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Talent Match Evaluation: Youth Employment Partnerships



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Peter Wells (Evaluation Director) and Sarah Pearson (Evaluation Project Manager)

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Summary

Introduction

Partnership working is a key feature of Talent Match. This report reviews the experience of the 21 Talent Match partnerships: it explores the models of partnership which emerged, the involvement of different stakeholders, the role of young people involved in partnership, and the drivers and constraints to partnership working.

The report draws on evidence gathered as part of an extensive longitudinal evaluation of the programme, including three waves of visits to each Talent Match partnership and three parallel surveys of partnership organisations and their delivery partners. The findings and recommendations from this report are intended for policy makers and practitioners working at national and local levels.

About Talent Match

Talent Match is a £106 million programme funded by the Big Lottery Fund to address unemployment amongst 18-24 year olds. It is being delivered using National Lottery funding between 2014 and 2018 through partnerships in 21 Local Enterprise Partnership areas in England. The programme seeks to support young people who are furthest from the labour market through personalised, flexible provision which addresses their needs and aspirations. Participation in the programme is voluntary. Talent Match has been co-designed by and is co-delivered with young people.

Context

Talent Match was launched in 2012 at a time of considerable institutional turbulence at a local and sub-regional level in England. Local Enterprise Partnerships had only just been established and new funding programmes, whether the Department of Work and Pension's Work Programme or devolved arrangements, were only just coming on stream.

The programme required partnerships to form at a Local Enterprise Partnerships area level and for these partnerships to then develop funding proposals to the Big Lottery Fund.

Main Findings

A number of themes have emerged from the evaluation:

- **Partnership was a requirement of Talent Match funding.** All partnerships reported that they were operating in a turbulent policy environment. Prior experience of partnership working helped some areas to start delivery quickly.
- **Skills required of Lead Partners.** The skills and capacity of the lead partners to navigate, and exploit, complex local governance networks was consistently identified (across the waves of research) as key to facilitating delivery. No consistent evidence was found to suggest that the 'type' or focus of the lead organisation (whether a

CVS/infrastructure organisation or youth work organisation) matters to the delivery of the Talent Match programme.

- **Involving Young People.** The involvement of young people has been a defining feature of the Talent Match programme. The majority of partnerships have identified youth involvement as a key feature that has assisted partnership working and delivery. For effective youth involvement the purpose of involvement needed to be clearly defined, and understood by all partners. In addition lead and delivery organisations needed to have the skills (or be supported to develop the skills) for meaningful youth involvement.
- **Legacy.** There is encouraging evidence on the legacy of partnership working. In the majority of areas, partnerships anticipate continuing to shape local employment services for young people. A key legacy of Talent Match can be seen to be the sustained collaboration between organisations.

We found that partnership on its own does not guarantee successful outcomes for young people such as employment or improved well-being. Nonetheless is a component of an effective programme, alongside factors such as the project quality, the characteristics of young people, or the local labour market context.

What are the drivers and constraints of partnership working?

Enabling factors:

- **Quality of partnership leads:** Partnership leads play a key role in setting the tone and direction for the partnership, managing relationships between partners (both strategic and delivery partners) and acting as an ‘independent broker’ in driving the local Talent Match programmes forward.
- **Previous experience of partnership working:** In some cases the organisations concerned had previous experience of partnership working and were able to translate this to Talent Match. For partnership leads previous experience of partnership working was important – and if it was in the same local area often they were able to utilise their existing contacts to benefit Talent Match.
- **Involvement of young people:** Several partnerships highlighted the important contribution made by young people in bringing a different dynamic to partnerships. The ‘lived experience’ of young people seeking employment helped shape the nature and delivery of Talent Match activities, and indeed delivery partners. Examples included the involvement of young people in interview panels for the selection of delivery partners, their role as peer mentors and in challenging assumptions of voluntary and statutory organisations around the needs of young people.
- **Test and learn:** In partnership visits a common refrain from interviewees was the value of ‘test and learn’. This enabled partnerships to adapt activities which were not working, and to try new ones. More generally this provided a positive atmosphere for partnership working that was rather different from those previously experienced.

Constraining factors:

- **Long lead in period to Talent Match going ‘live’:** Talent Match was characterised by a long lead in period of at least 12 months. This was reflected in staff turnover before the delivery phase began, difficulties sustaining the engagement of local partners (especially employers) and changes in local area need.
- **Other local initiatives to address youth unemployment:** Other initiatives emerged during Talent Match delivery to address youth employment (such as EU funded

programmes) or government policies developed around apprenticeships and traineeships. Whilst these provided local opportunities they also required partnerships to respond accordingly.

- **Difficulties in learning across delivery partners:** In some partnerships there was a separation of strategic partners on boards from delivery partners. This meant that learning from grassroots experience of delivery could be difficult. The early commissioning of evaluations to run alongside programme delivery helped alleviate some of these barriers and provided a common focus for strategic and delivery partners.
- **The climate of austerity in the public sector** and cost pressures faced by organisations in other sectors meant that some individual partners had increased workloads in their 'day jobs' which meant the time that they could devote to Talent Match was limited. Lack of attendance at partnership meetings was an issue for some partnerships.
- **Engaging employers.** This was seen to be difficult at the outset of the programme but over time most partnerships successfully engaged both representatives of employers to act in board member roles or engaged partners willing to provide employment opportunities.

Lessons

Working in partnership is necessary for effective programme delivery. The lessons from the evaluation of the Talent Match programme are as follows:

- **Partnership working is required to build local employment ecosystems.** Local employment support ecosystems will vary from place to place, in terms of employer involvement, the quality of existing relationships and to some extent the policy levers which local partners will have. Talent Match shows that large and small voluntary and community sector organisations are an important part of this ecosystem.
- **Lead partner capability is important for delivery.** The skills, capacity and legitimacy of lead partners were essential to the formation of effective partnerships. These factors enabled partnerships to develop quickly and be effective at addressing challenges, whether local, for instance in managing the performance of delivery partners, or more broadly such as an emerging need or a new funding opportunity.
- **Involving young people should feature in all youth employment programmes.** Talent Match shows how this can be done and the different forms it can take. It increased the legitimacy of the programme and gave credibility to decisions to change programme direction. It generally helped partnerships understand the needs of those young people furthest from the labour market. However, the resources for involving young people need to be built into programme design.
- **Employer engagement is a key area for VCS organisations to develop if they are to deliver employment programmes.** Employer engagement varied across partnerships and was perhaps a new challenge to some lead partner organisations. All addressed early shortcomings. Some partnerships were helped by the early involvement of larger or influential local employers.
- **Partnerships evolve and develop and future employment support should build on rather than duplicate or replace existing arrangements.** There are considerable costs in starting afresh with creating new partnerships and the Talent Match youth employment partnerships should form part of any future local employment ecosystem.

Introduction

Partnership working is a key feature of Talent Match. This report reviews the experience of the 21 Talent Match partnerships: it explores the models of partnership which emerged, the involvement of different stakeholders, the role of young people involved in partnership, and the drivers and constraints to partnership working.

This report draws together evidence on the approach to partnership working developed for the Talent Match programme. It draws on a range of data sources:

- An annual programme of visits to Talent Match partnerships carried out between 2014 and 2016 and involving face-to-face interviews with partnership leads, strategic partners, delivery partners and young people.
- Surveys of lead partner organisations and delivery organisations conducted in 2014, 2015 and 2018.
- Monitoring and administrative information collected by the Big Lottery Fund (the Fund).
- Engagement with Talent Match partnerships through events and workshops which have explored a range of aspects of Talent Match provision.

The findings and recommendations from this report are intended for policy makers and practitioners working at national and local levels, whether in terms of funding new programmes or developing existing or setting up new youth employment partnerships.

The Talent Match programme is being evaluated by a consortium of partners led by the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (CRESR) at Sheffield Hallam University working with the Warwick Institute for Employment Research at the University of Warwick, City-REDI at the University of Birmingham and Cambridge Economic Associates. The evaluation runs from 2013 until 2019.

1.1. About Talent Match

Talent Match is a £106 million programme funded by the Big Lottery Fund to address unemployment amongst 18-24 year olds. It is being delivered using National Lottery funding between 2014 and 2018 through partnerships in 21 Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) areas in England. The programme seeks to support young people who are furthest from the labour market through personalised, flexible provision which addresses their needs and aspirations. Participation in the programme is voluntary. Talent Match has been co-designed by and is co-delivered with young people.

The programme was launched in 2012 at a time of considerable institutional turbulence at a local and sub-regional level in England. Local Enterprise Partnerships had only just been established and new funding programmes, whether the Department of Work and Pension's Work Programme or devolved arrangements, were only just coming on stream.

The programme required partnerships to form at a LEP area level and for these partnerships to then develop funding proposals to the Big Lottery Fund.

The programme seeks to support young people who are furthest from the labour market through personalised, non-standardised provision which addresses the needs and aspirations of young people.

Participation in the programme is voluntary, and a key innovation of Talent Match is that it has been co-designed by and is co-delivered with young people. This sets it apart from previous youth employment initiatives and current government employment programmes.

1.2. Partnership and the Talent Match programme

Partnership working is not a unique feature of Big Lottery Fund programmes or social programmes more generally, although Talent Match is distinctive in this field in the scale and role of the voluntary sector as a lead partner.

