



Islamic Finance & Markets

in 10 jurisdictions worldwide

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Overview

- 1 In general terms, what policy has your jurisdiction adopted towards Islamic finance? Are Islamic finance products regulated differently from conventional instruments? What has been the legislative approach?

Islamic finance has developed rapidly in the UK over the past decade and the government has been very supportive towards its development and promotion. The UK hosted the first stand-alone Islamic financial institution in the EU and has the highest value of *shariah*-compliant assets of any non-Muslim country. The UK has a strong and proud tradition of openness and flexibility, which, combined with London's position as a leading international financial centre and the UK's significant Muslim population (just under 5 per cent of the UK population according to the 2011 Census), provides a strong foundation for growth. As a result of its standing, London has long been perceived as the Western 'hub' for Islamic finance.

The government announced the establishment of the UK's first Islamic Finance Task Force in March 2013. The task force's mandate is to help to build upon London's status as the Western hub for Islamic finance by showcasing the UK as the preferred choice for the Muslim world to invest in and do business with. Its objectives include engaging with the United Kingdom Islamic Finance Secretariat (UKIFS) and others to promote and raise the international profile of the industry and to use Islamic finance to facilitate inward investment and strengthen the UK economy.

Islamic finance products in the UK are not regulated any differently from conventional instruments and existing legislation and regulations apply. The UK's approach has been to ensure a level playing field for Islamic finance products and conventional instruments, and so the UK has proactively monitored and responded to any unequal treatment between the two by introducing remedial legislation and regulations. For example, the government was quick to remedy the adverse tax treatment of *sukuk* to place them on a level playing field with conventional debt instruments. Another example is where the HM Treasury abolished the double stamp duty land tax charge on *shariah*-compliant mortgages.

The government believes that the growth of Islamic finance in the UK is beneficial to all UK citizens and that Islamic finance should be available to everybody. On the retail side, all consumers gain from a wider choice of retail financial services, in particular those consumers whose religious beliefs prevent them from accessing conventional finance. On the wholesale side, the entire country benefits from the UK financial services industry's success as the leading Western centre for Islamic finance.

- 2 How well established is Islamic finance in your jurisdiction? Are Islamic windows permitted in your jurisdiction?

Islamic retail products first appeared in the UK in the 1990s, and in the last decade there has been significant growth of Islamic finance

products in both the wholesale and the retail sectors. With in excess of US\$18 billion in *shariah*-compliant assets, the UK is ranked highly in worldwide league tables.

Against the backdrop of global drivers of Islamic finance, the Government, the Financial Services Authority (FSA) (replaced in large part by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA)) and the Bank of England have actively supported the development of Islamic finance in the UK over the past decade. In 2000, the Bank of England recognised the potential for retail and wholesale Islamic finance in the UK and, together with HM Treasury, established a working group to investigate the obstacles facing the industry. This led to the first of many legislative measures introduced by HM Treasury to enable the development of Islamic finance in the UK. Since 2003, HM Treasury, HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and the FSA have introduced several changes to the tax and regulatory systems to enable UK companies to offer a range of Islamic financial products including asset finance, mortgages and ISAs. Since 2004, the FSA has authorised a number of Islamic financial firms and the UK is the first country in the EU to authorise stand-alone Islamic financial institutions to offer only *shariah*-compliant products. This has been achieved by applying the same authorisation criteria to Islamic and conventional financial institutions. Britain currently has 22 financial institutions, including five fully *shariah*-compliant banks, offering Islamic finance products. The main financiers in the UK market include stand-alone Islamic financial institutions such as Islamic Bank of Britain and certain conventional institutions that have set up Islamic windows. If a conventional institution establishes a separate branch or subsidiary to operate as an Islamic window, that branch or subsidiary would probably require a separate authorisation from the FCA.

Sovereign wealth funds from Islamic countries are active in the UK. The mandate of the Islamic Finance Task Force is to facilitate Islamic financial business, including investment in UK infrastructure by Islamic sovereign wealth funds. Islamic funds also operate from the UK and IFIs offer Islamic finance products in the UK.

There are no explicit restrictions for investments in *haram* activities (ie, non-compliant investments), although investment might be limited to *halal* activities.

There have been many listings of *sukuk* on the London Stock Exchange. The issuers of these listings have principally been corporates and banks based in the Middle East.

- 3 What is the main legislation relevant to Islamic banking, capital markets and insurance?

