

STAFF TRAINING WORKING PARTY

(This was set up by the Co-operative Union with representatives from the Central Executive, the Education Executive, the Co-operative Wholesale Society and the Scottish Co-operative Society. Its terms of reference were, in brief:-

"... to examine the provisions and service for all forms of co-operative staff training and education at present provided by the Co-operative Union and the Wholesale Societies, and to submit a report thereon with recommendations as to which organisation or organisations should be responsible in the future for these services and how adequate resources are to be made available to provide them."

The report was completed in the spring of 1973, has been accepted by the various parties and is now being put into effect. We give below the recommendations of the Working Party and then a commentary by Dr. A. Wilson.)

1. THE RECOMMENDATIONS

A Training Executive

It is recommended that a Training Executive be formed, which will have continuing responsibility for preparing and monitoring a co-ordinated programme of central services to the Movement.

(a) Constitution

The members of the Executive will be officers concerned professionally with training in the Co-operative Movement and two such officers will be appointed to the Executive by and from -

The Co-operative Union,
The Co-operative Wholesale Society Limited,
The Scottish Co-operative Society Limited,

together with two Retail Chief Officers appointed by the Central Executive, and two Retail Personnel/Training Officers appointed by the Central Executive on nomination by the Training Executive.

In addition, the Chairman will be the Chief Education Officer and thus provide a link with the College and Education Department for organisational purposes.

(b) Responsibility

The Executive will be responsible to the Central Executive of the Co-operative Union. The Central Executive is the main Committee of the Movement and is formed of representatives of the C.W.S., S.C.S., and Retail Societies. It is, therefore, considered to be the appropriate supervisory body to control the Training Executive, which will be serviced by the Co-operative Union.

(c) Function

Generally the Training Executive will ensure that in addition to their own internal

training requirements, the Wholesale Societies will provide facilities to meet the training needs in respect of retail personnel in individual societies and groups of societies up to and including branch managers and section heads. All other training and education requirements above this level will be met by the Co-operative Union. The other more general responsibilities at present carried by the Union, e.g. publications, representation to other bodies etc. will remain the responsibility of the Union, but it will draw upon the expertise and advice within the Training Executive as fully as possible.

The Executive will keep under review the training and education necessary to meet the immediate and future needs of retail societies, and the relevance and adequacy of the facilities provided by each organisation to meet those needs, recommending as necessary any changes required to be made to provide adequate services to fulfil the various provisions required.

The Executive will be charged to ensure that the provisions contributed by each organisation will be co-ordinated and that duplication will be avoided. Further, that the various services will provide continuity in education and training for the benefit of all types of co-operative employees and societies drawing on each other's facilities and resources as necessary.

(d) Staff

The Co-operative Union and Wholesale Societies will employ and remunerate their own staffs, and the Training Executive will endeavour, where possible to promote relative uniformity in salaries and conditions of service for the staffs severally employed by making appropriate recommendations to the organisations concerned.

(e) Finance

Where practicable economic charges will be made to societies for services provided. It is anticipated that the Wholesale Societies will make economic charges for the services which they provide. For those services provided by the Co-operative Union it is expected that economic charges will be made for short term courses, seminars, etc., but for longer-term courses, it is to be expected that the Co-operative Union will subsidise these to some extent from its own funds as the students frequently do not return to or stay with their initial societies after completion of their long-term training.

(f) Education Executive

At present the Education Executive is directly responsible to the Central Executive for Co-operative Union educational provisions of all types. The Education Executive will no longer be involved in staff training, but will concentrate on member and social education and provisions for students from overseas, and will,

under the control of the Central Executive, continue its present responsibility for Stanford Hall, which will also be used for such residential provisions of the Training Executive as may be appropriate. The standard provided at Stanford Hall will need to match the functions expected from it.

(g) Sectional Administration

The Sectional Secretaries of the Co-operative Union will be available to the Training Executive for such sectional duties as may be required.

STAFF TRAINING WORKING PARTY REPORT2. Comments on the Report

by

Dr. A. Wilson

(Dr. Wilson is Director of Studies in Management and Industrial Relations at the University of Manchester and was the first Chairman of the Society.)

The timing for this report and the subsequent establishment of the Training Executive is highly opportune. The new Training Act is about to come into force in August, with important implications for training programmes, training levies and supervision, and the major training boards affecting the movement, the DITB and the FDTITB have been rethinking their functions and modes of operation. Perhaps even more important has been the dramatic change in the structure of the Co-operative Movement in recent years which has resulted in the merging of the Co-operative Wholesale Society and the Scottish Co-operative Society, and with virtually the whole of the retail trade of the movement in the hands of 60 to 70 societies. The members of the working party are to be congratulated on producing a report which should bring some much needed clarification in an area which has troubled relationships between retail societies, the Co-operative Union and the wholesales for the last decade. In particular they appear to have reached a helpful compromise on the overlapping territory of education and training, and the framework which is proposed should enable the educators and trainers fulfil their respective responsibilities with clearer objectives than

has hitherto been possible. It should also enable the growing training capability of the Co-operative Wholesale Society to be harnessed more effectively to the training needs of retail societies.

