Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement
Corrected oral evidence: Civil Society

Wednesday 15 November 2017
10.40 am

Listen to the meeting

Members present: Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbots (The Chairman); Baroness Barker; Lord Blunkett; Baroness Eaton; Lord Harries of Pentregarth; Baroness Lister of Burtersett; Baroness Morris of Yardley; Baroness Newlove; Baroness Pitkeathley; Baroness Redfern; Lord Rowe-Beddoe; Lord Verjee.

Evidence Session No. 11 Heard in Public Questions 96 - 103

Witnesses

I: Sir Stuart Etherington, Chief Executive, NCVO; Neil Jameson, Citizens UK; Matthew Bolton, Civil Society Futures.
The Chairman: Thank you very much for coming along today. Some of you will be known to, and know of, the Members of this Committee. I have to read the formal police caution that you get on all these occasions. A list of the interests of Members relevant to the inquiry has been sent to you and is available. 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 Committee’s website. A few days after the session, you will be sent a copy of the transcript to check it for accuracy, and it would be most helpful if you could advise us of any corrections as quickly as possible. 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 at that point. Could I ask you to briefly introduce yourselves and then we will go to the questions?

Sir Stuart Etherington: Stuart Etherington. I am the chief executive of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, which is the umbrella for charities and voluntary organisations in England. We have 13,000 voluntary organisations in membership.

Matthew Bolton: Good morning. I am Matthew Bolton. I am the deputy director of Citizens UK, so I work for the same organisation as Neil, to my right, but I am here today representing Civil Society Futures, which is an independent inquiry into civil society. Citizens UK is one of four organisations which are taking forward an inquiry, chaired by Julia Unwin, into the role of civil society in the future.

Neil Jameson: Good morning. I am Neil Jameson, the executive director of Citizens UK. If I may, Chair, I will pass round a little flyer, which summarises on the front exactly who we are.

The Chairman: We can pass those round at the end.

Neil Jameson: We are a civil society alliance made up of faith institutions, schools and other civil society groups and we have been going for 30 years. Our aim, which is specifically helpful, I hope, to you, is to help people participate in public life and to strengthen the groups they come from in the process.

The Chairman: Thank you very much. If I could start by opening up with an overarching question, could you give us your views of how you would describe the current state of civic participation and civil society in the UK?

Sir Stuart Etherington: We would look at this through the lens of volunteering and people engaged as volunteers, both in terms of civic participation and supporting the causes that they care about and coming forward often to form voluntary organisations. The health of that aspect of the voluntary sector is reasonably good. We see about 22 million people involved in volunteering activity at least once per year and about
14 million about once a month. In that sense, volunteering and engagement rates are very stable and have been for some time. They tend to peak around major sporting events, and the Olympics was no different—there was a peak, but nobody who has organised these major events has been able to sustain the legacy of that in terms of an overall increase and it tends to drop back.

One of the interesting parts under the surface in relation to that data is that there has been a steady increase in the number of younger people coming forward. The notion that young people are not engaged or involved is not true. We are seeing a fairly steady increase in activity among the 16 to 25 year-old cohort, which is encouraging. We do not know why that is happening. I am sure some people will argue that it is a particular initiative, but I suspect it is not. We are not sure why there has been a steady increase.

We will distribute to the Committee after this session a piece of work we did some years ago, *Pathways through Participation*, which is still a pretty definitive piece of research work about why people become involved, what causes them to continue to be involved and what turns them off. That is quite valuable in setting a framework for understanding, so we will make sure that you get a copy of that report.

**Matthew Bolton:** Civil Society Futures has been set up to investigate the health and role of civil society, particularly looking forward to how we can have a civil society in the future which will help create a good society. I will predicate this by saying that we are one-third of the way through and interim findings are not out yet, but I will talk a bit about some of the thinking going into the inquiry which is relevant to the question and lift out a couple of things which we have found to be somewhat surprising.

It is worth saying that one of the research partners to the inquiry is indeed the NVCO. In the formal submission that we have made to this Select Committee, we are resting on some of the research that the NVCO has done into the charitable sector. One of the aims of Civil Society Futures was to investigate the more informal part of civil society—the associations, both online and face to face, which are out there and often do not register in investigations into civil society activity of this sort, which tend to focus on the formal organisations, I guess, because it is easier to try to understand what is happening there.

Alongside the research that is going on, we are doing some place-based deep dives into particular areas to understand the rich texture of what civil society is like in certain places, which is partly the role that Citizens UK is playing.

