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Involving young people: Lessons from the Talent Match programme evaluation



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Introduction

This summary draws together evidence on the involvement of young people in Talent Match, gathered through the evaluation of the programme carried out between 2013 and 2018. It is intended for audiences interested in both the process and impact of involving young people in public services.

The summary explores:

- **How have Talent Match partnerships involved young people?**
- **Which groups of young people have been involved in Talent Match?**
- **What difference does involvement make to young people and the Talent Match partnerships?**

All Talent Match beneficiaries have co-produced their own employment journeys through close engagement with key workers. This summary is concerned specifically with those young people who have been 'formally' involved in the design, delivery and evaluation of Talent Match through participation in activities which aim to inform, influence or lead various aspects of the work of the Talent Match partnerships.



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 is rooted in extensive evidence that user involvement can bring a range of benefits to public services which may include increased voice for those affected by policy interventions, improvements to service effectiveness and greater

efficiency. In addition, there may be benefits for the individuals involved, by way of skills development, improved confidence and enhanced networks.

There has however been little evidence on the involvement of young people, and particularly those who are NEET. The evaluation of Talent Match provides an important opportunity to gather evidence on the involvement of young people in the design and delivery of employment support.



How have Talent Match partnerships involved young people?

An average of 71 young people in each Talent Match partnership have been involved in the design and/or delivery of local activities. Young people have been involved across all aspects of Talent Match provision. They have been particularly involved in peer activities, research and evaluation, outreach and engagement. A range of approaches to involving young people have been taken, and developed over time, in response to the needs and priorities of young people. These have included youth boards and panels and youth ambassadors and apprentices.

By the end of 2017, 1489 young people had been involved in Talent Match. This means that in each Talent Match partnership an average of 71 young people have engaged in processes which have influenced employment support for young people in their area. This is a significant step-change in the delivery of services designed to meet the needs of this group.

There has been a wide variety of approaches to involvement, many of which have been genuinely innovative. Four approaches can be identified, which are common across many Talent Match partnerships:

- Youth-led governance and consultation groups which have a representative function or influence on wider governance structures such as partnership boards, steering groups and commissioning panels. Examples include the Youth Panel in Greater Manchester, the Youth Boards in London and Generation E in Cornwall.

- Individuals or groups of young people with a remit to engage young people in Talent Match and deliver peer support and training - often termed as Talent Match 'Champions' or 'Ambassadors'. Examples include Talent Match Champions employed as peer mentors in Northamptonshire, Youth Leaders in Talent Match North East who have co-designed promotional materials and engaged peers through face to face events and social media, and Talent Match Leeds' Young Ambassadors who co-deliver induction days for all young people who join the programme locally.
- Groups which have a remit to help develop and/or deliver services which respond to the needs of young people, either through advising service development or direct delivery. For instance, the six Talent Match Apprentices in Cornwall who each lead on different aspects of delivery depending on their skills and experience, and the Northamptonshire Talent Match Challenge Group which each year identifies an event or project to run and is given a budget by the Talent Match partnership.
- Influencing policy and practice locally, giving feedback to employers, local authorities and Jobcentre Plus. For example, Generation E in Cornwall has advised a local employer on employment issues.

Approaches to involving young people have developed over time. In some Talent Match partnerships, early approaches to the involvement of a range of young people have been narrowed to focus on providing intensive support for the meaningful involvement of Talent Match beneficiaries (particularly those facing barriers to gaining employment). In others, structures and forums for participation increased in size, with a view to embedding youth involvement activities firmly into partnership work. The capacity for reflection, and change, is an important learning point, as in all Talent Match partnerships the needs, and purposes of youth involvement have evolved over time.

Talent Match D2N2

The ambition for young people's involvement in Talent Match D2N2 is "*to shape policy for the future*". The approach has developed with recognition that there is a need for a range of different opportunities for participation. A 'menu' of opportunities has included involvement in commissioning processes, attendance at the Programme Board, and engagement in Youth Forums which support local decision making around project delivery. Young people are supported in these roles by a Young People's Participation Officer. Social activities have also been offered to encourage a wide range of young people to engage, and thus ensuring that young people have had a significant influence on the Talent Match partnership.

