

# Evaluation of National Citizen Service Pilots

## Interim Report



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## The evaluation consortium

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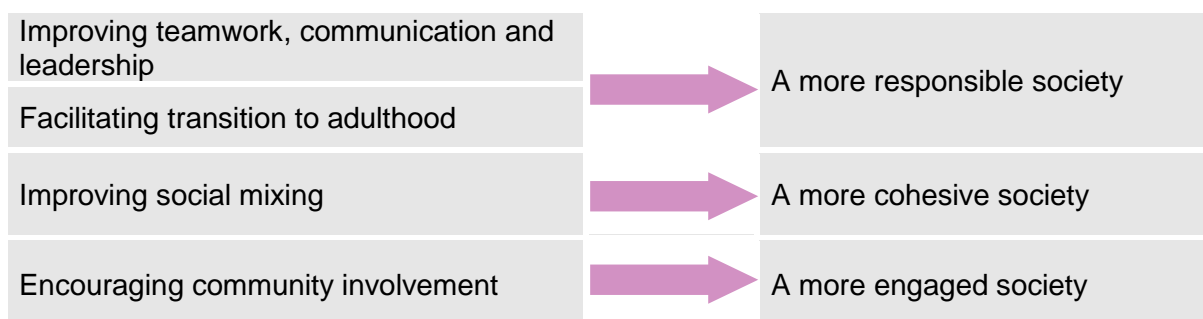
Finally, we would like to express our appreciation to the staff and participants from NCS providers for their co-operation, support and patience in assisting and participating in this evaluation.

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## Executive Summary

National Citizen Service (NCS) is one of the Coalition Government's flagship initiatives for building a bigger, stronger society. The programme aims to be a rite of passage for all 16 year olds and help to promote a more cohesive, responsible and active society. It is a summer programme involving residential and at-home components in which young people come together as a team to design and carry out a social action project in their local area.

NCS had three broad aims at the outset of the programme: to make society more cohesive, more responsible and more engaged. The evaluation has identified impacts on young people in relation to four outcomes that contribute to these three core aims.



This report presents the findings of the independent evaluation of the pilot of NCS in 2011. The evaluation involved: a series of case studies assessing what worked in the delivery and implementation of the programme; before and after surveys with NCS participants and a comparable group of non-participating 16 year olds to measure the impact of the programme; and economic analysis of the costs and benefits of the programme. The evaluation aimed to:

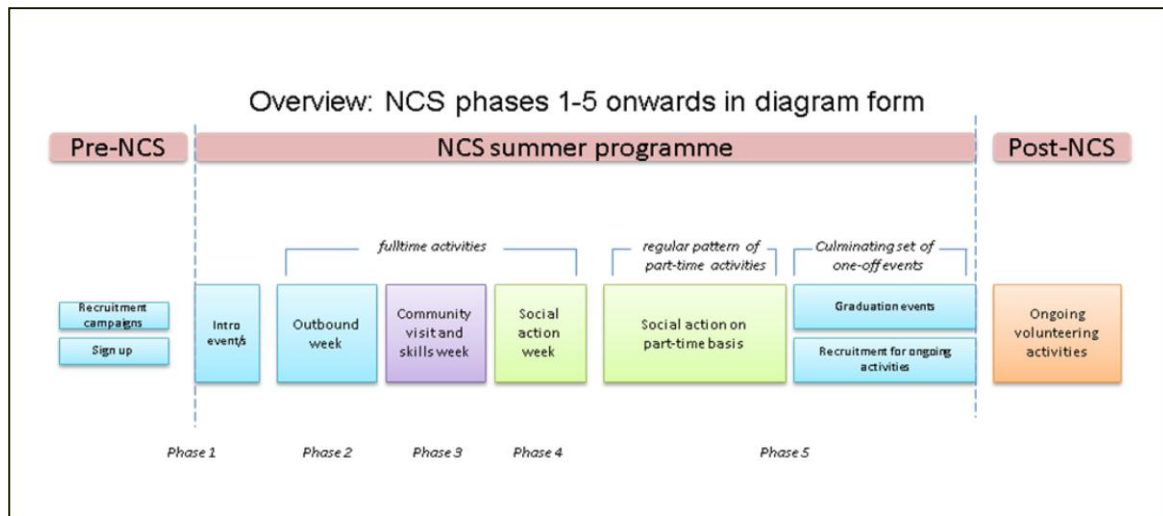
- measure the impact of NCS on young people's attitudes and behaviours with regard to: social mixing; communications, teamwork and leadership; community involvement; and transition to adulthood
- estimate the value for money of the NCS programme
- inform development of NCS by identifying lessons for the design and delivery of the programme