One of the things that we have been reminded of is that there is an inequality in who tends to form the cohort of core participants; it is people who are wealthier with more time who do most of the participation, but we were interested in the question of hot spots and cold spots. If you engage with some of the charitable funders, you will hear a
lot, in terms of where they get a lot of applications for funding from, that there are certain hot spots in the country where there is more charitable activity of that formal sort. We have done a number of deep dives into areas which are hot spots and cold spots in that way of understanding it. One of the things that has been surprising to us is that, even in those cold spots of less formal charitable activity, once you get under the surface—and we have been in parts of Sunderland and Shirebrook in Nottinghamshire—there is a rich texture of mutual support and local associations often built around some of the institutions that exist. Churches and schools, which are everywhere, often have an ecosystem of civil society activity of that informal sort around them, and there are other organisations which do not have names and are people coming together to support each other. That has been one of the positive and surprising initial findings that has come through this focus on looking for and trying to understand the less formal aspects of civil society and going into particular places to do these deep dives.

Neil Jameson: In anticipation of this question, I was reflecting on my journey here past this great building, which is now guarded by people with guns and there is fencing where there was no fencing. I was frisked downstairs more than I ever was at an airport—maybe there is a special alert on, but there was frisking and so on. I read the *Guardian* this morning and there were three reports about 70,000 Girl Guides who cannot be Girl Guides because there are not enough people volunteering to support that institution. Also, a Fabian Society report has just come out about the decline in participation and membership of trade unions as a result of all sorts of things.

That is significant for Citizens UK because the organisations that we recognise are the organisations whose roots have been around for a long time and were membership organisations, so we do not talk about volunteers but about leadership. Our role is to strengthen participation, which means governance—for civil society to have a seat at the table, if you like. If these institutions are floundering or if there are barriers to stop people participating, as I described in coming here, that is very serious because most people learned how to work together not at their parents’ knees but—as it used to be—when they joined a union or a voluntary association or they went to church. We are a civic organisation, not a religious organisation, but it is critical that people learn how to do democracy. Cicero said that citizenship is learned; to be a citizen is something that you learn rather than something you are born into.

These institutions are floundering. The Church of England has admitted that it has fewer than 1 million members for the first time for a long time. The trade unions, as we know, are also floundering and are, for many people, irrelevant. I am a Quaker myself and we have proudly announced, which is a terrible thing to be proud of, that we have declined from 23,000 to 13,000 in the last 10 years. The Methodist Church could be irrelevant and gone in 10 years’ time. This is very serious for this Commission. If the institutions are irrelevant, maybe they need to change, which is partly what we are trying to help them to do. They need
to play a part in civil society, to be relevant to their members, to teach people how to be civic leaders and, therefore, to be organised much more effectively to have a seat at the table in the way that often these institutions have had—sometimes represented by bishops, but not always by clergy and certainly not by laypeople. I would say that there is a mixed feeling about civil participation over the last 30 years and people have to try much harder to participate, particularly in governance. It is not so much about volunteering for the elderly; there is a great tradition of that, and I come from that tradition. It is whether what we have in civil society is relevant and respected as a significant, if not the most significant, player in the struggle between the state and the market. The people who keep the peace at local level are members of civil society. The state does okay, but, without civil society and these institutions I mentioned, it is a terrible nightmare of shopping malls and, if you like, yourselves, with the market, of course, playing an increasingly significant part.

**The Chairman:** We obviously get evidence from—and this is not in any way a derogatory phrase—the usual suspects. You talked about deep dives in cold spots, and we are worried about the left-behinds and how we will hear from them. What are you doing there, and is there any evidence available that we could get before we conclude our evidence-taking?

**Matthew Bolton:** Yes. The good news is that, although the inquiry as a whole is for two years and we are only a third of the way through, the final deep dive will be completed by the end of this calendar year. Indeed, depending on the availability of the Select Committee, there is one this Sunday in Barking and Dagenham. There is a community centre based in a church building and we are holding a meeting on a Sunday. We tried to hold a meeting on a weekday evening, thinking that it would be a good time for people to come and participate in a conversation about what the community is like here, what the people care about and what they see as some of the opportunities and challenges in the future. The big learning from the mistake of holding it in the evening was that, for a lot of people, their work does not follow predictable hours; people are on zero-hours contracts, they do not know when they will be working, they are doing part-time jobs in the evening, it is not nine to five and they have caring responsibilities and so on. We are aiming for a Sunday in the hope that we will get greater participation. So that is one. We will also be holding one in a seaside town. We have done six out of eight, and there are reports of each of them that we can send in.