Involving young people in decision-making has proved challenging for many partnerships, and alongside organisational learning there has been recognition that young people themselves need support and development to enable them to engage. Where this has been successful, benefits to involvement have included influencing the development of services which are genuinely responsive to young people's needs, which in some cases has revealed issues which had not previously been considered.

Talent Match Humber

In Talent Match Humber, the Young People's Partnership was restructured, as in the early days of the programme it had been open to non-beneficiaries. An open approach had led to the activities of the Young People's Partnership not being entirely relevant to Talent Match beneficiaries and a high turnover of attendees, as non-beneficiaries tended to move on quickly.

Emerging out of the restructuring was the People Against Disability Discrimination (PADD) group. The PADD group was established as a response to the particular needs and issues faced by young people with disabilities.

The group has proved very successful and the young people involved are very engaged and committed to the group. Many of the group had experienced challenges in finding work, and the PADD group provided an important way to re-engage these young people. The facilitation and development of the PADD group had also involved some positive learning for Talent Match staff. Key learning points included:

- The need to ensure that PADD group members understand their role and contribution.
- The need to simplify language and processes.
- The importance of acknowledgement and understanding of the complexities of everyday life for many group members.
- Recognition that the realisation of learning difficulties is a key milestone for some group members.
- Recognition that realisation, engagement and involvement can sometimes lead to frustration and anger for young people, and the need for strategies to support them.



Which groups of young people have been involved in Talent Match?

Involvement in Talent Match has supported young people who don't have experience of paid employment and who are more likely to have a limiting or non-limiting disability.

The majority of young people who have been involved are male, and aged over 21 years. Compared to those who have not been involved they are older and more likely to have a limiting or non-limiting disability. They are also more likely to be better qualified, have completed an apprenticeship or formal education before joining Talent Match, or to have undertaken a work placement or volunteering. Smaller proportions of involved young people have been in paid employment, experienced negative prior life experiences and identify as heterosexual compared to those who have not been involved, and they have received more support from Talent Match partnerships.

