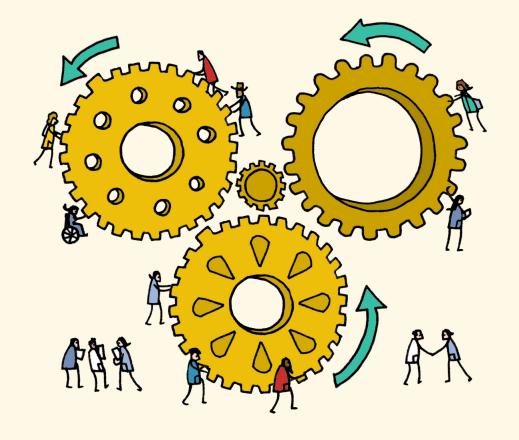


A report on the UK's co-operative sector









The Co-op Economy 2021

"Co-ops distribute their power through one member one vote and anchor their shared wealth in the communities they operate in. At a time when we're looking to build back better the co-op model, proven over time, is being re-discovered by people looking to build a fair and equitable future and this report evidences that."

Rose Marley, CEO, Co-operatives UK



The Co-op Economy is the only comprehensive report on the UK's co-operative sector. It reveals turnover, membership and employee figures for thousands of co-op enterprises across the UK.

Co-ops are democratically owned and controlled by their members. They exist to meet common needs and aspirations, not to pay dividends to shareholders. They share power and wealth and are guided by a clear set of values and principles. They possess the attributes the UK needs to build back better - yet co-ops represent less than 1% of the total number of UK businesses.

This report demonstrates that co-ops have become even more valuable to the communities in which they operate during the Covid pandemic. It adds to the growing volume of evidence that co-ops are far more resilient than other business types. Co-ops are shown to be more ambitious - and are growing in number. To build back better the UK needs businesses that do more for their communities. It needs principled businesses that do the right thing each and every day. It needs businesses owned and controlled by the people most invested in long-term success, not short-term profits. To build back better the UK needs more co-ops.

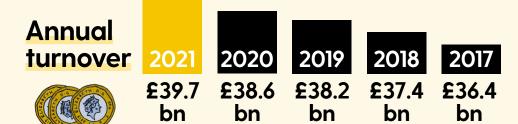


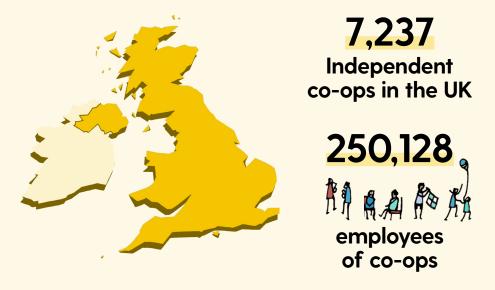
A democratic economy

There are **7,237 independent co-ops** operating across the UK. They operate across all industries, from farming to finance and from energy to education, with high street retailer The Co-op being the UK's biggest co-op by turnover. The UK's co-ops have a combined turnover of **£39.7 billion** - up more than a billion from 2020.

Co-ops help create a more democratic economy. There are **almost 14 million** memberships of co-ops in the UK. That's millions of people who each have a say in how these co-op businesses are run. It's democracy at work every day.

Co-ops are guided by a clear set of values and principles. Ethically run, they do more for the communities in which they operate. They are valid businesses that demonstrate on a daily basis that doing the right thing and success should and can go hand in hand. The question is... why aren't there more?





Memberships of co-ops

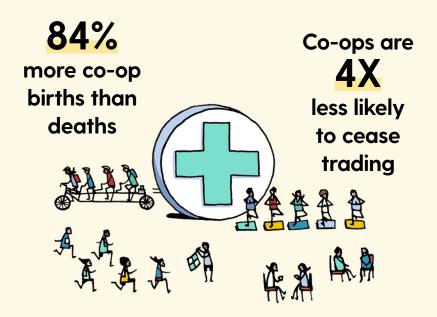
2021	13.9 million
2020	14.0 million
2019	14.0 million

Co-op resilience to Covid

The spread of Covid has left national economies, entire sectors and individual businesses counting the cost, yet co-ops have proved more resilient to the pandemic.

