



# Creative English Alliance

## Evaluation of the Creative English Programme

by  
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November 2015

*'If you can't speak the language, you can't join in!'*

- Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP

(Secretary of State for Department for Communities and Local Government,  
May 2010 - May 2015)



# Evaluation of the Creative English Programme

## Final Report

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Prepared for: **FaithAction**

Prepared by: **Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations,  
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23<sup>rd</sup> November 2015

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## Executive Summary

### The Creative English Programme

Creative English is a community-based, English language teaching programme that provides courses for people with little or no English language skills, using a drama-based teaching method. The original programme, funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) as part of a £6million investment in community-based English language provision, ran between November 2013 and November 2015 and was administered by FaithAction, a national network organisation for faith-based and community organisations. The programme was accessed by over 2,400 people in 36 local Creative English 'hubs' across England.

The context of the programme's commissioning is closely linked to the UK Government's aims around integration, social mobility and English language proficiency and is more specifically related to the policy behind the *Creating the Conditions for Integration* paper published in 2012. This policy approach describes successful societies as those in which all members are engaged and have the ability and confidence to contribute; English language proficiency is seen as an important factor in the ability of individuals to meet these criteria.

### The Evaluation

As part of the original contract with DCLG, FaithAction commissioned a team of social researchers from Coventry University's Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations to provide an external evaluation of the programme. The team designed a research process that allowed them to spend lots of time with those closest to the delivery, observing Creative English sessions and working with learners, facilitators, and other volunteers in 8 out of 36 local hubs, as well as FaithAction staff. The research undertaken between April 2014 and November 2015 used four key themes to investigate the impact and success of Creative English:

1. The extent to which the programme meets its aims in **social mobility and integration**.
2. The contribution and **role of the faith sector** in delivering the programme
3. The **language** progression of learners and the effectiveness of **teaching** methods used
4. The **strategic and operational** approach taken by FaithAction in delivering the programme

### Key Findings

The Creative English programme has exceeded against all targets set. In total, 2,432 learners participated and 1,536 learners completed the programme, against targets of 2,147 and 1,500 respectively. Working comprehensively towards aims of social mobility and integration, Creative English has recorded over-achievements in its key areas of progression, seeing learners move towards employment and further education, playing a more active part in their local community and engaging more with housing, health and education bodies. Most importantly for learners and FaithAction however is the fact that every single learner who completed the programme reported increased confidence in speaking English to others.

Data collected through this evaluation process, particularly through observations in Creative English sessions, has verified and added a deeper analysis to much of the above success. Most striking from this were the increases in the confidence of learners, witnessed by researchers, as well as improvements in English language proficiency and a multitude of stories of greater engagement and success outside of sessions, in community life, further education, schools, health and other statutory services.

A substantial part of the programme's value for its funders is that at the heart of its design is the ambition to reach people who are traditionally seen as 'hard to reach' – those who have not been engaged in English language courses previously. Data collected aligned with this ambition, showing that over 85% of learners were women, 75.4% of learners were from Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian or Somali backgrounds, aligning well with targets and aims set by DCLG and FaithAction.

The research process found faith to be a key feature across the programme. It was administered by FaithAction, delivered mostly by faith-based organisations and attended by a group of learners, of which

more than 70% were Muslim. Fieldwork in case study hubs showed that the faith-based nature of the programme played a significant role in enabling its delivery. At a physical level, the faith sector provided many of the venues, volunteers and learners for the programme. At other levels it provided the ethos, the values and the levels of mutual trust required for the programme to run and for learners to attend. At most case study hubs, there were a large number of people who most likely would not have felt able to attend courses run outside of the faith sector, demonstrating many of the reported advantages of the faith sector in reaching members of the community who are traditionally excluded from other types of service provision. Faith was certainly found to be a key element of the programme's success.

The research process found some excellent practice in facilitation, leading to improvements in English language proficiency for learners witnessed over multiple visits. Conversely, there was also some less effective practice which meant that learners' experiences were not as positive as they could have been, meaning that opportunities to enhance their confidence and language progression were not exploited. Given that the programme is delivered by volunteers, often with very little experience in training, teaching or facilitation, some variance in practice across the programme should reasonably be expected. Suggested ways to enhance this practice have been included in the evaluation's recommendations (below).

In most cases, however, noticeable progress was being made by learners, in proficiency, willingness to use English, and in their confidence in and outside of class. It was pleasing to hear regular anecdotes from learners, and facilitators, of learners using the language learnt during the programme in new, practical situations outside of the classroom, for example being able to buy clothes for their children, speaking with household repair technicians, and so on.

Insight into the business model deployed by Creative English shows that the programme adeptly provides value in different ways for each of its four sets of key stakeholders: DCLG, learners, hubs and volunteers. Key to its success is a set of distinctive characteristics, including: partnership working, volunteering, faith and fun. By employing these alongside a strong, flexible business model, FaithAction has created a model which holds great promise for sustainability, providing a strong foundation for the success of Creative English to continue.

## **Recommendations**

The Creative English programme is making a positive difference to the lives of low- and intermediate-proficiency speakers of English. Learners are made welcome in an accessible, friendly, fun environment and are given the opportunity to mix with other people outside their own immediate family group, as well as being given the chance to improve their English language skills. The research process has found evidence that the programme is providing a valuable stepping stone towards greater engagement with the wider community and, in some cases, further training and increased employability. Here there is a clear synthesis with the overarching aims of enabling integration and promoting social mobility.

The evaluation's key finding is that the core aims and values of the programme should continue unchanged, along with the underlying methodology which characterises the programme. To further enhance levels of success, however, this report suggests some potentially valuable adjustments to these activities, including the recommendations below:

- Learners could be given more opportunities to contribute to session content, for example by providing information about their own family life, habits and personal preferences. This might help make sessions even more relevant and motivating, and would provide opportunities for all participants, including facilitators, to learn more about each other's lives.
- Less emphasis could be placed on performance in front of the entire class, and more time could be devoted to work in pairs and small groups. This might allow learners more talking time, and cater for individual differences more effectively.
- Tutors could be asked to follow a standard template so that the structure of every session becomes familiar to learners. Sessions might always contain the same sort of starting and concluding routines, with only slight variations from session to session, for example. This might be a recap of the same basic

facts about the cast of characters, and/or the use of the same series of questions to elicit the same sort of information about the learners' daily lives. This repetition will help learners to acquire, retain and produce more fluent language sequences. The familiarity of the routine will also help to increase their confidence, and might reassure participants who do not regularly attend, but who drop in from time to time.

- The issues of 'grading language' and certain common 'facilitator behaviours' could be raised with the facilitators at the hub huddles and made a more prominent feature of the volunteer training programme, with the aim of ensuring that language and tasks are always pitched at an appropriate level for the learners. If learners can be given tasks that they are more likely to be able to complete successfully, then this will have a marked effect on the development of their confidence.
- A closer working relationship with volunteers should be sought by FaithAction, providing more support and communication and more focus on the volunteer experience as a Creative English 'customer'.
- Related to the above, data should be recorded to capture the journeys of the volunteers. Where volunteers are drawn from the cohort of learners, this is an especially strong element of the programme and one that is not currently recorded.
- FaithAction should review their engagement with hubs, with a particular focus on their relationships with smaller, less established organisations, to ensure that the appropriate level of support is provided across the programme and that the delivery of Creative English remains consistent and high quality in all locations.



## Introduction

Creative English is a community-based, English language teaching programme that provides courses for people with little or no English language skills, using a drama-based teaching method. The original programme, funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) as part of a £6million investment in community-based English language provision, ran between November 2013 and November 2015 and was administered by FaithAction, a national network organisation for faith-based and community organisations. The programme was accessed by over 2,400 people in 36 local Creative English 'hubs' across England.

The context of the programme's commissioning is closely linked to the UK Government's aims around integration, social mobility and English language proficiency and is more specifically related to the policy behind the *Creating the Conditions for Integration* paper published in 2012. This policy approach describes successful societies as those in which all members are engaged and have the ability and confidence to contribute; English language proficiency is seen as an important factor in the ability of individuals to meet these criteria.

Creative English was one of six funded programmes within a government commissioning process which aimed to increase access to English language classes for those who wanted to learn but were not engaging in current provision – its ambition was to '...back innovative and creative ways of delivering community based English language programmes....'(DCLG 2013)

As part of the original contract with DCLG, FaithAction commissioned a team of social researchers from Coventry University's Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations to provide an external evaluation of the programme. Research undertaken between April 2014 and November 2015 used four key themes to investigate the impact and success of Creative English:

1. The extent to which the programme meets its aims in **social mobility and integration**.
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3. The **language** progression of learners and the effectiveness of **teaching** methods used
4. The **strategic and operational** approach taken by FaithAction in delivering the programme

The purpose of this document is to convey the key findings of the research undertaken, using the above four themes to structure the analysis and discussion of the programmes impact, leading to conclusions and recommendations for the future of the programme.

## Methodology

An ambitious research design was requested by FaithAction in the original brief which provided a deep and thorough understanding of the programme, its distinctiveness, performance for its different stakeholder groups and impact from the perspective of those closest to its delivery, whilst ensuring that the process was practically viable within the structure of the programme and adhered to time and budget requirements.

To achieve this, an innovative and flexible data collection process was designed that applied methods found in 'ethnographic' research, in which researchers visit research sites, becoming part of the environment and creating 'an intensive, detailed examination' (Bryman and Bell, 2003: 55) of an organisation or setting. In practice, this allowed the team to spend lots of time at Creative English hubs, both observing and taking part in sessions alongside learners and volunteers, allowing more of the data to come from more natural conversations with learners, staff and volunteers rather than more traditional, formal interviews. These methods were then supplemented by data from semi-structured interviews (DCLG and FaithAction) and participatory group exercises including ranking activities with FaithAction staff. Creative English performance data has also been used to support the team's analysis.

Researchers originally planned to visit a sample of 6 hubs but later increased this number to 8 (3 in the Midlands and 5 in London), to allow the research to be exposed to different forms of delivery, including courses that were run very intensively (lots of sessions delivered per week) and a course which charged a small attendance fee (this fee represents the policy of the centre in question). The team were also able to



attend a volunteer training session and a regional workshop for hubs in the Midlands, called a 'hub huddle', providing further data and insight into the programme.

On reflection, the flexibility and adaptability offered by this approach was found to be of great value to the research team, offering an effective balance between avoiding, wherever viable, invasive or disruptive methods for the people involved in delivery whilst being able to build a strong evidence base and understanding of the programme's impact in order to provide a valid and rigorous evaluation.

## Learners Engaged and Progression Targets

The Creative English programme had very clear metrics for measuring success set by the Department for Communities and Local Government. These were devised before the programme began and, by and large, proved suitable for the purposes of tracking progress and targets throughout the programme.

As well as the total number of learners engaged and learners completing the course, there were 5 key progressions that all learners were measured on. These progressions (Figure 1) all contributed to one or both of the overarching integration and social mobility aims of the programme.

