Key worker models: *What key worker approaches, capacity and capabilities are important at different stages of the journey to employment?*

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Talent Match Case Study Theme Report

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About this report

This report focuses on the role of key workers (i.e. individuals providing one-to-one advice and support to beneficiaries) in employment programmes and the approaches, capacity and capabilities that are important at different stages of the journey to employment. It draws on findings from the Talent Match (TM) National Evaluation about how key worker support is being delivered, how it has evolved over the lifetime of TM and what key worker support looks like.

Talent Match is a Big Lottery Fund strategic programme investing £108 million in 21 Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) areas, which have experienced particularly high levels of youth unemployment. The focus of the programme is on developing holistic approaches to combating worklessness amongst long-term NEETs. A key aspect of the programme is to bring young people closer to, and into employment.

Part One of this report outlines what key workers are and the different approaches they adopt in employment programmes.

Part Two presents findings from a survey of all TM partnerships and case studies in four TM partnerships comprising qualitative interviews with partnership leads, key workers and beneficiaries. Based on these findings it presents a model of how key workers support young people on their journey to employment, highlighting the experience, attributes and skill sets needed by key workers at different stages of a young person's journey to employment.

Part Three sets out the learning on key worker approaches, capacity and capabilities emerging from this research.

Part 1: The key worker role in context

1.1. What is a key worker?

'Key workers' are individuals who provide one-to-one advice and support to beneficiaries on employment programmes. They might have different labels in accordance with the programme in question and how it is delivered – such as 'adviser', 'mentor', 'support worker', 'adviser', 'advocate', 'coach', etc., but in this summary report the generic term 'key worker' is used.

The particular mix of tasks and responsibilities of a key worker varies in accordance with the programme and question and where they key worker is located. Nevertheless a central element of a key worker role in any programme or context is one-to-one support and guidance.

Important distinguishing features of TM vis-à-vis mainstream employment programmes are that:

- Key worker support is more intensive and holistic and extends over a longer period – potentially from pre-employment to employment entry, sustaining work and in-work progression;

- It is a voluntary programme with young people at its core; and

- There are no sanctions for non-participation or non-compliance.

1.2. How can we better understand the role and activities of key workers

In terms of a simple model, key worker support may be focused on:

- A **youth work** approach – such as a programme of developmental, educational and social activities that positively impact on young people, drawing upon psychological, motivational and therapeutic models.

- A **careers guidance (or IAG [information, advice and guidance])** approach – such as activities that support understanding, decisions and transitions through education, training and the labour market, drawing upon approaches that recognise what individuals are ready to receive, accept and act through provision of careers support, guidance and information; or

- A **combination** of both a youth work approach and a careers guidance / IAG approach.

The **support beneficiaries require may change as they move along the journey to employment**. This raises the important question of what support is most beneficial at different stages of the journey to employment and what capacity and capabilities do key workers need to best deliver such support.

The aim of this thematic study it to understand how this support is being delivered, how it has evolved over the lifetime of the project and what this support looks like.

Part 2: Findings – TM key worker approaches, capacity and capabilities

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2.1. Overview

Box 1 presents the headline findings from a TM partnership survey and qualitative case study research on key workers with four partnerships.

Box 1: Headline findings

Profile of key workers: The number and profile of key workers varied across the partnerships. The majority have attained a qualification in youth work or a qualification in careers guidance or information, advice and guidance. Small numbers of key workers were reported to have community development qualifications or education, learning and development qualifications.

Important skills and attributes for key workers: The most important skills of a key worker identified by TM partnership leads are communication skills, empathy and compassion, experience of working with young people, followed by patience and resilience (such as the capacity to manage difficult situations).

TM key worker approach to supporting young people: The role of the key worker and their open and flexible approach is enabling TM beneficiaries to develop emotionally, personally and socially to ensure they are ready to progress into the labour market. This is very much in line with a youth work approach which provides a strong foundation for a supportive relationship to develop. The support provided is personalised and holistic, covering all aspects of a young person's social and personal development. It is based on a mentoring relationship.

Key workers need to not only be flexible and adaptable in their approach: Importantly they need to be resilient too in order to manage the demands of the role. It is evident that different skill sets need to be applied at different stages of a young person's journey. This adaptability is considered vital making the key worker approach successful.

