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Progression to Employment: Lessons from the Talent Match programme evaluation



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Introduction

A key feature of the Talent Match programme was to engage and support young unemployed people to move towards and into employment. Talent Match sought to target young people furthest from work and who often faced multiple barriers in securing employment.

This summary draws together evidence from a range of sources including, surveys, thematic case studies and interviews with Talent Match partnerships, stakeholders, delivery partners, young people and employers involved in the Talent Match programme in order to address the following questions:

- **Targeting: Which local areas and sub-groups of young people has the Talent Match programme focused on?**
- **Progression: How have young people progressed on the Talent Match programme?**

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

Unemployment rates are higher for young people than for the total population, there have been underlying changes in the youth labour market and there has been a move towards employers expecting young people to be work ready. This helps explain why a range of national active labour

market policies and local initiatives focus on young people. Some policies are mandatory and have strict eligibility criteria. As a voluntary, holistic and inclusive programme Talent Match adopted a different approach.



Targeting - Which local areas and sub-groups of young people has the Talent Match programme focused on?

Prior to considering the progression towards employment of young people supported by Talent Match we briefly consider how Talent Match partnerships targeted their resources. This provides important context to the analysis which considers how young people have progressed on the Talent Match programme.

What is the focus of place-based targeting in Talent Match?

The Talent Match programme has been delivered in 21 Local Enterprise Partnership areas in England. Within these areas, an early focus of the Talent Match partnerships was on targeting geographic 'hotspots' of youth unemployment, in order to address the challenges faced by young people living in areas where youth unemployment was particularly high. How this place-based targeting was interpreted in practice, and the size of local areas focused on varied. Approaches included:

- Identification of hotspots and subsequent use as an eligibility criterion for participation in the Talent Match programme.
- Identification of hotspots to inform delivery activity, but without use as an eligibility criterion.
- No identification of hotspots but an intention to target certain areas – definitions of these areas sometimes relied on a common understanding of localities rather than on standard statistical units.

Over time (and from early in the Talent Match programme) place-based targeting has been relaxed in most Talent Match partnerships, partly in response to falling levels of youth unemployment and as the partnerships have increasingly supported young people who are furthest from the

labour market and whose circumstances mean that they are facing significant challenges to finding sustainable work. However, some partnerships, such as Middlesbrough, Greater Lincolnshire and New Anglia maintained a geographically targeted approach either focusing on specific wards or towns.

Regardless of whether a geographical targeting approach has been used, Talent Match partnerships have supported young people living in deprived areas. Nearly two in five Talent Match participants live in the 10 per cent most deprived neighbourhoods in England and nearly three in five live in the 20 per cent most deprived neighbourhoods in England.

What is the focus of people-based targeting in Talent Match?

