

Quality Assurance & Quarterly Bonuses

When Quality Assurance was first introduced, LTU gave the initiative its qualified support and hoped it would bring significant improvements to the way staff were managed and rewarded.

At the time LTU predicted a number of potential concerns that could undermine and corrupt the initial, laudable aims of the Quality Assurance and Bonus System, and, unfortunately, our fears have increasingly been realised.

LTU's concerns regarding the Quality Assurance and Quarterly Bonus system include:

- **The original focus upon delivering a quality service to customers - and only attempting to sell to clearly identified customer needs - has been seriously compromised in pursuit of demanding sales targets.** Staff are expected to attempt to sell to customers on all calls: if they don't, they risk having their QA Scores marked down and losing their Bonuses.
- **Inconsistent, petty and pedantic marking of calls, leaving staff under pressure and confused about what exactly is expected of them.** Furthermore, new and regularly changing scripts are often confusing and are not given sufficient time to 'bed down'.
- **Reductions in the numbers of calls marked - from the original 15 to now just 10 a quarter for full-time staff.** This gives staff less chance to recover from perhaps one or two mistakes in an entire quarter.
- **A clear trend over recent months toward more calls being marked as 'Red'. This includes calls that would previously have been challenged successfully at Appeal but are now being rejected.** This not only affects Advisers, but also has a knock-on effect on Team Leaders and Quality Advisers.
- **Insufficient time - just five days - for Advisers to appeal against unfairly marked calls.** This quarter,

call marking has been 'front-loaded' to October, leaving many Team Leaders (especially those leading larger teams) with insufficient time to provide feedback to their Advisers before the time limit is exhausted.

- **Staff who have performed well to earn Quarterly Bonuses being denied payment if their line managers say they have been off work too often.** This includes staff who can prove that their sickness is genuine and who don't even meet the Bank's official definition of 'Persistent Short Term Absence'.
- **Poor VoIP phone quality that can disrupt the quality of calls, since staff cannot always hear customers clearly - leading to them being marked-down under QA.**
- **Moves toward it becoming increasingly difficult for staff to receive Gold and Silver QA Scores, despite some receiving cuts in their pay rates shortly after QA was first introduced because of the higher bonuses staff were supposedly then able to earn.** Total Pay received by staff seems to be deliberately being driven down.
- **Threats to staff that if they fail to achieve Silver or Gold scores, they could be put on Coaching Plans or formal Performance Improvement Plans (which could lead to their dismissal).** This is despite the Bank agreeing that achieving a 'Bronze' call rating means that staff have performed satisfactorily.
- **Unrealistic 'compliance' requirements that can lead to Advisers and Team Leaders being refused bonus payments.** For example, for Team Leaders the 95% risk measure means just one mistake by a member of their team could lead to them receiving no bonus.

We explore some of the above concerns - and what is needed to rebuild credibility in the Quality Assurance and Quarterly Bonus arrangements - over the remainder of this Newsletter.

'Catch-22': Quality Customer Service Or ... Sell, Sell, Sell!!!

One of the biggest threats to the original Quality Assurance concept has been the subversion of the scheme's original purpose where staff should sell to customers only where there was a clear and genuine customer need.

In fact, the original QA documentation was intended to ensure that staff would be marked down for attempting a 'cold sale'.

However, the original, more balanced approach to the role of Advisers has been compromised by the Bank's insistence that all calls should be treated as proactive sales opportunities, irrespective of whether or not this genuinely is the case.

The Balanced Scorecard objectives of STM's and Regional Managers simply do not sit comfortably alongside the original aspirations of the Quality Assurance system. This had been anticipated by LTU at the time when Quality Assurance was introduced, when LTU predicted:

"There could be a tension between the new Bonus Scheme and the objectives of Centre Managers and STM's who are to remain - at least for the foreseeable future - on BSC Bonus arrangements (i.e. sales targets).".

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What's more, if staff fail to identify a customer need and then attempt to sell on the back of it, they may be marked down through their Quality Assurance score; perhaps receiving a Red score and losing any bonus entitlement they may have worked hard to achieve.

