



# Learning and Review Report

October 2015



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## **Glossary**

BIG	Big Lottery Fund
BVSC	Birmingham Voluntary Service Council
CDF	Common Data Framework
CESI	Centre for Social and Economic Inclusion
CRESR	Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research
CSP	Core Strategic Partnership
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ESA	Employment Support Allowance
EU	European Union
HR	Human Resources
IER	Institute for Employment Research
ITT	Invitation to Tender
JCP	Job Centre Plus
JSA	Job Seekers Allowance
LEP	Local Enterprise Partnership
MBC	Metropolitan Borough Council
NEET	Not in Employment, Education or Training
OEJU	Official Journal of the European Union
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PQQ	Pre Qualification Questionnaire
RAG	Red, Amber, Green
SLA	Service Level Agreement
ToC	Theory of Change
UC	Universal Credit
YEI	Youth Employment Initiative

## Executive Summary

Talent Match is a BIG Lottery-funded programme investing £108 million in 21 Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) areas across England over 5 years. It seeks to support 18-24 year olds who are furthest away from the labour market to move towards sustainable employment. Talent Match Birmingham and Solihull was awarded £7.6 million and is being led by BVSC who commissioned Merida Associates to undertake learning and review research to capture the programme's journey from inception in July 2014 to September 2015 and to review the implementation of the Demonstrator Model, which is the local approach to delivering Talent Match outcomes. The Model covers referral routes into the programme, support offered by coaches, wrap around support, volunteering placements and paid work opportunities through the Talent Match Company, and describes these elements as 'pathways' into sustained employment. Each participant will have a personalised experience of the programme, one designed to meet individual need. The programme is overseen by a Core Strategic Partnership of cross-sector agencies from Birmingham and Solihull and Talent Match Ambassadors who are all young adults.

## Methodology

Merida used the Theory of Change approach, as recommended by BIG Lottery, to work with the Talent Match staff team and explore how programme activities lead to outcomes that support the overall aims of the programme. The consequent Theory of Change model helped to shape the inquiry questions for the review. The outcomes that are the stepping stones to employment were identified as:

- Increased self-esteem
- Increased confidence
- Increased motivation
- Improved communication skills
- Young adults develop aspirations
- Young adults develop positive attitudes to work

*“I'm really happy I chose to get help from Talent Match it's the best decision I made... I really enjoy my visits with my coach he keeps me positive and motivated and always looks out for me.”  
(Participant)*

The assumption is that young adults who achieve these outcomes will be more resilient, more work-ready and better able to cope with the day-to-day workplace environment. A mixed methodology was used in the research including interviews and workshops with all key stakeholder groups and online surveys for participants, core partners and volunteer placement agencies.

Talent Match helped to recruit 3 peer researchers from the Ambassadors group to work alongside the Merida team and help gather evidence from participants. Peer researchers also contributed to the design of evaluation questions and methods, discussed findings and informed recommendations.

## Context

Since the submission of the Talent Match Birmingham and Solihull proposal to the BIG Lottery there have been a number of important changes in the strategic and operational context in which the programme operates. These can be summarised as:

- Fewer young adults are claiming unemployment benefits
- There are more programmes and initiatives to work with 18-24 year olds classed as NEET than there were when Talent Match was designed
- There has been a significant increase in the number of jobs available in both Birmingham and Solihull

## Progress to Date

Performance figures at the end of Year 2 Quarter 3 identify that there are 167 young adults engaged on the programme of which 16 are classed as 'Hidden NEET'.<sup>1</sup> To the end of September 2015, 29 young adults have secured employment through the Talent Match Company, of which 2 have moved into sustainable jobs; 2 participants have taken up apprenticeships; 4 have moved into formal education; 19 young adults have undertaken a volunteering placement and 14 are volunteering on a regular basis.

Talent Match is working to improve its uncontactable and/or dropout rate, which currently stands at 54% (3 months) and 59% (6 months).

In looking at the performance of Talent Match to date it is important to understand how a number of factors have contributed to lower than expected performance across all elements of the programme:

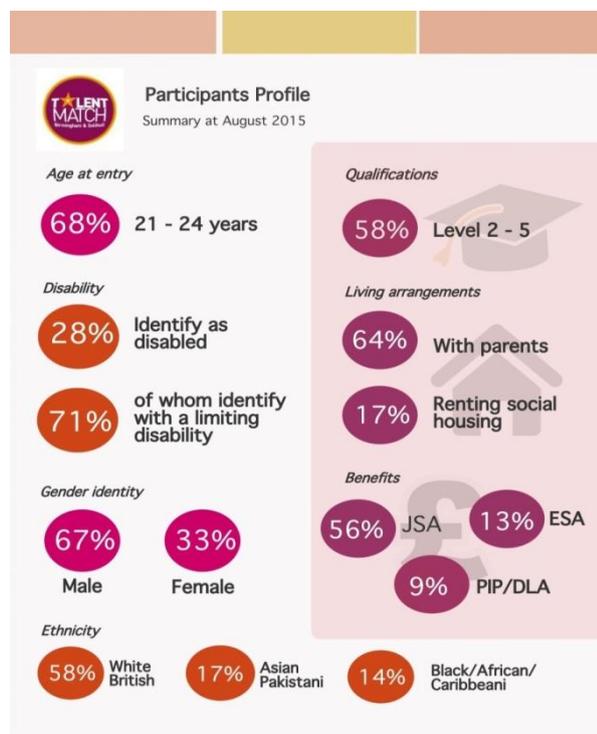
- Establishing BVSC as a Contracting Authority and developing commissioning processes that comply with EU regulations to procure wrap around support
- Changes to the number of NEET young adults, combined with higher numbers of participants with complex needs
- Participants taking longer to progress along their individual pathways than predicted
- Challenges in aligning data management systems with national requirements

Talent Match has put a Performance Action Plan in place and anticipate the plan will start to show improvements in outcomes in the next quarter.

*“What is different is that it is really tailored to individual needs...and you have the same coach, so you build a relationship” (Participant)*

## Talent Match Participants

Most participants identified their goal in engaging with Talent Match was to get a job; some people said they want to gain qualifications, skills or experience and to improve their confidence and employability. Data



<sup>1</sup> Not receiving benefits and not working, self-employed, in formal education or training at the baseline stage.

presented to the Core Strategic Partners in August 2015 showed that, on entry, two-thirds of participants were assessed as needing considerable support before they would be ready for the workplace. Just 9 young adults were assessed as ready for work.

Overall participants commented that they feel more positive, confident and motivated. Coaching was the main benefit they identified. Participants liked that coaches offer support and challenge, the push to move forward balanced with the sense that someone was "on their side". Another benefit was the possibility of securing paid work through the Talent Match Company that would be recognised work experience and could lead to a sustained job.

Young adults identified that the flexibility of Talent Match allowed them to try out different work roles through volunteering or paid placements, to see if it was what they wanted to do, and they could access wrap around support and coaching at any point on their own pathway. Young adults said Talent Match helped them to become more organised and to gain more confidence, for

instance in travelling independently and becoming more autonomous. Some reflected that being given the power to make their own decisions was a bit uncomfortable but overall felt it was beneficial.



*“My coach is really supportive and it's amazing to have someone help you look for jobs and placements that are tailored to your interests. Talent Match focuses on you as an individual, which is really refreshing, I'll definitely be recommending the programme to friends”. (Participant)*

The concept of the Talent Match Ambassador role was developed by young adults during the pre-programme consultation to ensure that young adults are engaged in shaping the

programme and the development of the Demonstrator Model. The Ambassadors group is in the process of being revitalised, a coach has been assigned to develop the group and a volunteer co-ordinator has been appointed to support the new Ambassadors.

### Review of Demonstrator Model

All the elements of the Demonstrator Model are commissioned and in place and there is evidence that the coach role is being well received by participants and is working well. Participants identified that the Talent Match approach feels personally tailored to their needs and aspirations. Due to small numbers, however, it is not yet possible to give an evidence-based and therefore robust view of whether or not the model is successful at getting young adults into sustainable employment. The first 3 participants into the Talent Match Company have recently exited, of whom 2 moved into sustainable jobs which indicates that the model addresses the

barriers young adults face in moving into the labour market and suggests that the approach will deliver results.