Changes in the key worker role: Key worker roles are mainly filled by people with backgrounds in youth work and/or careers guidance work. At the TM programme has proceeded and a greater proportion of TM beneficiaries are closer to employment, the emphasis of key worker support needs to evolve with greater emphasis placed on employability. TM partnerships reporting a change in approach to key worker recruitment have shifted to towards more with a careers guidance background and a preference to recruit those with professional experience and/or a relevant qualification.

> **Configuring support for young people and the role of the key worker over the lifetime of the programme:** Although key workers are central to working with TM beneficiaries on an individual basis in all partnerships, the support offered by key workers has been configured in different ways by the TM partnerships and has varying emphases. TM partnerships started out with different approaches and delivery models and recruited key workers accordingly. In keeping with the 'test and learn' ethos, as TM has evolved some partnerships have changed their approaches - towards increasing emphasis on careers guidance support over time.
>
> **A key worker model:** A key worker 'model' is presented describing the different phases of the key worker approach from 'building a working alliance' through to 'exiting the programme'. The model depicts the complex and changing nature of the key worker role and highlights the range of skills required by a key worker in working with young people often with multiple and complex needs.

2.2. Findings from a survey of TM partnerships

Terminology

A range of terms are used by TM partnerships to describe a key worker (see Figure 1), with mentor and advocate being the most frequently used terms.

Figure 1: Terms used to describe key worker

Changing numbers of key workers

The number of full-time key workers varied across TM partnerships from two and 40 (with variations in partnership size being a key factor here). Over half of TM partnerships had key workers who worked part-time. Only one partnership has volunteer key workers.

Some TM partnerships used delivery partners as employers of key workers rather than directly employing key workers.

Sixteen partnerships reported changes in the number and composition of key workers over the duration of the project to enhance the support offered to beneficiaries. Changes included:

- numbers of key workers (particularly full-time staff) had increased as the programme has progressed (as would be expected given increasing numbers of beneficiaries);

- the TM offer had changed because of changes in the balance of beneficiary needs, changes in delivery partners or realignment of services to better reflect beneficiary needs workers;

- key workers with different and/or specialist skills or more experience were required (for example recruitment of dedicated careers guidance workers); and

- funding from an additional source had resulted in the recruitment of key workers with specialist skills.

There is an understanding that those in a key worker role need a combination of qualifications and experience in order to help those furthest from the labour market. It is a role that is difficult to fill by using volunteers.

Qualifications and experience

The majority of key workers working on TM have attained a qualification in youth work (higher education qualification) or a qualification in careers guidance or IAG (Levels 2-4). The most commonly held pertinent **qualifications** of key workers were:

- Youth work diploma or certificate;

- Higher education qualification in youth work; and

- NVQ Level 3 Certificate in Advice and Guidance.

TM partnerships that had employed key workers based on life experience had provided training and opportunities to gain relevant qualifications.

At the start of the TM programme TM partnerships looked for individuals with a broad range of experience and skills applicable to the key worker role. The majority recruited individuals with substantial and demonstrable experience of working with young people (especially vulnerable young people).

In terms of relative importance, from a pre-determined list of skills recognised as important for a key worker to support young people with complex and challenging needs, TM partnership leads ranked communication skills, empathy and compassion, experience of working with young people as most important, followed by patience and resilience (such as the capacity to mentally manage difficult situations) and relevant qualifications as least important.

At individual level key workers also brought other specialist **skills** to the TM programme, including dealing with disability, mental health, homelessness, addiction and substance abuse, youth justice, domestic violence, carers and benefits advice.

Key workers have a range of **experience** relevant to their role ranging from youth work, careers guidance and community work and development to teaching, welfare and probation work. This suggests that a mix of youth work, careers guidance and community development is needed for those in a key worker role (see Figure 2 for an overview of the numbers of key workers by experience and background).

