



Curriculum & Assessment Review, NCS Trust



The Curriculum and Assessment Review, announced in July 2024, was established to review and update the current education system in England to ensure it meets the needs of all children and young people. Led by Professor Becky Francis, the review aims to address the challenges and shortcomings in the current curriculum and assessment framework, ensuring it supports high-quality education and equitable outcomes for every student. Overall, it seeks to create a more inclusive, adaptive, and modern education system that better prepares students for the challenges of the 21st century. NCS Trust's submission of evidence to the review is detailed below.

General views on curriculum, assessment, and qualifications pathways

What aspects of the current a) curriculum, b) assessment system and c) qualification pathways should be targeted for improvements to better support and recognise educational progress for children and young people?

To better support and recognise the educational progress of young people, the curriculum should be broadened to include enrichment and non-formal learning experiences.

A broad and balanced curriculum requires timetabled opportunities for non-formal learning and enrichment activities alongside the academic curriculum within the school day. In the current curriculum, enrichment activities are scheduled either during lunchtimes or after school, due to pressures to deliver an extensive national curriculum within a relatively short school day. This means many young people, particularly those experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage, miss out. Barriers such as caring responsibilities, part-time work, hidden costs associated with activities, and inadequate public transport prevent participation.¹

Enrichment has to compete for resources with other parts of the curriculum due to a lack of specific funding and direction from central government. There is no consensus about the purpose of enrichment programmes or the expectations of funders and regulators.² Currently, access to enrichment is distributed unequally, varying by geography and by the socioeconomic status of the young person taking part, with more disadvantaged young people having fewer enrichment opportunities than their peers.³

¹ EPI. 2024. [Access to extra-curricular provision and the association with outcomes](#).

² NCFE and Association and Colleges. 2023. [The Valuing Enrichment Project: emerging findings and recommendations](#).

³ CSJ. 2021. [A level playing field](#)

Polling shows there is appetite among children, parents, and teachers for co-curricular and enrichment activities to be a more integral part of the existing school day.⁴ There is an opportunity for schools to offer a gateway for children and young people to access non-formal learning (NFL) both within the school, as well as connecting them to off-site opportunities. Frameworks, guidance, and benchmarks could effectively support this - including exploring Ofsted's role in further supporting schools to understand what constitutes excellence in non-formal learning.⁵

Enrichment and non-formal learning can support educational progress and drive young people's personal and social development.

Enrichment includes activities that are designed to support a young person's social, personal, and educational development and skills. This includes youth programmes and clubs; adventures away from home and outdoor activities; volunteering and social action; and sports and arts clubs, among others. Enrichment plays a crucial role in supporting educational progress and equipping young people with the essential skills they need for life and work. Enrichment activities boost young people's school enjoyment, and develop essential skills like resilience, independence, teamwork, and confidence – qualities valued by employers and needed in day-to-day life.⁶ In addition to this, incorporating enrichment provides opportunities for schools and colleges to collaborate with stakeholders, employers and partners resulting in new opportunities for partnership work, opportunities to promote equality, diversity and inclusion, and increases visibility within the local community.⁷

Previous initiatives by the Department for Education that have sought to increase opportunities for enrichment such as the 2018-19 Essential Life Skills (ELS) programme achieved significant impact. Across 12 opportunity areas, the provision was designed to promote the development of life skills, such as teamwork and resilience, building on a growing body of evidence that links such skills with improved educational, labour market, and wellbeing outcomes. Providers including schools and a diversity of other organisations delivered a variety of activities to support the development of life skills. Activities included smaller targeted projects, such as adventure, sports, and arts-focussed projects to larger-scale summer camps. For young people, the programme helped to develop a range of valuable life skills, putting them in a better position to progress in education, achieve qualifications, and ultimately succeed in the labour market. The programme also demonstrated that co-curricular provision can promote a range of specific benefits including enhanced confidence, resilience, relationships, and social and emotional intelligence. The programme however identified that external providers sometimes struggled to engage pupils, particularly where they did not have the same relationships with parents/carers as schools did, and noted the importance of partnerships to enable coordination.

^{4/5} NCS Trust and Centre for Education and Youth. 2021. [Enriching Education Recovery](#).

⁶ Social Mobility Commission. 2019. [State of the Nation 2018 - 19: Social Mobility in Great Britain](#)

⁷ Association of Colleges. 2023. [The Valuing Enrichment Project: emerging findings and recommendations](#).

Furthermore, the 2006 Extended Schools Programme, an initiative that aimed to increase opportunities for enrichment, also achieved great impact and outcomes for young people. The programme has provided over £167 million of funding for schools to offer a range of activities beyond the regular school day over the last 17 years. The funding allows those schools serving the most disadvantaged areas to offer a wide range of services and activities outside of the normal school day to help meet the learning and development needs of pupils, their families, and local communities. Activities funded through this programme included breakfast and homework clubs, sports clubs, art clubs, drama, ICT, and programmes for parents and families. The programme has seen positive outcomes for young people with evidence of improved educational achievement, higher attendance, enhanced self-confidence, strengthened relationships, and higher aspirations for the future.⁸

Increased access to opportunities for non-formal learning and enrichment has a positive relationship with academic achievement, particularly for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and marginalised communities.

