

Talent Match Evaluation and Learning Contract: Briefing Report 2015

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November 2015



Introduction

This briefing paper reflects on the main findings from the Talent Match evaluation as at Autumn 2015. It draws on a suite of reports published at the same time as this one. We set out the possible implications of the evidence for the programme, key areas of learning, and aspects for the evaluation to consider looking ahead. At the end of this briefing paper we also return to some of the issues and challenges raised in the 2014 Annual Report.

A wide range of research activities have been undertaken so far with most of these informing [published reports](https://blogs.shu.ac.uk/talentmatch/) (available at: <https://blogs.shu.ac.uk/talentmatch/>). This includes evidence generated from the Common Data Framework, the longitudinal tracking of beneficiaries, thematic research (including topics such as the involvement of young people, partnership development, the engagement of employers and mental health and wellbeing) and visits to, and surveys of, lead and delivery partners.

At the time of writing there is research ongoing, and this includes qualitative interviews with beneficiaries and the second phase of the comparator survey. A report on the Impact of Talent Match is scheduled for publication at the beginning of 2016. This will include a far more comprehensive economic impact assessment of the programme.

About Talent Match

The Big Lottery Fund is investing £108million in Talent Match, its innovative programme designed to address the problems of high levels of unemployment amongst 18-24 year olds. It is important to recognise that Talent Match is a novel and innovative programme. Three aspects are worth highlighting:

- **The personalised, individual nature of support:** there is no standard approach, partnerships do different things according to need, their skills and what young people request.
- Talent Match is typically working with **young people who are a long way from the labour market.**
- **The programme is voluntary** and therefore drop-out rates may be high.

Overall, the research last year highlighted that the involvement of young people in the design and delivery of the programme was one of its most innovative aspects and set it aside from both previous initiatives of this scale and current government employment programmes.

Changing Labour Market Context: the space for Talent Match

It is beyond the scope of this paper to reflect fully on changes in the labour market for young people in September 2015; moreover the 18-24 year old cohort is an incredibly diverse group with significant variations by qualification and geographic area.

However, there are some noticeable patterns and trends which are reflected below:

- **There continues to be a downward trend in youth unemployment.** For instance the unemployment rate for 16-24 year olds stood at 15.6 per cent at the end of July, down a percentage point on the same position 12 months earlier. In the 18-24 year old group 578,000 were unemployed while 1.67 million were economically inactive.
- **Numbers of young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs) vary by region.** The Labour Force Survey provides reliable estimates of NEETs by region. At the end of June 2015 these ranged from 12 per cent in London to 23.4 per cent in the North East. The northern regions and West Midlands were above the

national average of 15.3 per cent, the southern regions including London and the East Midlands were below the average.

- **Rise in numbers unemployed but not claiming benefit.** A striking figure which is of relevance to Talent Match is that the proportion of unemployed young people who are not claiming benefits (typically JSA) and NEET stood at 65.8 per cent (or 313,000 young people) in September 2015. This proportion has risen by over 20 percentage points over the last three years. This may reflect changes to welfare conditionality, such as the use of benefit sanctions increased.

The final figure is important because it represents the main Talent Match target group. It will of course not be an homogenous group and will include hidden NEETs as well as others.

Reporting last year found that there was some divergence in labour market fortunes between the Talent Match areas. Unemployment had fallen to a greater extent in some areas (Cornwall, Worcestershire and Northamptonshire) than in others; this does not necessarily translate into higher youth employment for the reasons given above. Estimates of hidden NEETs will be updated for the forthcoming economic impact report.

Changing Public Policy Context

The 2015 General Election has not resulted in any significant changes in the direction of policies concerning employment, skills, enterprise or welfare. Key policies to be announced in or around the time of the Summer Budget 2015 included:

- The introduction of a new **Youth Obligation** from April 2017 which will require all Universal Credit claimants aged 18-24 to either 'earn or learn'. Alongside this will be the introduction of a new **Intensive Activity Programme** for new claimants.
- The withdrawal of **automatic entitlement to Housing Benefit** for 18-21 year olds (except for the most vulnerable groups and 'other hard cases').
- The **expansion of both the number of Apprenticeships and Traineeships**. There is also a new requirement that all new Apprenticeships without A*-C English and Maths must seek to gain these qualifications.