It is important to note that the programme being evaluated is a pilot. Consequently, this evaluation does not provide the final word on the impact and efficacy of NCS but forms a key part of its development by identifying what currently works well and what could be changed in the future. It also only measures short-term impact at this stage; a further follow-up survey in the summer of 2012 will measure the sustainability of these impacts and any additional impacts that may emerge over a longer period of time.

### The NCS delivery model

The 2011 pilots consisted of five distinct and phases of activity as illustrated in the diagram below. The phases are consecutive, with each aiming to build in team-

building, planning and skills developed in the preceding phase. Participants should go through their NCS programme in teams of 12-16, which stay together throughout the programme.



The programme was delivered by 12 NCS providers. These comprised a range of organisations and consortia drawn from the voluntary and youth sectors and other social enterprises. Although providers were committed to delivering the programme to the above model, they also differed in a number of ways. Three provider typologies were identified and used as units of sub-group analysis throughout the report.

<b>Size, coverage and governance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large national providers</li> <li>• Regional consortia</li> <li>• Small locally focused providers</li> </ul>
<b>Delivery model</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct delivery</li> <li>• Contracted out delivery</li> <li>• Mixture of direct and contracted out</li> </ul>
<b>Charging arrangements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No charge to all participants</li> <li>• Variable charge (by discounts, refunds or bursaries)</li> </ul>

## The NCS participants

The impact survey and the monitoring information data provide robust information on the participation and retention of young people in the NCS pilots. As NCS is designed to challenge young people, it cannot be expected that all will go on to complete the programme. The data show that while all NCS places commissioned in 2011 were not filled, the programme showed good retention rates for a youth initiative of this kind. NCS participants were proportionately more likely to be drawn from disadvantaged and minority groups, compared to the population as a whole and also more pro-social in terms of their volunteering experience and attitudes towards helping out.

### Numbers starting and completing the programme

- Over 10,000 places were commissioned for the 2011 NCS pilots
- Around 8,500 participants took part in the programme
- 6,809 participants (81%) completed the programme and 7,901 (87%) started Phase 2
- Females were more likely to complete the programme than males
- Retention was higher amongst BME participants than white participants
- Participants who paid a fee to take part were a more likely to finish the programme as were young people who had previous experience of volunteering
- In terms of provider type, those delivering the programme directly had better retention rates (90%) while regional consortia had lower retention rates (71%)

An important element of the NCS model was achieving a social mix of participants. The evaluation collected data from NCS participants and a comparable sample of non-participating 16 year olds from maintained schools in relation to demographics, attitudes and behaviours.

### Profile of NCS participants

NCS participants were more diverse than the population from which they were drawn in terms of:

- Ethnicity – around 28% of participants were non-white, compared to 18% in the general population
- Disability – 16% of NCS participants had a disability or health problem expected to last more than a year, compared to 12% in the general population
- Socio-economic background – NCS participants were more likely to be eligible for Free School Meals (23% vs. 14%), less likely to live with their father (60% vs. 69%) or mother (89% vs. 95%), and less likely to have a parent in work.

### Engagement in volunteering activity

NCS participants more likely than the general population to have undertaken pro-social behaviour such as volunteering and helping out at local clubs and associations:

- 80% of NCS participants had engaged in one or more of a list of pro-social activities compared with 67% in the comparison sample;
- 79% of NCS participants (vs. 42% in the comparison sample) said they wanted to spend more time getting involved in these activities.

## The impact and experience of the programme

The evaluation aimed to be able to measure the independent impact of NCS and describe participants' experience of the programme. In the sections below we present three types of data on impact and experience for each of these four areas aims of NCS.

