

Evaluation of
Wales Co-operatives Centre's
Services

April 2004

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Executive Summary and Conclusion

The Evaluation

The evaluation of Wales Co-operative Centre was undertaken by a team from the Tavistock Institute between March and October 2003. It comprised a number of activities:

- Independent investigation of best case study examples of WCC cases
- A broad-based survey of a selection of WCC clients
- An extensive range of interviews with sponsors, funders and partners
- Documentary review of internal and associated papers set in the context of the literature
- Interviews and focus group meetings with managers and staff
- Comparison research with organisations offering similar services across the UK presented to WCC staff and managers in a workshop

The evaluation focussed on:

- WCC Services, especially the Credit Union Support Project and the Enterprise Rehearsal Project, which were each separately funded
- WCC as an organisation delivering those services

WCC Services

The report covers the three main service streams provided by WCC at the time of our evaluation – Support to Co-operatives, Credit Union Support and the Enterprise Rehearsal Project. Each of these are reported on separately, the reports on Credit Union Support and the Enterprise Rehearsal Project in more detail.

Co-operative Support

The Co-operatives Support Team comprises a set of specialists in different areas of co-operative support, such as business succession and co-operative start-up, and provides support to a variety of co-operative forms, including manufacturing

enterprises, secondary agricultural co-operatives and community co-operatives through training, business planning and registration processes. It maintains partnerships with other key service providers, especially solicitors and funders to co-operative enterprises such as ICOF.

The evaluation concludes that:

- Support to co-operative enterprises comprises the core competence of WCC's activities and unique selling point. It gives practical expression to values of solidarity and secures them through their legal constitution, making more likely their continued contribution to the social economy as well as to social capital in Wales more generally.
- Co-operative organizational solutions are often the only economic option available to safeguard or extend employment opportunities.
- WCC's work with co-operatives has protected local amenities, created jobs and added value to local economic welfare, sometimes in isolated communities where there are limited alternative routes to employment and economic activity.
- Co-operative support provided by WCC is highly rated by clients and, in many cases, seen as essential to job creation or protection and economic wellbeing.

Credit Union National Project

The Credit Union National Project (CUNP) provides training and business development support to credit unions in Wales in partnership with the Association of British Credit Unions (ABCUL) who have been developing representative capacity in the CU movement in Wales. The CUNP also administers the Credit Union Development Grant Fund on behalf of the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG), provided through European and WAG funding. The Development Grant aims at step increases in size and capability of the credit union movement in Wales over the period of its funding.

The evaluation concludes that the Project supports credit unions in developing into more sound financial institutions, contributing to financial inclusion, the wellbeing of members and communities and adding value to local economies through:

- Providing support and development services to credit unions that are highly rated by their stakeholders and clients, who see WCC role as essential

- Acting impartially and conscientiously in discharging their duties as Secretariat to the Credit Union Development Grant Fund Board so that the Fund is used to maximum effect
- Undertaking its administration of the grant rigorously and provides clear transparency in its recording of grant administration, including monitoring of targets
- Efficiency in its disbursement of large sums of money, ensuring that targets are addressed in a way which is equitable between large and small credit unions and is rated equally highly by both.

The CUNP is currently developing the marketing framework essential expansion in membership which is the next stage of credit union development in Wales, the expansion.

The evaluation recommends that:

- *The CUNP considers how it might assist credit unions in gearing up their financial and accounting systems to manage a large expansion in membership.*
- *The CUNP tracks the progress of research findings in the sector, such as the current action research programme in the West Midlands, to identify further development support for credit unions*

The Enterprise Rehearsal Project

The Enterprise Rehearsal Project provides support for six months to people within six weeks of first receipt of benefit. The project is delivered in partnership with Menter a Busnes, which provides a sister-service for the seasonally unemployed within The Enterprise Factory, funded by the Welsh Development Agency (WDA).

The evaluation shows that the project:

- Provides skilled and empathic business start-up support to people on benefit
- Adds value to the work of a range of statutory and voluntary sector agencies
- Is unique in working with this client group to support self-employment
- Wins high satisfaction rates from clients

- Is especially valued for its business planning support
- Offers vital support in helping clients identify start-up funding
- Can result in successful clients becoming employers, thereby adding further value to the economy of Wales

WCC as an organisation

WCC is considered in this report in relation to its strategic, business process, management and learning aspects.

The evaluation concludes that in terms of its **strategic performance**:

- WCC performs outstandingly well in relation to its strategic position. In particular:
- WCC's relationship with funders and sponsors has consolidated a leading position in the social economy of Wales
- WCC has considerably extended their position by demonstrating that it can play a major role in delivering to meet the objectives of AG and the WDA for the social economy
- This demonstration requires continual hard work with sponsors and funders to explicate how WCC can help realise policy objectives
- WCC works with a wide range of partners to develop new opportunities for job creation and local economic activity to the benefit of people and communities in Wales and secure social benefits through sound organisation
- WCC can provide valued leadership in the social economy but this leadership can only be won through being seen to serve the interests of other partners

In relation to **business processes and administration**, the evaluation concludes that:

- WCC business planning processes and administration are exemplary and enable it to provide value for money in delivering services

In **management** of a diverse and dispersed work group, the evaluation concludes that :

- WCC is addressing the demand for greater management capability for an increased, increasingly diverse and dispersed staff group in a number of ways

And recommends that

- *WCC new management team would benefit from a management development programme to identify and implement future options*

In relation to learning and evaluation, the evaluation concludes:

- WCC creates multiple opportunities for the staff group to come together and engage in collective evaluation and learning
- WCC staff group as a whole do not yet fully share a common language which would underpin collective evaluation and learning

And recommends that:

- *WCC should seek specialist advice and facilitation in developing greater engagement and learning across the staff group*

A. Introduction

A. 1. The evaluation

This paper provides the draft final report of the evaluation of Wales Co-operative Centre (WCC) Services and organisational review undertaken by a team led by the Tavistock Institute between March and October 2003. The evaluation aimed to provide an evaluation of services, particularly of the Credit Union National Project and the Enterprise Rehearsal Project, for which funding was separately provided. Further funding was made available by the Centre in order to learn about its support to services and organisational performance more broadly.

A.2. Methodology

This section sets out the main data collection methods used and accounts of the survey, comparison research and analytic tools used in the organisational review.

A.2.1. Data Collection methods

A range of data collection activities were envisaged for this study.

First, in relation to WCC support services by the Co-operative Support Team, the Credit Union National Project and the Enterprise Rehearsal Team, data collection activities included:

- An independent investigation of best case examples of WCC Services which included separate interviews with beneficiaries and staff members and, where applicable, document analysis
- A survey of a sample of ten per cent of WCC clients selected on a quota basis. The selection criteria were based on the aim of gaining the viewpoints of a wide range of enterprises, both in terms of the type of enterprise and a good geographical spread in the areas in which WCC operates. The telephone interviews were undertaken by a bilingual Welsh/English-speaking team to clarify their expectations and capture their experiences and ratings of the services received
- Interviews with sponsors, funders and partners
- Group interviews with each of the teams delivering the services and individual interviews with their managers were conducted
- A range of documentary material was examined.

More resources in data capture and analytic activities were focussed on the Credit Union National Project and Enterprise Rehearsal Project team activities to reflect the more extensive funding for the evaluation of these services. On the other hand, the evaluation undertook more case study work in relation to the Co-operatives stream to capture the wide diversity of their activities. More documentary review and additional interviews with members of the Credit Union Development Grant Board were undertaken in order to understand the work of the Centre in administering the CU Development Grant Fund administration for which they are also responsible. A set of interviews was also undertaken in relation to WCC's role in the Communities First Support Network, although this work was at an early stage during the evaluation. The data from these interviews is therefore employed in relation to organisational performance rather than reported separately in relation to Services.

Second, in relation to WCC's organisational performance, a further set of activities included:

- Interviews with staff, managers and Board members
- Interviews with partners
- Documentary review and
- Comparison research

A.2.2. The Case Studies

The aims of the case study methodology were to:

- Explore how WCC staff work to support business development
- Map the possible impacts of successful business development
- Prepare for the survey of a larger sample of WCC clients (for example, ensuring that questions made sense)
- Provide independent verification of best case examples.

The case study methodology adopted was to use clients' own narrative frameworks to understand the WCC staff role, for example through critical incidents. The case studies involved an interview with the staff member responsible for providing support, a visit to the enterprise for an extended interview with the direct beneficiary and, in one or two cases, with employees or those involved subsequently, together with observation of the enterprise in action and documentary review. Case study selection was through staff nominating best case exemplars.

A.2.3. The Survey

Purpose of the survey and implications for the sample

An important task for the evaluation was to assess the extent to which the services offered by WCC are matched to the needs of users. The case studies provided accounts of best case examples of WCC Services in terms of achieving the results intended for them. The role of the survey in the evaluation was to examine whether these cases were unusual or misleading in terms of the assessment of support provided by services or whether the positive results achieved by Centre services in relation to the case studies could be more broadly generalised to the service user population. The survey sample was therefore structured to generate responses from a sample of each of the three main services – The Enterprise Rehearsal Project, the Credit Union National Project and the Co-operative Support Project.

Table 1: Sample in relation to population by service

	No. in total population	No. in sample	% of sample of total population
Co-ops	119	18	15.1
ERP	423	60	14.2
Credit unions	47	21	44.7
Total	589	99	

(Note: The population from which the sample was drawn included the total client group for the Credit Union National Project and for the Enterprise Rehearsal Project, reduced in the case of ERP from 465 to 423 due to absent addresses or telephone numbers. In the case of the Co-operative Support Team the population used was based on a database of 129, structured to provide representation of different types of co-operatives supported. This population was reduced to 119 through excluding case study subjects and absent addresses.)

