



Investigation into Hidden NEETs

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Introduction

Talent Match Birmingham and Solihull has commissioned Merida Associates to investigate the cohort of young adults aged between 18-24 years old in Birmingham and Solihull who are not claiming benefits, and are not in education, training or employment, known as Hidden NEETs.

The objectives of the investigation were to:

- Understand more about the factors that contribute towards young adults becoming Hidden NEET
- Understand any changes in the numbers of young adults categorised as Hidden NEET between 2012, when Talent Match Birmingham and Solihull was developed, and 2014-15 when programme delivery commenced
- Consider how and where Hidden NEETs in Birmingham and Solihull might be reached
- Identify examples of good practice in supporting Hidden NEETs

The report concludes with recommendations to support targeted engagement with this group that can support the commitment of Talent Match Birmingham and Solihull to reaching young adults who are furthest away from the labour market.

Methodology

The research was conducted as an investigative enquiry and the approach taken was to undertake desk research and interviews with key informants and follow leads that emerged as the research unfolded. The focus of the investigation was to develop a more informed picture of the diversity of people brought together under the Hidden NEET term and to chart any changes in the cohort over time. Initial desk research was undertaken to understand more about definitions of Hidden NEET, access existing statistics, explore the policy drivers underpinning the prioritisation of this cohort of young adults and to identify good practice.

Interviews with key informants provided narrative evidence on the make-up of the Hidden NEET cohort across Birmingham and Solihull and also signposted researchers to other interviewees and relevant data sets. Talent Match identified some participants who were Hidden NEET on entry to the programme and 7 young adults participated in telephone interviews to share their experiences.

All names of young adults in the report have been changed.

Who are the Hidden NEET? – Taleisha (24)

Taleisha was caring for her Mum and not receiving any benefits. She had had part-time and temporary jobs in the past.

Who are the Hidden NEET?

ONS statistics from the Labour Force Survey identify NEETs as either 'unemployed', those looking for work and available for work, or 'economically inactive', either not looking for work and/or not available for work¹. A Parliamentary Briefing Paper (2015) notes that nationally: *"under half (46.8%) of young people who are NEET are unemployed. The remaining (53.2%) are economically inactive; not working, not seeking work and/or not available to start work."*²

Across the Talent Match funding programme the BIG Lottery defines Hidden NEET young adults aged between 18-24 as *"not receiving benefits and not working (either less than 16 hours per week or 16 or more hours per week,) self-employed, in an apprenticeship, in formal education or in training at the baseline stage."*

Who are the Hidden NEET? – Grace

Grace was in accommodation provided by the Home Office and received food benefits. When she was granted permission to seek work she had to find a job immediately as her food benefit was stopped and she had to find somewhere

Young adults who fall into the category of Hidden NEET are far from being a homogenous group. Being workless, economically inactive or unable to engage with the labour market, education or training is often the only thing they have in common. Mizra Davies (2015) reported that for Q2 in 2015 women made up the majority (54%) of all 16-24 years old NEETs (unemployed and inactive) and 63% of

¹ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/lms/young-people-not-in-education--employment-or-training--neets-/august-2015/index.html>

² Mizra-Davies, J. (May 2015) *NEET: Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training* House of Commons Briefing Paper Number 06705

women who were NEET and economically inactive reported they were not looking for work because of looking after a family or a home. The other key groups who are economically inactive are people with health conditions, learning difficulties or disabilities, lone parents, carers and care leavers.

Who are the Hidden NEET? – Malachi (24)

Malachi had been to college for vocational training, he passed the first stage exams but failed his final exam. He became very de-motivated, felt he had made a wrong career choice and ended up just staying at home with his Mum. He became isolated and depressed.

The Longitudinal Study of Young People in England identified that 48% of 19 year olds with a disability had ever been NEET, with 24% having been NEET for over a year at some stage.³ It also identified that those who had been eligible for free school meals are more likely to be NEET, as are those who had been excluded or suspended from school. Department for Education data⁴ suggests that young adults who had been in Pupil Referral Units or Alternative Provision were significantly more likely to become NEET or 'unknown' than those who attended mainstream state schools.

Information gathered from housing providers' representatives for the Talent Match Business Plan suggested that up to 45% of their young service users were not claiming benefits and therefore 'Hidden'; and people working in the informal economy may also be classed as Hidden NEET.

³ Department for Education, Longitudinal Study of Young People in England, July 2011

⁴ Statistical First Release

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/destinations-of-key-stage-4-and-key-stage-5-pupils-2012-to-2013>

The Labour Force Survey data is only broken down by gender so it is difficult to understand the ethnicity of Hidden NEETs. A literature review conducted for the Young Women's Trust in 2014 noted that "analysis of the literature does not provide a complete or consistent understanding of the role of ethnicity" and their Scared for Life report suggests that differences in age and ethnicity categorisations across data sets may mask any underlying variations. Department for Education data⁵ suggests ethnic groups with a higher proportion of NEETs are Mixed White / Black African, Mixed White / Black Caribbean and Black Caribbean. The data for 32% of Gypsy Roma young adults aged 18-19 years was recorded as 'not captured', indicating that they had gone 'off the radar'.

Who are HIDDEN NEET in Birmingham and Solihull?