- Data from before and after surveys of NCS participants and a control group of non-participating 16 year olds from maintained schools to measure the independent impact of the programme. The control group was selected from a larger sample to match NCS participants in terms of socio-demographic characteristics and levels of pro-social behaviour. Our follow-up survey showed that the control group were also engaged in a range of activities in which they would have been expected to develop a range of skills over the summer. The survey measures only short-term impact at this stage; a further follow-up survey

in the summer of 2012 will measure the sustainability of any impacts found and any additional impacts that may emerge over a longer period of time.

- Data on impacts from the case studies collected through qualitative interviews with NCS staff and young people. Where measurable impact has been found by the survey data, this provides an understanding what led to these impacts. Where measurable impacts were not identified this data maps the range of impacts observed at an individual level and helps explain why these were not more widespread.
- Data on the self-reported experience of young people collected in the survey of young people after their participation in NCS. Participants were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a range of statements about the programme. This does not provide a measure of the independent impact of the programme, as it cannot be compared to a comparison sample.

### Summary of impacts and experience

The overall picture that emerges from the impact survey is that NCS had a range of impacts on two of the four outcomes and more limited impact in the other two.

The impact survey identified:

- A range of statistically significant positive impacts of the programme in relation to communication, teamwork and leadership.
- A range of statistically significant positive impacts of the programme in relation to transition to adulthood
- A small number of statistically significant positive impacts in relation to social mixing, although the overall pattern of change in this area was mixed.
- A small number of statistically significant positive impact in relation to community involvement although overall pattern of change in this area was mixed.

In addition to the independent impact of the programme, it is clear that NCS participants found NCS enjoyable and worthwhile (giving scores of 9 and 9.1 out of 10). 92% of participants said they would recommend NCS to other young people.

The next four sections provide more detail on the types of impact the programme had and what participants thought of the programme under the four outcomes.

### Communication, teamwork and leadership

*What impact did the programme have?*

- The most significant impacts of NCS were on young people's teamwork, communication and leadership skills, with impacts being seen in all areas. The proportion of young people who felt confident being the leader of a team increased by 13 percentage points more among NCS participants than among the control group (increasing from 47% to 63% compared with an increase from 50% to 53% among the control group).
- The proportion who felt confident in putting their ideas forward increased by seven percentage points more among NCS participants than among the control group (from 59% to 74%, compared with an increase from 60% to 69% among the control group) and increased by five percentage points more in relation to explaining their ideas clearly (from 58% to 73%, compared with an increase from 60% to 71% among the control group).

*What created the impact?*

Qualitative interviews suggest that two elements of the NCS programme were important in facilitating this change in participants. These related to working with

others to achieve shared goals and youth involvement in the design, planning and delivery of the social action project. The relative effectiveness of these factors was influenced by how well the NCS team was able to 'gel' and bond as a group.

*How did participants experience related aspects of the programme?*

Over 90% of participants agreed that NCS had made them proud of what they had achieved.

### **Transition to adulthood**

*What impact did the programme have?*

- Participants saw significantly greater improvements in several measures of self-reported wellbeing compared with the control group:
  - The proportion of young people reporting low levels of anxiety increased by nine percentage points more among NCS participants than among the control group (increasing from 45% to 49% compared with a decrease from 56% to 51% among the control group).
  - The proportion reporting that they feel that things they do in life are worthwhile increased by five percentage points more among NCS participants than among the control group (increasing from 65% to 79% compared with an increase from 64% to 73% among the control group).
  - The proportion reporting high levels of happiness increased by five percentage points more among NCS participants than among the control group (increasing from 66% to 72% compared with an increase from 67% to 69% among the control group).
- Participants also saw a positive change in attitudes towards future study compared with the control group:
  - The proportion reporting that they are interested in doing more learning increased by three percentage points more among the NCS participants than among the control group (increasing from 84% to 92% compared with an increase from 87% to 91% among the control group).
  - The proportion reporting that they plan to study for another qualification in a sixth form or college in the autumn of 2011 increased by six percentage points more among the NCS participants than among the control group (increasing from 27% to 34% compared with an increase from 29% to 30% among the control group).
- Attitudes to anti-social behaviour (ASB) improved more among NCS participants than the comparison group. The proportion who recognised that the statement "young people want to stay out of trouble" as being "just like me" increased by seven percentage points more among the NCS participants than among the control group (increasing from 61% to 64% compared with a decrease from 69% to 65% among the control group).
- The survey did not identify any independent impact on levels of self-esteem, life satisfaction, assessment of life skills or longer term plans. On many of these measures, the period of the research represented a time of considerable change for the young people such that there were big changes in both the NCS and comparison group.

