

**NATIONAL
VOLUNTEER
PROGRAMME**

Rt Hon David Blunkett MP

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Blunkett MP was elected as the Member of Parliament for Sheffield Brightside (latterly Brightside and Hillsborough) in 1987, having served for eighteen years on Sheffield City Council, with seven of those as leader. Since 1997, he has served as Secretary of State for Education, with responsibility for the Millennium Volunteer Programme and the Citizenship curriculum; Home Secretary, with responsibility for citizenship and voluntary action; and Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with responsibility for Job Centre Plus and programmes for the employment of young people.

FOREWORD

On 23rd March 2011, I raised with the Prime Minister the following question:

“The Government have not yet factored into their future Budget proposals the sell-off of the bank assets that we own. Given the Prime Minister's commitment to volunteering and the dire straits that many young people face because of unemployment, will he consider an endowment fund for a nationwide volunteer programme, building on the six-week national citizen service and benefiting individuals and the nation as a whole?”

David Cameron replied:

“The right hon. Gentleman makes an extremely interesting suggestion. Obviously, there will be an opportunity to sell the bank assets that we own. I do not think that that opportunity is right now, or that we should wait to get national citizen service, which he rightly mentions, up and running. I want to see every 16-year-old in our country have the opportunity to take part in something like that to make them feel more part of our country and recognise the responsibilities that we all have as we move towards adulthood.”

In the light of the disturbances, criminality and looting, it is now time to address the broader question of how we change values and attitudes fundamentally, so that mutuality and reciprocity come high on the public agenda.

On the 17th August 2011 HRH Prince Charles, on a visit to Hackney (following the disturbances of the previous ten days), reiterated his call for a national community service, to give young people a sense of worth, of being valued, and having a purpose in life:

“We should have national community service to offer opportunities. All we have been doing is dealing with the symptoms, not giving opportunity.”¹

A YouGov survey published in the *Sunday Times* on 21st August revealed that 77% would support ‘national citizen service’ – a compulsory period of community service for all young people.²

It can be seen that a National Volunteer Programme has widespread support and, at this moment in time, is critical to the wellbeing not just of individuals but of the nation as a whole.

But for the individual a sense of worth is critical. A reason to get up in the morning and a pattern of daily life which has some purpose must surely be an objective of social policy for every young person. The added benefit of helping to break intergenerational and cultural inertia would contribute to the laudable objective of every family working,

and overcoming the scourge of workless households, which surely unites those of all political persuasions.

That is why despite the economic challenges of the moment and the government's austerity programme, resources must be found to offer genuine opportunity to those many young people whose lives will otherwise be blighted by the experience of being out of education, training or work.

Given that it is estimated that less than 1 in 10 of those dealt with by the courts in the first two weeks after the disturbances in August were in a job or education, this is indeed a challenge.

David Blunkett

Rt. Hon. David Blunkett MP



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My thanks to the work of Community Service Volunteers for the advice provided over the last few years in developing the concept of a substantial volunteer/community service scheme

INTRODUCTION

The importance of developing active and vibrant communities is self evident. Yet, in an ever increasing global economic, social and cultural environment – with twenty-four hour, seven-days-a-week news – the anchor, stability and security of community has never been more important. The old adage think global, act local, is more relevant than ever.

The riots in August 2011 made this clear. From the Scarman Report into the riots of 1981, and the various inquiries into disturbances in some northern cities in 2001, there are lessons that we already have to hand in advance of the ‘victims’ panel’ taking evidence:

1. The vast majority of those involved were under-25s;
2. Those taking part showed a severe disregard for people, their property and their communities;
3. The rioting largely occurred in areas of urban deprivation.

Truly we live in changing times. We need to adapt and to adopt new ways of coping with that rapidity of change, a challenge which brings fear and hope as both families and governments wrestle with the enormity of economic, social and cultural change.

What was demonstrated, at least in part, by the recent riots was that we have not yet found a way to deal with the culture of irresponsibility that has prevailed among some young people in our society. According to the most recent estimates, of over 1000 people brought before the courts for crimes committed relating to the riots, just 25% were aged 25 or over.³

As the Leader of the Labour Party Ed Milliband put it in his speech following the riots:

“We have to answer the most basic questions: Why are there people who think it’s okay to loot, vandalise and terrorise their own neighbourhoods? Who seem to owe no loyalty to their communities? Who think they have everything to gain and nothing to lose from doing this?”