Who are the Hidden NEET? – Emma
Emma was living with her parents who were supporting her financially. She had been to college and completed a year at university before leaving due to mental health issues. She was attending a course at a mental health charity to build her self-confidence.

Many of the young adults who are Hidden NEET in Birmingham and Solihull may have a combination of factors that contribute to making them Hidden or unknown to services. Some will have undiagnosed mental health issues, be care leavers and or homeless. Others will have complex or multiple needs, require support to tackle substance misuse, or have other more pressing day to day challenges that make moving into work, training or education a low priority. There has been research to

suggest that "NEETs are more likely to be living unhealthy lifestyles... are more likely to smoke, drink and have poor diets... also have more chance of getting caught up in violent situations and having mental health problems"⁶.

Anecdotal data gathered from interviews with organisations and young people identified that the following are characteristics of young adults who fit the definition Hidden NEET (or Unknowns as described by some respondents) across Birmingham and Solihull:

- Young adults who are living at home and supported by parents. This group could include young adults from affluent or reasonably well off families where there is no economic imperative for young adults to contribute to the household. Others may be in families/households where neither the young adults, nor their parents, carers or older adult family members, have knowledge of what support, benefits or services are available. Some young adults in this situation are not eligible to claim benefits.
- Young adults who may be sofa surfing or homeless (but who may not be registered as such) and being supported by friends or family, and/or who may be engaged in the informal economy - for example, one young woman had been living with her parents who were made homeless and she ended up in a hostel. She was not eligible for welfare benefits and supported herself through babysitting and other cash-in-hand jobs. It is thought that around half of homeless

⁵ Statistical First Release
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/destinations-of-key-stage-4-and-key-stage-5-pupils-2012-to-2013>

⁶ Professor Alan Maryon-Davis, President of the Faculty of Public Health, (Local Government Improvement and Development, 2009)

young people are NEET, at the point of becoming homeless.

- Young adults who have 'dropped off the radar' following benefits sanctions.
- Young adults who have left college prior to completing qualifications or who have left school and not moved into further education, training or employment.
- Young adults who are caring for children or disabled and / or older family members.
- Young adults at risk of crime or engaging in anti-social behaviour, who are engaged with the informal economy or who are being supported by parents and family members; or for whom some form of criminal activity is the main source of income.
- Young refugee and asylum seekers who have been granted a right to remain. Some limited work was undertaken by Birmingham's Youth Service outreach in the "hotspot" areas of Oscott, Aston, Soho and Lozells & East Handsworth, It identified that the young people characterised as coming from newly arrived communities such as Somalia, were unfamiliar with the support they could receive from various agencies, particularly in relation to skills and employment support.
- In Solihull there is a split across the North and South of the Borough; there are more pockets of NEETs in the North than in the South.
- Professionals suspect that there are some Hidden NEET young men with a

tendency not to go out of their home, who may be experiencing depression and who are physically inactive.

Who are the Hidden NEET? – Kelly (22)

Kelly had never worked. She was living with her parents who became homeless and she moved into a hostel but wasn't eligible to claim benefits. Kelly supported herself by doing cash in hand work such as baby sitting.

An online survey to inform the development of Talent Match Birmingham and Solihull (April 2013) with 33 organisations that support NEETs identified the following groups as most likely to be hidden (highest response rate first):

- Young adults at risk of offending/ involved in criminal activity
- Young adults with learning difficulties or disabilities
- Those involved in gang-related activities
- Young adults with mental health problems
- Refugees and Asylum Seekers
- Substance misusers
- Carers

Survey respondents identified many barriers to employment for Hidden NEETs such as chaotic lifestyles, unsafe or unreliable home situations, risk of exploitation, cultural isolation (specifically for some groups of young women), and disillusionment with the labour market.

How many Hidden NEETs in Birmingham and Solihull?

The difficulty in estimating the number of Hidden NEET is well established. After a concerted trawl of published data and some provided by research contributors, it is still not possible to present meaningful figures of Hidden NEETs in Birmingham and Solihull.

Locally produced unemployment figures are made up of claimant count data, which consists of people claiming the out-of-work benefits Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) or Universal Credit (UC). They don't, therefore, capture people who are 'economically inactive', who may be claiming benefits like Employment Support Allowance or Income Support, and more likely to be hidden.

Analysis from the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion (CESI) briefing for October 2015⁷ shows that there was a national fall of 42,000 in the number of out of work young adults who are not in full-time education in the past quarter, to 1,049,000, and about 595,000 of that group are recorded as economically inactive. The fall was larger amongst the inactive cohort than the unemployed.

The briefing states that 59% of "unemployed young people (not counting students) (...) are not claiming Jobseeker's Allowance or Universal Credit and therefore are not receiving official help with job search". This equates to 269,000 young adults nationally and has risen by over 30% since October 2012.

Further, the briefing also reports that while the numbers of people who are economically inactive due to family caring responsibilities (e.g. lone and couple parents) have remained static, the numbers

of that group claiming non-work-related benefits, such as Income Support, have decreased, indicating that NEETs with family responsibilities may become more hidden over time.

The most recent Regional Labour Market data⁸ gives a regional breakdown by age over the last four years. It shows that in 2011-12 there were 2.5 times more 'economically inactive' (180,000) 18-24 years in the West Midlands than 'unemployed' young adults (73,000) in the same age band and that differential has grown to 3 times as many 'economically inactive' by 2014-15. It also shows that the numbers of 'unemployed' and 'economically inactive' 18-24 years overall have reduced in the same period and that the reduction is more marked in the 'unemployed' group. (see Appendix I for data table).

