

A Manifesto for Co-operative Education in Wales

**From Birth to Business Schools: A Whole Nation Approach
to Co-operation, Collaboration and Community Cohesion**



Summary: Putting Co-operation at the Heart of Education in Wales

Wales stands at a pivotal moment. Economic inequality, climate pressures, digital fragmentation and social division demand new ways of learning, working and living together. This manifesto proposes a national strategy to embed co-operation across the entire Welsh education system, from the earliest months of life to higher education, apprenticeships and lifelong learning, so that co-operation becomes a defining feature of Welsh society.

A Co-operative Wales is built not only through enterprises, but through people. The manifesto sets out how co-operative values, habits and competencies can be cultivated progressively through every learning phase. It argues that children first encounter co-operation through relationships, trust and belonging; that young people must learn the knowledge, skills and democratic habits needed to participate in co-operative life; and that adults benefit from structures that support community, voice, fairness and shared endeavour.

Drawing on Welsh traditions of mutual aid, Cynefin, bilingual identity and global co-operative history, the manifesto calls for a system-wide transformation:

- embedding co-operative principles within the Curriculum for Wales;
- strengthening progression from early years to adulthood;
- aligning qualifications, teacher training and apprenticeships with co-operative models;
- creating co-operative cultures in schools, colleges, universities and communities;
- and developing strong partnerships across government, civil society, business and the co-operative sector.

The proposals recognise that Wales already participates in a dynamic UK and global co-operative movement, but that its full potential will only be realised when education equips learners to understand, create and lead co-operatives confidently.

“A Co-operative Wales is built not only through enterprises, but through people”

The strategy outlined seeks to double the size of the Welsh co-operative and mutual economy through education that nurtures collaboration, democratic participation, ethical reasoning and community responsibility. This will be a marathon, not a sprint.

This is a vision for a Wales where learners feel rooted in their communities, able to think critically about the world, and ready to shape a fairer, greener, more compassionate, co-operative and democratic future. It positions co-operation not as an optional enrichment activity but as a national approach to citizenship, belonging and prosperity.

A Co-operative Wales is one where every learner understands that they are a contributor; where every community has the confidence and capacity to solve problems together; and where every generation grows up knowing that a more humane, sustainable and solidaristic way of organising society is not only possible but already taking shape.

Further engagement is invited in developing this plan produced by Coops Wales via david@cooperatives-wales.coop

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1. Introduction: Towards a Co-operative Wales

Wales is a nation rooted in mutual aid, solidarity and democratic participation. This manifesto sets out a vision for Making a Co-operative Wales – a Wales where co-operation becomes a defining feature of how we learn, live and organise our society, and where learners are equipped for critical thinking so they can question, analyse and shape the world around them.

That vision connects Wales directly to the international co-operative movement. Through the International Co-operative Alliance, Welsh co-operators are part of a global community of around 3 million co-operatives, representing over 1 billion members and providing jobs or work opportunities for roughly 280 million people. The largest 300 co-operatives and mutuals together generate more than US\$2.4 trillion in annual turnover, showing that co-operation is not a niche alternative but a major force in the world economy.

Within this global picture, the UK co-operative movement makes a substantial contribution: approximately 7,400 co-operatives generate around £42.7 billion in annual income, serving 16.6 million members, around a quarter of the UK population, and employing almost 240,000 people. When the wider mutual and democratic economy is included, co-operatives, building societies, insurers, credit unions, this represents well over £160 billion of annual income and a sector that policymakers now aim to double in size.

In Wales, co-operatives already form a growing part of that democratic economy, with around 14,000 employees contributing to an estimated £1.5 billion in annual turnover, alongside a wider social business sector with turnover of approximately £4.8 billion and more than 65,000 jobs. A national strategy for co-operative education is therefore not starting from scratch: it is building on a live, growing Welsh co-operative ecosystem that links local communities to UK-wide and global networks of shared ownership and democratic enterprise.

If Wales is serious about fairness, sustainability, community cohesion and democratic participation, then co-operative education must sit at the heart of our national project. Wales already has strong foundations: traditions of mutual aid, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, Cymraeg 2050, and cross-party recognition that co-operatives strengthen communities and reduce inequality.

At the same time, Wales faces major challenges: inequality, climate pressures, demographic change, digital disruption, mistrust in institutions, and the urgent need to strengthen citizenship, belonging and well-being. We live in a period where rapid technological change, including the growth of a digital-only society, risks narrowing human agency, weakening community bonds, and reducing

opportunities for face-to-face collaboration, deliberation and democratic participation.

Co-operative education provides an essential counterbalance: it teaches learners to think critically, work collaboratively, make ethical judgments and maintain strong human relationships in an increasingly digital world.

This manifesto argues for a joined-up educational strategy that treats co-operation as a core organising principle from birth to adulthood. Co-operative learning promotes agency, empathy, reciprocity, digital discernment and the ability to challenge misinformation, skills essential for navigating and shaping a society where digital systems increasingly mediate economic, social and civic life.

We propose a whole-system approach in which:

Every early years setting, school, FE college and university becomes more co-operative in culture, governance, pedagogy and partnerships.

Learners learn about, learn for and learn through co-operation.

Cynefin (belonging, place and interconnection) anchors co-operative education in Welsh identity, community and language.

Co-operation becomes a means to tackle inequality, climate change, mental health, democratic disengagement and the social impacts of digital dependency.

The manifesto outlines a progression from infancy (shared attention, collaboration, caring, kindness and empathy) through adulthood (co-operative citizenship and enterprise). It calls on examination boards to integrate co-operatives into assessment and urges institutions to connect learning with the wider co-operative economy in Wales, across the UK and globally.

Co-operative education is nation-building. It offers Wales a practical, bilingual, culturally grounded route to becoming a country where every learner belongs, participates and thinks critically; where every community acts together; and where every generation grows up knowing that a democratic, fair and sustainable way of organising society, both online and offline, locally, nationally and internationally is possible.

2. Historical and Ethical Foundations: Associationism, Robert Owen and Intergenerational Co-operation

A Co-operative Wales stands in a long tradition of association, mutual aid and democratic self-organisation. The work of social historian Stephen Yeo, the writings of George Jacob Holyoake, and the pioneering educational philosophy of Robert Owen offer a powerful ethical and historical foundation for

this Manifesto.

They remind us that co-operation is not only a business model but a moral, social and educational project, rooted in human dignity, non-violence and shared agency.

2.1 Associationism and Un-statist Socialism

Stephen Yeo's work highlights how Holyoake advanced "associationism" as a non-violent, ethical way of organising social and productive relations. For Holyoake, associationism meant:

- people organising together voluntarily
- sharing work, risks and rewards
- making decisions democratically
- solving problems through reason rather than coercion
- building institutions that cultivate mutual aid and moral responsibility

Yeo describes this as a form of un-statist socialism: not dependent on state hierarchy, nor driven solely by private competition, but emerging from free association, local initiative and democratic co-operation.

In the context of Wales, this suggests that a Co-operative Wales:

- cannot rely only on state policy or market forces
- must build a culture of voluntary association, grounded in Cynefin
- needs citizens who see co-operation as a normal way of acting together

The adoption and delivery of this Manifesto turns associationism into practical public policy: embedding habits of co-operation in all learning so that association becomes second nature.

2.2 Robert Owen: Education as the Seedbed of Co-operation

Robert Owen argued that character is formed by circumstances and education. If society wishes for just, co-operative, peaceful communities, it must design education to cultivate:

- empathy, kindness and fairness
- shared responsibility and mutual aid
- critical thinking and democratic participation
- habits of collaboration and care

Owen's vision was that new forms of education would produce new forms of society. For modern Wales, this means:

- Early years: co-operative play, shared problem-solving, bilingual story-telling about fairness, kindness and community.
- Primary: class meetings, shared rule-making, simple co-operatives (e.g. class shops, gardens)

and local "people's history" of mutual aid and co-ops.