*What created the impact?*

Qualitative interviews identified that impacts on life skills were affected by the activities and structure of the residential phases and youth involvement in the programme. Young people's capacity to progress into education, employment or training in line with their aspirations was facilitated by gaining new skills, experiences and qualifications, being asked to demonstrate these skills to employers, and an



expanding awareness of opportunities and social networks. Finally, the programme was felt to have reduced ASB through increasing awareness and understanding of the consequences this kind of behaviour.

Where impact was not identified, the qualitative interviews suggest that it may have been difficult for NCS to make a measurable impact in this area as young people felt they had these skills already or already had high self-esteem. Baseline scores for the NCS participants back this up.

*How did participants experience related aspects of the programme?*

- 95% of participants agreed that NCS had given them the chance to develop more skills for the future
- 85% of participants agreed that NCS had made them learn something new about themselves
- 85% of participants agreed that NCS had made them aware of more education or employment opportunities

### **Social mixing**

*What impact did the programme have?*

- Participants saw improvements in attitudes to mixing with people from different backgrounds compared to the control group:
  - The proportion saying they had no friends from a different religion decreased by four percentage points more among NCS participants than among the control group (decreasing from 20% to 17% compared with an increase from 21% to 22% among the control group).
  - The proportion saying all their friends were from different estates or parts of town increased by seven percentage points more among NCS participants than among the control group (increasing from 13% to 15% compared with a decrease from 18% to 13% among the control group).
- The impact survey also identified a negative independent impact on whether people felt their local area was a place where people from different background got on well – while the number of NCS participants agreeing that this was the case increased from 43% to 55%, the comparison sample increased by more (six percentage points)
- On the majority of measures included on the impact survey, participation in NCS was not associated at the aggregate level with significant change in attitudes to and experiences of social mixing compared to the comparison sample. This was measured in terms of attitudes to trust in the local area and mixing with people from different backgrounds
- The qualitative case studies identified that where this was an impact for individual participants, this was influenced by the degree to which young people met others from different backgrounds on the programme, with positive impacts being found when this did occur.

*What created the impact?*

The qualitative interviews identified two key barriers here that may explain why only limited impact was seen at an aggregate level. Firstly, the perceived lack of diversity within some NCS teams was said by young people to have been a barrier. A second explanation was that young people already had a relatively diverse social network thus reducing the relative effect of meeting others from different background. An explanation for the results relating to NCS's impact on attitudes to mixing in the local area could relate to some of the challenges NCS participants had in working with the local community.

*How did participants experience related aspects of the programme?*

- Over 90% of participants agreed that NCS had given them the chance to know people they wouldn't normally mix with
- 85% of participants agreed that NCS had made them feel more positive towards people from different backgrounds

### **Encouraging community involvement**

*What impact did the programme have?*

- The survey identified a statistically significant impact of NCS in terms of the number NCS participants who had recently helped out a neighbour. The proportion of young people who had done this increased by four percentage points more among NCS participants than among the control group (increasing from 31% to 40% compared with an increase from 31% to 36% among the control group).
- The data suggests that NCS participants who helped out were more generous with their time than the control group – with 19 per cent giving up more than seven hours per week over the summer, compared with 12 per cent of the control group.
- Participation in NCS was not associated with any other statistically significant independent impacts on encouraging community involvement, measured in terms of perceptions of being listened to, viewing it as everyone's responsibility to help out, and helping out themselves in practice.
- Despite this, qualitative interviews identified positive impacts in this area for individual young people, such as being aware of broader more a range of ways to help out locally and a belief they are able to make a difference to their local area.

