

More Than Volunteers

The case for a national civic service

Attila E. Alpman

CIVITAS

More Than Volunteers

Attila E. Alpman

CIVITAS

First published: **November 2026**

© **Civitas 2026**

55 Tufton Street,
London SW1P 3QL

Email: books@civitas.org.uk

All rights reserved

ISBN 978-1-912581-79-5

Independence: Civitas: Institute for the Study of Civil Society is a registered educational charity (No. 1085494) and a company limited by guarantee (No. 04023541). Civitas is financed from a variety of private sources to avoid overreliance on any single or small group of donors.

All the Institute's publications seek to further its objective of promoting the advancement of learning. The views expressed are those of the authors, not of the Institute.

Designed by Rubber Duckiee Ltd.

Printed in Great Britain
by 4edge Limited, Essex

Contents

About the author iv

Introduction 1

Chapter 1. The threat, and the gap it exposes 3

Chapter 2. Defence and resilience 7

Chapter 3. Social cohesion 11

Chapter 4. Young people and opportunity 18

Chapter 5. The proposal 22

Chapter 6. Lessons from the National Citizen Service (NCS) and from abroad 31

Chapter 7. Anticipating objections 35

Chapter 8. What needs to be decided 43

Chapter 9. Counting the cost 45

Annex: International comparisons 46

Notes 60

About the author

Attila E. Alpman is a consultant, researcher and editor with a focus on media and communications development in conflict and post-conflict areas. For almost 40 years he has worked with media, NGOs, governments and international organisations in Africa, Europe, central and west Asia, and North America on media development, monitoring, communication strategy, production, research and training. He did his national service in West Germany during the Cold War, stationed near the inner-German border. He lives in London with his wife, son and foxhound.

Introduction

> *There is no national security without a strong, cohesive society … faced with this information warfare, security starts in every home.*
>
> Prime Minister Andy Burnham, United Nations General Assembly, 22nd September 2026.[1]

This paper was prompted by *Understanding the UK's Transition to Warfighting Readiness*, published by Civitas in January 2026 and written by Sir Bernard Jenkin, Derek Twigg and Chris Donnelly, with a foreword by Lord Robertson of Port Ellen.[2] That report makes an uncomfortable but carefully argued case: Britain is not ready for the strategic environment it now faces, and the assumptions that shaped its defence planning for 3 decades have not survived contact with reality. Its central prescriptions, rebuilding stockpiles, expanding industrial capacity, planning for sustained conflict and deepening alliance integration, are broadly correct, and this paper does not seek to challenge them.

What the report also insists upon, following the language of the National Defence Strategy, of General Sir Richard Barrons and other senior figures, and of NATO doctrine more broadly, is that warfighting readiness is a property of whole societies, not of professional militaries and defence industries alone. The phrase 'whole of society' has become standard in strategic documents and in the statements of ministers and commanders. The authors of the Civitas report use it as it is intended: as a demand on political and institutional seriousness that goes well beyond the size of the procurement budget. The gap this paper addresses is not in their analysis. It is in what has followed from it.

Specifically, no government document, no ministerial statement and no subsequent report has yet said, in concrete terms, what a whole-of-society approach actually requires: who is to be prepared, in what ways, through which institutions, and on what terms. Speaking at the Labour Party Conference on 28th September 2026, defence secretary Wes Streeting put it as well as anyone has: 'defending our country means more than strengthening our armed forces. It means

strengthening the country they defend.'[3] He then pointed, rightly, to the defence industrial workforce and to the 1 million young people out of work as a place to start. That is a beginning. This paper argues it is only that.

The whole-of-society requirement, taken seriously, reaches into three dimensions that are usually treated as separate policy problems. The first is defence and resilience: the trained civilian depth that Britain's mobilisation plans assume but cannot generate. The second is social cohesion: the civic fabric that makes a society resistant to the forms of attack it is already experiencing. The third is young people and opportunity: what the country can offer in exchange for asking something of them, and why that exchange, properly designed, is also the most direct available response to Britain's skills crisis and its defence industrial workforce shortage.

This paper does not presume to settle the question of compulsion or to propose a legislative timetable. It argues that the question of how a whole society can be made ready needs to be asked seriously, and in public, with young people at the table. That debate will run for years. This paper is intended to inform it.

Chapter 1
The threat, and the gap it exposes

Britain is already in a conflict. Not a declared war, not a crisis with a name, but a sustained campaign against its institutions, its information environment, and the social fabric that holds democratic life together. The Prime Minister described the forces ranged against it as working 'Not just through hard power, but through softer, slower means that sow fear and despair.'[4] Understanding that is the starting point for everything that follows. It may not be a conflict that announces itself. Paul Mason, in a report for the University of Exeter, warns that because hybrid and cognitive aggression are central to Russian and Chinese doctrine, Britain, if attacked, might not enjoy the 'last days of peace' it had in 1939.[5]

The head of MI5 marked the 25th anniversary of 9/11 by describing a threat landscape 'markedly different to 2001's', in which terrorism 'now sits alongside strategic national security threats posed by capable States', from sabotage subcontracted to criminals to covert interference in democracy: ''dragons are back, but snakes persist.''[6] In the year to October 2025 the number of people MI5 was investigating for involvement in state threat activity rose by 35 per cent, after a 48 per cent rise in state threat investigations the year before.[7] The activity is not abstract. In March 2024 a warehouse in Leyton, East London, holding aid and Starlink internet equipment bound for Ukraine, was set on fire by young British men recruited on behalf of the Wagner Group, and its organisers became the first people convicted under the National Security Act 2023.[8] That July an incendiary parcel caught fire at a DHL depot near Birmingham, one of four sent from Lithuania in what European investigators believe was a Russian military-intelligence operation and, Polish prosecutors say, a dry run for setting fire to aircraft bound for North America.[9] Cyber attack runs alongside both. In 2024 the National Cyber Security Centre received almost 2,000 reports of attacks, of which 90 were judged significant and 12 at the top end of severity, 3 times as many as the year before.[10] The government's own Resilience Action Plan concedes that the cyber resilience of critical national infrastructure ''is not keeping pace'' with the threat.[11] Across Europe, sabotage, arson and cable-cutting have become routine enough to be reported briefly. In September 2026 the government

announced closed-door briefings on Russian threats for the chief executives of defence firms and critical-infrastructure providers.[12]

The manipulation campaigns are arguably more damaging than the physical attacks. What official reports tend to call 'coordinated inauthentic behaviour', a phrase so carefully drained of alarm that it defeats its own purpose,[13] is more plainly described as state-sponsored deception and manipulation, run at industrial scale, designed to corrode democratic societies from the inside. The Prime Minister has said that Russian agencies have used bots and fake websites, falsified newspaper articles and forged the branding of 28 British organisations, including universities and the BBC, and that there is evidence they tried to interfere in the 2019 General Election.[14] The strategic logic is straightforward: locate a society's existing divisions, deepen them, amplify the extremes, and aim less to persuade than to exhaust, until a country loses the capacity to agree on anything for long enough to act. None of this invents a society's divisions; it finds them. The United States Senate's bipartisan inquiry into Russia's Internet Research Agency found that its campaign concentrated on the most socially divisive issues in American life, and on race above all. The channels of mistrust were already dug. The campaign needed only to flood them. Whether such campaigns change what people think or how they vote is much harder to establish, and one study of Russian Twitter accounts in the 2016 American election found no measurable effect on the attitudes or votes of those who saw them.[15] Nothing here assumes that voters are gullible, only that they are exposed, and that a society short of trust is easier to wear down. The campaign does not want for domestic assistance. There is a dependable supply of willing voices at both ends of the political spectrum ready to carry its themes, and no shortage of more respectable figures who prefer not to ask where the money comes from.

The Kremlin spends around £1.3 billion a year on this campaign. Speaking at the United Nations General Assembly on 22nd September 2026, Prime Minister Andy Burnham described it as

> *… an insidious campaign that reaches into people's homes and twists what they feel about their own country and community, creating a narrative of decline, stoking division and sowing despair.*[16]

Burnham went further than most official statements in connecting the information threat directly to the social conditions that make populations vulnerable:

> *If you're struggling with the cost of living and your life is not improving – or if you're a young person not in employment, education or training – then you are going to be much more vulnerable to this kind of influence.*[17]

That is a strategic assessment, not a rhetorical gesture. It connects the manipulation campaign to the social fractures this paper is concerned with, and it was made not in a domestic policy speech but from the floor of the United Nations. Having opened with the line that stands at the head of this paper, he went on: 'True resilience depends on this military strength. But … it is about something deeper as well. It's about the strength of the social fabric that binds us together.'

In the same speech the Prime Minister announced a National Centre for Information Defence, to counter hostile state information attacks.[18] It is a necessary step, and a telling one. A centre of that kind can take down bot networks. It cannot create the trust that makes a population hard to manipulate in the first place. That is the work of a different kind of institution.

The same diagnosis runs through the work of the Conservative-appointed Khan Review, through the National Preparedness Commission, and through the Civitas report itself, which describes the whole of society as the unit on which readiness depends.[19] None of them has yet said what doing something about it requires.

This is the part of the threat that professional forces, however well equipped, cannot reach. The Defence Investment Plan, published on 30th June 2026, commits £298 billion over four years, concentrated on the deterrent, munitions, air defence, drones and the industrial base.[20] It does not address what the whole-of-society approach, invoked in every strategic document, actually demands.

Parliament has asked the obvious question. On 1st September 2026 Lord Naseby asked the government what work it had done 'to assess the feasibility of introducing some form of military service for young UK citizens.'[21] The reply, from the defence minister Lord Coaker on 15th September, described no feasibility work at all. It pointed

instead to the new Armed Forces Foundation Scheme, a voluntary, paid gap year for 18- to 25-year-olds offering ‘a shorter period of paid military training and service’, whose first intake numbers about 150, and to careers and leadership activities in schools and universities. It then restated the formula of every government since the last national servicemen left:

> *This Government has no current plans for compulsory military service. Since 1963, it has been the policy of successive Governments that the best way of providing for the defence of our country is by maintaining professional Armed Forces which are manned by volunteers.*

Lord Naseby asked whether it could be done. The government answered that it would not be done, as though the two were the same question. They are not, and the evasion is telling.

Britain’s allies, facing the same campaign, are doing more. Across the Nordic and Baltic states, and now in Germany, France, Belgium, Croatia, Poland and Austria, some form of national or civic service is being introduced, reintroduced, extended or redesigned. They are not converging on a single model, but few of them still treat the question as closed. In Britain the idea is raised mainly to be dismissed. That is a curious way to treat a question whose costs no one has troubled to count.

Those costs are of three kinds: to defence and resilience, to social cohesion, and to young people and the country’s future. They are distinct problems with different causes and remedies, and it would overstate the case to present them as one problem in disguise. But they converge on the same absence, an institution through which a whole society is actually asked to take part. The rest of this paper is about what such an institution might look like, and what would have to be true for it to work.

Chapter 2
Defence and resilience

The armed forces are below their target strength and have been for some years. Recent reforms to pay, conditions and recruitment are beginning to close the gap: in the year to July 2026 total strength rose for the first time since 2021, and full-time trained strength increased for three consecutive quarters, to 127,060.[22] That is welcome, although it is still some 5,000 fewer than 3 years earlier. But recruitment is only one measure of military capacity, and for a defence conceived as the work of the whole of society it may not be the most important. The others concern depth: the trained reserves, the mobilisation machinery, and the broad base of relevant skills that allow a military to expand when a short war becomes a long one.

The long decline is a matter of record. Options for Change in 1990, Front Line First in 1994 and the 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review each cut the regular army further, the last from 102,000 to 82,000.[23] Each reduction was defensible on the assumptions of its moment, but together they produced a force highly capable within a narrow envelope and brittle outside it. The administrative symptoms were no better. In 2012 the Army handed recruitment to Capita under a 10-year partnership worth some £1.36 billion. The online recruiting system arrived 52 months late; the number of local recruiting offices was cut from 131 to 68 and then had to be partly restored; in 2017 only 11 per cent of applicants went on to join, while 47 per cent withdrew of their own accord; and half of those who did join took up to 321 days to reach basic training.[24] In every year but one between 2010 and 2023 the Army missed its recruiting target, by 22,350 soldiers in all.[25] The reforms since are real: a 35 per cent pay rise for new recruits, more than 100 outdated medical bars removed, a fast-track cyber entry route, and a new tri-service Armed Forces Recruitment Service, contracted to a Serco-led consortium and due to go live in 2027, which promises a conditional offer within 10 days and a training start within 30.[26] A better pipeline can fix much of that. It says nothing about the structural distance between British society and its own defence, a distance the Army's own research has measured: in 2023 it found that 59 per cent of young people did not believe they would fit in.[27]

Senior commanders have made the case for depth directly. In January 2024 the then Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Patrick Sanders, said that Britain should 'train and equip' a citizen army, that expanding the army for a potential land war would be a whole-of-nation undertaking, and that allies in northern and eastern Europe were already 'laying the foundations for national mobilisation.' 'Ukraine brutally illustrates', he said, 'that regular armies start wars; citizen armies win them.'[28] Ukraine's resilience has depended on more than its armed forces: it has been sustained by a society that understands what it is defending. Morale, civic commitment and the willingness of a population to bear sacrifice are strategic variables of the first order, and they cannot be bought on the open market.

The Civitas report takes up the point precisely. It distinguishes four categories of force: a professional core; auxiliaries; a reserve; and a mobilisation force, the last two covering not only war but 'disasters and pandemics', and providing 'a way for non-military and charitable organisations to contribute'. It warns that 'in a democracy, conscription which is not universal risks becoming a social catastrophe', and recommends that Britain 'devise a new system, perhaps drawing on the experience of Nordic countries'. It also notes that in Poland, the Baltic states and Scandinavia, higher military pay 'has not proved an effective incentive', and that the binding constraint is the shortage of instructors and training infrastructure.[29] This paper is, in part, an exploration of how Britain might generate the report's reserve and mobilisation forces democratically, fairly, and with a civilian weight that fits a country with no paramilitary tradition.

The machinery is being rebuilt, but it has a hole where the people should be. A new War Book was confirmed in April 2026, 22 years after the last was abolished.[30] The Cabinet Office's Home Defence Programme is working out which civilian roles would need to be filled in a conflict. The Ministry of Defence's plan, Fortitude, includes a strand on critical-infrastructure protection and another, Genesis, on mass mobilisation. Options for a new force to protect critical national infrastructure, modelled on the reserves, are due to go to the defence secretary by December 2026.[31] The Armed Forces Bill will extend the recall liability of the Strategic Reserve to age 65.[32] A Defence Readiness Bill, to give powers to mobilise reserves and industry, is promised later in this Parliament.[33] Every one of these plans assumes a pool of trained, reachable civilians, but none creates one.

The government's own resilience strategy shows the same gap from the civilian side. Its Resilience Action Plan, published in July 2025, is candid that 'the state cannot do it alone', that resilience must be 'a shared responsibility', and that delivering it across society 'will require a profound cultural and behavioural shift'. What it then asks of 'the average person' is 'looking out for vulnerable neighbours and stocking up on some basics like bottled water and a torch.' Its new UK Resilience Academy will train up to 4,000 people a year from the public and private sectors, in a country where some 700,000 young people turn 18 each year. The willingness is there: in 2020, 750,000 people signed up as NHS volunteers within weeks of being asked.[34] What is missing is an institution that trains people before the emergency, and can find them again when it comes.

History suggests that relying on volunteers to supply them is optimistic. The House of Commons Library's recent briefing on a new Home Guard records that the volunteer Home Guard formed in 1951 was quietly disbanded in 1957 for lack of recruits, that the Civil Defence Corps of the 1960s struggled to recruit, and that the 2021 *Integrated Review's* promise to explore options for a wider civilian reserve never came into being.[35] The most serious recent attempt fared little better. Defence plans for the Reserve Forces in 2013, set out in *Future Reserves 2020*, committed £1.8 billion over 10 years to raise the trained strength of the Army Reserve to 30,000 by 2018; the target was missed, and progress was flattered along the way by changing the definition of who counted as trained.[36] The record of organisations raised in peacetime from volunteers has, in the words of the Library briefing's sources, 'historically been poor'.[37] That is the plainest statement of the case for this paper's title. Volunteering is admirable and indispensable, and Britain has a great deal of it. It does not, on the evidence, produce depth on the scale or with the reliability that a whole-of-society defence requires. Something more than volunteers is needed.

That depth is not only military. Most of the capacity a country under sustained pressure would need is civilian: people who can give first aid, run a rest centre, move patients, keep a generator going, drive a lorry, recognise a phishing attack, fill sandbags in the right place, or stay calm and useful in a crisis. A country under such pressure also needs drone operators, combat medics, and people who can secure a network, fix a power grid or spot a manipulation campaign before it spreads. The system that would need them already exists. Under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, emergency services, local

authorities and the NHS plan together through Local Resilience Forums: 38 in England and four in Wales.[38] The government's own call for views as part of the Act's 2027 review is candid about the forums' limits: they are not legal entities, have no power to direct their members, depend on variable local funding, and lack a single professional framework.[39] Paul Mason, whose report argues that wartime powers must be designed openly in peacetime, proposes that every Local Resilience Forum, devolved government and Strategic Authority run a cognitive-warfare exercise within 2 years.[40] These are serious reforms to the structure. None addresses the people who would fill it.

The cost to defence of the present arrangement is not measured in unfilled vacancies. It is the cost of a force with no institutional means of growing when it has to, a reserve allowed to wither, a mobilisation plan being redrawn without a population trained to answer it, and a resilience system that knows its risks but not its people.

Chapter 3
Social cohesion

A whole-of-society defence depends on a prior condition the Defence Investment Plan does not mention: the state of the society itself. Social cohesion is not a soft good, secondary to the hard business of security. It is a security asset, and its erosion is precisely the vulnerability that the campaign described in Chapter 1 of this report is designed to exploit. A low-trust, sorted, mutually suspicious population is the easiest kind to divide and exhaust. A cohesive one is, in the most practical sense, harder to attack.

This is the settled view of serious defence thinking, and not only in Britain. Germany's defence minister Boris Pistorius said in June 2026 that 'in a country where social cohesion is destroyed, where polarisation spreads, there is no security, neither internal nor external.'[41] The Center for Strategic and International Studies treats societal resilience as a critical and integrated aspect of national security, in a tradition running back through the thinking of military strategist Carl von Clausewitz to the observation that moral factors—will, cohesion, the readiness of a people to endure—decide wars as surely as material ones.[42] The British government now says the same. Its social cohesion plan, Protecting What Matters, published in March 2026, calls cohesion 'a vital front in the resilience of our national security.'[43]

What has been lost

Part of the explanation for the present strain is institutional. Until well into the last century Britain was held together by a dense network of organisations, trade unions, friendly societies, working men's clubs, chapels and churches, Scouts and Guides, the Territorial Army, local party branches, that for all their faults created regular occasions in which people who would not otherwise have met found themselves doing something together. They were often exclusionary and frequently parochial, and nostalgia about them is selective memory. But they did something that nothing has replaced. Robert Putnam's work on the United States showed how closely the density of such civic life tracks trust, health and democratic stability, and how far it can fall.[44] His distinction between

bonding capital, the ties among people who are alike, and bridging capital, the ties across lines of difference, names what has thinned most. His later and more uncomfortable finding deserves facing too: in more diverse American neighbourhoods people tended, in the short run, to 'hunker down' and to trust everyone less, their own group included.[45] Putnam's conclusion was not that diversity should be reversed but that a broader sense of 'we' has to be built, and that the institutions able to build it have to be built first. That is the argument of this paper. In Britain many of these institutions closed not because people stopped valuing them but because the pits, mills and yards that sustained them closed first. What has taken their place is, too often, social sorting: people living, working and socialising with others like themselves, a tendency that platforms designed to feed people more of what they already believe, and to reward what angers them, have accelerated rather than reversed.

