

NCS

NATIONAL CITIZEN SERVICE TRUST

Annual Business Plan
2024/25



UK Government
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**SKILLS
FOR LIFE**

2008

**National Citizen Service Trust
Annual Business Plan
2024/25**

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the National Citizen Service Act 2017



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Foreword from the CEO

Mark Gifford

NCS Trust continues to transform itself. We are doing more on a smaller budget, building on our strong reputation for impact and delivery, while taking a far greater role in the youth sector.

My four years as CEO of the trust has made me immensely proud of how far we have come as an organisation after a historic period of change. Despite significant external challenges we continue to evolve in our crucial role supporting young people to navigate society and reach their potential. It has been four years of innovating to meet the changing needs of young people and recognising the post-pandemic mental health challenges our young society faces.

In 2023, our new strategy showcased our innovation and ability to engage universally with young people, with a particular focus on underserved young people. In the first year of our new offer, we have been able to provide over 178,000 experiences for young people. Our range of experiences include a five-day away from home experience, local regular community experiences and online activities. Social cohesion is at the core of this offer alongside supporting young people to develop their life skills, work-readiness and provide opportunities for social action. We will continue to build on this success in the second year of delivery, continuing to provide impactful, meaningful experiences.

We are focused on building 'a country of connected, confident and caring citizens where everyone feels at home'. This is crucial to our country right now. Through our new delivery model, we work in partnership with over 300 frontline youth organisations to achieve this. We have successfully developed our grant making functions and this has led to £20m being awarded to sector partners. I'm excited to

see how these partnerships and experiences for young people will develop in 2024/25. We also held our first post-pandemic partner conference in March 2024, further building relationships across the sector and placing ourselves in a strong position to continue to deliver high quality experiences for young people.

This year, our new Youth Advisory Board will continue to ensure our core mission stays in line with the thoughts and needs of young people. We are also extremely grateful to welcome Harris Bokhari OBE as the new chair of our board of trustees who joined us in July 2023. We are looking forward to continuing to work with him in the upcoming year.

Our focus on ensuring our offer remains relevant and impactful demonstrates our response to the changing needs of young people. In 2024/25 we will do more to support the wellbeing of young people and develop their skills, further innovate in the online space, and remain an important and collaborative partner in the youth sector.

Above all is our focus on social cohesion - respect and acceptance for a diverse range of people and views and celebrating the things that bind communities together. This will be given even greater prominence in our experiences.

Our Annual Business Plan shows an organisation that is a significant contributor to society, that is focused on young people and the issues important to them, while managing public money well.



Mark Gifford (he/him)

About NCS

NCS offers a range of experiences to young people that support them to grow their strengths and realise their potential, empowering them to become exactly who they want to be. Since its inception, NCS has delivered over one million experiences to young people, and more than 18 million hours of volunteering and social action have been completed.

NCS Trust is the only dedicated public body for youth. As an Arms Length Body (ALB), NCS Trust receives public funding through the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to help deliver the National Youth Guarantee.

Our vision is of a country of connected, confident, caring citizens where everyone feels at home. Through NCS experiences, we want young people to:

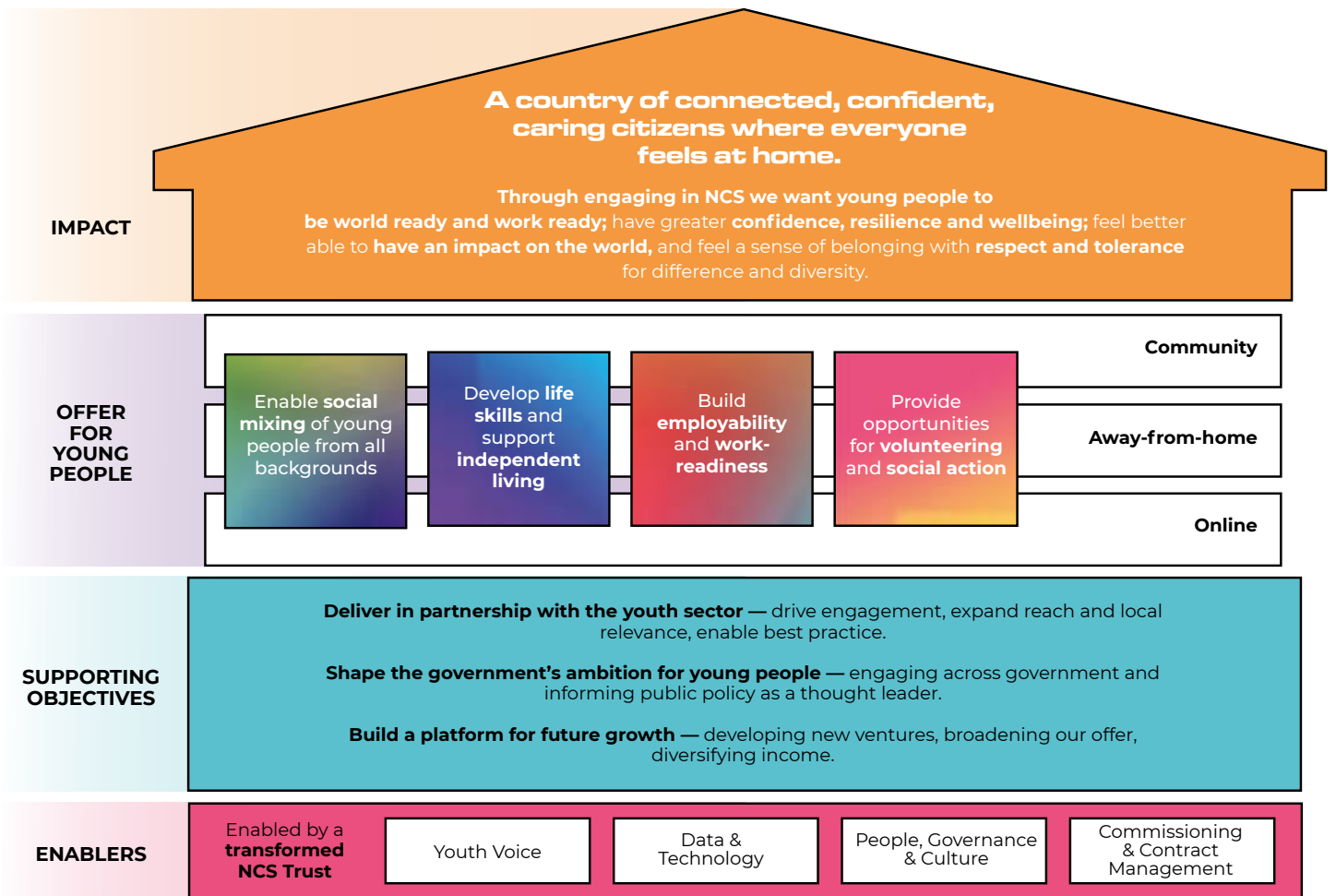
- » Become world ready and work ready
- » Have greater confidence, resilience, and wellbeing
- » Feel able to have an impact on their world
- » Have respect and tolerance for difference and diversity

