



Financial Services Growth & Competitiveness Strategy Call for Evidence

December 2024

This response is submitted by Unite the Union, the UK and Ireland's largest trade union representing over one million members across all sectors of the economy including transport, manufacturing, financial services, food and agriculture, construction, energy and utilities, information technology, service industries, health, local government, and the not-for-profit sector. Unite also organises in the community, enabling those who are not in employment to be part of our Union.

3.6 – Unite represents staff working across banking, insurance, and outsourcers. These workers are vital to ensuring the UK can compete on a global scale. The skilled workforce is highly trained and demonstrate that experience is key in this vibrant sector.

3.8 – Unite the union has concerns about increased levels of financial exclusion. Access to finance must be prioritised for all operators in the sector. The closure of bank branches has left many communities without access to the trusted financial guidance and support that they very much need from staff. The limited number of Banking Hubs in operation and slow implementation of them has left some of the most vulnerable unable to participate in the economy. With one in ten ATMs closed in the last ten years and with many businesses and services refusing to take cash, free access to cash remains absolutely vital for the elderly and the estimated 8m people who rely on cash, many of whom are from poorer communities.

That there continues to be a lack of female representation at the highest levels of the financial services industry is a cause for concern which requires urgent action. The gender pay gap across the sector and in banking in particular need attention from regulators and government; soft targets are not closing the gap.

4.5 – There is no doubt that digital innovation will play a huge role in the development of the sector. However, the skills and expertise of workers in the financial services sector remains essential to ensure there is a strong and resilient sector moving forward. There continue to be digital gaps across many regions and sections of our communities. It is only through continued investment in the workforce that this section of our economy can continue to be a global competitor.

4.13 – The financial services industry is crucial throughout numerous regional economies. The jobs and opportunities that the sector provides are clear to see. Unite agrees about the benefits

for the regions the opportunities they offer “also allow the wider UK to benefit from our status as a global financial hub.”

4.17 – The focus on skills and talent is a central element for Unite the union. Without a determined effort to continuously invest in the skills of staff the sector will fail in its attempts to maintain or grow the financial services sector on a global scale. It is too all too common for employers to make existing staff redundant and employ new staff instead of reskilling and retraining their current employees.

4.20 – Unite the union welcomes a “government and sector-wide commitment to employee training and continued learning.” This is long overdue and Unite has been collaborating with employers to press for improvements in skills training. Most recently the union has negotiated a skills agreement for a significant number of staff in a major high street bank . There is a clear need for employers to go further in this area.

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