The state of it

The evidence of strain has sharpened. More in Common's tracker finds that 64 per cent of Britons now say the country is divided, the highest since the tracker began, and that 45 per cent think our differences are too great to overcome, up 10 points in a matter of months.[46] The divide most often named is no longer between rich and poor but between migrants and those born here. The same organisation's work on extremism finds that about one in seven Britons consider political violence acceptable in some circumstances, and identifies a younger, heavily online group, marked by financial hardship, low institutional trust and exposure to conspiracy content, that is more tolerant of political violence than almost any other demographic, and calls it 'a distinct and underappreciated risk'.[47] The summer disorder of 2024 and the protests that have followed are the visible edge of this. The quieter loss of trust in institutions, and in one another, is the larger part.

What the state does, and what it does not

The diagnosis is not new. Ted Cantle's review of the 2001 disturbances in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford found communities living 'parallel lives'; Dame Louise Casey's review in 2016 found segregation still entrenched; Sara Khan's in 2024 added the

threat to democratic resilience.[48] Twenty-five years of reports have reached similar conclusions without producing an institution.

Protecting What Matters, the social cohesion strategy published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government in March 2026, lays out a package of measures: school-linking projects, £750 million for youth and sports facilities, mandatory citizenship teaching, and the Pride in Place programme.[49] It says, correctly, that when people mix and get to know each other 'it becomes clear that there is more that unites than divides them', an echo of Jo Cox's maiden speech in 2015: 'we are far more united and have far more in common with each other than things that divide us.'[50] What it does not offer is any occasion on which that mixing is likely to happen for young adults. The school-linking budget is £500,000, for community-led projects that link schools, so that children from different backgrounds meet, learn and play together. A companion Community Cohesion and Resilience Programme funds local projects against harmful narratives, and the Belong network is piloting cohesion strategies in Bradford and Leicester.[51] All of this is worthwhile, and all of it works on neighbourhoods and schoolchildren. The one national programme that tried to mix 16- and 17-year-olds from different backgrounds, the National Citizen Service (NCS), was wound down from March 2025. A country that has concluded that mixing matters, and has then closed an institution built to do it, has a gap in its policy that no amount of refurbished youth centres will fill.

What the evidence says works

The honest answer is that a national service does not automatically build cohesion, and a paper making this case should say so before its critics do. A carefully randomised Danish study following men selected by lottery for conscription found no effect 15 years later on social trust, national attachment or willingness to contribute to society, though it did find a lasting rise in political interest.[52] The final evaluation of the NCS found that short residential stays of 2 to 4 nights produced small gains in leadership and teamwork, no effect on trust or local belonging, and one negative result on social inclusion.[53] Against that, evidence from Spain, where conscripts were for decades randomly posted outside their home region, suggests that sustained contact across regional lines in early adulthood strengthened a shared national identity.[54]

The pattern is not an accident, and the Danish result should not obscure how consistently 70 years of social psychology have pointed the same way. Gordon Allport's contact hypothesis of 1954 held that contact between groups reduces prejudice when four conditions are met: equal status within the setting, a common goal, co-operation rather than competition, and the support of the institution in charge.[55] That same year, at Robbers Cave in Oklahoma, Muzafer Sherif divided boys at a summer camp into two groups, watched competition turn them into enemies, and then dissolved the hostility. Pleasant shared activities, meals and films only made things worse. What worked were tasks neither group could achieve alone: 'superordinate goals', as he called them, 'compelling and highly appealing' to both.[56] In the 1970s Elliot Aronson's 'jigsaw classroom' in newly desegregated schools in Texas, in which each child held one piece of a lesson the whole group needed, reduced hostility and raised self-esteem.[57] Samuel Gaertner and John Dovidio later showed why co-operation works: it lets people redraw 'us' and 'them' as a larger 'we', without asking them to give up the smaller identities.[58] A meta-analysis of more than 500 studies by Thomas Pettigrew and Linda Tropp found that contact reduces prejudice in the great majority of cases, and more strongly where Allport's conditions hold.[59]

Recent field experiments have tested the idea where it is hardest. In Indian cricket leagues, young men assigned to mixed-caste teams became more likely to form friendships across caste lines and less inclined to favour their own caste, while those who only played against other castes did not.[60] In post-ISIS Iraq, Christian footballers placed on teams with Muslim players became more willing to train with Muslims, to vote a Muslim player their sportsman of the season and to sign up for a mixed team again.[61] The qualification is that such effects are strongest within the setting that produced them and weaker beyond it, and that the evidence is thinner for adults and for entrenched ethnic prejudice than enthusiasts sometimes claim.[62] That is an argument for long, demanding and well-designed contact, not against contact. The point is not to manufacture an enemy or engineer loyalty. It is to give people real, shared work in which they depend on one another, have equal standing and can see that their joint effort matters. A few nights away do not meet those conditions. A service spent in mixed cohorts, drawn across regions and classes, working as equals on tasks that visibly matter, might. Whether it does is something to be measured, not assumed.

There may also be a slower effect on trust in institutions rather than between groups. Trust in public institutions is low partly because most people know them only through the news. A young person who has worked alongside paramedics, firefighters, nurses or engineers knows their pressures, constraints and values from the inside. Over decades, a service would place such people in every profession and community: a distributed network of citizens who understand public institutions because they have been part of them. That too is a hypothesis to be tested, not a promise.

The Australian Strategic Policy Institute offers a warning worth heeding: the moment cohesion is treated primarily as a security problem, it begins to be hollowed out, and minorities stop trusting the programmes meant to include them.[63] The argument of this paper is that a civic institution might strengthen cohesion as a by-product of serving young people well, not that cohesion should be manufactured for the state's convenience.

Citizenship, not community

To call cohesion an asset raises a harder question than the security writing tends to answer: cohesion around what? The word is often used as though Britain had merely mislaid a unity it once held securely. That is the version most easily exploited. Cohesion is not nostalgia for a romanticised and homogeneous past, of Enid Blyton stories and bobbies on the beat, of bread pudding and *Last of the Summer Wine*, that some like to conjure and some are quick to exploit. Nor is the answer to revive the brittle optimism of Cool Britannia: neither romance, on either side of the political horseshoe, is much help. A serious account has to start instead from the society that actually exists: plural, various, and unlikely to agree on a single homogenous narrative of who its people are.

The hardest form of the cohesion objection, then, is not about evidence but identity. Can a universal civic service work in a country whose national identity is contested?

Part of the answer is to be careful with the word *community*, which does a great deal of heavy lifting in British public life and fails at much of it. The label 'the Muslim community' is applied at once to Iranians who fled a theocracy, to Ahmadis whom many other Muslims regard as heretics, to gay and lesbian Muslims, to liberal secularists and to the devout of several quite different traditions. As Adil Ray

showed in his BBC sitcom *Citizen Khan*, whose Mr Khan of Sparkhill styles himself a 'community leader' at every opportunity, the term now makes sense chiefly as satire, and audiences of every faith and none recognised the joke.[64] Much the same, with modifications, is true of 'the Jewish community', as a good many Jews will point out. Successive governments that have recognised a community where there isn't one, and a community leader to speak for it, have done more harm than good.

Nor are people made of a single identity. We hold several at once and rank them differently from day to day: a person may feel their identity as a parent, a nurse or a Londoner more keenly than any label of nation, faith or ancestry, without disowning any of the others. Theresa May's warning in 2016 that 'if you believe you're a citizen of the world, you're a citizen of nowhere', and David Goodhart's division of the country into rootless 'anywheres' and rooted 'somewheres', both assume that people must choose.[65] Most are both: rooted somewhere, and open to a good deal beyond it. To treat the 'somewheres' as unable to see past their own horizons is as patronising as the metropolitan condescension it was meant to rebuke. A concern that a nation, a culture or its institutions might be slipping away is a legitimate feeling, as legitimate for the English or the Cornish as it is for the Yanomami or the San, but it sits quite comfortably alongside a desire to be open to change, to travel, and to live and work among the unlike, as people always have.

Citizenship offers a different starting point, not only a passport but civic membership: a share in the institutions that govern a common life, and the rights and obligations that go with it. It is the one thing every participant in a civic service would demonstrably share on the first morning, before a word had been exchanged. A foundation that taught how that common life is governed, how laws are made and challenged, what courts, councils and Parliament do, and what rights and duties citizenship carries, would give the idea content. Few young people now leave education with that knowledge, and no other institution systematically provides it. Habermas called the relevant tradition 'constitutional patriotism': attachment founded on commitment to the norms of common life rather than on cultural particularity. Kwame Anthony Appiah's rooted cosmopolitanism makes the complementary point, that people can be wholly rooted in a place while owing loyalty to a good deal beyond it.[66] Neither requires a nation to agree on its ancestry, its religion or on a narrow idea of a national story.

This is also why the language of patriotism should not be ceded to those who use it most cynically. Samuel Johnson called patriotism 'the last refuge of a scoundrel', and was probably thinking of someone in particular.[67] But to treat every expression of national attachment as a symptom of anxiety or exclusion is to hand a monopoly on national feeling to the people least interested in the welfare of their fellow citizens. Attachment to institutions and norms that are open to anyone willing to share in them is the version worth contending for.

A shared civic starting point is not the same as a shared sense of belonging. The first can be assumed. The second has to be built, and it can only be built by people doing something worthwhile together as equals. It cannot be ordered, and no one should be asked to profess it.

Diversity is not, in itself, a virtue. It is a description. It can be made valuable where it brings different perspectives, languages and experience to bear on a common task. Turning diversity from a fact into an asset requires common ground and a common cause. Britain is as well placed as any country to find both, because its constitutional tradition treats the rule of law and the protection of rights not as rivals but, in Lord Bingham's account, as parts of the same idea.[68] Much the same thought came, in his 2025 Christmas Broadcast, from the person with the strongest claim to embody the older kind of national identity: 'with the great diversity of our communities,' the King said, 'we can find the strength to ensure that right triumphs over wrong.'[69] A civic service need not merely tolerate a plural society. It could be one of the few institutions capable of strengthening it, not by asking a diverse population to agree on who it already is, but by giving that population something to build together. Contemporary Britain tends to address its young as consumers. This would address them as citizens. That is a different thing, and a better one.

Chapter 4
Young people and opportunity

The third dimension of the case is the one with the firmest evidence and, on the surface, the least to do with defence. It concerns what the country owes its young people, and what it currently fails to provide.

The transition from education to adult life offers a large minority of young people very little structure and even less prospect. This is not primarily a story about those who have fallen out of the system, though that group is large enough to demand attention on its own terms. It is a story about what the existing system provides to nobody by design: a structured, purposeful, credentialled year at the threshold of adulthood, combining practical skills with shared civic experience, available regardless of background or educational trajectory.

What the system currently offers instead varies enormously by starting position. For those who go to university, the passage to adulthood is cushioned by 3 years of institutional structure, paid for with debts of around £50,000 or, as interest accrues, significantly more.[70] For the roughly half who do not, it is more abrupt and far less supported. Apprenticeships and technical routes have improved but remain too few and too unevenly spread. What waits for many is a labour market that offers work without a trajectory: delivery and platform jobs that provide income but little training and less advancement. The internships, the networks, the informal knowledge of how to enter a profession, the driving licence, even the confidence to handle an interview, all flow most easily to those who already have them. The Social Mobility Commission finds that young people from lower-working-class backgrounds are more than twice as likely to be out of education, employment or training as those from higher professional ones, 22 per cent against nine per cent, a gap that has barely moved in a decade.[71]

Networks matter more than they appear to. A graduate of a selective university leaves with thousands of contemporaries who will spend their careers in useful places; a young person who did not go leaves with far fewer, in a narrower stratum. The largest study of the question, by Raj Chetty and colleagues, drawing on 21 billion

friendships among 72 million Facebook users in the United States, found that friendship across class lines predicted upward mobility more strongly than any other measure they examined: if children from poorer homes grew up with the share of better-off friends that richer children have, their adult incomes would be about a fifth higher. It also found that sharing a school or a club is not enough, because within the same institution people still befriend their own kind.[72] Mixing has to be designed. The same sorting works from the other end: a leadership class educated, employed and socialised among people like itself makes decisions for a country it rarely meets. A service year in which the comprehensive leaver from a coastal town and the independent-school leaver from the home counties work in the same team would give each a colleague, a reference and a view of the country that neither would otherwise acquire.

The same gap appears from the employer's side. The government estimates that the defence sector alone will need around 53,000 additional workers by 2035, in engineering, computing, the skilled trades and project management. In September 2026 it agreed with the largest defence firms a pledge to offer young people 40,000 opportunities a year by 2030, rising to 50,000 by 2035, building on a £182 million defence skills package that includes 5 new Defence Technical Excellence Colleges.[73] These are welcome and overdue. They are also the narrow version of the argument this paper makes: a pipeline into one sector, for those who find their way to it. There is no good reason for the defence industry to recruit abroad while a million young people are out of work at home. The question is how the rest of the country's needs, and the rest of that million, are to be met.

In the first quarter of 2026 the number of 16- to 24-year-olds not in education, employment or training (NEET) reached 1,012,000, or 13.5 per cent of the age group, for the first time since 2013.[74] The government's own review of youth inactivity, led by Alan Milburn, warned in its interim report that without reform the rate could rise to over 16 per cent, and estimated the cumulative annual cost at some £125 billion.[75] Behind the figures sits a sharp deterioration in young people's mental health: in 2023 almost a quarter of 17- to 19-year-olds in England had a probable mental disorder, against 1 in 10 in 2017.[76] The Prime Minister made the connection himself at the United Nations: 'When inequalities grow too wide, our societies are at greater risk', and part of the challenge is 'to lift our people up

and create the opportunities they need'.[77] These figures are cited here not as the primary frame for the opportunity argument, but as evidence of the scale of the failure. The civic service proposed in this paper would reach all young people, not only those who have already fallen out of the system. The NEET figure is a measure of how badly things are currently going wrong. The service would be designed to prevent that, not merely to catch those for whom it already has.

None of this is a failure of the young themselves. Milburn's research found that 84 per cent of young people in this position want urgent help into work.[78] What is in short supply is not willingness but opportunity, the organised means through which a readiness to contribute can find recognised and useful expression. Political philosopher Michael Sandel has argued that a society organised wholly around individual advancement corrodes the sense of mutual obligation on which common life depends, leaving those sorted to the bottom with neither prospects nor esteem.[79] A generation that feels forgotten by the institutions meant to serve it is not short of civic feeling. It has simply been given very little to attach that feeling to.

There is a fiscal dimension that single-department accounting misses. Research for the Audit Commission in 2010 estimated the average additional lifetime public-finance cost of a young person aged 16 to 18 who was NEET at around £56,300, in 2008 prices.[80] More recently, the Milburn review estimated that today's 24-year-old NEETs, even if they re-enter the labour market, will lose up to £300,000 in earnings over their lifetime, a loss that falls mainly on the individual rather than on the public purse.[81] The damage also lasts: British evidence suggests that long spells of unemployment in youth leave a wage scar of 12 to 15 per cent still visible at the age of 42.[82] Because the returns to reducing it would fall across health, welfare, education, justice and defence simultaneously, they are systematically undercounted by any analysis confined to one department's budget.

Milburn's final report is due imminently, and may appear shortly before or after this paper is published. The principle emerging from commentary, a reciprocal obligation matched by real support, is close cousin to the argument of this paper.[83] The difference is one of scale and purpose. A duty to engage addresses those who have already fallen out. A civic service would reach young people before they do, and would attach any obligation not to benefit conditionality

but to a shared national task. The two are complementary, and a civic service designed alongside Milburn's reforms could give the duty to engage something worth engaging with.

Chapter 5
The proposal

A single institution, properly designed, could address all three concerns at once: military preparedness, social cohesion, and the crisis of NEETs. That convergence is practical, not abstract or theoretical, and it is reason enough to consider it seriously.

The model set out here is the author's preferred one, offered for examination rather than as a settled plan: a national civic service undertaken by young people at around 18, in two components. The first is a common foundation, in which participants from every background and region train together in deliberately mixed cohorts and leave with a set of nationally recognised qualifications and a working knowledge of how the country is governed. The second is a period of specialist service in a track matched to aptitude and to national need: the emergency services, civil resilience, environmental resilience and climate adaptation, health and social care, infrastructure, cyber defence, or support to the armed forces. The emergencies a participant is most likely to meet are floods, storms and heatwaves rather than war, and the tracks should reflect that. For some, it could include an international strand, working with partners abroad where host communities have asked for help. The author's ideal is that the whole should amount to a paid year. But its name, duration, age range, and whether it should be universal or obligatory, are left open here. They are among the questions Chapter 8 puts to an inquiry.

What it offers

The case begins not with what the service would ask but with what it would give. This is not a matter of political tactics. It is a matter of principle. A demand made of every young person by a state that offers little in return is an imposition. The same demand, matched by a service genuinely worth the giving, is an exchange, a social contract of sorts. The legitimacy of any obligation depends entirely on the quality of the offer.

In outline, every participant would receive:

- Income and support. A living allowance sufficient that cost is no barrier; board and lodging on residential placements; transport; health, including dental and mental health support; and help with additional needs, such as caring or disability costs, as an entitlement rather than a favour.
- Licences and certificates employers ask for. A funded driving licence, worth £1,500 to £2,500, and, for a young person outside a city, often the difference between a job and no job; emergency first aid and mental-health first aid; fire safety; manual handling; a construction site card; cyber-security awareness to a recognised standard; a portable DBS check.
- The start of a profession. On the specialist tracks, the first recognised stages of qualification in ambulance and care work, fire and rescue, security, flood and water rescue, logistics driving, construction and digital security. A year can take a participant to the first stage of these professions, not to full qualification.
- Progression. Credit towards apprenticeships and technical qualifications, and towards degrees for the learning done in service; UCAS recognition, perhaps with additional admissions points of the kind Norway gives to applicants who have completed military service,[84] and, on the Singaporean model, a university place held during service; guaranteed first-stage interviews for public-service roles, as the Civil Service has offered veterans since 2020;[85] priority in recruitment to the emergency services and the reserves; a single national record of every credential earned.
- Afterwards. A lifelong alumni network across every background; support with further study; and, for those who want it, a paid reserve commitment, civilian or military, with the employer protections and continued benefits that sustained engagement deserves.
- Fees and further study. One option, raised in earlier drafts of this paper and deserving serious costing, is to waive a year of university tuition fees for each year served. At the 2026/27 cap of £9,790 in England,[86] that is worth nearly £10,000 a year, and more once the interest on the loan that would otherwise have been taken is counted. There are precedents. The United States gives each full-time AmeriCorps member an education award equal to the maximum Pell Grant, $7,395 in 2024, for tuition or the repayment of student loans;[87] Israel began in 2016 to cover most of the cost of a first degree for discharged soldiers;[88] and

the British armed forces already offer Enhanced Learning Credits of up to £6,000 to those with 6 years' service.[89] A fee waiver, however, is worth most to those already bound for university. It would need equivalents of comparable value for those going into work, apprenticeships or further education: a funded first Level 3 qualification at any age, funded completion of a professional route begun in service, and a grant top-up to the Lifelong Learning Entitlement, which from January 2027 offers loan funding worth up to £39,160 for study across a working life.[90]

Much of this is currently available only to those who can pay for it or who know to seek it out. Nor is the principle new to defence: in 1998 George (now Lord) Robertson's Strategic Defence Review promised every recruit the chance to gain 'six key skills' for later working life.[91] A funded driving licence alone is, for many young people, transformative. The offer as a whole would have to be worth taking on fair terms for those with the least room to rearrange their lives, not merely attractive to those already able to take a year out. Other options, from housing preference and matched savings to incentives for employers, are possible.

The service should also make room for what the old civic institutions did through activity rather than instruction: sports and leagues across cohorts, expeditions and adventurous training on the model of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award at scale, music, drama, and clubs run by participants themselves. These are not decoration. They are how a shared experience becomes shared.

