

# Employment in Financial Services

## Contributing Editor

*Louise Skinner at Morgan Lewis & Bockius*

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



### India

Author: *Vikram Shroff*  
at AZB & Partners

The important labour laws that may apply to financial services employees are:

- Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 (IDA)
- Contract Labour (Regulation & Abolition) Act, 1970
- Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972
- Payment of Bonus Act, 1965
- Equal Remuneration Act, 1976
- Maternity Benefit Act, 1961
- Apprentices Act, 1961
- Employees' Compensation Act, 1923
- Employment Exchanges (Compulsory Notification of Vacancies) Act, 1959
- The Employees' Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952
- Shops and Establishments Act(s)[\[1\]](#).

In addition, there are financial services regulations in India such as the Banking Regulation Act, 1949; Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934; Securities and Exchange Board of India Act, 1992 (and the regulations thereunder); Insurance Act, 1938; Income-tax Act, 1961; and the Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999 (and the regulations thereunder). There are also multiple regulators established under these laws.

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[\[1\]](#) State-specific.

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### United Kingdom

Author: *Louise Skinner, Thomas Twitchett, Oliver Gregory*  
at Morgan Lewis & Bockius

In the UK, there are two main regulators responsible for the supervision of financial institutions. These are:

- The Prudential Regulation Authority (the PRA) – The PRA supervises over 1,500 financial institutions, including banks, building societies, credit unions, insurance companies and major investment firms. It creates policies for these institutions to follow and watches over aspects of their business.
- The Financial Conduct Authority (the FCA) – The FCA regulates the conduct of approximately 50,000 firms, prudentially supervises 48,000 firms, and sets specific standards for around 18,000 firms.

Some financial institutions are regulated by both the PRA and FCA (dual-regulated). Those financial institutions must comply with rules set down by the PRA in its rulebook (the PRA Rulebook) and by the FCA in its handbook (the FCA Handbook). Other firms are regulated solely by the FCA (solo-regulated) and must comply with the FCA handbook alone. Different rules can apply depending on the nature and size of the firm. The PRA and FCA work closely on certain issues and firms, but the FCA focuses specifically on ensuring fair outcomes for consumers.

The Senior Managers and Certification Regime (SM&CR) sets out how the UK regulators oversee people in businesses supervised and regulated by them, and how those people must act. As the FCA has summarised, “The SM&CR aims to reduce harm to consumers and strengthen market integrity by making individuals more accountable for their conduct and competence” (<https://www.fca.org.uk/firms/senior-managers-certification-regime>).

SM&CR consists of three elements:

- The Senior Managers Regime (SMR) – This applies to the most senior people in a firm (senior managers) who perform one or more senior management functions (SMFs). These functions are specified in the PRA Rulebook and the FCA Handbook. Senior managers must be pre-approved by the PRA or FCA before starting their roles. Each senior manager must also have a “Statement of Responsibilities” (that sets out what they are responsible and accountable for), which may include (depending on the firm) certain responsibilities prescribed by the regulator known as “Prescribed Responsibilities”. Every year, senior managers must be certified as fit and proper to carry out their role by their firm.
- The Certification Regime (CR) – This applies to employees who, because of their role, could pose a risk of significant harm to the firm or its customers, such as employees who offer investment advice (certified staff). For solo-regulated firms, these roles are generally called certification functions. Firms must certify that these employees are fit and proper for their roles both at the outset of their employment and continuously.
- The Conduct Rules – The Conduct Rules set minimum standards of individual behaviour in financial services in the UK. They apply to almost all employees of a firm. They also include particular rules applicable only to senior managers.

Certain parts of SM&CR apply to particular firms only. This is outside the scope of this note, which sets out the general position under SM&CR.

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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?**

## India

Author: *Vikram Shroff*  
at AZB & Partners

The pre-screening measures, when employing a financial service employee, are carried out in compliance with the frameworks laid down by the respective industry regulators. For instance, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the central banking sector regulator in India, periodically issues certain guidelines for banking and non-banking employers to conduct mandatory employee background checks. These regulators also recognise certain “Self-Regulatory Organisations” (SROs), who then play the primary role in conducting grassroots verifications. SROs conduct character and antecedent verification of employees registered with them as per the standards set by the regulator. Strict police verification of at least the last two addresses is usually mandated and verifications are periodically updated and shared on a common database at an industry level. For instance, the Finance Industry Development Council is an SRO of Non-Banking Finance Companies (NBFCs) and is registered with the RBI.

A financial services employer should be sensitive to the data being used for pre-screening measures as India protects individual privacy. Hence, both the employer and the service provider engaged by the employer should obtain prior consent from the prospective employee before pre-screening. If the pre-screening measures include the collection of “sensitive personal data information[1]”, then an employer must seek the individual’s consent, which would also help mitigate risks for any claims concerning the invasion of an employee’s privacy. Employers should ideally ensure that pre-screening is complete before the employee is hired. A comprehensive pre-screening will include verification of educational qualifications, checks with past employers, verification of residential addresses, police records, and passport status. Usually, with seniority of the role, checks with past employers happen more rigorously, while for entry-level employees, checks with academic institutions about educational qualifications may be done more rigorously. Similar standards must be met by contract employees empanelled by the service providers.

There is no regulator-specified reference that must be provided by previous employers in the financial services industry. However, in practice, most public sector banks (eg, Bank of India) and many central public sector undertakings in financial services (eg, Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC)), as per their selection or onboarding protocols, require at least two “Character Certificates”, one of which should be from the head of the educational institution last attended or the present employer and the other should be from gazetted officers[2] or bank officers, without any familial ties to the employee.

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[1] Information Technology Act, 2000 & Information Technology (Reasonable Security Practices and Procedures and Sensitive Personal Data or Information) Rules 2011.

[2] A ‘gazetted officer’ is a high rank government official working as an officer for the government of India or any state government whose name and credentials are published in the Gazette of India.

