Strategic Initiatives that Support Sustainable Youth Employment

Final Report

Dated: 03.09.15
Introduction

The Talent Match programme is a Big Lottery funded programme that aims to identify and support young people who are long term unemployed (12 months plus) or those that are not in education, employment or training (NEET) with a flexible model of tailored support.

There are 21 Talent Match projects throughout England, with each project being led by an appropriate local provider in partnership with local delivery agencies to ensure each is tailored to the needs of local young people. Talent Match in Birmingham and Solihull is led by Birmingham Voluntary Service Council (BVSC) and Solihull SUSTAiN.

The Talent Match project was developed in consultation with young people, at partner meetings and through local research with over 100 individuals contributing to the development of the programme. The result was a “Demonstrator Model”.

The Demonstrator Model is designed to give the flexibility to make a difference, by addressing different barriers to unemployment through the provision of tailored coaching and wrap around support. The model additionally aims to test its approach of supporting young people into sustainable employment.

Mapping Activity

Development in Social Enterprise CIC was successful in gaining a time limited contract to identify what employment support interventions were available in Birmingham and Solihull and the wider region that have strategic relevance to Talent Match Birmingham and Solihull.

The working definition of strategic relevance is to identify programmes that can either:

- Enhance the Talent Match programme or
- Be enhanced by the Talent Match programme

The research will inform the partnership working plans of the Talent Match delivery team and the Talent Match Core Strategic Partnership Group (TMCSPG) in order to achieve Talent Match goals.

This document also shares the key findings which are likely to be of interest to organisations engaged with unemployed young people in Birmingham and Solihull. It gives details of the recommendations made to Talent Match. It has been shared with the Talent Match Core Strategic Partnership Group (the advisory board) for Talent Match.
Acknowledgments

Development in Social Enterprise and the Talent Match team would like to thank all the individuals and organisations that took the time to share their ideas, expertise and experience to contribute to this report.

Over 500 individuals were contacted as part of this mapping exercise. In total 16 organisations responded to our online survey and a further 22 individuals took part in semi structured interviews. A list can be found in Appendix A.

Executive Summary

The Talent Match programme is a Big Lottery funded programme that aims to identify and support young people who are long-term unemployed (12 months plus) or those that are not in education employment or training (NEET) with a flexible model of tailored support.

Talent Match in Birmingham and Solihull is led by Birmingham Voluntary Service Council (BVSC) and Solihull SUSTAiN. The Talent Match project was developed in consultation with young people, at partner meetings and through local research, with over 100 individuals contributing to the planning activity. The result was a “Demonstrator Model” the approach agreed for Birmingham and Solihull.

The Demonstrator Model is designed to give the flexibility to make a difference, by addressing different barriers to unemployment. It also aims to test the approach of supporting young people into sustainable employment. The model has three key elements:

1. A coach (key worker styled adviser / mentor for each individual)
2. A waged work experience option provided through the Talent Match Company hosted with local employers who receive a wage subsidy.
3. Wrap around support (a range of specialised interventions dependent on employability need) that can be spot purchased from the Talent Match Procurement Framework.

The Talent Match planning was extensive and involved a three staged approach guided by the funder (Big Lottery). It included:

1. Initial engagement with stakeholders,
2. Development and exploration of a flexible support programme
3. A formal proposal to the Big Lottery with a detailed plan and budget.

The planning began in 2012 when the picture of personal development and employability support for young people was significantly different to what it is today. Prior to Talent Match there had been large scale reductions in youth provision in Birmingham and Solihull, much of which was due to austerity measures, budget cuts and restraints. At the time there was only one large scale programme operating locally that specifically targeted NEET cohorts in Birmingham and Solihull (The Advance Programme).
Naturally, since then, there have been many changes in employment support provision with some providers (in some cases large) downsizing and some closing. Other new organisations have entered the market in this period as well. This has led to a much more fragmented picture of employment support provision in Birmingham and Solihull.

However, the majority of organisations have survived the changes and a number of new initiatives have been developed. Most of the initiatives in one way or another have developed elements similar to the Talent Match provision for example:

1. Assessment of the individual,
2. Mentor support,
3. Financial incentives and waged work experience options.

The Talent Match cohort are in most cases eligible to access the identified existing provision, such as Destination Work, Birmingham Jobs Fund and Apprenticeship (Work Based Learning) programmes such as those run by providers in Birmingham and Solihull. Whilst these programmes have elements of support that are similar to the Talent Match Demonstrator Model, it would seem that Talent Match has greater resource and flexibility than most, particularly with its comprehensive wrap around support within its procurement framework. There is additionally a BIG Lottery requirement that Talent Match should not duplicate existing provision but provide additionality.

