Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement

Corrected oral evidence: Citizenship and Civic Engagement

Wednesday 11 October 2017
11.45 am

Listen to the meeting

Members present: Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbotts (The Chairman); Baroness Barker; Lord Blunkett; Lord Harries of Pentregarth; Baroness Lister of Burtersett; Baroness Morris of Yardley; Baroness Pitkeathley; Baroness Redfern; Baroness Stedman-Scott; Lord Verjee.

Evidence Session No. 5 Heard in Public Questions 43 - 50

Witness

I: Oliver Lee, Chief Executive, The Challenge; Dr Andrew Mycock, Reader in Politics, University of Huddersfield; Dr Sarah Mills, Loughborough University.
Examination of Witnesses

Oliver Lee, Dr Andrew Mycock and Dr Sarah Mills.

Q43 The Chairman: I am sorry that we have kept you waiting; we will get under way as speedily as we can. Thank you very much for coming along to talk to us today. I have to make a formal statement. A list of interests of Members relevant to the inquiry has been sent to you and is available to you. This session is open to the public and is being recorded for BBC Parliament. A verbatim transcript will be taken of the evidence and will be put on the parliamentary website. A few days after this session you will be sent a copy of the transcript to check for accuracy. It would be helpful if you could advise us of any corrections as quickly as possible. Finally, if after the evidence session you wish to clarify or amplify any points made during your evidence, or have additional points you wish to make, you are welcome to submit supplementary evidence to us. Without more ado, could you briefly introduce yourselves and then we will go to the first question?

Dr Andrew Mycock: Dr Andy Mycock, reader in politics, University of Huddersfield. I was a member of the Youth Citizenship Commission which sat in 2008–2009.

Dr Sarah Mills: Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. I am Dr Sarah Mills. I am a senior lecturer in human geography at Loughborough University. I have completed ESRC-funded research on youth citizenship, volunteering and informal education, on voluntary youth movements in historical and contemporary contexts, and National Citizen Service.

Oliver Lee: Good morning. I am Oliver Lee, chief executive of an organisation called The Challenge. It was founded in 2009 with the germ of the idea of National Citizen Service at that point in time. Subsequently, there was an initial pilot of about 150 people in that year and we are delivering this year about 45,000 National Citizen Service places across the country, 30% of which are through local delivery arrangements with local delivery partners. We also do a series of other activities astride the National Citizen Service graduate agenda, or extension agenda as it is sometimes called.

The Chairman: Can we begin with an overview? It would be helpful if you could provide the Committee with a brief statement of your views on the current state of civic engagement among young people in the UK. Who would like to go first?

Dr Andrew Mycock: Civic education or civic engagement?

The Chairman: The state of civic engagement.

Dr Andrew Mycock: It is my age. I have just turned 50; my hearing is going. There is a need to take a glass-half-full approach. If you look back a decade ago and compare it with the situation now, there has been a transformation in not only the political preparedness of politicians and others to debate the status of youth citizenship and civic engagement
particularly but a broadening and more sophisticated understanding about what we understand by the term civic engagement. There is a greater acceptance now that it stretches beyond the formal to the non-formal and informal modes of engagement and participation. With social media, there are greater opportunities to engage in different ways and modes, with different outcomes. That glass-half-full approach needs to have a certain amount of reality placed on it. What we see, particularly with regard to young people—and I know we are here to speak about young people and their role in civic engagement this morning primarily—is that even if we look into the so-called youthquake of the general election of this summer, it is notable that still the vast majority of young people do not vote at elections, are not members of political parties and do not feel that politics is a system that they understand or that it actually works to support them.

Fundamentally, if we look at how formal politics encourages civic engagement, there is a tendency to look at the symptoms rather than the causes, and I would urge this Committee to ensure they look more at the causes of civic engagement. That means looking at the political systems and the modes of civic engagement as well as the expansion of opportunities for young people in particular to get engaged. To summarise, as I say, we should take an optimistic view of the state of play at the moment, but there is a need to always approach this with a sense of criticality.

**Dr Sarah Mills:** In terms of a brief statement on the current state of civic engagement, there is a long history, both inside government and in civil society, about how to train young people as citizens in the making or acknowledge the contribution they already make as active citizens in the here and now. There have been shifts back and forth in relation to citizenship education within schools, changes in the nature and membership of voluntary youth organisations, such as the Scouts from whom you heard earlier, Girlguiding, Woodcraft Folk, faith-based brigades. More recently, National Citizen Service has marked a shift change, and again you heard about NCS earlier from the chief executive. It has echoes of those voluntary youth organisations in its activities and target audience.