“Let’s start by asking the question of what values we saw from the looters and rioters. Greed, selfishness, immorality. Above all, gross irresponsibility.”

It is clear that many young people in the areas affected by the riots are growing up with values that are incompatible with a fit and flourishing society.

Meanwhile, deprivation and worklessness do, of course, exacerbate problems in communities.

Analysis by the Trade Union Congress (TUC) showed that three of the London boroughs worst affected by the riots are some of Britain's areas with the highest unemployment. Hackney, Haringey and Lewisham are among the 10 places in the UK where jobs are hardest to find. According to the Government's most recent figures, there are almost 29 people chasing each job vacancy in Haringey (the London borough that includes Tottenham). With just 367 vacancies and 10,518 people out of work, it is second in the list of places where jobs are most difficult to find.⁴ Research by the University of Liverpool's Urban Planning Department further demonstrated that 41% of suspects live in one of the top 10% most deprived places in the country, whilst the data additionally showed that 66% of neighbourhoods where the accused live experienced increased poverty between 2007 and 2010.⁵

Official figures released on 17th August showed that the youth unemployment rate has risen to 20.2%. There were 949,000 16 to 24-year-olds without work, a rise of 15,000, a figure that is unacceptably high.⁶ Almost 100,000 young people have been on the dole for two years or more.⁷ Statistics issued by the Department for Education on 24th August concluded that 979,000 were not in education, employment or training of any kind, with a growing number in the age range 19-25.

That is not to dismiss the behaviour of those involved in the riots as rooted simply in an inability to find a job. However, we can see that low employment rates exacerbate a culture of no hope, where the power and image that comes from being part of a gang is a much more accessible and attractive offer than a job. A culture of dependency and victimhood prevails, and opportunities to escape are limited.

There is an enormous amount that can be done to provide a positive outlet and major gains for our society as a whole. Britain is facing significant challenges over the coming decades. With an ageing population, the Dilnot Enquiry showed that the cost of old age care is going to be a vast strain on our budget. The Workplace Retirement Income Commission states that 14 million people are not saving into a workplace pension scheme at all.⁸ Yet, this challenge will only grow as people live longer. A girl born in the UK today has a one-in-three chance of reaching 100 and a boy has a one-in-four chance.⁹

Government must aid these transitions, providing mutual help through the duty we owe each other. A large-scale volunteer programme could be this. We should see a national volunteer programme as not just an answer for those who participate, but also as part

of the solution for these growing problems. Participants could volunteer in care homes, or assist with support in the homes of those needing help to enable older people to stay in their own home for longer.

Many developed nations do have a meaningful national service; civilian national services have been established in over thirty countries. In the United States, Bill Clinton's *Americorps* has engaged more than 500,000 citizens to serve in full or substantial part-time work over one year with thousands of non-profit, community and faith-based organisations; in Germany, the *Zivildienst*, was the programme of choice for the majority of young people to fulfil their national service obligation until July 2011 (when conscription was suspended); and in China, the Young Volunteer Poverty Alleviation Relay programme aims to ease the burden of poverty in rural areas, with cadets serving annually for between 6 months and 2 years.

Yet, there are clear contradictions in the current Government's policy of furthering civic responsibility in Britain. The citizenship programme, now mandatory in secondary school in England, is to be set aside as part of the Government's review intended to slim down the curriculum, and to provide less rather than more guidance for continuity and consistency across the country. This contradiction, in the face of the Government's declared intention to change the culture and the nature of the way in which we nurture young people, the development of an understanding of responsibilities and not just rights, needs to be addressed urgently.

Citizenship in school (and, linked to this, active citizenship outside of school) is a prerequisite to the transitional programme of the National Citizen Service, and would also be to a full-time, more substantive and in depth experience for young people from 16 onwards.

Such a programme would build on the 20,000 young people who at its height were benefiting from Millennium Volunteers, set up in the late 1990s and highly successful in linking with major organisations such as Community Service Volunteers, the Princes Trust and the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV).

