



European Securities and
Markets Authority

MiFID Questions and Answers

Investor Protection & Intermediaries





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I. Background

1. The Markets in Financial Instruments Directive (MiFID)¹ is designed to help integrate Europe's financial markets and to establish a common regulatory framework for Europe's securities markets. It does this by allowing regulated markets, multilateral trading facilities (MTFs) and investment firms to operate throughout the EU on the basis of authorisation in their home Member State (the 'single passport'). MiFID also introduced new and more extensive requirements for firms, in particular for their conduct of business and internal organisation. One of the main purposes of MiFID is to harmonise investor protection and market transparency throughout Europe.
2. MiFID is made up of the following European legislation:
 - a. Directive 2004/39/EC, which was adopted in April 2004. It is a 'framework' Level 1 Directive which has been supplemented by technical implementing measures (see the Level 2 legislation in b. below).
 - b. Implementing Directive 2006/73/EC² and Implementing Regulation 1287/2006³ (the Level 2 legislation).
3. ESMA's predecessor (CESR) produced a series of questions and answers (Q&A) based on questions received through CESR's MiFID Q&A mechanism. The Q&As reflected common positions agreed by CESR Members. They were one of the tools used by CESR to elaborate on the provisions of certain EU legislation, thereby fostering supervisory convergence.
4. Similarly, ESMA is required to play an active role in building a common supervisory culture by promoting common supervisory approaches and practices. In this regard, ESMA will continue to develop Q&As as and when appropriate.

II. Purpose

5. The purpose of this document is to promote common supervisory approaches and practices in the application of MiFID and its implementing measures. It does this by providing responses to questions posed by the general public and competent authorities in relation to the practical application of MiFID.
6. The content of this document is aimed at competent authorities under MiFID to ensure that in their supervisory activities their actions are converging along the lines of the responses adopted by CESR, and now ESMA. However, the answers are also intended to help firms by providing clarity as to the content of the MiFID rules, rather than creating an extra layer of requirements.

¹ Directive 2004/39/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 April 2004 on markets in financial instruments, 30.4.2004, OJ L 145/1.

² Commission Directive 2006/73/EC of 10 August 2006 implementing Directive 2004/39/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council regarding organisational requirements and operating conditions for investment firms and defined terms for the purpose of that Directive, 2.9.2006, OJ L 241/1.

³ Commission Regulation (EC) No 1287/2006 of 10 August 2006 implementing Directive 2004/39/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards record-keeping obligations for investment firms, transaction reporting, market transparency, admission of financial instruments to trading, and defined terms for the purpose of that Directive, 2.9.2006, OJ L 241/1.



III. Status

7. The Q&A mechanism is a practical convergence tool used to promote common supervisory approaches and practices under Article 29(2) of the ESMA Regulation.⁴
8. Therefore, due to the nature of Q&As, formal consultation on the draft answers is considered unnecessary. However, even if they are not formally consulted on, ESMA may check them with representatives of ESMA's Securities and Markets Stakeholder Group, the relevant Standing Committees' Consultative Working Group or, where specific expertise is needed, with other external parties.
9. ESMA will review these questions and answers to identify if, in a certain area, there is a need to convert some of the material into ESMA guidelines and recommendations. In such cases, ESMA Regulation Article 16 procedures will be followed.

IV. Questions and answers

10. CESR published its first MiFID Q&As in April 2008 and last updated them in May 2010. This document endorses the Q&As previously adopted by CESR⁵, as amended, and is intended to be continually edited and updated as and when new questions are received. The date each question was last amended is included after each question for ease of reference.
11. Questions on the practical application of any of the MiFID requirements may be sent to the following email address at ESMA mifid@esma.europa.eu.

⁴ Regulation (EU) No 1095/2010 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 November 2010 establishing a European Supervisory Authority (European Securities and Markets Authority), amending Decision No 716/2009/EC and repealing Commission Decision 2009/77/EC Regulation, 15.12.2010, L331/84.

⁵ On the basis of Article 8(4) of the Rules of Procedure of the ESMA Board of Supervisors (ESMA/2011/BS/1), guidelines, recommendations, standards and any other Level 3 material issued by CESR continue in force until such time as they are re-adopted, replaced or revoked, having the status provided for under the Charter of the Committee of European Securities Regulators.

Question 1: Article 19(4) of MiFID - Client profile review

Date last updated: April 2008

Question: How can an investment firm continue to ensure that it can rely on information provided by the customer (i.e., that the information is not manifestly out of date, inaccurate or incomplete), particularly where the firm is providing an ongoing advisory or portfolio management service?