Telephone survey

From the outset, the evaluation proposed a telephone survey of a sample of WCC clients, rather than a poll of the total population by self-administered questionnaire. While considerably more expensive than a postal survey, a telephone interview has several advantages which were deemed to be key to the evaluation of WCC:

- First, the survey comprised both closed items and some open-ended questions, and interviewers could ensure through clarification of questions and answers, that questions were understood in a standard way and responses would therefore have more reliability.
- Second, the integrity of the sample, its coverage and hence its validity in providing the basis for broader generalisation, could be ensured; by contrast a postal survey would be more likely to generate erratic responses
- Third, the issue of the trading position of the businesses was important to establish; successful businesses were more likely to have moved on from

their original address and a telephone survey was more likely to track down the respondents outlined for the sample.

The evaluation team considered that the issues of reliability and validity of data from the survey was more likely to be satisfied through a telephone survey of a quota sample than by a larger number of responses from a postal survey.

Survey results for each of the services is presented in the evaluation report for that service.

A.2.4.Organisation studies

The organisational study of WCC was conducted through standard methods and instruments. All staff members were involved in group interviews conducted on a team basis in which they were asked to respond to a standard organizational diagnostic question; 9 staff members were involved in telephone or face to face interviews to triangulate this data. Documentary review was also conducted to help answer the following questions:

What does the organisation say it does? Proposals for funding, information and marketing materials, internal papers

What does the organisation do? Survey and case study findings

How does the organisation know what it does? Activity reports from staff

A.2.5.Comparison research

The comparison research was originally envisaged as a best practice benchmarking exercise in which WCC staff would compare their performance in key areas with those in organisations providing similar services. Considerable efforts were made to research and recruit organisations providing comparable services. However for a number of reasons the envisaged benchmarking activity evolved into a more general comparison exercise. Although the other organisations participating were not Wales-based, it was a struggle to find comparable services. The rapid change in the UK social economy environment also destabilised the aims of the exercise. A number of organisations were in the process of revising their positions in relation to the kinds of services WCC offers. In addition, there were issues of confidentiality and in some cases a desire to report on philosophy and ideology which did not match WCC staff aspirations for the exercise. Four out of five of the comparator organisations subsequently agreed an account of their operations which could be shared with WCC and these are appended to the report. In the fifth case, the organisation was mid-review and did not want to publicly commit themselves to a position they may wish to change in the near future.

A.3. Structure Of This Report

The main body of the report provides an evaluation of each of WCC's main services during the period of the evaluation: the Co-operative Support Team, the Credit Union National Project and the Enterprise Rehearsal Team. The elements reporting on CUNP and ERP are also made available as stand-alone documents.

B. WCC Services

B.1. Introduction

Specific issues addressed in this section related to WCC clients' needs in terms of

- the suitability of the Centre's current range of services to the needs of its client groups
- the efficiency and effectiveness of the specific services in relationship to their target client groups

The suitability of the Centre's current range of services to the needs of its client groups and the efficiency and effectiveness of the specific services in relationship to their target client groups are important criteria for the evaluation for WCC and its stakeholders: clients can only benefit from services which meet their needs and sponsors and other stakeholders support WCC to the extent that client needs are met. Providing services to their clients can be seen as the primary task of WCC – its main purpose and on which its continued survival depend.

B.2. The Evaluation Of the Co-Operative Support Team

B.2.1. Introduction

The Co-operatives Team comprises a set of specialists in different areas of co-operative support, such as business succession and co-operative start-up, and provides support to a variety of co-operative forms, including manufacturing enterprises, secondary agricultural co-operatives and community co-operatives through training, business planning and registration processes. It maintains close relationships with other key service providers, especially solicitors and specialist funders to co-operative enterprises such as ICOF. Data for this section includes case studies, survey results and documentary review of Co-operative Team Activity Reports, Handbook and other monitoring material.

B.2.2. The Case Studies

A number of different case studies was undertaken to reflect the variety of types of enterprise which are supported by the team.

EOM Electrical Contractors – a Business Succession case

When the family run Evan Morgan Ltd went into receivership in July 1995, its 12 employees decided they would 'stick together' rather than go their separate ways. In a somewhat extraordinary move, the owner of Evan Morgan Ltd, now in

receivership, contacted the WDA (then DBRW) who then got him in contact with the WCC.

The 12 employees felt that Newtown and the surrounding area could accommodate them all but they wanted to work together rather than go solo. They felt that staying together allowed them to bid for large projects as well as doing work a solo person could do. As a larger entity they would also be better equipped to absorb shock from late or non-payment of their services.

When WCC arrived on the scene the consensus was to stick together but some confusion as to how best to do this. The employees had already had discussions with HSBC Bank (then Midlands Bank) and local accountants. WCC staff came over and led them through the process. The employee group secured a loan from HSBC Bank's Small Loans Scheme themselves. WCC staff helped with putting together a business plan, brought in a specialist solicitor to take care of legal issues and gave some general advice along the way. The new employee owned company, EOM Electrical Contractors, was trading by December 1995.

The growth of EOM has been phenomenal. They now have over 40 employees and are the largest electrical contractor in the area with a turnover of £1.6 million expected this year. The relationship with the WCC has not been severed. The WCC staff member 'drops by' when he is in the area. The WCC staff member has also come back to Derek Morgan, EOM Managing Director's request, to talk to staff about co-operatives and what they are all about and then again to set up an Employee Trust with a statutory pension and issuing shares. Derek Morgan also talks in Business Succession Seminars held by the WCC two to three times a year.

Impacts include:

- maintaining real jobs and creating new jobs
- contributing to the local economy through providing a local service
- social impacts through developing staff capacity to engage

Datrys Consulting Engineers – a Business Succession case

Holland based international engineers, architects and consultants, Posford Duvivier, decided to close down their North Wales Office. The Director of the Office, Paul Williams, was approached and offered a management buyout.

Paul had no capital to sink into such an endeavour so he contacted the WDA, Finance Wales, Business Connect and the local authority with enquiries for financial support and assistance. No financial support was forthcoming from any of the sources approached.

It was Business Connect that put him in contact with the WCC. Right at the outset, WCC was able to identify Paul and his colleague's needs. Paul was reassured and decided that this would be the way forward.

Paul "got the full treatment" from the WCC; help with developing a business plan and with teasing out of a marketing strategy. He used this to get four other colleagues aboard. A mediation from WCC also secured a soft loan from ICOF (Industrial Common Ownership Finance).

Posford Duvivier closed the office down In February 2002. The new co-operative, Datrys, started trading in August 2002. Turnover is already exceeding the business plan and two staff have been added; a receptionist and a former member of staff has returned as a technician. Employee's Trust is in place.

Impacts include:

- maintaining and creating employment
- contributing to the local economy through maintaining
- a locally-based service

Cheeses from Wales – an agrico-operative

Cheeses from Wales are a secondary marketing cooperative around speciality cheeses. It has succeeded the Cheese Association of Wales, an informal organisation with 34 members funded mainly by the WDA and the Food Directorate. The WDA, as the chief funder, commissioned a report which concluded that the organisation needed a more formal constitution to operate efficiently.

South Caernarfon Creameries is the largest member of Cheeses from Wales and is a co-operative. The other members are mostly small family-run businesses or sole traders. All members were content with a co-operative structure and no serious consideration was given to another option.

The WDA contacted WCC who have taken the group through the steps necessary to adopt the new structure. WCC facilitated the initial meetings between all partners. They also helped with formulating a business plan and producing a prospectus, gave advice on contacts and funding.

Various public sector bodies are supporting the co-operative with the public relations side of the launch and they have received funding for marketing materials. A grant is being made available from the WDA but the five-year business plan in place aims for sustainability.

Impacts include:

- improving sustainability of members' agribusiness through locally-owned distribution and supply
- creating a locus of potential further support to members

Constitution Hill – a community cooperative

Constitution Hill Limited has formed around running the Aberystwyth Cliff Railway and Camera Obscura. The site was previously in private ownership with the adjacent coffee shop being subcontracted to the charity, Prospects. Prospects ran the coffee shop as a community business with a labour force of people with a learning disability. A WCC staff member had helped in the initial start-up of the coffee shop.

When the private owner wanted to sell up and there were no takers, Prospects contacted the WCC staff member again to discuss taking over the entire site and making it into a cooperative along the same lines as the coffee shop. The process was an arduous one as Ceredigion Council resisted the idea and refused financial aid or to sell the lease of the land to the business. Prospects staff feels that it was due to the WCC staff member's experience and conviction that other people came aboard and through meetings and discussion the Council finally relented and leased the site to Prospects.

WCC staff attended all meetings between Constitution Hill Limited and the Council. He gave assistance with putting a business plan together, formulating a constitution and advice on a public relations campaign. Funding came through ICOF, public contributions, CADU (Historical Monuments), Ceredigion Council Renovation Department and Prospects secured EC funding in 2002.

The Cliff Railway has gone from being shunned by the community due to its dilapidated state to being a major attraction in Aberystwyth. The restoration of the premises has been slow but consistent and with EC funding Constitution Hill seems likely to survive.

Impacts include:

- adding value to the economy through maintaining local amenities for tourists and local people
- providing local employment
- contributing to local regeneration efforts through physical improvement to run-down amenities

Findings from the case studies

The relationship between individual clients and WCC staff is often a very close and personal one and it tends to continue after the formal start-up has been completed. Case study clients all rated the support from their WCC staff member

as crucial and the opinion was often expressed that the project would not have moved forward without the development officer's help. The people involved in the new co-operative or venture, have sometimes spoken in seminars held by WCC and this is spoken of as 'repaying the favour'.