Recognition matters more than is often appreciated. Completion should be marked publicly and locally, with alumni thanked in the places they served and included in civic occasions. As a service becomes normal, the question among young people may shift from 'why would you do that?' to 'where did you serve?', and that shared reference point is itself a connection across other differences. The pride it carries should attach to contribution made and skills gained, not to military glory.

Durable skills, not the fashions of the moment

The foundation should be built from skills that will still be useful in 20 years, whatever the policy weather: first aid, fitness, digital security, driving, communication, teamwork, leadership and the fundamentals of the trades. Specific applications, whether today's heat pump or

tomorrow's grid technology, sit on top as a changeable surface. Train the electrician's competence, not this year's device. A skill tied to a subsidy regime can be reversed by the next government. The competence underneath it cannot.

Three levels of contribution

The design must be honest about what a year, or less, can and cannot produce. It should distinguish three levels:

Level 1. Foundation

Who: Everyone, in the first component (perhaps 8 to 12 weeks).

What it produces: Useful capability for any emergency and any job, including first aid and mental-health first aid, fire and water safety, cyber hygiene, emergency communications, conflict de-escalation, personal safety and fitness, teamwork and leadership, personal finance and planning, and civic and constitutional literacy, that is, how Parliament, the courts, local government and the public services work, and the rights and duties that go with citizenship.

Level 2. Supervised support

Who: Most participants, in the specialist component.

What it produces: Trained, supervised assistance to existing services, including hospital portering and patient movement, rest centres and temporary accommodation, logistics and driving, flood-response support, flood defence and environmental work, community safety, support to mountain and sea rescue, suitable roles in social care.

Level 3. Professional pathway

Who: A selected minority, continuing afterwards.

What it produces: The first stage of a regulated profession that takes longer than a year, that is, a paramedic, firefighter, police constable, lifeboat crew, advanced cyber specialist, armed forces reserve.

The distinction between qualification and contribution is critical. A participant may support a paramedic crew but is not a paramedic.

A participant may assist a mountain-rescue team but is not a team member until the team's own standard has been met. The principle is qualification before deployment: nobody is placed in a role before they are trained and assessed for it, nobody replaces a regulated professional, and every placement has a named host and a supervisor.

Where it would sit: The resilience system

A civic service should not invent a parallel emergency system. It should be built into the one that exists. Each Local Resilience Forum already assesses its risks in a Community Risk Register. It could also identify the human capabilities it lacks, the roles participants could safely fill, the supervision available and the standard required. Placements would then be demand-led, trained against real local need rather than an abstract national menu.

The Resilience Action Plan has already laid some of the ground. It funds five 'Stronger LRF Trailblazers', in Northumbria, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Suffolk and London, with permanent Chief Resilience Officers, while admitting that local resilience funding can be 'fragmented, short-term, and fall short of requirements.' It has published National Occupational Standards for resilience and emergencies, and promises the first measure of national resilience, one that will count 'training and exercising' and 'community capacity'.[92] The trailblazers are natural first hosts for placements, the occupational standards a natural basis for the training, and the new measure a natural way to show whether either is working. The Prime Minister told the United Nations that power should be brought 'closer to the people'; placing young people with their own local resilience forums would do exactly that.[93]

As Strategic Authorities take on resilience responsibilities, and as the review of the Civil Contingencies Act considers a statutory footing and competency frameworks for the forums, a civic service could supply the trained people those reforms assume, and the forums could supply the structure a civic service needs. The same logic applies nationally: the Home Defence Programme's list of roles to be backfilled in a conflict, and the Ministry of Defence's work on infrastructure protection and mobilisation, are natural specifications for the specialist tracks.

The capability should follow an eight-step cycle: identify the need, set the standard, train, assess, place under supervision, exercise, refresh and record, so that a former participant can be found, and called on, 5 years later. Without the last step the whole exercise produces goodwill but not depth.

Building on what already exists

A civic service should take what already works and connect it, not replace it. Cadet experience could count towards the foundation, and former cadets could serve as team leaders. Duke of Edinburgh's Award achievements could be recognised in placement, and service activities could count towards the award. The experience of the NCS in running residential programmes and social action, and the providers and staff who did that work, should be drawn on rather than lost. For those still in education, the service could act as a placement provider for T-Levels at scale, and for participants who discover academic interests through service there should be clear routes into access courses and university foundation years. Each specialist track should be designed with the services that would host it: the ambulance track with NHS ambulance trusts, the fire track with fire and rescue services, the cyber track with the National Cyber Security Centre, the care track with local authorities and care providers. Progression from every track should be mapped and published, so that participants know which doors their service opens.

A connection to care

The government's plans, announced on 29th September 2026, for a National Care Service to be established in the next Parliament open another possible connection.[94] Germany's former *Zivildienst*, the civilian alternative to military service until conscription was suspended in 2011, brought young people into care homes and other social settings.[95] It is not a model to import wholesale: a modern care service must be built on properly paid, trained and permanent staff, not on a succession of short-term helpers. But some participants might spend part of their service in carefully chosen, supervised roles alongside care professionals, helping with suitable practical and social tasks rather than substituting for qualified workers. For some, it might reveal care as a worthwhile

career they had never considered. For others, it might bring a deeper understanding of ageing, disability and dependence. None of this should be presumed. The number of suitable placements, their effect on staff time and their value to the people receiving care would all need testing, with safeguarding and non-displacement explicit from the start.

Beyond Britain

The threat this paper describes is shared with Britain's allies, and so is the response. Several are building service schemes at the same time, and a British civic service could be designed to work with them rather than in parallel. Exchanges with partner schemes, in France, Belgium, the Nordic and Baltic states and elsewhere, would let participants train and serve alongside their European contemporaries; mutual recognition of qualifications would let a first-aid certificate, a flood-rescue module or a cyber credential count across borders; and joint exercises with partner resilience services would build the habits of co-operation that a real emergency would demand. Britain's return to Erasmus+ from 2027 offers one existing framework for exchanges.[96] Over time, allied schemes could agree common standards, a civic counterpart to the interoperability their armed forces already practise. None of this exists yet, and it should not be presumed. But a country that wants to be taken seriously on European security would gain from a civic institution that its allies recognise and wish to work with.

Cohesion by design

If cohesion is produced by design rather than by service as such, the design has to be specified. Six principles follow from the evidence in Chapter 3:

1. Mixed by construction. Foundation cohorts are deliberately composed across regions, classes, faiths and backgrounds, and residential, not local.
2. Equal status. Everyone starts at the same rank and on the same allowance. No track, school or postcode buys a better start.
3. A common goal that matters. Training is organised around real tasks, such as an exercise with the local fire service or a flood-defence project, not simulations of citizenship. The task

must require co-operation across the mixed team, not merely parallel individual achievement.

4. Co-operation, not competition. Teams are assessed together. Cohorts compete only as mixed teams.
5. Long enough to matter. Weeks and months, not nights. NCS showed what 2 to 4 nights can and cannot do.
6. Measured and published. Trust, contact and belonging are measured before, during and after, independently, and the results are published, including failures.

These are design principles, not guaranteed outcomes. They are the conditions under which a civic service would deserve to be judged a success or a failure.

Any institution that gathers a large part of a generation will draw some who are a problem: the young person drawn to violence, to conspiracy or to bigotry. It would be foolish to pretend otherwise. But extremism grows in isolation, in the sealed room, the online echo chamber, the closed group that agrees with itself until the rest of humanity stops looking quite human. Prevent, Channel and the wider Contest strategy exist to deal with individuals once they are a concern, and Prevent in particular has been accused, not always unfairly, of feeling like surveillance to the people it most needs to reach. A civic service must never be mistaken for any part of that machinery. It should not be an informer, a referral desk or an extension of anyone's watchlist, and no young person should join a civic scheme only to discover that it is a screening exercise. The moment it is seen as one it is finished. Nor should any identity, faith or background be treated as a risk factor.

What it might do is work upstream, on the conditions rather than the individual: take the isolated young person and put them in a room with the full, awkward, irreducible variety of other people, on a shared task, over months. That will not reform everyone, and nobody should promise that it will. But it is harder to want to harm strangers once you have carried a stretcher with one and shared bad food with another. Like every school, it would need ordinary safeguarding and a way of managing difficult cases, and, like any employer, it would apply role-specific vetting where roles involve vulnerable people, weapons or security, and nowhere else.

An obligation, not a draft

If a civic service were to become obligatory, it would not be conscription in the older sense, and the distinction is not cosmetic. It would be a civic obligation, comparable in kind to jury service or compulsory education, discharged in civilian life as readily as in uniform, with genuine civilian alternatives, robust conscientious-objection provisions settled in law, and independent oversight. Military-support tracks would be a minority of the whole, designed to feed the reserves rather than swell or dilute the regular force.

Whether that obligation is justified, or whether a voluntary or shorter service would achieve as much, is the question this paper puts to an inquiry rather than answers. Either way, the point is not more conscripts. It is, in the phrase this paper takes for its title, more than volunteers.

Chapter 6
Lessons from the National Citizen Service (NCS) and from abroad

Why Britain's last attempt shrank and then disappeared

The obvious question for any British proposal of this kind is why the last one shrank and then disappeared. In 2008 David Cameron, then Leader of the Opposition, proposed a national citizen service for school leavers. In government it became the NCS: part time, voluntary, a few weeks in the summer for 16- and 17-year-olds, reaching perhaps 1 in 6 of the cohort at its peak. In January 2017 the National Audit Office found that its cost per participant had been higher than anticipated and would need to fall by almost a third for the programme to reach its planned scale within budget.[97] A later restructure replaced much of the residential model with a menu of shorter activities, many of them local or online.[98] In November 2024 the culture secretary, Lisa Nandy, announced that it would be wound down from March 2025 in favour of a new National Youth Strategy, and the NCS Trust's charter was surrendered in July 2025.[99] Its final evaluation found real but modest benefits from the residential element and little from the rest.[100]

Three lessons follow, and a new institution would need to answer each of them.

It belonged to one party and one department. It could therefore be treated by the next government as the last lot's project. A civic service would have to be cross-party by construction, legislated rather than contracted, and owned jointly by the departments whose purposes it serves. That is why the next step proposed here is a cross-party inquiry, not a party pledge.

It was small and optional. A scheme one in six take part in is easy to cut. A scheme most people do, like school, is not. Voluntary schemes also tend to select for the already motivated and already connected, which is to say they mix least the people most in need of mixing. Whether universality is the answer, or whether a well-funded voluntary scheme could reach far enough, is one of the questions

an inquiry must settle. But the lesson that a marginal scheme is a vulnerable one stands.

It had no hard purpose. With no defence, resilience or skills mission, no powerful institution had a stake in defending it. Anchoring a civic service in the Civil Contingencies Act, the Home Defence Programme and the skills system would give the emergency services, the NHS, local government and the armed forces a reason to protect it.

To these the evaluation adds a fourth: it was too short, too local and too contracted out, with 2-year contracts and payment by results that discouraged providers from investing in anything lasting.[101] The present Armed Forces Foundation Scheme, voluntary and 150 places strong, risks repeating the pattern on a smaller scale.

The other recent British proposal fared worse. In May 2024 the Conservative Party promised compulsory national service for 18-year-olds: some 30,000 a year would spend 12 months in the armed forces and the rest would give a weekend a month to community service, at a cost put at £2.5 billion a year.[102] Three days earlier, a defence minister had told Parliament that national service recruits 'could damage morale, recruitment and retention and would consume professional military and naval resources.'[103] The plan polled badly (Chapter 7), was announced without the institutions that would have had to run it, and offered participants little in return.

Nor are the cadet forces an answer on their own. They are admirable, and larger than often assumed, with nearly 89,000 young people in the community cadet forces and 48,000 in school contingents.[104] But the school contingents were long concentrated in independent schools, 176 contingents against 61 in state-funded schools in England before the expansion programme began in 2012, and the Ministry of Defence is clear that cadets are not a route into the armed forces.[105]

What allies are doing

Britain is now less typical of its European allies than it was a decade ago. Few have gone straight to compulsion, and many have concluded that the voluntary professional model alone does not produce the depth they need. But they are pursuing different purposes with different bargains: trained military reserves, civilian

resilience, recruitment into the regular forces, and, more rarely, a shared civic experience. None offers a ready-made template for a British civic service. The main points are these.

The Nordic and Baltic states have kept or restored their selective or universal service, with Norway, Sweden and Denmark extending it to women. Finland, with a population of 5.6 million and a reserve of around 900,000, remains the model most often cited for depth.[106] Sweden's concept of total defence is instructive in a different way: every resident from 16 to 70 is part of it, and the duty can be discharged through military service, civilian service in rescue services and healthcare, or a general service obligation in activities that must keep running in war.[107] But a legal liability to be called on in war is not the same as training a whole generation in peacetime. Sweden's military intake is deliberately selective, designed to meet the armed forces' needs rather than to train an entire age group.[108]

Switzerland, often cited for its militia tradition, keeps compulsory military service for men, with a civilian alternative one and a half times as long, mainly in social welfare, healthcare and environmental work.[109] In November 2025 its voters rejected, by 84 per cent to 16 per cent on a turnout of 43 per cent, an initiative to replace it with a civic duty for all citizens, men and women, to be met through military service, civil protection or civilian service.[110] A country with a long tradition of service does not necessarily want more of it, and the vote is a caution against assuming that a universal civic duty would be popular simply because it is civilian.

France has replaced the brief Service National Universel (SNU) with a new voluntary national service of 10 months for 18- to 25-year-olds, paid and housed, with its first intakes in autumn 2026.[111] A June 2026 survey found 81 per cent support, including 78 per cent of 16- to 24-year-olds, for the idea of every young person spending about a year on a mission of general interest, but 72 per cent of young people wanted such a year to be voluntary rather than compulsory.[112] Where the offer is real and the case is made openly, young people are not the obstacle.

Germany has combined voluntary service with a compulsory questionnaire for young men, medical screening being phased in for men born from 2008, and a legislated route to a draft if volunteers fall short. When the first medical call-ups began in September 2026, more than 45,000 school students walked out of class in over 100 cities.[113] The lesson is clear: compulsion without a visible

and credible offer provokes resistance, and that resistance is not unreasonable.

Belgium's new voluntary service year began in August 2026 with 500 places and drew 3,248 applications.[114] Croatia reintroduced 2 months' compulsory basic training in 2026, with a monthly allowance of about €1,100. Of its first intake of 800 in March, 446 were volunteers, and only 10 of the 354 young men called up declared conscientious objection.[115] Austria's governing coalition agreed in September 2026 to lengthen compulsory service.[116] Poland has set out plans to train very large numbers of reservists.[117]

The two combatants of the war that prompted all this offer lessons of a darker kind. Russia conscripts all year round, and Ukrainian intelligence expects it to mobilise 600,000 more over 2026 and 2027, with electronic summonses triggering exit bans.[118] Ukraine, forced to build mass in the middle of a war, has offered bonuses and university places to volunteers aged 18 to 24 and has legislated to make national resistance training compulsory in education.[119] It is building, under fire, what it wishes it had built before. The lesson for Britain is not that it faces Ukraine's situation. It is that the time to build trained depth, with consent, is before it is needed.

Two conclusions follow from the comparative picture. The first is that recruitment is not capacity. Belgium's oversubscription is encouraging, but a trained reserve requires instructors, hosts, accommodation and supervision to expand alongside it, which is exactly the constraint the Civitas report identifies. The second is that military capability and social mixing are separate tests. A scheme can succeed at one and fail at the other, and should be judged against each.

The comparative lesson, then, is not a model to copy but a set of warnings and possibilities. Schemes that pair a real obligation or invitation with a substantial offer have fared better than those that skimp on the offer, narrow it to an elite or impose compulsion without explanation. The design logic may transfer even where the models do not.

Chapter 7
Anticipating objections

Professionalism, and the fear of unwilling recruits

The most common military objection is that a modern professional force has no use for short-term recruits, who would dilute training, consume skilled instructors' time and arrive without motivation. This is the considered view of the institution that would have to make any military track work, and it deserves a direct answer rather than dismissal.

The answer has two parts. First, military-support tracks are designed to feed the reserves and civil resilience, not the regular force. The objection is met by design, not argued away. Second, the objection rests on an assumption that does not survive scrutiny: that defence is properly the business of professionals alone. The superiority of professional over conscript forces has sometimes been attributed, in British debate, to the Falklands War, in which a professional British force defeated largely conscripted Argentine units. Few serious military analysts regard the motivation of Argentine conscripts as the decisive factor, and the campaign was in any case a short, expeditionary war fought at great distance, with no demand on the population at home. It is a poor guide to a debate about prolonged, society-wide endurance.

The objection also misreads what service now involves. Modern British training has moved decisively towards devolved initiative and candour, through Mission Command and the blame-free After Action Review, which have proved more effective models of leadership and teamwork than most civilian equivalents. What serving and former personnel most often name as the abiding memory of service is comradeship, not obedience. The sullen conscript of the objection is a figure from the parade grounds of the 1950s, not from the institutions that would run a scheme today. Motivation, in every serious military tradition and most civilian ones, is built rather than presupposed.

Does service build cohesion at all?

The evidence reviewed in Chapter 3 is mixed, and a critic can fairly cite the Danish lottery study, which found no effect of conscription on trust. The evidence does not prove that a civic service would create cohesion. What it does is tell against one version of the idea—short, military, sorted service with no deliberate mixing and no shared civilian purpose—and offer a reason to test whether sustained, equal-status co-operation on tasks with a real common purpose does better. None of the studies cited evaluate the scheme proposed here. A scheme that failed this test, or sorted participants into unequal experiences, would have to change. That is a condition it must meet, not a difficulty it may assume away.

Liberty and conscience

The strongest objection in principle is that compulsory service is coercive, and that a year taken from a young life is a real cost to the person who gives it. This paper does not ask the reader to accept compulsion now, but the objection deserves an answer because an inquiry would have to weigh it.

Two things can be said in reply. A liberal democracy already asks a great deal of its citizens: taxation, jury service, the compulsory schooling of their children, each justified because it sustains the conditions under which liberty is possible. A civic service with genuine alternatives would belong in that company, not with the older military draft. And any obligation would be legitimate only because, and only if, it were matched by a substantial offer, with robust and unstigmatised routes for conscientious objection. Those routes are easier to honour in a civic scheme than a military one, because the civilian tracks that meet the conscience case would in any event be the larger part of the service. Austria, Germany and Finland have run alternative civilian service at scale for decades. The strongest case for an obligation, which an inquiry would have to weigh, is that universality has a price. Voluntary schemes reach those already willing and already connected; they do not reach the isolated, the disengaged or the sceptical, who might gain most and whose absence most weakens the mixing. Only an obligation guarantees both the mixing and the numbers. And if everyone is asked, no one is singled out: the obligation falls equally, and so

do the benefits. Whether that case outweighs the cost to liberty is precisely the question this paper leaves open.

The militarisation of civilian life

A quieter objection, made more often from the left, is that any national service, however civilian its badging, normalises military logic and lends the state a mobilising reach that a liberal society should be wary of. The concern is legitimate. The answer is partly in design, with civilian tracks run by civilian institutions rather than the armed forces in another uniform, and partly in candour: a scheme conceived and presented as an investment in young people, whose defence value is real but secondary, is a different thing from a manpower pipeline with civilian trimmings. The kind of scheme that Britain had built would be visible in the design, and the design would be public.

Law and the constitution

There is a real risk in the machinery itself: in vesting compulsory powers in the state and getting the safeguards wrong. Recent experience counsels caution. The National Security (State Threats) Bill was fast-tracked through Parliament in the summer of 2026, amid warnings from humanitarian organisations that its offences could catch legitimate humanitarian work.[120] Whichever side has the better of that argument, speed is a poor friend to a coercive power. The opposite principle is the one Paul Mason urges for wartime powers: that they be designed openly, in peacetime, to be just, effective and reversible, precisely so that a society will accept their existence.[121] A civic obligation, if there were one, would belong on that side of the line: built on published criteria, with conscientious objection and exemptions settled in law, and agreed with the devolved governments rather than imposed on them.

