

# Employment in Financial Services

## Contributing Editor

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## 01. What is the primary regulatory regime applicable to financial services employees in your jurisdiction?

### Hong Kong

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The primary regulatory regime applicable to financial services employees in Hong Kong are as follows:

- Under the Banking Ordinance (BO), the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) is responsible for regulating all authorised institutions (banks, restricted-licence banks and deposit-taking companies). In particular, the HKMA needs to ensure that the chief executive, directors, controllers and executive officers of the authorised institutions are “fit and proper”.
- Under the Securities and Futures Ordinance (SFO), the Securities and Futures Commission (SFC) is responsible for regulating the securities and futures markets. Employees performing any regulated functions under the SFO must obtain the requisite licence from the SFC. Relevant individuals engaged by the authorised institutions who perform regulated functions (eg, bank staff working in the securities dealing department) are not required to be licensed or registered with the SFC but their names have to be entered in the register maintained by the HKMA.
- Under the Insurance Ordinance (IO), the Insurance Authority (IA) is responsible for regulating the insurance industry. Employees carrying on a regulated activity under the IO must obtain the requisite licence from the IA.

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### Ireland

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The Central Bank of Ireland (CBI) is responsible for the authorisation and supervision of regulated financial service providers (RFSPs) in Ireland. RFSPs can include credit institutions, credit unions, brokers/retail intermediaries; and other RFSPs such as electronic money institutions, insurance and reinsurance undertakings, investment firms and payment institutions. The regulatory regime applies in a bespoke way to each sector and its employees and tailored legal advice should be taken for a specific situation. The

general principles of the regulatory framework are set out below.

## **Fitness and Probity**

The primary regulatory regime applicable to employees of RFSPs is the Fitness & Probity ("F&P") framework under the CBI Reform Act 2010 (2010 Act) as amended. Its function is to assess and monitor the suitability of individuals for certain key positions, known as Controlled Functions (CFs), including Pre-approved Controlled Functions (PCFs). The general rule is that an RFSP cannot permit a person to perform a controlled function unless the RFSP is satisfied on reasonable grounds that the person complies with the F&P Standards prescribed under the 2010 Act and further set out in the regulations and Guidance prescribed by the CBI. A link to resources governing the F&P Standards is [here](#).

Fitness relates to an individual's competency, experience, qualifications and capacity to perform the role (including time commitments and being free from conflicts of interest).

Probity relates to an individual's honesty, diligence, independence, ethics and integrity in performing their role.

Employers are required to perform due diligence to confirm that individuals they propose placing in CF roles are fit and proper. Employers are also required to hold a certificate of compliance in respect of each in scope employee, certifying that the employee complies with the F&P Standards. Employees of RFSPs must agree in writing to comply with the F&P Standards.

A breach of an individual's F&P obligations can result in criminal and administrative sanctions for the RFSP and suspension and disqualification for the individual from holding a controlled function.

## **Minimum Competency Requirements**

The CBI also operates a minimum competency regime under the Minimum Competency Code 2017 and the CBI (Supervision and Enforcement) Act 2013 (section 48(1)) Minimum Competency Regulations 2017, which set out professional standards and competencies, and continuing professional development (CPD) requirements, for persons providing certain financial services and products across certain sectors e.g., credit union and insurance services. The aim is to protect consumers by ensuring a minimum acceptable level of competence from individuals acting for or on behalf of RFSPs providing advice and information and associated activities (such as dealing with insurance claims or complaints), in connection with in-scope financial products.

## **The Individual Accountability Framework**

The CBI (Individual Accountability) Act 2023 (the "2023 Act") was signed into law on 9 March 2023. The 2023 Act introduced a new Individual Accountability Framework ("IAF"):

- An enhanced Fitness and Probity Framework;
- New Common Conduct Standards, including Additional Conduct Standards for PCFs, applicable to employees and officers of RFSPs as well as Business Conduct Standards;
- The Senior Executive Accountability Regime ("SEAR"); and
- Administrative Sanctions Procedures ("ASP") which empowers the CBI to investigate and sanction individuals for breaches of their obligations under the IAF including the Conduct Standards and their F&P obligations.

The IAF commenced in Ireland from 29 December 2023. The F&P Framework and the application of the new Conduct Standards became effective from this date. Other parts of the IAF will be effective later in 2024.

## **Conduct Standards**

Under the 2010 Act, both CFs and PCFs must take any step that is reasonable in the circumstances in the performance of their role, to ensure that they meet the requirements of the Common Conduct Standards. The Common Conduct Standards are explained in Guidance published by the CBI [here](#). The Conduct Standards include the requirement to act with honesty and integrity, due skill and care, co-operate in good faith with the CBI, act in the best interests of customers and comply with applicable rules governing market conduct and trading as applicable to the relevant RFSP's sector. The F&P Standards set a standard that CFs and PCFs must meet to ensure that they are sufficiently skilled and have the competence and capability to

perform their roles. Whereas the Common Conduct Standards impose positive, enforceable legal obligations on individuals in those roles, governing their conduct and requiring them to act in accordance with a single set of standards of expected behaviour. Employers must train their employees on the applicable Conduct Standards. Employees are required to attend at that training and to fully understand and comply with the Conduct Standards. Additional Conduct Standards apply to PCFs.

### **Senior Executive Accountability Regime**

SEAR which applies to senior managers/officers holding PCF and CF1 roles, will be applicable from 1 July 2024. SEAR will come into force in respect of Non Executive Directors (NEDs) and Independent Non Executive Directors (INEDs) with effect from 1 July 2025.

In terms of the scope of application, SEAR will be introduced on a phased basis and will initially apply from 1 July 2024 to credit institutions, insurance undertakings (excluding reinsurance undertakings, captive (re)insurance undertakings and insurance special purpose vehicles) and investment firms that underwrite on a firm commitment basis, deal on own account, or are authorised to hold client monies or assets; and third-country branches of the above.

However, the CBI has noted in its Consultation Paper 153 (CP153) that "there is much in the spirit of the SEAR that firms not initially falling within scope should consider as aligned with good quality governance". RFSPs which are not in Phase 1 of SEAR should therefore consider the presence of the new regime and whether it may be appropriate to comply with the spirit of SEAR by ensuring that individual responsibilities for senior managers are mapped and clearly allocated across the firm's senior management. This is to ensure that it is very clear who is individually accountable for what and in order to ensure that the business and its risks are being properly managed.