**The Chairman:** Thank you; that would be very helpful.

**Baroness Morris of Yardley:** That is very interesting, and I agree entirely, but are you, therefore, saying that the opposite is not true? I take your point about the old institutions and their importance, but were you also saying that nebulous groups of people volunteering together or new institutions cannot fulfil that role?
**Neil Jameson:** We look all the time for them. We are a membership organisation and we have in London about 198 institutions in membership and a vast number of them are faith-based. They have roots and they have people still attending.

**Baroness Morris of Yardley:** They tend not to be new organisations though.

**Neil Jameson:** My colleague, when he joined us, thought, “What about football supporters’ groups?” They are partisan, quite naturally, and they will not work with other groups, and it is this approach to public life.

**Lord Blunkett:** Do you find that charities work with each other?

**Neil Jameson:** There are competitions with them, naturally, depending on their purpose, so none of us is perfect, but I would honour those which have roots, have been around a long time and are training people in how to work together. Schools and parents’ associations are not bad, but universities are not so good these days. Because we are a membership organisation, one of the conditions of joining Citizens UK is that you have to pay to join and you have to agree and sign a little document to say that you will work with other people and on their issues and that you believe in the “common good”—and that obligation to work with other people seems to put a lot of people off, because everyone has a very strong view on the world and what should happen.

**Baroness Morris of Yardley:** They are more like pressure groups.

**Neil Jameson:** More pressure groups; we are multi-issue. To answer your question, Chairman, the living wage campaign of Citizens UK started in 2001, or the “real living wage”, as we are now calling it, the purpose of which was to give people time to spend with their children, to help with the nurturing of children. It was never totally about more money; it was time because the problem, particularly in east London, is that people are absorbed by work and two parents work and they cannot volunteer, particularly if they are on a lower wage.

Also, to answer your question, I think Dr Barry spoke to you about our report on the missing Muslims. One significant crisis, which Dominic Grieve chaired a commission recently to look at, was the plight of the Muslim community here and it concluded that, if you are a Muslim in Britain, you mostly do not feel very welcome. Feeling welcome is critical to the state, to the plight of democracy. If you have not seen our report, I can send it to you.

**The Chairman:** Thank you.

**Baroness Redfern:** You have touched on part of my question, which is: who is not taking part in civil society, and what are the barriers that these groups have? You have mentioned that faith groups and some universities have been involved, so could you elaborate a bit more on that question, please?
**Neil Jameson:** Every city has primary schools, and they are a significant target for Citizens UK and recruitment because parents are participating more than they are in secondary schools. We look for, and welcome, new institutions. We have never had a book club join, but maybe one day we will. As I say, the obligation to pay and to work with other people reduces the number of people who join. The purpose of Citizens UK is to help people be more powerful, and we have to define what we mean by “powerful”, but that also puts people off. They do not particularly want to be more powerful, they want to be more effective, but we say, “That means power, and you have to have power to be more effective”. We have these large alliances now where the persuasion has happened. We do not mind where people come from, but they have to be in a group. Tenants associations are not anything like as effective as they used to be and they are parochial in the way that they operate, so it is only institutions which can join Citizens UK. We just launched Tyne & Wear Citizens, which covers three cities and has 18 groups in membership which are diverse.

**The Chairman:** Stuart, I am sure you would like to come in on this.

**Sir Stuart Etherington:** There is no shortage of organisations out there. There are 160,000 charities, and the number fluctuates a little, but it roughly stays around that number, so people are coming together. I do not know whether the restriction is about whether or not people want to work together, because the picture in relation to voluntary organisations is inevitably mixed and there are certain competitive pressures on them which drive them in slightly different directions.

What is difficult to get a handle on, and I do not know if Matthew has picked this up in relation to the deep-dive exercise, is the emergence of new types of organisation, which are not formal charities but are more networked organisations. They tend to be more of the enterprise type, the social enterprise movement, which is very different in character from what we would see in traditional charities in that it is focused on developing earned income as a key part of their make-up, where there is a blurring between the commercial and civil society going on. They are emerging as an important force, and I wonder whether some of the things that we are seeing in the rise of the number of younger people coming forward in civic participation and engagement is not being reflected in new types of organisation. It seems to me that there is a group of people who no longer think that there is a clear distinction between public and private benefit, and they are engaged in organisations which are providing public benefit and an amount of private benefit for the individuals involved. That is emerging. There are increasingly, if you like, permeable boundaries between types of organisation, public and civil society, civil society and corporate. We may well be missing, because we are not picking it up anywhere, the growth of organisations which are of a different type.

