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RESEARCH INTO THE NATIONAL CITIZENS SERVICE PILOT (AUTUMN, 2014) IN WALES

March 2016

Executive Summary

1. Research aims and objectives

- 1.1 The National Citizen Service (NCS) is a UK Government-backed initiative that brings together young people aged 15 to 17 from different backgrounds to help them develop greater confidence, self-awareness and responsibility, with a view to creating a more cohesive, responsible and engaged society. It was piloted in Wales in the autumn of 2014. Young people who take part can expect to work in a team of 12 to 15 young people from different backgrounds; face challenging activities which take them out of their comfort zone; live and work with their team during residential weeks, both away from and within their local area; and get involved in their local community.
- 1.2 As part of the process of monitoring the NCS pilot a small-scale evaluation of the NCS pilot was commissioned by the Department for Communities and Tackling Poverty in the Welsh Government. While the experiences and outcomes for participants have been documented by annual evaluations of the UK NCS programme, and some evaluations have included qualitative

evidence from interviews with parents and teachers, the views of stakeholders also involved in the delivery of youth work and volunteering have not hitherto been collected. Given the time and resource constraints of this study and the importance of the Third Sector in Wales in delivering youth services, it was decided that the views of stakeholders were needed to fill the gap in understanding about the delivery and impact of NCS. The views of stakeholders are particularly important in view of the already busy landscape of youth provision in Wales.

- 1.3 The Welsh Government supports a number of its own programmes designed to promote youth engagement and voluntary action in Wales. It was expected that the NCS pilot for Wales was integrated and worked alongside the Welsh Government's programmes where possible.
- 1.4 Semi-structured interviews with 14 stakeholders (12 external stakeholders, 2 internal Welsh Government stakeholders) were undertaken (13 telephone interviews, one face to face interview) in March and early April 2015. A survey of teachers whose students participated in the NCS pilot in Wales was also undertaken as part of this small-scale evaluation. As the original population for the survey was small, the results of the survey are not robust and can only provide a snapshot of the views of those people who have a role in supporting the young people that attended the NCS pilot in Wales. The limitations presented by the resource available for this study and the limited nature of the data available on the actual delivery, participant experiences and views of wider stakeholders such as parents and teachers must be taken into account. Whilst offering some important headline messages, this study does not provide a full account of the Welsh NCS pilot.

2. Key findings

- 2.1 Levels of engagement with and awareness of NCS varied amongst those interviewed on a spectrum from those that had been aware of NCS since early in the process of the discussion of piloting it in Wales to those that had only become aware shortly before or at the time of it's delivery. Levels of awareness of NCS in Wales were particularly low amongst the County Voluntary Councils.

- 2.2 A key theme that emerged around engagement and awareness of the NCS pilot in Wales was a feeling of not being 'sufficiently' engaged. There was a certain amount of disappointment and frustration that after being involved in discussions about the NCS Wales pilot from the beginning the actual engagement with the pilot once it was delivered was limited or non-existent. A clear message was that these organisations very much wanted to be involved in supporting the NCS pilot in Wales in a number of positive ways- be it through recruitment, signposting, getting involved in the community participation element or attending events- but there were limited opportunities to do so. This resulted in frustration that the pilot did not capitalise on the capacity to support a programme like NCS that exists within Wales.
- 2.3 A number of organisations felt that they were not given enough time to engage effectively with the project, however were understanding of the fact that the speed of implementation had been problematic in allowing sufficient cross-Wales engagement to take place.
- 2.4 None of the organisations argued against the basic premise of the National Citizen Service being a 'good idea' and there was considerable positive feeling about the programme's central aims and objectives. Some respondents noted that the NCS programme was successful in creating a 'buzz' and getting young people engaged i.e. the brand is attractive.
- 2.5 A theme that emerged very strongly from the stakeholder interviews was that there is considerable overlap between the NCS programme and what is happening in Wales already. From the outset it was unclear what additionality NCS would offer to the youth work and volunteering landscape in Wales. The Cabinet Office specification noted that the delivery of NCS in Wales would be expected to forge strong links with the Welsh Government programmes including Communities First, GwirVol and the Welsh Baccalaureate, and with public, private and Third Sector organisations in Wales to deliver the desired programme. However, without a clear picture of how NCS would fit into the existing landscape it is uncertain what outcomes for young people would be over and above what may be already achieved by the range of activities in existence. There are a number of points related to this theme:
- The need to recognise the wealth of youth work and volunteering

opportunities that already exist in Wales.

- The risk of complicating an already well established landscape, particularly in relation to offering volunteering opportunities.
- The potential of those organisations in Wales that already exist to deliver any future NCS programme or similar as a co-ordinated effort.
- The concern that funding a programme like NCS would take already stretched funds away from those organisations currently delivering youth work and volunteering opportunities in Wales.
- The need to ensure the delivery of long-term support to young people in Wales.
- The need to ensure that any future programme would have a Wales focus, and effectively address Welsh language delivery.
- The potential overlaps with the Welsh Baccalaureate in Wales.

2.6 Stakeholders were asked whether in their opinion the NCS Pilot achieved its objectives. Most were unable to comment on this aspect as they had limited knowledge of any outcomes, or could only provide anecdotal or second-hand evidence. However, respondents did feel able to comment on whether the NCS Pilot had met the aims of how the pilot should be delivered in Wales, as set out in the original Cabinet Office specification. Most felt that the way the NCS pilot was delivered in Wales did not meet the original criteria set out in the Cabinet Office specification. The key areas of emphasis where there was felt to be discrepancy between intention and outcomes were:

- The active involvement of a number of Communities First Clusters in the development and delivery of NCS in Wales. The NCS pilot in Wales was delivered in Communities First Clusters only as specified, however delivery only occurred in South Wales. The delivery organisation did involve Communities First youth workers in the delivery of the programme in these areas, although did not recruit through Communities First Clusters. Research participants were disappointed that the programme was only delivered in urban areas in South Wales.

- That the social mix of the programme achieved the right balance between ensuring a measurable geographical, economic and social mix of participants. Applicants are asked to consider a mix of urban and rural areas, town and country areas and smaller villages to cover all of Wales. Respondents also had difficulty in identifying how the element of social mixing could have been effectively achieved given the limited geographical scope and the focus on Communities First Clusters. A number felt that only focussing delivery of such programmes on young people in disadvantaged areas meant that the desired social mixing did not happen.
- That applicants should demonstrate a strong working relationship with organisations working with young people in Wales in order to achieve successful recruitment and be able to demonstrate a strong partnership approach, making use of, and working with public, private and Third Sector organisations in Wales to deliver the desired programme. This did not happen in the way envisaged and recruitment happened through schools alone. This was felt to be a big missed opportunity in ensuring a better social mix, ensuring that the programme captured those that didn't already have access to such opportunities, and ensuring that relationships were built with existing organisations in Wales so that the pilot could potentially have a longer-term impact through continued support and sign-posting. Respondents felt that they were not sufficiently engaged in the NCS pilot, some expectations they had were not met and this was a missed opportunity.

2.7 The majority of respondents felt that there was future potential for an NCS like programme in Wales, but this was caveated with a number of concerns:

- Any future scheme should recognise and integrate the youth work already existing in Wales and build on the experience and expertise that can be offered.
- Respondents were concerned about conflicts around funding if already stretched resources were allocated to a 'new' programme.
- Respondents felt that any future NCS like programme should have a

strong Welsh cultural context and adequately incorporate the Welsh language.

- 2.8 There was positive consensus that the organisations interviewed would want to be involved in facilitating any future NCS like programme in a variety of ways.

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