How does citizenship and civic engagement mean in the 21st century? Why does it matter, and how does it relate to questions of identity?

1. Citizenship and civic engagement concerns people feeling part of something and taking social responsibility. It enables societies to flourish by mobilising the energy of people within a particular community. It matters because people will have connection with one another and feel part of a ‘home’ by birth, naturalisation or residency however long or short. It does relate to questions of identity and people identify with being part of different groups and communities. Not feeling part of or identifying with a community is less likely to engender civic engagement.

Q2 Citizenship is partly about membership and belonging. Are there ways we could strengthen people’s identity as citizens, whether they are citizens by birth or naturalisation? Could citizenship ceremonies or events throughout the educational process play a role?

2. Should pride in being or becoming British be encouraged? Yes and pride needs to be rooted in part on a culture of respecting diversity.

Q3 Civic engagement can be seen as both a responsibility and a right of citizenship. Beyond the existing legal framework, should citizens have additional formal rights and responsibilities? How do you see the relationship between the two? Should they have the force of law individually or be presented as reciprocal duties between citizen and state? How should they be monitored and/or enforced?

Q4 Do current laws encourage active political engagement? What are your views on changes to the franchise for national or local elections, including lowering the voting age? Should changes be made to the voting process or the voting registration process?

Q5 What should be the role of education in teaching and encouraging good citizenship? At what stages, from primary school through to university, should it be (a) available, and (b) compulsory? Should there be any exemptions? Should there be more emphasis on political participation, both inside and outside classes? How effective is current teaching? Do the curriculum and the qualifications that are currently offered need amending?

3. Secondary school curriculum changes have seen the removal of hours devoted to extended school activities and extra curriculum time and teacher/support worker resources to broaden students involvement in outside school projects. School activities and initiatives should be extended to include young people furthering their study at FE colleges. The national and regional FE Review led by the Education and Skills Funding Agency, through LEPs and other partnership structures does not give any insight into citizenship and civic engagement activities for learners taking this route. The same message is relevant to young people taking Apprenticeships, with time and resources provided to engage in civic activities.

Q6 Do voluntary citizenship programmes such as the National Citizen Service do a good job of creating active citizens? Are they the right length? Should they be compulsory, and if so, when? Should they include a greater political element? Should they lead to a more public citizenship ceremony? Are they good value for money? What other routes exist for creating active citizens?
4. From local experience of youth groups, the view held is that the active citizen agenda with young people needs to be more than just a few hours of volunteering that NCS provides.

5. Support for citizenship activities needs a wider focus and should acknowledge the role of work done by an wider range of organised group activities – youth clubs come through strongly and rightly so, but so should organised sport, arts etc. Any forum where young people can engage together in productive activities or social action and where they can move on to leadership roles is key. These organised activities also provide good role models – a young person may become a coach and latter support the village hall that is their changing rooms and eventually join the Parish Council etc. A gradual developing of a sense of citizenship. These wider groups should be linked in and seen as follow-on to NCS involvement to maintain young people’s interest and provide on-going activities.

6. For a significant number of NCS participants, the experience is really good and they produce some really useful social action but as with any programme that is so prescriptive a lot of participants will simply go through the process and some have a terrible time.

7. A colleague who was at a Police and Crime Commissioner Youth Crime Commission meeting a couple of years ago heard one young person say publicly to a sizeable audience: ‘that NCS was the worst experience of her life.’ Comment made at an event at The Priory Street, York in front of a large number of influential people.

8. Do voluntary citizenship programmes such as the National Citizen Service do a good job of creating active citizens?

Overall things like NCS are great as a standalone programme that young people can enjoy but to suggest that this would create more active citizens is not something that is actually occurring. Significant amounts of young people are not engaging with NCS (the amount of unfilled spaces each year evidences this) and with the reduction in youth work support they are being left on their own, potentially vulnerable and ultimately as the issues build are far less likely to be active citizens, and are likely to become those that need more active citizens to help them.

9. Are they the right length?

The issue with NCS is that it is over too short a period of time. The programme last around 6 weeks. It appears from experience on the ground and comments from young people, that six weeks is merely tokenistic and does not provide the opportunity for effective and on-going support to produce active citizens. Those that will become active will do it despite NCS not because of it. What is missing is a support mechanism to encourage further social action once the programme is over. If NCS is the first experience of volunteering for young person how do they continue? Who helps them find new opportunities?

Q9 Should they be compulsory, and if so, when?

10. No. Involvement by choice creates a far more motivated and participative learner.

11. The North Yorkshire and York Volunteering Strategy 2015- 2020 has specific actions to engage young people in volunteer as part of creating a longer term engagement in communities. This strategy was produced in partnership by members of the VCS Strategic
Leaders group to provide a context for collaboration and planning. The table provides relevant extracts relating to young people and citizenship.

12. Government should look to supporting the development of strategic plans for communities (be they geographical or communities of interest), to bring together key partners involved in planning and funding work with people and communities to create stronger and more sustainable communities. This approach would mirror the economic plans of LEPs, and provide the social context to complement economic development activities.

