Centre
for Social
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NUFFIELD COLLEGE

CSI 32: How do we build social integration among young people?

Summary

- As the UK becomes increasingly ethnically diverse, building positive relationships ("social integration") among young people is of paramount importance. One potential means of achieving this is through youth social/civic engagement schemes, such as *National Citizen Service* (*NCS*).
- *NCS* is a government backed programme established in 2011 to help build a more cohesive, mobile and engaged society. It brings together young people from different backgrounds to engage in a program of activities with the 'aim of helping them become better citizens'.
- A quasi-experimental test of how *NCS* impacts social integration was undertaken. Overall, participating on *NCS* leads to significant improvements in young people's social integration - warmer attitudes, more positive inter-ethnic contact, and more positive perceptions of community cohesion - evident at least 3-5 months after participating.
- *NCS* has particularly positive impacts on young people who join the scheme with lower social integration to begin with.
- It leads to bigger improvements in integration among young people who face greater barriers to integration in their daily lives, such as those who rarely have positive social contact with other ethnic groups.
- *NCS* also has especially positive impacts on young people from communities where social integration is much weaker; particularly those from more segregated and more disadvantaged communities.
- Overall, *NCS* helps close the 'integration gap' between more and less socially integrated young people and communities. It achieves this by bringing up the social integration of those young people who are less socially integrated, or who face greater barriers to integration, while maintaining the integration of those young people who are more socially integrated, or who face fewer barriers[1].

Methodological and measurement details

Knowing if youth social/civic engagement itself *causes* social integration can be difficult. Perhaps more socially integrated young people are more likely to sign-up for engagement schemes; or, maybe some underlying trait, say pro-social personality, leads people to be both more engaged and more integrated. To say with confidence that engagement causes integration we need to pursue a robust methodology.

The impact of *National Citizen Service* (*NCS*) on integration was tested using a quasi-experimental approach. Data was collected during the 2015 summer period of *NCS* by Ipsos MORI as part of their independent evaluation of the programme conducted for the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). All participants who took part during a 4-week evaluation window were surveyed before participating and re-surveyed 3-5 months after participation. This allows us to see whether any changes occurred in integration after participation. These changes among participants are then compared to a 'control group' of young people who did not participate in the *NCS*, but who were surveyed over the same period. This group is composed of a random sample of 15 to 17-year olds who expressed an interest in participating with the *NCS* but did not go on the programme during the 2015 summer phase[2]. The control group is designed to represent the changes that would have occurred (if any) among the *NCS* participants had they not participated in the *NCS* programme. To estimate the impact of participation we look at *the change occurring before and after participation among participants* compared to *the change occurring over the same period among the control group*. The difference in these changes between participant/control individuals provides the size of the impact of participation (known as a difference-in-differences approach).

What is social integration? There is substantial debate around this and most agree it is multi-dimensional concept, existing across a range of domains (such as social, civic or economic) and for different groups (such as age or ethnicity). Here we focus on one aspect of social inter-ethnic integration; that is, *attitudes towards* and actual *mixing between* different ethnic groups. The attitudinal indicators of integration include (1) warmth towards other ethnic groups[3] and (2) perceived community cohesion[4]. Frequency of (3) positive and (4) negative mixing with other ethnic groups[5] capture two behavioural indicators.

Introduction

The question of how socially integrated we are as a society, and how we build integration where it is needed, is once again of intense policy interest. The newly released government green paper, the Integrated Communities Strategy[6], sets out the government's initial plan to 'create a stronger, more united Britain'. In many respects social integration in the UK has already come a long way. On average, segregation for all ethnic groups is declining[7], leading to more mixing; on several indicators both White and non-White groups continue to report increasingly positive attitudes towards one another[8]; while the mixed-ethnicity group is the fastest growing group in the UK. However, pressures remain alongside this increasing diversity: segregation remains persistently high in some areas; a growing body of research suggest ethnically diverse communities tend to be less cohesive places[9]; and events like Brexit highlight the persistent anxiety towards immigration among large sections of society.

