



# Neighbourhood Renewal Fund Phase Two

## CREATE Project Evaluation

January 2006

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Commissioned on behalf of  
Plymouth 2020

Researched by:  
Rebekah Southern  
Holly Henderson

## Executive Summary

### **Introduction**

The Social Research & Regeneration Unit at the University of Plymouth was commissioned by Plymouth 2020 Partnership to evaluate the Community Renewal Education And Training Enterprise (CREATE) project as part of Plymouth's overall Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) Phase Two Evaluation. The CREATE evaluation was conducted between the autumn of 2005 and January 2006. This report summarises the main research findings.

### **Problems to be Addressed by the Project**

CREATE is a continuation of a cross cutting NRF project - the Community Learning and Activity Programme (CLAP) - that has been operational since 2003. CLAP covered the five NRF priority neighbourhoods: Barne Barton, Stonehouse, North Prospect, Honicknowle and Ernesettle, and was delivered through one locality based partner organisation in each area – the Tamar Development Trust, the Stonehouse St Peters Icthus Society Ltd (All Saints), North Prospect Partnership CLAD, Honicknowle Commnet and the Budshead Trust respectively. CREATE likewise operates in each of the five areas, but it has expanded to include a sixth partner organisation: Brake Farm Community Resource Centre. Phase Two of the project was approved in April 2004 and granted a total of £150,002 NRF funding until March 2006 to:

- ❖ Increase the learning prospects for those whom mainstream funding and educational providers find hard to reach and equalise their opportunities through better access to learning that is more relevant to their needs with a particular focus on literacy and numeracy;
- ❖ Develop the co-ordination of learning within the five neighbourhoods through the inauguration of new neighbourhood learning posts that develop the infrastructure of partner organisations to provide standardised quality assurance;
- ❖ Increase the capacity of the Five Areas Forum as a Community Based Learning Provider of Excellence, including the development of a model/protocol for working with mainstream providers, and identifying solutions for the long term sustainability of community learning across the five neighbourhoods.

### **Aims, Objectives, Outputs and Outcomes Achieved**

CREATE currently has five aims with six supporting objectives. The evaluation process demonstrated that a great deal of activity is occurring in relation to each of these aims and objectives.

It was agreed that for the purposes of the Monitoring & Evaluation Framework, the CREATE project would be measured against four of the core output targets that it is formally contracted to deliver, as part of its NRF funding agreement, plus one of its LSC targets, and an additional target relating to project sustainability. Progress has been made against all of CREATE's output targets. Indeed, the project has already exceeded its target number of new contacts. Although the evaluation team suggest that it might struggle to achieve the full number of learners starting, or the target for progression onto basic skills programmes by the end of its funding period, the overall assessment is positive.

Assessment of outcomes has been more difficult. Until the advent of the Monitoring & Evaluation Framework earlier this year, the project had been focussing primarily on its contracted outputs. As such, the evaluation team have worked with the Strategic Learning Co-ordinator to develop suitable outcome indicators and targets, and also establish a '*current position*' in relation to these targets. Although a good deal of progress has been made in this respect, the data has not been finalised due to staff illness within the CREATE project. A separate report will therefore be submitted to the NRF Team by the Strategic Learning Co-ordinator in due course.

Feedback from CREATE beneficiaries has been overwhelmingly positive. Although a limited number of comments were made to the effect that better linkages between the different neighbourhoods involved in the project would have been beneficial, the individual stories of those that were met suggest that CREATE has been extremely successful in engaging local people into learning. Moreover, this engagement has changed their lives for the better. Against this backdrop, it is not surprising therefore that concerns were expressed about the future of the project beyond the NRF funding period.

### **Value for Money**

A basic unit cost per learner was calculated by dividing the total funding received (minus £42,000 allocated for capital spend) by the profiled number of learners starting (599). This equates to a little over £417 per learner. In the considered view of the LSC representative interviewed CREATE represents good value for money when compared to similar projects that the LSC funds.

### **Wider Impacts Achieved in relation to Floor Targets**

CREATE contributes to key Government Floor Targets in relation to worklessness and the activities and linkages established through the project also offer benefits for other targets but it is more closely aligned to local and national strategies for skills development.

## **Sustainability and fit with the Mainstream**

The importance of long-term sustainability has been recognised by the project since its inception. Indeed, this was one of the priorities for the LSC in funding the project, and it is one of the key performance indicators on which CREATE is being judged. Evidence suggests that the prospects of sustainability are good. It is the understanding of the evaluation team that sustainability for CREATE is likely to be achieved through two principal mechanisms: accessing new funding streams and becoming a mainstream provider. In terms of new funding streams, some of the partner organisations have now secured Learn Direct contracts. Additionally, five out of the six partners are currently involved in 'Doorway to Skills' which is an ESF funded initiative (channelled through the LSC). However, it must be noted that these funding streams increasingly require the partners to move towards more formal – including accredited – forms of training. Significantly, the CREATE partners are also part of Plymouth's emerging 'Learning Consortium' which is a city wide developmental initiative that is being funded by the LSC. The idea is that if these organisations can prove that they are delivering learning to an acceptable level, they may be able to partner Further Education Colleges within the city, and even apply for funding direct from organisations such as the LSC.

## **Project Processes**

This section of the report highlights the key findings to emerge in terms of project delivery. It confines itself to a strategic level discussion of the project, rather than focusing on the specific processes occurring within the individual partner organisations. It is divided into '*external issues*' (i.e. those that have influenced delivery but have been beyond the control of the CREATE Project) and '*internal issues*' (i.e. those that have occurred within the project itself).

Externally, evidence from the evaluation suggests that the key influence on the shape and direction of the CREATE project has come from its funders. In particular, it was felt that at the application stage the project was '*pushed*' further down the accreditation route than its deliverers would have liked in order to secure its grant funding. Whilst this was not warmly welcomed, on the other hand, interviewees indicated that some positive outcomes have occurred as a result. For example, it had enabled them to work in parallel with the Recognition and Recording of Progress and Achievement (RARPA) standards which is a significant achievement. There was also some suggestion that through CREATE, the project deliverers had become more aligned with the LSC's processes and procedures which was considered a beneficial development. Less positive views were expressed about the project's relationship with NRF as a funding body, however, which was seen as less than transparent and embedded with unnecessary bureaucracy.

Internally, the stakeholders that were interviewed praised the Budshead Trust for its role as project lead. More generally, it was evident that one of the key strengths of the CREATE project is the very good relationships that exist between the different neighbourhoods involved. Partnership working was seen as fundamental to project delivery. This has been facilitated through monthly stakeholder meetings which have enabled the partners to iron out difficulties, as well as share ideas and resources. Evidence suggests that effective partnership working has also occurred between the CREATE partners and wider stakeholders. Importantly, this includes mainstream providers such as the local colleges, with whom they now have a very good relationship, thus enabling a smooth transition for learners into mainstream education where appropriate.

Less positive findings emerge in relation to the project's internal evaluation procedures with particular regard to the recording of information. Although the partners have learned from each other and adopted common procedures in certain areas, there is a general lack of consistency in the recording of information especially concerning learner files.

## **Conclusions**

It is the considered opinion of the evaluation team, that CREATE is a successful project that has effectively engaged learners, whom mainstream educational providers find hard to reach and that has also contributed to both hard and soft outcomes for its participants. The views of project beneficiaries have been extremely positive, although a limited number of comments were made to the effect that more frequent contact between participants from the different neighbourhoods would have been beneficial, and a certain amount of anxiety was expressed about the future, beyond the period of NRF funding.