- Secondary: co-operative inquiry into real social and economic issues, youth-led co-operatives, restorative approaches to conflict, democratic school structures.
- Post-16, FE, Apprenticeships and HE: specialist pathways into co-operative enterprise, governance, law, finance, digital innovation, climate justice and community wealth building.
- Adult learning: ongoing opportunities to form and sustain co-operatives, take part in governance, and share skills and stories across generations.

In this Manifesto, Owen's principle, that education must model the society we wish to see, is realised by building co-operation into the whole life course.

2.3 Intergenerational Co-operation: A Living Tradition

Holyoake and Owen both recognised that democratic communities depend on strong relationships across generations. A Co-operative Wales must embed intergenerational learning and co-operation in its educational system.

This is vital because it:

- strengthens social cohesion and trust
- preserves and renews local knowledge, language and culture
- connects young people with elders who have lived experience of unionism, mutual aid, community organising and co-operative action
- counters isolation and fragmentation in a digital-only society
- develops respect and understanding across age, class and cultural backgrounds

Practically, this means:

- schools, FE colleges and universities acting as community learning hubs, welcoming elders, families and co-operators into everyday learning
- intergenerational projects (community gardens, repair cafés, digital inclusion, bilingual storytelling, local history, care initiatives, climate action) designed and run co-operatively
- Robert Owen Day used to bring together children, young people, adults and older residents to celebrate and practise co-operation
- co-operative apprenticeships and mentoring that pair young people with experienced co-operators and community leaders

The Manifesto therefore builds a living chain of co-operation, in which each generation learns from the last and passes on skills, institutions and stories to the next.

2.4 Why These Foundations Matter for Wales

By grounding this Manifesto in Yeo, Holyoake and Owen, Wales:

- locates its co-operative ambition in a respected, historic tradition
- frames co-operative education as a moral and civic necessity, not just an economic strategy
- strengthens the case for systemic, long-term investment in co-operative learning
- positions learners as associational citizens, capable of founding, governing and sustaining co-operatives throughout their lives

In short, these foundations show that Making a Co-operative Wales is both a continuation of a long, ethical tradition and a contemporary response to the challenges of the twenty-first century.

3. Doubling the Co-operative Economy: Implications, Opportunities and Challenges

Wales aims to grow and ideally double its co-operative and mutual economy. This ambition is not only economic but educational. A thriving co-operative economy requires people who understand democratic governance, shared ownership, collective problem-solving and social value creation.

Despite its strong traditions, Wales currently has a relatively low density of co-operative enterprises compared with some other parts of the UK and Europe, particularly in sectors such as energy, housing, digital services and retail. The education system must therefore help to close this gap.

3.1 Opportunities

A larger co-operative sector would:

- keep wealth circulating locally
- provide fairer, more democratic work
- support a just transition to a sustainable, low-carbon economy
- strengthen bilingual employment opportunities
- create co-operative apprenticeships and social innovation pathways
- enhance community cohesion and civic participation

3.2 Challenges

To achieve this, Wales must address:

- low public understanding of co-operative and mutual business models
- limited teacher knowledge and confidence
- insufficient visible co-operative enterprises as exemplars
- exam and accountability systems that rarely reward collaboration or democratic skills

- dominant cultural narratives of shareholder capitalism and individual competition
- weak progression pathways into co-operative leadership, governance and enterprise
- uneven distribution and relatively low density of co-ops across Wales, leaving some communities with few or no co-operative organisations at all

3.3 Educational Implications

Education must:

- build co-operative behaviours from birth
- teach fairness, solidarity and shared decision-making in primary years
- explore co-operative economics, democracy and community wealth building in secondary learning
- offer post-16 pathways into governance, law, finance, social innovation and community enterprise
- train educators to teach using co-operative pedagogies and content
- link schools, FE, Apprenticeships and HE with real co-operatives and mutuals as living laboratories

Co-operative education becomes the infrastructure enabling Wales to build a fairer, greener, more democratic economy and society and to meet its ambition to significantly grow the co-operative sector.

4. Co-operative Education and the Curriculum for Wales

Co-operative education aligns directly with the Four Purposes of the Curriculum for Wales, helping all learners become:

4.1 Ambitious, Capable Learners

- Working together on challenging problems.
- Learning how to listen, question, reason and reflect as teams.
- Building resilience through shared effort and mutual support.

4.2 Healthy, Confident Individuals

- Developing empathy, resilience, emotional literacy and support networks.
- Feeling a sense of belonging, safety and value in their learning communities.
- Practising care, kindness and responsibility for others.

4.3 Ethical, Informed Citizens of Wales and the World

- Understanding rights, responsibilities, justice and democracy.
- Recognising economic alternatives such as co-

operatives, mutuals and employee-owned firms.

- Acting on issues such as inequality, climate change and social cohesion through collective projects.

4.4 Enterprising, Creative Contributors

- Creating co-operative and social enterprises.
- Innovating collaboratively for community benefit.
- Learning to design, plan and evaluate initiatives that put people and planet before profit.

4.5 Co-operative Education across Areas of Learning and Experience

Co-operative education strengthens all Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLEs):

- **Humanities:** citizenship, ethics, justice, identity, Cynefin, sustainability, community, co-operative history.
- **Languages, Literacy and Communication:** bilingualism (Cymraeg and English), inclusive communication, voice and participation, democratic dialogue.
- **Health and Well-being:** relationships, inclusion, participation, mental health, shared responsibility and restorative practice.
- **Science and Technology:** collaborative problem-solving, climate action, community-led innovation, energy and digital co-operatives.
- **Expressive Arts:** collective creativity, cultural participation, shared identity and storytelling about co-operation.
- **Mathematics and Numeracy:** financial literacy, shared ownership models, budgeting, data-informed democratic decision-making.

Co-operative education makes the Curriculum for Wales lived and democratic, not just written.

5. Cynefin: Belonging, Place and Wise Co-operative Decision Making

5.1 What is Cynefin?

Cynefin is often translated as "habitat", but it carries a much richer meaning. It speaks to:

- a deep sense of belonging, the place where someone feels at home, where the landscape, people and surroundings are familiar and reassuring
- the intertwined connection between an individual and their physical, social and cultural environment
- a multi-layered relationship including history, culture, language, memory and the everyday life of a community

5.2 Understanding Cynefin in Education

Cynefin helps learners understand:

- their local community, its history, cultural beliefs, businesses, co-operatives and people
- that they are part of something bigger: a shared story of Wales, its land, its languages and its communities
- that diverse identities, languages and backgrounds all have a place in the Welsh story

5.3 Cynefin as a Decision-Making Framework

Cynefin also describes different kinds of situations and how best to respond:

- **Clear:** cause and effect are obvious; best practice applies.
- **Complicated:** cause and effect can be worked out through expertise and analysis.
- **Complex:** cause and effect are only visible in hindsight; we must probe - sense - respond.
- **Chaotic:** no clear order; we must act quickly to restore stability.
- **Disorder:** we do not yet know which domain we are in.

5.4 Cynefin in Co-operative Education

Cynefin:

- grounds learning in local identity, culture and belonging so that every learner feels included
- supports co-operative decision-making by helping people recognise the nature of a problem, clear, complicated, complex or chaotic and respond collaboratively
- encourages humility and learning: in complex issues such as climate change, poverty or community tensions, we test ideas, listen and adapt together

Cynefin underpins both the emotional and cultural side of co-operative learning (belonging, identity, bilingualism) and the practical side (wise, democratic decision-making). A Co-operative Wales must therefore be a Cynefin-based Wales.

