Business Support for Co-ops – peer mentor handbook

The Mentor Handbook is a guide for mentoring organisations providing mentoring support to successful groups via the Business Support for co-ops programme.

The Handbook sets out how the Business Support for co-ops programme is delivered, the processes involved as well as offering useful tips and guidance in delivering mentoring support.

How to use this document

- Use the contents listings on the right hand side (or below for mobile users)
- Use the search bar to search for specific content
- You can download the resource as a pdf
- There are editable templates at points during the document – download these to use during your sessions

About Business Support for Co-ops

The Business Support for Co-ops programme is delivered by Co-operatives UK, the voice for the UK's thousands of independent co-ops.

Business Support for Co-ops is supported by The Co-operative Bank, the only UK high street bank with a customer-led Ethical Policy, and co-operative values enshrined in its articles of association.

As part of its commitment to supporting co-operatives, Business Support for co-ops provides resources to help grow new co-ops and community businesses to start-up, existing co-ops to grow, and non co-ops to convert.

The Business Support for co-ops started out life as The Hive back in February 2016. To date over 1,200 groups have benefited from support.

What does the Business Support for co-ops programme offer?

Up to six days of tailored business support. Alongside expert advice, we will pair groups with an existing co-op to receive half a day of peer-support. The support includes:

- Start a co-op: Support for people wanting to launch their own co-op
- Help for your co-op: Support for existing trading co-ops to help them grow or adapt their services or those that might be going through a challenging time
- Convert to a co-op: Support for existing businesses wanting to become a co-op.

You can read case studies of groups and co-operatives that have successfully applied for expert advice or peer mentoring through this programme.

Find out about the Business Support for Co-ops programme

View support

Introduction

About the peer mentoring support

Peer mentors have been through the process of setting up a co-operative or community business and are able to provide groups with moral support, help with ideas-generation and act as a sounding board. Peer mentoring support is available for co-ops and community businesses at various stages of development, from business planning to setting up as a co-op. In this context, the term ‘mentoring’ describes a relationship in which an organisation (via the key people in it) is supported through a learning or developmental journey. It’s about reflecting, encouraging and supporting the new or existing enterprise to make the most of its potential.

Peer support from another co-op

Peer support is a great opportunity for new or existing co-ops to learn from those that have been in their position before. Peer mentors will have the lived experience of starting a co-op and getting it up and running and can offer insight into the challenges they might encounter and how to overcome them. Groups can get into the details of running the business or simply visit the mentoring organisation’s premises to get a sense of their day-to-day activities.

Half day peer support

Successful groups can receive half a day of peer-support with an existing co-op. Once we have assigned a co-op for peer support, it will be up to both parties to define how to best make use of this time. It can take the form of a few informal chats, sharing of useful documents or a visit to the co-op. We can also fund some travel. The aim is that they can learn from people who have set up their own co-op and been through similar experiences.

Applicants can suggest the co-op they would like to be paired with, or they can leave it to the programme team to propose the most appropriate co-op. Groups can find other co-ops by exploring ourdirectoryof co-ops. If the application is successful, we will make every effort to allocate groups to their preferred co-op. However, we reserve the right to offer an alternative based on availability, geography, skills and experience.

Reporting and payment

When you have completed the mentoring support with your client, please contact the Business support team at Co-operatives UK.

You will be sent an email containing a unique URL to complete an online survey. This is your opportunity to advise how the support was delivered, what went well, what could have been better and the impact of the support.

Once you have submitted your completed report you will be sent an automatic link to submit your invoice for the work undertaken, you should therefore prepare invoices for the work in advance of completing the form and have it to hand. At the same time, your client group will also be sent a report to provide feedback on the support received and specific impacts.