The number of co-ops operating across the UK grew by 1.2% between 2020 and 2021, with almost twice as many co-ops created as dissolved (197 versus 107). In contrast, there has been a net reduction in the UK's business numbers, with the number of new-starts down and the proportion of company 'deaths' increasing by 17% – from 344,660 to 389, 956 – over the course of 2020.

Covid has had a devastating effect on the economy and people's lives. Yet co-ops, because they are created to meet the needs of their members, proved **four times less likely** to cease trading during 2020. As owners, those members – whether customers, suppliers or workers – have a vested interest in the success of the co-op over the long term. Co-ops can help the UK build back better by giving people better options in the way they consume, earn a living and do business.





1.2% growth in number of UK co-ops

"Why are co-ops so resilient? The co-operative purpose, ownership and governance all dictate long-termism. In an economic shock it's the members calling the shots in their collective, long-term interests, not investors making decisions based on short-term returns.

"Co-ops patiently build-up and reinvest reserves and use members' capital wherever possible, rather than piling on debt to achieve faster growth."

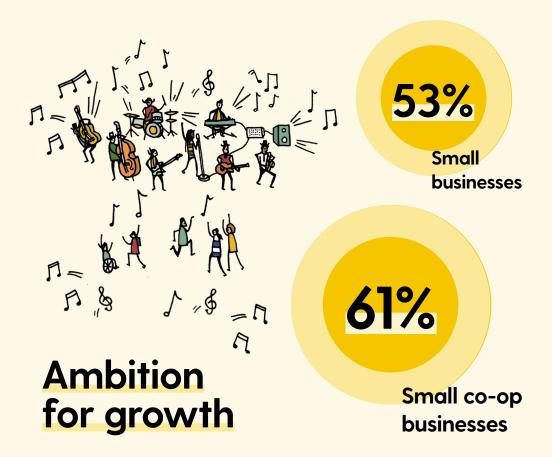
Rose Marley CEO, Co-operatives UK

Ambitious co-ops

The co-op determination to succeed has been undaunted by Covid. Of the 68% of co-ops with ambitions to scale and/or diversify before the pandemic, 73% still have the same ambitions, with 15% even more ambitious. Just 4% of co-ops say Covid has forced them to reduce their ambitions.

Small co-ops are markedly more ambitious than small businesses generally. **An impressive 61%** of co-ops expressed ambitions to grow and/or develop in the first quarter of 2021 compared with 53% of small businesses generally.³

The commitment of the people closest to each and every one of the UK's thousands of co-op businesses – the members – is fuelling and driving co-op ambition. A striking 44% of co-ops identified the **support of committed** members as being a clear benefit during the pandemic.



"Our ambition is to provide grocery and food co-ops with access to the same leading edge technology regardless of their size, and using this technology to help communities across the world open their own grocery co-ops."

Stephen Gill VME Co-op



¹ Total business numbers as published by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, 2020

² Company birth/death rates as published by the Office of National Statistics, 2021

³ Business ambition as published by the Federation of Small Businesses, 2021

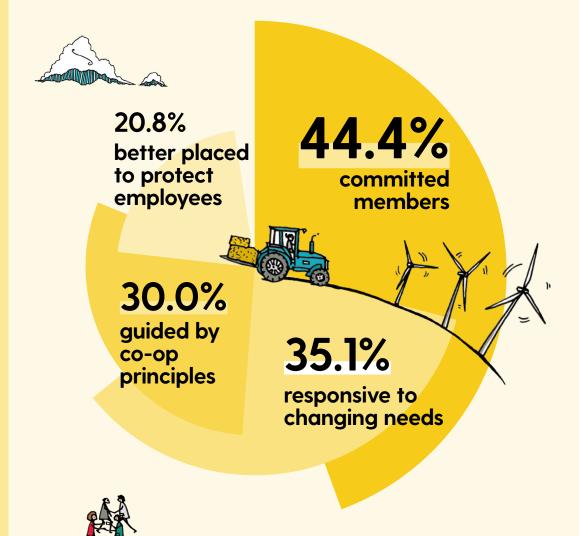
The co-op difference

Co-ops share power and wealth. Their mutual purpose and distinctive 'one member one vote' democracy drives inclusion and fairness, enhances well-being, builds resilience and makes co-ops effective at meeting common needs.