Numerous studies indicate a positive relationship between disadvantaged young peoples' access to enrichment activities and non-formal learning and their academic achievement⁹. Vulnerable adolescents engaging in quality activities demonstrate increased educational resilience and are more likely to go to university¹⁰, and at-risk students who participate in co-curricular pursuits are more likely to reach reading and numeracy benchmarks.¹¹

Engaging young people in social action activities – such as volunteering and peer-to-peer mentoring – has been shown in multiple studies to have a positive impact on learning. Taking part in NCS experiences is estimated to increase entry rate levels into university for those young people participating by 12%. The impact is even greater for participants from disadvantaged areas, with those attending NCS experiences 50% more likely to go to university than their peers.¹²

Further evidence on the current barriers to participation as a result of socioeconomic disadvantage are provided in response to subsequent questions.



⁸ Department for Education. [Extended Schools Programme](#): January 2024.

⁹ Oberle, E., Ji, X.R., Magee, C., Guhn, M., Schonert-Reich, K.A., & Gadermann, A.M. .2019.. Extracurricular activity profiles and wellbeing during middle childhood: A Population Level Study. PLoS ONE 14(7): e0218488.

¹⁰ Peck, S.C., Roeser, R.W., Zarrett, N., & Eccles, J.S. .2008.. Exploring the Role of Extracurricular Quantity and Quality in the Educational Resilience of Vulnerable Adults. Journal of Social Issues, 64(1).

¹¹ Marchetti, R. 2016. Academic Achievements and Extracurricular School Activities of At-Risk High School Students. Education Research Quarterly, 39(4).

¹² National Citizen Service, Jump Projects, Simetrica. 2017. If you could bottle it: A wellbeing and human capital value for money analysis of the NCS 2015 programme.

Social justice and inclusion

In the current curriculum are there any barriers to improving attainment, progress, access, or participation (class ceilings) for learners experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage?

Despite the noted benefits of enrichment on educational attainment, young people experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage face additional barriers to accessing enrichment opportunities.

High quality enrichment can support academic achievement, increased social mobility and essential skills development, leading to greater life satisfaction, a wage premium, and improved employment outcomes.¹³

However, access to enrichment remains unequal. One in five primary and secondary pupils report that their schools do not offer any enrichment activities in an average week, rising to one in four pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. This is supported by results of a CSJ-YouGov polling exercise, where one in five (19.6%) parents in England reported that their primary or secondary school children do no enrichment activities in an average week, rising to one in four of those in the lowest social grades (C2 and DE).¹⁴

In the state sector, enrichment activities in the curriculum often take place after school or during lunchtimes due to pressures to deliver an extensive national curriculum within a relatively short school day. Many young people, particularly those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds miss out. Barriers such as caring responsibilities, part-time work, hidden costs associated with activities, and inadequate public transport prevent participation.¹⁵ Interim findings from our forthcoming report with the National Foundation for Educational Research on our Enrichment Partnership Pilot (EPP), commissioned by DfE and DCMS, found that it tended to be the same group of students attending school-based enrichment activities and that school staff often don't have the capacity to reach out to pupils that rarely take part.¹⁶

Meanwhile, 80% of private schools have extended their school day to include timetabled enrichment, giving them a significant advantage.¹⁷ Private schools have a 3:1 advantage over state schools in terms of resources per pupil which includes funding for enrichment activities.¹⁸



¹³ Social Mobility Commission. [An unequal playing field: extra-curricular activities, soft skills and social mobility](#): July 2019.

¹⁴ CSJ. 2021. [A level playing field](#).

¹⁵ EPI. 2024. [Access to extra-curricular provision and the association with outcomes](#)

¹⁶ Centre for Education and Youth. Education and Enrichment Report. [forthcoming publication]

¹⁷ The Centre for Social Justice. 2021. [A Level Playing Field](#)

¹⁸ UCL IOE. 2019. [Private benefits? External benefits? Outcomes of private schooling in 21st Century Britain](#)

Access to enrichment and non-formal learning activities also varies by geographical location. For example, in the North East of England, only 9% of young people take part in music classes, compared to 19% of youth nationally – and 22% of youth in the South East.¹⁹ Furthermore, young people living in rural areas participate more in sport and organised activities (such as Scouts and Guides etc.), whereas, in the context of tutorials, dance, and attending religious classes, rates of participation are higher for young people in urban areas.²⁰ This means young people are missing out on experiences that have been shown to prevent violence and antisocial behaviour, improve their mental health and wellbeing, and have a positive impact on their skills for life and work.²¹

In order to ensure equity in enrichment opportunity, we suggest the introduction of an enrichment guarantee, featuring 80 hours timetabled enrichment across the academic year.