### **Business Standards**

The 2023 Act provides for the ability of the CBI of Ireland (CBI) to prescribe the "Business Standards" for the purposes of ensuring that in the conduct of its affairs a firm:

1. acts in the best interests of customers and of the integrity of the market;
2. acts honestly, fairly and professionally; and
3. acts with due skill, care and diligence.

The Business Standards are obligations which apply to the RFSP.

### **Protected Disclosures Legislation - Whistleblowing**

The Protected Disclosures Act 2014 as amended provides that all employers (with 50 or more employees) and most RFSPs regardless of head count (including MiFID firms, UCITS management companies, AIFMs, externally managed UCITS and externally managed AIFs) have and maintain secure, confidential and effective internal reporting channels and investigation procedures that comply with its requirements. Employees and other workers, including INEDs and NEDs as well as contractors have significant anti retaliation protection in connection with making a protected disclosure. Employers are required to appoint a designated person to acknowledge a report within 7 days, make diligent inquiries and to follow up with the reporter within three months in relation to the progress/outcome of the investigation. The Central Bank (Supervision and Enforcement) Act, 2013 as well as the European Union (Market Abuse) Regulations, 2016 set out whistleblowing requirements for in scope employees and anti retaliation protection.

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## **Switzerland**

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Employment law in Switzerland is based mainly on the following sources, set out in order of priority:

- the Federal Constitution;
- Cantonal Constitutions;
- public law, particularly the Federal Act on Work in Industry, Crafts and Commerce (the Labour Act) and five ordinances issued under this Act regulating work, and health and safety conditions;
- civil law, particularly the Swiss Code of Obligations (CO);
- collective bargaining agreements, if applicable;
- individual employment agreements; and
- usage, custom, doctrine, and case law.

Depending on the regulatory status of the employer and the specific activities of financial services employees, respectively, Swiss financial market laws may also apply. They are, in particular, the Federal banking, financial institutions and insurance supervision regulations.

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## **02. Are there particular pre-screening measures that need to be taken when engaging a financial services employee? Does this vary depending on seniority or type of role? In particular, is there any form of regulator-specified reference that has to be provided by previous employers in the financial services industry?**



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There are no particular pre-screening measures specified by the financial regulators in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, financial institutions would generally conduct background checks on prospective employees (especially those taking on senior positions) to ensure they comply with the “fit and proper” requirements of the financial regulators.

There is no particular form of regulator-specified reference to be provided by previous employers in the financial services industry. Nevertheless, the SFC has specified disclosure obligations for licensed corporations in respect of outgoing employees who were subject to internal investigations (see question 10).

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### **Ireland**

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RFSPs must satisfy themselves that all CF and PCF candidates or employees comply with the F&P Standards. Pre-employment due diligence must be performed, including asking the candidate to certify they will comply with the F&P Standards and notify the RFSP immediately of any change in circumstance that may mean they no longer comply. Employers must continue to ensure that in scope employees comply

with the F&P Standards and must complete an annual declaration to this effect. This means that due diligence must continue throughout the employment relationship and not just at the recruitment stage.

Candidates for PCF roles must complete an online individual questionnaire, which is submitted to the CBI in advance of appointment to the role through the Central Bank portal. The CBI must grant its approval for the PCF appointment before a candidate can take up the role. Any PCF offer of employment must be conditional on that approval being obtained. The CBI may request applicants attend an interview as part of the approval process.

Employers should take all reasonable steps to secure references from previous employers in order to due diligence the candidate's compliance with the F&P Standards and their suitability for the role. However, an employer is not obliged to issue a reference in respect of a former employee which means that a prospective employer may not be able to secure a reference from a previous employer. The CBI does not oblige employers to either issue or obtain a reference as part of screening checks, however employers must make good efforts to do so.

There are material obstacles from a data privacy and practical perspective to employers conducting criminal background checks in relation to prospective employees. Data relating to criminal convictions is special category data under the GDPR. Employers would need to satisfy both Article 6 and Article 9 requirements under the GDPR to justify the processing of this data. In terms of Article 9, this means employers would need to show reasons of substantial public interest or that they are carrying out their legal obligations in processing the data. In terms of Article 6 the employer will need to show that the processing is necessary to comply with a legal obligation to which the employer is subject or the processing is necessary for the employer's legitimate interests for example to ensure the suitability and honesty of its employees and to protect its reputation. Employers are also prevented from asking candidates about "spent convictions" which are usually minor criminal offences dating back over seven years.

Pre-employment medical checks must also have a clear legal basis justifying the processing of an employee's medical and health information.

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## Switzerland

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Under Swiss civil law, there is no requirement to apply pre-screening measures. However, while not a statutory requirement under Swiss financial market laws per se, companies subject to these laws apply pre-screening measures to ensure that a prospective financial services employee meets the requirements set forth by these laws. In particular, regulated companies such as banks, securities firms, insurance companies, fund management companies, managers of collective investment schemes and asset managers are required to obtain authorisation from the Swiss Financial Market Supervisory Authority (FINMA) relating to strategic and executive management and each change thereto.

As a general rule, the higher the responsibility or position of a person, the more requirements financial services employees may need to fulfil. Persons holding executive or overall management functions (eg, a member of the board or members of the senior management) are required to fulfil certain requirements set forth by the applicable Swiss financial market regulations. Such requirements may include providing current CVs showing relevant work experience and education as well as excerpts from the debt and criminal register. It may also include providing various declarations (eg, concerning pending and concluded proceedings, qualified participations and other mandates). Furthermore, financial services employees holding certain control functions (eg, compliance officer, risk officer and their deputies) may also be required to prove that they are suitable for the position by providing, for example, a current CV showing relevant work experience and education.

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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?



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In addition to an employment contract, there are additional documentation requirements in connection with the application or transfer of the employee's licence with the financial regulators.

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The following documents should be in place:

- written statement of terms of employment e.g., a written contract of employment that complies with the Terms of Employment (Information) Act 1994-2014 and the European Union (Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions) Regulations 2022;
- grievance and disciplinary policy;
- protected disclosures policy;
- dignity at work policy (anti-harassment and bullying prevention);
- safety statement; and
- where possible, an employee handbook that details all the statutory leave policies and other bespoke policies of the RFSP.

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No special contractual documents are required when engaging employees within the financial services industry.

However, it is generally recommended to conclude a written employment contract with each employee. FINMA, for instance, requires a copy of employment contracts concluded with senior management of regulated entities.

In particular, the employment contract should reference the employer's (regulatory) set of directions and the employee's obligation to comply with said instructions. In addition, because regulated companies such as banks, securities firms, fund management companies, managers of collective assets or asset managers are required to obtain authorisation from FINMA before the engagement of key personnel, it may be

sensible to include a condition precedent relating to FINMA's acceptance of the relevant employee in the employment contract.