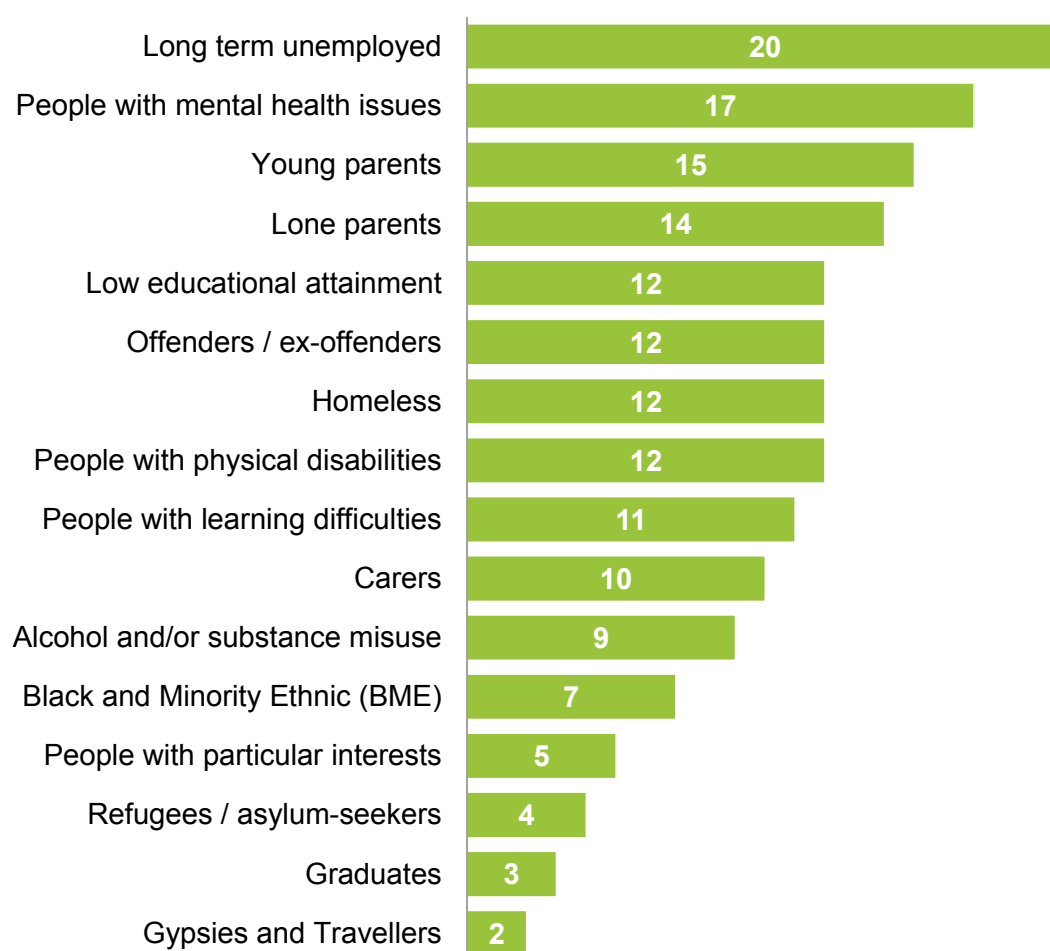
Targeting of those furthest from the labour market and providing them with holistic support was part of the rationale for the Talent Match programme.

All partnerships have targeted the long-term unemployed and emphasised helping the hidden unemployed. Talent Match partnerships have also placed a strong emphasis on helping young people with mental health issues and supporting young parents.

Figure 1 provides detail on the numbers of Talent Match partnerships supporting different groups of young people.

It is helpful to consider how the group of young people supported by Talent Match compare to those of all young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET). This provides an initial indication of targeting in the programme with the subsequent discussion considering the rationales for differing approaches to targeting.

Figure 1: Groups targeted by Talent Match partnerships



Base: 20.

Source: Talent Match Partnership Survey 2018

Gender

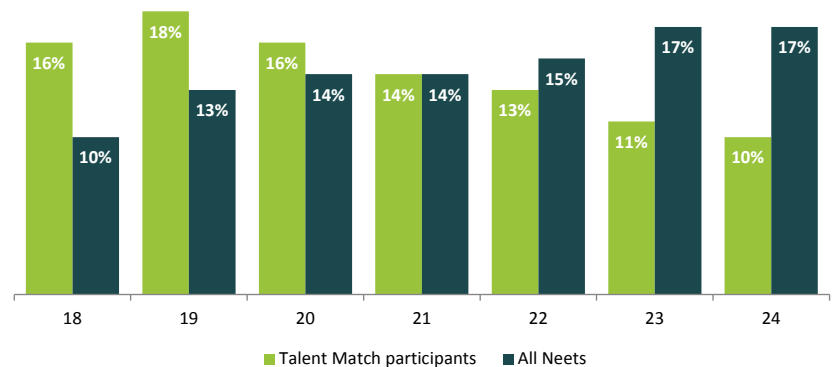


- Almost two thirds (63 per cent) of young people participating in Talent Match are male.
- In contrast only around half (48 per cent) of all NEETs in England are male.

Source and bases: Baseline survey (23,351), Labour Force Survey (619)

Age

- Half of young people signed up to Talent Match were aged 18-20 at their baseline interview.
- This suggests that Talent Match participants are on average slightly younger than NEETs across England, who are more concentrated in the 22-24 range.



Source: Baseline survey (23,378), Labour Force Survey (619)

Maths and English



69% had not achieved five GCSEs A*-C including English and Maths (or equivalent) at the baseline.

