

A Background Briefing from the Eurozone Hub

Criteria for being “fit and proper” in the Banking Union

ECB-SSM’s May 2018 supervisory guidance updates on fit and proper assessments

Quick Take

Focus on fitness and propriety

1. Fitness and propriety decisions within the Banking Union are now more centralised. This will on the one hand translate into more consistent supervisory outcomes and experiences but may take time as the new process comes into force;
2. Existing applications in respect of individuals may need to be revisited and possibly resubmitted; and
3. Existing management and control functions within BUSIs may need to provide greater record of evidence that they sufficiently fulfil supervisory expectations on fitness and propriety in the event of a role change or new addition affecting the overall composition of certain functions.

In keeping with global standards, regulatory and supervisory policy in the EU and the Eurozone use the assessment of the fitness and propriety of management bodies and key function holders as a core supervisory tool and prerequisite to taking up the exercise of a relevant regulated and/or control function. The European Central Bank (**ECB**), acting in its Single Supervisory Mechanism (**SSM**) function within the Eurozone’s Banking Union, on 22 May 2018 published a new version of its “Guide to fit and proper assessments”¹ (**the F&P Guide**).

Given the range of prudential regulatory as well as conduct of business supervisory shortcomings that have continued since 2008 to emerge at individual firms as well as across the market, the supervisory scrutiny on what constitutes being “fit and proper”, who determines this and how, has become more and more crucial to effective supervision of regulated financial services activity. The F&P Guide marks a significant extension but also streamlining of this part of the EU’s Single Rulebook and how it applies

¹ See: https://www.bankingsupervision.europa.eu/ecb/pub/pdf/ssm.fap_guide_201705_rev_201805.en.pdf?8f1918219aee7a63d2dbcd43bae958

Key changes introduced in the revised version of the F&P Guide include:

- a. The Joint Guidelines are much more prominently “anchored” and embedded in the F&P Guide.
- b. The time period for assessing potential material conflicts of interest in relation to professional appointments has been raised from two to five years;
- c. Unsecured loans will no longer be queried in conflicts of interest reviews;
- d. Procedures on how to count multiple directorships have been changed;
- e. Assessments on sufficient time commitments now reference accounting for travel and training time for the relevant role(s) and whether this buffers for “periods of increased activity” due to extraordinary factors including crisis situations;

within the Banking Union. In many ways the “jurisdiction agnostic” approach that is taken in the F&P Guide is welcome. Whilst it is referred to as a guide, the document reads, even in the revised version, like rules. Moreover, it is addressed to national components of the SSM and sets the ECB-SSM’s supervisory expectations and approach to how assessments are to be conducted and what that means for supervisory dialogue.

This Background Briefing assesses how the following will impact existing and new Banking Union Supervised Institutions (**BUSIs**) regardless of whether the ECB-SSM or national components are the lead supervisory authority:

- scope of application of the revised F&P Guide and changes to the 15 May 2017 version including how the ECB-SSM takes and streamlines EU-wide rules² set by the European Supervisory Authorities (**ESAs**) notably in the European Securities and Markets Authority (**ESMA**) and the European Banking Authority (**EBA**) “Guidelines on suitability” (the **Joint Guidelines**);

- how the F&P Guide applies to Banking Union national competent authorities (**NCA**s) and how it interoperates with ECB Decision (EU) 2017/935³, as amended by ECB Decisions (EU) 2017/936⁴, in turn as amended by (EU) 2018/228⁵ on fitness and propriety assessments and the amendments nominating heads of works units to adopt delegated fit and proper decisions (collectively the **F&P Decisions**); and
- practical considerations for those firms that need to comply with the range of Supervisory Principles on Relocations (**SPoRs**)⁶ issued by the ECB-SSM and other ESAs and which are addressed to and supplemented by own principles issued by the NCAs. Regardless of the SPoRs, the F&P Guide’s provisions will also matter for the UK post-BREXIT. This is likely to be the case given the differences between the rules applicable across the EU, the F&P Guide’s contents and the Eurozone’s rules on suitability and fit and proper assessment and how this differs to the UK Regulators’ own “Senior Managers and Certification Regime”.

Scope of application of the F&P Guide

Since the ECB commenced its SSM supervisory mandate on 4 November 2014, it has been responsible for taking supervisory “Decisions”⁷ on the appointment of all members of the management bodies of those BUSIs that are categorised as Significant Credit Institutions (**SCIs**) and thus subject to direct ECB-SSM supervision for Banking Union matters. By contrast, those BUSIs that are categorised as less significant institutions (**LSIs**) are directly supervised by Banking Union NCAs and indirectly by the ECB-SSM. It is important to note that NCAs will still be responsible for a range of supervisory aspects that fall outside the current regulatory perimeter of the SSM.

