

WRITTEN EVIDENCE SUBMITTED BY NIGEL TODD ON BEHALF OF THE CO-OPERATIVE COLLEGE

Nigel Todd chairs the Board of Trustees of the Co-operative College and the submission signposts the role of co-operatives and the co-operative education in providing a 'gateway' to reach the adults described in the inquiry's terms of reference.

Executive Summary:

- a. Co-operatives have a commitment to the education of their members and staff, and adopt wider social responsibilities;
- b. As part of a 250 million strong global social movement, UK co-operatives access an international discourse on democratic adult education and act as conduits for sharing ideas;
- c. Through their membership structures, co-operatives draw on the participation of their members and can act as trusted 'gateways' to engage their memberships;
- d. Co-operative memberships in many sectors reach exceptionally deep into the social structure;
- e. Learning is one of the chief benefits that active co-operative members derive from their memberships;
- f. Trust and openness to fresh ideas has enabled the emergence of a new co-operative movement based on schools, and is taking forward ideas for using co-operative education in other settings such as prison reform.
- g. The Co-operative experience suggests a future national policy focus on strengthening parental involvement in education, using membership based organisations as 'gateways' to reach disadvantaged adults, and considering international co-operative initiatives as helpful to current British debates on penal reform.

What policies and/or practices best motivate disadvantaged adults to engage in adult learning? Practice may relate to activity in the classroom or beyond the classroom.

1. This submission highlights the role of membership based co-operatives in acting as 'gateway agencies' enabling participation in adult learning.

Co-operatives are defined as autonomous associations of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically- controlled enterprise

Co-operatives also commit to common values and principles, including self-help, solidarity, democracy and social responsibility and education and training:

'Co-operatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively

to the development of their co-operatives. They inform the general public - particularly young people and opinion leaders - about the nature and benefits of co-operation.' (<http://ica.coop/en/what-co-operative>).

2. Providing education has been a fundamental principle of co-operatives in Britain since the early C19. The commitment was embedded in co-operative philosophy via the work of Robert Owen, and subsequently given institutional support by the Rochdale Pioneers when they created the first modern form of co-operative society in 1844. British Co-operative education had both instrumental purposes – equipping members and staff to manage co-op stores and factories – and wider ambitions to promote active citizenship and to transform the economy along co-operative lines.
3. In 1919, the British Co-operative Movement established the Co-operative College (www.co-op.ac.uk) as a residential and outreach centre for supporting co-operative education conducted in local co-op societies, as well as extending Co-operation into what would later be termed the developing world. The College evolved as a 'hub' for curriculum initiatives, courses, distance learning provision, overseas development, research and more recently support for a completely new co-operative movement among English schools.

In 2016, the College completed a restructure, converting the organisation into a membership based educational co-operative.

4. The Co-operative College has also been a keen participant in the International Co-operative Alliance (<http://ica.coop/>) that reflects the interests of 250 million co-operative members worldwide. As a result, the College and UK co-operatives have been able to share in global co-operative discourses and educational initiatives, some of which were promoted by the United Nations through its International Year of Co-operatives, 2012 (<http://social.un.org/coopsyear/>). There is linkage, too, with European co-operatives via Eurocoop (<http://www.eurocoop.org/en/>). Knowledge transfer is an important feature of these relationships.
5. The co-operative sector in the UK is varied and extensive, attracting interest from governments of all political party backgrounds. Co-operatives are found in spheres as diverse as retailing, housing, credit, funerals, insurance, agriculture, community asset ownership, taxis, environment, renewable energy, arts provision, schools, healthcare, training, research and consultancy, telecommunications, marketing, social care, and more amounting to a £37 billion a year contribution to the UK economy. There are 6796 member owned co-operatives in the UK owned by 15 million members (<http://www.uk.coop/economy2015/uk-co-operative-economy-2015-report>).
6. The demographic profiles of UK co-operatives' memberships is somewhat under researched but it is clear that there is a strong presence among people from low income, low skills, and socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

Housing co-operatives, particularly those that originated in regeneration schemes in the 1980s, or more recently in transfers of former council housing estates (such as Rochdale Borough Housing with over 4000 members: <http://www.rbh.org.uk/our-mutual-rbh>), carry the demographic profiles of social housing more generally:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/335257/Chapter_4_Demographic_and_attitudinal_characteristics_of_social_renters.pdf .

Similarly, credit unions, have tended to be located among low income groups and have been seen as solutions to financial poverty, although some large credit unions are also workplace based among low paid workers (eg: <http://www.creditunion.co.uk/Organisations.htm>).

And traditional consumer co-operative societies that form the fifth largest retail group in the UK, as well as being the country's largest neighbourhood convenience store operator, maintains a deep presence among C-D social class categories as well as with older people.

Whilst workers' co-ops have a very small presence in Britain, Suma, the largest workers' owned co-op now with 200 staff, has a workplace profile very typical of food wholesaling (<http://www.suma.coop/about/>). And the expanding group of worker-owned Homecare Associates, formed originally in Sunderland by a co-operative activist, has a staff profile of predominantly working class women (<http://www.sunderlandhomecare.co.uk/aboutus.html>).