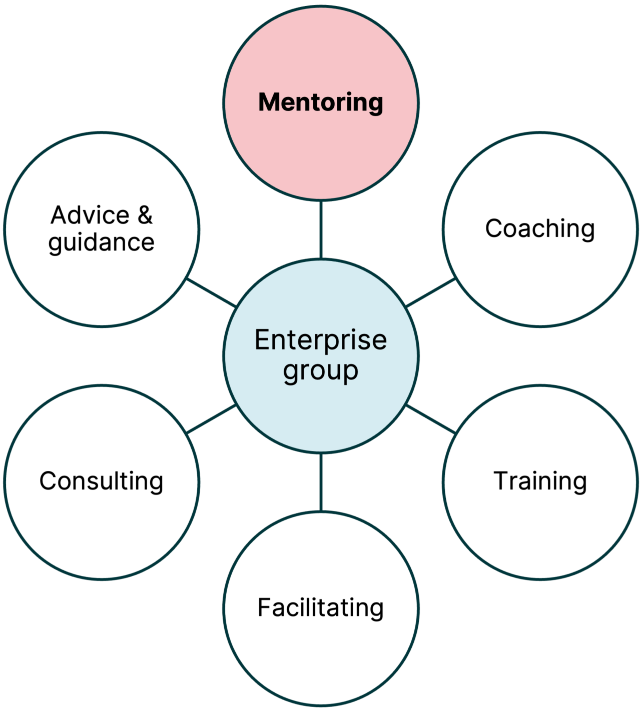
Payment terms

30 days, unless otherwise indicated

What is peer mentoring?

Mentoring is just one type of business support

Mentoring is just one type of business support, each of which is used in different circumstances and for different reasons. The main types of enterprise support are shown in the diagram below. What they all have in common is that the enterprise group – or mentee – is at the centre.



Types of enterprise support

Mentoring is often confused with some of these types of support. Mentoring can draw on these skills and activities but tends not to be the same as an adviser or coaching as per the table below.

	Adviser	Coach	Mentor
Focus	Guiding	Task and performance, building skills and competence	Building capability
Key skills	Imparting own experience and wisdom	Give feedback on performance	Helping mentees discover their own knowledge and experience
Goal orientation	Helps align individual and organisational goals	Helps mentee establish goals	Usually works with mentee’s own goals

	Adviser	Coach	Mentor
Closeness of relationship	Low to moderate	Moderate	Relatively high, can lead to a strong friendship
Flow of learning	Mainly one-way	Mainly one-way	Usually two-way

Benefits for our Mentors

Mentoring is a two way process and can be as beneficial to the mentor as it is to the mentee. As well as receiving some financial support for the time you put in, here are some more reasons to get involved:

- Many established co-ops already provide ad hoc support to new groups and can benefit from this formalised approach.

- Inspires, energises and motivates mentors to develop their potential and unleash the best in themselves.
- Provides a chance for mentors to step outside of the day-today environment and use their professional skills in an entirely new and rewarding context.
- Enhances interpersonal, communication and mentoring skills and the transfer of these skills back into the workplace.
- Delivers a rewarding sense of job satisfaction and energy from helping a mentee develop and grow their co-op enterprise.

- Mentors can find they expand their personal communication skills, developing their understanding of learning styles and how to share knowledge by asking the right questions, in an appropriate and open manner.
- Mentors realise they have huge amounts of tactical (practical) experience, and many find it extremely rewarding to support other people wherever they can.
- Often, established co-ops benefitted from the support of others themselves, and want to 'give something back'.
- Peer mentoring can be used as part of continuous professional development (CPD). Mentors develop new skills (for example social media skills) and perspectives from the mentee through "reverse mentoring".

Ways of working

Establishing a successful relationship with your client group

Once you have been matched with your client group we suggest that you:

- Draw up a timetable of regularly spaced meetings in advance – this can be a combination of face to face meetings (one to one or group); telephone discussions; and email exchanges and will vary according to the group
- Establish a set of ground rules
- Keep notes of your meetings and use these as the basis for ongoing discussions. Remember to capture any specific issues or learning that can be used by the programme.
- Work towards developing a trusting relationship and establishing a good rapport with your client group
- Use your questioning and listening skills to establish your client group's individual needs, remembering that these will be different based on them and their organisation's background and experiences.