The mandatory, partially mandatory, and optional elements of an individual employment contract are outlined in article 319 et seq of the CO (in particular regarding remuneration, working time, vacation, and incapacity for work). Further regulations may apply based on collective bargaining agreements.

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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?**



### **Hong Kong**

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#### **SFC**

The "Guidelines on Competence" published by the SFC lists the necessary qualifications for employees carrying on regulated activities. For academic qualifications, employees should attain at least Level 2 in either English or Chinese as well as in Mathematics in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education or equivalent. In addition, employees are expected to obtain recognised industry qualifications and pass the local regulatory framework paper. For responsible officers (ROs), the SFC requires higher levels of educational qualifications and experience.

#### **IA**

The "Guideline on 'Fit and Proper' Criteria for Licensed Insurance Intermediaries Under the Insurance Ordinance" published by the IA sets out the education requirements for licenced employees under the IO. Higher levels of educational qualifications are required for responsible officers.

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### **Ireland**

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Yes, under the Minimum Competency Regime (see question 1), employees who perform certain prescribed functions and roles in prescribed RFSPs such as insurance businesses and credit unions, must meet the required competencies and qualifications standards.

The 2023 Act also introduces a new requirement that persons can only be permitted to perform a CF role (including a PCF role) where a certificate of compliance with the F&P Standards given by the firm is in force (Certification Regime).

As part of the Certification Regime, a certificate of compliance may only be given if:

1. the firm is satisfied on reasonable grounds that the person complies with the F&P Standards; and



2. the person has agreed to abide by the F&P Standards and to notify the firm without delay if for any reason they no longer comply with the F&P Standards.

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## Switzerland

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Depending on the status of the employing entity and the position of the financial services employee, a special certification or, more generally, proof of relevant work experience and sufficient education is required.

As a general rule, persons holding executive, overall management, oversight or control functions (eg, a member of the board, CEO, compliance officer, risk officer or their deputies) in regulated companies such as banks, insurance companies, securities firms, fund management companies, managers of collective assets or asset managers are required to demonstrate to FINMA that they have sufficient relevant work experience and education. As proof, FINMA requests current CVs, diplomas, certifications and contact details of references. The scope and nature of the future business activity and the size and complexity of the company in question also need to be considered.

Furthermore, client advisers of so-called financial service providers (eg, investment advisers) must have sufficient expertise on the code of conduct and the necessary expertise required to perform their work. Client advisors often prove that these requirements have been met by successfully attending special courses. In addition, insurance intermediaries registered with FINMA's insurance intermediary register have to prove that they have undergone sufficient education and have sufficient qualifications. For this purpose, FINMA has published a list of different Swiss and foreign educational qualifications deemed to be sufficient on its website.

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

## Hong Kong

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Under the SFO, ROs have enhanced responsibilities. They assume primary responsibility for compliance at a licensed corporation and are involved in supervising the regulated activities. A licensed corporation is required to appoint no less than two ROs to directly supervise the conduct of each regulated activity. Similarly, under the BO, registered institutions are required to appoint no less than two executive officers to be responsible for directly supervising the conduct of each regulated activity under the SFO. For each regulated activity, at least one RO must be available at all times to supervise the business and must be an executive director.

Under the IO, an RO of a licensed insurance agency or licensed insurance broker company has enhanced responsibilities. Responsible officers must use their best endeavours to ensure the agency or broker has



established and maintains proper controls and procedures for securing compliance with the conduct requirements under the IO.

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Yes. Common Conduct Standards and Additional Conduct Standards were introduced by the 2023 Act and employers need to update employees' contractual documents to reflect same.

The Common Conduct Standards set out standards of behaviour expected of individuals carrying out Controlled Functions (CFs) within firms. The Common Conduct Standards are basic standards such as acting with honesty and integrity with due skill, care and diligence and in the best interest of customers. An individual that is subject to the Common Conduct Standards will be expected to take reasonable steps to ensure that the Common Conduct Standards are met.

In addition, senior executives, which includes individuals performing PCF roles (e.g. the directors, designated persons) and other individuals who exercise significant influence on the conduct of a firm's affairs (CF1) will also have Additional Conduct Standards related to running the part of the business for which they are responsible. An individual who performs a PCF/CF1 role should take reasonable steps to ensure that the Additional Conduct Standards are met.

When SEAR comes into effect, those performing senior executive functions will be required to have detailed statements of responsibility setting out the scope of their role. The Duty of Responsibility which the PCF will have under SEAR is extensive. The duty extends to taking any step that is reasonable in the circumstances to avoid a breach by their firm of its obligations in relation to an aspect of the firm's affairs for which the PCF is responsible.

There are a number of General Prescribed Responsibilities that will need to be assigned to PCFs:

- (a) Performance by the Firm of its obligations under SEAR
- (b) Performance by the Firm of its obligations under the F&P framework
- (c) Performance by the Firm of its obligations under the new Conduct Standards
- (d) Responsibility for overseeing the adoption of the firm's policy on diversity and inclusion.

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Specifically, employees holding executive, overall management, oversight or control functions in regulated companies are responsible for ensuring that the companies' organization ensures the continued compliance with applicable financial market laws. Swiss financial market laws do not have enhanced responsibilities for different employee categories. Instead, a person's fitness and propriety are assessed within the context of the specific requirements and functions of a given company, the scope of activities at that company, and the complexity of that company.

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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?



### Hong Kong

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The HKMA, SFC and IA each have a register for licensed employees to be listed on to undertake regulated activities:

- HKMA – the register of securities staff of authorised institutions is available on the HKMA’s website[1]. For registration, the names and particulars of the relevant individuals are required to be submitted to the HKMA for inclusion on the HKMA Register.
- SFC – the register of licensed persons is available on the SFC’s website[2]. For registration, individual applicants would need to submit an electronic application to the SFC through its online platform. When there is a change of employment, the licensed representative may apply for a transfer of accreditation through SFC’s online platform within 180 days after the cessation of the previous employment. It takes approximately seven business days to process an application for transfer of accreditation to carry on the same types of regulated activity for which the licensed representative was licensed immediately before the cessation.
- IA – the register of licensed insurance intermediaries is available on the IA’s website[3]. For registration, applicants can submit their licence applications to the IA by paper submission or electronic submission via an online portal.

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[1] <https://apps.hkma.gov.hk/eng/index.php>

[2] <https://apps.sfc.hk/publicregWeb/searchByName?locale=en>

[3] <https://iir.ia.org.hk/#/index>

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No.

