

# the co-operative party



## STEPS TO SUCCESS

LESSONS FROM CO-OPERATIVES  
IN EDUCATION

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# Introduction



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**Since the election of the Coalition Government twelve years ago, England's education and early years' sector has undergone substantial change. With the increase in academisation, the rise of free schools and the increased marketisation of early years, the sector has seen radical change in governance, accountability and affordability.**

The last twelve years have seen real terms budget cuts for schools across England, widening inequality and worsening attainment gaps. Due to austerity and ongoing economic turmoil, spending per pupil remains below 2010 levels – with this unlikely to be corrected until the end of the parliamentary term. During all of this, dedicated teachers and education professionals have continued to strive to deliver the best for their students in difficult circumstances.

Local accountability has diminished in many areas of the education sector as local authorities have been increasingly marginalised from the running and operation of schools. Several academy chains have reduced the range of responsibilities for local governing bodies and in many areas this has reduced the democratic say of parents, carers, and local communities in running of local schools.

The lack of accountability in some schools has seen the emergence of excessive pay levels for some senior staff and governance failures. The lack of appropriate regulation and inspection of MAT groups has at times led to failings in schools which have had a direct negative impact on pupils.

Productivity has been an issue for the UK economy for many years, with insufficient attention given to the development of skills since the Coalition Government took office. Knowledge, skills and understanding along with positive attitudes are an essential element of a good education, and we must create a curriculum and apprenticeship system which ensures skills development is at its heart.

The Co-operative Party believe another future is possible. This report lays out our vision for an early years, education and apprenticeship system which puts accountability, democracy and affordability at its heart. We believe in a system built on the co-operative principles which provide staff, parents, carers, pupils and communities with a voice in how their schools and nurseries are run. Already we are seeing the emergence of a new way of doing things, with the Co-op Academies Trust (CAT) and Co-op Childcare leading the way. This contribution takes lessons from co-operatives delivering education and we hope will provide a useful input to a wider and ongoing debate.

**“We believe in a system built on the co-operative principles which provide staff, parents, carers, pupils and communities with a voice in how their schools and nurseries are run.”**





# History

## What has the co-operative movement done in education?

### From 1844

Ever since the Rochdale Pioneers came together in 1844 to establish the Co-operative Principles, education has been at the heart of the co-operative movement. The fifth principle states that co-operative societies must provide education and training to their members and the wider public. Education for members helps to continue the development of the co-operative, while education is provided to the public on the benefits of co-operation.

Since the expansion of the co-operative movement throughout Victorian Britain in the 19th century, co-operatives throughout the nation have been committed to delivering education and training. There are now co-operative nurseries, schools, and colleges – demonstrating the growth and longevity of co-operative education.

The democratic principles and structures at the heart of co-operation set co-operative education apart from other systems. Under co-operative education models, members, workers, teachers, parents and students are given a greater say in the decision-making structures. This helps to create an education system where people feel valued, listened to and respected – working together to deliver better outcomes for all. This is vitally important at a time when many feel the decision-making power within the education system is becoming less democratic.



PHOTOGRAPH OF THIRTEEN OF THE ORIGINAL MEMBERS  
OF THE  
ROCHDALE EQUITABLE PIONEERS' SOCIETY.



*Above: Photograph of the Rochdale Pioneers (top) in 1865; the original Toad Lane Store (below), now The Rochdale Pioneers Museum.*

## Into the 21st Century

Under the last Labour Government, there was a considerable increase in the number of co-operative schools across the UK. The reforms introduced by the 2006 Education Act helped to pave the way for more schools to introduce co-operative governance structures. Co-operative schools embodied stakeholder membership and democratic participation in governance – implementing the co-operative principles in action. Co-operative schools expanded in number in the next few years, with there being 150 by 2011. Despite their growth and success, consecutive governments' desire to see all schools convert to academy status made it increasingly difficult for co-operative and community schools. Support waned from the Department for Education, leading to greater numbers of co-operative schools converting to academy status. The co-operative school movement remains in South West England, London, the East of England and part of the Home Counties.