On a wider level CREATE contributes to certain key Government Floor Targets, most notably for worklessness, but it is more closely aligned with national and local strategies for skills development. Capturing evidence to support its achievements in the systematic way that is currently required by NRF, has presented something of a challenge for this project, partly due to a lack of consistency in the recording of internal information across the delivery areas.

In terms of project delivery, it was evident that one of the key strengths of the CREATE project is the very good relationships that exist between the different neighbourhoods involved. This has been facilitated through regular stakeholder meetings, which have enabled the partners to iron out difficulties as well as share ideas and resources. There is strong evidence to suggest that it has strengthened the capacity of the partner organisations, although this has been most effective where an educational infrastructure has already been in place. The project has also forged effective partnerships with mainstream providers.

Issues of sustainability have been taken very seriously by the project, and evidence from the evaluation suggests that its longer term prospects of continuing in one form or another are very good.

### **Recommendations and Lessons Learned**

Since the project only has three months left to run within the current NRF funding period, the evaluation team is not recommending that any changes are made to current CREATE activities. Rather, the recommendations and lessons learned section intends to add to the existing NRF evidence base, and inform the delivery of future projects in Plymouth and beyond. It specifically suggests that future initiatives and funding bodies:

1. Consider the Lessons Learned from the Federation Approach.
2. Streamline Internal Reporting Procedures.
3. Consider the Implications of Short-term Funding Streams on Local Communities.

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# Neighbourhood Renewal Fund Phase Two

## CREATE Project Evaluation

### 1.0 Introduction

The Social Research & Regeneration Unit at the University of Plymouth was commissioned by Plymouth 2020 Partnership to evaluate the Community Renewal Education And Training Enterprise (CREATE) project as part of Plymouth's overall Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) Phase Two Evaluation. The CREATE evaluation was conducted between October 2005 and January 2006 and this report summarises the main research findings.

The report begins with an overview of the local NRF context, the evaluation approach taken and the specific methods used. In accordance with the evaluation brief, it then goes on to discuss the problems to be addressed by the project: key achievements; value for money; sustainability and fit with the mainstream; and the processes involved in project delivery. An overall assessment of the project is then made, along with recommendations and lessons for the future.

### 1.1 The Local Context

Plymouth has been in receipt of Neighbourhood Renewal Funding (NRF) since 2001, the purpose of which is to help the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) – Plymouth 2020 - deliver the Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy. At the national level, NRF aims to '*narrow the gap*' between the most deprived areas and the rest of the country (Social Exclusion Unit 2001). Locally, the focus is on reducing the inequalities that exist in the most deprived neighbourhoods of the city, which at the start of NRF Phase Two were Barne Barton, Stonehouse, North Prospect, Honicknowle and Ernesettle.

Overseen by the Neighbourhood Renewal Sub-group of Plymouth 2020, there are currently 38 individual projects being funded through the NRF Programme. It is also of note that for NRF Phase Two there has been a move away from the 'bid and deliver' model to a '*commissioning*' model of delivery. Hence each individual project sits within a '*commissioning group*', which is made up of key service providers within the city. CREATE sits within the '*Learning & Work Partnership*' commissioning group.

## 1.2 Evaluation Approach

Phase One of the NRF Programme was evaluated in 2004 by CSR Partnership, and a number of shortcomings were identified in relation to monitoring and evaluation at both programme and project level. In particular the evaluators were unable to assess project outcomes, and were also unable to establish links between project activities and government targets, most notably Government Floor Targets. Consequently, the Neighbourhood Renewal Sub-group of Plymouth 2020 has been developing and implementing more robust systems for Phase Two. At the project level this has included the introduction of 'Monitoring & Evaluation Frameworks' which require projects to clearly set out the following items in a logical sequence:

- ❖ Needs assessment (the problem to be solved);
- ❖ Aims (changes);
- ❖ Objectives (activities);
- ❖ Outputs/indicators (work generated by the activities);
- ❖ Output targets;
- ❖ Outcomes/indicators (changes and benefits that take place as a result of the activities which relate to specific aims);
- ❖ Outcome targets.

In addition, and as part of its endeavour to create an '*evaluation culture*' within the city, the Sub-group took the decision to recruit and train internal evaluators from partner organisations to conduct the Phase Two NRF evaluation, rather than using external consultants. Training for the evaluators has been provided by the Social Research & Regeneration Unit at the University of Plymouth, who have continued their involvement in the process by taking responsibility for the evaluation of two individual projects within the overall programme, including CREATE.

The evaluators' brief is to focus on the following:

- ❖ Problems to be addressed by the project;
- ❖ What the project has delivered in terms of aims, objectives, outputs and outcomes;
- ❖ Value for money;
- ❖ Wider impacts achieved in relation to Local Neighbourhood Renewal Targets
- ❖ Sustainability and fit with the mainstream;

- ❖ Project processes;
- ❖ Conclusions;
- ❖ Recommendations and lessons learned.

The newly developed Monitoring & Evaluation Frameworks are central to this process and, since Plymouth's eligibility for future funding will at least in part be judged according to its performance in reducing floor target inequalities, achievements against key Government Floor Targets also provide a focal point for the Phase Two evaluation.

### 1.3 Research Methods

Since the NRF projects vary considerably in nature, the evaluators were required to utilise the most suitable research methods to evaluate each individual project. The CREATE evaluation was conducted through a combination of primary and secondary research methods. As a starting point, the evaluation team conducted a desk based investigation of relevant documentation utilising valuable sources of evidence. This included the original project proposal, a selection of quarterly returns and a previous evaluation report (Clay, M. 2004). In order to situate CREATE within its wider context and establish its degree of fit with wider strategies, other local sources of information were also consulted such as the NRF Phase One Evaluation Report (CSR Partnership 2004), the Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy (Plymouth 2020 Partnership and Plymouth City Council 2002), as well as national reports such as the Skills Strategy White Paper (DfES 2003) and the DfES (2004) Skills Alliance: Skills Strategy Progress Report.

The secondary research was supplemented where appropriate and where possible within the time-frame and budget allocation, by a period of focused fieldwork in the form of face-to-face meetings with project beneficiaries and key stakeholders. These meetings were conducted during October 2005 and early part of January 2006. Members of the evaluation team met with seventeen beneficiaries and ten stakeholders. This included:

- ❖ The Strategic Learning Co-ordinator (Project Lead).
- ❖ At least one (and in some cases two) individuals from each area involved in the delivery of CREATE, who were also members of the Five Areas Forum which is a partnership of locally mandated community groups from each of the NRF neighbourhoods, established in 2002 to assist the development of the regeneration process.

- ❖ A representative from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) who are co-funders of the project.

It is of note that the fieldwork was hampered by two factors: a key member of the CREATE delivery team was off work for a considerable period of time due to illness; and one of the beneficiary focus groups had to be cancelled due to an unforeseen tragedy within the group.

The fieldwork followed the ethical procedures set out by the Faculty of Social Sciences and Business Ethical Sub-committee at the University of Plymouth, and both beneficiaries and stakeholders were assured that any views expressed would not be attributed to individuals within the final report.

