



Closure Report for the National Citizen Service (NCS)

1. Closure Announcement

On 12th November 2024, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport announced the government's intention to defund the National Citizen Service (NCS) by 31st March 2025, with the NCS Trust to be closed when Parliament allows. NCS staff were informed immediately following the parliamentary announcement. This decision was communicated to the NCS board at a meeting on the evening of 11th November, after the Chair and CEO were informed by the Secretary of State earlier that day.

Following the notification of these plans, on 12th November the NCS Trust initiated a structured wind-down process, completed by June 2025. At this point, residual operational responsibilities were transferred to the Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS).

This report documents the wind-down process, structured as follows:

Initial Response: The Trust's immediate reaction and subsequent actions following the announcement.

Wind-Down Evaluation: A detailed assessment of the Trust's closure process, benchmarked against established best practices—acknowledging the unique and unprecedented nature of the circumstances.

Key Learnings: Insights and lessons derived from the wind-down experience.

2. NCS Background

Founded in 2009 and granted Royal Charter Body status in 2018, NCS was founded to help build a more cohesive

society through supporting young people at a crucial moment in their lives, through connecting young people across many walks of life, building their skills and confidence, and empowering them to make a difference in their communities.

NCS was an offer for 15-17 year olds in England. It was first piloted in 2011, grew rapidly over 10 years and then went through significant transformation from 2020 to respond to the evolving needs of young people. The NCS programme was almost entirely funded by HM Government, first through the Cabinet Office and then transferred to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). NCS Trust was the organisation set up to manage the NCS offer.

Throughout our years of operation, NCS was driven by a clear vision and mission. These guiding principles shaped everything we did, helping to empower young people and create a more connected society.

Our vision

A country of connected, confident and caring citizens where everybody feels at home.

Our mission

To inspire generations of citizens through shared experiences that develop character and bridge social divides.

Through all its evolutions, these areas remained fundamental to NCS:

- **Social cohesion:** NCS was always focused on social cohesion. Our vision was 'A country of connected, confident, caring citizens where everyone feels at

home. We have always been focused on bringing together young people from different backgrounds and bridging social divides.

- **Universality:** To achieve social cohesion, we always provided a universal offer, encouraging participation from all walks of life and providing additional support to those who need it.
- **Residential:** We saw the impact of taking young people out of their comfort zones, away from home, in a focused, exciting and new environment. Evidence and impact evaluation proved that it builds confidence, capability and connection.

Further details on NCS's offerings are available in its Annual Report 24/25.

Key Achievements at Closure

Participation: Since its launch, NCS has delivered almost 1.5 million experiences to 15-17 year olds, with participation over-indexed to groups of young people most in need, with 80% reporting enhanced future-ready skills and 70% citing increased respect for diversity.

Performance Against Targets: Across its last two-year funding period, The Trust delivered over 600,000 experiences to young people, more than double its target of 261,000, with customer satisfaction scores at the highest levels since programmes began. Participation targets were achieved across its full portfolio of offerings for young people - residential programmes undertaken away from home, community programmes delivered closer to home, and online digital experiences.

Innovation: To the benefit of young people, the most recent two-year funding period has witnessed more programme innovation than any other period in NCS history. The launch of grant-funding allowed more than one hundred grassroots organisations to work with NCS for the first time, delivering more than 177,000 additional experiences to young people in their own local communities. Additionally, NCS's development of online

experiences allowed participants to learn and grow their skills at home, with the complexity and impact of each new digital experiences launched growing across that period. This culminated in the launch of an online game to support financial literacy, Neohaven Noodles, which saw almost a quarter of a million visits in just over two months; and three new digital prototypes, co-designed with youth organisations, that provide solutions to challenges seen right across the youth sector.

Financial & Operational Outcomes: The Trust outperformed income generation and knowledge-sharing targets, full KPI reporting can be found in the Annual Report 24/25.

3. High Level Chronology

Given the compressed timeframe for winding down the Trust and the lack of recent precedent for revoking a Royal Charter, identifying established benchmarks to guide the process proved challenging. To ensure adherence to best practices, the Trust proactively engaged its Board, the Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS), the National Audit Office (NAO), and other expert sources for strategic guidance.

The Executive Team, supplemented by key external advisors, convened frequently in the initial phase to establish high-level governance principles. These principles guided all subsequent operational and financial decisions during the wind-down period. The Trust's primary focus was the safe and effective delivery of all active programmes through March 2025.

The Trust implemented a comprehensive staff support strategy to ensure operational continuity throughout the wind-down period. This included the immediate establishment of wellbeing support programs alongside structured outplacement services which included; career coaching, interview skills training, LinkedIn profile workshops and CV review services.

A robust communication framework was developed, featuring weekly organisational updates, regular “Ask Me Anything” sessions, and a maintained Q&A log to ensure transparency. Additional measures included organisation-wide meetings for team cohesion, weekly stand-up meetings, and the repurposing of the November staff away day as an achievement and recognition event.