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### Switzerland

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There is no universal register of all financial services employees. Rather, different Swiss financial market laws provide for a registration requirement that may apply to individual financial service employees. Whether a particular financial market law, and, consequently, a registration requirement, applies to a financial services employee depends specifically on the regulatory status of the employing entity and the particular activity of that employee.

- Also, client advisers of Swiss or foreign financial service providers (eg, investment advisers) may be required to register with the adviser register, unless an exemption applies. Client advisers are the natural persons who perform financial services on behalf of a financial service provider or in their own capacity as financial service providers. Client advisers are entered in the register of advisers if they prove that i) they have sufficient knowledge of the code of conduct set out in the financial services regulations and the necessary expertise required to perform their activities, ii) their employee has taken out professional indemnity insurance or that equivalent collateral exists, and iii) their employee is affiliated with a recognized Swiss ombudsman in their capacity as a financial service provider (if such affiliation duty exists).

Furthermore, “non-tied” insurance intermediaries (ie, persons who offer or conclude insurance contracts on behalf of insurance companies) are required to register with FINMA’s register of insurance companies. To register, persons must inter alia prove that they have sufficient qualifications and hold professional indemnity insurance or provide an equivalent financial surety. “Tied” intermediaries will no longer be able to register voluntarily in the FINMA register (unless this is required by the respective country of operation for activities abroad).

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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?**



### **Hong Kong**

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There are no specific mandatory rules relating to compensation payable to financial services employees in Hong Kong.

The HKMA has issued a Supervisory Policy Manual CG-5 “Guideline on a Sound Remuneration System”. This focuses on providing a broad idea and introducing basic principles of how remuneration policies should be designed and implemented in the authorised institution, to encourage employee behaviour that supports the risk management framework, corporate values and long-term financial soundness of the authorised institution.

Under the Guideline, the elements of a sound remuneration system are as follows:

#### **Governance**

- Remuneration policy should be in line with objectives, business strategies and the long-term goals of the authorised institution.

- The remuneration arrangement for employees whose activities could have a material impact on the authorised institution's risk profile and financial soundness should support, but not undermine, the overall risk management approach.
- The Board of an authorised institution is ultimately responsible for overseeing the formulation and implementation of the remuneration policy.
- The establishment of a Board remuneration committee would assist the Board in discharging its responsibility for the design and operation of the authorised institution's remuneration system.
- Risk control personnel should have appropriate authority and involvement in the process of design and implementation of the authorised institution's remuneration policy.

### **Structure of remuneration**

- Balance of fixed and variable remuneration should be determined with regard to the seniority, role, responsibilities and activities of their employees and the need to promote behaviour among employees that support the authorised institution's risk-management framework and long-term financial soundness.
- Variable remuneration should be paid in such a manner as to align an employee's incentive awards with long-term value creation and the time horizons of risk.
- Guaranteed minimum bonus to senior management or key personnel should be subject to the approval of the Board (or the Board's remuneration committee with the necessary delegated authority).

### **Measurement of performance for variable remuneration**

- The award of variable remuneration should depend on the fulfilment of certain pre-determined and assessable performance criteria, which include both financial and non-financial factors.
- Size and allocation of variable remuneration should take into account the current and potential risks associated with the activities of employees, as well as the performance (overall performance of the relevant business units and the authorised institution as a whole as well as the contribution of individual employees to such performance).
- Judgement and common sense may be required during the process to arrive at a fair and appropriate remuneration decision. The rationale for the exercise of judgment and the outcomes should be recorded in writing.

### **Alignment of remuneration pay-outs to the time horizon of risks**

- Deferral of variable remuneration is appropriate when the risks taken by the employee in question are harder to measure or will be realised over a longer timeframe.
- The award of deferred remuneration should be subject to a minimum vesting period and pre-defined vesting conditions in respect of future performance.
- Authorised institutions should seek undertakings from employees not to engage in personal hedging strategies or remuneration and liability-related insurance to hedge their exposures in respect of the unvested portion of their deferred remuneration.

### **Remuneration disclosure**

- Authorised institutions should make remuneration disclosures at least annually. The disclosure should include the qualitative and quantitative information that the HKMA has set out in its annual remuneration disclosure.

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**Ireland**

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There are prescriptive, sector-specific requirements, which apply to the remuneration of specified

categories of employees or directors, and which apply in the asset management, investment services, banking, and insurance sectors.

Employers in these sectors are tasked with ensuring that the remuneration paid to material risk takers (individuals whose professional activities have a material impact on an RFSP's risk profile) or identified staff align with the RFSP risk profile.

There are detailed rules with technical guidance (emanating from EU law) specific to each sector, but at a high level they (to differing degrees) set out rules on; variable remuneration composition, ratios or other metrics to compare variable to fixed remuneration to ensure it is appropriate; malus requirements, which would allow the RFSP to cancel or reduce the employee's variable remuneration before it is paid out; and clawback provisions which allow RFSPs to recover variable remuneration after it has been awarded. It is important to ensure that employees' contracts of employment acknowledge that any variable remuneration will be subject to all regulatory restrictions and rules and may be clawed back in certain circumstances.

The CBI's 2014 Guidelines on Variable Remuneration Arrangements for Sales Staff also emphasise the importance of remuneration structures to have sufficient deterrents built into them (such as malus and clawback mechanisms) to avoid incentivising undesirable/risky behaviours from sales staff in the banking, insurance and investment services sectors.

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## Switzerland

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Swiss civil law provides for special rules that govern the compensation of current and former members of inter alia the board and executive committee (Ordinance against Excessive Compensation) of Swiss companies limited by shares that are listed on a Swiss or foreign stock exchange. In addition, there are disclosure provisions listed companies need to follow concerning remuneration under stock exchange regulations.

In addition to the above, FINMA has formulated ten principles regarding remuneration that banks, securities firms, financial groups and conglomerates, insurance companies, insurance groups and conglomerates are required to implement. The principles serve as minimum standards for the design, implementation and disclosure of remuneration schemes.

These schemes should not incentivise to take inappropriate risks and thereby potentially damage the stability of financial institutions.

One of the focal points of the principles is variable remuneration that depends on business performance and risk. In particular, all variable remuneration must have been earned by the company over the long term. Consequently, remuneration is dependent on performance, taking into account the sustainability of such performance as well as the risks. That said, FINMA's principles do not limit the amount of variable remuneration. However, FINMA aims to prevent the granting of high remuneration based on large risks and the generation of short-term, unsustainable earnings. Furthermore, persons who have significant responsibility relating to the risk or receive a high total remuneration, must receive a significant part of the variable remuneration on a deferred basis and consequently, in a way that is linked to the current risk. Under the FINMA principles, "clawback" and "malus" arrangements are permitted.