We don't envisage that it will be necessary to have more than one face to face meeting and we would encourage you to do some of this by phone. Try to make the most of the first meeting and allow sufficient time.

Confidentiality

It's important that you respect each other's confidentiality. Remember that anything you talk about when you meet up is between the two of you so you shouldn't talk about it to someone else. But, legally, you should report any criminal conduct or possible harassment or bullying.

Four things to think about are:

1. Concerns: If you've got any, contact the Business Support for Co-ops team.
2. Secrets: Don't promise to keep any secrets. Make that clear from the beginning and remember to ask your client if they mind you sharing confidential information with anyone else.
3. Information: Keep information about your client (like their phone number) somewhere secure. Never share any of their financial details.
4. You: Confidentiality works both ways. Be aware of those personal areas of your life you're happy to share with your client and those you are not.

Early termination of the agreement

Although every effort will be made to ensure a close match between you and your client, sometimes this may still not work out. This may be not reflect on either party, and either party may finish the relationship, and exit the agreement.

If any issues arise during the programme, contact the Business Support for Co-ops team as soon as possible and every effort will be made to address any issues. Both parties will be contacted to confirm the situation and support if required another suitable Mentor/mentee may be arranged for both parties going forward.

Let Business Support for Co-ops team know when you've arranged your last session so that we can arrange a final review of both you and your client's experience.

Code of conduct

Professional Conduct and Quality Assurance

By taking on the role the Mentor agrees to adhere to our professional standards and specific terms and conditions and will take steps to avoid any conflicts of interest. We abide by The Global Code of Ethics For Coaches, Mentors, and Supervisors.

By taking on this role, the mentor agrees:

- To always act in a professional way, providing consistently high quality, responsive and timely support to the client group
- Ensure transparency and open communication with Co-operative UK
- If a client group / organisation asks a mentor to deliver further support outside of the scope of work agreed under the Business Support for co-ops programme, we expect Mentors to inform Co-operatives UK and to provide details of the support being requested/supplied. This is because if any issues/complaints arise as a direct result of work carried out by the provider without prior knowledge or agreement with Co-operatives UK, this could create a reputational risk for Co-operatives UK and/or partners.
- Alert Co-operatives UK to any issues / concerns with a client group / organisation, particularly where this could affect their ability to deliver aims and objectives and milestones. Failure to report concerns / risks immediately could affect the terms of Co-operatives UK contract with The Cooperative Bank.
- To respond to complaints / issues / feedback immediately and update the Business Support for co-ops programme team accordingly
- To provide reports to the Business Support for co-ops programme team using the template that we provide

Recognising equity and diversity

- Mentors will abide by their respective bodies' diversity statements and policies
- Mentors will avoid knowingly discriminating on any grounds and will seek to enhance their own awareness of possible areas of discrimination
- Mentors will be cognisant of the potential for unconscious bias and seek to ensure they take a respectful and inclusive approach, which embraces and explores individual difference
- Mentors will challenge in a supportive way any colleagues, employees, service providers, mentees or participants who are perceived to be using discriminatory behaviour
- Mentors will monitor their spoken, written and non-verbal communication for inadvertent discrimination
- Mentors will engage in developmental activities that are likely to increase their self-awareness in relation to equality and diversity

As part of our quality assurance processes, we will invite each client group / organisation to comment on the support provided during the programme lifetime (though the client group / organisation is able to comment or offer feedback on the direct support they receive at any time).

Mentor support toolkit

Overview

This section gives guidance on establishing roles and responsibilities, as well as ensuring an appropriate relationship between mentor and mentee:

- Mentor purpose and role
- Building trust and rapport with your mentee
- Mentor roles and responsibilities
- Mentee roles and responsibilities

Building trust and rapport with your mentee

Mentoring is about mutual trust and respect. It's a two-way relationship in which both sides get the chance to learn new things and further personal and organisational development. We have selected your organisation as a mentor because of the experience you have gained from which your mentee can learn. Every mentoring relationship is different; but all mentoring relationships present the opportunity for both mentor and mentee to learn from each other.