The co-operative movement has a long-term presence in further education, with the Co-operative College providing education and training for over 100 years. Founded in 1919, the Co-operative College has delivered education to generations of co-operators on how to successfully establish and manage co-operative enterprises – providing courses, workshops and wider training opportunities. The Co-operative College has expanded its operations internationally, aiding co-operative development in the Global South to help spread the benefits of co-operation.

**“Co-operative schools embodied stakeholder membership and democratic participation in governance – implementing the co-operative principles in action.”**



*Lewisham's parent-led model, Friendly Families Nursery.*



*East Manchester's Connell Sixth Form College.*

There is a notable absence of co-operative business models in higher education courses and the wider education curriculum. Currently few courses, including A Level Economics, focus on co-operative business management and administration and their application. This means many students, including undergraduates, lack awareness of co-operative models and their potential usage as business models. This significantly harms the growth and development of the co-operative sector.

Co-operative childcare and early years are a small but growing sector in the UK. These democratic forms of childcare create a model which puts parents and staff in control of the early years' services. The exact model for co-operative childcare ranges from consumer co-operatives to parent-led co-operatives – which put parents in direct control of the early years' services. Consumer co-operative models include Little Pioneers, a rapidly expanding nursery provider operated by Midcounties Co-operative, one of the UK's largest co-operatives. Little Pioneers allows parents to have a say in their children's early years' services and reinvests profits in delivering the best childcare possible. Parent-led models, such as Friendly Families Nursery in Lewisham, give parents direct involvement in the organisation and delivery of early years provision – from recruitment through to management. With the right support and regulatory environment these early years initiatives have the potential to grow in the coming years.

Over the last few years, co-operative involvement in schools has re-emerged as some multi-academy trusts adopt co-operative values and principles. The largest such trust is the Co-operative Academies Trust (CAT) with the Co-op Group as its business sponsor. The Co-op Group brings the ethos of co-operation and



co-operative principles into primary, secondary, special and further education. In 2019, the Co-op Academies Trust opened its first sixth form college, Connell Sixth Form College in East Manchester. This marked the Co-op Group's first move into Post-16 education, with both A Levels and technical qualifications being offered to students – as well as the opportunity to work at the Co-op while studying at the College.

## **It is clear co-operation still has much to offer the education system.**

Staff, students and parents continue to feel the benefit of co-operative principles in education and early years, but there is more to do to spread these benefits nationwide. In this report we set out what is needed in order to deliver co-operative transformation to early years, schools, sixth forms and apprenticeships.

# Early Years

## The Co-operative Party believes in delivering equal access to high quality, affordable childcare to every child in the country.

Delivering high quality early years provision to all children is critical to improving attainment levels, social and language skills and setting children up to have the opportunity to succeed in education from pre-school onwards. Once an attainment gap emerges in early years, it is increasingly difficult to close as children progress through their schooling. Delivering universal high quality early years provision must therefore be a priority for any government which aims to improve life chances and social mobility.

The UK's childcare sector is presently dominated by private providers, delivering services which are some of the most expensive in the world. Paying for their children's childcare often forces parents into financial hardship – with parents losing around a third of their salary to childcare costs. With the UK in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis which is driving many into poverty, excessively high childcare costs can be devastating for a family's financial health and living standards. The availability of childcare services has declined, making it increasingly difficult for parents to get appropriate care for their children. This has meant many parents have had to leave work in order to care for their children as an alternative to early years childcare.

Inequality also dominates the childcare sector, with an attainment gap between advantaged and disadvantaged children deeply entrenched.

The Covid-19 pandemic further deepened these inequalities – leading to less well-off children reaching developmental milestones later than their well-off peers. This is amplified by the underfunding of the sector by the Government, primarily providing only 15 hours of childcare per week for three and four year olds in England. The Government provides an additional 15 hours entitlement for certain 'working families' but this locks out many low income and workless families which are most at risk of their children suffering from lower attainment. Without rectifying this and ensuring the least advantaged are entitled to additional hours, it will not be possible to reduce the attainment gap.