**Extracts relevant to young people and citizenship taken from – North Yorkshire and York Volunteering Strategy 2015-2020**

| Strategic Aim 1 To provide every individual, no matter what their background, with the opportunity to volunteer and contribute to their community |
|---|---|---|
| **Objectives** | **Specific Actions** | **Resources** |
| 1.1 North Yorkshire has clear and accessible information on what volunteering is, what opportunities there are, and how to get involved | Awareness campaign developed across strategic partners, establishing common messages, briefing key local media, explore having a ‘volunteer’ vacancy column and case studies | Grant sources to be looked at for an awareness/communication campaign |
| 1.7 Schools, universities and colleges are engaged to embed the idea of volunteering within the consciousness of children and young people to ensure a future generation of volunteering | Identify how volunteering can contribute to the Extended curriculum for schools and colleges. Links to the strategic priorities and groups to be made, and briefings eg: Children and YP Plan, Higher York, FE Principals | |

**STRATEGIC AIM 2 To make volunteering more recognised, visible and valued in the community and more widely**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Objectives</strong></th>
<th><strong>Resources</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Positive images of volunteering capturing the breadth of opportunities is promoted</td>
<td>Use of case study stories, anecdotally and in the media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Volunteers and volunteering in the community is recognised and celebrated</td>
<td>Volunteer Week, Trustee Week and other awards to be timetabled for collaborative action, Include in media plan</td>
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Should they include a greater political element?

13. To help young people understand the political landscape and how to engage with decision makers would be useful but not sure NCS is the right vehicle to explore complex views– simply because of the timescales involved. The need to join up with appropriate curriculum subjects within local schools is important to provide this context.

Are they good value for money?
14. No. The money invested in NCS could be distributed across the country to support youth work (or other programmes) much more effectively. It would provide year round support and opportunities for young people to become active citizens and provide a significant amount of added value through the relationships that can be built up. Helping to spot things like CSE, Radicalisation, At risk of teenage pregnancy, at risk of entering the criminal justice system and so on. As an example the £8 million spent on advertising NCS would have kept a significant amount of youth services open. The audit commissions report on NCS said it all – too expensive what it provides. NCS certificated experience can be met through a number of infrastructure routes, which local your support organisations can make available and provide support to ensure achievement.

What other routes exist for creating active citizens?

15. To actually provide the support for young people to become active citizens the money should be invested into youth work or specific volunteering programmes such as Involved (previously millennium volunteers). The rational being that youth workers provide year round support and can run many volunteering events within the time periods that young people want – not just over the summer holidays (there are other options but again are quite prescriptive). The added benefit is that they can support young people with many other issues, they are well qualified, work across a variety of age groups (11 – 19) and therefore can create the active citizen habit. I started as a youth club member that was encourage to volunteer and I’ve volunteered in a number of roles since then, as an example.

16. Support for citizenship activities needs a wider focus and should acknowledge the role of work done by an wider range of organised group activities – youth clubs come through strongly and rightly so, but so should organised sport, arts etc. Any forum where young people can engage together in productive activities or social action and where they can move on to leadership roles is key. These organised activities also provide good role models – a young person may become a coach and latter support the village hall that is their changing rooms and eventually join the Parish Council etc. A gradual developing of a sense of citizenship.

17. A recent announcement is the NCS will now provide mental health training for young people on NCS – youth workers do this as part of the on-going support process and would start at 11, not 16 which by the press releases own admission is up to 2 years behind, as a lot of issues start at 14. It is also after the GCSE exams and there is no help earlier, especially for those young people struggling with exam worries etc.

Q7 How can society support civic engagement? What responsibility should central government, devolved and local governments, third sector organisations and the individual have for encouraging civic engagement? What can the Government and Parliament do to support civil society initiatives to increase civic engagement?

18. Recognise and acknowledge the role of work done by an wider range of organised groups– youth clubs, organised sport, arts etc. Any forum where young people can engage together in productive activities or social action and where they can move on to leadership roles is key. These organised activities also provide good role models – a young person may become a coach and latter support the village hall that is their changing rooms and
eventually join the Parish Council etc. A gradual developing of a sense of citizenship. Links to these in any local area should be part of the vision for NCS.

19. In York, North Yorkshire and the East Riding VCSE Strategic Leaders Group work together within a shared strategic context to make a difference in the civic/community life of our communities to make that difference. The Volunteering Strategy is a key document for the Group setting out the aims and priorities to 2020, and used as part of conversations with funders and planners to shape local investment. Government could look to supporting the development of strategic plans for communities (be they geographical or communities of interest), to bring together key partners involved in planning and funding work with people and communities to create stronger and more sustainable communities. This approach would mirror the economic plans of LEPs, and provide the social context to complement economic development activities.

20. A recommendation from recent research into the BME communities in North Yorkshire suggested funding should be available for a training programme to:

- provide information about how our health, housing, education and other civic functions work. These could be through ESOL learning programmes such as those designed by the Workers' Education Association, which also incorporate confidence building and empowerment approaches. They could have a wider application to more than BME groups,
- improve the 'voice' of BME groups by developing skills in advocacy, campaigning and articulating needs
- provide skills in group development for BME and other groups using the skills and resources already existing in local support and development organisations.

