

At your service.....
A Big Green Gap Year for students (?)



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The question

**Would students & rural society
benefit from a Big Green Gap Year?**



Why I'm interested

- I was required to do a Gap Year by my university
- Worked as CSV / Social Work Assistant
- Concern for university-community-student mutuality
- GameChanger: youthful 'army' of dynamic individuals





Background

- IPPR 1994 *“argued for a national voluntary Citizen’s Service initiative...and more recently...a form of national service which would build on the success of the Americorps programme”*

McCormick, 1994 cited in Arthur & Bohlin (2005) *Citizenship & Higher Education*: 53

- *Service Learning (USA)*

National Service defined

“a nation-wide program of community work that citizens, mostly young people, enter...participants serve the needs of the nation, acquire job and life skills, and learn the essentials ofcitizenship”

(Gorham, 1992: 5)



John Dewey (1859-1952)

- “all genuine education comes about through experience” (1938: 25)
- transaction between individual & environment can foster reflection
- “projects as a means for producing learning from experience” (Dwight *et al*, 1994: 80)
- “[The school itself] shall be made a genuine form of active community life, instead of a place set apart in which to learn lessons.” (1900: 27)

UK

“We are working towards ensuring that...every young person gives at least 50 hours of service to their community in their teenage years....this will become a customary part of the growing up process for every young person.” *HM Government (2009) Building Britain's Future*

National Citizen Service NCS: 8 weeks service for 16 year olds: 30,000 places in 2012



The transition to HE

- Extends 2ndry school *citizenship* classes/projects
- Extension of existing volunteering – brownies etc.
- A ‘Bridge’ to independent learning at university
- A ‘safe’ 1st movement away from dependence
- ‘Real world’ experience, life/study skills: timekeeping
- A chance to reflect – is university really for me?



Pros.....

- A means to address the *democratic deficit*
- Enthusiasm, & engagement of youth with society
- Cross-generational work
- Accelerate 'attack' on climate change
- Exchange service for university fees
- Purposeful 'employment' in time of recession
- Contribute to *Big Society* & localism



Pros II

- Solve rural problems
- Strengthen rural communities
- Improve lives
- Connect to others
- Transform our own lives
- individual responsibility-mutuality
- “civic education, participation, equality, & democracy”
(Gorham, 1992: 10)



Cons

- Cheap labour
- Displacing 'real' jobs
- Voluntary or compulsory?
- Admin time/cost
- Politically expedient (in time of flux)
- 'necessary or merely "nice"'? (Dionne *et al*, 2003: 5)
- 'poor communities exploited as free sources of student education' (Stoeker *et al*, 2003: 2)
- Patronising - charity

- "When it comes to national service, the libertarians lean toward scepticism, the communitarians toward a warm embrace."
(Dionne *et al*, 2009: 3 citing Eby, 1998)



Points to ponder

- “There is nothing wrong with wanting to illuminate college students about the real world before they graduate and venture out into it unprepared” (Stoeker *et al*, 2003: 3)
- “Service as public work is the essence of the democratic project...” (Dionne *et al*, 2003: 7)
- “if we decide that there are no public things to which we should be willing to pledge some of our time and some of our effort...we will be breaking faith with our nation’s experiment in liberty rooted in mutual assistance and democratic aspiration.” (Dionne *et al*, 2003: 10)



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