

Full Time Social Action Review | Call for Evidence

NCS Trust Response

October 2017

Overview

NCS is a three to four week, part-residential programme for 15-17-year-olds in England and Northern Ireland. Young people from all backgrounds work in diverse teams of twelve to fifteen, building skills for work and life, taking on exciting challenges, making new friends, and contributing to their community.

NCS is overseen by the NCS Trust but delivered by a locally rooted network of more than two hundred local charities, social enterprises, businesses, sports clubs, schools and other youth oriented organisations. The NCS network includes several members of the coalition of youth organisations that called for this review, such as vInspired and The Challenge, and NCS strongly supports the aims and objectives of the review.

By the end of this year, more than four hundred thousand young people will have participated in NCS since the first pilots in 2009. Young people who would be unlikely to mix under normal circumstances come together for a shared experience in common purpose, regardless of their background. NCS reaches young people from all backgrounds, and especially those who benefit the most. NCS participants are more likely to be on free school meals (18% of participants¹), from minority ethnic backgrounds (34% of participants) and more likely to have special educational needs (5% of participants).

Civic engagement is one pillar of NCS' mission, alongside social cohesion and social mobility. NCS empowers young people to make a difference in their communities, with sixty hours committed to planning and delivering a local community project over two weeks.

Young people have given back at least twelve million hours of social action on programme so far.² But it doesn't end there. Independent evaluation of NCS shows that young people go on to volunteer four hours more per month, on average, after completing the programme.³ The Office for National Statistics (ONS) recently found 16-24 year olds had moved from being the least likely to volunteer in 2000, to the most likely to volunteer in 2015. This dramatic change coincides with the creation and rapid expansion of NCS,

¹ 2017 summer data (vs 17% of participants on FSM in 2016).

² Ipsos Mori Evaluations from 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2013 <http://www.ncsyes.co.uk/about-us> "One Year On".

³ 4 hours per month per 2015 NCS Evaluation, <http://www.ncsyes.co.uk/sites/default/files/NCS%202015%20Evaluation%20Report%20FINAL.pdf>, p25. 6.9 hours per month per 2013 "One Year On" Evaluation <http://www.ncsyes.co.uk/sites/default/files/NCS%202013%20One%20Year%20On%20Evaluation.pdf> pg 2.

and both ONS and NCVO cite this as a contributing factor in their analysis of the data.⁴

1) What experience have you had of full time social action / volunteering, either as a young person or as a provider for young people?

Full time volunteering is described in the call for evidence as more than sixteen hours per week on average for at least six months. NCS participants spend sixty hours planning and delivering social action projects over a two week period, which equates to thirty hours per week. This is double the sixteen hours per week expected of a full time volunteering commitment. Whilst NCS is therefore not a long-term social action commitment, it does give tens of thousands of young people from all backgrounds a chance to experience full-time volunteering first hand.

Our regular and rigorous programme feedback shows the benefits of this approach for young people. who are encouraged to explore challenges facing their local community, identify what matters to them and assess where they can make the most impact. They are then supported to reach out to a diverse range of local charities, businesses and other community organisations to carry out their social action project.

Below are some examples of social action projects completed on NCS, in young people's own words:

...we raised money for a special needs school in the local area by holding fundraising events such as a coffee morning and bag packing in local supermarkets. Jack, Staffordshire

...we dug a pond for a local children's charity Evesham Adventure Playground. Henry, Worcester

...we held an afternoon tea session in a local church to help social integration in the local community. Lauren, Skipton

...we worked with Westside Nursing home in Purley to help bridge the gap between older and younger generations. Kofi, Croydon

...we raised awareness and collected donations for a local food bank called The Thomas Project. Aran, Walsall.

...we took part in a sponsored walk for a local charity Positive Futures. Joshua, Strangford.

...we completed a sponsored 'space hop', hopping for 1 mile, to raise money for a local cancer charity. Emily, Fermanagh.

⁴ <http://visual.ons.gov.uk/billion-pound-loss-in-volunteering-effort-in-the-last-3-years/>
<https://www.google.com/url?hl=en-GB&q=https://data.ncvo.org.uk/a/almanac16/volunteer-profiles-2&source=gmail&ust=1493382849727000&usg=AFQjCNFJRnULHB9tiQKUcsKYfsZHPnxL5Q>



...we helped to renovate areas within Derby to contribute to our #loveyourcity project. Erin, Derby.

...we completed a sponsored 24 hour no sleep and no technology camp, raising over £1,300 for Help for Heroes. Chantelle, Kettering.

...we worked to raise money and awareness for Jerry Green dog rescue. We hosted a dog show event, with prize donations gathered from local businesses in our community. Sophie, Mansfield.

...we supported Hope Community Services by organising and creating care packages for the homeless. Lydia, Bassetlaw.

After having what is often their first taste of social action on NCS, our graduates want to do more. On average, young people who have completed NCS give back an additional 4 hours per month in volunteering after they graduate compared to a matched control group.⁵ We believe that NCS has created significant latent demand for further opportunities from a large and diverse group of young people - we therefore welcome further supply of opportunities to meet this demand.