Despite the high costs of childcare for parents, it is still a low wage sector – indicating a lack of funding and profit leakage to private shareholders. The low wages offered in the sector have contributed to difficulty



retaining and recruiting staff, which has in turn meant childcare providers have had to halt taking on new children or even close.

Co-operative childcare models can provide solutions to these sector challenges. New co-operative settings are proving to be an effective antidote to the current profit-extracting system which is letting down parents, staff and children. By establishing democratic models of ownership, childcare and early years, co-operatives are enabling parents and staff to have a say in how childcare services are governed and delivered and ensuring that income is devoted to improving outcomes for the children.

**“New co-operative settings are proving to be an effective antidote to the current profit-extracting system which is letting down parents, staff and children.”**



# Case studies

## Co-op Childcare, branded Little Pioneers, is a nationwide co-operative childcare service delivered by the Midcounties Co-operative.

Established in 2002, Co-op Childcare has grown to over 48 nurseries across England, offering 3,600 childcare places – becoming the 10th largest nursery provider nationally. Since its inception, Co-op Childcare has operated in a co-operative model which provides parents with the opportunity to become members and take part in decision making – on activities, menus, services and more. By joining the Midcounties Co-op as members, parents and staff are able to vote for and serve on the member-controlled board of directors which oversees management of the nursery group. The member-controlled board have final decision on the strategy, key performance indicators and reinvestment of profits of the Co-op Childcare group – ensuring democratic, accountable decision making. Over 95% of parents using Co-op Childcare services are members of the Midcounties Co-operative, creating an engagement membership which actively participates in delivering the best childcare provision. Parents can also become members of both Childcare Advisory Panels and Parent Forums, enabling them to feedback to staff and management on childcare services – increasing the democratic accountability of individual nurseries within the Co-op Childcare group.

Co-op Childcare is committed to reinvesting its profits in delivering improved services for members and working conditions for staff. This prevents the profit leakage which dominates the rest of the childcare sector –

leading to higher prices for parents and lower wages for staff while private shareholders extract profits.

Co-op Childcare prides itself on incorporating the co-operative values and principles into the nursery curriculum through the 'Little Pioneers Way'. This helps to teach children the importance of the co-operative principles such as democracy, openness, equality and social responsibility.

Co-operatives are often distinguished by their community engagement work. The Co-op Childcare is no different. Little Pioneers nurseries are very active in their local communities, with staff and members getting involved in local projects to help the community. Every year, Little Pioneers makes a donation from its profits to local charities. During the pandemic, this included funding subsidised childcare for key workers through the Frontline Hero Support Fund, which helped to save £1000 for key worker's families.



*Midcounties Co-operative, which includes Little Pioneers and Your Co-op Childcare, has been supporting local communities for over 100 years and is proudly owned by its members.*



*The aim of Grasshoppers, an independent nursery in Hackney ran by parents, is to provide an enriching experience for the children and to be an asset to the wider community.*

## Grasshoppers in the Park Nursery

Established in 2002, Grasshoppers in the Park is a Hackney-based nursery which is parent-led. Grasshoppers operates as a non-for-profit organisation governed by parents, with all members involved in decision making on all aspects of the nursery – from DIY through to social events. In order to keep fees down, every member is required to take on a role and contribute to the nursery, whether it may be helping with laundry or taking children for a walk in the park. Parents who are able can take on larger responsibility, such as helping out in the classroom during the week. The nursery holds a decision making meeting once a month, where all parents and staff convene to make democratic decision. While the Grasshoppers parent-led model requires greater input from parents, the model provides an unique opportunity for parents to be deeply involved in their children's early years development and shape the care they receive.

# Recommendations

## Early Years & Childcare

### 1. Guarantee quality childcare by maintaining existing staff to child ratio of 1:4

- \* The Government has recently conducted a consultation into raising staff to child ratio in England from 1:4 to 1:5. Advocates of the change believe it will reduce childcare costs for families.
- \* It is likely that such a change will have a negative impact on child development. Increased ratios designed to reduce costs of childcare may compromise quality of provision at a time when it needs to be of the highest quality.
- \* The English childcare sector has been developed around the existing staff to child ratio of 1:4.
- \* Early years buildings and classrooms – have been designed to accommodate this ratio of staff to children, with the goal of delivering best outcomes for child development.
- \* A higher ratio would likely lead to less focus on each child, which would have a particularly negative effect on those with additional needs.
- \* The added pressure on staff could also heighten the current staff shortages and low staff retention experienced within the sector.

