

CO-OPERATIVES UK

OFFERING HOPE TO FUTURE GENERATIONS

Co-operatives can help young people
live better lives. Here's how.



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INTRODUCTION

'Offering hope to new generations' is a new report which outlines key findings from our YouGov research; shares inspiring examples of young people already working and living co-operatively across the UK; and provides recommendations so more young people can take advantage of what co-operatives offer to help build better futures.



This is one of the most challenging times to be a young person in the UK. Climate change, the UK economy, Brexit, job instability, social media pressure and the unknown lasting impacts of the Covid pandemic... it is no wonder young people are feeling pessimistic about their future.

With so much in disarray, is it possible to reach young people and help them feel more secure and actively improve their lives in the present? We think so.

Co-operatives UK is the trade body for the UK's co-operative sector. We believe young people deserve access to the opportunities and support they need to learn relevant skills, secure good jobs and become productive and happy.

We commissioned new research to examine the challenges faced by 16 to 25 year olds to better understand how co-operative organisations can support them both now and in the future.

We believe co-operatives offer significant opportunities to respond to the challenges presented by young people.

Co-operatives – which operate across all sectors – allow young people to thrive in an environment that provides fair wages and secure jobs, tackles climate change and provides both educational and personal development alongside a sense of belonging.

THE RESEARCH

The market research explored issues faced by 16 to 25 year olds and took the form of a YouGov survey. Specific focuses included career prospects and ambitions; experiences of discrimination; and knowledge/awareness of co-operatives.

In this report the term 'young people', particularly when used in the context of the market research, directly relates to 16 to 25 year olds and the findings of the YouGov survey.

The total survey sample size of 16 to 25 year olds was 2,016. Fieldwork was undertaken between 3 and 12 December, 2021. The survey was carried out online. The figures are weighted and representative of all UK 16 to 25 year olds online.

Offering hope

Generation Z has a lot on its plate and feels there is not much help. This is where co-operatives can step in with real, actionable solutions. Though a lot has to be done to raise awareness, it is encouraging that co-operatives and the benefits they bring are slowly gaining traction with younger people.

Co-operatives are transforming lives. Our case studies reveal how co-operatives directly combat the issues most adversely affecting younger people. A deeper understanding of those issues and solutions can help co-operatives do more to transform the lives of an entire generation.

KEY FINDINGS

Significant challenges identified by young people in our research include:

- Mental health issues
- Insufficient good jobs
- Social inequality and an increasing digital divide
- Social and environmental problems

These issues are explored in more detail in the next section of this report – including how co-operatives can provide solutions for young people.



02. YOUNG PEOPLE ARE CONCERNED

Young people are concerned. Mental health, job security, discrimination, the climate emergency. This section explores these issues and how co-operatives can make a difference.



MENTAL HEALTH

It has been a tumultuous few years and young people are suffering. Covid, the cost of living, job security, housing provision... The impact on mental health is clear.¹

Many young people use a variety of online communities, services, and resources to access support but mental health remains a major issue. More than two-thirds (68%) of 16 to 25 year olds surveyed have experienced mental health problems themselves or know someone who has. This was the largest issue identified – by an overwhelming margin.

Many of these mental health problems are environmental – a side-effect of pressures faced today, including a lack of job security and affordable housing. Dedicated mental support for mental health issues stemming from environmental pressures, while absolutely necessary, is often treats symptoms rather than causes. Tackling the problems that cause detrimental mental health issues head on will drive more effective and impactful results in the long term.

A perceived lack of job security, a rise in living costs, and unfair working conditions are all impacting the mental health of young people. In our survey, 76% of young women and 60% of young men have faced mental health issues or know someone that has. Collectively, this rises to 77% of young people in the south west and 76% of those living in the north east.

The severity of these issues and access to treatment often differ greatly, with males less likely to seek help from the NHS than females. Three times as many men as women die by suicide each year.² Much of this comes down to the strong feelings of isolation in these times; young people often feel misunderstood, overlooked, and ignored.

Younger generations also feel socially isolated due to information overload and the negative impact of social media on their psychological well-being.³ Covid-19 exacerbated this, forcing physical isolation and intensifying the 'need' and use of social media despite its negative impact. The result is that Generation Z is the loneliest generation of all.⁴ There is a strong need to help people harness social media to improve lives, rather than be a detriment force.