I would argue that the growth of NCS combined with the rise in social action, spearheaded by the #iwill campaign, has embedded what I would argue is a particular brand of youth citizenship that is centred on social action and, because of that, it emphasises responsibilities more than rights. That brand of social action is almost positioning citizenship as the same as volunteering and volunteering as citizenship, and I am keen to discuss those themes later. I believe there is great scope for NCS to embed citizenship education and political literacy more fully in its curriculum, to address some regional disparities—and I have recommended as such in my written evidence—to improve the NCS experience and potential for civic and political engagement. Overall, the current state of civic engagement among young people in the UK is shaped, in part, by these spaces, their geographies, their relationships to
each other. I would also recommend closer engagement between citizenship education in schools, NCS and Step Up to Serve. I look forward to our discussions on those themes.

**Oliver Lee:** I would not disagree with anything I have heard, including in the previous evidence session. Overall, it is a positive picture. The data suggests a progressively positive picture over the last 15 to 20 years. Michael Lynas referred to some of that data. I absolutely think that it is not an area to be complacent over. There are clear areas, such as incentives and finding specific opportunities for community engagement, whether it is social action, volunteering or something more broad, and finding that opportunity on behalf of the young person where considerable improvement could still be made. It is undoubtedly an improving picture over time, which I think is welcome.

**Q44 Lord Harries of Pentregarth:** Which groups of young people are being missed out and are least likely to be engaged, in your experience?

**Oliver Lee:** We are an organisation whose fundamental mission is about social integration and social cohesion. Those are our charitable objects. We make very significant effort to try to avoid any element of society being missed out. That would be to conceal the fact though that there are certain elements of that demographic—and we try to take a broad slice of the society from which the people with whom we are working are drawn to include every element of that—which are undoubtedly more challenging to reach and more expensive to support through some of these activities, potentially, all the way from preceding the activity, through the activity itself into the aftermath of the activity. The Personal Coach programme to which Michael Lynas referred, which he was absolutely accurate over and which applies to some of those specific harder-to-reach elements of society, is an example of an initiative that we are undertaking at the moment to try to close some of those gaps. To give you an example of that, this year we have 800 or so looked-after children or those from pupil referral units among the 45,000 who we have put through the NCS programme as an organisation this year. That is The Challenge specifically, not NCS more widely. To pick up a related point with regard to free school meals from you earlier on, which I think is key, and to clarify that: in 2016—so last year and we do not yet have the figures for this year—of those who went through the NCS with The Challenge, it was 22.9% on free school meals.

**Dr Andrew Mycock:** The evidence suggests that it is those coming from families of a lower socioeconomic background, and ethnic minorities in particular for young people, who tend to get involved and engage in civic activities compared to other cohorts. The area which is left out of that analysis is about geography. Geography matters enormously. If you think about the opportunities for getting involved in a youth council, it is a postcode lottery across the United Kingdom as to that approach. That is largely down to the fact that different local authorities invest different amounts of resources. There is no set minimum standard offer to young people where they live. Programmes such as NCS and others that are offered across the United Kingdom or across England and Northern
Ireland are not offered in a universal sense. Citizenship education is defined, to a certain extent, by geography and other things.

In that sense, there is a need to go back to the Youth Citizenship Commission report where we made a recommendation on that. There was consideration that there needs to be a standard minimum offer to all young people so that they have universal opportunities to engage in different programmes, that there should not be one particular programme but they should all be offered a programme. There is a need to accept that formal programmes are posited in a language which often, if not being divisive, certainly puts some young people off participating. In that sense, there is a recognition of a need to co-ordinate informal and non-formal participation, which may not be seen as civic engagement directly and not be termed as that, but on a very banal level means that young people are engaged in their communities. There is a need to widen that sense of what we understand by the term civic engagement itself, to recognise that there is a diversity of engagement forms and they are not necessarily ones that those of us who are immersed in the world of politics typically recognise.

**Dr Sarah Mills:** In relation to young people who are being missed out and are least likely to be engaged, I would flip the question and say those least engaged are young people who are socially and politically excluded more generally in society. One of my PhD students Tim Fewtrell has just finished a project on young Muslim volunteers. The levels of volunteering are incredibly high in fundraising, et cetera, but that image of the good young Muslim volunteer does not make it through into media discourse. There were further barriers to volunteering from some of the young girls who responded about Islamophobia on the street, and so volunteering levels could be even higher but the barriers more generally in society were real challenges. It is encouraging to hear youth organisations—NCS, et cetera—talk about some of the ways to open up their schemes with bursaries for those from lower socioeconomic groups, but our ESRC research (Mills & Waite) also found some hidden costs of social action. Because there is so much emphasis on fundraising across the board in the youth sector, there is an atmosphere of pressure on families from taking sponsorship forms home, to being asked to contribute to bake sales. Those more everyday hidden costs of social action or the cost of transport to social action projects are a real area for policy recommendations to improve that experience and reduce the burdens on those young people.