In the case of the EU’s prudential regulatory framework, notably the Capital Requirements Regulation (**CRR**) and the Capital Requirements Directive (**CRD IV**), the rules underpinning ESA and now ECB-SSM action on fit and proper assessments are set out in Art. 91 CRD IV. These provisions contain what EU law terms “minimum harmonisation” provisions. As CRD IV was transposed across the EU-28 Member States (soon to be EU-27 as a

² Specifically:

- EBA/GL/2012/06 – the EBA Guideline on the assessment of the suitability of members of the management body and key function holders – available per: <https://www.eba.europa.eu/documents/10180/106695/EBA-GL-2012-06--Guidelines-on-the-assessment-of-the-suitability-of-persons-.pdf>;
- EBA/GL/44 – EBA Guideline on internal governance – available per <https://www.eba.europa.eu/documents/10180/103861/EBA-BS-2011-116-final-EBA-Guidelines-on-Internal-Governance-%2829.1.pdf> but note the on-going review process: <https://www.eba.europa.eu/regulation-and-policy/internal-governance/guidelines-on-internal-governance-revised->; and
- Joint ESMA and EBA Guidelines on the assessment of the suitability of members of the management body and key function holders under CRD IV and Directive 2014/65/EU – available per the following landing page <https://www.eba.europa.eu/regulation-and-policy/internal-governance/joint-esma-and-eba-guidelines-on-the-assessment-of-the-suitability-of-members-of-the-management-body>.

³ See: https://www.ecb.europa.eu/ecb/legal/pdf/celex_32017d004201_en_txt.pdf

⁴ See: https://www.ecb.europa.eu/ecb/legal/pdf/celex_32017d0016_en_txt.pdf

⁵ See: https://www.ecb.europa.eu/ecb/legal/pdf/celex_32018d000601_en_txt.pdf

⁶ Please see our dedicated Eurozone Hub coverage on the SPoRs and impacts on business

⁷ A supervisory Decision is a formal legal instrument of the ECB issued within the context of SSM. The ECB has direct powers to collect information, including through interviews and the imposition of conditions, obligations or recommendations in fit and power decisions. Where the ECB exercises its SSM powers it may also do this within the context and the powers of the substantive provisions of national law implementing EU legislation.

result of the UK leaving the EU) in different ways, with some Member States even going beyond CRD IV's provisions, differences have occurred. This results in fragmentation and conceptual differences or even gaps. Some of these differences also exist across the 19 EU Member States of the Eurozone and its Banking Union. The F&P Guide's overarching aim is to fix the fragmentation and create a more "single" i.e. more uniform Single Rulebook plus a more integrated supervisory culture.

The F&P Guide in term of its scope of application, builds upon the operative provisions of the F&P Decision, uses the terminology in CRD IV as well as the rules in specific supervisory Guidelines of the EBA. Besides applying to those BUSIs primarily within its remit, it also is relevant in respect of those financial entities, who for the purposes of CRD IV, are categorised as "financial holding companies" or "mixed financial holding companies" as well as entities that are categorised as "qualifying holdings". The scope of the F&P Guide is thus of relevance for those licensing decisions for which the NCAs have the operational responsibility in the decision-making process, but equally since the ECB-SSM has the ultimate and definitive supervisory power to grant or revoke a license for all BUSIs.

The F&P Guide is clear in that it expects SCIs will take note of and comply with the:

- A. policies, practices and processes described in the F&P Guide; and
- B. harmonised application of the assessment criteria and supervisory practices that the ECB-SSM will apply according to the F&P Guide.

The F&P Guide aspires to be jurisdiction agnostic and flexibly pragmatic. This is welcome and seeks to deliver the aims it has set itself namely to:

1. Reinforce and build the EU Single Rulebook, as it applies in the Banking Union, in the area of fitness and probity assessments and also to achieve common supervisory practices;
2. Be inclusive by extending to analogous functions where relevant. Specifically, the term "management body" that has a specific meaning in certain EU legal terminology is interpreted more widely to encompass the bodies (and by extension, "key function holders") in all "...governance structures that perform management or supervisory functions". For simplicity, this is referred herein collectively and generically as the "SSM Approved Functions" or (**SSM-AFs**); and
3. Be jurisdiction agnostic and flexibly pragmatic as the F&P Guide "...does not advocate any particular governance structure and is intended to embrace all existing structures."

As a result, whilst the F&P Decision is a legally binding instrument of the ECB, the F&P Guide is framed as a 'non-binding legislative instrument' that is jurisdiction

agnostic in that it "...cannot in any way substitute the relevant legal requirements stemming either from applicable EU law or applicable national law."