Surveys between 2018-2022 consistently show that over 80% of young people say that NCS gave them a chance to develop skills that will be useful for the future and over 70% of young people say that NCS builds their respect for diversity. NCS gives back more than it takes - for every £1 spent on the 2019 NCS summer programme, an economic benefit of £3.05 was generated.



Our Strategy and Strategic Priorities

Our Strategy 2023–2025



2023/24 was the first year of our new strategy and 2024/25 will continue to build on this, learning and further improving the offer for young people. There are four strategic priorities, directly linked to our strategy and its objectives, which will guide our focus:

- » Demonstrate impact and prepare for the future
- » Provide a new NCS offer for young people
- » Build external partnerships and positive collaboration
- » Operate as an inclusive and agile trust

The world is a different place for young people than it was when NCS was founded. We have transformed our offer and range of experiences to better meet young people where they are. Young people now have a choice in how to engage with NCS, and grow their strengths in different ways through our year-round offer; trips away from home, grant-funded programmes that take place in their local community, and online activities. In 2023, we delivered over 178,000 experiences to young people, and in 2024/25 we will deliver at least 130,500 more.

We are supporting the government's ambition for young people by generating insights and evidence on what works, and convening cross-sector stakeholders to support policymaking. Through our transformed offer, we are working with over 300 locally embedded partners. Whatever their experience, young people will have the opportunity to grow and realise their potential to become exactly who they want to be - through boosting their confidence, being a force for good, and learning new skills. Social cohesion and putting young people first remain at the heart of everything that NCS does.

More detail on our priorities, including key performance indicators (KPIs), is included in the Business Plan section of this report.



2023-2025 Strategy

Reflections on Year 1 - 2023/24

NCS underwent a period of large change when creating its 2023-25 strategy, the biggest change in the trust's history, implemented to best serve the needs of young people while delivering further value for money. Our delivery model allows for young people to engage in a choice-based approach to taking part in our experiences, enabling them to make the most of our year-round delivery.

During 2023, we were able to award £20m across two years in grant funding to youth sector partners and award £20m to our away from home partner which has expanded and diversified our network. We have been able to build strategic partnerships and position ourselves as a trusted voice in the sector, by publishing insights on important topics such as education and enrichment, and social cohesion. In the first year of the 2023-25 strategy, we have created methodologies that allow us to review and learn. Important learnings are being reflected on and will be embedded in 2024/25.

We have evolved our youth voice practice and are extremely proud of the work the Youth Advisory Board has been a part of in 2023. This has been the first set of remunerated positions for young people at the trust and they have been critical contributors - from leading board discussions and informing strategy development, to representing the priorities of young people to decision-makers across government and the youth sector. A youth shadow panel formed an important part of the appointments process for our new NCS Trust Board Chair, Harris Bokhari, and additional board members - the first youth shadow panel of its kind within a Public Appointments process.

NCS also ensures that representative youth voice and insights inform key decision making through leveraging existing insights and commissioning new insights, including surveys of 2,000 young people. The trust has been noted as a role model in the youth voice space, convening other arms-length bodies and Ministers about amplifying youth voice in policy making.

We have achieved this while also reducing costs for the fourth consecutive year, reducing administration costs, absorbing inflationary pressures and conducting a pay review for staff

Achievements from 2023/24

- » Over 178,000 experiences have been delivered to young people.
- » Over 22,000 away from home experiences were delivered.
- » Over 119,000 community experiences were delivered.
- » Almost 37,000 engagements with digital experiences.
- » NCS Trust is now working with over 300 partners through grant-funding and procurement routes.
- » NCS Trust held its first partner conference in March 2024 where grantees and partners came together to collaborate, learn, and improve, focusing on topics such as best supporting young people, marketing, and evaluation.
- » 200 young volunteers helped support the Coronation of King Charles III in May 2023. Their Majesties invited 50 NCS young people to join a private screening of the Coronation at St Margaret's Church next to Westminster Abbey.
- » To mark World Mental Health Day 2023, 45 young people from NCS joined the Prince and Princess of Wales, BBC Radio 1 presenters and Dr Alex George, the UK's youth mental health ambassador, at Mental Health Event in Birmingham.



Priorities for Year 2 - 2024/25

The priorities for the second year of our strategy are to continue delivering our four strategic priorities, embed our learnings from year one, and continue to provide quality experiences for young people. With a new offer for young people, we are focused on evaluating and demonstrating its impact. We will be developing the support offered to our network, to ensure high-quality data is collected and evaluated, demonstrating impact and ensuring continuous improvement. We are also planning and preparing for a future strategy beyond 2025, ensuring this best supports young people's needs.

After a successful year of providing a new year-round offer, we will continue to build and develop the NCS website and MyNCS, providing a choice-based offer to young people. Additionally, we will be focused on ensuring the offer continues to reach a broad and diverse group of young people to uphold our dedication to a universal offer.

