1. The Royal Charter for the National Citizen Service Trust (NCST) states that it is the duty of that organisation to ‘provide or arrange for the provision’ of National Citizen Service (NCS) programmes. The NCST have said that ‘the need to focus on local communities and organisations to achieve long term social impact’ will be a guiding principle of the NCS delivery network redesign process which they are currently engaged in; and that they ‘will be encouraging organisations of all shapes and sizes that meet a clear set of minimum requirements, to review and bid for the opportunity’ to join this network. Indeed, this is – in our experience – an aim shared by the vast majority of organisations currently included in this delivery network, including The Challenge.

2. In 2015, The Challenge was contracted by the NCST to act as its Regional Delivery Partner (RDP) in seven of its 19 delivery regions. As an RDP, we are responsible for working with Local Delivery Partners (LDPs) – a role fulfilled in the main by smaller, locally-focused charities – to provide NCS across each of these geographical areas. At present, the NCS delivery network includes over 250 LDPs.

3. The Challenge has a track record of running high-quality programmes for young people – our NCS net promoter scores (as captured by the NCST in partnership with Rant and Rave) have been consistently high, whilst our HeadStart incentivised social action programme was recently recognised within a report by the Careers and Enterprise Company as ‘what works in volunteering’\(^1\). We do, accordingly, directly deliver NCS where we believe that this will result in the best possible experience for young people and the greatest social impact. Indeed, we also believe that the provision of NCS across the country is improved through the involvement of organisations operating at different levels of scale. In part as The Challenge delivers NCS within a number of geographic regions across England, we are well-placed to pilot innovative changes to the programme’s structure and curriculum – including in areas with divergent demographic and geographic characteristics, and through the use of control groups – and to run additional activities and services aimed at boosting its social impact. For example, during the summer 2017 delivery period, we employed eleven mental health advisers who worked to support young people with mental health needs to participate in the programme – this innovation was made financially viable as these advisers worked across geographical areas larger than those which many smaller charities operate within. Furthermore, like many NCS providers, The Challenge regularly convenes meetings of the LDPs which we work with so as to enable the sharing of best practice in areas such as

inclusion and graduate engagement – we would contend that we are better able to lead these discussions as we are well-versed in the realities of programme delivery.

4. We do, however, believe that through partnering with organisations which are rooted in local communities, enjoy close links with local charities and community groups or possess specialist expertise in a particular aspect of youth programme provision, we are able to both improve the quality of the NCS experience for young people and to reach teenagers who might not otherwise choose to participate in NCS. We are, therefore, committed to increasing the number of NCS places which we sub-contract to LDPs within our delivery areas, and have made significant progress towards realising this goal in recent years. Between 2014 and 2017, the number of LDPs which we work with increased by 38%; whilst in 2017 we sub-contracted over 50% of NCS places to these organisations in four of the seven areas in which we operate as an RDP. The NCST is, moreover, working in concert with current and potential NCS delivery organisations to ensure that, by 2025 at the very latest, no RDP will directly deliver more than 40% of the NCS places which it is contractually responsible for.

5. The Challenge is, in addition, exploring whether we might be able to enter into contractual partnerships with organisations which are not well-placed to fulfil the full range of programme delivery functions usually undertaken by an LDP, but which may be able to contribute meaningfully to a particular aspect of NCS delivery. For example, we are currently in discussions with the Young Brent Foundation regarding whether youth voluntary sector organisations in that borough might be able to assume responsibility for the promotion of the programme to local teenagers.

6. Of course, NCS also meaningfully benefits civil society organisations of all sizes through the third and fourth phases of the programme, which see teams of young people run social action projects with and for local charities and community groups. In 2017, the young people who completed NCS in The Challenge’s delivery areas (excluding those who did so through a LDP) raised £446,850 for a wide range of charitable causes through completing approximately 1,067,688 hours of social action and working in partnership with 1,633 charity partners.