Get to know your mentee

- Talk about their business and their life outside it. Try to understand what they think and why. Value their viewpoint
- Taking time to build rapport with your mentee will help you to get the most from the mentoring relationship. Rapport comes from shared values or experiences, and sometimes from a 'chemistry' that is hard to define

Do what you say you're going to do

- Agree what you are aiming to achieve through your mentoring sessions
- Be reliable and always do what you say you are going to do

Communicate openly and honestly

- Discuss issues as soon as they arise
- Ask for and give feedback
- Don't set unrealistic expectations about what mentoring can achieve

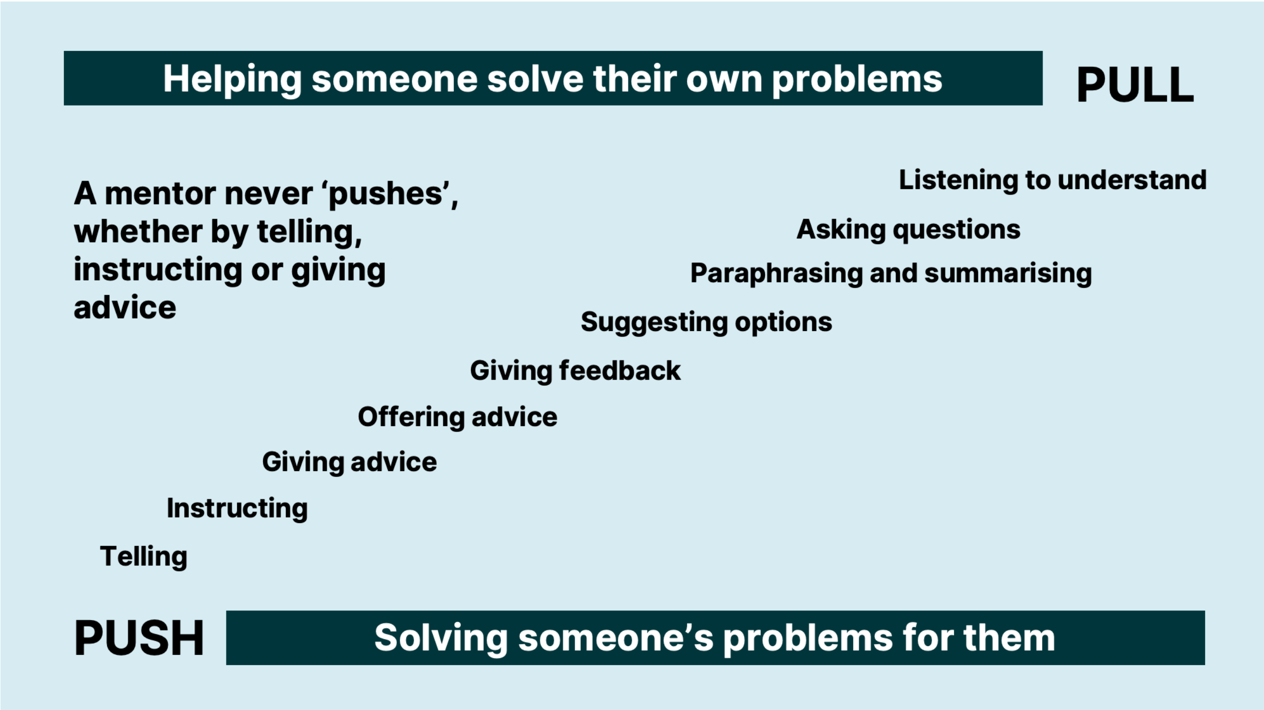
Don't be afraid to challenge

Don’t be afraid to challenge

- Your open, honest relationship will allow you to challenge your mentee constructively to explore a wider viewpoint

Mentors ‘pull’ – they don’t push

A mentor never ‘pushes’, whether by telling, instructing or giving advice.



Mentor purpose and role

The role of a mentor is to build sustainable, trusting relationships with mentees (new and developing co-operative enterprises) to assist them with setting up and developing their business and successfully help them to navigate the complex financial, regulatory and organisational hurdles.