Professional development opportunities were maintained in line with our training policy. The Trust also implemented multiple welfare support systems, including dedicated line manager support sessions, mental health first aid resources, a wellbeing champion network, and access to counselling services.

Regarding staff retention, the Trust developed a comprehensive plan to maintain operational capacity. While the initial proposal for enhanced redundancy terms submitted to HM Treasury was not approved, alternative measures were successfully implemented. These measures collectively supported the orderly wind-down of operations while maintaining staff welfare and operational effectiveness.

The executive team conducted a ‘stop, start, continue’ exercise, the outputs of which were then shared in a special meeting with all staff. This included decisions to stop all programmes for FY 25/26, any longer-term strategy and spending review preparation work to cease, our external board effectiveness review to be cancelled, along with other procurements that had been in the pipeline.

Activities to ensure long-term value from NCS were realised (for instance, via transferring assets) and a committee was put in place to oversee this. A stakeholder call of board members past and present also took place in December to support this.

Financial forecasts were reprofiled, and a draft budget for FY 25/26 was put in place, though this could not be finalised until staffing requirements were clear and the

consultation process was complete. The admin budget continued to be managed within target thresholds.

The trust’s legal team worked diligently to comprehend the trust’s legal situation, including the choreography and timeline of moving primary legislation to revoke the Charter, to understand staff and board requirements during the wind-down and close-down period, and the trust’s other legal obligations, drawing on external legal support as needed.

A paper was drawn up with advice from NAO and legal to set out changes to the board’s responsibilities during the period and presented to the board. Additional activities were put in place, such as monthly board meetings and more regular meetings between the board and the executive.

A new governance structure was established with DCMS. This included a joint programme board, regular Subject Matter Expert meetings, and a governance assurance group with DCMS representation, the CEO, and key Board members.

On 12th December 2024, the Trust formally initiated a structured wind-down programme, appointing a dedicated programme lead and establishing specific closure-related KPIs. Project charters were developed for each functional area (Systems and Data, Finance, Legal and Governance, IT, and People), outlining key activities, milestones and associated reporting mechanisms to facilitate the closure of operations.

Risk Management Framework

A comprehensive risk assessment was conducted to evaluate the risk profile during the transition period. This identified several critical risks, including potential loss of institutional knowledge during staff departures, data security vulnerabilities, and safeguarding considerations. Newly identified risks were promptly addressed through appropriate mitigation strategies as they emerged.

Workforce Restructuring Process

The staff consultation process commenced on 9th January 2025 under the oversight of the Remuneration Committee.

Appropriate governance measures were implemented to manage potential conflicts of interest, including the exclusion of executive team members from relevant committee decisions where necessary.

Phased Transition Planning

As operational requirements became clearer, the Trust implemented a phased workforce planning approach, structured across three distinct periods:

- Service delivery will continue until 31st March 2025
- Operational wind-down to be completed by 30th June 2025
- Final closure activities from 1st July until Royal Charter revocation (through legislation or surrender)

Workforce requirements were carefully assessed for each phase, with the majority of staff departing by the end of March 2025 and approximately 40 staff retained until June 2025. Following negotiations, DCMS formally agreed on 21st February to assume responsibility for residual activities from 1st July 2025. Staffing arrangements were subsequently refined throughout the consultation process to align with operational requirements.

Under with advice from DCMS and the support of the Secretary of State, the NCS Trust Board took the decision to wind up NCS and surrender its Royal Charter. Under this process, NCS agreed with DCMS to transfer its residual assets and liabilities to DCMS.

The Members of NCS have an express power under clause 17 of its Royal Charter to surrender the Royal Charter and wind up or otherwise deal with the affairs of NCS.

Having received approval from DCMS to proceed with the winding up of NCS, the Members passed and confirmed a resolution using the power under clause 17 of the Royal Charter at a meeting held on 16th June 2025.

4. Evaluation of wind-down against developed framework requirements

The closure of NCS Trust as a Royal Charter body represented an exceptional circumstance with limited existing best practice guidance. To address this, the Trust developed a structured framework outlining key closure activities, drawing upon multiple sources including an external consultancy report, best practice guidance from the Cabinet Office and Institute for Government, and advisory input from staff and Board members.

The framework is detailed below, with an assessment against each criterion indicating completion status. The framework's structure aligns with the primary workstreams established in the wind-down programme (refer to Section 3).

This report documents activities through the completion of wind-down operations in June 2025. Subsequently, DCMS, as the responsible department, will assume minimal residual Charter-related responsibilities pending legislative completion.