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## United Kingdom

Author: *Louise Skinner, Thomas Twitchett, Oliver Gregory*  
at Morgan Lewis & Bockius

For employees subject to the SMR, anyone performing an SMF must be pre-approved by the relevant regulator before they can start their role. Generally, firms that wish to employ a senior manager must first carry out sufficient due diligence to satisfy themselves that the candidate is a fit and proper person to perform their proposed functions. In this regard, firms must consider the individual’s qualifications, training, competency and personal characteristics. The firm must also carry out a criminal records check. They may then apply to the relevant regulator for that candidate’s pre-approval. In the firm’s application, all matters relating to the candidate’s fitness and propriety must be disclosed. The firm must also enclose a statement

of that individual's proposed responsibilities and (depending on the firm) the latest version of the firm's management responsibilities map.

For employees subject to the CR, before the appointment and annually thereafter, these employees must be certified by the employing SM&CR firm as being fit and proper. Certification does not involve pre-approval by the FCA or PRA.

Additionally, firms must comply with the regulatory reference rules for all candidates subject to either the SMR or CR before their employment. These rules require employing firms to request a regulatory reference from all previous employers covering the past six years of employment. Information must be shared between regulated firms using a particular template, which includes information relevant to assessing whether a candidate is fit and proper. Firms are also expected to retain records of disciplinary and fit and proper findings going back six years for their employees (or longer for findings of gross misconduct), and they must update regulatory references that they have previously given where new significant information comes to light that would impact the content of a previously given regulatory reference.

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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?**



#### **India**

Author: *Vikram Shroff*  
at AZB & Partners

When engaging employees within the financial services industry, documents covering past employment, educational qualifications, certificates of achievement, income tax returns, medical health fitness certificates attested by a registered doctor, official identity cards and proof of address (Aadhar Card and Voter ID card, Driving Licence or Passport) and documentation for anything mentioned on a curriculum vitae. In the financial services industry, certificates showing excellence in finance-related services will increase the candidature of a potential employee. The contract of employment of an employer usually contains clauses that make the offer conditional upon the fulfilment of the employee's representations relating to educational qualifications, background, work experience, skill certifications (if applicable), character certificate, etc.

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#### **United Kingdom**

Author: *Louise Skinner, Thomas Twitchett, Oliver Gregory*  
at Morgan Lewis & Bockius

As a matter of general UK employment law, employers must give employees written particulars of certain terms and conditions of employment. This is known as a "section 1 statement" after section 1 of the Employment Rights Act 1996, which sets out the mandatory information that employers must give to employees no later than the first day of their employment. This includes fundamental information such as the names of the employer and employee; the date of commencement of employment; the rates and timing of pay; and working hours. Other prescribed particulars (such as information regarding pensions, collective

agreements and training) can be provided to employees in instalments within two months of commencement of employment. Typically, a written employment contract will contain the relevant information to satisfy these requirements.

Financial services employers should ensure that, in addition, their employment contracts reinforce the requirements of SM&CR. This will help the employer manage the employment relationship in a manner compliant with SM&CR and demonstrate to the relevant regulators the employer's commitment to compliance with SM&CR. The employment contract will usually include, therefore, additional provisions regarding the completion of SM&CR-compliant background checks; confirmation of the employee's regulated function (eg, their SMF or certification function); required regulatory standards of conduct; cooperation with fitness and propriety assessments; and tailored termination events.

In addition, all senior managers must have a statement of responsibility setting out their role and responsibilities. Certain firms must also allocate certain regulator-prescribed responsibilities (prescribed responsibilities) among senior managers. It is common to set out a senior manager's regulatory responsibilities in their employment contract.

Dual-regulated firms must also ensure that individuals approved to carry out a PRA-designated SMF are subject to any specific contractual requirements required by the PRA. For example, depending on the type of firm, a firm may be required to ensure that the relevant individual is contractually required to comply with certain standards of conduct, such as to act with integrity and with due care and skill (among other requirements).

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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?**



### **India**

Author: *Vikram Shroff*  
at AZB & Partners

The recruitment of financial services employees for public-sector enterprises may be done through competitive scores secured through multi-level tests held for generalist and specialist posts. For instance, the Institute of Banking Personnel Selection conducts tests for selection for public sector banks; and the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), LIC, etc, hold similar tests for their recruitment.

In terms of industry practice, eligibility to appear at the preliminary levels or the final interview stages of the above tests may sometimes require certain specific certifications (eg, computer certifications for clerical posts in the banking sector. These certifications are prescribed by industry regulators and are actioned by industry collectives. For instance, the RBI<sup>[1]</sup> has made it mandatory for all banking and non-banking financial institutions to obtain certification for their employees. Industry collective the Indian Banking Association provides such certifications in specific areas like treasury operations, risk management, accounting and credit management. Along with this, further certifications may also be required for Anti-Money Laundering (AML), Know Your Customer (KYC), compliance with foreign exchange regulations, awareness of legal aspects of cyber security, etc.<sup>[2]</sup>

Similarly, the National Institute of Securities Markets (NISM), an institute promoted by SEBI, accredits institutions that coach and certify wealth management advisors. NISM-accredited qualifications are compulsory for wealth managers in the capital market segment. Also, the Indian Institute of Banking and

Finance (IIBF) gives certification for Debt Recovery Agents based on RBI guidelines. Various collectives like the Fixed Income Money Market and Derivatives Association of India, Foreign Exchange Dealers Association of India and the Institute of Company Secretaries of India, inter alia, collaborate with the IIBF in the certification process in the treasury, forex and compliance sectors. The IIBF's certification for customer service, KYC/AML programmes of the IIBF, and other similar certified courses from the NISM/AMFI/IRDA etc, are essential before hiring employees for certain specialised roles.

As part of the registration process, the SEBI regulations relating to portfolio managers and investment advisors require certain specific employees to be employed with minimum qualifications.

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[1] Capacity Building in Banks and AIFIs, August 11, 2016 available at <<https://rbidocs.rbi.org.in/rdocs/notification/PDFs/NOTI36A5A106C515E84422947AB1D42F6EB391.PDF>>; IBA Circular no. CIR/HR&IR/KSC/2017-18/2602.

[2] RBI mandate on capacity building in banks, KPMG, available at <<https://home.kpmg/in/en/home/services/learning-academy/aas-learning-solutions/rbi-mandate-capacity-building-banks.html>>

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## United Kingdom

Author: *Louise Skinner, Thomas Twitchett, Oliver Gregory*  
at Morgan Lewis & Bockius

See question 2.