We will be nurturing the extensive number of partnerships we created in 2023, by facilitating relationships between our partners to provide a cohesive experience for young people. We will continue building our position as a trusted partner to support the government and their priorities. This year, we will be celebrating ten years of youth voice within the trust, and in the spirit of continuous learning, the Youth Advisory Board will be designing internal activity to reflect on, iterate, and grow the ways we embed youth voice within NCS. Having generated new learning methods, we will use these to develop into a learning organisation that strives for continuous improvement and create a culture that truly values young people and welcomes their constructive challenges, creativity, and fresh perspectives.



Business Plan

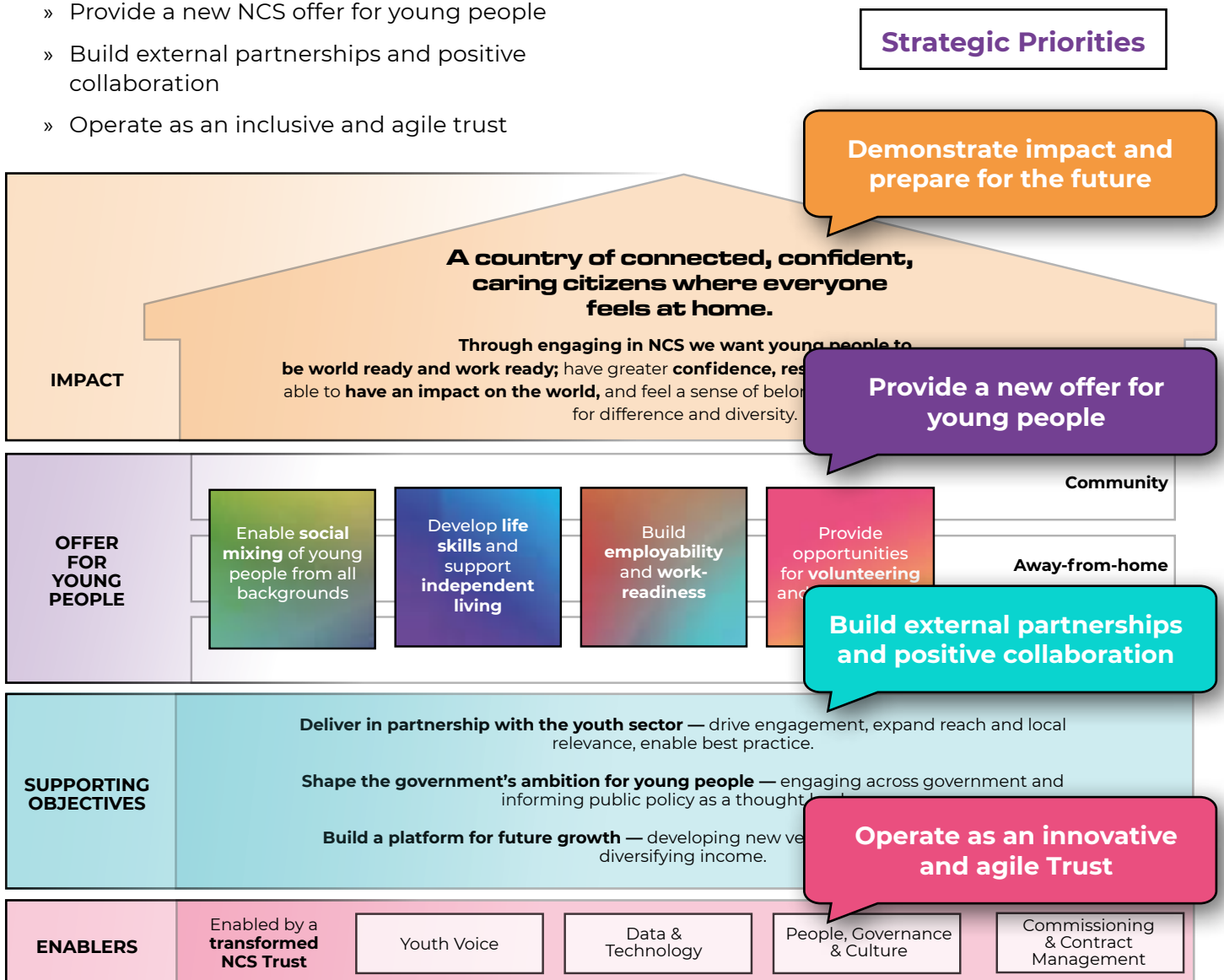
Strategic Priorities and Objectives

NCS Trust has a new strategy and offer for 2023-25. While 2023/24 was focused on launching the offer, 2024/25 will focus on learning and improving the offer for young people.

We have a budget of £54.2m for the 2024/25 financial year and a set of four strategic priorities which align to the four layers of our strategy:

- » Demonstrate impact and prepare for the future
- » Provide a new NCS offer for young people
- » Build external partnerships and positive collaboration
- » Operate as an inclusive and agile trust

For each of these strategic priorities, we have more detailed objectives. These priorities each have KPIs and targets. We will track these, and make this information publicly available to the government and the taxpayer, as part of our commitment to being a transparent and accountable public body.





Demonstrate impact and prepare for the future	Provide a new NCS offer for young people	Build external partnerships and positive collaboration	Operate as an inclusive and agile trust
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Support the NCS network to improve data collection processes to drive quality and evaluate impact » Demonstrate the impact of the new offer » Progress the long-term strategy » Prepare for and deliver the Spending Review » Diversify income streams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Deliver a year-round, choice-based offer that encourages sustained engagement » Ensure that NCS reaches a broad and diverse group of young people » Deliver, evaluate, and grow UK Year of Service » Ensure a positive, safe, and high-quality young person experience » Maintain our brand for the new portfolio of experiences » Build and improve the NCS website and MyNCS to offer choice to all young people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Facilitate relationships between organisations within our diverse network of NCS experience providers » Support the government's ambition for young people and provide insights to support their priorities » Build our platform as a trusted voice and partner » Build strategic partnerships to deliver our strategy » Deliver strategic projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Improve our collective culture as a right-sized trust » Develop a more representative and empowered youth voice practise » Develop and implement new, efficient internal processes and systems » Build a diverse and supportive board » Become a learning organisation focused on continuous improvement

Demonstrate Impact and Prepare for the Future

As this is a new strategy and offer, establishing the value and impact is a key priority. It's important to demonstrate how NCS experiences for young people meet our four objectives, which ladder up to the outcomes in our theory of change, and ultimately align to our vision as an organisation. We will also start preparing a longer-term strategy, considering the needs of young people in 2025 and beyond.