**Figure 1:** Creative English Progression Descriptions

<b>Health and Housing</b>	<i>The learner is now more confident to engage with the local housing office, to visit the doctor, or ask a health question to a pharmacist. It might mean that they can now make an appointment, either face to face or over the phone.</i>
<b>Community</b>	<i>The learner is now more confident to use English within the local community and can 'venture' out where they wouldn't have gone before with their new confidence. This might be visiting the library, the play area in the local park, or volunteering for a local group.</i>
<b>Further Education</b>	<i>The learner is now interested in learning more English, or learning something new, and feels confident to consider a more formal course, maybe ESOL or similar.</i>
<b>Speaking English to Others</b>	<i>The learner is more confident to use English in everyday situations, for example, getting on a bus, buying items from the market or shops (using English!)</i>
<b>Progression Towards Work</b>	<i>The learner is now confident enough to consider applying for work. You may have done a session on CV's, or practised interview techniques. These would count as a progression towards work, but again it will need to be recorded.</i>

These progressions link closely with the domains laid out in the *Indicators of Integration Framework* (Home Office 2004). Though the focus of the piece is on the integration of recently arrived refugees, the work and the findings are transferable to other non-English speaking arrivals to the UK. Here Employment, Housing, Education and Health are given as the 4 markers and means of attainment that work towards an individual's integration. Attaining employment, for instance, does not integrate an individual as such but is a precursor to and step towards that end goal of integration and will support other steps that must take place.

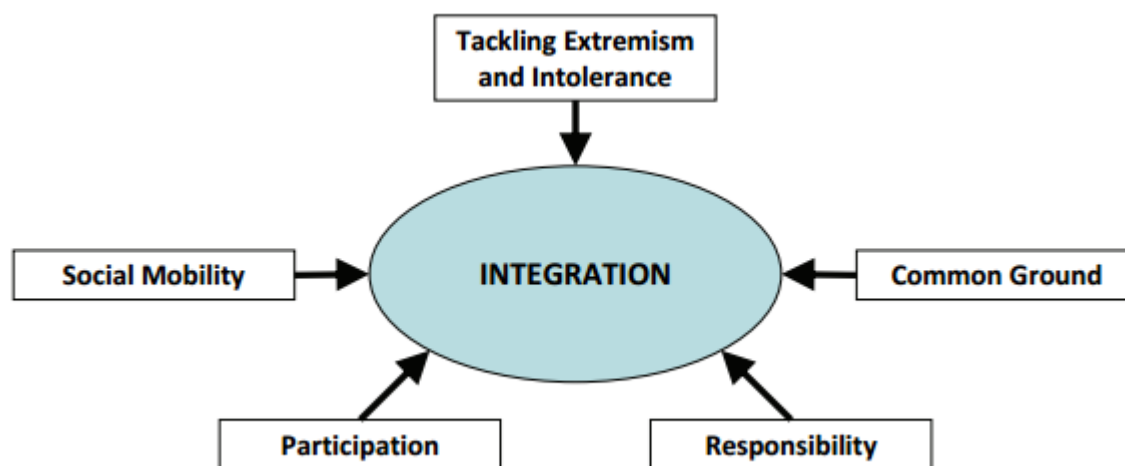
Language and cultural knowledge are listed together in the framework as being a category of action that facilitates integration. That English language proficiency is not listed on its own, but rather is bracketed with cultural competency, is both telling and a good fit with the Creative English ethos and scenario and 'drama-based' teaching methods which directly link to cultural and contextual understanding. Furthermore, the idea that knowledge of how to act in a society and a familiarity with the processes needed to both fit in and to take an active part are given equal status alongside the ability to speak the language ties in closely with the Creative English progression of increasing the confidence of the speaker to use English.

Such scenario and drama-based learning also enables learners to become familiar with procedures and practices, giving learners scope to rehearse them, thereby reducing the risk of social embarrassment (Tsui in Bailey 1996) and making them more likely to participate in the wider community. The act of seeking out these interactions and participating is a central component to integration taking place (DCLG 2012).

Integration itself is a widely used and nearly equally widely defined term with there being little agreed consensus as to what definitively constitutes integration (Robinson 1998, Castles et al, 2001). It is beyond the remit of this piece to develop a new definition of integration, nor would it be good practice to cherry pick one that supports our findings.

Therefore the model of integration that will be used is the one proposed by the *Creating the Conditions for Integration* (2012) report. This is a logical choice as the programme came about as a direct result of this report and so it is reasonable for outcomes to be linked to the logic and theory it is based upon. The framework is seen below in Figure 2.

**Figure 2:** *Creating the Conditions for Integration*; Key Factors for Integration (2012)



Here we can see that social mobility, one primary aim of the Creative English programme, feeds into integration, another primary aim. A detailed analysis of the data for the 5 progression targets is shown for each individually alongside findings from the field research/observations and literature that links the progressions to the overarching aims of the programme. Where findings from the field indicate that the programme is not working towards the overarching aims, or indeed may be hindering progress towards them, this will be flagged up.

Also available is data detailing the gender, ethnicity and religion of learners. These figures were not tied to targets.

Data was uploaded by each hub and was sent to FaithAction on an ongoing basis. This ensured good quality, real time data and allowed the progress of targets for individual hubs and the programme as a whole to be continuously monitored. Where hubs appeared to be behind on their targets, action could then be taken before any significant slippage occurred. The evaluation has seen first-hand that this did occur and that FaithAction were prompt in taking remedial action and working with hubs that were either underperforming or at risk of doing so.

The data referred to in this piece is correct as of 05/11/15 and is taken from the final data upload that was sent to DCLG as per reporting protocol. Using the combined totals from Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the programme, every output was met and over-delivered on. This represents a significant achievement.

Overall, 2,432 learners were engaged against a target of 2,147. This represents an over-completion of 13.3%. From these engaged learners, the target was to have 1,500 learners 'complete' the course by

attending 10 or more sessions. By the end of the programme, 1,536 people had completed. The over-completion here was 2.4% with regards to learners completing the course.

Figure 3 shows how Creative English performed against the overall targets set for the programme for each of the progressions and for learner engagement. Targets for Phase 2 take into account over-achievement from Phase 1 and begin from the figure achieved rather than the Phase 1 target.

Most impressively, the figures also show that every single one of the 1,536 learners who completed the course also reported improved confidence as a result of taking part in the sessions. Improving the confidence of learners to speak English and to interact in their wider communities is a core aim of FaithAction when running Creative English and is also very important to learners. Exercises undertaken with those involved in the programme showed that the majority of FaithAction staff members involved in the programme believe that increased confidence in learners is more important in achieving the overall aims of the programme than increased language skills and 31 out of 32 learners spoken to at their final session at 2 London hubs placed increased confidence higher above English language proficiency in terms of importance of outcome.

*“How can you speak to anyone unless you first have the confidence to? Confidence come[s] first and then you get better at English.”- Creative English learner, London hub.*

**Figure 3: Creative English Targets and Numbers at Programme End**

Output	Actual	DCLG Target	% of Target achieved
Learners engaged	2432	2147	113.3
Learners complete	1536	1500	102.4
Completed learners claiming improved confidence	1536	1500	102.4
Learners into further learning	1148	492	233.3
Learners engaging in new community activities	2454	1133	216.6
Learners towards work	725	461	157.3
Learners engaging with health, education or housing services combined	2888	937	308.2

## Learner Demographics

Basic learner demographic data is recorded at hub level when new learners register for the first time and is collated by FaithAction.

The overwhelming majority of learners engaged on the course were Muslim, accounting for 71.7% of all learners. Sikh learners (7.7%) and Christian learners (7.7%) the next largest faith groups involved. The statistics for ethnic backgrounds engaged correlate largely with those for faith groups engaged with 38.3% being from Pakistani backgrounds, 12.7% from Bangladeshi, 12.4% Indian and 10.0% Somali.

Such a demographic profile is untypical of the UK as Muslims make up only 4.8% of the total population (Census 2011). These demographics, however, are more likely to be typical of the target areas that FaithAction were given by DCLG to focus the programme on.

Finally of the 2,432 learners engaged on the course, 2,082 (85.6%) were female and 350 (14.4%) were male. This was against an initial pre-proposal target of at least 60% of the learners being female, and so represents an over-achievement. Given the structure of the course and that it is largely based in faith and

community centres on weekdays and during the daytime, it is more likely that the majority of those engaged would be female (As discussed below, Census 2011 shows that women from Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Somali backgrounds are among the least likely demographic groups in the UK to be engaged in the labour market) but significant effort did go into making the course accessible to males, too.

In fact, there was a great deal of evidence showing that significant emphasis has been placed by the hubs on ensuring that the course is accessible and welcoming to anyone wishing to attend. To encourage those with children to attend, some hubs provide a free crèche during the sessions whilst others allow parents and (in one case observed) grandparents to have their children with them during the session. The structure of sessions makes this possible in a way that it would not be likely to happen with a standard ESOL course. A striking example of this comes in the case of a Somali man of no fixed abode who attended sessions at a London hub when he was staying in the area, and who often went several weeks between sessions.

It is clear from our observations and from the demographic data collected by FaithAction that the Creative English programme has been effective in targeting and engaging with those who are traditionally seen as hard to reach and socially isolated.

Unfortunately extra data was not collected to record the demographic details of volunteers who assisted with teaching and the running of classes. Though this was not a target, it does represent a missed opportunity to record the depth of engagement that took place and the opportunities that were offered. FaithAction were not asked to collect this data but it may be an area of consideration for DCLG to consider in future commissioning exercises.

## **The 5 Progressions**

The following sections each give context to and detail the findings with regards to each measured progression alongside the statistics recorded in the English Language Learner Questionnaire.

### **Health, Housing and Education:**

The target for learners to engage with health, education or housing services was 937 by the end of the programme. The final number achieved was 2,888, representing a significant over-achievement by the Creative English programme. This figure is higher than the total number of learners engaged because contact with each of health, education and housing services are counted separately.

A number of specific sessions are included in the syllabus to cover the topics relevant to this progression target. These include:

- Making an appointment at the doctor's
- Going to the pharmacy
- Identifying and naming body parts and types of pain
- Choosing a school
- Talking to teachers and asking for help when a child has a problem
- Talking to teachers at parents evening and about school reports
- Raising a concern with a landlord
- Dealing with insurance companies

A large proportion of the syllabus links to this progression and researchers have observed a number of sessions related to these themes, with a range of positives noted. As three of the four *Indicators of Integration Framework* markers relate to this progression, it is a strength of the programme that such emphasis is placed on these areas. In many ways, too, this progression enables a series of "quick wins" for an individual, enabling them to start taking smaller steps that underpin the ability to look for employment or to enrol in further education whilst benefitting from increased confidence and other positive personal outcomes.

A typical example of this is the female learner who had gained enough confidence to visit her GP on her own for the first time. She attributed the Creative English sessions with giving her the belief that she could do it herself. This was important to her as it meant that she could discuss medical issues without needing to have a younger family member present and translating. The group attended by the researcher in this case was all female and the majority of the group have, at some point, felt embarrassed to need a relative

(particularly if male) with them when discussing female health issues. For this reason not being able to go alone had, according to the learners, previously put some off of visiting their GP.

One of the hub volunteers interviewed during the research was motivated to get involved in teaching English in her community through her work at a hospital. During her non-medical role there she often acted as an unofficial translator between doctors and patients. She spoke of many patients who lacked the English language skills to understand what they were being told and the confidence to question a doctor submitting to treatments when they didn't understand fully what was wrong with them or what the treatment would entail. She believes that the ethos and curriculum of Creative English goes a long way to addressing this problem.

