Exeter City Community Trust – written evidence (CCE0086)

Background
Exeter City Community Trust (ECCT) has been involved with the National Citizen Service (NCS) since the spring of 2014 when it was, initially, sub-contracted to run the course for about 30 individuals. In subsequent years, ECCT has dealt directly firstly through Engage for Life in 2015 and, when it lost the NCS contract, direct with the Regional delivery partner (NCS/SW2) since summer 2016 and the numbers of candidates has risen from 135 in 2015 to 455 in summer 2017.

Exeter City Community Trust
This Charity, founded in 2007, is an adjunct to Exeter City Football Club, which is one of only four football league clubs that are supporter owned in the UK. Previously known as Exeter City Football in the Community Trust, the charity has expanded substantially over the last ten years as its remit to reach out into the community has been extended. Annual turnover is now in excess of £1m and it employs 32 full time staff, 70 part-time and 60 on a seasonal basis. It is Exeter’s leading health and well being charity, working in partnership with the football club. The recent change of name reflects that the health, education, wellbeing and physical activity programmes reach over 45000 members of the community each year and around 48% of these programmes are not football related.

We provide below the charity’s answers to the questions raised under Section 6 of the Call for Evidence.

1. Does the National Citizen Service do a good job of creating active citizens?
There is no doubt in our minds that this programme has had a positive effect on the lives of those taking part by creating citizens who have more self-confidence, more social awareness, better life skills, interview techniques and ability to communicate in public. It provides Young People (YPs) with a sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy.
The programme also provides YPs with exposure to parts of the community which they might not otherwise be aware through the projects which every group undertakes. This helps in the transition to adulthood and the creation of a more socially active citizen.
An example is the group who recently transformed a rundown children’s play area at the visitors’ centre at Exeter Prison into a brighter more inviting place through creating colourful murals, clearing the ground area and bringing in old tyres, painting these white to create giant plant pots filled with flowers. Chalk boards have been hung up and toys provided obtained through fund raising appeals and the generosity of the public. This particular project was picked up on Twitter by the chairman of NCS, Stephen Greene.
Another project which is being finalised at the moment is by a group that has produced a short film highlighting mental health in the young. This contains interviews with youngsters who have suffered mental health issues and also interviews with families and friends and how they deal with the issues raised. The completed film will be shown on a loop at the YES (Youth Enquiry Service) charity in Exeter and will also be shown in schools in the area.
The difficulty is being able to measure how the skills learnt during these programmes translate into full adulthood and whether these skills are temporary or permanent. Within the financial constraints of the charity, it is not possible, for example, to monitor the progress of those who took part when ECCT first became involved in the programme in 2014. This is where help from the centre would be beneficial in order for us to understand whether the work we do has translated into success or failure and whether the government is spending its money wisely.
2. Are the programmes the right length?

This year, ECCT requested to run three week programmes rather than the traditional four but this was turned down. One of the issues arising from the popularity of the programmes is obtaining sufficient trained staff to run these. Most of the individuals employed to help run the programs are teachers or students working during the traditional summer or autumn breaks. If the programmes were three weeks long, many of them would be able to commit to helping out on two different programmes but, with four weeks, there is not sufficient time available to them to help out on more than one if they are to have any holiday of their own.

From the YPs point of view, there are some who, after the two week residential course, find it difficult to adapt to the less structured second half of the course. This can cause some to drop out while there are others who relish the freedom which comes after their schools’ much more disciplined approach to learning.

The four week course run by ECCT this summer was made up as follows;

**Week 1** – Outward Bound style residential programme in Brecon Beacons – an adventure week of team building and social mixing

**Week 2** – Educational style residential programme at Bicton College, Exmouth consisting of workshops providing lifestyle, financial and social skills which are engaging whilst preparing the YPs for the planning in Week 3.

**Week 3** – The YPs live at home but spend their days at Exeter College preparing a social project which they undertake in Week 4. On the Friday of this week, ECCT runs a Dragons’ Den style event where the groups present their projects and are given advice, guidance and criticism by a group of influential people within the City, a lot of whom have a business background, who give up their time to help ensure the projects succeed. This formula has been exceptionally beneficial this year and, although we believe some other NCS regions also use this format, it is not universal. We think it should be and that, if it was, each region would be able to select its best projects to be presented national with the finalists fronting a real Dragons’ Den show. The publicity from this would be very useful in widening the appeal of NCS. We understand there is a ‘Social Action Stars’ programme for the best six projects nationally but this should be extended and all YP groups aware of the exposure they could receive.

**Week 4** – The delegates carry out their project in the community (examples given earlier). Each YP must undertake 30 hours of social action.

It should be noted that ECCT runs ‘Keep Warm Events’ in advance of the programmes being run. This year this included an Open Air Cinema evening at the football club in March and a social event in a marquee in May, once again at the club, with Dominos Pizzas, live music and photo booths to ensure the social mix process starts well before the YPs get on the coaches for the first week of the residential course. These events are important for the retention of YP and also help to reduce anxiety leading up to the start of the programme. ECCT also deliver a series of parent guardian evenings which provide more details on the programme and the benefits along with areas in which PG can support.

**September** – Those delegates who complete the programme attend an awards ceremony. ECCT has made this into a big event at one of the largest halls in Exeter with stalls outside providing food, live music being played and dignitaries invited to attend (see later in submission for more).