However, Advisers also complain that if they get caught out trying to make 'cold sales' where there is not an identifiable customer need, they may have the 'book thrown at them' and be accused of making non-compliant calls.

In other words a 'Catch-22' situation: if staff don't attempt to make a sale on every call

they may be penalised by losing their Quarterly Bonus, but if they do and make a non-compliant call, they may also be penalised by losing their Quarterly Bonus.

Putting Customers First

Many Advisers complain about the unremitting pressure upon them to try to sell at every opportunity - irrespective of whether there is an obvious customer need - which serves merely to alienate customers and unsettle staff who are concerned that they may be financially punished (through the loss of Quarterly Bonuses) for being caught doing what they are told.

LTU believes that it is high time that staff were given a clear, consistent message from the Bank.

Senior Management needs to openly admit that either it does want staff to attempt to sell on every customer call OR it should return to the original values of the Quality Assurance system and expect staff to attempt to make sales only when there are genuine rather than 'manufactured' reasons why Advisers believe sales might suit the needs of customers.

LTU Survey

LTU will be shortly meeting the Bank to discuss the pressures upon staff to attempt to make sales on every customer call.

The Union has plenty of feedback to show that this is an endemic problem across Telephone Banking.

LTU will also be issuing a Telephony Survey over the next two weeks, in order to further expose the unacceptable sales pressures that staff are placed under and to more fully understand the experiences staff have of the Bank's Quality Assurance system.

Removing The Threat To Bonuses

Many Team Leaders and Advisers report feeling duped when finding out that they have been denied their Quarterly Bonuses, whether the reasons are because:

- **they have been wrongly marked as having made 'Red' calls or received lower overall ratings than they deserve; possibly because of marking inconsistencies, confusion over contradictory and confused scripts, pedantic or petty marking, or a host of other equally unjustified marking.**
- **they have been denied bonuses that they have earned after being told that they have been off work too often, even if the length or frequency of their absences has not been sufficient to trigger the Bank's official PSTA policy.** This has mainly been an issue in Centres such as Sunderland, where the Bank has a long track-record for misapplying the Bank's sickness policies. Staff who have worked hard to earn their Quarterly Bonuses should not be denied payment because they have been unwell or for any other equally bogus reasons.
- **because there have been non-compliant calls, which has been particularly unacceptable for Team Leaders. It certainly isn't right that a Team Leader can lose an entire Quarterly Bonus just because one**

member of their staff has made a non-compliant call during the quarter.

Many Advisers and Team Leaders are left with the impression that they are being denied their hard-earned Quarterly Bonuses, simply because the Bank wants to save money at their expense.

Fair Pay For Hard Work

Direct Channels must stop denying staff bonuses for reasons that most staff will consider bogus and unacceptable.

Equally, the Bank must under no circumstances consider making the achievement of Gold and Silver QA Ratings harder to achieve - or Red calls more common - in order to save money at the expense of staff.

Adviser and Team Leader Pay is already low and many staff depend upon receiving their Quarterly Bonuses to help make ends meet.

Furthermore, Advisers have had to put up with a lot over recent months: the implementation of Lifestyles Working Patterns; misapplication of the Bank's Sickness and Emergency Leave policies; and considerable uncertainty about their Job Security. Any move to reduce the Quarterly Bonuses that many staff receive would be resisted fiercely by staff and LTU.

Support You Can Count On

LTU is the only trade union operating within the Lloyds Banking Group that is entirely independent of the Bank and guarantees to represent staff with problems by paid Union Officials; not by people seconded and paid for by the Bank or who are just carrying out representative duties one day a week.

Independent, professional representation is essential if staff are to be represented effectively.

Any members who are concerned by their treatment under the Quality Assurance system, or who believe they have been denied Quarterly Bonuses unfairly, should telephone LTU's 24 Hour confidential Advice Line Service on 01234 262868.

Members are also encouraged to share their experiences anonymously on LTU's eforum at www.ltu.co.uk.

STEVE TATLOW
Assistant General Secretary

To join call 01234 262868... today!