National Council for Voluntary Organisations – written evidence (CCE0239)

About NCVO

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) is the largest membership organisation for the voluntary sector in England. With nearly 13,000 members, NCVO represents all types of organisations, from large ‘household name’ charities to small voluntary and community groups involved at the local level. NCVO is the national champion and voice for volunteering in England and we are committed to supporting, enabling and celebrating volunteering in all its diversity.

Executive Summary

Charities play an important role in providing opportunities for civic engagement, particularly through volunteering and social action.

For charities and voluntary organisations to fully play their role in supporting citizenship and civic engagement we believe that the committee should focus on how to:
- support and enable volunteering to thrive in all its forms, but maintain the principle of voluntary participation
- support and enable charities working within communities to develop social cohesion and integration
- support and enable charities to play their part in civic engagement and developing a new generation of volunteers, by recognising and encouraging their campaigning role

Volunteering is in itself a powerful expression of citizenship and civic engagement, but also acts as a route to a range of other civic activities, and can develop a long-term commitment to civic engagement.

NCS has made an important difference for many young people, but there are a number of steps that should be taken to enable NCS to be more effective at encouraging young people to become active citizens and to ensure it can play a role as an entry point or staging post on a longer journey of social action and volunteering.

Young people must be able to complete high quality social action opportunities as part of the programme, and the NCS Trust must ensure there are pathways for NCS graduates into other volunteering and social action opportunities and that NCS provides practical support to young people to get involved after the programme.

Further and better collaboration between NCS and the voluntary sector is needed, and in particular NCS must support smaller, local organisations so that they are able to effectively deliver the programme and ensure that commissioning processes are accessible to these organisations.
The Government’s full time social action review provides a chance for more detailed exploration of the opportunities and challenges presented by longer citizen service schemes, but as with all volunteering it is vital that these schemes provide high quality experiences.

It will be important for the committee to engage with the full time social action review so it can eek assurances that any growth in full-time social action will be driven by a commitment to high quality and accessible opportunities for a diverse range of young people.

NCVO is opposed to making programmes like NCS, which include an element of volunteering, compulsory: this would be contradictory to the principle of volunteering and counter-productive to the spirit of altruism that is at the heart of volunteering.

Rather than look at compulsion, we recommend that the committee explores ways to remove barriers to volunteering, including:

- Making it easier for unemployed people looking for work to volunteer, by getting rid of red tape and confusion about the rules.
- Providing a support fund to address barriers to volunteering for people with disabilities
- Encouraging more employers to allow time off work for volunteering, including time off for trustees
- Strengthening volunteer development and management

Voluntary organisations, especially those working within a local community, make a major contribution to building social cohesion and integration, using a wide variety of different models.

We urge both national and local government to look closely at the many projects being run at the community level, identify good practice, and ensure stable funding for groups who are effectively delivering more cohesive communities.

To ensure long-term funding for these projects, we believe that the government’s forthcoming Dormant Assets Fund should be used to build on the success of local community foundations by creating income-generating endowment funds. Money from dormant assets could be used to incentivise donations from philanthropists, further growing these funds.

Charities are also an important route for political engagement, and provide a route for individuals to become more politically active. This role that charities play should be enabled and celebrated, however there remain concerns about the regulatory environment of charity campaigning, which could have a knock-on restrictive impact for individuals’ ability to engage politically.
The government should both continue to publicly back the role that charity campaigning plays in developing public policy and involving individuals in the political process, and not undermine this role through its policy choices. In particular we urge government to implement the recommendations made by Lord Hodgson, following the review of third party election campaigning.

The role of charities and voluntary organisations in civic engagement

1. NCVO welcomes the opportunity to take part in this inquiry, the remit of which includes a number of issues which charities have to consider on a daily basis.

2. While many individuals engage with and participate in civic life independently, for many others charities and voluntary groups can serve as both an introduction to civic engagement and as a long-term vehicle for activity including volunteering, fundraising, and campaigning.

3. In particular, we believe that volunteering and social action are an important part of the experience of citizenship and civic engagement. It can also set people on a journey through which they may engage or participate in many other forms of activity as an active citizen.