3. Is it right that the programmes are voluntary or should they become compulsory and, if so, when?

There is a universal opinion within ECCT that the programme should remain voluntary. At the moment momentum is building and, within some schools, it is regarded as a rite of passage after GCSEs. Apart from the logistics of trying to find venues and staff to operate a compulsory programme, it is important that the attendees are those who want to take part. Having YPs on
board who do not wish to be there would create a disruptive element which would detract from the learning process. The statistics for summer 2017 in respect of ECCT are that 539 YPs signed up (paying their £50 to NCS), and 455 started the programme. There were inevitably a few drop-outs during the program but about 445 will graduate this month. This figure compares with a target of 405 given to us by NCS South West.

4. Should they contain a political element?
This has been discussed by those on the courses but there was a sense within the delegates that they do not want the programme to ‘feel like school’ and thus anything that might overlap with courses in the classroom are to be avoided. It was felt that anything political would inevitably end up being biased and, as such, should be left off the curriculum. However, it was suggested that the NCS ethos and its efforts to create better more active citizens could be included in schools’ curricula as a way of introducing the concept and, at the same time, promoting NCS programmes. We have tried to involve our local MP either through a visit to see NCS in action or as a judge on Dragons’ Den but, to date, this has not been successful.

5. Should they lead to a more public citizenship ceremony?
ECCT hold a ceremony in the second week in September at The Great Hall at Exeter University. The large number of YPs graduating means that this has to be split into several different sessions and, as a result, can last for several hours. As mentioned above, there are stalls outside the hall providing food and drink as well as live music with the aim to help YPs continue the sense of bonding experienced during the programme. Parents/guardians are invited to attend and see the results of the programme for themselves. Last year, the Lord Lieutenant of Devon attended the ceremony as well as other dignitaries and trustees of ECCT. We do not feel that, given the numbers involved, it would be practical to open this ceremony out to a wider public.

6. Are they good value for money?
While we do not have all the statistics, we understand that the cost to the taxpayer of a YP turning to anti-social activity is in the order of £200,000 to £250,000 by the time they reach 25. While we appreciate that not every YP attending the programme is in danger of becoming anti-social, this does indicate that, if just a few YPs are diverted away from an anti-social lifestyle, there would be a financial benefit to the taxpayer from funding these courses.
As the £50 YP funding is normally met by the parent/guardian, it tends to be at the awards ceremony that we meet up with these individuals to obtain feedback. There has been universal praise for the quality of the courses and the value for money involved given that it included two weeks accommodation and meals. There is also acknowledgement that the main benefits have been increased confidence, ability to socially interact outside of their normal circle of friends and enhanced life skills.
Although most families can afford the £50 charge, ECCT are in a position to wave or refund this fee in the event of mitigating financial circumstances. While we appreciate that £50 is a nominal payment, we would be concerned that, if there was a rise is the cost to the young people or their parents, it would disrupt the social mix that is at the heart of the programme. However, it is sensible to require a deposit as this concentrates the mind of the parent/guardian/YP and, hopefully, leads to fewer no-shows on the programme itself and thus provides easier administration and less wasted accommodation costs.

From the point of view of the provider, ECCT is still able to fund the costs of staffing, accommodation, food and travel costs yet achieve a small surplus despite the drop in funding levels this year. ECCT has the cash balances that allow for the fluctuations in cash flow that can result from delayed payments from NCS but we can imagine that smaller organisations might find this difficult to manage. We would be concerned if the funding levels were to drop further given
the infrastructure that needs to be in place to ensure the programmes are professionally run. Good quality staff are key to running successful programmes and this can only be achieved by having stability in the way these programmes are run. ECCT run pre-programme training weekends for their NCS staff as well as additional training for Group Leaders. ECCT has created these courses themselves but, to ensure consistency in NCS programmes nationally, we think that more prescribed training courses or availability of resources from the Centre would be useful.

7. What other routes exist for creating active citizens?
The Duke of Edinburgh awards are an alternative route. In that case, there is Bronze, Silver and Gold awards. An extension to NCS would to create two levels, first an introductory programme covering Year 8/9 YPs who are typically harder to engage with followed by the full NCS programme for those who have finished GCSEs. The introductory course could cover basic information about the full course to include citizenship issues which could then be fully covered in the main programme.

8. Is there more that the local authority could do to help facilitate the courses?
ECCT have very close links to the local authority, Exeter City Council, partially because Exeter City Football Club is community based but also because ECCT liaises with the local authority in respect of social programmes which may be capable of being supported by the charity when it is no longer financially feasible for this to be carried out by the local authority. The local authority supports an awards programme within ECCT which provides grants to local sporting groups and one of our trustees is employed at a senior level within the authority. The local authority also helps provide judges for the Dragons’ Den events and is also of help when teams are looking to set up social projects within the city.

ECCT has built up a good relationship with schools and colleges in the area and, as a result, is able to access YPs within these schools to promote NCS. Head teachers and year 11 leads are becoming more aware of NCS as it builds in reputation although more could still be done nationally to promote these programmes within the schools. As mentioned above, the third week of the programme is undertaken at Exeter College which provides further education facilities for students post GCSEs and approximately 70% of YPs taking the NCS programme continue their education at this college. Thus the third week of the programme is a good initiation into their future education establishment and supports this transition.

Contributors
The main contributors to this submission have been Danny Harris, NCS Lead for the charity and Deputy Head of Community, Fran Davenport, NCS Senior Operations manager, Jamie Vittles, Head of Community, Julian Tagg, Chairman of the charity and the football club, Chris Gill and David Coard both trustees of the charity. Any of these can be contacted via Jamie Vittles, Exeter City Community Trust on 01392 255611. More details of the charity can be found on www.exetercitycommunitytrust.co.uk.

We believe we produce a flagship programme on behalf of NCS and are happy to share our thoughts and experience with the House of Lords Select Committee.

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