Vital Regeneration

An Independent Evaluation of Vital Regeneration’s Create+ Project

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The purpose of the research conducted by Accendo and The Centre for Institutional Studies, University of East London between September 2011 and January 2012 was to independently assess the affect of the Create+ project on the lives of young people who are not in education, training and employment (NEET) and those ‘at risk’ of becoming NEET.

Research activities included:

- an analysis of Vital Regeneration’s project monitoring data (for participants between October 2006 and October 2011);
- review of the academic literature on NEETs;
- mapping the local youth provision, deprivation and crime;
- observations and participant discussion at seven Create+ project sessions;
- ten face-to-face interviews with Create+ staff and freelancers;
- nine face-to-face interviews with Create+ participants;
- ten face-to-face /telephone interviews with project partners;
- a ‘snapshot’ outcomes survey with 20 current course participants; and
- preparing a DVD showing the impact of the project, as articulated by participants

This report summarises the main findings from the research.
Create+ is a project within Vital Regeneration’s portfolio of services.

Vital Regeneration is an award-winning charity, established in 2005, which incorporates private sector procedures and practices into its operations, and which is committed to a responsive, ‘cutting edge’ approach to give additional confidence to key stakeholders, and to win large contracts from private investors. We found a strong management culture with a clear purpose and set of procedures to maintain its probity and competitiveness.

The purpose of Vital Regeneration is ‘to deliver effective, long-lasting solutions to the social, environmental and economic problems experienced by people living in disadvantaged communities.’ Being embedded within a larger organisation with three inter-related areas of work focused on youth & families, employability & skills and sustainable communities – brings additional benefits to the Create+ project, including staff training, greater local knowledge, and more opportunities to build strong partnerships, all of which increase the potential of Create+ to deliver high-quality services.
The current Create+ course offers 33 hours of face to face training over 11 weeks and participants can gain two nationally-recognised qualifications through it:

- A Bronze Arts Award
- An Adult Literacy Level 1 or 2 qualification (if a young person does not have a C grade or above in their GCSE English, then they are required to sit an adult literacy test)

Courses make use of a range of ‘hooks’ through which Literacy is delivered almost ‘incognito’ - music production, film production, events management and graphic design. In 2009 Create+ started offering nationally recognised level 1 Bronze Arts Awards as an enhancement to the OCN accreditations already offered:

- Each Create+ session is delivered by a team of three:
  - A creative industry professional
  - A literacy tutor
  - A youth engagement worker

Young people on Create+ courses receive one to one careers support and advice, access to volunteer opportunities and work experience placements. They are also supported to progress into employment, apprenticeships or further learning. Participants are also offered a visit or a ‘phone call, one, three and six months after the course to offer them continued pastoral and progression support. The Youth Engagement Officer supports participants by connecting them to local services that can help with their welfare – e.g. training providers offering ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) courses and housing associations providing free furniture.

There is a clear model about how the project works to reduce NEET risk factors and increase the life chances of young people. Our research found that there is a well developed definition of the characteristics of NEETs. Partner organisations making referrals to the project are asked to evidence risk factors and this practice enables Create+ to work with its target group. During the research period, Create+ worked with many young people who were ‘at risk’ of becoming NEET, in behavioural units in schools and at community centres in target disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

From October 2006 until December 2011, 241 young people participated on the intensive programme:

- 65% were male / 35% were female
- 27% Caribbean
- 21% White British
- 16% mixed ethnicity
- 12% Black African or Black British
- 4% Asian
- 2% Arab/Middle Eastern
These data suggest that many different ethnic groups participate in Create+ and this provides the opportunity for diverse cultural and ethnic groups to work together.

Young people were aged between 13 and 24 years.