It is also important to note that the fieldwork took place following an announcement that, due to '*over-programming*', Plymouth 2020 Partnership required all NRF projects examine their budgets, with a view to reducing existing grant funding for the remainder of the NRF funding period. This formed a very important context to the research and may have influenced participants' views of the NRF process.

## 2.0 Problems to be Addressed by the Project

CREATE is a continuation of a cross cutting NRF project - the Community Learning and Activity Programme (CLAP) - that has been operational since 2003. The CLAP project engaged adults in first steps learning, and also supported people into more formal learning and education opportunities. It covered the five NRF priority neighbourhoods: Barne Barton, Stonehouse, North Prospect, Honicknowle and Ernesettle, and was delivered through one locality based partner organisation in each area – the Tamar Development Trust, the Stonehouse St Peters Icthus Society Ltd (All Saints), North Prospect Partnership CLAD, Honicknowle Commnet and the Budshead Trust respectively. CREATE likewise operates in each of the five neighbourhoods, but it has expanded to include a sixth partner organisation: Brake Farm Community Resource Centre.

Phase Two of the project was approved in April 2004 and granted a total of £150,002 NRF funding until March 2006. This was matched with £142,661 of funding from the LSC, totalling £292,663. The Budshead Trust<sup>1</sup> is the contract holder and has contract management and administrative responsibilities for the CREATE project. Operational oversight rests with the Learning Management Group of the Five Areas Forum. Members of the Learning Management Group also attend the Plymouth Learning and Work Partnership's Community Learning and Regeneration Action Group, and the Strategic Learning Co-ordinator represents the project at the Plymouth Learning & Work Partnership Sfl Task Group.

## 2.1 Project Origins

CLAP was developed as a pilot project during the late Spring and early Summer of 2003, as a result of the collaboration between the Five Area Forum, the LSC and Plymouth 2020 Partnership. The project responded to national government strategies which called for the development of skills and the removal of barriers to learning for disadvantaged communities (see for example the ODPM's National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, 2001; and The Learning Curve's Strategy for Developing Skills and Knowledge for Neighbourhood Renewal, 2002). And it was clearly aligned with the principles of the Government's Skills Strategy White Paper: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, which emphasises the need *"to help people develop the skills they need for employment and personal fulfilment"* (DfES 2003; p59).

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<sup>1</sup> The Tamar Development Trust led the original CLAP project. Project leadership was transferred to the Busdhead Trust for CREATE as a result of the loss of a key member of staff within the Tamar Development Trust.

Locally, CLAP responded to Plymouth's Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy (2002) through Targets 2, 3 and 6 which called for:

- ❖ A widening of participation in learning, particularly amongst non-traditional learners;
- ❖ A deeper understanding of the barriers to learning and progression including addressing community cohesion issues;
- ❖ Increasing community participation in NRS priority neighbourhoods, building capacity of community groups and individuals.

The CLAP evaluation report stated that all five neighbourhoods exhibited a high degree of need for a community learning intervention, with North Prospect and Budshead demonstrating the most striking statistical figures, with 30% of adults within these neighbourhoods having low literacy and 40% of adults having low numeracy skills, against a Plymouth benchmark of 26.2% (Clay, M 2004; p2)<sup>2</sup>. The evaluation report also stated that more generally, the priority neighbourhoods all contained high levels of isolated, disaffected and reluctant potential learners. Further, it claimed that traditional mainstream providers had found it difficult to engage with this type of client group. All of the delivery organisations involved in CLAP had previous experience of engaging harder to reach learners, as well as linkages with progression mainstream providers. A decision was therefore taken to develop an innovative grass-roots partnership for the delivery of community learning activity to adults, who had been unable or reluctant to access learning, training and education from more traditional organisations and services (Clay, M; 2004).

The overarching aims of the CLAP project were to:

- ❖ Engage people in the priority neighbourhoods in first steps learning and subsequently support people into more formal learning and education leading to qualification and employment;
- ❖ Develop people in the priority neighbourhoods in self confidence, self-esteem, enhanced motivation and aspiration.

Because each of the priority neighbourhoods were different, CLAP exhibited diversity in project delivery. To quote the evaluation report:

*"The programme has provided a range of learning activities across the neighbourhoods, with delivery methods that are diverse and responsive to ensure*

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<sup>2</sup> Although the evaluation team have not been able to verify these figures.

*the needs of the learner are met and that they suit the various starting levels and learning styles of individuals” (Clay, M; 204: p5).*

However, increased access to Information Technology was a common theme across all neighbourhoods with capital assets to facilitate CLAP, including computers, computer suites and software. As well as providing educational programmes, all neighbourhoods also provided childcare linked to an activity; or added to the development of neighbourhood child care provision.

Evidence from both the project documentation and the stakeholder interviews indicates that CLAP adopted an appropriate approach to delivery, as it enabled the neighbourhoods to effectively reach their intended target groups. The overall CLAP project worked with 510<sup>3</sup> adults during its lifetime and of those 429 engaged in a learning programme. Additionally, there is a strong indication that the approach strengthened the capacity of the neighbourhood infrastructures, and also strengthened the relationships between the partner organisations and mainstream providers, both of which are positive outcomes.

## **2.2 Project Development**

Through the success of the CLAP project and the momentum generated, the Five Areas Forum applied for further NRF and LSC funding to progress the community learning provision. The initial application covered the five original neighbourhoods. However, when Brake Farm put in a free standing bid to develop a community learning project within Honicknowle, a merger was recommended and the proposal was extended to include Brake Farm as a sixth partner.

Evidence of the continued need for community learning was highlighted in the CREATE Neighbourhood Renewal Fund Phase Two Proposal. Highlights from the Phase Two proposal are summarised in Table One below.

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<sup>3</sup> This figure excludes returns from Tamar Development Trust.

**Table One: Neighbourhood Profiles**

Barne Barton	Figures from the PSLP Basic Skills action plan indicate that Barne Barton has the highest level of basic skills need in the city, with 30% of the population having literacy needs, and 32% of the population having numeracy needs
Budshead/Ernesettle	Budshead Ward is the second worst ward in the city for poor literacy and numeracy skills according to the Plymouth Ranking Statistics (1999), with 35.5% numeracy and 32.1% literacy compared with the Plymouth benchmark of 26.2% numeracy and 24.9% literacy
Honicknowle	In 2001 the Basic Skills Agency identified that within Honicknowle 33.1% of the population aged between 16 and 60 had poor numeracy (fourth worst for Plymouth) and 31.3% had poor literacy (third worst for Plymouth). Additionally, a Local Neighbourhood Action Plan for Honicknowle survey found that 51.9% of respondents identified adult literacy as a problem and 52.4% identified adult numeracy as a problem
North Prospect	52.2% of adult North Prospect residents have no formal qualifications compared to a city average of 74.3%, with the adult literacy rate being 64.8% and the adult level of proficiency in numeracy being 59.7% (unsourced)
Stonehouse	According to the 2002 MORI survey Stonehouse had "lower levels of academic attainment and lower levels of basic skills compared to national levels with 25% of adults with no qualifications compared to the national average of 19% in England." The ONS estimates that 33.8% of adults have no qualification (undated)

Source: CREATE project proposal

Unfortunately each area chose to use a different data source to demonstrate the level of need, hence the statistics are not directly comparable with one another. As such the evaluation team has drawn some additional data together to provide a profile of the neighbourhoods. This is shown in Table Two.