21. This programme of learning could usefully be delivered by some of the people already involved in running and supporting their own groups where they exist. This includes volunteers involved in the admittedly small number of formally constituted community groups. Provision could be made for Training for Trainers courses which would equip people representative of some of the groups mentioned above with the skills and knowledge necessary for empowering themselves and others.

Q8 What are the values that all of us who live in Britain should share and support? Can you identify any threats to these values, which affect the citizenship of, for instance, women or various minority groups? If so, how can their citizenship be strengthened?

Q9 Why do so many communities and groups feel “left behind”? Are there any specific factors which act as barriers to active citizenship faced by different communities or groups - white, BME, young, old, rural, urban? How might these barriers be overcome?

22. Research conducted on behalf of the North Yorkshire Equality and Diversity Strategic Partnership into BME communities in North Yorkshire identified BME groups are often invisible to policy makers and service providers because their numbers are small and people are often not concentrated together. Invisibility is a barrier to all types of engagement. This lack of engagement in active citizenship and lack of visibility can lead to the absence of culturally appropriate approaches to engagement and services. Invisibility and absence of organised groups was reflected by the difficulty faced by the researcher to identify many organised groups, and the need to adopt other methods to find people to interview, which included attending children’s centre groups and English classes. This led to
a good depth of views from a diverse range of individuals, with very little reference to groups.

23. The statistics and views of the people and groups interviewed, showed a level of super diversity – of nationalities, races, religions, social class, age and reasons for living in North Yorkshire. This reflects the diverse nature generally as different districts of the county have attracted migrants and settlers for different socio economic reasons across the generations, all with different histories and needs. This diversity mitigates against a critical mass sufficient to influence and engagement. As a result of this super diversity, there is little scope for generalising about the experiences of people belonging to BME groups of receiving services and, in fact, it would be dangerous to do so. There were differential expectations about public services and different people and groups experienced different issues.

24. There were, some common themes and barriers including the complexity of accessing both health services and social housing, the cost of paying for ESOL classes for people very willing to learn English and, most importantly, the stressful working conditions that some people faced without recourse to enforcement and advice agencies.

25. The results of the research led to recommendations about a need for greater awareness of the needs of a very diverse population and adopting a ‘needs not numbers’ approach to service provision. The results provide intelligence to be used to inform planning to attract funding for a learning programme that can provide not only learning about how our systems work but also equip people and groups with a voice by developing their skills in advocacy, campaigning and articulating needs. This voice could be further enhanced by the forming of a reference group of people representing the groups visited and of individuals who took part in the research. Consideration will need to be given to family and work constraints of those who want to be involved and the costs of travelling across a county like North Yorkshire.

26. Rural areas have unique barriers to getting involved in social action or volunteering as a first point of citizenship. Transport, distance, sparsity of children, sparsity of people to lead activities and lack of places for young people to congregate and get involved are all very real issues for young people in rural communities, especially for those whose parents are for many reasons unable to take their children to groups and activities. Youth clubs and other groups help to counter this at a very local level. Public facilities such as village schools could be opened up more for use by wider groups in the communities.

Q10 How do you see the relationship between citizenship and civic engagement on the one hand and social cohesion and integration on the other? What effect does the level of diversity in schools and workplaces have on integration in society as a whole? How can diversity and integration be increased concurrently?

Q11 How important are levels of English proficiency for first and second generation immigrants and what could be done to increase them, including through support for ESOL classes? Are there particular barriers faced by newcomers to Britain? Could the naturalisation process, including the citizenship test, be improved and if so, how?
27. Recent research among the BME community in North Yorkshire highlighted a lack of or the cost of ESOL classes in FE colleges and elsewhere were seen as a barrier to people learning English in order to feel confident to engage in community, social and economic activity.

Q12 Can you give examples of initiatives and role models that have helped promote a positive vision of British Citizenship within a tolerant and cohesive society?

28. The idea of youth Parish Councils could be adopted more widely, where communities have one and take it seriously it gives young people a really good first taste of holding a role of worth and having their views heard and acted on.

29. Supporting process for parish plans to be developed with the aim of bringing together the views, needs and opportunities from across diverse populations, would help develop everyone’s understanding of one another and involvement in shaping services and activities to suit everyone’s interest and needs. Parish plans have in the past brought communities together and led to more civic engagement in local planning and activities.

David Sharp, Chief Executive of North Yorkshire Youth, the co-author of this response, has a career background of working with and engaging young people in community activities. David is very interested in attending the committee to share his knowledge of working with young people generally and more specifically his experience of doing this across the largest county in England and the particular challenges that poses with young people living in both urban and deeply rural areas.

Response on behalf of: the voluntary and community sector North Yorkshire and Rural Community Council for North Yorkshire, one of 38 ACRE Network members (Action with Communities in Rural England).

Response from: Co-authors:
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