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



## Hong Kong

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### SFC

Persons engaging in regulated activities are required to continuously update their knowledge and skills through continuous professional training (CPT). The “Guidelines on Continuous Professional Training” published by the SFC provides for the following CPT requirements:

- a minimum of 10 CPT hours a year for licensed representatives and relevant individuals; and
- a minimum of 12 CPT hours a year for responsible officers and executive officers (including 2 CPT hours on topics relating to regulatory compliance).

In addition, an individual should attend at least five CPT hours a year (out of the 10 hours for licensed representatives and relevant individuals and 12 hours for responsible officers and executive officers) on topics directly relevant to the regulated activities for which he or she is licensed at the time the CPT hours are undertaken.

### HKMA

The HKMA has implemented the “Enhanced Competency Framework”(ECF) for banking practitioners. While the ECF is not a mandatory regime, banks are strongly encouraged to adopt it as the benchmark for enhancing the level of core competence and ongoing professional development of banking practitioners.

### IA

Under the “Guideline on Continuing Professional Development for Licensed Insurance Intermediaries”, licensed insurance intermediaries who are individuals are required to receive training through CPD to preserve their professional competence and standards in providing service to policyholders and potential policyholders.

The minimum number of CPD hours for individual licensees is 15 CPD hours for each assessment period, including a minimum of three compulsory CPD hours on “Ethics or Regulations” courses.

Financial services employees are also required to receive training on anti-money laundering and counter-financing of terrorism. New staff should be required to attend initial training as soon as possible after being hired or appointed. Apart from the initial training, refresher training should be provided regularly to ensure that staff are reminded of their responsibilities and are kept informed of new developments.

Last updated on 22/01/2023



## Ireland

Author: *Karen Killalea, Ciara Ni Longaigh*  
at Maples Group

Yes. A CF employee, subject to the Minimum Competency regime, will be required to complete CPD training. Evidence of meeting that CPD requirement is also a factor in determining a person's F&P. RFSPs must maintain records of CPD training provided to CFs to demonstrate compliance with the minimum competency regime.

The 2023 Act also introduces new training obligations for those subject to the Common and Additional Conduct Standards, with firms being required to train those persons on how these obligations apply to them and their new duties of responsibility. Attendance at, or completion of, training in respect of the Conduct Standards should be mandatory and such attendance should be carefully documented with refresher training rolled out periodically.

Employers within the scope of the Criminal Justice (Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing) Acts 2010 - 2021 (including RFSPs) are required to provide annual training to relevant staff and directors on its requirements and the RFSP must have procedures in place to comply with that legislation and associated guidance.

Depending on the RFSP's business, additional mandatory training may be needed annually, for example, on topics such as market abuse.

The designated person for responding to protected disclosures should be trained and competent in the identification and handling of protected disclosures.

Last updated on 24/04/2024

## Switzerland

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at Walder Wyss

In general, regulated companies (eg, banks, insurance companies or asset managers) are required to set up and maintain an organisation that ensures compliance with applicable financial market laws. Given the organisational measures and depending on the regulatory status of the employing entity and the position and activities of the financial services employee, there are training requirements.

While Swiss financial market regulations do not have an exhaustive list of exact training requirements, FINMA requires, among others, that the highest bodies of supervised companies (eg, executives of board members of banks, securities firms, insurance and reinsurance companies, fund management companies, managers of collective assets or asset managers) can fulfil the requirements of the so-called fit and proper test. These requirements extend to all character-related and professional elements that enable an officeholder to manage a supervised company in compliance with applicable laws. Part of the professional elements are relevant work experience and education. In addition, persons holding key positions (eg, compliance and risk officers and their deputies) are required to demonstrate sufficient know-how because of their work experience and education.

That said, the Swiss financial services and insurance supervisory regulations provide for more concrete training requirements. In particular, client advisers of Swiss and foreign financial service providers (eg, investment advisers) may need to demonstrate that they have sufficient knowledge of the code of conduct rules of the Swiss financial services regulation and the necessary expertise required to perform their activities. In addition, insurance intermediaries registered with FINMA's insurance intermediary register have to prove that they have undergone sufficient education and have sufficient qualifications. On its website, FINMA has published a list of different educational Swiss and foreign qualifications that it deems to be sufficient.

Last updated on 16/04/2024

## **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?**

## Hong Kong



## **SFC**

Under the SFO, licensed representatives and ROs are required to be “a fit and proper person” to carry on the regulated activities and must adhere to the standards of behaviour set out in the “Code of Conduct for Persons Licensed by or Registered with the Securities and Futures Commission”. Other relevant guidelines regarding standards of behaviour include:

- “Fit and Proper Guidelines”, which set out the general expectations of the SFC of what is necessary to satisfy the licensing or registration requirements that a person is fit and proper.
- “Guidelines on Competence”, which set out the competence requirements and its objective to ensure a person is equipped with the necessary technical skills and professional expertise to be “fit”, and is aware of the relevant ethical standards and regulatory knowledge to be “proper” in carrying on any regulated activities.

## **HKMA**

Under the BO, employees of an authorised institution that carry on regulated activities under the SFO are required to be fit and proper. In addition, the HKMA needs to be satisfied that the chief executive, directors, controllers and executive officers of the authorised institutions are fit and proper. Other relevant guidelines regarding standards of behaviour include:

- “Code of Banking Practice”, which is to be observed by authorised institutions in dealing with and providing services to their customers.
- Supervisory Policy Manual CG – 2 “Systems of Control for Appointment of Managers”, which sets out the system of control that authorised institutions should have for ensuring the fitness and propriety of individuals appointed as managers.

## **IA**

The conduct requirements for licensed insurance agents and brokers are set out in Division 4 of the IO. Other relevant codes and guidelines include:

- “Code of Conduct for Licensed Insurance Agents”, which sets out the fundamental principles of professional conduct that buyers of insurance are entitled to expect in their dealings with licensed insurance agents.
- “Code of Conduct for Licensed Insurance Brokers”, which sets out the fundamental principles of professional conduct that buyers of insurance are entitled to expect in their dealings with licensed insurance brokers.
- “Guideline on ‘Fit and Proper’ Criteria under the Insurance Ordinance”

Last updated on 22/01/2023

## **Ireland**

Author: *Karen Killalea, Ciara Ni Longaigh*  
at Maples Group

Yes there are. They are:

- the F&P Standards;
- the minimum competency regime; and
- the IAF and SEAR (see question 1).