There are significant disparities in enrichment provision and participation across the UK. Determining factors include the schools that children and young people attend, the areas they are growing up in, and their socio-economic background. This results in variable costs to schools and parents, and unequal opportunities for young people to access and benefit from enrichment.

An enrichment guarantee would address this disparity, establishing a baseline target of access and variety of enrichment opportunities. These opportunities should be co-created with young people and facilitated by schools and educational settings. This would be enabled by partnerships between local youth sector providers and schools (and/or local youth partnerships and local education partnerships) - with the latter facilitating access for young people (e.g. through providing a space or sharing information), increasing the visibility of what's on offer in the local community.

Timetabled co-curriculum activities ensure that young people at the greatest risk of missing out on opportunities have a reliable way to access enrichment and have been shown to be the most effective at driving participation. **We suggest the introduction of 80 hours of guaranteed enrichment opportunities timetabled across the academic year to ensure all young people have the opportunity to participate in meaningful enrichment and non-formal learning activities** that help build skills and break down barriers to opportunity, ensuring a baseline of access.



^{19/20} Social Mobility Commission. 2019. [An Unequal Playing Field](#)

²¹ NCS Trust and Centre for Education and Youth. 2021. [Enriching Education Recovery](#)

Curriculum and qualification content

Non-formal learning, enrichment and youth provision, such as NCS, support young people to build empathy, connect with others and build the skills they need for study, life, and work. Young people feel that formal education alone does not provide them with the skills they need for life and work.

Young people are too often isolated from those who are different to them - through the demographic of their area or school, but even in the digital realm with social media increasingly reflecting an echo chamber. Non-formal learning and enrichment can provide opportunities for young people to mix with others from diverse and different backgrounds in a structured way. There is significant evidence that this has downstream benefits on a variety of measures to do with social cohesion such as feeling more connected, happier, and having greater life satisfaction.²²

While subjects like Personal, Social, Health, and Economic Education (PSHE) teach young people about the importance of treating others with respect, understanding different perspectives, and building positive relationships, 42% of primary schools and 38% of secondary schools had PSHE education that was graded inadequate by Ofsted.²³ Enrichment and non-formal learning can also positively influence a young person's respect for others and sense of belonging. Numerous studies have identified a positive relationship between the number of NFL activities that a young person participates in and

their sense of belonging^{24/25}, which has in turn been linked to positive mental health outcomes.²⁶

Social mobility is also seen as a key mechanism in driving outcomes associated with social cohesion²⁷ and a range of evidence notes a strong relationship between opportunities for social mobility and more cohesive communities.²⁸ There is significant evidence that increasing opportunities for young people from all backgrounds to develop skills for life and work can be a catalyst for social mobility²⁹ and can also help to address challenges around youth mental health and unemployment.³⁰



²² Ramos, M. R., Li, D., Bennett, M. R., Mogra, U., Massey, D. S., & Hewstone, M. 2024. Variety Is the Spice of Life: Diverse Social Networks Are Associated With Social Cohesion and Well-Being. *Psychological Science*, 35(6), 665-680.

²³ UK Government. [Written Evidence from Ofsted](#): 2014.

²⁴ Allen, K. A., Vella-Brodrick, D., & Waters, L. 2016. Fostering School Belonging in Secondary Schools Using a Socio-Ecological Framework. *Educational and Developmental Psychologist*, 33(1), 97-121.

²⁵ Allen, KA., Gallo Cordoba, B., Ryan, T. 2023. Examining predictors of school belonging using a socio-ecological perspective. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*. 32, 2804-2819.

²⁶ O'Donnell, A. W., Redmond, G., & Gardner A. A., Wang, J & Mooney, A. 2023. Extracurricular Activity Participation, School Belonging, and Depressed Mood: A Test of the Compensation Hypothesis during Adolescence. *Applied Developmental Science* 28 (4): 596-611.

²⁷ NCS Trust. 2020. *Social Cohesion Evidence Review*.

²⁸ LGA. 2019. [Building Cohesive Communities: an LGA Guide](#).

²⁹ The Sutton Trust. 2017. [Social Mobility](#)

³⁰ The Learning and Work Institute and The Prince's Trust. 2022. [The Power of Potential](#)

However, only a third of young people feel like their school is supporting them to develop the skills that they need for life and work and only 36% of young people in secondary school think they understand the skills employers are looking for. Life-skills is noted as the most important area of support that people would like to see outside of formal education (cited by 79% of teachers, 73% of parents, and 68% of children and young people).

