

Creating a Citizens' University on every high street

In partnership with:

NESTA Making
Innovation
Flourish

About the Young Foundation

The Young Foundation is a not for profit institution bringing together insights, innovation and entrepreneurship to meet social needs. We have a track record of over 50 years' success in helping to create new models of mass learning, including the Open University, the University of the Third Age, extended schooling, and Summer Universities, and more recently Studio Schools, apprenticeship models such as Working Rite, the School of Everything and the UpRising Leadership Programme.

We work across the UK and internationally – carrying out research, influencing policy, creating new organisations and supporting others to do the same, often with imaginative uses of new technology. We work with a wide range of organisations – from charities and businesses to governments and local authorities – using a comprehensive set of tools and approaches.

For more information see www.youngfoundation.org

About NESTA

NESTA is the UK's foremost independent expert on how innovation can solve some of the country's major economic and social challenges. Its work is enabled by an endowment, funded by the National Lottery, and it operates at no cost to the government or taxpayer. NESTA is a world leader in its field and carries out its work through a blend of experimental programmes, analytical research and investment in early-stage companies (www.nesta.org.uk).

The Idea

We believe that every community benefits when it contains the skills needed to deal with everyday crises and pressures. We need professionals to deal with the most difficult problems. But widely spread skills can play a hugely important role in helping communities to be healthy, safe and happy.

The Citizens' University has been developed as a novel way of providing citizens with the skills and confidence they need to help others. Its aim is to reduce unnecessary deaths, reduce the risk of violence, and strengthen communities' capacity to act for themselves.

The Citizens' University will prioritise skills which can be learned relatively easily by the majority of people in small, bite-sized modules that don't require a significant commitment of time from the individual. For some of the skills we are talking about, such as first aid, there are existing national providers. The Citizens' University will aim to help these providers reach much greater numbers of people by training up a cadre of volunteer trainers. For other skills, such as averting a conflict, mentoring a learner reader or developing a hyperlocal website, the Citizens' University will provide help to existing small scale providers supporting them in formalising their training, reaching a much bigger audience and creating a network of providers across the country.

The Citizens' University will in the long run aim to have a presence on every high street by using pop-up shops to attract the general public and as sites on which to provide the training. This new institution will be developed with a coalition of civil society organisations who will provide specific modules or support the Citizens' University in other ways.

Its medium term aim is to reach, at relatively low cost, at least 1% of the population – with, we hope, a catalytic effect on much larger numbers of people.

Meeting a need: unlocking opportunities for citizens

Too often we look to government to solve problems that we can address ourselves. Citizens often want to become more involved in the stewardship of our communities, but lack the skills or confidence to act.

Our investigations reveal a strong undercurrent of demand for skills-based courses that will enable people to support others in their community. For example, recent NESTA research showed that a quarter of UK adults have had an idea to tackle issues in their community, yet only 17% of those with an idea had done anything about it. The biggest barrier to taking action is not knowing where to get the right support, with 80% saying they would progress their idea if there was appropriate support in place.

Here we summarise some of the key challenges – and how they could be addressed.

Key challenges

Health shocks and crises

- Up to 150,000 die annually because first aid is not widely known: 59% of people are not confident trying to save a life.ⁱ
- The early signs of long-term health issues (like serious cholesterol imbalances, kidney and liver problems) are visible but too few can identify these, meaning illness is untreated and more severe.
- Untreated mental health issues cost taxpayers billions annually and early detection can save lives. At any moment, 1.5 million people aged 16 to 75 are suffering from depression, although most cases are untreated. Depression is responsible for 70 per cent of recorded suicides in Britain.ⁱⁱ

Key opportunities

Building skills to avert and manage a crisis

Concerns for personal safety

- A recent surveyⁱⁱⁱ found that whereas 60% of Germans say they would intervene to stop a gang of children vandalising a bus shelter, only 30% of British people say they would do so – the lowest response out of the six European countries surveyed.
- Perceptions of cities being unsafe are prevalent – particularly almost women with one survey finding one in five girls under the age of 18 said they felt threatened by gangs, and 17% said they feared someone would assault them.^{iv}
- Another survey finds that 31% of women never go out alone after dark.^v
- 6% of women and 4% of men reported having experienced domestic abuse in the past year, equivalent to an estimated one million female victims of domestic abuse and 600,000 male victims.^{vi}