In the face of these pressures, building social integration society is critical. However, it is particularly important for young people. In England, around 20% of the country described themselves as non-White British in 2011. However, in 2017, around 40% of babies born were recorded by their mothers as non-White British[10]. As our world is to our parent's generation, the world our children grow up into will be radically different from that of today. Providing opportunities for integration to flourish is important to prepare young people for a future society where diversity is increasingly the norm. The question is, how do we achieve this? What practical steps can policy-makers take to build integration among young people; especially when some of the main obstacles to integration, such as disadvantage and segregation, appear so intractable (at least in the short-term)? One potential pathway is through youth social/civic engagement schemes. To explore how such schemes could build integration we examine the UK *National Citizen Service* (*NCS*).

Youth engagement and social integration: the National Citizen Service scheme[11]

NCS is a government backed programme established in 2011 to help build a more cohesive, mobile and engaged society. A key aim of NCS is that by bringing together young people from different backgrounds 'NCS helps them to become better individuals, and in turn better citizens'. The programme itself is open to 16 and 17 year-olds across England and Northern Ireland. The two- to four-week programme includes outdoor team-building exercises, a residential for participants to learn 'life skills', and a community-based social action project. Young people usually go through the scheme in teams of 12-15 members. One of the key aims of the scheme is to improve young people's social mixing with people from different backgrounds within these teams. To encourage this mixing providers are incentivised to create a profile of participants which matches the make-up of the Local Authority in which a programme is run. The scheme is nationally implemented and open to everyone, and in 2016 12% of all 16 to 17-year olds in England participated[12].

How does participating on NCS impact young people's social integration?

Overall, participants report significant increases in their social integration after completing the scheme. 3-5 months after completion, participants report greater warmth towards other ethnic groups, more positive perceptions of cohesion in their community, and more positive experiences of mixing with other ethnic groups. Importantly, they do not report more negative mixing with other ethnic groups, even though *NCS* likely increases opportunities for both positive and negative experiences.

However, simply looking at the average impact of participation (across all young people who participated) leaves important questions unanswered. Does participation really help all young people? Could it be more effective for those young people who join with particularly weak social integration? Or instead, does it simply augment the integration of young people who join with comparatively stronger integration, with the potential to widen any gaps in integration that are there to begin with?

Does the impact of NCS depend on how integrated young people were before joining?

To test this, we can group participants (and comparable control-group young people) into sub-categories according to whether they reported low, medium or high integration *before* the participation-period. We can then explore whether *NCS* leads to bigger increases in integration if a participant reported less integration *before* coming on to the programme.

We find that young people who joined the scheme with the lowest levels of social integration saw the biggest improvements in their integration from the scheme. **Figure 1** shows an example of this, plotting the before/after 'warmth towards other ethnic groups' for the participant and control-groups (see the 'Methods box' on page 1). Young people who joined the scheme with high levels of pre-participation warmth (between 76° and 100°) experienced almost no impact from participating – we observe no difference in trends between the high-warmth

participant and control groups. However, young people with low-levels of pre-participation warmth (who joined reporting warmth between 0° and 50°) saw a substantial increase in their levels of inter-ethnic warmth.