There can be little point in further lamentation that the traditional importance accorded to education in the Co-operative Movement has been eroded by developments both within and without the movement. Member education is no longer what it was - nor is it likely to revert to the broad further educational provision which once admirably surrounded the more serious core of socio-political philosophy. Relatively generous schemes of staff education are difficult to afford in periods of rapid change, fierce competition and low profits. And, in an age of amalgamations, rationalisation and redundancy, there are troubling problems in relation to the careers of individual employees, who can no longer expect to serve out the whole of their working lives within the movement. The Central Executive might be thought to have been side-stepping these problems when laying down the terms of reference for the working party. To enunciate that "a fully comprehensive and adequate service should be provided for the Co-operative Movement for all types of staff training and education" is admirable but somewhat over-ambitious. Fortunately for the working party, it was given the less daunting task of examining "the provisions and service for all forms of co-operative staff training and education at present provided by the Co-operative Union and the Wholesale Societies", and of submitting a report with "recommendations as to which organisation or organisations should be responsible in the future for these services and how adequate resources are to be made available to provide them."

This apparently straightforward exercise is, of course, complicated by several factors, the most difficult of which is forecasting the training needs of a changing organisation in a rapidly changing industry. Training needs are partly dependent on the structure of the movement in five and ten years' time, and mainly on the long-term state of the distributive industries. How much expenditure, moreover, is justified in universal training in an industry where labour turnover is high? Then there is the vexed question to which there can be no final answer: how much concentration on staff training can be encouraged without seriously depriving the movement of resources and energy for staff education and member education? Obviously without effective staff training, the trading efficiency of the movement suffers, with consequent repercussions on resources available for education, but the proper balance raises philosophical qualms for many active co-operators. To the sympathetic observer, the lack of clear objectives and the in-fighting which has surrounded these matters has prevented the movement from achieving the optimum in either. Not least in importance are the problems of structural politics associated with the growing importance of the Co-operative Wholesale Society, and the decline of the Co-operative Union services. How much should the wholesale tail be encouraged to wag the dog?

Reasonable and Practicable

Certainly there was no lack of fascinating problems for the working party to get bogged down in if any of their members had felt so inclined. The report, however, indicates that the major issues were tackled in a constructive fashion, which has enabled the working party to come up with reasonable and practicable recommendations for action.

The compromise to take away from the Education Executive its staff training responsibilities while leaving it responsible for Stanford Hall, member education and overseas educational provision is sensible, provided it is not required to play poor relation to its new brother, the Training Executive, which will also be responsible to the Central Executive, but which will draw much of its funds from the Co-operative Wholesale Society and from direct service charges on retail societies. The composition of the Training Executive is both workably small and well balanced with appropriate professionals. The decision to cut off the T.E/Wholesale's responsibility for staff training services to retail societies at Branch Manager level will need to be reviewed as training programmes are developed. Much of the expertise of the Co-operative Wholesale Society staff training service has been in the development of more senior managers. Middle management training is the key area for operational efficiency, and Stanford Hall will need all the help it can get from the Co-operative Wholesale Society training service, if it is to play its role as the management college of the Movement.

The financial guideline that economic charges should be made to societies for services provided is also sensible. Perhaps one might hope that these services will not be subjected to excessively strict cost-benefit analysis, as it is impossible to quantify the full benefits in the short term. Meanwhile systematic in-society training along these lines should be facilitated by the impending changes in the ITB systems. It is right and proper that the Co-operative Union should continue to subsidise longer-term courses and member education courses and conferences at Stanford Hall, though presumably longer-term students from developing countries should be largely financed by ODA/British Council arrangements. It is also reassuring

to find a commitment of the Training Executive to "promote relative uniformity in salaries and conditions of service for the staffs severally employed" by the Co-operative Union and the Wholesale Societies. Anything less than this inevitably leaves Stanford Hall staff and sectional secretaries in an invidious position, and the principle of comparability should not be too difficult to apply if the financial will is sound. Another commitment which all who are sincerely interested in Co-operative education and training must welcome is in relation to the resources at Stanford Hall for senior management courses. "The standard provided at Stanford Hall will need to match the functions expected from it." Presumably this somewhat ambiguously worded recommendation betokens a recognition that Stanford Hall is capable of making an even more useful contribution to management development in the future, provided it does not continue to be tied to the sort of shoestring budget which has handicapped it in the recent past.