The Programme Guide for Talent Match set out the principles the programme was to follow which were designed to “enable thousands of young people to lead successful and fulfilling lives:

- **Structured opportunities: Bringing together the public, private and voluntary and community sectors to create effective partnerships and coordination at the local level.**
- **Supporting local solutions:** matching the supply of talented young people to local demand for employment and enterprise.
- **Asset based:** a belief in people powered change and the ability of young people to improve their own circumstances and life chances with the right support. Young people should be engaged and involved in all aspects of the activities we fund.
- **Strong and positive communications:** promoting positive images of young people, and changing hearts and minds."

(Big Lottery Fund 2012, emphasis added)

Alongside the Programme Guide the Fund also provides guidance on the formation of partnerships and on the establishment of partnership agreements. However, the Fund is clear that its guidance is not legal advice and that local organisations should seek independent legal advice when establishing collaborations.

As might be anticipated, the Talent Match partnerships vary considerably both in terms of scale (the number of partners involved), the background of the lead partner (whether in youth work, experience of formulating and delivering employability projects, general infrastructure, a national provider or consortium), and delivery approaches. Approaches varied locally, influenced by local institutional landscapes and existing relationships; as well as the capacity and previous experience of the local voluntary and community sector (VCS) and the scale of the resources allocated.

1.3. Resourcing

Partnerships were awarded between £1 million and £10 million of grant funds. The differences in grant funding reflected differing levels and rates of youth unemployment at the launch of the programme. As the programme has evolved, some partnerships have drawn down additional resources, notably through the ESF Youth Employment Initiative programme, or through the Big Lottery Fund European Social Fund (ESF) co-financed programme, Building Better Opportunities. Inevitably there will have been additional resources available to different partnerships.

Given the innovative nature of the Talent Match programme, variations in grant funding are to be expected as partnerships target different groups, follow different approaches and respond to different local needs.

Those partnerships receiving the most funding tend to be located in the larger urban areas of northern England and the Midlands, with the exception of London which also received around £10 million. Less densely populated and more rural areas of England tend to receive less Talent Match grant funding. The average grant award for the Talent Match programme as a whole is a little over £ 5 million.

1.4. Focus on LEP level partnerships

Talent Match was the first Big Lottery Fund programme to be delivered at a Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) level. Although the delivery model was through VCS organisations acting as a lead partner and an accountable body for funding, the local partnerships were intended to be planned at a LEP level.

Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) have become an important part of the institutional architecture of regional and local development in England. That said LEPs still vary widely in operational capability and in the extent to which they are embedded in local decision-making structures. Further developments, for some areas, have been formation of combined authorities and the election of city-region mayors. London is an exception to this having already established the Greater London Authority and an elected mayor in 2000.

In practice engagement between Talent Match partnerships and LEPs and in the case of London the Greater London Authority has varied. Early interviews for the evaluation found that some LEPs did not see a role for youth employment programmes as part of their portfolios of activity, despite evidence that local partnerships were doing much to engage their LEP.

However, as devolution has advanced engagement has improved, notably in areas such as Greater Manchester, Liverpool, the Black Country, Leeds City Region and Humber. This has informed planning for future activities, not least around what employment support may look like at a sub-regional level.

1.5. Partnership working

Talent Match came at an important time with many mainstream employability programmes moving away from partnership approaches towards ones based more on contractual and payment by results procurement methods. Talent Match differed in its non-mandatory approach and the leading role of VCS organisations.

Approaches to VCS leadership varied locally: in some cases there was a more obvious lead organisation, whilst in others this was done through a process of

deliberation and discussion. At the same time local areas were establishing 'shadow' partnership structures to develop proposals for funding.

The outcome of this phase was the emergence of four different types of lead organisation:

- **National VCS organisations**, in particular the lead role played by the Prince's Trust in five areas (New Anglia, South East, Tees Valley, Leicester and Leicestershire, and Lincolnshire), the Wise Group (North East) and Worcestershire (Shaw Trust).
- **Local 'infrastructure' organisations** (e.g. CVSs) in areas including Stoke and Staffordshire, Greater Manchester, Birmingham, Black Country, Coventry and Warwickshire, and The Marches.
- **Local specialist VCS organisations** including Cornwall, Northamptonshire, London, Sheffield City Region, Liverpool City Region, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire.
- **Consortia based organisations**, including Humber and Leeds City Region.

At face value these organisations bring very different capacities and capabilities to bear on the programme. Their strengths were different, either in having specialist expertise in the involvement of young people, extensive experience the delivery of employment programmes, their connection with the local VCS or their national remit. The scale of the organisations also varied. In other outputs, we explore in more detail whether different approaches led to different outcomes.

1.6. Evaluation questions and Report Structure

The overarching question for this element of the evaluation focused on '**is the model of partnership working in Talent Match effective?**' Other questions which flow from this, and reflect Big Lottery Fund's ambitions for the programmes are:

- How do Talent Match partnerships work?
- Are partners satisfied with their involvement?
- What are the constraints and drivers of partnership working?
- What is the experience of working with particular partners, such as Jobcentre Plus or Local Enterprise Partnerships?
- Have young people been effectively involved and how have they been involved?
- To what extent have local factors or prior experience of collaborations, shaped partnership effectiveness?

The report is structured around three broad areas:

- The wider evidence base for what makes partnership working effective.
- The models of partnership working which emerged in Talent Match.
- The experience of those involved in Talent Match partnerships.

We then draw these three bodies of material together to assess the overall effectiveness of Talent Match partnerships and draw lessons for policy makers and practitioners in the design and delivery of future locally based youth employment programmes.

The evidence base for Partnership working

2.1. Introduction

Partnerships have become a common means of delivering public policies to address complex societal problems, sometimes referred to as wicked issues. In simple terms, partnerships work across individuals, groups and organisations. They may work at a local and community levels as well as national or global levels. They may also span geographic boundaries and different types of groups and organisations.

This section of the report summarises this work and draws out the relevance of this work for programmes such as Talent Match.

2.2. The Rationale for Partnership

Partnerships vary in size and structure but in essence they are inter-organisational collaborative relationships. They have been characterised variously (see Rees et al., 2012¹) as involving otherwise independent bodies/ organisations/ agencies with common interests working together – both horizontally and vertically, in a relationship characterised by at least some degree of trust, equality and reciprocity, usually to achieve pre-defined outcomes (e.g. in service delivery, moves into employment, etc.).

This is summed up in an OECD definition of partnerships quoted by McQuaid et al., (2006: 163²) as: “Systems of formalised co-operation, grounded in legally binding arrangements or informal understandings, co-operative working relationships, and mutually adopted plans among a number of institutions. They involve agreements on policy and programme objectives and the sharing of responsibility, resources, risks and benefits over a specified period of time.”

Over several decades there has been a move towards greater partnership working, particularly at the local scale, in policy areas where there are complex and cross-cutting issues (with employability being a prime example) which have seemed beyond the control of any one organisation/agency acting alone. In such partnership arrangements voluntary and community sector organisations tend to be seen as integrating or niche actors in both governance and delivery of services under the paradigm of New Public Management.

1 Rees, J., Mullins, D. and Bovaird, T. (2012) *Partnership Working*. Third Sector Research Centre Report 88.

2 McQuaid, R., Lindsay, C., Dutton, M. and McCracken, M. (2006) Working together? Research into the role of inter-agency co-operation in improving employability. *Labour Market Bulletin*, 20, pp. 163-167.

Indeed, partnership working has become a defining characteristic of policies combatting worklessness and disadvantage more generally (Geddes, 1997³), especially at the local level where partnerships are seen as being able to be sensitive to local needs in co-ordinating service provision (Adam et al., 2017⁴).

The rationale for partnership working – with particular pertinence to employability programmes at the local level – includes a wide range of factors/ considerations:

- **Inter-agency co-operation** can produce more flexible/ innovative policy solutions by bringing together complementary expertise across policy domains – including bringing on board niche or specialist providers with particular experience in working with particular sub-groups. This is a key reason for including the VCS in local employability programmes.
- The need for **orchestration of activity** where institutional fragmentation has led to a proliferation of agencies working at a variety of scales and with varying remits across policy domains.
- **Joining up** - helping in the integration of policy agendas.
- **Sharing of knowledge and resources** (especially important in the context of austerity) to generate synergies (i.e. it is possible to achieve more by acting together than by acting separately).
- Achieving **economies of scale** resulting in more and better value services.
- Enhancing **alignment of objectives and resources** to obviate duplications of services, to fill gaps and to foster greater efficiency.
- Making policies more **responsive to local conditions** and needs of particular sub-groups; and often, but not necessarily.
- **Extending participation/ fostering co-creation** in policy design.

2.3. Partnership Effectiveness

The evidence base on the effectiveness of partnership working reflects the diversity of forms it takes and the problems it aims to address. While it is relatively easy to assess the performance of a partnership against key targets (e.g. positive outcomes of beneficiaries, etc.) it is difficult to measure good partnership working objectively. The achievements of partnerships are not only influenced by the quality of the partnership, but also by the starting point of the partnership, and by wider economic and political factors.

Factors typically highlighted with successful partnership are as follows (for example see Green and Adam, 2011;⁵ Adam et al., 2017):⁶

- **Strong leadership.**
- The use of **visioning processes** (or similar) as a focal point for building consensus among partners.

3 Geddes, M. (1997) *Partnerships against poverty and exclusion? Local regeneration strategies and excluded communities in the UK*. Bristol: Policy Press.

4 Adam, D., Atfield, G. and Green A.E. (2017) What works? Policies for employability in cities. *Urban Studies*, 54, pp. 1162-1177.

5 Green, A.E. and Adam, D. (2011) *City Strategy: Final Evaluation, Department for Work and Pensions Research Report*, 783.

