The Challenge – written evidence (CCE0203)

About The Challenge

1. The Challenge is the UK’s leading charity for building a more socially integrated society. We design and deliver programmes that bring different people together to develop their confidence and skills in understanding and connecting with others.

2. Alongside our role as a programme delivery organisation, we also develop policy ideas to forge a more integrated Britain. During 2014 and 2015, The Challenge convened the Social Integration Commission. Following the Commission’s conclusion, we set up the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Social Integration, which is chaired by Chuka Umunna MP.

3. The proposals set out in this submission are informed by our experience of designing and delivering programmes which promote meaningful interaction and engagement between people from different backgrounds and growing them to scale; of discussing the issue of civic engagement and social segregation with young people, employers and parliamentarians; and of conducting original research.

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

4. Across industrialised nations, including the UK, we are increasingly living in ‘bubbles’ made up of ‘people like us’ – whether of similar income levels and educational backgrounds, of the same culture, faith and ethnicity, or of the same generation. These bubbles have grown to reflect patterns of residential segregation, but are also formed through the social habits of people living in diverse areas. Research shows that Britons on average interact socially with someone of a different ethnicity less than half as often as would be expected if their social circles reflected the demographic makeup of their local area. This is the case even in our most diverse regions, including Greater London and the Midlands\(^1\). This indicates that it is not uncommon for people to live peaceably alongside others from different walks of life but to meet, mix and connect almost exclusively with people from similar backgrounds. In the UK, this trend was arguably crystallised through the 2016 EU referendum campaign and its aftermath, during which it became apparent that many people – whether Remain or Leave voters – hadn’t come into contact with a supporter of the opposing view in that debate.

5. This phenomenon – ‘social segregation’ – has been shown to fuel the sense that there is more which divides us than that which binds us together, preventing the development of the bonds of trust and the sense of belonging and rootedness which underpin successful communities and nations. Indeed, research demonstrates that a lack of contact between people from different social and cultural backgrounds feeds prejudice, breeds anxiety and fuels the politics of recrimination and blame\(^2\). Divided societies suffer from poorer mental health outcomes and are more likely to experience civil unrest\(^3\). There is also a growing

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\(^1\) The Challenge, 2016, British Integration Survey 2016

\(^2\) For full referencing and more information please see: The Challenge (2015), Integration City, Page 9

\(^3\) Riots Communities and Victims Panel (2011), 5 Days in August: An interim report on the 2011 English Riots,
body of evidence to suggest that a lack of ‘social mixing’ impedes life chances, inhibits social mobility, prolongs periods of unemployment and restricts economic growth⁴.

6. Indeed, research by the Harvard-based sociologist Robert Putnam suggests that people living in diverse but divided communities tend to ‘hunker down’ and ‘withdraw from collective life’ – placing less trust in their neighbours, including those from a similar background; assuming markedly more negative attitudes towards their local areas; voting less; volunteering less; and giving less to charity⁵. This cocktail of increasing diversity and declining integration is, then, a clear risk to the health and strength our communities and negatively impacts on civic engagement.

7. Active citizenship can be the glue which binds people together and helps to foster connections across social faultlines. This is, in large part, as studies show that participating in volunteering programmes encourages individuals to actively engage with members of their community (both service users and fellow volunteers) whom they wouldn’t otherwise come into contact with⁶. It should, accordingly, be viewed as a vital component of a strong and healthy society. The Challenge would, furthermore, argue that active citizenship programmes should be actively designed so as to bring together and promote meaningful and positive contact between people from different ethnicities, cultures, social backgrounds and generations.

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

8. National Citizen Service (NCS) is an intensive programme open to 15 to 17-year olds across England and Northern Ireland, in which young people participate in team and personal challenges at an outward bound centre and whilst living independently in a university halls-style setting. Participants then plan and deliver a social action project in their local areas. The Challenge would argue that the programme does a very good job of creating active citizens.