4.1 Governance and Assurance

Ref	Requirement	NCST Comment	Status
4.1.1	Establish oversight group/committee (DCMS, HM Treasury, Cabinet Office, NCS representation).	Wind down governance structure agreed and documented with DCMS	Complete
4.1.2	<p>Create a detailed closure timeline (key dates, phases).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phase 1: Planning, due diligence, closure plan development, legislative process initiation. • Phase 2: Closure plan implementation, program/service transfer/closure. • Phase 3: Final closure activities, closure report, claim management, and handover of responsibilities. 	Workstream leads agreed and closure project plan developed. Working closely with DCMS teams through progress and timeline tracking through regular reporting and documentation, workshops and SME working groups	Complete
4.1.3	Establish regular reporting requirements (financial position, contract closures, HR matters, risk register, audit trail).	Regular reporting on wind-down programme to ELT and the Board	Complete
4.1.4	Implement and maintain a comprehensive audit trail (decisions, actions, expenditures).	<p>Audit trail of decision making via ELT action plan and project working groups.</p> <p>Actions, decisions and dependencies for the wind down programme are being tracked both internally within the Trust, and also across a joint log with DCMS team(s). This activity will continue for the duration of the wind down programme and is reported and discussed weekly with ELT and DCMS sponsor groups.</p> <p>This will also include any handover plans, key date, activities and agreement, for NCS to NCS April to June staff, and NCS to DCMS aligned with the three wind down and closure time bands</p>	Complete
4.1.5	Draft comprehensive closure report (actions, financial analysis, compliance, risk management, lessons learned).	This report	Complete

4.2 Additional corporate governance measures taken by NCST

Ref	Requirement	NCST Comment	Status
4.2.1	Conduct stop, start continue review by Exec team	Completed in December 2024	Complete
4.2.3	Review of organisational policies ("stop, start continue")	Completed in December 2024	Complete
4.2.4	Review of the compliance dashboard	Completed in May 2025	Complete

Additional measures were also implemented to ensure governance remained robust during the close-down period:

- More frequent board meetings (minimum once a month)
- Weekly governance meetings between the Chair and the Head of Governance and Compliance
- Regular meetings on finance between the Chair and CEO and Executive Director of Finance
- Direct inclusion of the Chair of the People and Remuneration Committee in decisions related to staff retention and the consultation process to avoid any conflicts of interest
- DoA reviewed during the period to 31 March and updated during wind down period (April - June)
- Measures to protect against heightened risks related to fraud, safeguarding, data loss, and information security
- An updated set of KPIs reflected in the Annual Strategic Plan to reflect the wind-down environment
- Chair decisions made together with the Chair of ARC and the People and Remuneration Committee acting as vice-Chairs
- An updated risk log to reflect the closure decision and roll out of risk training
- Greater liaison (at least monthly with more frequent meetings as required) between Trust Finance leadership and Senior Finance personnel in DCMS Finance and the NAO Audit lead.
- Monthly meetings with NAO
- Establishment of Value for Money Committee
- Establishment of advisory and assurance group with chairs of committees, CEO, Chair and DCMS Lead
- Sharing closure KPIs and dashboards from the wind-down transformation programme with the board

4.3 Legal

Ref	Requirement	NCST Comment	Status
4.3.1	Establish litigation protocol with DCMS for any future claims NCS may receive and manage the process (receiving, assessing, escalating claims).	Litigation protocol agreed	Complete
4.3.2	Ensure advice provided on TUPE regulations (if applicable).	Being provided as and when required	Complete
4.3.3	Assess liability for contract terminations and documents on spreadsheet to be agreed between NCS Commercial & DCMS Commercial.	Master contract register compiled and shared with DCMS	Complete
4.3.4	Confirm legal entity status of NCS and advise on the dissolution process.	This has been confirmed and we have had advise on the dissolution process	

4.4 Finance

Ref	Requirement	NCST Comment	Status
4.4.1	Develop asset and IP schedule and support with disposal/transfer plan (compliance with regulations, value maximisation).	Our only assets of value are our IT hardware for which we have produced a disposal policy. We work in partnership with DCMS to develop a plan for knowledge asset transfer for items which do not hold balance sheet value but would be of benefit for public good (e.g. the game, Biteback and various research papers we have produced)	Complete
4.4.2	Identify outstanding liabilities and plan handover process with DCMS legal, NCS legal, NCS finance and NCS' insurance provider.	We are working closely with DCMS finance on a plan for post June.	Complete
4.4.3	Prepare accounts for the period from 1 April to the date of dissolution.	N/A - this will be a post-June activity (conducted by DCMS)	N/A
4.4.4	Ensure provision for the costs of and payment to external auditors.	Actioned	Complete
4.4.5	Put in place a closure risk register	A wind down risk register has been put in place and reviewed as part of the wind down programme	

4.5 Systems, Data & Technology

Ref	Requirement	NCST Comment	Status
4.5.1	To plan the safe and secure disposal of / transfer of all currently held experience data across all services, includes all structured and unstructured data managed by the Trust; mandatory requirements to fulfil Public Records Act, FOI Act and legal obligations.	Working in partnership with DCMS departmental Records Officer and with other support, such as legal and data protection	Complete
4.5.2	To plan and deliver an asset management plan for all physical assets including staff held hardware	Asset plan in existence. Policy for disposal finalised.	Complete
4.5.3	To correctly close down, transfer or plan the lifetime of all systems over an appropriate timeline	Working in partnership with DCMS departmental Records Officer and with other support, such as legal and data protection	Complete
4.5.4	To manage system changes as delivery winds down, partner access and YP comms come to an end	Planning underway through Technical Design Authority to plan and manage system closedowns	Complete

