

# NATIONAL CITIZEN SERVICE BILL

## LORDS COMMITTEE STAGE

16 November 2016

### Key points

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- 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 & 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 & 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 pre and post NCS.

#### 3. NCS should build on its existing record of bringing together people from diverse backgrounds

- Greater focus on diversity and inclusivity (rather than number of participants)
- 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

### Social action journey

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While NCVO is supportive of the Bill, we believe it is crucial that the Bill cements the role of NCS as part of a wider social action journey, maximising its effect by ensuring that for participants it is an entry point to a longer journey of social action and volunteering.

To ensure that participants also take advantage of other opportunities, the voluntary action element of NCS needs to be of high quality, and focused on making a positive impact, thereby making sure that the experience is a positive one that participants will 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 [6 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 that the best way to achieve this goal within the Bill is to ensure that the role of NCS in supporting this wider social action is enshrined as a primary function of the NCS Trust.

**As such, we support Baroness Royall’s amendment 10 to Clause 1 which inserts a duty “to support, and not undermine, existing opportunities available to young people between the ages of 5 and 25 before and after their participation in NCS Trust commissioned programmes, where those opportunities contribute to the purposes in paragraph (a)”.** This amendment will ensure that NCS’s contribution to a wider social action journey is at the centre of its objectives, and that the necessary steps to supporting this journey will be acted upon.

**We also support Baroness Royall’s amendment 38 to Clause 6 which would include the number of young people participating in wider social action, and the impact of NCS programmes on wider social action as a measure to be reported on.** If the NCS Trust is to form part of this wider social action journey, it is essential that the NCS Trust measures, and is accountable for, participation in wider social action and the overall impact of its programmes on social action.

## Royal charter

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While NCVO believes that it is important that the new NCS Trust body has sufficient independence from government, we are conscious that a Royal Charter may present some challenges for the flexibility of the new NCS Trust.

One particular concern about the potential inflexibility of a Royal Charter structure, is the need for Privy Council approval of amendments. Although the Royal Charter does not cover a lot of the day-to-day activity that will be undertaken by the NCS Trust, it includes provisions for its governance and primary functions.

We would welcome clarification from the government on how it intends to ensure that Royal Charter status does not unduly limit the NCS Trust’s flexibility in delivering its primary functions, and in governing itself. In particular, we are concerned that the need to secure Privy Council approval for amendments to the Charter may make it difficult for the NCS Trust to ensure its governance arrangements remain appropriate.

Given the timing of the Bill and the impact this would have, we do not support amendments that would remove the Royal Charter, but we hope the government will be able to provide reassurance over the concerns that have been raised.

# Collaboration and commissioning with the voluntary sector

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To maximise the impact of NCS, close collaboration with voluntary sector partners is also needed. 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.

Commissioning must also support these smaller, local organisations so that they are able to effectively deliver the programme.

Some of the local feedback we have received identifies that a lack of attention is paid by NCS providers to the social action project that forms the end point of the programme. This can lead to damaged relationships with other voluntary organisations in the local area and can mean that young people don't get the most out of the experience. It can also mean that the social action project is not developed with impact in mind and fails to work with existing organisations or initiatives seeking to address challenges which are important to the local area or community.

Local voluntary organisations and volunteering infrastructure have a great deal of skills and expertise to offer the programme but to date NCS has not always nurtured and capitalised on this expertise to support the effective delivery of the programme and the quality of the offer for young people.

Some of the key challenges identified by Volunteer Centres (VCs) and infrastructure include:

- VCs and other infrastructure orgs are being approached last minute, often troubleshooting against an unrealistic deadline
- Providers have tried to use VCs to deliver social action aspect of NCS, without resourcing or subcontracting - skills and services being used by NCS providers
- VCs are investing in and supporting delivery of NCS without remuneration so money is not being passed down the supply chain
- This has an impact on longer term outcome in terms of getting young people on a pathway towards doing more volunteering. A poor quality experience can put them off and discourage voluntary organisations from working with the programme again or involving young volunteers.
- Smaller organisations have found it challenging to engage with the contracting and bidding process that have attempted to bring in local expertise e.g. NCS Pathfinders programme.