**Baroness Redfern:** You said that at 16 to 25 you saw an increase in volunteering.
Sir Stuart Etherington: Yes.

Baroness Redfern: Are there barriers to volunteering if you live in a rural area compared to an urban area?

Sir Stuart Etherington: I am sure there must be, in getting to places and mixed messages from people involved in welfare benefits so that not everybody knows that you can claim benefit and volunteer. Often, the messages are very mixed—"Well, that type of activity means you are not available for work"—and there still is quite a lot of confusion about what you can and cannot do as a volunteer.

Baroness Redfern: Also, if you are relying on transport or there are transport issues.

Sir Stuart Etherington: Yes, there may well be issues about rural isolation.

Baroness Redfern: Yes, it is a barrier.

Baroness Lister of Burtersett: Matthew, in your written evidence, you put great emphasis on the socioeconomic divisions that we need to understand when understanding the patterns of active citizenship. I would like to ask you, and others may have views as well: what are the particular barriers that people in poverty face, what can we do to reduce those barriers, and am I right in thinking that they are more likely to be involved in the kind of informal ecology that you are talking about rather than the more formal organisations that Neil and Stuart have been talking about?

Matthew Bolton: In the written evidence, we emphasise that inequality and the way that income and income relating to time is a primary aspect of it. Building on the different forms of civil society that we might find, when we were talking about the boundaries and the scope of the inquiry, we were interested in the private sector and some of the larger employers, who are increasingly investing some money into supporting employees to have civil society-type activities, be they social or cultural, around the place of employment. Again, there is an inequality because you will find that more in the higher-paid FTSE 100 companies than in low-income cleaning contractor work. It relates to time and to questions of confidence and belief in any positive change coming from it. When we are listening to communities, particularly when their experience has been for decades, or sometimes generations, that change has happened to them and there is less confidence that their participation could lead to positive results—but, again, some of this is surprising.

When we did the deep dive into Mansfield, which is an area which has faced industrial decline, a lot of the work there is insecure and low paid and it is an area which voted 70% to 30% to leave in the referendum, surprisingly, what was galvanising people in Mansfield to come together and want to do something was that they wanted to be known as a place
of welcome. They were miffed that some of the media coverage had painted them as a place which was somewhat inhospitable to newcomers, so they wanted to get together, particularly some of the church-plus groups, around the church but not necessarily with the church itself driving it, and they wanted to be known as a place of welcome. There were some surprising aspects to it, but we have found that a combination of income inequality leading to time inequality and this question of a belief that things will change play out in inequality.

**Lord Harries of Pentregarth:** I wonder if I could tease out one or two things you said, Sir Stuart, about these new organisations which are difficult to identify; the social enterprise organisations. Are you able to give us an example as I am finding it difficult to envisage exactly what we are talking about? Going back to your first statement about the steady growth in young people, where has that been taking place, and has some research been done on this? The intriguing factor, which I was not aware of, is that there is a great peak at times of a national sporting event. Could you tease it out to give us a bit more of a feel for what we are talking about?

**Sir Stuart Etherington:** Going to the second question first, the question of young people’s engagement is an interesting one. There is an enormous amount of public policy focused on that area at the moment. If you ask the Office for Civil Society, it is principally interested in two things, one of which is social investment and the other is youth social action. There is a lot of money being put in, and the National Citizen Service is the obvious main thrust of that policy, but there is also Step up to Serve, which was a cross-party initiative championed by the Prince of Wales. There is a lot of interest in youth social action. It may well be that that is beginning to pay dividends, but we do not quite know why this increase is taking place and why this interest is increasing.

**Lord Harries of Pentregarth:** You said that there is an increase in government commitment and interest, but is there an increase in numbers?

**Sir Stuart Etherington:** Yes, absolutely, there is an increase in numbers. Whether the two are related—because of the time difference—I am not sure. We do not know enough, and it is incumbent on us to do a little bit more work to understand exactly what that phenomenon is about, where it is occurring and what is happening.

On the social enterprise question, it is clear that there is a growth in activities in organisations. The normal legal form for social enterprise is the community interest company, which was an invention of the last Labour Administration. I envisage it as public benefit organisations at one extreme and private benefits at the other and, in the middle, there are these organisations which have an element of both where they are there for the public interest and their assets are locked, but they can pay a capped dividend so there is an element of private benefit. There has been a growth in those organisations. They do things such as furniture recycling, agricultural projects in cities, public space-type projects and
they are often taking over some elements of public space and running
them, so there is a whole range of organisations that are growing.

