



# Make It Happen

## Social Action Toolkit

**NCS and Citizenship  
Curriculum Materials**

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This toolkit will help you plan and run a social action project.

It will also help you get ready for National Citizen Service.  
See [www.ncsy.es.co.uk](http://www.ncsy.es.co.uk) for more details.

**Social action involves people working together on an issue of concern to achieve a positive change or benefit for the community**

- If you follow these eight steps, you will learn about the processes of planning, running and evaluating social action and you will also do something worthwhile for your community.
- Remember to keep records during each step – you may need the evidence later.
- You can work in a group and divide the tasks up between you, but you'll need to show what you personally contributed to the project.

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**Step 1: Choosing the issue**

This is probably the most important part of your action. Make sure you choose an issue that is really important and interesting for you and the rest of your group. You all need to agree, so don't allow one person to push their idea on everyone else. You are going to be voting during this step.

- Firstly, decide whether the issue should focus on something inside the school or outside of the school. Here are some pros and cons.
- Add more to the boxes and decide on the option with the most pros.

	In-school	Out-of-school
Pros	- Easy to manage, no travel	- Bigger range of topics
Cons	- Very familiar topics, might already have been dealt with	- Need to make new contacts - Need to travel

- **If you decided on an in-school action**, look at the options on the next page. Add your own suggestion to one of the empty boxes, if you like.
- Chat about each option in a pair and then privately write your favourite topic on a slip of paper and put your slip in a box.
- Count the votes to see the winner.
- **If you decided on an out-of-school action**, draw up an empty chart (similar to the one on the next page) and fill the boxes with suggestions from the group.
- Everyone in the group can make two suggestions. You'll need to think about your suggestions carefully and give reasons for each. You may need to do some research before you offer a suggestion.
- Once the chart is full, write your favourite topic on a slip of paper and put your slip in a box.
- Count the votes to see the winner.

Bullying	Pupil Voice
Recycling	Meal arrangements
Social mixing	Healthy food
Fairtrade products	Cycling to school
[Your suggestion]	[Your suggestion]

**Step 2: Getting help and support**

Before you start on the social action, you need to think about who can help you.

Draw the following chart onto a large sheet of paper and fill in the boxes. You will probably need to do some research (see Step 3) before you complete the chart.

**Social action issue:**

[You to complete]

**People affected**

**Possible supporters of the action**

**Decision-makers**

**Suppliers of information and advice**

**Step 3: Carrying out research**

It is important to do some research before you start your social action to find out:

- whether the social action is necessary
- what the people affected by the action think about it
- what suggestions they can make to help you carry out the action effectively
- who the key people are – you are going to need their help.

There are several different types of research that you may wish to use. The sheets on pages 7 & 8 summarise these different types of research and will help you choose the best methods.

Keep a record of what you find out as you may need to come back to your research findings during your social action.

**Firstly think about the following questions:**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Discussed?</b> ✓	<b>Answer</b>
1. What are we trying to find out in our action?		
2. What documents might we need to research?		
3. Whose views do we need to get?		
4. How many respondents will we have?		
5. How will we choose our respondents?		
6. Will we use different research methods for different kinds of respondents?		
7. How much time and people-power will we allocate to research?		
8. How will we analyse the data we collect?		
9. Who will analyse the data?		
10. How will we use the results of our research?		
11. Who will help us with the research methods?		

## Research Techniques

### 1. Face-to-face unstructured interviews

- The interviewer interviews one person at a time.
- He/she has a number of key questions to ask, but can add extra questions if new topics come up, and to gather background information.
- The interview is often sound recorded.
- This technique is useful for small numbers of key people and can provide very valuable and detailed information.
- It is not suitable for large numbers of respondents because it is very time-consuming and difficult to analyse.

### 2. Questionnaires and surveys

- Written questionnaires are prepared for use with a large number of people.
- The questionnaires consist of a mix of 'open' and 'closed' questions. Open questions give the respondents a chance to express their own views, whereas closed questions give a choice of answers to tick. It is much easier to analyse the responses to closed questions (simple counting) but open questions provide more detail.
- Researchers try to get a cross-section of respondents (i.e. a good mix of ages, genders, social classes, educational backgrounds etc.).
- The questionnaire can be filled in by the respondents themselves (sometimes online) or used during a street interview.