Building skills to create safer neighbourhoods

Weak social ties

Building skills to create strong and resilient communities

- Just 37% of people feel they can influence decisions in their local area; only 3% of us have been involved in civic participation in the last month.^{vii}
- A majority of young people do not feel they can influence decisions locally or nationally.^{viii}
- Older people are increasingly detached and isolated: nearly ½ (4.6 million) consider TV as their main form of company; more than ½ spent Christmas Day alone (2006). Over 1m “always” or “often” feel lonely.^{ix}
- Weak social ties correlate to helpless communities: in places where people think neighbours would help each other, 83% think someone would intervene to stop graffiti-spraying, vs. 43% in places with weak ties.^x

“Macro” challenges with “micro” roots

Building skills for healthy and sustainable households

- Britain has a crisis of obesity – an increase of 400% of in 25 years. Obesity in the UK is at an all time high – with around 23% of women and 22% of men now classed as obese. Between 2003 and 2010 an additional 2 million men and 1 million women will fall into this category.^{xi}
- Despite a recent resurgence in home cooking during the recession, fewer people know how to cook a meal from scratch than a decade ago.^{xii}
- Energy used in homes is responsible for over a quarter of all UK emissions of carbon dioxide.^{xiii} As we look to reduce our nation’s environmental impact, reducing households energy use will be critical.

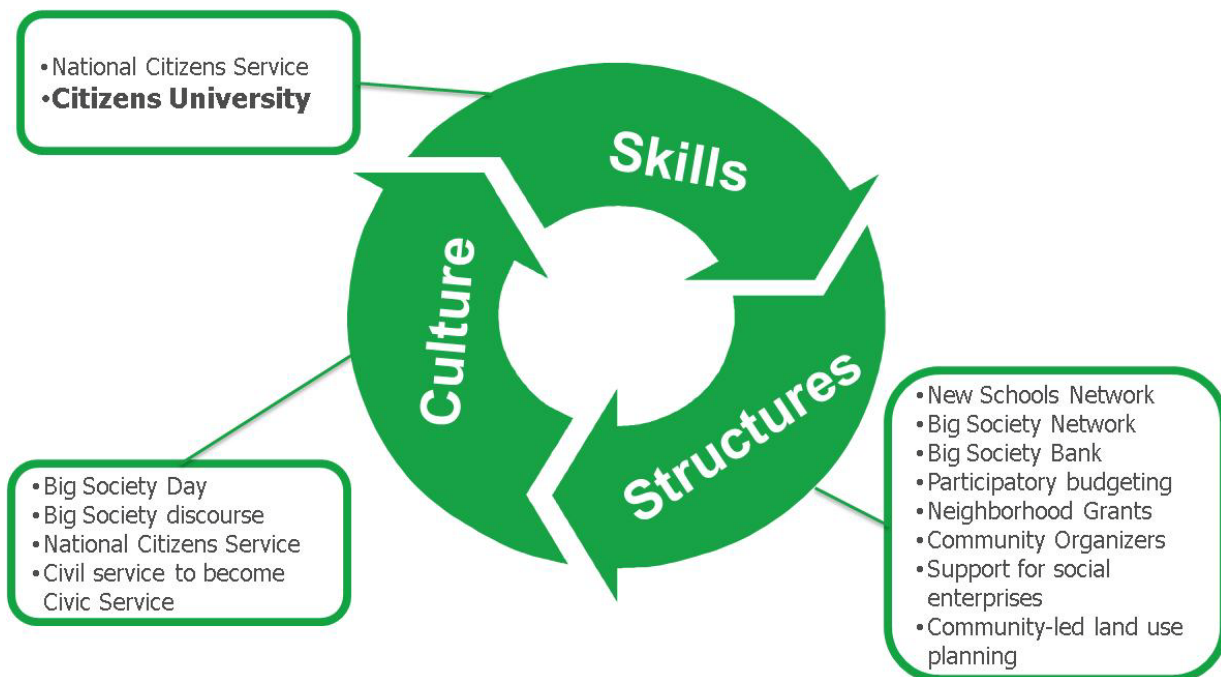
Meeting the demand: Citizens' University

