

## Motion from ISMs – Funding for Co-op Press and Co-op College

### 9

At last year's AGM almost 98% of votes were cast in support of our Motion calling on The Co-operative Group to support the wider co-operative movement. Six weeks later we were surprised and disappointed when the Co-op Group announced changes to the funding of the Co-op College and Co-op Press which disregarded the will of their members by reducing that support.

Whilst welcoming the subsequent confirmation of 2021 funding for the Co-op Press, this AGM calls upon the Co-op Group to restore the funding to these organisations and truly play its part in maintaining our co-operative heritage, promoting Co-operative education and supporting a strong, independent and co-operative press, in line with Co-operative Values and Principles. As the largest society this is very important, as is respect for the democratic process.

#### More information on our motion:

### Motion 9 – Funding for Co-op Press and Co-op College

The Board was disappointed to receive this motion.

Co-op is proud to champion our vision of *Co-operating for a Fairer World* and believes that the wider co-operative movement is central to achieving this ambition. It is important to us that we retain a strong, vibrant and modern movement fit for the challenges of the 21st century and we support the movement in changes that would continue to make its support and services relevant to a wider range of co-operatives for today. We were delighted to support the motion at last year's AGM which also received backing from our members and, as can be seen from the You Said, We Did document, outlining how we have responded to the 2020 AGM motion, believe we have taken forward the sentiment which was expressed through our actions.

Co-op continues to provide over £1.6m to support the work of the wider movement's institutions. Over a number of years, we have sought to encourage those institutions, such as Co-operatives UK, Co-operative College, Co-operative Press and Co-operative Heritage Trust, to explore ways they might collaborate more effectively – for example on the provision of training and education, news and communication and other support services. Last year, we asked that these discussions be given more focus – in particular in respect of the opportunity for greater collaboration between Co-operatives UK and Co-operative Press – and we have been pleased to note that productive discussions are underway with the newly appointed management team at Co-operatives UK. In anticipation that time would be needed to develop new thinking, the Co-op agreed to maintain funding arrangements for 2021, pending the outcome of new

thinking on future collaboration.

Unfortunately, the motion is seeking to disregard this process and, rather than looking forward to a more effective approach to communications and education which unites the wider movement behind an approach fit for the modern age, aims to simply protect the status quo.

In respect of co-operative education, the Co-op continues as a subscribing member of the Co-op College, procures training services and funds joint projects – for example, to provide co-operative education and training to our member pioneers and Co-op Academy students. We share this approach in common with the other co-operative societies who have supported this motion and have no plans to change this.

From 2021, we did decide to cease a discretionary unrestricted charitable donation to the Co-op College, as we were concerned that the College was not operating effectively and sustainably and continued to pursue initiatives which were not aligned to our members' priorities. We are pleased to see that the trustees of the Co-op College have started to address some of the longstanding weaknesses in their operation in the past few months and also that they are engaging with Co-operatives UK, for example on shared approach to co-operative learning and education.

Again, the motion does not acknowledge the extent of our Co-op's on-going support for co-operative education. The motion calls for our Co-op to maintain an unrestricted donation which we do not believe any other co-operative makes – we think that the right approach to supporting the College is to pay for services provided, in line with the approach of other co-operatives.

We are concerned that the motion is backward looking and misrepresents the Co-op's position and as such, we are not supportive of it.

The Board is proposing its own motion which clearly states our ambition for the wider co-operative movement and the role we believe our members wish us to play. We hope that a future-facing, optimistic and ambitious motion will galvanise support around a relevant, vibrant and inclusive sector.