Cost and the labour market

A large-scale scheme would be expensive, and no account of it should pretend otherwise. As an illustrative scenario only, and not a costed proposal: at £15,000 to £20,000 per participant-year, covering allowance, board, training and administration,

each 100,000 places would cost £1.5 billion to £2 billion, and a full cohort of some 700,000 to 750,000 would cost in the order of £10 billion to £15 billion a year. Those figures are the author's assumptions, not a published model, and they leave out much that a real costing would have to include: supervision, accommodation and training infrastructure, and the opportunity cost to participants and employers of a year spent in service.

The figures cannot be waved away, only set in context: against the lifetime public cost of youth inactivity, against the scale of loss the Milburn review estimates, against the cost of recruitment failures and against the value of a trained civilian reserve that the country would otherwise have to buy in an emergency, if it could buy it at all. The question is not only 'can we afford it?' but 'what is not doing it already costing, and where does that cost fall?' No firm answer is possible until a cross-departmental fiscal model has been built, and building one would be among the first tasks of whichever commission, review or inquiry takes the question forward.

Emergencies have their own price. The National Audit Office put the expected cost of the government's measures in response to Covid-19 at £372 billion.[122] A trained civilian reserve would not have prevented a pandemic, and no one should claim it would have paid for itself. But the scale of that bill is a reminder that preparation is a form of insurance, and that its premiums look smaller once the claim has been made.

How a service might be paid for is a separate question. The options include reallocating part of existing youth, employability and skills spending, which is spread across several departments; drawing on the Growth and Skills Levy, which replaced the Apprenticeship Levy, for the accredited and apprenticeship-linked elements; counting resilience and defence-support tracks against the budgets they serve; and a dedicated resilience levy. Each would need testing for who ultimately pays.

It may also be objected that a stipended service would distort the youth labour market. The present youth labour market, insecure and offering little training, is not obviously the thing to protect. A scheme that sends young people into work with recognised credentials, experience and a driving licence should raise the floor beneath them rather than lower it.

Fairness and class

This is perhaps the weightiest objection, and the one where the historical evidence supports the critic rather than merely raising a possibility. Compulsory service has repeatedly fallen hardest on the least advantaged, while the affluent secured deferments or comfortable postings. Research by the Child Rights International Network, published by ForcesWatch, found army recruitment to be targeted at poorer areas.[123] A marketing brief for the Army's 2017 campaign, released under freedom of information, described its target audience as '16-24, primarily C2DE. Mean household income 10K.'[124] That concerns voluntary military recruitment, not civic service, but it is a warning of how easily a national scheme could formalise the same pattern.

Equality of obligation is not enough. A year can cost a young person with caring responsibilities, an apprenticeship or an income their household depends on far more than it costs a prospective undergraduate taking a funded gap year. The answer lies in design, and it is demanding: equal tracks with equal status and equal subsequent benefit; no exemptions purchasable by advantage; outcomes monitored and published; and a standing commitment to redesign if one group carries the heavier load. Deferral should be available for those mid-study or mid-apprenticeship, and for the humane grounds no scheme should penalise pregnancy, new parenthood, serious illness, disability and caring responsibilities, which should be met by adjustment rather than exclusion. Disability in particular should be an occasion to design a role in, not a reason to shut a young person out.

A common obligation, a common allowance and a common uniform would not by themselves mean that everyone had been given the same opportunity, and the design must be judged against the lives of the people asked to take part, not against the intentions of those who designed it. That means several things in practice. The allowance must meet essential costs without help from a participant's family, and no household should lose Universal Credit or housing support because a young member is serving. Deferral must not become a privilege of those with good advice and flexible employers, so its grounds should be published and open to independent review, and a part-time, split or non-residential route must carry the same training, recognition and benefits as the full one; an exemption that removes the burden but also the benefit is not inclusion.

Selection for the most sought-after tracks, and for any international strand, must not simply reward prior qualifications, confident self-presentation, passports or family money, and the outcomes of each track should be published by class, region, disability and ethnicity. Nor should the hardest or most hazardous work fall to the least connected while others secure comfortable postings, which would teach hierarchy rather than equal citizenship; displacement of paid staff, and injuries, should be scrutinised independently.

Evaluation should report not only results but participation: who was asked, who could take part, who deferred or left, which track each entered, and what happened to them afterwards, giving particular weight to those who found the service a burden or could not join it. Its purpose would be not to prove that a favoured model is fair, but to learn whether it is, and how it should change if it is not. The standard is demanding but simple to state. A young person without savings, connections, a flexible employer or a supportive home should be able to look at the service and recognise an offer of comparable worth to that made to someone with all four. If a scheme cannot meet that test, its claim to build cohesion is compromised at its foundation.

Britain's own history offers a template: wartime tribunals established the three-way choice of absolute exemption, conditional civilian work or non-combatant service, and conscientious objection in British law goes back to exemptions granted to Quakers in 1757. Two countries outside NATO show what happens when the burden is seen to fall unequally. In Israel, the long-running dispute over exemptions for ultra-Orthodox men has become one of the bitterest questions in its politics.[125] In South Korea, a recent poll found around six in 10 adults in favour of extending the draft to women.[126] In both, the argument is not only about security but about whether the obligation is shared fairly. That is the argument any British scheme would have to win, and it can only be won by design, not by declaration.

Who counts is a further question of fairness. In several countries, service is not only rewarded but required. In Turkey a man of military age cannot be appointed to the civil service unless he has served, been deferred or been placed in the reserve.[127] In Russia a man found to have avoided conscription without legal grounds is barred from the state civil service for 10 years.[128] In South Korea, employers have been forbidden to hire draft evaders, a rule the Constitutional Court found unconstitutional in its present form in August 2026.[129] In the United States, men who fail to register for the draft cannot be

appointed to federal posts.[130] In Israel, where university, housing and employment benefits are tied to military service, Arab citizens, most of whom do not serve, have argued that the link discriminates against them.[131] Benefits tied to service fall away from everyone who was exempted, deferred or ineligible. A British scheme should therefore open doors rather than close them: an advantage in recruitment, admissions and public procurement for those who have served, not a bar on those who could not. Whether the civic argument requires common nationality, or rather participation in a shared public life open to every young person who lives here, is a question an inquiry would have to answer.

Consent

The opinion of the public at large is not the same as the opinion of the young people who would be asked to serve, and a scheme that polled well among the over-50s could still fail among 18-year-olds. British polling shows the pattern plainly. When YouGov tested versions of national service in 2023, only 10 per cent of 18- to 24-year-olds supported a compulsory year of military service and 78 per cent opposed it; yet the same age group gave net support to every voluntary scheme tested, and a voluntary year of community service was backed by 69 per cent of the public as a whole.[132] The Conservative scheme proposed in 2024, compulsory in principle, was opposed by 52 per cent to 39 per cent.[133]

RAND Europe, reviewing the evidence that year, found young people significantly opposed to serving in the forces even in the event of armed conflict.[134] The German walkouts show what happens when compulsion arrives before the offer does. But opposition is largely specific to what is proposed. France's experience suggests that where the offer is real and the case is made directly to young people, support follows. The case has to be made to young people, with the benefits to them at its centre, rather than over their heads. It helps to distinguish three groups. Some young people would serve anyway, and for them a scheme offers structure, qualifications and recognition for what they would have done regardless. Most are not opposed but need to be persuaded that a year is worth their while, and for them the offer must be clear, tangible and substantial enough to outweigh what they give up. A minority would object to any obligation on principle, and for them a liberal scheme must

provide real alternatives and protections. A scheme that asked much and offered little would deserve the opposition it received.

Feasibility

The last objection is that the thing cannot be built: that the training sites, instructors and administrative capacity do not exist. For an immediate national rollout this is correct, and none is proposed. The Civitas report on warfighting readiness is right that instructors and infrastructure, not money or willingness, are the binding constraint. Whether host capacity, safe supervision and accreditation can be created at the scale any given design would require is precisely what an inquiry should establish before anyone commits to numbers. Caution here is not timidity. It is the only responsible way to approach something this large without breaking it.

Chapter 8
What needs to be decided

This paper has argued that Britain should examine a national civic service seriously, rather than dismiss it by invoking the merits of a professional armed force or the impracticality of anything large. The proposal is deliberately more developed than a slogan, but it is not an implementation plan. Whether a service should be universal, whether participation should be obligatory and whether a year is the right length are questions to be answered with young people and with the institutions that would train and host them, not settled in advance by any single paper or author.

A useful next step would be an independent, cross-party inquiry or commission, drawing in young people, the armed forces, emergency services, the NHS and social care, local government and Strategic Authorities, employers, educators, youth organisations and the devolved governments. Its task would be to test this proposal against voluntary, shorter and alternative designs, and to establish what each could realistically achieve for resilience, cohesion and opportunity. In particular, it would need to establish:

Demand and capacity

Whether there are enough roles of genuine value, with safe supervision, accreditation and accommodation, and what it would take to create them without displacing paid staff or overloading instructors.

Cost

A cross-departmental fiscal model, including the opportunity costs to participants and employers and the costs that fall on host services, set against the costs of inaction across health, welfare, education, justice and defence simultaneously.

Law and conscience

The legal and ethical case for any obligation, the scope of exemptions and conscientious objection, equality duties, eligibility (including for non-citizen residents) and the settlement with the devolved governments.

Fairness

Whether the offer would be of comparable worth to young people with the least room to rearrange their lives, and whether any benefit should ever become a condition.

Cohesion

A credible test of whether sustained, equal-status co-operation on real tasks builds trust and belonging, and what would count as failure.

Fit

How a civic service would relate to the Civil Contingencies Act review, the Home Defence Programme, the Milburn reforms, the Armed Forces Foundation Scheme, the defence youth pledge, apprenticeships, T-Levels, cadets, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and the National Care Service, and how far it could work with the service schemes of Britain's allies.

Above all, young people themselves would need to be brought into the design, through schools, colleges, youth organisations and their own representatives, as participants rather than as a polling sample.

Practical trials may prove useful, but their design and scale should follow from the questions they are meant to answer, not the other way round. It may be that an inquiry concludes that a year is wrong, that compulsion is wrong, that shorter or voluntary schemes work better, or that these three concerns are best pursued partly or wholly through separate institutions. That would still be worth knowing. The paper calls for that work, and for a public argument about its findings, conducted seriously and over time, with the people it most concerns at the table.

Chapter 9
Counting the cost

The costs of acting are real, and this paper has tried not to hide them: the money, the demands on young people, the administrative difficulty, the risk of building the thing badly. They have been weighed throughout against a second set of costs, the ones already being paid, quietly and on no single department's ledger: a defence with no means of generating depth, a civic fabric worn thin, and the foreclosed prospects of the young. The argument is not that the first set of costs is small. It is that the second is larger, and less often acknowledged.

It may help, at the end, to be plain about what kind of argument this is. It is an attempt to imagine a common cause, and to ask what we can agree we want to be. It is not a stretch to think that the most basic answer is to be safe, and that safety, properly understood, requires the active participation of the society being kept safe, not merely the exertions of its professionals on its behalf. Another answer, perhaps less comfortable, is that all of us, that 'whole of society' the strategic documents invoke, might be asked to contribute to that safety. This paper contends that we can, and that in the contributing there may be something to be gained beyond safety itself: the experience of having done something demanding, together, as equals, which is the only kind of common identity a free and plural country can honestly claim.

The Prime Minister told the United Nations that security starts in every home. It is also built, or not, in the years between school and settled adulthood, in whether a young person is given something worth doing and people unlike themselves to do it with. The defence secretary told his party conference that defending the country means strengthening the country they defend. Both are right, and neither has yet said how. Britain has the diagnosis, from its own government, from its own security services, from its closest allies and from the report that prompted this paper. What it lacks is a serious attempt to decide.

Annex: International comparisons

The paper argues that Britain's recruitment and resilience arrangements do not match the threat, and that the reluctance even to discuss national service leaves the country behind neighbours who have already moved. This annex sets that claim against the evidence from twelve comparators: the three largest European allies (France, Germany and Poland), the four Nordic states, the three Baltic states, Belgium, and Britain itself. Four further cases, Ukraine, Israel, Russia and North Korea, fall outside the sample but are relevant to it, and are discussed at the end.

The comparison is not an argument that Britain should copy anyone. The schemes serve different purposes: some exist mainly to build trained reserves, some to provide civilian resilience capacity, some to create a shared civic experience and some to do several of these at once. They are compared for what they show about design and reception. Three cautions apply. The figures come from different years and definitions, so the numbers show orders of magnitude, not decimal places. The line between enacted law, a government proposal and a press report matters, and is marked. And the position is moving fast: several entries will have changed by the time this paper is published and should be checked against current sources before citation.

A further qualification applies. Resilience, in the sense the paper uses it and the term 'whole of society' implies, is too broad to be compared between countries through defence spending, recruitment or reserve numbers alone. It also covers infrastructure (energy, transport, communications, shelter and food supply), technology and industrial capacity, and a range of social, political and legal questions: how far citizens trust their institutions and one another, how the law allocates duties and emergency powers, and how well the state communicates with the public. Most of these are difficult, if not impossible, to quantify, or to set side by side in a table or graph. The purpose of this annex is therefore narrower: to compare the few factors that can be measured, as one illustrative part of the whole.

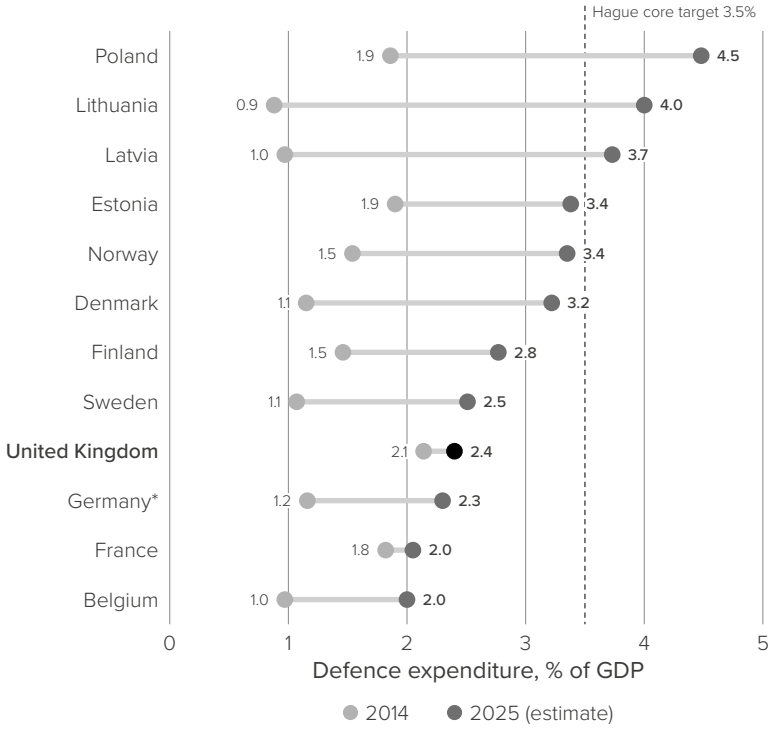
Within those limits the picture is simple. Britain is spending more on defence, and recruitment has begun to recover. But the states closest to Russia, and now Germany and France, are doing

something Britain is not: building depth, in trained reserves, in civilian preparedness and in public acceptance that the burden is shared.

Spending and reserves

Defence spending across Europe has risen sharply. By SIPRI's count, European military spending reached $864 billion in 2025, up 14 per cent in a year, and NATO's Hague commitment sets a target of 5 per cent of GDP by 2035, of which 3.5 per cent is for core defence.[135] Britain has moved, but less than most. Its spending was 2.14 per cent of GDP in 2014, is estimated by NATO at 2.40 per cent for 2025, and at 2.56 per cent for 2026, against a commitment of 2.5 per cent by 2027. Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia are estimated at 4.7 per cent to 5.3 per cent for 2026; Denmark, Sweden and Norway at 3.2 per cent to 3.5 per cent; Germany at 2.7 per cent, up from 1.2 per cent in 2014 and rising fast.[136]

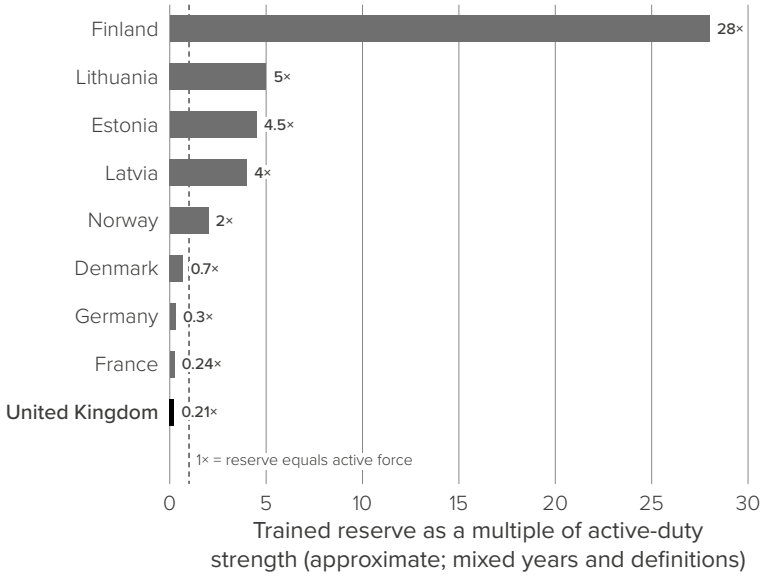
Figure A.1. Defence spending, % of GDP, 2014 and 2025 (estimate)



*Source: NATO (2025) Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014–2025), data cut-off 3rd June 2025. Available at: https://nato.int/content/dam/nato/webready/documents/finance/def-exp-2025-en.pdf (accessed: 18/10/26). *Germany: the NATO table gives no 2025 estimate; the 2025 figure is SIPRI's (2026), which uses a different method, so the Germany point is indicative.*

Spending, however, buys equipment as well as people, and the bigger difference is in the people. Finland can call on about twenty-eight trained reservists for every serving soldier; Lithuania on five, Estonia on four and a half, Latvia on four, Norway on two. Germany's ratio is about one to three, France's about one to four, and Britain's about one to five.[137] A professional force, however well paid, cannot mobilise a society; a reserve of this size is the product of a conscription or training system that has run for decades.

Figure A.2. Trained reserves as a multiple of active strength



Source: Reserves: Szymański, P. (2024) 'Universal, selective, and lottery-based: conscription in the Nordic and Baltic states', on OSW Commentary, Centre for Eastern Studies, 23rd September. Available at: https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2024-09-23/universal-selective-and-lottery-based-conscription-nordic-and (accessed: 18/10/26) (2023 data: Finland 870,000; Lithuania 100,000; Estonia 34,729; Latvia 38,000; Norway 50,000; Denmark 12,000). Germany (about 60,000): Gibadło, B. and Tarociński, J. (2025) 'Germany's military service reform: voluntarism at its core', on OSW Analyses, 10th December. Available at: https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2025-12-10/germanys-military-service-reform-voluntarism-its-core (accessed: 18/10/26). France (47,000 reservists, about 200,000 active): AFP (2025) 'France to restore voluntary military service of 10 months from 2026', in Khaleej Times*, 27th November. Available at: https://www.khaleejtimes.com/world/europe/france-voluntary-military-service-2026 (accessed: 18/10/26). UK: Future Reserves 2020 trained strength 28,880 against 137,480 Regulars: Ministry of Defence (2026) 'Quarterly service personnel statistics: 1 July 2026', on Gov.uk, 3rd September. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/quarterly-service-personnel-statistics-2026/quarterly-service-personnel-statistics-1-july-2026 (accessed: 18/10/26). Active strength for the Nordic and Baltic states from NATO (2025), as in the note to Figure A.1. Sweden, Poland and Belgium are omitted because comparable counts are not available.*

The Nordic and Baltic states

Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania share a border with Russia, and Sweden, Norway and Denmark sit behind them. All seven have chosen conscription, in different forms, and all treat preparedness as a task for the whole population. They are the closest working examples of what the paper argues for, and the clearest evidence of its limits.

