles, and responsible for the actions of employees and the conduct of the business under their purview. As for material risk personnel (ie, individuals who have the authority to make decisions or conduct activities that can significantly impact the FI’s safety and soundness, or cause harm to a significant segment of the FI’s customers or other stakeholders), they should be fit and proper for their roles, and subject to effective risk governance, appropriate incentive structures, and standards of conduct.

Subsidiary legislation or other MAS guidelines specific to the FI’s sector also contain corporate governance regulations, prescribing responsibilities to the board of directors, nominating committees, or senior management.

MAS’ Guidelines on Risk Management Practices – Board and Senior Management further states that an FI’s board and senior management are responsible for governing risk within an institution. This includes setting up appropriate risk management systems, stress-testing programmes and business contingency plans.

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06. Is there a register of financial services employees that individuals will need to be listed on to undertake particular business activities? If so, what are the steps required for registration?

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There is no mandatory register for Dutch financial services employees.

Companies in the financial sector, however, must have a licence to provide financial services. Local regulators are responsible for the issuance of such licences. Companies in the financial sector with a license are published by the local regulator on a public register.

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The MAS keeps a register of appointed representatives conducting regulated activities under the Securities and Futures Act 2001 (see question 4) or providing financial advisory services under the Financial Advisers Act 2001. The register is updated based on an FI's notifications of appointment to the MAS, with prerequisites applying to the appointment of such representatives (see question 4).

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07. Are there any specific rules relating to compensation payable to financial services employees in your jurisdiction, including, for example, limits on variable compensation, or provisions for deferral, malus and/or clawback of monies paid to employees?

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Remuneration policy

Under Dutch law, financial services companies must implement an internal remuneration policy. Financial services companies must explain in the management report the relationship between the remuneration policy and the social function of the company.

Variable remuneration

The variable remuneration that a financial services company awards to an employee amounts to a maximum of 20% of that person's fixed annual remuneration. There are a (very) limited number of exceptions to this maximum.

Five-year statutory retention period for shares and other financial instruments

Financial services employees whose fixed remuneration consists of shares or related instruments may only sell them after five years.

Adjustment or recovery of bonuses (claw-back)

Adjustment or recovery of bonuses is mandatory if a financial services employee has failed to meet appropriate standards of competence and proper conduct or has been responsible for conduct that led to a significant deterioration in the company's position.

Severance payments

Paying out severance payments by financial services companies is not allowed if the employee leaves voluntarily or if there are seriously culpable acts or omissions in the performance of the function. Severance payments for directors (or other policymakers) may not exceed more than 100 per cent of their fixed annual salary.

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Disclosure requirements may apply depending on the employee’s role. For example, with some exemptions, financial advisors are required to disclose to the client the remuneration that they receive or will receive for making any recommendations in respect of a particular investment product, or executing a purchase or sale contract relating to a designated investment product on their clients’ behalf.

MAS’ Guidelines on Corporate Governance (applicable to designated financial holding companies, banks, and some insurers) also requires the FI’s board of directors to have a formal and transparent procedure for developing policies on and fixing the remuneration of directors, executives, and key management personnel. A separate remuneration committee made up of non-executive directors must be established to make the relevant recommendations. MAS expects compliance with these guidelines in a manner commensurate with the size, nature of activities and risk profile of the FI. Diverging from the guidelines is acceptable to the extent that FIs explicitly state and explain how their practices are consistent with the policy intent of the relevant principle.

Companies listed on the Singapore stock exchange have similar requirements under MAS’ Code of Corporate Governance, and these also exist in subsidiary legislation applicable to the FI. As for all other non-exempt companies, director and employee remuneration will ordinarily have to be disclosed through publicly available financial statements, under applicable accounting standards.

Apart from the above, there are no strict limits on compensation or requirements to impose deferral, malus or clawback provisions. Employers may include such provisions in their contracts, but should be aware that the enforcement of such provisions may be subject to challenge.

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08. Are there particular training requirements for employees in the financial services sector?

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Please see question 4.

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Examinations (see question 4) and continuing education requirements apply to certain employees in the capital markets services, financial advice and insurance sectors.

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09. Is there a particular code of conduct and/or are there other regulations regarding standards of behaviour that financial services employees are expected to adhere to?

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Under Dutch law, financial services companies must maintain integrity and ensure safety, stability and integrity within their company. This also means that financial services companies must prevent their employees from committing criminal offences, other violations of the law or socially inappropriate behaviour that undermines confidence in the financial services sector or financial markets. For these reasons, it is common to implement company-specific codes of conduct.

There are many statutory general regulations and standards of behaviour that financial services employees are expected to adhere to. Moreover, all industries have their own specific industry-wide guidelines and codes of conduct.

An important statutory obligation for directors, (other) policymakers and employees with customer contact is to take an oath or promise before entering into employment. The oath or promise contains a declaration that – among other things – the employee will perform his or her duties with care and integrity, will put customer interests first and will make every effort to maintain and promote confidence in the financial services sector.

In addition to the oath or promise as mentioned above, there is also the “banker's oath”. This oath goes further than the oath or promise mentioned above and is mandatory for all employees who work for banks.