Figure 2: Experience and background of all key workers
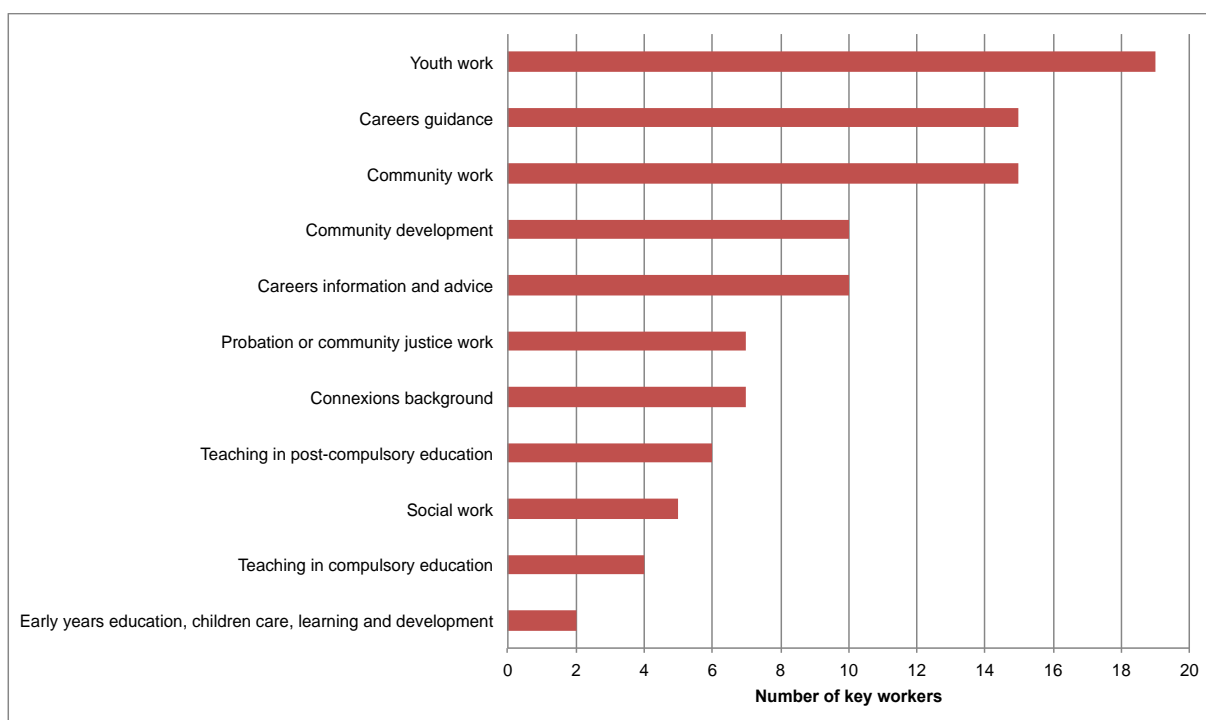
Note: One partnership did not respond.

More specifically, knowledge of local labour markets, employers, learning opportunities and services were identified by TM partnerships leads as important for key workers.

TM partnerships raised the issue that key workers have to be able to set boundaries (such as not accepting calls in the evening and at weekends) recognising that this is not only important, but challenging when supporting young people with complex needs over the long-term.

TM approaches to the key worker role and changes over time

The approach to the key worker role varied to some extent across TM partnerships, although key workers were in all cases central to the delivery model. A few partnerships employed apprentices in the role. These apprentices were young people recruited based on their personal experience and/or with an interest in youth work.

On a continuum (a scale of 1-5) TM partnerships indicated their approach to key workers in terms of youth work versus careers guidance background at the start of the programme compared to their current approach. Partnerships were also asked to indicate on a continuum the emphasis on life experience versus qualifications and professional experience. Two partnerships out of 20 responses reported recruiting most of their staff based on life experience and three based mostly on professional experience or a relevant qualification.

Fourteen out of 20 TM partnerships responding to a survey reported that their approach to working with beneficiaries has remained unchanged since the start of the TM programme. Of those that made changes, these were in response to:

• improved understanding of beneficiary needs;

• learning what works best in terms of approach;

- impact of wider environment changes (such as reduction in other services); and/or

- changes in the types of beneficiaries.

Four TM partnerships reported a change in their approach to key worker recruitment. They had shifted to towards a greater emphasis on careers guidance work, with a preference to recruit those with professional experience and/or a relevant qualification.

TM partnerships that employed apprentices or volunteers in the key worker role had shifted in order to provide senior mentors and/or coaches to support those in the key worker role.

TM Partnerships reported that the ideal caseload for a key worker ranged from 8-10 intensive cases to 25-40 active cases. Twenty cases seemed to be the preference by many partnerships. In practice, key workers often worked with around 40 young people seeing anywhere from 10-20 per week – but there are differences between partnerships (not only in caseloads but in relation to the amount of travelling time involved).