There are currently three key challenges for Talent Match:

- Reductions in the number of young adults claiming work-related benefits
- Reaching those Hidden NEETs who are not engaged with the benefits system
- The need to strategically position the programme against the other initiatives in Birmingham and Solihull that are likely to be 'competing' for the same cohort of young adults

The full report poses questions for the programme to consider including:

- *Given the reduced number of unemployed young adults in the economy and anecdotal evidence about young adults entering the programme with more complex needs than may have been originally anticipated, can Talent Match use the information generated from the new database and the National Evaluation datasets about the needs of participants to further develop and hone support pathways to support young adults with more complex needs who may eventually make up the majority of the cohort?*
- *Could a better understanding of the needs of the Talent Match cohort to date help to strategically position the programme in a distinctive 'niche' that may enhance collaboration with other initiatives for this client group?*
- *What other partners (outside those already involved in the CSP) may Talent Match need to engage with strategically to understand more about reaching and working with 'hidden NEET' young adults?*
- *How could more interactive communication channels be developed to offer wrap around support providers, volunteer placements providers and employers an opportunity to feedback what is working well and what has not worked so well?*

There is evidence to demonstrate that the Talent Match team are working hard to address supply issues in relation to employment and volunteering placements and have put systems in place to ensure that the commissioning of individual packages of wrap around support is done as quickly as OEJU legal requirements allow. This combined with the performance improvement planning already in place should see many of the previous barriers to performance addressed.

The current investment in developing the Ambassadors group should strengthen the continuing influence of participants within the programme. There is no doubting the passion that the Talent Match team has for working with young adults and their commitment to delivering a programme that meets young adults' needs and helps move them into employment, this has been evident in the research process.

## I. Introduction

Talent Match is a BIG Lottery-funded programme investing £108 million in 21 Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) areas across England and delivered through cross-sector partnerships. It is a 5 year programme that seeks to support 18-24 year olds who are furthest away from the labour market to move towards sustainable employment and to engage these young adults (often described as NEET - Not in Education, Employment or Training) in the design and delivery of the programme at a local level.

Talent Match Birmingham and Solihull was awarded £7.6 million and aims to engage young adults from across Birmingham and Solihull, with 80% of participants from Birmingham and 20% from Solihull. Young adults voluntarily choose to engage with Talent Match and to be eligible they must be unemployed for at least 12 months. Talent Match Birmingham and Solihull has identified groups of young adults they would particularly seek to engage with the programme: care leavers, young offenders, or those at risk of offending, young adults with learning difficulties and disabilities and 'hidden NEET' i.e. those young adults who are economically inactive, not claiming benefits and who are often not engaged with or known to any services.

Talent Match Birmingham and Solihull is being led by BVSC who employs the programme staff, provides strategic management, legal and payroll services, and is responsible to the BIG Lottery Fund for the overall delivery of the programme. BVSC also facilitates the engagement of key stakeholders through the Core Strategic Partnership (CSP). While overall governance and accountability remains with BVSC, the CSP has representatives from the public, private and voluntary sectors across Birmingham and Solihull. Its purpose is to contribute strategic guidance and oversight of the planning, development, implementation and evaluation of Talent Match.

The overall approach to Talent Match by the BIG Lottery is one of 'test and learn' and to support delivery and share learning across the whole initiative (21 areas) the BIG Lottery Fund has commissioned the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (CRESR) at Sheffield Hallam University, with its partner the Institute for Employment Research (IER) at the University of Warwick, to undertake a programme-wide national evaluation.

To provide local learning for Birmingham and Solihull, BVSC commissioned Merida Associates to undertake learning and review research to capture the programme's journey from inception in July 2014 to September 2015 and to review the implementation of the Demonstrator Model, which is the local approach to delivering Talent Match outcomes.

Throughout this report quotes have been identified as either 'participant' or 'stakeholder' and have been drawn from all data sources including interviews, focus groups and online surveys. 'Participants' covers all young adults aged 18-24 years and Talent Match Ambassadors and 'stakeholders' includes staff, external providers and strategic partners.

Talent Match is used in this report to refer to Talent Match Birmingham and Solihull.

## 2. Methodology

For this learning and review report a mixed methodology<sup>2</sup> has been used to capture different kinds of information and provide a range of ways for people to take part in the research.

- Interviews with staff (6) provided the operational and strategic contexts for the programme. Staff also participated in Theory of Change workshops (2) facilitated by the review team.
- Ambassadors (4) took part in a focus group to reflect on their evolving role and how participants' views can contribute to the ongoing delivery of Talent Match.
- Interviews (10) with Core Strategic Partners generated useful baseline information about the roles of partner agencies, changes in the economic landscape and the impact of young adults' involvement in shaping the programme. Core Partners were invited to participate in an online survey and 3 responded.
- Interviews with employers (4) informed understanding of the motivation for employers to engage with Talent Match and how both employers and young adults benefit.
- Interviews with wrap around support providers (2) developed understanding of the provider framework.
- An online survey was circulated to all organisations that have provided volunteer placements to date and 2 responded.
- An online survey was circulated to all Talent Match participants and 39 young adults responded representing 24% of the total cohort to date. 5 participants also shared their experiences in a focus group.
- Desk research has been conducted drawing on reports, documents and other materials from the programme team and wider sources.

The learning and review proposal set out the intention to work with young adults as peer researchers helping to gather evidence of impact from participants. 3 peer researchers (all of whom are Talent Match Ambassadors) were recruited, trained and supported by the review team and have:

- Contributed to the design of evaluation questions and methods
- Scribed at the focus group with Talent Match participants
- Helped to complete online surveys with Talent Match participants over the phone
- Taken part in a review team meeting to discuss findings and inform recommendations

Peer researchers will also be joining the evaluation team to present findings to both the staff team and Core Strategic Partnership.

There is limited information available for some aspects of the Demonstrator Model so findings for those elements should be regarded as indicative rather than conclusive.

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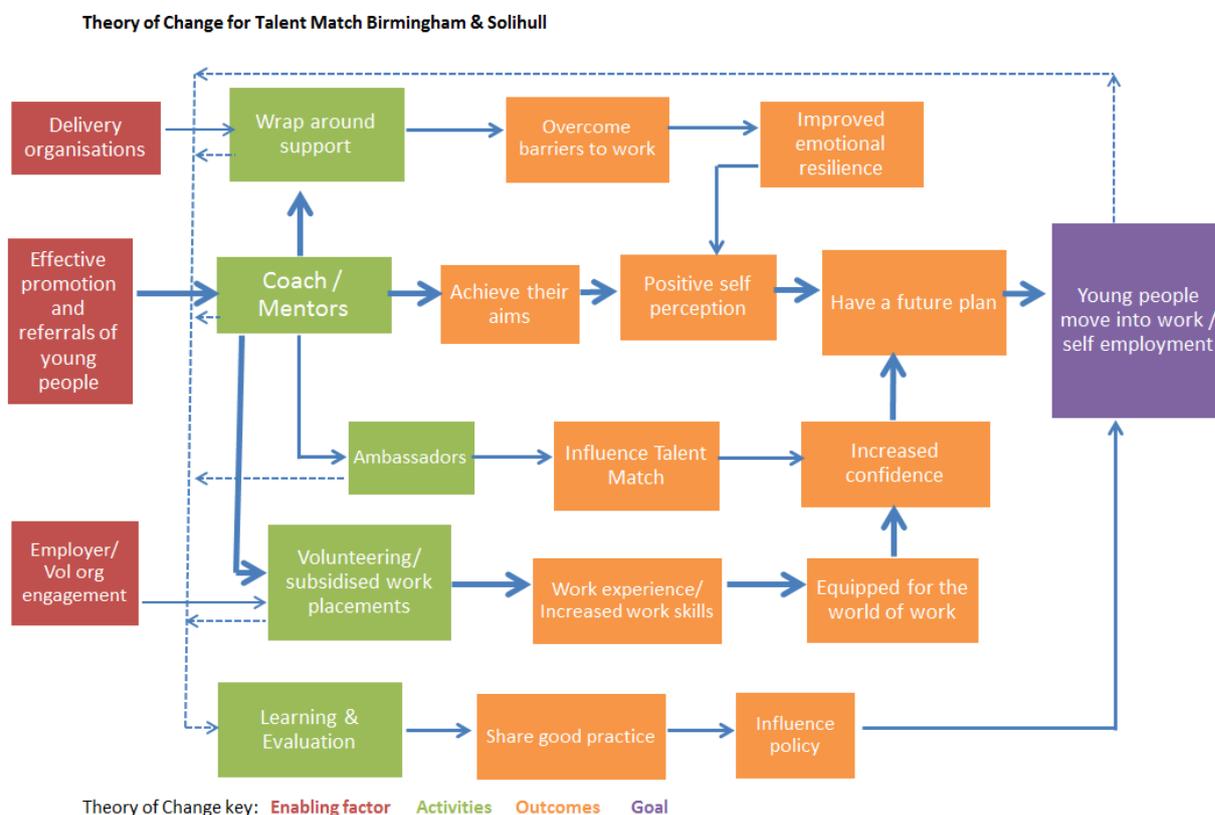
<sup>2</sup> The detail of which is set out in the Evaluation Framework designed for this project