Informants in our case studies reported a feeling that the WCC is a link into 'something larger' – the solidarity of the trade union and labour movement. The consequent dedication of development officers beyond it being just a job is frequently mentioned. General reassurance and encouragement is considered equally important to more concrete legal advice and help with procedures.

The formation of a cooperative in particular demands a lot of work, often over a considerable period, from those involved. When prompted to discuss what more WCC could offer its clients then issues such as more advice on the workings of the Inland Revenue and tax matters were mentioned, beyond the remit of WCC! There is some appetite for closer networking with other cooperative enterprises. In at least two cases clients said it would have been good to know more about what they were likely to encounter in the process at the outset. At the same time they acknowledged that outcomes are unpredictable and more information might have resulted in a complete overload while they were going through the start-up process. A desire for more time with development officers, as well as frustration with constraints on their own time and effort, with knock-on effects on coordination of activities was mentioned. Secondary cooperatives also referred to a desire for further training. Overall the services offered by WCC were rated very highly by clients in the case studies.

B.2.3. Co-operative Support Survey results

Representatives from 18 secondary, worker and community co-operatives were interviewed in the course of the survey. These had a broad geographical spread and aimed at getting to all the various types of co-operatives. This part of the survey showed high level of satisfaction with 12 out of the 18 interviewed being 'very satisfied' with the service. The average satisfaction rating is 4.5 in a range of 0 to 5.

It should be noted that in this category, the importance clients place on their development officers in the establishment and development of the co-operative is very high. Twelve respondents stated that the role of the Co-operative Support Team was "Absolutely vital" in setting up the co-operative. This is a crucial point: comparable services are not available anywhere else.

Some respondents struggled to reconstruct the expectations they had originally had of the service. However, eleven informants felt that they have had their expectations met by the WCC. When discussing whether his expectations had or had not been met, one person answered yes and no. This interviewee had not been able to fund his/her business and was about to 'freeze it for a while'.

Another respondent's answer to this question was incomplete but was generally very positive about assistance received from the WCC.

The co-operatives are very diverse in character and hence need. Some are formed with quite firm ideas as to what is their mission and remit. Some have been operating for years in some form and their contact with WCC has been purely in the procedural and legal aspects of setting the organisation up formally as a co-operative. Some are starting from scratch with a new business idea.

Table 2: Client Satisfaction with Co-operative Team Services

Satisfaction	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Fairly satisfactory	Not entirely Satisfied	Not satisfied	Total Responses
	12	4	1	1		18
	Absolutely Vital	Very Important	Quite important	Not very important	Could get elsewhere	
	11	1				12

Others involve an entire community, forming a co-operative around e.g. buying and utilising their defunct community hall for the benefit of the community as a whole.

The WCC offers a range of useful services to these diverse groups. Sometimes all of these are utilised by the client but sometimes only a part of the 'package' is needed. Help with legalities around the setting up of a co-operative was especially appreciated with those who had used that service. Development of a constitution and help with business planning also got good reviews.

Access to grant funding or help in identifying possible sources of funding was valued by those who had been successful in obtaining it but was a source of frustration with those who were less successful.

Training on e.g. a co-operative's secretarial duties, roles of trustees, roles of directors, was likewise appreciated. There were, however, instances where training had fallen through due to too few participants or the overly specialised nature of the training needed, causing disappointment.

Referrals were mentioned but there was a strong sense that "the WCC was the main port of call", as one respondent put it and the most "hands-on" out of the organisations contacted although with all due fairness help was appreciated wherever it came from. Confidence building and enthusiasm through working with WCC staff came through strongly and was associated with increased satisfaction.

There is a suggestion that WCC services could possibly be improved by tailoring the services further to specific needs. One interviewee suggested further development of WCC co-operative services lying in possibly extending the support available. "The WCC sits at one end and Venture Wales and others at the other end. There is no 'middle ground'. A mentor that is familiar with the business side of the operation would be most useful, that could research the appropriate grant funding structures and provide the most appropriate training." The personal relationship between clients and his/her development officer is valued but the comments of this interviewee indicate that an even closer working relationship might be beneficial.

Other organisations contacted by co-operative clients indicate something of the diversity of enterprises and the range of partnership working. These included: Local Authority Economic Development Units, WDA, Venture Wales, Business Support, Sustainable Wales, Coalfields Regeneration Fund, Local Associations of Voluntary Organisations, Community Fund, Heritage Fund, Business Connect, Cylch, Prime Cymru, Barclays Bank, Wales National Assembly, Enterprise Agencies, National Parks.

B.2.4. Achievements and Directions

From examination of Co-operative Support Team records and reports we see a slow-building process of support leading to completion in bringing a new co-operative enterprise into trading. Adopting a co-operative structure at start-up or business succession is the exception rather than the norm for businesses and we would expect to see a trickle rather than a flood of clients for Co-operative Support Team services. Working to support co-operative development is also lengthy, time-consuming and uncertain in its outcomes. Business plans will be developed and many meetings take place before clients may decide not to take a co-operative idea further. However, the successes when they come can contribute considerably to creating or sustaining jobs and retaining wealth in local economies. Enquiries have also risen significantly since the introduction of marketing skills to the team and promotion of the service among Business Support services which act as referral agencies needs to continue or be stepped up.

Finance remains a key barrier to realising greater levels of success. ICOF only lends to co-operatives where one-person, one-vote prevails, which is not always appropriate or desirable from the clients' viewpoint. None of the other funders in Wales, including Finance Wales and the Co-operative Bank, offer the funding packages which would best match the sector's needs according to our informants.

B.2.5. Conclusions

The evaluation concludes that:

- Support to co-operative enterprises comprises the core competence of WCC's activities and unique selling point. It gives practical expression to values of solidarity and secures them through their legal constitution, making more likely their continued contribution to the social economy as well as to social capital in Wales more generally.
- Co-operative organizational solutions are often the only economic option available to safeguard or extend employment opportunities.
- WCC's work with co-operatives has protected local amenities, created jobs and added value to local economic welfare, sometimes in isolated communities where there are limited alternative routes to employment and economic activity.
- Co-operative support provided by WCC is highly rated by clients and, in many cases, seen as essential to job creation or protection and economic wellbeing.

Action Points For Future Consideration:

- More advice on the Inland Revenue system and tax matters would be welcomed
- Dedicated training for secondary co-operative members
- Tailoring responses further to specific needs of clients

B.3. The Enterprise Rehearsal Project

B.3.1.Introduction

The Enterprise Rehearsal Projects provides support for six months to people within six weeks' of first receipt of benefit. The project is delivered in partnership with Menter a Busnes, which provides a similar service for the seasonally unemployed within The Enterprise Factory, funded by the Welsh Development Agency (WDA). The ERP was first developed in the Cardiff and Vale Council area and has now been expanded to cover all Wales. In 1996 the Wales Co-operative Centre took responsibility for the Project. The Project focuses on individual unemployed people referred to them from Job Centres and other referral points and provides encouragement and support to the clients as they test out their own business idea over a six month period, whilst protecting their entitlement to benefits

The evaluation of the Project has included a number of different activities:

- Case study exploration was designed to show the potential
- impact of the ERP in a best case scenario and provide
- preparatory work for a survey
- A telephone survey of a random sample of ten per cent of
- ERP clients was undertaken by a bilingual Welsh/English
- speaking team
- Interviews and discussions with staff were held
- Documentary sources were examined
- Comparators were sought in other organisational settings

The ERP focuses on continual client assessment, personal support, signposting and business planning. ERP additionally provides help in identifying seed funding for entrepreneurs. A diverse range of clients and client businesses requires constant reference to their comprehensive database of funders. At the time of our first contact with the team, for example, clients were pursuing business ideas that produced rare cacti, offered feng shui, imported diving equipment, and maintained walls.

The ERP team most commonly supports sole traders, such as builders, gardeners, cleaners and hairdressers. These can give individual households a good living, even if they do not generate much further employment.

The Tavistock Institute evaluation team collected data independently; however the ERP team has itself put in place evaluation and monitoring instruments and conducted their own survey. Through these activities the ERP team have identified the second year of trading as a time of particular vulnerability for clients. They would therefore like to explore the idea of putting in place a package of to support clients through this point in their life cycle. This would

considerably extend the duration of support, though it might be at a reduced level from support to the start-up phase.

Partnership working is a crucial element in the ERP. The ERP service itself is delivered in partnership with Menter a Busnes, who offer similar support to seasonal entrepreneurs. There is also a sound referral and cross-referral system, with partners such as Flintshire Business Start-up Scheme, Gwent Women's Business Forum, Women's Enterprise Wales, and Prime Cymru, Business in Focus, Venture Wales, and the Prince's Trust offering initial referrals. The ERP also refers back to the Prince's Trust, for example, for small grants.

A typical cross-referral pattern is for clients to come to the ERP, being held as a case while they are signposted to other organisations for specific inputs like seed money, and then received back and coached in the next step.

"Having one person [for clients] is important and simplifies things, while we act as a signpost to other help and resources" (Development Worker).

Most clients are referred by Jobcentre Plus. The Project reports that an area of difficulty concerns Benefit Agency staff who are often unfamiliar with the regulations concerning ERP clients; not surprisingly, given the fairly small client numbers.

"Most problems are to do with Jobcentres not knowing their own rulebooks and needing to check on their own regulations in a huge manual" (Development worker).

However, this is being addressed and the ERP team now have a relationship with a named officer within the Jobcentre Plus Head Office in Wales, who is responsible for troubleshooting any problems that arise.