2.3. Findings from the partnership case studies

Partnership lead perspectives on the key worker role

The **key worker role is central to the TM approach** and key to supporting young people and their journey to independence and employment. The relationship between the key worker and the young person needed to be positive:

> *"So if that young person trusts them [key worker] they're more likely to have a positive outcome with them." (Partnership lead)*

Whilst partnerships leads spoke about **positive impact of key workers**, it was also noted that boundary setting can be challenging, with key workers often have difficultly knowing when to, and feeling able to, 'switch off'. Partnerships leads considered boundaries as important to safeguarding key workers well-being in what can be an emotionally demanding and difficult role. This issue was managed through close working relationships with their key workers, team meetings and/or caseload reviews, often building on delivery partners' previous experience with key workers.

Partnership leads spoke of key workers needing to not only be **flexible and adaptable** in their approach, but importantly resilient in order to manage the demands of the role. For instance, one partnership lead spoke of the complexity of the relationship due to its possible length (over a few years) and how this can impact on the key worker:

> *"I think that's quite hard for [key workers] when they're presented with a young person and trying to work with them over a long period of time to get them through this maze of difficulties, yet they go home every day and try and lead their normal lives, so it is really important that people get the right support but also are mentally equipped to deal with those kind of relationships." (Partnership lead)*

TM partnership leads recognised that they needed key workers (either individually and / or at team level) to help beneficiaries at different stages of the journey to employment. Often TM partnerships had or desired a **mix of key workers**: based on **life experience and professional experience and/or qualifications**, and with

backgrounds in **careers guidance** and **youth work**. But funding constraints meant that this was not always possible:

> *"We can't really ask for IAG level 3 as a minimum requirement cos those types of jobs people go into salaries of between £22,000 and £27,000 per year, so we're way off that." (Partnership lead)*

The partnership leads interviewed agreed that **different skill sets need to be applied at different stages of a young person's journey**. This adaptability is vital in making the key worker approach successful. Adaptability is a range of competences that enable a key worker to manage their complex and demanding relationships with TM beneficiaries. Hence one of the partnership leads highlighted particularly the need for key workers to focus on employability as well as the relationship building more typical of youth work:

> *"I think youth work is primarily about engagement and constant contact and interaction and knowing how to get that person out of wherever it is they are and come and meet them, so probably more engagement type things, whereas I think employability background does that to some degree […] but it's far better in asking the right questions of the young person in terms of employability. If this was purely a welfare-based project, it was just about sorting out young people's lives and problems, I think a youth working background would be much more valid but as I keep saying to the mentors and people on the team, this is effectively an employability programme." (Partnership lead)*

It is evident that key workers have a role in building skills and capacity amongst young people. An important lesson here from a policy perspective is that as a programme proceeds and a greater proportion of beneficiaries are closer to employment, the nature and emphasis of key worker support needs to evolve with greater emphasis placed on employability and rather less emphasis on a youth work approach.

Key worker perspectives on their role

The nine key workers interviewed spoke about providing one to one support to TM beneficiaries helping them on their journey to employment. This often meant starting with identifying and addressing personal, health and well-being issues before supporting personal and social development and then moving towards employment.

The key workers agreed that they often spent more time with beneficiaries when they started on the programme to **build rapport and establish a trusting relationship**. Once a relationship is established many key workers met with beneficiaries on a weekly or fortnightly basis, often keeping in contact by SMS. A key part of this support is built on **implicit contracting**, with the key worker allowing the beneficiary to determine the frequency and type of contact:

> *"So my approach is I meet with that young person in a really calm, relaxed, open way and try and find out just what's going on in your life, just a general tell me where you are at the moment." (Key worker)*

> *"So it's flexibility, it's being there to be a whole person centred focus rather than having to try and fit someone in a box is really important." (Key worker)*

Some key workers said that as the relationship develops, they often suggest times to meet and the purpose of such meetings in order to help the young person move forward. This suggests a more **explicit form of contracting**.