There are also sector-specific conduct of business requirements in legislation and codes, including the Consumer Protection Code 2012, the MiFID II regime, and other regulatory requirements applicable to RFSPs based on their industry sector that apply and deal with matters such as:

- error handling,
- disclosures to customers,
- acting in the best interests of customers; and
- complaints handling.

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## Switzerland

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Depending on the regulatory status of the employing entity and, as the case may be, on the exact activities of a financial service employee, a financial service employee needs to adhere to certain code of conduct rules (eg, regarding transparency and care, documentation and accountability).

Supervised companies in Switzerland are, in principle, required to set up an organisation that ensures the compliance with Swiss financial market laws and its statutory code of conduct rules. For this purpose, among others, companies are required to issue regulations that their employees must follow.

Under Swiss financial market laws, code of conduct rules are generally based on abstract statutory rules and concretized by recognised privately organised associations.

In particular, several professional organisations (eg, the Swiss Bankers Association or the Asset Management Association) and self-regulated organisations issue their own set of code of conduct rules that members are required to follow.

Last updated on 16/04/2024

## **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?**

## Hong Kong

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### **SFC – Self-reporting obligation**

An SFC-licensed intermediary is subject to the self-reporting obligation under paragraph 12.5 of the “Code of Conduct for Persons Licensed by or Registered with the Securities and Futures Commission”. A licensed or registered person should report to the SFC immediately upon the occurrence of any material breach, infringement or non-compliance with any laws, rules regulations, and codes administered or issued by the SFC, exchange or clearing house of which it is a member or participant of, and the requirement of any regulatory authority applicable to that intermediary. This encompasses both actual and suspected breaches, infringements or non-compliance. In the report, the particulars of the actual or suspected breach, infringement or non-compliance, and relevant information and documents must be included to fulfil the obligation.

The same is to be reported by the registered institutions to the HKMA. The HKMA also requires authorised institutions to submit an incident report on the same day of discovering the incident.

### **SFC - Internal investigation disclosure obligation**

In addition, a licensed corporation is required to provide the SFC with information about whether a licensed individual who ceases to be accredited to it (outgoing employee) was under any investigation commenced by the licensed corporation within six months preceding his or her cessation of accreditation. If the internal investigation commences after the notification of cessation of accreditation, the licensed corporation should also notify the SFC as soon as practicable. In addition, even if a firm has completed its investigation and made no negative findings against an outgoing employee, the firm will still be required to notify the SFC of the investigation.

The SFC expects licensed corporations to proactively disclose information about all investigative actions and the following is a non-exhaustive list of examples of investigations involving an outgoing employee that a licensed corporation should disclose to the SFC:

- investigations about a suspected breach or breach of applicable laws, rules and regulations;
- investigations about a suspected breach or breach of the licensed corporation's internal policies or procedures;
- investigations about misconduct that are likely to give rise to concerns about the fitness and properness of the outgoing employee;
- investigations about any matter that may have an adverse market or client impact; and
- investigations about any matter potentially involving fraud, dishonesty and misfeasance.

### **HKMA - Reporting incidents to HKMA**

According to the “Incident Response and Management Procedures” published by the HKMA, once an authorised institution has become aware that a significant incident has occurred, the authorised institution concerned should notify the HKMA immediately and provide it with whatever information is available at the time. An authorised institution should not wait until it has rectified the problem before reporting the incident to the HKMA.

According to the Supervisory Policy Manual SB-1 “Supervision of Regulated Activities of SFC-Registered Authorized Institutions”, to be in line with the reporting requirements imposed by the SFC on licensed representatives, authorised institutions will be required to notify the HKMA in writing within seven business days upon knowledge of the occurrence of certain information (including any subsequent changes) of the relevant individuals. The required information is on whether or not the person is or has been:

- convicted of or charged with any criminal offence (other than a minor offence) in Hong Kong or elsewhere;
- subject to any disciplinary action, or investigation by a regulatory body or criminal investigatory body (as the case may be) in Hong Kong or elsewhere;
- subject to, or involved in the management of a corporation or business that has been or is subject to, any investigation by a criminal investigatory body or any regulatory body in Hong Kong or elsewhere concerning offences involving fraud or dishonesty;
- engaged in any judicial or other proceedings, whether in Hong Kong or elsewhere, that is material or relevant to the fitness and propriety of the individual; or
- bankrupt or aware of the existence of any matters that might render him insolvent or lead to the appointment of a receiver of his property under the Bankruptcy Ordinance.

### **HKMA - Guidance Note on Cooperation with HKMA Investigations**

Under the “Guidance Note on Cooperation with the HKMA in Investigations and Enforcement Proceedings”, the HKMA encourages and recognises the cooperation of authorised institutions, banks and their staff in investigations and enforcement proceedings. Under this Guidance Note, cooperation includes early and voluntary reporting of any suspected breach or misconduct, taking a proactive approach to assist the HKMA’s investigation, and making timely arrangements to provide evidence and information.

### **IA - Self-reporting obligation**

Under “the Code of Conduct for Licensed Insurance Agents/Brokers”, there is a self-reporting obligation by licensed insurance agencies or brokerages to the IA. A licensed insurance agency or brokerage is required to have proper controls and procedures to ensure the following incidents are reported to the IA as soon as is reasonably practicable:

- a disciplinary action taken by the HKMA, the SFC or the Mandatory Provident Fund Schemes Authority;
- a criminal conviction (other than a minor offence) by any court in Hong Kong or elsewhere;
- any material breaches of requirements under the IO or any rules, regulations, codes or guidelines administered or issued by the IA; and
- any material incidents which happen to the agency or brokerage.

Last updated on 22/01/2023

## Ireland

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The CBI expects RFSPs to be open and transparent in their engagement, including concerning compliance with the F&P Standards and the Common Conduct Standards. While early versions of the IAF regulations and related guidance contained an obligation on a RFSP to report to the CBI if disciplinary action had been taken against an individual, the obligation was removed from the latest version of the draft legislation. The Guidance indicated that the CBI would expect that they would have already received relevant details as it provides that firms and persons performing PCF roles are required to report to the CBI where they suspect that a "prescribed contravention" may have occurred for the purposes of the CBI legislative framework and the CBI states that a breach of the Common Conduct Standards and/or Additional Conduct Standards is a "prescribed contravention" for these purposes.