- 7% of them considered themselves to have a disability (e.g. a hearing impairment, physical disability, mental health issue or visual impairment)
- 7% of them considered themselves to have a learning difficulty (e.g. dyslexia, a moderate learning difficulty or multiple learning difficulties)

As well as being referred onto the course because they were either NEET or at risk of being NEET, 25% of participants volunteered that they had an specific additional issue/need to contend with too. These needs included:

- Weak English skills (often through English being an Additional Language) (6% of all students)
- Being single parents (3%)
- Complex and unstable family situations/home-lives (3%)
- Criminal backgrounds (3%)
- Being homeless (2%)

Other needs that were reported, but to a lesser extent, included overcrowded households, history of drug abuse, negative peer pressure from friends and gangs, lack of motivation and lack of confidence. In the delivery team’s experience almost all beneficiaries had additional needs, but these were not all raised explicitly by the beneficiaries when enrolling and so were not collated in the monitoring information.

40% of participants told us that they had no qualifications or only qualifications below level 2 (which is equivalent to a GCSE pass) prior to joining Create+.

The Create+ model is depicted in the diagram on page 6.
Create+ model

TARGET GROUP
The project is typically targeted at: 14-19 year olds who have not achieved qualifications or are not in education, employment or training (NEET) or who are at risk of becoming NEET

CREATIVE 'HOOK'
The young person is attracted by:
- High standard of equipment and learning facilities; graphic design, filmmaking, music and events management
- Learning a skill for future employment
- The potential for gaining a GCSE equivalent qualification
- Industry professional tuition
- The opportunity to create and share their own work

INFORMAL LEARNING
Young person is willingly engaged in activity which enables a process of informal learning in which they learn to:
- Understand their capability
- Build confidence
- Understand the available opportunities
- Be supported in wider areas of need
- Enjoy the creative process and working with other people

IMMEDIATE RESULT
The young person experiences some of the following benefits:
- Creative industry skills development
- Qualification: Bronze Art Award (GCSE grade D – E)
- Qualification: Adult Literacy 1 or 2 (GCSE grade A* – E)
- Increased aspiration, motivation and self belief
- Better social skills and confidence
- New or stronger social networks
- Having more knowledge of support services
- Being more informed about job search
- Reflecting on achievable career options
- More developed creative confidence
- Increased resilience

LONGER TERM AIM
Young person is assisted with:
- Re-engaging in education and training; improving attendance and attitude
- Progression into further learning, volunteering, work experience, paid work and apprenticeships
Evaluation

We found that NEETs are attracted to learning about creative media and that they value the high standard of equipment and professionalism of the staff. Staff have a good understanding of how to support young people who can exhibit difficult behaviour and who have unarticulated complex emotional, social and economic problems. From our observations it is apparent that staff set clear behavioural boundaries and communicate well with young people. The delivery of sessions by a team with different skills and expertise works well and is delivered in a style that young people find fun and inspirational:

“The teacher was one of those people you can talk to about anything. You don't feel patronised, you feel like he is interested ... There was constant encouragement, saying that you are doing well ... and a relaxed environment ... There is a lot of anger and frustration [in young people’s lives] but inside the class, you feel safe”.

Young woman, now 24, a participant in Create+ courses several years ago

A characteristic of the Create+ model is that it integrates four distinct types of literacy learning into its activities:

- **EVERYDAY LITERACY** occurs whilst a young person creatively writes reports and creates their own artistic piece for a Bronze Arts Award, with additional language improvement support from the literacy tutor.
- **TECHNOLOGICAL LITERACY** is the intensive learning of a technical arts software package, such as Logic for music production, Final Cut Pro for video production, or PhotoShop for Graphic Design.
- **PROFESSIONAL LITERACY** arises from discussions with creative industries professionals and gives young people the vocabulary that is commonplace in creative professions. Discussions with the Youth Engagement Officer provide opportunities to discuss career choices and professional goals.
- **EMOTIONAL LITERACY** occurs with tutors when they encourage young people to articulate their feelings and to channel their anger and frustration into writing positive lyrics and creating positive designs.
**Relationship Building**

The Create+ model enables young people to build relationships in many different ways, as illustrated in the diagram below. The range of opportunities provided by the Create+ model enables a diverse group of young people to engage positively with the project.