Figure 1 – Young people who joined *NCS* reporting colder attitudes towards other ethnic groups saw the biggest increases in warmth after participation
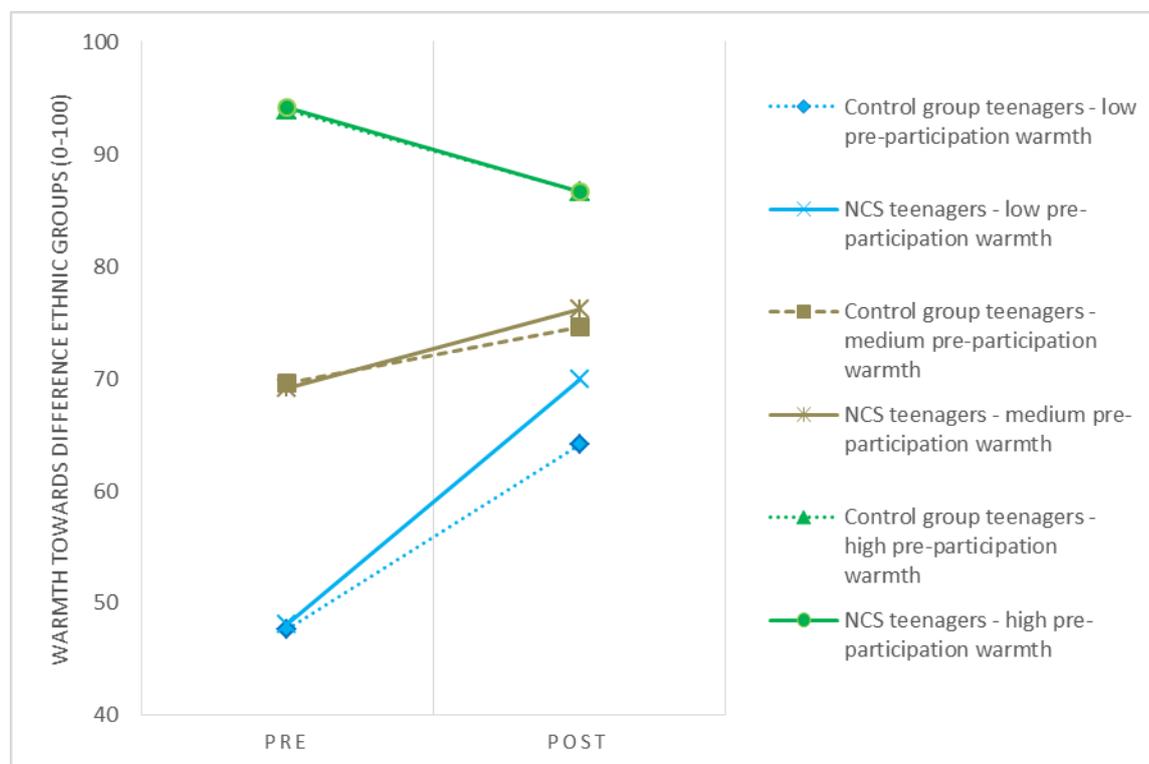
NCS therefore has a stronger impact on young people who came on to the programme with cooler attitudes to begin with. The result is that, after participation, the gap between those who started out with stronger and weaker levels of integration is reduced.
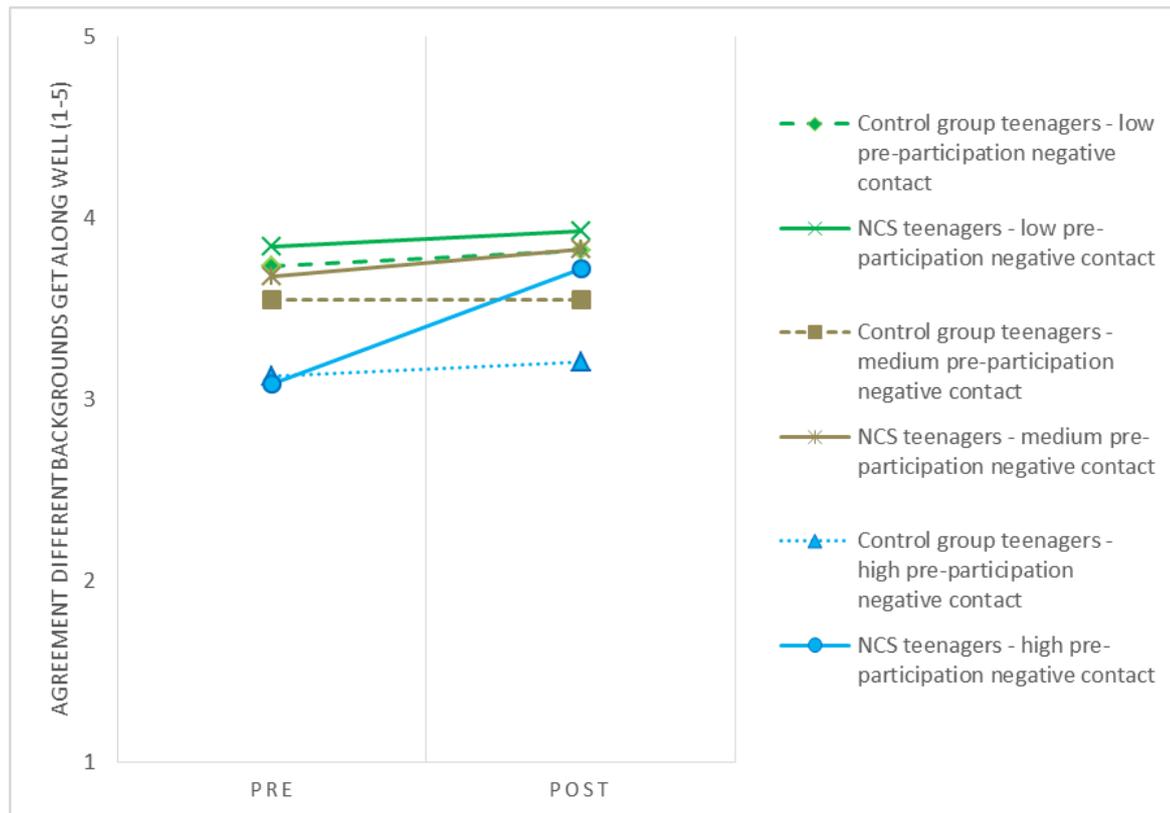
Does NCS have more positive impacts on young people facing greater barriers to social integration in their everyday lives?

