

# Our Commitment to Racial Equality and Inclusion



It's what we do

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# 1.0

A message from Steve  
Murrells, CEO - Co-op Group

# 1.0 A message from Steve Murrells, CEO – Co-op Group

**2020 has opened all of our eyes to the gross inequalities that still exist around us. When it comes to race, the issues we're facing are systemic, deeply entrenched, and knotty. It may seem complicated, but at the end of the day this is about everyone having a fair and equal chance to fulfil their potential.**



We believe that the act of *not being racist*, is not enough. So, I'm crystal clear that at the Co-op we are *Anti-Racist*. Being Anti-Racist, means that we'll work to eliminate individual, institutional and systemic racial inequalities that currently exist. We won't stand by when we spot it happening. We will speak out against it. We're far from where we want to be. But honest recognition of this is an important first step. Immediately followed by listening well and taking bold, well-informed, action.

Let's not kid ourselves that this change will happen through hope alone. Our founders – the Rochdale Pioneers knew this too, and they were world changers. But the responsibility is now on us, to wake up each day and make new, proactive and tangible choices for the better – personal, corporate and governmental. And it's not just written policies and regulations that matter either, but also unwritten norms and behaviours. That's why we're making some radical choices to do things differently.

We've set ourselves a bold vision to *Co-operate for a Fairer World*. That requires all of our colleagues and leaders to bring their diverse talents and expertise to the table to make change happen. From our people policies, through to our procurement; from our community plan, to our products and services; we will commit all of our assets, whole heartedly, to achieving a fairer world.

This document sets out our commitment to tackling racial inequality head on. To be frank, we will not achieve our vision without delivering on these commitments. These aren't on the side, or nice to have. Our very purpose of existence will fly or fail based on our ability to deliver these. I've no doubt that future generations will judge us on how well we respond to this challenge. We've got a long way to go. But I have the talent, energy and determination of my colleagues alongside me.

**Steve Murrells**

# 2.0

Our values  
and history

## 2.0 Our values and history

We follow in the path of bold leaders at the Co-op. Our Rochdale Pioneer founders set out to address social and economic injustice. There's nothing more unjust or unfair than inequality based on race. The Co-op values they established, which are shared by the worldwide co-operative movement, include commitments to democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity. Throughout our history these values have been put into practice in the fight against racism.



In December 1862, as the American Civil War raged, the founders of our Co-op showed their solidarity with those who were enslaved and those fighting slavery. They organised a public meeting of 5,000 Lancashire cotton weavers at Manchester Free Trade Hall – despite the fact that they were personally financially impacted for taking a stand. Together they wrote a letter to President Abraham Lincoln expressing the inhumanity of slavery and promising to stand in solidarity with him and the slaves he was seeking to emancipate. Our Co-op founders and the weavers of Lancashire did this knowing the high personal cost the Civil War was already causing. In 1863 Co-operative Wholesale Societies (CWS) adopted the wheatsheaf and the motto 'Labor and Wait', borrowing the emblem and the phrase (including its American spelling) from the anti-slavery movement.

A century later, co-operators in the UK were at the forefront of creating the global anti-apartheid movement. In 1985, our Co-op ended all trading links with South Africa at a time when the British government was still opposed to any sanctions or boycotts. Meanwhile, our bigger competitors continued to sell South African produce.

**Our long-standing commitment to Fairtrade helps to level the global playing field for non-white farmers.**

More recently, our long-standing commitment to Fairtrade helps to level the global playing field for non-white farmers. While closer to home, we've campaigned for and given practical support to the survivors of Modern Slavery in the UK. Within our own organisation, our Board is one of the most ethnically diverse of any national business.

So we have a strong history but our time for action is now. Therefore we're making new commitments in the following areas:

- Our Campaigning Voice
- Our Colleagues
- Our Communities
- Our Customers, products and suppliers
- Our Members

# 3.0

Our  
Commitments



## 3.0 Our Commitments

### Our Campaigning Voice

**Right now, it's time to use our voice on issues of racial equality.**

Throughout our 175 year history, we've campaigned for social change on the issues that matter to our members – from women's suffrage and food standards to slavery and loneliness. Right now, it's time to use our voice on issues of racial equality.

So, we'll

- Work with our Co-op Academies Trust to develop a new curriculum on anti-racism so that the next generation knows what it means to be anti-racist. We'll then lobby the government to roll this out as part of the national school curriculum across the UK.
- We'll publish annually our ethnicity **pay gap**. As we know transparency drives action so we will call on the government to make this mandatory for all businesses.

### Our Colleagues

**...doing all we can to make sure there are no barriers to the career progression of our Black, Asian and ethnic minority groups.**

We value and celebrate the cultural, ethnic, and religious differences that exist among our Co-op colleagues. That's what enables individuals to feel a sense of belonging and thrive. We can achieve this by doing all we can to make sure there are no barriers to the career progression of our Black, Asian and ethnic minority groups. We've made some progress in creating a more inclusive and diverse workplace, but we know there's much more to be done to close the gap.