Co-ops have performed comparatively well during the pandemic – and their design is the major factor. 92% of co-ops identified at least one clear benefit of being a member-owned business during Covid. The most commonly identified benefits were having the support of committed members (44%) and being able to respond to the needs of members, customers and communities (35%).

"Three years ago I'd be looking out at a field – there'd be nothing here. Now we've a £1.2 million facility that's supported by the whole community. To receive the amount of support we received is incredible. The investors are now the owners – and it's a community that will only grow bigger. What we are building here is sustainable."

Carl Barrett, Wythenshawe AFC Chairman



Co-op benefits

through Covid

Case study: Crescent Management

The performing arts industry has suffered immeasurably through Covid. As the word lockdown became an everyday term, work for actors vanished overnight. Yet in the midst of the global pandemic a co-operative actors' agency adapted – and even managed to reduce the commissions it takes.

Crescent Management is a London-based actors' co-operative agent. All 24 carefully selected actors its represents are also members of the co-op and agents - with each committed to representing the agency. The members were forced to make some tough decisions – including vacating their London office – when the impacts of Covid struck.

"Work for actors literally fell off a cliff," said co-op member Emily Outred. "We gave up our office pretty much as soon as Covid hit. We've all had tough times. And come next year when a lot of theatres will inevitably go bust, the picture will be very different again."

Decisions were all made for the long-term benefit of the co-op and its members – who of course are the actors themselves. Those decisions included reducing the commissions the agency takes. Emily said: "Being a co-op has made a huge difference. Many actors' agencies have just collapsed. Even if the employees of those agencies had switched to working from home there's still salaries to be paid."



"It's a real democracy here," added Emily. "There's nothing that's decided by head honchos. We take joint responsibility for our careers and we take the time to get to know each other and each other's work."

Actors taking more control over their own livelihoods has not met with universal approval. And the members need to buy into the collective ethos. Emily said: "Britain can be very snobby in the entertainment industry. Co-ops are sometimes looked down upon – viewed as being second best to the top agents. That can be problematic.

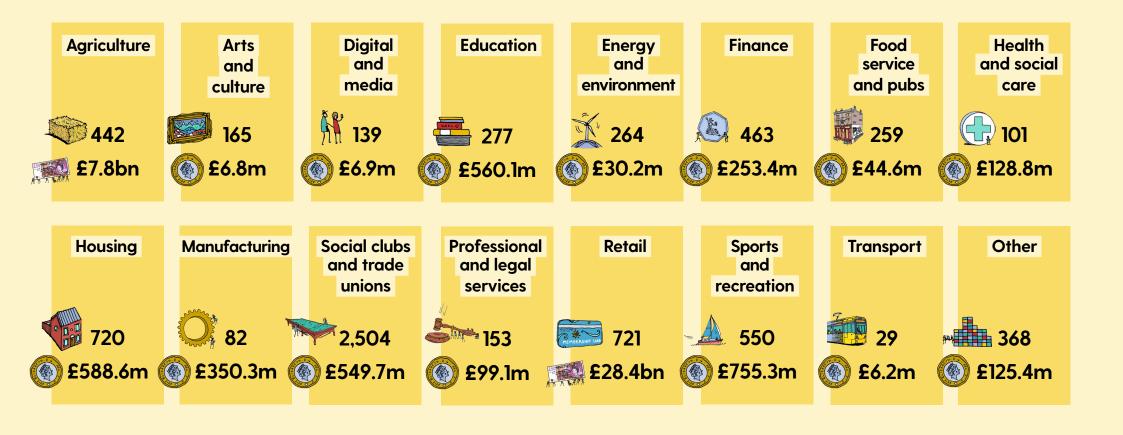
"It's a very very competitive business, but you have to be selfless here. Whether the competition for roles is within our agency or not, you'd be up against the same people anyway, We're all trying to get each other into that same room. You have to be ego-less and do what's best for each other collectively."