**Baroness Morris of Yardley:** This is a really important point that I cannot quite get my head round. The biggest challenge is rolling things out. As a nation, we are really good at starting things off and doing them on a small scale, but so many of them fall away and never become the national programme we had hoped for. In terms of some of the figures you have just mentioned, I am not quite sure what our aspiration should be or where the fault lies. Is it that we are not doing enough with these programmes which are very successful and doing a lot of good things for young people to get them to all people, or that we just cannot have a
system where a small number of highly funded successful programmes
manage to reach all young people? Does that make sense?

*Dr Andrew Mycock:* It makes sense, yes.

*Baroness Morris of Yardley:* I am not quite sure where you feel our challenge lies in that.

*Dr Andrew Mycock:* It is a very interesting point. It is about whether you instigate top-down programmes that seek to become universal.

*Baroness Morris of Yardley:* Because they have worked with some people.

*Dr Andrew Mycock:* Or you encourage bottom-up programmes. I think the answer is somewhere in between those two points.

*Baroness Morris of Yardley:* I thought you might say that.

*Dr Andrew Mycock:* I will give you some evidence on that. If you look at citizenship education in schools, that is an example of a national curriculum standard you can establish which then is translated into the locality. That has been seen to work. When there has been political commitment and will, it has seemed to work very well. The problem is that there has been variability in the two Houses here in terms of the desirability of citizenship education and what it should contain if it does exist. For programmes such as National Citizen Service there is the question of the extent to which it should be nationally offered and whether that should be universal. There is a danger that it could suppress other or existing successful programmes at a local level. There is some evidence that might be the case because of the fact there is a shortage of funding, particularly to local authorities, to maintain some very successful youth engagement programmes. There is a danger in which very simple solutions to much more complicated problems emerge.

If you look at it the other way round and the way that local moves up the other way, and if you look at what youth councils do and those programmes that are linked to it, they very much go from the bottom upwards. There is a need to recognise that at the moment, if there is a problem, it is that there is not enough co-ordination at a local level. Most of the youth initiatives we are seeing developed at the moment tend to come from the top down, from the national level downwards, and it reduces the agency for local councils, schools and civil society to develop their own initiatives and to network in imaginative ways. We are moving towards a one-size-fits-all approach, which I think takes the local out of it in some ways. I am not here to promote it, but the report that we did in the Kirklees Democracy Commission—which is currently developing a programme of work with young people—started from the premise that their viewfinder of citizenship begins in their local communities and moves upwards rather than starting at the national and moving downwards. There is a need to engage more with young people about what kind of programmes they would like to see. There is a tendency to
develop programmes and then push them downwards rather than start at a point and say, “What opportunities would you like? How do you see the geometries of citizenship and what kinds of programmes would you like to see to empower you and give you more opportunities?”

**Baroness Morris of Yardley:** There is still quality control—if you start from the bottom and let them be aware of what we have learnt from experience which they might not have had. That is their dilemma, is it not?

**Dr Andrew Mycock:** There is a need to establish some kind of minimum offer. I am very encouraged about this narrative of a journey. It works very well. Through that journey, if you look at transition points and the different ways in which you can focus on that sense of a journey, there is a need to consistently offer a minimum standard to all young people. There is a tendency at the moment for national programmes to constrain imaginative responses to that that come from the local response to local circumstances and local needs, particularly if you look at that previous question about social composition, where what works in London in terms of the design may not work in Cumbria. There is a need to have that local sense of shaping what the offer is, but it is a very good question.

**Lord Verjee:** Some of these issues have been covered. What are the main barriers and blockages preventing better action on citizenship and civic engagement and how could they be addressed? In particular, in your studies, The Challenge talks about social segregation as “there is more that divides us than binds us”. What are the blockages and how can we have a more cohesive society?

**Oliver Lee:** Can I very briefly refer back to the previous question on the subject of constraints nationally versus locally? My personal view is that NCS is at its most effective when there is an effective harmony between those two dimensions—local and national—so that there is a degree of quality control and commonality of approach, but there is also an enormous amount of local input into that, because there is of course vast variation. The direction of travel of NCS sees it strongly moving in that direction. To give an example through my organisation, if one were to go back about three years, roughly 5% of our places were delivered through local delivery partnerships. That is now just over 30% and it is continuing to move in that direction, and that is extremely welcome.