Answer: An investment firm should take reasonable care to keep the customer profile under review, also taking into consideration the development of the relationship between the investment firm and the customer. For example, the customer could be advised that he should inform the investment firm of any relevant changes affecting his investment objectives, risk profile, financial situation/capacity, trading restrictions, or the identity or capacity of his representative. If the firm becomes aware of a relevant change in the client's situation, it should request any additional information that appears necessary.

Question 2: Article 19(5) of MiFID - Appropriateness

Date last updated: April 2008

Question: According to Article 19(5) of MiFID, when an investment firm ascertains that a product or investment service is not appropriate to a client or potential client, it must warn the client or potential client. In such cases, may the investment firm proceed to the provision of the service right after the receipt of the warning by the client?

Answer: If a client wishes to proceed with a transaction after the client has been given a warning, it is for the investment firm to decide whether to do so, having regard to the circumstances of the case. But in such cases it may be prudent for the investment firm to ask the client or potential client to confirm in a durable medium his intention to proceed with the service.

Question 3: Articles 48 and 49 of the MiFID Implementing Directive - Aggregated orders and trade allocations

Date last updated: April 2008

Question (a): Does Article 48 of the MiFID Implementing Directive apply to investment firms when providing the service of portfolio management? In particular, does it apply to decisions to deal giving rise to a single order that may affect two or more client accounts? Or should the expressions “aggregation” and “aggregated orders” be understood as meaning that this Article applies only to cases where there are two or more orders received from clients?

Question (b): Does c) of Article 48(1) of the MiFID Implementing Directive only require a general order allocation policy at the level of the investment firm? Or does this provision imply that firms should define, prior to transmitting an aggregated order, the way in which the resulting trade (or trades) will be allocated to the relevant accounts? Can firms comply with the requirement to establish and implement an allocation policy that is fair without defining, order by order, how the trade(s) will be allocated, at least in “sufficiently precise terms” to limit the risk of post-trade abuse?

Question (c): Do Articles 48(2) and 49(3) of the MiFID Implementing Directive, which require firms to allocate trades in accordance with their order allocation policy and to put in place procedures designed to prevent reallocations detrimental to clients, require allocations to be done promptly?

Answer (a): The expression “carry out a client order” is used in the implementing directive in order to cover both the reception/transmission of client orders and the transmission of decisions to deal on behalf of a client when providing the service of portfolio management, as well as the execution of client orders. Therefore, Article 48 applies to investment firms when they provide portfolio management services. The references to “client orders” in Article 49 should also be understood as encompassing decisions to deal by a portfolio manager, including a single order that may affect two or more client accounts, or one client account and the own account of the firm.

Answer (b): This provision requires firms to establish an order execution policy “in sufficiently precise terms for the fair allocation of aggregated orders and transactions”, which means that a general order allocation policy will not suffice to be compliant. A fair allocation policy should state that the intended basis of allocation for each order that may affect more than one account is to be defined prior to execution of the order or transmission of the order for execution, as the case may be. This interpretation is consistent with CESR’s recommendations on the list of minimum records that investment firms must keep (CESR/06-552-c).

Answer (c): A fair allocation policy should provide for the prompt allocation of trades, and prompt allocation furthers the objective of preventing reallocations. In addition, Article 47(1) of the MiFID Implementing Directive requires investment firms to ensure, when “carrying out client orders” (see above), that “orders executed on behalf of clients are promptly and accurately recorded and allocated”.

Question 4: Article 32(2) of MiFID - Tied agents

Date last updated: December 2008

Question: Question for CESR concerning the Recommendations for implementation of Directive 2004/39/EC (CESR/07-337b, Chapter C, paragraph no. 30-32) undertaken by the MiFID Level 3 Expert Group through the MiFID Level 3 Intermediaries Sub-group. If an investment firm located in a Member State intends to provide investment services through a tied agent established in a country where the investment firm has no existing branch, which notification procedure should the home authority use - notification procedure under Article 31(2)(1) of MiFID or under Article 32(2)(2) of MiFID?

According to paragraph no. 30 of the Recommendations the investment firm can have recourse to a tied agent to exercise either its right to provide services or its right to free establishment. In both cases, the home authority informs the host authority of the firm's intention to use tied agents, and if available at the time of notification, the identity of prospective tied agents according to the standard notification procedure. This implies that both notification procedures (either under Article 31(2) of MiFID or under Article 32(2) of MiFID) are possible.

Furthermore, according to paragraph no. 31 of the Recommendations, when making use of the right to free establishment to provide investment services through a tied agent established in a country where the investment firm has no existing branch, the tied agent will be treated as a branch presence in that country. In this case, where the investment firm exercises only its right to provide services in the host Member State and wants to use just a tied agent there without a branch establishment, we are not sure about the notification procedure.

