



# REBUILDING OUR COMMON LIFE

A THREE-POINT PLAN TO  
FORGE A MORE SOCIALLY  
INTEGRATED BRITAIN

**THE CHALLENGE**

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# ABOUT THE CHALLENGE

The Challenge is the UK's leading charity for building a more socially integrated society. We design and deliver programmes that bring different people together to develop their confidence and skills in understanding and connecting with others. The Challenge worked with the Government to design National Citizen Service (NCS) and is now a major provider of the programme. In addition to NCS, we deliver HeadStart, an incentivised volunteering scheme with social integration at its heart; and Step Forward, an apprenticeship programme for school leavers of all backgrounds.

Alongside our role as a programme delivery organisation, we also develop policy ideas to forge a more integrated Britain. During 2014 and 2015, The Challenge convened the Social Integration Commission. Following the Commission's conclusion, we set up the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Social Integration, which is chaired by Chuka Umunna MP.

This briefing draws on our programme delivery experience, original research and extensive engagement with academics, policy experts and practitioners; and proposes a number of ideas which the new government might put into action to promote social integration.

The logo for 'The Challenge' is located in the bottom right corner. It features the words 'THE CHALLENGE' in a bold, white, sans-serif font. The text is set against a dark red, irregular shape that resembles a stylized arrow pointing to the right. The background of the entire page is a lighter shade of red.

**THE CHALLENGE**

## OUR 'PEOPLE LIKE US' PROBLEM

Across the UK rapid social, scientific and technological advances have combined with economic shifts and rising immigration to fuel a demographic revolution and transform our society. This has created new opportunities for more of us to lead more fulfilling lives. However, it has also created new challenges to our social solidarity because what it means to be a member of a community has changed.

Across industrialised nations, including the UK, we are increasingly living in 'bubbles' made up of 'people like us' – whether of similar income levels and educational backgrounds, of the same culture, faith and ethnicity, or of the same generation. These bubbles have grown to reflect patterns of residential segregation, but are also formed through the social habits of people living in diverse areas. Research shows that Britons on average interact socially with someone of a different ethnicity less than half as often as would be expected if their social circles reflected the demographic makeup of their local area. This is the case even in our most diverse regions, including Greater London and the Midlands.<sup>1</sup> This indicates that it is not uncommon for people to live peaceably alongside others from different walks of life but to meet, mix and connect almost exclusively with people from similar backgrounds. In the UK, this trend was arguably crystallised through the 2016 EU referendum campaign and its aftermath, during which it became apparent that many people – whether Remain or Leave voters – hadn't come into contact with a supporter of the opposing view in that debate.

This phenomenon – 'social segregation' – has been shown to fuel the sense that there is more which divides us than that which binds us together, preventing the development of the bonds of trust and the sense of belonging and rootedness which underpin successful communities and nations. Indeed, research demonstrates that a lack of contact between people from different social and cultural backgrounds feeds prejudice, breeds anxiety and fuels the politics of recrimination and blame.<sup>2</sup> Divided societies suffer from poorer mental health outcomes and are more likely to experience civil unrest.<sup>3</sup> There is also a growing body of evidence to suggest that a lack of 'social mixing' impedes life chances, inhibits social mobility, prolongs periods of unemployment and restricts economic growth.<sup>4</sup>

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**Social integration is the extent to which strong social ties, maintained through a web of relationships and interactions, inspire bonds of trust, reciprocity and solidarity between Britons from all backgrounds.**

It follows that social integration should be a leading consideration for policymakers of all political parties as we embark on the challenge of building a post-Brexit Britain at ease with itself and its place in the world.

Our common life has always been underpinned by shared institutions bridging social, cultural and generational divides – sustaining a vibrant ecosystem of trust – but the congregational spaces of the twentieth century are not equal to the challenges we now face as a post-industrial society. The organised church, civic organisations from the Women's Institute to The Scouts to community social clubs and trade unions – all have declined in membership and affiliation as our society and economy have become more open and social trust has shrunk. As a consequence, our defences against social disintegration have been eroded.

**In response, we, as a society, should seek to create more opportunities and incentives for people from all walks of life to meaningfully connect and build fellow feeling.** Creating new civic institutions which bring together people in common cause across social faultlines is at the heart of The Challenge's work. Policymakers might draw on our experience in this regard in order to promote active participation in community life and strengthen the ties that bind our nation together. This briefing outlines a number of suggestions as to how the new government might achieve this goal. It is by no means an exhaustive list of the policy interventions through which Ministers might seek to build a more socially integrated Britain.

<sup>1</sup> The Challenge, 2016, *British Integration Survey 2016*

<sup>2</sup> For full referencing and more information please see: The Challenge (2015), *Integration City*, Page 9

<sup>3</sup> Riots Communities and Victims Panel (2011), *5 Days in August: An interim report on the 2011 English Riots*, London, Page 62.