The 24 members of Crescent Management work together in a "massive job share." Covid has made training new members a trickier process, particularly in terms of the complexity of industry standard software. However, giving members collective responsibility over their careers is proving a win-win.

Emily said: "Most people come to co-ops for a number of reasons. They want to really understand the business; they want more control. There's not the pressure from agents to take work - you can say 'I don't fancy that'. It's really empowering. There's more transparency in what we do. There's much more freedom."



Number of co-ops and turnover by sector



Communities in control

Communities are increasingly taking control over local assets and enterprise; building and retaining wealth. There are 1,585 community-owned co-ops in the UK – an increase of 2.7% from 2020.

Hundreds of communities across the UK have safeguarded valuable businesses and created new ones using community shares, a unique form of local investment. From pubs to piers and shops to skate parks, there have been 357 community share offers since 2017 and 40 during a Covid-hit 2020. Those share offers have raised £111.4 million (£17.8 million in 2020); money that is retained within those communities and that helps generate additional local wealth.

Community co-ops like Bridgend Farmhouse, in Edinburgh, have also provided support for those hardest hit by Covid The once derelict farmhouse was converted into a community hub using funds raised through a community share offer. During the pandemic it provided critical support including the distribution of more than 75,000 meals and the provision of bikes for key workers.



...worth £111,4m in share equity

"We completed a community action research project with local volunteers during the pandemic, consulting with over 400 local households about their experiences and ideas to improve life in their community."

William Golding, Bridgend Farmhouss



co-op turnover

Number of community co-ops

2021 2020 1.585 1.544

2019

1481

1.412

Case study: Dewsbury Arcade

Residents in Dewsbury, West Yorkshire, are taking matters into their own hands to reinvigorate their declining town centre by creating the UK's first community-owned shopping centre.

With beautiful roof ironwork, the arcade in Dewsbury dates back to 1899 and was a popular shopping destination until 2014. A combination of decreasing footfall, poor management and lack of investment saw the arcade empty out and finally close.

Now, plans are afoot to regenerate the arcade by filling it with independent retailers from the town. Residents have formed The Arcade Dewsbury and intend to launch a community share offer in 2021. The aim is to raise £150,000 for the first year's lease and operating costs.

Chris Hill is a community property developer and Board Secretary to the community business. He's also been appointed Project Officer by Kirklees Council with a brief to develop the arcade. Chris said: "We want this to be an incubator for retail in the town centre. We want to fill the arcade with independent local businesses, selling everything from bath bombs to cakes, zines and antiques. It will be the first community owned shopping centre in the UK.



"The plan is to go on to lease or buy more empty shops. This is how small towns can come back again; how they can build back from the pandemic, and the years of decline prior to that. You've got to get in that community energy that can produce interesting stuff in town centres."

Chris and his colleagues – a group of entrepreneurs from Dewsbury – have been working hard behind the scenes. Working with the council, they have been business planning and lobbying to secure funding to refurbish the building. The plan is for the council to lease the regenerated space to the co-op once renovations are complete.

The Arcade Dewsbury is awaiting confirmation of preferred bidder status, which will give them the green light to go ahead with the share offer. "Forty percent of the population is of South Asian heritage – and we want the arcade to reflect this," said Chris. "We've already had expressions of interest that will guarantee a representative mix of traders. When we come to the share issue, we're going to be Sharia compliant too."

