

Open letter to Nigel Savage Chief Executive College of Law

Dear Nigel

COLLEGE OF LAW AND TRADE UNION RECOGNITION

I was recently sent a copy of your letter to staff by one of your employees who felt the letter was a one sided view. Having read the letter I thought I should write and let you know a little more about Amicus as the description of the union in your letter is in my view incorrect.

Firstly Amicus believes that we are the appropriate union for College of Law staff. As a union operating in the education sector we have a widespread mix of staff in membership. This ranges from university academics and tutors, to administrators, clerical and support staff across many UK education establishments. Because of our spread of skills and experience we know in detail the issues affecting staff in colleges and universities across the UK.

We are concerned that the College of Law may be afraid of robust analysis of its pay and remuneration systems by an independent union especially if Amicus can show there are serious flaws in the way College of Law rewards tutors and support staff.

For instance the "performance related pay" system that College of Law operates in Amicus view is an outmoded method of rewarding staff in an age of transparency, equal pay and opportunity. Time and again performance related pay has been shown to lend itself to bias and discriminatory factors. Amicus believes it is an outmoded system that is used to hold back real increases to all staff by limiting those who receive the "performance" payment.

Surely the College of Law is not afraid of a close examination of its pay system and a proper debate about the appropriate level of reward?

Your description of national bargaining as "a straight jacket" conveniently ignores the fact that within the higher education system for example, it is the employers themselves who maintain the arrangements. Most national systems do take account of local market flexibility and some even recognise large conurbation allowances as recognition for the additional cost of living and mortgages in high property value areas. Something the College of Law performance pay system ignores.

You seek to suggest that the merger between Amicus and the T&G is a shift in the centre of gravity of the union. This ignores the fact that the union will be the largest in the UK with substantial ability to support the education sector membership within the

union thereby ensuring the union has the funds and resources to continue legal challenges to errant employers who break the law.

Your comment that the union has sought to “carve out” one of the College centres for collective bargaining alone sounds dramatic. The reality is less so.

Amicus has tried both a voluntary route in talks with your HR Director Kevin Sampson, together with discussions using ACAS, to get the management of College of Law to enter into sensible voluntary arrangements for the union to represent its members across the UK.

It is the College management that have rejected these approaches, leaving the union with only the legal route of a statutory challenge to obtain the ability to represent staff at Birmingham for arrangements to negotiate wages, hours, holidays and other conditions of service . Please be clear Amicus would like to be able to sit down with College of Law management to talk about pay and conditions for all staff- tutors, IT staff and administration staff at every location. We believe though that each centre needs a local approach as well as some common arrangements across the UK.

In your letter to staff you do not mention at all that ACAS have confirmed to College of Law that Amicus has either members or signed petitions of support from 54.4% of tutor staff across the UK.

Amicus wants all staff to join the union and we will continue to press for negotiations if staff choose to join Amicus.

If, as you claim, the union is insignificant, then why have you taken the step of writing to all staff?

What happens if you lose your case at the Central Arbitration Committee and Amicus is granted bargaining for Birmingham? Will you and the Board admit you got it wrong and reopen discussions with Amicus?

The letter to staff is sprinkled with pejorative language. “Disruption” “carve out” “not prepared to cede” “serious risk” and “force” are some of the words used.

In Amicus view it would be better if College of Law looked at why 54.4% tutors are supporting the union.

College of Law needs to modernise. It needs to examine its pay system and address potential inequality issues. It needs to look at the new agenda of flexible family friendly working with a reward system that is not based on “performance” which is often biased in application.

Professional staff are members of Amicus. In the new world of work even staff in the legal professions are entitled to fair treatment! That is why Amicus has within its members professions and occupations that in order to advance their professional interests they have joined a union.

Church of England vicars are members of Amicus! So are speech and language therapists, psychologists, academics, employees of the Law Society and even members of the House of Lords.

Amicus would like all staff at College of Law to join but it is a choice only staff can make. However if staff do choose to join, Amicus promises to fairly represent their interests and with our skill and experience, ensure their standard of living and working arrangements are improved.

College of Law withholds making real change because within the staff forum it does not negotiate and its consultations are in reality lip service to staff needs.

Instead of refusing Amicus a voluntary agreement and ignoring what staff want on pay and conditions College of Law should be doing all it can to meet with those who are trade union members within College of Law's own workforce.

The "collegiate" atmosphere within College of Law may exist for a few. In reality Amicus members believe it is their hard work that has enabled College of Law's business to increase but has also seen a lot of the benefit in salary increases go to senior staff close to Board level.

Come on Nigel lets have a more transparent pay system. As Chief Executive of College of Law you should not fear staff joining a union. Join with Amicus by making College of Law a model employer instead, to paraphrase, of talking of "ceding power" - a very old fashioned view of the world of work.

Yours sincerely

Mike Robinson
National Officer
Education Sector

P.S. I have enclosed a membership form for you as well. The subscription rates are still £9.95 a month no matter what level of salary you are on.