



Talent Match

A youth employability programme co-designed with young people who face multiple and complex barriers to employment

UNITED KINGDOM

Title of the practice (in original language)

Talent Match

Who is/was implementing the practice?

Talent Match takes place in 21 Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) areas across England which experience high levels of youth unemployment. The Big Lottery Fund manages the initiative and distributes the funding. The partnerships established through Talent Match are led by voluntary or community led organisations which have experience of working with young people who are not in work, education or training. Young beneficiaries are equal programme partners and involved in all aspects of the programme's design and delivery.

Which other organisations are/were involved in the practice?

Talent Match partnerships bring together young people, employers, statutory agencies, education and training providers, the LEP and other voluntary and community sector organisations.

What are/were the main objectives of the practice?

The programme works with young people who face multiple and complex barriers to employment to stabilise their lives, support their aspirations and equip them with the skills and attitudes that will help them to take their first steps towards employment.

When was the practice implemented?

The programme is implemented over a five year period between 2014 and 2018 funding 21 partnerships. Seven of the funded partnerships have secured further funding from the Big Lottery Fund for further five years (until 2023).

Who is/was targeted by the practice?

The initiative targets young NEETs aged 18 – 24 who have been out of work, education or training for 12 months or more. This includes long-term unemployed youth and young people who have complex lives and face multiple barriers to employment.

What activities are/were carried out?

There is no standardised approach to activities but partnerships provide individualised solutions according to the needs and aspirations of participants. All 21 partnerships designed their own approaches to meet the needs of their local areas, to complement existing local services and to identify and fill gaps in current provision. Activities include listening young people and learning about them and their strengths and aspirations (mentoring), support to address basic needs, help in securing work placements / employment (signposting, training, hand-holding), mental health support as well as in work support for instance:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practical support e.g. help with arranging transport to work, appropriate clothing or assistance with organising caring responsibilities; • Support with non-work related issues that impact on keeping a job e.g. advice about making hospital appointments, dealing with probation; • Guidance on work-related matters including work appropriate behaviour and managing working relationships; • Assistance provided to an employer to support a beneficiary's job retention.
What are/were the sources of funding?	<p>Talent Match is funded by the Big Lottery Fund with a total amount of GBP 106 million (EUR 121 million). The Big Lottery Fund, a non-departmental public body, distributes money from the National Lottery following a 'People in the Lead' approach which puts communities and service users at the heart of social change.</p>
What are/were the outputs: people reached and products?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talent Match has engaged and supported over 22 230 young people who are furthest away from the labour market; a further 5 700 young people are planned to be engaged by December 2018. • 5 860 beneficiaries have been involved in volunteering and most of them (70%) volunteer regularly. • 1 490 participants have moved into formal education, 844 have taken up an apprenticeship and 1 780 have taken / are taking basic skills training. • 5 362 new jobs secured and recorded including over 260 new businesses / self-employed. But evaluators indicate that the number of jobs secured might be higher (2 000-3 000 more) than official records because many young people in work do not return to the projects to notify their employment situation.
What are/were the outcomes: medium-term results or effects?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people feel listened to and valued within the programme. They have appreciated having someone, usually a mentor, who takes time to listen, who cares about their situation, and gives them confidence that they are not alone and confidence to deal with the challenges they face. • Young people report positive effects on confidence, outlook in life and wellbeing. Nearly half (44%) of participants felt less anxious after 6 and more months on the programme. • Young people are better prepared for the world of work as a result of their time on the programme. The evaluators created a measure of 'proximity to the labour market' to quantify the extent to which young people have been moved closer to the labour market. It was reported that 'over half of all Talent Match participants (55%) are in the two categories classified as furthest away from the labour market at the start of their time on the programme. After three months, this goes down to 43% of participants, and reduces further to 35% after 6 and more months on the programme'. • Talent Match has started to influence policy, practice and commissioning, especially in terms of: 1) the time, flexibility, compassion and youth-centred approach required to achieve sustainable outcomes when dealing with young people who have lived chaotic lives and whose basic needs have not been met, 2) the importance and value of the relationship between young people and their mentors / key workers, and 3) the benefits of genuine (rather than tokenistic) co-production of youth interventions together with young people.
What are/were the lessons learnt and success factors?	<p>Lessons Learnt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local employment programmes are normally run by local authorities or large private providers but TM shows that youth and community groups can successfully lead and deliver large, high-quality, outcome focused contracts. The programme appears to have also been instrumental in supporting a range of delivery partners to introduce and embed the systems, processes and organisational culture required to deliver contracts in this way something that funded partnerships have indicated as key to securing other contracts.