B.3.2. Staffing

The ERP staff team is diverse in age, experience and background: previous organisations include banks, women's enterprise organisations, and job centres. The main criteria for employment on the Project are business support skills, empathy with the client and enthusiasm for the task. The diversity of backgrounds helps engender team working which is reinforced by intranet contact and regular team meetings in what can otherwise be a rather lonely working life. Staff reported high levels of satisfaction with the WCC as their employer.

B.3.4 Workload and Demand

The ERP team has recently experienced heavy demands on its time as a result of a round of discussions with new partners. Referring agencies confirm an increased demand for the service since January 2003, which may be related to changes in the benefits system. The Project received 1,200 enquiries between January 2001 and July 2003 inclusive, and 455 clients were registered by the Project. Demand for the ERP is therefore extremely high and far more than it can currently meet.

The ERP team has doubled in size over the past year but reports that they could triple in size and still not meet the demand. In one local area, for example, there was previously only one ERP officer. There are now three development workers, but they too are all now stretched to the limit with diaries fully booked up far in advance. There may be a case for looking at workload issues and perhaps prioritising clients.

B.3.5 Comparison with Other Similar Projects

The Enterprise Rehearsal Project has much in common with aspects of small business support. However, the added dimension of helping people off benefits and into sustainable, reasonably remunerated self-employment is particularly challenging. There is a very poor long term success record in the UK of moving benefit recipients directly into self-employment. Despite many individual examples of successful projects, most of the evidence suggests they are at best a transitional stage towards conventional employment, at worst a statistical mask covering underlying realities of unemployment. In particular, the problem of risk has been well documented in research into unemployment. Nevertheless, redundancy does create the positive space for a major career redirection for a certain dynamic proportion of unemployed people.

The ERP is, in our view, a successful and innovative attempt to make use of this space and to overcome these challenges. There are a number of ways in which the service is unique. Firstly, because ERP clients retain their entitlement to benefits, the risk is substantially reduced and more attempts are made to start a business and leave benefits. In other words, allowing people to keep their benefits in fact increases the chances of them moving off benefit. Secondly, some other schemes also require longer periods of unemployment for eligibility – 18 months rather than ERP clients' six weeks. Thirdly, ERP offers a level and style of personal, approachable, encouraging one-to-one support that is rarely found in this sector. Fourthly, ERP clients report that other support agencies are more selective in terms of the type of business they will support. Finally, by being able to 'hold' a client case as they move between cross-referred agencies, there is continuity in support, increasing the success rate.

B.3.6.ERP Users

The views of ERP users were gathered through both a case study and a user survey, and this section reports the results of this aspect of the evaluation.

The Case Study: Keylet

The purpose of the case study was to explore the impact which ERP has potential for creating, both in preparation of a survey instrument and to track the factors involved in successful case work. The Enterprise Rehearsal Project was therefore asked to nominate a best case example for case study investigation. The research team set out to develop a picture of the case through collecting data from more than one perspective: the client and ERP staff were both interviewed, the client in the workplace to generate observational data and collect further documentary sources.

As well as mapping the kinds of impact which the Enterprise Rehearsal Project can generate, the case provided useful preparation for the survey of ERP clients which followed.

ERP Case Study: Keylet

Five years ago the client had identified a business opportunity in a niche market letting property to students. He and his partner, an MBA student, were both on benefit after completing their education and training but had no capital to invest and started out in a bedroom, having one advertisement – a line in the local newspaper and printed business cards. Originally they went to the ERP team to look for financial assistance and the Prince's Trust subsequently gave them between £1k and £2k. They were allowed to remain on benefit and could draw on the expertise of the team in finding premises. The ERP staff member would travel to visit them, which was especially useful as they did not have to stop operating to draw on their help.

Subsequently the team told them about New Deal and they were able to bring in more staff economically. Advertising for staff can be very expensive to a young business and they were shown how to scan Jobcentre applicants for vacancies. New staff included a 16 year old IT support worker who now owns his own consultancy and an older man in his fifties whose career was rejuvenated and has since gone to work for Cardiff City Council. They learnt to look for unusual applicants with transferable skills, for example someone who had worked in haulage who was reliable and trustworthy but open to training.

The business now supports 14 full-time staff and improves the properties that they manage in the area. They have a full-time maintenance team as well as a team of letting agents. They use the services of professional services locally, including chartered surveyors and solicitors.

The aspects of ERP support that they felt were most important to them were:

- The ERP team's knowledge of the benefits system and of schemes like New Deal
- Specific guidance in relation to start-up funding which was essential to them
- The "inspirational" personal support and enthusiasm through the hand-holding stages

Impacts of this case include:

- The creation of new jobs, including jobs for previously unemployed people
- adding value to the economy through improving local property
- adding value to the economy through bringing business to local services

Client Survey

A telephone survey was conducted with a quota sample of 60 ERP clients, representing a total of 14.2% of the ERP client population once entries with absent contact details had been excluded (see Table One: above). The geographical spread of this sample is shown in Table Two. The telephone survey was conducted by a bilingual Welsh/English team of interviewers. Survey analysis sought to identify any differences in response due to business success or elapsed time since business start-up as the second year of trading has been identified by ERP clients and staff as a time of particular vulnerability.

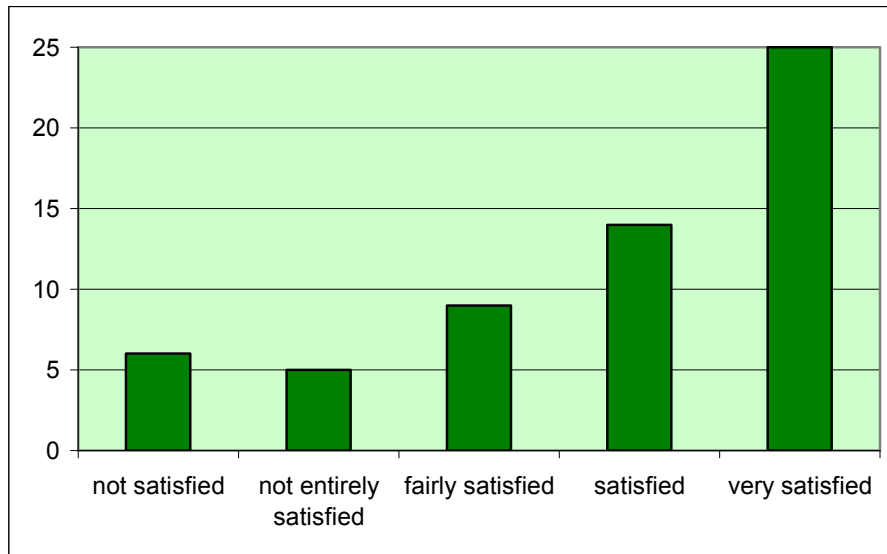
Table 3: Geographical spread of ERP sample

Area	Frequency count	% of client population	% clients within area	% of total
Anglesey	4	6.7%	80.0%	4.0%
Blaenau Gwent	1	1.7%	100.0%	1.0%
Bridgend	3	5.0%	42.9%	3.0%
Caerphilly	1	1.7%	25.0%	1.0%
Cardiff	10	16.7%	66.7%	10.1%
Carmarthenshire	2	3.3%	100.0%	2.0%
Ceredigion	1	1.7%	100.0%	1.0%
Conwy	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Denbigshire	2	3.3%	50.0%	2.0%
Flintshire	5	8.3%	100.0%	5.1%
Gwynedd	8	13.3%	61.5%	8.1%
Monmouthshire	1	1.7%	50.0%	1.0%
Newport	1	1.7%	100.0%	1.0%
Neath Port Talbot	1	1.7%	25.0%	1.0%
Pembrokeshire	1	1.7%	50.0%	1.0%
Powys	1	1.7%	16.7%	1.0%
Rhondda Cynon Taff	2	3.3%	28.6%	2.0%
Swansea	1	1.7%	50.0%	1.0%
Torfaen	2	3.3%	100.0%	2.0%
Vale of Glamorgan	11	18.3%	91.7%	11.1%
Wrexham	2	3.3%	100.0%	2.0%
Total	60	100.0%	60.6%	60.6%

Level of satisfaction with ERP WCC services

Given the difficulties encountered with this client group, ERP client respondents reported high satisfaction rates: 39 out of 60 respondents (65%) are satisfied or very satisfied with the services received from the WCC. *Table 3* shows the total distribution of satisfaction among the 60 ERP clients interviewed.

Figure One: Level of Satisfaction with ERP Services



The respondents identified several positive aspects of the ERP. There is generally a great deal of satisfaction with the WCC development worker involved. WCC staff are described as friendly, informal and approachable. Clients generally feel that they can ask anything 'without seeming stupid' and bounce ideas back and forth in a productive manner. The one-on-one sessions with a designated development worker are appreciated and considered useful in developing business ideas further and gauging the feasibility of a business idea.

The most valued service provided, however, is the practical task of writing up a business plan. Clients join ERP with very different backgrounds and ideas. Some have already written up a business plan when they join and have many years' experience in their field. These people may need help with costing the business plan, finding premises and/or identifying sources of funding. Development workers can always assist with costing a business plan, but obtaining funding and appropriate premises are more complex matters.

Other clients have been out of the workplace for many years or have come onto benefits after a trauma such as the death of a family member, divorce or having been made redundant. These people often have greater needs and vaguer ideas about what is on offer; they often mention confidence building as a key impact of the Project.

It is not easy to provide services to such a diverse clientele. Some people appreciate the informal manner of the development workers and are happy to make contact when they need things and carry on by themselves in the interim. Others need fuller support in terms of developing their confidence, their business ideas and with the practicalities of finding premises, identifying funding and dealing with legal and taxation issues.

Analysing the comments made by the least satisfied clients indicates that the common factor is a breakdown in communication with their development worker and/or between the WCC and the Benefits Agency.