Young people are statistically those most likely to volunteer and keen to help in their community. 32% of those aged 16 to 25 years engaged in regular, but limited, volunteering in 2009/10.¹⁰ A substantial part of this was organised alongside major national volunteer agencies by V, established by the Government following the Russell Report with both central government funding and resources raised from the private sector. As youth unemployment remains endemic, we should take advantage of the

desire among young people to help their community, and aid them in providing an opportunity to develop their skills and experience.

It is therefore proposed that – in addition to maintaining and refining the citizenship programme within schools – there should be a new National Volunteer Programme. This would be coordinated and delivered through the existing major volunteer organisations. In this way, the programme would build on what is already working, learning from the experience of V and Volunteer England, and ensuring that young people have a positive experience that changes their attitude to themselves and to the society around them. In other words, building an understanding of mutuality, reciprocity and, above all, respect for themselves and for others.

THE NATIONAL CITIZEN SERVICE

On 10 November 2010 it was announced that twelve groups had been selected to run the first National Citizen Service pilot projects. The NCS programme aims to promote:

- a more cohesive society by mixing participants of different backgrounds;
- a more responsible society by supporting the transition into adulthood for young people;
- a more engaged society by enabling young people to work together to create social action projects in their local communities.

It was hoped that it would give 11,000 16-year-olds the chance to learn new skills and get involved in their community in a number of different locations across England in summer 2011. It runs for three weeks full-time, including two weeks away from home. After that, volunteers need to complete another 30 hours on a part-time basis.

However, as reported in the Financial Times on 17th August this year, the government has failed to fill its target of 11,000 places on the scheme. One of the main concerns is that many teenagers have been asked to pay up to £99 to take part; while six of the schemes are free, the remainder have charged from £20 up to £99 – enough to deter those from the poorest backgrounds.¹¹

THE NATIONAL VOLUNTEER PROGRAMME

We need to return to the concept of a properly funded, well-organised community based youth volunteer programme. The National Volunteer Programme (NVP) would be assumed to be taken up by young people over the age of 16. For instance, participants could do it before going on to training or apprenticeship programmes, or between leaving school or college and going to university.

The programme would be on a nine month basis and would be geared to social, educational and environmental programmes that would aim to transform the community and provide confidence building, self esteem and new experiences for young people. There would be a proper stipend for the participants and, where they were away from home, accommodation and food.

This would be in addition to the National Citizen Service. The experience gained on that six week programme would enable young people to choose which areas of the new full time programme they would wish to take up.

Whilst the programme is voluntary, we want to build in incentives designed to help young people in their future life. It would provide them with a passport that would have financial as well as other benefits accredited to it, which could be redeemed either in relation to university fees or for particular start up programmes for employment, continuing training or a deposit for accommodation. Those not taking up the National Volunteer Programme could demonstrate alternatives, such as volunteering overseas, to qualify for future recognition. This would of course pose an additional cost, but could be part of the more refined use of existing resources for bursaries, start-up grants and current funding for training.

The NVP could also build on the work of the Outward Bound Trust (OBT). OBT help young people have access to safe, adventurous experiences through which they can raise their self-esteem and realise their full potential. The Outward Bound Trust were involved in an experiment initiated in the year 2000, where they used Lottery funding supported by the Department of Education and Employment to develop a range of outdoor experiences for young people. Regrettably, it was not continued despite highly favourable evaluation. Outdoor pursuit would fit well with the NVP, helping volunteers learn key skills like team work, perseverance and discipline.

Individual young people would learn both responsibility and duty to others, whilst the community would benefit and offer in return opportunities and support for the future.

ORGANISATION

This is an ambitious and visionary proposal. To implement it successfully would require powerful leadership and widespread cooperation, and thus the direction and commitment of the highest levels of government. In practice, this means the Prime Minister.

Reporting to the Prime Minister would be an operational board with representatives from the following six 'partnership' sectors – health, education, environment, community, sports and crime prevention. These would be responsible for the relationship with the agencies needed to participate, which would include the Department of Health, the Department of Education, the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Department of Communities and Local Government, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, the Home Office and, in using volunteers after next summer's events, the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG). The operational board would allocate funds, manage branding, design training, manage awards and contracts, and ensure rigorous quality assurance for the programme.