Non-formal learning, enrichment, and youth provision such as NCS, can help to break down the barriers to opportunity for young people, equipping them with the essential skills that are often the determining factor to life outcomes. Surveys between 2018-2022 consistently show that over 80% of young people say that NCS gave them a chance to develop skills that will be useful for the future and two in three NCS participants felt more confident about getting a job in the future as a result of participating in an NCS experience. Two years after doing NCS, participants were still ahead of peers on key work skills like teamwork, communication, and leadership.

There is also significant evidence that participation in NCS results in young people feeling more positive about others, feeling more confident in meeting new people, and having a greater recognition and respect of people from other backgrounds. NCS has a strong positive impact on young people's sense of responsibility towards their local community and encourages democratic engagement. Young people who started NCS with the lowest reported levels of positive interactions with other ethnic groups, or who faced

the greatest barriers to social integration have been found to have shown the greatest improvement - becoming 19.4% more likely to report positive social contact after participating in NCS.

The government could better support young people through a co-curriculum approach to enrichment alongside a wider policy platform to increase access to high quality enrichment opportunities.

As noted above, enrichment activities play a crucial role in equipping young people with the essential skills they need for life and work⁴⁰ and supporting young people to positively engage with others and their community. As such, enrichment needs to be viewed as an integral part of a young person's development and educational journey.



³¹ NCS and Duke of Edinburgh. 2021. Enriching Education Recovery: Summary of new polling with children and young people, parents and teachers.

³² Seymour, W. Craig, R. 2023. *Essential Skills Tracker. Skillsbuilder Partnership.*

³³ NCS. 2024. [Annual Business Plan.](#)

³⁴ Kantar and London Economics for DCMS. 202. [National Citizen Service 2019 Summer Evaluation: Main Report.](#)

³⁵ Ipsos MORI. 2017. National Citizen Service 2013 Evaluation – Two Years On: Main Report

³⁶ Jump x Mime. 2020. [In the Mix](#)

³⁷ NCS. 2022. Impact and Evaluation. A large majority (80%) of young people reported feeling more confident in meeting new people and feeling more positive about diversity.

³⁸ Kantar. 2017. National Citizen Service Evaluation & Kantar. 2020. Exploratory Wave Analysis

³⁹ Laurence, J. 2018. [Meeting Mixing Mending - How NCS Impacts Young People's social integration](#)

⁴⁰ Social Mobility Commission. 2019. [State of the Nation 2018 - 19: Social Mobility in Great Britain.](#)

International examples demonstrate how opportunities for enrichment are embedded into the curriculum, and have positive outcomes for young people.

- In Finland, the National Core Curriculum emphasises skills such as thinking and learning to learn, cultural competence, interaction, and self-expression aiming to enhance pupil participation, meaningful learning, and personal responsibility.⁴¹ Finland consistently ranks among the top countries in international assessments like the PISA (Program for International Student Assessment).⁴²
- Singapore's Gifted Education Programme (GEP) focuses on enrichment. The curriculum extends beyond the basic syllabus in breadth and depth, emphasising thinking skills, inquiry-based learning, and social-emotional development.⁴³
- In Australia, the curriculum emphasises holistic development and includes skills such as critical and creative thinking, personal and social capability, and intercultural understanding. The curriculum is designed to be flexible, allowing teachers to personalise learning and respond to student needs.⁴⁴

In order to ensure equality in access through the co-curriculum, we suggest the introduction of an enrichment guarantee featuring 80 hours timetabled enrichment across the academic year, supported by an enrichment framework.

As noted above, there are significant disparities in enrichment provision and participation across the UK. Determining factors include the schools that children and young people attend, the areas they are growing up in and their socio-economic background. This results in variable costs⁴⁵ to schools and parents, and unequal opportunities for young people to access and benefit from enrichment.

An enrichment guarantee would address this disparity, establishing a baseline target of access and variety of enrichment opportunities that is co-created with young people and facilitated by schools and educational settings. This would be enabled by partnerships between local youth sector providers and schools (and/or local youth partnerships and local education partnerships) - with the latter facilitating access for young people (e.g. through providing a space or sharing information), increasing the visibility of what's on offer in the local community.



⁴¹ Finnish National Agency for Education. [National core curriculum for primary and lower secondary \(basic\) education.](#)

⁴² World Economic Forum. 2016. [Finland has one of the world's best education systems. Here's how it compares to the US.](#)

⁴³ Ministry of Education Singapore. [Gifted Education Programme Enrichment Model.](#)

⁴⁴ Australian Government Department for Education. [Australian Curriculum.](#)

⁴⁵ See p12, Department for Education. 2021. [COVID-19 School Snapshot Panel.](#) Findings from the April survey.

