

Policy paper

Social Action

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Social action is about people coming together to help improve their lives and solve the problems that are important in their communities. It can include volunteering, giving money, community action or simple neighbourly acts.

Through the commitment and skill of citizens, social action can empower communities, help people in need, and complement public services. Taking part in social action is also associated with higher levels of wellbeing, and

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can improve people's confidence and skills.

This video by [Nesta](#)  explains how social action can help people across the UK.

The government has set out its ambition for a bigger and stronger society, a world where people ask what they can do for their community not only what their community can do for them.

Our work to encourage social action includes:

- supporting high impact projects to grow
- empowering communities to respond to issues that matter to them
- backing employer-supported volunteering
- supporting giving
- encouraging more young people to take part in social action
- recognising and rewarding outstanding contributions

1.

Supporting high impact projects to grow

The Centre for Social Action aims to identify and accelerate the development and spread of high impact social action initiatives that complement public services and improve social outcomes.

On 1 December 2015, the Minister for Civil Society Rob Wilson MP, spoke on the future of the Centre for Social Action:

“ We'll be investing £15 million in a new phase in the Centre for Social Action, taking the ideas that can make a difference, and enabling them to grow and become routine in our public services and communities.”



Since 2013, the [Cabinet Office](#) has invested more than £36 million in the Centre for Social Action. This has supported 215 social action models involving over 2 million people, and focused on key themes such as health, ageing and care, community action, rehabilitation, supporting young people to achieve their potential and social mobility.

The centre has also leveraged additional investment of around £31 million from partners, including other government departments and Nesta.

We will set out more detail on the areas in which the centre will be investing in this Parliament in due course. For further information, read the discussion paper [Social Action: Harnessing the Potential](#).

2.

Empowering communities to respond on issues that matter to them

Community action is about people taking action on the issues that matter to them.

The government has already recruited over 6,500 community organisers, who are listening to their communities and bringing people together to act on the things that matter most to their communities.

Community organisers have put in more than 500,000 hours and have mobilised more than 21,000 people. By the end of this Parliament the government will extend the number of community organisers to 10,000.

The government has also set up a new fund for community organisers through a partnership between [Department of Communities and Local Government](#) and Cabinet Office.

The [Community Organisers Mobilisation Fund](#), worth over half a million pounds, is supporting community organisers working in communities who want to shape their neighbourhoods using community rights and neighbourhood planning.

On 1 December 2015, Minister for Civil Society Rob Wilson MP spoke about community organisers :

“ We know that when community organisers are at work, people have a stronger sense of belonging to their neighbourhood, they feel more valued, they become more likely to team up and improve their area.”

3.

Backing employer-supported volunteering

Employer-supported volunteering can help build stronger communities and a stronger economy, by helping charities and community groups do more, and by helping to create a more motivated and productive workforce.

Volunteering is also linked with higher levels of wellbeing too.

Many employers already have impressive volunteering schemes. Our aim is to allow more employees to give their time to help others.

Many employers already have impressive volunteering schemes. Our aim is to allow more employees to give their time to help others. The government has set out plans for a new workplace entitlement to 3 days a year of volunteering leave, on full pay, for employees in large companies and the public sector. The government will be setting out plans for taking this policy forward in due course, and the Civil Service has led the way in supporting its employees to volunteer.

Cross-sector volunteering can also make a real difference to charities and businesses, particularly where activity focuses on sharing professional skills. Therefore the government is running a Skills Exchange Project.

Its vision is to build and strengthen communities, enhance individual wellbeing and support economic growth through cross-sector volunteering.

The aim of the project is to:



- raise awareness of the power of skilled volunteering and the benefits to business and charities
- engage and mobilise a network of charities, businesses and infrastructure organisations sharing insights and testimonials
- facilitate sharing of best practice from volunteering support services and supporting the development of local networks and relationships

To deliver these aims the skills exchange project has a number of activity strands including:

- skills exchange ambassadors to support us to raise awareness of the benefits of skilled volunteering and what it takes
- regional networking events, led by the universities of Sheffield and Hull, to bring together key organisations to share and debate solutions for

increasing employer-supported volunteering

- employer volunteering research to explore ways we can pool existing knowledge to support organisations to begin their volunteering journey

To find out more, or to be kept up-to-date on the progress of the project, join the [LinkedIn](#)  or [Facebook](#)  groups.