**Table Two: Additional Profile Data**

	Population (2001)	Unemployment rate (2002)	% Achieving 5 GCSE grades A to C (2004)
Barne Barton	4,140	12.5	24.2
Ernesettle	3,992	8.7	37.0
Honicknowle	9,803	7.6	33.3
North Prospect	5,109	13.2	24.1
Stonehouse/St Peter's Ward	7,427	13.6	26.6

Source: Plymouth City Council

Population Data – Census 2001

Unemployment Data – Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) 2003

Education Data - Adapted by Plymouth2020 from Data provided by Life Long Learning

Department, Plymouth City Council

The project proposal continued to respond to national and local strategies and was grounded in the findings from the internal CLAP evaluation. There is some evidence of project cycle management as advocated by the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit within CREATE. The project adopted a logical framework approach, in that it began with an agreed strategy that led to a

series of specific actions that were evaluated at the end of the initial project and used to inform continuation activities.

There is also evidence of adaptability within the project. Whilst the new CREATE project broadly fortifies the foundations laid by CLAP, changes have occurred in the transition from CLAP to CREATE. The stakeholder interviews revealed that this was driven by the funding bodies, placing a greater emphasis on achieving certain outputs, as will be discussed more fully in Section Seven of this report. From the LSC's point of view, this was necessary because there is evidence to suggest that learners in community settings have a tendency to engage in horizontal learning, in that they hop between different courses at a similar level rather than progressing vertically. Targets were therefore introduced to ensure that CREATE engaged *new* learners rather than continuing to work with the same people. Targets were also hardened for progression routes, including for basic skills, qualifications and accredited training.

Although the consensus amongst the project deliverers interviewed was that, given a choice they would have stayed with the CLAP model, evidence suggests that they have, for the most part, been able to adapt to changing circumstances and priorities without losing their community learning ethos.

The aims of CREATE are to:

- ❖ Increase the learning prospects for those whom mainstream funding and educational providers find hard to reach and equalise their opportunities through better access to learning that is more relevant to their needs with a particular focus in literacy and numeracy;
- ❖ Develop the co-ordination of learning within the five neighbourhoods through the inauguration of new neighbourhood learning posts that develop the infrastructure of partner organisations to provide standardised quality assurance and best practice in line with the Adult Learning Inspectorate's Common Inspection Framework and the NRF/LSC requirements, as well as co-ordinate community learning within their neighbourhoods in response to local needs;
- ❖ Increase the capacity and develop the future needs of the Five Areas Forum as a Community Based Learning Provider of Excellence, including the development of a model/protocol for working with mainstream providers and identifying solutions for the long term sustainability of community learning across the five neighbourhoods.

The Five Areas Forum continues to be closely involved with the CREATE project, and all major decisions regarding the project have been made via the Forum. There also continues to be diversity between the neighbourhoods in

terms of project delivery, with each partner organisation meeting community learning needs in the manner most suited to the neighbourhood in question. In Barne Barton, Ernesettle, Honicknowle and North Prospect the provision includes, numeracy and literacy courses as well as ICT. Stonehouse and Brake Farm have adopted slightly less conventional routes to learning. For example, Stonehouse has run learning activities such as Maritime and Coastline; Local Democracy; and, the Built Environment and Regeneration (although some of these activities have since become subsumed into the portfolios of other local organisations). The general aim of the learning activities in Stonehouse has been to support, enable and mentor adults in their learning based upon a sense of place in the neighbourhood. In Brake Farm the emphasis has been on training for tenants groups. It is important to note that, whatever the approach taken, all learning opportunities throughout the CREATE project are embedded with basic skills elements, although this is more overt in some cases than others.

It is of note that the capacity of the partner organisations has been further strengthened through the delivery of CREATE. The project has been working in parallel with the Recognition and Recording of Progress and Achievement (RARPA<sup>4</sup>) standards which is a major achievement. To date four of the six partner organisations have also developed their own accreditation. However, there is some evidence to suggest that capacity has been strengthened most for the delivery partners, who were better established at the outset with a background in education, and that those with a community development focus have struggled more.

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<sup>4</sup> Recognition and Recording of Progress and Achievement (RARPA) describes a particular approach to a significant part of the quality assurance systems of providers in the post-school sector for non-accredited provision.

RARPA Ref: [www.niace.org.uk/Projects/RARPA](http://www.niace.org.uk/Projects/RARPA)

### 3.0 Aims, Objectives, Outputs and Outcomes Achieved

This section of the report considers CREATE's achievements with reference to the recently compiled Monitoring & Evaluation Framework, and the views of beneficiaries are also included in this section.

#### 3.1 Aims and Objectives

As stated in the project's Monitoring & Evaluation Framework, CREATE currently has five aims with six supporting objectives. These are shown in Table Three below.

**Table Three: CREATE Aims and Objectives**

Aims	Objectives
1. To encourage the number of people from disadvantaged groups to engage in learning activities	To distribute marketing information on learning activities available across the 5 NRF areas
2. To enable pre-level 2 learners to gain a qualification and increase the number of people with literacy and numeracy qualifications	To provide information and advice services to local people on learning opportunities
3. To develop the infrastructure and capacity of partner organisations within the CREATE project	To set up first step learning programmes in areas tailored to suit neighbourhood needs
4. To develop new working relationships between project partners and other education providers to encourage the number of learners to progress into mainstream provision	To conduct capacity building, quality assurance and training needs as identified by 6 partner organisations
5. To sustain the community learning provision across the 5 NRF areas	To provide progression routes into mainstream education  To set up funded opportunities for the longer term sustainability of community learning across the 5 NRF areas

Source: CREATE Monitoring & Evaluation Framework

The evaluation process demonstrated that a great deal of activity is occurring in relation to each of these aims and objectives. CREATE is clearly working with disadvantaged groups and is developing infrastructural capacity. Thought has also been given to the project's longer term sustainability as will be discussed in more detail in Section Six below.

Sections 3.2 and 3.3 discuss achievements specifically in relation to the output and outcome indicators developed under the Monitoring & Evaluation Framework.

### 3.2 Outputs

It was agreed that for the purposes of the Monitoring & Evaluation Framework, the CREATE project would be measured against four of the core output targets that it is formally contracted to deliver as part of its NRF funding agreement, plus one of its LSC targets and an additional target relating to project sustainability. These are shown in Table Four below. The final column ('approved') shows the output targets for the duration of the funding period. The third column ('actual') is the number achieved to date (January 2006). It is important to note that the figures have been supplied to the evaluation team by the CREATE Strategic Learning Co-ordinator and incorporate the additional outputs generated through the re-profiling exercise that occurred in Quarters 3 and 4<sup>5</sup>. The figures do not accord with the quantifiable output data held by the NRF team. The NRF team have been unable to account for this anomaly.

**Table Four: CREATE Project Outputs**

NRF Code	Description	Actual	Approved
N1A	Number of new contacts	1433	976
N1B (i)	Number of learners starting	517	599
N1C (ii)	Number of learners achieving a qualification	236	250
N1D (ii)	Number of learners progressed onto basic skills programmes	118	185
<b>Additional Targets</b>			
LSC	Number of learners progressing onto mainstream education	88	93
Additional target	Sustainability addressed		

Source: CREATE Strategic Learning Co-ordinator

Table Four shows that progress has been made against all of CREATE's contracted output targets. Indeed, the project has already exceeded its target number of new contacts although the evaluation team suggest that it might struggle to achieve the full number of learners starting or the target for progression onto basic skills programmes by the end of its funding period. It is also of note that the numbers progressing onto basic skills programmes or mainstream education as a percentage of the total contacts made is low. However, in terms of its contracted targets the overall assessment is positive.