Turning to your question, Lord Verjee, we think there is a clear relationship between social responsibility, civic engagement—however one wishes to describe it—and a sense of trust and belonging flowing from social integration and overcoming either perceived or real segregation. In some or all of that mixture is an incentive, which could be described as the lens of social mobility; certainly the NCS Bill refers to this. Our argument would be that it is difficult—and this is a horribly overused word these days, for which my apologies—to separate out those different elements of that ecosystem entirely; they all interrelate with each other, which is why the goals pursued through NCS and the outcomes that it is seeking in a balanced way between those three areas...
are absolutely invaluable. To give you a sense of that, I do not think the key indicators of trust, confidence, respect, understanding and empathy will necessarily be in place within a community for somebody to take—even if it is incentivised—a leap of faith into some form of social action, some form of volunteering, to choose to spend their time on that, to choose to travel to that, unless they are confident in those whom they are surrounded by, including those from extremely different backgrounds. If that level of confidence and glue exists, I think there is much greater chance that this sort of engagement will take place in the manner that we would like it to.

There are a number of other factors I could turn to—for example, the role of business in this, which was touched on in the earlier session. It is quite interesting to see that the CIPD identifies that 67% of employers judge their new-entry employees as more work-ready if they have already had volunteering experience, yet you can contrast that against the fact that only 16% search for that through an application and only 33% search through an interview. What this means is that a lot of this is pushed rather than pulled and, if we wanted to make it more comprehensive, we would shift that round and it would be pulled by the individual rather than pushed towards the individual. I do not know whether that is the beginnings of an answer to your questions.

**Dr Sarah Mills:** I am struck in this debate by the terms that are used: social inclusion, social mobility, social action, social mix. There is a wider identity crisis in some of this discussion about civic engagement in that a lot of those policy hooks are used all at one and the same time, and “citizenship” is the broad umbrella term that captures a lot of that. Certainly from interviews with NCS providers and voluntary sector organisations that we have conducted, a lot of them are very open about the fact that they are in this competitive landscape and having to get on the policy hook of the day in order to stay competitive. That makes it very confusing for young people to decide which scheme is for them. While they are making a number of connections to these policy hooks, it is important to step back and reflect on which ones are the most salient to young people in their lives at that particular moment and which ones have a historical longevity, such as youth citizenship, to capture what it is we are really talking about here, whether that is about rights and responsibilities or civic engagement. The competitive landscape, certainly in the last few years, has led to these buzzwords, if you like, clouding or muddying the water somewhat in what different organisations purport to be, or are about, and how young people actually experience them.

**Dr Andrew Mycock:** I would argue that resources are one of the main barriers. It is a barrier in terms of the obvious effects in that it is limiting the opportunities for young people to engage. You find that local government and other state institutions and civil society groups are constantly in some form of conflict about who delivers and how they deliver. There is a lot of competition for resources in there. It means that often there is a lack of developed collaborative frameworks between the formal and informal groups. That links with what Sarah was suggesting,
which is that it is very confusing for young people because there is a lack of a detailed map and a lack of co-ordination and, particularly in schools, there is a lack of real advice for young people about what opportunities there are and what is appropriate for them. There is always a question about what kinds of opportunities are appropriate. A wider barrier is located in these two Houses and elsewhere, and that is political will. There seems to be a sort of replicative emphasis on young people that comes and goes. When I think about my experience in the Youth Citizenship Commission, at that point, towards the end of the Labour Government, there was great interest in young people; a new Government comes in and the entire body of work is dropped. There does not seem to be a consistent application and focus on young people. That is one thing that, more than anything, would help develop this more cognitive developmental progressive approach towards opportunities for young people in youth engagement and integration.

Lord Blunkett: I am very interested in the answers to the last question in terms of the latest hook and buzzwords and how to fill in the appropriate forms, but I want to go back to the original question in putting mine. Sarah said she wanted to say more about it in the opening question. There is the old adage of the priest in South America who said, “When I gave to the poor, I was a saint; when I tried to stop them being poor, I was a communist”, and he was a priest, not a politician. How can we get over this understandable emphasis on responsibility and duty, which I am totally in favour of rather than just rights and entitlements, but to translate that into people seeing that they can do more gradually in terms of changing the world for the better when they have learnt about themselves and their relationship to civil society?