## 2.1 Theory of Change (ToC)

Merida often uses Theory of Change (ToC) as a tool to guide evaluation processes as it can help to identify causal links between activities, outcomes and the overall goal of the programme. A Theory of Change explores the rationale that informed decisions about what kinds of activities were chosen to achieve positive outcomes for participants. It also looks at what needs to be in place (enabling factors) for programme activities to be successful. Our proposal outlined our intention to use ToC to help guide the review of Talent Match Birmingham and Solihull.

The BIG Lottery recommends the use of the Theory of Change model because of the focus on achieving outcomes and evidencing impact. Using a ToC can help Talent Match to reflect on whether the activities planned are achieving the outcomes anticipated. An initial ToC diagram has been developed (see Figure 1) and this will form the basis for ongoing review and reflection as the programme continues to develop and changes in the local economy potentially have an impact on its ability to achieve against its intermediate outcomes. The Theory of Change for Talent Match Birmingham and Solihull reflects the overall aim of the national Talent Match initiative to enable young adults furthest from the labour market to access employment or enterprise opportunities. The BIG Lottery funding supports partnerships that bring employers, the voluntary sector and training and specialist support providers together to respond to the specific needs of each Talent Match area. The context for the development of Talent Match Birmingham and Solihull is described in section 3.

Figure 1<sup>3</sup>



<sup>3</sup> ToC based on model developed by NPC see <http://www.thinknpc.org/publications/theory-of-change/> as recommended by BIG

The initial ToC diagram was developed from two workshops with the whole staff team and conversations with the Learning and Evaluation team and the Ambassadors / Peer researchers. It shows how learning is embedded in each activity, including the achievement of young adults into employment, so that the programme is able to continuously improve. The elements of the ToC are described below.

### **Programme goal**

To create cohesive pathways for unemployed 18-24 year olds in Birmingham and Solihull taking them towards sustained employment, self-employment, further education or training.

### **Intermediate outcomes**

Talent Match believes that long-term unemployed young adults often experience lack of self-belief and de-motivation over time. A poor sense of self and lack of resilience can compound more practical barriers like lack of skills, qualifications or access to transport and these barriers need to be addressed to enable young adults to move forward sustainably; addressing practical barriers in isolation is not enough as people can slip back once a programme ends. The outcomes that are the stepping stones to employment are identified as:

- Increased self-esteem
- Increased confidence
- Increased motivation
- Improved communication skills
- Young adults develop aspirations
- Young adults develop positive attitudes to work

The assumption is that young adults who achieve these outcomes will be more resilient, more work-ready and better able to cope with the day-to-day workplace environment.

### **Programme activities**

The design of the programme was informed by 9 consultation events attended by around 100 young adults between August and October 2012. Issues highlighted by young adults included the need for a flexible service, able to respond to young adults with multiple and complex needs, better co-ordination of support and honesty and clarity about what support was (or was not) on offer. Some of the young adults who participated in these events wanted to continue their involvement and as a result the Talent Match Ambassador role was developed.

Talent Match provides each young person on the programme with package of support tailored to meet their individual needs. At an initial assessment every young person works with their coach to identify their goals using a tool known as the Assessment SPOT. Reflecting on 10 key life areas that were identified through consultation with young adults, the Assessment SPOT indicates where support may be required and translates it into an individual action plan for participants designed to help them to reach their goals/proposed destination. The action plan is a live document and flexible enough accommodate changes in self-awareness, goals or experience

over time. There is not a typical Talent Match pathway or trajectory as support is all built around the individual and their needs and goals.

### ***Learning and Evaluation***

Learning and evaluation is not a programme delivery activity but it is integral to the programme, capturing and sharing learning about what works in terms of young adults moving into sustainable employment. The programme aims to share good practice arising from Talent Match Birmingham and Solihull with other providers and policy makers to influence future provision and policy relating to youth employment.

### ***Ambassadors***

In existence since 2012, Ambassadors helped to shape Talent Match, especially in the pre-application consultation and set up phases of the programme. The role is designed to ensure young adults' voices are heard at the centre of the programme. After a period of inactivity following a number of people moving into employment, training or education, the Ambassador group is being refreshed and at the time of writing Talent Match was inducting 3 new Ambassadors all of whom applied for the role and participated in a formal recruitment and selection process. They have joined an existing Ambassador who has sat on the Core Strategic Partners group since its inception.

Ambassadors aim to play an active role in promoting Talent Match, sharing good news stories through social media and events, and helping to build the evidence base to support the learning and evaluation function. There is also a peer mentoring aspect to the role and Ambassadors hope to strengthen the communication between participants and the Core Strategic Partners by creating opportunities for two-way dialogue.

### ***Coaches***

During the consultation phase young adults identified that they would like to engage with one key person during the programme and as a result the initial assessment and ongoing support elements have been brought together in a coach/mentor role.

Coaches are participants' main contact with the programme and it is their job to create an environment that is both professional and trustworthy. Coaches ensure young adults are at the centre of the decision-making process and they work to empower young adults to identify for themselves their personal barriers to employment and then support them to put an action plan in place to address those barriers.

Coaches undertake comprehensive assessment activities with participants, develop and monitor action plans with them and offer support at each step of the Talent Match pathway. This includes procuring wrap around support from external providers to meet the specific needs of each participant at the time they need it.

They are also responsible for developing and maintaining relationships with referral agencies and for ensuring the completion of all national evaluation data gathering forms (baseline and follow up reviews) and inputting them onto the programme database.

## ***Wrap around Support***

Wrap around support is available for all Talent Match participants as and when it is required. It is not compulsory and not everyone wants or needs wrap around support. Young adults work with their coach to identify what would help; it is not the coaches' role to tell young adults that this is something they need.

Wrap around support can provide a package of support tailored to help young adults achieve their goals. Young adults who have been long-term unemployed can often have complex needs or have a number of issues that they need to address, such as mental health issues, drug or alcohol use, homelessness, poor money management skills, lack of confidence, long-term health conditions or disabilities. A combination of personal and environmental factors can have an impact on their wellbeing and resilience and the Talent Match programme is able to offer support holistically to address a wide range of barriers.

Young adults can access a variety of services including, for example, counselling for stress and anxiety. Some services, such as Anger Management, have been bulk purchased as this has been identified by a number of young adults as something they would like support with. For others, wrap around support may be more focused towards the progression out of Talent Match, such as support to develop a business idea or in-work support while on a paid placement.

