

FULL-TIME SOCIAL ACTION REVIEW: CALL FOR EVIDENCE

NCVO, OCTOBER 2017

About NCVO

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) is the largest membership organisation for the voluntary sector in England. With over 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

NCVO is committed to grow and enhance volunteering wherever it takes place. We have shown support for programmes like National Citizen Service and the #iwill campaign that are seeking to get more young people involved in making a difference through social action and volunteering. The expansion of full-time social action programmes could have the potential to benefit young people and society.

We know volunteering and social action can play a meaningful role empowering young people to have a positive impact on the challenges communities and societies around them face. We know that it can be hugely important for a young person's development, that employers and universities value social action and that it can be harnessed as a way to improve social mobility.

However, data shows that disadvantaged young people are underrepresented in social action figures, compounding their disadvantage against their better-off peers. Volunteering is such a powerful intervention that we will damage social mobility if opportunities are not open to all.

NCVO wants to ensure those participating in full-time volunteering are able to do so and have a high-quality experience. However, the nature of full-time volunteering brings additional risks of being inaccessible - particularly for young people without a support network, accommodation or other responsibilities such as caring. Accessibility must therefore be central to this review.

Full-time social action programmes must offer high-quality opportunities, collaborate with the wider volunteering sector and have effective measures in place to ensure people are supported into further volunteering or social action.

Unrealistic targets for participation should not be set and instead, a focus on offering high-quality programmes and adapting programmes to meet the needs of a diverse range of young people should be prioritised.

What experience have you had of full time social action / volunteering, either as a young person or as a provider for young people?

1. There are currently an estimated 1,000 full-time volunteers across the UK. They give their time in a variety of ways, across charities working in conservation, education and health and care. Like any volunteer, we should endeavour to ensure they are given a worthwhile experience and can make the biggest impact possible. Although a very small part of the overall volunteering landscape, there should be awareness of the contribution of full-time volunteers and they should be supported as any other volunteer should.
2. **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- including full-time volunteering.**

What impact does full time social action / volunteering have on young people and providers in comparison to part time social action / volunteering?

3. We are unaware of any compelling evidence that demonstrates the specific impact of full-time volunteering, although we are aware of the positive impact full-time programmes, such as those run by the RSPB and City Year UK, can have on young people.
4. We know the positive impact volunteering more broadly can have on young people. Research carried out by the #iwill campaign¹ shows young people who have undertaken volunteering have stronger personal networks and higher life skills. 67% of employer's report that entry-level candidates with voluntary experience demonstrate more employability skills. 85% of young people who have participated in meaningful social action report that their experiences would help them get a job. We believe

¹ <http://www.iwill.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/download-manager-files/2016%20National%20Youth%20Social%20Action%20Survey%20-%20Headline%20findings.pdf>

volunteering is a powerful intervention – and therefore it is important that all young people have access to such programmes.

5. Anecdotal evidence suggests the impact of volunteering is more fundamentally tied to the quality of the experience, rather than the frequency or intensity.
6. It is therefore imperative that full-time social action programmes are high-quality. To ensure this, any volunteering programme should meet the six principles of meaningful youth social action, as outlined in a 2013 report from the Cabinet Office, the Young Foundation and NCVO's Institute for Volunteering Research.²
7. Investment in volunteer management is also necessary, with real understanding and buy-in from a strategic level on the importance of good volunteer management. The House of Lords Committee on Charities report earlier this year called for greater recognition and investment in volunteer management (recommendation 59).³
8. High-quality opportunities, supported by effective volunteer management, are more likely to attract young people and ensure they have a good experience, while making it more likely for participants to go on to further opportunities as part of a volunteering or social action journey.⁴
9. The experience of growing the National Citizen Service (NCS) has showed us the importance of the quality of the programme being offered. Despite government buy-in and ambitious growth targets, NCS haven't always provided high-quality social action experiences for young people. In evaluations, the social action element of the project is ranked lower than other parts⁵, while the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) this year also criticised NCS for failing to demonstrate their impact effectively⁶. Anecdotally, we have also heard examples of NCS failing to cooperate appropriately with local social action providers and infrastructure. The PAC also criticised the high costs per participant on the NCS, in comparison to existing volunteering opportunities with proven impact.⁷
10. If there is to be any expansion of full-time youth social action, there must be processes in place to ensure opportunities are high-quality and worthwhile. We have set out how NCS can improve their offer by working collaboratively with existing youth volunteering