All individuals performing an SMF, as classified by the FCA or PRA, will be subject to the SMR. SMFs are described in the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (FSMA) as functions that require the person performing them to be responsible for managing one or more aspects of a firm's affairs authorised by the FSMA, and those aspects involve, or might involve, a risk of serious consequences for the firm or business or other interests in the UK. As noted, any individual performing an SMF will need to be pre-approved by the relevant regulator before they can start their role, and thereafter they must be certified as fit and proper by their firm annually. Applications to the regulator for pre-approval must disclose all matters relating to a candidate's fitness and propriety and be accompanied by a statement of responsibilities. Firms must carry out a criminal records check as part of the application for approval.

Additionally, employees of firms who are not senior managers but who, because of their role, could still pose a risk of significant harm to the firm or any of its customers, may be subject to the CR. The certification functions that place an employee within the ambit of the CR are different under the rules of the FCA and the PRA but include persons such as those dealing with clients or those subject to qualification requirements. These employees must be certified by their firm as fit and proper for their roles both at the outset of their employment and on an annual basis thereafter (certified staff). Firms are not required to carry out criminal records checks for certified staff, but firms can choose to do so to the extent it is lawful.

The regulators have set out detailed guidance for firms to consider when assessing an individual's fitness and propriety. This includes assessing an individual's honesty, integrity and reputation; competence and capability; and financial soundness.

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



Author: *Vikram Shroff*  
at AZB & Partners

There are no provisions that lay down enhanced responsibilities for a particular category of employees in the financial services sector.

However, the conduct rules for employees in the financial sector mandate employees to adhere to higher standards of code of conduct and self-discipline. Their codes of conduct include inter alia anti-bribery obligations, prohibition from accepting gifts in an official capacity, making representations to media, making contribution to political parties, holding demonstration against public interest, exercising undue influence to secure appointments of family members at same organisation or granting banking facilities without permission. They are supposed to observe secrecy in general and specifically, maintain financial secrecy about stocks too.

This question was upheld in *Harinarayan Seet v. Andhra Bank*<sup>[1]</sup>, wherein the Andhra Pradesh High Court recognised that banking sector employees are mandated to exhibit higher standards of honesty, integrity, devotion and diligence and any failure to discharge such duty with diligence may trigger dismissal.

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<sup>[1]</sup> WP No. 23310 of 2011.

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Author: *Louise Skinner, Thomas Twitchett, Oliver Gregory*  
at Morgan Lewis & Bockius

Every senior manager under the SMR has a “duty of responsibility” concerning the areas for which they are responsible. If a firm breaches a regulatory requirement, the senior manager responsible for the area relevant to the breach could be held accountable for the breach if they failed to take reasonable steps to prevent or stop the breach.

In addition, for most firms, the FCA requires that certain responsibilities – “prescribed responsibilities” – are allocated to appropriate senior managers. These responsibilities cover key conduct and prudential risks. They include, among others, responsibility for a firm’s performance of its obligations under the SMR; responsibility for a firm’s performance of its obligations under the CR; and responsibility for a firm’s obligations around conduct rules training and reporting. Firms must give careful thought to the best person to allocate each prescribed responsibility.

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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?**



Author: *Vikram Shroff*  
at AZB & Partners

There is no one-point register for financial services employees that individuals need to be listed on to undertake business activities. Such a register may vary depending upon the industry one is seeking and whether the post is that of a specialist or a generalist. Specialists like IT professionals, lawyers etc., working in financial services are bound by registration requirements mandated by the practice rules of their domains. For example, IT or ITES industry professionals may register themselves with the “National Skills Registry”<sup>[1]</sup>, an initiative of the technology industry body NASSCOM. This registry maintains a central database of their qualifications, experiences and demographic information. NASSCOM also runs a BFSI Sectoral Skill Council (BFSI SSC) to cater to the financial services sector. The National Institute of Securities Market (NISM) Skills Registry is another similar initiative by the NISM.

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<sup>[1]</sup> FAQs on Understanding NSR, available at <<https://nationalskillsregistry.com/faq-understanding-nsr.htm>>

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## United Kingdom

Author: *Louise Skinner, Thomas Twitchett, Oliver Gregory*  
at Morgan Lewis & Bockius

The FCA maintains a public list of authorised firms and the activities for which each firm has permission. This list is known as the Financial Services Register. The register also includes a directory of certified and assessed persons working in financial services – this includes for each firm (as applicable) senior managers; certified staff; directors (executive and non-executive) who are not performing SMFs; and other individuals who are sole traders or appointed representatives.

Firms are responsible for keeping the directory up to date. Firms must report certain information to the FCA about persons included in the register and directory, including information on an individual's role, their workplace location, and the types of business they are qualified to undertake. The FCA provides guidance and Q&As to assist firms with navigating the register and directory.

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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?**

## India

Author: *Vikram Shroff*  
at AZB & Partners

There are certain rules relating to compensation payable to financial services employees, such as those in the banking, mutual fund or asset management, and insurance industries.

The central bank of India, the RBI, deals with the compensation policy for all private-sector banks and foreign banks operating in India by requiring them to formulate their own compensation policy and annually reviewing it. Banks are not allowed to employ or continue the employment of any person whose remuneration is excessive in the RBI's opinion. For instance, the RBI lays down guidelines on the compensation of "Whole Time Directors ("WTD") / Chief Executive Officers / Material Risk Takers and Control Function Staff"[1], elaborate guidelines encompassing the governance of compensation and its alignment with prudent risk-taking, policies for risk control and compliance staff, the identification of "material risk takers", and disclosure and engagement by stakeholders. It even envisages deferred payments being subjected to malus or clawback arrangements if there was negative performance. For variable pay, it mandates banks to incorporate malus or clawback mechanisms and suggests they specify periods of malus or clawback application to cover at least deferral and retention periods.[2] It is pertinent to highlight that private sector and foreign banks in India must obtain regulatory approval[3] for the grant of remuneration to WTDs or CEOs.