6 Adam, D., Atfield, G. and Green A.E. (2017) What works? Policies for employability in cities. *Urban Studies*, 54, pp. 1162-1177.

- Translation of vision into a clear **strategic focus and operational objectives** – and making a clear distinction between the two.
- **Action- and outcome-oriented** procedures.
- **Inclusion of key stakeholders** within the partnership - with complementary expertise and experience; and.
- **Organisational cultures** supportive of partnership working.

The formative evidence on partnership, how collaborations come together, deliver programmes and reform in new configurations is perhaps richer and has a stronger focus on learning and improvement.

2.4. Understanding the Longer Term Development of Partnership

John Bryson and colleagues (Bryson et al 2015) review many of the key developments of cross-sector collaborations.⁷ Although their focus is primarily with theorising collaborations, the issues they raise draw from extensive empirical studies. The issues they raise include: the significance of ‘general external antecedent conditions, more proximate initial conditions, internal processes, structural elements, and outcomes’ (p. 648). They draw attention to importance of leadership in steering collaborations. Drawing on more recent work they note Emerson, Nabatchi and Balogh’s (2011) attention on collaborative governance regimes, or as Bryson et al describe as a ‘system embedded in and interacting with a larger environment (p. 649).

Bryson et al argue that the major theoretical and empirical work of the past decade has focused on the following features in understanding cross-sector collaborations:

- **General antecedent conditions:** these include resources, institutional arrangements, vulnerabilities to political changes as well as windows of opportunity, and the need to address a public or societal issue. We might see Talent Match as a programme formed by general conditions around youth unemployment and the opportunity for the Fund to develop a programme to respond to this.
- **Initial conditions, drivers and learning mechanisms.** Bryson et al draw on attention not just to the setting of initial aims (the initial conditions) but also key texts which codify action combined with the necessary leadership to commence a programme, whether nationally or locally.
- **Collaborative processes.** Here the focus is on trust between actors from different organisations, the role of communication and how initial plans gain and then sustain legitimacy.
- **Leadership**, including governance, capacity and competences, is seen as a central feature of the Bryson et al model, around which other factors revolve.
- **Collaboration structures.** Effective working the authors argue requires the establishment of norms and shared assumptions which mean that collaboration reduces transaction costs because there is trust. They note the role of ‘boundary spanners’ (often project managers), who whilst based in single organisations may act for the benefit of the wider collaboration and focus on higher level goals. Bryson et al term this capacity structural ambidexterity.

⁷ Bryson, J.M, Crosby, B.C. and Middleton Stone, M. (2015) Designing and Implementing Cross-Sector Collaborations: Needed and Challenging. *Public Administration Review*. 75 (September/October) 647-663.

- **Endemic conflicts and tensions.** The theoretical and empirical evidence is not blind to the problems which may beset partnerships and they note particular working styles which may overcome problems: a focus on inclusivity over efficiency or interdependence over autonomy.
- **Accountabilities and outcomes** are and should perhaps be seen as being complex and include both tangible and intangible outcomes. Examples from Talent Match abound here, for instance the focus on employment outcomes versus the working and inclusivity of the partnership. Work on public value is important here in providing a conceptual framework for assessing the benefit of inter-organisational collaboration (adapted from Bryson et al 2015 p. 651).

The work of Bryson and others thus leads us to think about partnership development as multi-faceted, geographically and institutionally situated, and dynamic. It is effected by both internal tensions but also will be shaped by and respond to external events. Examples here would include a new government policy, the establishment of new institutions (such as LEPs) or the use of new mechanisms (for instance switching from grant based to contract and performance based funding).

2.5. Big Lottery Fund and Partnership

The Fund itself has contributed extensively to the evidence base on partnership working and in particular how the voluntary and community sector fits within inter-organisational collaborations. Perhaps most relevant here is the review by Helen Kara conducted as part of a wider study in support of the Fund's work around *Building Capabilities*.⁸

A contribution Kara makes, drawing on Macmillan (2003, p.30) is around the issue of legitimacy and accountability. She asks, '**is a third sector organisation involved in a partnership, a representative of the sector, a representative for the sector, or a representative from the sector?**' (Kara, 2014: p.9).

Kara highlights specific challenges organisations may face in working in partnership. These include wider policy changes (such as austerity), complexities in working in areas with unclear or perhaps unsettled governance arrangements (such as new devolved arrangements in England), rurality and the time required simply to travel to 'do partnership', rivalry and competition within and between sectors, bureaucracy (whether grant arrangements or the interpretation of procurement law), blurred boundaries between sectors (for instance social enterprise), variable engagement and disengagement, time and not least the time of participating in multiple partnerships and inequality or disagreement (Kara, 2014: 10-12).

Kara argues that these challenges lead to support needs if collaboration is going to be a success. This might be simply in the form of resources to fund time for partnership or skills development. More bespoke support may be required around user engagement or the need for 'emergency' response at times of partnership stress.

⁸ Kara, H. (2014) *Third Sector partnerships and capability building. What the evidence tells us*. Birmingham: TSRC. Working Paper 126.

2.6. Conclusion

The review of literature provides valuable insights into what may be expected and what should not be expected of Talent Match partnerships.

The Talent Match programme provides an important lens through which to explore a number of issues including the nature and scale of local partnership working in the field of employability support for young people, relationships between partnership and different aspects of programme delivery and the impact of different forms of programme governance on overall outcomes for the programme.

Models of partnership

3.1. Introduction

Evidence on the scale and nature of partnership working in the Talent Match programme is captured through a survey of lead Talent Match partnerships which has been carried out in 2014, 2015 and 2018. A survey of delivery partners was also conducted in the same years, providing further evidence of partnership working across the programme. A summary of the results of the 2018 lead Talent Match partner and delivery partner surveys is provided here and where relevant, results are compared to those in earlier survey waves.

The two surveys provide evidence on a number of dimensions of partnership working:

- Factors influencing the design of local Talent Match programmes;
- Partnership delivery structures;
- Targeted client groups;
- Involvement of young people;
- Change over time.

All Talent Match partnership lead organisations responded to the lead partner survey across all three survey waves.

A total of 162 organisations responded to the 2018 delivery partner survey, representing a response rate of 53 per cent (119 responses were received in 2014 and 148 responses in 2015). Of these, 85 per cent (137 organisations) were still delivering Talent Match services.

3.2. Overview of Partnership Structures

As we identified at the start of the report, partnership structures have taken simple models. Common features include:

- A **lead partner** which in effect acts as an accountable body for the funding: overseeing grant management and performance, convening a wider strategic partnership and commissioning delivery partners.
- **Delivery partner organisations** which are contracted to deliver Talent Match activities. These may be commissioned by the lead partner, developed in partnership between organisations, or proposed by delivery organisations.
- **Wider partnership bodies.** The lead partner formed a partnership group to oversee the programme and typically enlisted onto these group key local stakeholders. These members were typically at a senior level in their

organisations and able to provide advisory support to the lead partner and delivery partners.

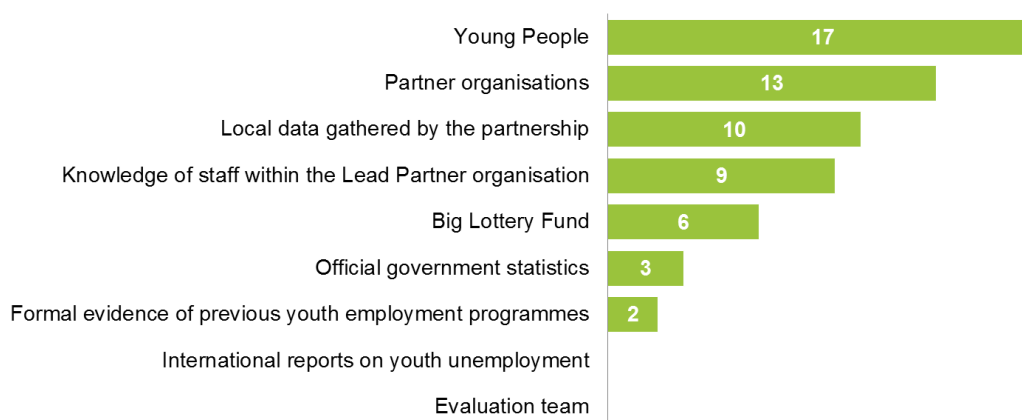
- **Young people** were involved in all partnerships, often both formally as members of partnerships groups but also in various delivery activities. The involvement of young people is explored in more detail in a separate report.

Finally other organisations had ongoing roles in the partnership. The most important amongst these was the Big Lottery Fund as the contracting and funding body. Partnerships also engaged the national evaluation team as well as commissioning their own local evaluations. And finally, Talent Match was not delivered in a vacuum, all organisations will have been involved in a range of other funded activities.

3.3. Factors influencing the design of Talent Match projects

Partnerships were asked to select the three most significant factors which informed the design of their Talent Match projects. Findings confirm the importance of local factors in influencing design and delivery of the Talent Match programme. Figure 3.1 below shows that for the majority of partnerships, young people played a significant role in informing the design of their projects. The responses confirm that the skills and capacities of local organisations were also an important factor in shaping Talent Match provision: partner organisations were also seen as significant by a sizeable number of partnerships, along with knowledge of staff within their own organisations.

Figure 3.1: Three most significant factors which informed the design of Talent Match project



Base: 20

Source: Talent Match Partnership Survey 2018

Partnerships were able to give multiple answers and were reflecting on what had happened; not what should have happened or they would have wished to happen. Arguably, all seven responses which at least one partnership indicated were significant, could have been significant for all. If a programme like Talent Match was launched in the future a question for the Fund and lead partners is could more be done to balance research evidence, the skills of partner organisations and the Fund, and the experiential knowledge of young people? Partnerships and projects evolved. It is positive that this happened but perhaps project design could have been better from the start. We return to this in the conclusion.