Learners have also reported, during observations, being more comfortable with speaking to their children about their homework from school and feeling more able to help if called upon, as a result of attendance. One learner commented that she was capable of helping with maths questions and always has been but has never felt like her English was good enough to be able to offer her children help. Another learner told a researcher that she had spoken to her child's teacher at school for the first time and that she probably would not have were it not for her being involved with Creative English and gaining the confidence to do so. She now believes that she will attend a school parents' evening in the future having avoided doing so before.

The importance of parental support and involvement in a child's education is well established (Desforges 2003) and with pupils whose parents are involved in school life and who can offer support with homework and other activities seeing higher levels of attainment than those who do not the UK government has long tried to encourage parental participation (Secretary of State for Education and Employment 1997). Educational attainment has been demonstrated to have a positive impact on an individual's social mobility (Haveman and Smeeding 2006) and Pakistani pupils being amongst those with the lowest typical levels of attainment in UK schools (Department for Education 2015), boosting the likely attainment of pupils from this and other backgrounds could lead to a generational legacy of increased social mobility.

In support of the above analysis, the following comments related to this progression have been recorded by facilitators with regards to individual learner development at their hub with some being direct quotes from learners:

*“\*\*\*\*\* was able to accompany her mum to the hospital as she had had a heart attack and told the doctor's how her mum felt. EG; She has a pain in her head and in her chest. This was after only 2 classes. She is encouraged that she is learning more English through this experience.”*

*“\*\*\*\* can speak with key worker who is helping her to get housing association property she speaks with her in English and bid for house online. She started to go for her medical appointments by herself, and feels confident.”*

*“\*\*\*\*\* had a low confidence since she joined Creative English her confidence improved and she help other learners in class. She registered herself with doctor all by herself. She goes to local community centre for sewing class and She is looking for house for herself as she was living in hostel. She has contacted few estate agents to find out if any properties are on rent.”*

*“She started to take her child to doctor appointments by herself. She speaks with nurse about her child's health progress.”*

*“I can speak to school and understand what is said. More confident speaking to neighbours and friends. I help with homework a little.”*

### **Community:**

The programme aimed to see 1,133 learners engage in community activities. The final total that did so was 2,454, representing a significant over-achievement. Again, this total is higher than the actual number of participants engaged in the programme as a whole because each individual engagement with wider community activities is counted. Though this is a useful measure and shows the wide engagement that took place as a result of learners attending Creative English, it would be useful in the future to have an additional measure that records purely the number of learners who have done so.

A number of specific sessions are included in the syllabus to cover the topics relevant to this progression target. These include:

- Starting to volunteer
- Celebrating an engagement and a wedding
- A street party
- Getting around

All of the hubs visited during the fieldwork take place in community locations that host services, activities and events other than Creative English. This use of buildings that offer wider provision has seen learners engage in other activities that take place in the buildings. Often this has been through word of mouth or advertising and leaflets that have been made available on the premises. In one case a learner found out about a parent and baby club that runs in the same building and began to attend this as well as the Creative English classes. In another case, women who attended had been made aware of additional English sessions that were being run in the building at another time and they chose to attend these in addition to Creative English.

As a part of the fieldwork, researchers spoke (where possible) with staff or volunteers based at the venues used by Creative English. Often these individuals were not directly involved in the programme other than having it hosted in their building. Where mixed-purpose halls and venues were used, however, it was typical for these individuals to report that Creative English learners had been attending other events or using other services that take place in the building and that this had continued beyond the learner's involvement in the programme.

The *Creating the Conditions for Integration* framework (DCLG 2012) makes clear that participation and empowerment are positively linked to integration with people being given, and then taking, opportunities to be involved, being heard and making decisions all being seen as central to an individual's integration experience. The *Indicators of Integration Framework* (Home Office 2004) does not take such a formal approach and cites the importance of individuals establishing social connections with others. The Creative English syllabus covers both formal routes into volunteering and community activism and the softer, less formal routes of getting to know neighbours and establishing friendships.

A number of visits to Midlands hubs, for example, have found a clear and encouraged route from entering the Creative English Programme as a learner and progressing to become a volunteer Creative English teacher or assistant at the end of 10 sessions. Facilitators and organisers at Midlands hubs also reported that many learners were unaware of the services offered by community centres and faith groups before attending Creative English sessions and told researchers that the programme has proved to be an excellent way of getting learners involved in the running and activity of the centres outside of the Creative English sessions.

Facilitators in a Birmingham hub commented on the success found by combining a curriculum and method of delivery that explores volunteering and seeks to build learners' confidence with a community centre that offers a range of opportunities for them to become immediately engaged with, 'without having to leave the building'.

In relation to getting around more easily, one hub team reported the success of day trips organised for the learners involving taking a group on public transport, visiting a community landmark – such as a museum – and having lunch in the city centre. Many of the learners had lived in neighbouring boroughs or areas for some time but had never visited landmarks or venues outside of their immediate vicinity and almost all of them had never felt confident enough to use public transport. The role of trained volunteers who were able to facilitate the trip and support the learners at every stage was seen to be a key strength of the approach. One volunteer noted that... 'A few of them found it difficult to ask for tickets on the way there but they were all much better on the way back' (Midland hub).

Perhaps the largest scale example of people being compelled to get involved in community activities can be seen at a hub in London where volunteers and learners worked to arrange a summer trip to the beach for their community. In total, around 50 people from their community were taken by coach from North London to Clacton on Sea for the day. Around half of those on the trip were children, many of whom had



never seen the sea before. Additionally many of those on the trip of all ages had never seen any of England outside their local area and they were very apprehensive about leaving such a multicultural area and going to one which is mainly populated by White British people. There was a great deal of apprehension and fear concerning racial abuse and attacks happening to them on the day but the day passed without incident and they were made to feel very welcome. As a result some identified more with British culture and felt a sense of belonging that they had previously not. The hub leaders do not believe that this trip would have taken place without Creative English being there first.

Two of the London hubs visited were mixed in terms of ethnic, national and religious backgrounds and most of the learners who came along had not met or interacted with the other learners before, despite often living in the same neighbourhood and, in some cases, having children of the same age in the same nurseries and schools. In some cases learners have told us that real friendships have been formed with other learners in the duration of the course and that they have been in contact outside of the sessions. For many of those involved, and particularly some of the women, the Creative English sessions provide a rare chance for them to socialise outside of their family groups. It was also noted, however, that some of these friendships did not extend beyond the “safe space” of the learning environment and that some people were either unable or unwilling to associate with others outside of the programme.

In general many of the learners did not seem to be engaged in their local communities beyond interaction with statutory services (such as taking their child to school). This, however, is not untypical of the UK as a whole as only a small proportion of adults regularly volunteer or take part in formal community activities – 27% (Community Life Survey 2015). With a significant number of learners being new arrivals and nearly all not being fully confident in their conversational English, it is no surprise that levels of community engagement are not high.

The following comments related to this progression have been recorded by facilitators with regards to individual learner development at their hub with some being direct quotes from learners:

*“\*\*\*\*\* has started to help the weaker speakers by asking questions on their behalf and translating into French where necessary. She feels much more confident trying to use her spoken English, although doesn't always understand what people say back. She has made new friends on the course. On 23/7/14, she volunteered to help clear up crèche as there weren't any crèche workers available.”*

*“\*\*\*\*\* asked about volunteering at children's centre, when her child starts nursery, to help her get experience for work.”*

*“Felt depressed and isolated, as she is not yet able to work in the UK. It really helps her to come out and talk to people and practice English. She came to Family Learning on 20/8/14 and asked me if she could do some volunteering with me. Via Creative English team, she was introduced to Community Hub and thus access to other social networks and activities, which she first attended independently on 10/9/14. She starts volunteering on Creative English programme 1/10/14.”*

*“She feels more confident. Before joining Creative English, she had never been out without her husband. Now she goes shopping on her own with her young son and takes him to the park. She feels the class is very good for learning English and understanding everything and what she has to do in different situations. She feels more confident about taking her child to different places. She has made a close friend in the class, who she sees outside of the sessions.”*

*“Can now talk to teacher at school about child's progress and talk with other parents about what is happening in the school with fundraising and coffee mornings.”*

### **Further Education (including ESOL)**

Progressing into further education is linked very closely to positive changes in social mobility (Haveman and Smeeding 2006). A powerful case can be made to demonstrate high barriers to entry into further education in the UK stifling social mobility and being injurious to social cohesion (Janmaat and Green 2013). In addition to this the importance of acquiring native language skills is one which is seen to be essential in developing a closer understanding of cultural norms and, eventually, towards becoming an active participant in community life (Kanno and Norton 2003). Here we can see both the importance of a course,

such as Creative English, that has very few barriers to entry and the signposting towards other forms of learning once learners are engaged.

The target for learners to engage with further education including ESOL after taking part in Creative English was 492 learners. The final total was 1,148. This is a notable achievement and one which suggests that the positive impact of the programme will continue to be felt over time. If possible, it would be useful for a longitudinal study to take place that follows the progress of learners as they move on, in order to enable an analysis on the longer-term impact of these results.

A number of specific sessions are included in the syllabus to cover the topics relevant to this progression target. These include:

- Choosing a college course
- Looking into the future (aspirations)

Muslim women have some of the lowest rates of educational attainment in the UK and see a very low uptake of further and higher learning. The success achieved, therefore, by the Creative English team in working towards and hitting this target is even greater when placed in the context that the majority of learners are from a demographic group that is amongst the least likely to pursue further education or training (Census 2011).

At a London hub, learners were made aware of a more formal ESOL based English language course that is available within the same community facility as the Creative English course. At least one learner had started attending this and there was widespread interest from others.

There was a concern from one individual though that a more formal language course may not be suitable for her. Creative English was seen by her to fit her needs as, in her own words, she is "not going to have a job interview or do any exams where I need perfect spelling". This example both demonstrates the practical appeal of Creative English and differentiates it from more traditional ESOL courses.

Volunteer facilitators who have progressed from being Creative English learners seem particularly driven to seek out further courses to work towards their aims. These vary from formal English qualifications to childcare certificates.

Away from formal courses and qualifications, nearly all learners spoken to expressed a clear desire to continue to improve their English and to learn more. Children were often a motivating factor in this with several women wanting to be able to help their children in their own education and with their schoolwork whilst one woman simply wanted to be able to have a conversation in English with her young grandson.

Learners are able to continue with Creative English even after they have completed 10 sessions. This flexible approach to sessions and attendance allows those who may not be able to commit to more formal structures to continue to attend and build their language skills and confidence in an environment that they are familiar with. This approach seems to assist with future transitions into other learning environments; an area further explored in later sections of this report.

The following comments related to this progression have been recorded by facilitators with regards to individual learner development at their hub with some being direct quotes from learners:

*"I want to study further, these classes have helped me with basic English to do this."*

*"\*\*\*\*\* has had an interview and will attend \*\*\*\*\* adult learning classes from September and will also join the \*\*\*\*\* centres more formal ESOL class."*

*"\*\*\*\*\* is starting accredited employability skills course at college"*

*"\*\*\*\*\* talked about her master's degree. She said she would like to do further study, maybe a PhD, so I have directed her to the NARIC website so that she can obtain a UK comparison for her masters. Then she will be in a place to apply to universities here."*

### Improved Confidence in Speaking English to Others

Of the 1,536 learners who have completed the course all 1,536 have reported improved confidence in speaking English to others. This represents a fantastic achievement as every single learner who has taken part fully has reported a positive effect. The target for this metric by the end of the programme was 1,500 and so has been achieved. It is also worthy of note that this number reporting increased confidence is only counted from those who completed the course so the actual number of learners with increased confidence in speaking English to others is likely to be higher.