9. In 2009 and 2010, The Challenge worked with the government to design and launch NCS, and we are now a major provider of the programme – delivering it across London, Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds as well as several other contract areas throughout England. Our NCS programme curriculum is designed to empower participants to become active citizens and meaningfully impact on their local community, as well as gaining skills for life and work.

Are they the right length?

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⁴ Social Integration Commission, 2015, Kingdom United? Thirteen steps to tackle social segregation, Page 7
⁶ Hothi, M (2007), Neighbourliness + Empowerment = Wellbeing: Is there are a formula for happy communities?, The Young Foundation
10. The Challenge has specifically designed its NCS programme curriculum so as to create spaces and effective incentives for young people from different backgrounds to meaningfully engage with one another. The programme runs outside of term time in the summer and autumn and our aim is to impact positively on young people’s attitudes towards those from different walks of life in a relatively short period of time. We do this through ensuring that our NCS curriculum is intensive – participants spend almost three weeks in one another’s company throughout the summer – and cultivating a social atmosphere – they live, cook and eat together.

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

11. Young people sign up to NCS because of the immediate benefits offered: a fun summer experience, the chance to develop skills, and the opportunity to meet new people. NCS offers a space for people to develop shared identities through having shared experiences. Making NCS compulsory could potentially change this environment and the way in which young people approach the programme for the worse.

12. The Challenge is ambitious in its approach to the continued expansion of NCS but believes that this growth should be organic. Rather than making it compulsory, our aim is for the programme to become a rite of passage for young people across the UK.

**Should they include a greater political element?**

13. Our NCS programme curriculum already contains elements designed to promote democratic engagement and encourage voter registration. In evening sessions on leadership, we explore what it means to be an active citizen. Through these sessions, we aim to promote the idea that leadership is not about being in a position of authority, but rather about using skills and experiences to take an active role in society and taking responsibility for others.

14. This resource from Bite the Ballot informs the session we deliver to young people on democracy. The session challenges young people to speak with their peers about the issues they care about. The activities also get young people thinking about the extent to which young people are underrepresented when it comes to voting and political engagement – and how others making decisions on their behalf, without consulting them, makes them feel.

15. This is followed by an explanation of the ways in which government spending is allocated. Participants are then challenged to think about and justify how they would reallocate government money if they were in power. At the end of these evening sessions, NCS participants are encouraged to register to vote.

**Should they lead to a more public citizenship ceremony?**

16. The Challenge does not have a strong view on this issue. However, our NCS graduation ceremonies provide an opportunity for young people to celebrate their shared success alongside their parents, guardians, friends and families.
Are they good value for money?

17. An independent evaluation of NCS, carried out by Ipsos MORI, demonstrates the positive impact the programme has on levels of social trust and young people’s attitudes towards mixing with people from different backgrounds. This finding was echoed in the Casey Review, which concluded that NCS is ‘having a positive impact in improving understanding and relationships between young people from different backgrounds.’

18 The independent evaluation by Ipsos MORI included a value for money analysis and found that the costs and monetisable benefits associated with NCS in 2015 could been estimated as follows:

- The NCS spring programme is estimated to deliver benefits of between £5.0m and £8.8m, and between £0.70 and £1.24 of benefits per £1 of expenditure.
- The NCS summer standard programme is estimated to deliver benefits of between £64.9m and £128.1m and between £0.76 and £1.50 of benefits per £1 of expenditure.
- The NCS autumn programme is estimated to deliver benefits of between £18.6m and £36.5m, and between £1.17 and £2.30 of benefits per £1 of expenditure.

19. It also concluded that NCS has the potential to deliver a number of benefits that are not currently possible to monetise, such as wellbeing. It is therefore difficult to assess the value of the programme in exclusively monetary terms.

What other routes exist for creating active citizens?

20. The Challenge supports NCS graduates to build on their involvement in their local community through organising alumni activities, and through two vocational education programmes: HeadStart and Step Forward. We designed these programmes to meet the needs and appeal to the interests of young people at different life stages, as they prepare for and undertake the transition into employment.