One set of barriers to integration is a lack of positive contact with other ethnic groups, or frequent negative contact, which can hinder the development of positive inter-ethnic attitudes. A central tenet of *NCS* is that it encourages *positive social mixing* between young people from different backgrounds. *NCS* may therefore have more positive effects on the attitudes of young people joining the programme with less frequent positive mixing or more frequent negative experiences in their daily lives.

Figure 2 shows the impact of participating on perceived community cohesion. However, it groups young people into whether they joined *NCS* reporting more or less *negative* social contact with other ethnic groups. Young people who joined the scheme never experiencing negative contact with other groups started out with higher cohesion. However, they saw little impact of participation on their cohesion, which remained relatively high. Young people who joined the scheme experiencing negative social contact quite often/very often started out with far lower cohesion. However, for this group participation had a stronger positive effect on perceived cohesion.

A similar story is told in **Figure 3**, which looks at how *NCS* impacted young people who reported more or less *positive* contact in their daily lives before joining *NCS*. This time we look at 'warmth towards other ethnic groups' as the outcome. Before participation, young people with very frequent positive contact report greater warmth, but participation only leads to marginal improvements. Young people who joined with less positive mixing (rarely/never) start out with far cooler attitudes. However, participation leads to a much bigger increase in their warmth.

Figure 2 - Young people who joined *NCS* reporting more frequent negative contact with other ethnic groups saw the biggest increases in perceived cohesion after participation