<sup>4</sup> Social Integration Commission, 2015, *Kingdom United? Thirteen steps to tackle social segregation*, Page 7







# 1. DESIGNING PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS TO BOOST SOCIAL TRUST

Our differences needn't divide us. Research by the Social Integration Commission demonstrates that when people from different walks of life meet, mix and lead interconnected lives, trust grows and communities flourish.<sup>5</sup> Through our experience of designing, delivering and rapidly growing programmes with social integration at their heart, The Challenge has identified a number of principles which we believe underpin effective and scalable interventions to build bonds of trust between people from different ethnicities, cultures, social backgrounds and generations.

It could be argued that policymakers within successive governments have too often overlooked the correlation between levels of trust within societies and measures of social and economic progress<sup>6</sup>; and the potential power of action aimed at boosting social trust to achieve improved outcomes for communities and public policy. **Through embedding the design principles set out in this document in our public services and building new civic institutions reflecting this approach, the new government might weave opportunities to connect with others from different walks of life into the fabric of everyday life in the UK** – more effectively utilising social trust as a tool in its policy armory.

Social contact with people from different backgrounds can impact positively or negatively on our perceptions of difference, depending on the conditions under which interactions takes place.<sup>7</sup> Policymakers should not only design interventions so as to bring together a diverse group of people, they should also actively promote social mixing – intervening where necessary to counteract the tendency of participants and service users to cluster in groups of people from similar backgrounds.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, policymakers should ensure that the resulting programmes and institutions embody, to at least some extent, the following design principles:

→ **Promote common goals.** Confronting people with a shared challenge – an obstacle which can be more easily overcome through teamwork than individual effort – is a key element of inspiring previously unlikely friendships.

→ **Facilitate equal status interactions.** People are more likely to engage with others when they view them as peers. This can be achieved through rotating leadership roles within an initiative or institution, or purposefully designing an intervention to involve a range of different activities, pushing all participants out of their comfort zones.

→ **Create intensive and/or sustained experiences.** Building meaningful relationships takes time and work. People from different walks of life should be encouraged to meet and mix intensively over a short burst of time or to engage with one another repeatedly over a longer period. Young people participating in NCS live, cook, eat and work together over a period of four weeks. Teenagers who take part in our HeadStart incentivised volunteering programme, on the other hand, regularly engage with members of their community through completing a few hours of volunteering with a charity partner per week, generally over the course of 10–12 weeks.

→ **Capitalise on transitions to drive behaviour change.** In our experience, integration interventions which reach people at transitions in their lives are more likely to succeed. Starting school, becoming a young adult and entering the workplace, enrolling at a college or university, becoming a parent, experiencing your child starting school, moving to a new area, or retiring – it is during these moments of transition that we are most open to adopting new habits and identities.

→ **Emphasise co-benefits.** Through employing effective marketing techniques and offering meaningful incentives to participation, The Challenge designs products which appeal to young people from all backgrounds. Teenagers sign up to our programmes because of the immediate benefits offered, such as the chance to have a fun summer experience, find a job or to develop new skills – because they have a good and obvious reason to join in. From the perspective of most participants, the chance to meet new people and build a more diverse social network is either a bonus or immaterial.

→ **Cultivate a unifying culture.** Through encouraging participants to use distinct jargon, through creating team labels and emblems, and even through incorporating a degree of ceremony and ritual into our programmes, The Challenge fosters a sense of common identity amongst the young people who take part in our programmes.

<sup>5</sup> Social Integration Commission, 2015a, *Social Integration: a wake-up call*

<sup>6</sup> Dincer, O.C. & Uslaner, E.M., 2010, 'Trust and Growth', *Public Choice*, 142:59

<sup>7</sup> Laurence, J, 2017, 'The key to a more integrated society: understanding the impact and limits of social mixing', *LSE Politics and Policy Blog*, 27 March 2017

<sup>8</sup> In delivering NCS, The Challenge intentionally places young people in teams alongside others with different experiences of life, often separating them from their friends.

## Designing postnatal programmes to tap into the shared identity of parenthood

There is no more significant moment of transition in many people's lives than becoming a parent, and no acquired identity which more powerfully transcends our previous sense of ourselves than that of parenthood.

Postnatal programmes are one example of a public service which could encourage social mixing. Last year, The Challenge carried out extensive market research on behalf of the government which established that there is an appetite amongst new parents for initiatives connecting them to peer support networks comprising people from different walks of life. Whereas, prior to having their child, expectant mothers and fathers actively seek out peers from a similar background; in the weeks following the birth of their baby, new parents typically come to prioritise the chance to discuss their experiences of becoming a parent with someone who they know will be able to relate above other social preferences.

Between 2011 and 2014, the National Childbirth Trust (NCT) successfully piloted peer-to-peer support programmes bringing together new mothers from both local migrant groups and settled communities in East Lancashire, North Yorkshire, West Yorkshire and the West Midlands. During interviews conducted with The Challenge, NCT research and delivery staff reported that these programmes facilitated the development of meaningful and long-lasting friendships between parents and families from both groups. That is, an initiative offering new mothers obvious and compelling co-benefits (the chance to learn about how best to care for their child and to discuss their experiences with someone going through the same thing,) through which they interacted as peers, on a sustained basis and in the pursuit of a common goal (the wellbeing of their children,) generated bonds of trust in addition to improved health outcomes.