### 3. Observation

- Observation involves watching and recording what happens during an event.
- The researcher does not take part in the event.
- It can include systematically counting the number of times something happens and noting who did what. Charts and diagrams, video and audio recording can be used to record what happened.
- The technique is useful for research into the social behaviour of different groups.

### 4. Focus groups

- A focus group is usually quite small – no more than 12 people.
- The group can consist of a well-selected cross-section of people – different ages, ethnicities, social classes and levels of education, but the make-up of the group often depends on the topic.
- The researcher may use follow-up questions to clarify answers.
- The focus group is usually recorded, sometimes with video.
- Advertising companies and political parties use this technique to find out what people's reactions might be to a new product or policy.

### 5. Documents

- This technique involves analysing the contents of documents.
- The range of documents that might be interesting to a researcher is huge: minutes of meetings, journals, diaries, letters and memos, as well as newspaper articles, public notices, press releases etc. It can also include visual and sound 'documents' such as video, sound recordings and photographs.
- Document research is used to find out about the background to an issue before other kinds of research are used.

### 6. Telephone interviews

- Some telephone interviews might use a survey questionnaire; others can be more in-depth, like a face-to-face interview.
- Although this technique is easier and cheaper than street surveys, it involves making appointments with the respondents so that they are available when the researcher calls them.
- Some researchers record the telephone conversations to avoid making copious notes during the call.
- This technique is used with respondents who have been selected by the researcher.

## Checklist of Research Tips and Advice

Whichever research methods you use, make sure you follow these tips.

- The research is important because it tells you things you probably didn't know. Take it seriously. Use the research findings in your plans and as supporting evidence for your choice of action. You will probably need to use more than one methodology.
- Think carefully about who your respondents will be. It is not good enough just to ask your friends and family what they think – you probably know this already. You must get information from the people actually involved in the results of your social action.
- Select respondents according to some principles. If the action will affect one group of people, for example young mothers, then clearly you need to mainly survey young mothers, but make sure they are a real mix of mothers from different kinds of backgrounds. If the action involves everyone in a locality, try to get a mix of people – ages, genders, social classes etc.
- Don't forget to collect the views of key decision-makers in the community. You have to find out who these people are.



- If you decide to design an interview schedule or a questionnaire, follow the following steps:
  - make a list of things to find out
  - decide on the types of questions (open or closed) that will suit each topic
  - think about how the answers will be analysed
  - write your questions clearly – not too long or vague
  - keep the questionnaire quite short – no more than 20 minutes to complete
  - if the questionnaire is to be sent back to you, remember to provide the return address or email.
  
- Test out the questionnaire before you use it with respondents, and ask your mock interviewee to be honest about what works and what doesn't.
  
- If you carry out interviews you will need
  - a quiet undisturbed place
  - a sound recorder that works (check the batteries!) plus a pen and paper to note down important things (and as a backup to the recording)
  - sufficient time to carry out the interview
  - a polite, listening manner, but be prepared to ask for clarification.
  
- Analyse the data thoroughly. Some data will be quantitative (numbers) and some will be qualitative (descriptive). You will need summary sheets to count up the responses to closed questions, and sub-headings for collating the responses to open questions. Display the findings in charts and graphs. You can also extract interesting quotes.

**Step 4: Deciding on kinds of action**

What do we mean by 'taking action'? There are so many things you could do, but you don't have to do all of these! Decide which of the following might be most useful and relevant for the social action you have chosen.

Actions	Examples	Reason why it would be useful for our issue
Presenting a case to others about the issue, written or spoken	Writing a press release Starting a blog to raise awareness Meeting a decision-maker to put forward an argument	
Carrying out a consultation	Finding out what people in the area, or pupils in the school, think about the issue	
Organising an event	The event could be a meeting, conference, debate, exhibition or display	
Representing the views of others	Could be as class rep in the school or putting a case in the community on someone else's behalf	
Writing or reviewing an organisational policy	Looking at a school's anti-bullying policy Finding out what a local council's policy is on youth facilities	
Setting up an action group	Campaigning in school for Fairtrade products Campaigning out of school for additional sporting facilities for children	