Perhaps the greatest challenge is for tutors to guide participants towards making positive choices about their future. To assist young people to make informed decisions, the Create+ programme offers volunteering and apprenticeships to give them opportunities to have new experiences that 'broaden their horizons' and open up possibilities of choosing alternative lifestyles.

**CREATE+ AND ITS WORK WITH PARTNERS:** Create+ runs programmes at specialist art venues, in schools with specialist units for those with learning difficulties and challenging behaviour, and at youth and community groups in some of the most disadvantaged areas in West London. The programme is responsive to available funding opportunities and works in partnership with other agencies to stimulate referrals of NEETs, and to support participants with pastoral support and ongoing progression opportunities, such as volunteering or work experience, when the course has finished.

Most programmes are run in west London and particularly in north Westminster. Whilst Westminster has a deserved reputation for being a wealthy and desirable London Borough, hidden from view are the pockets of disadvantage particularly in the north-west, north-east and south of the borough where extreme wealth and poverty exist ‘cheek by jowl’. In these situations the negative effects of living in poverty become more acute; stress, ill-health, mental health problems, and violent behaviour are more frequent where income inequality is most apparent and these conditions are typical of Westminster (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009).

In 2009, 39% of children living in Westminster were living in poverty, the 4th highest London borough and the same as the London Borough of Newham (Leeser 2011). In 2010, Westminster had the highest percentage of children in workless households in London (Leeser 2011). Not surprisingly there are a range of organisations working to support young people and their families to improve their life chances.

The Create+ programme adds value and capacity to existing provision and reinforces the work of Vital Regeneration’s partners by offering a high quality arts courses which they would not otherwise be able to afford:

"It’s a great programme, and it’s free. So, for charities like us, it’s one in a million. Music programmes are so expensive, and it’s something young people are always interested in, and want to do. Realistically, it’s not something we could afford week in week out; so it’s great for someone to come in and offer 11 weeks of not only doing a music production course, but also doing a bronze arts award, as well as a literacy award and employment help".  

(Partner Agency Representative)

In 2010, Westminster had the highest percentage of children in workless households in London and rated as the fourth highest borough for child poverty.
The Create+ course is offered in a range of settings; within school inclusion units in mainstream schools, pupil referral units and youth centre provision within the local community. In the educational settings the course is delivered to young people who are at high risk of school exclusion, not achieving qualifications and becoming NEET. In youth centre settings, the course is very different because attendance is voluntary; and the age group of the young people more variable.

Findings from our research suggest that statutory and voluntary sector agencies providing services to young people work together, but that this co-operation is curtailed by a competitive funding system. The plethora of initiatives and organisations rely on many different funders, each of whom sets their own targets. As a result each organisation providing services for young people has to demonstrate numbers engaged and attendance, which encourages organisations to ‘own’ young people, rather than to refer them on to other agencies. These practices are not helpful to Create+ which offers short term courses.

OUTCOMES: Research studies have found that many factors affect the life course of young people including the area in which they live, their family/carers, peers, and school (Jones 2005). The experience of attending Create+ will be just one influence on the lives of young people. We have therefore identified those mechanisms or links which connect participating in Create+ to changes in young people to assess if Create+ has made a difference to their lives.

Two types of inter-linked outcomes can be identified; opportunity and progress outcomes. They are both integral to a young person’s journey from disaffection and feelings of worthlessness to becoming motivated and willing to participate in education, training and finding work.

“There is a ‘buzz’ about Create+. Young people enjoy attending, they feel better about themselves, and they find the professionalism and flexibility of Vital Regeneration’s associate creative media staff motivational”
These outcomes rest on the assumption that NEETs are reluctant learners, typically frustrated and sometimes angry, and have a sense of hopelessness and feel unable to change their situation. It is assumed that these factors either prevent young people from engaging in education, training and employment or put them ‘at risk’ of not participating in these programmes.