Volunteering and social action

4. Giving time to help others and make a difference through volunteering and social action is already embedded in the culture of our country. The latest figures show that 21.9 million people across the UK volunteer at least once a year and an estimated 14.2 million people formally volunteer once a month. Volunteering is therefore already a powerful expression of citizenship and civic engagement. It is a route for individuals to do something about a cause they care about: be it preserving their local green spaces; helping get homeless people off the streets; supporting victims of domestic abuse; providing company and care to older people; giving advice and support to cancer sufferers and their families.

5. Volunteers are also at the heart of many other forms of civic engagement and help mobilise others to get involved as active citizens. Volunteers are crucial for the political process through organising, campaigning and registering voters. Volunteers allow groups to express identity, like the two-week London Pride celebrations. Volunteers are at the heart of the trade union movement and as campaigners and protestors, volunteers also help speak truth to power and ensure that the voices of communities are heard.

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1 https://data.ncvo.org.uk/a/almanac17/volunteering-overview/
6. We would like to make it easier and more rewarding for anyone who wants to volunteer. We want to seed people’s interest in and ability to volunteer, setting them on a path of participating and contributing much more in their communities. Evidence, like that from the Pathways through Participation Project\(^3\), shows that participation is best understood as a journey over someone’s life. For many young people structured school-based citizenship, community service programmes and the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award were points of entry to participation. Programmes like NCS can clearly provide a starting point or staging post on this journey for young people. If the experience that young people have at this early stage is positive then it can also help to create a habit for life.

7. By taking a pathways approach to volunteering and participation we believe we can help build on the huge amount of activity already taking place in communities and help develop a culture of volunteering where people are able to contribute to communities at different stages of their lives. We also support the objective of the review to help open up opportunities to people who may be left behind. We want to make volunteering accessible to more people and open up the opportunity for people across communities to experience the benefits of volunteering and social action.

The role of NCS in creating active citizens

How to enhance the role that NCS can play in creating active citizens

8. NCVO is supportive of NCS and we recognise it has made a big difference for lots of young people, improving their confidence, developing team-building and life skills, and increasing their awareness of their local community\(^4\). Giving young people an experience of volunteering or social action early in life can help encourage them to continue to participate in future. According to one report, 80% of teenagers who have volunteered said it improved their future employment chances and made them want to volunteer more\(^5\). It also fits with evidence from Pathways through Participation where younger interviewees identified structured school-based citizenship, community service programmes and the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award as common points of entry to participation. Other entry points or staging posts outside of NCS should therefore also be considered as valuable routes for creating active citizens\(^6\).

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\(^3\) [http://pathwaysthroughparticipation.org.uk/](http://pathwaysthroughparticipation.org.uk/)
9. Despite many positives, more can be done to improve the social action element of the programme, which involves young people planning and delivering a social action project to benefit their local community across two weeks. The social action element of the project is ranked lower than other parts in evaluations. Tellingly, only 28% of participants rated the help they were given to plan social action projects as ‘very good’ (compared to 64% saying staff overall were ‘very good’).7

10. We believe there are a number of steps that could be taken to enable NCS to be more effective at encouraging young people to become active citizens and to ensure it can play a role as an entry point or staging post on a longer journey of social action and volunteering.

11. Young people must be able to complete high quality social action opportunities as part of the programme which encourage them to get involved as active citizens in future. We know from research conducted by NCVO, Institute for Voluntary Research and Involve, that the “quality of the participation experience is pivotal in determining whether people continue”.8

12. The NCS Trust must ensure there are pathways for NCS graduates into other volunteering and social action opportunities and that NCS provides practical support to young people to get involved after the programme. The most recent evaluation suggests that this is a key area for improvement with only 17% of participants rated ‘very good’ the support they received to find other volunteering opportunities after the programme ended.9

Further and better collaboration with the voluntary sector is needed

13. We welcome the Government’s amend to the preamble of the royal charter to state that other organisations supporting young people should benefit from the actions of the Trust. In order to maximise the impact of NCS it is important that the requirements in the Royal Charter for NCS to collaborate are met at all levels of delivery by NCS providers. This includes close collaboration with voluntary sector partners at the local level.

14. NCVO has also welcomed the recent new partnership announced with the Scouts as a step in the right direction for NCS to work more closely with other charities with expertise to support the programme and its objectives.10 This partnership also aims to

10 Stuart Etherington, National citizen service partnership with scouts is a step in the right direction. NCVO
help set young people on a lifetime of volunteering and involvement in their communities. More opportunities like this should be explored. To not embed this more collaborative approach in future delivery would be a missed opportunity for young people.