A report by the Fabian Society in 2014⁹ argues that official NEET figures 'grossly understate the scale of the problem at local level' partly because 'the quality of local NEET data has broken down completely'. NEET data (16-19 years) used to be collected by Connexions but no one agency now has responsibility for following up with young adults to review their employment status or even for maintaining their contact details, although Solihull MBC has some data and Birmingham City Council tracks some young people to 19 years. The loss on contact has resulted in a significant rise in young adults in the 18-24 year group who have become 'unknown', estimated to be significantly more than the recorded NEETs. The report states that the West Midlands has lost track

⁸ http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_413432.pdf

⁹ Richard Brooks: *Out of Sight: how we lost track of thousands of NEETs and how we can transform their prospects* – Fabian Society (2014) http://www.fabians.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/OutOfSight_WEB.pdf

⁷ <http://cesi.org.uk/statistics/labour/october-2015>

of more than 25,000 young people since 2010.

The Department for Education (DfE) has published destination data for young people leaving school after sixth form (aged 18-19) who are tracked for 2 terms (October – March). It includes percentages of young people who have not transitioned into higher education or employment in the following categories:

- NEET** did not take part in any education, training or employment between October and March
- Not Sustained** took part in training or employment for less than 2 months in the period
- Not captured in data** could be abroad, in custody or ‘whereabouts not known’

The data for Birmingham and Solihull between 2010-2013 shows NEETs as 1-2% of the 18-19 years in each year, Not sustained, i.e. those dropping out, as 7-8% in Birmingham and 12-14% in Solihull. The Not Captured category, the one likely to include some Hidden NEETs, is the most variable, between 11% and 18% in Birmingham and 19% - 12% in Solihull. However, without knowing the total numbers of young people in each year, it is not possible to convert the percentages in figures (see Appendix 1).

More recent DfE data has been published as a summary (Table 1). The figures are noted to be lower than those in the official statistical release on young people in England who are NEET because they only include young people who are known to their local authority and do not count young people who are taking a gap year or are in custody as NEET. However, they do show that estimated NEET figures in both Birmingham

and Solihull have remained stable over the 3 years of available data, which reflects national data, and that in Birmingham the estimated proportion of young adults who are ‘unknown’ appears to have decreased by more than half in recent years.

It is assumed that the figures for ‘unknowns’ are a percentage of all 18-19 years olds known to their local authorities in each year. This would make 3886 young adults in Birmingham in 2014 and 375 in Solihull whose destinations were unknown. It is assumed that a proportionate of these young adults will be Hidden NEETs, although some will be in work, education or training.

The differences between these two data sets from the same source illustrate the difficulty in correlating NEET statistics.

Table 1: Estimated numbers of NEET and Not Known age 18-19 years¹⁰

2014	Est. no NEET	% NEET	% not known
Birmingham	1,340	10.1%	29.0%
Solihull	200	8.2%	15.1%
2013	Est. no NEET	% NEET	% not known
Birmingham	1,360	10.3%	44.2%
Solihull	200	8.0%	16.6%
2012	Est. no NEET	% NEET	% not known
Birmingham	1,360	10.2%	66.2%
Solihull	210	8.1%	15.3%

The Birmingham Commission on Youth Unemployment report (2013) estimated 15,500 16- to- 24-year-olds in Birmingham not in employment or full-time education and ‘a large number who we do not know about

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/neet-data-by-local-authority-2012-16-to-18-year-olds-not-in-education-employment-or-training> updated March 2015

because no public sector agency keeps track of them'. It also estimated that there were around 3,000 18-to-24-year-olds in Birmingham at that time that had been out of work and claiming Jobseeker's Allowance for a year or more.

Worklessness¹¹ data for Birmingham (as at February 2015) shows Kingstanding (22.3%), Lozells & East Handsworth (22.0%) Shard End (21.6%) and Sparkbrook (21.6%) wards to have the highest rates of people who are 'unemployed' or 'economically inactive'. These figures cover all working age people and are therefore not specific to 18-24 year olds. See Appendix I for a map showing worklessness hot spots in Birmingham. These may correlate with the locations of Hidden NEETs but many may be hidden in more affluent areas.

Numbers in Solihull are much smaller than Birmingham and while the numbers of NEETs are steadily falling in the Borough, the numbers of young adults who are recorded as Not Available to the Labour Market mirror national trends and are increasing. Anecdotal evidence suggests more young adults experiencing anxiety, depression and other mental health conditions are factors in this increase.

In Solihull young adults with additional needs are the largest group in the 'economically inactive' cohort, followed by parents, care leavers and a very small recorded number of young offenders (see Appendix I for data table).

Worklessness data for Solihull¹² shows that over the course of the year February 2014 – February 2015, there were falls in the

number of job seekers (-990 individuals), and lone parents claiming income support (-120 individuals), and an increase in the numbers claiming ESA/Incapacity benefit (+260 individuals). These figures cover all working age (16-64 years) people.

Over 40% of all 18-24 year old claimants in the Borough are males living in the three North Solihull regeneration wards Chelmsley Wood, Kingshurst & Fordbridge and Smith's Wood (175 individuals). Claimant count data, however, does not give the full picture as it does not include people identified as 'economically inactive', many of whom will be female.