We envisage that mentees will see their mentors as a sounding board and business friend.

Mentors will generate problem solving ideas and encourage strategic thinking. From an objective viewpoint, a good mentor offers choices as opposed to directives. They help to spot problems, and support their partner organisation to work through them.

Mentors will not be expected to replace the role of consultants on the mentees projects, such as legal or technical advisors, but will hopefully provide support to enable their mentees to make more efficient use of such advice, and to help choose reliable and experienced people to support their projects.

It is perceived that mentoring activities will be undertaken using a range of interventions to include face to face meetings (one to one or group), telephone discussions and e mail exchanges.

Mentor roles and responsibilities

The Mentor

- Facilitates improvement in the mentee, self-reflection, and learning
- Acts as a compassionate, empathetic, and attentive sounding board for the mentee and provides constructive, pragmatic feedback and guidance
- Offers encouragement and explores the mentee's ideas, assumptions, and decisions with them
- Shares their own relevant experiences of addressing challenges/issues, including lessons learnt
- Creates a 'safe', open, and non-judgemental learning environment. The mentee should be able to challenge and question without fear of an adverse reaction
- Signposts the mentee to useful resources, events (learning and networking events) and may suggest other developmental activities
- Prepares appropriately for the sessions
- Engages with mentees to agree how mentoring could support their prospective business
- Helps mentees to review their progress and set realistic and practical options to realise their goals
- Helps mentees to reflect on and learn from things that did not turn out as expected
- Encourages mentees to take responsibility for their own decisions, plans and actions

For the experience, skills and technical expertise of the mentoring organisations to be helpful to new and developing co-operative businesses, we need mentor organisations and the individuals within them to work in an enabling and supportive way.

We would like mentor organisations to think back to earlier stages of their development to consider what would have been helpful to them, and to listen to the expressed needs of their mentee organisation to support them moving forward. Sometimes moral support and encouragement could be just as important as discussing different technical or finance options.

An enterprise mentor is normally someone who has a great deal of business experience and who acts as a trusted confidante over a flexible period of time. It can be a close and meaningful relationship, in which the mentor shares their personal knowledge and experiences and promotes a self-discovery approach.

A mentor will normally:

A mentor will normally:

- Provide an outside perspective on the enterprise owner and the enterprise group
- Listen, in confidence, to the things that are worrying the group
- Help by sharing their own experience of failures and successes
- Give friendly, unbiased support and guidance
- Provide honest and constructive feedback
- Be a sounding board for ideas
- Facilitate decision-making by suggesting alternatives based on personal experience
- Provide ongoing support and encouragement
- Help in building networks - mentors can be an important gateway in making introductions, and helping them identify and contact influential people who will be useful to them

We would not expect a mentor to:

- Provide detailed technical or legal advice which the group will rely on (this will normally be provided by a qualified business adviser)
- Provide a counselling service
- Provide a training service
- Provide a coaching service
- Provide therapeutic interventions
- Sort out all the mentee’s problems
- Take responsibility for making their mentee’s business a success or make decisions for the mentee

Key skills of a mentor:

- Listening to understand
- Questioning to clarify and make sure they’ve understood correctly
- Questioning to explore additional options and consequences
- Being prepared to act on what has been agreed with their mentee
- Business or professional expertise – the accumulated wisdom of having ‘been there and done it before’
- Sense of proportion – the ability to place issues in a broader context
- Relationship management – being experienced in rapport building and general social skills

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Role and responsibilities – Mentee

The Mentee

- Discusses their preference for the frequency of sessions with the mentor and decides the items for discussion.
- Identifies and clarifies their individual and organisational goals and aspirations.
- Reflects on their business and personal challenges, issues, strengths, and developmental needs.
- Explores future needs and next steps.
- Is responsible for their own development, for any decisions they make, and any potential consequences.
- Takes responsibility for making changes.
- Is open to new ideas, is open to exploring issues, and receiving constructive feedback.
- Is committed to the process.