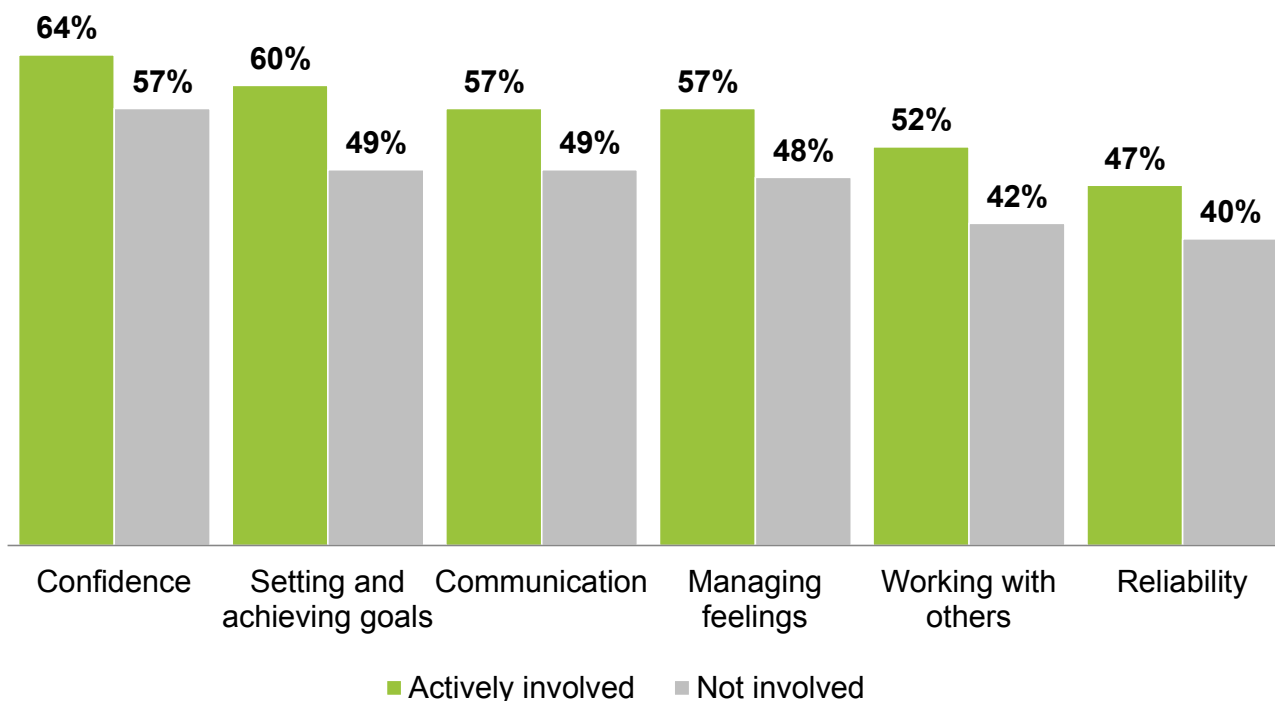


What difference does involvement make to young people and the Talent Match partnerships?

Involvement in Talent Match has helped young people move closer to the labour market. Young people experience greater improvements in confidence, setting and achieving goals, communication, managing feelings, working with others and reliability compared to their peers who have not been involved. They are also more likely to enter education, apprenticeship or placement, or take up volunteering.

Young people who have been involved in Talent Match identify individual benefits associated with their involvement, including the opportunity to build skills, increased opportunities for social engagement and improved confidence. There are also some statistically significant differences in outcomes for this group, when compared to their peers who have not been involved. These include a greater likelihood of entering into education, an apprenticeship or placement, or taking up

Figure 1: Talent Match participants reporting improvements on 'My Journey' scale by involvement



Base: 11,965-12,013

Daniel

When Daniel first engaged with Talent Match he was struggling with communication, finding it very difficult to work with others, and had problems with his mental health. His three goals with Talent Match were to improve his basic skills, develop good specific skills for the job he wanted to do (graphics), and to undertake some form of work experience.

Daniel became involved in the local Talent Match steering group. Being on the steering group opened up opportunities for Daniel to attend events and to travel. He began to meet people and get out and about, and with this, his confidence began to grow. He commented:

I'm not very comfortable around new people at the start and I can be really awkward. As I grew to know these people [in the steering group] I grew a bit more open with the way I talk to people. I needed a way to get to know new people and understand and bring my communication skills back up because at first it was a bit slow cos it was formal and I was a bit intimidated but I was sitting around with people and eventually I got my confidence up and I could talk freely with them which I'm really happy for.

He also took up other opportunities, including attending a skills show and sitting on a recruitment panel: *"It was a massive confidence boost, I honestly loved it...it's surprisingly enjoyable"*. Daniel recognised that by meeting people, and participating in activities, such as a residential, and visiting other Talent Match partnerships, he was able to develop his social skills:

That gave me a lot more boost, it means I was in again social situations talking, I was also there with, in a professional mind-set as well, but I was also meeting other people in similar situations to me or working with people with similar situations to me.

Daniel has secured employment through Talent Match and although he is still experiencing mental health issues, he feels that involvement in Talent Match had been an important contributing factor in finding work. He commented:

If it wasn't for being in social situations I would have found it really awkward to go and talk to people so that would have affected me being able to go to work.