¹¹ Includes unemployment claimant count plus people in receipt of other out-of-work benefits. Source BCC Worklessness Briefing August 2015

¹² SMBC Unemployment Briefing July 2015

Voices of Hidden NEETs

This section draws on telephone interviews with Talent Match participants who were identified as Hidden NEET on entry to the programme and previous research with 18 year old NEET young adults carried out for Solihull Connexions,¹³ not all of whom were Hidden.

How did they come to be Hidden?

Even in the small random sample of young adults (7) who engaged in this research there was a diversity of personal circumstances that resulted in them being Hidden NEET, for instance one person was sofa-surfing (staying rent-free with a friend) and taking short-term retail jobs and another had moved to Birmingham from another city when she got married and was living with her partner and his family (see vignettes for others).

Overall the young adults interviewed had some qualifications and at the point of entry to Talent Match were interested in getting a job. It was life events that had caused them to drop 'off the radar'.

Only one young person out of 17 NEETs interviewed in the Solihull research had not engaged with further education or work since leaving school. Of those that had been to college about a third had achieved qualifications that had not led to a job and were planning to take more courses. Some had taken several courses but were no nearer the workplace, feeling the employers would not 'take a chance' on them because they had no workplace experience. This group expressed despondency and demotivation. The majority who had started

college dropped out – 2 had become parents, some felt early on that college was not what they had expected, a couple felt they had made wrong course choices and just dropped out, or failed a stage exam and were unable to progress. They did not know where to go next and expressed lack of confidence.

The minority who had work experience had worked in part-time, seasonal or temporary jobs. Young people at 18 years had experienced being made redundant and the insecurity of working different hours each week.

What I like about Talent Match – Aliya

Aliya likes her coach "he likes what he's doing, you can feel it (...) only having a conversation with him, is like, I feel more confident"

Doing an interview she felt more confident knowing that even if she didn't get the job she would still be with Talent Match – "I was more comfortable, I was not so nervous".

Young people reported that life events like pregnancy, bereavement and encounters with the justice system had an impact on their ability to be 'work ready' or even be interested in getting a job. Anecdotal evidence suggested that young people had developed a 'rhythm of life' which did not include early rising or always keeping appointments. It was felt these kinds of patterns of behaviour put them 'out of sync' with the world of work and both inhibited their ability to be 'work ready' and discouraged them from wanting to take a job that involved regular hours.

¹³ Garry K, Goodwin P, *18 year old Young People in Solihull who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)* Solihull Connexions (2010)

Advisers working with young people highlighted some points, drawing on their own experience:

- Some young people come from families where no one works and there is no culture of work.
- Sometimes families advise young people into specific types of work – often construction if young people are practical or other aspects of the informal, cash-in-hand economy.
- Some young women are often looking after children for family members, enabling other family members to work, and consequently become Hidden.

How can Talent Match find them?

5 out of 7 of the young adults in the sample found out about Talent Match from the Birmingham Volunteer Centre or from seeing a poster in BVSC's reception window. One was given a specific Talent Match coach's phone number by a friend who had accessed Birmingham Volunteer Centre and been referred to Talent Match and the remaining person had picked up information at a college Jobs Fair. Several of the interviewees felt they had found Talent Match by chance.

One young adult commented that Talent Match would not have been able to find her when she was living at home. All of the interviewees made suggestions for how Talent Match might reach people who are in similar circumstances to their own before they joined the programme. The most common suggestion was for Talent Match to develop its online presence through social media including:

- Advertise on Facebook, using a paid for advert linked to the Talent Match Birmingham & Solihull Facebook page

- Collect testimonials from young adults who are involved in Talent Match and post them online
- Use as many online platforms as possible and post regular stories, activities, information about what is on offer through Talent Match etc
- Use Instagram to show video case studies of participants' progress / experience
- Encourage participants to share their experiences online
- Promote the support that is on offer

Other suggestions included having a presence in the Library of Birmingham and/or information about Talent Match displayed in libraries. One young woman explained that the library was somewhere she used to go regularly to keep herself occupied, go online and hang out.

It was suggested that going to where young adults hang out, such as community venues or activities, might be successful but cautioned that Talent Match would need to go with a trusted person who can engage and talk to young adults and who preferably would already be known to them.

What I like about Talent Match – Salma

Salma likes that Talent Match works around her:

"I can arrange things to suit me and we can still meet up even when I get a job".

One stakeholder in the Solihull research commented on young adults who lacked motivation to do anything: *"If they're in a benefit family and they don't know anything else, it's got to be something that captures their attention to make them think 'Actually, I want to do that.'"*

Another idea was to take Talent Match participants to Jobs Fairs so they could talk directly to other young adults and describe what it is like and what they are getting out of it.

Thinking about engaging with young adults before they drop out, it was suggested making links with schools and colleges so that they know Talent Match is available to young adults who might be struggling with mainstream employment pathways.

What I like about Talent Match – Malachi

Malachi likes the ongoing support from his coach and *“trying things out before making a decision about what I want to do”*

One young adult was encouraged by his mother to go to Birmingham Volunteer Centre to move himself forward, and thinking about young adults who are in the home being supported by their families, Talent Match should find a way to promote itself to concerned parents. One suggestion was to target gyms and other community venues. Local radio and press might be another avenue.