4.6 Commercial

Ref	Requirement	NCST Comment	Status
4.6.1	Conduct due diligence on termination provisions of all existing NCS contracts		Complete
4.6.2	Create contract schedule including financial analysis, termination provisions, exit strategies		Complete
4.6.3	Develop strategies for early contract exits, where required and minimising where possible		Complete
4.6.4	Review and close all grants	Grant closure process is finalised - reconciliation and payments completed. GGIS update finalised	Complete
4.6.5	Review data for financial reconciliation and payment	In line with grant closure process	Complete

Ref	Requirement	NCST Comment	Status
4.6.6	Establish where contracts need to novate or in other way move to DCMS	Short list compiled and agreed with DCMS. Regular meetings are in place across NCS and DCMS commercial teams.	Complete
4.6.7	Closure of all contracts or novation where required	<p>117 contracts in total, 2 to be novated (deeds now drafted). 2 new contracts awarded to support novation (TES and Netpremacy).</p> <p>17 contracts remain that require further action to bring forward closure. Work is ongoing and is scheduled to complete on time.</p>	Complete

4.7 People

Ref	Requirement	NCST Comment	Status
4.7.1	Develop a comprehensive HR plan including redundancy procedures, pensions, accrued holiday pay, retention strategies, early leaver management and succession planning	People plan for wind down completed including consultation plan, retention proposals, holiday plans, succession planning	Complete
4.7.2	Devise interim staffing structures	<p>Staffing structures until March, April - June agreed</p> <p>Staffing beyond June - DCMS</p>	Complete
4.7.3	Conduct a consultation process	Consultation process underway	Complete
4.7.4	Determine responsibility for financing and administering pension benefits.	This will switch from a group scheme to an individual scheme as people leave. The final payment to Royal London is to be conducted by a BACS process in June.	Complete
4.7.5	Work with legal to respond to any questions regarding TUPE	Questions have been responded to through collective consultation. Any remaining questions will be answered through individual consultation	Complete
4.7.6	Proactively support staff with development, outplacement and wellbeing initiatives	Wellbeing, outplacement support and L&D initiatives delivered	Complete

5. NCS View of ongoing Responsibilities for DCMS

Ref	Requirement	NCST Comment
5.1	Hold Board meetings in order to meet governance requirement of the Royal Charter and Act	DCMS action - This is required until the Charter is Surrendered/ Act revoked
5.2	Respond to FOI/GDPR requests	DCMS action
5.3	Ensure handover of ongoing services/programmes	N/A
5.4	Ensure records of bodies subject to the Public Records Acts are appraised and transferred to the National Archives	DCMS is reviewing provision of the Public Records Act alongside NCS list of assets
5.5	Make sure references to the public body are removed from legislation	DCMS action
5.6	Lay the final audited accounts before Parliament	DCMS action
5.7	Directors and Officers Insurance	Ensure board members are suitably covered and run off is triggered at point of Surrender/ Revoking of Act
5.8	Take Act/Charter through parliament in order for it to be revoked	The Board voted to Surrender the Charter, this will go to Privy Council for approval in July

5. Review against the Institute for Government's best practice

This section presents key observations from the NCS Trust closure process to inform potential future public body wind-down operations. Using the Institute for Government's best practice framework for public body closures as its evaluative basis, it focuses on core principles rather than operational specifics.

The evaluation suggests several areas where the closure process **did not fully align** with established best practices:

Strategic Understanding: Insufficient consideration was given to NCS's operational functions and the systemic impacts of its closure across the wider sector ecosystem.

Workforce Transition: Staff welfare considerations were not adequately incorporated into the announcement timeline or transition planning. Increased measures to maintain staff retention and motivation during the transition period were not agreed.

Decision-Making Process: Available evidence does not confirm whether a comprehensive business case was developed to support the closure decision.

However, the process demonstrated **effective management** in other areas:

- Clear establishment of the legislative basis for closure
- Maintenance of accountability structures throughout the transition period
- Effective collaboration with DCMS transition teams

Recommendations for Future Processes:

Pre-Closure Analysis: Conduct thorough assessment of the body's functions and sector-wide impacts prior to closure decisions.

Transition Planning: Develop comprehensive transition plans featuring; Realistic implementation timelines, Structured workforce support mechanisms, Clear communication protocols

Workforce Strategy: Implement staff retention and welfare measures as integral components of transition planning

This analysis provides a framework for enhancing future public body closure processes while maintaining operational continuity and workforce stability.

Best Practice Criterion 1 (Institute for Government)

Clear Goals: It is essential to set out clear goals for the abolition. Abolition should not be an end in itself unless the government is prepared to stop performing the functions the body carries out. Goals may include better cohesion with other parts of government, cutting costs, improving service delivery, simplifying the administrative landscape, increasing ministerial control, or changing leadership, but some of these should be approached with caution. Decision-makers should consider if the goals could be achieved without abolishing the public body

The evaluation of best practice indicates that established protocols were not fully complied with in this instance.

