

Employment in Financial Services

Contributing Editor

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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?

Isle of Man

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The IoM FSA does not regulate the use of post-termination restrictive covenants for employees in the financial services sector. Post-termination restrictive covenants will be a matter of contract and will typically include non-compete, non-solicitation and non-dealing restrictions. These are subject to the same common law rules on interpretation and enforceability as in any other sector. Restraint of trade provisions are, in principle, contrary to public policy as a result of which it is for the employer to justify the length and scope of the restrictive covenant and show that it goes no further than necessary to protect its legitimate business interests. If a restraint is considered to be excessive, the courts will not generally rewrite or modify it to make it enforceable and, therefore, the whole of a defective covenant could fall away or be of no effect.

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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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