The UK has not enacted legislation specifically addressing Islamic finance. Islamic banking, capital markets and insurance are subject to general finance laws (in particular the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (FSMA)) and regulations in the UK and are intended to be subject to the same tax treatment that applies to their corresponding conventional instruments. However, certain

amendments have been made to existing laws and regulations specifically to facilitate Islamic finance transactions in the UK.

The most important changes have been to the tax laws (which broadly work on the basis of form over economic substance) to ensure the tax treatment of *shariah*-compliant structures follow the treatment of their conventional finance alternatives. For example, the rules have been amended to provide for certain *shariah*-compliant finance arrangements (including certain *murabahah* and *musharakah* arrangements) to be taxed in the same manner as conventional equivalents under the alternative finance arrangements regime (see Chapter 6 of Part 6, Corporation Tax Act 2009).

The alternative finance regime has now also been extended to *sukuk*, which hitherto had been treated differently to conventional bonds for tax purposes because payments on *sukuk* represent profit distributions although such payments are economically similar to interest. Unlike interest, however, profit distributions are not usually tax-deductible and this would have made *sukuk* a more expensive way to raise finance, especially in comparison with conventional bonds.

To respond to this anomaly, pursuant to section 53 of the Finance Act 2007, the alternative finance regime (under which certain *shariah*-compliant finance structures are taxed in the same manner as their conventional equivalents) has been extended to provide that *sukuk* be taxed in a similar manner to conventional bonds. This has been achieved by providing that, where the arrangements meet certain conditions (including listing on a recognised stock exchange), amounts paid by issuers to *sukuk* holders (other than those representing the principal amount originally paid by the *sukuk* holder to the issuer) are generally deductible by the issuer under the loan relationships regime, and taxable in the hands of the holder as interest (if the holder is subject to income tax) or under the loan relationships regime (if the holder is subject to corporation tax).

In addition, the Finance Act 2009 provides relief from stamp duty land tax (SDLT) for *sukuk* (as alternative finance investment bonds), amends the law to classify *sukuk* as tax-exempt loan capital for stamp duty and stamp duty reserve tax (SDRT) purposes, and allows existing corporation tax and income tax rules on Islamic finance arrangements to be amended by regulation.

Supervision

- 4 Which are the principal authorities charged with the oversight of banking, capital markets and insurance products?

Prior to 1 April 2013, the FSA was the principal authority charged with the oversight of banking, capital markets and insurance products in the UK. From 1 April 2013, the FSA was abolished and the majority of its functions transferred to two new regulators: the FCA and the Prudential Regulation Authority (PRA). The FCA inherited the majority of the FSA's roles and functions and also adopted the legal corporate identity of the FSA. The FCA is responsible for the conduct of business regulation of all firms, including those regulated for prudential matters by the PRA, is responsible for the prudential regulation of firms not regulated by the PRA, and inherited the FSA's market conduct regulatory functions, with the exception of responsibility for systemically important infrastructure, which was transferred to the Bank of England.

The FCA and the PRA, therefore, now regulate IFIs to the extent they perform 'regulated activities' for the purpose of FSMA. Their approach to the regulation of IFIs is expected to be the same as the FSA, which can be summed up as 'no obstacles, but no special favours'. Unlike certain other regulatory authorities, such as Malaysia's, the FCA does not have *shariah* scholars who review the *shariah*-compliance of a products offered by an IFI. The FCA's approach is to treat IFIs as it would conventional firms, so an IFI would require authorisation to carry on regulated activities and obtain the necessary permissions from the FCA. IFIs may need to provide additional information to the FCA in certain circumstances,

such as the role, if any, that the IFI's *shariah* board performs in relation to operational and financial matters (see question 7). Furthermore, any financial institution already authorised by the FSA wishing to offer *shariah*-compliant products under its existing FCA permissions must, in practice, notify the FSA of its intention to expand its activities to include Islamic financial business.

Financial transactions entered into with an individual and not otherwise subject to regulation under FSMA may be subject to regulation under the Consumer Credit Act 1974 (CCA), unless that agreement is entered into wholly or predominantly for business purposes, or one of the other exemptions under the CCA 2006 applies.

Before its replacement by the FCA on 1 April 2013, the FSA stated that it intended to work with international industry bodies, such as the International Organization of Securities Commissions (IOSCO), which have their own Islamic finance initiatives. The FSA also supported moves to develop common *shariah* standards by organisations such as the IFSB and the AAOIFI. While the FSA did not implement either the IFSB or AAOIFI standards (which therefore do not have any binding legal effect), these standards are certainly useful in identifying best practice for IFIs and examples of the application of regulatory rules to IFIs.