Successful programmes are those which are responsive to the particular situation of each young person and are places where they feel valued. Our findings show that there is a ‘buzz’ about Create+. Young people enjoy attending, they feel better about themselves, and they find the professionalism and flexibility of Vital Regeneration’s associate creative media staff motivational.

The following findings illustrate how participating in Create+ has made a difference to young people and how the programme enables them to progress towards having better life chances. Twenty young people completed a questionnaire at the end of their course in December 2011 and nine young people were interviewed.

Even within an 11 week period we found indications that Create+ is able to improve young people’s resilience. Just under two-thirds of the young people said they had been dealing better with their problems since attending Create+. This reinforces the value of a youth worker attending each session to talk with young people about their problems and to offer them support.

One hundred percent of survey respondents said that since doing the Create+ courses they felt better about themselves. Young people were impressed by the creative media tutors and this had a positive affect on their outlook on life, as one young person described:

"The tutor, I seem to get along well with. He always comes with energy, he is inspiring. Sometimes … I am miserable and depressed. He looks like the sort of person who would come in feeling like that and still be bubbly and inspiring. That is a skill I want to pick up, because I want to be like that."

(Young man, 18, reporting feelings of depression and isolation while looking for work)

The survey findings showed that 85% of the young people felt more optimistic about the future at the end of the course, with two-thirds feeling quite a lot more optimistic.

We found that these improvements can be explained, at least in part, by the use of the creative curriculum. It is used effectively as a medium to interact with young people and to challenge young people’s behaviour. Informal discussions around lyrics as a ‘front’, and the use of offensive language, and references to drug or gang culture provides tutors with the opportunity to persuade young people that the art of lyric-writing is to be strong enough to show vulnerability and to ‘speak from the heart’ rather than to ‘impress’ others. There was evidence of this emotional learning during the music production course.

Young people said that they were able to connect better with their family and friends through the music making skills they learnt at Create+. Young people could share their work with friends:

'I show my mates on my phone, what I have made. I feel fly. I have created my own beat.’

(Young man, 15)

100% of survey respondents said that since doing the Create+ courses they felt better about themselves.
"I’ve learnt how to write lyrics: about life and how to grow up and stuff like that."
(Young man, 16 at the time of the course, who was in a school inclusion unit, and went on to study business studies and set up a record label)

The use of creative media enables young people to produce something tangible, that they can identify as theirs, and they can be proud of. Early on in a course tutors are able to assist young people to download their tunes onto their mobile to use as a ring tone. This shows young people ‘what is possible’ and ‘what they can achieve’ that is ‘cool’, and young people find this surprising and pleasing as well as motivational.

76% of students between 2006 and 2011 have completed an intensive course and all of those had the satisfaction and pride of creating their own ‘product’ produced on professional-standard software (either a film, music track or piece of graphic design). Additionally these students create portfolios of creative work that they are able to take to college interviews with them as examples of their work.

These types of activities foster mutual respect and the tutors use young people’s sense of achievement to develop new skills. In turn, young people are surprised that they can produce high quality work. The following quotes from young people illustrate these processes:

"I’ve learnt that the brain works in two ways: creatively and in a logical way. It’s opened up my eyes to certain things. It makes me want to tap in to a new part of myself. Before, if I had group work, I would always want to type instead of draw a picture. I want to start to be like that (use imagery) it will give me a talent."
(Young woman, 23, who had a marketing degree, but had been unemployed for six months)

"You write your own lyrics, it comes from you, it’s original. Its no one else’s its unique. You create something, you feel good because you have achieved something. I found it easy. I never knew it was that easy."
(Young man, 15, living in an economically deprived area, doing GCSEs but struggling with Literacy)

The overwhelming majority felt more able to express themselves creatively, illustrating the quality of the Create+ programme.
Qualifications and progression