The analysis reveals that the termination of NCS operations has resulted in several critical strategic gaps within the youth sector. Most notably, the social cohesion function previously delivered by NCS has been discontinued without any equivalent replacement provision being established. This decision has also led to an overall reduction in funding allocations for youth sector programme delivery. The absence of both a successor national youth strategy and a designated coordinating body for sector-wide activities has created a vacuum in strategic leadership and coordination across youth services.

The review identified two potential mitigation approaches that could have been implemented to avoid these negative outcomes. First, an organisational repurposing option would have allowed for the preservation of NCS's core objectives and functions while maintaining existing service delivery capacity. Second, a phased

transition approach would have provided an extended implementation timeline, enabling the development of a replacement youth strategy while preventing abrupt funding discontinuation and maintaining service continuity during the transition period.

Several key operational lessons emerge from this analysis. Firstly, a comprehensive functional analysis should always be completed before any significant structural changes to national service delivery systems. Additionally, the transition planning processes must incorporate parallel strategy development to ensure continuity of service provision. The establishment of robust service continuity mechanisms before implementing operational changes is equally critical. Finally, maintaining stability in funding streams during strategy transitions is essential to prevent service reduction.

This evaluation highlights the importance of strategic foresight and thorough transitional planning when modifying a national service. Future considerations of similar organisational changes should include impact assessments and continuity planning mechanisms to safeguard against service disruption and maintain operational effectiveness throughout transition periods. The lessons learned from this case study are intended to provide valuable insights for policymakers considering future structural changes to public service delivery systems.

Best Practice Criterion 2 (Institute for Government)

Understanding the Body: Before abolishing a body, it's crucial to understand what it does, why it is constituted the way it is, and how its functions ended up in that organisation. This includes understanding its history to avoid repeating past mistakes. Decision makers should speak to senior staff and the board, and conduct a mapping exercise of the staff, costs and functions.

Analysis reveals a lack of understanding regarding NCS Trust's operational scope

and functions, as demonstrated by subsequent public characterisations of the organisation as merely a “summer programme operating a few weeks annually.” This misrepresentation failed to recognise the Trust’s comprehensive year-round portfolio of diverse youth programming and experiences.

The closure process did not adhere to formal governance protocols, as evidenced by the Board of Trustees not being consulted or informed about closure plans before the public announcement. This oversight is a shift from standard organisational transition practices.

Key recommendations from this part of the assessment emphasize the critical importance of conducting thorough due diligence before any closure decision. Specifically:

1. A comprehensive functional analysis should be completed to understand the organisation’s scope and impact fully
2. Proper governance procedures must be followed, including timely consultation with relevant boards and stakeholders
3. Decision-making should be based on complete and accurate operational understanding rather than partial or misinformed perspectives

These measures would help ensure future closure decisions are made with appropriate consideration of all relevant factors and with due regard for governance processes. The implementation of such due diligence protocols would significantly reduce the risk of organisational closures being initiated without a full understanding of their implications.

Best Practice Criterion 3 (Institute for Government)

Legislative Basis: Decision-makers should consider the legislative basis of the public body [...]. Many public bodies are named in statute, and even small bodies can have a foundation in law, requiring legislation for abolition. Understanding what sort of parliamentary consent is needed for abolition is crucial.

There is a clear understanding from the Government of the legislative basis of NCST, and the requirement for primary legislation to revoke the Act and the Charter. Legal advice had been taken on this point.

Best Practice Criterion 3 (Institute for Government)

Wider Ecosystem: Public bodies exist within an ecosystem, and abolitions often change the balance of this ecosystem. Policy makers should be aware of the impact on other departments, public bodies, and organisations, and consider potential unintended consequences.

As an organisation, NCST operated as an interconnected body within multiple networks, maintaining extensive operational partnerships with hundreds of charitable organisations and youth sector bodies across the country. Its role extended beyond direct service delivery to include critical coordinating functions, including as the convening body for the Back Youth Alliance. NCST had established formal collaborative relationships with several national programmes, including the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award, Residential providers, relationships that were developed over many years to maximize synergies and service delivery effectiveness.

The abrupt closure has manifested across multiple dimensions of the youth sector ecosystem. Most immediately, the insolvency declaration by Kingswood, one of NCST’s major providers, demonstrates the ripple effects throughout the supply chain. More broadly, the termination of NCST’s operations has created uncertainty for numerous youth sector organisations that relied on its coordinating functions and funding. The future of established partnership programmes is now at risk, while several cross-government initiatives in areas such as social prescribing and mental health provision have been stopped, despite showing considerable potential and receiving positive engagement from multiple government departments.

This situation highlights several critical areas where closure protocols require strengthening. Future processes should incorporate comprehensive transition planning that specifically addresses the transfer or continuation of critical projects that deliver demonstrable value. A systematic stakeholder analysis should form an integral part of any closure decision-making process, ensuring that all affected parties are identified and their interests considered.