Last updated on 24/04/2024

## Switzerland

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As a general principle, supervised companies are required to ensure that persons holding, in particular, executive, overall management, oversight or control functions fulfil the requirements of the “fit and proper” test. Consequently, such persons must be of good repute and can guarantee compliance with applicable laws and regulations.

If a person cannot guarantee that the regulatory requirements are fulfilled at all times (eg, because of a material breach of its duties) the employing entity and its audit companies may be required to immediately report to FINMA, respectively, any incident that is of significance.

Last updated on 16/04/2024

# **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?**

## Hong Kong

Author: *Charles Mo, Joanne Mok*  
at Morgan Lewis & Bockius

### **Anti-money laundering and counter-financing of terrorism**

Financial services employees are required to receive training on anti-money laundering and counter-financing of terrorism. New staff should be required to attend initial training as soon as possible after being hired or appointed. Apart from the initial training, refresher training should be provided regularly to ensure that staff are reminded of their responsibilities and are kept informed of new developments (see question 8).

### **Whistleblowing**

There is no single comprehensive whistleblowing legislation to protect whistleblowers in Hong Kong. However, piecemeal provisions in various ordinances may protect specific whistleblowers for the reporting of specific offences. For example, the Employment Ordinance provides that an employer shall not terminate (or threaten to terminate) the employment of, or in any way discriminate against, an employee because the employee has given evidence or information in any proceedings or inquiry in connection with the enforcement of the Employment Ordinance, work accidents or breach of work safety legislation.

While it is not legally required, as good practice, employers should consider implementing a whistleblowing policy to set out, among others, the type of incidents that should be reported and the procedures for filing the report.

### **Workplace harassment**

Under the Sex Discrimination Ordinance, Disability Discrimination Ordinance and Race Discrimination Ordinance, any harassment in the workplace based on sex, pregnancy, disability and race (which includes colour, descent, ethnic or national origins) is unlawful.

As employers are vicariously liable for the wrongful acts of their employees (whether or not the act was done with the employer's knowledge or approval), one of the statutory defences is for employers to establish that they took "reasonably practicable steps" to prevent the wrongful act in the workplace. Employers should therefore put in place anti-harassment policies and procedures to prevent harassment from happening in the workplace and to provide complaint or reporting procedures to handle such incidents.

Last updated on 22/01/2023

## Ireland

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at Maples Group

Yes. Concerning the prevention of wrongdoing, RFSPs should implement a written protected disclosures/whistleblowing policy that explains the secure and confidential internal and external reporting channels available to workers who wish to report relevant wrongdoings. The anti-retaliation protection should be explained and workers should understand from the policy how a report of relevant wrongdoing will be dealt with by the RFSP.

RFSPs should ensure that they have clear, up-to-date and fully compliant policies governing:

- dignity at work (including anti-harassment and anti-bullying measures); and
- grievance and disciplinary policies.

RFSPs should ensure that employees are trained on the RFSP's dignity at work (anti-bullying and harassment) policies to ensure that the RFSP's values, culture and commitment to preventing harassment and bullying are clear regarding their rights and obligations.

## Switzerland

Author: *Simone Wetzstein, Matthias Lötscher, Sarah Vettiger*  
at Walder Wyss

There are no specific whistleblowing laws in Switzerland, but employees have a right to report grievances and misconduct to their employer, provided that they do not commit a breach of a fiduciary duty or cause damage (eg, malicious false reports).

However, employees must also report material facts or incidents of misconduct and the misconduct of other employees discovered in the course of their work to their employer under the employee's duty of loyalty.

On the other hand, an employee's duty of loyalty and, in particular, an employee's statutory duty of confidentiality flowing from it may also give rise to a duty to not report.

Based on the current legal situation, there may be a conflict between an employee's need to report grievances (internally or externally) and a possible duty to not report with regard to an external report. An attempt to resolve this conflict through legislation has failed, and a new attempt to introduce whistleblowing legislation in Switzerland is not expected anytime soon.

Concerning whistleblowing by employees to a public authority or even to the public, employees are regularly prevented from doing so by confidentiality obligations under criminal law. Any justification for such a disclosure will usually only be examined in the context of a criminal investigation against the employee.

However, larger companies have taken measures and set up certain processes to uncover and prevent wrongdoing without having to do so under mandatory laws. For instance, companies have implemented internal or external reporting offices.

When it comes to harassment, an employer is explicitly required to protect employees from sexual harassment (prevention) and to protect any victims from further disadvantages (active protection). According to the Gender Equality Act, victims of sexual harassment may be awarded compensation of up to six months' wages by the courts, in addition to damages and restitution, unless the employer can prove that they have "taken all measures that are necessary and appropriate according to experience to prevent sexual harassment and that they can reasonably be expected to take". Employers are therefore advised to actively address the issue of sexual harassment (as well as general discrimination and bullying) in the workplace and include it in their regulations or directives.

Last updated on 16/04/2024

## **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?**

## Hong Kong

Author: *Charles Mo, Joanne Mok*  
at Morgan Lewis & Bockius

There are no particular rules or protocols that apply when terminating the employment of an employee in the financial services sector. The termination procedures will follow the requirements under the Employment Ordinance and the contractual terms of the employment contract. In certain cases (eg, termination of senior executives), the parties may enter into a mutual release and settlement agreement.

The licensed corporations should notify the regulators of any changes, including cessation of appointment of the licensed representative and responsible officer or managers-in-charge of core functions, within seven business days. In the case of registered institutions, the notification should be made to both the SFC and the HKMA.

Under section 64R of the IO, within 14 days after the day on which an authorised insurer, a licensed insurance agency or a licensed insurance broker company (collectively, “Appointing Principal”) terminates the appointment of a licensed insurance agency, a licensed individual insurance agent, a licensed technical representative (agent), a licensed technical representative (broker) or a responsible officer (as the case may be), then the Appointing Principal should notify the IA in writing of the termination.

Last updated on 22/01/2023



## Ireland

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Where possible it is important to try to resolve any outstanding issues that a PCF has or may have before the PCF's contract is terminated. An RFSP is required to give details of the circumstances of a PCF's termination of employment and to confirm whether or not there are outstanding issues regarding the PCF.

It is important to ensure that there are adequate provisions to govern the following in any settlement agreement or termination arrangements:

- adequate handover of operational responsibility;
- continued co-operation on operational matters within the employee's knowledge or in relation to matters that may subsequently be investigated by the CBI;
- secure return of all company property including any personal data; and
- post-termination confidentiality obligations and any other necessary post-termination restrictions.