Does the ERP meet the expectations of its clients?

Of the 30 respondents to this question, the majority (57%) felt that ERP had fulfilled their expectations. In addition, another 20% had no expectations or didn't know what to expect.

However, 20% interviewees felt that their expectations of ERP had not been met. It is important to look carefully at what these individuals have to say about the service so that lessons may be learnt and ERP improved. It is also worth making the general point that it can be difficult for the development worker to manage the client's expectations while at the same time encouraging the client to take their business idea further.

The main area in which expectations were not met was around communication between the Jobcentre and the ERP. Confusion about starting dates on the Project led to difficulties for one interviewee. These problems are exacerbated by discontinuity in ERP services when development workers fall ill or leave the Project.

Secondly, the personal relationship that develops between the client and the development worker can be a double-edged sword. A strong relationship is highly appreciated by those for whom things have worked out well and is what interviewees usually thank for their success. But when a development worker leaves the scene, they are not easily replaced. In a few cases hand-over to a new development worker has led to discontinuity in the service with consequent damage to the trust of the client in the service. Making sure clients are not left in a vacuum when a development worker leaves or falls ill is of the utmost importance to the ERP and will improve the success rate of the Project.

Linked to this is a perceived shortage of ERP staff. ERP clients describe the staff as helpful but over-stretched and spread too thinly, and report difficulties getting hold of the right people, having to leave multiple messages for them.

The problems, to the extent that there are problems, seem to us to be almost entirely due to the over-commitment of ERP staff, given the boost to demand. The way to keep satisfaction levels up with the client group is to give clear messages to staff and clients about the level of support which can be offered and, if necessary, to prioritise specific targets groups.

ERP service delivery

There is no significant relationship between particular services offered by the ERP and levels of satisfaction. However, thinking through the business idea and assisting with the production of the business plan are generally highly appreciated services provided by development workers, and these activities build client confidence.

There is less consensus about satisfaction with help identifying funding, suitable premises and referrals; with some greatly appreciating these types of support and others less appreciative. It is likely that different needs amongst clients lead to different ratings; eg, a client who did not need premises is likely to have more difficulty rating the value of that service. It is also the case that development workers are less able to guarantee success in these areas, because success relies on factors outside of the development worker's control (e.g. funding decisions, availability of premises, problems originating from an organisation to which a client has been referred, etc.).

Does success breed satisfaction?

As one would expect, the more successful clients are more satisfied with the service they received. Out of the six respondents who give ERP the lowest satisfaction rating, 80% are not trading. The one successful trader in this group explicitly states that they attribute none of the business' success to ERP but rather to their own "hard graft". Conversely, amongst those who gave the ERP a 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' rating, more are trading than not trading.

It is worth noting that, however, that out of all those who are not trading, there is still considerable satisfaction with ERP services. Two of these people rated the service highly because it was an invaluable opportunity to try out an idea while still receiving benefits, even if they did not go on to pursue the idea. In other words, the success of the ERP cannot be measured solely by the proportion of clients trading, as other factors impact upon the decision to trade or not.

Time spent on ERP

ERP gives people the opportunity to develop a business idea while still receiving benefits for a period of six months. There are wide variations in the length of time it takes to support a client into business, ranging from 0.7 months (21 days) to 19.1 months (573 days).

There is no discernible statistical correlation between length of periods of contact with ERP and satisfaction with services, or between the length of time spent on the ERP and the level of success. Needs differ, and some people require only a few months on the Project before they begin trading, whereas others may require much longer on the Project and still not feel able to begin trading, or may not have found the right business idea.

Many participants mentioned that a longer period of support on benefits (at least a year) would have a qualitative improvement on their chances of getting into self-employment and off benefits.

Other organisations contacted by ERP clients

In the survey, we asked what other organisations the client had contacted in addition to the WCC. These are a useful indicator of where ERP fits into the Welsh enterprise and regeneration landscape as well as pinning down organisations that are potential, if not existing, partners. The organisations mentioned were Women's Business Forum, Prime Cymru, Women's Enterprise Wales, WDA, Prince's Trust, Business Connect, Design Wales, County Councils, Enterprise Agencies, County Business Start-up Schemes, Instant Muscle, Council Action and the Shaw Trust.

Users also mentioned organisations to which they had been referred by ERP: the New Deal Scheme, Work Connect, County Councils, People's Business Wales, Broker Cymru and Mentec. Also important are referrals to professional advice and assistance such as an illustrator, accountant, employment law specialist and tax offices. One person had also been introduced to his present business partner through the scheme.

B.3.7. The contribution of ERP

Cost benefits

If ERP is effective in helping people off benefit into sustained economic activity, then the cost of the project – running at £300,000 over three years - can be judged against the costs of benefit to the 150 people who reported business survival or better over eighteen months. While detailed cost benefit analysis has not been performed, some indications are provided by the costs of providing benefit which have been calculated at £8,150 per annum per unemployed person, including cost of benefit, cost of administration and loss of taxes.¹ This figure takes no account of less direct costs such as reduced output and corporation taxation, increases in bad debts, and the social costs of unemployment which result in higher demands on the NHS and Social Services, and direct local authority costs through housing and council tax benefits and free school meals. Even taking into account these additional costs, the calculation is based on a highly conservative estimate of the successes of ERP, since a few of the businesses created will provide additional employment for others and some businesses will create additional employment for others, providing further benefits to the local economy and to the health and wellbeing of local people with whom direct beneficiaries are connected by ties of kinship and other networks.

¹ Paul Bivand, 1999, The Exchequer cost of unemployment, Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion, London

On the other hand, income even to some still trading after one year may be lower than benefit. In terms of making a case for on-funding to WAG, the costs to the Wales-based statutory agencies will have to be made more explicit towards the end of the funding of the Enterprise Factory.

Adding Value

Of course, not the whole of these cost benefits for successful ERP candidates can be attributed to ERP alone. ERP staff, like their partners in Menter a Busnes, do not duplicate the services provided by others but perform as coaches to clients – signposting, accessing and making sense of information and advice provided to ERP clients through other agencies. However, almost all the clients contacted in the survey saw the ERP role as “vital”.

A considerable number of ERP clients remain in some sort of contact with the team beyond the six month period of their official placement, as shown in our survey data. In these cases ERP staff provide additional support beyond the agreed boundaries of their role, acting as signposts, for example to the New Deal register for employees, thereby adding further value to the effort directed at getting those on benefit back into economic activity. These activities do stretch the boundaries of the project and of WCC's role but in a fairly limited fashion.

The longer term success rates of ERP have to be considered in view of the fact that most self-employed people earn less than employees and some earn nothing at all.

Efficiency and cost effectiveness of ERP

ERP is on target to achieve 300 cases supported with a 50% success rate. The issue for efficiency is how quickly ERP staff can decide whether the referred person is likely to be a successful candidate for self-employment rather than getting bogged down in caseloads with referrals who are less capable. The referrals represent highly diverse sets of capabilities for running their own businesses. The businesses they are able to start may also be subject to considerable variation in medium to long term success. Retention in economic activity is obviously the most cost-effective form.

B.3.8. Summary Conclusions and Recommendations

The evaluation shows that the project:

- Provides skilled and empathic business start-up support to people on benefit
- Adds value to the work of a range of statutory and voluntary sector agencies
- Is unique in working with this client group to support self-employment
- Wins high satisfaction rates (65%) from clients
- Is especially valued for its business planning support
- Offers vital support in helping clients identify start-up funding
- Can result in successful clients becoming employers, thereby adding further value to the economy of Wales

Action points for future consideration:

- Improving the liaison between Job Centres and the Project about start dates, eligibility, expectations, etc. It is noted that ERP has been actively working to achieve such an improvement, both by working at the 'grass-roots' level with Job Centre staff and, more recently, by working with Job Centre Head Office staff.
- Arguing for substantially increasing the size of the Project to meet the existing level of demand or agreeing priority target groups with sponsors
- Actively disseminating the nature and success of the Project to organisations that may wish to offer similar services outside Wales, and future funding for the Project should include additional sums to cover this promotional aspect of the work.
- Exploring further the idea of putting in place a package of to support clients through the second year of their life cycle.
- Enhancing existing monitoring systems for specific time-limited periods with some more evaluative routines at the whole team level, eg, reviewing caseloads by marginalised target group, likely business success and capability for early sign-off. This would allow the team to evaluate more explicitly the current implicit rationing of staff time and resources and inform discussions with sponsors and funders how this fits with their own priorities for impact.

B.4. Evaluation of the Credit Union National Project

B.4.1. Introduction

This report provides an account of the evaluation of the role of the Credit Union Support Project based at the WCC. The aims of the evaluation have been to assess performance in relation to a two-fold role by the project:

- Supporting credit unions in scaling up membership, acquiring property, employing paid and unpaid staff and equipping credit unions with the skills and capability required by the Financial Services Authority and increasingly seen as necessary by the sector itself, by the provision of dedicated services including development, marketing and training
- administering the Grant Fund and supporting the Grant Fund Board in its work of grant disbursement and monitoring.

Background

The evaluation of the Credit Union National Project and administration of the Grant Fund takes place in the context of unprecedented attention on credit unions by policy makers in the developed world. While in the US Credit Union activity was developed to a significant degree under the legislative regime of the Clinton administration and in Ireland has always benefited from being part of mainstream financial services provision, in Wales and the UK more generally credit union development has been a marginal activity. Credit Unions have generally failed to self-sustain in the UK, operating on small margins, often occurring in the context of community development in socially and financially excluded communities, where there was a tendency to focus on social rather than economic objectives. Despite broad acceptance by the movement in Wales as beyond, that social objectives will only be realised by securing economic ones, credit unions are independent institutions which make their own decisions and the WC CUNP role can only be advisory.