Some key workers spoke about approaching beneficiaries in an adaptable way - **personalising support** to ensure that is right for the young person. The importance of being personal and informal was highlighted:

> *"A lot of it's holding hands, giving them that real one to one approach." (Key worker)*

> *"It's completely individualised, it's very informal, they can tell me anything." (Key worker)*

Other terms, such as 'realist', 'practical' and 'pragmatic', were also used by key workers to describe their approach to supporting and working with the beneficiary. For instance, a number of key workers said this was needed in order to help beneficiaries' progress:

> *"I'm not a trained counsellor, but we are trained to be able to listen and be able to make judgements as to where that young person needs to go next. So it's always very practical, pragmatic." (Key worker)*

The majority viewed their role as about building a young person up so that they could cope with life, live in the world and gain sustainable employment. All spoke of the importance of the **longevity of the relationships** with the beneficiaries and the positive impact this had on 'building them up'. For instance, one key worker spoke of the time in can take to get a beneficiary talking before you can start really helping them:

> *"Sometimes we've had clients that have took six months before they've actually opened up to you fully, but during that six months you've probably learnt a lot more, you've identified a few more barriers that you didn't know where there originally so then you start working on those as well." (Key worker)*

It is clear that the approach adopted by key worker focuses on building, establishing and maintaining a relationship over the longer term. The longevity of this relationship enables the key worker to create an environment for open communication and a trusting relationship. This enables issues, problems and barriers to be identified and appropriate support provided with the overall aim to help that young person develop the capacity and capability to be self-sufficient.

Whilst the majority of key workers viewed their training, professional experience and qualifications as important, several suggested that their **character** or personality was equally as important. A few key workers spoke about the importance of 'life experience' for working with beneficiaries. One spoke about their character as being important to engaging with this client group:

> *"Personally for me you need to be a certain type of character, qualifications do help, personally I didn't think I had sufficient qualifications to potentially do the role but what I did bring to the table was my character, which is a very nurturing, empathetic, caring person where I can understand people's perspectives." (Key worker)*

Attributes such as **empathy, nurturing and caring** were noted as being essential to not only establishing the relationship, but maintaining it over the longer-term. One key worker spoke about the importance of building the relationship in order to be able to challenge in the future:

> *"So I think it's very important to have my kind of characteristics where you build up a friendship, build a relationship first and then get onto the nitty gritty, this is what we should be doing, can we push you a little bit further." (Key worker)*

The **ability to listen, understand and not judge** were also discussed as important skills by the key worker. Drawing upon their own personal experience was also mentioned by a few keyworkers, for instance:

"I'm 'it's life experience' it's living what these young people are currently living and we're survivors of it so we've been through most of it ourselves so we understand what position they're in and what they're facing." (Key worker)

What do young people say about their key workers?

All nine of the TM beneficiaries interviewed had been on the TM programme for five months or more and had established relationships with their key worker. All spoke very positively about the relationship and support they received. The support they received was varied and broad ranging from personal and social development, emotional support, encouragement to reengage with learning, and help with preparing for and engaging with the labour market.

The first meeting with their key worker was important in terms of not only getting young people signed up to TM, but also demonstrating how the programme is different. For some beneficiaries, the TM being 'different' to other labour market activation programmes was key to their engagement and commitment. Beneficiaries who had attended other programmes often spoke about the inflexibility in provision and support for programmes other than TM, plus the sanctions imposed when they had 'failed' to complete an action.

The approach of the TM key worker – in terms of their **flexibility, ability to listen and understand** – played a key role in setting expectations about the relationship and the programme.

A recurring theme with beneficiaries talking about the approach of the key worker was the **importance of trust** between them and their key worker. **Building a trusting relationship** meant different things for the young people, such as someone who is always available to talk, listens and understand and, importantly, someone who does not judge them personally or their situation. Many spoke of their key workers going 'above and beyond' in providing support. For instance, beneficiaries spoke about the importance of **someone who listens and someone who is reachable**:

"It's been one of the key things, it's mostly going and having someone who listens, when I go and see [key worker] we talk about anything and everything" (Talent Match beneficiary)

The nature of the key worker-beneficiary relationship and the fact that is based on regular meetings over the longer term means that beneficiaries often had very close and familiar relationships with their key worker. A number of beneficiaries used the term 'friend' when speaking about their key worker:

"There are times when emotions can be a bit all over the place, I can't really see things clearly, [key worker] just helps me to stop, take a breath, start thinking about it a different way and [key worker] probably one of my best friends." (Talent Match beneficiary)

This situation can be considered controversial by some partnership leads and key workers, as beneficiaries can become over dependent on the key worker and the support provided. Indeed one beneficiary interviewed was fearful of what would happen when her key worker moved on (as he was going to do), given that he

"understood" her particular needs and was able to advocate on her behalf with other stakeholders.