Young people need to feel a sense of purpose, belonging and security. The case studies in this report show how co-operatives are meeting physical and financial needs. Often it is the social need that co-operatives and co-operation meet that makes the real difference.

Mental health challenges are not an impossible situation to improve. The ownership and control co-operatives offer people can and should have a positive impact.

1. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/labourmarketeconomicanalysisquarterly/march2021>

2. <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/statistics/mental-health-statistics-men-and-women>

3. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8640972/>

4. https://www.cigna.co.uk/assets/stress-care/docs/Loneliness_and_Work_-_Building_emotional_connections.pdf



ISAAC FINN

Twenty-two-year-old Isaac Finn is a third year Economics student at Loughborough University. During his first two years, he experienced depression. Isaac said: “There was stuff going on in my life but it was also about the world – Covid, the climate crisis, everything. I was overwhelmed.”

“I got help from my personal tutor and got counselling. Then I decided I wanted to help other people.” That’s when he formulated the idea that has since become Kocoon.

Kocoon is a fledgling online platform co-op created to equip young people with the knowledge, skills and resources to understand, manage and improve their wellbeing through access to academic research and signposting to charities and services.

“I started Kocoon because when I was unwell, it took me a while to find the right resources,” Isaac added. He also wanted to make academic papers about wellbeing and societal issues more accessible to non-academics.

Isaac said: “These resources are often presented in a way people find difficult to read. So we’re creating articles, short videos and infographics to present that information in ways people want to consume.”



“There was stuff going on in my life but it was also about the world – Covid, the climate crisis, everything. I was overwhelmed.”

Isaac Finn
Kocoon

JOB SECURITY AND SATISFACTION

Young people are concerned about the quality of jobs available to them. Salary, career progression, contract hours and wellness are all important factors.

Many 16 to 25 year olds are anxious about the future. Two-thirds (66%) think there are not enough good jobs for young people – rising to 73% in the south east. In addition, 50% think it is now more difficult to work overseas and Brexit has made foreign opportunities more difficult to secure.

An additional issue is how much taxation this group faces.⁵ The UK income tax system rewards wealthy people and enables tax avoidance, which means that even when young people secure good jobs, they pay an inordinate amount of tax. They have less money to put into savings or investment and are often, at the same time, blamed for not saving enough.

Young people's deductions will rise by 20% over four years and "will pay more than 10 times more in national insurance contributions each year than workers aged 65-plus" while discretionary income will drop by almost 30% and their disposable income by 4%.

These factors make future home ownership and pension savings and investment virtually impossible, further trapping young people in cycles of poverty or near-poverty.

Though co-operatives cannot help with the rate of taxation, greater job security and collective ownership help alleviate worries. are also more resilient, with almost twice as many co-operatives likely to survive the early years of business when compared to companies.⁶ And co-operatives have also proved to be more resilient to the economic turmoil caused by Covid.⁷

Co-operatives are more resilient because they are created to meet the needs of their members. As owners, these members – customers, suppliers and/or workers – have a vested interest in the success of the business over the long term.

Meanwhile, ownership over your own work helps create 'good' jobs. For example, at Suma, the UK's biggest worker co-operative – a co-operative owned and controlled by the workers themselves – everyone has an equal say in the business as well as equal pay.

Economic inequalities built into our economy create problems for young people from the off. Financial incentives have created a gig economy populated by independent contractors, online platform workers, contract firm workers, on-call workers and temporary workers. So a single job that lasts for six months or more, let alone permanently, feels much less possible and with the poor terms and conditions often applied, much less desirable.

5. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/feb/13/tory-tax-by-stealth-hit-young-people-on-low-wages-report>

6. https://www.uk.coop/sites/default/files/2021-06/Co-op_Economy_2020.pdf

7. <https://www.uk.coop/resources/co-op-economy-report-2021>



Some young people do see zero-hour contracts as a positive due to freedom and job flexibility. When asked in our survey, 29% believe zero-hour contracts provide opportunities for flexible working and give young people control over their work.

However, a majority of the 16-25 year olds surveyed (61%) believe the gig economy and zero-hour contracts contribute to young men and women being treated unfairly. This suggests many young people recognise that zero-hour contracts offer some benefits, but have reservations about how they are used by some employers.