N.B. sustainability will be discussed in Section Six below.

<sup>5</sup> NRF funding primarily covered staff salaries for the duration of the CREATE project and the LSC funded the learning activities. When the LSC funding came to an end in April 2005 the project '*re-profiled*' to continue providing learning activities with NRF monies. This effectively increased their output targets.

### 3.3 Outcomes

Assessment of outcomes has been more difficult. Until the advent of the Monitoring & Evaluation Framework earlier this year, the project had been focussing primarily on its contracted outputs. As such, the evaluation team have worked with the Strategic Learning Co-ordinator to develop suitable outcome indicators and targets, and also establish a '*current position*' in relation to these targets. Although a good deal of progress has been made in this respect, the data has not been finalised due to staff illness within the CREATE project. Hence it is not possible to report on CREATE's outcomes at this stage. A separate report will therefore be submitted to the NRF team by the Strategic Learning Co-ordinator.

### 3.4 Beneficiary Feedback

It is important not to judge interventions solely on hard data - beneficiary views on the success (or otherwise) of a project are an essential part of the evaluation process. This section of the report summarises the findings from the beneficiary element of the evaluation, which was conducted via a series of focus groups with CREATE learners. Two focus groups were held with learners who had accessed computer courses through CREATE. One of these involved participants from North Prospect and Barne Barton. The other involved participants from Ernesettle and Honicknowle. It is of note that learners from the different neighbourhoods were not accustomed to meeting together, and some suggestions were made informally to the effect that it had been a good experience – indeed some of the participants stated that they would have benefited from more regular contact with other neighbourhoods throughout the project.

Due to the distinct nature of the project in Stonehouse a separate focus group was held with learners from that neighbourhood and the intention was likewise to hold a separate focus group with learners from Brake Farm. However, the Brake Farm meeting had to be cancelled due to an unforeseen tragedy within the group and it was not possible to re-schedule due to the time constraints of the evaluation.

The findings are organised according to the focus group activities.

#### **North Prospect and Barne Barton**

Members of the evaluation team met with a total of eight CREATE beneficiaries from across the North Prospect and Barne Barton neighbourhoods (four from each area). Whilst the general focus was on the ICT courses that they had attended, it became evident that most of the participants had also attended

other CREATE courses (including those relating to literacy, numeracy, first aid, health and safety, web design, video photography and digital photography). Hence the conversation naturally covered broader issues as well.

Overall it was evident that CREATE has been extremely beneficial for the focus group participants, giving people the opportunity to learn new skills and increase in confidence. All of the participants had gained a qualification of some description as a result of their involvement. The project had also enabled some participants to get back into work. In the words of one participant:

*“I am new to the area. I hadn’t worked in an office since I was sixteen, and everything was out of date. I went to Working Links who sign posted me to the CREATE Project. I did an ICT course on Word and Publisher and through the new qualifications, I got a new job”.*

Another one of the participants said that:

*“After I learned how to use the computers, I started helping out others and now I am a volunteer doing one-to-one help at the community centre”.*

For a third participant who had suffered a heart attack and can no longer work, the project had enabled him to learn new skills and provide administrative assistance, as well as run the database, for his wife’s business.

More generally, participants talked of the way in which CREATE had ‘made them feel better about themselves’ and increased their self esteem. All of the participants stated that they enjoyed getting together, meeting new people and supporting each other. The environment in the classes was described as friendly and relaxed, unlike in some of the other classes that participants had attended elsewhere. Indeed, when asked what could be improved, the consensus was that it works as it is and could not be improved, except to say that with more funding the project could have reached additional groups (including the under 16s).

Against this backdrop, perhaps not surprisingly, many of the focus group participants were fearful about the future, and questioned what would happen beyond the current period of NRF funding. In the words of one interviewee:

*“Once the funding finishes in March, what happens then? People won’t go back into a class room. At grass roots level the community centre is key. Loosing the project would take away a vital part of the community. The uncertainty about the project’s future is messing with people’s lives”.*

### **Ernesettle and Honicknowle**

The Ernesettle and Honicknowle focus group brought together six CREATE beneficiaries (three from each area). Again the general focus was on ICT courses but, as with the other neighbourhoods included in the evaluation, the participants had attended additional courses as well particularly relating to numeracy and literacy, so the discussion was more wide-ranging.

Evidence from this focus group was similarly positive. Participants strongly suggested that CREATE has given them '*new opportunities*', allowing them to gain qualifications and '*do something for themselves*'. In this focus group the point was made that classes are free, which was seen as important. Overall it was suggested that the experience had given participants new confidence as well as increasing their employment prospects. For one participant, being on the course had enabled them to volunteer at the community centre, and also enroll on a four year counselling course. Another one of the participants stated that they had always been frightened of failure and that the CREATE project had given them the confidence to learn. This participant had just signed up for an NVQ in Administration and had secured a work placement. A third participant stated that:

*"When you get older you feel left behind. The course has given me confidence...it has opened up new opportunities with jobs, broadened horizons and now I feel as if I am just as good as the youngsters".*

Participants felt that one of the reasons it works so well is that the learning environment is not pressured - they can work at their own pace. None of the participants are afraid to ask questions in the classes and importantly they are not made to feel stupid. It was evident that the participants had received a lot of support both from the tutors and other CREATE learners. The consensus view can be summed up by the following quote:

*"Everybody is happy to be on the courses and the environment makes them want to learn. It isn't a competitive environment".*

The participants also stated that they had made new friends whilst attending the courses. CREATE was very much seen as a vehicle for bringing communities together and increasing '*community spirit*'.

Participants could not think of anything that could have been done better. In the words of one interviewee:

*"The way it's done works. It's as if people have actually listened to what is needed – it caters for everybody".*

The group raised concerns about the future funding of the CREATE project. It was felt that not only should there be more funding, but that the funding should be long rather than short term. People felt unnerved by the current situation, and a point was raised to the effect that it is difficult for people to sign up to new courses in the current climate, not knowing whether they will be able to finish them.

### **Stonehouse**

A focus group was held with three CREATE beneficiaries from Stonehouse. It was explained that the activities run through the CREATE project in Stonehouse have varied, and have taken a more unconventional nature than other neighbourhoods within the project. Participants had been involved in a range of what might be termed '*active citizenship*' activities, including the design and construction of a local information leaflet; conducting local surveys; responding to planning notices and other local documents; campaigning for recycling facilities; and, making jewellery to fundraise for the local school. Whilst basic skills training have been built into these activities, it has occurred in a very informal way. Consequently, formal qualifications or certification are not an outcome of activities in Stonehouse.

Evidence from the focus group suggests that the project has had a positive impact on those it has engaged. Participants have, for example, been given the opportunity to discuss issues, learn new skills and increase their '*political*' knowledge. The focus group participants displayed a clear sense of enjoyment, ownership and empowerment from their involvement in CREATE. In the words of one interviewee:

*"It empowered me and is very fulfilling.... the whole thing has been very interesting and very successful for my personal development".*

The focus group participants were also highly positive about the impact of CREATE on their neighbourhood. The information leaflet, for example, was thought to have been extremely well received.