The Credit Union Strategy Implementation and Representation Project bid for £100,000 per annum from Assembly Government funding matched again EU Structural Funds. One 'strand' provided for development of representative capacity in the Wales credit union movement and was led by the Association of British Credit Unions (ABCUL), which represents 85% of credit union members in the UK and 70% of credit unions. This was a vital partnership for the WCC Credit Union National Project because there are important constraints for credit union development embedded within the current UK legislative framework which can only be addressed directly through political representation and campaigning.

The overall aim of the Credit Union Strategy is to establish a self-sustaining credit union movement in Wales with the capacity and resources to maintain growth and development beyond the end of the project.

A key aim of the project was to increase credit union membership by a factor of three, which at the time of the funding proposal stood at around 12,000 members in Wales. The expectation was that marketing credit unions to new sectors of the community would ensure a broader, more financially secure base and that increased membership would lead to:

- Increases in the level of savings held in credit unions
- Increased lendings from members' savings, benefiting particularly the financially excluded
- Improvements in the service offered by credit unions to their members

However, increases in membership alone would not be enough to lever credit union development to step increases in performances and roles. It has been widely recognised in the credit union movement that the role of professional management and suitable premises is critical for achieving and sustaining increases, wherever possible at high street locations. Other targets set out for this project therefore included increases in paid staff and in volunteers, and significant tranches of training for volunteers who act in key roles, such as CU treasurers. A range of value added projects was also envisaged, such as the development and pilot of debt rescue schemes and of direct debit utility schemes. These projects were seen as a necessary development for credit union services because many people, particularly those on low incomes, are excluded from mainstream financial services and therefore only have access to high interest lenders and no access to direct debit facilities through banks and building societies. The value added projects are therefore designed to extend the reach and penetration of the credit union membership to financially marginalised groups as credit unions simultaneously act to secure more financially viable products and services. The provision of a credit union movement which is financially secure underpins its relevance and utility to the socially excluded.

Of particular interest to the broader credit union movement is the new 'live and work' credit union common bond regulations, as well as to the movement in Wales. There is widespread awareness in Wales of the benefits to be gained from moving credit unions on from the providing services within marginalised communities to become more self-sustaining. The introduction of employer payroll deduction schemes, targeted at large employers mainly in the public sector is therefore also seen as an essential element of the developments planned.

Growing the credit union movement in Wales requires more than support to marketing, training and representational capacity. £300,000 per annum has been provided by Assembly Government through the Credit Union Development Support Grant to enable individual credit unions to support step increases in their capability. The intention was to build credit unions resources in relation to some of the key factors outlined above: premises, staff and management

capacity to take forward service enhancements, and so on. The Grant was managed by a Grant Fund Board with an independent Chair, ABCUL Wales representation and an ABCUL Executive Officer with representation from each of the three credit union representative institutions in Wales, the North Wales ABCUL Chapter, the South Wales ABCUL Chapter and the Mid Wales forum of credit unions. The Credit Union Support Project role at WCC has been to administer this grant under the direction of the Grant Fund Board.

Evaluation scope and activities

The evaluation assesses the WCC CUNP role in relation to the Credit Union Strategy and the disbursement of the grant. The evaluation therefore does not consider the role of ABCUL or the wider strategy, although some questions about the strategy are raised by the findings.

The evaluation of the credit union support and grant fund administration involved a number of activities:

- Case study work of a 'best case' exemplar of WCC's support to Credit Unions
- A survey of randomly generated credit union clients to look at the generalisability of the case study findings
- Interviews and discussions with staff about their role in support to credit unions
- Interviews with members of the Grant Fund Board, providing perspectives from North, Mid and South Wales
- documentary review, especially in relation to grant fund administration

B.4.2. Client Satisfaction with WCC Credit Union Support

The Case Study

The purpose of the case study was to explore the impact which WCC Services have potential for creating, both in preparation of a survey instrument and to track the factors involved in successful case work. WCC Services were therefore asked to nominate a best case exemplar for case study investigation. The research team set out to develop a picture of each case through collecting data from more than one perspective: at least the client and WCC staff.

Case study work was undertaken during May. The case provided useful preparation for the survey of WCC clients which followed.

Llandudno and District Credit Union

The origins of the Llandudno and District Credit Union can be traced back to 1993 when there was freak flash flooding in the area. A community development

officer came to assist the community in dealing with the disaster and rebuilding. A credit union was one of a number of means of helping the community.

A dozen volunteers started the two-year WCC training. Approval and registration followed and the Llandudno and District Credit Union opened for business in 1996. WCC was instrumental in the setting up phase and the credit union has maintained close links thereafter, in particular calling on training and development workers.

Llandudno and District Credit Union has grown steadily. In 2002 their common bond was expanded and membership has now grown to 1,050. They have benefited from grant funding from the NAW/EC, administered by WCC and now have one full-time and two part-time paid employees. The Credit Union have been able to buy premises on the high street, which provides a rental income and gives more visibility.

Having paid employees has allowed the credit union to dedicate more time to marketing activities and this has paid off in generating increased membership around 1.5 fold and higher annual turnover.

Impacts include:

- providing access to financial support for members, contributing to
- their wellbeing and that of their families
- adding value to the local economy through improving the financial prospects of local people
- providing paid employment to employees

Analysis of Credit Union Survey Results

The telephone survey of credit unions was conducted through a sample of 12 Welsh Credit Unions. The purpose of the survey was to establish levels of general satisfaction with the service provided by WCC and explore the extent to which levels of satisfaction could be linked to differential size or performance of Cus. The survey was conducted by a bilingual team of Welsh/English speakers to ensure reliability.

Level of satisfaction with WCC CU services

Representatives of 12 credit unions, including paid and unpaid staff and volunteer members, were interviewed in the survey. The level of satisfaction with WCC services amongst the interviewees was high. All answers were clustered in the upper three categories; fairly satisfied, satisfied and very satisfied. The average rating comes in at an impressive 4.6.



Figure Two: Level of satisfaction with Credit Union National Project service

The consistent clustering of ratings in the upper echelons indicates a well-developed and even service across the board. A further indicator of this is the fact that there is no discernible relationship between satisfaction and the size of a credit union (in terms of membership and turnover). The service seems fair and generally satisfactory to all.

The services predominantly used by the credit unions are initial establishment, training (accredited by the Open College Network), access to grant funding, help with marketing and added value projects. All of these, and particularly training, were greatly appreciated by respondents and considered to have been crucial in the development of the credit union. In fact the claim that “the credit union might never have got off the ground without WCC support” were uttered by quite a few respondents.

The personal relationship with a WCC development officer was recognised as valuable. The fact that the connection then continues after the initial set-up through access to further funding, training, marketing and other services, has created a closely knit association with the WCC and its development officers. This is very much seen as an essential support network.

On the whole, then as one interviewee put it: “The WCC have been excellent; not only with regard to the ethos of what they stand for, but also with regard to the quality of staff, and the sympathetic attitude.”

WCC services and credit union diversity

The credit unions are diverse in size, client base and context.

Although not significantly noticeable in overall satisfaction rates then there is some discontent noticeable in verbal comments of representatives of smaller credit unions as they struggle to recruit a critical mass of members. These concerns, however, are counter weighed by sincere optimism about impending mergers.

One respondent did lay some of the blame at the feet of the WCC, suggesting that initially the WCC were tied by targets, which had led to a lack of comprehensive consideration regarding the actual viability of some credit unions.

The credit unions represented in the survey have grown out of workplaces, faith communities, towns, clusters of villages or even ideology. Despite an overall high level of satisfaction with training offered to them by the WCC then there seems to be some scope for improvement in tailoring training more closely to the needs of the individual credit union in question and/or taking into consideration an individual's experience in the job.

Communication

Where there was discontent with WCC services it was again in communication. One interviewee had got mixed messages from different development officers and two commented that communications tended to be "left till the last minute". There was some sense again here that WCC staff had to spread themselves too thin due to shortages.

Suggestions for improvement in this area included the establishment of a forum between WCC and the credit unions meeting once every three months or so which would foster communication and encourage interaction. One interviewee noted that there is currently minimal awareness about what other credit unions are doing in terms of development. The forum would also be particularly useful for emerging credit unions. It was not clear whether these respondents were aware of the structure offered by the North and South Wales chapters and the Mid Wales Forum or of the role ABCUL plays in developing the representative structure for credit unions in Wales which would address this issue.

It was also felt by some that the WCC could publicise its successes more than at present.

Impact of credit unions on communities

Unanimously then those interviewed agreed that credit unions had made a positive impact on their members and on the area in which they operate. Most discussed the role of the union in tackling poverty and providing a healthier alternative to loan sharks operating in the locality. Credit unions are seen as a support in localities of high unemployment and where ill health is rife.

Benefit recipients, single mothers, the elderly and the financially excluded were cited as benefiting the most. One interviewee concretely described the impact of the credit union thus: "Many more people in the area can now afford to take holidays, buy Christmas presents and so on without getting into extensive debt." The provision of small loans by credit unions is particularly beneficial to unemployed and financially excluded people as commercial lenders tend to oversupply, so that borrowers incur higher levels of debt than necessary.

Although not always as directly evident most interviewees deemed the knock-on effect of the existence of the credit union on the community as a whole, to be positive and considerable.

Many interviewees battle with perceptions of credit unions as being 'a poor man's bank' or an 'old people's bank'. Although the unions often benefit the poor and the elderly primarily, the interviewees were at pains to explain that credit unions are for everybody. As one person put it: "some people get loans, others save". There has also been a push by many credit unions to get young people to save.

Positive impact of credit unions established, however, the general feeling is best summed up by the comments of this interviewee: "There is no doubt about the impact the credit union has had on the local community. There is, however, still a long way to go."