**FORMAL QUALIFICATIONS**: Strictly speaking a qualification is an output rather than an outcome but for the NEET group it is part of their journey towards increasing their life chances. Where young people have previously been unable to obtain a formal qualification, gaining a Bronze Art Award qualification and a level 1 or 2 Literacy qualification are significant milestones in this journey. One young woman describes their importance:

“There was a literacy element ... They gave us the opportunity, just to try.. I think it’s sort of confirmation that you are capable. You can put it on a C.V. Getting a certificate, just that feeling, it’s a little boost. For a person who didn’t succeed, or pass exams at school, it’s encouraging”.

(Young woman, 24)

Since 2006, 85 young people have gained an arts qualification (either a London Open College Network accreditation or a Bronze Arts Award) and 45 have attained an entry level, level 1 or level 2 Literacy qualification.. For some, passing a Literacy examination in 11 weeks will be challenging, particularly as they may have learning difficulties. However, the survey findings show that the 90% of students felt that they had made progress with their reading and writing skills. Young people’s assessment that they are making progress is significant; this occurs even if they do not take and pass a qualification and is motivational.

**PROGRESSION OUTCOMES**: Progression outcomes are those which connect young people to the wider social world. A successful programme is one that assists young people to transfer their increased confidence and self-belief, as well as social skills, to their everyday lives. These factors enable them to achieve further.

The following case study illustrates how social skills and confidence develop and enable young people to engage more positively with mainstream institutions, such as schools and youth centres.

“I CAME TO THIS COURSE BECAUSE I WAS INTERESTED IN GRAPHIC DESIGN, BUT WITH MEETING NEW PEOPLE, AND SHARING STORIES, IT HAS MADE ME LEARN DIFFERENT THINGS...I AM MORE CONFIDENT TO TALK TO OTHER PEOPLE. TELL MOST PEOPLE I AM ON THIS COURSE, AND THEY ASK QUESTIONS. I’M GETTING INVOLVED IN A LOT MORE STUFF THAN I WAS. I’M GETTING A LOT MORE INVOLVED IN SCHOOL NOW; THINKING, ‘THAT COULD BE FUN, LET’S SEE HOW IT GOES. I GUESS IT MAKES ME FEEL HAPPY, I AM BRANCHING OUT’.”

(YOUNG MAN, 16)

90% of students felt that they had made progress with their reading and writing skills
FROM 50% TRUANCY TO EMPLOYMENT WITH VITAL REGENERATION

Jane, now 24, completed the course several years ago. When she started she had a 50% school attendance rate. The Create+ course encouraged her to participate, and also led her to voluntary and paid work with Vital Regeneration. She promoted the course to other students. This was a positive experience for her. Shortly after this she decided to have a child, and feels that the gap in employment due to motherhood is a current hurdle to overcome. Relationship building was an important part of the course for Jane, and she finds the ongoing, occasional contact with tutors continues to be a positive in her life.

"I've always been intelligent, when your bright you take school for granted. Family life wasn't all that great, and it was much easier to rebel. The teacher didn't like me and my friend being together, so she split us up; and there was some bullying in school; not physical, just the sly little things that make you feel like not coming in, and my attendance was bad; probably 50% in year 11. I had an illness and my mum went abroad, and there was no one to wake me up for school, so I was expected to get myself up for school.

I had a job, a freelance position as a promoter, flyers and handing out flyers, it was good money, £15 an hour: it was temporary, for six months. It was like a job. I used to go to Fulham and set up taster sessions and they would get me to perform my own tracks while doing the sessions. I was getting paid to reach people with my own music.

I have grown up now. It was good to have that then, because it allowed me to see things differently. At that age you are just coasting through life. If you are doing a course, you are keeping everyone happy. It was definitely a positive experience, the encouragement I had from the tutors. They still check up on me, and still give a damn about what I am doing.