However, the fact that the F&P Guide, like other ECB-SSM authored supervisory guides, are addressed either to SSM supervisors and clearly spell out how they are to approach their supervisory priorities, or are addressed to BUSIs with the need for these to adopt a "comply and explain" approach" means that in many ways, irrespective of how the provisions are framed, they can be interpreted as being rules. This is reinforced equally by statements (see 2.4 of the F&P Guide) which clarifies (emphasis bold and clarifications in square brackets):

"These policies are adopted without prejudice to national law and in compliance with the EBA Guidelines. **In the absence of contradictory binding national law, they should be adhere to by the ECB and NCAs. The NCAs have agreed, to the extent possible, to interpret and develop national law in line with these policies. The [F&P] Guide reflects the policies that have been agreed on by the Supervisory Board by the end of 2016.** They will be reviewed in the light of the ongoing development of SSM practice for fit and proper supervision and international and European regulatory developments or new interpretations of the CRD IV, authoritatively presented by, for example, the Court of Justice of the European Union."

This combination of using an ECB Decision as a legal instrument to lay down the operative framework, complemented by a 'supervisory guide' (qua rulebook) is now becoming part and parcel of SSM rulemaking and supervisory convergence efforts in the Banking Union. In this instance, unlike other thematic work areas, there is very little interaction, cross-reference or necessarily interoperability between F&P Decision and F&P Guide, so that it is apparent that the F&P Guide's workstream was perhaps quite separate to the implementation of the F&P Decision irrespective of the F&P Decision providing the structure upon which the F&P Guide operates.

It is important to equally note that the F&P Guide, is drafted in parts by non-native English speakers and non-lawyers. The intended audience equally, as with other ECB instruments, may conduct their operations in languages other than English. As a result, some of the nuances of the F&P Guide, including, in particular, when a "should" in English does not include a degree of discretion, and instead really means "must", may be lost in translation. Unlike other ECB, and as of late EU, instruments the F&P Guide has replaced most but not all references of "should" with "must" or "need to". The second version of the F&P Guide did not make those changes. So, whilst the F&P Guide is far reaching in its intended scope and aims, it is important to assess where boundaries of its application lie before looking at its contents.

What the F&P Decision and the F&P Guide still do not apply to and why that matters

What the F&P Decision and the F&P Guide do not (currently) do is extend to apply to “regular appointments” in respect of LSIs. This means that fit and proper assessments for appointments in situations taking place after the licensing or qualifying holding of a LSI has been approved are not covered by the F&P Guide. It remains to be seen whether this will change with an extension or mirroring of the contents of the F&P Guide at a later date. Whilst LSIs are directly supervised by NCAs within the SSM, it is important to note that LSIs can become ECB-SSM supervised if they are designated a SCI. This can occur either at the election of the ECB-SSM or if the LSIs exceeds the relevant quantitative and/or qualitative thresholds of the “significance” criteria set out in the SSM Regulation⁸ and the SSM Framework Regulation⁹.

So, whilst the F&P Guide may, in its second version, still be limited in how its scope applies to LSIs, it is important to note that a number of SSM rulemaking instruments and/or supervisory guidance have first been applied to SCIs and certain LSIs, and then subsequently been rolled out to LSIs. Separate to this “regulatory roll-out” process, there are a number of NCAs, both within or outside the Banking Union, that elect to apply or closely follow the SSM supervisory approaches and/or the regulatory requirements as they apply to SCIs and thus “mirror the provisions” to dealings with LSIs and possibly non-BUSI type regulated entities. Several NCAs within the ESFS, especially those that are responsible for areas other than the banking sector, may however have their own differing rules, interpretation of those rules and/or a different supervisory culture to the SSM generally, or the NCAs that form part of the SSM.

Consequently, a mirror of the provisions or a roll-out of the F&P Guide to all banking sector BUSIs and non-BUSI firms in Jurisdiction X may mean that a NCA that is responsible for areas other than the banking sector might still have different rules on assessing what is fit and proper. Hence if Applicant A has been approved for SSM purposes and/or possibly within a roll-out/mirror scenario by a NCA, possibly even a non-SSM NCA, there can be no assurance that when Applicant A is assessed as being fit and proper by a NCA responsible for the insurance sector, that the F&P Guide assessment will be taken into account, or if it is, as fully. Nor can there be any assurance that any provisions and documentation already submitted in support of an application will not need to be resubmitted. Equally the standard of assessment may differ.

This therefore still, despite the second version, leads to conceptual gaps both in terms of the rules themselves, the

standards applied and the sharing (let alone centralisation) of information. It remains to be seen whether these conceptual gaps will be resolved, as if left unresolved could in fact exacerbate fragmentation, remove any road to reducing the cost of compliance with a truly single Single Rulebook or at the very least unnecessarily duplicate the amount of submissions needed in support of fit and proper assessments.

The revised F&P Guide’s contents

The operative provisions of the F&P Guide can be distinguished between:

- six (6) supervisory “Principles” set out in Chapter 3 of the F&P Guide;
- the five (5) fitness and propriety assessment criteria set out in Chapter 4 of the F&P Guide;
- the supervisory assessment interview process set out in Chapter 5 of the F&P Guide;
- the supervisory assessment process set out in Chapter 6 of the F&P Guide; and
- the formal supervisory decision process set out in Chapter 7 of the F&P Guide, each of which are explored in further detail below.