Coaches commission the wrap around support and currently there are 59 different elements on offer through a providers' framework and once all the systems are fully up and running it is likely to take around 2 weeks from identifying individual needs to the support being purchased. Training provision is also commissioned through the wrap around support providers' framework.

## ***Volunteer Placements***

A key element on the pathway to sustainable employment is work experience and young adults can access this from volunteering placements negotiated through Talent Match. The rationale is that they can test out new skills and attitudes to work in a supported environment before progressing into paid jobs, self-employment or further learning.

Organisations delivering volunteer placements are engaged by Birmingham Volunteer Centre. Young adults can volunteer for up to 4 weeks and placement providers claim a placement allowance of £35.00 per week in recognition of the additional workload that supporting a Talent Match volunteer requires.

Young adults continue to receive one-to-one support from their coach while on a volunteer placement and can access wrap around support to meet identified need while continuing to volunteer.

## **Talent Match Company**

*"Young people told us they wanted to get off benefits and get a track record of working so we created the Talent Match Company." (Stakeholder)*

The Talent Match Company is a separate company limited by guarantee which employs all young adults on the subsidised wage work placement option offered by Talent Match. It provides a job matching service and works across the not-for-profit, statutory and private sectors.

There are 3 wage options open to employers: (1) the employer pays 100% of the participant's wage costs; (2) the employer pays an agreed proportion (c. 50%) of the wage costs, Talent Match pays the other part, this subsidy is negotiated on a case by case basis; (3) employers receive a 100% wage subsidy where Talent Match covers all wage costs (recently introduced). The wage options are currently under review. The employer deals with day-to-day line management of the participant and the Talent Match Company HR officer deals with performance issues as set out in a placement agreement. Young adults maintain regular contact with their coach during the work placement and are able to access wrap around support as required. Employment placements can be terminated with one week's notice.

Coaches are currently commissioning a package of employability support for young adults who have moved into the Talent Match Company and are awaiting placement with a host employer.

### **Enabling Factors**

In order for Talent Match to be effective and achieve its overall goal, there are a number of factors that need to be in place:

- Robust referral routes. Young adults most in need of support need to hear about the Talent Match offer or be directly invited to take part in the programme. Effective promotion to reach the young adults who have fallen 'off the radar', or people who know them (personal or professional agency contacts), helps to ensure appropriate recruitment and referrals.
- A range of volunteer and work placement providers in place and ready to provide employment and volunteering opportunities.
- A flexible delivery partners' framework needs to be in place to enable the commissioning of bespoke wrap around services to meet the needs of individual young adults.

### 3. Context

Successive governments have taken a two-tier approach to addressing NEETs – *preventative* measures taken to improve educational attainment at 16 years and post-16, and *re-integrative* initiatives intended to facilitate re-engagement with the labour market<sup>4</sup>. Talent Match falls into the latter category.

The initiative has evolved at a time of rapid change, both in the number of NEETs reported in ONS survey data and in Government and EU initiatives targeted at 16-24 year olds.

Since the initial submission of the Talent Match Birmingham and Solihull proposal to the BIG Lottery there have been important changes in the strategic and operational context in which the programme operates. These can be summarised as:

- Fewer young adults are claiming unemployment benefits.<sup>5</sup>
- There are more programmes and initiatives either live or coming on-stream to work with 18-24 year olds classed as NEET than there were when Talent Match was designed.
- There has been a significant increase in the number of jobs available in both Birmingham and Solihull.

Changes in welfare benefits may also impact on young adults' ability to enter employment. For instance, one partner suggested that proposed changes to housing benefit entitlement for some 18-21 year olds<sup>6</sup> could force between 5,000 and 15,000 more young adults into homelessness in Birmingham. This would have an adverse impact on young adults' ability to secure employment as they would not have a permanent address.

#### **Changes to the number of young adults classed as NEET**

At the inception of Talent Match there had been a consistent five-year increase in the number of young adults defined as NEET. The Birmingham Commission on Youth Unemployment (January 2013) identified that there were around 15,500 unemployed young adults in the City who were known to services.<sup>7</sup> Of these, the report estimates that around 3,000 young adults had been claiming Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) for over 12 months. The report also commented that there is "a large number who we do not know about because no public sector agency keeps track of them".

The report states that: "At current levels of youth unemployment, 18-24 year-olds on benefit in Birmingham will cost the Treasury over £88 million in 2012. The scars that this unemployment leaves on those young people, in terms of their lower future earnings and employability, will then cost the Treasury over £313 million over 2012-2022." It notes that: "...over the coming decade, the cost of youth

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<sup>4</sup> Nelson and O'Donnell 2012

<sup>5</sup> The claimant count is the number of people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), plus the number of people not in work and claiming Universal Credit.

<sup>6</sup> Wilson W. (August 2015) *Housing Benefit: withdrawing entitlement from 18-21 year olds* House of Commons Library Briefing Paper Number 06473, 26 August 2015

<sup>7</sup> Either because there were in the 16-17 year old age group and being tracked by the local authority as school leavers, or because they were the 18-24 year old age group and claiming benefits.

unemployment in Birmingham to the taxpayer will be more than £400 million." And that: "...the cost to the Birmingham economy of 18-24-year-olds out of work is over £128 million in lost output in 2012."

Figures from Solihull MBC<sup>8</sup> show that as of July 2013, 1,185 young adults were claiming JSA, the lowest it had been since December 2008 according to figures published by the Solihull Observatory in April 2013.<sup>9</sup>

The Centre for Social and Economic Inclusion August 2015 Labour Market Live Briefing comments that "The number of workless young people (not in employment, full-time education or training) is 1,072,000, down -51,000 on the quarter, representing 14.8% of the youth population (down -0.7 percentage points)." The briefing goes on to note that some 475,000 young adults (6.6% of the youth population) are unemployed and not in full time education.

Figures produced for Birmingham City Council (August 2015 Youth Unemployment Briefing) show that the number of 18-24 JSA claimants in Birmingham stood at 5,075 in July 2015 **a decrease of 67% on the figures prepared for the Birmingham Commission on Youth Unemployment.**

The figures for Solihull also show falls in the number of young adults aged 18-24 years who are JSA claimants. Figures from Solihull MBC show that as of June 2015 there were 470 claimants **a decrease of almost 40% from 2013 figures.**

The data indicates that, as with the Birmingham Commission on Youth Employment (2013), NEET levels in Birmingham are unevenly distributed across the area, with persistently high levels remaining in Washwood Heath, Aston and Sparkbrook. It is worth noting that regional statistics (ONS 2015) show that the North East has highest proportion of NEETs, with the West Midlands coming in 3rd and London recording the lowest<sup>10</sup>.

Data taken from the House of Commons Library Briefing Paper no. 05871<sup>11</sup> identifies that long-term youth unemployment (16-24 year olds, over 12 months as at May- July 2015) was down 17,000 on the previous quarter and down 54,000 on the previous year and stood at 149,000 nationally.

Analysis from the CESI (August 2015<sup>12</sup>) identifies that the proportion of "unemployed young people (not counting students) who are not claiming Jobseeker's Allowance and therefore are not receiving official help with job search is now 66% and has risen by over 30 percentage points since October 2012." They note that this figure represents some 313,000 young adults nationally. Research suggests that "Those eligible for free school meals, those who have been excluded or suspended from school, those with their own child and those who have a disability are more likely to be NEET".<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.solihull.gov.uk/Portals/0/KeyStats/UnemploymentBriefing/UnempBriefing201407.pdf> website accessed September 2015

<sup>9</sup> Solihull Unemployment Briefing, Economic Development & Regeneration Division and Solihull Observatory April 2013

<sup>10</sup> Mizra-Davies, J. 2015 p 4

<sup>11</sup> Delebarre J. Youth Unemployment Statistics (JCP) House of Commons Briefing Paper Number 05871, 16 September 2015

<sup>12</sup> Centre for Social and Economic Inclusion Briefing (Labour Market Live August 2015)

<sup>13</sup> Mizra Davies August 2015 website accessed Sept 2015

<http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN06705#fullreport>

Information gathered for the Talent Match Business Plan from housing providers' representatives suggests that up to 45% of their young service users are outside state assistance - however it has not been possible to identify numbers of young adults who are not working or claiming unemployment benefits for this report. Nor has it been possible to identify the number of 18-24 year olds claiming non-work related benefits such as Employment Support Allowance.