We made friends, we got close. I am sure not everyone is used to that, I came away feeling positive. I miss being in that environment, especially in my situation [having a young child]. I would like to be doing music once a week, to have my son in a crèche. People tell me about courses, but then I think, when my son is in school I will have to think about getting a job. I am feeling quite isolated because I am not able to do the things I did before. I feel like there's a gap in employment. If people ask me, I will have to make it up."

LONG TERM SUPPORT: Vital Regeneration has continued to support Jane and has recently invited her to join its new Families Programme, so that she can continue to be supported with her pathway to work, her family life and her involvement in her local community.

95% made new friends on the course and this helps young people feel good about themselves and makes them less socially isolated
CHOOSEING A CAREER AND FINDING EMPLOYMENT: Our research found that Create+ staff have a good understanding of providing realistic careers support and do not ‘push’ employment in creative industries. Typically, young people are asked to voice their aspirations and the realities of achieving these are discussed candidly. Most young people found the discussions useful.

70% of survey respondents agreed that Create+ helped them think through what they wanted to do for a job or a career. One young person reflected the views of others when they said:

“It did help, talking about what to do when I finished, sixth form, college, university, and work. I want to do engineering, with cars, bikes and planes. It was the first time I had talked about it. I was surprised what I wanted to do. At first I thought about business, because I was good at fixing things, and how things work, I started thinking.”

(Young man, 15, in a school inclusion unit, who lived on an estate where he feels he was at risk of becoming involved with youth gang culture in the past.)

The overwhelming majority of young people said that after Create+ they were more knowledgeable about the skills they needed to find work and had an attitude of ‘never giving up’ and ‘determination’.

70% said that they learnt lots or quite a lot of useful skills on the course (including verbal and presentation skills and creative technical skills) that may help them find work.

CAREER PROGRESSION: In 2010 – 2011, Vital Regeneration worked in partnership with several Pupil Referral Units and a lot of the young people on Create+ were already in a mainstream education provision but at risk of becoming NEET. Create+’s delivery team supported these young people by re-engaging them in learning and improving their attitude and attendance at school rather than through intentionally progressing them into jobs or voluntary work.

Vital Regeneration received the following feedback from two Pupil Referral Units it worked with in 2011. All students at these units have been excluded from mainstream schooling.

"The support of Create+ has seen a dramatic change in attendance and punctuality ... With 8 of the students who completed showing an increase in their attendance of at least 10% during the period the course ran!

The key to the programme is not just the excellent high quality resources and equipment that our students would not normally have access to, but just as important is the quality of the professional and supportive working relationships developed between Create+ staff and our students. The team have the insight, experience and flexibility to successfully deliver to a variety of demanding audiences. Students learn by doing a practical bespoke programme of original, creative and engaging skills based activities that help raise self-esteem, confidence and independence”.

(Headteacher in partnering school)

70% of survey respondents agreed that Create+ helped them think through what they wanted to do for a job or a career
The value of continuing in education is illustrated by the Lee’s experiences:

“At Create+ I started creating music. The teachers saw I had a passion for music. I am now writing music and recording music. I put it on YouTube. Next month I will release my own mix tape. My dream is to become a Music Manager. My passion is for music, but I want to help other people. If it wasn’t for Create+ I don’t even know. I would be hanging around on the streets. It helps you to find something inside that you never knew thought you had. There are loads of people on Create+ who never liked making music, who now make their own music. If you get stressed and angry you don’t just go around beating people up. You express yourself.”

“Planning for a future career

Impacting the lives of young people

Lee is 16: He was excluded from school when he was 14 years old. At this time he was diagnosed as having ADHD. Lee lives in an affluent neighbourhood, but is from a low income background. He was referred to a school which had a special educational unit for young people at risk of exclusion. Here his behaviour improved because he intermittently took medication for his disorder, but he still found it hard to achieve formal qualifications. Lee came into contact with Create+. Here he was able to express his passion for music and lyric writing and to express a desire to set up a record label. Lee started to write and record his own lyrics on the course. He joined a second course as an assistant support worker. He gained a Level one literacy qualification. Lee is now studying on a three day a week, three year business course. He did not perform well in his GCSE Maths and English but was able to access this course through providing evidence of his Literacy qualification achieved on Create+. Lee is determined to set up his own record label, but is realistic in knowing that the business qualification may be a good fallback should it not succeed financially. He attributes his current career path to the support and encouragement that he received on Create+.