Figure 3 - Young people who joined *NCS* reporting less frequent positive contact with other ethnic groups saw the biggest increases in warmth towards other groups after participation
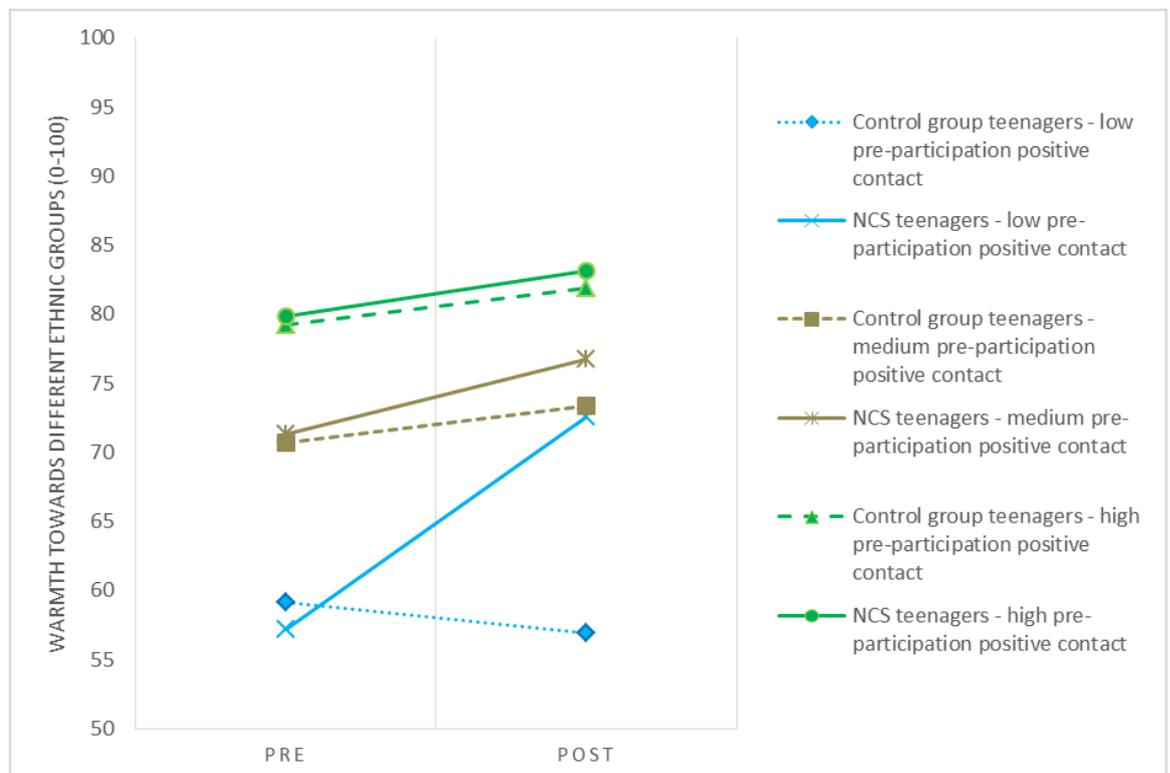
NCS therefore has a much stronger positive impact on integration for those young people who join with less frequent positive contact and more frequent negative contact. Critically, *NCS* thus works to close the 'integration gap' for young people facing greater barriers to social integration in their daily lives.

Does NCS have more positive impacts on young people who come from less socially integrated communities?

The communities in which young people live matter for their social integration. As discussed, living with higher socio-economic disadvantage and higher ethnic residential segregation can harm social integration[13]. Can youth engagement mend some of the frayed integration in such communities, and help close the gaps in integration for young people from such areas?

Figure 4 plots the impact of *NCS* on perceived cohesion for young people from the most and least disadvantaged communities[14]. Before participation, young people living in more disadvantaged communities report less perceived cohesion than their peers in more advantaged communities. However, *NCS* has a stronger positive impact on perceived cohesion among these young people. So much so that, *post*-participation, those from the most disadvantaged communities reported levels of cohesion close to those of their peers from the least disadvantaged communities.

