

Co-operative Development Agency

The Co-operative Development Agency was established by the Co-operative Development Act 1978. Its function was to promote the development of the co-operative sector of the economy in an advisory, promotional, representational and educational capacity. The Agency began operations on 1st September 1978.

The many constituent parts of the co-operative movement shared the same general principles, but their interests were widely separate and they worked in isolation from one another. In addition, the co-operative movement in the UK was seen to put a strong emphasis on retailing and wholesaling and to have a well established agricultural sector, but its housing, credit and industrial sectors were under-developed. The Co-operative Development Agency was a body free to formulate views and attitudes reflecting the interests of the movement as a whole, to co-ordinate and facilitate its development and to keep watch over the whole range of co-operative activities. Its main efforts were directed towards the specification and promotion of the conditions necessary for the development of industrial and service co-operative enterprises.

The Agency was financed by government grant in aid made by the Secretary of State for Industry (from 1983 the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry) and administered through the Small Firms Service, which provided support for co-operatives and information, business advice and counselling to small firms. In 1985 the Department of Employment assumed responsibility for the administration of the Small Firms Service. From that date the Co-operative Development Agency received grant in aid from the Secretary of State for Employment. The grant was supplemented by income from fee earning projects and grants from other sources, such as the European Social Fund. The Agency was also permitted to borrow temporarily such sums as it might require for meeting its obligations and discharging its functions, but not for the purpose of making grants or loans.

The Co-operative Development Agency and Industrial Development Act 1984 provided the Agency with powers to carry out training and to make grants and loans. It also removed the prohibition on the Agency undertaking commercial activities and entering into partnerships.

The Agency began its work with a board of eight chaired by Lord Oram, with a staff of ten working from offices in London, Manchester and Middlesbrough. The number of staff rose to a maximum of twenty three, over half of whom worked part-time, including some who worked on a voluntary basis. Lord Oram was succeeded by Ralph Woolf in 1981.

The Agency ceased to exercise its functions, except for the purposes of winding itself up, on 30 September 1990. It was not subject to the Public Records Act but when it was dissolved on 31 December 1990 its surviving records acquired public record status on their transfer, with all remaining assets and liabilities, to the Secretary of State for Employment.