Actions	Examples	Reason why it would be useful for our issue
Start a petition	Collecting signatures locally, or linking an online petition to a blog	
Inviting speakers to school	Could be a local MP, councillor or police inspector	
Make a video or photo slideshow	Using video or photographs to help make an argument	
Raising money for a cause	Researching an organisation or a cause of real interest to you, and raising funds or support to help its work	
Other		

- There are many websites and organisations that can give advice and links to places dealing with social action (ask your teacher).
- If you are running a campaign, you can use information technology yourself via email, social networking sites, digital video, online petitions and blogs.
  - Two examples of blog sites are [www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com) and [www.SimpleSite.com](http://www.SimpleSite.com).
  - For photos and video, you could use [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com) and [www.YouTube.com](http://www.YouTube.com).
- However, you can only use these tools if you have something to say, so prepare well and think about how you get your message over. Make sure that anything you post is well-argued, interesting and legal.

**Step 5: Getting round the blockages**

There are often problems and obstacles when planning and running social action. These will be frustrating, but they may well happen. The good news is that they can usually be overcome.

- Draw a brick wall like this one on a large sheet of paper. Talk about what obstacles might arise and write each one on a brick. Choose a large brick for a more serious obstacle and a smaller brick for a little problem.


- Now talk about ways of overcoming the obstacles. Draw a hammer on each brick and write the solution on the hammer. Knock down that wall!



**Step 6: What will success look like?**

You need to be clear about what you hope to achieve from your social action. Depending on the issue you have chosen, the impact might be wide-reaching and impact on large numbers of people, or it might be quite small, even though important to the group of people you have been helping.

- Here is a selection of things that the people you helped might say you achieved. Tick the ones that are likely in your social action and add in any that don't appear here, in the blank call-outs.

*We have lots of nice equipment for the users of our centre, and some additional funds*

*We have a lovely new facility that is safe and everyone enjoys using*

*There is a much better policy in place and it is stuck to by all parties*

*We have a group that represents us and we now feel that we have a voice*

*The petition has helped us change things and we are happy with the result*

*Our issue got lots of publicity and that has led to much more support in the community*

**Step 7: Putting it all together – action planning**

Drawing up an action plan can seem like a bore, but it will make a huge difference to the success of your action. In your group, you will need to decide on the order of all the different stages of the project and discuss who will do what, by when.

You have already thought about who can help, some of the actions you might take, research you need to do and obstacles you might have to overcome. Now you have to put it all together and allocate tasks!

- Cut out the boxes on the next page and fill in the information about your project. Arrange the boxes in order of priority on a table.
- Some tasks will need to be carried out at the same time, so different people should be allocated these jobs.
- Stick the boxes to a large sheet of paper and use it as your working plan.
- When you have made decisions about all aspects of the social action, complete the action planning form on pages 16 and 17 (or the one supplied by your examination board).

## Action planning

Team members

Issue for action

Aims & objectives

Actions needed

Names of your project

Resources & equipment needed

Helpers & supporters

Who does what?

Possible risks & obstacles

Dateline; what by when?

How to evaluate impact & success

### Action planning form

<b>Team members</b>			
<b>Issue for action</b>			
<b>Name of project</b>			
<b>Aims and objectives</b>			
<b>Resources and equipment needed</b>			
<b>Helpers and supporters</b>			
<b>Actions needed</b>			
<b>Who does what by when</b>	<b>Task</b>	<b>Who?</b>	<b>By when?</b>



<b>Risk assessment</b>	<b>Possible risks and obstacles</b>	<b>How to overcome?</b>
<b>How to judge impact</b>		
<b>How to evaluate the success of project</b>		
<b>How to celebrate our achievements</b>		

**Step 8: Did we do well? Evaluating the action**

Evaluating your action is different from analysing your research results. It is the process of looking back over what you did and how you did it, to learn lessons for the future.

- You should think about evaluation right at the start. Here are some important questions to ask yourself at the beginning:
  - what will count as success?
  - how will you measure the success of your action?
  - how will you get feedback from the people you worked with, in your group and in the community?
  - how will you celebrate and publicise the achievements of your action?
- At the end of the social action, the group should all sit down together and discuss the following questions. Write down your own contribution and learning as you go.

Discussion questions	Notes on my own role and contribution
Did the social action go to plan? What went well? What went less well? What would we do differently next time? What have we learned? - new knowledge - new skills	
Has the social action successfully brought about change? How do we know?	
What shall we do next? Why is it needed?	