Objectives

- » Support organisations in the NCS network to improve their data collection processes, ensuring our ability to drive quality and evaluate impact
 - At the Partner Conference in March 2024, we held workshops on monitoring and evaluation, focused on hearing feedback from our network. We will continue to build on these conversations, supporting a diverse network of partners to gather accurate data, through 1:1 support and similar learning events.
 - We will streamline processes internally to ensure a cohesive approach to data processes that supports evaluation.
- » Demonstrate the impact of the new offer
 - We will continue to work with our independent evaluation partner to improve the evaluation methodology, ensuring impact is measured across our whole offer. A particular focus will be on developing an impact modelling framework for the digital offer.
 - We are committed to being a learning organisation and have implemented a five-step learning plan to ensure continuous improvement. In 2024/25 the focus topics will be around quality and impact, young people's journey through NCS and relationships and partnerships.

- » Progress the long-term strategy
 - We have been conducting research and facilitating engagement with key stakeholders to ensure that our strategy is based on a wide range of evidence.
 - Our next steps will be designing and confirming a high-level strategy, followed by refining the detail and approach for operational rollout.
- » Prepare for and deliver the Spending Review
 - Our funding envelope runs until March 2025 and we will be preparing to submit a Spending Review in 2024, ensuring that the proposal supports the government's wider ambitions.
 - The spending review submission will be supported by evidence and decisions from the long-term strategy development.
- » Diversify income streams
 - With a reduced funding envelope, we have secured additional income to support multiple projects in 2023/24.
 - We will continue to build on this success, exploring further opportunities across government, private sector and match-funding opportunities.

Measures of Success

Our KPIs for this strategic priority are primarily about the impact achieved by NCS experiences. Other measures of success include improving processes around data collection, having a clearly defined long term strategy, and preparing for a Spending Review.

KPIs	Targets
% participants who attend NCS experiences and feel more positive towards people from different backgrounds to themselves following their NCS experience	70%
% participants who respond positively to 'Participating in NCS has made me more likely to take part in volunteering and social action projects in the future'	70%
Confidence to work with other people in a team Confidence in finding a solution to a situation or challenge Positivity about getting a job in the future Confidence in having an impact on the world	Statistically significant impact when compared to control group of non-participant

Building on Last Year's Achievements

- » We have developed a Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Framework to capture outcomes and processes and a new Quality Framework aligned to our new offer.
- » We worked with our independent evaluation partner to develop and deliver an evaluation plan for a new offer.
- » The Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning team conducted the first of our learning loops, consisting of three Learning Network events discussing outreach, inclusion and social mix. Findings have been collated into a report with actions for us to implement in 2024/25.
- » The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), jointly with the Department for Education, awarded a £2.7 million grant to NCS Trust and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award to act as delivery partners for the Enrichment Partnerships Pilot. The pilot aims to test whether providing centralised support to schools around enrichment has a positive impact on the quality and uptake of enrichment activities locally, without leading to additional costs/resources for schools.
- » We also secured an additional £750,000 from The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to deliver UK Year of Service. This is an employability programme for 18 to 24 year olds, that places them into socially beneficial jobs that they are passionate about, while building work experience, skills, professional networks, and confidence.

Provide a New NCS Offer for Young People

A key priority for 2024/25 is continuing to build on the success of the first year of delivering our new offer. We will continue to learn and improve from 2023/24 and ensure that all young people benefit from a range of year-round NCS experiences. We will continue to work with a diverse range of organisations, focusing on delivering impact for young people.

Objectives

- » Deliver a year-round, choice-based offer that encourages sustained engagement
 - We have already secured sign-ups for our away from home experiences in 2024 and will aim to enrol 100 young people into positions through the UK Year of Service programme.
 - The level of engagement with our community experiences has been growing continuously throughout the year and we will be building on this in 2024/25.
 - Young people will be supported and encouraged to stay engaged with our offer, improving and expanding the experiences. There will be a particular focus on adding more digital experiences such as interactive workshops, self-serve content, and modular pieces of digital content based on young people's preferences.
- » Ensure that NCS reaches a broad and diverse group of young people
 - Our offer has been, and will continue to be, universal, but we have created targeted experiences that specifically cater to underserved groups. These experiences will continue, further supporting our universal approach by offering pathways for young people to engage with the whole offer.
 - One of our core objectives is to encourage social mixing. We reached a diverse group of young people through our experiences in 2023/24 and will continue to do this in the new financial year.
- » Ensure a positive, safe, and high-quality young person experience
 - With more diversity in the experiences that we are offering, we have implemented an impact framework to ensure quality across the portfolio. This has allowed us to focus on areas for improvement, particularly for our digital experiences, and aim to continue this learning in 2024/25.
 - In 2023/24, 100% of our away from home suppliers passed their pre-programme assessments, testing their management systems and readiness to deliver. We will continue to support our network to strive for the same success in 2024/25.
- » Maintain our brand for the new portfolio of experiences
 - 2023 saw the launch of a new insight-led and youth-driven brand platform - Grow Your Strengths - which recognises the potential in young people. In 2024/25 we will continue to build on this platform encouraging more young people to take part in NCS experiences and discover their potential.
- » Build and improve the NCS website and MyNCS to offer choice to all young people
 - MyNCS is an online portal where young people can view and access the NCS experiences available to them. We will be developing this platform and the NCS website to enable young people to easily navigate the site and explore all of the NCS opportunities that are available to them.

Measures of Success

Our KPIs for this strategic priority are primarily about the number of NCS experiences delivered across the whole offer, including UK Year of Service. Other measures of success include young people's feedback on experiences, our brand, and MyNCS.