Finland

Model: universal conscription for men, voluntary for women, of 5.5 to 12 months, depending on role, with a non-military alternative; total defence planned across government and society.

Scale: Finland is the benchmark. In 2023, 23,304 of the 31,145 men called up, 75 per cent, served; wartime strength is about 280,000 and trained reserves about 870,000.[138] In December 2025 the president signed a law raising the reservist age limit to 65, from 50 for enlisted men and 60 for officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs), in order to build the reserve to about 1 million by 2031.[139]

Preparedness: about 50,500 shelters for 4.8 million people, a legal requirement for shelters in new buildings of 1,200 square metres or more, and household guidance, published in March 2026 by the National Emergency Supply Agency and the rescue association, for 72 hours of self-sufficiency.[140]

Reception: 81 per cent public support for conscription.[141]

Estonia

Model: universal conscription for men, voluntary for women; a large volunteer Defence League; a 'comprehensive security' doctrine that plans civilian and military capacity together.

Scale: capacity limits who serves. In 2023, 3,635 of 9,397 men called, about 40 per cent, served. A standing force of about 7,800 can grow to some 43,700 on mobilisation, with trained reserves of about 34,700 and a Defence League of some 18,000. Estonia now spends about five per cent of GDP on defence.[142]

Preparedness: a 10-year civil defence plan, approved in February 2024, aims to raise the share of residents fully prepared for a major crisis from 15 per cent to 25 per cent within 4 years and 40 per cent within 10, and large-scale evacuation capacity from 2 per cent to 10 per cent of the population, backed by €32 million over 4 years.[143]

Reception: 87 per cent public support for conscription.[144]

Latvia

Model: conscription abolished in 2006 and restored from 2023 as the State Defence Service, taking volunteers first and filling the remaining places by lottery; a 5-year National Guard option close to home.

Terms and scale: 11 months, with a daily allowance, meals and a €1,100 completion bonus. In the first 2 years, 1,076 conscripts served, of whom only 64 were drafted; 95 per cent completed and 271 stayed on as professional soldiers. Applications for the July 2026 intake reached a record 1,560, nearly double the year before. The target is 4,000 a year by 2028. Latvia now spends about 4.9 per cent of GDP on defence, up from under one per cent in 2014.[145]

Preparedness: municipalities, businesses and citizens are brought into planning; national defence education has been compulsory in grades 10 and 11 since September 2024 (112 hours over 2 years), and a public campaign asks households to be self-sufficient for 72 hours.[146]

Reception: support for conscription fell from 64 per cent to about 54 per cent in 2025, though it rose among 18- to 24-year-olds to about 55 per cent.[147]

Lithuania

Model: conscription suspended in 2008 and restored in 2015, the first EU country to do so after Russia's seizure of Crimea; volunteers first, then a lottery. Most serve 9 months.

Scale: 5,000 are to be called up in 2026, with new options in drone operation, special forces and cyber security.[148] Only 3,781 of 27,000 invited, 14 per cent, served in 2023, but trained reserves are about 100,000.

Preparedness: a government strategy of January 2022 prepares citizens for armed and unarmed resistance, built around the Riflemen's Union, a civilian volunteer body whose adult membership more than doubled, from 5,021 at the end of 2020 to 11,069 in September 2025. A civics and defence skills course became compulsory in the ninth grade from 2024/25 and is being extended to younger years.[149]

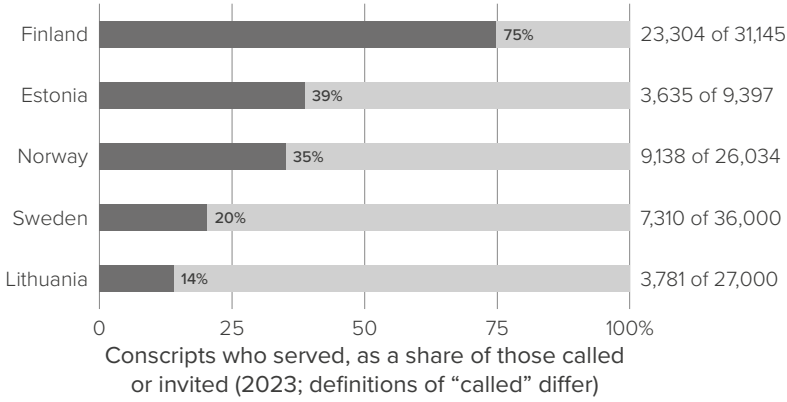
Reception: 63 per cent public support for universal service.[150]

Sweden, Norway and Denmark

All three have selective rather than universal conscription, and all have extended it to women. Sweden's model sits within a wider 'total defence' duty on residents aged 16 to 70 in war or the threat of war. In 2023 it conscripted 7,310 of 36,000 called, with a target of 10,000 a year from 2030 and wartime strength of 88,000 rising to 130,000 by 2035. A government bill of June 2026 would extend the obligation to the end of the year a person turns 47, and provide for readiness service of up to 230 days, from 1st January 2027.[151] Norway selects about 9,100 of 26,000 invited, a third of them women, and plans an active reserve of 63,700 by 2036 from about 50,000. Denmark, which declared equal conscription for women in this year's intake, reported about 1,600 at its first full intake, all of them volunteers and roughly a fifth women, for service of 11 months.[152]

The Nordic states stand out for what they ask of households. Norway declared 2026 the year of 'total defence': civil defence is to grow by half, to 12,000; the shelter requirement lifted in 1998 is to be restored, with existing shelters covering fewer than half of 5.6 million people; households are urged to hold 7 days' supplies; and a target of 50 per cent food self-sufficiency by 2030 has been set.[153] Sweden's civil contingencies agency tells households to prepare for at least a week; Denmark's minister has said every household should be able to manage 3 days.[154]

Figure A.3. Who serves: conscripts as a share of those called or invited, 2023



Source: Szymański, P. (2024) ‘Universal, selective, and lottery-based: conscription in the Nordic and Baltic states’, on OSW Commentary, Centre for Eastern Studies, 23rd September. Available at: https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2024-09-23/universal-selective-and-lottery-based-conscription-nordic-and (accessed: 18/10/26). Finland 23,304 of 31,145; Estonia 3,635 of 9,397; Norway 9,138 selected of 26,034 invited; Sweden 7,310 of 36,000 called; Lithuania 3,781 of 27,000. The base differs between countries (called, invited, eligible), so shares are indicative.

Figure A.3 shows the difference between a universal and a selective system. Finland conscripts three in four of those called; Estonia and Norway about a third to two-fifths; Sweden a fifth; Lithuania one in seven. Where conscription is selective, the question is who is chosen, and how it is seen to be fair. The Baltic states and Sweden take volunteers first and offer incentives, rather than relying on compulsion alone, and the evidence suggests this is why the schemes are accepted.[155]

The caution is serious. About 30 per cent of residents in Estonia and Latvia say they would do nothing under military threat, rising to 46 per cent among ethnic Russians.[156] Preparing a society is not the same as including all of it, which is the argument of Chapter 3 of the paper. And these states face a threat on their border that Britain does not, and are far smaller. Their design logic may transfer; their urgency cannot be assumed.

Germany, France and Poland

Germany, France and Poland are starting from much lower reserves, and each has chosen a different route. What they share is that they have moved in the past year, and that the voluntary offer comes first.

Germany

Model: voluntary service of 6 to 11 months, at about €2,600 gross a month; a compulsory questionnaire for men born from 2008, with medical screening from July 2027; and a legislated reserve power for a lottery-based draft if volunteers fall short of targets.[157]

Scale: the Bundeswehr reached 186,700 active personnel in August 2026, its highest in some 13 years, helped by 47,300 applications, up 26 per cent. The target is about 260,000 active and 200,000 reservists by the mid-2030s, against about 60,000 trained reservists now.[158] Defence spending was 2.3 per cent of GDP in 2025, up 24 per cent in real terms in a year, with a pledge of 3.5 per cent by 2029.

Preparedness: the federal civil protection agency advises 10 days' supplies at home, and a €10 billion civil protection pact runs to 2029.[159]

Reception: 53 per cent of the population supported reintroducing service for young people in a 2025 ZMSBw survey; among 16- to 29-year-olds, 42 per cent called it necessary and 30 per cent rejected it.[160] The Alternative for Germany (AfD, a nationalist party) and the left oppose it, and the Greens want a stronger civilian service. When medical call-ups began, more than 45,000 school students walked out in over 100 cities on 25th September 2026.

France

Model: voluntary military service for 18- to 25-year-olds, of 10 months, paid at about €800 a month, with 5 weeks of basic training; it replaces the SNU.[161]

Scale: 3,000 started in 2026, rising to 10,000 a year by 2030 and up to 50,000 by 2035; at 10,000 a year the cost is about €1 billion a

year. The active force of about 200,000 is to reach about 210,000, and the reserve of 47,000 to 80,000, by 2030.

Preparedness: the national guide 'Tous responsables', published on 20th November 2025, includes a 72-hour household kit.[162]

Reception: 86 per cent of adults supported reinstating military service in March 2025, 53 per cent as a compulsory scheme; among under-35s the figures were 78 per cent and 41 per cent.[163] A June 2026 survey on a civilian year found 81 per cent in favour, but 72 per cent of 16- to 24-year-olds wanted it voluntary. Commentators see voluntary service as unlikely to become a stepping stone to compulsion.

Poland

Model and scale: conscription was suspended after the last draft in 2008. Poland has built a mass voluntary training programme, for at least 400,000 people in 2026, and its Armed Forces Development Program sets a target of 500,000 personnel by 2039, 300,000 of them active and 200,000 reservists, against 233,800 military personnel in NATO's 2025 estimate.[164] A deputy defence minister, Cezary Tomczyk, has said that while there are volunteers there is no need for compulsion, but that 'if the moment comes there will be no way out'; there is no formal decision.[165]

Preparedness: the government advises households to keep a go-bag stocked for 72 hours, and since 1st January 2026 new multifamily buildings must be built so that they can serve as shelters.[166]

Reception: the polls conflict. Opinia24 for RMF FM (14th October 2026) found 48 per cent in favour of restoring compulsory service and 38 per cent preferring a fully professional army, with 53 per cent of 18- to 24-year-olds opposed; IBRiS for Rzeczpospolita (July 2026) found 51.1 per cent opposed and 37.7 per cent in favour, yet 76.6 per cent in favour of compulsory training for both men and women. Parliamentary elections are due in 2027. Defence spending is about 4.7 per cent of GDP, the highest in NATO's estimates after the Baltic states.

Other European states

Belgium is a contrast case: defence at NATO's 2 per cent floor and a voluntary 12-month year in the armed forces, launched in August 2026 with 500 places and 3,248 applications. The demand is there; the scale is not. Croatia has gone further, with compulsory basic training of 2 months for men born from 2007, adopted in October 2025; the first intake of 800 began on 9th March 2026, of whom 446 were volunteers and 82 women, and 10 asked for civilian service. Austria's government agreed on 27th July 2026 to keep 6 months' service and add 3 months of compulsory training, with pay rising from €625 to €1,000 a month from January 2027, if parliament provides the necessary two-thirds majority.[167]

The United Kingdom

Britain's recruitment has turned a corner, but from a low base. In the year to July 2026 the regular intake rose 7 per cent to 14,500 against an outflow of 13,050 (down 7 per cent), and total strength rose 1.2 per cent from a low of 180,780 in July 2025 to 182,980. Full-time trained strength is 127,060, up 0.7 per cent. The Future Reserves 2020 trained strength, at 28,880, fell by 0.4 per cent, and no strength targets have been published since 31st March 2019.[168] On the civilian side the Resilience Action Plan asks the 'average person' to look out for neighbours and stock 'bottled water and a torch', and the UK Resilience Academy will train up to 4,000 people a year, in a country where some 700,000 people turn 18 each year.[169]

Parliament has asked the question. On 1st September 2026 Lord Naseby asked what feasibility work had been done on some form of military service for young people; Lord Coaker replied on 15th September that there were no current plans, pointing to the voluntary Armed Forces Foundation Scheme, which has about 150 places.[170] Public opinion is conditional but not hostile. In YouGov's 2023 polling only 10 per cent of 18- to 24-year-olds supported compulsory military service and 78 per cent opposed it, yet the same group gave net support to every voluntary scheme tested, and 69 per cent of all adults backed a voluntary year of community service; the Conservatives' 2024 scheme was opposed 52 per cent to 39 per cent.[171] That is the pattern seen in France and Poland: support for the principle, resistance to compulsion, and the most resistance among the young.

Other relevant cases

Ukraine

The country with the most experience shows how hard it is to recruit once war has begun. In March 2026 the defence minister, Mykhailo Fedorov, said about 2 million people were evading registration and roughly 200,000 had left their units without authorisation; the Prosecutor General counted 255,000 absence proceedings and 56,200 desertion cases by November 2025. The mobilisation age was lowered from 27 to 25, but a programme for 18- to 24-year-olds drew only several hundred contracts, and brigades report manning at 40 to 60 per cent. Violent incidents against recruiters rose from 5 in 2022 to 341 in 2025, and 58 per cent in a 2025 survey said they understood those who evade.[172] The lesson is that legitimacy and fairness have to be built before the emergency, not during it.

Israel

Israel shows a universal duty undermined by exemption. On 26th April 2026 the High Court ordered the government to make five welfare benefits, among them housing purchase discounts and childcare subsidies, conditional on enlistment, and to pursue criminal proceedings against ultra-Orthodox draft evaders. Since the court's 2024 ruling more than 79,000 call-up orders had been issued to ultra-Orthodox men and only 2,100 had enlisted, about 2.7 per cent; in the year to January 2026 police arrested only 17 for evasion.[173] A scheme whose exemptions look unfair loses the cohesion it was meant to create. Any British scheme would have to be universal in its offer and visible in its fairness.

Russia

Russia drafted 160,000 conscripts in spring 2025, its largest spring call-up in years. Ukrainian intelligence now estimates that only 232,000 people signed contracts in the first half of 2026 against about 240,000 losses, and that Russia plans to mobilise 300,000 people in each of 2026 and 2027; these are Ukrainian claims and cannot be independently verified.[174] Russia also recruits abroad. Ukraine's foreign minister said in February 2026 that over 1,780 Africans from 36 countries were fighting in the Russian army, a

Ukrainian figure that Russia denies and that is unverified. Kenya's intelligence service told parliament that about 1,000 Kenyans had been recruited on promises of jobs, with little training; of those, 89 were on the front line, 39 hospitalised, 28 missing, and at least 1 dead.[175] A separate programme, Alabuga Start, recruited African women aged 18 to 22 with promises of study and pay, first advertised at $700 a month (later 'over $500'); about 90 per cent of the foreign recruits ended up assembling drones, often in hazardous conditions without protective equipment and with deductions from pay, and recruiters reportedly approached Ugandan orphanages.[176] A state short of manpower and willing to deceive reaches for young people with few options elsewhere. Their deception reflects Russia's own choices, but the vulnerability it exploits—young people without prospects—exists in democracies as well, which is the paper's point about the cost of leaving a generation without a route into useful work.

North Korea

South Korea's intelligence service reported in February 2026 that about 11,000 North Korean troops had been deployed to Kursk, roughly 10,000 combat troops and 1,000 engineers, with about 6,000 casualties; some 1,100 returned in December 2025 and may redeploy.[177] Here alliances substitute for domestic manpower. For Britain the democratic counterpart is interoperability with allies who have built depth, and Britain is more likely to share forces if it contributes comparable depth of its own.

Conclusions

Four points follow, bearing in mind that they concern only these measurable parts of resilience. First, spending is converging but depth is not: Britain, Germany and France are within half a percentage point of one another, at 2.2 per cent to 2.7 per cent of GDP, while the states nearest Russia spend 4.7 per cent to 5.3 per cent and hold reserves several times the size of their standing forces. Second, the states that treat resilience as a population task attach numbers to it: shelter counts, household stockpile periods and participation targets exist in Finland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Estonia, and Britain's plan states aspirations instead. Third, the debate leads the law: Germany, Denmark, Sweden and France have each moved in

the past year, Poland has left the door open to compulsion ahead of its 2027 elections, and Britain's position is that it has no current plans. Fourth, design determines reception: support is high where service is universal in offer and fair in application, softer where it is selective or compelled, and corroded where exemption is visible. Young people in Britain are not opposed to service in principle, since they back voluntary schemes; the paper's proposal is built on that evidence.

Notes

Introduction

1 Prime Minister's Office *et al*. (2026) 'PM speech at UNGA: 22 September 2026', on Gov.uk, 23rd September. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-at-unga-22-september-2026 (accessed: 29/10/26).

2 Jenkin, B. *et al*. (2026) *Understanding the UK's Transition to Warfighting Readiness*. London: Civitas. Available at: https://www.civitas.org.uk/content/files/Civitas-Warfighting-Readiness.pdf (accessed: 29/09/26).

3 Streeting, W. (2026) 'Wes Streeting's speech to Labour Party Conference 2026', on The Labour Party, 28th September. Available at: https://labour.org.uk/updates/stories/wes-streetings-speech-to-labour-party-conference-2026/ (accessed: 30/09/26).

Chapter 1. The threat, and the gap it exposes

4 Prime Minister's Office *et* al (2026) 'PM speech at UNGA: 22 September 2026', on GOV.UK, 23rd September. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-at-unga-22-september-2026 (accessed: 29/09/26).

5 Mason, P. (2026) *Designing the 21st Century Wartime State*. Exeter: University of Exeter, Centre for the Public Understanding of Defence and Security. Available at: https://www.exeter.ac.uk/v8media/research/facilities/policy/P._Mason_-_Designing_the_21st_Century_Wartime_State.pdf (accessed: 30/09/26). Summarised in University of Exeter (2026) 'Democratic oversight of new government 'War Book' key to ensuring support', 21st April. Available at: https://news.exeter.ac.uk/faculty-of-humanities-arts-and-social-sciences/democratic-oversight-of-new-government-war-book-key-to-ensuring-support/ (accessed: 30/09/26).

6 McCallum, K. (2026) 'MI5 chief: We have spent 25 years stopping another 9/11 - the truth is we might not see the next terror shock coming' in *The Independent*, 11th September. Available at: https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/twin-towers-september-11th-anniversary-ken-mccallam-mi5-b3044932.html (accessed: 30/09/26).

7 MI5 (2025) 'Director General Sir Ken McCallum gives threat update', 16th October. Available at: https://www.mi5.gov.uk/director-general-sir-ken-mccallum-gives-threat-update (accessed: 30/09/26); MI5 (2024) 'Director General Ken McCallum gives latest threat update', 8th October. Available at: https://www.mi5.gov.uk/director-general-ken-mccallum-gives-latest-threat-update (accessed: 30/09/26).

8 Counter Terrorism Policing (2025) 'Men who organised Russia-backed arson at London warehouse jailed', 24th October. Available at: https://www.counterterrorism.police.uk/news/men-who-organised-russia-backed-arson-at-london-warehouse-jailed/ (accessed: 30/09/26).

9 Eurojust (2026) 'Joint investigation team disrupts group using self-igniting parcels for terrorist attacks', press release, 6th March. Available at: https://www.eurojust.europa.eu/news/joint-investigation-team-disrupts-group-using-self-igniting-parcels-terrorist-attacks (accessed: 30/09/26); Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (2024) 'Parcels that exploded in Europe reportedly part of Russian plot', 5th November. Available at: https://www.rferl.org/a/parcels-exploded-russian-plot/33189080.html (accessed: 30/09/26).

10 Cabinet Office and McFadden, P. (2025) 'Cyber is a poster child for growth', on Gov.uk, 7th May. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/cyber-is-a-poster-child-for-growth (accessed: 29/10/26).