Figure 4 - Young people who joined *NCS* from more disadvantaged communities saw the biggest increases in perceived community cohesion after participation
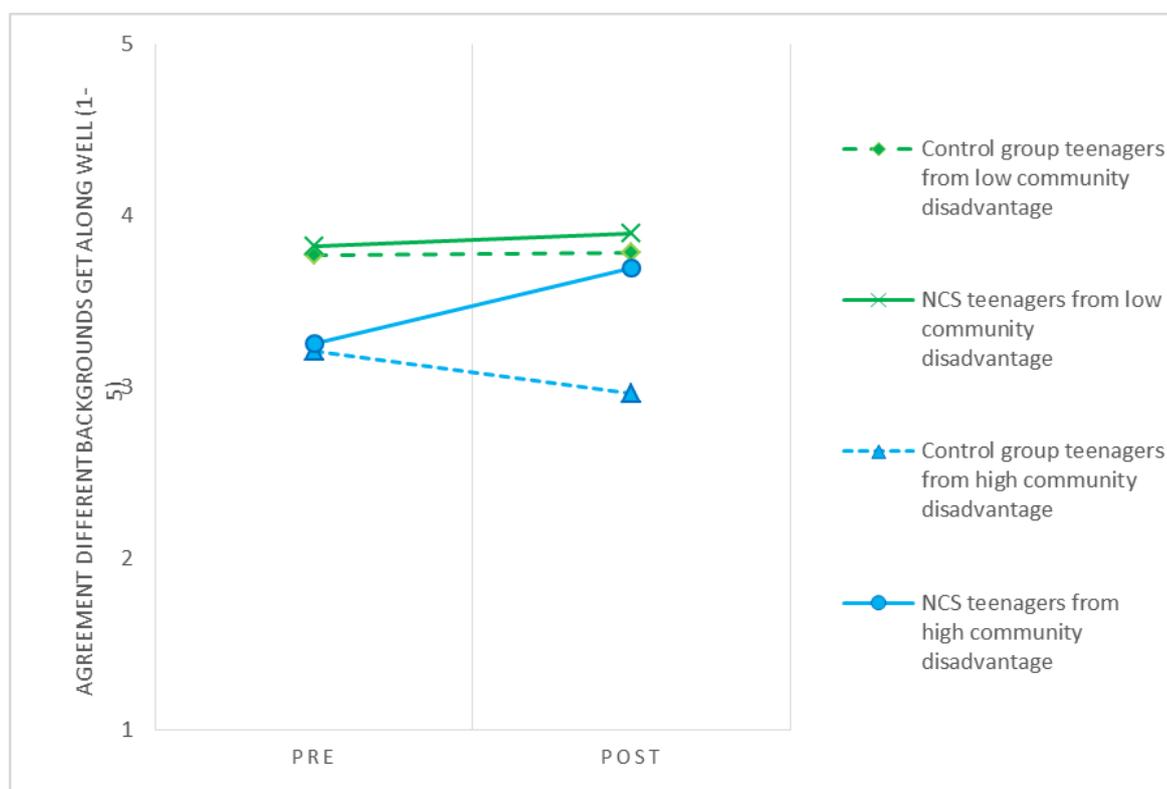

Figure 5 plots the impact of participation on positive mixing with other ethnic groups among young people from the most and least segregated Local Authorities[15]. Young people from segregated areas come on to the scheme reporting less positive mixing with other groups than their peers in less segregated areas. However, it is these young people from segregated areas who see the biggest increases in positive mixing. After participation, the gap in positive mixing between those from integrated and segregated communities is reduced by over half.

Conclusion

Youth social/civic engagement schemes, like *NCS*, have the capacity to act as effective pathways for building social integration among young people. However, they appear to be particularly effective among young people who, before joining, have the lowest levels of integration, face more barriers to integration in their daily lives, or come from communities where integration is much more frayed. In doing so, *NCS* helps close the 'social integration gap' between young people and communities, by bringing up those with the weakest integration while preserving the integration of those who already join well integrated to begin with.

