

A high-angle, top-down photograph of four diverse students (two young women and two young men) sitting around a light-colored wooden table. They are all smiling and looking towards the camera. On the table are various school supplies: pens, pencils, notebooks, and two mobile phones. A semi-transparent dark blue rectangular box is centered over the image, containing white and yellow text.

**Creating futures  
together**

The Co-operative  
Academy Programme

The **co-operative**

Here for you for life



## Our academy schools

The Co-operative Group sponsors seven academy schools – three secondary and four primary – in Leeds, Manchester and Stoke-on-Trent. Through our support for these schools, we're working to improve life chances for learners in deprived communities, providing an outstanding education with our Co-operative values as the foundation. This brings to life our purpose of 'championing a better way of doing business for you and your communities'.

This report will explore the relationship between The Co-operative Group and these academies.



## What is an academy?

An academy is a publicly funded school that operates independently of the local authority, with a framework designed to promote innovation, raise school standards and increase achievement levels for all children.

Academies have greater autonomy than traditional state schools in areas such as delivery of the curriculum, setting staff pay and conditions, and changing the length of school days and terms. However, as with state schools, they are still required to follow law and guidance on admissions, special educational needs and exclusions, and to collaborate and share facilities with other schools and the wider community.

**There are two types of academies – sponsored academies and converter academies.**

**Sponsored academies** are usually set up to replace under-performing schools with the aim of improving educational standards and raising the aspirations and career prospects for pupils from all backgrounds, including the most disadvantaged. It is this type of academies that the Group sponsors.

Sponsors are responsible for establishing an academy trust, the governing body, and the appointment of a head teacher. These sponsors come from a wide variety of backgrounds, including businesses (such as The Co-operative Group), faith communities, universities and private philanthropists. "Outstanding" schools and academies may also become sponsors themselves in order to help less-able schools to improve. Sponsors are not required to make a financial contribution.

**Converter academies** are successful schools that have chosen to convert to academy status in order to benefit from the increased autonomy academy status brings.



## Co-operative education

When the Co-operative movement began in the mid-nineteenth century, it provided educational activities for members and their families in an effort to raise education standards, often having reading rooms above grocery stores. Now, we continue this historical tradition through our Academy Programme.

As a sponsor, we pay little in the way of financial support to academies, however we offer them significant financial and business expertise, including high-quality governors and access to resources within our organisation.

The Co-operative Group launched its Academy Programme in 2010 with the opening of the Co-operative Academy of Manchester, followed by the opening of two further secondary and four primary academies.

### Where it all started...





## The **co-operative** academies trust

The Co-operative Academies Trust, has been created to help develop and deliver The Co-operative Group's vision for its academy programme:

"To inspire a new generation of high-achieving, aspirational, skilled and confident young people who fully understand and appreciate how a co-operative approach will prepare and enable them to play their part in the changing global society."

The Trust provides an effective and sustainable mechanism to drive collaboration, co-operation and efficiencies across each of the academies.

Four Co-operative academies already rated as **"Good"** by Ofsted – with some receiving this high grade for the first time, despite being poorly performing schools prior to the Group becoming sponsor.

The Trust has a board made up of colleagues with a range of expertise, including some with significant education experience drawn from Ofsted and local authorities. Each academy has a governing body responsible for implementing the agreed strategy at a local level, with most having a Chair of Governors provided by The Co-operative Group.

The Group doesn't just provide support to the Trust and governance of the academies, but also works with teachers to provide development opportunities for students. This can be in the form of work experience, soft-skills training, mentoring and more. We also strive to identify ways in which Co-operative employees can share their ways of working with academy staff.

## Introducing the Governors

School governors are the largest volunteer force in the country and there are many Co-operative employees and members who regularly dedicate their time to this challenging but rewarding role in our academies; bringing with them a wealth of business expertise and knowledge of the local area. Whilst governors from The Co-operative Group provide invaluable support to academy governing bodies, it is a two-way relationship that in turn provides opportunities for our employees to develop their leadership skills.

The Co-operative Group currently provides governors to six of our sponsored academies, with three acting as Chair of Governors. Our business governors are also joined by parents, teachers and volunteers from the local community.

Governors are critical to the success of schools – making key decisions and being responsible for:

- Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction
- Holding the head teacher to account – for the educational performance of the school and its pupils, and the performance management of staff
- Overseeing the financial performance of the school, ensuring its money is well spent

Ofsted has judged the quality of governance at our academies to be 'Good' or 'Outstanding' and has praised the quality of the contribution The Co-operative Group makes as a sponsor.