If one comes back to the sporting event phenomenon, and we observed it
in the Olympics and before in the Commonwealth Games, there are
particular issues about that type of activity, and some of them are
translatable. The amount of times that people are thanked is a key, in my
view, motivator of people who volunteer; thanking volunteers and
recognising voluntary activity. These people had specific roles, uniforms,
a name, they were on the telly and they were praised a lot. I do not know
the exact data, but I think there were three times more applicants than
available volunteering places for games-makers, and this is a
phenomenon. You get to feel very special, which is a key factor in
volunteering generally. It is about the fact that you are giving something
and the recognition of that. We know, and you will see it in the Pathways
through Participation work, that the reason most people carry on is the
quality of the experience they are engaged in and—which would be true
in relation to what Neil was saying—that they are having some positive
impact, that they are doing something effective and they are being
treated well while they are doing it. Those are key motivators, and you
get them in spades at the Olympics.

Baroness Pitkeathley: Before I put my question, I must declare an
interest as the incoming president of NCVO. What can government do to
support civil society and civic engagement?

Sir Stuart Etherington: Part of our submission to the Budget this year
was a focus on the development of independent sources of finance for
organisations, which is pretty critical. There was a lot of public
investment, not so much now, in voluntary organisations, and the real
problem was sustainability because the sources of funding were not
sustainable. Community foundations, endowments and the development
of assets are of crucial importance to supporting local voluntary activity,
and they all point to sustainable solutions. One of the problems with
public investment is that it is not sustainable and, when the voluntary
sector became more and more engaged in contracting, it is vulnerable to
changes in patterns of public spending, which we have just witnessed.
Thinking through how you encourage sustainability in civic engagement
and civic action is crucial. A lot of it is to do with money, but it is to do
with how that money is structured in a way which is likely to be more
sustainable, which is about assets and endowments, and that is crucially
important.

Ultimately, if you look at where we are going as a society, we will need
more civic/civil activity because, whatever the levels of public spending,
the demand for public services will outstrip the ability of taxpayers to pay
for it. You have to fill that gap, and part of the solution is more civic
leadership, more civil engagement and more people doing things
mutually. That has to be part of the solution and, if we want more of it,
we have to think about ways in which we can encourage it and finance it
in a sustainable way.
Baroness Pitkeathley: Does government have a specific, direct role in fostering that leadership that you mentioned?

Sir Stuart Etherington: Yes. We are talking at the moment about the availability of the second tranche of unclaimed assets and, because it is a honeypot, various bees are starting to arrive. We have to think about sustainability. That is investing in the capacity of organisations to stand on their own two feet and to be governed, effectively, as trustees, and we need to think about the role of trustees, in particular. My own view is that that leadership could be about saying, “How can I deploy this windfall”—which it is—“in a way that creates sustainable organisations at a local level?” That is critical, and that would be a leadership stance for government.

The Chairman: With an eye on the clock, do you want to contribute briefly to this?

Neil Jameson: One of my favourite quotes is from John Stuart Mill, who said, “That which people get for themselves is more important than that which they are given”. Citizens UK’s policy is that we do not take money from the state because we try to teach people that the money they have is power and, if they mix that money up with people and participation, they can come up with solutions. We want the Government to recognise it when civil society comes up with a solution. There are a variety of initiatives which the Government have picked up, and it is a pleasure to see Lord Blunkett here. The brief, fleeting moment when citizenship was a compulsory subject in schools has gone. It is not compulsory any more, and schools are helping that and the Government are blessing that—and not being alarmed if young people come up with radical proposals is quite important. The role of the state should be generous and, if civil society is recognised and people can participate, that is helpful. We need to look to the lobbying Act, which may have been raised with you before. It is a positive discouragement from people getting involved in the process of election, which is so important of course, and Lord Harries has played a very significant part in trying to see it off.

Lord Blunkett: The Chairman of this Committee produced a report as well.

Neil Jameson: The programme Prevent, of course, also has a mixed press. Our position is that it needs reviewing and it does not go down well with large numbers of young people in universities, who feel that people are spying on them. There are various policies and we need a generous state, not financially but to recognise that people coming up with their own solutions is liberating for them and to recognise that, if they behave, are responsible and work with others, it needs endorsement.

Baroness Newlove: Part of my question has been answered on the benefits side. As somebody who championed volunteers in my previous role, it saddens me to still hear that there are a lot more barriers, when it was about breaking the barriers and making it more open to people in
every walk of life. I have seen duckling watch and tractor watch, so I come from a good place in this. My question is about resolving the legal issues for volunteers on national insurance, credits, ill health and personal development training. I know from a lot of volunteers, who have done a lot of hours and have lots of skills that they can transfer over to help in nursing for maternity wards and midwives for asylum seekers, that they still seem to have a barrier to enhancing their skills and to keeping those quality workers for the organisations themselves.