KPIs	Targets
Number of NCS experiences delivered to young people	130,500
% of participants on free school meals (FSM) , with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), from diverse ethnic groups	Over-index
% NCS participants from NCS priority areas	50%

Building on Last Year's Achievements

- » We successfully delivered a portfolio of services in 2023/24 during the first year of the new strategy.
- » Over 178,000 experiences were delivered to young people in 2023/24 across our away from home, local community, and digital experiences.
- » The Net Promoter Score, a measure that represents recommendation and loyalty, for the 2023/24 away from home experiences was 40.2 for young people.
- » We ran our programmes safely with all ten providers passing their pre-programme assessments with 90% or above.

Build External Partnerships and Positive Collaboration

We are committed to continuing to build partnerships with the youth sector. We are already working with a diverse range of partners who are delivering NCS experiences and building additional strategic partnerships. We will continue to build on this success, recognising that there is a rich heritage and expertise in the sector. We will continue to convene stakeholders on key issues, as well as being a trusted voice and partner that helps to support the government's approach to youth provision.

Objectives

- » Facilitate relationships between organisations within our diverse network of NCS experience providers
 - We brought our wide range of partners and grantees together at a Partner Conference in March 2024. We will continue to build and nurture these relationships in 2024/25, to support the sector and improve our offer for young people.
- » Support the government's ambition for young people and provide insights to support their priorities
 - We will support effective policy-making through collecting data and evidence on what works, conducting and commissioning research, and convening across sectors and government to inform best practice.

- In 2024/25 in partnership with the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award we will publish our final research report on Education and Enrichment, generating new evidence and practical advice on improving young people’s equitable access to quality enrichment.
- » Build our platform as a trusted voice and partner
 - We have been working closely with our network of partners as well as with the Back Youth Alliance, #iwill, and other national youth programmes to improve youth sector collaboration.
 - Various insights are planned for publication in 2024/25 as we evaluate our learnings from the Enrichment Partnership and Mental Health & Social Prescribing pilots. We hope to understand if focused enrichment guidance can increase engagement but not cost, and use evidence to show the positive impact of the youth sector on young people’s lives.
 - We have had representatives attend and engage with various activities and events led by political parties in 2023/24 and will continue to support the government’s ambitions in 2024/25.
- » Build strategic partnerships to deliver our strategy
 - We have built numerous strategic partnerships in 2023/24 with One Million Mentors, Skills Builder and, Youth Employment UK. In 2024/25 we will continue to strengthen these relationships

and build new partnerships to further amplify youth voice and strengthen our relationships with the sector.

- » Deliver strategic projects
 - In partnership with the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award, the Enrichment Partnerships Pilot project launched in January 2024. This aims to develop local partnerships, identify efficiencies in schools and upskill staff to secure sustainability. We will continue to manage the grant-making lifecycle, supporting grantees to deliver in Education Investment Areas and managing a national Centre of Excellent that identifies best practice and learnings.
 - We commissioned external partners to do an evidence review on the impact of youth sector provision on young people’s mental health and to scope and design a social prescribing pilot that aims to test the role of youth provision in supporting young people’s mental health. We will be working closely with the partners throughout the project and will publish the findings in 2024.

Measures of Success

Our KPIs for this strategic priority are related to the amount of our funding that flows to youth sector organisations, and how we engage with the sector and government. Other measures of success include the number of insights we publish externally, the number of strategic partnerships developed, and findings relating to best practice from the Enrichment Partnerships Pilot.

KPIs	Targets
% funding flowing to youth sector and community based organisations	At least 50%
# initiatives (papers, briefings, inputs to reviews/consultations/committees, workshops, roundtables) sharing evidence and insights with government	4
# engagements facilitated between government, the youth sector and others	8

Building on Last Year's Achievements

- » NCS Trust and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE) collaborated on a joint programme commissioning research on Education and Enrichment and convening the education and youth sector on this topic.
- » We responded to a consultation led by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) on Social Cohesion and Resilience, publishing insights that highlight NCS Trust's dedication to this issue.
- » We attended workshops led by DCMS regarding youth engagement and dormant assets.
- » We have attended and facilitated young people engaging in numerous ministerial roundtables and political events, discussing important topics for young people and ensuring that we can support the government's ambitions.
- » We are an active member of the Youth Work Evidence Alliance, influencing and inputting into the building of shared outcomes across the youth sector.

Operate as an Inclusive and Agile Trust

The NCS Act of 2017, and the Royal Charter body status, ensure that we are transparent, independent, and accountable. These attributes remain central to everything that we do. We went through significant organisational restructuring in 2022/23 which meant our priority in 2023/24 was to embed ways of working in the new structure. In 2024/25, we will be reviewing learnings from 2023/24 and improving the new structure.

We are committed to ensuring that youth voices are both heard and instrumental to decision making. 2023/24 was the first year of the Youth Advisory Board and it will continue its work in 2024/25. The Employee Voice Forum will continue to represent the views of staff, improving our culture and ways of working.

Objectives

- » Improve our collective culture as a rightsized trust
 - After the first year of operating with a new organisational structure, we will continue to improve our culture and embed new ways of working.
- » Develop a more representative and empowered youth voice practice
 - After evolving our youth voice practice into our new Youth Advisory Board, we aim to support the creation of new roles for young people across the organisation, and ensure our Youth Advisory Board is connected to external partners and decision makers.
 - We will continue to develop and grow our youth insights function in the coming year, polling 2,000 young people that are representative of the national population to help inform decision making.
- » Develop and implement new, efficient internal processes and systems
 - We will continue to improve the processes and systems that support the new offer, delivery model, and organisational structure.
- » Build a diverse and supportive board
 - We appointed Harris Bokhari as the new chair of the board in July 2023 and welcomed three new board members. We will continue to embed and support the board through 2024/25.
- » Become a learning organisation focused on continuous improvement
 - We have completed our first year of delivery of the new offer and have been conducting a review of our transformed programme, ensuring that learnings are embedded.