Timetabled co-curriculum activities ensure that young people at the greatest risk of missing out on opportunities have a reliable way to access enrichment and has been shown to be the most effective at driving participation⁴⁶. **We suggest the introduction of a guarantee of 80 hours of enrichment opportunities across the academic year to ensure all young people have the opportunity to participate in enrichment and non-formal learning activities** that help build skills and break down barriers to opportunity, ensuring a baseline of access.

A baseline of 80 hours provides the necessary time to deliver roughly two hours per week across the academic year, and represents a balance between ensuring meaningful access to enrichment and maintaining flexibility within the school timetable. Currently, one in five young people do zero hours of enrichment in an average week, and just over half of young people take part in between one to four hours.⁴⁷ 80 hours (or two hours a week) offers an attainable target whilst making sure those missing out are more on par with their peers.

We believe that schools and colleges are best placed to determine how these 80 hours are delivered (e.g. through weekly sessions or dedicated enrichment days across a school year). The Department for Media, Culture and Sport's (DCMS) Youth Survey Pilot shows that schools and colleges play a key role in facilitating access to enrichment opportunities.⁴⁸ However, to raise awareness, quality, and diversity of enrichment offers, high-quality enrichment opportunities should be co-created with young people and facilitated by enrichment leads at schools and colleges in partnership with the voluntary sector – interim findings from our Enrichment Partnership

Pilot (EPP) found that 95% of schools would like to find out more information about working with local enrichment providers.⁴⁹ The study also found that when schools had a dedicated enrichment lead, it was felt there was more capacity to deliver and organise high-quality enrichment. Where partners are involved, trained youth workers could help deliver enrichment activities if the school is unable to resource adequate staff. Enrichment opportunities should be a broad and balanced range of offers that reflect young people's needs.

To ensure equity in access to high quality enrichment opportunities within this guarantee, **we suggest the introduction of an enrichment framework**. The purpose of this enrichment framework would be to:

- To support the education sector's knowledge and ability in facilitating a high quality enrichment offer, including through partnerships with others and to match Ofsted's expectations on enrichment offers.
- To provide a centralised view of best practice around enrichment.
- To provide a potential accountability framework for schools, colleges and Ofsted to offer a clear framework on what a high quality enrichment offer looks like.

It is envisioned that the framework would emulate similar existing benchmarks for schools such as the Gatsby Benchmarks for careers education, and be used in the same way the Gatsby Benchmarks are used in Ofsted school inspections. It will also build on existing sector guidance such as the Skills Builder Framework, NCS and DofE frameworks, and other statutory guidance for schools, colleges, and youth provision.

⁴⁶ UK Onward. 2022. [Beyond School](#).

⁴⁷ The Centre for Social Justice. 2021. [A Level Playing Field](#).

⁴⁸ DCMS. [Youth Survey Pilot Report](#); November 2024.

⁴⁹ NCS and Duke of Edinburgh. 2021. [Enriching Education Recovery: Summary of new polling with children and young people, parents and teachers](#).

A broad and balanced curriculum

To what extent do the current secondary curriculum and qualifications pathways support pupils to study a broad and balanced curriculum? Should anything change to better support this?

Opportunities for enrichment are key to delivering a broad and rich curriculum that provides young people with a range of opportunities to learn and develop the skills they need to progress in life and work.

Enrichment activities provide an alternative way for young people to develop skills, embed classroom learning, and experience the world around them.

Enrichment activities boost young people's school enjoyment, and develop essential skills like resilience, independence, teamwork, and confidence – qualities valued by employers and needed in day-to-day life. Enrichment activities are often undervalued, yet they are crucial for young people to discover new talents and develop essential skills. Rather than being seen as an “add on” or “extracurricular”, enrichment should be viewed as an integral part of a young person's development and educational journey.

An enrichment guarantee featuring 80 hours timetabled enrichment across the academic year would help create a more broad and balanced curriculum, provide young people with a diverse range of experiences and support them to be ready for life and work.

Greater access to high quality enrichment should be partly achieved through **long term investment in local infrastructure for collaboration and coordination between schools and youth providers.**

This work should be supported by the **development of an enrichment framework** to provide centralised benchmarks on high quality provision.

However there also needs to be a recognition of the challenges currently facing education providers. Our Enrichment Partnership work is currently exploring how improved coordination and partnerships can lead to more opportunities for young people without placing an additional burden on teachers.

A broad and balanced curriculum requires an approach that continues the mission to drive up standards in English and maths whilst also creating opportunities for young people to engage in opportunities to build their life skills, engage in creativity, and to support their wellbeing through enrichment activities.

However, in order to deliver the current extensive national curriculum within a relatively short school day, enrichment activities are often required to take place after school or during lunchtimes. As noted above, this creates additional barriers for some young people in accessing these opportunities. Only 31% of state schools have stated that school staff have the time and capacity to deliver high-quality and diverse enrichment activities, whilst 89% would like to work with more local enrichment providers in the future.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ ibid.