Chris is hoping to attract as many local people as possible to invest in the project. He said: "The great thing about a community benefit society is that it keeps money local. It involves local people in controlling it and keeps wealth within a community. We plan to set up project groups that give members responsibility for new activities like pop-up shops, for example."

Chris has developed other community buildings and knows the benefits it can bring. "On a previous project, a woman with little experience got involved and fabulously grew into the senior manager of the trust. Involving local people to take on responsibility empowers individuals – and towns – to realise their potential."

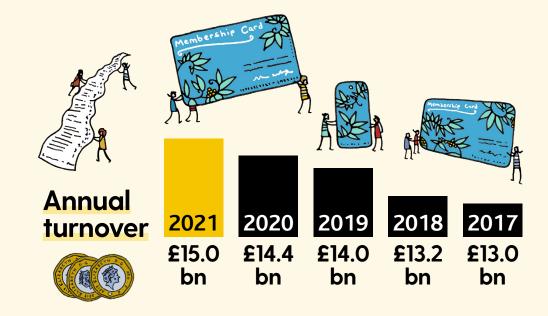


Customer owned retailers

The UK's co-op retail societies are some of the most well known and recognised businesses on the high street. Led by The Co-op, they continue to grow, contributing £15 billion per year to the UK economy – an increase of 4.2%. They also stand out because of how they are owned.

The retail societies are owned by their customers. Co-op membership is very different to a store or loyalty card. It means the businesses are beholden to their members, who have a genuine say in how the co-ops operate. The retail societies have a community focus and stand up for what their customers believe in.

The Midcounties Co-op, the UK's third biggest retail society by turnover, mobilised more than 1,000 volunteers and 100 community groups to make over 100,000 home deliveries to support vulnerable members. It also worked to dramatically grow its local supplier base to support local businesses in crisis. And The Co-op will come out of this pandemic paying front-line colleagues the Real Living Wage, while doubling the amount it distributes to local communities.



"The inequalities and unfairness that existed long before the pandemic, grip our communities even harder today. If we genuinely want to build back Britain different and better, then this must be a decade of collective action, where decisions are taken and implemented for the benefit of communities across the UK so we address the inequalities that have plagued our nation for simply too long.

"The heart of every co-operative has always been the idea that by coming together we can all improve our situation, and make sure that nobody gets left behind. We know that by taking a co-operative approach, we will achieve far more overall. Together the sum of the parts will create a greater whole."

Steve Murrells CEO, The Co-op

Worker control

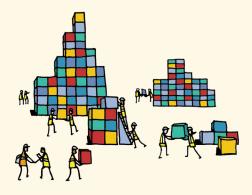
Worker co-ops – those businesses owned and controlled by the workers - performed especially well against the challenges of Covid. Our research also shows they were particularly effective at protecting worker well-being. Despite the pandemic, the slight year-on-year drop worker co-op numbers has been arrested, with the figure remaining at 394.

The picture improves further when taking into account multi-stakeholder co-ops, self-employed co-ops and employee trusts – those businesses typically characterised by worker ownership and control. Alongside a marginal increase in the number of individual businesses to 1.111, combined turnover has grown by almost £600 million (4.6%) to £13.1 billion.

With their focus on worker empowerment and 'good' jobs, worker co-ops highlighted their ability to be extra-flexible through Covid; managing furlough and sharing roles while putting worker well-being front and centre. As renewable tech co-op Dulas put it: "We've all stuck it out for each other, taken extra responsibility and gone the extra mile to carry out tasks on behalf of each other."







"Certainly the fact we are good at and receptive to short term change, to benefit the business, meant we reacted quickly and well to make decisions through the Covid pandemic."

Ross Hodgson, Suma







£13.1 bn



£12.5 bn



£12.5 bn

2018

£12.3 bn

2017

£12.0 bn

How to build back better

This resilience of co-ops, with new-starts typically around twice as likely to survive the difficult first five years as businesses generally, has been evidenced over time. This report goes even further, demonstrating that in times of acute stress that resilience is even more apparent, with co-ops four times less likely to cease trading.