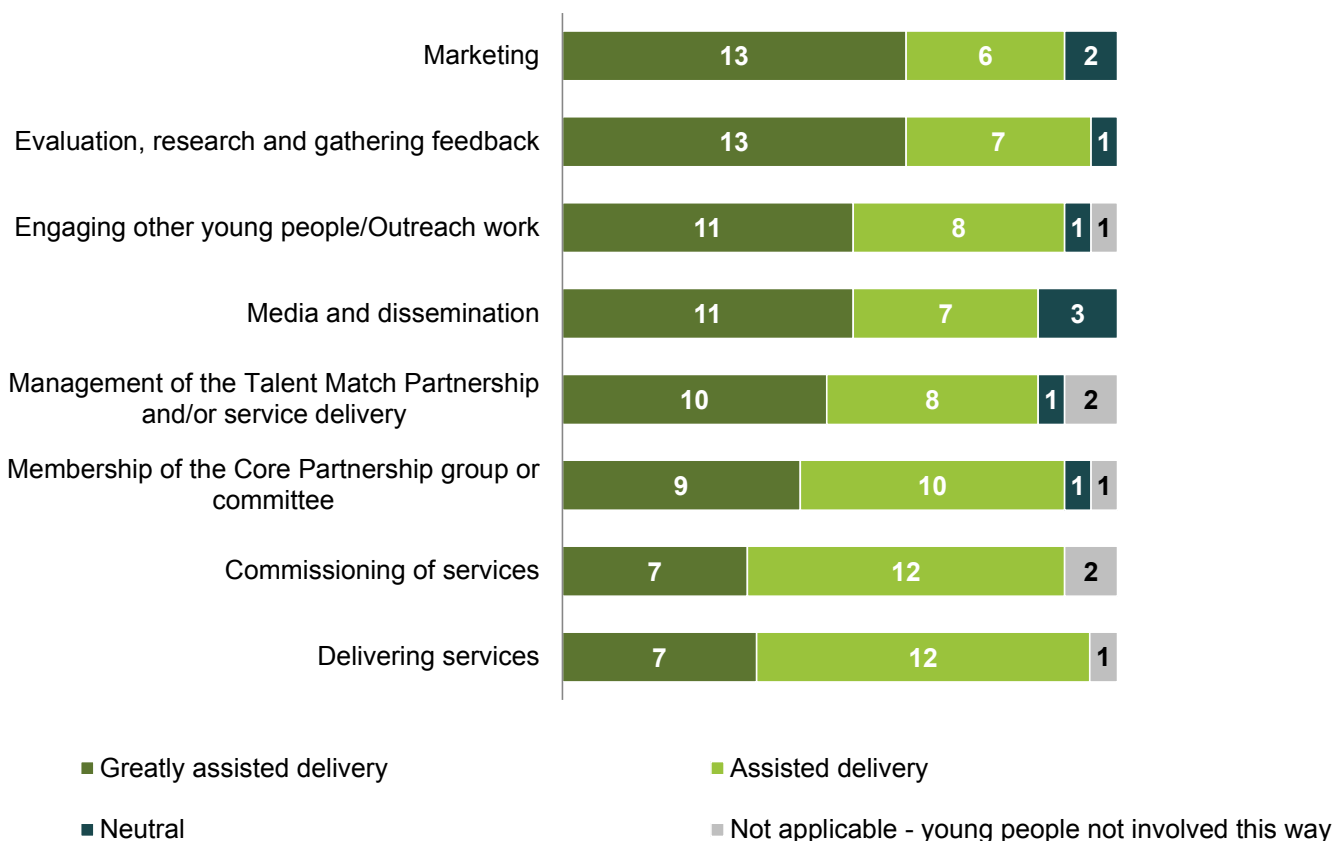
volunteering. Those young people who were involved also experienced greater improvements in confidence, setting and achieving goals, communication, managing feelings, working with others, and reliability (figure 1).

There is no clear relationship between involvement and employment or overall well-being outcomes for Talent Match participants. This is perhaps a reflection of the importance of involvement as a mechanism for supporting young people who are facing some of the biggest challenges to taking up work. Involvement in Talent Match has provided these young people with opportunities to develop skills and confidence which they may not otherwise have had. It is important to note, however, that for some young people, the process of involvement may surface or highlight barriers and challenges which require sensitive and long-term responses,

and young people’s well-being may be affected by ill-health or other issues which are beyond the scope of the Talent Match programme.