Long-term investment in local infrastructure for collaboration and coordination between schools and youth providers is required in order to create a sustainable and reliable high quality enrichment offer for all young people.

Schools and colleges are often not fully aware of the range of youth provision available in a local area, and rely on word-of-mouth or ad-hoc connections to groups and clubs that are already known. This misses an opportunity to facilitate learners' access to a wider range of opportunities. Similarly, youth and enrichment providers can struggle to reach young people who would benefit from their interventions and don't have the relationships with, or access to, schools that could play a crucial role in both these areas.

In response to this challenge, the Enrichment Partnership Pilot (EPP) was established by DfE and DCMS through HM Treasury's Shared Outcomes Fund, and is delivered by NCS and DofE. The pilot aims to facilitate greater access to enrichment without placing an additional burden on teachers. The EPP explores how improved coordination and partnerships across schools and the voluntary sector might lead to better quality and increased uptake of local enrichment activities without placing an additional burden (cost/resources) on schools. High-quality enrichment opportunities are co-created with young people and facilitated

by enrichment leads at schools and colleges in partnership with local youth sector partners so that schools are able to offer a diverse array of enrichment activities that reflect the diversity of youth provision within the local area. In cases where schools are struggling to staff enrichment activities, trained youth workers can deliver high-quality enrichment activities for young people in a school setting.

The EPP aims to improve the availability and quality of enrichment activities in up to 200 secondary schools within Education Investment Areas in the North East, the North West and the East of England. The pilot is led by a local enrichment coordinator, who will work with up to ten schools plus other organisations, businesses, and the council in their area, to build a menu of a wide range of locally-relevant opportunities, from sports and arts to volunteering and outdoor experiences.

Our ambition is for the EPP model to be a scalable, sustainable, national model which supports high-quality enrichment provision in schools for all young people. An 18-month extension to the EPP would provide time to further test and learn from the pilot, and enable delivery to run for a full academic year. This would also allow for the development of evidence based recommendations to inform a future three year scale up.



Qualification pathways 16-19

Are there additional skills, subjects, or experiences that all learners should develop or study during 16-19 education, regardless of their chosen programmes and qualifications, to support them to be prepared for life and work?

The youth sector is able to support the government's ambition of widening access to work experience for all young people to ensure that they are equipped with the skills for work.

Work experience is an important step for young people to build confidence, essential skills, and insight into the world of work. It can also provide opportunities for young people to build a professional network and support them to make clearer career decisions. Work experience is noted as the most significant indicator that a young person will not become not in education, employment or training (NEET),⁵¹ however access to meaningful work experience varies due to factors such as school type, family social class, where you live, and other socioeconomic factors.⁵²

Providing all young people with the opportunity to take part in two weeks worth of high-quality work experience can therefore play a significant role in ensuring that all young people are equipped with the skills for work. In practice however, there is a risk that this creates significant challenges for schools and employers to dedicate the time and resources required to organise and deliver high-quality work placements.

While enrichment, social action, and volunteering shouldn't be seen as a replacement of work placements, they support young people to develop work-relevant skills. For example, regular volunteering or taking part in a social action project provides opportunities to develop essential work-related skills such as time-keeping, personal organisation, communication, and teamwork.

We suggest that the government adopt a broader definition of work experience to recognise the value of enrichment, social action, and volunteering in developing essential skills. Non-formal learning and enrichment activities provide an additional experience, which, when delivered in tandem with traditional work placements, can facilitate a young person's discovery of new skills and the development of other essential skills (such as confidence, communication, teamworking, leadership, and problem solving) in a non-formal setting. Broadening the definition of work experience through collaboration with the youth sector would not only benefit young people, but also help alleviate some of the burden from over-stretched state schools, colleges, and employers.

Non-formal learning and enrichment activities develop skills including confidence, communication, team working, leadership, and problem solving among others. According to NFER, YouGov and Ipsos MORI surveys, 97% of teachers, 94% of employers, and 88% of young people agree that life skills (confidence, communication, motivation, and resilience) are as important, or even more important than, academic qualifications to young pupils' success.⁵³

Enrichment and non-formal learning creates opportunities to break down the barriers to civic participation and improved democratic education within the national curriculum would better support young people to vote.

⁵¹ Groundwork. 2018. [Tackling Youth Unemployment](#)

⁵² Speakers for Schools. 2022. [Work Experience For All](#)

⁵³ Sutton Trust. 2017. [Life Skills: Improving Essential Life Skills for Young People](#)

Young people between the ages of 18-24 are less likely to be registered to vote than any other age group. Young people are also less likely to turnout and vote - in the 2024 General Election, constituencies where a large proportion of the local population were older had a considerably higher turnout rate than those where the local population was younger.⁵⁴ Yet young people have an appetite to engage in civic life and vote if better supported - 69% of secondary school students in England would vote at 16 if given the opportunity, if introduced alongside a comprehensive and balanced political education within the curriculum.⁵⁵

Our own surveys with young people at NCS Trust have found a similar result.⁵⁶ Two out of three (66%) young people surveyed said they would vote in the next general election if given the right to vote, but just under two fifths (37%) felt they were well prepared to vote, and only half (51%) knew how to register to vote.⁵⁷

We suggest that the curriculum at 16-19 should include timetabled enrichment and non-formal learning opportunities alongside citizenship education to promote civic participation.