6. Citizenship, Inclusion, Belonging and Bilingualism

6.1 Citizenship

Citizenship in Wales means more than knowledge, it means participation and contribution. Co-operative education:

- gives learners real roles and responsibilities in decision-making
- teaches democratic processes by practising them
- connects local and global citizenship, from

school council to community co-ops to climate justice

6.2 Inclusion, Equality, Diversity and Belonging

A Co-operative Wales must ensure everyone belongs and everyone's contribution is valued. That means recognising that:

- racialised minority communities
- Disabled people
- LGBTQIA+ communities
- people of different faiths and none
- migrants and refugees
- working-class communities of every background

are not “add-ons” to the Welsh story, they are central to it. Co-operation and mutual aid have been survival strategies and sources of strength for many of these communities, often long before they were formally recognised by the co-operative movement or the state.

Co-operative education must therefore:

- embed anti-racist, anti-discriminatory practice
- ensure learners with additional learning needs and Disabled learners are fully included in co-operative structures, group work, councils, projects and leadership roles, with appropriate access and support
- structure learning so that every voice is heard, not only the most confident
- integrate the histories, cultures and contributions of racialised minority, Disabled, LGBTQIA+ and working-class communities into co-operative curricula, not as token additions but as a normal part of understanding co-operation and Welsh life

Co-operative formats, small group roles, restorative approaches, shared projects and rotating leadership, ensure no learner is excluded. This is Cynefin in practice: a place where you are known, where you matter, where you help shape what happens.

6.3 Bilingualism and the Welsh Language

Co-operative education naturally strengthens bilingualism by:

- using Welsh and English in authentic co-operative contexts
- making Cymraeg a language of teamwork, problem-solving and leadership
- connecting Welsh to identity, culture and Cynefin
- encouraging bilingual co-operative enterprises and community initiatives

A Co-operative Wales is also a bilingual Wales, where languages are lived, shared and used for collective good, and where Cymraeg is part of everyday co-operation, not only formal lessons.

7. Co-operative Learning Across the Education Phases in Wales

A Joined-Up Pathway to a Co-operative Nation

Co-operation and co-operative education are most effective when they are systemic, progressive and coherent across all phases of learning. The Curriculum for Wales, with its emphasis on progression, belonging, well-being and citizenship, provides an ideal national framework.

7.1 Early Years / Foundation Learning (Birth to 5+)

Core focus: Co-operation as relationships, belonging and emotional development.

Progression steps before formal schooling – co-operators in their own right.

Infants and young children learn co-operation through:

- responsive caregiving, shared attention and attunement
- turn-taking, sharing, early communication and empathy
- collaborative play and peer interaction
- routines where children co-create meaning and rituals
- bilingual experiences that strengthen identity and belonging

Parents, carers and practitioners introduce co-operative values and behaviours naturally within children's Cynefin, their home languages, culture, family networks and community. This stage embeds the emotional and social foundations for co-operative citizenship and democratic participation.

7.2 Primary Phase (Ages 5–11, Progression Steps 1–2)

Core focus: Understanding fairness, shared responsibility and co-operative community life.

Learners begin to develop conceptual awareness of co-operation through:

- class meetings, simple democratic decisions, shared rules
- peer support systems and collective problem-solving
- exploring stories and histories of fairness, inclusion and solidarity
- introductory lessons on Welsh co-operative heritage, including Robert Owen
- group projects that improve the school or local environment
- bilingual co-operative activities linked to Cynefin
- Children learn that co-operation is:
 - a way of working
 - a way of learning
 - a way of belonging

They begin to understand that communities thrive when people collaborate, share responsibility and act with compassion. This builds ethical, informed citizens at an early stage.

7.3 Secondary Education (Ages 11–16, Progression Steps 3–4)

Core focus: Co-operation as democratic participation, social justice, enterprise and community cohesion.

Learners deepen their understanding by:

- studying Welsh and global co-operative movements and the seven co-operative principles
- analysing social, ethical and environmental issues through a co-operative lens
- running student-led co-operatives (cafés, media, uniform shops, social enterprises)
- taking part in restorative practices and democratic school structures
- contributing to community-based projects addressing real needs
- studying co-operative business models in Business, Humanities and (where offered) Welsh Bacc challenges
- using the Cynefin framework to make wise decisions in complex situations
- participating in bilingual collaborative work, debates and planning

They learn:

- how co-operatives work
- why they exist
- how democratic decisions shape outcomes
- how communities build resilience through collaboration

Secondary education prepares young people to see themselves as contributors, leaders and co-creators of their communities.

7.4 Post-16 Education (Ages 16–19, Progression Step 5)

Core focus: Co-operative enterprise, leadership, community development and social innovation.

This phase consolidates and applies co-operative learning:

- A-Levels, vocational subjects and Welsh Bacc/ Skills Challenge modules with co-operative themes
- qualifications in co-operative enterprise, governance, social value and sustainability
- youth-led co-operatives designed and run by students
- leadership programmes that emphasise collective responsibility
- co-operative apprenticeships and work-based learning
- collaborations with local co-operatives, third

sector organisations, charities and businesses

- bilingual enterprise and community projects grounded in local Cynefin

Post-16 learners move from “learning about co-operation” to practising democratic leadership, shaping their communities, workplaces and society.

7.5 Further Education / FE Colleges

Core focus: Professional, vocational and community co-operative development.

FE plays a crucial role by offering:

- applied qualifications in co-operative business, social enterprise and governance
- skills pipelines for future co-operative accountants, managers, health and social care workers, designers, organisers and others
- partnerships with co-operatives in energy, housing, food, care, digital and other sectors
- entrepreneurship centres that support co-operative start-ups
- bilingual community-facing projects and placements

This ensures that Wales builds a workforce capable of sustaining a thriving co-operative economy and society.

7.6 Higher Education

Core focus: Co-operative research, innovation, policy and business incubation.

Universities contribute by:

- embedding co-operative economics, governance and sustainability into business, social science and humanities degrees
- creating research centres on community wealth building, climate justice and democratic innovation
- supporting co-operative incubators and student-led enterprises
- offering bilingual and international pathways into co-operative leadership
- connecting academia with real-world community co-operatives

HE ensures Wales develops experts, innovators and policymakers who can modernise and expand the co-operative sector nationally and internationally.

7.7 Adult & Community Learning

Core focus: Lifelong co-operative citizenship, shared prosperity and community empowerment.

Adults strengthen Co-operative Wales by:

- forming and running co-operatives of all kinds
- engaging in community planning, hackathons, community assemblies and participatory democracy
- learning skills for digital inclusion, financial

literacy and enterprise

- contributing to bilingual community hubs rooted in Cynefin
- taking part in intergenerational co-operative learning

Co-operation becomes a lifelong practice, not just a school subject.

7.8 A Joined-Up, Whole-Nation Co-operative Pathway

Across these phases, co-operative education builds progressively, from:

- being a co-operator (Birth–5) to
- understanding co-operation (Primary) to
- practising co-operation (Secondary) to
- leading co-operation (Post-16/FE/HE) to
- sustaining co-operation (Adulthood and community life)

This creates a Wales where:

- every child grows up with the skills to collaborate
- every young person understands democratic participation
- every adult can contribute to and benefit from co-operative enterprises
- every community has the capacity to solve problems collectively
- every citizen feels a sense of Cynefin, belonging and responsibility

It is a fully integrated national pathway to Making a Co-operative Wales.

7.9 Making Co-operation Second Nature in Everyday Practice

To move from “learning about” co-operation to living as co-operators, Wales must make association and co-operation part of everyday practice in all settings – from nurseries and primary classrooms to FE workshops and university seminars.