3.4. Lead Partners

As outlined above, there has been wide variation in the size of Talent Match partnerships. The number of organisations in the core partnerships in 2018 (including the lead organisation) ranges from three to 21. There is evidence that over time the size of Talent Match partnerships (in terms of the number of organisations involved in partnership arrangements) has fallen (see Table 3.1 below).

In terms of staff numbers, evidence suggests that, as might be expected, the numbers of paid staff in Talent Match partnerships (funded solely through Talent Match) grew to a peak around the mid-point of the funding period and are starting to reduce as the programme moves towards the end of the delivery period (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Core partnerships - organisations and staff

	Number of organisations in core partnership				FTE staff funded solely by Talent Match within core partnerships			
	Min.	Max.	Mean	Median	Min.	Max.	Mean	Median
2018	3	21	11	10	0	32	10	7
2015	4	26	13	12	1	45	11	6
2014	4	25	13	13	1	43	8	6

Partnership is dynamic and so would be expected to change over time. Some partnerships renewed their membership on an ongoing basis as part of a process of natural turnover, as individuals moved between organisations or changed their role within an organisation. Other incremental changes were made to fill gaps in partnership structures which became apparent as the Talent Match programme developed. In some instances more substantive changes were made in partnership personnel to reflect reorientation of Talent Match part way through the life of the programme.

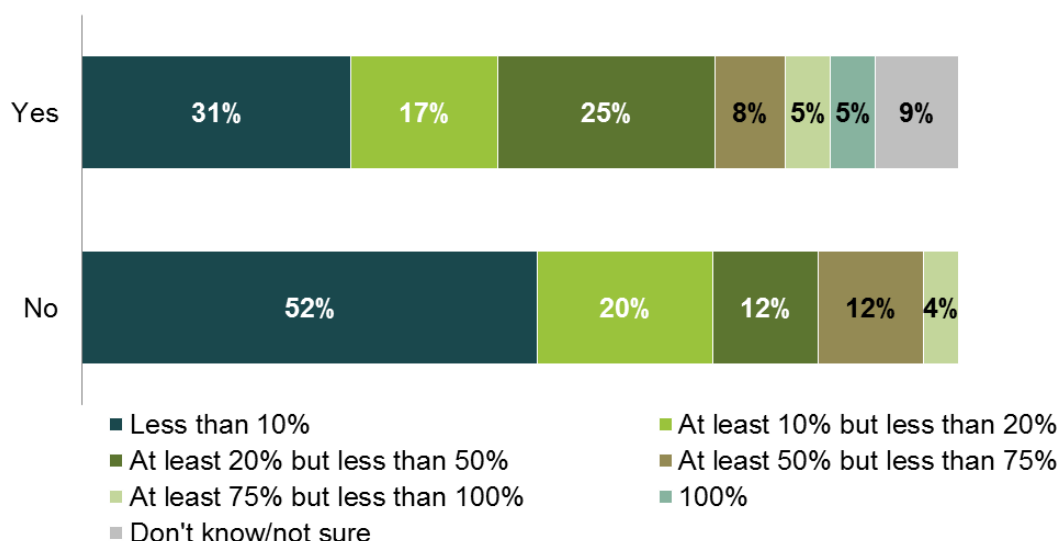
The two year reviews which were conducted by the Fund of each partnership in 2016 led to some reflection and change in partnership structures. Whilst partnership working takes time and endless reorganisation may well lead to programme failure, **a skill of the lead partner organisations is how they refresh and sustain the partnership.** Many of the Talent partnerships provide evidence of how this is done, whether through a project manager identifying poor delivery performance or young people empowered to bring new insights into a partnership. Examples included partnerships reconfiguring a service, such as the design of a wage subsidy project in one partnerships, or young people engaged to undertake 'mystery shopper' activities to understand how delivery partners were working but also to provide first hand testimony of the experience of receiving support.

3.5. Delivery Partners

Delivery partner organisations were asked a series of questions about their organisation and how they are set up to deliver Talent Match services and activities. All survey respondents were asked to indicate the proportion of their overall delivery of services/activities which Talent Match takes/took up.

Those organisations who were still delivering Talent Match services at the point of the survey are in the 'Yes' band in figure 3.2, below (n=137). Organisations that were no longer delivering Talent Match services are in the 'No' band (n=25). The rest of the analysis presented here focuses on partners still delivering Talent Match services/activities.

Figure 3.2: Proportion of overall service/activity delivery taken up by Talent Match



Base: Still delivering (137); no longer delivering (25)
Source: Talent Match Delivery Partner Survey 2018

A key point from the analysis is that relatively few organisations are 'dependent' on Talent Match as a funding stream. For almost three quarters of organisations which were still delivering Talent Match services, Talent Match comprised less than 50 per cent of their overall service activity.

. Two fifths of these organisations indicated they are members of the Talent Match Core Strategic Partnership, down from 55 per cent of those who responded in 2015.

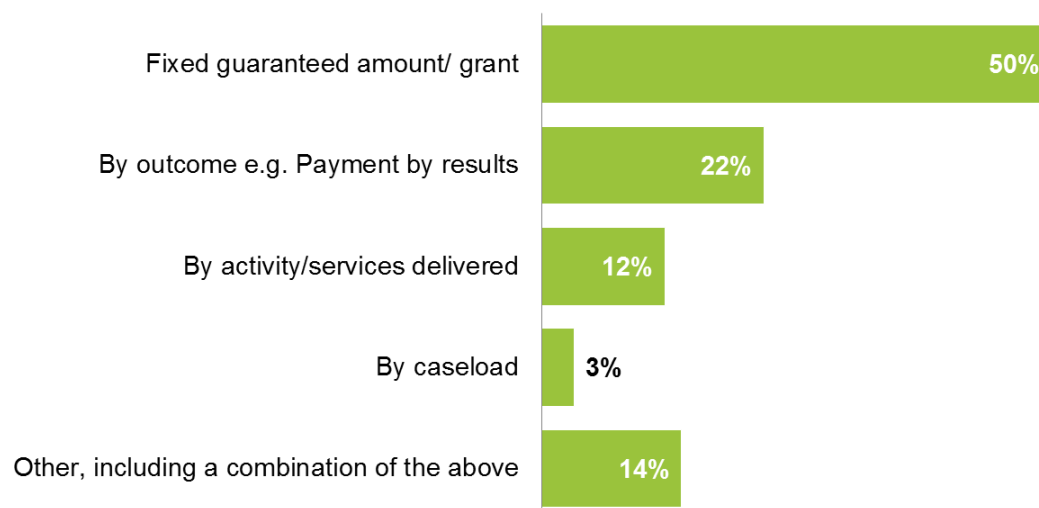
The majority (80 per cent) are from the third sector (including voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations), and 44 per cent have an income of over £1,000,000.

For almost one third of delivery partners, the main geographic level at which they carry out their activities is in particular neighbourhoods and communities, while for almost the same proportion the main geographic level of delivery is a particular Local Authority or Local Enterprise Partnership. This is perhaps as might be expected with place-specific organisations delivering the programme, organisations which appear largely to be of a relatively significant size and presumably therefore with the expertise to deliver specific services (such as counselling or employment support).

3.6. Payment and Performance Management

Figure 3.3 shows that half of delivery partners are being paid to deliver Talent Match activities/services on a fixed guaranteed amount/grant basis while just over one fifth are being paid by outcome.

Figure 3.3: Basis of payment for delivering Talent Match services/activities



Base: 125

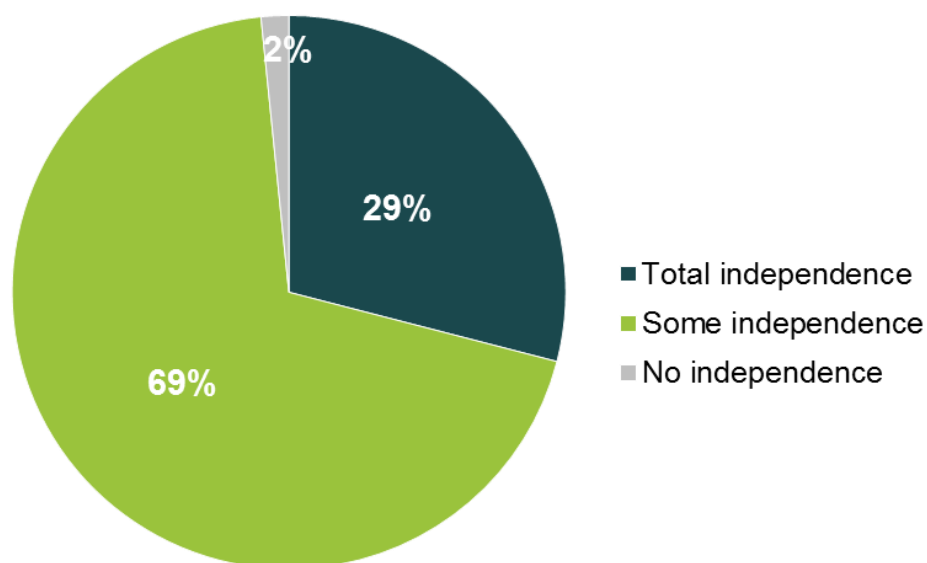
Source: Talent Match Delivery Partner Survey 2018

The payment by results approach was less common partly because some lead organisations were not experienced in using this model of payment. In Leeds City Region, where YOR Consortium had used payment by results on other programmes, systems were already set up. By contrast, the Greater Manchester Talent Match partnership wanted to engage a lot of delivery partners so that caseload levels would always be relatively small. In this case they were paid on a caseload basis.