4.

Supporting giving

We are committed to making it as easy and compelling as possible for people to give and to help civil society organisations to access the tools, training and moments they need to harness social action.

Major campaigns

The government supports major social action campaigns that encourage and celebrate social action, such as [Remember A Charity in your Will Week](#) and as a founding partner of [#GivingTuesday](#), the global day of giving.

Incentives

The government offers incentives to encourage people to get involved in social action. Examples include offering £125,000 in match funding for the [Grow Your Tenner](#) and #GiveMe5 fundraising campaigns, and [contributing £100k to ITV's Text Santa appeal](#) to incentivise people to donate or search for volunteering opportunities.

When you donate to charity or to community amateur sports clubs (CASCs) the government also offers [tax relief](#). How this works depends on whether you donate:

- through [Gift Aid](#)
- straight from your [wages or pension](#) through a Payroll Giving scheme


- [land, property or shares](#)
- [in your will](#)

The government also provides a top-up on small cash donations to charity through the [Gift Aid Small Donations Scheme](#).

Fundraising Training

The government funds the [Small Charities Fundraising Training Programme](#). Through this programme, worth over £100,000, the Cabinet Office appointed the Foundation for Social Improvement, in partnership with the Small Charities Coalition and GlobalGiving UK, as training providers to help charities with an annual income of up to £1 million to fundraise more effectively.

Do-it

The government has supported the [Do-it](#)  platform, a national volunteering database that makes it easier to find local volunteering opportunities.

In the last 2 years Do-it has undergone a radical transformation, making it easier for the public to navigate the platform, and to make it possible for any charity or community group to directly recruit volunteers through the site for the first time.

Better regulation

The government is supporting charities to establish a stronger self-regulator for fundraising activities that will ensure the public is never unduly pressured into giving their hard earned money. The new fundraising regulator will have a range of sanctions for those who fail to comply with the code of practice, thereby ensuring consistently high standards in fundraising.

This commitment to better regulation will help charities regain trust and enable the public to give with confidence.


5.

Encouraging more young people to take part in social action

The government aims to ensure:


1. all young people have the skills and opportunities they need to fulfill their potential, regardless of their backgrounds or life circumstances
2. high quality social action opportunities are available for young people to build their skills and networks outside of school and enable young people to give back to their communities

Step Up To Serve

The Cabinet Office continues to support Step Up To Serve's [#iwill](#)  campaign which aims to increase, by 50%, the number of young people aged 10 to 20 taking part in youth social action by 2020.

Over 500 organisations from a range of sectors have pledged to support the #iwill campaign.

The Cabinet Office has pledged to:

- continue to support the #iwill campaign by working to ensure young people from all backgrounds have the opportunity to engage in meaningful youth social action opportunities
- position youth social action principles at the heart of the Cabinet Office to empower young people
- share our evidence and best practice from the programmes we deliver with the youth sector
- recognise and celebrate volunteers, including young people aged 10 to 20, through the Prime Minister's [Points of Light award](#) 
- support young people's access to public service mutuals and the opportunities they provide to advance youth social action

- continue investing in youth social action. Cabinet Office has invested £1 million to support the development of youth social action opportunities based on the 2014 Youth social action survey, through the national and local youth social action fund



The Scouts Association funded through the Uniformed Youth Social Action Fund

The Cabinet Office is supporting the campaign by providing more opportunities to get involved in youth social action through a variety of funds:

- In 2014, £10 million was provided to create the [uniformed youth social action fund](#). This funding is awarded to uniformed youth groups through the Youth United Foundation. Over the two years, 20,000 places have been created enabling thousands of young people living in disadvantaged areas, or from hard to reach communities, to get involved in social action by joining uniformed youth organisations
- The £1.2 million [National Youth Social Action Fund](#), in partnership with Pears Foundation, has awarded nine organisations funding to grow youth social action opportunities for young people from rural areas

and/or from lower socio-economic backgrounds across England

- Alongside the national fund a £510,000 Local Youth Social Action Fund was created in partnership with UK Community Foundations, working with young people in Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire Community Foundations, to create opportunities for people living in rural areas and/or from a lower socio-economic background

National Citizen Service

National Citizen Service (NCS) is a unique 3 to 4 week programme aimed at 15 to 17 year olds across England and Northern Ireland.