The vision that lies behind the citizens' university is of a society where many more people are equipped to deal with the everyday challenges of life – and skilled to be useful to their fellow citizens when it matters most. Our goal is:

- **A national network**, bringing together civil society, business, the media and government, for citizens in averting crisis; enhancing community safety; creating strong and resilient communities; and enabling healthy and sustainable households.
- **A wide range of brief, accessible courses**, open to individuals of all ages, teachable in 6-10 hours.
- **A celebration of individual participation**, through achievement of a qualification, badging/tagging on website maps, and points that can be claimed against local tax.

The fit with the Big Society

The Big Society idea sees individuals empowered to take on challenges in their own communities. There are several policy initiatives underpinning this philosophy. The Citizens' University, a civil society initiative, fits alongside a range of other Big Society ideas and policies aiming to shift skills, structures and culture to build vibrant, active communities.



What skills are needed?

Communities benefit from having plenty of people in them with everyday skills. However vital skills like first aid training are not known widely enough to avert major crises every day. We could be doing much more to empower citizens in their day-to-day lives by giving them the skills and knowledge to be able to respond confidently and competently to a range of challenges. Four categories of skills form the core knowledge base for citizens to ensure our communities are safe, strong and resilient:

- 1) **Averting and managing crisis** (e.g. first aid, using defibrillators, how to intervene if someone is at risk of harming themselves)
- 2) **Enhancing neighbourhood safety** (e.g. how to de-escalate a conflict that may result in a fight, how to intervene in anti-social behavior, self defense)
- 3) **Creating strong, resilient communities** (e.g. supporting family, friends or neighbors to live independently, organizing community events, being involved in local decision making)
- 4) **Enabling healthy, sustainable households** (e.g. basic nutrition and cooking, home maintenance skills, making your home more energy efficient)

The skill modules: sample curricula

We have given thought to a basic set of modules that might together form a curriculum in each of these areas, but we would look to widen and deepen this offering over time

Modules will be chosen where there is a community benefit and unmet need. A Citizens' University would provide training in these areas to community members, and facilitate participants to join local networks with other active citizens. Individuals would be empowered to create neighborhood groups, identify those in the community who might need a little extra support or to be of assistance when a crisis occurs. These trained up citizens could go on to more actively participate in their communities

Citizen skills 1) Averting and managing crisis

These are skills that help to reduce the risk and effects of everyday crises. These crises happen unexpectedly and in all places; professionals are scarce and costly. Our collective ability to deal with crises is a good test of how strong our society is in practice.

Sample curriculum

Module	Expected benefits
First Aid, CPR, and knowledge of defibrillators	Increased ability to respond to medical emergencies
How to spot common medical conditions (heart attacks, stroke, asthma, high cholesterol, anaemia etc)	Common medical conditions identified and treated early
The ability to intervene when someone is at risk of harming themselves (because of drink, drugs, mental illness)	Fewer self-inflicted injuries
Preventing and responding to house fires	House fires are prevented or cause less damage/loss

Citizen skills: 2) Enhancing neighbourhood safety

These are skills that help to reduce crime and antisocial behaviour. These skills make citizens feel safer by building individuals skills to protect themselves in times of danger and to respond proactively to behaviour that makes other members of the community feel unsafe.

Sample curriculum

Module	Expected benefits
The ability to defuse conflict	Greater community cohesion, strong family relationships, reduced violence
Responding appropriately to antisocial behaviour	Greater sense of community safety and reduced violence
Effective self defence techniques	Greater sense of personal safety and reduced violence and crime
Identifying child or other kinds of abuse	Child abuse is avoided or intervention is made early

Citizen skills: 3) Creating strong, resilient communities

These are skills that help citizens work with each other to provide community support and connectedness. These skills build ties between people and help communities look after their own.