### 2. Increase resources for training of Ofsted inspectors

- \* Greater training provision should be provided to Ofsted inspectors to ensure inspection practice is of an internationally leading quality.
- \* Childcare is vitally important to child development and achieving world-leading inspection standard will drive forward improvements in provision including safeguarding arrangements.
- \* The Covid-19 pandemic has had a substantial impact on childcare working practices, causing many nurseries to be forced to pause accepting new children or even close. It is vital that Ofsted helps the sector improve while acknowledging and appreciating the severe challenges it currently faces.



### **3. Sustainable funding for the sector**

- ✦ The existing funding for the childcare sector is inadequate particularly in areas which are more reliant on state funding.
- ✦ This leads to providers either delivering childcare services at loss to the overall co-op or having higher income parents cross-subsidise childcare. Both are unsustainable in the long-term.
- ✦ The shortfall in funding prevents providers from paying competitive, attractive salaries for qualified Early Years professionals. This has contributed to the shortage of qualified educators in the sector. In order to make Early Years a career to aspire to, the level of funding needs to be reflective of the skills required in the workforce.

### **4. Raise the free-childcare allowance to 30 hours for all children from two years old**

- ✦ Families are currently universally eligible for 15 hours free childcare for three to four year olds, with those receiving certain benefits, including Universal Credit, eligible for 15 hours free childcare for two year olds.
- ✦ Working families are eligible for 30 hours free childcare for three to four year olds, but eligibility does not extend to families out of work.
- ✦ The ineligibility of non-working families for 30 hours free childcare causes substantial harm to the development of children in non-working families.
- ✦ To narrow the attainment gap, the 30 hours free childcare allowance should be extended to all families and children from two years old onward.
- ✦ This would ensure our children receive the best possible start – improving educational attainment and outcomes long-term.

### **5. Make childcare professionals eligible for the Skilled Worker Visa**

- ✦ The UK's exit from the European Union and the Covid-19 pandemic have seen many EU workers return to their home countries, substantially impacting the sector's retention of staff.
- ✦ The childcare sector regularly suffers from both high open vacancy levels and high turnover rates.
- ✦ With acute staff shortages reducing the quality of childcare, the sector should be made eligible for the Skilled Worker Visa which grants international workers the right to work and live in the UK for up to five years.

# Primary, Secondary & Special Education

The ongoing academisation of schools looks set to be a continuing focus for the Government.

Since their inception, academies have generated significant debate. The increased involvement on non-governmental organisations in the delivery of education has raised concerns regarding accountability and community involvement. External sponsorship by non-governmental organisations has varied in quality – bringing significant benefits to some schools and drawbacks to others. With successive government reforms leading to greater fragmentation and increasing commercialisation in the schooling system, competition has emerged between schools.

**The move towards all schools joining MATs is recognition of the need for greater co-operation between schools – sharing best practice and resources to help deliver better outcomes.**

With education reforms continuing in the direction of greater academisation, co-operatives have responded by increasing their involvement in academy trusts, ensuring co-operative principles are maintained in education. The Co-op Academies Trust (CAT) – sponsored by the Co-op Group – is the largest multi-academy trust with co-operative involvement.

Established in 2010, the Co-op Academies Trust committed the Co-op Group to returning to education provision. One of CAT's key objectives has been delivering improved education provision to disadvantaged communities in the North of England, using the Co-op Group's expertise and resources to improve the educational attainment of students from these communities.

Over the last 12 years, the Co-op Academies Trust has grown from two academies to 30 academies stretching from Stoke-on-Trent to the Wirral and across to Leeds with a large number in Greater Manchester. Its provision covers primary, secondary, special and post-16 provision. As academy sponsor, the Co-op Group brings its success, expertise and values to the delivery of education provision to some of the UK's most disadvantaged children. The co-operative principles provide a clear value set which runs through all member academies.