**Sir Stuart Etherington:** The argument is principally around full-time volunteering on this issue. There are very few full-time volunteers in the UK; we estimate no more than 1,000.

**Lord Blunkett:** As few as that?

**Sir Stuart Etherington:** It is as few as that, full-time volunteers, people who are volunteering for the whole period. Increasingly, the trend is a slightly different one towards micro-volunteering of people who have an hour in a day or they might go online. You see the growth of apps, and I use one at Greenwich, and they will come on and tell you, “I have half an hour’s gardening I can do”. I cannot claim to get a volunteer to do my garden, but that sort of interaction is facilitated by social media, which will go on. To give you an example of that, several of my staff go running and there is an app which allows you to register and you can break your run to spend half an hour with an older person who is isolated where maybe that half an hour in a day is quite important. The trend is towards micro-volunteering because people do not have the time to say, “I will always turn up on a Tuesday to do this”.

In terms of full-time volunteering, I am not completely convinced that these are huge constraints. The three areas which have been identified are national insurance, sickness pay and training. The one which it would be useful to focus on is the availability of training, which is particularly true for all types of volunteering, not just full-time volunteering. If you go back to the youth question, it may well be that this is differentiating, that young people are trying to differentiate themselves in the potential employment market, so, “I’ve been to school, I’ve done my degree, I’ve done my apprenticeship and, if I can demonstrate wider citizenship interest, it improves my employment prospects”. That sort of training-related, apprenticeship-related and social action-related stuff could be potentially beneficial.

If you come on to national insurance contributions and sickness, I have some concerns. Does it really make a difference in terms of the number of people coming forward to volunteer, and how much of that is a serious constraint? When international examples are pointed out, the situation is different from country to country. In Germany, it happens because it was a way of replacing national service, which was a particular example. The other thing that worries me slightly is that you are differentiating between those who volunteer full time and those who volunteer for short periods and you are saying, “This group gets these benefits and this group does not”, which is problematic. The other one that worries me
most of all is unscrupulous people—I am not suggesting that the people who are suggesting this are unscrupulous, but unscrupulous people might use this to blur the distinction between employment and volunteering and to get round the minimum wage. It worries me that there is a point at which you are blurring the distinction between voluntary action and engagement and paid employment, and the unintended consequences of this could be quite significant.

**Lord Verjee:** You touched upon some comparative studies in different countries, but could we enlarge on that a bit? What can we learn from participation in civil society in other countries, particularly our neighbours or globally? Are there best practices that we can pick up on or areas where we can strengthen the weaknesses that we have here? It would be very interesting to hear that.

**Neil Jameson:** I should have said that we are a community-organising network and we have a long tradition of organising people for this purpose, to play a part in participation. I saw this work being done very effectively in the United States in 1979. There is a growth of organising networks across the world of people who recognise the power they have. They have to fight to be recognised, of course, which is the most significant thing. There are now organising networks in Denmark, Sweden, Germany and Australia of people not taking money from the state but using their own money to get recognition and using the same idea of helping the institutions which teach people about democracy to be more effective. The issues are different, of course, the concerns and campaigns are different, but the process is pretty impressive, and it is historic. This is not a new idea but what people used to do; they used to organise, with their own money, to get what they wanted. Of course, rich people do that all the time, but the difference is that we focus on people with fewer facilities and less opportunity to do that. That would be my specialism, I guess.

**Q101 Baroness Eaton:** Before I ask my question, I declare my interest as chairman of Near Neighbours, which is a charity involved very much in working for more community cohesion. What more could charities do to build bridges between communities and promote social cohesion?

**Matthew Bolton:** I did not know you had that interest, but the response I was going to give on that is the important role that funders can play. Our experience in the initial rounds of inquiry with civil society organisations as part of this is that people get very busy doing their thing. Sometimes their thing has an inherent collaborative diversity aspect to it, but often it does not and it is about working with a particular group of people in a particular place, and organisations in civil society are determined to try to do the best by that group, which is understandably their preoccupation.