Lorinda Robinson, Head of Funeralcare Marketing and Chair of Governors for Nightingale Primary Academy, says:

"This voluntary role has given me a brilliant opportunity to make use of my business skills and play a positive role in the community. As Governors we provide strategic leadership, challenge and support for our academies, making a positive contribution to our children's education whilst enabling and strengthening the communities that we serve."



What Ofsted said...

“Governors robustly challenge senior leaders and effectively hold them to account for the improvement of the academy. They understand the academy’s strengths and areas for development.”  
**The Co-operative Academy of Stoke-on-Trent**

“Governors know the school extremely well and provide an excellent challenge and support to leaders in their drive for further improvement.”  
**The Co-operative Academy of Manchester**

“The Governing Body and the Director of the Trust have supported and challenged academy leaders well to make rapid improvements.”  
**The Co-operative Academy of Leeds**

**Over 800 hours** – the volunteer time of Co-operative Group colleagues last year to support activities at our three secondary academies.

The Co-operative Volunteer Programme

The Co-operative Volunteer Programme enables colleagues from all parts of the country to contribute to their local community. It provides individual and team volunteering opportunities to help with skills development, as well as making a real difference to the community – from painting school playgrounds, to mentoring young people and even becoming a school governor.

All businesses have an impact on the world around them and, in particular, their local communities. Our volunteering programme helps ensure that The Group’s is a positive impact, as volunteering speaks right to the heart of what we’re about as a co-operative.

The activities that Co-operative employees deliver for our academies are supported and reported on by our in-house volunteer team. We take our responsibilities very seriously, ensuring that all health and safety and safeguarding aspects of the activities we engage in are closely monitored, with all volunteers receiving thorough training.



Reading Partners

Launched in 2012, the Reading Partners Programme aims to raise literacy levels in the local area. Employees from The Co-operative Group volunteer within The Co-operative Academy of Stoke-on-Trent, as well as its feeder primary schools, to help pupils improve their reading skills.

The programme has seen improved reading levels, increased confidence, and has helped pupils to develop a love for reading. Volunteers say they have gained a better understanding of the local community, as well as having improved their own communication and listening skills since taking part in the programme.



## Work experience with The Co-operative

It is often noted that young people do not always have the required standards of communication and teamwork for the business world, and that some need help developing “soft” skills if they are going to appeal more to employers. Targeted at **Year 10 and Post-16 students**, The Group’s work experience programme aims to address this by providing students from our academies with the opportunity to develop an insight into the skills and attitudes required in the workplace, contributing to their personal and social development, and helping to influence their future career choices. We encourage individuals to be aspirational about what they can achieve, helping to increase their confidence and teaching them skills to ultimately help them find a job.

Through work experience, students gain an understanding of work, professional behaviour and attitudes, in particular The Co-operative value of self-responsibility. They see greater improvements in their confidence and belief in themselves as a direct result of their experience. Work experience is delivered in partnership with other Group-supported programmes such as our Apprenticeship Programme, giving students the maximum opportunities available.

Co-operative employees manage and champion the work experience programme, giving them an opportunity to develop management and coaching skills, while students often bring a new perspective to routine tasks.

In support of our revised purpose, the work experience programme on offer helps to raise The Co-operative’s profile within the communities surrounding our schools.

Since 2010, more than **100 students** from two of our three secondary academies have taken placements in Co-operative businesses.

100

“It refreshed my coaching and mentoring but more importantly it got the team thinking and reviewing what they do day to day. From a team leadership perspective that was the most important thing I wanted to get out of it; to introduce a questioning element to the team to make them think about how they work”

**Co-operative mentor**

“I feel more confident in what career path I want to go into”  
“I’ve gained lots of new skills and built up my confidence”

**Student quotes**

Students reflect that being expected to work like adults, and being given a level of professional responsibility, helps them to **develop a greater sense of pride in their work and actions.**



## Business engagement in schools

Each year The Co-operative Group provides numerous opportunities for employees to engage with our academies. This could be in response to requests for support received directly from the schools, or delivery of activities that have been developed by Group employees and deemed beneficial to academy students or staff.

The secondary academies regularly hold their open days with added support from The Co-operative, demonstrating first-hand the benefits of being sponsored by the business.

**Co-operative Food** colleagues provide product tastings as well as promoting the Food business to parents and carers of potential pupils.

**Membership** colleagues attend to showcase The Co-operative’s latest community projects. The Co-operative’s in-house **Apprenticeship Team** regularly attend careers’ fairs at our academies to promote apprenticeships as a viable career path for students. They are usually joined by a Co-operative Group apprentice, who will talk to students about their own experience.

In addition to this, representatives from the **Food** and **Funeralcare** businesses, as well as **IT colleagues** from The Co-operative’s **support centre** in Manchester, attend student and community careers fairs to provide information on their respective careers.