The implementation of structured programme transfer mechanisms would help preserve valuable services and maintain continuity during transitions. Phased implementation timelines should be established as standard practice to mitigate disruption and allow for proper adaptation within the affected ecosystem. These measures would collectively serve to protect the government's long-term investments while minimising damage to partner organisations and young people.

Best Practice Criterion 4 (Institute for Government)

Cost Assessment: There should be a thorough assessment of the long- and short-term costs of abolition. This includes not just financial costs, but also the cost of staff time, service disruption, and the risk of losing expertise.

The rapid wind-down failed to fully consider the long-term value of government investments in NCST, particularly regarding the transfer of specialised knowledge and resources. This included valuable capabilities in programme delivery, grant management, safeguarding protocols, program evaluation, and youth engagement.

The tight timeline resulted in suboptimal handling of assets such as educational resources, strategic partnerships, and innovative programs. The process failed to establish pathways for retaining staff expertise within the youth sector, leading to a significant loss of resources. Many experienced professionals with skills directly relevant to government priorities transitioned to unrelated fields due to the lack of redeployment options.

Two key recommendations within this section. Initially, future closure processes should implement structured transition mechanisms to systematically transfer physical and intellectual assets, strategic partnerships, and specialised staff expertise. This approach would maximise returns on prior investments while maintaining continuity in priority policy areas. Second, when replacement programs remain undeveloped, consideration should be given to maintaining existing operations until other initiatives become operational, establishing phased transition timelines, and creating formal knowledge transfer processes. These measures would prevent capability gaps while ensuring smooth transfer of assets and expertise to new delivery structures.

These recommendations would ensure that future processes better protect both financial investments and staff expertise within the youth sector.

Best Practice Criterion 5 (Institute for Government)

Sensitive Announcement: The announcement of an abolition should be done sensitively and positively. Staff should be informed before the media, and the communication should focus on how the change will improve outcomes, rather than appearing reactive or punitive

The closure announcement process did not adhere to established best practices for announcements. Staff were informed concurrently with the general public, as parliamentary protocol prevented prior notification. While the announcement acknowledged NCST's contributions, the rationale provided was inconsistent and not substantively linked to programme outcomes.

The stated justification—the need for a youth strategy that is “relevant and puts young people at the helm”—contradicted NCST's demonstrable commitment to youth engagement. In recent years, NCST has embedded youth voice in governance and decision-making, including a youth-led strategy development process that directly informed its current strategic

direction. NCS Trust has been recognised for driving youth participation, such as through the first youth panel in a public appointments process. Despite this, young people were not consulted before the Secretary of State's announcement. Feedback from youth consultations had highlighted a desire for more in-person experiences, making claims about NCST's irrelevance to a "TikTok generation" seeking offline engagement appear misaligned with evidence. This disconnect created confusion and impacted morale among staff and youth people.

Thorough due diligence must be carried out before closure decisions to ensure announcements and grounded in clear, evidence-based reasoning. Staff and stakeholders should be able to clearly articulate reasons for the decision, rather than assumptions. This approach creates transparency and mitigates unnecessary demoralisation.

Best Practice Criterion 6 (Institute for Government)

Motivate Staff: It is essential to motivate leaders and staff to make the abolition a success. Staff should be engaged in the process, and they should understand how the abolition offers opportunities for career development or for making a positive impact. A clear, positive narrative for change is important.

The NCS leadership implemented a structured approach to maintain staff morale following the closure announcement, supported by constructive engagement from the government sponsor team. Key measures included:

- Establishment of clear communication channels
- Provision of career transition support
- Access to training and development opportunities
- Outplacement services

These initiatives were effective in sustaining staff motivation during the change period. The government sponsor team demonstrated consistent

commitment to staff welfare through collaborative planning with clearly defined objectives.

The decision to limit redundancy packages to statutory minimum requirements created significant challenges, particularly as NCS staff had previously been recognised for their performance under civil service-equivalent pay constraints. This compensation disparity, combined with public mischaracterisations of NCS operations (including repeated references to the organisation as a seasonal program), negatively impacted morale.

Key Recommendations for Future closures;

Staff Recognition Framework:

Implement formal mechanisms to acknowledge employee contributions throughout wind-down processes. This should include:

- Transparent communication of closure rationale
- Appropriate recognition of staff achievements
- Consideration of enhanced compensation packages
- Transition Planning

This framework should improve staff retention during critical phases, reduce reliance on temporary external resources, preservation of institutional knowledge and lead to an overall more efficient operational wind-down.

These measures would maintain staff morale while ensuring cost-effective and orderly close down. The approach balances fiscal responsibility with appropriate recognition of staff contributions, ultimately protecting taxpayer value through more effective knowledge transfer and process continuity.

Best Practice Criterion 7 (Institute for Government)

Realistic Timelines: Abolitions can be complex and require detailed planning, therefore, timelines must be realistic, based on operational realities rather than political pressures. It is important to allow

adequate time for transferring functions, and there should be flexibility to adjust deadlines if needed

The prescribed timelines did not allocate sufficient time for the structured transfer of assets, functions, and institutional knowledge, nor for the controlled wind-down of operations with appropriate risk mitigation. Consequently, NCST faced elevated operational, financial, and reputational risks during the closure period. Additionally, the inability to fully reassign NCS knowledge, artefacts, and projects has diminished the potential return on public investment and compromised value for money.