Measures of Success

Our KPIs for this strategic priority are related to our income from alternative sources, and how much of our funding flows directly to delivery. Other measures of success include positive feedback from our staff, the Youth Advisory Board, and the Employee Voice Forum.

KPIs	Targets
% funding spent on admin	14% max
Overall increase in income from alternative sources	£2.4 million annually:
Match/additional funding	£1m
Value in Kind	£0.3m
Service User contributions	£1.1m

Building on Last Year's Achievements

- » The Youth Voice Forum was reformed into the Youth Advisory Board, offering 12 remunerated positions to young people across England to create a diverse group of young people that directly input and give advice on our decision-making.
- » Several members of the Youth Advisory Board have worked on internal projects at the trust, gaining experience in developing their professional skills.
- » The co-chairs of the Youth Advisory Board and advisors to the Royal Charter Body Board of NCS Trust were instrumental in the recruitment and onboarding of our new Chair of the Board, Harris Bokhari.
- » We have continued to reduce costs with savings of £24m (32%) between 2022/23 and 2023/24, and will continue to drive efficiencies to deliver value for money for the taxpayer.

Budgeting & Resource Allocation

High-level Budget

We are committed to a total cost budget of £54.2M for 2024/25. This includes £52.1M of Grant-in-Aid and £2.1M of self-generated income of which £1.1M is expected to be raised via service user contributions. We will continue to control costs tightly; reducing our spend on administration in both monetary terms and as a percentage of total spend. We have aligned our budget with our strategy and objectives. The budget is allocated across service lines as follows:

Service line	£
Away from home	£20M
Online	£4.3M
Local community	£10.2M
Supporting Orgs. & Experiences	£11.7M
	Total Costs: £46.2M

As a public body we support building capacity in the youth sector and enabling impactful and safe experiences for young people. Supporting organisations and experiences includes a focus on safeguarding, monitoring and evaluation, and working creatively to find ways to reach those that are the hardest to reach. We also work in partnership with credible organisations to provide further development opportunities for young people such as our Partnerships with Youth Employment, One Million Mentors and the Hope Collective. These costs support organisations to provide the best outcomes for young people and reduce risks.



Also included in the budget is UK Year of Service which has a budget of £2.1m which is partly funded by Grant in Aid £0.8m and the remainder from NCS alternate income sources. UK Year of Service is a unique national employability programme for 18-24 year olds that places them into socially beneficial jobs. It comprises paid work placements lasting 9-12 months that build work experiences skills, networks and confidence.

Budget and Strategy

We will manage our budget to achieve the activities and objectives as outlined in the business plan. In particular:

- » Increased budget allocation for direct delivery with focus on efficiency gains to fund additional frontline impact
- » Lower administrative costs
- » Increased investment in digital
- » Budget assigned to ongoing transformation to support the cultural move toward continuous improvement, improved ways of working and achieving efficiencies

Headcount at the trust was successfully managed throughout 2023, with average headcount remaining below 150 (five full time equivalent (FTE) lower than our budget commitment in FY22/23). Whilst cost of living and inflation create pressure on staff costs, we expect to be around or below 150 FTE throughout FY24/25. As a result of action already taken, including a transformed operating and delivery model, we are on track to be able deliver our commitments within budget. Whilst current economic and inflationary pressures begin to ease, we still face significant cost pressure to absorb the full year impact of previous inflationary increases, and as such, we will continue to work with our network to find significant efficiencies in order to deliver the same quality of experiences to young people. We have also launched an efficiency service team to ensure our cost savings are delivered. Any additional income raised via our business development activities will also help offset emerging pressures.



Risk

Risk Management Summary

Successful risk management is a key priority. We operate a robust Risk Management Framework which advocates regular open and transparent conversations relating to risks with stakeholders of all levels.

We hold a balanced risk appetite and recognise that in order to evolve our organisation and ensure delivery against our strategic objectives, we need to embrace risk and opportunities.

In line with evolution of our services, 2024 sees the introduction of two new appetite categories for Digital and Operational Delivery, providing further clarity around what we will, and will not tolerate when seeking opportunities and managing downside risk.

2023/24 saw new ways of working and delivery of new services, and as we enter 2024/25, we will continue to embed new ways of working with an enhanced focus on continuous improvement and acting on lessons learned from the last year.

Top risks and opportunities that could impact on delivery against strategic objectives are outlined below:

- » Successful implementation of new, innovative, and engaging initiatives such as digital experiences
- » Maintaining high service quality combined with delivery of multiple concurrent priorities could place increased demand on our people and workloads
- » External risks



Externally Influenced Risks

We face a number of external factors that could impact our ability to deliver our strategic objectives:

External Factor	Driver	Potential Impact	How we are responding
Political	Cyber security threats	Confidentiality, integrity, and availability of data and information assets could be compromised due to a cyber attack.	Cyber security risks will continue to be monitored and managed in alignment to industry and government best practice and mandatory standards.
Economic	Raised inflation	NCS Trust and our network may need to find significant efficiencies to be able to deliver the same quality of programme to young people.	Any additional income raised via the Business Development team will offset emerging pressures.
	Increased cost of living	Reduction in the number of young people signing up for away from home experiences.	Bursary schemes for the away from home experiences enable free places to young people most in need. The community and online experiences will be free for young people to access.
Social	Demographics	There is a risk that local community experiences may not reach a wide demographic population of young people.	We have commissioned targeted community experiences through grants to increase the provision of services to underserved young people. Residential places will be prioritised for 53 priority areas.

Technological	Innovation (products and services)	If we do not evolve our technological landscape, young people may not remain attracted to our products and services.	We will continue to build, implement, and run MyNCS to be the digital lynchpin of our offer — a one-stop shop where young people can sign up to NCS experiences.
Legal	Changes to Laws & Legislation	If we are unaware of changes to relevant regulations and legislation, there is an increased risk of breaches or non-compliance.	Regular horizon scanning and strong external stakeholder relations raise awareness of new and upcoming changes to existing regulation and legislations which may impact us.
Environmental	Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR)	If we fail to promote our engagement with CSR we could see a reduction in the number of young people signing up for away from home experiences.	This will be addressed through publication of our sustainability report in the annual report and accounts, which provides insight into how we deliver against our Environmental, Social & Governance (ESG) aspirations. We have also applied additional focus in this area through undertaking an advisory internal audit on ESG (October 2023). The recommendations observed are now supporting creation & development of our ESG Policy and Framework.