In the above mentioned case we should according to our opinion use Annex 1 – standard notification form for cross-border services - mentioned in the Protocol on MiFID Passport Notifications (CESR/07-317b) and after this notification this tied agent shall be assimilated to the branch and shall be subject to the provisions of MiFID relating to branches (Article 32(2) of MiFID). The use of Annex 2 – standard notification form for branch establishment mentioned in the Protocol on MiFID Passport Notifications (CESR/07-317b) would in our opinion deprive Article 31(2)(1) of MiFID of its purpose.

Moreover, if we should use Article 32(2) of MiFID, how is the investment firm supposed to fill out the Annex 2 (Program of operations - corporate strategy, commercial strategy, organizational structure) in case of legal entities and in case of natural persons as an established tied agent? Should we then verify the tied agent like a person responsible for the management of the branch or is it enough that the tied agent is verified by the authorisation as a tied agent?

In conclusion, we would like to make the right to free establishment clear. We suppose that this right after MiFID application lies in possibility to provide investment services and/or activities as well as ancillary services either through the establishment of a branch in the host Member State or through the establishment of a tied agent there as well. In this case, would it be possible:

- to establish tied agents in the host Member State and notify them according to Article 31(2) of MiFID; and

- to use cross-border tied agents established and also registered in the home Member State or in other Member States (other than the host Member State where tied agents are active under the full responsibility of the investment firm) and notify them according to Article 31(2) of MiFID?

Answer: The notification of the appointment of a tied agent established in a Member State where the investment firm does not have any branch should be made under MiFID Article 32(2) which states that:

“In cases where an investment firm uses a tied agent established in a Member State outside its home Member State, such tied agent shall be assimilated to the branch and shall be subject to the provisions of this Directive relating to branches.”

According to the prevailing opinion⁶, where a branch does not currently exist, the branch notification provisions in the CESR Protocol on MiFID Passport Notifications (CESR/07-317b) should be effective, as if the firm was notifying its intention to establish a branch for the first time. The home Member State authority should be satisfied that the investment firm has sufficient systems and controls over the tied agent’s activities in the host Member State.

Notification under Article 31(2) of MiFID would be appropriate, for example, where the tied agent is established in the home Member State and not the host Member State and intends to provide investment services in the host Member State on a cross-border services basis.

⁶ BaFin infers from the wording and context of Article 32(2) subparagraph 2 of MiFID that an investment firm that wants to use tied agents in a country where it is not established through a regular branch, must file a notification according to the rules on the cross-border provision of services (Article 31(2) of MiFID).

Question 5: Article 41(3)(c) of the MiFID Implementing Directive - Leveraged portfolio

Date last updated: May 2009

Question: According to Article 41(3)(c) of the MiFID Implementing Directive, “In the case of retail clients, the periodic statement referred to in paragraph 1 shall be provided once every six months, except in the following cases: (c) where the agreement between an investment firm and a retail client for a portfolio management service authorises a leveraged portfolio, the periodic statement must be provided at least once a month”.

What should be taken into account to determine if the reporting must be provided once a month:

- the exposure of the portfolio (due to leverage)?; or
- the risk incurred by the portfolio (due to leverage)?

In other words, the concern here is to know if the monthly reporting requirement applies:

- as soon as the portfolio allows leverage (exposure - for example, if the portfolio manager has bought a call option, the portfolio will be ‘exposed’ to the underlying asset and there should be a monthly reporting) (option 1); or,
- only when the portfolio incurs a potential risk of loss due to leverage (for example, if the portfolio manager has sold naked call options, the portfolio may be at risk depending on the value of the underlying asset and there should be a monthly reporting) (option 2).

Answer: According to Article 41(3)(c) of the MiFID Implementing Directive, the periodic statement of the portfolio management activities must be provided at least once a month where the agreement between an investment firm and a retail client for a portfolio management service authorises a leveraged portfolio. There are two questions to discern: (a) what is meant by ‘leveraged portfolio’?; and (b) must such monthly reporting be done as soon as the portfolio management agreement authorises a leveraged portfolio or only when the portfolio incurs a potential risk of loss due to leverage transactions authorised by the agreement?