15. **NCS must also support smaller, local organisations so that they are able to effectively deliver the programme and ensure that commissioning processes are accessible to these organisations.** Local voluntary organisations and volunteering infrastructure have a great deal of skills and expertise to offer the programme but to date NCS has failed to nurture and capitalise on this expertise to support the effective delivery of the programme and the quality of the offer for young people. For example, organisations such as volunteer centres form a crucial part of participants’ experiences and future participation in social action. We understand that the Trust intends to consult with volunteer centres about introducing a place-based approach to NCS, which would be beneficial if taken forward.

16. Working in partnership in this way and further collaboration with the sector could also help to maximise the benefits of NCS for the wider sector. Ensuring NCS has a positive impact on the wider sector, as the Royal Charter now requires, may also be an important way of demonstrating better value for money. The NCS programme cost an estimated £1,863 per participant in 2016, in comparison to the estimated £550 cost of creating a place in the Scouts for four years.¹¹

**Full time social action**

17. The government’s decision to set up a review into opportunities and barriers to increasing participation in full time social action by young people will provide a chance for more detailed exploration of the opportunities and challenges presented by longer-term citizen service schemes. Comparisons have been made with other countries (in Europe and the United States) operating full time, year-long citizen service programmes with high-levels of participation and question why the UK doesn’t have similar such schemes. Although we should draw on the learning from programmes outside the UK, these schemes may not be directly transferrable and must be considered in the context of the existing landscape of opportunities for young people and be adapted to ensure they complement and enhance other programmes and opportunities.

18. NCVO recognises that the expansion of full-time social action programmes has the potential to benefits to young people and society but with any growth in volunteering and social action, assurances should be sought that opportunities will be high-quality.

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To ensure this, the sector and young people should be consulted as part of the review on what expansion and recognition of full-time social action should look like and how it will fit within the wider landscape of other youth social action opportunities.

19. NCVO recommends that the review should carefully consider barriers for people accessing full time opportunities and how to address them to make full time social action more inclusive. For people without financial support or accommodation, or who are living in rural area, or have caring responsibilities - full time social action may be inaccessible. If such people are excluded from participation, they will also be excluded from the perks. Disadvantaged young people are already underrepresented in social action figures\textsuperscript{12} - this must not create an additional barrier. The review must consider accessibility, barriers and the scope for flexible alternatives to ‘year of service’ programmes.

20. The committee should engage with the full time social action review and should seek assurances that any growth in full-time social action must be driven by a commitment to high quality and accessible opportunities.

**Should voluntary citizenship programmes be compulsory?**

21. **NCVO is opposed to making programmes like NCS, which include an element of volunteering, compulsory.** The introduction of any element of compulsion would be contradictory to the very definition of volunteering, which involves people choosing to give their time freely to make a difference to others, the community and the environment. If compulsion is involved it simply is no longer volunteering.

22. Evidence suggests that this would also be counterproductive if the aim is to create more active and engaged citizens. Insight into how and why people participate shows that if people feel that action is being driven by an external agenda, it is likely to negatively affect their feelings about participation as it runs counter to the heart of voluntary action - that it is about free choice rather than coercion or a sense of obligation.\textsuperscript{13}

23. Comparable programmes elsewhere in Europe, such as programmes run in the United States, France and Germany are voluntary. Compulsory involvement in citizenship schemes appears to only be used in countries with military conscription, as an alternative form of service for conscientious objectors or those unable to serve in the armed forces.

\textsuperscript{12} #Iwill and Ipsos Mori. Youth Social Action in the UK - 2016
24. Compulsion would also mean that the unique and distinctive contribution that volunteering makes would be lost. Volunteers, active outside the state or the market, give their time freely in the service of others. This is civic engagement in its most powerful and articulate form. People who receive support from volunteers value the distinct nature of this activity and its intrinsic value. For example, the King’s Fund have suggested patients see an intrinsic value in knowing the support they are receiving from a volunteer is truly voluntary and the volunteer wants to be there.\textsuperscript{14}

25. NCVO strongly argues against compulsion and urges the committee to focus its efforts elsewhere, to explore how more high-quality opportunities for people to engage in volunteering and social action can be developed and to address the barriers that exist to people getting involved in these activities.