### **Programmes aimed at supporting young adults not in education, training or employment**

There has been an increase in policy responses to the numbers of young adults who are NEET including the following national initiatives that are being delivered locally:

- DWP's Work Programme
- DWP's Job Coaching programme
- Destination Work

Talent Match Birmingham and Solihull commissioned a strategic mapping report<sup>14</sup> to give an overview of the local landscape in respect of youth employment programmes and services. Evidence from the mapping report together with desk research and information from interviews identifies the following list of existing activity:

- Birmingham Jobs Fund
- Birmingham City Council's Youth Promise
- Solihull Skills for Jobs Project
- Apprenticeships (Work-based Learning) run by providers in Birmingham and Solihull
- A NEETs programme delivered by Igneus in partnership with registered charity Sova (national crime reduction charity)

The programme helps young adults who have offended or are at risk of offending. It provides tailored support to young adults in North Solihull, covering the areas of Chelmsley Wood, Kingshurst & Fordbridge, Smiths Wood and Castle Bromwich.

- In Birmingham, Jericho runs a business start-up hub specifically aimed at NEETS

A joint application has been made to the European Structural Investment Fund for the Youth Employment Initiative, which will be known in Birmingham and Solihull as Youth Promise Plus. It is potentially worth c. £50million over 3 years and is looking to engage 8,000 young people through a universal offer.

A new Government initiative, referred to as 'boot camps' in the press (Independent 17/8/15), will be starting from April 2016. Under the plan, anyone under 21 who is out of work and on benefits will be required to take part in a three-week intensive course to help them find employment or training. They will have to sign up to the programme within a month of claiming benefits or risk a sanction of benefits. This initiative is being overseen by a new Earn or Learn Taskforce headed by Matt Hancock, the Cabinet Office Minister.

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<sup>14</sup> [Strategic Initiatives that Support Sustainable Youth Employment](#) Final Report DiSE CIC Sept 2015

Evidently the marketplace for employment initiatives targeted at the 18-24 year age group has become more crowded since the inception of Talent Match and a summary of information about this can be found in the strategic mapping report.

### **Changes to the labour market**

Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership Annual Report 2014–15 identifies that the region's economy is growing and that there is a high degree of confidence that this growth can be sustained. A September 2015 LEP Newsroom report<sup>15</sup> notes that the rate of growth across private sector jobs in the Greater Birmingham area was 6% higher than any other core City LEP area (with the exception of West of England) and was above the national growth rate of 4.3%.

Core Strategic Partners in their interviews highlighted a number of new employment opportunities including:

- Opportunities created/that will be created through the development of the NEC Campus by Resort World
- The expansion of Touchwood and the regeneration of Mel Square in Solihull
- Grand Central complex and the development of the Digbeth area in Birmingham

The increase in opportunities has eased the position for those closest to the job market, it may have reduced the numbers of unemployed graduates for example, or provided employment for qualified young adults from neighbouring authorities. However the general sense was that for those young adults furthest from the labour market the picture remains unchanged as they lack the skills and confidence to access these jobs. Partners talked about skill mismatches between those with complex needs and the job opportunities on offer, however many were optimistic about what Talent Match can offer and one interviewee commented: *"There are real opportunities if we can get the pipeline and the skills mix right. It's never been a better time."*

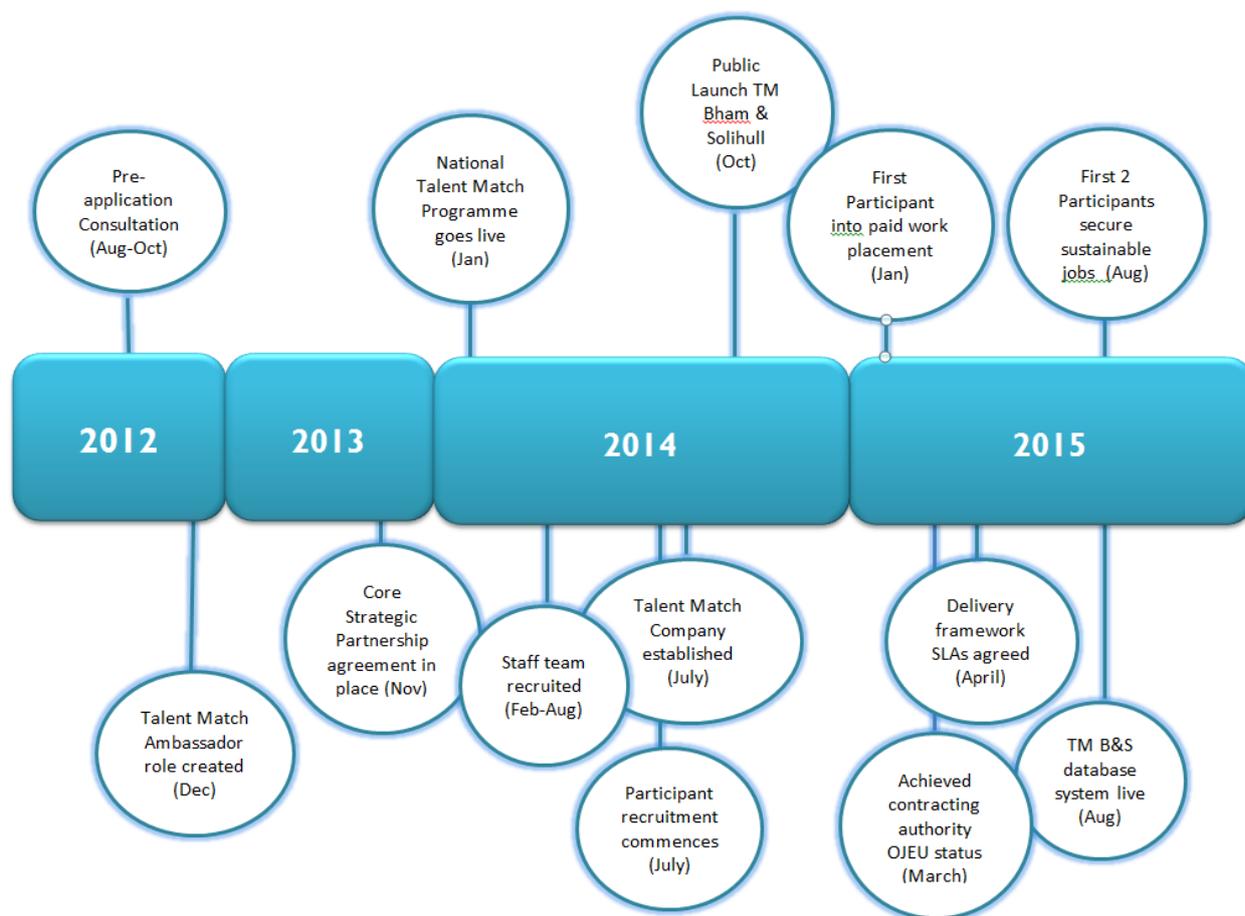
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<sup>15</sup> Website accessed Sept 2015 <http://centrefenterprise.com/2015/09/24/latest-ons-employment-survey-highlights-regional-economic-success/>

## 4. Progress to Date

A timeline (Figure 2) has been produced to illustrate key points in the Talent Match Birmingham and Solihull journey to date. It shows process elements underneath and milestones above the line.

Figure 2



The timeline shows that when the BIG Lottery launched the Talent Match programme nationally in January 2014, BVSC were still in the set up and mobilisation phase for Talent Match Birmingham and Solihull. Although Talent Match Birmingham and Solihull was 'open for business' generating referrals and working with young adults with effect from July 2014, in practice the programme was managing both delivery and mobilisation until April 2015 when the SLAs were agreed with organisations on the Providers Delivery Framework.