3.7. Relationships between Lead and Delivery Partners

Figure 3.4 shows that the vast majority of delivery partners indicated that they have at least some independence from the lead partner over how they chose to deliver Talent Match services/activities. Only two per cent felt they have no independence. Again, this is an important aspect of partnership working. With only a small number of exceptions, Talent Match lead organisations were commissioning services in a way which allowed for constructive input. On the one hand, this allowed for partnerships to be developed, especially as most delivery partners came from the local area; but on the other hand this approach would perhaps undermine tightly prescribed delivery requiring 'intervention fidelity'.

Figure 3.4: Extent of independence from lead partner in delivering Talent Match services/activities



Base: 124

Source: Talent Match Delivery Partner Survey 2018

Some lead partner organisations also chose not to engage in direct service delivery but rather to coordinate other organisations, organise governance arrangements and manage the grant. Although this was found to simplify relationships, some lead partners reported that this meant they reduced their grant income in an area they actually had service delivery capability in.

3.8. Choosing Who to Support

When asked to select the two most important factors in determining which young people were supported, almost half of delivery partners indicated that a specified requirement in their Talent Match contract determined who they support (Figure 3.5). Over one third highlighted referrals from other organisations and matching their skills to the needs of the young person.

The focus on young people and the use of an asset based approach is reflected here. Indeed, the term 'delivery partner' rather than 'contractor' highlights that the focus is on collaboration.

Figure 3.5: Two most important factors in determining who to support

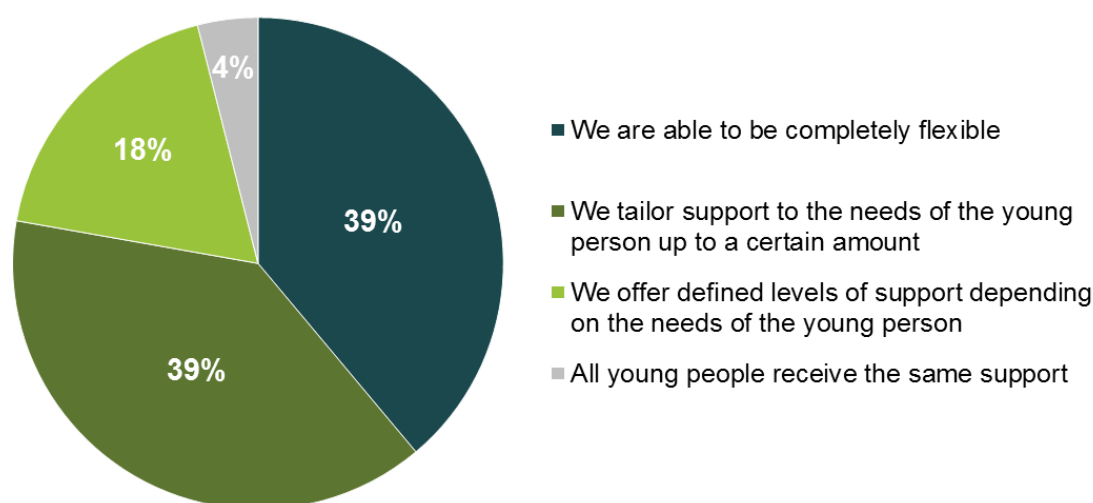


Base: 126

Source: Talent Match Delivery Partner Survey 2018

Figure 3.6 shows that almost two fifths of delivery partner organisations felt that they were able to be completely flexible in how they determined how much a support a young person received. The same proportion indicated that they are able to tailor support to the needs of a young person up to a certain amount.

Figure 3.6: Determining how much support a young person receives



Base: 126

Source: Talent Match Delivery Partner Survey 2018

These findings are striking and set Talent Match apart from increasingly prescribed approaches delivered through payment by results mechanisms.

3.9. Involvement of Young People

As outlined above, the involvement of young people in the co-design and co-delivery of the programme has been a defining feature of Talent Match. Young people have been involved in the development and delivery of the Talent Match programme in a variety of ways since the programme began and results suggest partnerships have

continued to see young people's involvement as an overwhelmingly positive thing, as they did in in both 2014 and 2015.

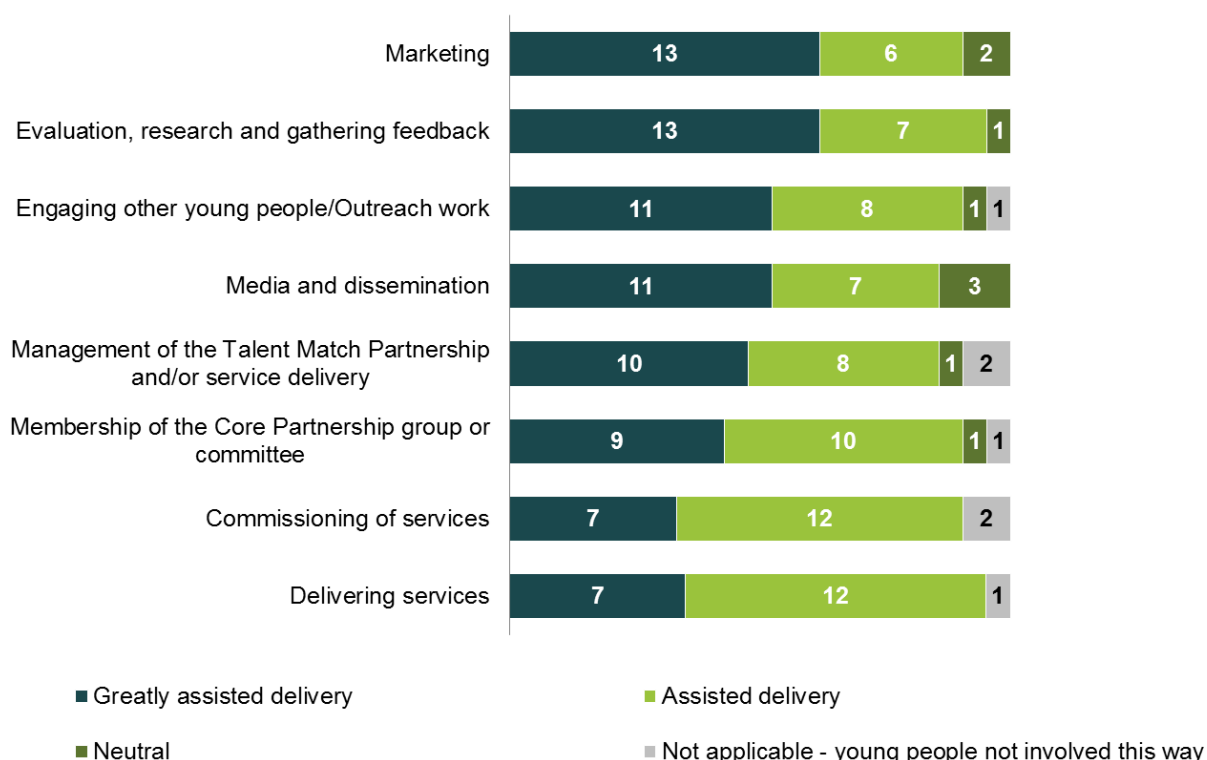
When asked if the involvement of young people in the elements listed in Figure 3.7 had either assisted or constrained the development and delivery of their programme, partnerships overwhelmingly stated that young people's involvement had assisted delivery for every element.

This is an incredibly strong endorsement for involving young people.

Of particular relevance to this report is the involvement of young people in the management of the Talent Match partnership and/or service delivery, and in membership of the core partnership group or committee. The majority of respondents indicated that the involvement of young people in partnership governance had greatly assisted delivery. The relationships between governance structures and programme outcomes are explored more fully in later section of this report.

None of the partnerships indicated that any of the elements listed had constrained delivery. Results from the delivery partner survey were similar (they were asked the same question). Only three types of youth involvement were highlighted as constraining delivery (membership of the core partnership group or committee, management of the Talent Match partnership and/or service delivery and delivering services) and the proportion of organisations selecting 'constrained delivery' was two per cent or under for each type.

Figure 3.7: Types of youth involvement - assisting or constraining delivery



Base: 20-21

Source: Talent Match Partnership Survey 2018

3.10. Changes to Service Delivery

The Talent Match programme is designed to develop and test innovations in supporting young people towards sustainable employment. As such, it might be anticipated that models of partnership working might change in response to local need, and as learning about 'what works' (and conversely what doesn't) is applied to inform delivery. Fifteen out of the 21 partnerships indicated that during the course of delivering Talent Match they had changed some of the ways in which their services/activities were delivered. All partnerships agreed that the changes made had improved how they deliver Talent Match services/activities (13 'improved a lot' and one 'improved a little'). Talent Match partnerships provided examples of some of the changes that had been made:

"Added more delivery partners a various times due to the need identified within the area"

"The core delivery model of coaching and support for young people had been commissioned through alliance contracting but organisational approaches and values clashing created an inconsistent service and the peer coaching core was under supported and resourced. The coaching service was bought in house to create consistencies"

"In terms of training interventions, moved to an open approved suppliers list from a commissioned framework"

"Following on from completing the Theory of Change we changed how we operated the commissioned service for employability. We found that when young people were 'referred out' to a delivery partner that their engagement with the programme and service started to tail off; so we brought the service into the full Talent Match team"

"Commissioned various services for training - this did not work and the young people did not want this, diverted funding to employ young people through commissioned services placed directly within organisations"

"We have adapted the mentoring model on a quarterly basis, responding to delivery partner feedback alongside young people feedback. Our "approach" now is to co-produce with delivery partners and young people in a meaningful way"

Two fifths of delivery partner organisations also indicated that they had made changes to the ways in which their services/activities were delivered and almost all agreed that these had improved service delivery (71 per cent 'improved a lot' and 21 per cent 'improved a little'). Just one organisation stated that the changes made had worsened delivery 'a lot'.