HeadStart

21. Through HeadStart, The Challenge recruits 16 to 19-year olds to complete a minimum of 16 hours of volunteering within their local communities. After undertaking one hour of voluntary work in a socially mixed setting through HeadStart, teenagers are invited to attend skills development, communications coaching and interview preparation workshops. After completing 16 hours of volunteering, they are guaranteed to be invited to interview for a part-time and seasonal job with one of the scheme’s corporate partners (such as Starbucks, Nando’s, Lloyds Banking Group and New Look.)

22. HeadStart was launched in London in 2013, partially in order to enable young people to continue their social action journeys following NCS. Initially only available to NCS graduates, HeadStart is now available to all young people in the areas in which we deliver the programme – Greater London, the West Midlands and Greater Manchester. By February
2018, we expect over 8,000 young people to have completed the programme. To date, over 100,000 cumulative volunteering hours have been logged by HeadStart participants.

23. External evaluations of the programme demonstrate its impact. HeadStart has been shown to prepare young people with experiences and skills which make them feel more prepared for their future lives as they move into adulthood. This is highlighted by the results of a pre and post-programme survey which shows that those young people who participated in HeadStart in 2015-16 experienced, on average, a 30% increase across all key outcome areas, including character development, trust and understanding as well as employability and job readiness. In addition, 83% of young people said that they were likely to continue volunteering in their community as a result of HeadStart; whilst participants reported a 51% increase in how connected they felt to their community.⁹

Step Forward

24. Step Forward is an apprenticeship programme which brings together new school leavers from all walks of life. This programme provides eighteen-year olds with one year’s professional work experience, training in highly transferable skills and the chance to build a professional and peer network across sectors including accounting, digital marketing and childcare.

25. The Challenge tailors the marketing and recruitment methods which we utilise to attract Step Forward associates to achieve a diverse mix of participants – supporting young people from different income backgrounds and ethnicities, and with highly divergent career aspirations, to apply (in 2014, over 400 young people applied for 48 places).

26. Through Step Forward, The Challenge engages with young people while they are still at school and can be reached en masse and actively encouraged to consider becoming an apprentice. Interested school leavers are matched to positions with a pool of employers with whom they then complete a one year Level 3 apprenticeship whilst also participating in classroom-based professional and personal development training.

27. In addition to working towards a qualification in their chosen area of work, associates are placed in purposefully mixed teams of 15-16 associates from across all training pathways in order to study non-subject specific skills and participate in social action projects.

28. The Step Forward model has succeeded in appealing to young people – in 2016, The Challenge received 40 expressions of interest for every place on this programme. We believe that this is in large part as we provide intensive support and guidance to young people at each step in the process of entering the labour market, and as the programme has been purposefully shaped to instill transferable skills in participants.

29. In 2016, 400 young people will take in the programme, which currently operates across London. The Challenge views this model as highly scalable and is exploring options to expand Step Forward into new regions.

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?

30. As outlined above, The Challenge believes that, as life in Britain becomes less uniform and we become a more diverse nation along a number of dimensions, active citizenship and civic engagement can be a means of fostering social integration, connecting communities and building trust amongst and between people of all ages, ethnicities and walks of life. Greater social integration in turn generates trust, improves people’s life chances and boosts employment and social mobility.

31. Our common life has always been underpinned by shared institutions bridging social, cultural and generational divides – sustaining a vibrant ecosystem of trust – but the congregational spaces of the twentieth century are not equal to the challenges we now face as a post-industrial society. The organised church, civic organisations from the Women’s Institute to The Scouts to community social clubs and trade unions – all have declined in membership and affiliation as our society and economy have become more open and social trust has shrunk.