Recommendations:

Realistic Timeline Development: The Government should engage with subject organisations during the planning phase to establish evidence-based closure timelines, ensuring alignment with operational complexity.

Adaptive Timeline Management:

Where fixed deadlines are unavoidable, provisions should be made for adjustments as the full scope of work, including opportunities to safeguard public value, becomes clear.

Best Practice Criterion 8 (Institute for Government)

Clear Accountability: Throughout the transition, accountability must be clear for each part of the public body, at every stage. This is particularly important when functions are being transferred from one body to another, and should be carefully planned and documented.

The decision to close NCS was implemented without prior notice, requiring the organisation to initiate its response without planning. Despite this, NCS demonstrated adaptability consistent with its historical responsiveness to unforeseen emergencies (e.g., Grenfell Tower fire, COVID-19 pandemic). As documented in the preceding Response section, the Trust promptly established a dedicated closure group, which commenced decision-making and

operational planning from the outset, with effective oversight from the Trust Board and Remuneration Committee.

A structured wind-down plan was developed, incorporating rigorous controls, comprehensive documentation, and an updated risk register. Progress was monitored against closure KPIs, ensuring an orderly decommissioning process.

Key Lessons Identified:

1. Pre-Announcement Planning:

- Future closure processes would benefit from pre-announcement engagement between the Department and the affected organisation to establish a high-level transition framework, including provisional timelines, governance protocols, and a communications strategy.
- This would mitigate the challenges of reactive planning and reduce uncertainty for staff in the initial phases.

2. Effective Closure Execution:

The Trust's experience underscores the importance of:

- Close collaboration between the Department and the organisation.
- Early, decisive action on critical issues (e.g., asset transfer, staffing, legal obligations).
- A formalised transformation programme, supported by a PMO function, to ensure robust governance (e.g., KPIs, risk and action logs, milestone tracking).

Best Practice Criterion 9 (Institute for Government)

Skilled Transition Team: A high-quality and experienced transition team is vital for managing an abolition successfully. This should include people with experience of previous abolitions and those with project and change management skills

The Trust faced a challenging situation due to limited available expertise internally and within DCMS of the revocation of a Royal-Charter body. However, it benefited from:

1. Executive team, Board members, and DCMS officials with some wind-down process experience
2. Knowledgeable third-party advisors and legal counsel (both internal and external)
3. Existing in-house capabilities in project management and organisational transformation, previously utilised during:
 - COVID-19 pandemic response
 - Recommissioning exercises

DCMS provided substantial support through:

1. Deployment of an additional program management expert to facilitate joint governance development
2. Timely access to subject matter experts across critical functions:
 - Human Resources
 - Legal
 - Commercial operations
 - Financial management

Key Lessons Identified:

1. Expert Resourcing Requirement:
 - The wind-down demonstrated the critical need for dedicated transformation specialists on both Trust and departmental sides
 - Specialist teams should be established at program commencement
2. Direct SME Access:
 - Immediate access to technical experts proved essential for:
 - » Maintaining operational efficiency
 - » Ensuring accurate communication of complex information
 - » Preventing information degradation through multiple channels

3. Decision-Making Protocol:

- Successful outcomes depended on:
 - » Pre-scheduled decision points
 - » Advance circulation of relevant briefing materials
 - » Clear decision-making pathways

4. Governance Structure:

- The joint DCMS-Trust governance model proved effective and should be considered as a template for future transitions

Best Practice Criterion 10 (Institute for Government)

Business Case: A proportionate business case should be developed for the decision to abolish a public body. This should act as a prompt to gather necessary evidence on how a body operates, the costs of change, and what benefits are expected

NCST has no record of, or access to, any formal business case that may have been developed to support the decision for its closure. This assessment is based on:

1. The absence of any documented business case provided to NCST
2. The lack of prior consultation or evidence-based discussion regarding close-down
3. The operational and financial considerations outlined elsewhere in this report that would typically require formal analysis in such decisions

Recommendation for Future Processes:

For similar decisions affecting public bodies, departments should:

1. Develop and share (where appropriate) a comprehensive business case that clearly outlines:
 - Rationale for close-down
 - Cost-benefit analysis
 - Risk assessment
 - Transition planning considerations
2. Maintain transparency in decision-making processes to ensure proper governance and accountability

Best Practice Criterion 11 (Institute for Government)

Guidance: The Government should develop authoritative guidance on how to plan and execute an abolition, building on previous experience across government

The wind-down process was informed by:

1. **Chapter 10 of Public Bodies: A Guide for Departments**, which outlines dissolution requirements for:
 - Statutory bodies
 - Royal Charter bodies
 - Royal Commissions
 - Key requirements addressed included:
 - Legal and parliamentary obligations
 - Legislative considerations
2. Supplementary guidance developed from expert advice supported the development of the evaluation framework referenced in Section 4.