The report also reveals that the co-op economy is growing - number of businesses and overall turnover – despite Covid. It shows that co-ops remain ambitious, markedly more so than other businesses, and that the distinctive, power-sharing and member ownership fabric of co-ops is a critical factor. Yet all this is happening despite low awareness of co-ops and an often unhelpful environment that government does little about.

We are now asking national and local policymakers to provide business support that caters to co-ops. We also need the UK government to provide a world-class corporate framework for the UK's ambitious co-ops. If government is serious about levelling-up and building back better, these should be priorities.

Read our policy asks >>





The co-operative top 100

Top 100 ranking			In directory, an atom	Trumparan	Oversamahin
2021	2020	Organisation name	Industry sector	Turnover	Ownership
1	1	Co-operative Group Limited	Retail	£11,472,000,000	Consumers
2	2	John Lewis Partnership PLC	Retail	£10,771,800,000	Employee Trust
3	3	Arla Foods Limited	Agriculture	£2,468,716,000.	Enterprises
4	4	National Merchant Buying Society Limited	Retail	£1,931,347,000	Enterprises
5	5	Central England Co-operative Limited	Retail	£868,014,000	Consumers
6	6	The Midcounties Co-operative Limited	ative Limited Retail		Consumers
7	7	Openfield Group Limited	Agriculture	£637,921,000	Enterprises
8	8	Dale Farm Co-operative Limited	Agriculture	£504,528,000	Enterprises
9	9	Mole Valley Farmers Limited	Agriculture	£495,374,000	Enterprises
10	10	The Southern Co-operative Limited	tive Limited Retail		Consumers
11	11	Scottish Midland Co-operative Society Limited	Retail	£409,084,000	Consumers
12	12	East of England Co-operative Society Limited	Retail	£349,571,000	Consumers
13	13	Berry Gardens Growers Limited	Agriculture	£329,229,000	Enterprises
14	14	Greenwich Leisure Limited	Sports and Recreation	£302,609,904	Multi-stakeholder
15	16	The AF Group Limited	Agriculture	£287,169,134	Enterprises
16	17	First Milk Limited	Agriculture	£282,803,000	Enterprises



Top 100 ranking		Own and in ortion to some	la distance a stan	T	O
2021	2020	Organisation name	Industry sector	Turnover	Ownership
17	15	Lincolnshire Co-operative Limited	Retail	£243,158,000	Consumers
18	19	LacPatrick Dairies (NI) Limited	Agriculture	£219,498,943	Enterprises
19	20	Fram Farmers Limited	Agriculture	£201,025,707	Enterprises
20	18	Scott Bader Company Limited	Manufacturing	£196,496,000	Employee Trust
21	21	The Channel Islands Co-operative Society Limited	Retail	£185,038,000	Consumers
22	New entry	Richer Sounds Limited	Retail	£176,012,000	Employee Trust
23	22	GrainCo Limited	Agriculture	£174,694,335	Enterprises
24	23	The Co-operative Academies Trust	Education	£163,663,000	Multi-stakeholder
25	24	Fane Valley Co-operative Society Limited	Agriculture	£155,429,444	Enterprises
26	27	ANM Group Limited	Agriculture	£117,221,000	Enterprises
27	29	Woldmarsh Producers Limited	Agriculture	£114,715,438	Enterprises
28	30	Farm Fresh PO Limited	Agriculture	£113,842,966	Enterprises
29	31	Brandsby Agricultural Trading Association Limited	Agriculture	£108,753,903	Enterprises
30	28	Agricultural Central Trading Limited	Agriculture	£101,723,230	Consumers
31	32	United Farmers Limited	Agriculture	£99,206,349	Enterprises
32	25	United Oilseed Producers Limited	Agriculture	£96,126,251	Enterprises
33	35	International Exhibition Co-operative Wine Society Limited	Retail	£94,236,000	Consumers
34	26	Fengrain Limited	Retail	£93,589,129	Enterprises
35	38	Heart of England Co-operative Society Limited	Retail	£92,100,000	Consumers
36	New entry	Kite Packaging Group Limited	Other	£91,244,000	Employee Trust
37	34	Meadow Quality Limited	Retail	£91,005,516	Enterprises
38	33	Organic Milk Suppliers Co-operative Limited	Agriculture	£90,466,000	Enterprises
39	36	Yorkshire Farmers Livestock Marketing Limited	Agriculture	£84,958,847	Enterprises
40	40 Chelmsford Star Co-operative Society Limited Retail		Retail	£84,584,503	Consumers