2) What impact does full time social action / volunteering have on young people and providers in comparison to part time social action / volunteering?

National Citizen Service (NCS) has a proven record of involving thousands of young people in social action. This year alone, more than one hundred thousand young people are expected to take part in NCS. That's one hundred thousand young people engaging with their local communities; one hundred thousand young people fundraising, campaigning, and volunteering their time; one hundred thousand young people tackling some of society's biggest challenges. So far, young people have given back an additional twelve million hours to their communities through NCS.⁶

Whilst NCS isn't a dedicated full-time social action programme, it leads to a strong increase in regular volunteering amongst young people. Following completion of the programme, 64% of NCS graduates said that they would like to continue to stay involved and volunteer.⁷

⁵ 4 hours per month per 2015 NCS Evaluation,

<http://www.ncsyes.co.uk/sites/default/files/NCS%202015%20Evaluation%20Report%20FINAL.pdf>, p25

⁶ This estimate combines time spent on social action projects on summer NCS programmes (over and above what young people report doing normally) with impacts on time spent helping out over a 16-month period following graduation. The data used is taken from Ipsos Mori Evaluations from 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2013 "One Year On".

⁷ NCS 2015 Evaluation

<http://www.ncsyes.co.uk/sites/default/files/14-090747-01%20NCS%202015%20Evaluation%20Report%20Final%20PUBLIC%20v2%2031072017.pdf>, p18.

Below is an example of how Alisha, an NCS graduate from Ilford, has stayed involved:

"Having volunteered with children suffering with mental health issues and seen the way that they can affect my peers in and outside school, I have been very passionate to remove the stigma surrounding mental health in the younger generation. As young people, I don't think we ourselves realise the sheer number of us that are suffering, often in silence and as a result I feel it is our responsibility to make sure that everyone knows how they can seek the help that they need. NCS has encouraged me to make a difference within my school and I am now part of a small group of peer supporters who help to address any concerns that students have either within or outside of school. Peer support has worked brilliantly in my school as a first port of call, especially for younger students who may feel slightly more intimidated to directly approach teachers with their concerns"

Examples like these show that part-time social action post-NCS builds unique and valuable skills that enhance confidence and career prospects, supporting communities in the process. Independent evaluation shows that for every pound invested in NCS, up to £8.36 is returned in social and well-being benefits.⁸ This independent evaluation shows that NCS supports young people's personal and social development and this has a knock on impact on their life chances. For example, research using UCAS data found that young people who had taken part in NCS were significantly more likely to secure admission to higher education⁹.

Our evidence shows that NCS participants are more likely to keep engaging in part-time volunteering, with significant societal benefits. We do not hold evidence about the additional social benefits created from young people engaging in full time volunteering as opposed to part-time volunteering. NCS Trust supports both types of volunteering and believes young people benefit most when opportunities for both are available to all. NCS wants to play its part as a platform linking young people from all backgrounds to a variety of full and part time volunteering opportunities.

3) What are the barriers to full time social action / volunteering and can you give examples of how these might be overcome?

Young people are more socially engaged than ever before. Data from an NCS commissioned report, DEMOS' *Introducing Generation Citizen*, suggests

⁸ NCS Wellbeing and Human Capital Evaluation, <http://www.ncsyes.co.uk/sites/default/files/NCS%20Wellbeing%20and%20Human%20Capital%20Valuation%20-%20Jump.pdf>, p1.

⁹ NCS Wellbeing and Human Capital Evaluation, Ibid pp.15-17

80% of young people felt that their generation was more concerned about social issues than previous generations.¹⁰

That said, young people are not always aware of how to turn this passion for social issues into real change. With its wide reach – over one hundred thousands participants expected this year alone - NCS plays a key role in empowering young people to make a difference. NCS gives young people the opportunity to meet local influencers, better understand local and national government, and introduces a real-life experience in volunteering that young people can learn from and repeat throughout their lives.

With over 64% of NCS graduates saying they want to stay involved with social action projects after they complete NCS, it is essential that young people from all backgrounds are offered a “next step” through a diverse range of full time and part time volunteering roles.¹¹ NCS is committed to continually enhancing what we can offer our graduates in this respect. Our “Opportunity Hub” is a “one-stop-shop” listing tens of thousands of volunteering opportunities for young people to continue their social action journey, and make sure NCS is just the start of their volunteering journey.

Whilst barriers to volunteering can be reduced by raising awareness and providing opportunities, current legislative arrangements pose an additional barrier for young people who wish to take part in full-time volunteering. Currently full-time volunteers in the UK are classified as NEET (Not in employment, education, or training), meaning that they're not eligible for vital support like National Insurance contributions afforded to other legal statuses such as Student, Unemployed, or those in full-time or part-time employment. This means that in many cases full-time volunteering is only accessible to those who have the means to support themselves financially.

Finding the balance between volunteering, employment, and education can be challenging for young people. Below are accounts from NCS graduates, Orla and Morgan, on what the barriers to taking part in full-time volunteering are for them:

Full time volunteering would mean I wouldn't have as much time for college work, my job and sports outside of college. Whereas if I part time volunteered it wouldn't interfere with my earnings and grades but in fact would make me a better person. Orla, Worcester (APM).