Another young adult suggested making links to other charities, such as those supporting people with Mental Health issues, who could refer people into Talent Match when they are ready.

What were they looking for?

The Talent Match participants were asked what attracted them, as Hidden NEETs, to join the programme. The consensus was that the one-to-one support offered through a

coach was the most attractive part of the Talent Match offer.

Most came to Talent Match looking for volunteering opportunities and to build their confidence, one or two were focused on getting a job. What attracted them to the programme was the offer of individual support, when compared to other schemes Talent Match has a focus on listening to what the young adults want, their aspirations and goals, not only on getting them into a job. Hidden NEET young adults reported that the support and encouragement they have received has helped to build their confidence and 3 out of the 7 are now working and supporting themselves.

Some young adults who are Hidden NEET are isolated or without close personal support from family or another trusted individual. Those leaving care, living alone in flats or hostels, young refugees and asylum seekers, lone parents and young adults leaving custody can potentially benefit from the core coaching element of the Talent Match offer, someone who is interested in them as a person, has their best interests at heart and who does not deliver a short intervention and disappear, someone they can have a professional relationship with but who, to some extent, provides a sense that they are not on their own.

Outcome – Kelly

Kelly is very enthusiastic about the help she has received and very proud of her journey from homeless hostel to her own flat and a job within 6 months.

Engaging Hidden NEETs

There is no single gateway or approach to reaching Hidden NEET. The diversity of young adults encompassed in the term means that a suite of approaches is likely to yield better results than focusing on a single approach.

Research evidence suggests a combination of the following approaches may offer the most effective and successful ways of engaging with young adults who are not likely to come into contact with Talent Match through other more mainstream entry points.

The National Institute of Economic and Social Research¹⁴ found that projects that had successful strategies for engaging hard to reach young adults in order to support them towards employment had prioritised engagement and invested considerable effort and resources towards it.

Figure 1: Effective approaches to engaging Hidden NEETs



¹⁴ Rolfe H, Portes J; Hudson-Sharp N: *Local authority schemes supporting people towards work*
An independent report for the Local Government Association
NIESR (2015)

A number of key elements for successful and effective engagement of young adults were identified during this research:

- Present the programme offer to young adults in a way that it can be seen to be accessible, attractive and perceived by potential participants as useful.
- Develop 'warm' referral routes with trusted community organisations, supported by strong marketing messages about the support on offer from the programme.
- Partnership working with community projects and organisations, trusted organisations and /or trusted adults (i.e. those places and people that are familiar and already known to Hidden NEETs) is effective in reaching young adults not claiming benefits. Co-location or outreach work in community organisations was successful as was delivering services in venues familiar to local young adults.
- Word of mouth (person-to-person information sharing) is one of the most effective ways in which young adults who are not engaged can be reached.
- Develop a social media strategy across several online platforms to maximise the reach of key messages on a regular basis. Engage participants in peer-to-peer promotion by celebrating achievements and sharing their journey online (safely). Use social media to share information about Talent Match and to create a buzz about the programme.
- Partnership working with external agencies such as specialist housing providers or refugee organisations who can facilitate access to young adults from particular isolated or excluded groups

Regular communication with specialist external agencies such as probation, youth workers, voluntary sector drug and alcohol agencies, mental health and community organisations about services offered and outcomes achieved can help to keep referral routes into the programme refreshed and active.

Partnership work to reach Hidden NEETs

"Within projects which were based in the community, referral was integral to engagement and was built up slowly and purposefully over time as relationships between advisers and local people developed."

"Projects which were focused on youth unemployment, including the NEET group in Bury and Surrey, had referrals from the Youth Support Service, a key partner and co-delivery organisation within the programmes."

(NIESR 2015)

Street level outreach work through detached youth workers in partner agencies is most likely to reach young men, particularly those linked to gangs or on the fringes of criminal activity. Some young women may be reached through housing or health agencies, such as housing associations, mother and baby hostels or midwives and health visitors.

Some of those classified as Hidden or unknown NEET will undoubtedly be engaged in jobs in the informal economy, often on the borders of legality, and this group of young adults may be unwilling or uninterested in engaging with the Talent Match programme. However there are opportunities to engage young adults, predominantly men, at risk of entanglement in low-level criminal activity or anti-social

behaviour through the work being undertaken by the Safer Birmingham Partnership and the BEST Network. Talent Match is already connected with the Safer Birmingham Partnership and the work being undertaken to target this group at risk of exclusion. Other projects working with this group have found potential clients by visiting cafes, sports venues, sporting events and community social events.

Changes in local authority structures will have an impact on information-sharing and referral routes as public services are reduced and personnel are redeployed. There is a risk that existing communication networks may break down. It is important for programmes like Talent Match to keep abreast of structural changes in the relevant local authority departments to ensure the people who need to know about the programme are kept informed. Previous centralised information-sharing routes may no longer be operating and Talent Match will

need to communicate directly with each relevant department and service.

In Solihull, for instance, a new Early Help team has been set up to support troubled families and there is a good chance this team will identify some Hidden and economically inactive NEETs who are stuck at home, during visits. Knowledge of Talent Match would enable the team to signpost young adults into the programme, and a more personal link between the team and Talent Match could facilitate 'warm' referrals.