Overall, it was suggested that CREATE in Stonehouse works very well. However, it was also put to the evaluation team that some areas could have been better. In particular, it was felt that the project could have engaged with more people in the community. Evidencing the learning and skills development that had taken place to funders, was also seen as something of an issue within Stonehouse. Finally, a suggestion was made to the effect that project delivery may have been aided by the facilitation of better linkages with the other neighbourhoods within the CREATE project.

### **Summary of Beneficiary Interviews**

Feedback from the beneficiaries of the CREATE project has been highly positive. The individual stories of the focus group participants suggest that CREATE has been extremely successful in engaging local people into learning. Moreover, the project had changed all of their lives in some dimension. The main concerns centred on the future funding of the project, and the feeling of uncertainty currently being experienced within the communities it serves. It was also suggested by some that more linkages between the different neighbourhoods within CREATE may have been beneficial.

#### 4.0 Value for Money

Section Three of the report seems to indicate that CREATE is a successful project from the point of view of its beneficiaries. In terms of value for money, it was granted a total of £150,002 NRF funding from October 2004 until March 2006. This was matched with £142,661 from the LSC<sup>6</sup> through its Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities (NLDC) Fund, totalling £292,663. Of that, £42,000 was allocated for capital spend. A basic unit cost per learner can be calculated by dividing the total funding received (minus the £42,000 capital spend), by the profiled number of learners starting (599). This equates to a little over £417 per learner. In the considered view of the LSC representative interviewed CREATE represents good value for money when compared to similar projects that the LSC funds.

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<sup>6</sup> LSC funding for the project finished in July 2005.

## 5.0 Wider Impacts Achieved in relation to Floor Targets

It is evident that CREATE contributes to certain key Government Floor Targets (the full list of Floor Targets is included in the Appendix) although the project is more closely aligned to local and national strategies for skills development. CREATE's most obvious contribution is to the worklessness Floor Target as follows:

### Worklessness

- ❖ Direct and indirect, long term contribution to parts of DWP PSA4 – “As part of the wider objective of full employment in every region, over the three years to Spring 2008, and taking into account of the economic cycle: demonstrate progress on increasing the employment rate, joint with the HM Treasury; **increase the employment rates of disadvantage groups (lone parents, ethnic minorities, people aged over 50 and over, those with the lowest qualifications and those living in the local authority wards with the poorest initial labour market position);** and significantly reduce the difference between employment rates of the disadvantaged groups and the overall rate .”

CREATE was set up to engage people into first steps learning with a supportive progression journey into more formal learning and educational activities. Across the partnership CREATE learners have had access to numeracy, literacy and ICT programmes as well as other courses such as first aid, health & hygiene and parenting skills. All of these activities enhance the employability of learners and some have gone on to access employment as a direct result of their engagement in the project.

In addition, there are a number of activities and linkages made through the project that offer benefits for other targets as follows:

### Housing

- ❖ ODPM PSA7 – “By 2010, bring all social housing into a decent condition with most of this improvement taking place in deprived areas, and **for vulnerable households in the private sector, including families with children, increase the proportion who live in homes that are in decent condition.**”

A partner within the project offers the level 2 CIH qualification in housing with embedded literacy; and projects within the partnership provide opportunities for CREATE learners to access and engage in

family life activities such as health & safety in the home, family first aid.

### **Liveability**

- ❖ ODPM PSA8 - “lead the delivery of cleaner, safer and greener public spaces and **improvement of the quality of the built environment in deprived areas.**”

Projects within the partnership provide opportunities for CREATE learners to access and engage in environmental education and gardening skills. Other projects have also provided opportunities for CREATE learners to contribute to the decision making process behind the planning of local facilities, infrastructure and regeneration.

### **Education**

- ❖ DfES PSA1 – “improve children’s communication, social and emotional development so that by 2008 50% of children reach a good level of development at the end of the Foundation Stage and reduce inequalities between the level of development achieved by children in the 20% most disadvantaged areas and the rest of England.”

The CREATE project has enabled learners to access personal development courses relating to budgeting, parenting skills, stress management and it has also encouraged their children to engage in other personal development opportunities.

- ❖ PSA6 – “Age 11: Raise standards in English & Maths.”

The involvement of parents in the CREATE project has enabled children to access and attend other projects such as after school and homework clubs. This has particularly helped this age group with the transition from primary school to secondary school.

- ❖ PSA7 – “Age 14: Raise standards in English, maths, ICT and science in secondary education.”

Across the project partnership homework clubs are available to this age group.

- ❖ PSA10 – “Age 16: 60% of those aged 16 to achieve the equivalent of 5 GCSEs at grades A\* to C.”

Across the project partnership homework clubs are available to this age group.

## Health

- ❖ PSA 1 – “life expectancy: substantially reduce mortality rates.”

There are a number of activities within the project that potentially contribute to this floor target. There are some generic activities around healthier lifestyles such as a food co-operative and referrals are made to smoking cessation initiatives.

- ❖ PSA3 – “tackle the underlying determinants of ill health (reducing smoking rates & teenage conception rates).”

Referrals are made to smoking cessation initiatives (‘Stop smoking’ and ‘Reduce smoking’) across the CREATE partnership.

## Crime

- ❖ Home Office PSA1 “reduce crime by 15%, and further in high crime areas by 2007-8.”

Two of the project partners have created sub groups looking at crime reduction in their respective areas, both of which have been accessed by CREATE learners. One of the projects has introduced and managed a neighbourhood watch patrol of the area, which has helped facilitate a reduction in crime.

## 6.0 Sustainability and fit with the Mainstream

With the current NRF funding period drawing to a close, issues of sustainability and fit with the mainstream are critical. This section of the report summarises the key findings to emerge in this respect.

### 6.1 Contribution to Mainstream Services

CREATE clearly contributes to certain key Government Floor Targets, most notably worklessness (see above) and Section Two of the report has demonstrated that the project also has a good degree of fit with both local and national strategies for skills development.

### 6.2 Sustainability

The importance of long-term sustainability has been recognised by the project since its inception. Indeed this was one of the priorities for the LSC in funding the project, and it is one of the key performance indicators on which CREATE is being judged. The delivery staff, along with members of the Five Areas Forum, have been proactive in their endeavours to secure a future for community learning activities within the NRF priority neighbourhoods and beyond. This was part of the rationale for building capacity within the six partner organisations. The view held was that whilst in some areas only the strongest organisation takes the lead, a conscious effort was made to ensure that all of the delivery organisations could continue independently should the CREATE ever need to disband.

It is the understanding of the evaluation team that sustainability for CREATE is likely to be achieved through two principal mechanisms: accessing new funding streams and becoming a mainstream provider. In terms of new funding streams, some of the partner organisations have now secured Learn Direct contracts. Additionally, five out of the six partners are currently involved in 'Doorway to Skills' which is an ESF funded initiative (channelled through the LSC)<sup>7</sup>. Describing the history of the project, one of the CREATE delivery team indicated that CLAP can be thought of as the '*grandparent*', with CREATE being the '*parent*' and Doorway to Skills the '*grandchild*' of community learning. The delivery partners will be involved in Doorway to Skills in different capacities: whereas some partners will act as signposts for learners, tutors from other partner organisations will actually deliver the courses. Whilst Doorway to Skills was considered to be a positive development, it is of note that it extends existing provision to include Level One Numeracy (through

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<sup>7</sup> The sixth partner – Tamar Development Trust – has attempted to secure sustainability separately through 'Learning Plus' which is a mainstream provider.

national basic skills testing), and also provides money to develop tutors at Levels 2, 3 and 4. It is also much more bureaucratic than previous funding streams have been, in that if outputs are not achieved funding will be withdrawn. As such, some concerns were expressed by the delivery partners about the further shift away from informal learning and towards accreditation, as well as the '*strings*' that are attached to such a shift.