The RBI also prescribes guidelines around compensation for key managerial personnel (KMP) and senior management in non-banking financial companies (NBFCs)[4]:

- NBFCs are mandated to form "Nomination and Remuneration Committees" (NRCs) as per Section 178 of the Companies Act, 2013, which will then be entrusted with framing, reviewing and implementing the compensation policy to be approved by the board of the company.
- The compensation must align with the risk related to the decision-making process. The compensation package can comprise both fixed and variable pay and may also be a mix of cash, equity or other forms, in line with projected risk factors.
- A bonus has no bearing on the performance of the individual. The bonus is guaranteed based on the fulfilment of certain criteria as may be specified in the compensation policy. A guaranteed bonus should neither be considered part of fixed pay nor variable pay and the same is not payable to KMP and senior management. However, a guaranteed bonus can be paid to new employees as part of a sign-on bonus whereby potential employees can be incentivised to join NBFCs.
- "Deferred compensation may be subject to malus/clawback arrangements." The compensation policy concerning malus or clawback must mandatorily apply for the period equal to at least the deferred retention period.

Despite the aforementioned guidelines being applicable from 1 April 2023, NBFCs must immediately begin aligning their internal procedures to comply with the mandatory guidelines above to assist the transition. Existing remuneration policies being followed by the NBFCs should be reviewed to make the necessary changes to be compliant with the above-mentioned policies.

When it comes to regulations on an "employee stock option plan" (ESOP) for financial services employees, regulators may impose industry-specific guidelines. For instance, as per the SEBI (Share Based Employee Benefits and Sweat Equity) Regulations, 2021[5], the employee stock option scheme should be drafted in a manner that no such employee violates SEBI (Insider Trading) Regulations, 1992 and SEBI (Prohibition of Fraudulent and Unfair Trade Practices relating to the Securities Market) Regulations, 1995. ESOPs issued to managerial staff and for non-cash consideration shall be treated as part of managerial remuneration. In another development, the RBI has directed that ESOPs should be at a fair value, shooting up costs and creating the cascading effect of replacing ESOPs with deferred bonus payments for senior managerial personnel.

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[1] Guidelines on Compensation of Whole Time Directors/Chief Executive Officers/Material Risk Takers and Control Function staff, November 4, 2019, available at  
<<https://rbidocs.rbi.org.in/rdocs/notification/PDFs/NOTI898C120D41D0E3465B8552E5467EDD7A56.PDF>>

[2] Guidelines on Compensation of Whole Time Directors/Chief Executive Officers/Material Risk Takers and Control Function staff, November 4, 2019, available at  
<https://rbidocs.rbi.org.in/rdocs/notification/PDFs/NOTI898C120D41D0E3465B8552E5467EDD7A56.PDF>

[3] Section 35B, Banking Regulation Act 1949.

[4] Guidelines on Compensation for Key Managerial Personnel (KMP) and Senior Management in non-banking financial companies (NBFCs), April 29, 2022, available at <<https://rbidocs.rbi.org.in/rdocs/notification/PDFs/KMPNBFCs962EC76438C845A6846A5BD59BC7513D.PDF>>

[5] Securities and Exchange Board of India (Share Based Employee Benefits and Sweat Equity) Regulations 2021, August 13, 2021, available at <[https://www.sebi.gov.in/legal/regulations/aug-2021/securities-and-exchange-board-of-india-share-based-employee-benefits-and-sweat-equity-regulations-2021\\_51889.html](https://www.sebi.gov.in/legal/regulations/aug-2021/securities-and-exchange-board-of-india-share-based-employee-benefits-and-sweat-equity-regulations-2021_51889.html)>

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## United Kingdom

Author: *Louise Skinner, Thomas Twitchett, Oliver Gregory*  
at Morgan Lewis & Bockius

The remuneration of financial services employees working at certain firms (such as banks, building societies, asset managers and investment firms) is heavily regulated. The relevant rules can be found in various FCA “Remuneration Codes” (each Code tailored to different firms) and also (for dual-regulated firms) in specific remuneration parts of the PRA Rulebook and directly applicable retained EU law.

The remuneration rules are complex and their application is dependent on each firm. The key principle of the rules, however, is that firms subject to them must ensure that their remuneration policies and practices are consistent with and promote sound and effective risk management.

Some elements of the rules apply to all staff, whereas others apply only to material risk-takers within a particular firm.

By way of a snapshot, the rules generally cover such matters as:

- the appropriate ratio between fixed pay and variable pay, to ensure that fixed pay is a sufficiently high proportion of total remuneration to allow for the possibility of paying no variable pay;
- the amount of any discretionary bonus pool, which should be based on profit, adjusted for current and future risks, and take into account the cost and quantity of the capital and liquidity required;
- performance-related bonuses, which should be assessed based on a variety of factors, including the performance of the individual, the relevant business unit and the overall results of the firm;
- restrictions on guaranteed variable pay and payments on termination of employment; and
- malus and clawback requirements.

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

### India

Author: *Vikram Shroff*  
at AZB & Partners

Financial services employees may undergo necessary training once they are selected and onboarded.

Financial services sectors categorise employees as specialists and generalists. On one hand, those in charge of specialist roles are deployed in treasury, derivatives trading, IT, forex, risk management, service delivery groups, product roles, legal, etc., while on the other, the generalists are deployed in branches, administrative functions, finance, some areas of treasury, taxation, general management, operations,

relationship or sales managing, etc. They should possess differentiated requisite academic qualifications with skill certifications (if any) or obtain competitive scores in recruitment tests.

As such, there are no legal requirements for prior training of employees in the financial services sector. There are various certificate courses, workshops and diplomas by financial institutions and agencies, which are recommended to be attended regularly to stay abreast of industry knowledge and to secure an edge in intra-organisational promotions.

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## United Kingdom

Author: *Louise Skinner, Thomas Twitchett, Oliver Gregory*  
at Morgan Lewis & Bockius

The PRA and FCA training and competence regimes set the minimum standards that must be achieved by individuals working in the financial services industry. These regimes aim to ensure that authorised firms have arrangements in place to satisfy themselves that their employees are competent.