- 5 Identify any notable guidance, policy statements or regulations issued by the regulators or other authorities specifically relevant to Islamic finance.

The FSA issued a discussion paper in November 2007, 'Islamic Finance in the UK: Regulation and Challenges', which outlined the regulatory framework for Islamic finance in the UK and considered the risks and challenges that Islamic firms in the UK face in the retail and wholesale markets.

The FSA and HM Treasury released a joint consultation paper on *sukuk* in December 2008, 'Legislative Framework for the Regulation of Alternative Finance Investment Bonds (Sukuk)'. This paper suggested further legislative reforms to align the regulatory treatment of *sukuk* with conventional debt securities; in particular, the creation of a new specified instrument for *sukuk* under the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Regulated Activities) Order 2001, to exempt such instruments from the definition of collective investment schemes under FSMA. HM Treasury also published a paper in December 2008, 'Development of Islamic Finance in the UK' on the government's approach to promoting and facilitating the development of Islamic finance in the UK.

- 6 Is there a central authority responsible for ensuring that transactions or products are *shariah*-compliant? Are IFIs required to set up *shariah* supervisory boards? May third parties, related parties or fund sponsors provide supervisory board services or must the board be internal?

The UK has no central authority responsible for ensuring that transactions or products are *shariah*-compliant. The UK does not impose a legal requirement that an IFI have a *shariah* supervisory board. Although, by complying with the relevant AAOIFI guideline for *shariah* supervisory boards, an IFI could arguably demonstrate that it complied with its duties under the FCA's Principles for Businesses (PRIN) to take reasonable care to organise and control its affairs responsibly and with adequate risk management systems. Furthermore, while there is no statutory requirement for IFIs to have *shariah* supervisory boards, most IFIs do, as a matter of course, have *shariah* supervisory boards that sit alongside their boards of directors or employ third parties to act as an external *shariah* supervisory board (either because their constitutive documents so require or because this provides investors, stakeholders and customers with an assurance that the IFI will operate in accordance with *shariah* principles).

- 7** Do members of an institution's *shariah* supervisory board require regulatory approval? Are there any other requirements for supervisory board members?

There is no express requirement for regulatory approval of a *shariah* supervisory board, however, in an application to the FCA or PRA to become authorised, the IFI would need to indicate whether the members of the *shariah* supervisory board would perform an executive or an advisory role. To the extent an advisory role is to be performed, the IFI would not need to apply for each member to be an approved person. The competence of the members of the *shariah* supervisory board would still be relevant to determine whether the IFI is fit and proper to be authorised. To the extent that the *shariah* supervisory board would perform an executive role, then the IFI would need to apply and meet the requirements of the FCA for each member to be an approved person, including the requirement as to competence and capability.

- 8** What are the requirements for Islamic banks to be authorised to carry out business in your jurisdiction?

The primary statute governing banking in the UK is FSMA. Under FSMA, it is an offence for a person to engage in 'regulated activities' unless he or she is authorised or exempt from the authorisation requirement.

As with conventional banks, Islamic banks are dual-regulated by the FCA with respect to how they conduct business and by the PRA for prudential requirements (such as capital and liquidity). To become an authorised bank, an application must be made to the PRA, the lead regulator for banks. This is assessed through a collaborative process. The final decision will be made and communicated by the PRA. To authorise the firm, the PRA must have received the FCA's consent.

- 9** May foreign institutions offer Islamic banking and capital markets services in your jurisdiction? Under what conditions?

Foreign institutions may offer Islamic banking and finance products in the UK, provided that they comply with the applicable UK laws (including FSMA).

- 10** What are the requirements for *takaful* and *retakaful* operators to gain admission to do business in your jurisdiction?

FSMA governs the regulatory regime in the UK. FSMA provides that carrying on a regulated activity, or purporting to do so, in respect of a specified investment by way of business in the UK, requires authorisation from the FSA, unless the person carrying on such activity is exempt. Effecting or carrying out contracts of insurance (which would include *takaful* and *retakaful*) is a regulated activity. Therefore, a similar authorisation procedure to that which applies to banks (as outlined in question 8) would also apply to *takaful* and *retakaful* operators.

- 11** How can foreign *takaful* operators become admitted? Can foreign *takaful* or *retakaful* operators carry out business in your jurisdiction as non-admitted insurers? Is fronting a possibility?

Foreign *takaful* operators may become admitted in the UK to offer *takaful* and *retakaful* products, by complying with the applicable UK laws (including FSMA).