This means that early years practitioners, teachers and lecturers:

- Design most learning as shared work: small groups with clear, rotating roles (listener, note-taker, chair, timekeeper, “includer”), so collaboration is built into the structure of lessons.
- Use co-operative routines every day: circle time, class meetings, peer feedback protocols, “pair - share - group” discussions, joint planning of projects, co-written class agreements.
- Plan for inclusive co-operation: adapting tasks, roles and supports so Disabled learners, neurodivergent learners, and those learning through Cymraeg and English can participate fully, not just watch others co-operate.
- Make governance visible and participatory: class councils, learner voice forums, department

meetings and student–staff committees that genuinely share power and make decisions about timetables, topics, projects, budgets and use of space.

- Model associationism as a professional habit: staff working co-operatively across disciplines, schools and institutions; joint planning; shared inquiry into practice; co-operative research with learners and communities.
- Use assessment that values co-operation: explicitly recognising group process, shared problem-solving, listening, compromise and ethical reasoning, not only individual test scores.

In this way, co-operation is not just a topic in Humanities or Business; it becomes second nature. Children and young people move through the system repeatedly practising:

- how to form and sustain associations
- how to share work and responsibility
- how to disagree constructively
- how to take decisions together and live with the outcomes

By the time students leave FE or HE, they are not simply “aware” of co-ops; they have years of embodied experience in co-operative habits that can transfer directly into workplaces, communities and new co-operative enterprises.

8. Education for Co-operation

8.1 Developing the Knowledge, Skills and Values Needed to Build a Co-operative Wales

A truly Co-operative Wales requires not only co-operative enterprises, but co-operative people, citizens equipped with the skills, values and understanding needed to create, lead and sustain co-operatives and mutuals. The international history of the co-operative movement shows that the most robust and resilient co-operatives are rooted in strong systems of co-operative education.

The Commission on Co-operatives and Mutuals (2014) emphasised that regions such as Mondragón demonstrate the power of education in building thriving co-operative economies. Their success was not accidental, it was the outcome of deliberate investment in learning about co-operation, learning for co-operation and learning through co-operation. Wales must adopt the same ambition.

8.2 Why Education for Co-operation Matters

The Commission heard that:

- public awareness of co-operatives is relatively high
- the public generally views co-operatives as trustworthy and socially responsible

Yet understanding of how co-operatives actually

work - governance, finance, member control, legal forms, business operations, is limited.

This creates a gap:

People like co-operatives, but do not necessarily understand them well enough to create or lead them.

A strategy to grow a strong co-operative sector in Wales must therefore include:

- increasing public understanding of the specific benefits of co-operatives and mutuals
- ensuring that young people encounter co-operative models as legitimate, viable and ethical forms of enterprise
- developing a wide pool of people with skills in co-operative business, finance, legal structures, accounting and democratic governance

Without this educational foundation, co-operative development cannot achieve its full potential.

8.3 The Current Gap in Education

The Commission recognised a striking issue:

Learning about co-operatives and learning how to co-operate are not yet embedded in the formal curriculum, nor consistently reflected in school values.

As a result, in Wales as in other nations, many people can complete:

- compulsory education
- further education and apprenticeships
- university education, including postgraduate study

...without ever learning about alternative models of enterprise such as co-operatives, mutuals or employee-owned organisations.

The Co-operative Education Trust Scotland reported a similar pattern: individuals could spend twenty years in the education system, earn advanced qualifications and still know nothing about co-operative or mutual ownership models. This is not a failure of young people; it is a systemic failure to provide exposure to democratic and socially responsible economic alternatives.

8.4 Evidence of What Works

There are encouraging examples across the UK:

- In Scotland, the Co-operative Education Trust Scotland supports learning about co-operation, with around 40% of schools using their resources.
- In Wales, work such as "Co-operation from the Start" and early years guidance (e.g. from Sheffield Co-operative Development Group and partners) shows how co-operation can be embedded from the earliest years.
- In England, the Schools Co-operative Society helps schools embed co-operative values and principles across leadership, pedagogy, ethos

and governance.

- Programmes such as the Co-operative Group's Inspiring Young People show that children respond positively to co-operative values.

However, these remain small-scale and cannot substitute for a national strategy. Wales lacks a system-wide, bilingual, curriculum-aligned approach.

8.5 What Education for Co-operation Must Include

In a Co-operative Wales, education for co-operation would:

A. Be embedded from birth onward

Supporting early social development, empathy, attunement, compassion, and shared learning.

B. Feature throughout the Curriculum for Wales

Across Humanities, Business, Languages, Health & Well-being, Science & Technology and Expressive Arts.

C. Strengthen bilingualism and cultural identity

Positioning co-operation as part of Welsh civic life, history and Cynefin.

D. Include understanding of the co-operative business model

Governance, finance, democratic systems, shared ownership, social value.

E. Develop co-operative competencies

Collaboration, democratic participation, shared problem-solving, ethical leadership, conflict resolution.

F. Support inclusion, equity and belonging

Ensuring every learner's participation and contribution is valued.

G. Build the skills pipeline for Wales' future co-operative economy

From accountants to community organisers, from managers to enterprise founders.

H. Use the Cynefin framework as a tool for co-operative decision-making

Helping learners navigate complex, chaotic, clear or complicated situations collaboratively.

8.6 Why Wales Needs This Now

To build a resilient, just, sustainable future, Wales must diversify its economic models. Co-operatives, mutuals and community enterprises:

- keep wealth in local communities
- strengthen democratic participation
- build trust and solidarity
- support sustainability and climate resilience
- promote equality and inclusion
- reinforce local identity and bilingualism

A population educated in co-operative principles is essential to achieving these outcomes. Education for co-operation is therefore not an “add-on”, it is a core component of nation-building, aligned with:

- the Curriculum for Wales
- the Well-being of Future Generations Act
- Anti-racist Wales goals
- Cymraeg 2050
- community wealth-building strategies
- local economic development
- a just transition to a sustainable economy

8.7 A National Commitment to Co-operative Education

To secure a thriving co-operative future:

- Co-operative values and principles must become cross-cutting themes in the Curriculum for Wales.
- Every educator, from early years practitioners to university lecturers, should have access to professional learning in co-operative pedagogy.
- Schools, FE colleges and universities should be supported to become co-operative communities themselves, not just teach about co-operatives.
- Wales should develop bilingual resources, qualifications and pathways in co-operative enterprise.
- Robert Owen Day (May) should act as a national showcase and catalyst.
- Learners should encounter co-operatives not as historical footnotes, but as living, viable forms of business and community organisation.

This is how Wales will cultivate the knowledge, confidence and capacity required to grow a flourishing co-operative sector.

8.8 Education for Co-operation: A Foundation for a Co-operative Wales

By embedding education for co-operation in all phases, Wales can:

- build a generation of co-operative entrepreneurs, leaders and citizens
- strengthen community cohesion and civic participation
- contribute to a fairer, more democratic and more sustainable economy
- nurture a bilingual, culturally grounded sense of Cynefin
- ensure every learner grows up understanding that another way of organising society is possible

Education for co-operation is education for Wales' future.

8.9 Connecting Learners to the Real Economy of Their Place

If co-operation is to be more than an abstract ideal, learners must be helped to see, map and question

the economy they live in: their street, village, town, city, region and Wales as a whole.

Across primary, secondary, FE and HE, learners should be:

- Mapping their neighbourhood economy: identifying local employers, small businesses, public services, voluntary groups, co-ops, credit unions, mutuals and informal mutual aid networks.
- Investigating ownership and control: who owns key assets (shops, housing, energy, data, land), who benefits, what alternatives exist.
- Identifying gaps and future needs: food access, housing, care, transport, digital inclusion, youth work, climate resilience, language maintenance, elder care, creative industries.
- Learning from existing co-ops and community enterprises: visits, interviews, placements, shared projects, “co-op in residence” schemes.
- Using this knowledge in curriculum work: geography projects on local land use, business studies on ownership models, humanities enquiries into community history, Welsh Bacc challenges focused on local economic change.

