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By Grant Ringshaw

E&Y CALLS ROSS IN ITS EQUITABLE DEFENCE

Mike Ross, the former chief executive of Scottish Widows, has been called as an expert witness by Ernst & Young, the accountant, as part of its defence against a £2.1bn claim for negligence over its role in the collapse of Equitable Life, the mutual insurer.

Ross's involvement will add extra spice to a bitter legal battle since he will go head-to-head with Charles Thomson, the chief executive of Equitable, who was previously his deputy at Scottish Widows.

E&Y, which was responsible for auditing Equitable's accounts between 1990 and 2001, is being sued by the mutual insurer's board.

Equitable was forced to close to new business in 2000 after it lost a House of Lords ruling on its treatment of guaranteed annuity rate policies. The claim centres on allegations that E&Y should have realised the guaranteed contracts were too expensive. E&Y is vigorously defending the case.

Other expert witnesses are understood to include John Cryan, a senior investment banker at UBS who is advising Equitable, and **Malik Karim**, who runs **Fenchurch Advisory Partners**, an investment banking boutique, who is advising E&Y.