Why I mentioned the role of funders—and Near Neighbours is a very good example of this—is that, if it were an increasing focus and a requirement of the funding that forms of collaboration were needed in order to access it, that would definitely drive change in a positive
direction. In terms of collaboration and integration, with people working together, and the big challenges that we are all facing—the affordable housing crisis in London, for example, and looking to the States, where often charitable funders co-operate to create pooled funds with a big goal in mind, "Let's tackle the housing crisis", or the one I know of in the States which is focused on improving the quality of care for elderly people—funders have collaborated. They have set up a fund and there is a requirement that a variety of civil society advocacy groups, advice groups, campaigning groups and organising groups have to come together and create a united bid for that money. That shift in the way the funding works drives new forms of collaboration which, otherwise, because people are very busy doing their thing, do not often happen.

Baroness Eaton: Where does the quality of outcomes feature? We are talking about joining up and having a united view about what we are trying to achieve with all these people, but how important is the assessment of success?

Matthew Bolton: It is critically important in the case of those collaborations between organisations. People may have received the book that was sent which I have written, How to Resist: Turn Process to Power, which is a book about effective social change. The recommendation, speaking to experts from 38 Degrees or experts in how film is used to create social change, is that the way to get the most effective outcome through new forms of collaboration between different organisations is that each of those organisations brings its best game. If you can get very effective organisations which are using digital technology, doing face-to-face organising or making film, each of those organisations needs to bring what they are expert at to a new collaboration, which will help us get the best outcome.

Baroness Eaton: But it has to be measured.

Matthew Bolton: It has to be measured.

Baroness Barker: All charities have to fulfil public benefit requirements, but we have heard a lot during our inquiry about discrimination and inequality and, particularly, about the discrimination that is felt by the Muslim community. The concern which has been expressed to us is that some organisations perpetuate that division and inequality. Do you think that is the case, and do you think that something should be done to make sure that they do not do that in the future—for example, the requirement that there should be one woman on the board of every charity?

Sir Stuart Etherington: Let me focus on that governance question because governance and the way it is perceived sets the tone for organisations. This is Trustees Week and it started with the Commission releasing a piece of research, which we assisted them with, which showed that there is not a great deal of diversity in the governance of voluntary organisations. In fact, there is a civic core of white men aged 62—and I am, in fact, a white man of 62—and they are quite significant. There are two reasons. One is the social justice issue, which you are raising, and
the other one is the sustainability issue. These people are going to be 72 in 10 years’ time and, unless we find ways of reviving the governance of organisations, we will be in deep trouble, and everybody is focused on governance at the moment, for pretty obvious reasons.

The question is: what do you do about that? That profile has probably not changed for a considerable period of time, and I wonder whether we need an initiative of some kind, not necessarily a financed initiative but, in legislating for this, there would be a backlash against this, and finding trustees is difficult enough without that. If you take the Davies report on the private sector, it had some effect in the diversity of boards—maybe not as fast or as great as people wanted but it had an effect. Maybe we should be looking at something similar in relation to charity boards and there should be an initiative about how to create more diverse boards because we are stacking up quite a lot of problems in the future if we do not address that issue. That diversity could apply not just to gender but to sexuality, disability, and the shape and the number of younger trustees coming on to boards, for example. There needs to be a much more significant initiative there.

**Baroness Barker:** You have talked, Stuart, about the collapse of locally funded charitable organisations and, if we were in the worst possible scenario, there would be the statutory services and, apart from that, the only other organisations left standing would be religious organisations, which are not bound by equalities legislation, and I think you are right. In a previous inquiry we talked to the Church Urban Fund about its presence, and there is a challenge for religious organisations of all denominations around equalities and their exemptions from the equalities legislation, if they are increasingly going to have this important residual position in local communities.

**Neil Jameson:** It is quite difficult to make that compulsory, but clearly voluntary codes are very important. The Missing Muslims report is suggesting, and we are working with the Muslim Council of Britain on this, that at least a third of the board of any mosque should be women and that that is monitored through a gold, silver and bronze system of awards, effectively, for the mosques that are doing the right thing. That has gone down quite well, and we cannot force mosques to do that, unless the law requires it, but that is a reasonable thing to do.

To return to the point that Baroness Eaton was raising about the purpose of charities, there is a wonderful book in the States about why philanthropy should make democracy the first charity. It is a preoccupation for us that people need to learn how to be democratic. If that is ignored and it is just left to the voting cross, which has been around for a while, civil society and democracy is under some stress and strain, people stop voting and do not feel they have a part to play, so it is the role of trusts and foundations to recognise that.

I want to praise the Big Lottery. A condition of getting a lottery grant now, which we play some part in, is: who will benefit from this, who will grow and which leaders will be developed through this process of helping
old people or what-have-you? It is the same with the ESRC grants and there is now an obligation on universities to say, “Who are you working with?” They do not say, “What roots do they have?”, but they need to be rooted. Universities do all sorts of abstract stuff, but they have to have partners who have roots locally. These are good initiatives we would applaud, but equally the foundations are now moving in on this. The gap in training for people to learn how to work together is a serious one, and it should be.