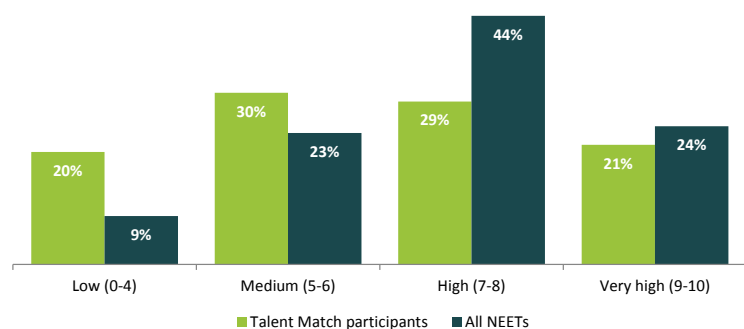
This compares to **68%** for all NEETs nationally



Source: Baseline survey (22,301), Labour Force Survey (secure lab)

Well-being

- Talent Match participants appear to be less satisfied with their lives overall than NEETs across England.
- Talent Match participants are particularly more likely to have low life satisfaction; although over three quarters of those who have been on the programme for six months or more go on to improve their overall well-being.



Source: Baseline survey (22,886), Annual population survey (845)



Progression: How have young people progressed on the Talent Match programme?

Talent Match has acted as a catalyst for progression towards employment by causing or accelerating positive change for participants, including improving confidence and wellbeing.

What is progression?

The indicators used to assess the progress of young people toward, into, and within employment include:

- Engaging in pre-employment activities.
- Entering employment.
- Sustaining employment for a pre-defined time period.
- In-work progression – e.g. to a more highly paid job, to a job that better suits an individual's requirements/ ambitions, etc.

An emphasis on the importance of broader outcomes beyond employment is integral to Talent Match. The Talent Match partnerships adopted a person-centred approach recognising that confidence, self-belief and well-being are key to progressing along the journey to, and within employment. Key worker support played an important role in supporting young people into work and this support continued once young people had entered employment.

What progress did young people make towards, into and within employment?

Many Talent Match participants have made substantial progress:

- **Nearly half of young people participating in Talent Match (46 per cent) undertook a work placement or volunteering opportunity. These have been important mechanisms for supporting the progression of those young people who were facing considerable challenges to getting a job.**

- **Two in five Talent Match participants (41 per cent) entered employment.**
- **Nearly one in five Talent Match participants (18 per cent) either started or completed an apprenticeship or entered formal education, so reducing their chances of being NEET for a significant period.**
- **One in five participants (18 per cent) sustained employment for at least six months.**

Progress has varied for different groups of Talent Match participants:

- Those with good formal qualifications and those from non-White ethnic groups were more likely to move towards and into employment. The latter is in contrast to the national picture and may in part reflect particular local circumstances. It also indicates that Talent Match may have helped to overcome some of the labour market barriers, including discrimination, which are known to face some non-White groups.
- Those with disabilities were less likely to achieve these outcomes.

Interviews with young people revealed the self-defined progress young people made:

- **Significant progress:** Some felt they made significant progress against clear employment goals – perhaps by becoming work ready despite facing considerable barriers. For instance: *“In terms of the last year [my goals have] been made a lot clearer cos if this was me a couple of years back I wouldn't have known what I were doing, what I wanted to do, but since these placements and everything else I've got a more defined goal as to where I want to end up. So I would say it's helped tremendously, what I've been doing and how I've done it, to help me get to where I am.”* (Talent Match participant)
- **Reasonable progress:** Others considered that they had made reasonable progress in that they found employment – but this might not have met aspirations regarding fulfilment at work, job type, hours or pay in employment. For example: *“I wanted to do IT work...I still want to look for something else. I want a job I*

look forward to, instead of dreading getting up in the morning cos I've got to go to work. I don't mind working at all; I just want a job that I'm happy in." (Talent Match participant)

- **Limited or no progress.** Inevitably some felt that they had made 'limited or no' progress against the goals they had set themselves. This may be for a variety of factors including changes in personal circumstances, or dissatisfaction with their employment circumstances: *"I know I want something else but it would have to be better paid anyway cos you always take more money in the end... it's a really simple job but it's not good for social life and seeing people."* (Talent Match participant)

What progress did young people make towards enhanced wellbeing?