There is another way. Platform co-operatives are owned and governed by their members. They are stakeholder, not shareholder driven businesses, focused on democratic control, shared ownership, and a sustainable relationship between social purpose and profitability. Zero hours by choice can be effective – and co-operative platforms like CoopCycle are developing these choice-based alternatives.

Increases in the number of temporary roles or ‘gig’ work, such as delivery drivers or virtual assistants, has impacted perceptions relating to job security. Almost one-third (30%) of young people have experienced a lack of control over their working lives. Many young men and women have experienced a lack of job security (32%) as well as poor career prospects (28%).

Aside from the issue of zero-hours contracts, an economy that incentivises employers to operate gig-based models reduces benefits that come along with full-time permanent employment contracts – like easily accessed sick pay, holiday pay and low thresholds for enrolment onto pension schemes. Young people also worry about the quality of jobs available.

It makes good business sense for self-employed people to join forces and form co-operatives – either as worker-owned or freelancer-run, so they retain their self-employed status and control over their work.

There are many examples across multiple sectors – from music to graphic design to media – in which freelancers have joined forces to become more than the sum of their parts. The award-winning Media Coop in Glasgow is one example, while CoTech – a network of ethical co-operatives providing technology, digital and creative services – includes co-operatives formed by freelancers.

Co-ops enable their members to have access to fairer, more decent work, as well as a share of the profits. And by coming together, freelancers can bid for larger scale tenders, gain access to new markets, innovate through sharing creative ideas and expertise – as well as reducing overheads.



FABIO CAWLEY

When 25-year-old graphic design graduate Fabio Cawley joined Chapel Street Studio, a co-op of freelance creatives based in Bradford, it boosted his confidence and skills – and opened the door to new career opportunities.

“Thanks to being part of this co-op, I now see myself as a graphic designer, instead of just a graduate,” he said. “For me, it’s all about progression. I’ve had some challenging pieces of work and I can see the progression. That makes me happy. A lot of people say they like my work. You can’t get better than that.”

Being a member of Chapel Street Studio has expanded Fabio’s network and opened many new doors for him. Fabio said: “Opportunities come to me. It’s like a hub. There are a lot of progressive, creative people, pushing for stuff. I just happen to meet different people and chances come to me. It’s a blessing.”

Fabio’s confidence has also been given a welcome boost. He said: “It has helped to give me a hustler mentality. And I’m sat here looking down at my million-pound idea for an eco-friendly product. The next step is to pitch it to the right people. My colleagues at Chapel Street Studio are helping me make connections and pointing me in the right direction.

“I feel part of a team now. I never really had that with my other jobs. I’ve had some bad experiences. It’s a nice atmosphere at Chapel Street. That’s one of the main things compared to other jobs. I’ve heard my friends talk about their experiences and I think, ‘I’m happy with this.’”



“I feel part of a team now. I never really had that with my other jobs. I’ve had some bad experiences. I’ve heard my friends talk about their experiences and I think, ‘I’m happy with this.’”

**Fabio Cawley
Chapel Street Studio**

STEPH RUTHERFORD

Turning your life around can begin with changing your working environment. Surrounded by a supportive, co-operative team in a positive atmosphere, 29-year-old Steph Rutherford found purpose and peace of mind working at Village Greens.

Steph wanted to help out during the early days of the Covid pandemic. She said: "I've had struggles with my mental health, so as much as it was to help out the store, it was also knowing that I would struggle living by myself at that time as well."

Steph began life at Village Greens as a paid member of staff. She said: "There was a flour shortage and we found a supplier who delivered it in 25kg bags. My job for a month was decanting flour into 1kg bags. I had a layer of flour on me at all times! I was well happy and I thought 'this is one of the most joyous working experiences I've ever had.'

"It felt like more than just decanting flour. There was a buzz. There's always a positive energy in here. It still helps now, if I'm feeling low or whatever. The world's a complex place and some days you don't feel great. I've had a long struggle with my mental health. And every day I go into work I come out feeling better, which I know is incredibly rare; knowing you've got a support network around you."



"Every day I go into work I come out feeling better, which I know is incredibly rare; knowing you've got a support network around you."