Last updated on 24/04/2024



## Switzerland

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There are no specific rules or protocols that apply when terminating the employment of an employee in the financial services sector. However, because changes in the strategic and executive management of, in particular, regulated companies such as banks, insurance companies, securities firms, fund management companies, managers of collective assets or asset managers are subject to a prior authorization by FINMA, the timing of termination and re-hiring of particular persons should be considered.

The general rules on the termination of an employment relationship apply under Swiss law: any employment contract concluded for an indefinite period may be unilaterally terminated by both employer and employee, subject to the contractual or (if no contractual notice period was agreed) statutory notice periods for any reason (ordinary termination).

The termination notice needs to be physically received before the notice period can start, meaning the notice needs to be received by the employee before the end of a month so that the notice period can start



on the first day of the next month. If notice is not received before the end of the month, the notice period would start the month following the receipt of the notice. A termination notice might be either delivered by mail or personally.

Swiss law does not provide for payment in lieu of a notice period. The only option in this regard is to either send the employee on garden leave or to agree within the termination agreement to terminate the employment relationship per an earlier termination date than the one provided for in the termination notice.

As a general rule, an employment contract may be terminated by either party for any reason. However, Swiss statutory law provides for protection from termination by notice for both employers and employees, distinguishing between abusive and untimely notices of termination.

Based on social policy concerns, the employer must observe certain waiting periods, during which a notice cannot validly be served (so-called untimely notice). Such waiting periods apply (art. 336c CO), for example, during compulsory military or civil defence service, full- or part-time absence from work due to illness or an accident, or during an employee's pregnancy and 16 weeks following the birth of the child. Any notice given by the employer during these waiting periods is void. Any notice given before the respective period is effective, but once the special situation has occurred and for the period it lasts, the running of the applicable notice period is suspended and only continues after the end of the period in question.

In addition, Swiss civil law defines certain grounds based on which terminations are considered abusive (article 336 CO). Termination by the employer might be considered abusive (eg, if it is based on a personal characteristic of the other party (eg, gender, race, age), or if the other party exercises a right guaranteed by the Swiss Federal Constitution (eg, religion or membership in a political party) unless the exercise of this right violates an obligation of the contract of employment or is seriously prejudicial to the work climate). If the employer abusively terminates the employment contract, the employer has to pay damages to the employee and a penalty of up to six months' remuneration (article 336a CO). Nevertheless, an abusive termination remains valid.

Regarding settlement agreements, Swiss employment law allows the conclusion of such agreements, but there are strict limits on the parties' freedom of contract. Termination agreements may not be concluded that circumvent statutory provisions on employee protection. According to Swiss case law, termination agreements are usually valid and enforceable if both parties make real concessions, and if the agreement is also favourable for the employee. To conclude a termination agreement initiated by the employer, the employee must also be granted a sufficient reflection period. No further formalities need to be observed when concluding termination agreements, although it is generally advisable to have them in writing.

Last updated on 16/04/2024

## **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?**



Hong Kong

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at Morgan Lewis & Bockius

There are no particular rules that apply concerning the use of post-termination restrictive covenants for employees in the financial services sector. The rules concerning post-termination restrictive covenants are governed by common law principles in which they will only be enforced if the restriction is necessary for the protection of the employer's legitimate business interest and is reasonable in scope and duration.

## Ireland

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No there are no bespoke rules that apply. Post termination restrictions in Ireland are void as being in restraint of trade unless it can be shown that the restrictions are necessary to protect an employer's legitimate proprietary interest and they are proportionate and reasonable in their scope and duration to achieve that protection[i].

[i] Law as of 15 April 2024

Last updated on 24/04/2024

## Switzerland

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There are no particular rules that apply concerning the use of post-termination restrictive covenants for employees in the financial services sector in Switzerland. Rather, general post-contractual non-compete regulations come into play: the parties of an employment contract may agree on a non-compete clause, which must be included in the employment contract in writing to be valid. For the non-compete clause to be relevant, it must be sufficiently limited in terms of time, place and subject matter. Normally, the duration of a post-termination non-compete clause is no more than one year; however, the statutorily permissible duration is three years.

As a prerequisite for a contractual non-compete clause to be binding, access to sensitive data is required. The employee must either have access to customer data or manufacturing or business secrets. However, access alone is not enough. There must also be the possibility of harming the employer using this knowledge.

If a relationship between the customer and the employee or employer is personal (which is, for example, the case for lawyers or doctors), a post-termination non-compete clause is not applicable according to the Federal Supreme Court.

If there is an excessive non-compete clause, this can be restricted by a judge. In practice, most of the time, no restriction of the post-termination non-compete clause is imposed if the employer offers consideration in return for the agreement. The prohibition of competition may become invalid for two reasons. Firstly, the clause can become irrelevant if the employer has no more interest in maintaining the non-compete clause. Secondly, the clause is not effective if the employer has terminated the employment relationship. However, this does not apply if the employee has given the employer a reason to terminate the employment relationship.

Swiss employment law does not provide for any compensation for a post-termination non-compete clause.

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## 14. Are non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) potentially

# lawful in your jurisdiction? If so, must they follow any particular form or rules?



## Hong Kong

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Non-disclosure agreements are legally enforceable in Hong Kong. They follow the contract law rules and there is no other particular form or rules. To be enforceable, a non-disclosure agreement must protect information that is both confidential and valuable. There are common exceptions where confidentiality will not apply to certain information, including information available in the public domain, information lawfully received from a third party without proprietary or confidentiality limitations, information known to the employee before first receipt of same from the employer, and information disclosed in circumstances required by law or regulatory requirement.

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## Ireland

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Yes. It is possible to use NDAs in Ireland and it is quite common for them to be used, but there are some limitations on their use and enforceability.

Certain mandatory reporting obligations will override a contractual non-disclosure agreement, such as the requirement for PCFs under section 38(2) of the CBI (Supervision and Enforcement) Act 2013 to disclose certain matters to the CBI.

Further, an NDA cannot extinguish an employee's right to anti-retaliation protection where the employee makes a protected disclosure either internally or externally under the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 - 2022.

Last updated on 24/04/2024



## Switzerland

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Non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) are generally lawful in Switzerland. However, NDAs are not regulated by statutory law and therefore do not have to follow any particular statutory form or rule. Nevertheless, most NDAs often contain a similar basic structure.

The core clauses of an NDA concern:

- manufacturing and business secrets or the scope of further confidentiality;
- the purpose of use;
- the return and destruction of devices containing confidential information; and
- post-contractual confidentiality obligations.

As a general rule, it is recommended to use the written form.

To ensure possible enforcement of an NDA in the employment context, the requirements of a post-

contractual non-compete obligation (see below) must be met.

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