Top 100 ranking		O	la dissans a satan	T	O
2021	2020	Organisation name	Industry sector	Turnover	Ownership
41	37	Wealden Leisure Limited	Sports and Recreation	£83,060,685	Multi-stakeholder
42	42	G's Growers Limited	Agriculture	£67,906,000	Enterprises
43	39	Tarff Valley Limited	Agriculture	£67,685,135	Enterprises
44	47	Scotlean Pigs Limited	Agriculture	£66,229,868	Enterprises
45	41	Speciality Produce Limited	Agriculture	£65,097,375	Enterprises
46	45	Aquascot Limited	Manufacturing	£65,086,047	Employee Trust
47	52	South Caernarvon Creameries Limited	Agriculture	£64,247,811	Enterprises
48	44	Scottish Pig Producers Limited	Agriculture	£63,301,409	Enterprises
49	46	Long Clawson Dairy Limited	Agriculture	£60,629,000	Enterprises
50	43	Camping and Caravanning Club Limited (The)	Membership associations, social clubs and trade unions	£58,466,000	Consumers
51	48	Rochdale Boroughwide Housing Limited	Housing	£56,239,000	Multi-stakeholder
52	50	Trivallis Limited	Housing	£56,139,000	Multi-stakeholder
53	51	Steer Davies & Gleave Limited	Professional and Legal services	£54,836,377	Employee Trust
54	49	Triangle Wholefoods Collective Limited	Retail	£54,341,735	Workers
55	53	Clynderwen and Cardiganshire Farmers Limited	Agriculture	£51,231,624	Enterprises
56	55	Bron Afon Community Housing Limited	Housing	£48,200,000	Multi-stakeholder
57	54	Eastlight Community Homes Limited	Housing	£48,016,000	Tenants
58	New entry	BMAT Education	Education	£47,277,000	Multi-stakeholder
59	64	Surrey County Cricket Club Limited	Sports and Recreation	£45,090,000	Community of Interest
60	57	Tullis Russell Group Limited	Manufacturing	£41,735,000	Employee Trust
61	58	Radstock Co-operative Society Limited	Retail	£37,801,923	Consumers
62	61	Phoenix Community Housing Association (Bellingham and Downham) Limited	Housing	£36,870,000.	Multi-stakeholder
63	59	Watford Community Housing Trust	Housing	£34,928,000	Tenants
64	79	Lancashire County Cricket Club Limited	Sports and Recreation	£34,049,923	Community of Interest