The wellbeing of Talent Match participants has improved: over three-quarters (78 per cent) of Talent Match participants who initially recorded a low wellbeing score went on to record a higher score at a later stage.

Interviews with young people revealed that some saw improving their wellbeing as their main priority. This highlights the importance of the integrated nature of Talent Match in providing non-work support, which included personal development, social and peer activities and counselling alongside employment-related support.

In general, evidence from qualitative interviews with the same young people at two different points in time indicates that Talent Match appears to have stimulated positive change and accelerated progress, including by:

- Improving confidence and wellbeing.
- Providing motivation to find employment.
- Supporting access to training, jobs and in-work progression in practical ways.

Importantly these improvements could be enduring: *"I guess it's a good sign really, they've made me strong enough to be independent."* (Talent Match participant)



Lessons

Progression and targeting are key parts of all employment support programmes working with those often furthest from the labour market. The lessons from the evaluation of the Talent Match programme are as follows:

1. **Talent Match has made an important contribution to young people's progression.** While not all positive outcomes for Talent Match participants can be directly attributed to the Talent Match programme, especially for young people with access to other positive support networks, most Talent Match participants acknowledged that the support that they had received through Talent Match partnerships was helpful in supporting them to progress toward their employment goals.
2. **Integrated support for both work-related and non-work issues is required to help young people to progress.** This support may be in the following forms: firstly, in terms of addressing often very practical barriers including transport, childcare and for some housing; secondly, in terms of improving wellbeing and confidence (for instance through counselling or peer support); and thirdly in the provision of high quality employment information, advice and guidance. Evidence points to the positive impacts of an integrated package of support centred on the needs and capabilities of the young person. This may be best delivered through key worker support and can help individuals enter, sustain and progress in work. However this support can be expensive, especially for individuals who are furthest from the labour market.
3. **Employers have an important role in progression.** Employability programmes are often criticised for their supply-side emphasis (e.g. on the unemployed and not on employers). In any employment programme it is important to remember the role of the employer, since it is employers who are gatekeepers of jobs. For progression into employment to be achieved understanding

employers' requirements and working with them, as appropriate, to support programme participants in work is beneficial. Talent Match thematic research on in-work support has provided some good examples of working with employers to secure progression.¹

- 4. Progression is also influenced by the quality of jobs available and young people's understanding of employment options.** The self-assessment of young people regarding the progress that they had made highlights how some felt thwarted by unfulfilling jobs. While very few secure their dream job at the outset, the Talent Match evidence suggests that the quality of jobs is important for well-being and in terms of opportunities for progression. This highlights the importance of attempting to match jobs with individuals' aspirations, while also using programme support to develop an understanding of alternative job opportunities. Thematic research on key workers and the role of high quality information, advice and guidance shows how this might be done.²

¹ For further details of this research on in-work please see our thematic study. A blog is available here https://blogs.shu.ac.uk/talentmatch/blogs/?doing_wp_cron=1538665596.7831161022186279296875 and the longer report here: <https://blogs.shu.ac.uk/talentmatch/files/2015/03/tm-in-work-support-report.pdf>

² For further details of this research on the role of key workers please see our thematic study. A blog is available here <https://blogs.shu.ac.uk/talentmatch/evaluation-blog-12-how-key-workers-can-help-young-people-progress-towards-work/> and the full report here <https://blogs.shu.ac.uk/talentmatch/files/2015/03/tm-key-worker-report.pdf>



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

Contact Information

Peter Wells / Sarah Pearson

CRESR, Sheffield Hallam University, Unit 10,
Science Park, Howard Street, Sheffield, S1 1WB



<https://blogs.shu.ac.uk/talentmatch/>



0114 225 3073



cresr@shu.ac.uk



@CRESR_SHU

**Sheffield
Hallam
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Centre for
Regional Economic
and Social Research

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ECONOMIC
ASSOCIATES



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WELLS, Peter <<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5200-4279>>, PEARSON, Sarah <<http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5049-5396>>, DAMM, Christopher <<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7355-3496>> and SANDERSON, Elizabeth <<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1423-1670>>

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