In looking at the performance of Talent Match to date it is important to understand how a number of factors have combined to impact on the ability of the programme to get the pathways in place for young adults to move through the model.

These factors can be summarised as:

### **Establishing BVSC as a Contracting Authority and developing commissioning processes that comply with EU regulations**

This has been one of the main factors that have impeded the mobilisation phase of the programme. It was not until after the BIG grant of £7.6 million had been awarded that one of the Core Strategic Partners questioned whether the size of the award meant BVSC now needed to become a registered contracting authority<sup>16</sup> in order to carry out the procurement of services for Talent Match.

BVSC took legal advice from a procurement specialist and found they did need to register as a contracting authority. The procurement specialist took them through the registration process which takes a set period of time and there is no flexibility in the timeframe within the OEJU<sup>17</sup> rules. Putting in place commissioning processes to comply with these rules was both resource intensive and time consuming. When the rules changed in February 2015 this further delayed the process.

Given this is a new commissioning process, and one that can be open to challenge, Talent Match was keen to adhere to legal advice. Some Core Strategic Partners and delivery partners have described BVSC's approach as being risk adverse; however BVSC wanted to ensure that it minimised its exposure to organisational risk and has striven to follow best practice in all aspects of its commissioning processes. Learning about everything from e-tendering portals to developing Pre Qualification Questionnaires and criteria for assessing bids has taken considerable organisational time and energy.

In addition, BVSC is a membership organisation and a voluntary sector infrastructure body so its aim was to ensure that all tendering opportunities were conducted in an open and transparent way, and that as far as possible smaller organisations were given equal opportunity to engage with the tender processes.

To deliver the personalised support that young adults had identified in consultation, Talent Match needed to anticipate the different kinds of wrap around support participants might need in order to ensure appropriate support is available. The pre-programme consultation identified that young adults would welcome support on issues such as financial exclusion, childcare, housing, substance misuse, mental and physical health, and lack of confidence. Talent Match 'translated' these identified issues into a comprehensive set of services to be provided by suitably experienced organisations.

Procurement and commissioning processes did create delays for the programme and Provider Framework agreements were not signed with delivery partners until April 2015. Ongoing

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<sup>16</sup> Procurement and commissioning processes in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are governed by the Procurement Contracts Regulations (2006), while in Scotland they are governed by the Procurement Contracts (Scotland) Regulations 2006. Both these regulations bring into UK law the EU Directive on the Co-ordination of Procurement Procedures 2004. Source ACEVO Commissioning Unit. An Introduction to Commissioning and Tendering (undated).

<sup>17</sup> OJEU stands for the Official Journal of the European Union (previously called OJEC - the Official Journal of the European Community). This is the publication in which all tenders from the public sector which are valued above a certain financial threshold according to EU legislation must be published. Source: OJEU.eu web site accessed September 2015

commissioning of wrap around support for participants will follow due process and will always take at least 2 weeks from identification of need to service being ready. Wrap around services are now been procured, including one bulk purchase (Counselling). As more young adults engage with Talent Match it is envisaged that the number of bulk purchases will increase. See Appendix 4 for an overview of the wrap around support procurement purchase process.

### **Changes to the number of NEET young adults, combined with higher numbers of participants with complex needs than originally anticipated**

In addition to the changes in the external operating environment captured in the context section of this report, particularly the significant reduction in numbers<sup>18</sup> of young adults eligible and available to participate in the programme, there is anecdotal evidence that suggests that the young adults coming into Talent Match have more deep-seated and complex needs than had been anticipated when the programme was designed.

**There have been a number of unforeseen operational complexities** that include staff sickness and changes. Moreover neither the Business Plan nor the initial delivery plans predicted that setting up the Talent Match Company would be so time consuming. In practice, while the mechanics of company registration were unproblematic developing appropriate terms, conditions and policies to employ young adults through the Company took longer than originally anticipated.

There is a shared view across the staff team that it has taken participants longer to progress along their individual pathways than was originally expected. Participants are staying longer in the coaching phase either because it is taking time for them to feel ready to move into wrap around support, volunteer placements or work placements or, in other cases, because there have been delays in commissioning support or appropriate placements have not been available. Both positions have the potential to create programme dropout points.

**Unpacking anomalous data reporting** has taken considerable time and energy across the whole staff team. Three factors have combined to make understanding data anomalies challenging:

- Talent Match has experienced delays in procuring the necessary data management and monitoring systems and it was only in August 2015 that a bespoke database went live. Up to this point staff were relying on comparatively inflexible Excel spreadsheets that made manipulating large quantities of data and running reports time consuming and cumbersome. In addition, considerable time had been spent in aligning the Common Data Framework used nationally with project output and outcome definitions.
- The National Evaluation data gathering tools are being used to provide BIG with programme monitoring data and information for each of the 21 programme delivery sites. Programmes

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<sup>18</sup> Figures produced for Birmingham City Council (August 2015 Youth Unemployment Briefing) show that the number of 18-24 JSA claimants in Birmingham stood at 5,075 in July 2015 **a decrease of 67% on the figures prepared for the Birmingham Commission on Youth Unemployment.**

The figures for Solihull also show falls in the number of young people aged 18-24 and who are JSA claimants. figures from Solihull MBC show that as of June 2015 there were 470 claimants **a decrease of almost 40% from 2013 figures.**

input data into an online data capture system and then each area gets back its own delivery report which forms the basis of individual programme reports to BIG. This creates 'time lags' in counting outputs.

- The team have worked to ensure that collection of the National Evaluation data remains integral to the process of supporting the young person's journey, but at times they feel conflicting pressure between the Assessment SPOT and the evaluation review process.

Understanding and identifying these and other significant data reporting/timing anomalies associated with the Talent Match Company has diverted strategic, operational and delivery staff time and energy from focusing on developing the Demonstrator Model pathways and has contributed to lower than expected performance across all elements of the programme.

Talent Match has put a Performance Action Plan in place and the team anticipates the plan will start to show improvements in outcomes in the next quarter.

Performance figures at the end of Year 2 Quarter 3<sup>19</sup> identify that there are 167 young adults engaged on the programme of which 16 are classed as 'Hidden NEET'.<sup>20</sup>

Keeping participants engaged up to the 3 month and 6 month review points is proving difficult and the programme has identified a need to improve its uncontactable and/or dropout rate, which currently stands at 54% for those who have reached the 3 month point, and 59% for those who reached the 6 month point<sup>21</sup>. Good practice from other Talent Match projects has been sourced and will be used to inform ways to stay in touch with participants in the future.

To the end of September 2015, 29 young adults have secured employment (through the Talent Match Company, of which 2 have moved into sustainable jobs); 2 participants have taken up apprenticeships; 4 have moved into formal education; 19 young adults have undertaken a volunteering placement and 14 are volunteering on a regular basis.

55 organisations have signed up to offer volunteer placements. To date, 101 employers have been engaged and of these 41 have gone on to offer employment opportunities through the Talent Match Company. This means that some 40.5% of employers, despite showing an initial interest, do not go on to offer employment through the programme. At this stage the reasons for this are not understood by the programme.

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<sup>19</sup> Source: Talent Match performance data to end of September 2015

<sup>20</sup> Young people classed as "hidden" are participants who were not receiving benefits and were not working (either less than 16 hours per week or 16 hours or more a week), self-employed, on apprenticeship, in formal education or in training at the baseline stage.