The new **National Living Wage** is not being extended to the 18-24 year old age group.

Interviews with policy officials around these changes highlighted the overall focus on 18-24 year olds who are claiming work related benefits. Two other aspects were noted. Firstly, the role of the voluntary and community sector in reaching hidden NEETs and in particular non-claimants; and secondly, growing interest in sustainable employment. Of direct relevance to the Talent Match programme will be the expansion of Traineeships.

Progress to date

This report draws on the first 18 months of data from the Common Data Framework (up until the end of June 2015).

Analysis has largely been descriptive based on self-reported measures. At this stage we have not considered the difference Talent Match makes in great detail. The following stand out as key findings - with findings also set out in an infographic at the end of the report:

1. **Headline outcome:** 643 young people have secured employment and 47 have become self-employed or started a business (note: data from the end of October 2015 shows over 1,100 now in employment and suggests the programme is moving into a key phase of implementation).

2. **Numbers engaged by the programme:** nearly seven thousand young people have been engaged by Talent Match; 19 per cent were hidden NEETs. Nearly all those on Talent Match (over 95 per cent) report their satisfaction with the programme. This is at three, six and 12 month stages.
3. **Furthest from the labour market targeted:** Talent Match is targeting young people furthest from the labour market (measured on factors such as qualifications, experience, and disability).
4. **Those furthest from the labour market receive the widest range of support,** including combinations of basic skills, addressing practical barriers such as transport access and counselling support. This reflects the key rationale of the programme.
5. **Qualifications:** 70 per cent had not achieved five GCSEs A*-C including English and Maths; although only eight per cent had no qualifications.
6. **Disability:** 23 per cent supported by the Programme had a disability. This is higher than might be expected and reflects the steps of partnerships to support those groups who generally face greatest barriers in securing sustainable employment.
7. **Key barriers to finding employment:** access to and cost of cost transport; lack of prior work experience; lack of local job opportunities; lack of qualification and skills; and lack of confidence.
8. **Support received:** on average young people received five forms of support: with the most common being one-to-one, information, advice and guidance, and advice on personal development.
9. **Job satisfaction:** Those moving into employment tend to be satisfied with their job but they also often report that they are underemployed. This may point to an unmet need around in-work support as well as the state of the labour market.
10. **Mental health and well-being:** a recurrent theme from the analysis is around self-reported mental health, and well-being more broadly. For instance 45 per cent report that a lack of confidence is a barrier to employment. Around 12 per cent of beneficiaries have received counselling. Those not securing employment outcomes were also more likely to report lower levels of well-being. Talent Match is playing an important role in supporting young people who face such barriers.

It is too early to determine the overall impact of the programme. However, with data over 18 months it should also be noted that there is now a relatively consistent picture of the profile of beneficiaries. Relatively little change has been observed from quarter to quarter.

What has changed since last year?

The focus of the reports published last year was very different. They largely concerned issues of setting up the Programme and establishing a baseline for the evaluation. Alongside some of the features highlighted above (in About Talent Match) we noted:

- **The breadth of interventions Partnerships have commissioned.** These include outreach, peer mentoring, counselling, information, advice and guidance, as well as some in-work support. Whilst all partnerships are doing some form of pre-employment support, only eight Partnerships are implementing demand side and in-work measures.
- **The approach to targeting beneficiaries varies,** some focusing on particular geographic areas, some on groups and others through a combination of approaches. Collectively Partnerships are seeking to engage over 29,000 young people over the course of the Programme.
- **Lead partners take one of four organisational forms:** national VCS organisations such as the Prince's Trust; local 'infrastructure organisations (e.g. Councils for Voluntary Service); local specialist organisations; and consortia based organisations.

- **Engagement with Local Enterprise Partnerships and employers varies considerably** and had been approached in different ways.
- **Intensity of support varies** with unit costs ranging from £1,603 to £7,550 per beneficiary.