Gaps in Current Guidance:

While existing documentation provides a structural foundation, the Trust identified two critical needs for improvement in dissolution guidance:

1. Practical Implementation Toolkit

A more operational guide should be developed, covering:

- Functional area protocols (Finance, Legal, HR, Commercial)
- Enhanced governance requirements (Board duties, decision sequencing)
- Communication planning
- Risk mitigation strategies

2. Knowledge Transfer Mechanism

Systematic sharing of:

- Post-closure reports
- Lessons learned documentation
- This would prevent loss of institutional knowledge and reduce the need for improvised solutions in future wind-downs.

Recommendations:

1. Guidance Enhancement

- Cabinet Office should develop a practical abolition handbook with:
 - Checklists
 - Template documents
 - Case studies

2. Knowledge Management

- Establish a central repository of closure reports accessible to at-risk public bodies

6. De-scoped Activity

Due to stringent timelines and a lack of prior notice, as noted in the Best Practice Review, several planned activities were removed from the scope. A comprehensive table below outlines these de-scoped activities, detailing the subsequent impact and the outcomes of these decisions.

Situation	Rationale	Impact / Cost	Result
Closure was announced without a confirmed timeline, budget, plan or scope	Decision taken by the SOS	<p>June 30th agreed wind down the end date without consideration for the closure procedure for a Royal Charter Body, creating incredibly tight timelines and resource pressure.</p> <p>Lack of scope at the start of the programme led to some under-resourcing in specific areas, creating later work to reshape and resize the staffing</p>	<p>Given more time the programme would have had more structure - a critical path agreed with DCMS ahead of programme kick-off, agreed and structured reporting that was co-designed with DCMS, formalised stage gate meetings and an agreed handover process. This programme has required all of this to be designed and produced in-flight and then tweaked to fit the needs of the programme as more detail became clear</p> <p>An agreed closure budget would also have allowed up-front procurement of external consultants to support in specialist areas - again this happened in-flight and has been tweaked to suit the changing scope as and when required</p>
Due to a condensed timeline we couldn't undertake full analysis over 70 systems and their value and had to take a high level of assessment that only HR/ Finance / Young person and commercial systems had value.	We didn't have time to look through every system due to the timeline being very short.	Potential of lost value in systems that needed to be retired at pace	Value of data in systems lost
The customised and developed solutions that have had investment for over 10 years have been handed over or retired with limited time to find new owners that might have had more value.	There wasn't time to research, evaluate and find new homes for all our developed solutions.	Potential loss of customised solutions for safeguarding, and managing the young person journey that could have benefited the youth sector	Duplicated and fragmented investment in systems across the sector.
The timing of the decision on closure meant that the +1 was not executed with Ingeus or Grantees	DCMS decision	Underspend / funding could have been utilised on Programme Delivery for 2025 if a long closure timeline had been planned	All contracts and grant agreements terminated by 30th June and no further programme delivery in 2025.

Situation	Rationale	Impact / Cost	Result
The timing of the decision meant that corporate contracts (117 contracts) ran beyond the planned closure date of 30th June 2025.	DCMS decision	Significant work undertaken by Commercial requiring additional resources to vary contracts to close early, serve notice of early termination or novation to DCMS.	To date 18 contracts still require action to close. All other contracts (99) have had action undertaken to bring forward early termination.
Decision to remove Procurement resource as early as March as there was no anticipation of continued spend.	NCST decision	Unplanned procurements continued to support with the wind down and handover activity, which were not anticipated.	Additional spend on Commercial support.
Decision to prioritise Sustained Value work through Jan-March 2025 resulting in new procurements including large tenders.	NCST / DCMS decision	Significant sustained value work was delivered in Jan-March 2025. However, this did divert resources from the wind down activity.	Wind up activity has been more pressurised than anticipated, with inadequate time for handover to Commercial Project Managers.
L&D Policy and approach. Our policy was not designed to undertake training for redeployment purposes. A change to the policy would have enabled this to be considered in more depth, mitigating the risks of unprecedented demand in a very short period of time. Time would have been available to source 3 suppliers for each request	Develop and update the policy and processes to support L&D for redeployment.	There would have been far less pressure applied to administering this process. Possible better value for public money, although this would not have been a significant factor.	Less demand on the People Team during the consultation process. Mitigation of errors due to high demand. Possibly better value for public money.
The staffing structure post-March 2025 did not fully reflect the requirements due to time restrictions that prevented this work from being undertaken and presented through collective consultation as new roles for everyone to apply for.	Conduct a comprehensive organisational design for roles required for closure.	It may have been possible to shape the closure resources better.	Unknown, as this task remained ambiguous and had never been done before.
We did not have the resources in place to conduct a meaningful EDI Monitoring survey or the annual people survey.	Ability to conduct a meaningful EDI & People survey	Unable to include this data in the Annual Report for 2025/26	More accurate data would have been available to inform the annual report for 2025/26