The F&P Guide concludes with a short Chapter 8, providing a reminder that, per Art. 16(2)(m) of the SSM Regulation, the ECB-SSM component has the power, at any time, to remove those members from the SSM-AFs of a SCI who breach certain supervisory threshold conditions. This power is separate to, but may be exercised concurrently with, the other ECB’s SSM powers and/or powers of the NCA within the SSM or NCAs or those of other non-Banking Union authorities.

Chapter 3 of the F&P Guide – the supervisory “Principles”

This Chapter introduces six supervisory “Principles” that act as overarching guidance for ECB-SSM and NCAs within Banking Union as well as BUSIs alike. In many ways, these supervisory “Principles” mark the first move of SSM to enshrine formal ‘principles based regulation’ as a support to outcomes-based and rules-based regulation contained in other SSM-specific instruments, or, in a wider setting, the other components of the Single Rulebook as applied within the Banking Union. Whilst some of these “Principles” may be familiar for certain BUSIs operating in the Banking Union and/or the wider EU as well as the UK, they do not displace those existing principles. These F&P Guide specific provisions include:

⁸ Council Regulation (EU) No 1024/2013 available here: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013R1024&from=EN>

⁹ Regulation (EU) No 468/2014 available here: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32014R0468&from=EN>

Chapter 4 of the F&P Guide – the fitness and propriety assessment criteria

The F&P Guide's five fitness and propriety assessment criteria can be summarised as:

Principle	Key requirement(s) for supervisors	Key practical takeaways for BUSIs
Principle 1 – Primary responsibility of credit institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECB and NCAs decide what information must be provided including national forms if necessary¹⁰. • Where necessary, the ECB and NCA can ask the BUSI or the “appointee” i.e., the applicant to provide additional information in writing or orally. Failure to provide the information renders the application incomplete and no positive supervisory decision can be taken. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BUSIs are primarily responsible for selecting individuals for the SSM-AFs who comply with the fitness and propriety requirements. • BUSIs are responsible for their own due diligence assessment of the members of the SSM-AFs both prior to appointment and on an ongoing basis. • All information necessary must be provided in a timely and accurate manner to the competent authorities.
Principle 2 – Gatekeeper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ECB-SSM acts as gatekeeper to ensure that individuals who would pose a risk to the proper function of the SSM-AFs are prevented from carrying out that role. There is nothing in the F&P Guide that explicitly suggests what would happen if there is a disagreement between the ECB-SSM and a non-Banking Union NCA in relation to a given person. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implied reference for BUSIs to remain aware of and comply with their existing EU and national legislative and regulatory obligations to ensure that their SSM-AFs remain fit and proper. In certain jurisdictions, early warning and self-notification/disclosure requirements apply in addition to detailed periodic certifications.
Principle 3 – Consistency (formerly Harmonisation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ECB-SSM's activity and the contents of the F&P Guide seek to ensure a higher level of harmonisation i.e., drive supervisory convergence and homogeneity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No real operative impact for BUSIs but, as per above, conceptual gaps and supervisory fragmentation are issues that will require capture in a compliance framework.
Principle 4 – Proportionality and case- by-case assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fit and proper assessments are conducted in a proportionate manner and the application of the suitability criteria should be commensurate with relevant role of the SSM-AF as well as the size of the BUSI and its nature, scale and complexity of its activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From a practical perspective this means that BUSIs wishing to avail of a proportionate and commensurate assessment process will need to justify and explain why this should apply and that in it applying it does not detract or reduce from the supervisory outcomes or quality of supervision.
Principle 5 – Principles of due process and fairness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fit and proper assessments are confidential and the ECB has a duty to take a supervisory decision in a balanced manner based on the material information provided. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BUSIs retain all the procedural guarantees introduced by the SSM Regulation, the SSM Framework Regulation including the right to appeal a supervisory decision.
Principle 6 – Interaction with ongoing supervision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A fit and proper assessment drives supervision of BUSI governance. Any supervisory decisions may drive ongoing supervision and vice versa. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BUSIs need to deal openly with their supervisors.

¹⁰ Available from the ECB-SSM website together with the “Fit and Proper Questionnaire II at <https://www.bankingsupervision.europa.eu/banking/tasks/authorisation/html/index.en.html>

Chapter 4 of the F&P Guide – the fitness and propriety assessment criteria

The F&P Guide's five fitness and propriety assessment criteria can be summarised as:

Assessment Criteria	Key requirement(s) for supervisors	How SSM-AF Criterion is assessed by supervisor	Key takeaways for BUSIs
Criterion 1 Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SSM-AF Members must have sufficient knowledge, skills and experience to fulfil their functions. The test of "experience" for the purposes of the F&P Guide (currently) is used in a broad sense that extends to practical and professional experience from previous occupations as well as theoretical experience (knowledge and skills) gained through education and training. All SSM-AFs are required to have as a minimum threshold "basic theoretical banking experience that allows them to understand the institution's activities and main risks". This includes minimum experience (or completion of specific training) covering "banking¹¹ and financial" markets, legal and regulatory requirements, strategic planning and the implementation of the business plan, risk management, accounting and auditing, compliance and governance control assessments and financial controlling. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review of CVs including an assessment of previous positions and responsibilities held, length of service, number of reports, size of entity and the actual relevance for the SSM-AF. Without prejudice to national forms, a detailed CV is required to be submitted. Training plans already followed or to be implemented will be reviewed and accounted for as providing evidence of suitability or a method of curing deficiencies of the experience of a SSM-AF appointee i.e., proposed applicant. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This SSM-AF Criterion, in particular what constitutes "experience" may have more stringent requirements in certain jurisdictions, including when assessed outside the context of Banking Union. BUSIs will thus most likely want to ensure the more stringent requirement is fulfilled. Proportionality applies, so that a more complex SSM-AF function will require more experience than a less complex SSM-AF. Management body SSM-AFs may require a different level of experience than those of the supervisory functions if these bodies are separate. Specific SSM-AFs such as the Chief Risk Officer, Chief Financial Officer, Compliance Officer, Chair of the Audit Committee or Chair of the Risk Committee will need to provide evidence of demonstrable specialised experience in the relevant area. These are in addition to the "detailed presumption of adequate experience requirements" set out in the F&P Guide.

¹¹ The revised version specifically added the reference to "banking and" to financial markets.

Criterion 2 Reputation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">SSM-AF members shall at all times be of sufficiently good repute "...to ensure the sound and prudent management of the supervised entity".	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Satisfied as being of "good repute" if there is no evidence to suggest otherwise and no reason to have reasonable doubt about the good repute.This includes assessing the nature of (pending) criminal or administrative legal proceedings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">There is no proportionality test available.
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Chapter 4 of the F&P Guide – the fitness and propriety assessment criteria

The F&P Guide's five fitness and proprietary assessment criteria can be summarised as:

<p>Criterion 3 Conflicts of interest and independence of mind</p>	<p>SSM-AF members “should” (this probably means “must”) be able to make sound, objective and independent decisions – and thus free of conflicts of interest. An inability to resolve a material conflict of interest means the SSM-AF appointee cannot be considered suitable.</p> <p>Table 1 of the F&P Guide sets out a non-exhaustive list of potential conflicts of interest that are presumed to be material and would be assessed on a case-by- case basis where they exist. In summary, this includes any of the following between the SSM-AF appointee and the BUSI and members of its group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current close-personal relationships, current legal proceedings, conduct of significant business; • The current or holding of any of the following over the past five (raised from two) years within the BUSI, its group or its competitors, a “senior staff position”, commercial relationship, commercial interest; • A current substantial financial interest in or obligation (incl. loans, investments and shareholdings) to the BUSI its group, its clients and competitors; and/or • A current or the following over the past two the SSM-AF appointee or a close personal relation holds a position of high political influence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The competent authorities will assess the materiality of the conflict of interest and the adequacy of measures adopted by the BUSI. If there are residual concerns, then a supervisory “condition” may be imposed in respect of the individual SSM-AF application. • Possible conditions include (1) recusal from meetings or decision-making; (2) resignation of a certain position; (3) specific internal monitoring by BUSI; (4) specific reporting to authorities; (5) cooling-off period; (6) obligation of BUSI to publish details of conflict; (7) imposition of “at arm’s length” conditions; and/or (8) specific approvals by the whole management body for a certain situation to continue. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BUSIs and the SSM-AF appointee must inform the competent authority of all conflicts of interest and BUSIs must provide a “Conflict of Interest Statement” explaining how that conflict is being prevented, mitigated or managed. • BUSIs “should” (this probably means “must”) governance policies in place for identifying, mitigating, managing and preventing conflicts of interest, whether actual, potential or perceived. Conflicts are to be split between those that are material and which require taking specific actions and those that are not material. • The F&P Guide is however not fully clear as to what should happen if there is a conflict between a national law/ regulatory requirement and/ or professional requirement in relation to the affected person or BUSI. The anticipation is that the more stringent rules should take precedence and that any BUSI conflicts of interest policy has a detailed and holistic framework and hierarchy of precedence. The supervisory condition number 8 may not be permissible or capable of compliance in certain jurisdictions as it might conflict with individual company law directorship and/or professional duties. • The presumed material conflicts of interest are exceptionally wide-reaching. Certain standards are conceptually different in the F&P Guide then in law i.e., “high political influence” or “politically exposed person”.
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<p>Criterion 4 Time commitment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All SSM-AF members must be able to commit sufficient time to performing their functions in the institution. The revised version of the F&P Guide specifically now references assessment of the travel and training time for the role(s) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment of the number of directorships held, the size and complexity of the entities and the activities of where other directorships are held and the place or jurisdiction in which they are located. Additional assessment of professional or personal commitments and circumstances. BUSIs will need to deliver a specification of the time commitment required for a role, a full list of mandates and expected time commitments and a self-declaration by the SSM-AF appointee that they have sufficient time to dedicate to all the mandates. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The number of directorships which are held by a member of the management body of a “significant institution” for purposes of CRD IV, which can be both a LSI and/or SCI for SSM purposes, is limited to one executive directorship and two non-executive directorships or four non-executive directorships subject to exemptions for directorships within same group, same qualifying holding or institutional protection scheme. Another exemption applies for directorships in non-profit sports or cultural associations, charities, churches (presumably this extends to other organisations of worship) chambers of commerce/ trade unions/professional associations and private discretionary investment vehicles of the management body.
<p>Criterion 5 Collective suitability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BUSIs must have SSM- AFs that evidence collective suitability. The F&P Decision also requires that a management body evidence “sufficient diversity” (undefined term). 	<p>The BUSI must provide the following information that will be assessed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A description of the composition of the SSM-AF; A short reasoned statement on how the SSM- AF appointee contributes to the collective suitability needs; and Where it exists, a result of the periodic self-assessment of the collective suitability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The BUSI has primary responsibility in identifying the gaps in the SSM-AFs and its collective suitability and SCIs must report this to the Joint Supervisory Team.