*What created the impact?*

Where positive impact occurred this was attributed in the qualitative case studies to three related factors: social action projects with a local focal point; positive engagement in NCS from members of the community; and making an observable, tangible difference through the social action project. However, there were also barriers to impacts on community involvement, particularly where participants had negative experiences of their social action project or did not feel the project took place in a location that they considered local.

*How did participants experience related aspects of the programme?*

Participants were asked about their future community involvement and 77% said that following NCS they were more likely to help out locally. Anecdotal data from NCS alumni teams suggests that this is happening and the extent to which this is the case will be measured in the second follow-up survey in summer 2012.

## **Estimating value for money**

NCS cost the government £14.2million to deliver. An additional £3million was raised by providers and in kind support. This means that the unit costs per commissioned place is calculated at £1,303 to the government and £1,553 in total.

Three types of social benefits resulting from the identified impacts of NCS can be estimated as up to £28 million:

- Over £600,000 in hours volunteered by participants during the programme

- More than £10million in increased earnings, including almost £3million in increased tax revenue, can be expected from increased confidence, improved leadership and communication.
- Up to an additional £17million increased earnings, including almost £5million in increased tax revenue from a greater take up in educational opportunities by NCS participants.

As the pilot programme costs nearly £14.2m to government, the societal benefits are between one and two times the cost, showing a net benefit to UK society. The lower end of this range reflects the uncertainty in the above estimates, as explained in the technical report. If, in future, the unit costs of the programme should fall to the cost to society per commissioned place, but the benefits remain the same, the ratio of benefits to costs could be as high as three to one. Furthermore, the actual benefits may be greater than these estimates because:

- Unit costs used in these calculations were based on number completing the programme; those who dropped out may have benefitted in some way
- The value of additional benefits that are not easily given an economic value (increased well-being, benefits of volunteering, social mixing and reduced anti-social behaviour) are not included in these estimates.

## Learning for NCS in 2012

Interviews with staff and participants highlighted several key issues to focus on in order to ensure that successes from the first year pilots are continued and learning can be translated into greater and more cost effective impacts in 2012. These include:

### *Raising awareness*

- During first year of delivery awareness of the programme was low; addressing this at a national level will be required to facilitate any expansion and help recruitment of participants through early engagement of schools and others that act as gatekeepers to young people
- Appetite for future participation appears to be high, with 68% of young people surveyed as part of the comparison sample reporting they would have liked the opportunity to participate in NCS. However, providers will need to improve strategies for converting young people expressing interest into participants that complete the programme.
- Furthermore, 92% of participants said they would recommend NCS to other young people, suggesting involving alumni in recruitment would be worth pursuing

### *Staffing the programme*

- Providers were concerned about the feasibility of increasing the number of NCS staff nationally by three times.
- Equally, staff were keen to be involved in 2012 assuming that delivery would become more effective and efficient and less strain would be placed upon them.
- Training was provided in three key areas, NCS orientation, working with young people and practical necessities, yet there were gaps identified in relation to guided reflection and working with more challenging young people.

### *Delivery of the programme*

- There was broad support amongst NCS staff and participants for the structure of the programme in relation to its incremental nature which encouraged young people to take a greater role in leading their teams and projects.

- Concerns over the structure related specifically to the timing and ordering of the residentials, the overall length of the programme and the suitability of phase 4 as a distinct phase.

#### **Recommendations for the NCS Programme Team (Cabinet Office and Department for Education) and Providers**

- Work towards longer lead-in times to enable providers to improve staffing, planning and recruitment
- Consider improving the stability of providers' positions by awarding longer contracts
- Consider enabling greater flexibility in some aspects of the programme delivery, particularly in relation to the timing and ordering of residentials and the overall length of the programme
- Staffing models should aim to include clear roles and lines of responsibility, information sharing mechanisms, suitable staff numbers and consistency of approach in working with young people.
- Improve clarity of training and guidance about 'guided reflection' and its role in NCS
- Ensuring that the programme is coherently 'championed' at national and local level

These recommendations have been shared with the NCS Programme Team as findings have emerged throughout the evaluation. Where possible, these have been taken on board in terms of planning, design and implementation of NCS in 2012.