<sup>21</sup> Source: BIG Lottery/CRESR data

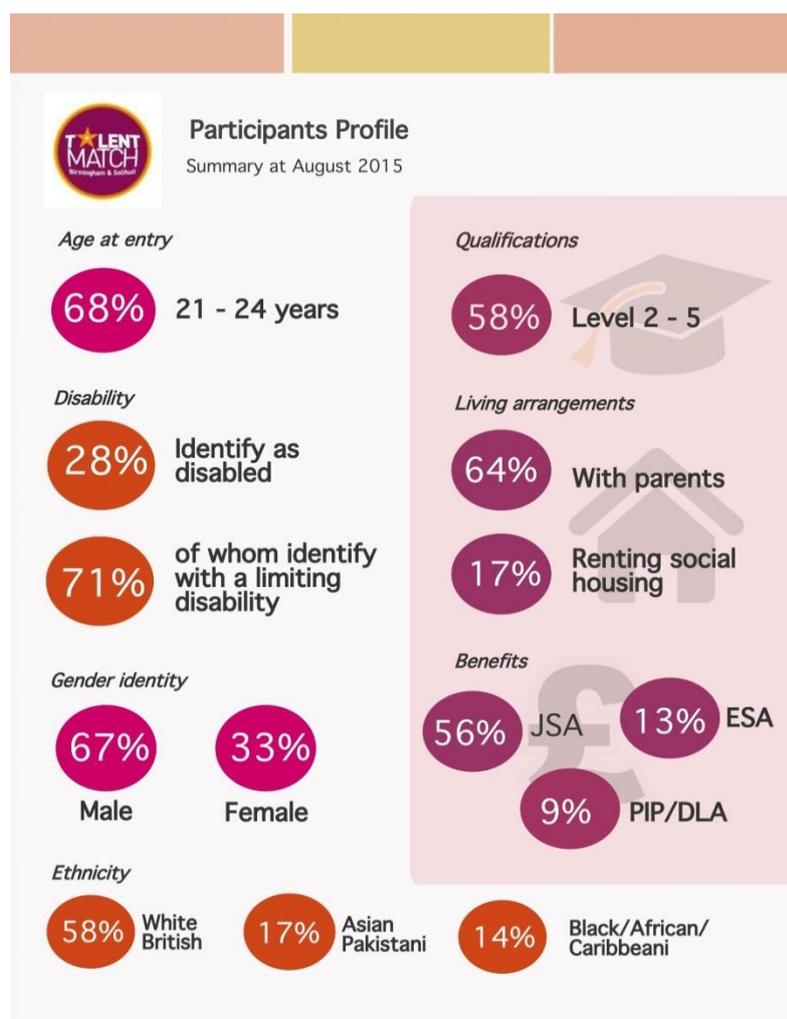
## 5. Talent Match Participants

### 5.1 Participants' profile

Programme data used for the review research showed that 163 participants had been registered onto Talent Match Birmingham and Solihull by the end of August 2015. About two-thirds of participants are male and two-thirds are towards the older end of the age range 18 – 24 years. Over half of participants have qualifications at Level 2 or above and just under two-thirds live with their parents or guardian. This profile suggests the cohort includes young adults who have been reasonably successful in education and who probably have some experience of further education, other youth employment programmes or previous employment, as well as those with more disadvantaged backgrounds.

Most participants identified that their goal in engaging with Talent Match was to get a job; some people said they want to gain qualifications, skills or experience or to improve their confidence and employability. The sample of participants that responded to the online survey suggests the cohort includes a relatively low number of young adults wanting to start their own business.

Figure 3



Total no. participants = 163. Full profile data summary at Appendix I

The data shows Talent Match has engaged with a high proportion of young adults who identify as disabled (28%, no. 45), exceeding population averages (fewer than 20%).

The ethnic diversity of the cohort indicates that two of the three groups that make up the largest numbers on the programme are over-represented when compared with 2011 Census data for Birmingham and Solihull as a whole, this may correlate with the ethnic groupings in the geographical hotspots for youth unemployment targeted by the programme.

Table 1

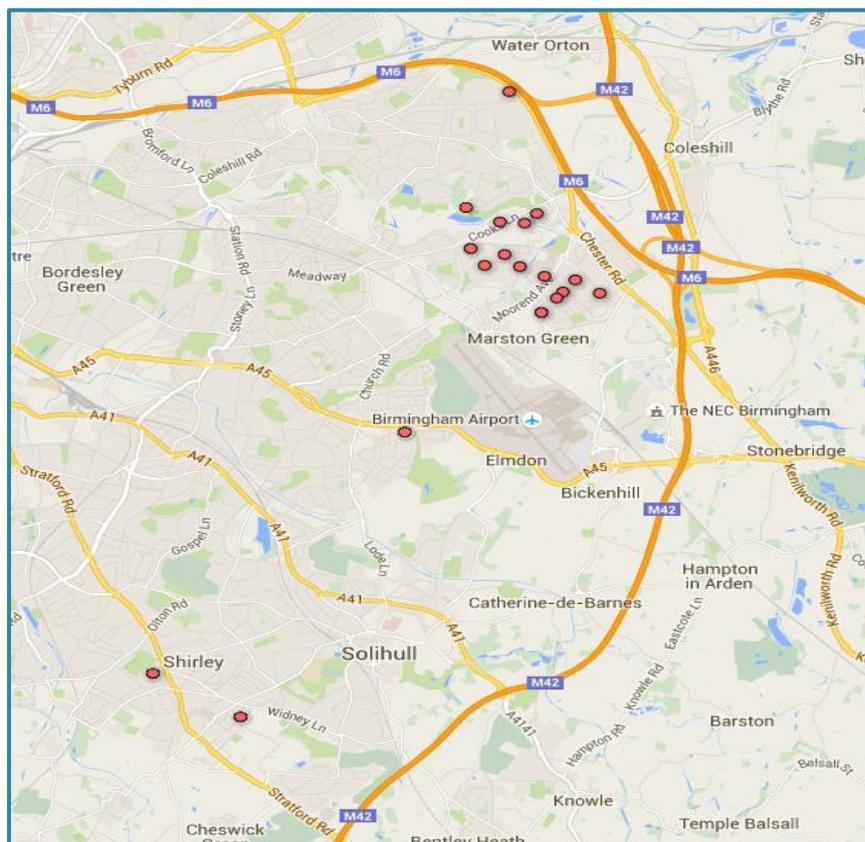
Ethnic Group	Talent Match	2011 Census Birmingham	2013 Census update Solihull
Asian Pakistani	17%	13.5%	1.6%
Black Caribbean/African	14%	7.2%	1.4%
White British	58%	53.1%	85.8%

Map 1 shows an overall spread of participants across Birmingham with clusters in hotspots such as Stechford, Shard End and Sheldon in the East of the city, Bordesley Green, Small Heath and Ladywood near the centre, Handsworth and Lozells to the West and Kingstanding and Perry Common in the North. Map 2 shows recruitment across Solihull and illustrates targeted focus in North Solihull.

Map 1: Birmingham participants



Map 2: Solihull participants



Participants are assessed by coaches on entry to the programme to determine how far they are from entry to the workplace, each young person is assigned a RAG (Red, Amber, Green) rating. This process helps coaches to assess how much support each young person might need, and at what level of intensity. Internal analysis of the RAG rating data was presented to the Core Strategic Partners in August 2015 showed that two-thirds of participants were assessed as Red or Red/Amber, indicating they would need quite a lot of support before they would be ready for the workplace. Just 9 young adults were assessed as Green and ready for work.

## 5.2 Participant feedback

The information gathered from the participants' survey and focus groups with participants and Talent Match Ambassadors has been collated in this section. Peer Researchers have helped to analyse the findings in discussion with Merida team members.

*What makes Talent Match different*

*“What is different is that it is really tailored to individual needs...and you have the same coach, so you build a relationship” (Participant)*

Participants identified that Talent Match is different to other employment support programmes in that it offers a more holistic approach. Young adults feel that Talent Match is tailored to their personal interests and is not just focused on getting them into any job; they are encouraged to think about their future and what they see themselves doing and to work towards that ultimate goal. Young adults feel that they are offered more control within Talent Match, that they are able

to decide for themselves what they want to do as participants and that they are supported to make those choices. Engagement with Talent Match is voluntary and young adults say they experience it as less directive than other programmes. Participants identified the regular one-to-one contact with their Talent Match coaches as a key difference compared to other programmes and the continuity of contact with the same coach over their period of engagement in the programme was a significant factor. Focus group participants agreed the coach was “*more like a life coach*” than just a job coach.