Chapter 5 of the F&P Guide – supervisory interviews

One of the ECB-SSM's primary tools for gathering and/or validating information is the use of supervisory interviews. These are conducted by an interview panel of at least two and no more than three supervisory staff of sufficient seniority interviewing the SSM-AF appointee. The interview panel is required to be free of conflicts of interest (actual or perceived) and free from bias. Supervisory interviews must be scheduled with sufficient advance notice in writing of date, time and place of the requested interview and equally the language in which the interview is to be conducted. To the extent the BUSI has agreed to receive supervisory Decisions in English, the interviews will then be conducted in English.

The F&P Guide is clear that reviews of any new appointment of CEOs and Chairperson positions (or equivalents) at standalone BUSIs and/or at the top level of a BUSI group will be conducted, including interviews, in order to fulfil the ECB-SSM's supervisory tasks in this area. It should however be noted that an ECB-SSM led interview does not preclude interviews being led by Banking Union NCAs and/or other EU and national authorities.

The interview process is split between what is an "informative interview" i.e., fact-gathering and any follow-up "specific interviews". Unlike the rules of certain national authorities the F&P Guide is not clear whether those individuals that have been invited to an interview may, if circumstances dictate, make use of their legal rights to be accompanied by legal counsel.

It should also be noted that whilst ECB-SSM rules dictate that any recordings of the interview are to be held as confidential and in accordance with the ECB's data handling procedures, unlike other authorities, it is unclear whether the SSM-AF appointee has a right to review or correct the notes or recordings prior to these being used for a Decision. The rights to legal representation, rights to access files and the right to a "statement of reasons" are only available after receipt of a communicated Decision.

Chapter 6 of the F&P Guide – the supervisory assessment process

The F&P Guide is clear that a fit and proper assessment can be triggered by any of the following occurring or being planned:

1. A new appointment, a change of role or a renewal;
2. New facts or any other issue arise; or

3. In the context of a licensing or qualifying holding procedure.

Resignations do not require a supervisory Decision, except where there are concerns that the Assessment Criterion 5 (Collective suitability) may no longer be satisfied. In such instances, a supervisory-led exit interview may be conducted. As with the above, the absence of an ECB-SSM-led interview or administrative/operative process will not preclude the operation of such process by any other regulator or supervisor exercising its own competent jurisdiction.

The stakeholder decision tree involves a SCI lodging a request for an assessment, using national notification forms, where available, with the relevant NCAs who in turn inform the ECB-SSM. The NCA and the ECB-SSM together collect the necessary and carry-out the assessment. Following the assessment, a draft supervisory Decision is prepared by the ECB-SSM, in conjunction with the NCA, and then submitted to the ECB-SSM's Supervisory Board who will approve the supervisory Decision that is then communicated formally to the BUSI and the SSM-AF appointee by the ECB's Governing Council. This process is however subject to the election of a Decision being delegated, in accordance with the terms of the F&P Decision to certain SSM heads of unit, who exercise delegated authority to approve certain supervisory Decisions, as described below.

Chapter 7 of the F&P Guide – the supervisory Decision process

Supervisory Decisions form the basis of how the ECB-SSM formally communicates a supervisory outcome to the relevant BUSI, or in the case of fit and proper assessments, the SSM-AF appointee. In the case of the F&P Guide, the following types of supervisory Decisions can be approved and communicated to the BUSI and, in "exceptional circumstances", to the SSM-AF appointee:

- **Negative Decision;**
- **Positive Decision;**
- **Positive Decision with a supervisory "Recommendation".** These non-binding instruments of the ECB may set out supervisory expectations to be fulfilled including the taking or refraining from taking action in relation to a certain issue;
- **Positive Decision with a supervisory "Condition".** This is a more formal instrument and may only be imposed where a negative Decision could be adopted but the shortcoming is easily remediable, the Condition is well defined and can be fulfilled in a short time frame, or the content of the Condition can be grounded on the basis of the Assessment Criteria established in applicable national law. The F&P Guide

is clear that the most common Conditions include (but are not necessarily limited to):