A number of specific sessions are included in the syllabus to cover the topics relevant to this progression target. These include:

- Shopping at the supermarket
- At the hairdressers/barbers
- Asking for help

The aim to improve confidence in speaking English to others does, of course, overlap with every other session run and with the other progression targets. An increased enthusiasm for speaking English from the learners has been noted by the researchers throughout the observations and this has manifested itself in various forms and to different degrees.

At one London hub, two women who knew each other prior to attending Creative English sessions and who both spoke the same first language were observed speaking to one another in English during a break in the session. When asked why they were speaking English and not their first language, they replied that this is now something that they try to do to practise. They don't always do it outside of sessions and less frequently when in their own community but it is something that they have made a conscious effort to do and something that they did not do before.

In another hub, three male learners all with different first languages and from different ethnic backgrounds were assigned to a role-play task. When the researcher approached to observe their practice, they were actually discussing football results from the previous evening in English. When asked why they were doing this rather than the assigned task, they were of the agreement that it was the act of talking in English that mattered most to them as this gave them the confidence and ability to do it in their everyday lives.

There does also seem to be a link between the number of the sessions attended and how confident learners are to take part and speak aloud in group sessions. Here it seems that those who have attended a number of sessions and who feel a part of the group are more willing to act out a scenario in English, even when they seem aware that they cannot fully articulate the scenario.

The following comments related to this progression have been recorded by facilitators with regards to individual learner development at their hub with some being direct quotes from the learner:

*"I feel happy because I can speak to my grandchildren in English and enjoy with them."*

*"\*\*\*\*\* has spoken to her husband in English. They talked about food. She feels able to speak to her family and friends in English"*

*"I feel more confident in speaking to people who I don't know in English"*

*"\*\*\*\*\* has used English with her neighbours - they say, "Well Done!" to her."*

*"I have become more confident because of this course and I have learnt to speak a lot more English around more people at home and outside, for example with my neighbours and when I need to make appointments."*

### Progression Towards Work

725 learners on the programme have made progression towards work whilst taking part. This is against a target of 461 and so, again, represents a significant over-achievement. When looking at the numbers around this target, it is also important to note that it may not include all volunteers who are giving their time

up to help on the programme so as to gain experience and confidence towards future employability and FaithAction staff who have been upskilled by their experience in running the programme. It will also not include learners who have sought or made progression towards work after they have left the programme. The impact is likely, therefore, to be considerably higher than that demonstrated by these figures.

A number of specific sessions are included in the syllabus to cover the topics relevant to this progression target. These include:

- Jobs and interviews
- Starting a new job and directions
- Looking into the future (aspirations)

Longitudinal studies have found that ethnic minorities in Britain are more likely to be unemployed than the White British population and even when educational attainment is higher in ethnic minority groups the group still experiences restricted levels of social mobility (CoDE 2013). The environment or neighbourhood that an individual grows up in has been shown to have a key moderating influence on this outcome (Musterd and Andersson 2006) with individual social mobility remaining low in areas of low social mobility even when educational attainment rises. This is linked to levels of employment and employability in those areas. Employment is also listed as a mean and marker of integration in the *Indicators of Integration Framework*, giving this progression particular importance to the overarching aims of integration and social mobility.

Women from Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Somali backgrounds are among the least likely demographic groups in the UK to be engaged in the labour market (Census 2011). Women from these groups represent a large share of the Creative English learner cohort. Several learners have stated a desire to enter the labour market as a motivator for them taking part in the course. The majority of those spoken to and observed are women with children of pre-school and/or school age. This appears to be representative of the overall cohort of learners.

One male learner at a London hub studied further education in India but has struggled to get what he perceives as a 'good job' since coming to the UK. He believes that his standard of conversational English holds him back in both interviews and the workplace and that the Creative English course will help improve his skills in a way that a formal ESOL course would not.

Sometimes learners' attendance is motivated by wanting to strengthen their position and ability in their current job roles. One learner in the Midlands, for example, attended in order to be able to speak to customers in English to allow him to progress from a back-office role to a more customer-facing role. Volunteers from the hub noted that their ambition was to help him to progress to more formal ESOL classes, delivered in the same area but his confidence to take part in these classes needed to grow and could be fostered in part through the Creative English programme.

The clearest examples of a progression towards work and a development of skills needed to enter the labour market have been seen through some of the hub volunteers. One female volunteer at a London hub initially began her involvement with Creative English as a learner and after regular attendance and a discussion with the tutor about her aims she became a volunteer, assisting the tutor in running the sessions and registering new attendees. She believes that this gives her greater scope to improve her spoken English as well as the confidence to speak aloud in front of a small group. In a more tangible outcome, the volunteer will also be able to put this experience on her CV and will be able to get a reference from FaithAction. This will be her first UK based reference.

This positive impact on volunteers has also been seen in the Midlands hubs. For one facilitator, her role in Creative English was her first job and the first time she had felt confident enough to take up a regular role outside of the house; she was able to do this because Creative English offered a safe, all-female and non-threatening environment.

Other volunteers are working with FaithAction on Creative English to directly gain experience in roles that they wish to progress into elsewhere. An example of this is at a London based hub that has a crèche during the sessions. Throughout our observations the crèche has been staffed by volunteers and all the volunteers spoken to have expressed a desire to work in childcare and believe that the experience of volunteering will

help them to do so. There has been a relatively high turnover of crèche volunteers at this particular hub as the initial two volunteers successfully found employment. Another volunteer in the Midlands had graduated from University in a non-teaching related area but had enjoyed the teaching element of Creative English and is now looking to follow a career in teaching.

The following comments related to this progression have been recorded by facilitators with regards to individual learner development at their hub with some being direct quotes from learners:

*“\*\*\*\*\* has completed a CV ready to email out to prospective employers. He also has a greater understanding of how to write a cover letter.”*

*“Took part in small interview skills workshop and noticeably more confident. Has secured part time work as of 1/10.”*

*“I think I will be able to find work more easily, because I can speak some basic English.”*

*“I want to volunteer to get some experience so that I can find work. I think the course has helped me feel able to do this, I am more confident.”*

*“I feel confident to apply for jobs now.”*

*“\*\*\*\*\* recently came from Africa and looking for work. When he started creative English he didn’t speak word of English. In third session he started to speak with others in class and told me that he is feeling confident. Now he has register himself with few employment agencies for finding job.”*

## **The Role of the Faith Sector**

Faith is a highly prominent feature of Creative English. The programme is administered by FaithAction, a national faith network organisation, and, with a few exceptions, is delivered by a group of local, faith-based organisations from many different faiths, providing the service to a group of learners, of which 71% were from Muslim backgrounds. Assessing the role and contribution of the faith sector in the delivery of Creative English, therefore, is an important part of evaluating the programme.

An assessment of the role of the faith sector as a delivery agent can be split within two distinct relationships: a broader, contextual relationship between faith-based service providers and the government in general and, second, the more direct relationship between faith-based organisations within Creative English and learners.

Addressing the former relationship first, the diversity of the UK population and the blend of multiculturalism and secularism that is established across the UK create a unique context for the relationship between the faith sector and the government (LGA 2012).

The decentralisation and localism agendas first promoted by the coalition government (2010 – 2015) placed greater emphasis than previous recent governments on the benefits of philanthropic action, community groups working together to improve their local area and increased local decision making with less “top down”, government dictated initiatives (IPPR 2014).

The Local Government Association (2012) states that the principle of decentralisation will require the continued, and possibly increased, engagement of the whole community, voluntary and faith sectors. This context dovetails with an increased contemporary need to demonstrate cost effectiveness in a time of government austerity and to operate in an increasingly competitive marketplace, leading to organisations in these sectors, often for the first time, taking the roles of delivery agents for a policy or service in order to bridge funding gaps. Indeed there is little debate that faith groups in the United Kingdom are now seen as playing an important role in the delivery of urban services, particularly with regards to social inclusion (Dinham and Lowndes 2008).

The faith sector is particularly well placed in this context due to a number of key attributes, many of which relate to Creative English. The breadth of geographical reach of the faith sector and its physical, long-standing location within local communities (Christians in Parliament 2013), coupled with the spiritual and

social capital that allows it to draw upon a ready pool of motivated volunteers (Wilson and Janoski 1995, Wilson and Musick 1997 and Janoski et al 1998), brings clear advantages. These advantages are even more pronounced when seeking to engage traditionally hard to reach groups such as the homeless, the mentally ill and/or unstable, newly arrived migrants and otherwise vulnerable people such as older people and children (Dinham, Furbey and Lowndes 2009).

The second relationship – between learners and faith-based organisations in the Creative English programme – builds upon this context well, with data collected from learners demonstrating many of these faith sector characteristics set out above.

Views of learners with regards to the importance of the faith sector in delivery varied. Some participants were unaware that faith based organisations played any role at all in the delivery. This was generally the case when the sessions were run at non-faith specific venues such as community centres.

At one London hub the participants were all Somali women and sessions took place in the local mosque. Many of the women there were pleased with the faith sector involvement as it meant that they could learn in an environment that they were comfortable in and that their families had no issues with them going to. In the case of this cohort, they would simply not have been able to attend English sessions unless they took place in that particular environment; here the faith-based environment was a clear enabler, showing the advantages of the faith sector discussed above.

Experiences at other hubs found that the very fact that the sessions were taking place in a faith-based environment helped to encourage attendance. A group of Muslim women at another London hub held in a church hall were all in agreement that the sessions being held at a church venue encouraged them to attend. They and their families saw the church as a safe space for them to attend, and this would not have been the case with an adult education centre, college or other secular community venue. Visits to hubs in the Midlands supported this idea, including a course attended by a group of South Asian women attending sessions at a church hall. Here the values of the faith sector were seen to be transferable across faiths and there was a genuine trust in the institutions involved. This links with the concept of social capital being optimised where there are shared values and norms (Fukuyama 1992) – across faiths, for example – whilst also linking with Dinham, Furbey and Lowndes' (2009) argument that when a programme, such as Creative English, seeks to engage with people on the margins of society, there is a strong case for the faith sector being the most effective vehicle. Recent arrivals to the UK also tend to seek contact with their own faith-based organisations before they do so with local authority or statutory bodies (Foley and Hoge 2007). This gives great scope for the faith sector to contribute to the formative stages of an individual's life in a new environment.

In many areas too, the faith sector played a strong role in enabling Creative English to reach and recruit learners. In some cases this was through formal announcements at prayer times and at others it operated on a more informal word of mouth level, within congregations.

No learners that we spoke with during the fieldwork were against the involvement of the faith sector in delivery, though it may be the case that the sample was self-selecting due to those who were against it choosing to not take part in the course. There is some evidence that sometimes the role of faith in the programme was a barrier for some potential learners. One example is a non-Muslim learner of sessions at a large Mosque who told us that initially he was apprehensive about attending and nearly didn't make it through the door for his first session because he was nervous about entering an entirely new environment and because he believed that there may be some attempt to proselytize made. Through his continued attendance, he overcame these fears and at one session, he even brought his children along to meet the children of other learners.