For Talent Match partnerships, young people’s involvement has been extremely positive. All partnerships reported that young people’s involvement had greatly assisted delivery (figure 2). Young people’s involvement ensures that the voice of young people has helped to shape Talent Match activities and those of local partners, including employers.

Figure 2: Talent Match partnerships: has young people’s involvement assisted delivery?



Base: 20-21

Talent Match London

Talent Match London has engaged young people in peer mentoring and active leadership roles. One delivery partner in East London described how Talent Match had “*devolved more power to their youth board*” by engaging young people proactively in developing employer links and networks. This was described as: “*been fantastic - it’s boosted numbers and provision*”. Social and networking facilities for young people were provided through a ‘youth room’: a space available every Friday afternoon for young people to meet and play games (pool, table tennis etc.) whilst “*meeting like-minded people who are moving forward and not held back by their peers.*” Employers and service providers also attend to meet young people and provide training and information.

Interviewees highlighted benefits to involving young people:

- Potential beneficiaries are more likely to sign up if they know that the programme has been designed by young people. One Youth Board member in East London attributed the rise in numbers of Board Members (from four to 14) to the perception that “*someone was voicing the opinion of young people.*”
- More effective outreach activities as young people know best how to do this.
- Better engagement of employers as they know that the programme is youth-led which enhances the commitment of young people.
- Facilitating partnership between delivery organisations: “*It’s not about competition all the time*” (Youth Board member).
- Encouraging innovation and effective delivery among partners as a result of young people’s evaluation. One example is a delivery partner that had restructured staffing arrangements in response to feedback from young people.
- Improving the skills and confidence of young people. One Youth Board member described it as a “*great experience.*”



Lessons

Lessons from the evidence on young people’s involvement in Talent Match include:

- 1. Young people’s involvement has many forms and changes over time.** The ambition to place young people at the centre of Talent Match has been realised by providing a wide range of opportunities for involvement, building in opportunities for social activity and peer support, and learning from experience and revising approaches over time. The ability of Talent Match partnerships to respond flexibly to the views and priorities of young people has been important in encouraging, and sustaining, young people’s involvement.
- 2. Young people’s involvement improves service quality.** Some of the key impacts of young people’s involvement are in influencing the work of Talent Match partnerships and other stakeholders, which include employers. This has ensured that the voice of young people has informed the development and delivery of provision across Talent Match areas, and has enhanced the experience of and impact of employment support for all Talent Match beneficiaries. There would be clear benefits to embedding young people’s involvement into future provision to ensure that it meets the needs of young people.
- 3. Involvement is an important mechanism for supporting young people who are facing some of the most challenging barriers to labour market participation.** The young people involved in Talent Match have included those with disabilities and mental health issues. Opportunities for involvement have enabled these young people to develop skills that they might not otherwise have obtained.
- 4. Involvement helps young people to move closer to the labour market.** Those young people who have been involved in Talent Match are more likely to enter formal education, secure an apprenticeship or work placement or take up volunteering than those who have not been involved. These are important steps toward sustained employment, particularly for young people who don’t have experience of paid work.

5. **Involvement supports young people to build skills and confidence.** Young people who have been involved in Talent Match report greater gains particularly in confidence, communication skills, goal setting, managing feelings, working with others and reliability. In future employability programmes there may be a rationale in seeking to support involvement of those groups for whom these attributes and skills are particularly low.
6. **Involvement one is part of a range of support that is needed to help young people to progress.** The fact that there has been no direct relationship between involvement and improved employment outcomes for young people involved in Talent Match is a reflection of the challenges that this group are facing in finding work. Involvement should be seen as a complement to, but not a replacement for, a range of other activities to support young people to overcome barriers to labour market participation.



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