There is also an Employment and Skills Team who work with over 19s and provide outreach work, their work will include 'disillusioned' young adults, those who have some qualifications and work experience but are stuck, therefore they could be an effective partner for Talent Match. Solihull MBC is also setting up a working group to look at support for young adults with additional needs, such as learning disabilities, one of the priority groups for Talent Match.

Conclusions

Young adults who fall into the Hidden NEET category are a disparate group and there is not a common set of circumstances and characteristics that defines the group.

The young adults who make up this group include those engaged in the informal economy and who are happy to remain there; those engaged in the informal economy who would like to move into more formal work but feel they do not have the skills, experience or contacts to do so; young adults engaged in criminal activity at some level; young parents and carers; and young adults with learning disabilities, depression, anxiety or alcohol or substance misuse problems.

Research and anecdotal evidence suggests that many young Hidden NEETs will be coping with multiple barriers to employment including for example chaotic lifestyles, unsafe or unreliable living situations where they are exposed to risks of violence and or sexual and other exploitation.

Robust, reliable and locally specific data on this group is challenging to source, this data deficit makes it difficult to really understand the scale of the issue - however there is common agreement that any attempt at quantifying the numbers of young people who are referred to as Hidden NEET is likely to underestimate the population numbers.

There is some consensus, however, that while numbers for the NEET population as a whole have reduced since the Talent Match programme was devised and mobilised, the numbers of Hidden NEETs have remained more stable.

The small scale interview evidence gathered for this research shows that the young adults who were Hidden but did manage to access Talent Match were ready to move towards employment but required some tools and support to do it. This indicates that the Hidden NEET cohort could particularly benefit from the pathway provided by the Talent Match Demonstrator Model. The personalised individual support offered by coaches was crucial in attracting those Hidden NEET young adults to the Talent Match programme. This finding reinforced evidence collected for the recent review of the Talent Match Birmingham and Solihull programme¹⁵ which also highlighted the pivotal role of the participant-centred approach of the coaches.

Finding Hidden NEET young adults, by definition, is difficult. The small sample of Hidden NEET participants interviewed for this research all took proactive first steps by going to the Volunteer Centre or attending a Jobs Fair before they found Talent Match. Some of them acknowledged that it would have been hard to reach them when they were stuck at home, although they all made useful suggestions for engagement, mostly to do with social media.

The Talent Match staff team is unlikely to have the internal capacity to do the outreach work necessary to find young adults who are isolated at home or in their immediate neighbourhoods. Research suggests that building strong relationships with organisations working on the ground in local communities so they are able to refer young adults into the programme may yield positive results. This could include undertaking outreach work in hot spots or

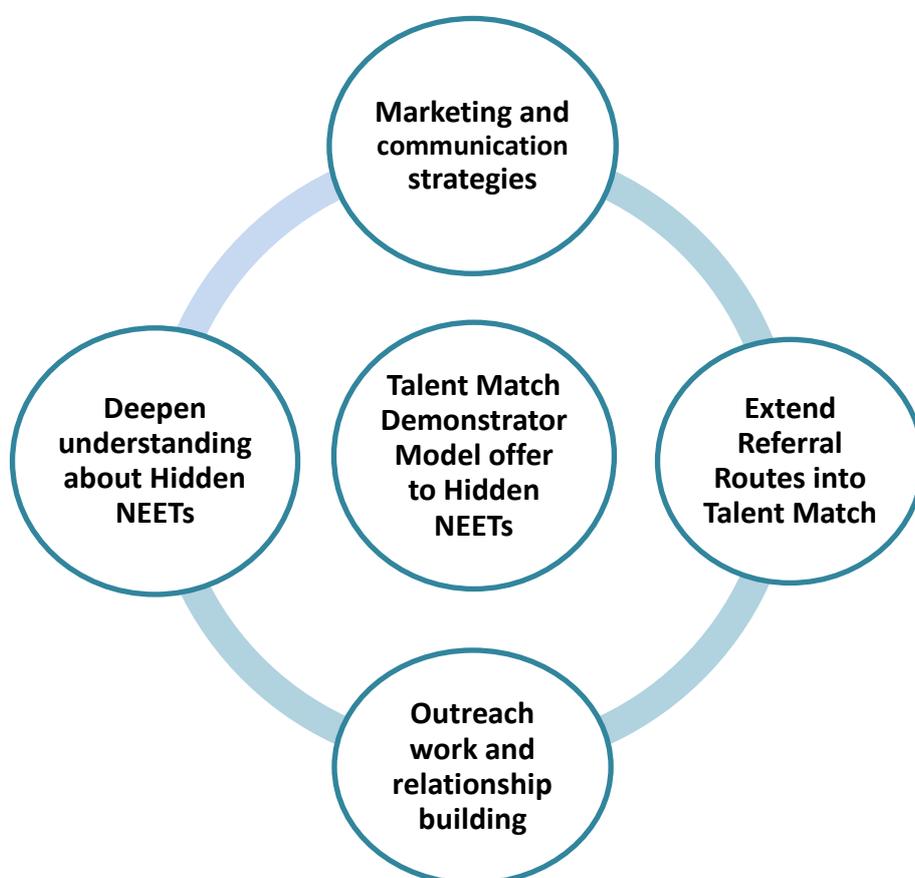
¹⁵ Goodwin P, Garry K, Redding V: Talent Match Birmingham & Solihull Learning and Review report Merida Associates (2015)

places where young people who are 'outside the mainstream' gather and building new links with public sector agencies.