Overall, however, findings suggest that the role of the faith sector in the operation, and success, of the Creative English programme was of importance. At a physical level, the faith sector provided many of the venues, volunteers and learners for the programme. At other levels it provided the ethos, the values and the levels of mutual trust required for the programme to run and for learners to attend. At most case study hubs, there were a large number of people who most likely would not have felt able to attend courses run outside of the faith sector, supporting many of the ideas discussed earlier in this section concerning the advantages of the faith sector in reaching members of the community who are traditionally excluded from other types of service provision.



## Teaching and Language

There are many ways to teach English to speakers of other languages, and many different kinds of learner. The main aim of Creative English is to develop the basic English language skills of adult speakers of other languages living in Britain, so that they gain the confidence to function outside the faith community and are motivated to continue their language learning journey, possibly later enrolling on conventional, publicly-funded, ESOL programmes.

Many participants in the Creative English programme live in neighbourhoods where the majority of people have first languages other than English. In these neighbourhood contexts English will be used as a lingua franca; deviations from standard usage are not likely to cause problems as long as speakers can understand each other. Creative English focusses primarily on oral skills, and deals with everyday topics of likely relevance to participants, such as shopping, housing, education and health.

### Observations Made During Creative English Sessions

After attending a Creative English programme some learners may go on to attend a typical 'ESOL' course, if there is one available. The programme therefore may help prepare learners for ESOL, both in terms of developing their confidence to participate in language classes, and also in terms of learning some new language and consolidating the acquisition of language that they may have previously encountered at some point, but this is not its main aim. The main aims of Creative English relate to developing confidence and a feeling of belonging, although developing basic language proficiency will have a positive impact on confidence. There is an emphasis on reducing 'learner anxiety', and judging from observations made during Creative English sessions at various centres, the programme is proving effective from this perspective. Learner anxiety disrupts the acquisition process and affects students' confidence and levels of participation, as reported by Krashen (1981), Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) Gregerson (2003), Liu and Jackson (2008) and many other researchers, and so the Creative English approach will be beneficial for learners over both the short and long term. Given that the Creative English facilitators are volunteers, one would expect that they are involved in the programme for reasons of altruism, and an underlying desire to help the programme participants, and this was reflected in the efforts the facilitators made to make learners feel welcome, and to encourage their participation in communicative tasks and activities.

From a teaching perspective, the Creative English approach can be considered as an innovative form of CLT – Communicative Language Teaching. CLT has been the mainstream approach in English-speaking countries since the 1980s, and syllabi created by the Council of Europe, for example, have been based on 'notions' (such as 'time' and 'space') and speech act functions as opposed to the more traditional categories of grammar and vocabulary. Nunan (1991) summarised five features of CLT:

1. An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language.
2. The introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation.
3. The provision of opportunities for learners to focus, not only on language but also on the learning process itself.
4. An enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning.
5. An attempt to link classroom language learning with language activities outside the classroom.

These features were clearly identifiable in the Creative English sessions that were observed, and in fact the learners were in constant communication of one form or another, either with each other while a facilitator or volunteer monitored, or with a facilitator individually, or participating in group activities. All communication involves some exchange of information, so communicative language teaching requires participants to have a genuine reason for interacting with each other, and to tell each other things that they do not already know. This is in contrast to traditional language classes where teachers ask 'display' questions and learners repeat information that the whole class shares. In the Creative English sessions learners had opportunities to communicate through a wide range of different activity types including:

- Role-play
- Interviews
- Games
- Surveys and questionnaires

- Pair-work and small group work
- Learning by teaching

### **The Role of the Facilitator**

In CLT the primary role of the teacher is to facilitate communication between all members of the class as they carry out various activities. The teacher sets up the activities – most often with learners working in pairs or small groups – and explains what the learners have to do, providing examples or models where necessary. Once the activity is under way, the teacher checks on individual pairs and small groups to see if they are communicating effectively and gives help where needed. ‘Learner-centredness’ and the minimisation of ‘TTT’ (teacher talking time) are fundamental considerations in the CLT approach, and the teacher’s role becomes one of being a ‘guide on the side’ as opposed to a ‘sage on the stage’ (King, 1993). Novice teachers, and perhaps also volunteer teachers who might worry about a lack of expertise to explain aspects of language such as grammar, may find this description of their role quite reassuring. They can focus more on ‘what’ is correct, and give learners opportunities to say it correctly, e.g. through modelling and drilling, without having to worry about giving in-depth explanations for ‘why’ it is correct. At higher levels of proficiency learners may begin to ask for explanations as to ‘why’, and may even use metalanguage terms that the teacher is unsure of (if he or she is new to language teaching) but at lower levels most learners are often content just to know what they can say in a given situation without worrying too much about analysing grammar.

The training the Creative English volunteers are receiving prepares them for a CLT-type teaching role, and, as mentioned previously, the approach itself is in harmony with ‘classic’ CLT but also brings its own advantages. These volunteers who deliver the course material are referred to throughout this piece as volunteer facilitators.

### **Volunteer Aptitude, Performance and Support**

The programme and its delivery are heavily reliant on the commitment and aptitude of the volunteer facilitators. The delivery and content of the sessions seemed to vary from hub to hub, based on the volunteers’ interpretations of the material they were working with, and the effectiveness and quality of the sessions observed depended very much on the aptitude, ability and preparedness of the volunteer facilitator – or facilitators. Very often there were 2 or 3 volunteer facilitators present in sessions, and while this often worked very well and added value to the session, it seemed to lead sometimes to a certain ‘disjointedness’ (more on this below). Some observed sessions were led by very effective facilitators, and the sessions were well structured and linked clearly to ‘the Street’ and the stories of the characters who reside there. There was clarity in the aims and objectives, the materials and props were used quite systematically, and there were links between sessions and between individual activities within the sessions. Other facilitators seemed less prepared and less confident with regard to using the materials and props, and did not refer much (or at all) to the Street and the characters. As a result some sessions flowed less smoothly and had a somewhat disjointed feel; learners seemed confused and unsure of what they had to do, and a major problem was that quite frequently what they were being asked to do was beyond their level of language proficiency. This could have a negative effect with regard to learner anxiety and confidence-building. These issues were far less prominent in sessions where the volunteer facilitators had undertaken the facilitator training, had taken time to prepare materials in advance, and had chosen materials from the Creative English books which were appropriate for the language levels of the learners in the room, as taught in the facilitator training. If these measures were taken by volunteer facilitators more consistently across the hubs – judging from our observations – the delivery would be enhanced for the programme as a whole.

At the end of the less-structured sessions, there was not much evidence that the learners had extended their English proficiency, and although the emphasis in the Creative English programme is placed on confidence-building rather than on the development of language proficiency, many of the learners observed had a pressing need to improve their language skills in order to cope with day-to-day communicative situations. If learners are given language tasks they can succeed in then this will itself feed into confidence-building. In the more clearly structured and consistent sessions, learners were able to effectively apply the language taught in that session by the end of each session.

The age and background of a volunteer facilitator sometimes seemed to lead to issues of ‘communication style’, and obviously personality is a factor in this too. Although there may sometimes not be a great deal

that can be done with regard to such issues, it may be worth raising volunteer facilitator awareness in some cases. It was noticed that on some occasions learners were spoken to in a way that could be thought slightly over directive. This is quite a common problem in many language teaching contexts, with teachers seeming to subconsciously equate a low level of foreign language proficiency with 'age', resulting in the teacher speaking to learners as if they were children. A comparison can be made with so-called 'elderspeak' – the affected style that some people use when speaking to older people.

FaithAction undertake regular visits, session observations and regional workshops with volunteers – 'hub huddles' – which are useful refreshers on top of the original training. Problems originating in facilitator approach and teaching 'style', such as those described above, could be fairly easily ironed out through more awareness raising at the hub huddle sessions and in other interactions between FaithAction and volunteer facilitators.

On the whole there was some excellent practice which led to very successful, well-run sessions and clearly positive outcomes for learners. Conversely, there was some less effective practice which meant that learners' experience was not as positive as it could have been and opportunities for them to achieve greater confidence and language progression could have been better exploited. As the programme is delivered by volunteer facilitators who often have very little prior experience of facilitation, training or teaching and have received only a small amount of training, some degree of variance in delivery standards should be reasonably expected. Putting more support in place to ensure that all volunteer facilitators take the training, understand the importance of preparation before sessions and have a strong enough understanding of the materials to be able to tailor them to the learners, would minimise the negative effects of this variance.

### **The Role of Materials and Methodology**

In some of the observed sessions there seemed to be differences between what is written in the teaching materials and what was delivered in the classroom. As mentioned above, sometimes facilitators seemed unsure of how the materials should be used, and quite often the tasks the learners were being asked to carry out were too difficult for them – both in terms of the level of language they were expected to understand and then use, and in the complexity of the tasks themselves. Sometimes the facilitators addressed this by deviating from the session plan and improvising with songs and games.

There is good potential in the use of props provided to the hubs, and in the storyline relating to the Street and its characters, but there was some inconsistency in the extent to which these were exploited. The props are a very useful tool and, where used appropriately, did seem to enhance the engagement of learners. In some sessions they were used a lot, while in others not at all and often the use of both the storylines/scenarios and props seemed to lead to learner confusion. The level of language the facilitators used was sometimes at the root of this; as mentioned previously, language was often pitched at levels above that which the learners could realistically cope with. This is an issue that occurs when mixed ability groups are taught together as the training materials cannot be expected to be pitched at the lowest possible level of learners. FaithAction are aware of this and will be addressing this in the future with additional training material.

The use of the labelled picture cards was much more consistent and provided a greater flexibility to tailor the session to the level of the learners, which was often below that required to comprehend the storylines/scenarios effectively. Some vocabulary items did not seem particularly useful for the learners, for example words such as *tousled*, which was introduced in a role-play task 'at the Hairdresser's'.

Sometimes the volunteer facilitators' use of modelling – demonstrating in their own speech and behaviour how the language is used – could have been enhanced through more repetition, more grading of language (in terms of complexity, pace of speech, and clarity of speech), and more opportunities for learners to repeat after the facilitator. The lack of clear demonstration – occasionally exacerbated by the fast pace of the session (see below) sometimes led to the learners being asked to carry out tasks and activities which they did not understand well enough to complete successfully. In role-plays, for example, sometimes the activities were explained in words but not in actions or with pictures, leaving the learners without an effective point of reference for following the role-play themselves. A cartoon strip or a series of vignettes could be a useful prompt in this respect. It might be worth creating picture sequences as a framework for more or less routine exchanges that only vary in quite predictable ways, such as buying tickets, checking prices or

greeting English-speaking acquaintances. These sort of exchanges could be practised on multiple occasions, to build fluency and confidence.

Clearly the choice of session topics is a key and distinguishing element of the programme. The remit to cover practical, everyday issues through the use of role-plays offers great potential for learners' integration and for success in daily transactional and interactional scenarios outside of the session. On some occasions with some groups of learners the topics covered did not seem to be immediately relevant. Having said this, from the perspective of facilitating integration – or at least increasing understanding and awareness of certain aspects of British culture – perhaps there is an argument for including some scenarios, but care should be taken to ensure that this is not at expense of the effectiveness of the teaching and that some things discussed that learners may have little to no awareness of (such as when two newlyweds go on honeymoon) are clearly explained so as to avoid confusion.