- 12** Are there any specific disclosure or reporting requirements for *takaful*, *sukuk* and Islamic funds?

There are no specific disclosure or reporting requirements for either *takaful*, *sukuk* or Islamic funds that differ from conventional products.

- 13** What are the sanctions and remedies available when products have been falsely marketed as *shariah*-compliant?

If financial products have been falsely marketed as *shariah*-compliant, there are three potential remedies available to an investor. The first is a contractual remedy, which, depending on the terms on which the product was purchased, may enable the investor to call an event of default (arising from the misrepresentation by the IFI of a material term of the contract) and then accelerate amounts owed by the IFI to the investor.

The second remedy is to institute a civil claim for misrepresentation. For fraudulent and negligent misrepresentation, the claimant may claim rescission of the contract and damages. For innocent misrepresentation, the court has a discretion to award damages in lieu of rescission, or rescission; the court cannot award both. And this is only if the right to rescind exists. If that is lost, damages under section 2(2) Misrepresentation Act 1967 are unavailable.

The third remedy is only applicable if the relevant product is a securities offering that is made through a public offering and where a prospectus is issued that is untrue or misleading as to the *shariah*-compliance of the securities offered. In this circumstance, section 90 of FSMA establishes that the person responsible for the prospectus is liable for damages to a person who has acquired securities to which the particulars apply and has suffered loss as a result of any untrue or misleading statement in the particulars, or the omission from the particulars of any matter required under section 80 or section 81 of FSMA. Additionally, section 90A of FSMA extends the issuer's liability to include liability to persons that have suffered loss as a result of a misleading statement or dishonest omission in the prospectus or a dishonest delay in publishing the information. Consequently, not only persons acquiring the *sukuk* direct upon issue but also those trading the *sukuk* on the secondary market would be entitled to bring a claim pursuant to these provisions.

- 14** Which courts, tribunals or other bodies have jurisdiction to hear Islamic finance disputes?

There are no specific courts or tribunals in the UK that hear Islamic financing disputes. The matter would be dealt with by the competent court in the UK, which, at first instance and depending on the complexity and final value of the dispute, is likely to be either the county court or the High Court of Justice.

Contracting concepts

- 15** *Mudarabah* – profit sharing partnership separating responsibility for capital investment and management.

The entry into a *mudarabah* arrangement is acceptable for a UK entity or person as it would be treated as akin to a partnership arrangement wherein the investor (*rab-al-mal*) contributes the capital and the recipient (*mudarib*) provides professional or managerial expertise to carry out the venture to earn a profit that is shared between the *rab-al-mal* and the *mudarib* in accordance with an agreed ratio.

Where a *mudarabah* is used for deposits with a bank, care must be taken to ensure any deposit complies with the definition of 'deposit' in the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Regulated Activities) Order 2001 (as amended) (RAO). While a traditional *mudarabah* requires that the *rab-al-mal* bears the risk of any loss on the deposit, the RAO requires that to be classified as a deposit under article 5(2) of the RAO, the depositor must be entitled to the right to repayment, whether on demand or in accordance with terms agreed. The FCA's solution to this and to ensure that Islamic deposits are categorised as protected deposits under FCA rules (and therefore that customers who deposit funds with IFIs receive equivalent deposit protection to conventional depositors under the Financial Services Compensation Scheme) was that depositors under a *mudarabah* would be entitled to full payment of the amount deposited (thereby

satisfying the RAO requirement). The *rab-al-mal* would, however, have the right to opt out of the deposit protection subsequently on religious grounds and choose to be repaid under the risk-sharing methodology reflecting a traditional *mudarabah*.

16 *Murabahah* – cost plus profit agreement.

Murabahah transactions can generally be implemented under English law. As in economic terms the *murabahah* is akin to a loan, the transactions would be classified as loans for International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) purposes.

With respect to the taxation of a *murabahah* transaction, prior to the introduction of section 57 of the Finance Act 2005 (replaced by section 564C of the Income Tax Act 2007 and sections 503 and 511 of the Corporation Tax Act 2009), the profit paid by the customer to the bank would not have been tax-deductible by the customer. However, since the new legislation came into effect, subject to satisfying the applicable preconditions, such profit would now be treated as interest payable during the period of the loan and hence qualify for a tax deduction.