CESR considers that regarding the notion of ‘leveraged portfolio’, reference should be made to question no. 116 of the European Commission’s (EC) Q&A on MiFID which defines this notion. In its MiFID Q&A, the EC has defined ‘leveraged portfolio’ as follows: “‘Leveraged portfolio’ is a term that can designate two situations. The first one is the case where the portfolio manager has borrowed in order to finance investment. The term is also used for portfolios containing derivatives or structured products that create investment which is leveraged” (see question no 116, page 82). CESR understands the second part of the EC definition as meaning that as soon as there is one transaction that creates leverage, there is a leveraged portfolio. A portfolio containing leveraged transactions which are perfectly hedged (i.e. 100% inverse correlation to the initial position) would not amount to a leveraged portfolio for the purposes of this answer. A portfolio containing leveraged transactions which are imperfectly hedged (i.e. less than 100% inverse correlation to the initial position) would amount to a leveraged portfolio for the purposes of this answer.



CESR considers that the wording of Article 41(3)(c) of the MiFID Implementing Directive is not ambiguous; as soon as the agreement between an investment firm and a retail client for a portfolio management service authorises any type of leveraged transaction(s), monthly reporting should be conducted. This is irrespective of whether there is a potential risk of loss due to leverage.

Question 6: Articles 17(1) and 18(3) of the MiFID Implementing Directive - Due diligence on sub-custodians

Date last updated: May 2010

Question: When depositing client financial instruments into an account opened with a third party or client funds into an account opened with a credit institution, a bank or a qualifying money market fund, should the investment firm exercise a legal due diligence concerning the legal or regulatory framework applying to that third party with regard to the safeguarding of such assets?

Answer: According to Article 17(1) of the MiFID Implementing Directive, investment firms can deposit financial instruments held by them on behalf of their clients into an account opened with a third party provided that the firms exercise all due skill, care and diligence in the selection, appointment and periodic review of the third party and of the arrangements for the holding and safekeeping of those financial instruments. The same provision further specifies that this implies that investment firms shall take into account, amongst other things, any legal requirements or market practices related to the holding of those financial instruments that could adversely affect client's rights. Article 18(3) of the MiFID Implementing Directive contains very similar obligations regarding client funds: that article states that where investment firms do not deposit client funds with a central bank, they exercise all due skill, care and diligence in the selection, appointment and periodic review of the credit institution, bank or money market fund where the funds are placed and the arrangements for the holding of those funds. It also specifies that this implies that investment firms shall take into account, amongst other things, any legal or regulatory requirements or market practices related to the holding of client funds that could adversely affect clients' rights.

CESR considers that the wording of those two articles implies that the due diligence that investment firms must make when selecting custodians or deposit-taking institutions includes a due diligence of the legal or regulatory framework applicable to such sub-custodians or deposit-taking institutions (a so called 'legal due diligence'). This meaning is further confirmed by other articles of the MiFID Implementing Directive, such as Articles 16(2) and (3) or Article 32(2), which contain references to the applicable law. Those articles do indeed impose additional requirements on investment firms when the applicable law would hinder the protection of the assets of their clients. Firms can organise themselves in the way they find the most appropriate to make such due diligences.

Question 7: Article 23 of MiFID - Tied agents

Date last updated: May 2010

Question: Can you define the terms broker and an authorised representative? What is the difference?

Where an individual starts working for a new firm, are there any restrictions preventing him from approaching former clients, from his previous employment, to provide them services offered by his new firm?

Where an individual starts working for a new firm, are there any restrictions preventing him from providing services to former clients from his previous employment when the clients, on their own initiative, approach him?

Answer: The terms broker and authorised representative are not defined under MiFID.

A broker typically is a person who executes client orders on behalf of a client or receives and transmits orders in relation to one of more financial instruments. A broker can also give investment advice and perform other investment services and activities.

MiFID does not make any reference to authorised representatives. However, under Article 23 of MiFID, firms are able to appoint Tied Agents. Tied Agents may receive and transmit orders from clients or potential clients.

In relation to the last two questions, MiFID does not contain requirements regarding the solicitation of clients from a former employer.

Question 8: Article 4(1)(4) of MiFID, and Article 24(1) of the MiFID Implementing Directive - Investment advice and investment research

Date last updated: April 2011

Question: A firm provides ‘advice’ or ‘research recommendations’ regarding the underlying products (e.g. oil, gold, indices, currencies, etc.) of the financial instruments that they deal with (e.g. CFDs). Do such ‘advice’ or ‘research recommendations’ fall under the MiFID definition of investment advice or investment research?

Answer: According to Article 4(1)(4) of MiFID (regarding investment advice), and Article 24(1) of the MiFID Implementing Directive (regarding investment research), both investment advice and investment research must relate to financial instruments in order to qualify as such.

