NATIONAL CITIZEN SERVICE BILL  
COMMONS SECOND READING  
16 January 2017 

Key points

- NCVO is supportive of the bill and of the National Citizen Service, which we recognise has made a big difference for lots of young people, empowering them to take action in their communities and helping them develop skills and experience which will be valuable throughout their lives.

- Since it started five years ago, NCS has reached tens of thousands of young people. By 2020, NCS will receive over £1bn of public money and is expected to serve 300,000 young people per year.

- However, we believe that NCS has the potential to be more effective, and the placing of NCS on a statutory footing as it expands is an important time to consider where delivery can be improved.

For NCS to be as effective as possible, we believe that:

1. **Further and better collaboration with the voluntary sector is needed**
   - Organisations supporting the delivery of NCS should be adequately resourced
   - Commissioning should support and enable smaller, local organisations with relevant expertise to be involved in delivering the programme

2. **NCS should be an entry point/staging post on a longer journey of social action and volunteering**
   - The voluntary action element of NCS needs to be high quality (and should be focused on making a positive impact). We recommend that NCS providers should have clear guidance on what high quality youth social action looks like
   - Participants should be supported into other volunteering opportunities, eg local opportunities and trusteeships.

3. **NCS should build on its existing record of bringing together people from diverse backgrounds**
   - Greater focus on diversity and inclusivity (rather than numbers)
   - The programme should go further to ensure those who face additional barriers to getting involved can take part.

4. **Young people should be meaningfully involved in the development of NCS going forward.**
Background

In 2010, Prime Minister David Cameron announced the National Citizen Service, with an initial 10,000 places for 16 year olds. In the Spending Review 2016, it was announced that NCS would be expanded to deliver 300,000 places per year by 2019/20.

NCS is a voluntary personal and social development programme for 16 and 17-year-olds. Running for two to four weeks in the school holidays, it has three key ingredients: adventure, skills development and social action. The original aims were to give young people the opportunity to:

- develop the skills they needed to be ‘active and responsible citizens’
- mix with people from different backgrounds
- get involved with their communities.

The NCS bill is intended to secure the future of NCS and make the NCS Trust more accountable to parliament and the public. A new body, the National Citizen Service Trust, will be established by royal charter.

Youth social action

Youth social action is defined as young people taking practical action in the service of others to create positive change. Good, meaningful social action is of double benefit to the young people themselves and the community. Whether it’s volunteering for a charity, caring for someone in their community, providing peer support online or fundraising for a specific cause, we want all young people to see the difference they can make. Social action might happen through a structured programme, or might be self-generated by young people themselves.

Why is it important for young people?

- Youth social action can be a win-win, bringing ‘double benefit’ to young people and communities
- Young people involved in social action become more confident, skilful and politically engaged
- Young people bring energy and passion, but also important skills, eg technology and social media
- The most excluded stand to gain the most from the increased skills and confidence that youth social action can deliver
- Consistent participation as a young person provides the momentum for life-long commitment to volunteering
The future of NCS

We are largely supportive of the bill, however we do think this is an opportunity to reflect on what has been successful, and how the youth social action opportunities provided by NCS can lead to a lifetime of social action. We have identified four main areas of focus that we believe are at the heart of offering an improved offering.

Collaboration with the voluntary sector

Organisations supporting the delivery of NCS should be adequately resourced. Smaller organisations such as volunteer centres in particular form a crucial part of participants’ experiences and future participation in social action, so sufficient support is vital.

We welcome the government’s decision to amend to the preamble of the royal charter to state that other organisations supporting young people should benefit from the actions of the trust, and also that, following the debates in the Lords, the minister for civil society has written to the trust to set out expectations that the trust report on relationships with the sector beyond their legal reporting responsibilities included in the charter.

We understand that the trust intends to consult with volunteer centres about introducing a place-based approach to NCS, which is a positive step. It is important that commissioning is done such that small local organisations are supported so that they are able to effectively deliver the programme.

NCS should be an entry point/staging post on a longer journey of social action and volunteering

While NCS has provided valuable opportunities for many participants, it can maximise its effect by ensuring that it is an entry point to a longer journey of social action and volunteering.

To ensure that participants do this, there is a need to ensure the voluntary action element of NCS is high quality, and focused on making a positive impact, ensuring the experience is a positive one for participants that they want to repeat.

To help achieve this, NCS providers should have clear guidance on what high quality youth social action looks like. This should build on the six principles developed by the #iwill campaign through consultation with young people. Measuring success in relation to this standard for quality of the youth social action part of the programme should be part of the evaluation of NCS.

Participants should also be supported into other volunteering opportunities, such as local opportunities and trusteeships. We believe the bill could be more explicit in placing this responsibility on the NCS Trust to promote other social action and volunteering opportunities as a primary function and to ensure that the annual reporting requirements
include how many young people are involved in volunteering or social action following completion of the NCS programme.

While the minister’s letter to the trust sets out reporting expectations beyond those included in the charter, there is no recommendation to report on further voluntary action.

**NCS should build on its existing record of bringing together people from diverse backgrounds**

Such a high profile programme should aspire to be leading the way in its approach to being inclusive and accessible to a diverse range of young people. The programme should go further to ensure those who face additional barriers to getting involved can take part.

The government and NCS should be clear about and recognise the limitations in the appeal and reach of one specific programme alone and take practical steps to engage those that NCS does not reach. NCS should make a commitment to work more effectively in partnership with organisations and charities who have the knowledge and expertise to reach the most marginalised young people in society.

There should be more recognition and investment by the government in other models which have demonstrated their effectiveness in engaging young people in order to support and develop the diverse landscape of opportunities for young people to get involved that is required to achieve the ambition of every young person having the opportunity to develop the skills, confidence and experience to enable them to have the best chances in life.

In the minister’s recent letter to the NCS Trust he reinforced the need for NCS to increase diversity by stating that ‘ensuring equality of access at the local level, across the country, is a government priority for NCS’. We are in favour of the requirement to measure the number of participants who have a disability, and would support further measures to increase the diversity of NCS participants.

**Young people should be meaningfully involved in the development of NCS going forward**

This should ensure that young people are consulted on and inform plans to improve the social action element of the programme as plans are developed to scale up. A focus group of young people should be brought together to inform a review of the social action element of the programme to address the quality of the experience for young people, the impact of social action projects locally and to identify better pathways for young people into other volunteering and social action opportunities. To ensure the social action element programme is able to have a sustained impact as it scales up it will need to evolve in line with the changing needs of young people, charities and communities involved.

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