Figure 5 - Young people who joined *NCS* from more segregated areas saw the biggest increases in their frequency of positive mixing with other ethnic groups after participation
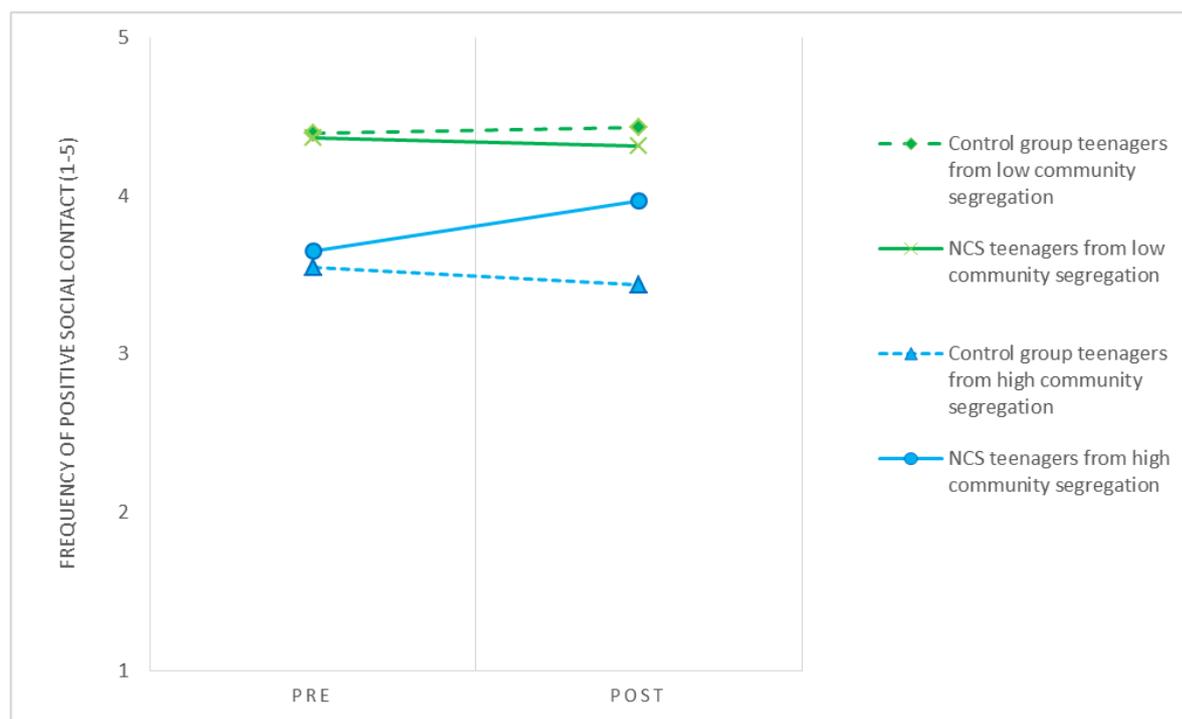
James Laurence – May 2018

This briefing note draws on a fuller report published in March 2018. See http://csi.nuff.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/JLaurence-Meeting-Mixing-Mending-v2.pdf

[1] *This briefing note is drawn from a full report into NCS' impact on youth integration*: Laurence, J. (2018) *Meeting, Mixing, Mending: how NCS Impacts Young People' Social Integration*. Oxford: Centre for Social Investigation/NCS; http://csi.nuff.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/JLaurence-Meeting-Mixing-Mending-v2.pdf

[2] This could be because: young people had signed up but were placed on a waiting list due to full programmes; or because they signed up to attend a program but did not arrive on the day; or young people who provided their contact details online or at a recruitment event but did not follow-up their interest during the evaluation period.

[3] How warm one feels towards people from a 'different race or ethnicity' (thermometer variable: 0-100)

[4] How much one agrees/disagrees 'my local area is a place where different backgrounds get along well together' (coded 1-4)

[5] Separate measures of how frequently one has 'positive or good' experiences or 'negative or bad' experiences with people from a 'different race or ethnicity' (coded 1-5)

[6] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-government-action-to-create-stronger-more-integrated-britain

[7] *See* Simpson, L. (2012) *More Segregation or More Mixing?* Manchester: Centre for Dynamics of Ethnicity

[8] *See* Storm, I., Soboleska, M. and Ford, R. (2017) 'Is ethnic prejudice declining in Britain? Change in social distance attitudes among ethnic majority and minority Britons', *British Journal of Sociology*, 68(30), 410-434

[9] *See* Van der Meer, T. and Tolsma, J. (2014) 'Ethnic diversity and its effects on social cohesion.' *Annual Review of Sociology*, 40, 459-478.

[10] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths/bulletins/birthcharacteristicsinenglandandwales/2016

[11] Further information regarding the *National Citizen Service* can be found here: http://www.ncsyes.co.uk/

[12] *See* National Audit Office (2016). *National Citizen Service*. London, UK: National Audit Office.

[13] *See* Laurence, J. et al. (2015). 'When numbers count: Community ethnic composition, prejudice, and the moderating role of inter-ethnic segregation for the contact and threat hypotheses'. *International Migration, Integration and Social Cohesion Annual Conference*, Geneva, Switzerland.

[14] Community socio-economic disadvantage is measured via an index comprised of key disadvantage indicators, including: % of an area in social housing, the % of households in an area that is headed by a female lone parent, and the % of residents in an area that is unemployed.

[15] Residential segregation is captured using the 'multi-group entropy index', which measures segregation between all groups in an area.