In the DCMS Youth Survey Pilot, participation in clubs and activities outside of the curriculum was lowest among 16-19-year olds.⁵⁸ Everyday at NCS Trust we see first hand how young people take the initiative to bring communities together and create positive change through the experiences that we deliver. We recognise that in communities where young people feel secure and connected and can face the future with confidence, communities can thrive, opportunities are created, and local economies can prosper.

Participation in enrichment and non-formal learning offers an opportunity to tap into this enthusiasm from young people's interest in civic engagement, political literacy, democratic engagement, and interest in participating in social action. For example, NCS experiences support young people's civic participation and political literacy in a range of activities. For example:

- Our partnership with Shout Out UK is delivering political literacy "hackathon" events in regions where we saw far-right violence this summer, to better support social cohesion.
- NCS Trust has facilitated a Youth Symposium in the North-East region bringing together young people and local decision-makers to engage in productive dialogue.
- Prior to the 2024 General Election, NCS Trust convened the BackYouth Election Cafe event to create dialogue between 100 young people and key decision-makers.

⁵⁴ IPPR. [Half of us: Turnout patterns at the 2024 general election](#). July 2024.

⁵⁵ Votes for Schools. [Should everyone be able to vote at 16?](#) November 2022.

^{56/57} Savanta & NCS Trust. 2000 Young Minds Survey. [unpublished]

⁵⁸ DCMS. [Youth Survey Pilot Report](#). November 2024.

Final Section: Any other views

Do you have any further views on anything else associated with the Curriculum and Assessment Review not covered in the questions throughout the call for evidence?

To ensure enrichment opportunities are accessible and high-quality in order to deliver positive outcomes for all young people, we would like to underline these four key policy proposals that have been weaved throughout our submission.

1. An enrichment guarantee featuring 80 hours timetabled enrichment

across the academic year to ensure that young people at the greatest risk of missing out have a reliable way to access enrichment opportunities.

How does this benefit young people, the youth and education sectors, and the government?

- Guaranteed access to high-quality enrichment would help young people experience the benefits of enrichment. Including skills development, improved wellbeing and physical health, increased civic engagement, positive employability outcomes, the enjoyment of the activity itself, and the opportunity to develop new and lasting friendships.^{59 60}
- This actively supports the government to deliver its missions. It breaks down barriers to opportunity by helping young people feel ready for work and life, and reduces strain on the NHS by preventing demand through proactively supporting young people's mental and physical health.
- It ensures more stable demand and ways of working for youth sector provision, helping the long term sustainability of youth services, and enabling growth and innovation.

2. The development of an enrichment framework to provide standardised guidance on what a high quality enrichment offer looks like.

How does this benefit young people, the youth and education sectors, and the government?

- The framework would improve the education sector's knowledge, ability, and accountability in facilitating high-quality enrichment. It will provide a centralised way of understanding and determining high-quality enrichment, what school structures and resources are necessary, and guidance on how to implement the enrichment guarantee.
- Standardised guidance would support Ofsted inspections and provide clear markers to evaluate against. It would also help schools and colleges to quality assure and evaluate their own enrichment activities. This would result in a more consistent and high quality enrichment offer nationally for young people.



⁵⁹ <https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/EC-and-outcomes-final-1.pdf>

⁶⁰ Youth provision and life outcomes https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65ce4180e1bdec0011322215/Literature_Review_-_Report_-_Youth_Evidence_Base-accessible.pdf

3. A broadening of work experience to recognise the value of enrichment, social action, and volunteering

in developing essential skills to alleviate some of the burden from over-stretched schools, colleges, and employers.

How does this benefit young people, the youth and education sectors, and the government?

- For the government, broadening work experience would help in delivering its commitment of two-weeks work experience for every young person.
- For the education sector, diversifying the work experience offer would help alleviate some of the resource burden from over-stretched schools and colleges, and provide more flexibility to deliver work experience.
- For young people, this approach ensures that all young people, regardless of their background or family networks, have access to a wider range of meaningful experiences, helping them build essential skills and broaden their career horizons.



4. Long-term investment in local infrastructure for collaboration and coordination between schools and youth providers, in order to create a sustainable and reliable high quality enrichment offer for all young people.

How does this benefit young people, the youth and education sectors, and the government?