Comparisons with the Credit Union Movement in Ireland crept up frequently in the interviews. One interviewee commented that the concept of credit unions is not yet well established in Wales and that hence "there is a limited pool of knowledge and expertise upon which to draw. There is therefore considerable reliance upon WCC to 'plug this gap' in knowledge."

One interviewee, however, felt the County Council was already equipped to deal with credit union development and that there was a service overlap.

Other organisations contacted by credit unions

WCC support to credit unions occurs in the context of partnership with a number of other organisations. Other organisations contacted for help by credit union representatives surveyed were ABCUL, The WDA, The Children's Society, The Coalfields Regeneration Programme, County Council Business Development Officers, Wales Council for Voluntary Action, local voluntary organisations, regeneration groups and community action groups.

B.4.3. Grant Fund Administration

This is not an evaluation of the outcomes and impacts of the Grant Fund itself but an evaluation of the role of WCC in providing Grant Fund administration. This account is based on interviews with staff, documentary review and interviews with Grant Fund Board members.

The Credit Union Development Grant Fund Board

The Credit Union Development Grant Fund is administered by WCC, which also provides the secretariat to support the work of the Grant Fund Board. The Grant Fund was established for three years in the first instance, to run from January 2000 to January 2003. A Grant Fund Board was established with the support of WCC including representatives of the credit unions of Wales, with all-Wales coverage, as well as ABCUL and WCC staff.

A key role for WCC staff has been to ensure the Board has sufficient information to enable it to take decisions. The Board has met bi-monthly and sometimes monthly in order to process the grant fund applications. Links between the credit unions and WCC and ABCUL are reinforced through both partners making reports to the regional for a – the North Wales Chapter, the South Wales Chapter and the Mid Wales Forum as well as to a Local Authority Forum. WCC staff are seen as operating as impartial and conscientious in discharging their secretariat role.

However Board membership was not just an essential tool in disbursement of the grant but also provided the perspective of credit unions in giving expertise and guidance to newer or smaller credit unions, for example pointing out that it may be more cost-effective and efficient to employ two part-time staff rather than a full-time staff member. As one WCC staff member put it, “The Board understands how credit unions operate and can offer models of good practice ... they don’t get drawn into setting irrelevant or rigid criteria”.

Disbursing the Grant Fund

The traditional credit union development model in the UK was the creation of small, under-capitalised and under-resourced credit unions that struggled to sustain themselves and provide an efficient and accessible financial service to significant numbers of members. Grants of up to £30,000 a year for a three year period were made available to meet the costs of premises and employed staff, both of which are seen in the field as key elements in credit unions becoming self-sustaining. The Grant Fund was established to address this under-capitalisation to bring the benefits of high street locations and professional financial management in a bid to address the needs of Welsh credit unions and attract more members. WCC invited applications from Credit Unions within the terms of the grant which were then considered by the Grant Board. This involved both the sending out of the application forms and issuing guidance to the credit unions and, sometimes, talking credit unions through the process.

The Grant Fund Board's role was to make decisions about the funding levels within the constraints of the grant. The funding was attached to targets and milestones and these had to be set in advance with the agreement of the Grant Fund Board. Once the grants were allocated, Terms and Conditions for its draw-down were drawn up based on the agreed targets. Funding was drawn down on a quarterly basis in advance and the monitoring of targets was therefore a key element of the administration which had to be taken into account in the release of each tranche of funding. WCC undertake their administration of the grant rigorously and record financial and other information meticulously.

Demands on WCC Staff

WCC's work in the administration of the grant has therefore been considerable. One Grant Fund Board member informed us that WCC staff had to provide help to every single application, ranging from providing prompts for more information to detailed support through the application process. Analysis of a random sample of credit union grant fund files recording the transactions with Credit Unions in relation to the Grant Funding demonstrates the level of coaching and follow-up which is required at each stage of the process. Grant eligibility, for example, varies between Objective 1 and Objective 2 areas. As the project nears its end, levels of underspend have to be particularly carefully monitored in order that credit unions should make best use of the grant. With underspend for the last three months running at around £400,000 it has been necessary for Centre staff to increase monitoring levels and send out a further round of applications to credit unions even at this late stage. Getting credit unions to understand the need to act and spend in the later stages of the project poses a challenge to Credit Union project staff.

Clear administrative and accounting systems needed to be developed to ensure compliance with the terms of the grant. Grant Board member informants were unanimous in their assessment of the administration of the grant, "admirable", "exemplary" were typical terms used. The documentary review concurs with that judgement.

Our own audit of the monitoring system reveals that, not surprisingly, credit unions have struggled to use their grants in full. In line with the experience of many community-based initiatives, the initial poor capacity on the ground means that capacity to spend the grants is rather slow initially. Grants for staff and premises require the identification and acquisition of suitable premises and lengthy recruitment processes tend to result in initial underspend. As expected we see momentum increasing in expenditure through the life of the grant fund. It has to be borne in mind that the credit unions were, for the most part, volunteer organisations and recruiting staff and premises can often be a lengthy processes even in well-established organisations. Many factors can slow progress, for example partnership working around acquiring new shared premises. We would

therefore not expect to see credit unions reach the maximum grants provided for them.

Nonetheless, if we take at random monitoring reports for two different credit unions, third quarter figure show actual expenditure of £52,000+ against an anticipated £65,000+. In another case expenditure of £67k against an anticipated £69,911 is so high it almost certainly suggests a high degree of professional management is being provided at some level, although in general the returns would seem to be completed by volunteer treasurers, with varying levels of professional training. So our judgement is that some underspend in community-based projects is unavoidable and in this instance, the introduction of a new institutional form in the Grant Fund Board introduces the probability of conservative grant allocation. Applications for these funds are also detailed and suggest significant amounts of volunteer time at work in discharging credit union roles and responsibilities. We therefore conclude that the grant is being administered efficiently.

The monitoring system also tracks expenditure against targets agreed with each credit union in relation to acquiring premises, paid posts, numbers of volunteers, membership, shares, assets and loans etc. These generally show that progress towards targets is becoming the norm for credit unions in Wales. By December 2003, all targets set for the Project had been achieved – shares, assets, staffing, premises and members. This provides the conditions for consolidation and further expansion by the Credit Union sector in Wales.

Creating a supportive framework for credit union support

Many of the smaller credit unions have only slowly been developing the back office capacity to process grant applications and provide monitoring returns. Smaller organisations generally find the European funding procedures cumbersome and bureaucratic and developing a good relationship between grant beneficiaries and administrators of funds can be a key to achieving compliance. Relations between the Centre Credit Union staff and credit unions are generally good as we have seen in the previous section. Nonetheless, in administering grant funding project staff have additionally developed an outreach activity, the Monitoring Visit, involving key administrative and financial staff going out to credit unions to give advice and check that their returns will comply, for example ensuring that invoices for funding spent are eligible within the terms of the grant. Over and above their monitoring obligations the advice offered can be seen as an informal, internal monitoring audit which supports credit unions in making their official returns. These visits have been especially welcomed by credit unions who look to Credit Union Project staff at WCC to support them at key stages in their development. The relationship is a close one and is envisaged as ongoing and future-oriented, for example in relation to support through potential amalgamation.

Continuing to develop credit unions through the Credit Union Development Grant Fund

Credit unions in Wales are diverse in size, management capacity and local sponsorship. Not all credit unions needed to acquire premises but many did and grant funding was sought in these cases. Paid staff was the other main area of funding, according to the Grant Fund Board members. The aims of the project envisaged a three-fold increase in credit union membership with consequent increases in levels of savings held, increased borrowing and so on. In general while there has been significant progress in this area – increases of 1.5 was reported in one case for example, the gains from increased membership from the funding have still to be realised in many cases. Such shortfalls in achieving objectives are common in local development projects involving volunteers: the capacity to spend the grant has to be developed, property often takes months to acquire and recruitment to paid posts can be delayed. A marketing strategy at the all-Wales level has been developed by the WCC Credit Union National Project and the next phase of funding is likely to see applications from credit unions to underpin more sustained and coherent marketing strategies in order to increase membership more radically.

Conclusions

The evaluation concludes that the Project supports credit unions in developing into more sound financial institutions, contributing to financial inclusion, the wellbeing of members and communities and adding value to local economies through:

- providing support and development services to credit unions that are highly rated by their stakeholders and clients, who perceive WCC role as essential
- Acting impartially and conscientiously in discharging their duties as Secretariat to the Credit Union Development Grant Fund Board so that the grant is used to maximum effect
- Undertaking administration of the grant rigorously and providing clear transparency in its recording of grant administration, including monitoring of targets
- Efficiency in its disbursement of large sums of money, ensuring that targets are addressed in a way which is seen as equitable between large and small credit unions and is rated equally highly by both

Actions points for future considerations:

- *The project considers how it might assist credit unions in gearing up their financial and accounting systems to manage a large expansion in membership*
- *The CUNP tracks the progress of research findings in the sector, such as the current action research programme in the West Midlands, to identify further development support for credit unions*

Action points also include considering:

- tailoring training more closely to the needs of the individual credit union in question and/or taking into consideration an individual's experience in the job
- bringing credit unions together in for a where they can share learning about development strategies.

C. WCC Organisational Review

C.1.Introduction

In this section we use a range of data to evaluate WCC's organisational performance, including interviews with staff and managers, interviews with sponsors, partners and internal and external documents. The review of the organisational review is also firmly grounded in the organisational literature which referenced in a few places. The section reviews WCC's performance in relation to:

- strategic role and position
- business processes and administration
- management of staff
- evaluation and learning capability.