Significantly, the CREATE partners are also part of Plymouth's emerging 'Learning Consortium', which is a city wide developmental initiative that is being funded by the LSC through NLDC funding for 2006/07. The consortium, supported by organisations such as Co-active, Tribal and Plymouth Learning and Work Partnership, is currently examining its strengths and weaknesses, capacity to deliver learning and so forth, and is developing its aims and objectives, the culmination of which will be a business plan (scheduled for March 2006). The idea is that if these organisations can prove that they are delivering learning to an acceptable level, they may be able to partner Further Education Colleges within the city and even apply for funding direct from organisations from the LSC. The CREATE partners expressed some optimism that their involvement with the Consortium could ultimately lead to mainstream status for them.

## 7.0 Project Processes

It is evident that CREATE has benefited a large number of local people in each of the NRF neighbourhoods. This section of the report highlights the key findings to emerge in terms of project delivery. It confines itself to a strategic level discussion of the project, rather than focusing on the specific processes occurring within the individual partner organisations. It is divided into 'external issues' (i.e. those that have influenced delivery but have been beyond the control of the CREATE Project) and 'internal issues' (i.e. those that have occurred within the project itself).

### 7.1 External Issues

Evidence from the evaluation suggests that the key external influence on the shape and direction of the CREATE project has come from its funders. This has been evident since the application stage of the process. For example, the project was required to incorporate Brake Farm (a second venue in Honicknowle) into its bid for funding, although this venue had not been part of the original CLAP project (see Section Two). As will be discussed more fully below, this extension was not without its difficulties.

Illustrating the same point, it was felt that at the application stage the project was 'pushed' further down the accreditation route than its deliverers would have liked in order to secure its grant funding. In the words of one interviewee:

*"CLAP had focused on being a helping hand for learners via informal, unconscious and unstructured learning....the movement from CLAP to CREATE increased the accreditation, structure and levels of consciousness of learning into paper based academic learning".*

Whilst those that were interviewed acknowledged that current thinking on basic skills is changing and that the project has to adapt to wider pressures, the move towards accredited provision was not widely welcomed. It was explained that accredited courses tend to be more rigid and have a higher drop-out rate than the flexible community based learning approach that CLAP had adopted. Consequently, it was suggested that the delivery of CREATE has been something of a 'balancing act'. Partners have had to adapt to the change in emphasis, whilst finding innovative ways of engaging people and continuing to 'hand hold' their learners so as not to lose them. Fears were expressed that this is likely to be an even greater issue in the future, and it was put to the evaluation team that if the project is pushed further down the accreditation route, it may affect the uptake of courses as well as the retention of learners. These pressures are likely to be especially problematic for the partners within CREATE, who have adopted less conventional routes to learning.

On the other hand, interviewees indicated that some positive outcomes have occurred as a result of CLAP's transition into CREATE. For example, it has enabled them to work in parallel with the Recognition and Recording of Progress and Achievement (RARPA) standards which is a significant achievement. There was also some suggestion that through CREATE, the project deliverers had become more aligned with the LSC's processes and procedures which was considered a beneficial development.

Less positive views were expressed about the project's relationship with NRF as a funding body, however. In the words of one interviewee *'overall the NRF support is not clear or transparent and this has caused stress and unrest'*. Further, it was felt that *'There is unnecessary bureaucracy embedded in the work'*. The quarterly returns in particular were felt to be a source of stress for the group, both in terms of the nature of the information to be collected, and also the timescale allowed for this activity which, it was felt, does not allow for the project lead to provide as much support to the project partners as is sometimes necessary. Against this backdrop the stakeholders indicated that they have a good relationship with their dedicated NRF Project Officer, who has been very helpful within the constraints of the programme, although some comments were made to the effect that the group had suffered as a result of changes that were introduced part way through the project. Whereas at the outset all of the delivery partners had direct contact with the NRF Project Officer, this has subsequently changed so that only the project lead is now involved in the monitoring visits.

## 7.2 Internal Issues

On the positive side, the stakeholders that were interviewed praised the Budshead Trust for its role as project lead. In the words of one interviewee the Budshead Trust has *"done an outstanding job in co-ordinating the project"*.

More generally, it was evident that one of the key strengths of the CREATE project is the very good relationships that exist between the different neighbourhoods involved. Partnership working was seen as fundamental to project delivery. In the words of one interviewee *'if the project had just been set up in the individual areas then we would never have done it'*. That is not to say that the process has always been smooth. Indeed, there was a frank admission that there have been some heated debates between the different stakeholders, particularly during the early stages of the project and, as mentioned above, the introduction of Brake Farm was felt to have caused certain tensions within the group. Brake Farm was effectively a year behind the other neighbourhoods as it had not been involved in the CLAP project, in addition to which it did not start until Quarter Two of the CREATE funding stream, and with minimal output targets by comparison to the other organisations. A representative from

Brake Farm suggested that initially *'there was resistance from other members already delivering'*. However, evidence from the evaluation suggests that effort was made to break down those barriers through monthly stakeholder meetings, and that partnership working has improved. The stakeholder meetings have enabled the partners to iron out difficulties and they have also provided opportunities for the sharing of ideas and resources. For example, one of the partner organisations had developed a Learner Progression Form. It was brought to a monthly meeting as an agenda item, discussed with all members and was subsequently adopted across the partnership.

The CLAP project was included in the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education's (NIACE) Neighbourhood Learning for Regeneration Report (Turner, C and Casey, L 2005) as a case study. The case study demonstrates the grass roots approach to learning, as well as strength of the partnership. The report especially highlights as a *'pointer for practice'* the *"consortium approach to delivery, drawing together a range of local organisations in a collaboration while maintaining local autonomy that suits the needs of each neighbourhood"* (NIACE 2005: p43).

Evidence suggests that effective partnership working has also occurred between the CREATE partners and wider stakeholders. Importantly, this includes mainstream providers such as the local colleges, with whom they now have a very good relationship, thus enabling a smooth transition for learners into mainstream education where appropriate.

Less positive findings emerge in relation to the project's internal evaluation procedures with particular regard to the recording of information. Although the partners have learned from each other and adopted common procedures in certain areas, there is a general lack of consistency in the recording of information especially concerning learner files, even though the lead partner introduced a common set of learner and tutor forms at the outset of the project for partners to use. For example, some (but not all) of the delivery partners have developed paper based individual learning plans for their participants that are completed by both the learners and their tutors on a regular basis. However, they do not follow a common format thus making it difficult to evaluate learning outcomes across the partnership. In other neighbourhoods learner files did not appear to exist. This was recognised as a weakness by some of the interviewees, and there was a suggestion that the common set of papers should have been used by partners at the outset of the project to ensure consistency with monitoring and quality assurance.