We also reflect on some of the challenges for the programme. The following updates these reflections:

- **Targeting of those furthest from the labour market:** the new evidence from the CDF shows that on the whole these groups are being targeted but there is significant variation between partnerships.
- **Value for money:** we cannot comment further on this directly until the initial findings from the comparator study are ready in November.
- **Sustaining the involvement of young people:** this remains a key part of the programme for most partnerships. We found that there is significant variation between partnerships as to the extent of involvement in project delivery.
- **The local coordination, capacity and capability to deliver the programme:** the likelihood of further devolution to city-regions in England will bring different challenges to the programmes, especially those inside and outside the initial plans for devolution and city-deals. A key challenge will be to avoid duplication between local and national initiatives.
- **Innovation:** in the mental health theme report (published alongside this Briefing Paper) findings are provided of an example of genuine innovation in the configuration and delivery of youth mental health services. A key point here is the extent to which a local partnership can reshape the local system of support to disadvantaged young people.

These challenges all remain appropriate although we now have a clearer sense of the main challenges and the extent to which Talent Match has addressed these.

Looking ahead for the Test and Learn approach

The **Test and Learn** approach is a key and novel feature of the Big Lottery Fund's strategic programmes. The evaluation reports published are revealing much about how the programme is working (which individuals are supported, how, and with what outcomes). The following appear to be the key issues in taking this approach further:

- **estimating the impact of Talent Match** will be an important feature of the remainder of the evaluation. In particular, this concerns the difference the 'Talent Match approach' has made
- **learning from a broad and multi-faceted programme.** Interventions are designed within a local context and reflect local capabilities of delivery organisations. This presents challenges for replicating the learning from the programme, in contrast to a more tightly prescribed intervention. **The challenge for replication is understanding the combination of factors leading to a successful outcome for a young person.**
- **understanding labour market dynamics.** Labour market opportunities vary by place and group. The major differences in the programme largely lie in the scale and scope of demand side activities: in particular the engagement of employers and the potential for in-work measures including intermediate labour markets, wage subsidy and in-work support and training.

Talent Match Evaluation 2015: Infographic

At the end of June 2015 Talent Match had **engaged 6,910 young people** of whom **643 had secured employment**. Those engaged are likely to be white males (Figure 1). Nearly three fifths live with their parents/guardian and around half will have at least A*-C GCSEs (Figure 3). Although a small proportion of total beneficiaries, significant numbers (compared to the general population) will have experienced homelessness, have a criminal record or been in local authority care (Figure 4). Of those on the Programme: **23% have a disability; 14% have a disability which limits their activities; and 18% have experienced mental ill health**. Although most report common labour market barriers (lack of work experience, lack of jobs or lack of qualifications), **significant proportions face barriers which require far more intensive and wrap-around support** (such as childcare, gaining basic skills and addressing having a criminal record) (Figure 5). For information about the evaluation, reports and blogs go to: <https://blogs.shu.ac.uk/talentmatch/>

Figure 1: Participant Characteristics

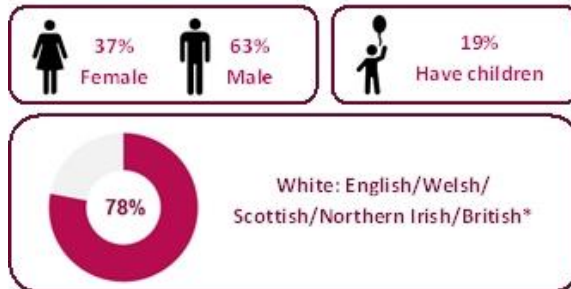


Figure 2: Highest Qualifications

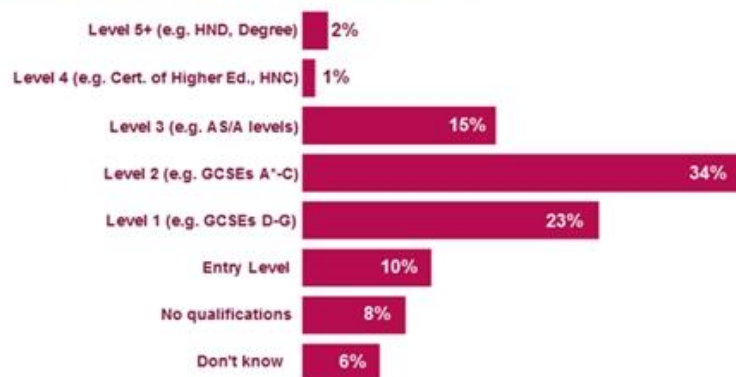


Figure 3: Tenure



Figure 4: Experiences



Figure 5: Hardest employment barriers faced



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