- a. An undertaking to follow specific training;
 - b. Divestiture of an external directorship or function; or
 - c. A probationary period. The BUSI is required to notify the ECB (and presumably a host of other regulators/supervisors – although the F&P Guide omits this) once the Condition has been satisfied;
- **Positive Decision with an obligation.** This includes an obligation upon the recipient of the Decision to take a specific action relating to the fitness and propriety that apply to the BUSI as a whole but not the SSM-AF appointee. According to the F&P Guide the most common “obligations” include:
 - a. Reporting on pending legal proceedings;
 - b. Improvements to written conflicts of interest policies; or
 - c. Improvements to collective suitability.

Positive and negative supervisory Decisions can include references to related ongoing supervisory workstreams. In each instance, the following principles and redress options, as set-out in the SSM Framework Regulation apply following the communication of a Decision and allow the BUSI and the SSM-AF:

- Appellant rights subject to thee having sufficient standing i.e., is only available to concerned parties. Once standing is proven the party has the right to be heard both in terms of the ECB-SSM’s Administrative Board of Review or to challenge a Decision directly with the Court of Justice of the European Union;
- Appellant parties have the right to legal representation, the right of access to the ECB file and the right to receive a “statement of reasons”; and
- The ECB-SSM shall take into account all relevant circumstances and may hear witnesses and experts if it deems necessary. The ECM-SSM may also take evidence.

What the F&P Guide does not do is clarify the rights of the appellant(s) to redress via the NCAs and/or the relevant dispute resolution venues.

The F&P Decision’s powers to authorise heads of unit to exercise delegated authority in relation to supervisory Decisions on fitness and propriety

Given the sheer volume of Decisions, which will only increase as a result of BREXIT, certain Decisions are able to be delegated to heads of unit within the ECB-SSM. The F&P Decision, specifically Art. 3 thereof, sets out

the instances where a fitness and propriety Decision may be delegated to the relevant heads of work unit, as described in Decision (EU) 2017/936. The types of Decisions that may be delegated were those that are neither complex, controversial or in relation to SSM-AFs at entities not at the top level of a group or an entity which represents the bulk of assets. This allows for a more streamlined administrative process.

Consequently, Art. 3 of the F&P Decision sets out which fitness and propriety Decisions may not be delegated and thus which must go through the ordinary approval process i.e., via the Supervisory Board and Governing Council. The scope of this process could change over time depending on how the SSM copes with the volume of administrative processes. At present Art. 3 of the F&P Decision sets out that these non-delegable Decisions in relation to fitness and propriety include where the assessment is in relation:

- to a supervised entity at the highest level of consolidation within the Banking Union Member State of a supervised group;
- the credit institution with the largest total value of assets in a significant supervised group;
- a SCI that is not part of a significant supervised group;
- to a person applying for a SSM-AF who does not fulfil the fit and proper requirements – i.e. a negative Decision;
- to a person applying for a SSM-AF in which a positive Decision contains conditions – unless such conditions are necessary to cure the fit and proper requirements and have been agreed in writing;
- the person applying for the SSM-AF is currently subject to “criminal proceedings before a court of law or been convicted of a criminal offence at first or final instance” – presumably this also applies to courts of appeal as if not this would be a gap and thus possibly an oversight;
- the person applying for the SSM-AF is currently subject to a financial services or regulatory investigation, an enforcement action or an administrative sanction is currently being carried out, pending or imposed upon that person;
- a draft delegated Decision and the NCA has not submitted this 20 working days prior to the expiry of the deadline for the adoption of a fit and proper Decision under applicable law; or
- a Decision has insufficient information or the complexity of the assessment requires that the fit and proposer Decision be adopted under the ECB-SSM’s existing “non-objection procedure” and thus goes through the ordinary procedure.

ECB Decision on streamlining process for adopting supervisory Decisions on “significance” as well as the F&P Decisions.

The ECB-SSM's bid to streamline administrative procedures has also extended to those that relate to supervisory Decisions on significance of a BUSI i.e., its categorisation as a LSI or SCI. These delegation mechanics are set out in Decision (EU) 2017/937 of the European Central Bank, which nominates specific heads of ECB-SSM business units to adopt delegated supervisory Decisions instead of the ECB's governing bodies. This power (currently) only applies to determining “significance” and the supervisory Decisions for those entities:

- that classify or cease to classify a SCIs as included within a “significant supervised group”;
- that cease to classify a BUSI as a SCI; or
- that are SCIs and alter their name.

We anticipate that this delegation will continue as the volume of supervisory Decisions increases as a result of the ECB-SSM extending the Single Rulebook, but also supervising more BUSIs.