National Citizen Service participants taking part in their social action project

National Citizen Service participants undertake a series of phases:

1. The adventure phase allows young people to experience a range of exciting outdoor activities, from hiking to canoeing. This phase works to challenge participants and build their confidence, leadership and

teamwork skills



2. In the skills phase young people live in university-style accommodation, meet organisations and important people from their community and learn new skills for work, education and life
3. In the social action phase young people give back to their local communities through developing and delivering their own social action project. They go through the whole process in groups made up of a mix of other young people

Since NCS began, over 200,000 young people have taken part in this experience. NCS is creating more confident, capable and engaged young people.

Independent evaluations have demonstrated that young people become more confident about getting a job and feel more positive towards people from different backgrounds as a result of NCS.

The NCS Trust, who are responsible for the delivery of NCS, estimate that NCS participants have dedicated 8 million hours of volunteering to their local communities.

The government has committed over £1 billion to expand the programme to cover 60% of all 16 year olds by 2021.

Read the National Citizen Service 2014 [evaluation](#)  or visit the National Citizen Service [website](#) .

Youth Voice

The government is committed to giving young people the power and opportunity to play a real part in their community by promoting engagement, advocacy and consultation at both national and local level.

Towards this, the Cabinet Office supports the [British Youth Council](#) (BYC) through a grant agreement to deliver UK Youth Parliament and associated youth voice activities including the Make Your Mark ballot and the Youth Select Committee.




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The Cabinet Office has committed to grant-fund BYC to deliver these activities until the end of the Parliament.

The impact of Youth Social Action

The government is helping to build a robust evidence base of the impact of youth social action on young people and their communities.


In 2016, the [Behavioural Insights Team](#)  published the final evaluation of the Cabinet Office youth social action fund.

The evaluation provides robust evidence that young people who take part in

social action initiatives develop some of the most critical skills for employment and adulthood in the process.

Though the 3 programmes evaluated were each different in their approach, they consistently improved young people's levels of empathy, and their sense of community involvement. Some programmes also increased students' cooperation and levels of grit.

In addition, in one of the trials, the Behavioural Insights Team conducted a mock interview task with several participants and found that those who took part in social action were 10% more likely to be successful at a job interview than those who did not partake.

Read the Behavioural Insights Team [report](#) .

In 2014 and 2015, on behalf of the Cabinet Office and Step Up To Serve, Ipsos MORI surveyed a nationally representative sample of 10 to 20 year olds to further our understanding of youth social action participation in the UK.

The key findings from the 2015 report are:

- 42% of 10 to 20 year olds took part in meaningful social action in the past 12 months, with almost a quarter (23%) participating in social action at least once a month
- 70% of young people are likely to take part in social action in the future
- 93% of young people who have participated in social action recognise the personal benefit and benefit to others (double benefit) of taking part

Read the [Youth Social Action Survey 2015](#)  report.

Recognising and rewarding outstanding

6.

contributions

Points of Light

The daily [Points of Light](#) award recognises outstanding individual volunteers – people who are making a change in their community.

It was developed in partnership with the successful Points of Light programme in the United States, established by President George H W Bush, which has recognised over 5,000 individuals and has the support of President Barack Obama.

Big Society Awards


The [Big Society Awards](#) have been created to recognise and celebrate groups or organisations doing exceptional work in their community, going above and beyond to make things better for others.

The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service

The [Queen's Award for Voluntary Service](#) is the highest award given to local volunteer groups across the UK to recognise outstanding work done in their own communities.

The award was created in 2002 to celebrate the anniversary of The Queen's coronation and it is equivalent to an MBE for volunteer groups.

Any group doing volunteer work that provides a social, economic or environmental service to the local community can be nominated for the award. Each group is assessed on the benefit it brings to the local community and its standing within that community.

To find out more about the nomination criteria and to make a nomination, please visit the [Queen's Award for Voluntary Service nomination page](#) .

Honours

The [honours](#) system recognises people who have made life better for other people or are outstanding at what they do.

They recognise those who have:

- made achievements in public life
- committed themselves to serving and helping Britain

Honours are given to people involved in fields including community, voluntary and local services and people get honours for achievements like:

- making a difference to their community or field of work
- long-term voluntary service
- improving life for people less able to help themselves

Watch the [Cabinet Office Vine](#) . [Complete an Honours Nomination](#) 

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