Delivery partners also provided examples of some of the changes they had made:

"Less youth work support and more IAG focused support provided to young people"

"We identified that young people required support to address the barriers to accessing/sustaining EET, the main challenge being mental

health. So our provision now focuses on young people who need additional support to manage and maintain positive mental health"

"We have improved our case management processes and performance management of our staff"

"We began by focussing on lone parents but then became a more 'general' core provider after 12 months"

"Suspended use of Job Subsidies as most employers didn't claim the payment even if they had initially indicated that they intended to; this cost saving was passed on to other part of the project"

"In the first year of the delivery the majority of support offered was 121 mentor support - as the programme has developed we have increased the amount of outreach support, incorporated more group work activities and also provided programme enrichment activities through organised events and visits"

A number of factors help explain these changes. Firstly, the Big Lottery Fund through its (active) contract management role in its strategic programmes was able to provide a critical challenge to partnerships at key stages and in particular at the point of the two year contract review. Secondly, the lead partner organisation was able to redirect focus, often with the support of the Big Lottery Fund. Thirdly, the governing bodies of partnerships and in particular the involvement of young people on these bodies provided a challenge to partnerships. Finally, lead partners have had to respond to changes in the local operating environment, new funding opportunities and in some cases the emergence of new organisations and partnership structures.

The findings show that partnership roles changed and reflected lessons from the early part of delivery. This is not uncommon in programmes such as Talent Match. A challenge for funders such as the Big Lottery Fund is whether the 'test and learn' approach could have been embedded more strongly from the start of the programme. The evidence from partnerships is probably that some partnership organisations engaged with test and learn more fully than others and saw the opportunity whether for themselves or the wider area to use Talent Match for longer term improvements in the support of young people - something explored further below.

3.11. The future for Talent Match partnerships

We look at the future of partnerships at three levels: through the lens of the lead partner; the delivery partnership; and the local area.

Lead Partner

A further set of questions in the Partnership Survey explored aspects of future funding and sustainability. The delivery period for the Talent Match programme runs until the end of 2018. This period may extend for some partnerships with underspends. A further group of partnerships were invited to make applications new, innovative and distinct activities.

Eleven out of the 21 partnerships stated that they have funding to continue some aspects of the Talent Match programme. When asked to provide details on this funding the majority indicated this funding was via the Big Lottery Fund either in the form of continuation funding or approvals to use underspends.

Many of the partnerships have been able to access EU funding, typically for activities which are additional to Talent Match, such as in working with different age groups. For example in Liverpool this has contributed to the development of an integrated service offering for young people aged from 14-29.

However, it is striking that the lead partners have not secured funding from other sources, whether through national or local programmes. Those that have are the exception.

Delivery Partners

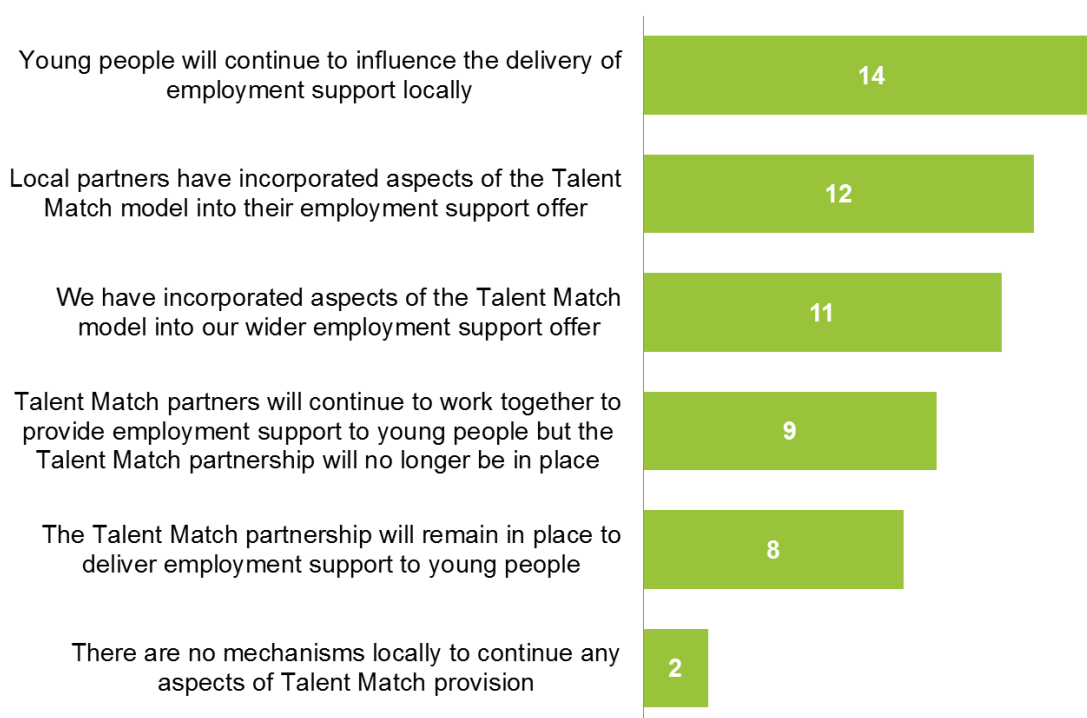
Only 18 per cent of delivery partner organisations indicated they have funding to continue any aspects of the Talent Match programme. This represents 18 organisations. When asked who this funding is from, 12 indicated this was via the Big Lottery Fund and five pointed to trusts or charitable foundations. For two organisations this funding was via the local police/crime commissioner and six stated it was from an 'other' source with three of these mentioning European Union funding, such as the European Social Fund.

Local Areas

Data suggest that in about half of the areas Talent Match provision will continue to exist, in some form, beyond the initial delivery period. It is also important to consider how the considerable emphasis on partnership working developed through Talent Match will continue to influence employment support for young people in Talent Match areas. Figure 3.8 below shows the form that Talent Match partnerships indicated they will take going forwards. Results suggest that sustaining the collaborative models developed for Talent Match is a priority in most Talent Match areas. Eight partnerships indicated they are to remain in place to deliver, while nine said their partnerships would no longer be in place but they would continue to work together. In the majority of Talent Match areas, aspects of the Talent Match programme will also continue to influence local employability provision. This includes the ongoing involvement of young people in the design of services. Only two partnerships said there are no mechanisms locally to continue Talent Match provision.

This finding, despite the lack of new funding, is encouraging and demonstrates an important legacy of Talent Match beyond the employment outcomes it has supported.

Figure 3.8: Talent Match partnerships and the future



Base: 20

Source: Talent Match Partnership Survey 2018

3.12. Conclusion

The main conclusions which can be drawn from the research into the models of partnership working in the Talent Match programme are as follows:

1. There is a distinct **Talent Match Partnership Model** which involves the following parties: the Big Lottery Fund; a lead VCS organisation; strategic 'stakeholder' organisations (such as LEPs and local authorities); and young people. However the relationships between each varied from place to place depending on prior experience of co-working, capacity of different organisations and the overall focus for the Talent Match project. Local areas had considerable flexibility to shape their partnership within the rules of the programme.
2. The **involvement of young people** distinguishes Talent Match from most of other employment programmes. It was a key feature of all partnerships and 18 Talent Match areas saw it as critical to all areas of delivery. Only a couple of partnerships felt it has constrained delivery in any way.
3. **Lead partner organisations** were vital to the oversight of Talent Match, for bringing Talent Match 'to life' in local areas, and where necessary for driving change. However, there was variation between areas as to the extent to which organisations felt able to lead the Programme locally.
4. **Delivery partners** were engaged in different ways but the majority felt they were able to help shape projects with the lead partner. This co-production was seen as vital but also meant that lead partners had to work hard to secure and maintain the buy-in of delivery organisations.

5. **Sustainability** of partnership will only become clear after the closure of the programme. Whilst nearly all partnerships (whether the lead partner, wider partnership or the local area) saw Talent Match leaving a legacy, the end of the programme will leave a gap in support. Less than a fifth of delivery organisations said that they would continue to deliver the same level of service.

In broad terms the Talent Match programme effectively supported the established local partnerships, many involving new sets of working relationships.

Experiences of partnership working

4.1. Introduction

This section explores the factors within the models of partnership working that assisted programme delivery. It draws on the final wave of partnership survey data gathered in 2018. Further evidence from partnership visits provides a summary of assisting and constraining factors.