² <https://youngfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Scoping-a-Quality-Framework-for-Youth-Social-Action-FINAL.pdf>

³ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201617/ldselect/ldchar/133/133.pdf>

⁴ http://pathwaysthroughparticipation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2011/09/Pathways-Through-Participation-final-report_Final_20110913.pdf

⁵ <http://www.ncsyes.co.uk/sites/default/files/NCS%202015%20Evaluation%20Report%20FINAL.pdf>

⁶ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmpubacc/955/955.pdf>

⁷ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmpubacc/955/955.pdf>

organisations⁸. We believe new initiatives can only be successful when they are properly embedded within the wider landscape of youth social action.

- 11. Full-time social action programmes must offer high-quality opportunities, collaborate with the wider volunteering sector and have effective measures in place to ensure people are supported into further volunteering or social action.**

What are the barriers to full-time social action / volunteering and can you give examples of how these might be overcome?

12. Disadvantaged people are already underrepresented in social action figures. 15% of people from the most deprived areas of England volunteer formally, compared with 36% in the least deprived⁹. Those who are educated to a degree-level are almost three times more likely to volunteer than those with no formal education¹⁰. Only 40% of the least affluent 10 - 20 year olds volunteer, compared to 49% of the most affluent¹¹. Women, young people and people of colour are underrepresented on trustee boards¹².
13. Because we know volunteering can be such a powerful intervention for young people, we want to ensure that everyone can volunteer and enjoy the benefits. Inaccessible opportunities will limit the potential benefits to social mobility that volunteering can provide.
14. We think there are significant questions over the accessibility of full-time social action and are therefore concerned that growth will further exclude disadvantaged people from the benefits of volunteering. Full-time social action often requires young people to have family that live in a city and that can support them financially. For young carers, those coming out of care, people living in rural areas and those facing pressure from parents to 'earn their keep', full-time social action may be out of reach. If they are excluded from participation, they will also be excluded from the perks.
15. Organisations such as City Year UK have made real efforts to ensure their full-time volunteers are from a diverse background. In 2015 – 2016, 27.5% of their volunteers

⁸ <https://blogs.ncvo.org.uk/2017/03/14/ncs-the-lessons-for-youth-social-action-and-where-we-go-from-here/>

⁹ <https://data.ncvo.org.uk/a/almanac17/volunteering-overview/>

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-life-survey-2015-to-2016-statistical-analysis>

¹¹ [http://www.iwill.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/download-manager-files/2016 National Youth Social Action Survey - Headline findings.pdf](http://www.iwill.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/download-manager-files/2016-National-Youth-Social-Action-Survey-Headline-findings.pdf)

¹² <https://nfpsynergy.net/free-report/national-trustee-survey-charts#downloads> and <http://www.grantthornton.co.uk/globalassets/1.-member-firms/united-kingdom/pdf/publication/2016/charity-governance-review-2016.pdf>

were young people eligible for free school meals¹³, above a national average of 14.3%¹⁴. Such figures are encouraging and we would want other programmes to emulate.

16. The review should consult with City Year UK about how they have made this possible. We believe there are additional ways in which full-time volunteering can be made more accessible, such as allowing young people to participate in programmes part-time to allow for other responsibilities, such as paid employment, caring and studying.
- 17. Volunteering is a powerful intervention and can be an effective way of increasing social mobility. However, we know that too often, disadvantaged people miss out from benefits. The review should explore ways to ensure any expansion of full-time social action is accessible to all, so not to further disadvantage certain young people vis-à-vis their more affluent peers.**

Should there be an expansion of full time social action / volunteering opportunities for young people, and do you have any evidence of unmet need or demand?