This grounds co-operative education in Cynefin as economic reality and ensures learners leave education understanding that:

- the current economic model is not the only possibility, and
- they themselves can act collectively to change it.

8.10 Students as Future Co-operative Founders and Change-Makers

Education for co-operation must make explicit that today's learners are tomorrow's co-operative founders, members, workers and organisers. If Wales is to double its co-operative and mutual economy, the people who will achieve this are the children and young people currently in our nurseries, schools, colleges, training providers and universities.

This entails:

- Imagination about new co-ops: exploring which co-ops do not yet exist locally (care co-ops, housing co-ops, platform co-ops, creative co-ops, energy co-ops etc.) and why they might be needed.
- Practical experience of starting and running small co-ops: student-run cafés, uniform shops, media co-ops, repair clubs, tool libraries, arts collectives, community gardens and digital platforms, all governed co-operatively.
- Pathways from school to co-operative work: clear routes into co-operative apprenticeships, social economy degrees, governance training, community organising and local enterprise support.
- A sense of ethical responsibility: learners who have investigated their Cynefin should leave

education knowing there is a need for different types of co-ops, a co-operative economy and a Co-operative Wales and understanding that they have both the opportunity and responsibility to help build them.

Here, the familiar formula “learning about, for and through co-operation” gains sharper meaning:

- About: co-operative history, principles, models and legal forms.
- For: knowledge and skills required to set up, govern and sustain co-ops.
- Through: co-operative methods and student-run associations as the core pedagogy of institutions.

8.11 Schools and Colleges as Foresight Labs for Wales’ Future Needs

Schools, FE and HE institutions should be understood as foresight laboratories for Wales’ future, places where learners examine the long-term challenges they will inherit and explore co-operative responses before they leave education.

This involves:

- Scanning future needs: climate adaptation, care for an ageing population, mental health, food and energy security, housing, digital justice, cultural and linguistic continuity.
- Using the Cynefin/complexity lens: recognising that many issues are complex; they require experimentation, shared learning and iterative co-operative responses.
- Designing long-term co-operative projects: multi-year, cross-curricular and cross-phase initiatives where learners investigate a local issue (e.g. food poverty, coastal erosion, community transport) and then design and test co-operative solutions.
- Feeding learning back into policy and practice: schools and colleges sharing findings with local authorities, Cwmpas, Welsh Government and co-operative networks so that learners’ work shapes real decisions.

Through this, learners practise the associationism described by Yeo and Holyoake, people organising from below, through voluntary, democratic association, to meet needs that markets and states alone have not adequately addressed. Co-operative education becomes the means by which Wales grows a generation who expect to associate, know how to do it, and see co-operation as the natural, ethical and effective way of responding to shared challenges

9. The Welsh Baccalaureate and Co-operative Progression

GCSEs, A Levels and other Level 2 and 3 qualifications, the Welsh Baccalaureate (Welsh Bacc) and associated skills frameworks (including the Skills Challenge Certificate) provide a powerful national platform for embedding co-operative learning, democratic participation and community engagement.

If co-operation is to become second nature, learners need to see it, practise it and have it recognised in the qualifications that shape their educational journeys.

9.1 Co-operative Competencies by Phase

Co-operative education should progress in step with learners’ development and with the Curriculum for Wales progression steps. As a guide:

End of Primary (approx. age 11)

“I can co-operate with others and understand why it matters.”

Learners should be able to:

- work in groups with shared goals and rotating roles
- recognise fairness, inclusion and helping others
- explain in simple terms how people can work together to improve their school and community
- connect co-operative ideas to their local Cynefin (place, community, culture, language)

Lower Secondary (11 - 14)

“I can understand and explain co-operative ideas, not just do them.”

Learners should be able to:

- describe what a co-operative is and how it differs from other enterprises
- take part in structured group tasks, plan jointly and reflect on their co-operation
- use simple co-operative decision-making tools and restorative approaches
- connect co-operative practice to issues of justice, equality and community well-being

GCSE Phase / Welsh Bacc Foundation & National (14 - 16)

“I can use co-operative approaches to tackle real problems.”

Learners should be able to:

- complete co-operative projects (social action, enterprise, community challenge)
- demonstrate ethical reasoning about inequality, climate, rights and digital life
- understand key features of co-operative enterprise (members, governance, surplus, social value)

- use data and evidence to inform democratic, co-operative decisions

Post-16 / A Levels / Advanced Welsh Bacc / FE

“I can lead and sustain co-operative work with others.”

Learners should be able to:

- lead co-operative projects while sharing power and responsibility
- design, evaluate or help set up co-operative and mutual enterprises
- articulate how co-operation contributes to ‘community wealth building’, a just transition and wellbeing
- connect their learning to real co-ops, mutuals, unions and community organisations

This progression reflects Owen’s insight that character and capability are formed through sustained experience and aligns with Holyoake’s associationism by preparing young people to form, join and lead associations throughout their lives.

9.2 A National Co-operative Challenge

To make this concrete, the Manifesto proposes a formal, bilingual Co-operative Challenge within the Welsh Bacc and other skills frameworks that:

- focuses explicitly on co-operative enterprise, community action or democratic participation
- requires learners to work co-operatively with defined roles, responsibilities and reflection points
- assesses collaboration, ethical reasoning, community impact and understanding of co-operative principles
- invites learners to engage with local co-operatives, credit unions, mutuals and community groups as partners
- uses Welsh and English as working languages, reinforcing bilingual practice in real-world contexts

The Co-operative Challenge would give a clear signal that co-operation counts, not just as a value, but as a recognised skill set essential for Wales’ future.

9.3 Progression into Co-operative Pathways

The Welsh Bacc and related frameworks should:

- highlight co-operative apprenticeships, internships and volunteering opportunities
- signpost learners to FE, HE and community programmes that specialise in co-operative enterprise, governance, ‘community wealth building’ and social innovation
- encourage schools and colleges to form long-term partnerships with local co-ops, enabling learners to see real career pathways in the democratic economy

This turns the Welsh Bacc and other qualification routes from generic skills frameworks into a gateway to a Co-operative Wales.

9.4 Apprenticeships in Wales: Embedding Co-operation in Work-Based Learning

Wales already operates a national apprenticeship programme across a wide range of industries and sectors, supported and funded by Welsh Government and delivered in partnership with employers, FE colleges, training providers and public bodies. Apprenticeships exist at multiple levels and in multiple fields, health and social care, construction, engineering, catering and hospitality, digital, creative industries, retail, food production, public services and more and are a key part of the skills and economic strategy for Wales.

If Wales is to build a Co-operative Wales, then this large and growing system of work-based learning must also become a site where co-operation is taught, practised and recognised.

Apprenticeship frameworks and standards provide a natural home for:

- Co-operative knowledge - understanding co-ops, mutuals and community businesses in the relevant sector (e.g. housing co-ops in construction, care co-ops in health and social care, platform and digital co-ops in tech, food and farming co-ops in agriculture, food production and catering).
- Co-operative skills - team-based problem-solving, democratic decision-making, conflict resolution, shared leadership, communication and ethical reasoning.
- Co-operative values - fairness, solidarity, responsibility, stewardship, community benefit and respect for diversity.

To align apprenticeships with this Manifesto, Wales should:

- Integrate co-operative content into apprenticeship standards and curricula across sectors, so that apprentices learn about different ownership and governance models, including co-ops and mutuals, alongside conventional firms.
- Encourage and support co-operatives, mutuals and community enterprises to become apprenticeship employers, offering high-quality training places in democratic workplaces.
- Embed co-operative learning methods in apprenticeship delivery, with apprentices working in teams on real projects that require them to plan, decide and evaluate together.
- Use apprenticeship assignments and projects to explore local economies and Cynefin - mapping ownership, identifying gaps, and considering how co-operative solutions might address unmet needs in their sector or community.
- Develop specific “co-operative apprenticeship pathways” in areas such as community energy, housing, social care, catering, food and farming, digital, creative industries and community development, in partnership with Cwmpas and sector bodies.
- Incorporate associationism and democratic

practice into supervisory training, so workplace mentors and managers understand how to foster co-operative cultures rather than purely top-down hierarchies.