As mentioned previously, the main focus of the programme is confidence-building, with the aim of facilitating more effective integration and social mobility. While the development of language proficiency is not an overriding aim, a little more attention paid to the learners' linguistic performance may actually contribute in both the short and long term towards the development of their confidence and readiness to communicate in English across a range of real-life situations. Although language is of course too large a subject to cover in one day, and 'grammar', particularly, is usually the aspect of language that even trained language teachers feel most apprehensive about dealing with, if the hubs could be provided with a reference book such as *Grammar for English Language Teachers* (Parrott 2010) or *Essential Grammar in Use* (Murphy 2007) then at least the volunteer facilitators could look up explanations about language 'on-the-spot' should the need arise. It is quite probable that learners would appreciate at least some explicit focus, however ad hoc, on aspects of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, as they may well see this as a priority in their attendance at the classes (and language progress will feed back into their confidence). This idea was discussed with FaithAction by the evaluation team during the evaluation process. Whilst acknowledging that grammar proficiency is not a priority for this programme, FaithAction has responded to this finding by producing a grammar guide which is now in use across the programme.

### **Learners' Proficiency Levels and Progression**

The Creative English sessions are attended by learners with quite a wide range of proficiency levels from 'very limited' (people who may have arrived in Britain very recently) to 'intermediate' (often people who have lived in Britain for quite some time, but sometimes new arrivals who have reached good levels of proficiency through schooling in their countries of origin). The language level of the majority of learners is 'limited' or 'very limited'. Often there is a commonly spoken language between the learners, which some facilitators use to their advantage by asking the more proficient English speakers to act as informal interpreters for the rest of the group. This can be useful in many instances but it is also possible for learners with lower levels of proficiency to feel inhibited about speaking in front of other class members who are at higher levels; this may have a negative effect on confidence-building. However, we should expect any group of learners to acquire new language items at different rates, because of their differing educational backgrounds, differing learning styles and preferred learning strategies, and affective factors such as levels of anxiety and motivation.

It was decided to measure the extent to which facilitators at the hubs would agree in their evaluations of learners' language levels. The ambition of the original methodology was to measure the progression of learner's English language skills by a process of observation and interviews throughout their time on the Creative English course, following the progress of individual learners through the sessions. The nature of the course, however, meant that in practice, attendance from specific individuals could not be predicted or guaranteed. Coupled with budgetary and time constraints that limited the number of visits that could be made to hubs, the original planned measurement of progression became not practically viable. Furthermore, once in the research environment, the research team had concerns about the negative effects for learners of asking them to undergo tests on their language ability, going against the informal and fun nature of the programme, and so the research methodology was amended in consultation with FaithAction. In short, once we learned more about the programme, the potentially negative impacts of the original proposed methods for the learners and the wider programme seemed to outweigh the potential benefits for the research process.

For these reasons an alternative approach was developed that did not directly involve learners, based on the English Language Learner Questionnaire. All hubs are required to complete this for all learners and to return the information to FaithAction and facilitators are asked to estimate the learner's English language abilities when they attend their first session and when they have attended 10 sessions. Learners' abilities are ranked as 'Very Limited', 'Basic', 'Intermediate' or 'Advanced' on both occasions.

A range of imaginary learner profiles based on 'can do' statements was provided in a survey for evaluation purposes and the volunteer facilitators were asked to place them in the bands 'very limited'; 'limited'; 'basic'; and 'intermediate'. These bands differ from those used in Creative English and align with more standardised ESOL tests. While there was agreement on some of the learner profiles, there was not always a clear consensus as to which band the learner should be placed in in others. This is not surprising if one considers that many of the facilitators are new to English teaching and will not have much experience of communicating with many different learners and, on the basis of this, of evaluating their levels of proficiency. The task was made more challenging by the use of a different grading system and this may have caused a degree of confusion. It would though be helpful going forward to further develop the facilitators' ability to judge the proficiency level of participants so that they can interact with them appropriately, stretching the most proficient without having unrealistic expectations of those at lower levels.

In most cases, however, noticeable progress was being made by learners, in proficiency, willingness to use English, and in their confidence in and outside of class. It was pleasing to hear regular anecdotes from learners, and facilitators, of learners using the language learnt during the programme in new, practical situations outside of the classroom, for example being able to buy clothes for their children, speaking with household repair technicians, and so on. These findings are also supported by data recorded at hub level in the English Language Learner Questionnaire.

## **Strategic and Operational Analysis**

This final section provides insight into the strategy and operations of Creative English: the essence of how the programme provides services and delivers value. The aim of the section is to provide an analysis of the programme's strengths and weaknesses, through defining, exploring and critically analysing the programme's business model, leading to a discussion of how and how effectively value is created for key stakeholder groups. The section concludes by presenting the distinctive characteristics of the programme and potential areas for improvement in the future.

### **The Creative English Business Model**

A business model is a description of how an organisation works including who its customers are, what value they want from the organisation and how that value is provided (Magretta 2002). To begin this section's analysis, this first area of focus uses a visual tool, the 'business model canvas' (Osterwalder and Pigneur 2010, Strategyzer.com), to provide an overview of the key components of the Creative English Programme and how those components interact with each other. The original version of the below canvas is [available here](#) or at Prezi.com for reference.



# Business Model Canvas for Creative English

<b>Key Partners</b>  36 Creative English Hubs <i>(local faith-based organisations)</i>  Referral Partners  National Network of Faith-based Organisations  UK Government	<b>Key Activities</b> Community-based English language teaching Learner recruitment and marketing Monitoring and reporting Partner liaison and support Volunteer training  <b>Key Resources</b> Teachers/volunteers Teaching materials Community venues Website and marketing materials	<b>Value Propositions</b>  <div>Increased confidence and practical English language proficiency</div> <div>Fun, accessible, flexible and welcoming classes</div> <div>High quality, cost-effective English-language provision aimed at social mobility and migrant integration leading to a financially sustainable service</div>	<b>Customer Relationships</b> Relationships with learners are maintained by facilitators and hub staff through word of mouth, website and publicity material  Contract management and reporting forms relationship with funders  <b>Channels</b> <b>Classroom delivery</b> The primary delivery channel is face-to-face in the learning environment provided by the hubs.  The nature of the settings differs from hub to hub although they are usually based in or around places of worship	<b>Customer Segments</b>  Learners <i>People with little or no English language skills</i>  <div>Service Users</div> <div>Funders</div> Department for Communities and Local Government  <i>Commissioners of community-based English language provision</i>
<b>Costs</b>  Original approximate cost per hub, including Creative English 'start up' costs, in first phase* <b>£15,000</b>  Approximate ongoing costs per hub after first phase (materials and training, exc. FaithAction support costs) <b>£1,000</b>		<b>Funding sources</b>  Fully-funded programme supported by the Department for Communities and Local Government <b>£1.25m</b>  Future funding from hubs provided through a licensing model <b>£1,500 per 12 month license</b>		

\*This figure includes the start-up costs associated with the programme including the following:

- Creation of course materials
- Sourcing training kits, finding hubs, referral partners and forming contracts with them
- Conducting monitoring and evaluation trips
- Paying for the database
- Staff training
- Administering the Innovation fund (discussed below)
- Running hub huddles
- Setting up newsletters and communication methods
- Providing tablet computers for all hubs
- Related equipment for the central office

Expanding on the overview provided here, the description below discusses the key elements of the programme's business model, leading to an analysis of how value is created for key stakeholders.

## Partners, Activities and Resources

The upper left-hand side of the canvas shows the key elements of the programme's inner workings. The programme operates with FaithAction as the lead, national organising body, designing the course structure and content, overseeing the programme's delivery at a strategic level, providing learning materials, coordinating national marketing and communicating impact and results.

Central to delivery are 36 local, faith-based organisations (referred to as 'hubs') delivering Creative English courses in local community venues across England and responsible for the programme's primary activity of English language teaching. FaithAction is responsible for overseeing the work of the hubs and providing training, support, monitoring and funding to enable them to deliver the programme. In exchange, the hubs are required to report periodically on learners' progress and to take responsibility for the logistics of delivering the courses locally, including providing venues, organising sessions, recruiting learners and volunteer facilitators, marketing the course in local areas, etc.



Referral partners – organisations with strong local links in the community and faith-based sector – have a distinctive role within the programme, receiving funding to enable FaithAction to establish relationships with hubs in key locations where necessary, allowing the programme to set up very quickly in local areas – providing an especially important capability at the beginning of the programme when FaithAction were required to set up courses within short timescales.

### Service Users, Funders and Relationships

On the upper right-hand side, the canvas sets out the programme's external relationships with 'customers', which can be split into two distinct groups: English language learners and DCLG. The business model canvas uses the term 'customer segment'; as with many public and charitable services, however, there is a clear difference between those who use the service and those who fund the service. For this reason, the terms of 'service user' and 'funder' have been introduced to provide clarity and demonstrate how the programme's operations serve the needs of each group respectively.

This difference between funder and user is a common characteristic of government funded programmes and has direct implications for a business model. For example, programmes are required to manage and maintain two different but equally important sets of external relationships and invest resource in communicating and working in different ways with each group. The Creative English programme deals with this through using a clear division of labour, with FaithAction taking the lead in maintaining relationships with funders, enabling the local hubs to focus on providing delivery channels (learning environments) for and building relationships with learners (local marketing and publicity, one-to-one relationships between facilitators, etc.). Effective partnership working and strong internal relationships are therefore vital to the success of the programme, a reoccurring theme throughout the programme's business model.

### Creating and Enhancing Value

Central to all business models are value propositions – the bundles of benefits that the programme offers to 'customers' to meet their needs and the reason that people would choose one service over another similar service. Exploring the value desired by customers' and analysing how well that has been delivered allows the effectiveness of the Creative English business model to be discussed. The value created can best be explored by looking at the benefits for each group: funders, learners, hubs and volunteers.

#### Funders

DCLG are the original commissioners of Creative English, funding the programme within the remit of the government's aims around social integration, social mobility and increasing access to English language learning provision in the UK. The original commissioning process chose 6 programmes to fund – of which Creative English was one – from a £6million budget, out of bids from more than 100 providers. Interviews with DCLG representatives provided insight on the rationale behind funding the Creative English Programme over other programmes, including the key criteria involved in the decision-making process which demonstrate well the value of the programme for its funders.

It is clear from the interview data that value for DCLG is strongly linked to the **quality of the service** provided by the programme, specifically the innovative nature of the methods used, the ability of the Creative English programme to have a positive impact on learners' social mobility, integration and English-language proficiency and the ability to reach and engage with people who have not previously engaged in English language provision in the UK. Whilst, throughout the interviews, the desire to increase the confidence of learners was not discussed, FaithAction representatives see the programme's ability to achieve this as a necessary precursor to the wider aims discussed above.

Second, and very much linked to the above point, was the cost effectiveness of the programme, which, for DCLG representatives, is derived from Creative English's ability to mobilise partnerships with faith-based organisations to deliver value for money in comparison to traditional ESOL provision, including using often underutilised venues, existing local connections in communities (related to the reach and access discussed above) and other resources of local faith-based organisations as well as delivering through volunteers.