We will continue to closely track, monitor, and manage risks pragmatically through continued engagement with key internal and external stakeholders and prioritising planned activities.

Compliance including Functional standards

NCS continues to track compliance through its compliance framework which aggregates the trust's obligations under the signed Framework Agreement, Act, Charter, and wider managing public money obligations including functional standards. Mechanisms are in place to ensure clear lines of accountability and robust reporting to the Executive Leadership Team and where appropriate the Audit and Risk Committee and the Board.

Case Studies

Jemimah Owolabi

Jemimah was born in Spain to Nigerian parents. In 2019, Jemimah's family moved from Barcelona to London, where Jemimah and her younger sister enrolled at a school near their home in Barking & Dagenham. At first, Jemimah found that adapting to a new culture and language was challenging, and making new friends wasn't easy. Fortunately, thanks to her natural linguistic ability, her experience of learning Yoruba and Catalan and studying hard, Jemimah soon became fluent in English. She embraced her studies at school and was fascinated to learn new topics like Black History Month in October. However, unfortunately in February 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic led to a national lockdown, which meant that Jemimah and her fellow students weren't able to attend school in person for the rest of year 8.

When Jemimah returned to school in year 9, she joined football and basketball clubs to indulge her love for sport and make new friends. She also enjoyed meeting new students from different countries like Romania and Bangladesh. Jemimah further expanded her social circle through attending Eastside Young Leaders Academy - a supplementary school - which runs Saturday programmes covering a range of subjects to help young people develop skills and leadership potential.

Eastside is also a partner school of The Catalyst Collective - an NCS grantee which matches and supports Black teenagers with professional Black women for mentoring relationships. Jemimah signed up to attend a trip organised by The Catalyst Collective to visit the law firm, Irwin Mitchell, with a group of young women of a similar age. The action-packed day included networking with Irwin Mitchell employees and taking part in activities designed to develop skills for the workplace, including communication skills, collaboration, teamwork, problem-solving, paying attention to detail, critical thinking, and debating.

For Jemimah, there were many highlights throughout the day including meeting a senior lawyer called Angela Jackman, a descendant of the Windrush generation, who had been one of the first Black women at her Oxford college. Angela's story describing how she progressed from economically challenging circumstances in the late 1990s to become a partner at the firm, strengthened Jemimah's belief that she can achieve anything she aspires to. She was also interested to hear how a young apprentice at Irwin Mitchell who had just completed their A levels was already thriving at the law firm. For Jemimah **"this event shattered myths and answered questions I've always had about doing an apprenticeship."**



In the afternoon, the group engaged in an organised debate for and against e-scooters. The teams had just half an hour to prepare their case, so Jemimah stepped into a leadership role, taking the lead in developing the opening debate for her team. The exercise demanded a lot of thinking on the spot and Jemimah **“had to employ critical thinking and problem-solving skills”** to put her points across effectively.

Through her wider involvement with The Catalyst Collective, Jemimah’s mentor - Belema - has reinforced important mantras for Jemimah such as, ‘through facing your fears, you can do anything’ and ‘hard work doesn’t go unnoticed’. Jemimah also learnt the importance of rewarding and giving recognition to others too.

Jemimah enjoyed sharing the experience with the other young women and talking to them about their own career plans. While some said they would like to do law, Jemimah is still very keen to pursue a career in engineering as she loves STEM subjects and likes the idea of creating products. One particular area which interests her is that of sustainable urban planning, especially in developing countries.

Currently studying maths, physics and Spanish A levels at boarding school, having achieved a full scholarship, Jemimah is thankful for her role models and mentors at The Catalyst Collective, Eastside, Irwin Mitchell, and most importantly, her own parents. Their sacrifices in moving countries, changing jobs, learning new languages and finding quality educational opportunities for their daughters has inspired Jemimah to make the most of her experiences.

Looking to the future, Jemimah says that it’s important to **“believe in yourself, be yourself and do what you want to”**.

You can also read about Jemimah’s experience in her own words on our [blog](#).



“It was truly inspiring and rewarding to host a group of ambitious and delightful young women from The Catalyst Collective. Their probing questions were well thought-out and their engagement throughout the day was wonderful to see. Irwin Mitchell is in a prime position to offer opportunities of this nature to diverse and aspiring lawyers. I feel very proud to have participated in such a successful event with colleagues and look forward to more.”

**Angela Jackman KC,
of Irwin Mitchell**

Ella Tovey

Ella went on two NCS experiences in 2023: a five day, away from home, Live It, experience in the summer, at Caldecote Xperience near Milton Keynes, and a Big Sleepover weekend in Cromer. Ella admitted to feeling slightly apprehensive about embarking on her first away from home NCS experience. However, any misgivings she had soon disappeared as she bonded with her new companions, and by the end of the first evening she had a whole new set of friends.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Ella, like many people, had become very introverted and it took over a year for her to regain the confidence to socialise comfortably with others. Staying with other young people away from home helped Ella rebuild her social skills and take on new challenges. Ella made a conscious decision to have a go at all the outdoor activities on offer at Caldecote. Although relatively unfamiliar with watersports, she took the plunge, learning how to canoe and sail with teammates on a large lake. Ella also enjoyed learning financial skills in the Money Workshops and life-saving CPR on a first aid course.

Later in the year, on the Big Sleepover weekend, Ella attended a workshop on public speaking which helped overcome her trepidation around speaking in front of large audiences. The techniques she learnt gave her the confidence to apply for a prefect's role at her school. The selection process required candidates to give a presentation about themselves to a hall full of students plus a group of teachers in the staff room. Using the methods and confidence she'd acquired, Ella gave two assured performances, impressing her audiences and boosting her own self-belief.