In this way, apprenticeships become:

- a route into good work in co-operative and mutual enterprises,
- a means of changing the culture of existing employers by bringing in workers trained in co-operative values,
- and a way for young people and adults to experience co-operation as everyday practice in the workplace, not just as a classroom topic.

Linking the Welsh apprenticeship system to the aims of this Manifesto ensures that work-based learning contributes directly to growing a Co-operative Wales, creating a new generation of workers, supervisors and managers who are ready to participate in and help build a democratic, fair and sustainable economy.

10. Examination Boards: Changing What “Makes Schools Tick”

In a high-stakes system, what is examined shapes what is taught. For co-operative education to be genuinely national, examination boards and qualification bodies must embed co-operation and democratic ownership into specifications, assessment objectives and support materials.

10.1 Integrating Co-operation Across Subjects

Rather than treating co-operation as a discrete topic, exam boards should ensure that specifications across subjects incorporate co-operative content and contexts:

- **Humanities (History, Geography, RS/Ethics, Politics, Sociology)**
 - History of Welsh, British and global co-operative movements (Owen, Rochdale, South Wales Valleys, miners’ institutes, mutual aid societies, Patagonian Pioneers, Chartism and early co-operatives)
 - Victorian and modern social history: industrialisation, poverty, mutual aid, community organising
 - geography of co-operative and community-led development, environmental sustainability, local wealth building
 - ethics and politics of solidarity, shared ownership, stewardship and dignity
- **Business, Economics and Accounting**
 - co-operative and mutual models taught alongside conventional corporations and charities
 - comparison of governance, ownership, profit distribution and social value across models

- exam questions and projects requiring analysis or design of co-operative enterprises
- **Science & Technology, Digital, Design**
 - case studies of renewable energy co-ops, platform co-ops, community tech projects,
 - ethical analysis of data, AI and platforms through co-operative and democratic lenses
- **Languages and Expressive Arts**
 - collaborative, bilingual creative projects with co-operative themes
 - storytelling and media work that explores co-operative histories and futures
- **Mathematics and Numeracy**
 - data on inequality, community wealth, voting patterns, participation and social impact
 - modelling co-operative finances, member shares, and community benefit metrics

10.2 Embedding Co-operation in Assessment Objectives

Assessment objectives should reward:

- ability to recognise and evaluate co-operative solutions to social, economic and environmental problems
- understanding of different ownership and governance models
- evidence of collaboration, reflection and ethical reasoning in project-based components
- skills in participatory research, where learners engage with their local economy, co-ops and communities

10.3 Resources, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and Support

To support teachers and centres, exam boards should:

- provide bilingual resource packs with historical and contemporary co-operative case studies, including Welsh examples
- commission model schemes of work and exemplar responses focussed on co-operatives and mutuals
- offer CPD with Cwmpas, co-operative organisations and universities on co-operative education and assessment

Through these changes, examination boards can help change what “makes schools tick” from narrow individual competition to shared learning, association and democratic participation.

11. Whole-Institution Co-operative Approaches

This Manifesto does not simply argue for “more co-op lessons or modules.” It advocates whole-setting, whole-school, whole-FE and whole-HE co-operative institutions, where associationism is woven through governance, culture, partnerships and everyday practice.

11.1 Governance and Leadership

- Governing bodies and senior leaders adopt or align with co-operative values and principles, influencing strategy, resourcing and culture.
- Learners, families, staff and community partners have real voice and influence through councils, forums, assemblies and co-designed processes.
- Institutional decision-making reflects shared responsibility and transparency, not top-down control.

11.2 Culture, Relationships and Inclusion

- Behaviour, well-being and anti-bullying policies are rooted in restorative, relational and co-operative approaches.
- Bilingualism and Cynefin are central to everyday practice: learners see their languages and communities as assets and sources of wisdom.
- Intergenerational activities and community partnerships are normal, not exceptional.
- Diversity is treated as a strength: racialised, Disabled, LGBTQIA+ and working-class learners and families are included in leadership and governance, not only in consultation.

11.3 Partnerships and Procurement

- Institutions partner with local co-operatives, social enterprises, unions and community groups as co-educators, not just external stakeholders.
- Public money spent by schools, FE and HE is used, where possible, to support ethical, co-operative and local suppliers, strengthening community wealth.
- Co-operative and mutual models are considered for services, facilities, childcare, catering, transport and digital infrastructure.

11.4 Professional Learning and Staff Co-operation

- Staff have access to ongoing CPD in co-operative pedagogy, co-operative economics, Cynefin and bilingual co-operative practice.
- Initial teacher education integrates co-operation as a cross-cutting theme.
- Staff themselves work co-operatively: joint planning, shared inquiry, peer observation, mentoring and research.
- Workload and well-being strategies are co-designed with staff, recognising that co-operative

institutions must also be fair workplaces.

Whole-institution co-operation ensures that learners live inside co-operative cultures; they don't just hear about them.

12. Community Cohesion Through Co-operation and Collaboration

Co-operation is both a way of organising learning and a way of binding communities together. In a context of inequality, racism, mistrust and digital fragmentation, co-operative education provides tools for:

- building relationships between schools, families and communities
- addressing shared priorities
- reinforcing a sense of belonging and mutual responsibility

12.1 Co-operation, Anti-Racism and Inclusion

Co-operative structures can be powerful vehicles for anti-racist and inclusive practice when:

- they intentionally include racialised minority communities, Disabled people, LGBTQIA+ communities, migrants and others in leadership and decision-making
- they address not only interpersonal prejudice but also structural inequalities (e.g. housing, employment, access to services) through co-operative solutions
- learners undertake co-operative projects that respond to real experiences of exclusion and injustice in their communities

Community co-ops in housing, food, transport, childcare, digital inclusion and culture can become practical sites where an Anti-racist Wales is built.

12.2 Intergenerational and Place-Based Co-operation

Community cohesion is strengthened when people of different ages work together around their shared Cynefin:

- schools, FE and HE acting as community hubs for co-operative projects
- intergenerational initiatives (gardens, repair cafés, oral history, arts, language clubs, climate action) designed and run by local people
- learners engaging in participatory research into local needs, assets and histories, and co-designing responses with residents

This shifts education from “preparing to leave” to “preparing to stay and contribute”, or to take the habits of co-operation with them, wherever they go.

12.3 Robert Owen Day as a Catalyst for Community Cohesion

Robert Owen Day (see Section 13) can function as an

annual focal point for community cohesion, bringing together:

- learners, families, elders, co-ops, unions, faith groups, local authorities, cultural organisations
- celebration of co-operative history and practice in Wales
- bilingual, place-based events that express local culture and shared values

Community cohesion, in this Manifesto, is not extra work: it is the natural outcome of education and community life organised co-operatively.

13. Robert Owen Day (May) as a National Celebration of Co-operation

Robert Owen (1771–1858), born in Newtown, is a foundational figure in the global history of co-operation and democratic education. Yet he remains under-recognised in Wales.

