

DEVELOPMENT OF THE STRUCTURE AND ARCHITECTURE OF THE CO-OPERATIVE UNION AND THE FUTURE ROLE OF THE UKCC

Members of the Council have had the opportunity to review the detailed proposals regarding "The Development of the Structure and Architecture of the Co-operative Union" and consider the implications and opportunities for the UKCC.

Council is requested to welcome and endorse the initiative of the Co-operative Union although further debate and opinions are required from the Membership of the UKCC in order that a formal response can be submitted to the Co-operative Union in due course. However, it should be recognised that our response should primarily focus on the position of the UKCC. In very general terms the outline of the proposals are excellent, the emphasis being on the future with clear definitions on just what the Co-operative Union should aspire to be.

These prime objectives can be summarised as below:

1. A powerful representative for the Co-operative Mutual and Social Economic Sector rebadged and rejuvenated.
2. A provider of modern, professional, and flexible trade association services for the entire Movement.
3. Recognised as the body supporting the retail consumer movement to adopt policies and structures with real potential to halt its decline in market share and restore some of its dynamism and presence based on strong community membership.
4. Operating an effective political operation through a renewed and modernised political wing.
5. Having a think-tank facility working with the wider mutual sector leading the defence and promotion of mutuality as an important and effective sector of the economy.
6. Providing a high quality, flexible customised co-operative education service.
7. Generating and supporting new co-operative enterprise in other sectors of society.

It is therefore, against this background and also the recommendations contained in the Co-operative Commission that the UKCC should perhaps take stock of its own position, and again review its strategic objectives, some of which were agreed last year, especially the alliance with the Co-operative Union.

Perhaps the most significant breakthrough which will affect the future direction of the UKCC is the proposal to allocate up to four seats on the Central Executive / Board from "other sectors" and that during any transitional period in the formation of the new Central Executive / Board the UKCC will be offered three co-opted positions.

The UKCC must therefore, seize this opportunity with a positive response and review our future direction. In determining our own future destiny we now have to be further mindful to ensure that there is no duplication of effort and resources. The UKCC can reflect on its first ten years of operation with satisfaction. However, we have to be clearly focused as to the next phase / wave of our development and progress. In view of the immense opportunities

now offered to the UKCC we should perhaps reevaluate the benefits of the UKCC, reassess the benefits Members derive, and review what we should aspire to be operating initially within the enlarged Co-operative Union's proposed structure.

The UKCC now has to build on its strategic and administration alliance with the Co-operative Union and working within the framework of the new structure, the strong brand name of the UKCC could, I believe, considerably assist the Union in its aspirations to be a powerful representative organisation for the "Co-operative, Mutual, and Social Economy sector rebadged, and rejuvenated".

Consideration should now be given to widening the membership of the UKCC to embrace the emerging sectors of co-operative endeavour not already Members of the Council. This could include the Care Sector, Health, Resident Management Co-operatives, Supporters' Trusts, Student Co-operatives, and GP Co-operatives. The UKCC should also review its links with other mutual organisations and representatives from key social economy bodies. We already work closely with the Building Society Association and the Friendly Societies in promoting an annual event regarding mutuality.

In acknowledging that these broader "mutuals" are not true co-operatives they are engaged as full Member Stakeholder organisations and we could consider some form of associate membership of the UKCC for non-co-operative organisations. Obviously, they would not have any formal voting rights regarding nominations to the Co-operative Union Central Executive / Board. This broader based approach to membership would certainly mirror the situation prevailing within some of the Regional and Mutual Co-operative Councils, and therefore provide some consistency to our "tiered structures".

In the light of the Labour election victory and the ministerial reshuffles we should review some new opportunities in the under-mentioned areas / sectors.

1. Agriculture

The Departments of Agriculture and Environment have been merged, with Environment having the ascendancy for the first time. The Government has announced that they are prepared to start with a blank piece of paper. Is this the ideal time for the UKCC / FAC to enter the debate and raise the co-operative advantage?

2. Students

The Government has announced that numbers in higher education are to rise to one in three to one in two. This makes links with Student Associations in higher education even more important.

3. Public Service Delivery

The Government has signalled its willingness to see other areas' models of delivery for public services other than the Public Sector. The obvious tie with GP Co-operatives and leisure centres, less obvious with Football Trusts, but even these can be classed as community assets.

4. Transport

A massive issue where traditional approaches are not delivering. Is there a consumer co-operative angle?

Improved communication will lie at the heart of our future profiling and development. We should be making comments, passing opinions on major national and regional issues. Our new web site, membership database, and ongoing development of the Internet for publications and communications will contribute to the wider objectives.

Another key issue facing the UKCC in the future will be one of succession. In the past, the UKCC has been extremely well served by high profile political chairs. Lord Carter and Lord Graham have provided the level and balance of input required -to Central Government. With our new partnership with the Co-operative Union and the proposals for representation at the "top table" the UKCC now has a wider dimension and in view of these developments the time is now perhaps right to consider whether or not an appointment within our own ranks to initially shadow Lord Graham, and then in due course, take over his role as Chair, or alternatively, do we seek to maintain the status quo and appoint a further high profile London politician. Our representation on the enlarged Central Executive / Board will certainly provide the UKCC with an ideal opportunity to ensure that the Consumer Movement can play a key role in the furtherance of the other sectors of co-operation by being able to fully understand the opportunities offered by the emerging sectors and the ongoing educational and profiling which will be required with consumer co-operators.

This paper is not intended to be an all-embracing document with regard to every aspect of our strategic objectives. It clearly identifies many of the issues and opportunities facing the wider co-operative sector and considers some of the options and courses we could follow.

In conclusion, we have a unique opportunity to build upon what has been achieved to date as an integral part of the reinvigorated Co-operative Union. We must ensure that we grasp this opportunity and cement our relationship with the Co-operative Union to the benefit of the wider Co-operative and Mutual Sector.

Initial soundings will be taken at the Council meeting on 29 June 2002 and all Members are requested to come prepared to contribute to the discussion paper. Thereafter, detailed submissions can be provided by Council Members with a view to a detailed consensus report being finalised in time for the special Congress to be held later in the year.

Lord Graham - Chair - UKCC
David Dickman - Secretary - UKCC
29 June 2001