

Education for a Co-operative Country

Draft Report from the Co-operative Education Roundtable Cardiff, 19th November 2016

The socio-economic and political context is particularly challenging right now. However, this may be a climate conducive to re-learning the power of self-help and reciprocity, strengthening localism, and in fostering greater collaboration and co-operation between organisations.

There are historic and contemporary evidence to support the need for a strategic focus on Co-operative Education, if the benefits of Co-operation are to be achieved and maintained in Wales.

Creating co-operators with passion results from training and information that both focus on people's specific needs, and works across sectors. At the November roundtable, Co-operative Education was broken down into four areas of focus for development:

1. Structures

1.1 In Wales, there has been little interest shown for Co-operative Schools (as run in England), though the possibility of a Co-operative University was discussed as a long-term (and probably inter-national) aspiration.

1.2 However, a proposal was put forward for a Co-operative Education Development Board which would:

- cut across parties and include Welsh Government input, as well as representation from the Co-operative and Education sectors;
- take a strategic role over a 10 to 20 year timescale;
- have joint secretariat shared between Welsh Government and the Wales Cooperative Centre.

1.3 The Co-operative Education Development Board would fulfil the following roles:

- promote Co-operative Education within existing delivery structures;
- with the buy-in of Welsh Government, aim for rollout of Co-operative Education into all curriculums;
- address a comprehensive "cradle to grave" agenda of learning which covers all modalities (formal and informal) as well as all ages (both for children and adults);
- Take forward the relevant recommendations of the Welsh Co-operatives and Mutuals Commission (2014), and address any gaps in these recommendations, such as Adult and Community Education;
- focus on leadership development, methodology and content.

2. Leadership Development

2.1 It was agreed that educating co-operators to empower citizens and communities is more needed than ever and therefore, this theme in re-launching Co-operatives and Mutuals Wales. There was widespread recognition that there are already many good community leaders, and that the place to start is in the informal structures of Co-operative Community Education. The objective is to identify, nurture and educate existing community leaders in the power of the co-operative values and principles, in order to drive community (re)development, co-operating communities and the Co-operative business model.

3. Methodology / Pedagogy

3.1 Co-operative Education needs to be delivered both in:

- Formal learning settings (the vision is that the Welsh Government support will enable Co-operative Education to be written into the curriculums);
- Informal training and learning (both online through e-learning training modules, and face to face in regional clusters).

3.2 Co-operative Education should be delivered using existing assets, for example:

- Co-op shops in-store media;
- Housing associations;
- Communities First initiatives (or the structures that will replace these);
- Credit unions, particularly in their outreach work in schools;
- Community organisations.

3.3 Co-operative Education needs to cover:

- The "co-operative glue", the central tenets of co-operation that apply cross-sector (e.g. model, governance, financials. etc);
- Specific and technical skills that are sector specific.

3.4 Points raised for future discussion included: consideration of where Co-operative education fits within revised Adult Community Learning (ACL) policy, pupil's learning, accessibility and reciprocity (everyone can participate and contribute), cooperative education vs. competitive education, Digital Literacy skills; what and how should Government specifically support through its funding?

4. Content

4.1 The starting point for this conversation was the imperative for promoting a general awareness of Co-operative Values and Principles as a viable basis for building a better and more inclusive society. This awareness and support would make it possible to fill in the gaps in educational content (i.e. knowledge sharing, research, Further Education, Higher Education and adult courses), as well as to unlock community and other funding.

4.2 The need for up-to-date research and evidence was flagged up, and also the need to differentiate between Co-operatives as a social movement and the Co-operative as a High Street retailer.

5. Conclusions and thoughts for future development

5.1 The socio-economic and political context is particularly challenging right now. However, this may be a climate conducive to re-learning the power of self-help and reciprocity, strengthening localism, and in fostering greater collaboration and co-operation between organisations.

5.2 The vision for Co-operative Education is a shift in emphasis from "creating competitors (and employment fodder)" to "creating co-operators (and citizens)". There is a real drive to really adhere to the fundamentals of the Co-operative ethos as a social movement, as it represents a practical antidote to global forces and corporate power.

5.3 In revising Adult Community Learning policy, there is a need to familiarise ourselves with the relevance of the Social Services and Well-being Act (Wales) 2014; and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, which provides a 'philosophical context' for the work of the public sector (and possibly wider) in making resources available to support Co-operative Education.

5.4 Working in partnership with others, including: Welsh Government, Trade Unions, Head Teachers, Adult Learning Wales, Wales Co-operative Centre, the Woodcraft Folk, the National Union of Students, WCVA, Age Alliance, Local Government and others, and starting to build these relationships now but with a long-termist view was flagged as a possible objective for the next roundtable meeting. However, while aiming for a long-term comprehensive agenda, it is important to identify achievable smaller short-term goals and milestones.

Feedback from the day

Collected from post-its at the end of the day:



- Well structured, good timekeeping, enabled a focused way forward
- Excellent meeting, enthusiastic collaborators
- Authoritative presentation, good audience participation, facilitation good, all good in fact
- Nothing negative, all good!
- Excellent, informative
- Very useful, great ideas to take forwards
- The right people in the room, with passion and well organised by Noreen!
- Great topic, great inputs, exciting outcome!
- Thoroughly enjoyed the whole day
- Ran very smoothly, Q&A sessions were well controlled, good mix of small and large group discussion
- Good discussion, good food and facilitation
- Nice lunch! Plenty of tea and coffee
- Feeling of real progress - not always the case at these events!
- Great conversations, great presentations, well held together
- Good listening and summarising, unobtrusive fab facilitating
- Friendly but structured approach with space to think, share and question
- Happy day, positive, energised
- Space to debate and discuss, learning from others



- A few more minutes needed in the breakout rooms
- More time or more focused debate
- LOT of stuff in one day!
- Would like to have had some reps from unions here for their input
- Confusion of Co-operative group – the High Street retailer, with Co-operation as a social movement!
- Consider using social media channels to drive wider engagement
- Not going back to the small groups

Postscript

Our thanks are due to the many individuals and organisations involved in making the first of a two stage event a reality, especially Cartrefi Cymru which generously provided the venue, refreshments and who enabled the proceedings to be captured on video. This material is now being jointly edited by Cartrefi Cymru and Co-operatives and Mutuals Wales and should be available in the New Year. Our second is being held on Saturday 8th April at the same venue for those wishing to practical contribute to progressing a shared Co-operative Education agenda.