Ella enjoyed meeting new people on her NCS experiences and is still regularly in touch on group chats, with several close friends she made. At the beginning of her summer experience, Ella found that some people were more difficult to get on with than others. However, as the week went on, the group activities and downtime helped everyone to get to know each other better and appreciate their differences in a positive light. The friendly team leaders also helped ensure that everyone got along and fostered a cheerful atmosphere.

Ella's positive mindset also helped her overcome some initial reservations she had about camping. Foregoing home comforts is not everyone's cup of tea, but at the time Ella decided to view staying on a campsite as 'character building'. She now looks back fondly on the experience, appreciating the time she shared with other young people in a new environment.

When asked if her NCS experiences had given her a new perspective in any way, Ella said that it had reminded her to **"have more fun, make the most of things and just give it a go."** It certainly seems that Ella did all of that and more!



Hamish McVean

Hamish first heard about NCS through non-profit education provider, Unloc, when representatives from the organisation gave a presentation at his school in Portsmouth. The three day experience appealed to him as he thought it would be good for his CV and he was keen to get some work-related experience in the February half term.

Hamish didn't know anyone else on the programme before joining and admitted that the prospect of spending a few days with a group of new people was a **"little nerve wracking"** at first. However, being a sociable person, Hamish made friends straight away, immersing himself in an icebreaker game which he loved.

On the second day, Hamish and his fellow NCS participants visited the Southsea Deli where they learned how to make tortellini and listened to the owner, Daniel Nowland, tell his story about how he started the business. The deli had started solely as a coffee shop but Daniel had expanded its range to include food, based on feedback from his customers. Hamish found it interesting to learn how businesses need to be adaptable and evolve based on changing demand.

Daniel also gave some useful career related advice to the group. For example, he warned them to be careful about posting negative content on their social media accounts which could be seen in a bad light by potential employers and harm their job prospects. Hamish enjoyed making the pasta with a machine which he said was a good team building exercise, as it required effective teamwork and communication to prevent the strips of pasta from breaking.

Hamish learned about a different type of business on the third day when he visited BHLive Active Pyramid in Portsmouth, which hosts a 2,000 member community gym, one of the largest soft play centres in the UK (Exploria,) and a busy cafe. Hamish and his friends were given a personal trainer workshop where they practised teaching each other three different fitness exercises using free weights. They were also given a tour of the gym and invited to try out a range of gym equipment, including running and rowing machines, stair climbers, and boxing kits.



Hamish was interested to learn about the different job roles at BHLive, from sales and customer service, to event organising and catering. The deputy general manager of the centre told the group that while CVs were one way of assessing a job applicant, he said it is more important that candidates demonstrate during an interview that their personality is the right fit for the role. For example, someone applying for a role as a soft play supervisor would have to show their enthusiasm for working with children and display qualities such as empathy and people skills. **“You’d need good emotional intelligence”**, as Hamish points out.

Another aspect from the visit which Hamish found interesting was the fact that career paths are often not linear and it is important to acquire different skills along the way. He recognised, however, that entry jobs like some of those on offer at the soft play centre are a good way of getting on the job ladder even if your career takes a different direction later on.

Like many young people of his age, Hamish doesn’t currently know exactly what he would like to do career-wise, but he would like to study computing, maths and politics for A level. He started computer programming when he was just eight years old, using a coding programme called Scratch. He enjoys after school clubs where he designs computer games like ‘fighting zombies’ and he has also done the Oxford University Coding Challenge. However, Hamish questions whether he would enjoy this hobby as much if it became a full time job. He would like to get work experience between now and the end of his A levels to try out different things. **“Before today, I would not have thought of working for a soft play centre, for example,”** Hamish says.

Hamish feels that his NCS experience has helped give him more confidence to enter a new environment and meet new people in the future. He always thought he would be able to do that, but his success in teamwork and making friends during his NCS experience proved that he could do it. Hamish is also confident with talking about his own personality and strengths after doing a workshop where he created a 30-second commercial about himself. He now feels better prepared for interviews as he has pre-prepared sentences and key words which he can use to communicate his personal brand.

“NCS helped me improve my confidence as I now know that I can make new friends, even in a situation where I’ve not known anyone. Additionally, NCS helped me explore new job opportunities which I otherwise would have never considered.”

Hamish McVean

Care home project

A group of teens from South Tyneside brought memories of old back to local care home residents, with a heritage themed post-war 1950s party.

Taking part in an NCS funded local community experience with The Key - a North East based charity committed to inspiring young people to believe in themselves - the team, calling themselves 'Criminal Minds' thanks to a shared passion for criminology, set out to tackle the intergenerational divide with their social action project.

Funding from NCS allowed The Key to put the 16 and 17 year olds through their KEY+ Challenge, which encourages teens to plan, pitch and then deliver an innovative project that they care about.

Deciding on doing something caring for elderly neighbours, the team first had to pitch their 1950s party idea to a panel. Nervous about public speaking and pushing themselves into unknown territory, they were initially apprehensive about how the panellists would respond. But it was a resounding yes, thanks to the detailed planning and their creative and caring idea!

Tam Criminal Minds then got to work booking their venue, securing a local chef to cater the event and even scoured the internet for 1950s themed decorations.

Inviting a local care home to join them in the celebrations, the event was a roaring success. The teens organised live entertainment and even hosted a game of bingo, much to the delight of their attendees.

This project was funded by NCS as part of our targeted community experiences. Grants have enabled organisations like The Key to scale up their existing intervention, trial new innovations, and/or work with targeted groups of young people.

Here's what team Criminal Minds had to say about the project:

"It has helped introduce me to volunteering and gave me the chance to learn new skills."

Denver

"It has helped introduce me to social action and gaining work experience."

Chloe

"It has helped me get a better insight on what else is going on in my community."

Neive

"It has helped me get into volunteering and gave me some things to think about, like what I would like to do in the future."

Shannon

"It has helped improve my confidence and given me skills I can add to my CV."

Aiden



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