NATIONAL CITIZEN SERVICE BILL
LORDS SECOND READING

25 October 2016

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 & 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.

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, and 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 both young people & communities
- Young people involved in social action become more confident, skilful & politically engaged
- Young people bring energy & passion, but also important skills, eg technology & 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

**What should it look like?**

In 2013, Cabinet Office, The Young Foundation and Institute of Voluntary Research consulted with many organisations across the youth, voluntary, education, business and faith communities. They established an agreed set of six principles that underpin high quality, meaningful youth social action.

**6 principles of quality youth social action**

1. Challenging-Stretching and ambitious as well as enjoyable and enabling
2. Youth-led-Led, owned and shaped by young people’s needs, ideas and decision making
3. Socially Impactful- Have a clear intended benefit to a community, cause or social problem
4. Progressive- Sustained, and providing links to other activities and opportunities
5. Embedded- Accessible to all, and well integrated to existing pathways to become a habit for life
6. Reflective- Recognising contributions as well as valuing critical reflection and learning
NCVO believes that high quality opportunities are more likely to attract young people and ensure they have a good experience. In turn a good experience is something that is more likely to encourage them to go on to other opportunities as part of a journey into other volunteering or social action opportunities. We are keen for volunteering to be seen as part of a pathway of participation across the life course where people have the opportunity to engage in a range of opportunities that fit around other commitments in their lives.

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.

Further & better collaboration with the voluntary sector is 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. Local voluntary organisations and volunteering infrastructure have a great deal of skills and expertise to offer the programme but to date NCS has failed to nurture and capitalise on this expertise to support the effective delivery of the programme and the quality of the offer for young people.

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

While NCS has provided valuable opportunities for many participants, it can maximise 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 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 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 trustee-ship.

We believe the bill could be more explicit in placing this responsibility on the NCS Trust, by including the promotion of other social action and volunteering opportunities as a primary function in clause 1 of the bill and by ensuring that the annual reporting requirements set out in clause 6 include how many young people are involved in volunteering or social action following completion of the NCS programme.
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 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.

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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