**Steph Rutherford
Village Greens**

DISCRIMINATION, INCLUSIVITY AND ETHICS

Co-operatives are built on a shared set of values and principles – and young people are increasingly looking for good employers who treat people fairly.

Awareness of discrimination has increased exponentially in recent years. Important issues like unequal pay and unacceptable behaviour in the workplace have also been thrust into the spotlight. Political and ideological movements such as Black Lives Matter, #MeToo and transgender rights have gained great visibility. For 16 to 25 year olds, these are more than just slogans; they're personal challenges.

Discrimination has increased pressure and anxiety both at work and in the search for work. Our research revealed that 40% of 16 to 25 year olds have faced discrimination in and outside of work, including racism, homophobia and misogyny. Further discriminatory factors include physical and/or mental impairments, sexual orientation and gender.

Increasingly, young people are looking for employers to be more diverse, inclusive and ethical. Lip service to these important issues is not enough. Organisations must be actively playing their part.

Two thirds of young men and women (66%) would like to work for a fairer and more ethical employer. Almost three quarters of young people (71%) also favour good employers – those businesses which support employees in ways such as career development and work/life balance. And businesses which offer good career prospects are also favoured by 16 to 15 year olds (58%).

Groups that are more likely to face discrimination put greater value on ethical issues. For example, when considering careers, a diverse workforce is more important to young women (51%) than men (33%). If a person feels they are being unfairly treated, this may also impact them in other ways, such as their mental health and career prospects.

As more jobs become dependent upon technology, young people risk losing out if they don't have access to the required software, hardware and connectivity. Almost half (44%) of 16-25 year olds are worried about an increasing digital divide. They need options in terms of training and tech-related job opportunities.

In addition, 41% are concerned that a small number of companies and individuals control much of this technology. Many young people worry about the impact of technology itself; some share concerns about how personal data may be used and the potential impact on privacy (49%).



JOE FRIEL

A web design and development agency, Yalla Cooperative is a co-operative of young tech experts who create and build digital products and solutions. The team are based in the UK, Palestine, Turkey and Germany so international co-operation and anti-prejudicial understanding is key.

For the young Yalla members, the benefits of co-operative working are many. Founder member Joe Friel said: "Countless times I've spoken to friends who say they're in a toxic work culture and because they're just starting out, they have to do their dues there for three years.

"But I've personally seen that isn't the way that co-ops work. You are given a voice and allowed to bring fresh ideas – and the business benefits from that. It's a symbiotic thing. In turn, if you feel like you're shaping the organisation you are part of, then you are likely to achieve more as a person than in other structures.

"There's also a lot more room to grow because you have more say. In Yalla, for example, we immediately involve new members in key businesses decisions and that impacts how invested they are in the work.

"For young people, if you can find the right support and community, there's no end to what you can achieve. Whereas if you're in a top-down structure, that can limit you because you have to go through processes."

Co-operatives can help young people from different cultures and countries come together and realise their potential, even in a high-tech environment.



"We immediately involve new members in key businesses decisions and that impacts how invested they are in the work.

"For young people, if you can find the right support and community, there's no end to what you can achieve.

**Joe Friel
Yalla Cooperative**

CLIMATE EMERGENCY

Young people are concerned about climate change and sustainability – and co-operatives are taking action.



Climate change and general environmental problems are an undeniable reality around the world.⁶ In the UK alone, we face changing weather patterns, warming and wetter summers, decreasing biodiversity, and coastal erosion. This is compounded socially, because more often than not, environmental problems affect poorer communities more.

While a relatively small number of young people in the UK feel they have directly felt the impact of climate change (8%), this is an important issue for many. Research published in Nature reveals that climate anxiety is increasingly common in children and young people across the world.⁷

On a worldwide scale, inhospitable weather, storms, rising sea levels and major events like hurricanes are already creating climate refugees and severe economic crises. This will only increase as time goes on, unless real action is taken.

Young people are increasingly aware that climate change threatens to impact people, wildlife and the economy. The COP26 summit in Glasgow in 2021 firmly put climate action on the agenda, while the Insulate Britain protests called on the government and businesses to take action.

All these issues together produce a grim forecast. Fortunately, there is tremendous potential to engage young people in the UK and provide opportunities that directly address their biggest concerns.