Built on the Co-op Group's historic co-operative model, the CAT has developed an inclusive, accountable and democratic structure for its academies. CAT is governed by a Trust Board which draws representatives from the Co-op Group as sponsor, school staff and parent/community governors. The Trust Board has responsibility for setting CAT's strategies, policy and overseeing the finances of all academies and tries to ensure as much decision making rests at a local level. This helps to ensure strong relationships between the CAT and key stakeholders from staff, parents and carers and the wider community. The parents and carers of CAT's pupils/students are encouraged to become a member of the Co-op Group and there are opportunities for them to influence the strategic direction of CAT. The financial support the Co-op Group

provides to the CAT comes directly from members through the Co-op Local Community Fund scheme, which enables members to earn 2p for their community from every pound spent with the Co-op Group. There is additional devolution from the CAT's Trust Board to the Academy Governance Councils (AGCs) of individual academies, with members of the AGCs drawn from the sponsor, staff, parents and the wider community. They help set strategy and oversee leadership and finances for the individual academy.

With the conversion to academisation, the link between schools and democratically elected local government - the governors of community and maintained schools - has been diminished. This has reduced the democratic accountability of many academy chains – which no longer have the input of elected local education authorities. By working to maintain and strengthen the relationship with local education authorities, CAT has continued to ensure the democratic accountability of its academies to elected officials. All of its academies work within their local authority's school admission arrangements and relationships are open and honest. CAT has aimed to develop a 'family of schools' working in collaborative partnership with local education authorities – ensuring a commitment to local democratic accountability.

The CAT's work in economically disadvantaged areas has been successful and has brought about improved academic outcomes as well as improving social mobility, but national changes are required regarding the curriculum, approaches to assessment and inspection so that all disadvantaged children and young people receive the education that will help them be an active participant in the future. Unfortunately, the UK's performance on social mobility is poor in comparison to

**“Over the last 12 years, the Co-op Academies Trust has grown from two academies to 30 academies”**

international competitors, failing disadvantaged children across the UK. Since 2010, the national examination system has created a third of children who are deemed not to have met the expected standard when they take their GCSEs. The narrow academic focus of this examination has left too many students following education programmes that will not support their future career prospects. The Co-operative Party believes skills development should start earlier, with additional resources provided to secondary schools to deliver a more skills' based curriculum so all children have the basic skills required for the future economy when they leave school. The Labour Party's Skills Council's recent report, chaired by Lord David Blunkett, supports this conclusion. Greater skills' provision, including compulsory digital skills and the inclusion of more creative subjects as well as design and technology (DT), will help to ensure a more equitable, relevant and exciting curriculum is delivered.

# Recommendations

## Primary & Secondary Education

### 1. Ensure all schools are well-funded and locally accountable

- \* The real terms budget cuts suffered by schools since 2010 should be reversed so all schools are well-funded. Without increasing spending per pupil, it will be difficult to reduce educational inequalities and attainment gaps which harm life outcomes and social mobility.
- \* Locally accountability is essential to ensuring the quality of public services. In the model of CAT, MATs must be encouraged to develop collaborative relationships with local education authorities (LEAs).
- \* MATs must contribute strongly to locally agreed education plans which drive local economic regeneration.
- \* A new settlement should be agreed with teaching unions to deliver improved pay and conditions. This new payment package should aim to lower teacher shortages, reduce overwork and improve wellbeing.
- \* Restore the requirement for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) to all state-funded schools.

### 2. Promoting inclusion and fairness in the education system

- \* Provide universal Free School Meals provision to all children in state-funded schools.
- \* As laid out by the Labour Party, the next Labour & Co-operative Government should remove the VAT exemption on public schools.
- \* A new funding mechanism should be introduced which provides additional funding based on the percentage of children eligible for free school meals within the school. This would ensure adequate funding goes to the most disadvantaged schools and academy groups.
- \* All academy groups should be required to adopt the local authority admissions policies, with selection processes prohibited.
- \* Establish a new national framework for Education, Health & Care Plans (EHCP) and local authority funding dedicated to special education needs (SEN). This would ensure greater consistency of SEN provision across England.