11 Cabinet Office (2025) *The UK Government Resilience Action Plan: The UK's strategic approach to resilience*, July. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-government-resilience-action-plan (accessed: 30/09/26).

12 Cabinet Office *et* al. (2026) 'CEOs from sensitive sectors to receive briefings on Russia threats' on Gov.uk, 25th September. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ceos-from-sensitive-sectors-to-receive-briefings-on-russia-threats (accessed: 30/09/26).

13 The defence debate would benefit from plain English. 'Coordinated inauthentic behaviour' is the phrase social media companies coined for the state-sponsored fabrication of public opinion at industrial scale. 'Kinetic activity' means shooting; 'boots on the ground' means soldiers sent to fight and perhaps to die; 'hard power' means force, or its credible threat; 'resilience' means the ability to take a serious blow and keep

functioning. A debate conducted in terms citizens can follow is one they can join, and a whole-of-society defence requires that they do.

14 Prime Minister's Office *et al*. (2026) 'PM speech at UNGA: 22 September 2026', on Gov.uk, 23rd September. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-at-unga-22-september-2026 (accessed: 29/09/26).

15 United States Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (2019) *Report on Russian Active Measures Campaigns and Interference in the 2016 U.S. Election, Volume 2: Russia's Use of Social Media*. Washington, DC: US Senate, October. Available at: https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/publications/report-select-committee-intelligence-united-states-senate-russian-active-measures (accessed: 30/09/26). The committee found that no single group of Americans was targeted more than African Americans. On effect: Eady, G. *et al*. (2023) 'Exposure to the Russian Internet Research Agency foreign influence campaign on Twitter in the 2016 US election and its relationship to attitudes and voting behaviour', in *Nature Communications*, 14, article 62. Available at: https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-022-35576-9 (accessed: 29/10/26). DOI: 10.1038/s41467-022-35576-9. The study found that exposure was concentrated in a small group of strongly partisan Republicans and that exposure showed no measurable relationship to attitudes, polarisation or voting. Its authors caution that it covers Twitter only and does not show that other forms of interference had no effect. The point here is narrower: such effects are hard to measure and may be impossible to measure with confidence, and the argument of this paper does not depend on the campaigns having succeeded. It assumes that people are exposed to them, not that they are credulous.

16 Prime Minister's Office *et al*. (2026) 'PM speech at UNGA: 22 September 2026', on Gov.uk, 23rd September. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-at-unga-22-september-2026 (accessed: 29/09/26).

17 Prime Minister's Office *et al*. (2026) 'PM speech at UNGA: 22 September 2026', on Gov.uk, 23rd September. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-at-unga-22-september-2026 (accessed: 29/09/26).

18 Prime Minister's Office *et al*. (2026) 'PM speech at UNGA: 22 September 2026', on Gov.uk, 23rd September. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-at-unga-22-september-2026 (accessed: 29/09/26).

19 Khan, S. (2024) *The Khan Review: Threats to Social Cohesion and Democratic Resilience*. London: Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-khan-review-threats-to-social-cohesion-and-democratic-resilience (accessed: 29/09/26); Jenkin, B. *et al*. (2026) *Understanding the UK's Transition to Warfighting Readiness*. London: Civitas. Available at: https://www.civitas.org.uk/content/files/Civitas-Warfighting-Readiness.pdf (accessed: 29/09/26).

20 Ministry of Defence (2026) *The Defence Investment Plan*, 30th June. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-defence-investment-plan (accessed: 29/09/26).

21 UK Parliament (2026) 'Armed Forces: Young People', written question HL2915, tabled by Lord Naseby on 1st September, answered by Lord Coaker on 15th September. Available at: https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2026-09-01/hl2915 (accessed: 29/09/26). Lord Naseby asked 'what work they have done to assess the feasibility of introducing some form of military service for young UK citizens.' Lord Coaker's answer described the voluntary Armed Forces Foundation Scheme for 18- to 25-year-olds, with 'a shorter period of paid military training and service,' and the armed forces' outreach in schools and universities, including 'careers engagement, leadership and skills development activities,' and concluded: 'This Government has no current plans for compulsory military service. Since 1963, it has been the policy of successive Governments that the best way of providing for the defence of our country is by maintaining professional Armed Forces which are manned by volunteers.' The answer did not describe any assessment of feasibility.

Chapter 2. Defence and resilience

22 Ministry of Defence (2026) 'Quarterly service personnel statistics: 1 July 2026' on Gov.uk, 3rd September. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/quarterly-service-personnel-statistics-2026/quarterly-service-personnel-statistics-1-july-2026 (accessed: 29/09/26).

23 BBC News (2014) 'Army cuts plan brings risks, says National Audit Office', 11th June. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-27794717 (accessed: 29/10/26).

24 National Audit Office (2018) *Investigation into the British Army Recruiting Partnering Project*, HC 1781, 14th December. Available at: https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/investigation-into-the-british-armys-recruiting-partnering-project (accessed: 29/09/26).

25 McGuire, R. (2024) 'British Army recruitment targets not met since 2010', on Overt Defense, 10th January, reporting Ministry of Defence figures released to John Healey MP. Available at: https://www.overtdefense.com/2024/01/10/british-army-recruitment-targets-not-met-since-2010/ (accessed: 01/10/26).

26 Pollard, L. (2025) 'Armed Forces Recruitment', on UK Parliament, 6th February. Available at: https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2025-02-06/hcws422 (accessed: 29/10/26).

27 British Army (2023) ''You belong here', says latest British Army recruitment campaign', 4th September. Available at: https://www.army.mod.uk/news/you-belong-here-says-latest-british-army-recruitment-campaign (accessed: 01/10/26).

28 ITV News (2024) 'Britain needs to train and equip a 'citizen army' to prepare for war, says Army chief', 24th January. Available at: https://www.itv.com/news/2024-01-24/britain-should-train-and-equip-a-citizen-army-ready-for-war-says-army-chief (accessed: 30/09/26).

29 Jenkin, B. *et al*. (2026) *Understanding the UK's Transition to Warfighting Readiness*. London: Civitas, pp.57-59. Available at: https://www.civitas.org.uk/publications/warfighting/ (accessed: 29/10/26).

30 Brooke-Holland, L. (2026) *Home defence: What is the War Book?*, House of Commons Library, 2nd September. Available at: https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-11157/ (accessed: 29/09/26).

31 House of Commons Library (2026) *Home defence: A new 'Home Guard'?,* House of Commons Library, 2nd September. Available at: https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-11183/ (accessed: 29/09/26).

32 Ministry of Defence (2026) 'Armed Forces Bill 2026', on Gov.uk, 15th January. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/armed-forces-bill-2026 (accessed: 29/09/26).

33 Langford, C. (2026) 'Government targets later in Parliament for Readiness Bill', on UK Defence Journal, 21st September. Available at: https://ukdefencejournal.org.uk/government-targets-later-parliament-for-readiness-bill/ (accessed: 29/09/26).

34 Cabinet Office (2025) *The UK Government Resilience Action Plan*. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6abf85df53b50d6291a0685a/UKG_Resilience_Action_Plan__1_.pdf (accessed: 29/10/26).

35 Brooke-Holland, L. (2026) *Home defence: A new 'Home Guard'?,* House of Commons Library, 2nd September. Available at: https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-11183/ (accessed: 29/10/26).

36 House of Commons Library (2013) *In brief: Future Reserves 2020*, Standard Note SN06635. Available at: https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06635/SN06635.pdf (accessed: 30/09/26); Bury, P. and Catignani, S. (2019) 'Future Reserves 2020, the British Army and the politics of military innovation during the Cameron era' in *International Affairs*, 95(3), pp. 681-701. Available at: https://academic.oup.com/ia/article/95/3/681/5426078 (accessed: 30/09/26).

37 Brooke-Holland, L. (2026) *Home defence: A new 'Home Guard'?,* House of Commons Library, 2nd September. Available at: https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-11183/ (accessed: 29/10/26).

38 HM Government (n.d.) 'About this website and UK resilience', on Be Ready. Available at: https://prepare.campaign.gov.uk/about-this-website-and-uk-resilience/ (accessed: 30/09/26).

39 Cabinet Office (2026) 'Civil Contingencies Act 2004: Call for Views', 14th July. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/calls-for-evidence/civil-contingencies-act-2004-call-for-views/civil-contingencies-act-2004-call-for-views-html (accessed: 29/09/26).

40 Mason, P. (2026) *Designing the 21st Century Wartime State*. Exeter: University of Exeter, Centre for the Public Understanding of Defence and Security. Available at: https://www.exeter.ac.uk/v8media/research/facilities/policy/P._Mason_-_Designing_the_21st_Century_Wartime_State.pdf (accessed: 30/09/26).

Chapter 3. Social cohesion

41 dpa-AFX (2026) 'Pistorius warnt vor Zerstörung des Zusammenhalts', 22nd June, reporting the Helmut Schmidt Lecture, Berlin. Available at: https://www.finanzen.net/nachricht/aktien/pistorius-warnt-vor-zerstoerung-des-zusammenhalts-15758726 (accessed: 29/09/26). Author's translation.

42 Center for Strategic and International Studies (2025) 'Will, Cohesion, Resilience, and the Wars of the Future', in War and the Modern Battlefield: Insights from Ukraine and the Middle East, 16th September. Available at: https://www.csis.org/analysis/chapter-2-will-cohesion-and-resilience (accessed: 29/09/26).

43 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2026) *Protecting What Matters: Towards a more confident, cohesive, and resilient United Kingdom*, 9th March. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protecting-what-matters-towards-a-more-confident-cohesive-and-resilient-united-kingdom/protecting-what-matters-towards-a-more-confident-cohesive-and-resilient-united-kingdom (accessed: 29/09/26).

44 Putnam, R. D. (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

45 Putnam, R. D. (2007) 'E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-first Century. The 2006 Johan Skytte Prize Lecture' in *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 30(2), pp. 137-174.

46 O'Geran, L. (2026) 'The state of social cohesion in 2026', on More in Common. Available at: https://www.moreincommon.org.uk/research/the-state-of-social-cohesion-in-2026/ (accessed: 29/09/26).

47 Stowers, S. *et al*. (2026) 'Britain Under Strain: Initial findings on extremism and democratic resilience', on More in Common and UKEDRC, 8th July. Available at: https://www.moreincommon.org.uk/research/britain-under-strain/ (accessed: 29/09/26).

48 Home Office (2001) *Community Cohesion: A Report of the Independent Review Team*, chaired by Ted Cantle. London: Home Office.; Casey, L. (2016) *The Casey Review: A review into opportunity and integration*. London: Department for Communities and Local Government. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-casey-review-a-review-into-opportunity-and-integration (accessed: 30/09/26); Khan, S. (2024) *The Khan Review: Threats to Social Cohesion and Democratic Resilience*. London: Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-khan-review-threats-to-social-cohesion-and-democratic-resilience (accessed: 29/09/26).

49 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2026) *Protecting What Matters: Towards a more confident, cohesive, and resilient United Kingdom*, 9th March. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protecting-what-matters-towards-a-more-confident-cohesive-and-resilient-united-kingdom/protecting-what-matters-towards-a-more-confident-cohesive-and-resilient-united-kingdom (accessed: 29/09/26). The strategy commits the government to 'invest £500,000 to fund additional community-led school linking projects - on top of the local authorities already funded', to give children from different backgrounds the chance to meet, learn and play together.

50 Cox, J. (2015) Maiden speech, House of Commons, 3rd June. Hansard, HC Deb vol. 596.

51 Cabinet Office (2025) *The UK Government Resilience Action Plan: The UK's strategic approach to resilience*, July. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-government-resilience-action-plan (accessed: 30/09/26).

52 Jakobsen, M. and Serritzlew, S. (2026) 'Does universal conscription impose a civic penalty? Individual-level evidence from a randomized conscription lottery' in *European Journal of Political Research*, published online 15th January. Available at: https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/european-journal-of-political-research/article/does-universal-conscription-impose-a-civic-penalty-individuallevel-evidence-from-a-randomized-conscription-lottery/8D01155A1B43A7A1AE006341AFA3E05B (accessed: 30/09/26).

53 Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2026) *Evaluation of National Citizen Service 2023 to 2025*, by Verian, 13th February. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-citizen-service-evaluation-2023-to-2025/evaluation-of-national-citizen-service-2023-to-2025 (accessed: 29/09/26).

54 Cáceres-Delpiano, J. *et al*. (2021) 'Intergroup contact and nation building: Evidence from military service in Spain' in *Journal of Public Economics*, 201, article 104477.

55 Allport, G. W. (1954) *The Nature of Prejudice*. Cambridge, MA: Addison-Wesley.

56 Sherif, M. *et al*. (1961) *Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation: The Robbers Cave Experiment*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Book Exchange.; Sherif, M. (1958) 'Superordinate Goals in the Reduction of Intergroup Conflict' in *American Journal of Sociology*, 63(4), pp. 349-356.

57 Aronson, E. *et al*. (1978) *The Jigsaw Classroom*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

58 Gaertner, S. L. and Dovidio, J. F. (2000) *Reducing Intergroup Bias: The Common Ingroup Identity Model*. Philadelphia: Psychology Press.

59 Pettigrew, T. F. and Tropp, L. R. (2006) 'A meta-analytic test of intergroup contact theory' in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90(5), pp. 751-783.

60 Lowe, M. (2021) 'Types of Contact: A Field Experiment on Collaborative and Adversarial Caste Integration' in *American Economic Review*, 111(6), pp. 1807-1844. Available at: https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/aer.20191780 (accessed: 30/09/26).

61 Mousa, S. (2020) 'Building social cohesion between Christians and Muslims through soccer in post-ISIS Iraq' in *Science*, 369(6505), pp. 866-870. DOI: 10.1126/science.abb3153.

62 Paluck, E. L. *et al*. (2019) 'The contact hypothesis re-evaluated' in *Behavioural Public Policy*, 3(2), pp. 129-158.

63 Coyne, J. and Sinai, S. (2026) 'Social cohesion is crucial to security. But we mustn't make it a national-security issue' in *The Strategist*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 10th March. Available at: https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/social-cohesion-is-crucial-to-security-but-we-mustnt-make-it-a-national-security-issue/ (accessed: 29/09/26).

64 BBC One (2012-2016) *Citizen Khan*, created by Adil Ray, Anil Gupta and Richard Pinto.

65 May, T. (2016) Keynote speech to the Conservative Party Conference, Birmingham, 5th October.; Goodhart, D. (2017) *The Road to Somewhere: The Populist Revolt and the Future of Politics*. London: Hurst.

66 Habermas, J. (1996) *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. W. Rehg. Cambridge: Polity.; Appiah, K. A. (2006) *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*. New York: W. W. Norton.

67 Boswell, J. (1791) *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, LL.D., entry for 7th April 1775.

68 Bingham, T. (2010) *The Rule of Law*. London: Allen Lane.

69 The Royal Household (2025) The King's Christmas Broadcast 2025, 25th December.

Chapter 4. Young people and opportunity

70 Student Loans Company (2026) 'Student Loans in England: Financial Year 2025-26', on Gov.uk, 18th June (updated 2nd July), Table 5(iii): average balance on entry into repayment of £47,730 for the 2026 cohort (provisional), compared with £53,010 for the 2025 cohort. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/student-loans-in-england-2025-to-2026 (accessed: 11/10/26). Interest on these loans is linked to RPI inflation and, on Plan 2 loans, rises with earnings to RPI plus three percentage points: Witherden, G. (2025) 'Student loan changes: how much you'll repay in 2025-2026', On Which?, 5th April. Available at: https://www.which.co.uk/news/article/student-loan-changes-how-much-youll-repay-in-2025-2026-aKvvh1Q9jNFF (accessed: 27/10/26).

71 Social Mobility Commission (2026) 'All NEETs are not the same, Social Mobility Commission warns government review', 26th February, drawing on State of the Nation 2025. Available at: https://socialmobility.independent-commission.uk/all-neets-are-not-the-same-social-mobility-commission-warns-government-review/ (accessed: 30/09/26).

72 Chetty, R. *et al*. (2022) 'Social capital I: measurement and associations with economic mobility' in *Nature*, 608, pp. 108-121.; Chetty, R. *et al*. (2022) 'Social capital II: determinants of economic connectedness' in *Nature*, 608, pp. 122-134.

73 Ministry of Defence and Streeting, W. (2026) 'Thousands of work and training placements for young people' on Gov.uk, 24th September. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/thousands-of-work-and-training-placements-for-young-people (accessed: 30/09/26); Ministry of Defence *et al*. (2026) '24 universities and colleges awarded investment to boost student places and strengthen UK defence industry' on Gov.uk, 9th June. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/24-universities-and-colleges-awarded-investment-to-boost-student-places-and-strengthen-uk-defence-industry (accessed: 30/09/26).

74 Office for National Statistics (2026) 'Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), UK: May 2026', 28th May. Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/unemployment/bulletins/youngpeoplenotineducationemploymentortrainingneet/may2026 (accessed: 29/09/26).

75 Department for Work and Pensions (2026) *Young people and work: interim report* (Milburn review), updated 10th August. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/young-people-and-work-interim-report/young-people-and-work-interim-report (accessed: 30/09/26).

76 NHS England Digital (2023) 'Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2023: wave 4 follow up to the 2017 survey', 21st November. Available at: https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2023-wave-4-follow-up (accessed: 30/09/26).

77 Prime Minister's Office *et al*. (2026) 'PM speech at UNGA: 22 September 2026', on Gov.uk, 23rd September. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-at-unga-22-september-2026 (accessed: 29/09/26).

78 Toynbee, P. (2026) 'Plans are under way to finally help Britain's unemployed young people - will Labour pull it off?' in *The Guardian*, 25th September. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2026/sep/25/britain-unemployed-young-people-labour-plans-alan-milburn (accessed: 30/09/26).

79 Sandel, M. J. (2020) *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?* London: Allen Lane.

80 Coles, B. *et al.*(2010) *Estimating the life-time cost of NEET: 16-18 year olds not in Education, Employment or Training*. York: University of York, for the Audit Commission. Available at: https://www.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/research/pdf/NEET_Summary.pdf (accessed: 30/09/26).

81 Department for Work and Pensions (2026) *Young people and work: interim report* (Milburn review), updated 10th August. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/young-people-and-work-interim-report/young-people-and-work-interim-report (accessed: 30/09/26)

82 Gregg, P. and Tominey, E. (2005) 'The wage scar from male youth unemployment', in *Labour Economics*, 12(4), pp. 487-509.

83 Toynbee, P. (2026) 'Plans are under way to finally help Britain's unemployed young people - will Labour pull it off?' in *The Guardian*, 25th September. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2026/sep/25/britain-unemployed-young-people-labour-plans-alan-milburn (accessed: 30/09/26).

Chapter 5. The proposal

84 Samordna opptak (2025) 'Tilleggspoeng – Universitet og høgskole', published 18th August 2025, last changed 23rd March 2026. Available at: https://www.samordnaopptak.no/universitet-og-hogskole/poeng-beregning/tilleggspoeng.html (accessed: 18/10/26). Completed first-time military service in Norway (or civilian service) gives two extra points, to a maximum of two in total; the points are to be halved to one from 2028.

85 Cobseo (2020) 'Civil Service starts guaranteed interview scheme for veterans', 5th October. Available at: https://www.cobseo.org.uk/civil-service-starts-guaranteed-interview-scheme-for-veterans/ (accessed: 01/10/26).

86 University of Manchester (2026) 'Standard tuition fees', Student Support, citing the Government fee cap for 2026/27 (subject to Parliamentary approval). Available at: https://www.studentsupport.manchester.ac.uk/finances/tuition-fees/fee-amounts/standard-tuition-fees/ (accessed: 01/10/26).

87 AmeriCorps (n.d.) 'Segal AmeriCorps Education Award: find out more'. Available at: https://www.americorps.gov/members-volunteers/segal-americorps-education-award/find-out-more (accessed: 01/10/26).