Tools and techniques

Overview

This section outlines a number of useful tools and techniques to work through when mentoring:

- 20 key questions
- Goal setting and action planning
- The GROW Model
- SWOT Analysis
- G-STAR model

20 key questions

Here are 20 key questions that maybe useful to ask in your meetings with your mentee group:

1. “What will give you the most value from today’s session?”
2. “What do you want to focus on today?”
3. “What is keeping you awake at night?”
4. “What is the present situation in detail?”
5. “What is happening now that is working well?”
6. “What is happening now that tells you that you have a problem?”
7. “What do you have control over?”
8. “What strengths and resources do you bring to this?”
9. “Where do you want to be a year from now? How will you measure your success?”
10. “If you had to find a way, what would it be?”
11. “What do you not know about this situation/project? How could you find out?”
12. “If you improved one thing you do, what change would make the biggest improvement to your business’s performance?”
13. “What would you do if you knew you couldn’t fail?”
14. “What do you enjoy about what you do?”
15. “What might you be overlooking?”
16. “Who else has done this before?”
17. “What have you learned from this?”
18. “What can you do differently next time?”
19. “What did you do well?”
20. “What will you do next?”

G-STAR model

This is a particularly useful technique to help your client think about a particular issue – it can often be a fast track to the real answers your client group is looking for.

G What are your clients/ GOALS?

- What are your goals for today's discussion?
- What will give you the most value from today's session?
- Do you have control over this issue?
- When do you need to achieve this goal by?

S What SITUATION is your client facing?

- How do you feel about the situation?
- How can you describe the situation?
- What do you know about the current situation?
- What do you not know about the current situation?

T What is their THINKING at this time?

- What options have you considered about the situation?
- What underlying assumptions are you making?
- Think how others would solve this problem.
- Think about how you will measure your success.

A What ACTIONS are they considering?

- What do you need to do first?
- By when do you need to have this done?
- In what sequence will you do these tasks?
- Can you think of anything that may disrupt your actions?

R What RESULTS do they expect?

- Are the results realistic?
- Have you considered other outcomes?
- What contingencies can you put in place?
- What are the consequences of not achieving these results?

Goal setting and action planning

A great way to start is by setting goals and making an action plan. This will keep you on track and help you to:

- Find out where your client needs support
- Agree goals that they can work towards

- Gauge how you are doing and keep an eye on your goals
- Pat each other on the back for your successes

Goals are most useful when they are SMART:

Specific	For example, rather than 'get a website', say 'choose a suitable domain name for my business'
Measurable	Decide how you'll know when you've achieved it
Achievable	Can you do it?
Realistic	Do you think you have a real prospect of reaching your goal?
Timed	Is this a long-term or short-term goal? Agree timescales for each goal – you won't be able to get everything done at once

SWOT Analysis

This is a useful technique for understanding strengths and weaknesses and identifying opportunities and threats. It is a framework that your client group can use to analyse themselves and can help them to craft a strategy that will help towards success.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Opportunities	Threats

The following questions can help you to guide your client to complete the SWOT grid for their own enterprise

Strengths

- What advantages does your enterprise have over competitors?
- What do you do better than anyone else?
- What unique or lowest-cost resources can you draw upon that others can't?
- What is the level of community support?
- What expertise does your team bring to the table?

Weaknesses

- What could you improve?
- What should you avoid?
- What are people in your market likely to see as weaknesses?

Opportunities

- What good opportunities can you spot?
- What interesting trends are you aware of? Useful opportunities can come from such things as local events or changes in technology, markets, government policy, social patterns,

population profiles and lifestyle changes.

Threats

- What obstacles do you face?
- What are your competitors doing?
- Are quality standards or specifications for your job, products or services changing?
- Do you have bad debt or cash-flow problems?
- Could any of your weaknesses seriously threaten your business?

Encourage your client group to think widely and creatively with their SWOT. Could any threats become opportunities, for example?

The GROW model

Whilst the GROW model is based on coaching, it can also be adapted for mentoring. It is usually more suited to individual one to one mentoring.