Thirdly, the programme's plans to be **financially sustainable** beyond the initial funding cycle were seen as highly valuable for DCLG, based on the intention to offer a franchise version of the programme which would attract funding from local partners and continue the delivery after the initial contract.

For DCLG, the business model has delivered value very effectively. As discussed in previous sections of this report, progression records show very clearly that the programme has performed excellently against the aims of the contract, showing that the desired impact for learners has been delivered as per the contracted targets, and within budget.

The programme's cost effectiveness and financial sustainability are clearly linked: basic laws of economics suggest that low operating costs should lead to higher demand for the service in the future. The government made a significant initial investment in the programme which covered the cost of the 'start-up' period – often the most cost-intensive part of an organisation's life cycle – including capital spending on physical materials, course material creation, staffing and other direct costs. The average cost per hub for the programme's initial period was around £15,000, including the list of costs associated with the start-up period above (creation of course materials, sourcing training kits, finding hubs, tablet computers, etc.). In the latest phase of the programme, this cost has reduced to approximately £1000 due to the ongoing operating costs being much lower than those in the pilot phase. As described in the above canvas, the latter figure does not include many of the costs involved for FaithAction in supporting the programme and only relates to the course materials and volunteer facilitator training, so the actual cost to FaithAction is higher.

The government's investment has dramatically increased the programme's potential sustainability by subsidising initial costs, thereby reducing the future cost of delivery which makes the course far more affordable for potential future delivery agents. As a result of this, FaithAction have recently launched the Creative English Alliance, a venture which offers twelve-month licences to provide the course to organisations for the standard price of £1500. Whilst it is too early to judge the success of this most recent venture, the value created for the government from their initial investment is clearly very strong. DCLG have catalysed the ongoing provision of a course with a proven record of delivering public value, which would almost certainly not be commercially viable without an initial subsidy and now has the opportunity and plans to become self-sufficient. This franchising venture, and possible ways to enhance it for future hubs, is discussed further below.

Finally, linked to the quality, cost-effectiveness and sustainability of Creative English discussed above is FaithAction's core competency of **flexibility** which, throughout the evaluation, has ensured that maximum value has been delivered for the funder (and for other stakeholders). During the evaluation period, there have been a number of significant shifts in the context of the programme, including issues with hubs and other partners, significant staffing changes and contractual and reporting issues. FaithAction have shown at every stage an ability to adapt where necessary and respond effectively to challenges whilst protecting the level of quality in delivery. An example of this comes from FaithAction's close and regular work with the evaluation team for this project. On FaithAction's request, many of the key evaluation findings have already been reported verbally to the FaithAction team who have amended their practice to reflect a number of the recommendations. One example is the recommendation to provide more guidance around grammar for facilitators, as discussed in the Teaching and Language section of this report, which FaithAction have already responded to by creating a basic grammar guide which is now in use. This flexibility and commitment to providing a quality service has undoubtedly added value for the funder, ensuring that the programme has delivered against and over its original impact targets, despite change and operational challenges.

### Learners

The success of the programme in attracting learners shows that there is a clear value proposition for Creative English's service users. Data collected during time spent at hubs before, during and after classes, in brief chats with learners and more lengthy conversations with staff and volunteers, has provided a wealth of insight into why people are attracted to and attend classes, over and above the desire to learn English and attend a free course.

For learners, who are typically migrants with limited English language ability living in the respective local areas of hubs, they choose to attend Creative English over other activities and similar courses for the following reasons:

- **'They need to feel comfortable here. It's a safe space'** (volunteer facilitator, Midlands hub)  
Course delivery is often tailored to the needs of people in the immediate local area, including many that are run as 'women only' (as discussed in previous sections), creating an environment which feels safe,

welcoming and accessible for people who have not engaged in more traditional English language provision. Volunteers in every hub noted that the ability to match the delivery and environment of the classes to the needs of those in the room was a key factor in making people feel welcome and comfortable and ‘not scaring them off’ (volunteer facilitator, Midlands hub).

- **‘...some ... [learners] ...come because they know we’re part of the Church and they have lots of trust in the Church’** (volunteer facilitator, Midlands hub)

The involvement of faith groups in delivering classes was often discussed as a factor in people’s attendance. As discussed in Section 2, learners’ level of trust in faith institutions in comparison to other providers, often not contingent on whether the hub’s religious identity matched their own, was a reoccurring theme across case study sites; it was felt that many learners would prefer to attend a course in a Christian or Sikh community centre, for example, than an adult education college or similar secular venue.

- **‘Learner was able to buy her children clothes in a new shop’** (an example of a ‘positive story’ from a volunteer facilitator during a regional ‘hub huddle’)

The focus in Creative English on language which has an immediate relevance and ‘everyday focus’, using themes such as schooling, doctor appointments, shopping, buying insurance, etc. was seen as a key factor in retaining learners and a differentiating factor from other English language learning provision.

- **‘Their confidence goes up every week’** (volunteer facilitator, Midlands hub)

More emphasis is placed on raising the confidence of learners through providing informal, entertaining, physically active sessions rather than more formal language teaching that is more concerned with increasing technical proficiency (grammar, vocabulary, etc.); this was also seen as a key reason for learners returning to sessions. The ethos of the programme is based on the idea that while language proficiency is important, a learner can have a good degree of proficiency but not have the confidence to use it – the value of this ethos to learners is clearly very strong for learners.

- **‘...each lesson stands alone so it is ideal for people who drop in and out’** (‘Up Our Street’ community newsletter, May 2015)

The programme’s flexible structure was often described as a reason people were able to attend, including the ability for learners to miss individual sessions when necessary and not be disadvantaged in the following session and for timings to be scheduled around the needs of learners, for example: one class which changed its initial schedule to accommodate ‘the school run’. The programme is able respond flexibly to the needs and nature of the group – a key strength in removing barriers to attendance for learners who have not previously engaged in English language learning provision.

These were commonly cited factors across all case study sites and were seen as the most important factors by volunteers in the recruitment and retention of learners. The data does not, however, allow us to rank these factors by importance to learners – as we were able to above with DCLG – or more comprehensively verify the importance of these factors for their involvement. This is mostly because of language barriers between researchers and learners, making lengthy conversations and more extensive or interactive activities not practically viable.

The value proposition described here is clearly attractive for Creative English’s service users, with the key characteristics of the course helping to overcome some of the traditional barriers to attendance, such as timing and location. As discussed above, the programme has been highly successful in attracting and retaining learners, verified not just by attendance and progression statistics but also a multitude of recorded success stories and learner feedback comments relating to the factors above.

As stated in the Teaching and Language section, however, there are a number of key areas where the value for learners could be increased, primarily through enhancing the standard and consistency of teaching, such as more small-group work to enhance the confidence building element, ensuring that all volunteer facilitators have attended training sessions (for example, by making the hub’s funding or licence contingent on their attendance) and understand how to use the materials and the importance of preparation before sessions, and enhancing the facilitators’ ability to effectively grade students. In general, the

performance data collected by the programme shows that the value proposition and business model is strong; evidence from observations verifies this for the most part but also suggests that the value for learners could be improved. Recommendations from the Teaching and Language section demonstrate ways in which this can be achieved.

### Hubs

Whilst the business model canvas makes clear that the key customer segments are the programme's funders and service users, Creative English also provides a range of benefits to its internal stakeholders (those involved in delivering the programme) – particularly the local faith-based organisations taking the position of hubs. With the discussion of the business model above showing that partnership is integral to the successful delivery of the programme, it is important to assess how value is created for these organisations.

From data gathered during visits and discussions with volunteer facilitators and hub representatives, the following benefits – beyond the initial funding available to run the course – are offered to faith-based organisations involved in delivering the programme:

- **Reach:** the programme attracts people to community centres, increasing visitor footfall and providing opportunities to signpost learners to other services offered, strengthening their overall work in the local community.
- **Diversification:** the programme provides the opportunity for organisations to gain experience in delivering English language courses and to be involved in delivering a government-recognised programme. This provides access to national networking opportunities and a degree of esteem, particularly for less established organisations, from being part of an approved and legitimate national scheme, potentially leading to further work in language teaching and with migrants.
- **Support:** FaithAction provide a package of support, advice, volunteer training, visits and marketing materials which reduces much of the burden of starting a course. On top of this, FaithAction have also provided an 'Innovation Fund' to hubs, offering additional funding for those looking to deliver sustainable projects which teach English in a creative way.

All three of these points were featured in conversations with hub representatives repeatedly during visits; the factor which was most often discussed, however, was the support provided by FaithAction. Many used words to the effect of 'FaithAction were a great help' (hub staff member, Midlands hub) in supporting the hub to start delivery, and some, particularly from the larger community centres, cited the level of care and support provided throughout the programme, valuing regular one-to-one communication with key FaithAction staff members.

There were many comments, however, concerning the level of administrative input required from the hub in delivering the programme, particularly in relation to reporting requirements. To support hubs in this administrative activity, FaithAction provided a grant of £5000 which was nominally allocated to this, as well as a tablet computer to facilitate data input. FaithAction also provided support and monitoring through a fortnightly phone call to every hub and visits during Creative English sessions.

From the data gathered during visits, there seemed to be a clear difference between the more established hubs (larger facilities offering multiple regular services and with a larger staff) visited and the less established hubs (smaller, more informal or newer organisations with fewer existing staff members) in relation to the performance of administrative duties and in the nature of the relationship with FaithAction. The former did not report any issues during visits with recruiting learners, marketing, back-office course administration and regular reporting of performance and also described strong relationships with FaithAction, including regular and useful communication. Often, these larger organisations spent some of the FaithAction grant on back-office administration, enabling them to keep these tasks separate to the role of the volunteer facilitators and often providing a more regular and readily available point of contact for the programme, allowing them to maintain a positive and consistent relationship with the learners and FaithAction.

The latter group did not seem to have as much positive or regular contact with FaithAction, outside of complying with reporting requests and receiving monitoring visits, and seemed to struggle more with the administrative requirements of the course, often recruiting lower numbers of learners (in case study sites) and, in some cases, cancelling classes at short notice. In these cases, a smaller amount of the grant from

FaithAction was spent on providing additional back-office administrative staff, meaning that administrative tasks – such as data reporting – were often left to the volunteer facilitators. FaithAction has reported that their attempts to contact the smaller hubs were often less successful, with the point of contact being difficult to reach either because of a lack of administrative staff in the office or because the point of contact was the volunteer facilitator who was often hard to reach because of existing commitments.

The sample size of hubs visited was not large enough to be able to make a definitive generalisation about the whole programme but, from the case studies included, the running of the courses seemed much more professional when delivered by more established organisations and the relationship with FaithAction seemed to be more positive, also. A key factor here seems to be the provision of back-office functions to support the programme, removing these duties from the role of the volunteer facilitator.

It is clear from comments made during visits to most case study hubs that the support from FaithAction is very much appreciated and important in the process of establishing courses. The value brought by this, however, could perhaps be enhanced through reviewing the frequency and type of communication between FaithAction and smaller, less established hubs and, where required, providing a greater level of support. This should, however, be accompanied by guidance issued to hubs advising them to allocate clear administrative support in the running of Creative English as this has been seen to enhance the quality of delivery and the effectiveness of the relationship with and support provided by FaithAction.