The relationship between the beneficiaries and their key worker provide a foundation in which open and honest conversations can take place. Conversations can be on anything, but beneficiaries valued the openness and the impartiality. TM beneficiaries spoke about how key workers helped with decisions by **talking through options** and had **challenged their ideas** about what they could do and achieve. They talked about the journey they had taken from not knowing or understanding what they could do to taking 'small steps' helping them on the way to achieving their objectives. Key workers had variously helped young people find a safe place to live, build confidence, help with personal issues, support learning, plus provide practical support with CVs, job applications, financial matters and so on. When asked what more key workers could do, beneficiaries typically were unable to identify anything.

It is evident that the role of the key worker and their **open and flexible approach** is enabling beneficiaries to develop emotionally, personally and socially to ensure they are ready to progress into the labour market. This is very much in line with a youth work approach, which provides a strong foundation for a supportive relationship to develop. The support provided is holistic and led by the young person.

2.4. A model of the key worker approach

Table 1 presents a model of the approach a key worker can adopt in establishing, developing and maintaining a supportive relationship in which to help a young person progress into education, learning and/or employment. The model is developed from the interviews with all those interviewed and adapted from models of career guidance.

The model sets out the different phases of the key worker approach from 'building a working alliance' through to 'exiting the programme'. As the support is individualised, it is not possible to say how long each phase lasts, as this will vary between beneficiaries. Phases associated with the 'identification of support and options', the 'exploration of soft data' (such as likes and dislikes, motivations and aspirations) and 'the exploration of hard data' (such as qualifications, training and work experience) take place over an extended period and may occur throughout a young person's journey on TM.

The aim and activities of each phase is identified, together with the skills and attributes needed by the key workers. These skills and attributes are not distinct to each phase; rather they represent particular skills that are particularly important at each phase. An essential part of supporting young people with challenging, multi and complex needs is the need to build and maintain rapport, which is represented on the model as occurring across all phases. Contracting changes across the lifetime of the relationship from 'implicit' (i.e. informal) to 'explicit' (as in a formal action plan).

Table 1: Key worker model

	Building a working alliance	**Identification of support and options**	**Exploration of soft data**	**Identification of support and options**	**Exploration of hard data**	**Identification of support and options**	**Exiting the programme**
Aim	To set out and establish a relationship, agree how the relationship is going to work	To identify what support is needed and strategies to move forward (health and well-being, finances, housing, etc.)	To explore interests to identify preferences and aspirations	To identify support and routes into gaining experience (in terms of social interaction and journey to employment); To provide opportunities to test out options	To explore learning and work preferences and aspirations. To challenge those aspirations	To identify steps to progress towards employment	To ensure strategies and plan of action (next steps) in place
Activities undertaken in this phase	Name, role, setting scene, orientation, goal setting, communication, location of meeting	Information and advice, referral Personal and social development	Exploration of: preferences, motivations, leisure pursuits, hobbies, career interests, attitudes	Information and advice, referral Identify education routes, work experience Help with CV and applications	Exploration of: school / college, qualifications, training, learning, work related experiences, work history	Information and advice, career guidance	In-work support, shift in relationship with onus on young person
Important key worker skills	Informal Flexibility Communication Non-judgemental Compassion Interpersonal	Empathy Honesty Signposting Influencing Advocacy Patience	Challenge Honesty	Challenge Negotiate, mediate Honesty	Balance between non-judgmental and more judgemental, realism	Challenge Honesty Knowledge of local labour markets and opportunities	Reassurance Reinforcement of strategies

←————————————————— **Rapport building and maintenance** —————————————————→

Implicit ←————————————————— **Contracting** —————————————————→ Explicit

To some extent the essence of this model is captured in one partnerships lead's description of the skills and actions needed from key workers at different stages during the TM journey in Box 2.

