London Youth – written evidence (CCE0205)

Question 4.
Do current laws encourage active political engagement?

- Politicians and other people in decision-making positions are generally too far away from young people, leaving young people with a feeling of disempowerment and unclear how to influence decision-makers. This can make them less likely to participate in ‘traditional’ methods of engagement although many would wish to engage.
- There are variations depending on whether the committee means local or national political engagement. For example, in London there are moves towards wider participation such as the Youth Council.
- Citizenship education is no longer a key part of the National Curriculum, which may put up further barriers to young people participating in politics.

What are your views on changes to the franchise for national or local elections, including lowering the voting age?

London Youth has previously supported initiatives encouraging young people to get out and vote such as Bite the Ballot.

Should changes be made to the voting process or the voting registration process?

- Voter registration needs to be made simpler and easier for young people.
- Other methods should be considered that are used in other countries such as remote or electronic voting. (Although the security of paper-based systems and recent problems with electronic systems are noted.)
- Political parties need to do more to appeal to the concerns of young people and to ensure their policies are understandable to an audience with less experience of policy-making.

Question 6.
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?

London Youth believes that the National Citizen Service can have a very positive impact on participants - and contends that this is compounded when NCS is delivered by local youth organisations which have the flexibility to better respond to local community needs and challenges. We think it is a good step that NCS has been expanding its programmes to reach a wider range of young people from a wider range of backgrounds.

NCS provides a valuable ‘taster’ of active citizenship but should be recognised that NCS delivers to certain age groups at certain times of the year. A broader approach such as Step
up to Serve would cover a wider age range and facilitate participation at other times of the year. Local authorities and youth groups could play a bigger convening role.

**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?**

London Youth is not sure how the current NCS could have a greater political element, though there could be more of an effort made to bring a political context generally to social action programmes through the engagement of local councillors and MPs.

Although the current NCS celebration events are key to reflecting on and celebrating the achievements of young people in terms of their contribution to their community, London Youth is not sure that a public citizenship ceremony would be particularly useful or cost effective

We contend that there are plenty of other routes to active citizenship, from uniformed groups to volunteering opportunities and other social action programmes. When these are developed and delivered locally they can be more beneficial as they meet the specific needs of young people in those communities.

**Question 9.**

**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?**

London Youth contends that the most fundamental cause of a “left behind” feeling is overall poverty and economic inequality. This is perhaps more important to address than ethnicity, age, gender or urban/rural issues. Young people in disadvantaged areas can feel this most acutely, being bombarded with materialistic ideas and concepts yet not being able to afford these ‘aspirations’. It will always be more difficult to engage young people into concepts of active citizenship where there are high levels of economic and educational inequality. For example if a young person has to work at 16 to help meet their family’s basic needs then they will not have the time to take part in such schemes, and they shouldn’t be further penalised for this.

**How might these barriers be overcome?**

Social action and the ability for young people to create positive change in their communities can help to overcome such barriers. We fully believe in the double benefit of social action as laid out by Step Up To Serve. We ensure through our own social action programmes such as City Leaders, Future City Leaders and our own organisational Youth Advisory Board that young people are able to find solutions to these barriers themselves, while enabling them to become the community leaders of the future. We seek participation in our programmes from a wide range of young people to ensure a diversity of representation and opportunity.
It should also be recognised that schools are not the only place where young people can be engaged. For a variety of reasons, some young people don’t get on at school but do participate in youth organisations in their communities which they can attend for free, on a voluntary basis, interacting with trusted adults.

Earlier this year (March 2017) we published a series of recommendations in a report on life for young people in London called ‘Young People’s Capital of the World?’. This included:

- **Recommendation 3:** The Mayor of London and the Greater London Authority should put mechanisms in place to ensure that young people have a clear voice, brokered through community youth organisations, in the development of London strategies and in key local decisions around service provision, housing and regeneration, and skills and employability.
- **Recommendation 4:** The Mayor of London should make explicit the role of youth organisations in facilitating positive outcomes for young people in his plans for education, skills, culture and the arts, clean air and open space and community regeneration, as well as in crime prevention.