18. We think there has been too much focus on the supply of volunteering opportunities in recent years. The hugely ambitious targets for engagement set for NCS, which have been substantially revised down this year¹⁵, suggests that expanding provision may not be matched with the expected number of participants. This example should make us question how realistic it is to emulate year of service schemes in France, Germany and the US, which involve hundreds of thousands of young people.¹⁶ Only an estimated 1,000 people currently volunteer full-time in the UK.¹⁷
19. We believe more focus should be on demand for volunteering, ensuring that we are creating opportunities to match how people want to give their time. Regular volunteers give on average 11.6 hours per month and time is the number one barrier to volunteering¹⁸. From the evidence we can see, more flexible opportunities are needed which allow people to combine their volunteering with other, competing priorities in their lives.
20. Full-time social action may not suit every young person. We should consider the broader landscape of opportunities, to ensure there are a diverse range of

¹³ http://www.cityyear.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/CityYearUK_AnnualReport_2015-16.pdf

¹⁴ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/552342/SFR20_2016_Main_Text.pdf

¹⁵ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmpublic/955/955.pdf>

¹⁶ http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/sophie-livingstone/national-service_b_17984282.html

¹⁷ http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/sophie-livingstone/national-service_b_17984282.html

¹⁸ <https://data.ncvo.org.uk/>

opportunities to suit young people from a range of backgrounds, including those who have other responsibilities, such as working, studying or caring. While we must enable those who want to volunteer full-time to do so, we must also focus on making the type of volunteering that 14 million people do every month accessible to everyone.

21. NCVO outlined in our general election manifesto¹⁹ ways to make it easier and more rewarding for people to volunteer. The ideas we put forward focussed on breaking down barriers to volunteering so more people could get involved. Our proposals included:
- Getting more employers to allow time off work for volunteering, including time off for charity trustees.
 - Providing a support fund to address barriers to volunteering for people with disabilities.
 - Strengthening volunteer development and management.
 - Make it easier for unemployed people looking for work to volunteer, by getting rid of red tape and confusion about the rules.
 - Make it easier for people to volunteer in public services.
22. **In growing full-time social action, there should be just as much focus on demand as on supply. Unrealistic targets for participation should not be set and instead, a focus on offering high-quality programmes and adapting programmes to meet the needs of a diverse range of young people should be prioritised.**

If you were to propose up to three things to enable more full time social action / volunteering, what would they be?

23. NCVO believes high-quality and meaningful full-time volunteering opportunities should be available to those that want to do it. However, if we are to enable more full-time volunteering, we must ensure that is accessible.
24. Some have suggested a change in legal status would enable more full-time volunteering and help improve accessibility. Currently, full-time volunteers are classified as NEETs and have no legal status, meaning they are prohibited from receiving certain training, national insurance contributions and payment of stipends when off sick. There is an argument that full-time volunteers should be given a legal status, through making an additional exemption to Section 44 of the National Minimum Wage Act 1998, granting them certain rights.

¹⁹ <https://blogs.ncvo.org.uk/2017/05/04/ncvos-general-election-message-charities-and-volunteering-make-britain-great/>

25. NCVO doesn't see how a new legal status would fundamentally make full-time volunteering more accessible. The core barriers to full-time volunteering are likely to be time commitments and lack of income. These are the barriers that are likely to prevent young people without a support network or with caring responsibilities from taking part. A change in legal status would address neither of these issues. There would also be risks in opening up another expansion to the National Minimum Wage Act, which would require rigorous regulation to prevent exploitation under the exemption.
26. Instead, NCVO believes the panel should prioritise attention on how flexible opportunities can be built around full-time programmes. Young people should be able to participate in programmes part-time, allowing those that need to, the time for other responsibilities - such as paid employment, caring and studying. This would allow more young people to participate in a more structured form of volunteering, and enjoy the benefits it can bring. Introducing a different legal status for those contributing above 16 hours a week, would risk penalising those volunteering under the threshold that want to participate, but through circumstances, cannot. NCVO sees a risk of creating a two-tiered approach to volunteers.
- 27. If we are to enable more social action, we must ensure it is accessible. NCVO understands why there are calls for a new legal status, but are concerned that a new status will not meaningfully reduce barriers and risks creating a two-tiered system of volunteering. Instead, flexible alternatives should be built around any expansion of full-time volunteering.**