### Volunteers

The idea of viewing volunteers as customers is a well-established concept in academic literature (Keaveney, Saltzman and Sullivan 1991), discussing the volunteer experience as the service, 'paid for' with donated time and energy, providing a responsibility for the organisation to design and deliver a valuable volunteer experience. Within the Creative English programme, volunteers have a crucial role in the delivery and, as described in the business model above and the Teaching and Language section, a great deal of the quality of the service provided to learners hinges on their input.

From visits and discussions with volunteers in the programme, we have found lots of stories of transformation and success for individuals as a result of being involved, showing clear value for volunteers. Some have found the programme to be a great opportunity to, for example, use their previous professional experience during gaps in work or retirement or gain experience for a potential future career as a teacher or community worker, on top of finding taking part in the programme and working with learners very enjoyable and rewarding. There are also many examples of learners with more advanced English progressing to take the role of volunteers, using their increased confidence and skills to help teach the course. Central to the value gained from these benefits, as evidenced in the data collected, has been the encouragement and support provided by the local hub, the training, materials and support provided by FaithAction and the flexibility of the programme structure, making it easier for volunteers to take part around other commitments and take an effective level of ownership of the programme.

Many volunteer facilitators, however, reported a common theme of the challenges associated with course administration and reporting as a key downside to being involved. One volunteer noted that it was often 'a bit overwhelming' and that volunteers '...just don't have the time to do the reports, do the course prep, speak to the learners and run the classes' (Midlands hub). Again, as described above, however, this negative feeling towards the course administration was reported more by volunteer facilitators working at less established, smaller organisations. In the larger organisations, tasks were often shared amongst hub staff members and less input was expected from volunteers in this respect. This point is related to that discussed above regarding hubs and administrative duties, adding further weight to the argument for separating the bulk of administrative tasks from the role of the volunteer facilitator.

Here, there is perhaps also room for FaithAction to enhance the value of the course for volunteer facilitators by increasing the contact, support and supervision provided directly to volunteers, ensuring that the volunteer experience remains positive throughout and allowing greater feedback from volunteers to inform the programme. For example, if the volunteer is finding the delivery difficult because of administrative duties, being able to discuss this with FaithAction in regular supervision sessions or conversations could enhance the experience for the volunteer in itself and would also make FaithAction aware of the challenges of delivery for that person, giving the FaithAction team the opportunity to provide additional support where necessary to the hub and volunteer facilitator. With the quality of delivery so dependent on the volunteer

facilitator, enhancing the value of the programme for this group would have a positive effect on the programme as a whole; a greater focus on the volunteer experience would help in achieving this.

### **Key Strengths and Distinctive Characteristics**

Throughout the above analysis, a number of key strengths of the programme are discussed which seem to be relevant to every aspect of the programme and, when combined, make the programme distinctive. These are as follows:

#### Partnership

Creative English's entire business model is based on a partnership approach. Most of its key resources and key activities are provided and delivered by partners. The programme relies on local faith-based organisations to create delivery channels, build relationships with service users and, ultimately, be the face of the brand at the point of use. The programme's cost effectiveness and innovation, key sources of value for DCLG, stem from its ability to deliver high quality services through partnerships with local organisations. Partnership is key to many government funded programmes and is an important feature of work in the faith sector (Local Government Association 2012); for Creative English, however, it is more than an important feature: the programme's whole approach is reliant on its ability to manage and mobilise effective partnerships. Its proven ability to do this effectively and flexibly is a key strength of Creative English.

#### Volunteering

The role of volunteering is critical for much of the programme. Not only do volunteers allow the programme to achieve its aim of being cost effective but the inclusion of and development opportunities for volunteers also significantly enhances the public value of the programme. The quality of service provided by the programme is largely dependent on the skills, energy and commitment of individual volunteers who, whilst receiving training and regular support from FaithAction and hubs, are required to take on the responsibility for almost every aspect of the delivery. Many programmes involve volunteering but Creative English, distinctively, provides a very high degree of flexibility and ownership to volunteers over the programme, ensuring that they are able to deliver a course which suits them, their learners and their local area.

#### Faith

The role of faith runs throughout almost every element of the programme. The course is both administered and delivered by faith-based organisations with strong and, often, historic connections within local areas. In almost every visit made to case study sites, the role of faith was discussed and is clearly central not just to the business model but to the ethos and culture of programme. As discussed above, it is felt that many learners feel a greater level of trust in faith groups over secular services and choose Creative English because it is delivered in faith-based venues and by faith-based organisations.

#### Fun

Central to the value proposition for learners is the fact that the programme is fun to take part in. In almost every session attended by researchers, learners and volunteers had the opportunity to use props, wear fancy dress, pretend to be fictional characters or sing songs. Many courses also have a very family or child friendly atmosphere, with learners often bringing their children to classes and whole families attending graduation ceremonies to watch learners receive certificates of attendance. Whilst many of these aspects are not unique to Creative English, the combination of these factors and the commitment of the programme to ensure that learning is fun for everyone, including volunteers, is certainly distinctive and, judging from learner feedback, seems to be a key reason for people to keep attending.

### **Improving the Business Model**

The analysis of the business model above has provided two key areas where the data suggests that there are either weaknesses in the programme's delivery or potential opportunities to enhance the programme's success and sustainability in the future. These are discussed below, with relevance to launch of the Creative English Alliance where appropriate.

#### *Support from FaithAction:*

Within the Creative English Alliance, the sustainability of the programme is largely contingent on FaithAction being able to deliver (and market) the value of the programme to organisations. Clearly the low cost of the programme is an advantage, as are the key characteristics above and the successful track-record of impact shown throughout this report. This section notes, however, that there are potential ways to enhance that



value for prospective hubs by ensuring that a greater level of support and guidance is provided throughout delivery. Whilst many more established hubs noted positive relationships with FaithAction, others reported struggling with aspects of recruitment, administration and delivery and less positive and consistent relationships with FaithAction. The business model here could perhaps be improved through reviewing FaithAction's relationships and communication methods with smaller hubs and, as a result, potentially offering a greater package of support to these hubs than provided to the more established ones. This could include more face-to-face visits and more and different ways of regular contact with hubs. FaithAction has acknowledged that the reach and involvement of smaller hubs is important to the ethos and delivery of the programme; for these organisations to be an effective part of the programme, it should be recognised that FaithAction's relationships with these hubs are likely to be more resource intensive than those with larger hubs, in order to ensure positive relationships and a consistent standard of delivery across the programme.

On top of this suggested change, there are also potential ways of enhancing the value of the programme for future hubs within the Creative English Alliance model by offering a package of support to prospective hubs that both enhances their ability to manage and deliver the programme and offers wider, strategic benefits to organisations. This could include some of the following (depending on resource availability within FaithAction):

- A face-to-face introduction to the course for hub staff perhaps within a workshop format with staff from other hubs
- An offer of joint volunteer supervision between FaithAction and hubs
- An element of project management training
- Regular networking opportunities to enhance organisation's regional or national profile
- FaithAction network membership (and clear marketing of the benefits of this)
- Joint web and social media marketing activity with FaithAction (for example, a page of the website, a guest blog or 'take-over' on FaithAction social media accounts)

#### *Support for Volunteers*

As discussed above, volunteering is a key characteristic of the programme. There is a need for more support and closer, more direct relationships with volunteers from FaithAction in order to ensure a positive volunteer experience as well as safeguard the quality of service provision. More could also be done to recognise and report the volunteer experience in the programme, as the value of volunteering in the programme for individuals is very strong and recording this would provide positive stories for the marketing of the programme as well as providing additional profile and recognition for the volunteers.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The Creative English programme is making a positive difference to the lives of low- and intermediate-proficiency speakers of English. They are made welcome in an accessible, friendly, fun environment and are given the opportunity to mix with other learners outside their own immediate family group, as well as being given the chance to improve their English language skills. The research process has found evidence that the programme is providing a valuable stepping stone towards greater engagement with the wider community and, in some cases, further training and increased employability. Here there is a clear synthesis with the overarching aims of enabling integration and promoting social mobility.

The programme has over-achieved, and in some cases significantly, with regards to all metrics related to learners engaged, learners completing and a range of progressions. Some of this success can be credited to the programme being well designed to engage effectively with those who would not normally attend traditional English language course provision. The success is also due in no small part, however, to the unwavering efforts and dedication of the FaithAction team. Creative English was launched as a national programme without first running a small scale pilot and sessions needed to be learned and acted upon en route. Working in a flexible and adaptive manner, FaithAction have addressed criticisms and concerns as and when they arose throughout the evaluation process and have dealt with a range of shifts and challenges within the delivery also, leading to the positive outcomes that this report finds.

FaithAction now have a tested service with a proven track record of impact, fitting into both a supportive faith sector and government aims to employ this sector in public service delivery. The recent launch of the Creative English Alliance demonstrates well the potential sustainability of the programme for the future.

This report's key finding is that the core aims and values of the programme should continue unchanged, along with the underlying methodology which characterises the programme. Creative English should continue to revolve around the cast of fictional characters and related activities. To further enhance levels of success, however, this report suggests some potentially valuable adjustments to these activities, including the recommendations below:

- Learners should be given more opportunities to contribute to session content, for example by providing information about their own family life, habits and personal preferences. This is likely to help make sessions even more relevant and motivating, and would provide opportunities for all participants, including volunteer facilitators, to learn more about each other's lives.
- Less emphasis should be placed on performance in front of the entire class, and more time should be devoted to work in pairs and small groups. This might allow learners more talking time, and cater for individual differences more effectively.
- Tutors should be asked to follow a standard template so that the structure of every session becomes familiar to learners. Sessions might always contain the same sort of starting and concluding routines, with only slight variations from week to week, for example. This might be a recap of the same basic facts about the cast of characters, and/or the use of the same series of questions to elicit the same sort of information about the learners' daily lives. This repetition will help learners to acquire, retain and produce more fluent language sequences. The familiarity of the routine will also help to increase their confidence, and might reassure participants who do not regularly attend, but who drop in from time to time.
- The issues of 'grading language' and certain common 'volunteer facilitator behaviours' should be raised with the volunteer facilitators at the hub huddles and made a more prominent feature of the volunteer training programme, with the aim of ensuring that language and tasks are always pitched at an appropriate level for the learners. If learners can be given tasks that they are more likely to be able to complete successfully, then this will have a marked effect on the development of their confidence.
- A closer working relationship with volunteers should be sought by FaithAction, providing more support and communication and more focus on the volunteer experience as a Creative English 'customer'.
- Related to the above, data should be recorded to capture the journeys of the volunteers particularly when people progress from learner to volunteer as this is an especially strong element of the programme and one that is not currently recorded.
- FaithAction should review their engagement with hubs, with a particular focus on their relationships with smaller, less established organisations, to ensure that the appropriate level of support is provided across the programme and that the delivery of Creative English remains consistent and high quality in all locations.

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**Creative English was developed by FaithAction. It is based on Dr. Anne Smith's thesis refined during her PhD at Queen Mary University of London. It is based on the theory that drama-based facilitation increases a sense of belonging and therefore helps participants to learn at a quicker rate.**

The programme, funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government for two years, has reached over 2,400 people across the UK. 100% of those who completed 10 or more sessions of the course told us that their confidence improved.



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