- Evidence of what works to deliver a successful enrichment partnership between the education and youth sector will be collated so that best practice can be scaled up to ensure that every young person can access high-quality enrichment opportunities at school.
- Young people will benefit from a more diverse and high-quality enrichment offer that is rooted in their local community.
- Enrichment partnerships will help break down barriers to opportunity as schools will be able to deliver high quality enrichment opportunities that are more accessible to young people.
- The education sector will benefit as it reduces the burden of delivering diverse and high-quality enrichment opportunities when the sector is already financially squeezed and has limited staffing resources. Where this is the case, trained youth workers can deliver high-quality enrichment activities for young people in schools.

About NCS

NCS Trust is the only dedicated public body for youth, with a focus on driving social cohesion outcomes for young people. We work closely with the government to shape their ambition for young people. Our vision is 'a country of connected, confident, and caring citizens where everyone feels at home'.

NCS has provided over 1,000,000 experiences for young people, and more than 18 million hours of volunteering and social action have been completed.

Through a portfolio of away from home, local community, and online experiences, NCS offers a range of experiences to young people that support them to grow their strengths and realise their potential to become exactly who they want to be — through boosting their confidence, getting involved in social and community action, making new friends from diverse backgrounds, and developing essential skills to become world and work ready.

Taking part in NCS experiences at pivotal moments in their lives supports a generation of young people to seize opportunities and face the future with confidence, have an appreciation and understanding of different views and perspectives, and be more actively engaged in civic life.

We believe that these are the ingredients of a more socially cohesive society.

NCS recognises that young people are living in a rapidly changing and increasingly divided society, and require additional support to participate, overcome barriers, and build meaningful connections with each other and their communities. In response to this, our mission is to develop young people's connection, confidence, capability, and citizenship, and every day we see how young people embrace opportunities to come together and develop greater respect for each other.

- **Connecting young people:** After participating in NCS, young people feel more positive about others,⁶¹ feel more confident in meeting new people,⁶² have a greater recognition and respect of people from other backgrounds,⁶³ and have reported having positive experiences with someone of a different race or ethnicity.⁶⁴ Young people who started NCS with the lowest reported levels of positive interactions with other ethnic groups, or who faced the greatest barriers to social integration have been found to have shown the greatest improvement - becoming 19.4% more likely to report positive social contact after participating in NCS.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Jump x Mime. 2020. [In the Mix](#)

⁶² NCS. 2022. Impact and Evaluation. A large majority (80%) of young people reported feeling more confident in meeting new people and feeling more positive about diversity.

^{63/64} Kantar. 2017. National Citizen Service Evaluation & Kantar. 2020. Exploratory Wave Analysis

⁶⁵ Laurence, J. 2018. [Meeting Mixing Mending - How NCS Impacts Young People's social integration](#)

- Building young people’s capability so they are able to achieve their potential:** After taking part in NCS, 67% of young people stated that they now feel more confident about getting a job in the future and 67% felt more optimistic about the future. 84% of participants agreed they got a chance to develop skills that will be useful to them in the future, particularly teamwork (87%), speaking (64%), and problem-solving (60%).⁶⁶ Two years after doing NCS, participants were still ahead of peers on key work skills like teamwork, communication, and leadership.⁶⁷ In the long-term, the entry rates for NCS graduates into higher education were, on average, 12% higher than for non-NCS graduates, and are significantly higher for those living in poorer areas.⁶⁸
- Encouraging civic participation and promoting citizenship:** NCS has a substantial positive effect on young people’s political participation, increasing young people’s participation in politics by up to 12%. The impact on petition signing and protest also saw a positive impact of 13% and 63% respectively.⁶⁹ After taking part in NCS, young people are more likely to be democratically active, engaged in volunteering, and have higher levels of trust in others than those that have not taken part. Young people have given over 18 million hours in community-based volunteering and social action through NCS, and almost two-thirds of young people say that they will continue volunteering after the programme ends.
- Building confidence and wellbeing:** Independent evaluations have shown that NCS has a positive impact on participants’ wellbeing. There is evidence of improvements in life satisfaction, happiness and anxiety levels, and can show a social return on investment with every £1 spent generating an estimated economic ‘wellbeing’ benefit of £3.05.⁷⁰ 74% of young people have said that they saw there were more opportunities available to them as a result of participating in NCS⁷¹ and reported improvements in life satisfaction and on their ability to bounce back from stress.⁷²



⁶⁶ NCS Trust (2021) Summer 2021 Evaluation

⁶⁷ Ipsos MORI (2017) National Citizen Service 2013 Evaluation – Two Years On: Main Report

⁶⁸ Jump Projects LTD and Simerica (2017) [A wellbeing and human capital value for money analysis of the NCS 2015 programme.](#)

⁶⁹ BIT. 2021. [Getting young people into politics.](#)

^{70/71} NCS Trust 2021. Summer Evaluation 2021.

⁷² NCS Trust. 2022. Summer 22 Impact Evaluation