**Co-operative Funeralcare** colleagues have worked with the pastoral team at The Co-operative Academy of Leeds to provide them with bereavement guidance books and have even taken part in a Year 7 careers vocabulary busting session.



## Group inspires young people into work

The Co-operative Group has been awarded a **Business in the Community Big Tick** in recognition of the work-related learning opportunities offered to pupils at our academies.

By encouraging students to be aspirational about what they can achieve, and increasing their confidence through work experience and learning business and interpersonal skills, The Co-operative equips them with the knowledge to build successful working lives.

In addition to working directly with students, we also work with teaching staff at the academies to ensure that they understand how best to help their students into the world of work.

"My students and the community my academy serves have benefitted significantly from the programme. I am proud that several students now work at The Co-operative; some of my most vulnerable students have had a year's placement in the business and have gained the confidence they needed to be successful in their next steps. Through this programme we have seen these students go on to further programmes of study and work."

**Kathy Leaver, former Principal at The Co-operative Academy of Manchester**



## Pack your bags, you're off to Holland!

Pupils from The Co-operative Academy of Leeds gave up a Saturday to pack bags for customers at The Co-operative Food store in Chapel Allerton, Leeds, in a bid to raise funds for a school trip.

The Year 11 football team successfully raised £1000 towards a trip to Holland where they enjoyed taking part in a football mini-league with teams from Germany, Holland and Belgium.

Without the students demonstrating the Co-operative principle of self-help, alongside the fantastic support given by the Food business, their trip may well have not gone ahead due to affordability.

John Briddon from The Co-operative Food said: "We are always exploring the different ways in which our businesses can support our academies and this is a fantastic example of that."





## Good news stories

# Student achieves his university dream at the academy

A student from The Co-operative Academy of Manchester became the first ever student to be accepted at university directly from the academy, having met the conditions of his offer from Manchester Metropolitan University to study Finance and Accounting.



Sandy Fiddler, Assistant Vice Principal and Head of Sixth Form at the academy, approached The Co-operative Group with a request for a mentor to support a pupil studying A-Level Accounting. Abrar Ahmad from The Group's Accounts Payable team quickly volunteered and became a mentor for four months.

Abrar's line manager at the time of his volunteering, Diane Woolnough, said "This volunteering opportunity has had a positive impact on Abrar. I have seen first-hand how he has developed his interpersonal skills so it is a 'win-win' all around."

## Academy leaders go back to the classroom

Senior leaders from the academies attended a media training day in Manchester, where they were taught how to handle the media with the same training The Co-operative's Executive and senior management teams receive.

The intense one-day session, co-ordinated by Dave Smith from The Co-operative Group's Public Relations team, equipped academy leaders with the understanding, skills and confidence to work with the media in both positive and negative scenarios, as well as providing them with experience in print and broadcast media. The feedback from the academy leadership was very positive with several attendees confirming they would have increased confidence when dealing with the media going forward.

## The final word

Chain Effects – a report into the largest academy chains in England (of which The Co-operative Academies Trust is one) – identified that despite pupils having high levels of disadvantage and entering secondary education with low levels of attainment, The Co-operative Group-sponsored academies were judged an impressive **6th out of 32 academy chains** for the progress pupils made.

Talking in 2014, Steve Brice, Principal at The Co-operative Academy of Manchester said: "Staff and students at the academy are lucky to enjoy such close and productive links with our sponsor.

Throughout the course of the academic year, The Group has added value in real terms to support the work that we do to raise standards. I had the privilege of visiting our Year 10 students during their work experience placements in the summer. I was so impressed with the quality of the placements and experiences that had been made available, and by the commitment that Co-operative Group staff showed by really investing in our young people.

In addition, employees from The Group took the time to visit the academy throughout the year to take part in open days, lead assemblies and work with students in all year groups. Students also enjoyed rewards trips to 1 Angel Square, and all of this engagement with the sponsor remains key to the work we do to raise aspiration here at the academy each day."



## Useful websites

The Co-operative Academies Trust [www.co-operative.academy](http://www.co-operative.academy)

The Schools Co-operative Society [www.co-operativeschools.coop](http://www.co-operativeschools.coop)

The Co-operative College [www.co-op.ac.uk/schools-and-young-people](http://www.co-op.ac.uk/schools-and-young-people)

The Sutton Trust – Chain Effects  
[www.suttontrust.com/researcharchive/chain-effects](http://www.suttontrust.com/researcharchive/chain-effects)



## Contact

If you have any questions, or would like more information about The Co-operative Academy Programme, please email [workingwithschools@co-operative.coop](mailto:workingwithschools@co-operative.coop)



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