### 3. Greater emphasis on skills provision at schools

- ✦ Ensure all pupils receive a broad and balanced curriculum that includes digital skills for all.
- ✦ Ensure all pupils have access to technology devices, so they can develop the digital and technological skills required for the future economy.
- ✦ Establish an entitlement for pupils to a broad and balanced curriculum thereby creating a statutory duty for schools to deliver a wide and varied skills-oriented curriculum.
- ✦ A new national curriculum for careers should be introduced in secondary schools, providing children with greater information on career paths at an earlier age.

### 4. Effective inspection and regulation of MAT groups

- ✦ Ofsted inspection should transition away from inspecting individual schools towards assessing and inspecting MAT groups, including an assessment of their sponsors. MAT groups should have a full inspection, which would include a complete inspection of several schools within the MAT. MAT inspection should include a review of operations, finances and sponsor management practices.
- ✦ This would entail a move away from the conventional inspection of individual schools on a four-year basis and transition towards an annual audit of schools, which would primarily focus on safeguarding and culture. Schools would be expected to undertake a self-review of their performance and publish this for the school community. If concerns are raised through the annual safeguarding visit or through a review of the self-assessment, a full inspection could be called. It is anticipated however that the regularity of full inspections would be significantly reduced which we believe would support innovation and begin to tackle the decline in teachers applying for Headteacher positions.
- ✦ Ofsted inspection of MATs would also include an assessment on the economic viability of the MAT and its links and engagement with the local community. This would include how effective their efforts had been to tackle underperformance in their own academies as well as their efforts to support other local schools, some of which may not be in their own Trust.
- ✦ Regulatory scrutiny should also be applied to Private Financial Initiative (PFI) companies operating within the education sector.







## 5. Encourage co-operative societies to enter MAT provision

- ✦ The success of the CAT model demonstrates the benefits co-operative partners can bring MATs. Co-operative partners can provide a coherent values platform, management expertise and democratic practices.
- ✦ Co-operative societies outside the North of England would be well-placed to sponsor or support MATs based on co-operative principles, helping to re-establish co-operative education provision throughout the UK. For example, Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust is based on co-operative principles and aims to bring a co-operative model to their academy chain.
- ✦ In the spirit of co-operative Principle 6, co-operatives and mutuals should support existing Co-op MATs and work to develop new ones. This would spread the principle of co-operation between co-operatives to the education sector.

## 6. Achieve greater value within the Multi Academy Trust (MAT) sector

- ✦ The Government committed to the consolidation of the MAT sector in future legislation, but more should be done to encourage deeper consolidation into larger MAT groups which brings economies of scale, larger resource sharing and greater cross-academy collaboration.
- ✦ The full benefits of the MAT model are achieved at scale – when resources and expertise can be shared in a collaborative way. Greater consolidation would ensure all schools have access to beneficial economies of scale, resources sharing and best-practice transfer.

## 7. Greater regulation of excessive executive pay

- ✦ The transition to academisation has seen substantial growth in executive pay, with MAT chief executives often earning considerably more than their local education authority equivalents. The CAT have implemented a 1:10 pay ratio between lowest and highest earners, keeping executive pay at more sustainable levels.
- ✦ The Government should consider imposing pay ratios on MATs to ensure executive pay inflation does not continue exponentially.

# Apprenticeships & Further Education

Co-operative societies have throughout their history provided excellent training and apprenticeship opportunities for people of all different backgrounds. As a core value of co-operation, education and training is at the heart of the co-operative business ethos – with co-operatives providing opportunities across the UK, often to people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds.

The Co-operative Party is highly supportive of the training and apprenticeship opportunities co-operative societies deliver and believe there should be parity of esteem between these options and academic routes.