Box 2: A partnership lead's outline of key worker skills and actions at different stages of the TM journey

At the outset:

"Initially the skills they need it to be able to engage with that young person and find a hook that will keep them continuing with them, what they then need to be able to do is converse with them and engage with them either through personal support or whatever that person needs at the initial stages cos I would have thought normally a young person isn't ready for employment in the initial three to six months, so really they need to find out what's their barriers, how they can overcome that and what are their issues." (Partnership lead)

The partnership lead went on to talk about the variety of skills key workers need at different stages of supporting a young person, as well as how the nature of the relationship needs to change:

"So there's a different skill set there, it's trying to find information, then they need to be able to get that info out of them and see how they can support that and then sort that, cos once you've sorted that out that's when you can start focusing on employment, so I'd say from six to 12 months is when they will need a different skill set in encouraging and coercing the young people to start accessing services if they haven't done so already, e.g. going for interviews and things like that, everyone's at different stages but I would have said that's when you need to be a bit more hard line with them cos you can be at that point cos you've worked with them for a while, you can be a bit stricter and say you should be attending interviews, there's no reason why you're not now, you should be doing this, this and this." (Partnership lead)

Then at the final stages of the key worker relationship with the TM beneficiary:

"Once they're in employment or training, I think it's keep that continuity, it's being there but not being there, cos some people don't want to have them continuous, it's like I'm finished now, and it's a natural end, which would be nice, sometimes I would imagine some of them come to a natural end, others still need you there as that little 'how are you doing?'. So you need to be applying different skill sets throughout." (Partnership lead)

This model represents the approach a key worker can adopt in establishing, developing and maintaining a supportive relationship in which to help a young person progress into education, learning and/or employment.

Part 3: Key learning points

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3.1. Key lessons for partnerships

1. **It is important to recognise that key worker models combine youth work and careers guidance approaches**

   A combination of youth work and careers guidance approaches is needed in order to support young people furthest form the labour market. Key workers need to take elements of each approach to ensure that young people are supported at each stage of their journey to employment. This means that there is merit in a holistic approach that draws upon the tools of a youth worker and a careers guidance worker. The youth worker approach creates an open and safe environment for a young person to start their journey to employment. Then drawing upon the practices of a careers guidance worker approach, a young person can be supported in developing their knowledge and understanding of the labour market and the opportunities available to them.

2. **Key worker models evolve over time**

   The role of the key worker is shifting as partnerships have a better understanding of what young people need in order to progress into employment. For instance, as more beneficiaries move closer to employment greater emphasis on careers guidance is appropriate. The challenge is to recruit people to a key worker role who have appropriate qualifications and/or experience given funding constraints.

3. **Key workers and key worker teams need to combine a range of experience, skills and qualifications**

   Key workers need to draw on multiple skills, 'tools' and local knowledge to support those furthest from the labour market. Individuals in a key worker role need a combination of qualifications and experience – generally a combination of youth work, careers guidance and community development. If one individual does not have this combination, it is important that on a team basis the full variety of experience, skills and qualifications can be drawn upon. Local knowledge of services and the labour market are useful also.

4. **Key workers need to ensure that beneficiaries do not become too dependent on them**

   A key challenge for key workers is to provide holistic support and help with current issues, and to balance that support with ensuring a young person does not become too dependent. It needs to be recognised that the aim of support is to help a young person to become more independent and self-sufficient in managing and coping with difficult situations and barriers in the longer term.

5. **Partnerships need to provide support for key workers**

A key challenge for partnerships is to support their key workers, provide safeguards and help with boundary setting (such as not routinely accepting calls in the evening and at weekends), recognising that this is not only important, but challenging when supporting young people with complex needs over the long-term.

3.2. Key lessons for policy

6. **The value of a holistic approach**

To support those furthest from the labour market a holistic approach is needed in order to address the complex and multiple barriers some young people face. This holistic approach needs to take into account the emotional and personal well-being, as well as personal development of a young person.

7. **Combining youth worker and careers guidance approaches**

There is merit in a holistic approach that draws upon the tools of a youth worker and a careers guidance worker. The youth worker approach creates an open and safe environment for a young person to start their journey to employment. Then drawing upon the practices of a careers guidance worker approach, a young person can be supported in developing their knowledge and understanding of the labour market and the opportunities available to them.

8. **The importance of not neglecting careers guidance approaches in employability programmes**

Careers guidance approaches are needed in order to help young people to start and progress with their journey into the labour market. Careers guidance workers have the expertise with which to help a young person receive and understand information about the labour market, as well as challenge assumptions and misunderstandings about the opportunities that may or may not be available to them in their local environment.

9. **The need for money to be allocated to key worker roles**

While it is recognised that key workers plan an important role, this is not always reflected in the amount of funding allocated for key workers in business plans. As a result this can preclude lead partners and delivery partners from specifying experience and qualifications in job adverts that they might otherwise have wished to include in person specifications. It is important that sufficient resource is earmarked for the key worker role at the planning stage of programmes.

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Further reading

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