Dr Sarah Mills: That relationship between responsibility and rights sits at the heart of a lot of the discussions on citizenship. My opening statement in relation to that was about how the brand of youth citizenship that NCS and other organisations espouse is very much about volunteering and social action. We engaged with a cohort of NCS graduates about what citizenship is and 80%-plus agreed that NCS had helped them to learn more about what it was to be a citizen. However, when we asked in qualitative interviews, it was about the volunteering and about social action. The way we could have a more encompassing understanding of citizenship within those types of programmes is about, as Andy said earlier, the postcode lottery. Our research found that geography matters and that who your NCS provider is will determine the particular activities and curriculum that you receive. While some NCS graduates meet their MPs, have very “big p” politics debates and discussions on voting, others do bricklaying, more community gardening and design posters. Those activities can be political, however, geography is a real area of improvement for the NCS—to equalise that and to ensure that young people are engaging in political literacy/citizenship education through what is ostensibly a national programme. Yes, responsibility is absolutely at the heart of many formations of youth citizenship. It is the active way that young people before they can vote, et cetera, can perform citizenship, but it is not the only way to engage them as active
citizens by saying, “You are going to volunteer; this is how you volunteer”. There should be a broader understanding of youth citizenship.

**Lord Blunkett:** Anything to add? Do you agree?

**Oliver Lee:** Save for one very small point, which is that an assertion one would make is that an element of NCS’s uniqueness is that it was specifically designed and academically grounded in that original curriculum to promote positive contact between people from different backgrounds. It was designed to do that through purposefully intense and even, on occasion, stressful extended situations. In that context integration, to an extent, is the first domino here and is therefore not necessarily, I would argue, a buzzword; it is a pretty important word at the heart of much of this.

**Dr Andrew Mycock:** This is the core of your work, this idea about what you understand by the term “citizenship”. Over the last 20 years communitarian forms of citizenship have dominated. What we might see now is that we have moved into a neo-communitarian age where before it was rights. In some ways we seem to offer a rather truncated version of citizenship where responsibilities are not just put before rights but it is often responsibilities without rights. Young people are given a rather inert and compliant version of citizenship which means that they do not seem to be schooled in giving themselves that agency and efficacy to change the world in which they live, in terms of volunteering when there does not seem to be an offer back. It is interesting if you look at why young people voted for Labour in the last election. It was the first time in certainly my lifetime I can remember a political party going out and saying, "We are offering you rights back. We are returning some of the rights that you have had taken away from you". That seemed to energise it. There is a need to make sure that we go back to balancing the notion of responsibilities and those rights that are attendant upon a balanced form of citizenship.

**Baroness Lister of Burtersett:** There is one particular aspect of the rights and responsibilities around political citizenship, and you raised it in your evidence, Andrew, and that is the voting age. Do you think that reducing the voting age would strengthen young people’s citizenship? I got the sense that you were quite ambivalent about it, but I would be interested to know what you all think about that in terms of a very clear political right. We talk a lot about young people not using the vote and we talk about it as a responsibility, but it is a political right.

**Dr Andrew Mycock:** I have been on a journey. The Youth Citizenship Commission in 2009 did not come to a decision on lowering the voting age. I was one of those who said that it should not be lowered because I did not think the case at the time was right. I have been on a journey towards a more supportive position, but the danger at the moment is that we are looking at what has happened in Scotland and we are reading into it that this is some kind of success story. It is not. Although we saw a high turnout in the 2014 referendum, turnout has since dropped dramatically for those under the age of 18. There is a wider question
here. If you are going to lower the voting age, you need to think about that correlation, that relationship between rights and voting age, and at the moment that conversation is not being had. It seems very strange to be pushing lowering the voting age to 16 and pushing the rights of various other things upwards. It is a very confusing message.

Beyond that, this wider question that you are looking at about political socialisation needs to be taken far more seriously. If we go back to 1969, there were promises after the point of lowering the voting age to 18 that we would bring in some form of political or civic education and, lo and behold, we did—in 2002. If we are going to think about lowering the voting age now, it needs to be taken seriously because there is a need to support young people to ensure that they feel confident about going to the ballot box. I will leave it at that.

Q47 **Baroness Barker:** The investment of more than £1 billion in NCS is the biggest investment by Government in this area. As was said in the previous session, earlier on this year the Public Accounts Committee was very critical of the comparative value for money of NCS. How can NCS improve its value for money?