What is the GROW model

The GROW model was developed by Sir John Whitmore (1937-2017) in conjunction with colleagues in the 1980s and disseminated through his book 'Coaching for Performance' (Whitmore 2019), first published in 1992 and now in its 25th edition having been translated into 20 languages. GROW provides a framework for a coaching session, a conversation, a meeting or a project and is the best known coaching model in the world today:

GOALS (or objectives)	The mentee sets out their goal for the session, which might start out by being vague. With the help of the mentor, these can be clarified so they they become clearer.
REALITY	The current situation, including any barriers to the goals that might exist, including a reality check to see if the mentee perceives the true situation.
OPTIONS	The mentee is encouraged to look at a variety of alternatives and evaluate them.
WILL / WAY FORWARD	The mentee chooses a course of action.

The GROW sequence illustrates the solution focus of coaching and breaks down like this:

Goal

The Goal section of GROW is addressed at the beginning of each session and referred to again from time to time to keep the focus moving forward, especially if the mentee becomes stuck. It raises energy and clarifies thinking. Identifying what we want to achieve puts us on the path to accomplishing it by focusing on the solution rather than the problem.

Some Goal questions are:

- What do you want?
- Over what time frame?
- Where would you like to be on a scale of 1–10?
- Imagine you have achieved it:
- What do you want to achieve in five years/one year/three months?
- How could you say your goal in a few words?
- Which part of that is the real focus?

Reality

This is an exploration of the mentee's world at the moment. Time spent here helps people get clear about what is happening and how it affects themselves and others. It provides an opportunity for viewing issues from different perspectives.

Some useful questions here are:

- What is happening at the moment?
- How important is this to you?
- If an ideal situation is 10, what number are you at now?
- What have you done so far?
- What are you doing that's working towards your goal?
- What are you doing that is getting in the way of your goal?

Options

Mentees will move naturally towards the Options stage as their Reality becomes clearer. Then it is useful to ask some of these questions:

- What are your options?
- What could you do?
- What else?
- What steps could you take?
- Who could help you with this?
- Where could you find out the information?

Notice that most of these questions are almost all open. Keep asking open questions until the mentee has stopped coming up with options on the table. Once it seems that the list is complete, ask the closed question 'is there anything else?' to find out whether it is time to finalise the process. This question often results in new options and can be asked as many times as it continues to deliver results.

Will / Way forward

As opposed to 'Options', which brings to light all possibilities, 'Will' is about discovering which actions the mentee can commit to undertaking. When asked, 'What will you do about this?' there is a danger that the mentee will make a list of what they think they should do, rather than choosing a pathway which suits their talents and ways of behaviour.

Some examples of Will questions are:

- What will you do about that?
- How will you do that?
- When?
- What will it take for you to commit to that action?
- Where will you find that?
- Who will you talk to?
- What else you could you do?

If the coach senses a lack of commitment, a question like, ‘How committed are you to doing that?’ should be asked straight away. If there is any hesitation, it is best to go back into the GROW process to clear any blocks and find the most comfortable way forward.

Flexibility of GROW

It is crucial to understand that the components of GROW do not necessarily follow that order; an effective coaching conversation usually starts by exploring Goal and Reality, but then moves about between all four elements.

Further support and resources

Mentors should make use of their own experience, knowledge and networks to sign-post mentees to further advice, support agencies and resources etc.

Co-operatives UK

Co-operatives UK offers a useful step by step guide on setting up a co-operative (community business).

Co-operatives UK also provides a simple subsidised digital registration service to register your Co-operative or Community Benefit Society with a regulatory body on your behalf. Registration costs £150 which includes VAT and the statutory fee. This fee is subsidised thanks to The Co-operative Bank, as part of Business Support for co-ops programme for co-ops. If you use this service, you will also receive one year's membership to Co-operatives UK.

Our funding and support section lists a range of agencies, support programmes and funding agencies.

Community Shares

Community shares is a user-friendly name for withdrawable, non-transferable share capital, which is unique to co-operative and community benefit societies. Since 2012, over £200m has been raised by more than 126,000 people in community shares across the UK.