88 *Times of Israel* (2016) 'Eisenkot's 'revolution': A GI Bill of Rights for the Israel Defense Forces', 12th August. Available at: https://www.timesofisrael.com/eisenkots-revolution-a-gi-bill-of-rights-for-the-israel-defense-forces/ (accessed: 01/10/26).

89 London Metropolitan University (n.d.) 'Enhanced Learning Credits'. Available at: https://www.londonmet.ac.uk/applying/funding-your-studies/bursaries-and-grants/enhanced-learning-credits/ (accessed: 01/10/26).

90 Department for Education (2026) 'What the Lifelong Learning Entitlement means for you', on The Education Hub, 15th May. Available at: https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2026/05/what-the-lifelong-learning-entitlement-means-for-you/ (accessed: 01/10/26).

91 Ministry of Defence (1998) The Strategic Defence Review, Cm 3999, July, chapter 6, paragraph 130: 'All recruits to the Services will be given the opportunity to gain the six key skills'. Available at: https://www.resdal.org/Archivo/gb-cap6.htm (archive copy of the White Paper) (accessed: 18/10/26).

92 Cabinet Office (2025) *The UK Government Resilience Action Plan*. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6abf85df53b50d6291a0685a/UKG_Resilience_Action_Plan__1_.pdf (accessed: 29/10/26).

93 Prime Minister's Office *et al.* (2026) 'PM speech at UNGA: 22 September 2026', on Gov.uk, 23rd September. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-at-unga-22-september-2026 (accessed: 29/10/26).

94 Prime Minister's Office *et al.* (2026) 'Prime Minister Andy Burnham sets out plans for a new National Care Service', on Gov.uk, 29th September. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-andy-burnham-sets-out-plans-for-a-new-national-care-service (accessed: 30/09/26).

95 Collischon, M. *et al.* (2018) *The Effect of Compulsory Service on Life Satisfaction and its Channels*, IAB Discussion Paper 24/2018. Nuremberg: Institute for Employment Research. Available at: https://doku.iab.de/discussionpapers/2018/dp2418.pdf (accessed: 30/09/26).

96 Fella, S. (2025) *UK-EU reset: Agreement on UK participation in the EU Erasmus+ programme*, CBP-10449, House of Commons Library, 22nd December. Available at: https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10449/ (accessed: 01/10/26).

Chapter 6. Lessons from the National Citizen Service (NCS) and from abroad

97 National Audit Office (2017) *National Citizen Service*, HC 916, Session 2016-17, 13th January. Available at: https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/national-citizen-service/ (accessed: 30/09/26).

98 Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2026) *Evaluation of National Citizen Service 2023 to 2025*, by Verian, 13th February. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-citizen-service-evaluation-2023-to-2025/evaluation-of-national-citizen-service-2023-to-2025 (accessed: 29/09/26).

99 National Citizen Service Trust (2025) 'Minutes of the June 2025 board meeting and joint statement', on Gov.uk. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-citizen-service-trust-minutes-of-the-june-2025-board-meeting-and-joint-statement (accessed: 29/09/26).

100 Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2026) *Evaluation of National Citizen Service 2023 to 2025*, by Verian, 13th February. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-citizen-service-evaluation-2023-to-2025/evaluation-of-national-citizen-service-2023-to-2025 (accessed: 29/09/26).

101 Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2026) *Evaluation of National Citizen Service 2023 to 2025*, by Verian, 13th February. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-citizen-service-evaluation-2023-to-2025/evaluation-of-national-citizen-service-2023-to-2025 (accessed: 29/09/26).

102 Al Jazeera (2024) 'UK's Sunak promises mandatory national service for 18-year-olds if elected', 26th May. Available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/5/26/uks-sunak-promises-mandatory-national-service-for-18-year-olds-if-elected (accessed: 01/10/26).

103 TheyWorkForYou (2024) 'National Service: National Security', written answer by Andrew Murrison MP, 23rd May. Available at: https://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2024-05-15.26391.h (accessed: 01/10/26).

104 Ministry of Defence (2026) 'MOD sponsored cadet forces: 1 April 2026', 11th June. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/mod-sponsored-cadet-forces-statistics-2026/mod-sponsored-cadet-forces-1-april-2026 (accessed: 01/10/26).

105 Before the Cadet Expansion Programme (launched 2012) there were 237 Combined Cadet Force contingents in England, 176 in independent schools and 61 in state-funded schools: Wood, H. (2014) *Combined Cadet Forces in State Funded Schools: Staff Perspectives*, Department for Education Research Report DFE-RB342, June. Available at: https://dera.ioe.ac.uk//20310/2/DFE-RB342.pdf (accessed: 18/10/26). The programme reached its target of 500 units in November 2019: Ministry of Defence *et al.* (2019) 'Cadet Expansion Programme reaches 500 unit target', on Gov.uk, 1st November. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/cadet-expansion-programme-reaches-500-unit-target (accessed: 18/10/26). By April 2020 there were more units in state schools than in independent schools. The Ministry of Defence states that the cadet forces are 'not conduits for entry into the Armed Forces' and that cadets are 'not liable for military call up': Ministry of Defence (2026) 'MOD sponsored cadet forces: 1 April 2026', 11th June. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/mod-sponsored-cadet-forces-statistics-2026/mod-sponsored-cadet-forces-1-april-2026 (accessed: 18/10/26).

106 European Parliamentary Research Service (2025) *Conscription as an element in European Union preparedness. Brussels: European Parliament*. Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2025/769541/EPRS_BRI(2025)769541_EN.pdf (accessed: 29/09/26).

107 Krisinformation.se (2025) 'Total defence duty', updated 6th March. Available at: https://www.krisinformation.se/en/hazards-and-risks/hojd-beredskap-och-krig/total-defence-service/ (accessed: 30/09/26); Jonsson, E. *et al.* (2024) 'Multifaceted Conscription: A Comparative Study of Six European Countries', in *Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies*, 7(1) 5th March. Available at: https://sjms.nu/articles/10.31374/sjms.166 (accessed: 30/09/26).

108 Bronsard, S. and Harfi, M. (2025) *National service: building a new French (and European) model*, France Stratégie Flash Bulletin No. 1, May. Available at: https://www.strategie-plan.gouv.fr/files/files/Publications/2025/2025-05-04%20-%20SNU/FS-2025-Note%20Flash%20n%C2%B01-EN%2007-05.pdf (accessed: 30/09/26).

109 Swiss Confederation (n.d.) 'Civilian service', on ch.ch. Available at: https://www.ch.ch/en/safety-and-justice/military-service-and-civilian-service/civilian-service/ (accessed: 01/10/26).

110 Swiss Federal Council (2025) 'Civic Duty Initiative', federal vote of 30th November. Available at: https://www.admin.ch/gov/en/start/documentation/votes/20251130/civic-duty-initiative.html (accessed: 18/10/26). Result: about 84.2 per cent against (2,014,600 to 379,600), turnout about 43 per cent, no canton in favour: Keystone-SDA (2025) 'Service-citoyen initiative rejected with 84.2 percent of votes against', bluewin.ch, 30 November. Available at: https://www.bluewin.ch/en/news/switzerland/service-citoyen-initiative-rejected-with-842-percent-no-vote-li.2987119 (accessed: 18/10/26).

111 Service-Public.fr (2026) ' What are the terms of the new national service? '. Available at: https://www.service-public.gouv.fr/particuliers/actualites/A18677?lang=en (accessed: 29/09/26).

112 OpinionWay pour Unis-Cité (2026) *Les Français et le Service National Citoyen*, 15th June. Available at: https://www.opinion-way.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/OpinionWay-pour-UnisCite-Les-Francais-et-le-Service-National-Citoyen-Juin-2026.pdf (accessed: 30/09/26).

113 Şimşek, A. (2026) 'German students take to the streets against compulsory military service plans', on Anadolu Agency, 25th September. Available at: https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/german-students-take-to-the-streets-against-compulsory-military-service-plans/4069445 (accessed: 30/09/26).

114 Chini, M. (2026) 'Belgium's new voluntary military service kicks off: Will it boost recruitment?', in *The Brussels Times*, 26th August. Available at: https://www.brusselstimes.com/2287392/belgiums-new-voluntary-military-service-kicks-off-will-it-boost-recruitment (accessed: 30/09/26); VRT NWS (2026) '500 young recruits ready to start voluntary service year', 3rd August. Available at: https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/en/2026/08/03/500-young-recruits-ready-to-start-voluntary-service-year/ (accessed: 30/09/26).

115 Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Croatia (2026) 'Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence Anušić: 800 conscripts to report for basic military training; 446 volunteers; only 10 called-up conscripts declared conscientious objection', 2nd March Available at: https://www.morh.hr/en/deputy-prime-minister-and-minister-of-defence-anusic-800-conscripts-to-report-for-basic-military-training-446-volunteers-only-10-called-up-conscripts-declared-conscientious-objection/ (accessed: 30/09/26).

116 Kirez, T. (2026) 'Austrian government agrees to extend mandatory military service', on Anadolu Agency, 22nd September. Available at: https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/austrian-government-agrees-to-extend-mandatory-military-service/4064500 (accessed: 30/09/26).

117 Easton, A. (2025) 'Poland announces military training plan for all men', on BBC News, 7th March. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cy83r93l208o (accessed: 30/10/26).

118 Gritsay, Y. (2026) 'Russia plans to mobilise 600,000 troops this year and next, Ukraine says', on Euronews, 28th August. Available at: https://www.euronews.com/2026/08/28/russia-plans-to-mobilise-600000-troops-this-year-and-next-ukraine-says (accessed: 29/09/26); Kavalerov, D. (2026) 'Russians leave before election, fearing mobilisation to follow', on Euronews, 19th September. Available at: https://www.euronews.com/2026/09/19/russians-leave-before-election-ends-fearing-mobilisation-to-follow (accessed: 29/09/26).

119 Ministry of Defence of Ukraine (2025) '"Contract 18-24": a new model of voluntary military service', 11th February. Available at: https://mod.gov.ua/en/news/contract-18-24-the-ministry-of-defence-introduces-a-new-model-of-voluntary-military-service (accessed: 29/09/26); UA News (2026) 'The Verkhovna Rada has introduced mandatory training for students in national resistance', 26th March. Available at: https://ua.news/en/ukraine/vr-zaprovadila-oboviazkovu-pidgotovku-studentiv-do-natsionalnogo-sprotivu (accessed: 29/09/26).

Chapter 7. Anticipating objections

120 Abernethy, P. (2026) 'The National Security Bill's blind spot: how the UK government's new laws could endanger humanitarian work', on Bond, 30th June. Available at: https://www.bond.org.uk/news/2026/06/the-national-security-bills-blind-spot-how-the-uk-governments-new-laws-could-endanger-humanitarian-work/ (accessed: 30/09/26); Home Office (2026) 'National Security (State Threats) Bill 2026: overarching factsheet', on Gov.uk, updated 8th July. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-security-state-threats-bill-2026-factsheets/national-security-state-threats-bill-2026-overarching-factsheet (accessed: 30/09/26).

121 Mason, P. (2026) *Designing the 21st Century Wartime State*. Exeter: University of Exeter, Centre for the Public Understanding of Defence and Security. Available at: https://www.exeter.ac.uk/v8media/research/facilities/policy/P._Mason_-_Designing_the_21st_Century_Wartime_State.pdf (accessed: 30/09/26).

122 Civil Service World (2021) 'Cost of Covid rises to £372bn, National Audit Office finds', 18th May, reporting the National Audit Office's COVID-19 Cost Tracker. Available at: https://www.civilserviceworld.com/professions/article/cost-of-covid-rises-to-372bn-national-audit-office-says (accessed: 01/10/26).

123 Child Rights International Network (2019) *Conscription by poverty? Deprivation and army recruitment in the UK, August*, published by ForcesWatch. Available at: https://www.forceswatch.net/resources/conscription-by-poverty-deprivation-and-army-recruitment-in-the-uk/ (accessed: 30/09/26).

124 ForcesWatch (2017) 'Army recruitment practices exploit and widen class divisions', 10th July. Available at: https://www.forceswatch.net/comment/army-recruitment-practices-exploit-and-widen-class-divisions/ (accessed: 01/10/26).

125 Ravitsky Tur-Paz, S. (2026) 'The Rise and Fall of the (Non-)Conscription Law - Explainer', on Israel Democracy Institute, 12th March. Available at: https://en.idi.org.il/articles/63729 (accessed: 30/09/26).

126 Hankook Ilbo (2026) '6 in 10 Koreans back mandatory military service for women', in *The Korea Times*, 21st August. Available at: https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/southkorea/society/20260821/6-in-10-koreans-back-mandatory-military-service-for-women (accessed: 30/09/26).

127 Republic of Turkey (1965) Devlet Memurları Kanunu (Civil Servants Law), No. 657, article 48(A)(6). Available at: https://www.lexpera.com.tr/karsilastirmasi/devlet-memurlari-kanunu-657/266/266/0/madde-48 (accessed: 01/10/26).

128 Russian Federation (2004) Federal Law No. 79-FZ 'On the State Civil Service of the Russian Federation', article 16(1)(11), as amended by Federal Law No. 170-FZ of 2nd July 2013. Available at: https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_48601/38d7d81bc32f1d2d60d69afd608040ac3cbbd6e1/ (accessed: 01/10/26).

129 Money Today (2026) 'Constitutional Court: law restricting employment of draft evaders and requiring their dismissal unconstitutional' [in Korean], 27th August. Available at: https://www.mt.co.kr/society/2026/08/27/2026082714573963588 (accessed: 01/10/26). The court ruled article 76(1) of the Military Service Act incompatible with the constitution, on grounds of occupational freedom, and left it in force until Parliament amends it, by 29th February 2028.

130 Office of the Law Revision Counsel (n.d.) United States Code, Title 5, section 3328, 'Selective Service registration'. Available at: https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/5/3328 (accessed: 01/10/26).

131 Adalah (2010) 'Widening Use of Military Service as a Condition for University and Employment Benefits', 19th September. Available at: https://www.adalah.org/en/content/view/7889 (accessed: 01/10/26). Adalah cites a 2006 Haifa District Court ruling that giving soldiers priority in student housing discriminated against Arab students.

132 Smith, M. (2023) 'Do Britons want to bring back national service?', on YouGov, 4th September. Available at: https://yougov.com/en-gb/articles/46034-do-britons-want-bring-back-national-service (accessed: 30/09/26).

133 Conner, J. (2024) 'How popular are the parties' 2024 manifesto policies?', on YouGov, 14th June. Available at: https://yougov.co.uk/politics/articles/49655-general-election-2024-which-new-policies-do-people-support (accessed: 30/09/26).

134 Slapakova, L. *et* al. (2024) 'Should the UK bring back national service? Considerations and lessons from international research', on RAND Europe, 28th June. Available at: https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2024/06/should-the-uk-bring-back-national-service-considerations.html (accessed: 30/09/26).

Annex: International comparisons

135 Liang, X. *et al*. (2026) *Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2025*, SIPRI Fact Sheet, April. Available at: https://www.sipri.org/publications/2026/sipri-fact-sheets/trends-world-military-expenditure-2025 (accessed: 18/10/26).

136 Bayer, L. (2026) 'Five NATO members seen to spend over 3.5% of GDP on core defence this year, alliance estimates show', on Reuters, 7th July. Available at: https://www.internazionale.it/ultime-notizie-reuters/2026/07/07/five-nato-members-seen-to-spend-over-3-5-of-gdp-on-core-defence-this-year-alliance-estimates-show (accessed: 18/10/26). Figures for Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland: Karlgren, T. (2026) 'NATO's new figures: Sweden at the top level', on Dagens PS, 10th July. Available at: https://www.dagensps.se/varlden/natos-nya-siffror-sverige-pa-toppniva/ (accessed: 18/10/26). NATO's published figures are for core defence. Estonia's prime minister, Kristen Michal, has put the total at almost seven per cent of GDP, including 1.5 per cent for non-military national defence: ERR News (2026) 'Estonia spending "almost 7%" of GDP on defence, prime minister says', 8th July, republished by LRT, 10th July. Available at: https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/2985225/estonia-spending-almost-7-of-gdp-on-defence-prime-minister-says (accessed: 18/10/26).

137 Reserves: Szymański, P. (2024) 'Universal, selective, and lottery-based: conscription in the Nordic and Baltic states', on OSW Commentary, Centre for Eastern Studies, 23rd September. Available at: https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2024-09-23/universal-selective-and-lottery-based-conscription-nordic-and (accessed: 18/10/26) (2023 data: Finland 870,000; Lithuania 100,000; Estonia 34,729; Latvia 38,000; Norway 50,000; Denmark 12,000). Germany (about 60,000): Gibadło, B. and Tarociński, J. (2025) 'Germany's military service reform: voluntarism at its core', on OSW Analyses, 10th December. Available at: https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2025-12-10/germanys-military-service-reform-voluntarism-its-core (accessed: 18/10/26). France (47,000 reservists, about 200,000 active): AFP (2025) 'France to restore voluntary military service of 10 months from 2026', in *Khaleej Times*, 27th November. Available at: https://www.khaleejtimes.com/world/europe/france-voluntary-military-service-2026

(accessed: 18/10/26). UK: Future Reserves 2020 trained strength 28,880 against 137,480 Regulars: Ministry of Defence (2026) 'Quarterly service personnel statistics: 1 July 2026', on Gov.uk, 3rd September. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/quarterly-service-personnel-statistics-2026/quarterly-service-personnel-statistics-1-july-2026 (accessed: 18/10/26). Active strength for the Nordic and Baltic states from NATO (2025), as in the note to Figure A.1. Sweden, Poland and Belgium are omitted because comparable counts are not available.

138 Szymański, P. (2024) 'Universal, selective, and lottery-based: conscription in the Nordic and Baltic states', on OSW Commentary, Centre for Eastern Studies, 23rd September. Available at: https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2024-09-23/universal-selective-and-lottery-based-conscription-nordic-and (accessed: 18/10/26).

139 Mukhina, O. (2025) 'Finland raises military reserve age to 65, aims for 1 million troops by 2031, as NATO warns of Russian threat', on Euromaidan Press, 23rd December. Available at: https://euromaidanpress.com/2025/12/23/finland-raises-military-reserve-age-to-65-aims-for-1-million-troops-by-2031-as-nato-warns-of-russian-threat/ (accessed: 18/10/26).

140 Gibala, M. (2025) 'Finnish shelters. A history lesson for modern civil defence', on Defence24, 31st October. Available at: https://defence24.com/defence-policy/finnish-shelters-a-history-lesson-for-modern-civil-defence (accessed: 18/10/26). National Emergency Supply Agency and Finnish National Rescue Association (SPEK) (2026) 'Brochure on citizens' home preparedness and 72 hours' self-sufficiency – Finland', on Civil Protection Knowledge, 5th March. Available at: https://civil-protection-knowledge-network.europa.eu/media/brochure-citizens-home-preparedness-and-72-hours-self-sufficiency-finland (accessed: 18/10/26).

141 Szymański, P. (2024) 'Universal, selective, and lottery-based: conscription in the Nordic and Baltic states', on OSW Commentary, Centre for Eastern Studies, 23rd September. Available at: https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2024-09-23/universal-selective-and-lottery-based-conscription-nordic-and (accessed: 18/10/26).

142 McNamara, E. M. (2025) 'Estonia's road to comprehensive security', on Heinrich Böll Stiftung Warsaw, 24th July. Available at: https://pl.boell.org/en/2025/07/24/estonias-road-comprehensive-security (accessed: 18/10/26); Szymański, P. (2024) 'Universal, selective, and lottery-based: conscription in the Nordic and Baltic states', on OSW Commentary, Centre for Eastern Studies, 23rd September. Available at: https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2024-09-23/universal-selective-and-lottery-based-conscription-nordic-and (accessed: 18/10/26).