**Oliver Lee:** I am not going to rehearse Michael Lynas’s points. I was sitting in the back of that session earlier and I would endorse those points and would agree with the figures and the data points that he pointed to. Above and beyond that, there is no doubt that the programme, which is challenging, and has been challenging to get to the point that it is at now, is seeking a series of really quite significant outcomes. That has been a challenging process for all involved, unquestionably, given where the funding flows from, and it needs to be seeking an ever-increased level of efficiency and value for money. I am absolutely committed to that. It also needs to be seeking an ever-increasing disbursal of that money, which goes back to my earlier point about local versus national. There needs to be breadth of activity in this lane, which I am reassured is in fact very much broader now than it was, with many thousands of organisations, and it is certainly becoming increasingly broad.

There are other efficiencies that can be considered. One needs to be careful with regard to quality and impact and outcomes. We ran 10,000 of our places this summer as a pilot on behalf of the NCS Trust in a compressed model seeking similar outcomes but over, broadly speaking, a three-week rather than a four-week programme. That, of course, would derive savings. We would need to confirm that the outcomes and impacts are common otherwise a judgment needs to be taken between those two things.

The final point I would make is that the development into a thoroughly high-performing organisation from a start point in 2013 of the NCS Trust means that there is inevitably duplication at the moment between elements of what the NCS Trust is now capable of doing and elements of what the front-line delivery organisations are doing. There should be a singular commitment to drive out those duplications such that this
becomes ever-more efficient.

**Dr Sarah Mills:** I read the Public Accounts Committee report with interest and obviously followed the NCS Bill and submitted evidence to that inquiry. It is clear that value for money could be improved. It is partly a question of evaluation. I was encouraged to hear that there have been more reports since and research undertaken by the NCS Trust. There is more long-term longitudinal work that needs to be done there, and I think time will tell on many of those issues.

I am also encouraged by the recent announcement between NCS and the Scouts. There is potential there. To be honest, it would have been helpful to have had that type of relationship at the start of NCS in terms of a closer working relationship with the third sector. Certainly my research has heard about a lot of challenges and animosity towards NCS because of that relationship, because of the climate and reality of austerity in the youth work sector. Bridges are being built. It will take time and it was encouraging to hear in the previous session of those closer working relationships. Value for money could be improved, but it needs to be cognisant of the specific dynamics between the state and the third sector. It is also a question of devolution. There is an assumption sometimes that NCS is across the UK. It only operates in England and Northern Ireland. It does not operate in Scotland or Wales. There was a pilot in Wales, but it was not taken up by the Welsh Government. Devolution and geography also need to be taken into account in terms of the future of NCS as well.

**The Chairman:** Are you happy, Baroness Barker?

**Baroness Barker:** Yes.

**Baroness Redfern:** Do you think different government initiatives to encourage civic engagement link together into a cohesive strategy? Are there coherent links between citizenship education, the #iwill campaign, and National Citizen Service? Who wants to go with that one?

**Dr Sarah Mills:** Each of those organisations is working incredibly hard in its own space to carve out their niche and, as was said in the previous session, to start that working relationship again. I was encouraged to hear that they are sharing datasets and thinking about that evaluation a bit more cohesively. Some of the challenges have been because of the movement of NCS. It started in the Department for Education, went to the Cabinet Office and is now in the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. In the middle of that there was the formation of the NCS Trust. The real area for better working relationships is the link between NCS and citizenship education in schools—that link between formal and informal education. In the third sector in terms of the #iwill campaign, there is a much closer working relationship than perhaps there is between NCS and citizenship education in schools. That would be my recommendation for close work.
Dr Andrew Mycock: It is a good question. In some ways the question starts at government and the fact that different wings and different branches of government are working on similar initiatives at any one time. I am thinking now about Chris Skidmore, the Minister for the Constitution, and a project there looking at youth engagement, and you are looking at it. At times, that tends to produce a fractured response. You will see different initiatives associated with different bodies and they tend to not coalesce particularly well. Beyond that, there is almost a sense of competition between some of these initiatives which means that they often spend a certain amount of their energies in trying to establish themselves as opposed to other initiatives. I think that is a problem.

To go back to the Youth Citizenship Commission when we were looking at the start of NCS and other projects, the problem in many ways is that you are trying to wire in programmes that do not sit particularly well with the school curriculum in some senses. There is a need to think about that sense in which citizenship teachers are furnished with the abilities to offer a range of opportunities rather than to say citizenship education necessarily tramlines into a particular opportunity.