Sample curriculum

Module	Expected benefits
Teaching others to read (eg. Setting up reading groups, becoming a reading tutor)	Increased participation and productivity
Being a temporary carer for child or elderly person (eg. how to provide respite care)	More respite and emergency care provided by family, friends and community
How to support individuals to remain independent and families to stay together	More members of the community remain living in their own homes and family breakdown is reduced
Helping members of your community reach their potential (e.g. mentoring)	Increased participation and productivity
Being part of local decision making (e.g. community organising, how government works)	Greater participation and buy-in to local decisions
Create neighbourhood groups and organise events (e.g. neighbourhood watch, Big Lunch, hyperlocal website)	Greater community cohesion and tighter community networks

Citizen skills: 4) Enabling healthy, sustainable households

Skills that help improve the life outcomes or environmental sustainability of households.
These skills help to deal with big social challenges by cultivating little behaviour shifts that can add up across society.

Sample curriculum

Module	Expected benefits
Home maintenance skills for vulnerable households (e.g. changing tap washer, bike maintenance)	Vulnerable households become more self sufficient
Making your house more energy efficient	Decreasing household energy use
How to grow vegetables, cultivate an allotment or community garden	Greater community self-sufficiency and cohesion
Basic nutrition and cooking	Improved health outcomes for individuals
Basic parenting and caring for elderly parents	Improved child health and development and more care provided by family
How to be optimistic and bounce back from setbacks	Greater individual resilience

The Learning Model

The learning model would aim for flexibility, accessibility and easy acquisition of measurable skills.

Curriculum

- Confirm modules to be taught through surveys of citizens and government
- Development of a curriculum framework with key competencies
- Materials developed in partnership with existing national providers where possible (eg. St John Ambulance)

Delivery environment

- Each module taught in 6-10 guided learning hours
- Taught in pop-up centres in disused private retail/buildings or in existing public buildings (eg. libraries, colleges)

Teaching

- Modules taught by existing practitioners or teachers
- Teachers and learners supported by a variant of the School of Everything online platform (schoolofeverything.com)
- Learning could be continued through peer learning networks on the online platform

Governance

- Initial roll out coordinated by the Young Foundation
- Scaled up model would be run by a new social enterprise or mutual
- Collaborative approach with partner organizations and providers

Recognition and giving back

In recognition of the community benefit derived from building up peoples' knowledge in these areas, there would be a number of incentives built into the Citizens' University model, which might include:

Recognised qualification

- The modules would be branded as a common set.
- Where participants complete a sufficient number of modules, they would receive an accredited qualification.

Claimable points

- The implementation stage will consider the potential for benefits, including whether individuals who pass courses could receive points claimable against council tax (eg up to a £50 a year discount) or other benefits (eg. a platform such as healthyincentives.org.uk or time-banking scheme)
- Entitlements may be lost if the individual is involved in undesirable behaviours – for example is convicted of any offence (including road traffic offences).

Networks and opportunities

- Opportunities for individuals to give back to their community using the skills they have acquired would be maximized.
- Facilitating graduates to join local networks and attend events with other active citizens
- Supporting them to develop new networks and events where none already exist.

Potential formal role in the future

- The design and implementation planning stage will consider a range of options for a formal registration system
- Any registration system would be for an ad hoc role in the community (eg. unique volunteering opportunities , skilled volunteer pool)
- This would need to consider the need for such a scheme, cost/benefit analysis and potential risks.

ⁱ St John Ambulance

ⁱⁱ http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/health/article1784993.ece

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2006/nov/02/drugsandalcohol.britishidentityandsociety>

^{iv} PLAN UK, *Because I am a Girl* <http://www.plan-uk.org/becauseiamagirl/becausednews/fear-violence-girls-survey/>

^v National Statistics, *People's perceptions of their neighbourhood and community involvement*

^{vi} Parity, *Domestic Violence: The Male Perspective*

^{vii} <http://www.localgov.co.uk/index.cfm?method=news.detail&id=90571>

^{viii} Youth Citizenship Commission

^{ix} Young Foundation research, *Sinking and swimming: Mapping Britain's unmet needs*

^x Young Foundation research for Local Innovation projects

^{xi} TNS Worldpanel

^{xii} TNS worldpanel

^{xiii} http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/environmentandgreenerliving/energyandwatersaving/dg_064371