The majority of available employability support is funded through traditional sources. There are a number of national programmes such as the Work Programme which is funded by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and delivered by “Prime” providers such as People Plus (were A4E) and Pertemps. National programmes are only accessible through referral from Job Centre Plus ((JCP) the employment support and benefits deliver arm of DWP) teams and advisers.

The majority of the wider provision is resourced through the two local authorities Birmingham City Council (BCC) and Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC) with the source often being European funding. The wider provision also makes good use of national resources such as apprenticeship funding.

This council commissioned provision is more flexible in nature than the DWP provision and in some cases is very close to the Demonstrator Model developed by Talent Match. It has, for example:

1. A model of assessment,
2. Mentor support,
3. Wage incentives
4. Ability to spot purchase additional support if required.

Whilst this is similar in design to Talent Match, this more flexible provision is mainly targeted on specific hotspot areas of high unemployment rather than cohorts of young people. Such hotspots remain historically consistent, for example: Tyburn, Sparkbrook, Aston, Washwood Heath, Lozells, Handsworth, and Chelmsley Wood. This is not an exhaustive list.
Within Birmingham there is evidence of a much greater spread of employability support, whereas in Solihull there is less evidence of the same level of provision for those who are unemployed to gain skills and work. However, both Birmingham and Solihull provision seems to be targeted on specific hotspot areas rather than specific cohorts of young people.

The largest programme in Solihull is the Destination Work support programme which is focussing on three areas, two in Birmingham and one in Solihull (Chelmsley Wood). This contrasts with the self-employment and enterprise provision which is much more evidently resourced in Solihull, but is patchier in Birmingham since the closure of the Enterprise Catalyst business support programme.

It is expected imminently that Birmingham City Council will be successful in securing significant European resource that is very likely to be a “game changer” for employment support across Birmingham and could be close to a universal offer for young people. If this bid (The Youth Promise Plus) is successful it will have significant strategic and delivery impact upon Talent Match.

There are a number of private sector providers operating in the employment training field in Birmingham and Solihull including, Advance Personnel Management (APM) UK, Stanguide and Pertempts. The evidence suggests that the majority of private sector providers are delivering national programmes funded by central government rather than local provision. Each have specific programmes that are designed to support young people into employment, however it was difficult to engage all of these organisations in our research.

Much of the current more flexible (local authority funded) provision in Birmingham and Solihull is being delivered by experienced and long standing voluntary and community organisations and social enterprises that have expertise and a track record in the employment training field, for example: BID, BEST, Jericho, BITA, St. Paul’s, Pathways, Princes Trust, DRC etc., although there are new entrants to the market that are delivering to specific cohorts.

The BEST Network is an existing and successful voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector led, employment training consortium (with over 80 members) operating in both Birmingham and Solihull. The majority of voluntary sector providers operating in the employability field are members of the network. The network has experience of working with private sector primes (APM) and has experience of running support programmes for the NEET cohort through the Advance Programme.

Whilst most providers are aware of Talent Match provision and vice versa, there is little evidence of cross-fertilisation of ideas and co-operation, with the majority of programmes competing for clients. However, the majority were open to working with Talent Match to enhance the provision and pathway for unemployed young people.

**Conclusions**

The Talent Match programme is flexible in design and has the ability to plug gaps in provision across Birmingham and Solihull however, the landscape and provision has
changed significantly since the planning stages and there is a need to draw providers together to increase partnership work to improve the pathway for young people and avoid competing for clients by trying to create a single point of access agreement i.e. an assessment and flow through to the most appropriate programme.

Birmingham City Council’s Youth Promise Plus bid is a potential “game changer” that will have considerable operational and strategic relevance for Talent Match and other existing employability support programmes in Birmingham.

The voluntary and community sector has significant employment support experience and many have been approved on the Talent Match Framework however, a number have indicated that they have found it difficult to engage with the Talent Match programme to date, but remain willing to in the coming months.

The private sector providers have significant experience, but are mainly delivering national programmes of employment support. Private providers at an operational level have indicated their willingness to engage with the Talent Match Programme.

**Recommendations**

The recommendations listed in this report are to identify where Talent Match may be able to make improvements to enhance delivery and develop appropriate partnerships with other relevant providers and agencies.

The recommendations are listed in two categories strategic and operational. Whilst our work was to consider strategic relevance, during our research there were a number of operational issues that were identified which could be enhanced, hence their inclusion for consideration of the Core Strategy Group.