Where the assets acquired by the bank under the *murabahah* transaction include real property, while SDLT would otherwise have been levied on both the purchase of property by the bank and the subsequent sale to the customer, since the introduction of section 73 of the Finance Act 2003, provided certain conditions are met, no SDLT is payable on the subsequent sale of the property by the bank.

For VAT purposes, HMRC treats the sale of the asset by the vendor and the onward sale by bank to the customer in accordance with the normal VAT rules which will be dependent on the nature and location of the asset.

17 *Musharakah* – profit sharing joint venture partnership agreement.

It is permissible for a UK entity or person to enter into a *musharakah* arrangement as it is akin to a joint venture or partnership arrangement. However, care should be taken to determine whether the *musharakah* arrangement could fall within the broad definition of ‘collective investment scheme’ in FSMA. To the extent the *musharakah* arrangement is considered a collective investment scheme, the IFI may need to apply for permission under FSMA, Part IV.

A *musharakah* where each partner’s share in the capital remains constant would be treated as a partnership and therefore be transparent for tax purposes, which means that the profits of the partners would be taxed.

In the case of a diminishing *musharakah*, following the enactment of section 47A of the Finance Act 2005 (replaced by section 564C of the Income Tax Act 2007 and sections 503 and 511 of the Corporation Tax Act 2009), and provided that the specified conditions are met, the return paid to the financier is now treated as if it were interest payable on a loan and is tax-deductible.

18 *Ijarah* – lease to own agreement.

An *ijarah* will generally be classified as an operating lease if it does not transfer substantially all the risks and rewards incidental to ownership to the lessee. If substantially all the risks and rewards incidental to ownership are transferred to the lessee, such an *ijarah* is likely to be categorised as a finance lease. An *ijarah muntahiyah bi-tamlik* (lease to own) is akin to a conventional hire purchase and so would be accounted for in the same way as a finance lease.

19 *Wadiah* – safekeeping agreement.

Wadiah agreements are not commonly used in the UK, but the entry into such an agreement should be possible provided the applicable regulatory requirements are met.

Products

20 *Sukuk* – Islamic securities. Have *sukuk* or other Islamic securities been structured and issued in your jurisdiction to comply with Islamic principles, such as the prohibition of interest?

To date, the London Stock Exchange (LSE) boasts that over US\$34 billion has been raised through 49 *sukuk* issuances that have been listed on the LSE and such securities can be admitted on either the Main Market, which is a regulated market under the EU Markets in Financial Instruments Directive (2004/39/EC); or the Professional Securities Market, which is a platform reserved for professional investors and is not a regulated market. Most of the listed *sukuk* have been structured as either *sukuk al-mudarabah* or *sukuk al-ijarah*. To take advantage of certain tax efficiencies, the vehicle most often adopted for the issuer is a limited company incorporated in a tax-efficient jurisdiction. Several *shariah*-compliant institutions are listed on AIM, enabling the purchase of *shariah*-compliant shares. Further, there are seven *shariah*-compliant exchange traded funds based on Islamic indices.

The requirements in relation to listings of *sukuk* on the Main Market are governed by FSMA and the UK Listing Authority’s (UKLA) Prospectus Rules, the Listing Rules and the Disclosure and Transparency Rules. An application to list a *sukuk* on the Official List must be submitted to the FCA together with listing particulars, which, in accordance with section 80(1) FSMA, should contain all such information as investors and their advisers would reasonably require, and reasonably expect to find there, for the purpose of making an informed assessment of the assets and liabilities, financial position, profits and losses, and prospects of the issuer of the securities; and the rights attaching to the securities.

21 What is the legal position of *sukuk* holders in an insolvency or a restructuring? Are *sukuk* instruments viewed as equity or debt instruments? Have there been any court decisions or legislation declaring whether *sukuk* holders are deemed to own the underlying assets?

There are various structures that can be adopted for a *sukuk* that may have an impact on how it is classified for insolvency, tax and regulatory purposes. *Sukuk*, are, however, typically structured to have the same economic effect as a conventional bond and are treated as such for IFRS purposes.

On an insolvency involving the issuer, the legal position of *sukuk* holders should not be any different from that of conventional bondholders in that the *sukuk* holders would have a debt claim against the issuer for the outstanding face amount of their respective certificates.

Whether a *sukuk* is treated as an equity or debt instrument depends on the structure and the risks and rewards of the *sukuk*. In particular, whether the *sukuk* is asset-based or asset-backed could impact this analysis. Often, it is the case that, from the originator’s perspective, the *sukuk* are shown as a financial liability on its balance sheet because it retains control over the issuer entity. From the *sukuk* holders’ perspective, the holding would need to be classified into certain categories, such as an instrument held to maturity or a loan and receivable. Legislation now provides that where certain conditions are satisfied, the return paid to *sukuk* holders is tax-deductible by the issuer consistent with the treatment afforded to conventional bondholders.