Breaching guidelines, codes of conduct or the statutory oath could lead to disciplinary sanctions being taken by the company itself (such as termination of the employment contract) or by disciplinary supervisors (such as a reprimand or a fine).

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Generally, MAS' Guidelines on Individual Accountability and Conduct emphasises the importance of reinforcing standards of proper conduct among all employees, while employees conducting regulated activities must remain fit and proper for their roles under MAS' Guidelines on Fit and Proper Criteria.

Guidelines, codes, directions, notices and legislation in relation to corporate governance and risk management (including those mentioned in questions 5 and 6) should also be considered.

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10. Are there any circumstances in which notifications relating to the employee or their conduct will need to be made to local or international regulators?

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Financial services companies must report to local regulators any behaviour or event that poses a serious threat to the ethical conduct of the business of the company or may affect the reliability of policymakers, sound and controlled business operations and continuity.

Furthermore, there are several local disciplinary authorities where reports can be made about financial services employees who fail to comply with Dutch law, guidelines and rules of conduct.

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Forms need to be submitted to the MAS when an individual ceases to act as a representative in regulated activities or financial advisory services. Depending on the FI, the MAS may also have to be informed of appointments or changes of representatives, directors, chief executive officers, and other key officeholders (see questions 2 and 4).

MAS notices are also required for the reporting of misconduct for employees who are representatives of certain capital market service providers, financial advisers, and insurance broking staff. Examples of reportable misconduct include acts involving fraud, dishonesty or other offences of a similar nature, and non-compliance with regulatory requirements. Specific declaration forms and timelines may apply depending on the FI. An FI may also be required to submit updates on cases where investigations have not concluded or disciplinary action was not taken, or submit a declaration that there was no misconduct reported in a given calendar year.

While not specific to financial services employees, the Corruption, Drug Trafficking and Other Serious Crimes (Confiscation of Benefits) Act 1992 requires any person with knowledge, or reasonable grounds to suspect, that any property is being used in connection with criminal activity to file a Suspicious Transaction Report with the Suspicious Transaction Reporting Office. MAS notices concerning the prevention of anti-money laundering and incidents of fraud emphasise this obligation.

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11. Are there any particular requirements that employers should implement with respect to the prevention of wrongdoing, for example, related to whistleblowing or the prevention of harassment?

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Financial services companies must create a safe and healthy work environment. Furthermore, financial services sector companies have a statutory responsibility to protect consumers from unethical, unprofessional and negligent behaviour and services. In this regard, it is advisable (and common) to implement an internal code of conduct.

Under Dutch law, financial services companies must set up an internal reporting procedure (with specific requirements) where suspected misconduct can be reported.

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MAS' Guidelines on Individual Accountability and Conduct provide that appropriate policies, systems and processes should be put in place to enforce expected conduct, including transparent investigation and disciplinary procedures, formal whistleblowing programmes, and a process for the reporting and escalation of issues to senior management on any issues related to employee conduct. Anti-workplace discrimination legislation is also expected in 2024.

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12. Are there any particular rules or protocols that apply when terminating the employment of an employee in the financial services sector, including where a settlement agreement is entered into?

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There are no particular rules or protocols that apply when terminating the employment of financial services employees.

Please see question 7 for more information on severance payments.

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Depending on the employee concerned, the MAS may have to be notified of an employee ceasing to hold an office or to act as a representative (see questions 2, 4 and 11). Termination-related benefits and remuneration may also require disclosure (see question 7).

Apart from this, there are no industry-specific rules or protocols applicable to terminations. Singapore's Employment Act and the Tripartite Guidelines on Wrongful Dismissal, of general application to all employers, also prescribe rules concerning notice periods, the timing of final payments, and circumstances in which a termination may be wrongful, among other things.

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13. Are there any particular rules that apply in relation to the use of post-termination restrictive covenants for employees in the financial services sector?

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There are no particular rules that apply concerning the use of post-termination restrictive covenants for financial services employees.

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Singapore law in relation to post-termination restrictive covenants is of general application and not specific to the financial services sector. Such restraints are prima facie void, but may be valid and enforceable if they are reasonable (both in the interests of the parties and the public), and if they go no further than what is necessary to protect a party's legitimate proprietary interest.

The Singapore Courts have recognised that an employer has legitimate proprietary interests in its trade connections (commonly protected by restraints against the solicitation of clients or customers); the maintenance of a stable, trained workforce (commonly protected by restraints against the poaching of employees); and its confidential information and trade secrets (commonly protected by confidentiality restraints). This is not a closed list.

Non-competition clauses are however relatively more difficult to enforce as compared to other restrictive covenants, and they may not be enforceable at all under Singapore law as it presently stands if an employer's legitimate proprietary interests are already covered by other restraints. Even then, it may still be possible for the employer to obtain an ex parte interim injunction for non-competition though.

Guidelines on restrictive covenants are also expected to be released in the second half of 2024, which will look to shape norms and provide employers and employees with guidance regarding the inclusion and enforcement of restrictive covenants in employment contracts.

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