

Card Operations - Continuous Improvement Programme - 'RISE'

As part of an overall review of the Telephony function within Card Operations, the Bank will today begin cascading details of a new continuous improvement programme called RISE. The project stands for Reforming, Improving, Service and Efficiency and according to the Bank aims to improve both customer service and the work experience of staff.

LTU has had an initial meeting with Card Operations and our negotiations are scheduled to continue on a regular basis over the next few months, as the project develops.

Although the Bank's plans are wide-ranging, the Bank says that it intends, at least initially, to concentrate on two main areas: **Sickness Absence and Shift Patterns**. Inside this Newsletter we look at these areas and we provide more detailed advice to members on both the

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actions the Bank may take and the protections available to staff.

So far our dealings with the Bank have been open and positive, but there is much that still needs to be addressed and it is imperative that the Bank negotiates properly on the changes it seeks.

In the meantime if members have any specific concerns with the Bank's proposals they should contact the Union's 24 Hour Advice Line on 01234 262868 as soon as possible for independent, professional guidance and support.

Sickness Absence - A Problem?

The Bank's briefing sets out details of sickness absence in the months of July and August for the Call Centres in Southend and Brighton. The graph suggests that sickness levels for those months in those units is considerably higher than the National Average for sickness absence in Call Centres and this, in turn, is being used by the Bank as proof that sickness absence rates is an issue that needs to be addressed.

However, the National Average quoted is an annual figure and therefore can't be compared with absence in any two specific months. The graph doesn't tell us the National average for sickness absence in July and August.

Whatever the validity of the figures, there is little doubt that average sickness absence in Call

Centres generally is higher than in many other UK industries. The latest report on pay and conditions in Call Centres from the research organisation IDS, lists various absence rates including 2.3% in the IT Services industry, 3.1% in Construction and 2.8% in Media and Publishing. The national average for Call Centres quoted in the IDS survey is 6.2%. LTU will press the Bank to look at why other industries have better absence records and consider how best practice in those other industries can be applied to Card Operations.

We need also to ensure that Card Operations continues to adhere to the Bank's published policies on managing sickness absence which were negotiated by LTU and which provide important safeguards for staff.

Shift Patterns

The other main area the Bank has said it wants to look at is shift patterns.

Here, the Bank has sought to show that current shift patterns do not allow it to meet customer demand in peak periods or give sufficient time for training and coaching. So it's logical to suppose

that, at some point in the not too distant future, the Bank will aim to seek changes to those shift patterns.

The important issue will be what protections are made available to staff who are quite happy working the patterns they are on now but who,

for whatever reason, are unwilling or unable to change.

LTU has a clear understanding with the Bank that where an employee has worked on the same work pattern for more than six months, that pattern may not be changed without agreement and that changes to contracted i.e. fixed working hours should be purely voluntary.

The Bank must adhere to that policy in implementing any future changes in shift patterns.

Work Options

Of course, if staff themselves wish to change their work patterns they have that opportunity

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Provided the Bank negotiates properly on any areas of change we hope to be able to give our support to the RISE programme. However, it is clear from what we have been told already that there may be major changes that will affect all staff in Telephony in Card Operations to some degree or another and it remains to be seen just how radical the Bank intends to be.

I will keep you informed of developments, but if

through the Bank's Work Options policy.

Work Options, negotiated by LTU, allows staff to seek changes in their work patterns to better suit their own personal circumstances. The policy provides for a full discussion to take place over any request and for a written explanation to be provided if the request is declined for any reason.

What Work Options should not be, however, is a vehicle for the Bank to try to persuade individual staff to change their work patterns to suit its own needs. Members should be wary of any individual approaches under the guise of a Work Options review.

any members are either:

- **approached to change their work patterns against their will or**
- **approached in relation to their sickness absence records**

they should contact the Union's 24 Hour Advice Line on 01234 262868 immediately for independent, professional advice and guidance.

NICK HOLT
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