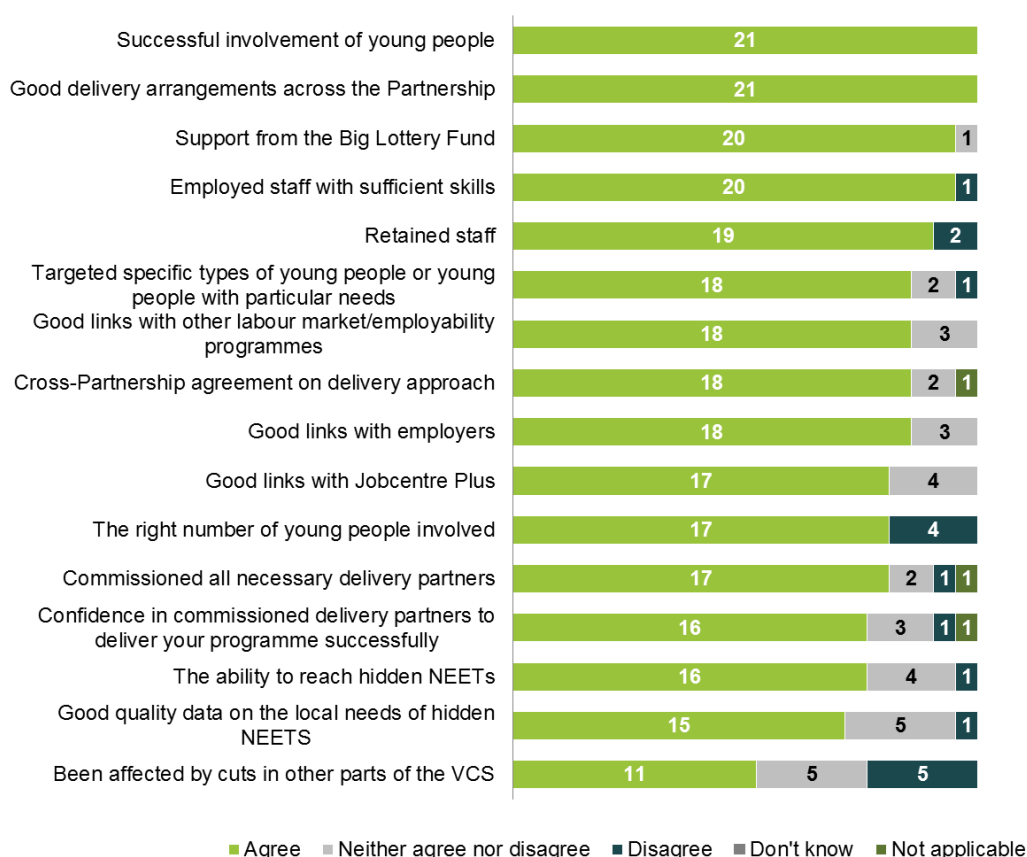
4.2. Factors Assisting and Constraining Delivery

Figure 4.1 shows the extent to which various features were true across the partnerships. To reinforce the results from the previous section, all 21 partnerships agreed that they had successful involvement of young people and good delivery arrangements across the partnership.

There were low levels of disagreement across statements although only 11 partnerships agreed that they had been affected by cuts in other parts of the voluntary and community sector. There were also fewer partnerships agreeing they have good quality data on local needs of hidden NEETS.

Results from the delivery partner survey were similar (they were given the same list of statements in relation to their own organisation). Levels of disagreement were also low, although almost one fifth (18 per cent) disagreed that their organisation had been affected by funding cuts to other parts of their organisation and eight per cent disagreed they have good links with Jobcentre Plus.

Figure 4.1: Partnership factors - To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements: your Talent Match partnership has...



Base: 21

Source: Talent Match Partnership Survey 2018

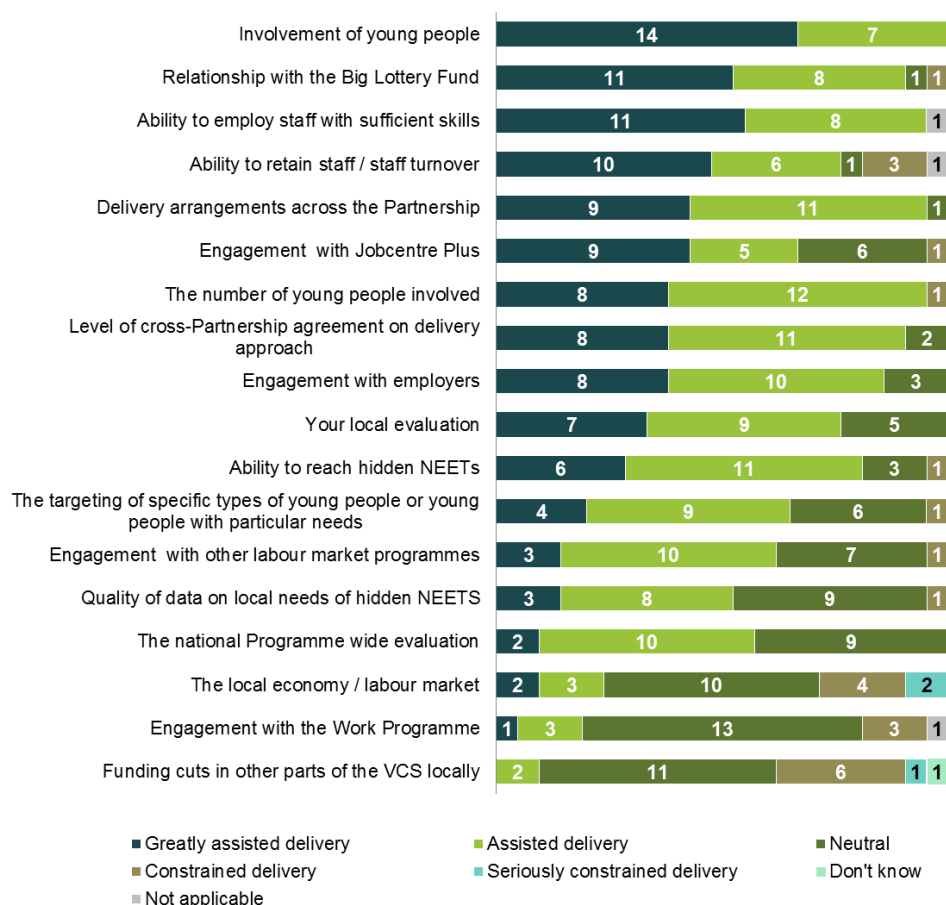
Figure 4.2 shows the findings from a question as to which factors partnerships through either assisted or constrained delivery. Again, and as in 2014 and 2015, the involvement of young people was seen by the majority of partnerships as a factor which has assisted them.

Results from the delivery partner survey were similar. The vast majority (86 per cent) also saw the involvement of young people as a factor which had assisted delivery. In addition, over four-fifths saw the following factors as assisting factors: staff with sufficient skills, the ability to reach your Talent Match target group(s) and ability to retain staff / staff turnover.

Partnerships also identified factors that had constrained progress. Seven partnerships stated that funding cuts in other parts of the VCS locally had adversely affected the delivery of their Talent Match Programme while six partnerships felt the local economy and labour market had been a constraining factor. Three partnerships also felt that engagement with the Work Programme had adversely affected delivery and the same number saw their ability to retain staff and have a low staff turnover as constraining them. At the outset of the programme we noted that there had been considerable change in some partnerships from the team which secured the Talent Match funding to the team charged with delivery.

Similarly, almost one fifth (19 per cent) of deliver partners saw funding cuts to other parts of their organisation as adversely affecting delivery of the programme, while 16 per cent felt the local economy/labour market had been a constraining factor. These factors are perhaps surprisingly low but may also reflect the wider fall in youth unemployment over the course of the programme.

Figure 4.2: Factors assisting and constraining delivery



Base: 20-21

Source: Talent Match Partnership Survey 2018

It should be noted that there were no strong patterns in responses: that is, specific partnerships did not tend to be wholly positive or wholly negative with most using the full response scale. Similarly, there were no strong relationships by groups of partnership (for instance urban and rural, or large and small amounts of grant funding).

Additional evidence from partnership visits throughout the programme provides richness to the findings of the survey and confirms the importance of local experience, capacity and relationships, and the involvement of young people as factors that assisted effective partnership working. However, these factors could also be constraining: where the purpose of involving young people lacked clarity, and where there were cultural differences between partner organisations, and overlaps and competition between local initiatives. The main assisting and constraining factors identified through partnership visits are outlined below.

Assisting factors

We found the following to have greatly assisted delivery:

- **Quality of partnership leads:** Partnership leads play a key role in setting the tone and direction for the partnership, managing relationships between partners (both strategic and delivery partners) and acting as an 'independent broker' in driving the programme forward.
- **Previous experience of partnership working:** In some cases the organisations concerned had previous experience of partnership working and were able to translate this to Talent Match. For partnership leads previous experience of partnership working was important – and if was in the same local area often they were able to utilise their existing contacts to benefit Talent Match.
- **Involvement of young people:** Several interviewees during partnership visits highlighted the important contribution made by young people in bringing a different dynamic to partnerships. The 'lived experience' of young people seeking employment helped shape the nature and delivery of Talent Match activities, and indeed delivery partners (through involvement of young people in interview panels and selection of delivery partners, etc.).
- **Test and learn:** In partnership visits a common refrain from interviewees was the value of 'test and learn'. This enabled partnerships to curtail activities which were not working, and to try new ones. More generally this provided a positive atmosphere for partnership working that was rather different from those more commonly experienced.