Recommendations

Figure 2 provides an overview of the recommendations arising from this research and illustrates the linked and interdependent relationships between each recommendation. The work carried out for this report clearly shows that no one route on its own can provide the answer to engaging young adults who are Hidden NEET. There are, however, indications that if Hidden NEET young adults do find out about and access Talent Match that the elements of support on offer through the Demonstrator Model can and do meet their needs.

Figure 2



This section presents recommendations, based on the research undertaken, that are intended to inform discussion and programme planning. Talent Match may need to consider prioritising some actions in accordance with the time, capacity, skills or resources required to act on them. It is therefore recommended that, following discussion, a Hidden NEET action plan with timed and phased actions is prepared.

Marketing and Communication

The young adults¹⁶ who participated in this research suggested making better use of social media, for instance Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, to reach potentially Hidden participants. It is recommended that Talent Match reviews and broadens its use of social media for sharing information about Talent Match.

¹⁶ All of whom were identified as Hidden NEET at the point of joining Talent Match Birmingham and Solihull

As word of mouth communication is a recognised way of reaching this client group, it is recommended that Talent Match thinks about how to use the young adults already engaged on the programme to spread the word. One option would be to use filmed 'talking head' testimonials from young adults who are involved in the programme. The young adults who participated in this research were powerful advocates for the programme and the use of participants' own voices and words, as a key component of a marketing and communications campaign aimed at young people using social media, could help create a 'buzz' about the programme.

Talent Match should consider building relationships with media savvy groups such as Beat Freaks Birmingham <http://www.beatfreaks.com/#beatfreaks> and Creative Alliance Birmingham <http://www.creativealliance.org.uk/> who may offer creative and insightful ideas about how to reach, engage and 'package' messages for Hidden NEET.

Another option might be to employ a young creative through the Talent Match Company (maybe someone who is a Hidden NEET) to help to develop messaging and communications that would appeal to not only Hidden NEET (and non Hidden NEET) directly but that could be shared with trusted adults and agencies working with the group for them to share via their own social media and web-based communications. The creative could work with the Talent Match Ambassador with responsibility for social media communications.

The following points for consideration could help Talent Match think about how to segment and target information, marketing and communications:

- What information do Core Strategic Partners need to be real champions for Talent Match, spreading the word about what is on offer, sharing information about Talent Match with organisations in their networks and working alongside Talent Match staff to create referral routes into the programme?
- What information do organisations in the third sector need about Talent Match in order for them to confidently refer young adults into the programme?
- What information can Talent Match share via Facebook, Instagram and Twitter and other platforms that will encourage re-sharing of the information and result in wider broadcasting of key messages? Could this be combined with paid-for Facebook advertising linked to a Talent Match Birmingham and Solihull Facebook campaign?
- Given that some of the young adults interviewed had found out about Talent Match from the Volunteer Centre as a result of parents suggesting that volunteering may be a route into employment, is there anything that Talent Match can do to provide information to this group of 'concerned parents'?
- How does Talent Match get information about the programme into libraries (particularly the Library of Birmingham) and other community and youth oriented venues?

Developing Referral Routes

It is recommended that Talent Match brings together intelligence from the recently commissioned Strategic Mapping report¹⁷ with intelligence from programme team and Core Strategic Partnership members to inform a concerted approach to building strategic and operational alliances and allocate key individuals, including Core Strategic Partners, to develop relationships with targeted agencies in order to generate more informed and appropriate referrals into the programme.

Ensure that implementation planning for Youth Promise Plus in Birmingham and Solihull is informed about Talent Match's offer to Hidden NEETs and negotiate robust cross-referral mechanisms to avoid duplication. A strategic and operational alliance should be developed with the BEST Network as a potential delivery agency with this client group.

As Talent Match is already engaged with the Youth Crime Initiatives through the Birmingham Community Safety Partnership, it is recommended that consideration is given to how this relationship can generate access to trusted individuals and organisations working with Hidden NEETs in targeted 'hot spots' around the City.

Identify within the wider voluntary and community sector and public sector organisations that already have relationships with Hidden NEETs to target information and create 'warm' referral pathways.

For example:

- Mental Health (and other) organisations refer young adults to the Volunteer Centre - an analysis of Volunteer Centre

¹⁷ [Strategic Initiatives that Support Sustainable Youth Employment](#) Final Report DiSE CIC Sept 2015

referral routes could enable Talent Match to target these organisations directly.

- More targeted information and relationship building with housing providers specialising in supporting young adults through the Birmingham Youth Hub <http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/youth-hub> run by St. Basils in partnership with the BCC Homeless and Children's services.
- In Solihull there is potential to work with the Looked After Children Education Service (LACES) team who plan a pathways for young people leaving care and the 16+ team that works with care leavers until they are 21/25 years. Midwifery services would also be useful as they currently identify young parents for support in Solihull. This could also be done in Birmingham - for example Sandwell & West Birmingham Hospital Trust offers specialist support to young parents <http://www.swbh.nhs.uk/services/young-parents-maternity-service/>.
- Keep abreast of new services that are being developed, particularly in social care, that may open up new access to Hidden NEETs, for instance the Early Help team in Solihull.