## 8.0 Conclusions

It is the considered opinion of the evaluation team that CREATE is a successful project that has effectively engaged learners whom mainstream educational providers find hard to reach, and that has also contributed to both hard and soft outcomes for its participants through a community based learning approach. The views of project beneficiaries have been extremely positive, although a limited number of comments were made to the effect that more frequent contact between participants from the different neighbourhoods would have been beneficial. Against this backdrop it is perhaps not surprising that a certain amount of anxiety was expressed about the future, beyond the period of NRF funding.

On a wider level CREATE contributes to certain key Government Floor Targets, most notably worklessness, but it is more closely aligned with national and local strategies for skills development. Capturing evidence to support its achievements in the systematic way that is currently required by NRF has presented something of a challenge for this project. In response to weaknesses identified in the interim NRF evaluation report in relation to monitoring and evaluation (CSR Partnership 2004), new Monitoring & Evaluation Frameworks have been introduced for each project. Whilst this is undoubtedly a positive development, the introduction of a new system part way through the project's lifetime has caused a certain amount of difficulty, especially given the lack of consistency in the recording of internal information across the delivery areas. This is an important point for the future of the project. Unless the monitoring and evaluation procedures are tightened, it is likely to present difficulties for the partners' engagement in future initiatives such as Doorway to Skills which has more rigid monitoring requirements and penalties attached for non-compliance.

In terms of project delivery, it was evident that one of the key strengths of the CREATE project is the very good relationships that exist between the different neighbourhoods involved. This has been facilitated through regular stakeholder meetings, which have enabled the partners to iron out difficulties as well as share ideas and resources. There is strong evidence to suggest that it has strengthened the capacity of the partner organisations, although this has been most effective where an educational infrastructure has already been in place. The project has also forged effective partnerships with mainstream providers.

Issues of sustainability have been taken very seriously by the project and evidence from the evaluation suggests that its longer term prospects of continuing in one form or another are very good.

## 9.0 Recommendations and Lessons Learned

This final section of the report outlines the recommendations and lessons learned from CREATE. The section confines itself to a discussion of the project-wide issues arising. It must be noted that since the project only has three months left to run within the current NRF funding period, it is not recommended that any changes are made to current CREATE activities. Rather, this section intends to add to the existing NRF evidence base and inform the delivery of future projects in Plymouth and beyond. It is based around three items:

**One: Consider the Lessons Learned from the Federation Approach.** Evidence from the evaluation seems to suggest that genuine partnership working has been cultivated through the federation approach adopted by CREATE. This has been facilitated in particular through regular stakeholder meetings and it is suggested that future initiatives learn from the model developed by CREATE, but also consider extending the approach by developing effective linkages between beneficiary groups as well as delivery partners.

**Two: Streamline Internal Reporting Procedures.** As a learning point for the future, it is recommended that projects being delivered by more than one organisation standardise their internal reporting procedures. This should help to facilitate a more consistent approach to monitoring and evaluation which will ultimately enable projects to evidence their outcomes systematically.

**Three: Consider the Implications of Short-term Funding Streams on Local Communities.** Evidence from this evaluation and other research indicates that short term funding streams can be damaging to local communities if successful interventions are not sustained. This is part of the rationale for mainstreaming. In the case of CREATE, it is evident that the partners will continue to deliver community based learning activities but that the emphasis of the learning will shift in line with the priorities of the new funding streams they have secured. Continuity of existing provision was a cause of anxiety for many beneficiaries. It is suggested therefore that such issues are considered as part of the wider debate regarding the best use of future regeneration funding streams.

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## APPENDIX

### **Appendix A: Government Floor Targets 2004**

## Appendix A: Government Floor Targets 2004

### Housing

#### ODPM

##### *Decent Homes*

By 2010, bring all social housing into a decent condition with most of this improvement taking place in deprived areas, and for vulnerable households in the private sector, including families with children, increase the proportion who live in homes that are in decent condition. **(PSA7)**

##### *Fire Fatalities*

No local fire and rescue authority having a fatality rate, from accidental fires in the home, more than 1.25 times the national average by 2010. **(PSA 3)**

### Liveability

Lead the delivery of cleaner, safer and greener public spaces and improvement of the quality of the built environment in deprived areas and across the country, with measurable improvement by 2008. **(PSA 8)**

### Education

#### Department for Education and Skills

##### *Children's Development*

Improve children's communication, social and emotional development so that by 2008 50% of children reach a good level of development at the end of the Foundation Stage and reduce inequalities between the level of development achieved by children in the 20% most disadvantaged areas and the rest of England. **(PSA 1)** (Sure Start Unit target, joint with the Department for Work and Pensions).

##### *Age 11*

Raise standards in English & maths so that:

- ❖ By 2006, 85% of 11 year olds achieve level 4 or above, with this level of performance sustained to 2008; and
- ❖ By 2008, the proportion of schools in which fewer than 65% of pupils achieve level 4 or above is reduced by 40%. **(PSA 6)**

#### *Age 14*

Raise standards in English, maths, ICT and science in secondary education so that:

- ❖ By 2007, 85% of 14 year olds achieve level 5 or above in English, maths and ICT (80% in science) nationally, with this level of performance sustained to 2008; and
- ❖ By 2008, in all school at least 50% of pupils achieve level 5 or above in each of English, maths and science. **(PSA 7)**

#### *Age 16*

By 2008, 60% of those aged 16 to achieve the equivalent of 5 GCSEs at grades A\* to C; and in all schools at least 20% of pupils to achieve this standard by 2004, rising to 25% by 2006 and 30% by 2008. **(PSA 10)**

#### *Teenage Conception*

Reduce the under-18 conception rate by 50% by 2010 as part of a broader strategy to improve sexual health. (Joint with Department of Health)

### **Health**

#### **Department of Health**

##### *Life expectancy*

Substantially reduce mortality rates by 2010:

- ❖ From heart disease and stroke and related diseases by at least 40% in people under 75, with at least a 40% reduction in the equalities gap between the fifth of areas with the worst health and deprivation indicators and the population as a whole;
- ❖ From cancer by at least 20% in people under 75, with a reduction in the inequalities gap of at least 6% between the fifth of areas with the worst health and deprivation indicators and the population as a whole. **(PSA 1)**

##### *Health inequalities*

Reduce health inequalities by 10% by 2010 as measured by infant mortality and life expectancy at birth

Tackle the underlying determinants of ill health and health inequalities by:

- ❖ Reducing adult smoking rates to 21% or less by 2010, with a reduction in prevalence among routine and manual groups to 26% or less;

- ❖ Reducing the under-18 conception rate by 50% by 2010 as part of a broader strategy to improve sexual health. (Joint with the Department for Education and Skills). **(PSA 3)**

## **Crime**

### **Home Office**

Reduce crime by 15%, and further in high crime areas by 2007-8. **(PSA 1)**

## **Worklessness**

### **Department for Work and Pensions**

#### *Employment*

As part of the wider objective of full employment in every region, over the three years to Spring 2008, and taking account of the economic cycle:

- ❖ Demonstrate progress on increasing the employment rate, joint with HM Treasury;
- ❖ Increase the employment rates of disadvantaged groups (lone parents, ethnic minorities, people aged 50 and over, those with the lowest qualifications and those living in the local authority wards with the poorest initial labour market position);
- ❖ Significantly reduce the difference between the employment rates of the disadvantaged groups and the overall rate. **(PSA 4)**