- Genuine involvement of young people in designing and delivering services has had a positive effect in reaching and engaging a high number of 'hidden' youth and in ensuring better and wider feedback on the services provided, thus better tailored provision. Experience also shows that co-production helps with wider efforts to influence policy and practice – for example, LEPs, local authorities, job centres and private employers have started to invite and even commission Talent Match beneficiaries to give feedback on their strategies and services. Co-production can also have a positive effect on the transversal and soft skills of young people who are involved in co-designing and co-delivery.
- The partnerships have found that mental health and conditions like autism are the single biggest barrier for young people. They have provided mental support alongside employment support. The partnerships have also made efforts around changing recruitment practices of companies to suit autistic candidates better.
- Employment retention (and progression) of young people improves when they are recruited and trained into job roles they are suited to and have an interest in. Talent Match experience suggests that pushing or forcing young people to attend programmes which they were not ready for or were not suitable do not work.
- Employment support needs to stretch all the way into employment. In-work support improves retention: Successful in-work support involves giving advice on a range of issues rather than taking action on behalf of young people. In-work support needs to be tailored to the beneficiary and employer, with good communication between the parties involved.
- Local partnerships need to work across sectors to ensure services are seamless and no one is left behind.
- Commissioning and funding needs to change: There is a need for longer contracts for providers of youth employment services to give them room to achieve sustainable outcomes. Short term contracts promote quick-fixes and could encourage providers to work only with those who are employment ready to the detriment of the most vulnerable.
- Working closely with employers from the start, including in the design of the activities, has allowed partnerships to secure engagement, raise awareness on mental health issues and challenging recruitment practices. It is important to be proactive in reaching to employers, develop a 'menu' of options for employer participation from light-touch options (e.g. helping young people with mock interviews, workplace visits) to more time and effort intense options (e.g. providing work placements, apprenticeships).
- Recognising and sharing positive experiences amongst employers through the establishment of awards and employer charters. For instance, Talent Match Mark was initiated by the partnerships and was co-developed by Talent Match London together with Youth Employment UK and Movement to Work. It is an award framework that recognises and celebrates small and large employers who support young people. It has involved 1 800 employers until now, including large international and national organisations as well as SMEs. Employers can get involved by offering a range of activities such as a light-touch job / career exploration opportunities for young people (i.e. hosting workplace visits, taking part in career days, offering mock interviews, taking part in Q&A's and coffee & chat sessions with potential applicants); providing two to six week work experience placements to allow young people to delve into a particular career path whilst developing skills and offering job opportunities and apprenticeships.

Success factors

- The programme, projects and services have been co-designed and co-delivered with young people. In practice, young people are designing services, sitting on steering committees, deciding on budgets and services as equal partners, recruiting project staff, training job centre staff, evaluating the services, etc. This approach significantly contributed to the success of the project.
- The partnerships are led by charities, local and national, that are able to identify and engage those young people who are hardest to reach.
- The Talent Match experience recognises that progression of young people who have lived chaotic lives and experienced trauma is not linear; it is important to work with them flexibly — for as long as needed, without penalising for missed appointments or set-backs in progression. Some Talent Match partnerships do not have any time limit on the time they can spend on the programmes, others provide support for at least 12 months.

What are key sources of information?

- The Big Lottery Fund Knowledge and Learning Programme Briefing: Talent Match
- Evaluation of the Talent Match programme: Annual Report 2014
- Talent Match Programme Guide
- Talent Match: Questions and answers
- Available at: <https://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/talentmatch>