Outreach work

Good practice suggests that outreach work is one of the ways in which Hidden NEET young adults can be reached by Talent Match, by working with either small, locally based trusted organisations serving a particular group or community, or with larger organisations which provide specialist services such as housing, addiction support or those that offer youth work outreach for

young people in danger of becoming involved in anti-social behaviour or criminal activity.

In this respect, the recommendation in the internal Talent Match report prepared on Retention, Reviews and 'Hidden NEETs' (August 2015) to "*Pilot a project to reach hidden NEETs working in tandem with smaller/niche delivery partners.*" is endorsed.

It is recommended that Talent Match thinks about how Ambassadors could be supported, trained and enabled to carry out outreach activities to support the engagement of Hidden NEETs.

It is recommended that Talent Match ensures that consistent support and facilitation mechanisms are in place (such as up front travel expenses) to ensure that interest in joining Talent Match is successfully translated into the engagement and retention of Hidden NEETs.

Data and intelligence sources

The data sets available for NEETs/Hidden NEETs are confusing and lacking in detail to enable effective differentiation, and therefore understanding of the cohorts, at local level. It is recommended that knowledge within the Core Strategic Partnership is pooled to identify data sources that may provide ongoing intelligence about Hidden NEETs as it is not clear what data is collected or who by.

Talent Matches own data sets have the potential to provide rich information on referral routes and barriers for example.

The Statistical First Release on Destinations after KS5 gives institution level data and also parliamentary constituency level tables [https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/de](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/destinations-of-key-stage-4-and-key-stage-5-pupils-2012-to-2013)

[stinations-of-key-stage-4-and-key-stage-5-pupils-2012-to-2013](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/destinations-of-key-stage-4-and-key-stage-5-pupils-2012-to-2013) . Using this data it may be possible for Talent Match to identify schools, colleges etc. with higher numbers of NEETs and link with them, or other local services in constituencies with a higher identified proportion of 'unknowns' .

Profile, population and other statistical information is available from Birmingham and Solihull local authority websites:

<http://www.solihull.gov.uk/Portals/0/KeyStats/SolihullPeopleandPlace.pdf>

<http://www.solihull.gov.uk/About-the-Council/Statistics-data/solihullobservatory/wardprofiles>

<http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/census>

<http://birminghampublichealth.co.uk/page.php?pid=203>

The source data for many of the local authority statistics along with other information that may be useful in understanding the client group can be found through the Office of National Statistics website:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/taxonomy/index.html?nscl=People+and+Places>

The Local Government Association and the Parliamentary Research Service have published reports and information about youth unemployment and non-engagement:

<http://www.local.gov.uk/>

<http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/offices/commons/commonslibrary/>

Appendix I: Numbers of Hidden NEET

Table A: West Midlands figures for unemployed and economically inactive 18-24 year olds (figures to nearest thousand)

Year	Unemployed 18-24 year olds		Economically inactive 18-24 year olds	
	Number	%	Number	%
April 2011 – March 2012	73,000	21.3	180,000	34.4
April 2012 – March 2013	77,000	21.8	174,000	33.0
April 2013 – March 2014	65,000	20.7	168,000	32.0
April 2014 – March 2015	56,000	15.7	168,000	32.1

Table B: Destinations of young adults 18-19 years

	Birmingham			Solihull			National		
	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
NEET	1%	2%	1%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%
Not sustained	8%	7%	7%	12%	13%	14%	8%	8%	9%
Not captured	18%	11%	18%	19%	11%	12%	20%	16%	18%

Most recent available data

Table C: Solihull NEET figures 2012-2015

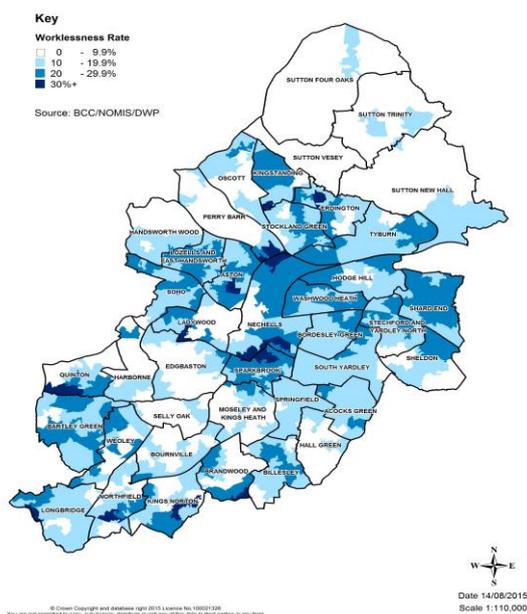
Year	NEET (total)	NALM (total)	NEET (Yr14)*	NALM (Yr14)**
2015	362	96	127	58
2014	388	81	173	34
2013	405	95	177	53
2012	419	87	163	40

Source: Solihull MBC Careers Service

NEET*= the number of Year 14 (18-19 years) in the NEET group and NALM** = the number of that NEET figure who are Not Available to Labour Market due to pregnancy, teenage parent, illness etc.

Figure 3: Map showing worklessness hot spots in Birmingham

Birmingham Worklessness Rates - February 2015 Quarter



Source: BCC Worklessness Briefing August 2015