Climate change is now front of mind for many 16 to 25 year olds. Almost half (45%) of all respondents in a survey by Bath University said that feelings about climate change affected their daily lives, and three-quarters said they thought the future was frightening.⁸ Linking these concerns with worries about job security is further evidence of how these issues are impacting the mental health of young people.

Many young people see tackling climate change as being essential to building a fairer world. As a result, they also expect the same from employers, with half of young men and women (50%) wanting more ethical employment, which includes caring for the environment. The issue is so important to young people that there are now dedicated recruitment platforms like Ethical Jobseeker that promote jobs in organisations that have a positive environment, social or cultural impact.

This demonstrates a real opportunity for the co-operative movement to work closely with young people. In our recent study of co-operative business, we found that two thirds of member-owned businesses are taking action to reduce carbon emissions, while one in five has published net-zero targets.⁹

6. <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/climate-change/effects-of-climate-change>

7. <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-02582-8>

8. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-58549373>

9. <https://www.uk.coop/resources/race-net-zero-role-co-ops-driving-climate-action-post-cop26>

NASRI ISMAEL

North Kensington Community Energy (NKCE) is a community benefit society that aims to make the London borough of Kensington and Chelsea a greener, fairer place to live. It is part of Repowering London, a not-for-profit organisation that empowers communities to fund, install and manage their own renewable, local energy.

NKCE has installed solar arrays (a group of solar panels) on two schools, a sports centre and community centre. It raises funds for the panels via community share offers, attracting investment from local people. It sells the cheaper, cleaner energy and offers a 3% return to investors and re-invests any surplus into the local community.

Nasri Ismael is a community champion employed to grow NKCE and build connections with local people. Nasri said: "I love what I do because I'm involved in something that will benefit the future generation. I'm helping save carbon emissions by promoting clean electricity."

Nasri is training in how to save energy at home and is already passing this knowledge onto others. She said: "This work is really rewarding because it's more personal. Some people are having stress and depression because of the cost of energy bills.

"I know I'll help this person. I show them how they can get money off their bills and explain things like winter payments. Enlightening them and signposting them to help and support, it's really fulfilling."



"I love what I do because I'm involved in something that will benefit the future generation. I'm helping save carbon emissions by promoting clean electricity."

Nasri Ismael
North Kensington Community Energy

3. CO-OPERATIVE SOLUTIONS

Many of the challenges faced by young people today have co-operative solutions. However, awareness of co-operatives across the board must increase to unleash their potential.

CO-OPERATIVE SOLUTIONS

A key to engaging young people is through their shared values. It is leaning into the alignment of these values that will allow co-operatives to help young people to build a better future together.



Co-operatives are owned by the people closest to the business, not distant investors only interested in a financial return. These owners – the members – are typically the workers, customers or local community and co-operatives who meet their shared needs. This means co-ops focus not just on making a profit, but how that profit is made and what they do with it to bring value to their members and community.

Many of the challenges faced by young people today have co-operative solutions. By this we mean co-operatives can solve issues faces by younger generations. However, awareness of co-operatives is low. Over half of young people (54%) are unable to name a single co-operative business and only 14% can name three or more. The lack of awareness is arguably the biggest hurdle faced. Unsurprisingly, given the low awareness, less than a quarter of young people are members of a co-operative.

Without this awareness, co-operative businesses will struggle to effectively engage with young men and women. However, successful engagement requires more than awareness. Co-operatives need young people to understand how they share the same values and provide many benefits they want.

VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

Co-operatives are built on a bedrock of shared values and principles. There are 10 values which all co-operatives are based upon:

- Caring for others
- Democracy
- Equity
- Equality
- Honesty
- Openness
- Self help
- Self responsibility
- Solidarity
- Social responsibility

The values chime with younger people and can directly impact on issues identified as being of most concern. For example, values of caring for others, equity, equality, honesty and solidarity can all drive improved mental health outcomes.

In a similar way, values of social responsibility, solidarity and caring for others can drive climate emergency action.

VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

There are seven co-operative principles that define how a co-op operates. The principles help co-operatives put their values into practice.