**We support Baroness Barker's amendment 21 to Clause 5 to include the extent of NCS co-ordination with other voluntary sector bodies within the NCS Trust's business plan, and Baroness Barker's amendment 28 to Clause 6 to include the extent to which the NCS Trust has collaborated with and effectively resourced the voluntary sector in delivering NCS as one of the measures on which the NCS Trust will be required to report on.** By focusing on some of the areas where there have been local concerns, we are confident that the NCS Trust can further improve the way it works with the wider voluntary sector.

**We also support Baroness Barker's new clause, amendment 39, on consulting with the voluntary sector on how well it has performed its functions in relation to the performance measures contained within Clause 6.** We believe it is important that the NCS Trust continues to build a positive relationship with the wider voluntary sector, and part of that relationship must include inviting assessment of how effectively it is performing its functions. The feedback we have received from the likes of volunteer

centres, providers and the wider sector suggests that the delivery of NCS would benefit from continuing consultation with the sector.

We note that the government is currently consulting on guidance for schools and local authorities in promoting NCS with a range of voluntary sector representatives, and we hope it would be supportive of a consultative approach being pursued by the NCS Trust.

**We also support Lord Hodgson’s new clause, amendment 47, to initiate an independent review of NCS commissioning.** Given the challenges that have been identified by the feedback we have received, a review of the barriers faced by smaller organisations in particular would help to deliver a better commissioning environment. The amendment would also consider the impact of commissioning on social value, ensuring that commissioning undertaken with a social purpose does not fall short when it comes to the impact of that commissioning on social value. **We also support Baroness Scott’s amendment 27 to Clause 6 on ensuring commissioning is carried out in accordance with the principles set out in the Social Value Act.**

We are aware that the National Audit Office is currently undertaking a review of the value for money of NCS which is due to report in early 2017. We believe a wider review of commissioning would complement this work, and provide valuable information to the NCS Trust in organising commissioning as effectively as possible.

**We also support Lord Cope’s amendment 24 to Clause 6 that would require the number of small providers to be reported on.** This would provide useful information in identifying whether there are particular challenges for small providers.

## Value for money

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The Bill contains a welcome commitment for the NCS Trust on the value for money being provided by NCS, which alongside the review currently being carried out by the National Audit Office suggests a welcome focus on ensuring the programme is delivering as expected.

Despite the success of the programme so far, the relatively high cost per participant (£1,538 in 2014<sup>1</sup>), means the performance of NCS against alternative social action provision must continue to be monitored.

While we believe the scheme is working and providing important opportunities, it must be remembered that NCS is part of a much wider youth social action infrastructure, and as such needs to perform favourably against alternatives to ensure government funding is continuing to be invested in the most effective way.

**We support Baroness Barker’s amendment 29 and Baroness Royall’s amendment 30 on ensuring the assessment on the value for money of the scheme is made with reference to alternative youth social action provision.** Given the significant investment into the scheme, it is important we continue to assess the scheme in the light of alternative ways to deliver youth social action.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN06364>

## Targets

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The government has set an ambitious target for 300,000 participants in NCS by 2020, which is going to be very challenging to meet. Given NCS has consistently failed to hit its participation targets since it was launched in 2010, it is crucial that future targets can be examined and modified where they prove to be unrealistic.

While NCS has been successfully expanded, around 58,000 of the 80,000 places offered in 2014/2015 were filled. In 2013/14, fewer than 40,000 young people took part, against a target of 50,000.

**We support Baroness Royall's amendment 36 to Clause 6 which would mean the NCS Trust would have to report on the extent to which they have met participation targets, and their ability to do so in future.**

This mechanism would reduce the danger of overreaching with the programme, and provide an opportunity to change course if the target proves impossible for the NCS Trust to meet.

## Diversity

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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 also 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.

**We support Baroness Royall's amendment 35 to Clause 6 which would require the NCS Trust to report on the extent of participation by hard to reach groups.**

**We also support Baroness Barker's amendment 32 to Clause 6 on ensuring the diversity of NCS trustees reflects the diversity of the communities the scheme is serving.**

## Involving young people in decision-making

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For NCS to continue to develop it is important that those benefiting from the scheme and the wider opportunities it presents are able to contribute to the strategic direction of the NCS Trust.

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.

**We support Baroness Royall's amendment 37 to Clause 6 which would require the NCS Trust to report on the extent to which young people have been involved in setting the strategic priorities of the NCS Trust.** 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.

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**For further information please contact:** Chris Walker, Senior External Relations Officer, NCVO, [chris.walker@ncvo.org.uk](mailto:chris.walker@ncvo.org.uk) or 020 7520 3167.