**Supporting civic engagement through volunteering**

26. Millions of people give their time and talents as volunteers every day\textsuperscript{15} and make an astounding contribution as active citizens to improving lives and communities across the country. However, overall levels of volunteering while remaining stable are difficult to increase\textsuperscript{16}. We also know that some groups, who can have the potential to gain most from becoming active citizens through volunteering, find it more difficult to get involved and experience the benefits. For example, 15% of people from the most deprived areas of England volunteer formally, compared with 36% in the least deprived\textsuperscript{17}. Those who are educated to a degree-level are almost three times more likely to volunteer than those with no formal education\textsuperscript{18}. Only 40% of the least affluent 10-20 year olds volunteer, compared to 49% of the most affluent\textsuperscript{19} and women, young people and people from BAME groups are underrepresented on trustee boards\textsuperscript{20}.

27. Whilst recognising the huge contribution volunteers already make, there is clearly more that can be done to help reduce barriers to volunteering and help more people to become active citizens and make a difference.

28. **We need to make it easier for unemployed people looking for work to volunteer, by getting rid of red tape and confusion about the rules.** Unemployed people looking for work and receiving benefits can volunteer, yet are often told they can’t. NCVO has worked with DWP to issue clear guidance on eligibility to volunteer whilst receiving

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\textsuperscript{14} Kings Fund. Volunteering in Health and Care: Securing a sustainable future. P. 9
\textsuperscript{15} NCVO Civil Society Almanac 2017
\textsuperscript{16} NCVO Civil Society Almanac 2017
\textsuperscript{17} NCVO Civil Society Almanac 2017
\textsuperscript{18} Community Life Survey 2015-2016
\textsuperscript{19} #Iwill and Ipsos Mori. Youth Social Action in the UK- 2016.
\textsuperscript{20} NFP synergy (2016) National Trustee Survey and Grant Thornton – Charity Governance Review 2016
benefits\textsuperscript{21} but more needs to be done to ensure this is implemented by Job Centre plus staff on the ground and people who are unemployed get the opportunity to volunteer and experience the associated benefits.

29. The government should provide a support fund to address barriers to volunteering for people with disabilities. Too often, disabled people miss out from the potential benefits from participation in volunteering and social action and can get left behind. Government currently provides Access to Work grants, money for practical support for people with disabilities, health or mental health conditions. We think that volunteering can play an important role in the pathway to employment for those trying to enter the labour market - and the extension of the fund could help more people access volunteering opportunities, making both a contribution to their community alongside building their own skills and improving their employability.

30. We need to encourage more employers to allow time off work for volunteering, including time off for trustees. We know that lack of time is the number one barrier preventing people from volunteering\textsuperscript{22}. We urge the government to get employers to allow time off work for volunteering, particularly for trustees. Allowing time of work for trustees would simply require an amendment to existing legislation (section 50 of the employment rights act) that currently gives employees the right to request time off work for public duties such as performing duties as a magistrate or school governor\textsuperscript{23}. Such a proposal was supported in the House of Lords committee report earlier this year\textsuperscript{24}. Reducing such a barrier could enable a more diverse range of people to get involved in trusteeship as data shows that there is a lack of diversity in trustees- who tend to be older, male and white\textsuperscript{25}.

31. We want to strengthen volunteer development and management. To ensure volunteers have the right skills and support to make a bigger difference and a rewarding experience, there should be targeted investment in high level and sophisticated volunteer management. Investment could also be targeted to areas of deprivation to build a more diverse community of volunteers, giving access to volunteering opportunities and the necessary support to people of all ages and backgrounds.

32. Funding can be better allocated towards ensuring better quality volunteering rather creating demand. An example that demonstrates this is the Youth United Foundation. An investment of £20m awarded to the Scouts Association has ensured over 40,000

\textsuperscript{21} NCVO- Volunteering and benefits
\textsuperscript{22} NCVO Civil Society Almanac 2017
\textsuperscript{23} https://www.gov.uk/time-off-work-public-duties
\textsuperscript{24} http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/18/section/50
\textsuperscript{25} House of Lords Select Committee on Charities: stronger charities for a stronger society, March 2017
\textsuperscript{26} NFP synergy (2016) National Trustee Survey and Grant Thornton – Charity Governance Review 2016
places were opened for young people to participate in uniformed organisations in areas of deprivation. Together with Girl Guiding, over 120,000 young people have been signed up, but they are now on waiting lists and close to 30,000 volunteers are going to be needed to address this.