32. As a consequence, our defences against social disintegration have been eroded. In response, we, as a society, should seek to create more opportunities and incentives for people from all walks of life to meaningfully connect and build fellow feeling. Creating new civic institutions which bring together people in common cause across social faultlines is at the heart of The Challenge’s work. Policymakers might draw on our experience in this regard in order to promote active participation in community life and strengthen the ties that bind our nation together.

33. Research by the Social Integration Commission demonstrates that when people from different walks of life meet, mix and lead interconnected lives, trust grows and communities flourish. Through our experience of designing, delivering and rapidly growing programmes with social integration at their heart, The Challenge has identified a number of principles which we believe underpin effective and scalable interventions to build bonds of trust between people from different ethnicities, cultures, social backgrounds and generations and promote active citizenship.

34. It could be argued that policymakers within successive governments have too often overlooked the correlation between levels of trust within societies and measures of social and economic progress; and the potential power of action aimed at boosting social trust to achieve improved outcomes for communities and public policy. Through embedding the design principles set out in this document in our public services and building new civic institutions reflecting this approach, the new government might weave opportunities to connect with others from different walks of life into the fabric of everyday life in the UK – more effectively utilising social trust as a tool in its policy armoury.

35. Social contact with people from different backgrounds can impact positively or negatively on our perceptions of difference, depending on the conditions under which

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10 Social Integration Commission, 2015a, Social Integration: a wake-up call
interactions takes place\textsuperscript{11}. Policymakers should not only design active citizenship programmes so as to bring together a diverse group of people, they should also actively promote social mixing – intervening where necessary to counteract the tendency of participants and service users to cluster in groups of people from similar backgrounds\textsuperscript{12}. Furthermore, policymakers should ensure that the resulting programmes and institutions embody, to at least some extent, the following design principles:

36. **Promote common goals.** Confronting people with a shared challenge – an obstacle which can be more easily overcome through teamwork than individual effort – is a key element of inspiring previously unlikely friendships.

37. **Facilitate equal status interactions.** People are more likely to engage with others when they view them as peers. This can be achieved through rotating leadership roles within an initiative or institution, or purposefully designing an intervention to involve a range of different activities, pushing all participants out of their comfort zones.

38. **Create intensive and/or sustained experiences.** Building meaningful relationships takes time and work. People from different walks of life should be encouraged to meet and mix intensively over a short burst of time or to engage with one another repeatedly over a longer period. Young people participating in NCS live, cook, eat and work together over a period of four weeks. Teenagers who take part in our HeadStart incentivised volunteering programme, on the other hand, regularly engage with members of their community through completing a few hours of volunteering with a charity partner per week, generally over the course of 10–12 weeks.

39. **Capitalise on transitions to drive behaviour change.** In our experience, integration interventions which reach people at transitions in their lives are more likely to succeed. Starting school, becoming a young adult and entering the workplace, enrolling at a college or university, becoming a parent, experiencing your child starting school, moving to a new area, or retiring – it is during these moments of transition that we are most open to adopting new habits and identities.

40. **Emphasise co-benefits.** Through employing effective marketing techniques and offering meaningful incentives to participation, The Challenge designs products which appeal to young people from all backgrounds. Teenagers sign up to our programmes because of the immediate benefits offered, such as the chance to have a fun summer experience, find a job or to develop new skills – because they have a good and obvious reason to join in. From the perspective of most participants, the chance to meet new people and build a more diverse social network is either a bonus or immaterial.

41. **Cultivate a unifying culture.** Through encouraging participants to use distinct jargon, through creating team labels and emblems, and even through incorporating a degree of

\textsuperscript{11} Laurence, J, 2017, ‘The key to a more integrated society: understanding the impact and limits of social mixing’, LSE Politics and Policy Blog, 27 March 2017

\textsuperscript{12} In delivering NCS, The Challenge intentionally places young people in teams alongside others with different experiences of life, often separating them from their friends.
ceremony and ritual into our programmes, The Challenge fosters a sense of common identity amongst the young people who take part in our programmes.

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