



Amicus Response to the Financial Services Skills Council Skills Bill
Consultation Survey for Stage 3 : Gap Analysis

1. **Amicus is the UK's second largest trade union with 1.2 million members across the private and public sectors. Our members work in a range of industries including financial services, manufacturing, print, media, construction, not for profit sectors, local government, education and the health service.**
2. The union represents some 180,000 workers across the finance sector.
3. We feel that the consultation questionnaire issued is particularly geared to employers' responses rather than a trade union. Our response therefore takes the form of this submission.
4. Firstly, we have some concerns about the short timescale allowed for responses (less than three weeks over a period that included Easter)¹. This limits the ability of all legitimate stakeholders, particularly those with few resources, to respond effectively.
5. As a general starting point we would highlight the lack of consideration of working with trade unions as a means of assessing staff views on some of the issues raised and, indeed, as a means by which to address them. Q7 is a case in point whereby working with the unions is not offered as an option to consider in addressing the priorities listed.
6. The first part of the questionnaire deals with priorities for the Sector Skills Agreement and will presumably illicit responses varying by sector and or geographical location that broadly match the skills needs identified in the Skills Bill analysis of the industry. Clearly Amicus' first priority is around equality of access to training and career development

¹ We would point out that one of the key consultation criteria contained in the Cabinet Office's *Code of Practice on Consultation* is "allowing a minimum of 12 weeks for written consultation".

for our members, so in relation to Questions 4 & 5 we would highlight career path development as the first priority. We would also wish to prioritise entry routes, management / interpersonal skills and financial literacy (although see later comments).

7. Problems over the lack of new entrants (Q9) and career paths (Q11) are intrinsically linked. All the suggested actions to address lack of new entrants have relevance, but the sector's image is only likely to improve once issues around recruitment practices and career opportunities are actively addressed. We support all the actions around career paths detailed in Q11 and we would wish to emphasise that all training should have currency through accreditation. The FSSC's Foundation Degree consultation set out some good practices and approaches in this respect.
8. With regard to financial capability (Q13) and generic skills (Q15) Amicus would support the suggested actions, but we would argue that employers cannot realistically expect to employ new entrants who are perfectly ready-made for the job and must therefore take some responsibility for developing these skills. Existing staff also need to develop these skills. We also feel that the term "remedial" is unhelpful (Q15). As the FSSC is aware, funding is already available to assist with literacy and numeracy skills, the problem is rather one of de-stigmatising these skills needs and changing employers' perceptions and attitudes towards them (areas which trade unions can play a vital role in).
9. In addition, on the issue of financial capability, the FSSC should be aware of a report on the Financial Services Authority's Financial Capability Workplace Working Group educational pilot activities published last year which highlighted the important role that trade unions can play in improving people's financial capability².
10. Among the report's key findings were :
 - The workplace was a good conduit for financial education, although this generally proved more effective in larger organisations.
 - The pilots worked most effectively when all levels of management supported the programme. In addition, giving staff paid time off to attend seminars really helped drive attendance levels.
 - Unions were very supportive and helped encourage involvement in the programme.

² *Make the Most of Your Money : a report on the FSA Financial Capability Workplace Working Group educational pilot activities* (FSA, 2006). (Note : John Earls of Amicus was a member of the Working Group.)

11. Furthermore the report also concluded that trade unions played a critical role in a number of the pilots and the potential for trade unions to promote financial capability in the workplace should be explored further.
12. On Q17 Amicus is in favour of greater focus on development of managerial skills and widening access to them to employees outside of the current managerial establishment. Improved management skills within organisations must also lead to improved staff attitudes, one of the areas identified in the skills needs analysis. We support the development of centres of excellence and of quality benchmarks as both realistic and effective.
13. Clearly the sector has a need to address the need for the higher level skills that the industry will need by 2014. Amicus would support the expansion (rather than redirection) of funding to include higher level skills as a necessary course of action and indeed we understand that certain Regional Development Agencies are looking at this. However, redirection of funding raises the question of how employees with lower skills needs will be supported in their development, such that they are not left behind as the industry moves on.
14. With regard to Q23 Amicus supports the expansion of accredited training to new areas, particularly with regard to occupational mobility and transferability of skills.
15. Finally Amicus views the National Skills Academy as a positive development and would support its expansion outside of England as both realistic and relevant (Q25).

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