



in the Financial Services Sector

Issue 13 - 29th July 2004

Amicus Finance Sector challenges gender pay gap

Finance Sector employers attended a meeting last week at the Amicus headquarters in London to consider the gender pay gap in the financial services sector.

Representatives from the sector were told that women's skills and experience are currently being ignored. This is fuelling a gender pay gap in the banking and insurance industry which is 21% higher than the national average. Amicus and Unifi met with employers to formulate plans at the second annual equalities summit with the Equal Opportunities Commission.

Many hundreds of thousands of women are at present locked below middle management in administration and front of house branch positions. The conference will ask business if it is truly achieving its potential by sidelining some of its most experienced staff which is producing the side effect of low pay which is making the industry less and less attractive for women to work in.

Union research has shown that women are reluctant to apply for management jobs because they believe that flexible working and family friendly initiatives are not available above the glass ceiling. It has also shown that women are a minority in most managerial and professional grades and barely visible in certain professions.

David Fleming, Amicus National Secretary for finance, said: "All too often companies bridle of the idea that equal pay means compulsion and more red tape. The idea behind this summit is to show that the unlocking the skills potential trapped below the glass ceiling is relatively painless but will have a huge effect on the skill shortage in the workplace".

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Action on gender equality

At Labour's National Policy Forum, Tony Blair announced the launch of a year-long inquiry to recommend ways of tightening of the law. He said, "The pay gap between women and men has narrowed since 1997 but it is still too big; part time women earn 40% less on average than men. So today I am announcing the establishment of a Commission on Women and Work, chaired by Margaret Prosser, to report to me on how we ensure all women get a fair deal at work."

The inquiry, provisionally entitled 'Women at Work Commission', will look at how men and women's education and skills affect which jobs they can get as well as the

"glass ceiling" in career progression. It has also been asked to compare women's experience in the job market before and after having children.

Amicus National Officer for Equalities, Linda McCulloch said, "The gender pay gap remains unacceptably large because organisations are not competing equal pay reviews. Amicus welcomes this announcement. However, we will continue to argue that unless there is a mandatory requirement for organisations to audit their pay systems, the discriminatory practices that cause the gender pay gap will simply continue".

MPs criticism financial services sector on savings

The financial services industry was criticised by the all-party Treasury Select Committee of MPs. They accused providers of not doing enough to treat consumers fairly, damaging their confidence. The report, "Restoring Confidence in Long-term Saving" urged the savings industry to come up with firm proposals to help restore consumers' faith by becoming more open about the products it offered and how risky they were. The chairman, John McFall, said: "This committee has uncovered a catalogue of problems that have beset the long-term savings industry in recent years. People now trust their local supermarket more than many of our largest life insurers. Complex and opaque practices and products have been allowed to persist for too long. The average consumer feels excluded because they simply do not understand what the industry has to offer them."

Mick McAteer, the principal policy adviser to the Consumers' Association, said: "This is a damning indictment of the financial services industry." Mary Francis, director general of the Association of British Insurers, said: "We will look carefully at the Treasury committee's recommendations."

To view the report:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200304/cmselect/cmtreasy/71/71.pdf>

Out now - Finance Sector Industrial Report

The Finance Sector Industrial report is now available to download from the Amicus website. Please visit: <http://www.amicustheunion.org/main.asp?page=455>

Building an Effective European Works Council

The TUC is offering workplace representatives who are involved in the EWC a three-day course. This course will enable EWC members to assess current strengths and weaknesses within their own EWC's and to identify useful practices. The course is being run from the 12-14 October 2004.

For more information go to: <http://www.tuc.org.uk/learning/tuc-8333-f0.cfm>

Offshore customer contact centres damage company brand

A report from Research and Markets has found that 74% of UK customers who had personal experience with offshore customer contact centres felt more negative towards the company providing the offshore service, than before they used the service. The research "Finding the Balance: The effect of offshore customer contact on profit and brand" concluded that customers who had experience offshore customer

contact were more than four times more likely to change their supplier than those who had no direct experience of off shoring.

Additionally they found that:

Last year 7.3% of the UK public changed supplier because of the previous supplier's use of offshore contact centres and

42% of customers were less interested in sales calls when they came from outside the UK.

Staff must be kept involved during offshore deals

Employers have been urged to work harder to secure support from staff when negotiating controversial offshore outsourcing contracts. The National Outsourcing Association (NOA) has said that many organisations make the mistake of not being open with staff about outsourcing plans from the start and, in the worst cases, employees finding out about an offshore deal by reading an article in the press.

Amicus National Secretary, David Fleming responded to this report by saying that it was vital that trade unions are fully involved in any decisions that may lead to the offshoring of jobs from the UK. He stated, "There must be full consultation with recognised trade unions. Companies must explain themselves and prove the benefit of offshoring. Amicus will not allow organisations simply to simply follow a trend; the principle of offshoring must be explained. Transparency is essential".

HSBC takes a new approach

HSBC is planning to launch a range of simpler banking, savings and insurance products that will be priced to rank in the top five of the industry's best buy tables. Michael Geoghegan, six months into his new post as chief executive of HSBC's British business, also intends to put a fresh focus on the bank's branches as part of his effort to boost HSBC's share of financial services products. Work is underway on cutting HSBC's 300-strong product range to 12 to 15 core items.

Oral communication skills are vital

A survey of business has found that oral communication is the most desirable skill in a prospective employee. The survey shows 26 per cent of employers see oral communication as the most important skill, with employers in Wales and the transport industry the most eager to find staff with interpersonal skills.

250 jobs to go at Barclaycard

Barclaycard is cutting 250 jobs after merging its operations with the consumer lending operation of its parent company, Barclays bank. The roles are "falling away" in operational, marketing and other support areas at the head office in Northampton. Unifi has said that it is "disappointed" at the job losses.

**This bulletin has been produced by Saba Mozakka,
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