All FSMA-authorised firms are required to have adequately trained and competent senior management and employees. The training and competence requirements include:

- Threshold conditions on suitability – All firms must show that persons connected with the firm are fit and proper, taking into account all the circumstances. When assessing the suitability threshold of an employee, the FCA and the PRA will consider:
  - the nature of the regulated activity the firm carries on or is seeking to carry on;
  - the need to ensure that the firm's affairs are conducted soundly and prudently;
  - the need to ensure that the firm's affairs are conducted appropriately, considering especially the interests of consumers and the integrity of the UK financial system; and
  - whether those who manage the firm's affairs have adequate skills and experience and act with probity.
- FCA Principles for Businesses or PRA Fundamental Rules – These rules lay out the parameters of the “fit and proper” standard set for firms in the threshold condition on suitability, and require firms to undertake the following:
  - recruit staff in sufficient numbers;
  - provide employees with appropriate training, with competence assessed continuously;
  - make proper arrangements for employees involved with carrying on regulated activities to achieve, maintain and enhance competence; and
  - train employees to pay due regard to the interests of a firm's customers and treat them fairly.
- Competent employees rule in chapters 3 and 5 of the Senior Management Arrangement Systems and Controls Sourcebook – This is the main employee competence requirement in the training and competence regime under the FSMA and applies to individuals engaged in a regulated activity in UK-regulated firms. The application of this rule can be complex and dependent upon the firm and the activities it undertakes, but in general, it provides that firms must employ personnel with the skills, knowledge and expertise necessary for the discharge of the responsibilities allocated to them.
- Detailed training and competence requirements in the FCA's training and competence handbook (TC) – The TC rules are designed to supplement the competent employees rule, especially concerning retail activities carried on by firms. Among others, these rules include the following:
  - rules on assessing and maintaining competence;
  - supervision of employees who have not yet been assessed as competent;
  - appropriate qualifications; and
  - recordkeeping and reporting for firms within its scope, including how a firm assessed its employees as competent, and how it has ensured that its employees remain competent.

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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?



Author: *Vikram Shroff*  
at AZB & Partners

Financial services regulators like the RBI, SEBI and Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) regulate employees through prescribed frameworks and their organisation-specific rules.

The obligations for the conduct of employees in financial services are determined depending upon the type of organisation: public sector banks (majorly owned by the state) or private banks; sectors (banking, non-banking, insurance, capital market); regions (different local laws); and level of seniority (liability of officers or manager is different from regular employees or clerical staff). Though there are no statutory standards, judicial pronouncements have set a higher threshold of duty of care for employees in the financial services sectors. The Andhra Pradesh High Court in *Harinarayan Seet v Andhra Bank*<sup>[1]</sup> held dismissal of service as a proportionate punishment for dereliction of duty by banking employees, which would have otherwise attracted a lesser penalty for employees in less-critical sectors.

In terms of general labour legislation also applicable to financial services employees, financial services organisations fall under the definition of “commercial establishments”, whose definition has been laid down by the Shops & Commercial Establishments Act (state level). They provide certain conduct-specific obligations, for example, a prohibition against discrimination, suspension or dismissal for misconduct.

The other major piece of labour legislation that lays down standards of conduct is the Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946 (IESOA). However, its applicability to commercial establishments or to a specific industry is dependent upon state-wide laws. For example, the states of Haryana and Karnataka have notified the application of the IESOA to commercial establishments with a minimum of 50 employees. This implies that financial services institutions in these states, meeting the above criteria, are bound to comply with the IESOA. Upon the application of the IESOA, the establishments are required to submit to the certifying officer draft standing orders proposed for their establishment, which should cover acceptable standards for employees.

In the banking sector, employees of public-sector banks, private-sector banks and foreign banks are bound by the obligations laid down by the RBI and their organisation rules. The provisions of these rules, which are different from other industries, are stricter: observance of secrecy; prohibition against using influence to secure employment for family members; bypassing regular compliance checks for availing of banking facilities; prohibition against media contributions, participating in politics or standing for election; demonstrations prejudicial to the public interest; and acceptance of gifts in an official capacity.

In terms of financial propriety, employees must not indulge in speculation in stocks and shares, but must avoid personal insolvency and even disclose their moveable and immoveable assets. During employment, they are also forbidden from engaging in any outside employment (stipendiary or honorary) without the prior approval of the organisation. Higher managerial employees are subject to additional scrutiny. Those belonging to public sector enterprises are brought within the jurisdiction of the Central Vigilance Commission, the apex vigilance institution. It is due to the gravity of corruption cases that the senior management of private sector banks is also included within the ambit of “public servant”, which usually includes employees of only public sector organisations. This was upheld by the Supreme Court of India in the case of *Central Bureau of Investigation v Ramesh Gelli*<sup>[2]</sup>. The organisations in the insurance and

capital markets sectors also have similar institution-wide conduct and disciplinary rules.

Directors of organisations in the financial services sector may also be subject to duties stated in Schedule IV of the Companies Act 2013 and the SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations 2015.

When it comes to outsourcing activities, financial institutions formulate a board-approved “Code of Conduct” as part of the “Outsourcing Agreement”, which is to be complied with by the outsourced service providers and their employees.<sup>[3]</sup>

Though financial services employees are held to a higher set of moral standards, their right to participate in trade union actions for voicing their concerns has been upheld time and again. Recently, the Madras High Court in the case of *D Thomas Franco Rajendra Dev v The Disciplinary Authority and Circle Development Officer and State Bank of India*<sup>[4]</sup> observed bank officers’ right to unionise. However, the right of bank employees to go on a strike gets limited since banks and other financial institutions are declared as ‘Public Utility Services’ (“PUS”). Accordingly, while they are not barred from going on strike, they must adhere to certain pre-requisites namely service of notice of at least 6 weeks before going on a strike, prohibition of any strike within 14 days from date of service of above notice, prohibition of going on a strike before the expiry of the date of that strike and non-authorization of any strike during the pendency of any conciliation proceedings or 7 days after the conclusion of such a proceeding. Upon being declared a PUS, the concerned industry must adhere to these conditions failing which the strikes would be declared as illegal.

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[1] WP No. 23310 of 2011.

[2] (2016) 3 SCC 788.

