



Transforming Public Services, The next phase of reform

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 manufacturing, financial services, print, media, construction and not for profit sectors, local government, education and the NHS.

Amicus has many members who will be affected by public service reform in Scotland. As a key public sector stakeholder Amicus hopes that the Scottish Executive will work closely with it and other public sector unions to build modern and effective public services in Scotland.

Executive Summary

- Amicus is in favour of public service reform where reform is needed to improve and extend the service however we believe successful reform relies on robust consultation with workforce union representatives who are expert in the various fields of delivery.
- Amicus supports user engagement with public services and believes this works best when partnered with the full engagement of staff.
- Amicus has concerns about any plans that continue the marketisation and fragmentation that has been taking place under the banner of choice. These plans seem more motivated by cost cutting and outsourcing risk than service improvement.
- Amicus supports the rolling out of good practice from other sectors where appropriate.

- Amicus is willing to make further submissions on this issue and is looking forward to working with the Scottish Executive on all of its work in the public sector.

The Amicus case in detail

1. Amicus is in favour of public service reform where reform is needed to improve and extend the service.

There are many areas where current public services can be developed or changed in order to improve the service that is delivered to service users. Amicus enthusiastically welcomes many of the Scottish Executive's suggestions focusing on improving communication structures, cutting bureaucracy, raising standards, improved staff training, using technology and diversifying the types of services available to better suit the needs of 21st Century society.

2. Amicus fully supports users being involved in the performance assessment and improvement of their local services and believes appropriate and effective mechanisms need to be developed for this to happen.

Amicus is concerned that badly designed user engagement schemes could increase bureaucracy with negligible benefits and that any scheme needs to be affectively tested before being rolled out.

3. High quality services require sufficient resources and the full involvement of all stakeholders. In addition to user engagement it is critical to engage staff in service formation, design and on-going development. Public service employees have a wealth of valuable experience and expertise to contribute and are also interested public service users.

Amicus is concerned that many reform policies are being implemented without mechanisms for the ongoing involvement and consultation with staff. Amicus is disappointed that trade unions are not mentioned as an important contact with many public sector employees. The involvement of

staff and trade unions is essential to successful reform as it would complement user engagement and enhance the future development of services for patients and carers.

4. Amicus has concerns about any plans that continue the marketisation and fragmentation that has been taking place under the banner of choice.

Government plans for public service reform seem often to be clouded by an ideological belief that markets are the best way to drive up efficiency and increase user choice. Amicus feels that this position lacks evidence and has encountered many examples that contradict it. There is a distinct lack of evidence that the contestable tendering process used to outsource services drives up quality. By the nature of many of the services these contracts create monopoly companies that unlike the public sector have no direct electoral legitimacy. In addition outsourcing of significant parts of the services such as cleaning, catering or IT do nothing to help create “joined up services.” There is very little evidence to show that this is cost effective as recent IT consultancy contracts in the NHS have shown.

Amicus is concerned that the aim of this seems to be to transfer risk and responsibility for public service delivery away from government and onto other organisations. The result will be the fragmentation of public services and ultimately a poorer service for users.

5. Amicus would support the rolling out of good practice from the private and voluntary sectors.

Amicus recognises that there are examples of good practice in both the private sector and voluntary sector, e.g. management, efficiency, user relations and innovation. Amicus is not against the public sector learning from these sectors and engaging their expertise in parts of the reform agenda if there is evidence that this will improve the service.

Amicus is also not against the Third Sector being involved with parts of service delivery. The sector should not however be seen as a cheap way to outsource responsibility and cut terms and conditions for frontline staff. Third sector involvement in public services should be based on collaboration and service transformation not a cost cutting exercise through service transferral to the sector. Running core statutory services would have a negative effect on the independent advocacy and innovative roles of the Third Sector, removing much of its intrinsic added value.

Amicus is preparing a response to the UK Treasury's Third Sector review which will further develop these arguments. This response will appear on the Amicus website soon.

6. Amicus would be happy to make further and more detailed submissions on this issue and is looking forward to working with the Scottish Executive on all of its work in the public sector.

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John Quigley

Amicus Regional Secretary for Scotland

145 - 165 West Regent Street,

Glasgow, G2 4RZ

For clarifications or further information please contact:

James Lazou, Research Officer

E-mail: James.Lazou@amicustheunion.org

Tel: 020 7780 4020

Contact details for consultation:

Guy Hancock

Scottish Executive

Public Service Reform Development Division

Area 3-G South, Victoria Quay

Edinburgh, EH6 6QQ

E-mail: PublicServiceReform@scotland.gsi.gov.uk