To achieve parity of esteem, the policy makers will need to learn from best practices examples of delivering apprenticeships and widening opportunities. The Co-op Group has been leading the way by offering 1,200 apprenticeship positions across its businesses, adopting a key focus on providing opportunities for underrepresented groups at its AGM in 2021. Apprenticeships are available in a large range of job types – from lorry drivers to solicitors – across food retail, funeral care, insurance and legal services.

The Co-op Group's commitment to delivering high quality apprenticeship opportunities for underrepresented people extends beyond its own business, to supporting smaller businesses, co-operatives and social enterprises to take on new apprentices. The Co-op Group have launched the Co-op Levy Share scheme in April 2021, which enables businesses to pool unspent Apprenticeship Levy funding and transfer it to smaller businesses so they can provide additional apprenticeships. The Co-op Levy

Share provides an online matching service so pledging businesses can find recipient businesses that match their ethos. The Levy Share scheme is specifically designed to be flexible for businesses and targeted at the most disadvantaged groups. Since the start of the scheme, Apprenticeship Levy donors have committed over £15.4 million to new apprenticeships with over 40 large businesses taking part. This will help to create over 1,300 new apprenticeship opportunities - making it the largest scheme of its kind.

Despite the work of co-operative societies delivering apprenticeship opportunities, there has been a substantial decline in entry level apprenticeship starts in recent years. Data from IPPR indicates there has been a 72% reduction in entry level apprenticeship starts since 2014, with apprenticeships in SMEs declining by 36% since the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy. Entry level apprenticeships are the most accessible form of apprenticeship, requiring few if any qualifications to begin training. As such, a reduction in this type of apprenticeship can have a considerable impact on many people from disadvantaged communities, who may not have the necessary qualifications to be able to proceed to degree or degree apprenticeship level.

The decline in entry level apprenticeships will worsen social mobility and life chances in the UK, at a time of economic turmoil and stagnant wages. The Co-operative Party believes it is essential to take action to ensure adequate life-long learning and skills provision through high quality further education and apprenticeships.



# Recommendations

## Apprenticeships & Further Education

### 1. Establish statutory provision of careers service

- + This would create a legal requirement to provide career services to people across the UK. The new services could be delivered by local authorities or career service co-operatives which local people could become members of. New funding resources should be made available to ensure the capacity is there to achieve high quality services.

### 2. Establish a national target for apprenticeship starts – with a specific incentive for entry level starts

- + The Labour Government set a target of 50% of young people going to university in 1999. This target was successfully achieved in 2019.
- + A similar target should be established for apprenticeship starts – with a specific focusing on increasing entry level starts – which are the most accessible for those with low or no qualifications.
- + This would help social mobility for those people who will not be able to attain a degree or degree apprenticeship.

### 3. Increase the flexibility of Apprenticeship Levy spending criteria

- + Greater flexibility on use of funding would enable a larger number of apprenticeships to be created. The current funding system suits certain sectors more than others – with the lack of flexibility raising the cost of training in sectors like retail.
- + Additional flexibility to cover the true costs of training would enable a significant expansion of available apprenticeship opportunities.





# Glossary

## Acronyms

<b>AGC</b>	Academy Governance Council
<b>CAT</b>	Co-op Academies Trust
<b>DT</b>	Design and Technology
<b>EHCP</b>	Education, Health and Care Plan
<b>LAC</b>	Looked After Children
<b>LEA</b>	Local education authority
<b>MAT</b>	Multi-academy trust
<b>PFI</b>	Private finance initiative
<b>QTS</b>	Qualified teacher status
<b>SME</b>	Small and medium-sized enterprises
<b>SEN</b>	Special educational needs



## Institutions

### Co-op Academies Trust

A large multi-academy trust, sponsored by the Co-op Group, and based in the North of England.

### Little Pioneers

Also known as Co-op Childcare, Little Pioneers is a large nursery chain operated by the Midcounties Co-operative.

### Dartmoor MAT

A Devon based multi academy trust which incorporates co-operative values and principles in its operations.

### Grasshoppers in the Park

A London based, parent led nursery which operates on a co-operative model.

### Co-op College

An education charity which promotes co-operative learning, including the co-operative models, values and principles.



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