[3] Directions on Managing Risks and Code of Conduct in Outsourcing of Financial Services by NBFCs, November 9, 2017, available at  
<[https://rbidocs.rbi.org.in/rdocs/Notification/PDFs/NT87\\_091117658624E4F2D041A699F73068D55BF6C5.PDF](https://rbidocs.rbi.org.in/rdocs/Notification/PDFs/NT87_091117658624E4F2D041A699F73068D55BF6C5.PDF)>

[4] W.A. No. 432 of 2013 and W.P. No. 16746 of 2013

Last updated on 16/04/2024

## United Kingdom

Author: *Louise Skinner, Thomas Twitchett, Oliver Gregory*  
at Morgan Lewis & Bockius

Yes. Both the FCA and PRA have established their own high-level required standards of conduct known as the Conduct Rules. The FCA’s conduct rules are set out in the FCA’s Code of Conduct sourcebook. The PRA’s conduct rules are set out in the PRA Rulebook (and different versions apply to different types of PRA-regulated firms).

The FCA’s conduct rules apply to most individuals working at an SM&CR firm. The PRA’s conduct rules apply to more limited individuals working at dual-regulated SM&CR firms: senior managers (approved by the PRA or FCA); individuals within the PRA’s certification regime; key function holders; and non-executive directors.

The Conduct Rules apply to conduct relating to the carrying out of an individual’s role. They do not extend to conduct within an individual’s private life, provided that the conduct is unrelated to the activities they carry out for their firm. Nevertheless, an individual’s behaviour outside of work can still be relevant to the separate consideration of their fitness and propriety.

There are two tiers of Conduct Rules: a first tier of rules applicable to all individuals subject to the Conduct Rules; and a second tier applicable to senior managers only.

The rules of the first tier are:

- Rule 1 – You must act with integrity.
- Rule 2 – You must act with due skill, care and diligence.
- Rule 3 – You must be open and cooperative with the FCA, PRA and other regulators.
- Rule 4 – You must pay due regard to the interests of the customer and treat them fairly.
- Rule 5 – You must observe proper standards of market conduct.

The rules of the second tier (applicable to senior managers) are:

- SC1 – You must take reasonable steps to ensure that the business of the firm for which you are responsible is controlled effectively.
- SC2 – You must take reasonable steps to ensure that the business of the firm for which you are responsible complies with the relevant requirements and standards of the regulatory system.
- SC3 – You must take reasonable steps to ensure that any delegation of your responsibilities is to an appropriate person and that you oversee the discharge of the delegated responsibility effectively.
- SC4 – You must disclose appropriately any information for which the FCA or PRA would reasonably expect notice.
- SC5 (certain dual-regulated firms only) – When exercising your responsibilities, you must pay due regard to the interests of current and potential future policyholders in ensuring the provision by the firm of an appropriate degree of protection for their insured benefits.

Firms must notify the FCA if they take disciplinary action against an individual for a breach of the Conduct Rules.

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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?



### India

Author: *Vikram Shroff*  
at AZB & Partners

The RBI requires banks to conduct an annual review of fraud committed and provide a note of the total number to the board of directors or the local advisory board. These reports are not to be sent to the RBI but are to be preserved for verification by the RBI's inspecting officers<sup>[1]</sup>. Necessary disclosures may also need to be made to SEBI under some of its regulations.

Publicly listed financial services companies may be required to make necessary disclosures, including to the stock exchanges and their auditors, in case of workplace fraud.

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<sup>[1]</sup>Master Directions on Frauds – Classification and Reporting by commercial banks and select FIs (Updated as on July 03, 2017), available at <[https://rbi.org.in/scripts/BS\\_ViewMasDirections.aspx?id=10477](https://rbi.org.in/scripts/BS_ViewMasDirections.aspx?id=10477)>

Last updated on 16/04/2024



### United Kingdom

Yes. There are multiple potential reporting obligations with various timing imperatives. We include below a snapshot of some of the key obligations:

- under FCA Principle 11, firms have a general duty to inform the FCA of matters about which it would reasonably expect notice;
- a firm must notify the FCA immediately it becomes aware, or has information which reasonably suggests, that a matter which could have a significant adverse impact on the firm's reputation has occurred, may have occurred or may occur in the foreseeable future;
- a firm must notify the FCA immediately it becomes aware, or has information which reasonably suggests, that a significant breach of a rule (including a significant breach of a Conduct Rule) has occurred, may have occurred or may occur in the foreseeable future; and
- a firm must also notify the FCA if it takes disciplinary action against an individual for a breach of the Conduct Rules. Where the relevant individual is a senior manager, the notification must be made within seven business days. Where the relevant individual is certified staff, the notification must be made in the firm's annual reporting.

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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?**



### **India**

Author: *Vikram Shroff*  
at AZB & Partners

Corporate whistleblowing is still at a nascent stage in India and there isn't a robust legislative framework for it. Section 177[1] of the Companies Act 2013, clause 49 on "Corporate Governance" of the Listing Agreement between a listed entity and a stock exchange and the guidelines issued by RBI under Section 35(A) of the Banking Regulation Act 1949 [2] constitute the corpus of early whistleblower jurisprudence in India. Publicly listed financial services companies are required to have whistleblowing policies.

In terms of generally applicable laws, the IDA lists "Unfair Labor Practices" that the employer is prohibited from engaging in. There are certain state-specific laws which reiterate the same. There might also be sector-specific initiatives. One such example is the "Protected Disclosures Scheme for Private Sector and Foreign Banks" by the RBI, which cover areas such as corruption, criminal offences, non-compliance with rules, misuse of office, suspected or actual fraud causing financial and reputational loss and detriment to the public interest.

When it comes to the prevention of harassment, the general statutes are also applicable to financial sector organisations. Employers are required to comply with the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redress) Act, 2013, by taking reasonable steps to assist affected women workers. If harassment is coupled with any other issue like caste-based discrimination, then employees may register complaints through well-established civil or criminal redress mechanisms in the legal system.

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[1] Section 177, Companies Act 2013, available at <<https://ca2013.com/177-audit-committee/>>

[2] Section 35A, Banking Regulation Act 1949, available at <<https://indiankanoon.org/doc/587034/#:~:text=it%20is%20necessary%20to%20issue,to%20comply%20wit>

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## United Kingdom

Author: *Louise Skinner, Thomas Twitchett, Oliver Gregory*  
at Morgan Lewis & Bockius

### **Whistleblowing**

In addition to the requirements of the SM&CR outlined above which relate to the prevention of wrongdoing (including the Conduct Rules, fitness and propriety assessments, Senior Managers' Duty of Responsibility, the certification and approvals processes and associated training requirements), the PRA and the FCA maintain rules on whistleblowing. These are intended to encourage whistleblowers to come forward to report wrongdoing and protect them from retaliation when they do.