There have been no court decisions or nor has there been legislation declaring whether *sukuk* holders are deemed to own the underlying assets.

22 *Takaful* – Islamic insurance. Are there any conventional cooperative or mutual insurance vehicles that are, or could be adapted to be, *shariah*-compliant?

Friendly societies and other mutual insurance companies are potential vehicles that could be adapted to provide *takaful*. Friendly societies in particular have an affinity with *shariah* principles because all contributions to a friendly society are made voluntarily. Friendly societies have evolved in different ways over the years. Since 1992 most have taken advantage of the ability to incorporate, which allows them to undertake a defined range of activities.

There would be significant challenges in establishing a new *shariah*-compliant friendly society since, to be authorised by the FSA to carry on regulated activities in the UK, the friendly society would need significant amounts of regulatory capital. As a mutual institution, a friendly society does not have shareholders that might provide that capital. On the contrary, section 5(2)(b)(i) of the Friendly Societies Act 1992 provides, in effect, that only members (or persons connected with members) can receive benefits from the society and the converse of this is also generally held to be true, namely that a person cannot be a member of a friendly society unless he or she (or a connected person connected) receives insurance or similar benefits from the society.

23 Which lines of insurance are currently covered in the *takaful* market? Is *takaful* typically ceded to conventional reinsurers or is *retakaful* common in practice?

The UK *takaful* insurance market is in its infancy. Principle Insurance attempted to provide *takaful* motor insurance but suffered significant financial difficulties in 2009. Cobalt Underwriting launched a *takaful* structure in 2003 that allows syndication of the risks across a number of insurers but it remains to be seen how successful this venture will be.

Miscellaneous

24 What are the principal regulatory obstacles facing the Islamic finance industry in your jurisdiction?

In view of the legislation designed to remedy the adverse treatment of Islamic products relative to corresponding conventional products; and the FCA's and PRA's non-discriminatory regime towards ensuring the same authorisation and prudential requirements that apply to conventional firms also apply to IFIs, there appear to be no immediately apparent regulatory hurdles for the Islamic finance industry in the UK.

In HM Treasury's paper 'Development of Islamic Finance in the UK', issued in December 2008, the government identified a number of areas in which further progress was necessary to develop the Islamic finance industry. These included the need to create a set

of robust and accessible term-sheets for the main Islamic products through collaboration between industry and international standard-setting bodies; the need to raise awareness of, and knowledge about, Islamic finance at the grass roots level; and the need to highlight the UK's strength as a provider of education, training and skills in Islamic finance.

25 In what circumstances may *shariah* law become the governing law for a contract or a dispute? Have there been any recent notable cases on jurisdictional issues, the applicability of *shariah* or the conflict of *shariah* and local law relevant to the finance sector?

Shariah law is not applied in the UK and English law does not recognise *shariah* as a system of law capable of governing a contract, on the basis that English law does not provide for the choice or application of a system of law other than a system of national law. This is based on the Convention on the Law Applicable to Contractual Obligations 1980 (the Rome Convention), which requires that a governing law of an agreement must belong to a country.

The approach of the English courts, in the main, has been to distinguish between *shariah* and the contractual governing law of an Islamic finance agreement by ruling that *shariah* issues are not justiciable in the English courts. That element of the agreement is deemed as forming part of the commercial agreement (which English courts will rarely interfere with) and not the legal agreement. Instead the dispute will be dealt with applying the ordinary principles of English law and an English court will avoid ruling or commenting on the compliance of the agreement with *shariah* (see *Shamil Bank of Bahrain v Beximco Pharmaceuticals Ltd* [2003] 2 All ER (Comm) 84).

Parties may still elect to have a dispute in relation to a contract determined and resolved in accordance with *shariah* principles by submitting to arbitration. Under section 46 of the Arbitration Act 1996, arbitral tribunals are obliged to decide disputes with reference to either the national law chosen by the parties or any other agreed considerations (including *shariah* considerations).

26 Are there any special considerations for the takeover of an Islamic financial institution, outside the requirements of the general merger control regime?

The UK has no special rules governing the takeover of an IFI.

27 Are there any notable features of the Islamic finance regime and markets for Islamic finance products in your jurisdiction not covered above?

Not applicable.

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