**Strategic**

1. There is a real need, now that additional provision has been developed and more is planned, for example the Youth Promise Plus, to bring providers together to consider how each programme can help and enhance the other and reduce the duplication of effort whilst improving the pathway for young people seeking employment.
   a. The discussions would aim to achieve a single gateway and assessment process with appropriate referral routes through a mixture of provision. It would seem logical that this could be instigated by a local authority or the Talent Match Core Strategic Partnership noting that the Talent Match provision has a requirement to enhance and not duplicate other provision and that the core strategic group already has some representatives from appropriate bodies, such as the local authorities and DWP/JCP.
   b. This activity will need to include detailed discussions of how and when outcomes can be claimed and by whom. The key players (many of whom are on the TMCSPG) from our research so far would suggest the following agencies should be involved in this discussion:
i. Birmingham City Council, Andrew Barnes and Kevin Jones;
ii. Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council Tom Dixon;
iii. BEST Network Ray Walker and Richard Beard;
iv. Department for Work and Pensions Steve Whitehorn,
v. Job Centre Plus Frank Harris,
vi. other Destination work providers, for example, Stanguide and People Plus, local apprenticeship providers and colleges.

2. With Job Centre Plus being a key referral agency and delivery arm of the Department for Work and Pensions that has recently announced the deployment of 100 job coaches in Birmingham and Solihull that are likely to also come into contact with the Talent Match cohort. It is recommended that Talent Match consider how Job Centre Plus (delivery and referral level) could be involved within the core strategic group and ensure that the new job coaches (being placed in JCP premises) are working closely with the Talent Match team at an operational level.

3. The BEST Network is a recognised pre-employment support structure and player in the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector in Birmingham and has relevant expertise and experience delivering programmes targeting NEET young people. The majority of VCSE providers are members of the network. It has additional experience of partnering with “primes” for example APM UK. There would seem to be strategic and operational advantages for Talent Match to work more closely with the BEST Network.

Operational

1. Whilst there will only be a small proportion of young people in the Talent Match cohort who are aspiring to become self-employed, start their own business or social enterprise the current support available is very patchy. It may be appropriate for Talent Match to consider how it can address these gaps beyond the current provision through the Talent Match Procurement Framework.

2. The procurement process for the Talent Match Framework (wrap around support) was designed by the Talent Match team, who took procurement advice about communication at each stage of the procurement process, including offering a transparent query process through the procurement portal Intend. Despite this process, some respondents feel disappointed at the level of communication they had received and the longevity of the procurement processes. This viewpoint was largely expressed by agencies within the employment training field that are on the Talent Match Framework. While satisfaction with the procurement communication may not be resolvable, Talent Match may benefit from increasing the volume of information around its on-going development and successes. There is a clear need to improve PR communications and general information around the development and successes of Talent Match.
3. Whilst it is our understanding that Talent Match team are considering how the waged placements can be more flexible, it is worth noting that some providers highlighted their inability to engage with the Talent Match waged placements. The key issue for them being that the Talent Match Company is the employer and this model didn’t work for them (the provider). They reported a need to be the employer so that they could attract wage incentives (such as the Birmingham Jobs Fund) over and above any that were provided by Talent Match.

4. There are fewer wage incentives available in Solihull than in Birmingham. Talent Match should consider how it may address this through the targeting of its waged incentive element toward areas where there is less coverage.
Appendix A: Stakeholders Consulted

BCC (Andrew Barnes & Kevin Jones)
BID (Mark Woodall)
BSSEC (Alun Severn)
BVSC (Joseph Allen & Andy Hollings)
Castle Vale Community Regeneration Services (Lisa Martinali)
DWP (Steve Whitehorn & Frank Harris)
Enterkey Training (Dave Tyers)
GHC ltd (Zulfigar Khan)
Intraining (Lindsay Shakleton)
Jericho Foundation (Richard Beard)
Midland Mencap (Pam Johnson)
Norton Hall Children & Family Centre (Suzanne Knipe)
SMBC (Tom Dixon)
Solihull Sustain (Alan Crawford & Dave Pinwell)
Sport for Life (Tom Clarke-Forest)
Stanguide (Alan Bull)
University Hospitals Birmingham (David Taylor)

Online surveys completed by

- Affinity Sutton
- Aston Villa Football Club / Villa in the Community
- Athac
- BEST Network
- Birmingham City Council
- BITA Pathways
- Brap
- Centrepoint Christian Church
- Community Foundation
- Create a Future
- Crossover
- Disability Resource Centre
- Learn Direct
- Norton Hall Children and Community Centre
- The Jericho Foundation
- Witton Lodge Community Association