As far as Sarah’s comments about devolution go, one of the things which needs to be recognised is that this is a partial offer across the United Kingdom and that, within England, devolution, particularly to city regions, offers the opportunity to devolve down a lot of these programmes to a city region local level. National Citizen Service, #iwill and these other programmes could be not just delivered but designed and managed at that level as well. True devolution means that these programmes work better if you build from the bottom upwards and network on a local basis rather than on a top-down basis, as I said before.

Baroness Barker: During the passage of the NCS Bill, Lord Maude, who was one of the architects of the NCS programme, was quite open about fact that it was set up deliberately to stand aside and to be separate—in his words “protected”—from the rest of the voluntary sector, and a lot of what you are talking about is a consequence of the basic set-up of the organisation. Not now, because we have not got time, but would you consider the constitutional set-up of the NCS, and particularly its status now as a royal charter body and the extent to which it is possible to achieve the sorts of aims that you are talking about, which is greater efficiency and integration across a range of organisations in the light of that move? It is a given that its constitutional basis is as it is, but how can these aims that I think we are all in agreement are beneficial to young people be achieved? If you could write to us about that, that would be very helpful.

Baroness Pitkeathley: In the interests of time I am going to combine two questions. I am going to ask you first about the relationship between integration and civic engagement. How well do initiatives which are aimed at increasing civil engagement foster also greater integration? Could you give us some examples of best practice? We would like some real examples of best practice.
Dr Andrew Mycock: It is a very good question. It is a starting point. In many ways, a good approach towards youth citizenship is that you look at civic education as a tool to bring different groups of young people together. My view is based on work in Kirklees where I have been working with schools across the area—and we know the history of that—where we network different schools into a programme which I have brought you a report on called My Country, My Vote, where we get schools to work independently on different youth initiatives in their communities. We get them to work across the community. We have different schools from different backgrounds and they go and work with different youth-based civil society groups within their communities as well. It is wiring them together and getting that sense of interaction. At the core of good community cohesion is interaction, increasing those sites and spaces of interaction.

For that we bring in the local council and the university. The universities play a very fundamental role in providing neutral spaces. It is that critical thing about identifying neutral spaces. Sometimes schools themselves are not neutral. The data we have produced seems to indicate that if you can build a sense of common purpose, if you can give young people a sense in which they have the ability to change their environment, they start to feel that that civic identity has a binding effect. One thing we have found really difficult has been to change the behaviour of the politicians to engage with the young people, including at the sites of citizenship. We get our local councillors now to have constituency meetings in the schools to go to listen to young people so they feel valued. It is that question: that if you value young people—if politicians value young people—they will open up those wider relationships.

Oliver Lee: There is a reasonable body of evidence, both academic and more in the here-and-now practical outcomes that we are seeing, that demonstrates that first domino of integration leads to meaningful levels of civic engagement/civic contribution. This is an area of strength for the National Citizen Service. Integration being at the heart of that programme leads to a whole series of follow-on activities that we see on the graduate agenda. An example of that would be a programme that we run called HeadStart. This sees 16 hours’ worth of volunteering being incentivised by a guaranteed job interview at the end of it with one of various business partners. It goes back to my point about the “whole ship” enterprise; everybody needs to be involved in this, and there is a reference there clearly to business. What we see through that programme is a much higher likelihood of people continuing to contribute thereafter. It is very much the continuum that has been referred to on a number of occasions today.

Dr Sarah Mills: One of the founding principles of NCS is around social mix and integration. It was recently included in The Casey Review as an example of integration. There is real potential there. My research found that young people, when they talked about encountering difference, did not refer to race, religion, ethnicity or class but talked about different personalities, not judging others or meeting somebody from the next
street or another part of the village or town. There is a very local geography to that. Of course, you can encounter difference there at a local level, but what would be really encouraging to see is more cross-regional and cross-national events through NCS that do that geographical mixing, which was one of the original aims of the policy as well, with social mixing on that level, because if you do NCS in east London you will meet other young people from east London. It is encouraging to hear about more alumni-related events or follow-on programmes that can foster more cross-national and cross-regional encounters with difference as well.

Oliver Lee: Could I have 20 seconds on that? I would simply say that we think that national mixing is an area that NCS could do better. It was expressly designed, in the first instance, for it to lead that local sense of community conscience towards the latter part of the programme. We think that is still a thoroughly worthwhile outcome, but in the earlier phases of the programme, where people are moved for a variety of different reasons away from their communities to undertake the various activities, we think that could be done in a more national mixing sense, and there will be some innovation around that next year.

The Chairman: Baroness Lister, I am aware that I cut you off because you asked a question about reducing the voting age and we moved on. Dr Mycock told you he was on a journey, but we did not have a chance to hear from Dr Mills and Mr Lee about their views. Shall we take that one up now?

