

Staffing Levels - What's The Story?

It is without doubt the biggest issue being raised by members contacting the Union's Advice Line.

Below is a typical email we received recently from a member:

"We are in big trouble with staffing. At 5 PM there was still a massive queue and only 3 staff to handle it. The staff are seriously stressed out. The Manager had staff in tears today and there were some very upsetting scenes in the banking hall. Are the Bank going to employ some staff?"

The Bank's success over the years has been built in part on the speed in which it can cut costs relative to its competitors. It followed this strategy earlier than any of its competitors and has since adopted rigorously the principles of lean manufacturing.

But we believe that smaller staff numbers have come at a cost. More and more is now expected of those staff that remain and the question is what impact is that having on the quality of service provided to customers and also on the wellbeing of staff working in branches?

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Staff in branches would say that a combination of falling staffing levels and increased pressure, particularly in respect of sales, has meant the quality of service to customers has suffered. All the evidence we have suggests that branches simply do not have the staff to do the job properly.

Moreover, those staff remaining have said that once the next tranche of SAYE options matures next April, many of those that remain will be leave rather than put up with the unremitting levels of stress that seem to be permanent feature of branch banking in Lloyds TSB.

OASIS Figures - Are They Real Or Just A Mirage?

In order to determine how many staff should be working in a branch the Bank uses a work measurement system called OASIS. OASIS looks at a combination of factors including the characteristics of the branch, monthly volumes, a predetermined set of measurement figures for over 800 pieces of work/activities for each branch and then produces an overall suggested FTE after taking into account training and absence allowances and cover for security. This methodology for calculating staff numbers has been in place for a long time and is the basis on which staff numbers are managed centrally and adherence to the figures forms an important part of the Branch Manager and Local Director Balanced Scorecard.

But even the Bank admits that the OASIS system is outdated and doesn't properly reflect the type of work now done by staff in Branches. We understand that the Bank is looking to introduce a new work measurement system and as far as we are concerned that can't be introduced soon enough - provided it assesses the number of staff needed fairly and the Bank acts on it. A big question!

The Bank has provided LTU with actual and suggested staffing level figures for each Local Director Group and this shows that the majority of LDG's are operating within the suggested staff numbers. However, those figures tell only part of the story and we are currently discussing with the Bank the methodology for determining staff numbers and the reliability of OASIS data given the profound changes that have taken place in branch banking over the years.

The Next Steps

In order to get some hard evidence on the scale, depth and the effect staff shortages are having, LTU will be sending out a survey to all Branch Managers and to a selected sample of staff in branches in the next week. In the meantime, let us know what you think about staffing levels by completing the attached pro forma and faxing it to the Union's Bedford Office on 01234 262821 or emailing me at Mark.Brown@ltu.co.uk.

Saturday Working - Your Rights Explained

Saturday opening is now viewed by the Bank as a key day for doing business, managers are under increasing pressure to ensure that branches are staffed effectively, with not simply the right number of staff but with the right mix of sales and service staff to capitalise on business opportunities.

Given the importance to the Bank of resourcing Saturdays effectively it is time to remind members of their rights and the safeguards we have negotiated with the Bank over Saturday working.

These safeguards apply to all staff on old style 'fixed' contracts as well as, in practice, many staff originally on flexible contracts and whether they are asked:

- **to work on Saturdays when they have not previously done so**
- **to increase the number of Saturdays which they work**
- **to increase the number of hours which they work on a Saturday.**

Voluntarism Remains Paramount

Fixed Contracts

The safeguards we have negotiated for staff on 'fixed' or 'named day' contracts include the following:

- staff are under no obligation to discuss amendments to their hours of work or give any reasons for not wanting to discuss such changes.
- If staff on established contracts (those which do not include Saturday working as part of the normal working week) agree changes to their hours this will require a variation to the existing contract, or a separate contract for Saturdays - a new flexible / annual hours contract is not required.
- any amendment to the contract must specify the new work pattern that has been agreed and state how many Saturdays are to be worked. If at any stage staff wish to revert to working only Monday to Friday, the Bank will honour that wish subject to one month's notice.
- where staff work on Saturdays in exchange for Time Off in Lieu (TOIL), or where they are obliged to do so by virtue of the nature of their contract, then the Bank must specify in advance when this TOIL can be taken rather than it being allowed to accumulate with no guarantee it will be able to be used.
- overtime pay may still be paid to established contract staff who do not change their hours during the week but who agree to work on Saturdays as well.

Flexible Contracts

As stated earlier, these safeguards may apply also to staff who originally signed flexible contracts.

The Bank has always accepted and recently has reiterated its agreement with LTU that in order for a contract to remain flexible the following must have happened within the previous six-month period:

- **the employee's work pattern (i.e. days and hours worked) must have changed,**
- or
- **the employee must have received a written reminder that he or she is working to a flexible contract.**

If over a rolling six-month period the work pattern has remained the same and no such reminder has been received then the contract will be treated as no longer flexible. Any request from the Bank to amend the working pattern from then on may then be declined, whether in relation to Saturday working or otherwise. In this case all of the safeguards set out above will apply.

Any member experiencing any difficulties in respect of Saturday working should ring the LTU Advice Line on 01234 262868 for independent professional advice and assistance.

Mark V Brown
Assistant General Secretary