Owen:

- pioneered modern co-operative education
- founded community schools based on kindness, culture and collective decision-making
- advanced early childhood pedagogy decades ahead of his time
- championed fair working hours, conditions and social reform
- influenced global co-operative movements from Rochdale to Mondragón

13.1 Robert Owen Day: Purpose and Principles

We propose that Robert Owen Day, held annually in May, becomes a national, bilingual celebration and practice of co-operation. Its purposes are to:

- connect every age group, including families with infants, to co-operative values and citizenship
- create shared, practical experiences of co-operation in each local Cynefin
- highlight local co-ops, credit unions, mutuals, community groups and unions
- honour Wales' historic and current contribution to the global co-operative movement
- offer a focal point for teacher and community education about co-operation

13.2 Activities and Structures

Robert Owen Day could include:

- co-operative learning projects in schools, FE and HE leading up to the day
- community events (fairs, exhibitions, performances) showcasing local co-operatives and social enterprises
- service and solidarity projects addressing local needs (food, environment, well-being, social isolation)
- intergenerational activities bringing together

learners, elders and community organisers

- national and regional online sharing of stories, resources and outcomes

13.3 A National Programme on Robert Owen

To sustain momentum beyond one day, we recommend a National Programme on Robert Owen and Co-operative Education that includes:

- curriculum content across Humanities, Primary, Welsh Bacc, adult and community-based learning
- professional learning for teachers and lecturers
- partnerships with co-operative institutions, museums, archives and co-operative organisations
- bilingual learning resources highlighting Owen's legacy and its relevance to the 21st Century

Robert Owen Day and the wider programme turn history into living practice, reminding Wales that it has long been a laboratory of co-operative innovation.

14. Higher Education & Business Schools: Co-operative Innovation for the Future

Higher Education (HE) institutions and business schools shape the people who will design, manage and regulate tomorrow's economy. Yet traditional models often prioritise:

- shareholder value over social value
- competition over collaboration
- extractive business models over democratic governance
- individual advancement over community well-being

This is at odds with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act and with the ambitions of this Manifesto.

14.1 Rethinking Business and Public Leadership Education

Building on critiques such as those made by Professor Colin Talbot and others, Welsh HE and business schools should:

- systematically include co-operatives, mutuals, public-interest enterprises and community wealth building in their curricula
- examine power, ownership and governance in depth, rather than treating them as technical details
- connect students with real-world co-operative practice in Wales and beyond

14.2 A Co-operative HE Framework

Key elements of a co-operative HE framework include:

Curriculum Transformation

- embed co-operative economics, governance, social value, 'community wealth building' and mutualism across business, public policy and social science programmes
- use bilingual, Welsh and international case studies of co-ops, mutuals and democratic enterprises

Research and Knowledge Exchange

- establish research centres on democratic innovation, just transition, 'community wealth building', social enterprise and co-operative governance
- partner with government, Cwmpas, unions, local authorities, community groups and international co-op networks

Enterprise Support and Incubation

- create incubators and accelerators for student and community-owned co-ops
- provide legal, financial and governance support for emerging co-operative ventures

Placements and Apprenticeships

- offer placements in co-ops, credit unions, housing associations, community energy schemes and public-service mutuals
- develop apprenticeships in democratic leadership, co-operative finance, community development and social innovation

Governance and Institutional Culture

- bring co-operative values into HE governance itself: participation, transparency, shared responsibility, fair work
- explore co-operative or hybrid models for specific university functions and spin-outs

By reorienting HE and business education towards co-operative innovation, Wales prepares leaders who can grow and steward a democratic economy, not simply operate within existing corporate norms.

15. The Challenge of a Digital-Only Society

Wales, like every modern nation, is undergoing rapid digital transformation. While digital technologies can broaden access and efficiency, a digital-only trajectory risks weakening the social and democratic fabric that co-operative education seeks to strengthen.

15.1 Risks of Digital-Only Life

A poorly regulated digital environment can:

- erode face-to-face relationships and community bonds

- reduce opportunities for deliberation, empathy and democratic participation
- increase exposure to misinformation, polarisation and algorithmic manipulation
- deepen inequalities in access, skills and digital literacy
- concentrate power and wealth in a handful of global platforms
- undermine local economies as value and data are extracted
- marginalise bilingual, place-based culture and knowledge

15.2 Co-operation as Digital Antidote

Co-operative values and associationism provide a framework to:

- re-centre human relationships: prioritising dialogue, mutual understanding and empathy over passive consumption
- strengthen critical digital literacy: teaching learners to question, verify, collaborate and act collectively online
- build digital citizenship: understanding digital rights, data ethics, platform power and the possibilities of digital democracy
- foster digital co-operatives: worker - and user-owned platforms, community data trusts, local digital enterprises that keep value in Wales
- embed Cynefin in digital spaces: ensuring Welsh language, local stories and community experiences are present and owned by communities, not only by external platforms

15.3 A Co-operative Digital Strategy for Education

The Manifesto calls for a co-operative digital strategy where:

- digital literacy is treated as a democratic competency, not only a technical one
- co-operative pedagogy underpins teaching about AI, platforms, data and online life
- learners design and participate in digital co-ops and community media
- digital tools support collaboration, inclusion and bilingual practice, rather than isolation and surveillance

A Co-operative Wales must be digitally capable and critically conscious: able to harness technology for shared benefit and to challenge digital structures that undermine collective well-being.

16. Cross-Government Commitment and the Welsh Co-operative and Mutuals Commission

The Welsh Co-operative and Mutuals Commission (2014) and subsequent government responses recognised that co-operatives and mutuals:

- create jobs and fair work
- improve educational attainment
- reduce inequality
- strengthen communities and local economies

Within education, the (then) Minister for Education and Skills expressed the ambition for “a co-operative ethos to be one of the central organising principles running through all parts of the education system in Wales.”

16.1 Aligning Policy Frameworks

This Manifesto aligns with and extends existing Welsh frameworks, including:

- the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
- the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021
- the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018
- the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023
- the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan
- Cymraeg 2050
- local authority strategies for ‘community wealth building’, climate action and economic development

A Co-operative Wales requires whole-government alignment: education policy cannot be isolated from economic, social, language, digital and climate strategies.

16.2 A National Co-operative Education Strategy

We propose that Welsh Government, working with partners, develops a National Co-operative Education Strategy that:

- sets clear goals for co-operative learning across all phases
- supports curriculum development, CPD, research and resource creation
- links education policy to targets for growing the co-operative and mutual economy
- ensures co-operative education is systematically reflected in inspection, evaluation and funding frameworks

This provides a stable, long-term basis for embedding associationism and co-operation as defining features of Welsh civic life.

17. Implementation: Integrating the Manifesto into National Practice

To make this Manifesto real, Wales needs systematic, bilingual, community-rooted implementation aligned with existing policy frameworks.

17.1 Policy and Curriculum

- Embed co-operative values and principles as explicit cross-cutting themes in Curriculum for Wales guidance.
- Provide clear statements linking co-operation to the Four Purposes, AoLEs and progression steps.
- Roll out and embed revised Co-operation from the Start guidance in Early Years.
- Align co-operative education with the Well-being of Future Generations goals, the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan and Cymraeg 2050.

17.2 Professional Learning and Capacity

- Develop national in-service training programmes for teachers, leaders and support staff across all phases.
- Integrate co-operative pedagogy, co-operative economics, Cynefin and bilingual co-operative practice into initial teacher education, early years practitioner qualifications/ training and other professional training and qualifications too.
- Support communities of practice and networks of co-operative schools, FE colleges and HE institutions.
- Provide guidance on managing change co-operatively, including workload and well-being.

17.3 Resources and Materials

- Create bilingual teaching resources from Early Years to HE: lesson plans, case studies, texts, digital tools and assessment materials.
- Ensure Welsh-focused resources exist even where there are few local co-ops, drawing on historical, emerging and many international examples, such as aroundtheworld.coop
- Develop easily accessible resource hubs (e.g. via Hwb, Business Wales, Cwmpas).