Baroness Lister of Burtersett: I wanted to ask a question in lieu of what I thought I was going to be asking. It is a specific question for Sarah. Just for the record I should say that we are members of the same school at Loughborough University. One of the things that struck me in your evidence was that your research found that not all NCS programmes encourage youth-led social action. Can you give an example of a successful youth-led social action scheme and the impact it has? More generally, often one can learn from the things that do not work so well as from the things that do. Are there any examples that any of you have of initiatives that have not worked that well but one can learn quite a lot from in terms of what to avoid in the future?

Dr Sarah Mills: In relation to youth-led social action, that was one of the areas where there was a real regional geography to it based on your provider. The majority of providers were encouraging youth-led social action and ideas from the young people themselves about what they wanted to do in week three and four. However, some providers were predesigning projects in relation to logistics, risk assessments, et cetera, that young people would complete. We found that there was less buy-in from the young people, who of course have fantastic ideas of social action projects themselves. It was a minority, but it still impacted their NCS experience.

There are examples of fantastic inspirational NCS projects. One was around a campaign to lower train fares for young people. Michael Lynas
mentioned earlier about transport being a political issue. There are some fantastic youth-led citizenship-based engagements with local MPs around train fares. I guess my point there is that those are great NCS social action projects, but they never make it into the marketing and branding in the way that engagement with food banks or community gardening does. I think those projects deserve just as much attention as those that are based around fundraising for charity, which of course is noteworthy and fantastic to celebrate—and NCS graduations celebrate social action and those projects—but it would be great to see more public awareness of the variety of things young people are doing on NCS.

**The Chairman:** Shall we return to the voting age?

**Baroness Lister of Burtersett:** Is there anything we can learn from things that have not worked so well, but yes, the voting age?

**Oliver Lee:** Failure for it to be youth-led fails the test. Largely speaking, I agree with that. We would certainly see the social action in any NCS programmes that we deliver as fundamentally youth-led. I also think we would see them being broader than purely fundraising, and the series of activities that you have just described there, Sarah, we would absolutely include in that bracket. Another trap one can fall into quite easily—and it goes back to my point about quality—is if the programme that is being undertaken is not adequately demanding. We think that demand and that requirement to stretch the legs leads to a cohering impact between different people. It is very interesting to see those who you would not necessarily expect start to struggle at a particular point in time and start to rely on somebody extremely different from themselves who they might not previously have met in any other walk of life.

We do not have a particular organisational position on the voting age. I do not have a particularly strong personal one either. Political literacy can be excellently delivered and perhaps more so through NCS. We had a number of NCS graduates in these buildings yesterday. Bite The Ballot was referred to earlier; registration for voting and physically making sure those forms get sent; political discussions with a small “p”; 150 or so MPs over the last year have visited NCS through our organisation. I think we can do more and more of that.

**The Chairman:** A last word from Dr Mills on the voting age.

**Dr Sarah Mills:** It is interesting that the voting age was one of the key topics on some of the NCS programmes that included elements of political debate. Those topics generate a lot of discussion between young people and I am encouraged by the work of Bite the Ballot in relation to securing a range of young people’s views. I would love to see in every NCS programme a discussion about those types of political engagement.

**Lord Blunkett:** Can I just clarify with Andrew, in the 2008-2009 work that you did with Professor Tonge, young people were pretty well split down the middle at 16 and 17 as to whether they thought it was right to have a vote?
**Dr Andrew Mycock:** That is right, yes, there was only a slight majority in favour of it. Other work done by YouGov has produced very similar figures. One of the interesting things about lowering the voting age is the way in which it has gained momentum as a cause. It was noteworthy when we took evidence during the Youth Citizenship Commission that the vast majority of those who submitted evidence came from youth organisation groups. I am still not quite convinced that the demand for a vote at 16 is emanating from young people themselves as much as there is a sort of commodification of it.

**Lord Blunkett:** If I could be mischievous, Chairman: I belong to a political party that likes doing things top down to people.

**Dr Andrew Mycock:** The danger of it is that it is sold as a panacea to all ills in terms of youth political disengagement. As I said, there is a far wider scope and lens through which you need to produce evidence-based policy to lower the voting age. That said, I would advocate lowering the voting age, but only after this process has taken place rather than, as we have seen in Scotland, simply lowering the voting age instrumentally for a particular reason.

**The Chairman:** Thank you all very much. We have kept you late but it has been a very worthwhile session and you have given us a lot of food for thought. Thank you very much for coming along.