



Editorial

The year opened with the UK Government Department of Business and Trade's call for evidence on business support for co-operatives and non-financial mutuals. UK Society for Co-operative Studies (UKSCS) was one of the many organisations that responded to the call. The founding purpose of UKSCS is "to promote the exchange of information and experience on co-operative studies and research and to help in identifying and developing the studies and research still needed," so providing a response to the call for evidence was important. The report (UKSCS, 2026) highlighted three key challenges in doubling the co-operative economy: limited understanding of co-operatives as a distinct form of enterprise, low visibility of co-operatives in mainstream education and learning environments, and weak representation in data, statistics, and evidence base.

Of the four recommendations in the report, the first is to strengthen the visibility of co-operatives in business support materials. The emphasis on visibility is important because co-operatives are often invisible in public discourse (Mangan, 2021), only coming to people's attention during a scandal or crisis (Mangan & Byrne, 2018). The *Journal of Co-operative Studies* thus serves several important functions. It publishes scholarship on co-operatives, raises visibility of the co-operative model, and acts as a bridge linking theory and practice, academics and practitioners. Moreover, as the *Journal* is published by UKSCS rather than a for-profit academic publisher, the production as well as the content embodies co-operative values.

The summer issue showcases a range of co-operative voices and organisations demonstrating the rich landscape of co-operative research and experiences. The issue opens with Robin Neustaeter's history of women in the Antigonish Movement, Nova Scotia, Canada, between the 1930s and 1950s. Neustaeter's paper draws on the feminist archival case study entitled *What Can the Women Do?* to counter the marginalisation of women in co-operative history. The profiles of Mary Laben, Sr Monica Doyle, and Kay Thompson Desjardin demonstrate the women's significant contributions, voice, and influence on the Antigonish Movement. Their work was often invisible and yet women were engaged in a sustained effort to build and sustain their co-operative communities. This is work that could easily be forgotten or glossed over when more 'heroic' narratives are constructed, a point also made by Ruth Cohen (2020) in her history of Margaret Llewelyn Davis. By discussing the tensions, contradictions, and challenges experienced by the women, Neustaeter highlights the gendered nature of movements and draws important lessons about the complexities of building fair and equal societies.

Nathan Tamblyn offers a provocation by asking who owns a co-operative. In this article, Tamblyn queries the assumption that co-operatives are owned by their members. Instead, he argues that

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co-operatives are un-owned. Tamblin's argument is built from a careful reading of co-operative legislation. He begins by discussing co-operative identity, arguing that the enterprise is the co-operative, while the membership is an association of persons. Following some legislative history, the article draws on the Companies Act 2006 to discuss the legal conditions under which the term 'co-operative' can be used. It then discusses shares and other concepts of ownership, particularly democratic member control and profit sharing. By questioning our assumptions about co-operatives, Tamblin's goal is not to diminish them by questioning their identities, rather it is to highlight the importance of democratic member voice and finding a balance between social and economic objectives.

The tensions created by being co-operatives in a capitalist marketplace are also discussed by Smith and Discenza, who examine the experiences of North American retail co-operatives Mountain Equipment Co-operative (MEC) and Recreational Equipment Incorporated (REI). Smith and Discenza are particularly interested in co-operative degeneration, drawing on a range of documentary analysis to chart the challenges experienced by MEC and REI during 2021-24. MEC has been dissolved and converted to a for-profit corporation, while REI has experienced strategic and operational difficulties, including poor industrial relations with its workers. Smith and Discenza discuss self-help and accountability to members, democratic member control, and concern for community learning. They argue that economic ambitions should not be allowed to overshadow other co-operative principles and values.

McKeown, Mayoh, Ecclestone, and the women of *Deeds Not Words* report on a new co-operative venture, *Deeds Not Words* (DNW). Its aim is to support women who have had mental health difficulties and who have come out of prison. DNW, which takes its name from the suffragette slogan, is based in Edith Rigby House, a residential facility for women coming out of prison. It is an approved premises for Psychologically Informed Planned Environments (PIPE), which are a form of democratised therapeutic support. The article outlines the background and rationale for establishing the co-operative. The women of DWN then recount their experiences of being involved in the initiative, framed around the value of mutuality. Like Smith and Discenza, this article concludes with some reflections on co-operative principles and values. In this case, McKeown et al. discuss the complementary relationship between the democratic principles and the PIPE therapeutic model.

In the final paper, Tadgh Quill-Manley looks at the influence of European agricultural policy on the strategy of Irish dairy co-operatives between 1975-85. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was the main policy instrument at this time and Quill-Manley charts the possibilities and problems it created for Irish dairy farmers. Through a combination of official statistics and newspaper archives, the paper charts milk output, commercial development, milk poaching, and levies. It then examines the industry pressures created by the proposed milk cessation scheme, before concluding with reflections about the importance of adaptability.

Richard Bickle offers an appreciation of John Butler, who has died recently. John played a key role in the co-operative movement at local, regional, and national levels. His expertise, wide knowledge of the movement, and his reputation as an honest broker were vital. He was a leading member of UKSCS, including completing two lengthy periods as secretary of the society. Richard offers a fond appreciation of John and his invaluable contribution to co-operativism in the UK.

The issue closes with three book reviews. The first, by Andrew Bibby, assesses *The Co-operative College and a Century of Social Change* edited by Tom Woodin, Keith Vernon, and Linda Shaw. In a sad day for the Co-operative College and the wider co-operative movement, members voted to dissolve the College at an Extraordinary General Meeting on 13 May 2026, bringing to an end over a century of co-operative training and development. As Bibby notes, the book now seems like an obituary for the College, but that is not to take away from its significant achievements, particularly during the golden age of the 1950s and 1960s. Moreover, the detailed history also offers learning opportunities for future co-operators.

Anthony Webster reviews *Exploring Asian-Pacific Co-operatives in Theory and Practice: Resilience and Thriving between the State and the Market* edited by Morris Altman and Akira Kurimoto. He notes the book is an important addition to the legacy of the United Nations International Year of Co-operatives in 2025. The collection features academics and practitioners from across the Asian-Pacific region, many of whom are involved in the International Co-operative Alliance. This gives the book in-depth insights into developments in the region and offers particularly useful insights into how co-operatives can thrive in fast-changing capitalist markets. Finally, Nick Matthews reviews the third volume of Stephen Yeo's *A Useable Past: A History of Association, Co-operation, and un-Statist Socialism in 19th and early 20th Century Britain*. This volume focuses on the idea of a new moral world and Matthews points to Yeo's sensitive discussion of what it means to be human and ethical within the co-operative movement. This idea of what it means to be a genuinely co-operative society is one that gets to the heart of the co-operative movement.

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