In addition to a zero-tolerance approach to racism and bullying against our colleagues, whether that's from colleagues, managers or customers, we'll:

- Double the representation of Black, Asian, and minority ethnic leaders and managers by the end of 2022, moving from 3% to 6%, and then to 10% by 2025.
- Require diverse shortlists for all leadership roles – no exceptions, and we'll partner with organisations that will help us to reach talent from Black, Asian or minority ethnic backgrounds.
- Maximise the use of our apprenticeship levy and seek partnerships and opportunities which focus on benefitting Black, Asian and ethnic minority candidates.
- Actively collect and monitor data which enables us to track progress and reduce inequalities within our internal systems and processes when it comes to promotion and opportunities.
- Require all of our leaders to have objectives that ensure they are playing their part in delivering to our commitments to racial equality from 2021.



## Our Communities

**...we're committed to ensuring that our community activity reflects the diversity of the communities that we serve.**

We already support a diverse network of local community causes and activities which, in 2020, includes 973 projects nationwide where Black, Asian or ethnic communities benefit specifically. We've also increased the diversity of our Member Pioneers as we're committed to ensuring that our community activity is the diversity of the communities that we serve. But we need to go further to ensure that our community assets are fully inclusive.

So, we'll

- Use our Community Wellbeing Index, ethnicity data, external evidence and partner insight to understand issues of race inequality in the communities we support and where we need to focus our activity.
- Increase the number of local causes whose projects include Black, Asian, and ethnic minority beneficiaries to 25% through the Local Community Fund.
- Increase the number of ethnic minority led community organisations that our charity the Co-op Foundation will support.
- Provide targeted vocational and enrichment opportunities for Black, Asian and ethnic minority students at our Co-op Academy schools, building on their individual aspirations and ambitions.
- Work with the Co-op Academies Trust to increase the representation of senior leaders in the Trust.
- Target racial inequality as part of a broader focus on youth inequality through national programmes and the partnerships we select.



## Our products, services, customers and suppliers

### **Our products, services and customer proposition must reflect the diversity of our communities.**

Our products, services and customer proposition must reflect the diversity of our communities. That means making sure that what we sell meets the needs of our ethnic minority communities and our Co-op brand is seen as inclusive and welcoming. We will work to prove that being inclusive, by all measures, is good for business and we will use our influence and example to encourage the industry to follow our lead.

So, we'll

- Create more diverse consumer and member panels to get closer to what our customers and members need from our businesses.
- Develop specific products for ethnic minority groups and equip our colleagues with training in order to service our newly-attracted customers well e.g. our soon-to-be launched African and Caribbean funeral service.
- Ensure stronger representation of Black, Asian and ethnic minority groups across all our marketing platforms.
- Ensure that we celebrate with communities and that our products meet the needs of our customers as they celebrate key cultural events.
- Create more inclusive ways to access product and service information.
- Change our procurement process so that we partner and invest more with suppliers that have a strong focus on inclusion and closing the inequality gap in their own businesses.
- Encourage ethnic diversity as a focus for the businesses we trade with and offer practical support and encouragement where we can to those that need to progress.



## Our Members

**We want to go further when it comes to appropriate representation from Black, Asian and ethnic minority groups to better reflect the communities we serve.**

There are many ways in which members can become active co-operators: volunteering in their local community; becoming a Member Pioneer; helping us design new products and services; campaigning on the national causes we support; or participating in our governance structures. In all these areas, we want to go further when it comes to appropriate representation from Black, Asian and ethnic minority groups to better reflect the communities we serve.



So, we'll

- Ask our members from Black and Asian and ethnic minority communities to tell us how they view us and what we need to change to make us more welcoming and inclusive.
- Once we really understand these views, we'll work to address the issues being raised.

## Insight and transparency

**Listening and learning must be central to all our work and we will work with our colleague network.**

None of our new commitments will be possible to achieve without understanding where we really stand right now. We'll need to gather and collate the insight and data we need so that we can monitor our progress and set ourselves further compelling targets. Many of us have not experienced racism within our lives so we are not experts – and never will be. Listening and learning must be central to all our work and we will work with our colleague network, Rise, to ensure we're hearing the whole truth at all times.

So, we'll

- Launch in October 2020 our Inclusion Think Tank, which will be chaired by our Co-op CEO, Steve Murrells, and will include both internal and external partners committed to furthering equality across the Co-op.
- We will ensure that inclusion is recognised as a key strategic programme and part of our strategy and business transformation portfolio.
- Publish annually our detailed targets and our progress, with the first reporting due in September 2021.

## Our Commitment to Racial Equality and Inclusion



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