Further to this, we could build on successful work already in existence. In terms of crime reduction, we could learn from the progress that has been made in diversionary activities, which have continued over the summer in major urban areas not affected by the disturbances.

Young people working with other young people can be the most effective way of changing behaviour through mentoring and peer support. In this way, working from anti-bullying schemes in school through to mentoring young people who have major family and social problems, it would be possible to include young people themselves. For those who have been in trouble, paying back to society and persuading others to avoid similar negative experiences would be an example of Community Payback. This would be a positive way of developing aspiration, opportunity and hope for the future.

COSTS

The indirect costs are estimated per participant at £2,500.¹² This would include planning, marketing and promotion, administration and central overhead costs of the programme.

Every participant should receive a stipend to ensure no individual is excluded by poverty.

The direct costs per member are estimated as follows:

	£
Stipend	3,000
Citizenship training (off the job)	500
Travel	1,000

This means the total cost per participant would be £7,000. The cost of the programme, therefore, is estimated to be:

	£
20,000 volunteers	140 million
50,000 volunteers	350 million
100,000 volunteers	700 million

There would of course be sponsorship from business and a contribution from those public services where reductions in avoidable expenditure can be achieved through the volunteer programme.

The financial benefits of this programme of intervention will be quantifiably large. Speaking at the Conservative Party conference in October 2010, Communities and Local Government Minister Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP articulated this idea, explaining the savings that can be made from early intervention:

“Right here in Birmingham, there are two notorious gang families who have cost taxpayers £37 million. What an appalling waste. It doesn’t have to be this way. Council spending on Early Intervention for children and families can deliver £10 of savings for every pound spent. Investing money to address the causes of social breakdown is far more effective than subsidising the symptoms.”¹³

There are a range of costs that the National Volunteer Programme could help reduce:

- The National Audit Office has estimated that the cost of youth crime in 2009 was between £8.5 and £11 billion.¹⁴
- The National Audit Office has also estimated that the social and economic costs of reoffenders are between £7 billion and £10 billion per year – giving young reoffenders a genuine opportunity to change their lives makes fiscal sense, as well as being of great benefit for communities.¹⁵
- The Centre for Social Justice has estimated that the six million unpaid carers (friends and relatives who care for loved ones), of whom 2.8 million are over 50, save the state an estimated £87 billion a year.¹⁶

Whilst these estimates are unattainable in reality they do demonstrate the substantial financial gain that could be made by what is a relatively manageable outlay in the initial stages which, over time, would start to pay for itself.

A national endowment fund, which would allow for the continuation of a programme in the medium and long term, funded from the sale of financial assets, is one way of ensuring this sustainability.

This source of funding has not been built in to the Government's deficit reduction programme, and therefore an endowment fund would be an alternative use for this 'once off' windfall rather than a temporary funding of alternative uses, such as tax reduction.

CONCLUSION

The value to the individual as well as the community has been over many years acknowledged by those promoting and reinforcing the importance of Civil Society (described by David Cameron the Prime Minister as the 'Big Society'). The aims of a National Volunteer Programme would be wide-ranging, and would undoubtedly find cross-party support. Evidence¹⁷ shows community service has a range of benefits for those who engage in it as well as for the wider economy and society. These include:

- Higher literacy rates;
- Improvements in the local environment;
- Greater support for old age care;
- More personalised service in the health and emergency services and criminal justice system;
- Reduction in crime;
- Increased participation in vocational, further and higher education;
- More equal and more prosperous communities.

Ultimately, this is not just a response to the riots. A National Volunteer Programme would help to rebuild a sense of community. Values would be imparted through the programme - mutuality, reciprocity and, most importantly, responsibility and respect for others.

For the volunteers themselves, full-time work for nine months would provide an opportunity to learn key skills and develop their experience.

Despite the bleak economic outlook and the pressure that exists on business large and small, it is possible for those larger enterprises (including international companies) who can afford to do so, to release staff as mentors or as volunteers, working with and overseeing the work of young people. There are many unsung examples already taking place but with encouragement this could become a common part of Corporate Social Responsibility, which is currently at a lower level in this country than in North America and other parts of Europe.

Quite simply, everyone would gain.

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