Top 100 ranking		Organisation name	Industry coeter	Turnovor	Ownership	
2021	2020	Organisation name	Industry sector	Turnover	Ownership	
65	62	B A K O (Western) Limited	Retail	£33,501,257	Enterprises	
66	60	Osborne Co-operative Academy Trust	Education	£33,380,000	Multi-stakeholder	
67	65	Community Gateway Association Limited	Housing	£31,258,000	Multi-stakeholder	
68	67	Local Care Direct Limited	Health and Social Care	£30,653,571	Community of Interest	
69	66	Bedfordshire Schools Trust Limited	Education	£27,838,000	Multi-stakeholder	
70	69	Infinity Foods Co-operative Limited	Retail	£27,540,219	Workers	
71	72	Argyll Community Housing Association Limited	Housing	£26,893,000	Multi-stakeholder	
72	74	Cartrefi Cymru Co-operative Limited	Health and Social Care	£25,837,739	Multi-stakeholder	
73	68	Education And Leadership Trust	Education	£24,849,151	Multi-stakeholder	
74	71	Aspatria Farmers Limited	Agriculture	£24,460,718	Enterprises	
75	73	Scottish Shellfish Marketing Group Limited	Agriculture	£23,461,714	Enterprises	
76	75	Tamworth Co-operative Society Limited	Retail	£23,149,000	Consumers	
77	84	East of Scotland Farmers Limited	Agriculture	£22,410,799	Enterprises	
78	76	Mockbeggar Limited	Retail	£22,092,958	Enterprises	
79	87	South Armagh Farming Enterprises Limited	Agriculture	£20,599,710	Enterprises	
80	70	UIA (Insurance) Limited	Finance	£20,311,000	Consumers	
81	77	Merthyr Valleys Homes Limited	Housing	£20,203,000	Multi-stakeholder	
82	78	The Passmores Co-operative Learning Community	Education	£20,059,661	Multi-stakeholder	
83	85	Essential Trading Co-operative Limited	Retail	£19,769,728	Workers	
84	80	City Learning Trust	Education	£19,608,970	Multi-stakeholder	
85	New entry	Leger Education Trust	Education	£19,425,000	Multi-stakeholder	
86	81	Dengie Crops Limited	Agriculture	£18,672,301	Enterprises	
87	88	Coastal Grains Marketing Limited	Agriculture	£18,605,455	Enterprises	
88	82	Interchange and Consort Hotels Limited	Food service, Accommodation and Pubs	£18,579,578	Enterprises	



Top 100) ranking	Our amination name	landi satus canatas	Trumporer	Oversamahin
2021	2020	Organisation name	Industry sector	Turnover	Ownership
89	83	Hay and Brecon Farmers Limited	Agriculture	£17,596,891	Enterprises
90	86	Warwickshire County Cricket Club Limited	Sports and Recreation	£17,275,390	Community of Interest
91	90	Littleton & Badsey Growers Limited	Agriculture	£17,214,205	Enterprises
92	99	Cadwyn Housing Association Limited	Housing	£17,210,000	Multi-stakeholder
93	98	North East Grains Limited	Agriculture	£16,508,183	Enterprises
94	89	Farm Stock (Scotland) Limited	Agriculture	£16,460,415	Enterprises
95	95	Fresh Growers Limited	Agriculture	£15,553,262	Enterprises
96	New entry	Weald Granary Limited	Agriculture	£15,443,715	Enterprises 🙀 🐧
97	91	Watmos Community Homes	Housing	£15,119,000	Multi-stakeholder
98	New entry	Scott & Fyfe Limited	Manufacturing	£14,786,000	Employee Trust
99	93	Welsh Bakers Buying Group Limited	Retail	£14,454,551	Enterprises CT
100	94	Salford Community Leisure Limited	Sports and Recreation	£14,452,861	Multi-stakeholder

About this report

The Co-op Economy report has been compiled by Co-operatives UK on behalf of the UK co-operative movement. The report analyses data from thousands of co-op businesses across the UK for the period 2006 to 2021, including a representative sample of the UK's co-ops through the 2021 Co-op Economy survey (3.6% of the UK's co-ops).

Co-operatives UK monitors a range of data sources to provide the most comprehensive intelligence available on the UK co-operative sector. Data is collected from a range of sources including the Financial Conduct Authority and Companies House and it is continually updated to ensure it is accurate, complete and trustworthy.

We make our data openly available to allow anyone to access, analyse, build upon, share, and help us improve it. By making the data open, Co-operatives UK affirms this and offers a route for users to identify gaps and areas for improvement. The annual figures featured in the Co-op Economy report are re-based when new data is added or existing data updated. This means year-on-year data and trends are accurate in each report, though there may be differences if comparing across different publications. In 2015-16, a significant change was made to the methodology used to compile the dataset. This has led to an increase in its accuracy, but with a notable change in level of turnover reported in previous reports.

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Find out more at ww.uk.coop/open-data