143 Government of Estonia (2024) 'Government approves civil defence objectives and action plan', 22nd February. Available at: https://valitsus.ee/en/news/government-approves-civil-defence-objectives-and-action-plan (accessed: 18/10/26).

144 Szymański, P. (2024) 'Universal, selective, and lottery-based: conscription in the Nordic and Baltic states', on OSW Commentary, Centre for Eastern Studies, 23rd September. Available at: https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2024-09-23/universal-selective-and-lottery-based-conscription-nordic-and (accessed: 18/10/26).

145 Andžāns, M. (2025) 'Latvia's Renewed Conscription Turns Two', on Foreign Policy Research Institute, 27th June. Available at: https://www.fpri.org/article/2025/06/latvias-renewed-conscription-turns-two/ (accessed: 18/10/26); Gavilan, J. (2026) 'Record 1,560 Sign Up for Latvia's July 2026 Military Draft', on The Defense Post, 20th January. Available at: https://thedefensepost.com/2026/01/20/latvia-military-draft-2026/ (accessed: 18/10/26).

146 Astukevičs, A. and Vrobļevska, E. (2026) 'The evolution of Latvia's defense and security policy in resilience building', on Atlantic Council, 2nd January. Available at: https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/the-evolution-of-latvias-defense-and-security-policy-in-resilience-building/ (accessed: 18/10/26); Lazdina, A. (2025) 'Latvian schools' defence education programme assessed after first full year', on LSM, 10th June. Available at: https://eng.lsm.lv/article/society/education/10.06.2025-latvian-schools-defence-education-programme-assessed-after-first-full-year.a602613/ (accessed: 18/10/26).

147 Andžāns, M. (2025) 'Latvia's Renewed Conscription Turns Two', on Foreign Policy Research Institute, 27th June. Available at: https://www.fpri.org/article/2025/06/latvias-renewed-conscription-turns-two/ (accessed: 18/10/26).

148 Volovich, M. (2025) 'Lithuania expands conscription to 5,000 for 2026 as Baltic states bolster defenses', on Euromaidan Press, 3rd December. Available at: https://euromaidanpress.com/2025/12/03/lithuania-conscription-2026-baltic-defense/ (accessed: 18/10/26).

149 LRT (2022) 'Lithuanian government approves strategy to prep society for resistance', 26th January. Available at: https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1598501/lithuanian-government-approves-strategy-to-prep-society-for-resistance (accessed: 18/10/26); Idzelis, L. (2025) ''Citizens First, Total Defense Always': An Interview with Colonel Linas Idzelis on the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union', in *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review*, 44, 19th December. Available at: https://www.gssc.lt/en/publication/citizens-first-total-defense-always-an-interview-with-colonel-linas-idzelis-on-the-lithuanian-riflemens-union-lfpr-vol-44-2026/ (accessed: 18/10/26).

150 Szymański, P. (2024) 'Universal, selective, and lottery-based: conscription in the Nordic and Baltic states', on OSW Commentary, Centre for Eastern Studies, 23rd September. Available at: https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2024-09-23/universal-selective-and-lottery-based-conscription-nordic-and (accessed: 18/10/26).

151 Wollheim, J. (2026) 'Government Proposes Extended Conscription and Expanded Readiness Service', on National Defence Sector, 10th June. Available at: https://nordicdefencesector.com/en/article/the-government-proposes-extended-military-service-and-expanded-readiness-duty (accessed: 18/10/26); Government of Sweden (2026) 'Regeringens proposition 2025/26:279', 4th June. Available at: https://data.riksdagen.se/dokument/HD03279 (accessed: 18/10/26); Szymański, P. (2024) 'Universal, selective, and lottery-based: conscription in the Nordic and Baltic states', on OSW Commentary, Centre for Eastern Studies, 23rd September. Available at: https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2024-09-23/universal-selective-and-lottery-based-conscription-nordic-and (accessed: 18/10/26)..

152 Szymański, P. (2024) 'Universal, selective, and lottery-based: conscription in the Nordic and Baltic states', on OSW Commentary, Centre for Eastern Studies, 23rd September. Available at: https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2024-09-23/universal-selective-and-lottery-based-conscription-nordic-and (accessed: 18/10/26);; Wollheim, J. (2026) 'Denmark rolls out new 11-month conscription service', on National Defence Sector, 3rd August (updated 5th August). Available at: https://nordicdefencesector.com/en/article/denmark-rolls-out-new-11-month-conscription (accessed: 18/10/26).

153 AFP (2026) 'On Russia's doorstep, Norway goes 'total defence' mode', The Local (Norway), 23rd May. Available at: https://www.thelocal.no/20260523/on-russias-doorstep-norway-goes-total-defence-mode (accessed: 18/10/26).

154 Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MCF) (2024) *In case of crisis or war*. Available at: https://www.mcf.se/en/advice-for-individuals/the-brochure-in-case-of-crisis-or-war/download-and-order-the-brochure-in-case-of-crisis-or-war/ (accessed: 18/10/26); Bruun Vindum Brandt, K. (2024) 'All Danes must be able to cope for three days, says the Minister of Defense'', on TV 2 Kosmopol, 15th June. Available at: https://www.tv2kosmopol.dk/tv2dk/alle-danskere-skal-kunne-klare-sig-i-tre-doegn-siger-forsvarsministeren (accessed: 18/10/26).

155 Besch, S. and Westgaard, K. (2024) 'Europe's Conscription Challenge: Lessons From Nordic and Baltic States', on Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 8th July. Available at: https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/07/europes-conscription-challenge-lessons-from-nordic-and-baltic-states (accessed: 18/10/26).

156 Tobias, E. (2026) 'Willing to do Nothing: Addressing the Societal Resilience Gap in Estonia and Latvia', on Eastern European and Transatlantic Network, Carleton University, 22nd June. Available at: https://carleton.ca/eetn/2026/willing-to-do-nothing-addressing-the-societal-resilience-gap-in-estonia-and-latvia/ (accessed: 18/10/26).

157 Gibadło, B. and Tarociński, J. (2025) 'Germany's military service reform: voluntarism at its core', on OSW Analyses, 10th December. Available at: https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2025-12-10/germanys-military-service-reform-voluntarism-its-core (accessed: 18/10/26).

158 Bernacchi, G. (2026) 'German Military Expands to Largest Force in 13 Years With 186,700 Troops', on The Defense Post, 19th August. Available at: https://thedefensepost.com/2026/08/19/german-military-expands-force/ (accessed: 18/10/26); Gibadło, B. and Tarociński, J. (2025) 'Germany's military service reform: voluntarism at its core', on OSW Analyses, 10th December. Available at: https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2025-12-10/germanys-military-service-reform-voluntarism-its-core (accessed: 18/10/26).

159 Frauwallner, S. J. and Kraetzer, U. (2025) 'Sinnvolle Vorsorge gegen Kriegspanik: So will die Regierung Deutsche wappnen', on CORRECTIV, 28th October. Available at: https://correctiv.org/krieg/2025/10/28/sinnvolle-vorsorge-gegen-kriegspanik-so-will-regierung-deutsche-wappnen/ (accessed: 18/10/26); Bundesregierung (2026) 'Auf den Ernstfall gut vorbereitet sein' (Pakt für den Bevölkerungsschutz), 20th May. Available at: https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/pakt-bevoelkerungsschutz-2431070 (accessed: 18/10/26).

160 Tagesspiegel (2026) 'Studie zum Wehrdienst: 'Study on military service: "There is no shortage of citizens willing to fight"', 8th May, reporting the ZMSBw population survey (Forschungsbericht 139, fieldwork spring 2025). Available at: https://www.tagesspiegel.de/studie-zum-wehrdienst-an-kampfbereiten-burgerinnen-und-burgern-fehlt-es-nicht-15563263.html (accessed: 18/10/26).

161 AFP (2025) 'France to restore voluntary military service of 10 months from 2026', in *Khaleej Times*, 27th November. Available at: https://www.khaleejtimes.com/world/europe/france-voluntary-military-service-2026 (accessed: 18/10/26);; Paponaud, E. and Euronews (2026) 'France begins new voluntary national service programme', on Euronews, 31st August. Available at: https://www.euronews.com/2026/08/31/france-begins-new-voluntary-national-service-programme (accessed: 18/10/26).

162 French Government (2025) 'Guide "Everyone is responsible: let's act in the face of risks"', 25th November. Available at: https://www.sports.gouv.fr/guide-tous-responsables-face-aux-risques-agissons-10008 (accessed: 18/10/26).

163 Ipsos (2025) 'The French are in favor of military service, but not necessarily mandatory',', for Le Parisien, 15th March (1,000 adults, fieldwork 12–14 March). Available at: https://www.ipsos.com/fr-fr/les-francais-favorables-un-service-militaire-mais-pas-forcement-obligatoire (accessed: 18/10/26); OpinionWay pour Unis-Cité (2026) *Les Français et le Service National Citoyen*, 15th June. Available at: https://www.opinion-way.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/OpinionWay-pour-UnisCite-Les-Francais-et-le-Service-National-Citoyen-Juin-2026.pdf (accessed: 18/10/26).

164 Lanchukovska, T. (2025) 'Poland launches military training program: wants to train 400,000 people in 2026', on Liga.net, 6th November. Available at: https://news.liga.net/en/world/news/poland-launches-military-training-program-wants-to-train-400-000-people-in-2026 (accessed: 18/10/26); Polskie Radio (2026) 'Poland targets 500,000 troops by 2039 under new military plan', 16th January. Available at: https://polskieradio.pl/395/7784/Artykul/3634898,poland-targets-500000-troops-by-2039-under-new-military-plan (accessed: 18/10/26); NATO (2025) *Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014–2025),* data cut-off 3rd June 2025. Available at: https://nato.int/content/dam/nato/webready/documents/finance/def-exp-2025-en.pdf (accessed: 18/10/26).

165 Spider's Web (2026) 'Conscription divides Poles. But young people are right', report on Opinia24/RMF FM poll and Deputy Defence Minister Cezary Tomczyk's remarks, 14th October. Available at: https://spidersweb.pl/2026/10/pobor-do-wojska-sondaz-pazdziernik-2026.html (accessed: 18/10/26); Polskie Radio (2026) 'Poll: Most Poles oppose return of compulsory military service', 20th July (IBRiS for Rzeczpospolita). Available at: https://www.polskieradio.pl/395/7789/Artykul/3710395,poll-most-poles-oppose-return-of-compulsory-military-service (accessed: 18/10/26).

166 Moreu-Żak, S. and Kuszewska, G. (2025) 'The Shelter Act: Collective protection facilities in Poland', on In Principle, 23rd January. Available at: https://codozasady.pl/en/p/the-shelter-act-collective-protection-facilities-in-poland (accessed: 18/10/26); Polskie Radio (2025) 'Poles told to keep go-bags ready as war next door raises risks', 16th September. Available at: https://www.polskieradio.pl/395/7784/Artykul/3580063,poles-told-to-keep-gobags-ready-as-war-next-door-raises-risks (accessed: 18/10/26).

167 VRT NWS (2026) '500 young recruits ready to start voluntary service year', 3rd August. Available at: https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/en/2026/08/03/500-young-recruits-ready-to-start-voluntary-service-year/ (accessed: 18/10/26); Croatia Week (2026) 'Croatia's new basic military training: 800 recruits, 82 women, 10 opt for civilian service', 3rd March. Available at: https://www.croatiaweek.com/croatia-basic-military-training-800-recruits-2026/ (accessed: 18/10/26); Katsimon, O. (2026) 'Austria has approved a military service reform due to Russia's war against Ukraine', on Liga.net, 27th July. Available at: https://news.liga.net/en/politics/news/austria-has-approved-a-military-service-reform-due-to-russias-war-against-ukraine (accessed: 18/10/26); Keystone-SDA (2026) 'Austria plans to extend military service', on blue News, 27th July. Available at: https://www.bluewin.ch/en/news/austria-plans-to-extend-military-service-li.3543540 (accessed: 18/10/26).

168 Ministry of Defence (2026) 'Quarterly service personnel statistics: 1 July 2026', on Gov.uk published 3rd September (revised 23rd September). Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/quarterly-service-personnel-statistics-2026/quarterly-service-personnel-statistics-1-july-2026 (accessed: 18/10/26).

169 Cabinet Office (2025) *The UK Government Resilience Action Plan: The UK's strategic approach to resilience*, July. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-government-resilience-action-plan (accessed: 18/10/26).

170 UK Parliament (2026) 'Armed Forces: Young People', written question HL2915, tabled by Lord Naseby on 1st September, answered by Lord Coaker on 15th September. Available at: https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2026-09-01/hl2915 (accessed: 18/10/26).

171 Smith, M. (2023) 'Do Britons want to bring back national service?', on YouGov, 4th September. Available at: https://yougov.com/en-gb/articles/46034-do-britons-want-bring-back-national-service (accessed: 18/10/26); Conner, J. (2024) 'How popular are the parties' 2024 manifesto policies?', on YouGov, 14th June. Available at: https://yougov.co.uk/politics/articles/49655-general-election-2024-which-new-policies-do-people-support (accessed: 18/10/26).

172 Nieczypor, K. (2026) 'Ukraine's mobilisation crisis: a new minister, old challenges', on OSW Analyses, 3rd April, citing Fedorov (25 March 2026) and the Prosecutor General (November 2025). Available at: https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2026-04-03/ukraines-mobilisation-crisis-a-new-minister-old-challenges (accessed: 18/10/26).

173 Sharon, J. (2026) 'High Court orders government to impose financial sanctions on Haredi draft evaders', in *The Times of Israel*, 26th April. Available at: https://www.timesofisrael.com/high-court-orders-government-to-impose-financial-sanctions-on-haredi-draft-evaders/ (accessed: 18/10/26).

174 Gritsay, Y. (2026) 'Russia plans to mobilise 600,000 troops this year and next, Ukraine says', on Euronews, 28th August, citing Ukrainian military and foreign intelligence. Available at: https://euronews.com/2026/08/28/russia-plans-to-mobilise-600000-troops-this-year-and-next-ukraine-says (accessed: 18/10/26); Melnychuk, D. (2025) 'Putin calls up 160,000 more Russians for military service', on Nikvesti, 31st

March. Available at: https://nikvesti.com/en/news/politics/303240-putin-calls-up-160000-russians-military-service (accessed: 18/10/26).

175 Reuters (2026) 'More than 1,700 Africans fighting for Russia, Ukraine says', 25th February, as published by Arab News. Available at: https://www.arabnews.com/node/2634438/world (accessed: 18/10/26). Russia has denied recruiting Africans illegally. Associated Press (2026) '1,000 Kenyans were recruited to fight for Russia in Ukraine, intelligence report says', on NPR, 19th February (report by Kenya's National Intelligence Service, presented to parliament). Available at: https://www.michiganpublic.org/2026-02-19/1-000-kenyans-were-recruited-to-fight-for-russia-in-ukraine-intelligence-report-says (accessed: 18/10/26).

176 Associated Press (2024) 'Africans recruited to work in Russia say they were duped into building drones for use in Ukraine', 10th October. Available at: https://kvia.com/ap-national-news/2024/10/10/africans-recruited-to-work-in-russia-say-they-were-duped-into-building-drones-for-use-in-ukraine/ (accessed: 18/10/26).

177 Moroziuk, P. (2026) 'Nearly 11,000 North Korean troops stationed in Russia's Kursk Oblast at start of 2026, media reports', in *The Kyiv Independent*, 12th February, reporting South Korea's National Intelligence Service via Yonhap. Available at: https://www.yahoo.com/news/articles/nearly-11-000-north-korean-124958616.html (accessed: 18/10/26).

Chief Executive Officer: Dr. Jim McConalogue

Trustees:

Dr. David Green (Chairman)	Tom Harris
Dr. David Costain (Treasurer)	The Honourable Justin Shaw
Sir Alan Rudge	Peter Lloyd

About Civitas: The Institute for the Study of Civil Society

- We facilitate informed public debate by providing accurate factual information on the social issues of the day, publishing informed comment and analysis, and bringing together leading protagonists in open discussion. Civitas never takes a corporate view on any of the issues tackled during the course of this work. Our current focus is on issues such as education, health, crime, social security, manufacturing, the abuse of human rights law, and the European Union.
- We ensure that there is strong evidence for all our conclusions and present the evidence in a balanced and objective way. Our publications are usually refereed by independent commentators, who may be academics or experts in their field.
- We strive to benefit public debate through independent research, reasoned argument, lucid explanation and open discussion. We stand apart from party politics and transitory intellectual fashions.
- Uniquely among think tanks, we play an active, practical part in rebuilding civil society by running schools on Saturdays and after-school hours so that children who are falling behind at school can achieve their full potential.

Subscriptions and Membership (UK only)

If you would like to stay abreast of Civitas' latest work, you can have all of our books delivered to your door as soon as they are published. New subscribers receive a free copy of Roger Bootle's book, *The AI Economy: Work, Wealth and Welfare in the Robot Age* and Daniel Bentley's book, *The Land Question* on fixing the dysfunction at the root of the housing crisis.

For those who would like to support our work further and get involved in our Westminster events, we have a variety of Subscription and Membership options available:

www.civitasonline.org.uk/product-category/subscriptions

We regret that we are unable to post items to non-UK residents, although all of our publications are individually available via our Civitas Book Store (www.civitasonline.org.uk) and in most cases on Amazon.

Renewals for Existing Members

If you are an existing member wishing to renew with ease and convenience, please do select one of the subscription or membership options that most closely meets your requirements.

Make a Donation

If you like our work and would like to help see it continue, please consider making a donation. A contribution of any amount, big or small, will help us advance our research and educational activities. You can make a donation by getting in touch (020 7799 6677) or sending a simple email to info@civitas.org.uk so that we can come back to you.

Supporters of Civitas

Because we want to reach as wide an audience as possible, our subscription and membership fees are set as low as possible and barely meet printing and postage expenses. To meet the costs of producing our research and conducting our educational projects, we rely entirely on the goodwill and generosity of people who value our work.

If you would like to support our work on a rolling basis, there is a variety of advanced membership levels on offer. Supporters of Civitas have the opportunity to become more deeply engaged with the work their philanthropy makes possible.

You can pay by selecting a membership or subscription option and we will be in contact. Alternatively, just call us on +44 (0)20 7799 6677 or email info@civitas.org.uk and we can discuss your options.

To survive a crisis, Britain needs engaged citizens. The Government recognises that defence cannot be left to the state alone, and that resilience is a 'shared responsibility' – but it has done little to ensure that civil society is equipped to respond to emergencies, be those arising from hostile states or natural disasters. What is needed are institutions that prepare people before a crisis strikes and can easily find them when it does.

In *More Than Volunteers*, Attila E. Alpman offers a blueprint for a new 'National Civic Service' that would prepare young people for today's challenges and bring those from different backgrounds together towards a common purpose. Such a programme has the potential to address three issues facing Britain today. It could build a civilian defence strategy in times of geopolitical instability; strengthen social cohesion in an increasingly divided society; and create opportunities for young people facing professional and economic uncertainty.

A National Civic Service would have two components. The first would be a universal foundation course for 18-year-olds, providing a working knowledge of how the country is governed and a set of skills that schools alone cannot teach. The second would offer specialised training in areas of national importance, such as armed forces support, emergency services, health and social care, cyber defence and environmental resilience. All participants would receive a basic living allowance and accommodation, as well as qualifications and licenses to aid them in their future careers. The service would also complement recruitment efforts in each area, by offering a setting in which potential future personnel can be identified.

Unlike previous proposals for national service, a National Civic Service would be framed less in terms of compulsion or conscription and instead seek to establish a social contract between the state and its citizens. The legitimacy of any obligation, Alpman argues, depends on the quality of the offer – national service must be more than just volunteering, instead giving young people genuine opportunities and, most importantly, a sense of responsibility and purpose.

CIVITAS

55 Tufton Street, London SW1P 3QL
020 7799 6677
info@civitas.org.uk

£10

978-1-912581-79-5