## 2. NATIONAL CITIZEN SERVICE

### A VITAL TOOL IN THE PURSUIT OF A MORE CONNECTED, COHESIVE SOCIETY

National Citizen Service, a youth social action programme, designed to foster social cohesion, boost social mobility and promote social engagement amongst young people, is an example of a new civic institution which embodies these design principles. Since its inception in 2010, over 300,000 15–17 year olds have taken part in NCS. Indeed, participating in the programme is fast becoming a rite of passage for youngsters across the UK.

**As National Citizen Service continues to grow in the years ahead, policymakers should ensure that bringing together young people from different backgrounds to meet, mix and connect remains at the core of the programme**

The 2015 Conservative and Labour Party General Election manifestos both included commitments to support NCS and, in 2016, the government introduced legislation to place the programme on a statutory footing. In parliamentary debate, the National Citizen Service Bill received cross-party support, with members from all sides of both Houses recognising the scheme's unique success in promoting social mixing. This sentiment was echoed in the Casey Review, which concluded that NCS is *'having a positive impact in improving understanding and relationships between young people from different backgrounds.'*<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, an independent evaluation of NCS, carried out by Ipsos MORI, demonstrates the positive impact the programme has on levels of social trust and young people's attitudes towards mixing with people from different backgrounds.<sup>10</sup> As it continues to grow in the years ahead, policymakers should ensure that bringing together young people from different backgrounds to meet, mix and connect remains at the core of NCS.



<sup>9</sup> Casey, Dame Louise DBE CB, 2016, *The Casey Review: A review into integration and opportunity*, Page 53

<sup>10</sup> Cameron, Daniel et al, 2017, *National Citizen Service 2015 Evaluation: Main report*, London: Ipsos MORI



## 3. A NATIONAL SOCIAL INTEGRATION STRATEGY BUILDING ON THE CASEY REVIEW

In order to rise to the challenge of forging a country which works for everyone, the government should build on the important work carried out by Dame Louise Casey and her team through their Review into Integration and Opportunity – developing and implementing a social integration strategy aimed at strengthening community ties across the length and breadth of the UK. Whilst it is pivotal that this strategy should speak to the particular challenges faced by the most marginalised and socially segregated individuals and communities in our country; it should also include measures aimed at revitalising our community and civic infrastructure to reflect life in modern, multicultural, global Britain.

**Ministers should consider creating a National Retirement Service connecting retirees to volunteering programmes and social enterprises in their local areas – providing a space for people all ages to come together and learn from one another, and setting us on a path towards restoring the crucial social contract between generations which has begun to fracture.**

The Casey Review attests to the *'benefits that can derive from high levels of meaningful contact between people from different backgrounds.'*<sup>11</sup> The Challenge would suggest that the extent to which this understanding is embedded across government should be understood as a key benchmark against which the success of its social integration strategy should be judged.

The new government's social integration strategy should, in other words, be devoted not just to tackling entrenched inequalities and instances of isolation and division between communities; but to **mainstreaming a focus on social mixing within public service design and creating the shared experiences from which shared identities spring for Britons of all backgrounds.**

This latter goal might be achieved, in part, through harnessing the broad appeal of sports programmes and creating new incentives and opportunities for people at different stages of life to volunteer in their local communities.

### Cross-community sports

From Kenya to Northern Ireland, team sports contests have built bridges between communities by fostering a culture of co-operation and friendly competition. In fact, studies show that the emotions incited by playing sports can accelerate the bonding process and reduce anxiety.<sup>12</sup> Working with schools and sports organisations to create new sports leagues in which young people from different communities would play side-by-side in socially mixed teams might represent a relatively low-cost and effective means of enabling young people to gain positive experiences of social difference.

### A new agenda for service

As recognised in the Casey Review, youth social action results in *'significant increases in employability skills and character traits for adulthood such as empathy, community mindedness and grit and resilience.'*<sup>13</sup> In addition, The Challenge's experience of programme design and delivery has taught us that voluntary work has the power to bring people together from a wide range of backgrounds in common cause. In order to foster a culture of active citizenship and social solidarity, policymakers should create new meaningful opportunities for people of all backgrounds and ages to get involved in service and social action initiatives.

The new government might build on the success of NCS by requiring public sector organisations and companies of more than 250 to offer staff up to three days of Employer Sponsored Volunteering leave each year. In addition, Ministers might also consider creating a new initiative connecting retirees to volunteering programmes and social enterprises in their local areas – providing a space for people all ages to come together and learn from one another, and setting us on a path towards restoring the crucial social contract between generations which has begun to fracture. Businesses could be asked to support this National Retirement Service by offering employees on the cusp of retirement a few paid hours per week to participate, or by sponsoring pathways into volunteering programmes matching employees' skillsets.

<sup>11</sup> Casey, Dame Louise DBE CB, 2016, Page 53

<sup>12</sup> Ramsbotham, O, Woodhouse, T and Miall, T, 2011, Contemporary Conflict Resolution, Cambridge: Polity

<sup>13</sup> Casey, Dame Louise DBE CB, 2016, Page 58



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