For certain types of SM&CR firms, the rules mandate measures that employers must implement, for others they provide guidance on measures to consider.

The key measures are as follows:

- Whistleblowers' champion – a non-executive director and senior manager with responsibility for whistleblowing compliance within the firm, including oversight of internal policies and procedures and certain reporting requirements.
- Whistleblowing channel – a system which allows whistleblowers to report concerns confidentially and anonymously, and which allows such concerns to be assessed, addressed, and escalated where appropriate.
- Notification regarding external whistleblowing channels – that is, making staff aware of their right to report matters directly to the PRA and FCA and explaining how they can do so.
- Whistleblowing training – this must cover arrangements on whistleblowing within the firm and be provided (and tailored) to employees based in the UK, their managers, and employees responsible for operating the firm's whistleblowing arrangements.

### **Prevention of harassment**

Harassment and related unacceptable workplace behaviours (such as bullying and discrimination) are not specifically addressed in the SM&CR rules on individual accountability. However, it is clear from regulators' public statements that the culture of firms (in its broadest sense) is central to their approach. Having a healthy firm culture is seen as critical to consumer protection and well-functioning markets, and firms with healthy cultures are considered to be less prone to misconduct.

Firms that are subject to the SM&CR need to be alive to the possibility that instances of harassment and other non-financial misconduct could amount to breaches of the individual accountability regime or trigger certain requirements under it, such as a requirement to investigate, reassess an individual's fitness and propriety, or notify certain matters to the regulators. The same could apply to any failure by relevant staff to investigate and deal appropriately with allegations of this kind, such as a senior manager who turns a blind eye to reports of sexual harassment or workplace bullying. While there have been relatively few instances of non-financial misconduct resulting in an enforcement action to date, this is likely to become an emerging trend.

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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?



## India

Author: *Vikram Shroff*  
at AZB & Partners

The general legal standards on termination of employment are also applicable to employees in the financial services sector. India is not an “at-will” jurisdiction but is also not an “employment-for-life” jurisdiction. In general, termination of employment may be carried out for reasonable cause or on account of misconduct. In cases of termination on any ground other than misconduct, the employee must be provided with prior notice of termination or pay in lieu thereof. The body of laws that govern employee rights around termination are the IDA, state-specific shops and establishments acts, standing orders, and the employment contract. Workmen (basically non-managers) have additional protection in terms of the right to retrenchment compensation when terminated.

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## United Kingdom

Author: *Louise Skinner, Thomas Twitchett, Oliver Gregory*  
at Morgan Lewis & Bockius

### Settlement agreements

The whistleblowing measures outlined above are complemented by mandatory requirements for SM&CR firms concerning settlement agreements, namely that any such agreement must include a term stating that it doesn’t prevent the individual from making a protected disclosure, and must not require the individual to warrant that they have not made a protected disclosure or that they do not know of any information which could lead to them doing so (a “protected disclosure” is a type of disclosure recognised in English employment law that gives the person making it legal protection from retaliatory detrimental treatment).

SM&CR firms entering into settlement agreements must also ensure that they are not drafted in a way that is incompatible with other relevant regulatory requirements. For example, there is a specific prohibition in the FCA Handbook on firms entering into any arrangements or agreements with any person that limit their ability to disclose information required by the regulatory reference rules (see question 2). As such, terms relating to confidentiality and the provision of employment references should allow the firm sufficient flexibility to comply with regulatory reference requirements, which could include a requirement to update such a reference. In addition, any obligations of confidentiality should include a carve-out to permit relevant regulatory disclosures and reports.

### Handover procedures

The SM&CR includes requirements designed to ensure that adequate handovers take place between outgoing and incoming senior managers. Firms must take all reasonable steps to ensure that senior managers (and anyone who has management or supervisory responsibilities for them) have all the information and material that they could reasonably expect to have to perform their responsibilities effectively and under the requirements of the regulatory system. This applies when someone becomes a senior manager and when an existing senior manager takes on a new job or new responsibilities (or when their responsibilities or job are being changed).

Firms must have a handover policy in place to ensure compliance with these requirements. They must also

make and maintain adequate records of steps taken to comply with them.

The information and material handed over should be practical and helpful, with an assessment of what issues should be prioritised, and judgement and opinion as well as facts, figures and records. It should also include details about unresolved or possible regulatory breaches and any unresolved concerns expressed by the FCA, the PRA or any other regulatory body.

The format and arrangements of a handover should allow for an orderly transition, which should include the outgoing senior manager contributing to the handover everything that it would be reasonable to expect them to know and consider relevant, including their opinions. This could be achieved by requiring outgoing senior managers to prepare a handover certificate, but the FCA recognises that this will not always be practical.

To ensure that these requirements are satisfied, it is good practice to include in senior managers' employment contracts (and settlement agreements) specific obligations relating to handovers.

### **Reallocating senior managers' responsibilities**

In addition to ensuring that adequate handovers take place between outgoing and incoming senior managers, firms should also ensure on the departure of a senior manager that their responsibilities are reallocated and that this is recorded in a way that is compliant with relevant regulatory requirements. This may include temporary reallocation to one or more existing senior managers where the replacement does not take over immediately on the departure of the departing senior manager, as well as updating the firm's management responsibilities map and statements of responsibilities.

### **Reporting requirements**

When an individual ceases to perform an SMF, the firm must generally notify the relevant regulatory within seven business days.

SM&CR firms must notify the relevant regulators if certain types of disciplinary action are taken, which can include dismissal – see question 10.