“If it wasn’t for Create+ I don’t even know. I would be hanging around on the streets”
On all courses Create+ offers a varied menu of support that participants can benefit from – skills development, multiple qualifications, pastoral support and progression. On courses, not embedded in the school curriculum, where the focus was not just on re-engagement with learning, Create+ supported 25% of beneficiaries into positive progression outcomes (these were jobs, volunteering placements, apprenticeships, work experience and further education).

This progression into education or further education will give young people better opportunities to find work in the future. Deciding to continue with education suggests that the preventive work with the 'at risk’ NEET group is having positive effects on the choices young people make. Referring young people onto other organisations, such as arts organisations, further education colleges and training providers, will also assist young people in the future, particularly if they wish to have a career in the creative industries.

The monitoring data shows that young people participating on a Create+ programme are inclined towards staying in education and obtaining college places to further their education. Our research suggests that Create+ has a positive effect on young people and that this reduces the risks of them becoming NEET through their continued engagement in education.

There is scope for Create+ to support even more young people into volunteering, work placements and employment; and these opportunities could exist within Vital Regeneration itself or these goals could be further supported through projects such as the Families Programme.

**OVERCOMING FUNDING CHALLENGES:** Changes to the funding contracts, which have provided income for Create+ over the past 5 years have required the project to achieve slightly different outcomes in different boroughs. Lack of continuity in the larger funding streams for the project, e.g. the Learning & Skills Contract which became a Skills Funding Agency contract, also meant that there were periods when it was unviable to have a full staffing compliment on the project.

This broken continuity of staffing and local contacts, has made it challenging until 2011 for Create+ to maintain links with those providing volunteering and work placement opportunities and those referring beneficiaries onto the course. There is an opportunity for Vital Regeneration to be able to direct those young people who would most benefit onto Create+ through Vital Regeneration staff being co-located with City of Westminster Council Locality Teams on the Families Programme.

Nevertheless, 65% of young people who participated in the survey felt that Create+ had helped them with work, learning and volunteer opportunities.

65% of young people felt Create+ helped them with work, learning and volunteer opportunities
**The value of Create+**

**MONETARY VALUE OF OUTCOMES:** Investments in young people to prevent them from being excluded from school and from being incarcerated have been quantified, and indicate the level of savings that can be made by a project like Create+:

- The 2008 White Paper Back on Track suggests that it costs £11,000 more to educate a young person who has been excluded from school in a part-time place in a Pupil Referral Unit than it does to keep them in a mainstream school.
- The New Economics Foundation estimates that it costs the government £140,000 a year in direct and indirect costs to keep a young person in prison. Reoffending rates for young people remain stubbornly high at over 50%, further adding to the costs.

The price per student attending a Create+ course is considerably lower and is as follows:

- 33 hour course, with Arts Award and Literacy development supported by ongoing pastoral/progression support = £1626.

Many factors can be taken into consideration to assess the value of a project. In our assessment, Create+ provides an intensive service and has the expertise to engage young people with complex needs and challenging behaviour. This is a service that is unrealistic for mainstream provision; the equipment and technical expertise is expensive to buy in, for example. As a community organisation, Vital Regeneration is able to work more flexibly and creatively with young people through Create+ in ways that they find attractive and inspiring.

There is a dilemma associated with unit costs, however. Whilst we understand the need to cut costs to remain competitive, reducing costs runs the risk of providing less intensive work with young people and diverting attention away from NEETs, particularly those with the most complex needs who are largely invisible.

