



FTSE 100	5,057.69
FTSE 250	8,918.87
FTSE All-Share	2,591.39
FTSE Small Cap	2,781.07

City discrimination claims surge as recession bites

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CITY COMMENT

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SEX and the City. Why is it that the phrase slips so easily off the tongue? Long before Candace Bushnell wrote her tales of single women in New York, the words were a regular feature in newspapers, frequently entwined like so many bonking bankers.

As Aviva boss Andrew Moss tries hard to shift the focus from his office affair to the insurer's figures, the uglier side of City sex scandals has reared its head thanks to yet another gender discrimination case, this time at Nomura where two former Lehman workers claimed they were driven out of the bank for being women and not being Japanese – allegations the bank strenuously denies.

As the case is still being heard it is not for this column to discuss the details. But it comes at a time when an unprecedented number of women have lodged discrimination claims.

According to employment law specialists economic woes have sparked mass redundancies with some unscrupulous employers opting to get rid of pregnant staff or those who have just come back to part-time work or flexible hours after maternity leave. The axe is then dressed up as redundancy to try and avoid accusations of discrimination.

Employment lawyer Bettina Bender at CM Murray, reckons banks have long been a breeding ground for discrimination claims, adding the trend "continues unabashed during the banking crisis". And Michelle Chance at Fox has noted a threefold increase in the number of clients with sex discrimination claims recently. Sadly, she also explains some women will play the sex discrimination card, regardless of the strength or weakness of their case. Why? Because there is no limit to the amount of compensation they can be awarded if a court finds in their favour. With a straight unfair dismissal claim the potential compensation is capped.

Chance warns that anyone opting to go down the sex discrimination route should be aware it can be double-edged sword as it can effectively end a woman's City career, even if she has a legitimate claim and is successful. This can only be regarded by any right-thinking person as fundamentally unfair and should be addressed so justice can prevail.

While we await the result of the Nomura case, it is worth noting that the compensation for sex discrimination claims, which often involve injury to feelings, have recently been revamped but may not live up to recent expectations. And with public opinion of bankers at an all-time low, massive payouts seem increasingly unlikely.

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