17.4 Partnerships and Infrastructure

- Build strong partnerships with Cwmpas, co-operative enterprises, unions, local authorities, community organisations and networks, examination boards and HE providers.
- Establish Regional Co-operative Education Hubs to coordinate support, training and community links.
- Create a Co-operative Education Fund to pilot programmes, support institutions and resource Robert Owen Day.
- Engage With grassroots community networks

involved in 'Thriving Welsh communities: A manifesto built by communities for communities' such as Cwmni Bro Ffestiniog

17.5 Monitoring, Research and Evaluation

- Commission research into the impact of co-operative education on well-being, attainment, inclusion, community cohesion, climate action and democratic participation.
- Include co-operative indicators in national evaluation frameworks (Estyn, HEFCW, etc.).
- Undertake longitudinal studies of learners' trajectories into co-operative, social and community roles.

Implementation must reflect the very values it promotes: collaboration, transparency, participation, long-term thinking and shared responsibility.

18. A Co-operative Wales: From the Cradle, In Our Cynefin

By embedding co-operative values and principles from birth to adulthood, and by honouring Cynefin as both a sense of belonging and a way of making wise decisions together, Wales can become a beacon of:

- co-operation and democratic education
- social justice and solidarity
- sustainability and climate responsibility
- bilingualism and cultural confidence
- community cohesion and shared prosperity

Co-operation is not simply a curriculum area. It is:

- a cultural foundation
- a democratic practice
- a way of belonging and participating
- a route to stronger, fairer, greener communities

With a national Robert Owen Day each May, a Curriculum for Wales rooted in co-operation and Cynefin, examination and qualification systems that reward co-operative knowledge and practice, and communities actively building co-operative enterprises, Wales can truly Make a Co-operative Wales - a Wales where everyone is included, every voice counts, and every contribution is valued.

A Wales where everyone is, in some way, a Co-operator.

A Wales where association, mutual aid and shared responsibility are not aspirations but everyday realities.

OUR THANKS

2026 marks our tenth anniversary of campaigning for Co-operative Education in Wales, which has included the Robert Owen Day and other events which can be found on our YouTube channel - made possible with technical support from Jonathan Jones, James Cook, Zoe Allan, especially Armanondo C. Manalang Jr.

In particular we express our appreciation for the very special contribution made by Chrissy Meleady CEO of Sheffield Co-operative Development Group in drafting this policy document which has immeasurably added to its depth and breadth. Our thanks Dr Robin Asby, Alex Bird and Dan McCullum for their contributions. Our renewed gratitude also to Rebecca Harvey, Executive Editor, Co-operative Press for designing the document for print, and to Dawn McGuinness and Gareth Tucker for their expert Welsh translation. My thanks as ever to our chair, Chris Hall for his generous guiding hand. Acknowledgement of the use of this document warmly welcomed.

David Smith, Secretary/Organiser

Appendix: Forms of Co-operative and Mutual Organisations Relevant to Wales and the UK

Co-operatives and mutuals form a diverse, resilient, and democratically governed part of the Welsh and UK economy. Together, they contribute to community wellbeing, local wealth retention, inclusive employment, and sustainable development. Their principles support the ambitions of:

- The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
- The Foundational Economy Programme
- Community Wealth Building strategies
- Fair Work Wales
- The Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023

The following categories outline the principal organisational forms that can be developed and supported across Wales.

1. Worker Co-operatives

Enterprises owned and democratically controlled by the workers who are employed in them. Each worker typically has one vote regardless of seniority.

Key features:

- Worker ownership and democratic control
- Surpluses reinvested or distributed equitably
- Rooted in fair work and workplace democracy

Relevance to Wales:

Supports local employment, fair pay, and resilient post-industrial and rural economies.

2. Consumer (Customer) Co-operatives

Organisations owned and controlled by the customers who use their services.

Examples: Retail societies, housing co-ops, social care co-ops, transport co-ops.

Relevance to Wales:

Important for local access to affordable food, housing, transport, and care services.

3. Community Benefit Societies (BenComs / CBSs)

Registered under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014, operating for the benefit of the wider community.

Key features:

- One-member-one-vote
- Surplus reinvested for community benefit
- Eligible for Community Shares fundraising

Uses in Wales:

Community-owned pubs, shops, renewable energy projects, heritage buildings, and social housing.

4. Multi-stakeholder Co-operatives

Democratically governed by more than one stakeholder group (e.g., workers, service users, community members).

Relevance:

Ideal where services involve complex relationships, such as care, early years, cultural organisations, or community hubs.

5. Producer Co-operatives

Owned by independent producers who collaborate to achieve shared economic goals.

Relevance to Wales:

Supports farmers, creative professionals, artisans, and small manufacturers to access shared marketing, distribution, and equipment.

6. Agricultural and Farming Co-operatives

A specific form of producer co-op focused on farming.

Relevance to Wales:

Supports sustainable land management, market access, and resilience for Welsh farms.

7. Housing Co-operatives

Homes owned and democratically managed by tenants.

Relevance to Wales:

Addresses housing shortages and supports affordable, secure, community-oriented living.

8. Community Land Trusts (CLTs)

Non-profit local organisations acquiring land and properties for long-term community benefit.

Relevance to Wales:

Critical for maintaining affordable housing and preventing displacement in rural and urban Welsh communities.

9. Platform Co-operatives

Digital platforms owned and governed by the people who use or work on them.

Relevance to Wales:

An ethical alternative to gig-economy models; supports Wales' growing digital sector and fair work commitments.

10. Credit Unions

Financial mutuals that offer ethical savings and loans to members.

Relevance to Wales:

Strong movement already in place; supports financial inclusion and reduces reliance on high-cost lenders.

11. Building Societies

Mutual financial institutions offering mortgages and savings products.

Relevance to Wales:

Contribute to local investment, stable lending, and community-oriented financial services.

12. Friendly Societies

Mutual organisations providing insurance, healthcare, or welfare benefits to members.

Relevance to Wales:

Important historically and still relevant for community health and wellbeing support.

13. Public Service Mutuals

Employee-led organisations delivering public services outside direct state management.

Relevance to Wales:

Potential for youth services, culture, libraries, and social care; aligns with Welsh procurement duties on social value.

14. Employee Ownership Trusts (EOTs)

Businesses where a majority of shares are held in trust on behalf of employees.

Relevance to Wales:

Helps Welsh SMEs transition ownership when founders retire; retains local businesses and aligns with Fair Work Wales.

15. Employee Share Ownership Co-operatives

Hybrid models combining employee share ownership with co-operative governance.

Relevance to Wales:

Ideal for succession planning, transitions from private ownership, and creating democratic, fair workplaces in Wales's foundational economy.

16. Community Ownership & Community Investment Co-operatives

(Community Share Co-operatives / Asset-Based Co-operatives)

Co-operatives formed when residents come together to purchase, steward, and manage a community asset, such as a building, service, or land, often via a Community Share Offer.

Common uses in Wales:

- Saving pubs, shops, post offices
- Renewable energy schemes
- Acquiring buildings for childcare, social care hubs, community centres
- Sports facilities and leisure assets
- Heritage restoration projects
- Community workspaces

Relevance to Wales:

Strong alignment with Welsh policy on sustainability, placemaking, and community-led regeneration. Ensures long-term community control of vital assets and retains wealth locally.

- Support the development and expansion of Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) to assist social economy growth and serve financially excluded communities across Wales.

Summary

These 16 organisational forms together create a comprehensive ecosystem of democratic ownership models capable of:

- strengthening local economies
- increasing fair work and workplace democracy
- improving access to essential community services
- promoting social justice and inclusion
- supporting rural and urban regeneration
- retaining wealth within Welsh communities
- aligning with the statutory goals of the Well-being of Future Generations Act

This appendix provides the foundation for a diverse, resilient, and expansive co-operative and mutual sector across Wales.

18th DECEMBER 2025

A Manifesto for Co-operative Education in Wales

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