Constraining factors

The following constrained delivery:

- **Long lead in period to Talent Match going 'live':** Talent Match was characterised by a long lead in period. The staff members involved in developing the partnership were not necessarily those who took it forward once young people were recruited to Talent Match. This meant that some Talent Match staff members were not clear why management/ partnership structures had been set up in the fashion that they were. It also meant that some new staff coming into post when Talent Match went live were not aware why structures had been set out in a particular way; (in some cases they would have made different arrangements).
- **Other local initiatives to address youth unemployment:** The rise in youth unemployment at the time Talent Match was conceived also spawned the introduction of other local initiatives seeking to help young people into employment. To some extent this created some confusion and tensions when different organisations were seeking to help the same beneficiaries. It also meant that partnerships needed to utilise their networks as referral channels for Talent Match.
- **Too much involvement of young people:** There were some concerns expressed in interviews with partnerships (albeit by a minority of partners) that the emphasis on involvement of young people in Talent Match was excessive – sometimes going beyond benefits accruing from co-design to become an end in itself.

- **Some difficulties in learning across delivery partners:** In general, the separation of strategic partners on boards from delivery partners was made for good reasons. However, this separation to some extent meant that learning from grassroots experience of delivery was difficult. Some partnerships put structures in place for delivery partners to meet with the Partnership Lead to share experiences, but even so commercial considerations meant that some delivery partners were wary of sharing good practice. (Note that the latter issue is not unique to Talent Match).
- **The climate of austerity in the public sector** and cost pressures faced by organisations in other sectors meant that some individual partners had increased workloads in their 'day jobs' which meant the time that they could devote to Talent Match was limited. Lack of attendance at partnership meetings was an issue for some partnerships.
- **Missing partners.** In partnership visits interviewees were asked about gaps on partnerships. In general, most partnerships managed to fill these gaps over time. One generic gap identified was that of a lack of recruitment agencies involved as partners, who could potentially have provided useful local labour market intelligence as well as insights into what employers were looking for.

What is striking across the assisting and constraining factors is the similarity with some of the wider evidence. The assisting factors could be taken as the importance of 'boundary spanners', prior partnership working, or the adoption of an inclusive and learning approach. All of these features appear in the Bryson et al (2015) review cited in the evidence review in Section 2.

The constraining factors are by their nature more context specific, whether to the national policy environment or to changes at a local level such as the introduction of the new LEP tier of governance.

4.3. Conclusion

There were consistent findings that the involvement of young people, the model of partnership, the support from the Big Lottery Fund and having the right staff were all important to successful delivery. These factors were also seen to greatly assist delivery.

There was however more variation in whether other factors such as local links to Jobcentre Plus, engagement with other programmes or the targeting of specific groups assisted or constrained delivery. Moreover, beyond the factors on which there was near universal agreement, there were no clear patterns as to which partnerships saw certain factors assisting or constraining delivery (for instance in terms of grant funding or location in a rural or urban area).

However, from the qualitative findings, which involved partnership visits, the partnerships tended to concur as to which factors assisted or constrained delivery.

Conclusion

This report has considered evidence from the Talent Match programme and the wider evidence base on partnership to assess which factors contribute most to effective partnership working. The following themes have emerged:

- **Partnership is a requirement of Talent Match funding.** As such, the programme introduced a new tier of governance into an already turbulent policy environment. Our evidence suggests that prior experience of partnership working and strong intra- and inter- organisational relationships have facilitated delivery of the Talent Match programme in this context. Whilst there is no consistent evidence to suggest that the 'type' or focus of the lead organisation (in the sense of CVS/infrastructure organisation, youth work organisation or employment organisation, local or national) matters to the delivery of the Talent Match programme, the skills and capacity of the lead partners to navigate, and exploit, complex local governance networks have been identified as important factors in assisting delivery and the ability of lead organisations to demonstrate these capabilities may be a significant consideration in future programme planning.
- **Involvement of young people** has also been a defining feature of the Talent Match programme and the majority of partnerships have identified youth involvement as a key feature that has assisted partnership working and delivery. However, it is important that the purpose of youth involvement is clearly defined, and understood by all partners, and that organisations have the skills (or are supported to develop the skills) to get youth involvement right.
- **Legacy.** There is encouraging evidence on the legacy of partnership working from Talent Match. In the majority of Talent Match areas, partnerships (in their current form, or in the form of continued collaboration between partners) anticipated continuing to shape the local employment offer to young people after the closure of the programme. A concern though is that less than a fifth of delivery organisations reported that they would continue to deliver activities at the same scale.

In conclusion the report returns to the research questions set out at the end of section 1. Each is taken in turn.

5.1. How do Talent Match partnerships work?

Partnerships work in a variety of ways and with a range of lead partners, although most built quite clearly on pre-existing characteristics in an area. The lead partner played a key role in bringing the partnership together. Individuals within the lead partner organisation often played key leadership roles, promoting the goals of the programme as a whole over a more narrow individual interest.

The features of partnerships were however largely common. There was a lead partner who played an accountable body role and put in place the necessary agreements to ensure the effective governance of the programme and the accountability for expenditure. Legal agreements existed with all delivery partners although they were contracted in different ways, mostly on a grant basis but some on a payment by results or spot purchase basis. This tended to reflect the lead organisation's expertise in different contracting models and the wishes of the partnership board or committee.

Young people's involvement varied quite considerably. Perhaps most importantly some partnerships focused on involvement in specific groups whilst others looked at involving young people in a role of delivery roles.

Involvement of young people increased the legitimacy of partnerships but perhaps more importantly this was because it allowed the lived experience of young people distant from the labour market to shape programmes.

5.2. Are partners satisfied with their involvement?

On the whole Talent Match partnerships were inclusive both in terms of engaging delivery partners or wider VCS organisations and in the involvement of young people. With few exceptions delivery partners were not dependent on Talent Match funding. However it was noted that for many of the areas receiving Talent Match it was seen to be the key programme and therefore opportunity for the VCS in a local area.

5.3. What are the constraints and drivers of partnership working?

These issues were covered in detailed by three waves of lead and delivery partner surveys. The drivers or enabling factors for partnership were seen to be:

- **Quality of partnership leads.**
- **Previous experience of partnership working.**
- **Involvement of young people.**
- **Test and learn approach adopted.**

These responses were common across the partnerships and indeed reflect the wider evidence on partnership working. The constraining factors were however more context and programme specific:

- **Long lead in period to Talent Match going 'live'.**
- **Other local initiatives to address youth unemployment.**
- **Too much involvement of young people.**
- **Some difficulties in learning across delivery partners.**
- **The climate of austerity in the public sector and its effects on local VCS organisations.**
- **Missing partners.**

There was some reflection that the involvement of employers in partnerships and this is something many partners saw initially as a constraint (i.e. employers had little involvement) but because a key factor assisting delivery as employers saw the

benefits of working with Talent Match. However, it should be stressed that employer involvement at a partnership level remained relatively narrow.

5.4. What is the experience of working with particular partners, such as Jobcentre Plus or Local Enterprise Partnerships?

On balance the Big Lottery Fund was probably right to focus Talent Match of LEP areas. It allowed for the targeting of funding and working with 21 partnerships rather than what might have been a far higher number if the focus had been on top tier local authority areas for instance. However, engagement between LEPs and Talent Match partnerships has varied considerably and has possibly curtailed opportunities to better design employment support which combines demand and supply side interventions. Where these have emerged it has often been due to prior joint working at a sub-regional level.

The involvement of Jobcentre Plus offices has traditionally been seen as problematic and variable in terms of engagement in local grant funded employment programmes. Talent Match was implemented during a period of considerable welfare reform (such as increasing welfare conditionality/sanctions, the piloting of Universal Credit and changes to housing benefit) as well as during the last two years of the Work Programme.

Although involvement of Jobcentre Plus varied, most partnerships responded that relations within Jobcentre Plus had improved and were now much more active and full partners.

5.5. Have young people been effectively involved and how have they been involved?

The involvement of young people is something we consider in more detail in a separate report. In brief young people's involvement in partnership was a success, took many forms and was one of the most innovative features of the programme. Local partnerships learnt and developed new ways of engaging young people.

A few partnerships noted the resource implications of this way of working but on balance saw that involvement improved the quality of services delivered. Inevitably the programme directly engaged only a tiny proportion of the total numbers supported, but the youth focus of the programme set it apart from many other programmes.

5.6. To what extent have local factors or prior experience of collaborations, shaped partnership effectiveness?

The capacity and capability of partnerships inevitably varied and did reflect original grant allocations. However, partnerships also worked within these resource constraints and tended to shape approaches which reflected existing capacities and capabilities. Understanding these pre-existing capabilities is perhaps something seldom fully considered in grant management.

5.7. How effective are Talent Match partnerships?

Something which has emerged in the literature on partnership is the importance of understanding effectiveness in a range of ways. In terms of developing new ways of working and establishing local approaches which may last beyond the programme's life, and which continual to promote and support young people furthest from the

labour market, the Talent Match has been effective. Some of the partnerships are securing further funding, although the research on partnership shows that effective grant management or effective young people's involvement are not guarantees of long term success.

This is a concern and shows that future youth employment programmes perhaps need to consider how investments can help shape local employment support ecosystems to ensure that there is a clear and sustained offer to young people furthest from the labour market. Partnership across sectors, and which involves young people, is a key part of this.

Finally, a wider issue the analysis flags up and which is worth further exploration is around how a programme such as Talent Match is understood. On the one hand, if it is simply a time limited funding stream then some of the expectations around effective governance (such as co-decision making with young people or wider involvement in a local labour market ecosystem) are probably misplaced. The Big Lottery Fund is primarily a grant making organisation and does not have formal responsibility for the shaping of local governance arrangements, although its investments clearly have legacy effects both for individual organisations and the partnerships they work in.

On the other hand, a concern of all interventions such as Talent Match is that by not engaging more fully in the local employment ecosystem, the ability for grant funding delivered through partnership to have a legacy is more limited.



Talent Match Evaluation: Youth Employment Partnerships

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