**Lord Blunkett:** You may want to just write to us about this, but there is a parallel set of volunteering going on and that is with the increased responsibility which has come with academy trusts and multi-academy trusts. They are volunteers in the sense that they are not paid, but they have enormous responsibility, and governance issues are arising all the time. You may want to write to us with thoughts on that because they parallel some of the issues with the bigger charities.

**Q102 Lord Harries of Pentregarth:** Do you think that major state-funded policies—such as citizenship education as part of the national curriculum or the National Citizen Service—are building social capital and a flourishing civil society? As an extension of that, do you feel that your particular organisations have a role to play, not only in civic engagement, which is the second part of our title as a Committee, but on building citizenship? We have heard from you, Neil, that that is very much in your line, but what about more widely and which of the NCVO members focus more on volunteering, and do you also have a role?

**Sir Stuart Etherington:** Yes, and, echoing Neil’s point, the fact that people come together to form voluntary associations, that they get experience of how to do that, how to work together and how to govern themselves effectively needs to be supported. Many of the organisations that would be in membership of the NCVO form the groundwork on which you can build civic engagement of a wider sort. Finding the direct relationship between voluntary associations and building democracies is not always easy, but, if it quacks and it has feathers, it is probably a duck, so the idea that people are engaged and learning almost inevitably leads you to the conclusion that they are more likely to be civically engaged. Certainly, there is some evidence from the States that that is true, that people who are engaged in civil associations are more likely to vote and to be participants in the democratic process, but I think Neil would have a view.

**Lord Harries of Pentregarth:** Do you have any views on the effectiveness of citizenship in the National Citizen Service or centres of education?

**Sir Stuart Etherington:** The NCS has been very successful at doing what it does, which is the programme. One of the anxieties, which it is trying to address, is what happens as a result of this experience. People do the programme and generally, I would have thought, would value the programme; it brings them together with people they would not otherwise have been brought together with. For me, and this may be an
issue as much for voluntary organisations as it is for the NCS, then what? You have had this experience, but how do you then go on to say, “What can I do now in my community? What are the opportunities?” We need to do a little more thinking about how that experience relates to ongoing social activity and social action.

Matthew Bolton: To build on that and connect it to the other part of the question, which was about citizenship in schools, we have spoken to a couple of the larger NCS providers about that exact challenge. After the summer, the institution that young people return to which they belong to over time is the school, and we would urge, in trying to answer that question, that recognition is given to schools—and there is encouragement, recognition and judgment by Ofsted. We should encourage schools—because that is where they belong over time—to enable young people to have ongoing social action experiences, which could answer the question in a way that the NCS will struggle to achieve because of the way that it is structured, and how long people are part of that as opposed to how long, for example, they are part of a school.

Q103 Lord Rowe-Beddoe: We have received certain evidence, including that of the Big Lottery Fund, that funders need to do more to support civic engagement with charities. Would you care to comment on that?

Neil Jameson: I would just like to praise it; it has just given us £900,000 to do just that; to develop citizens’ groups in 10 major cities where the glue of civic activity is not strong.

Sir Stuart Etherington: There is a question that could be posed by funders about civic engagement. We have seen a phenomenon, which has been driven mainly by public procurement, where organisations have had to operate at scale and where the people who can secure national contracts are not necessarily able to demonstrate their engagement with local communities. There is a growing tension, which has to be acknowledged, between local voluntary organisations and large organisations which are bidding for contracts. Funders, which would be not only charitable funders or the Big Lottery Fund but, very importantly, public funders, should place within contract proposals—the letting of the contracts—some demand, if you like, or some contract obligation to establish how those organisations are engaging people in local communities. They do not do that, so you get very transactional contracts which do not ask that question. So funders are crucial, but I would add to the BLF’s suggestion that public funders are crucial in the way in which they contract in order to assist that.

The Chairman: Any final thoughts on that?

Matthew Bolton: It would be good to know what “good” looks like. There is a shift that is happening towards an increasing importance of people in the lead or civic engagement, who previously might have been described as “beneficiaries” or “clients”, somehow being in control. That is good, but there is not enough work on what good looks like, what is
not tokenistic, what is real and what kind of infrastructure and training is needed to help organisations to make that shift.

The Chairman: We have run over time, but that is because you have given us some very valuable thoughts and evidence. Thank you very much indeed.