C.2. WCC's Strategic Role and Position

In terms of the funding environment, since 1997 the UK environment has been favourable, These have extended those afforded by European Structural Funds; in Europe the role of the social economy, and of Co-operatives within it, has long been recognised (see box below). The Assembly Government's consultation document, The Social Enterprise Action Plan, is consistent with this policy environment has underpinned the funding of the services traditionally offered through WCC, especially its support to cooperative succession and start-up and to credit unions.

To realise the potential afforded by these opportunities has energetically pursued its strategic objectives by constructing arguments for practical opportunities which enable WCC to provide services supporting job creation and local economic activity.

In due course the arrival of Wales Assembly Government (WAG) has seen further emphasis on the social economy as a way of meeting social objectives. The decision by all the statutory sponsors to highlight the role of the social economy has been especially useful to an organisation which represents important social economy interests in Wales. The strategy being signalled by WAG to invest in Wales' wellbeing through its Communities First policy gives

new shape to the next strategic phase at the level of the Principality, which will be to focus on social aspects of inclusion.

WCC has developed a wide range of partners from all sectors of the community in Wales, many of which are well-established. However in order to penetrate new markets and serve communities previously unreached it has, over the past few years, been strategically sensitive in finding new partners. For example, in joining the consortium to provide the Communities First Support Network, within which WCC will provide constitutional support to the community enterprises emerging through this initiative, new partners, reported to us the value which WCC adds to their own activities. In delivering through a broad range of partnerships, WCC is reported by partners to show remarkable adaptability to new markets and different communities in the Principality.

WCC continues to vigorously pursue its aims such as the broader goals of the social economy in discussions with WAG and others. The Assembly Government's consultation document, 'Social Enterprise Action Plan' indicates commitment to provide further support to the social enterprise – ie trading forms – within the social economy, in which WCC also seeks and is expected to have a role. It will be important for WCC, while retaining their position as a leading – possibly the leading – organization in the Welsh social economy, not to define itself as coterminous with the social economy. Such a definition could potentially distance the organization from traditional sources of support, such as trade unionists who see in the ERP project a realistic effort for helping the unemployed back into economic activity which is not on offer through traditional heavy industry. Broadening WCC's its alignment from support to co-operatives to identifying with the social economy more widely is a useful step. However, the ideological and operational alliance with those who wish to support economic activity for marginalized groups more generally is just as consistent with the underlying values of the organization and may offer new strategic opportunities in the future.

Conclusions

In relation to its strategic performance, the evaluation data consistent across all data sources allows us to conclude that:

- WCC performs outstandingly well in relation to its strategic position. In particular:
- WCC's relationship with funders and sponsors has consolidated a leading position in the social economy of Wales
- WCC has considerably extended its position by demonstrating that it can play a major role in delivering to meet the objectives of AG and the WDA for the social economy

- This demonstration requires continual hard work with sponsors and funders to explicate how WCC can help realise policy objectives
- WCC works with a wide range of partners to develop new opportunities for job creation and local economic activity to the benefit of people and communities in Wales and secure social benefits through sound organisation
- WCC can provide valued leadership in the social economy but this leadership can only be won through being seen to serve the interests of other partners

C.3. Business Planning Processes And Administration

WCC is seen as an outstanding performer by delivering across a broad range of interests. As a result WCC has experienced considerable growth over the period post-1997, and particularly over the past three years. WCC has been so successful in developing partnerships and winning contracts for services that at one stage of our evaluation these comprised 28 separate funding streams. In our comparator research, many organisations with such a broad remit had withdrawn or were seeking to withdraw from delivering services because they reported the burden of business processes and administration involved was unsustainable. (On the other hand, one organisation which had withdrawn from delivering more than pilot services was reviewing the impact of that decision and reconsidering service delivery.)

WCC have considerably enhanced their position and underpinned their strategic capability by putting in place robust business planning systems and an immaculate administration. While capable of providing monthly management information, in practice WCC operations are relatively stable, progress against targets takes place typically over a quarterly period or longer and quarterly reports are therefore adopted as most appropriate. Many observers among partners and sponsors and funders commented that WCC was not just business-like but benefited from its status as a business. The systems for administration of the Credit Union Development Grant which we reviewed were particularly valued by Credit Unions.

Conclusions

In relation to business processes and administration, the evaluation is satisfied that:

- WCC business processes and administration are exemplary and enable it to provide value for money in delivering services.

C.4. Management And Leadership

The success WCC have achieved in their strategic role, underpinned by its business processes and administration, creates further challenges for the organisation in relation to managing a diverse and dispersed workforce. Success in business has resulted in rapid growth in staff numbers. The growth since 1999 to a staff group of 35 highlights the need for new methods of control and co-ordination of staff. This poses particular problems for a rather specialist staff group, of a kind which would usually use methods of mutual adjustment for co-ordination in face to face situations. In this case, the dispersion across Wales makes that difficult to achieve. WCC has responded in a number of ways including:

- Developing remote management, including a Development Worker's Handbook and IT solutions including an intranet
- Restructuring the organization into mostly functional teams with one exception, ERP, which remains in a service-based team and
- Creating a second tier of management to allow closer supervision and bring a broader range of experience into the management team.

It will take some time for all the new measures to take effect and WCC may well make further amendments to its management of staff. However, we would make the following observations:

First, while most managers adopt some virtual management mechanisms – memoranda, circulars etc, these are generally most effective when they build on fairly well-developed norms of behaviour. Because the staff group is very dispersed (thus indicating demand for a high level of remote management tools) but also very diverse in background (and thus less likely to have pre-existing shared norms of behaviour) demands on management are likely to remain relatively high in the near future. There will therefore be a continued need for management to direct and support staff, most of whom spend significant proportions of their time working alone.

Second, functional structures meet a need identified in WCC to provide for career development for specialists by exposing them to others within the same speciality. However, functional structures can reduce communication and co-operation between departments and multiply interdepartmental dependencies, which can make co-ordination and scheduling difficult. It may also – at least to some extent - obscure accountability for overall outcomes which was admirably provided in the previous structure². An alternative option would be a satellite structure, bringing staff together in sub-regional locations with some management presence. The evaluation would not argue for WCC to adopt a new

² (J.McCann and J.R. Galbraith, 'Interdepartmental Relations' in Handbook of Organizational Design: Remodelling Organizations and Their Environment, eds. P.C.Nystrom and W.H. Starbuck, vol. 2 (NYUP) 1981).

structure at this point, having so recently accepted an expert recommendation to implement the current structure and sought funding on the basis of it. However, we would suggest that WCC managers continue to review the structure with an eye to taking remedial action should it prove necessary.

Third, the increase in capacity at the management level is very timely, in that we were aware of the considerable demands on managers of providing line management for large teams while maintaining strategic presence. Realising the new capability it provides – that is, achieving synergies between the new management team members and the pre-existing team - will require a management development programme.

Fourth, the requirements for strategic direction placed on the organization during the period under evaluation created management dilemmas. The leadership involved in articulating the organization's role and purpose is also required of management in maintaining the commitment of its members. The positioning of the organization as a leader of the social economy on the one hand and, on the other, managing support to sole traders, are not mutually exclusive options. But they do require managers to communicate clearly and decisively the broader identity and values of the organization.

Conclusions

The evaluation concludes from its analysis of WCC management issues that:

- WCC is addressing the demand for greater management capability for an increased, increasingly diverse and dispersed staff group in a number of ways

And strongly recommends that

- *WCC new management team should benefit from a management development programme to identify and implement further options*
- *WCC management team carefully communicates the broader values and identity underlying WCC's diverse operational activities*

C.5. Evaluation and Organisational Learning in WCC

Achieving organizational success through strategic influence underpinned by business process and administrative excellence, as WCC has done, may seem to provide a compelling case for doing more of the same. The task of management, however, is to achieve a more rounded performance which is able to fully reap the benefits of the strategic position now won for WCC³.

³ (Mintzberg 1991).

Monitoring and quality control - which WCC is very effective at - is important to maintain performance standards, for draw-down of funding and to provide an audit trail when things go wrong but can be less effective in making things go right in the first place. However, in addressing quality issues there is a limit to how far an organization can go in terms of monitoring before returns on time and effort become low. Further, to create additional demands for monitoring can feel like being policed rather than being supported.

Engaging staff in evaluation and learning for themselves and with others is another way in which continuous performance improvement can be addressed. WCC have already put in place regular two-day staff meetings twice a year for all staff to come together. Staff also regularly come together in teams to discuss their work. How far these meetings provide the necessary conditions for effective engagement between different staff members and staff groups we do not know but is likely to vary. The requirement is for places safe enough and encouraging enough for people to genuinely share their perspectives and, where necessary, to admit mistakes and learn from them.

Thus, at this point it would appear that the mechanisms are in place but the culture may not yet be sufficiently mature to fully realise these opportunities for learning together. Analysis of the language used by different staff groups in response to the same question, for example, reveals that staff relate closely to their prior affiliations - the labour movement, the co-operative movement or broader regeneration settings - and not necessarily to the broader community of interests which WCC currently serves. These differences may create obstacles to the development of common language and understanding that would help organization members make collective sense of where they stand in relation to the social economy, co-operation and supporting sole traders. Although managers can provide leadership in this area, as discussed above, there is nonetheless a need in all organizations, especially those where a dispersed workforce represents the organization to partners and clients, for staff to contribute their own understandings to sense-making through discourse with their colleagues.

Conclusions

The evaluation concludes that:

- WCC creates multiple opportunities for the staff group to come together and engage in collective evaluation learning
- WCC staff group as a whole do not yet fully share a common language which would underpin collective evaluation and learning

And recommends that:

- *WCC should seek specialist advice and facilitation in further developing greater engagement and learning across the staff group*