In 2009 the unit cost was £2390 so it has now reduced by about a third. Retaining the ‘three team’ approach is a defining characteristic of Create+ and gives it the potential to work with those who are most disadvantaged and vulnerable but this is more expensive. Yet, in terms of value for money that takes into account the longer term costs of supporting young people, this may be a better option for society.

The Create+ monitoring data shows how young people ‘at risk’ of becoming NEET are the main participants on the programme and that since the unit costs have declined the proportion on NEETs has decreased. In 2006, for example, 52% of participants were NEET and 48% at risk of NEET, whereas in 2011, 19% were NEET and 81% were at risk of NEET. Overall, 27% of participants have been NEET and 73% have been at risk of NEET.

**In terms of value for money, this may be a better option for society**
Planning for the future

This research has been commissioned at a time of increasing youth unemployment which currently stands at a record high of over one million, and at a time when local authority and voluntary sector funding for youth services are being severely curtailed. Research predicts that NEETs will rise and become even more concentrated in particular geographical areas. There is also an increasing awareness of the longer term damage to young people’s health, well-being and economic status if they are out of work, training and education when they are young adults. This has both high personal and societal costs. (This section draws heavily on many other existing studies and these are referenced in the bibliography).

It is within this context that two particular issues can be considered:

1. DRAWING A CLEARER DISTINCTION BETWEEN PREVENTIVE WORK WITH THOSE ‘AT RISK’ OF BECOMING NEET AND THOSE WHO ARE POST-COMPULSORY EDUCATION AND WHO ARE NEET:

Young people who are ‘at risk’ of becoming NEET are usually 16 years or under and in contact with at least one statutory agency, typically a school or college or perhaps social services or a youth offending team. The challenge for Create+ is not ‘finding’ them but rather to motivate, inspire and to work with a young person to make positive life choices. At aged 14 – 16 years this often includes supporting them to take educational qualifications and to continue in education.

Other young people may be ‘temporarily’ NEET either by choice, or because they have been made redundant and are looking for work, or due to a personal crisis including bereavement or illness. These young people are typically 16 years and over and benefit from personalised support during difficult periods.

Another group of young people, who are also 16 years and over have many unmet needs and complex lives. They can be unknown to statutory and community agencies, or known only to criminal justice agencies or health services. They are likely to be disaffected and reluctant learners. Research studies have found that social programmes find it difficult to engage with these young people and intensive outreach work is required to gain their trust. Even when a young person agrees to attend a course they will require high levels of support and they will have more uncertain outcomes in terms of entering further education, training or employment. In other words, it is more expensive and more risky for a community-led project to provide effective services for these young people.

Recognising and acknowledging the requirements of these different NEET groups in funding applications will enable different costs and targets to be set for each group. This approach will enable Create+ to work with all NEET groups.

2. WORKING DIFFERENTLY WITH PARTNERS

In response to the changed social and economic climate, different ways of working with partners may be a more efficient use of scarce resources and more effective at delivering outcomes.

The findings from the research suggest that agencies as well as young people are ‘territorial’. Joint funding applications with other community organisations and with statutory youth providers is one way to break down a culture of ‘owning’ a young person in order to meet targets set by funders.

Including time for networking and advocacy work in funding applications is another way to strengthen co-ordinated working for the benefit of young people. Young people often share common problems that are barriers to education, training and employment, such as receiving poor health services, difficulties paying their rent and getting into debt, and Vital Regeneration is well-placed to advocate for changes in procedures and practices for the benefit of all young people.
THE FOLLOWING REFERENCES HAVE INFORMED THIS REPORT:

- Prince’s Trust (2007), The Cost of Exclusion: Counting the cost of youth disadvantage in the UK.
- Sampson, A. (2011), 'Community-based performing arts and young people's transitions into adulthood: developing policies for young people,' working paper; Centre for Institutional Studies, University of East London. www.ucl.ac.uk/cis
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