



National Citizen Service

A response by Civic Voice to the Cabinet Office March 2012

Civic Voice welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the review of the National Citizen Service.

Civic Voice is the national charity for the civic movement in England. We work with a network of local civic societies across England to make the places where everyone lives more attractive, enjoyable and distinctive and we organise the national celebration National Civic Day. We promote civic pride.

The civic movement has roots going back to 1846 and is one of the world's oldest social movements. Indeed, the very essence of National Citizen Service (NCS) can be linked back to an idea of the civic movement in 1957. Across England in 1957 the civic movement was campaigning to clear "eyesores" from our communities. Wide publicity for this national campaign was obtained and in 1958 ten "volunteer camps" were formed in various parts of the country. These volunteers at these camps undertook a variety of tasks designed to improve the local area, increase people's enjoyment of the countryside and promote active citizenship. Such was the success of the scheme in the countryside that it moved to the urban area, where at weekends and during the evening, teams of young people came together to make the area in where they lived a bit better. The idea of NCS in bringing young people together in a "fresh environment" is not therefore a totally new idea.

Civic Voice has a policy to only respond to consultations where we receive a large response from our member groups. The NCS received such a response. It must be acknowledged that our views are informed by our members' practical experience and local outlook and Civic Voice does not pretend to be an expert of youth service provision.

Civic volunteers are highly motivated by a sense of public duty to their area, with a strong desire to be part of a community and to make a difference – by being a member and contributing to the work of a civic society; civic volunteers have a stronger affinity with their community. It is therefore unsurprising that the civic movement attaches high importance to active citizenship and to embedding the concept in young people during their formative years.

NCS fits very much with the ambitions of the civic society movement. In last year's Civic Survey, 39% of respondents said "*Civic Voice should create a programme for 16 year olds to give them a chance to develop the skills needed to be active and responsible citizens*". The NCS is doing this. The NCS also builds on the excellent work being undertaken with young people by many civic societies throughout the country as shown in the examples given below.

In a world where everyone is expected to play a growing role in shaping and influencing their own surroundings and playing a more active role in their community, the civic movement feels that the NCS should be looking to help prepare young people for playing effective roles in public life. Civic Voice believes that a society with more responsible and active citizens is likely to have greater economic prosperity and an enhanced social environment.

Just a few examples of relevant work already being undertaken by societies are as follows.

- Hale Civic Society runs a citizenship programme to help ensure "that every 16 year old in Hale has a chance to contribute to the future of Hale". The programme comprises a series of projects for 16-20 year olds which, without the residential element is very similar to the NCS.
- Portsmouth Society regularly undertakes joint project work with local schools/youth clubs
- Marple Civic Society works with the young offenders scheme to regularly arrange clean ups throughout the town
- Birmingham Civic Society puts over 2000 school children through a six week active citizenship programme each year.

We asked civic groups to tell us what they see as the benefits of NCS to 1) young people 2) local communities and 3) the wider UK society. The responses included

- ☛ Benefits to young people by helping them to become more well-rounded individuals by taking part in new experiences,
- ☛ Enable them to socialising with new people and gaining skills and qualities that would help them in the future, for example confidence and team work.
- ☛ Building bridges between young people and the rest of their communities
- ☛ Promoting more positive images of young people and building the skills set of the future workforce

Civic Voice asked its members about the challenges in implementing NCS, and any approaches they could suggest overcoming them.

Key challenges identified were:

- ☛ Integrating NCS with other aspects of the development of young people. Specifically it is important that there is consistency between the teaching of citizenship in earlier years at school with the purposes, content and processes involved in NCS.
- ☛ Ensuring the inclusion of young people who do not have a network around them to provide the financial support to enable them to participate in the scheme. Civic groups thought the scheme could be improved by the offer of incentives or financial support but recognised the difficulty in making this happen
- ☛ Achieving sufficiently diverse recruitment. The key to delivering more integrated communities must surely be to create more interactions between young people from different backgrounds. It will be important to manage communication among all communities to ensure that young people, not all of whom will be in school, are reached and helped to engage with and sustain their involvement in NCS via people that they know and trust.
- ☛ Securing the involvement of all sections of the community. This is necessary not just for NCS to be affordable but also to ensure that it offers the richest possible experience for young people. Civic groups do not want NCS to become a costly one-off participation event but one that inspires young people to start on a life-time journey of civic action. Having in place local networks to connect young people into is key – the civic network.
- ☛ Minimising the impact of NCS on the funding of current youth services. It is felt that many good initiatives, in particular the Duke of Edinburgh Scheme existed and groups felt that it seemed wrong to implement funding into a new stream of work while other areas in youth services are facing cut back. It appears that there would be significant benefit in integrating NCS with existing programmes wherever possible to both minimise cost and duplication and ensure that there is a coherent national approach to working with young people.
- ☛ Integrating NCS with civic groups already active in the community. The future success of the volunteer movement in this country is dependent on connecting together all the different bodies within the sector. Community groups with confidence in working with young people to provide onward volunteering opportunities need to be identified and, where appropriate supported financially, to ‘adopt’ young people during and after their NCS experience.
- ☛ Developing an accredited qualification that could be included in CVs or UCAS applications to contribute to the strength of applications of young people who do not have significant other qualifications.

Going forward, we believe that the civic movement could make a major contribution to the delivery of NCS through providing social action/volunteering opportunities. This could be achieved in selected locations by organising social action projects during the NCS programme itself (via phase 4), arranging for continuing post-programme involvement in community action activities or at least by helping to signpost young people to other civic groups.

We believe that Civic Voice and its member societies can be valuable contributors to the NCS programme and would wish to be consulted more fully on how this might be achieved.