- A co-op is **owned and controlled** by its members. It exists for the benefit of its members, who may be customers, workers, suppliers or the wider community
- A co-op is **democratic** – this means every member has an equal say in how it's run and how profits are used
- Every member **contributes financially** in some way – from buying products, working for the co-op, investing in it or deciding how to spend its profits
- A co-op is an **independent business**, owned and controlled by its members.
- It offers **education and training** to everyone involved, so they can develop the co-op and promote the benefits of co-operation.
- It **co-operates**, works with and supports other co-ops.
- A co-op **supports the communities** it works with.

Unfortunately, the values and benefits of co-operative businesses were less understood or recognised by young people, especially those from ethnic minority groups. For example, 43% of white respondents consider co-operative businesses to be ethical, compared to 33% of people from ethnic minorities.

On the other hand, the survey reveals there are real opportunities for co-operatives to engage the next generation. Many young people find joining a co-op attractive because of the opportunities for career development (28%), the chance to have a say or vote on how the organisation is run (26%) and to support the community (24%).

This suggests more work is needed to engage young people as members and founders of co-operatives. In addition, the co-operative movement must help young people to understand how co-operative solutions can deliver a fairer future for them and others working in the digital economy.

Awareness works both ways. Young people are much more engaged if they feel they are being heard. Co-operatives have a responsibility to listen to young peoples' perspectives and ideas. Showing they have a place, a voice, and are valued by co-operatives will go a long way to increasing engagement and collaboration in the future.



LOUIS CARROLL

Often young people feel better when they work a job where they are valued doing what they love. Projekts MCR is a not-for-profit skatepark in Manchester. It's also a community benefit society that's owned by its members. It provides them with a vital space to practice, play, hone their skills and connect with likeminded people.

Seventeen-year-old Louis Carroll started out as a regular user of the skatepark – and when volunteering opportunities came up, he was encouraged by his mum to step forward. Louis said: “I wasn’t the most confident person and she pushed me to do it. I was a bit hesitant. I felt doubtful about what I could do.”

Through volunteering, Louis discovered he had a natural talent for helping people. In time, he began working for Projekts MCR, coaching on Saturdays and then eventually teaching in schools. He loves what he does and his confidence has grown too.

“I feel I can talk to people a lot easier,” he said. “I don’t overthink things as much as I used to. If I can stand up in front of 30 kids and teach them, then I’m pretty sure I can have a conversation with anyone. I have the confidence to speak to people now, whereas I didn’t before.

“I know I’m very fortunate. This place has brought me a lot of happiness and new friends too. I’ve met a lot of people and that’s what I’m most happy about.”



Photo: Owen Peters Photography

“I know I’m very fortunate. This place has brought me a lot of happiness and new friends too. I’ve met a lot of people and that’s what I’m most happy about.”

**Louis Carroll
Projekts MCR**

MASHAROF AHMED

Lambeth Community Solar (LCS) is a community benefit society that's part of Repowering London, a not-for-profit organisation that empowers communities to fund, install and manage their own renewable, local energy.

It fits community-owned solar panels on local buildings and raises funds for them via community share offers; attracting investment from local people. Masharof Ahmed, aged 31, has been a volunteer director with LCS for 18 months.

Masharof said: "As a director, I'm involved in decision making and have a vote in important decisions. For example, I vote on accepting share offers and go forwarding with projects."

Masharof's other volunteering activities include promoting the co-op via social media and helping facilitate events where LCS goes into the community to promote their activities. He also did some research for a Repowering London project in Kensington.

He recently landed a role as a support relations assistant for Friends of the Earth. Masharof added: "I do think my experience with Lambeth Community Energy helped me get that job. It's given me some new perspectives and ideas that I put across in the interview."

"Young people have really good ideas and co-ops are a good place to share them. The way co-ops work makes them naturally open to ideas and feedback. It's a great way to grow and learn and it's a good opportunity to network."



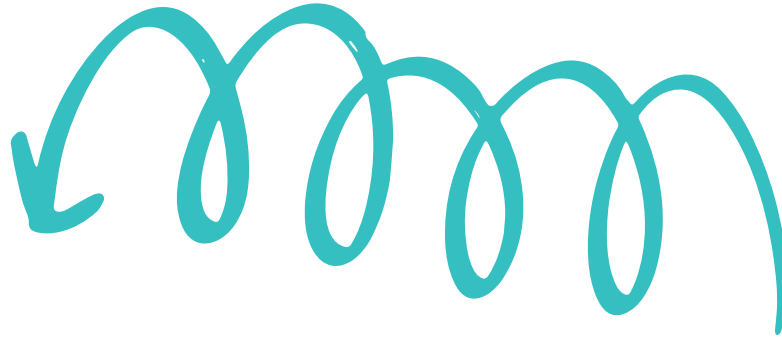
The National Youth Summit, held in July 2022, explored and assessed the challenges and opportunities facing our young people in the context of co-operation.

04. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Young people face an uncertain future, but the co-operative movement offers hope and solutions to transform and enable a fairer future for all.



CONCLUSIONS



There is a genuine opportunity to engage with young people in all areas of co-operatives and co-operation.



Young people face many challenges. Mental health concerns, long hours, low pay and unfair working practices, coupled with a lack of affordable options for housing or education, limit careers and social mobility. Younger generations are left feeling frustrated by a lack of control over their working lives and anxious about the future. Challenge like these can also contribute to mental health problems.

We know young people want to be excited about their future. They just need the tools to secure that future. With the right balance of awareness and inclusion, young people will find what they're looking for with co-operatives. It's a win-win solution that helps us build a better future together.

The co-operative movement offers hope and solutions to transform and enable a fairer future for all.

Young people are the future of the movement and the values of Generation Z chime with the co-operative values. Against the backdrop of an uncertain future where climate anxiety and job insecurity are major factors, the co-operative movement offers hope and solutions to transform and enable a fairer future for everyone.

We have a real opportunity to raise awareness of co-ops in young people by aligning our social change campaigning activity with issues like climate change that young people care about.

There is no quick fix. Initiatives spearheaded by The Co-op's 'Young Members Group' and Co-op Foundation's youth programme (which focuses on improving mental wellbeing), are examples of the great work taking place, but we can and must – collectively – do more.

Co-operatives UK will play its part; providing a welcoming and enabling environment for young people to engage in co-operatives and co-operation as members, as staff and as board members. It will actively recruit young people and develop apprenticeships.

The National Youth Summit, held in July 2022, assessed the challenges and opportunities facing our young people in the context of co-operation. But this is only the beginning.

The co-operative movement must amplify and if necessary, develop youth co-operative networks, youth-led co-op initiatives and federal members of Co-operatives UK aimed at engaging young people.

Co-operatives are the leaders in social change campaigning activity. There is also a real opportunity to raise awareness of co-ops in young people through this campaigning, which addresses issues young people care about.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our recommendations focus on two distinct areas; for those operating both within and outside the co-operative sector.

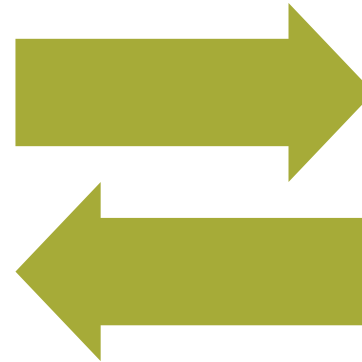
Recommendations for those working to equip young people to live in the world they are inheriting, including policymakers, educators and civil society organisations:

- Curricula for personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, citizenship, business studies and economics should all include relevant and useful information on co-operatives, as should careers guidance
- Support for young people to become entrepreneurs should cover co-operative options as a matter of course
- Organisations working in communities to help young people explore their options and develop their aspirations for work, living and social action, should help them explore co-operative options as a matter of course
- Employment support for young people should include opportunities for them to explore their co-operative options for work, living and social action, and government employment schemes should be made more accessible to co-operative employers

Recommendations for the co-operative sector:

- Consumer-facing co-operatives should put more time and dedicated resource into understanding the needs, values and motivations of younger consumers and look for areas of alignment with their value offer
- Co-operatives taking action in communities on issues like the climate emergency and social justice should make the participation of young people more of a priority
- Co-operatives with larger memberships should invest in digital platforms that can facilitate easier member engagement and participation, in ways that feel more natural to younger people
- Organisations working in co-operative development should put time and resource into understanding the needs, values and motivations of potential young co-operative founders, and then find ways to reach them with the right messages and support
- Co-operative employers should offer opportunities for young people through apprenticeships, paid internships and by engaging in government employment schemes

**EMPOWERING
CO-OPERATION**



CO-OPERATIVES UK

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