33. High quality volunteering opportunities need investment and the right support. NCVO welcomed the House of Lords select committee on charities’ recommendation for greater investment in volunteer management, support and training and that funders needed to be more prepared to fund invest towards such aims\(^\text{26}\).

**The relationship between citizenship and civic engagement and social cohesion and integration**

34. Voluntary organisations play a role at the heart of many communities, and are often able to bring together diverse groups of people from different backgrounds. Local charities in particular, have both a major stake in their community and a knowledge of those who live in their community, and are well placed to support attempts to build social cohesion.

35. Projects run by charities large and small are contributing to social cohesion and integration. For example Action for Refugees in Lewisham runs a supplementary Saturday school, serving 44 different nationalities with teaching designed to improve the self-confidence of children and their ability to integrate\(^\text{27}\).

36. Playing Out, a Bristol-based Community Interest Company, has developed a model where the community ensures children can play on the street, allowing them to build connections in their communities, with 15,000 children and 7,500 adults having been directly involved\(^\text{28}\).

37. **We urge both national and local government to look closely at the many projects being run at the community level, identify good practice, and ensure stable funding for groups who are effectively delivering more cohesive communities.**

38. These locally-based groups have continued to play a crucial role in local communities, despite the challenging funding environment of recent years. This was particularly important in the aftermath of last year’s EU referendum, when a number of charities were required to respond to an increase in the incidence of hate crimes\(^\text{29}\).

39. Local authorities have been under particular pressure with regards to funding in recent years, but the role of community organisations in bringing people together

\(^{26}\) House of Lords Select Committee on Charities: stronger charities for a stronger society, March 2017
\(^{28}\) [http://playingout.net/about/the-impact-of-playing-out/](http://playingout.net/about/the-impact-of-playing-out/)
\(^{29}\) [https://blogs.ncvo.org.uk/2016/06/30/easing-community-tensions-practical-advice-for-charities/](https://blogs.ncvo.org.uk/2016/06/30/easing-community-tensions-practical-advice-for-charities/)
must be supported for the long-term. **We believe that the government’s forthcoming Dormant Assets Fund should be used to build on the success of local community foundations by creating income-generating endowment funds. Money from dormant assets could be used to incentivise donations from philanthropists, further growing these funds.**

**Do current laws encourage active political engagement?**

40. Charities are often a route for individuals to engage politically. Sometimes this will be done through charities specialising in democratic engagement, but often this will be in a range of activities related to advocacy, whether through signing a petition, using charity materials to write to their MP or taking a more active role in campaigning for or against particular policies.

41. The campaigning environment for charities is thus also crucial in allowing more individuals to take part in the political process, both between elections and during the campaign.

42. A number of charities have expressed concern at the impact of the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-party Campaigning, and Trade Union Administration Act 2014 and the restrictive effect it had on their campaigning activity in the general elections in both 2015 and 2017.

43. It is also concerning that several other interventions by government and the Charity Commission have seemed to undermine the valuable role of charity campaigning even where changes were made after the concerns of civil society were acknowledged, as was the case with the anti-advocacy clause and the Charity Commission’s guidance on campaigning during the EU referendum in 2016.

44. It should be remembered when considering the role of charity campaigning that the role of volunteer campaigners, working together with like-minded people, is often at the heart of those campaigns, and that restrictions on charity campaigning have a knock-on impact on the ability of individuals to volunteer and engage on the issues that matter to them.

45. **The government should both continue to publicly back the role that charity campaigning plays in developing public policy and involving individuals in the political process, and not undermine this role through its policy choices. In particular it should implement the recommendations made by Lord Hodgson, following the review of third party election campaigning.**

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31 [https://blogs.ncvo.org.uk/2016/12/02/a-resolution-to-the-anti-lobbying-clause/](https://blogs.ncvo.org.uk/2016/12/02/a-resolution-to-the-anti-lobbying-clause/)
Third Party Election Campaigning: getting the balance right, March 2016