The same principles on delegation are also enshrined in the F&P Decisions. They in short, clarify the heads of work units to whom this decision-making delegated to. The 2017 amendments to the original F&P Decision had originally delegate powers to make delegated fit and proper Decisions to centralised/horizontal functions within the ECB-SSM (authorisation) who jointly would authorise the delegate power with one of the heads of the relevant Director Generals of the relevant Directorate General of Microprudential Supervision that is tasked with the supervision of the relevant SCI or the group. In 2018, further amendments to the F&P Decisions in the form of Decision 2018/228, allocate this delegated power to the Directorate General Microprudential Supervision I and II respectively if the entity falls within the respective remit. It remains to be seen whether this will possibly lead to concerns on institutional governance and quality assurance.

Practical considerations for firms needing to comply with the F&P Guide and/or with the recent “SPoRs”?

So, what does all of this mean in practice? Firstly, it is conceivable that the ECB-SSM will issue a further version of the F&P Guide as it finds its feet. Version 1 was issued in quasi-draft form ahead of the Joint Guidelines being published. That publication merited the need for Version 2 and with further rule changes on the horizon as well as emerging supervisory approaches may mean further change. Moreover, in terms of timing, it means that BUSIs and those wishing to, due to BREXIT or otherwise, establish themselves in the Banking Union will need to

be patient as the more intensive supervisory scrutiny and the ECB-SSM wanting to be seen as to not having a insufficiently fit and proper SSM-AFs fail “on its watch” is likely to mean that administrative timelines for review and approvals potentially take longer. Some established institutions may get a hall pass due to reputational strength and/or timing concerns, but that could then be “cured” by the ECB-SSM conducting supervisory reviews/spot checks at a later stage to check what was submitted for a SSM-AF is in fact the case post approval.

Secondly, in terms of qualitative and quantitative issues the advent of the F&P Guide and the ongoing development of the SPoRs will likely yield the following for BUSIs and those wishing to establish in the Eurozone and its Banking Union:

1. A more harmonised approach, as the F&P Guide seeks to establish a more common supervisory culture and approach, whilst, irrespective of BREXIT, needing to do more with less resources. This comes on top of a budget review and rotation of staff. We anticipate however that the concerns that the ECB-SSM continues to voice on fragmentation will likely accelerate a regulatory roll-out and/or mirroring of provisions is likely to be driven forward across the whole of the Banking Union and breadth of BUSIs;
2. With BREXIT, the volume of fitness and propriety assessments are likely to increase. The increased scrutiny that is expected, and as communicated by the SPoRs may contribute to longer lead times, when compared to the processing times of certain NCAs that some market participants may be used to;
3. Despite the harmonisation that the F&P Guide and the Joint Guidelines bring with them, they do not close all conceptual gaps that exist amongst the 19 Eurozone Member States, or do so as fully. Consequently, the residual gaps could cause further fragmentation. This means that SSM-AFs, firms and their advisers, will need to remain cognisant of the gaps and competing provisions as well as contradictions whilst the regime moves from standardisation increasingly to a uniform regime. The identification, mitigation and management of conflicts of interest, an area that the F&P Guide is comparably prescriptive and presumptive on, will require specific attention to make sure it can actually be complied with and that processing times are not unduly delayed; and
4. In a wider sense, the terms and framework of the F&P Guide, how it interoperates with the wider ESFS as well as the supervisory engagements of firms with NCAs will also mean taking a periodic look and possibly taking rectifying measures to ensure that Banking Union specific compliance and internal policies and processes are fully fit for purposes. This

means ensuring that written policies and procedures are not only designed with a view to interoperate and be compatible with non-Banking Union and non-EU regulatory regimes but are actually embedded within the relevant BUSI and its group. Specifically, the interaction with the rules of the UK regulators and specifically the Senior Managers & Certification Regime is likely to be crucial.

Outlook and the way forward

These are certainly not insurmountable challenges. Nevertheless, they will prompt more active horizon scanning of regulatory and supervisory developments at the following levels: the ECB-SSM, Banking Union and non-Banking Union levels of the ESFS. It will also require an on-going evaluation of changes in depth and breadth of conceptual gaps might affect business and strategy priorities. Whilst the F&P Guide cements the fitness and propriety regime in a concrete uniform manner within the Banking Union, it does present a number of opportunities, which might make the cost of compliance more efficient.

With the ESAs and the Banking Union's SSM and SRM likely to further intensify their supervisory scrutiny of BUSI's internal governance arrangements they will probably use fitness and propriety assessments as an on-going tool to check compliance. Firms will thus need to take a more strategic view in an area that has historically been less invasive and where prudential supervisors have been less proactive. All of this comes on top of NCAs efforts in this and other conduct of business workstreams and thus requires firms and their advisers to take a joined-up view balancing jurisdiction-specific requirements with a Single Rulebook that is becoming more uniform.

Should you wish to continue the conversation on the subjects raised herein, please do get in touch with any of our Eurozone Hub key contacts below.

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