



AMICUS THE UNION FOR YOU IN HSBC BANK

EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK REVISITED

Members will recall that this time last year the bank issued the Employee Handbook on the intranet. This caused concern in that employees were asked to sign that they accepted the new terms, some of which were amended from the previous handbook.

2007 has brought with it further consultation between the bank and the union on the handbook, centred on the changes the union did not agree last year and on how the revised text should be published to employees.

No need to sign

The first point to note is that the bank is not asking employees to sign to say that they agree the amended text. This is not to detract from its importance but because the signing process caused such unnecessary unhappiness last time. Staff and managers are instead asked to note the changes and speak to their line manager if they cause them concern. This process supersedes the signing process last time so it is now of no significance whether staff signed up to the new handbook last year or not.

Concerns

Pensions

The first area of major concern last time was the removal of the summary of terms of both the defined contributions and defined benefits schemes from the text and the insertion of the clauses stating that the schemes "do not form part of your terms and conditions of employment and may change". For the new (2007) handbook, the bank has now reinserted the summaries of the two schemes and amended the final paragraph of each of these sections (1.12.1 and 1.12.2) to, "The pension benefits detailed in the handbook are subject to the Trust Deed and Rules of the DCS/DBS which may be changed from time to time to the extent permitted by the Trust Deed and Rules."

This wording is acceptable to the union.

At the start of section 1.12, the bank refers to 65 as the normal retirement age. Following consultation with Amicus, this has been clarified by the subsequent text that states that pensionable retirement age for most staff was and remains at age 60. The new normal retirement age means that those with a pensionable retirement age of 60 can now choose to continue to work to 65. It does not mean that staff with a pensionable retirement age of 60 have to work to 65.

Sick pay

The tables setting out sick pay entitlements had been removed from the 2006 handbook but have now been reinserted. We have also had some debate on the wording in 1.7.4 re time-off for medical appointments. The nub of the issue was the union's desire to clearly define the circumstances in which staff may be asked to work additional hours to make up the time. The text now clearly specifies occasions when you "choose to make a medical appointment in the middle of the day, rather than re-arrange this for a more operationally convenient time". If members have any on-going concerns with the application of this clause, they should seek advice from the union.

Mobility clauses

These are found at section 1.9. Concerns had been raised by manager members re sub-sections 1, 2 and 3 in relation to the potential requirement to work or travel outside the UK. Following consultation with Amicus and the NCM, these paragraphs now have the additional phrase "and in such circumstances, personal and domestic circumstances will be taken into account"

Redundancy terms

Section 6 contains reference to the new SEP which was imposed as a result of the age negotiations. The union has not agreed either the policy or the new terms it contains.

The future

The bank and Amicus have agreed that any future changes to the handbook will continue to be the subject of meaningful consultation prior to publication. This will be done gradually through the year and will be the subject of separate circulars. It is our mutual intention that any potential conflict or concern that changes to the handbook may generate in the future is dealt with through the consultation process, allowing sufficient time for communication with and feedback from the union's members.

Help and feedback

Members seeking help and advice can call our helpline on 020 7253 9642. You can also give us your feedback by emailing hsbc@amicustheunion.org

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BERNADETTE FISHER, NATIONAL SECRETARY MARCH 2007**