7. An interesting characteristic of co-operatives is that they tend to be trusted by their members and the public generally. This was notably evident in the backwash of the 2008 financial crash, and in relation to a major crisis at the UK's largest co-operative organisation, The Co-operative Group. Independent research confirmed a higher level of public trust in co-operatives than in PLCs (http://www.csrwire.com/press_releases/21513-Public-Trust-in-Business-Shrivers-in-Recession-but-Consumers-Hold-Steady-on-Ethical-Commitments), and a YouGov survey, conducted for The Co-operative Group, suggested that 70% of the British public believed that it was a business that 'tried to do the right thing' (<http://www.co-operative.coop/corporate/haveyoursay/>) .

Evidently, co-operative values, actual and potential possibilities for members' control, and a broad sense that co-ops are on 'on your side', buttressed by examples of ethical and responsible trading, inform the appeal of co-operatives on grounds of trustworthiness.

8. From these starting points of commitment, knowledge transfer, demography, and trust, co-operatives offer an avenue into widening participation in adult learning. There is a good deal of scope for research into the modern impacts and experience of co-operatives' engagement in adult learning, but a rich evidence base includes for example:

- 8.1 The Mutuality Network and LSE Centre for Civil Society's 2003 study of member participation in housing and consumers' co-operatives in the

West Midlands found that participants in co-ops confirmed the ‘learning experience’ as the principal benefit they had gained (Tom Woodin, et al., *Getting Involved: Studies of member participation in co-operatives across the West Midlands*, Co-operative College Paper 2, Manchester, 2003, p.24).

- 8.2 The Co-operative College’s UK-wide Member Education Programme, undertaken over c.20 years for the Co-operative Group’s elected members of local and national committees, evoked positive feedback, not least from learners, including store staff and lay members, with limited previous education and study skills.
 - 8.3 The *Without Boundaries* project, a joint exercise with the Workers’ Educational Association (WEA), the Co-operative College and consumer co-operatives, funded from Co-operative sources, sought to revitalise an historic relationship between co-operatives and the WEA. It led to the co-production of workshops on co-operative history, basic ICT courses in Co-op shops, volunteering initiatives, and support for Co-op members interesting in becoming more involved in the Co-operative Movement.
 - 8.4 The creation of an international *Co-operative Education Conference* by the Co-operative College – now to be an annual ‘learning community’ ingredient of the College’s programme – has connected, inclusively, lay members of co-ops and staff with colleagues in other co-operative sectors in the UK and globally, and spanning interests from mutually sharing PhD research to displaying local experience from co-operative schools and co-operative history projects (<https://www.co-op.ac.uk/coopedconf/>)
 - 8.5 The Co-operative Bank’s work on financial inclusion among prisoners (<http://www.co-operative.coop/corporate/press/press-releases/Banking-Group/1000th-prisoner-banks-on-fresh-start/>), and The Co-operative Group’s work with the Koestler Trust generated insights into working with offenders whose background often fitted multiple characteristics of disadvantage (see: <https://www.co-operative.coop/Estates/operational%20risk/business%20crime/unlocked.pdf>; and <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2010/aug/24/arts-prison-koestler-awards-praise>; and <http://www.thenews.coop/39405/news/co-operatives/co-op-teaches-offenders-co-operate-out-crime/>).
9. Finally, two examples of new frontiers in co-operative education derived from the Co-operative College’s role as a ‘hub’ are worth noting in the context of the APPG’s Call for Evidence. These are:
- 9.1 Parental and community engagement in co-operative schools: the expansion of co-operative schools in England – there are now c.700 – as the third largest schools’ network behind those maintained by religious denominations, offers opportunities for adult learning to participants in the schools’ distinctive membership frameworks, enhancing the vital home-school link in education. It is a point not lost on several key partners such as the NASUWT (http://www.nasuwt.org.uk/groups/public/@journalist/documents/nas_download/nasuwt_010379.pdf) as well as the National Association of Head

Teachers and others (<http://www.consider-ed.org.uk/co-operative-schools-a-quiet-revolution/>).

Increasing parental involvement in co-operative schools is in its infancy, and is the subject of a PhD research project hosted by the College. Whilst there is no magic formula to guarantee success in extending adult learning through connection with schools, the co-operative membership model adds a new dimension to the concept of a school community, and this should be explored further.

- 9.2 Prison co-operatives: with the publication on 18 October 2016 of Dame Sally Coates's report on the reform of prison education (https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/524013/education-review-report.pdf) there is the prospect of a fresh approach to using adult learning as a way of reducing dramatic levels of reoffending among a rising prison population that often lacks basic skills, and in many cases were excluded from schools. Co-operative approaches to working with offenders have a long history in Britain and elsewhere, and have surfaced in the present-day prison system to a small degree, but recent experiments are available through the global Co-operative Movement.

The Co-operative College is hosting a Plowden Fellowship research project into 'prison co-operatives', but international examples are already being discussed (See: <http://www.thenews.coop/102261/news/co-operatives/long-read-criminological-case-co-operatives/>; and <http://www.thenews.coop/99345/news/community/blog-social-co-operatives-prison-systems/>).

Name three major policy developments necessary to secure the future of adult learning in 2016 and over the next 5 -10 years?

The Co-operative College would suggest three policy areas for consideration as routes to demonstrating the value of adult learning:

- (1) Prison co-operatives to help in reaching a 'captive' audience of the most disadvantaged adults who may then reduce their propensity for reoffending.
- (2) Learning linked to participation in 'gateway' agencies, particularly co-operatives but also other membership based organisations with clear values.
- (3) Co-operative schools as an area for potentially strengthening parental involvement in their own and their children's education.