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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?**



India

Author: *Vikram Shroff*  
at AZB & Partners

Post-termination non-competes are not enforceable, as they are treated as a restraint of trade. Courts have given prevalence to the livelihood of the employee over the employer's interests. However, a reasonable non-solicit restriction may be enforceable in India.<sup>[1]</sup>

Employees in financial services are also bound by post-employment (for both resignation and retirement) obligations.<sup>[2]</sup> RBI employees<sup>[3]</sup> who cease to be in service should not accept or undertake "commercial employment"<sup>[4]</sup> for one year from the date on which they cease to be in service without the prior approval of the concerned authority. For SEBI employees<sup>[5]</sup>, the cooling-off period is also one year. "Commercial employment"<sup>[6]</sup> broadly includes employment in any company or setting up their own practice without having professional qualifications and relying only on official experience. Such engagement may bestow an unfair advantage upon clients by virtue of the ex-employees' prior experience at the organisation. The

grant of prior approval by the concerned authority is dependent on whether there is any ensuing conflict of interest from such engagement.

[1] Employment Contracts in India: Enforceability of Restrictive Covenants, available at [https://www.nishithdesai.com/fileadmin/user\\_upload/pdfs/Research%20Papers/Employment\\_Contracts\\_in\\_India.pdf](https://www.nishithdesai.com/fileadmin/user_upload/pdfs/Research%20Papers/Employment_Contracts_in_India.pdf)

[2] Section 55, SEBI (Employees' Service) Regulations 2001.

[3] General Administration Manual, RBI, available at <https://rbidocs.rbi.org.in/rdocs/content/pdfs/71073.pdf>

[4] Section 2, Regulation 37A, RBI Staff Regulations, 1948.

[5] Section 55(3), SEBI (Employees' Service) Regulations 2001.

[6] Section 55(2), SEBI (Employees' Service) Regulations 2001; Section 2, Regulation 37A, RBI Staff Regulations, 1948.

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## United Kingdom

Author: *Louise Skinner, Thomas Twitchett, Oliver Gregory*  
at Morgan Lewis & Bockius

The SM&CR does not regulate the use of post-termination restrictive covenants for employees in the financial services sector. It is fairly typical for financial services firms in the UK to include non-dealing, non-solicitation, non-compete and similar restrictive covenants in their employment contracts. These are subject to the same common law rules on interpretation and enforceability as in any other sector. The only caveat to this is that firms should ensure that such terms do not include any provision that might conflict with the regulatory duties of either the firm or the employee. This will be a rare occurrence in practice for most types of restrictive covenant, but could arise in respect of post-termination contractual obligations that are closely associated with restrictive covenants, namely those relating to confidentiality. As such, firms should ensure that confidentiality clauses in employment contracts or other agreements such as NDAs include appropriate carve-outs.

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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?

### India

Author: *Vikram Shroff*  
at AZB & Partners

NDAs are governed by the Indian Contract Act, 1872 and are generally lawful in India.

Generally, post-contract restrictive covenants like non-compete clauses that restrain a person's exercise of lawful trade, profession or business are declared void because of Section 27 of the Indian Contract Act.

The enforceability of NDAs may be affected if they restrain an employee from exercising a lawful

profession, trade or business. Accordingly, an NDA crafted to protect the “confidential information” of the former employer but not to impose the above-mentioned restraints on the employee is saved from any clash with Section 27 of the Indian Contract Act and is, therefore, enforceable in the courts of law in India. If NDAs prohibit an employee from disclosing commercial or trade secrets, then they cannot be held to be in restraint of trade. This was observed by the Bombay High Court in VFS Global Services Pvt Ltd v Mr Suprit Roy<sup>[1]</sup>.

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<sup>[1]</sup> 2008 (2) BomCR 446.

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## United Kingdom

Author: *Louise Skinner, Thomas Twitchett, Oliver Gregory*  
at Morgan Lewis & Bockius

NDAs (also known as confidentiality agreements) are potentially lawful and enforceable in the UK. It is common to include NDAs in employment contracts (to protect the confidential information of the employer during and after employment) and in settlement agreements (to reiterate existing confidentiality obligations and to keep the circumstances of the settlement confidential).

NDAs do not need to follow a particular form, but they must be reasonable in scope. Following #MeToo, there has been considerable government, parliamentary, and regulatory scrutiny of the use of NDAs and their reasonableness in different circumstances.

The following limitations on NDAs should be noted:

- By law, any NDA purporting to prevent an individual from making a “protected disclosure” as defined in the Employment Rights Act 1996 (ie, blowing the whistle about a matter) is void.
- The regulatory body for solicitors in England and Wales, the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA), has issued a detailed warning notice and guidance to practitioners setting out – in its view – inappropriate or improper uses of NDAs. Failure to comply with the SRA’s warning notice may lead to disciplinary action. The SRA lists the following as examples of improper use of NDAs:
  - using an NDA as a means of preventing, or seeking to impede or deter, a person from:
    - cooperating with a criminal investigation or prosecution;
    - reporting an offence to a law enforcement agency;
    - reporting misconduct, or a serious breach of the SRA’s regulatory requirements, to the SRA, or making an equivalent report to any other body responsible for supervising or regulating the matters in question; and
    - making a protected disclosure;
    - using an NDA to influence the substance of such a report, disclosure or cooperation;
    - using an NDA to prevent any disclosure required by law;
    - using an NDA to prevent proper disclosure about the agreement or circumstances surrounding the agreement to professional advisers, such as legal or tax advisors, or medical professionals and counsellors, who are bound by a duty of confidentiality;
    - including or proposing clauses known to be unenforceable; and
    - using warranties, indemnities and clawback clauses in a way that is designed to, or has the effect of, improperly preventing or inhibiting permitted reporting or disclosures being made (for example, asking a person to warrant that they are not aware of any reason why they would make a permitted disclosure, in circumstances where a breach of warranty would activate a clawback clause).
- The Law Society of England and Wales, a professional association representing solicitors in England and Wales, has issued similar guidance (including a practice note) on the use of NDAs in the context of the termination of employment relationships.

- Other non-regulatory guidance on the use of NDAs has also been issued, including by the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service and by the UK Equality and Human Rights Commission.

Care should be taken accordingly to ensure that the wording of any NDA complies with prevailing guidance, especially from the SRA.

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## Contributors



### India

Vikram Shroff  
*AZB & Partners*



### United Kingdom

Louise Skinner  
Thomas Twitchett  
Oliver Gregory  
*Morgan Lewis & Bockius*

[www.internationalemploymentlawyer.com](http://www.internationalemploymentlawyer.com)