Full time social action would have a massive impact on my general well-being, however I do believe that full time social action would be too challenging and may distract me from my education. Alternatively part time social action would allow me to both pursue my academic career whilst also

¹⁰ DEMOS: Introducing Generation Citizen, https://www.demos.co.uk/files/Generation_Citizen_-_web.pdf?1392764120, p.15.

¹¹ NCS 2015 Evaluation, Ibid , p18.

allowing me to give something back to my community. Morgan, Staffordshire (APM)

That is why NCS is supportive of the call for a legal status for full-time volunteers. A legislative change would signal a recognition from government of the valuable contribution volunteers make in communities in the UK, and a commitment to ensuring young people have the necessary support to explore all types of volunteering opportunities alongside existing commitments.

4) Should there be an expansion of full time social action / volunteering opportunities for young people, and do you have any evidence of unmet need or demand?

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) recently found 16-24 year olds had moved from being the least likely to volunteer in 2000, to the most likely to volunteer in 2015.

This indicates an increasing commitment from young people to give back to their communities, while highlighting the role NCS plays as a stepping stone for young people to volunteer more regularly (both ONS and NCVO note the correlation between the growth in volunteering and the expansion of NCS).¹²

NCS Trust is committed to working across the sector to support a better framework for young people's social action ambitions to be realised. As stated above, through our "Opportunity Hub", we list tens of thousands of volunteering opportunities posted by volunteer centres, national and local charities and voluntary groups. These are made available to young people according to where they live, and help to build links locally. In addition:

- NCS actively encourages young people to continue their volunteering journey through ICS (International Citizen Service), and one in four ICS participants have taken part in the NCS programme.
- NCS provides opportunities for graduates to volunteer on NCS itself. This can involve mentoring younger participants on the NCS programme, supporting NCS social action at the national level through annual "action days", or joining regional and national youth boards. Youth Board members give feedback to help shape the NCS programme for future cohorts, and often lead social action projects in their area.

¹² <http://visual.ons.gov.uk/billion-pound-loss-in-volunteering-effort-in-the-last-3-years/>
<https://www.google.com/url?hl=en-GB&q=https://data.ncvo.org.uk/a/almanac16/volunteer-profiles-2&source=email&ust=1493382849727000&usg=AFQjCNFJRnULHB9tiQKUcsKYfsZHPnxL5Q>

- Through its partnership with The Scouts, NCS is exploring ways for its graduates to address the shortfall of voluntary scout leaders, in order to help reduce its current waiting list of fifty-five thousand prospective scouts.

There is always more we can do, and we are open to working with the youth sector, businesses and local government, to find new ways for young people to access all kinds of volunteering: local, regional and national; full time and part time; as they transition to adulthood and continue throughout their lives.

5) If you were to propose up to three things to enable more full time social action / volunteering, what would they be?

Seed pilot programmes in areas where full time social action could support.

We believe that young people have the skills and capabilities to support some of our most pressing social challenges. At present there are not enough proven, scalable models in different sectors for young people to take part in full time social action.

One way to achieve this would be to work across Government and across sectors to identify areas which would benefit from full time social action. For example, the list might include care sector, hospitals, local authorities, local charities, museums. Government could then invite social entrepreneurs and others to introduce pilot programmes in these areas. This could result in proven, scalable propositions across different areas of need that could attract further investment.

NCS would be happy to support this work.

Use NCS' existing infrastructure to promote volunteering opportunities to the widest possible audience.

As a platform that reaches hundreds of thousands of young people, particularly those from less affluent backgrounds, ethnic minorities and other harder-to-reach groups, NCS can use its scale to play a pivotal role in connecting young people from all backgrounds to their power to make a difference through social action.

NCS would welcome the opportunity to work with organisations across the sector to connect our graduates to a wide-range of volunteering opportunities - both part-time and full-time.

Furthermore, we would be willing to explore how the National Citizen Service brand could be leveraged to support this effort. The NCS brand has had considerable investment and has significant reach and affinity among young people. We believe that there are significant opportunities to leverage this to promote a good journey for young people post NCS by allowing different opportunities to live under the banner of 'NCS Year' or equivalent.



In addition, NCS is keen to pilot its own Service Year opportunity, using its brand, scale and reach among young people. We believe that there may be an opportunity to further our social mission and support our growth and staffing needs through full time social action. This might, for example, allow eighteen year old NCS grads to volunteer in a school for a year, receive additional training and support, and finish the year working on NCS in the summer. We are currently scoping this opportunity as part of our innovation work.

Review the legal status of young full time volunteers.

Social action is an important service that benefits both the individual volunteer and society. Currently full-time volunteers are not eligible for the same level of support afforded to civic roles such as carers, those on jury duty, or those who are unemployed or in education.

NCS Trust fully supports the call for a legal status for full-time volunteers. This would provide parity with other existing legal statuses, and allow sector organisations to give personal development support that would improve outputs for individuals, service users, organisations, and wider society. It would also give young people the security needed to pursue volunteer opportunities that provide essential skills to help them to get on in life.