Personal recommendations provided to a client in respect of one or more transactions relating to products other than financial instruments are outside of the definition of investment advice under MiFID⁷ and, therefore, are not subject to the MiFID requirements relating to investment advice. This is also confirmed in Recital 81 of the MiFID Implementing Directive, which states that “for the purposes of Directive 2004/39/EC, investment advice is restricted to advice on particular financial instruments”.

However, Article 19(1) of MiFID establishes that the overriding obligation for investment firms when providing investment services is to act “honestly, fairly and professionally in accordance with the best interests of its clients”. Therefore, ESMA considers that when a firm offers the possibility to deal in financial instruments which have other products (commodities, financial indices, currencies, etc) as underlying, then, depending on the exact circumstances, it is likely to be artificial, and contrary to the overarching obligation of the firm to act honestly, fairly, and professionally, to make a distinction between advice regarding the underlying products of a financial instrument and that financial instrument. In this situation, the underlying product of a financial instrument and that financial instrument should be regarded as a whole and any personal recommendation, for example, about the underlying product should be regarded as investment advice within the meaning of MiFID. Reference is also made to Recital 82 of the MiFID Implementing Directive, according to which “Acts carried out by an investment firm that are preparatory to the provision of an investment service (...) should be considered as an integral part of that service ...”. It should also be kept in mind that a personal recommendation can be explicit, but may also be implicit: a recommendation could be implicit, but clearly influence the client to take action in relation to a specific financial instrument.⁸

Research or other information recommending or suggesting an investment strategy, explicitly or implicitly, concerning one or several products other than financial instruments or the issuers of those products, including any opinion as to the present or future value or price of such products, intended for distribution channels or for the public is, in most circumstances, outside of the definition of investment research under MiFID⁹, and therefore not subject to the MiFID requirements relating to investment research. Where it might fall within the definition is if, in the light of the context and substance of the research, it implicitly suggests an investment strategy in relation to derivatives.

⁷ See also CESR Q&A ‘Understanding the definition of advice under MiFID’ CESR/10-293, 19 April 2010.

⁸ See footnote 7 above.

⁹ See also Recital 83 of the MiFID Implementing Directive.



Where research covering the underlying product of a derivative is not investment research as defined in the MiFID Implementing Directive then it could still be information to a client. In these circumstances, it will need to comply with the Article 19(2) requirement of MiFID to be “fair, clear and not misleading” and the associated requirements in Article 27 of the MiFID Implementing Directive.

Question 9: Article 4(1)(9) of MiFID - Automatic execution of trade signals

Date last updated: June 2012

Question: A service provider X sets up a website which gives its clients the opportunity to choose one or more third parties that provide trade signals (listed on the website). Once the client chooses a signal provider and authorises the service provider to issue orders on his behalf, the service provider transforms each individual signal received into a buy or sell order to be executed by the service provider itself or transmitted for execution to another firm, without further intervention from the client.

Does the service provided by the website provider X fall within any of the investment services listed in Annex I of MiFID?

Answer: Article 4(1)(9) of MiFID defines ‘portfolio management’ as “managing portfolios in accordance with mandates given by clients on a discretionary client-by-client basis where such portfolios include one or more financial instruments”. This MiFID service is characterised by the fact that investment decisions are implemented without any intervention being necessary by the client other than the conclusion of an agreement (‘mandate’) between the service provider and the client on the nature and details of the discretionary service to be provided.

In light of this feature, where the service described in the question is provided in relation to MiFID financial instruments, it requires authorisation - in particular, in relation to portfolio management. In the model described, the service provider exercises investment discretion by automatically executing the trade signals of third parties. Where MiFID applies, this triggers associated ongoing regulatory obligations including the suitability assessment, other conduct of business obligations and the provision of periodic reports to clients and regulators.

Where the client sets certain trading parameters such as the amount of money he wishes to invest or is prepared to lose, this will not affect the characterisation of the service as portfolio management.

On the contrary, where no automatic order execution occurs because client action is required prior to each transaction being executed, the activity performed will not amount to portfolio management and, depending on the interaction with the client, other investment services may still be relevant (e.g. investment advice in the case of personal recommendations, and reception and transmission of orders).

Examples of such situations where the investment decisions are taken by the client himself rather than the service provider in regard to the decisions to buy or sell the individual investments in question include the following:

- the trade signals are investment advice (or a general recommendation), and the client is required to confirm each recommendation received in the form of a trading signal before any order is executed or transmitted for execution on his behalf;
- the trade signals themselves are fully determined by the client himself who is required to set the detailed parameters for each signal/order/transaction, such as the precise market conditions that will trigger a particular signal, e.g. the purchase or sale of instrument A when its price on market B reaches level C.