***“I'm really happy I chose to get help from Talent Match it's the best decision I made... I really enjoy my visits with my coach he keeps me positive and motivated and always looks out for me.” (Participant)***

#### *Reflection on the Assessment Spot*

***“... cos it's self-evaluating you figure out weaknesses you hadn't thought about before and get support with them.” (Participant)***

Participants described how engaging with the Assessment SPOT helped them to look at what would motivate them and to set goals for themselves. It helped them think about what they needed to work on to move them towards getting a job, rather than just going for a job straight away. Focus group participants described how it helped them to get more organised. One participant described how when they identified a goal to get fitter, the coach sourced some free gym sessions to get them started.

#### *Benefits to participants*

Participants identified a number of benefits of being on the Talent Match programme, overall they feel more positive, confident and motivated. Coaching was the main perceived benefit, and the one all participants had experienced. They liked that coaches offer support and challenge, the push to move forward balanced with the sense that someone was backing them up.

Another benefit was the possibility of securing a paid job role through the Talent Match Company that could count as recognised work experience and even lead to a sustained job, as lack of work experience is a key barrier to employment for young adults, including those with job-relevant qualifications.

Young adults identified that the flexibility of Talent Match allowed them to try out different work roles through volunteering or paid placements, to see if it was what they wanted to do, and they could access different elements of the programme at any point on their own pathway. It was also helping them to become more organised and to gain more confidence, for instance in travelling independently and becoming more autonomous. Some reflected that being given the power to make their own decisions was a bit uncomfortable for people who were unused to it but overall it was perceived to be a benefit.

***“I think that Talent Match is helping me get work skills...but over the next 12 months I hope to gain more personal skills.” (Participant)***

Respondents to the participants' survey were asked to indicate whether or not they agreed with statements about their overall experience of Talent Match to date (Figure 4). Most people agreed that Talent Match had helped to get them into a routine and that a volunteer placement would help them move into paid work. Fewer people had experienced a paid work placement but of those who had, the majority agreed it felt like an authentic work experience.

*“Talent Match has really helped inspire and motivate me to start working towards my future. My coach is really supportive and it's amazing to have someone help you look for jobs and placements that are tailored to your interests. Talent Match focuses on you as an individual, which is really refreshing, I'll definitely be recommending the programme to friends”. (Participant)*

When asked to rate the support they have received from Talent Match, 35 out of 37 survey respondents (95%) said support from their coach was excellent or good and 34 (92%) said support from the programme overall was excellent or good. The responses revealed that about half of the sample had not yet experienced wrap around support, volunteer placements or paid work placements but of those that had, a clear majority said the support was excellent or good for each element.

Figure 4: Participant survey feedback



#### How Talent Match could be improved

Some participants would like to be able to see their coach closer to where they live, rather than travelling into the city centre every week. It was suggested that outreach sessions could be

offered in community settings, in addition to the central location, which was acknowledged to be accessible for most people. Participants would also like to receive more quickly reimbursement of travel costs to get to appointments.

Other suggestions included building specific skills into volunteering placements to help participants build their profile in an area of interest to them, for instance by shadowing someone in a desired role. Some frustration was expressed that the Talent Match process can be a bit slow sometimes and some participants would like the programme to offer more activities while they are waiting to be matched with a volunteering or paid work placement, either opportunities to meet up with other participants, such as on a residential, or skills sessions to practise skills that specific employers are looking for, help with CV writing and interview preparation.

***“It’s hard to say what has been least useful...it’s early days... but I’d have liked to get a job sooner.” (Participant)***

#### *Reported changes in outlook*

Participants described being more hopeful about finding jobs they will enjoy. Most still had the same goal of wanting to get a job, some said they were clearer about how to get there, and one or two people had broadened their outlook or changed their goals during the Talent Match process. One described being more open to different job opportunities when doing job search instead of thinking ‘*I can’t do that*’.

All focus group participants would recommend Talent Match and think that the key element to maintaining engagement with the programme is to develop a relationship with the coach and to understand the personalised nature of the offer for each young person.

***“Making people know that the coach is with you and thinking about what you need. The coach will stay with you and if you get a job will keep supporting you, and you will be welcome if you have to come back (to Talent Match).” (Participant)***

### **5.3 Talent Match Ambassadors**

Talent Match Ambassadors formed part of the foundations of Talent Match Birmingham and Solihull in that the role was created to ensure that young adults are engaged in shaping the programme. Ambassadors do not have to be participants on the programme, their role is to ensure that young adults’ experience, reflecting different demographic groups and communities, feeds into the programme.

Ambassadors were much involved in the pre-programme consultation and early set-up stages of delivery, actively listening to young adults across Birmingham and Solihull and feeding their ideas and suggestions into the development of the Talent Match Demonstrator Model. There is general agreement from stakeholders and young adults involved at the time that this created a successful and inspiring inception to the programme. Several interviewees were able to cite how young adults’ views had influenced the design of the programme. Early Ambassadors moved on over time and the role became less active for a while, although there has always been at least one Ambassador on the Core Strategic Partners group.

The Ambassadors group is in the process of being revitalised, a coach has been assigned to develop the group and a volunteer co-ordinator has been appointed to support the new Ambassadors. There are currently four Ambassadors, three of whom are also Talent Match participants, and they see their roles as getting young adults' voices into the planning and delivery of the programme, for instance by influencing the marketing/social media strategy. Ambassadors feel that they have a role to play in helping to raise the profile of Talent Match and in sharing good new stories, to help with recruitment and referral and also to engage the support of strategic partners in the changing landscape of youth employment programmes in Birmingham and Solihull. Each new Ambassador has a specific remit including social media content, peer mentoring and research to help evidence the difference Talent Match is making.

*“We are the same age (as Talent Match target group) and can really encourage other young people to be involved as we are not seen as threatening...we can relate” (Participant)*

Until recently, the Ambassador on the Core Strategic Partners (CSP) group contributed as an individual, however there are now two Ambassadors on the CSP and there is an opportunity to set up more formal mechanisms to gather and feed in young adults' experiences and opinions to the partners and also to communicate back to participants the decisions that are being made. Core Partners interviewed for the evaluation stated that they would welcome more interaction with participants and indicated that they are open to young adults re-establishing the influence that was evident in the programme planning and start-up phase.

Ambassadors hope to have autonomy, to set their own agenda and meet regularly to agree their priorities, share what they have heard from participants and review how each of their specific roles are influencing the programme. Ambassadors report that the benefits of being involved include a growth in personal confidence, feeling valued and respected and learning new skills while taking on responsibilities.

*How Talent Match could help Ambassadors be more effective*

Ambassadors made the following suggestions:

- Enable Ambassadors to meet on a regular basis to agree priorities, review progress and learning and inform the future of the programme
- Inform Ambassadors about programme progress or changes so that they can help by being an effective face of the programme and support communication of key messages to participants, partners and other agencies
- Supply Ambassadors with regular new items and information about events so they can promote them on social media or go out to meet young adults, promote the programme and help to generate copy for regular social media posts
- Include Ambassadors in outreach work into target communities to recruit more participants (already planned)
- Recruit more Ambassadors so that the group can be more effective and sustainable (the expansion of the group is already planned).

## 6. Core Strategic Partnership

The purpose of the Talent Match Core Strategic Partners group, as set out in its terms of reference document dated November 2013, is as follows ‘*TMCSPPG has been established as a cross sector strategic group representative of the public, private and voluntary sectors across Birmingham and Solihull. Its purpose is to strategically drive the planning, development, implementation and evaluation of Birmingham and Solihull’s Talent Match.*’

Stakeholders described the membership of the partnership as appropriate and consistent, with the right organisations represented across Birmingham and Solihull. The only perceived weakness was employer representation, although some statutory sector partners are also employers.

Core partners reflected that the initial work to build the partnership had been effective and that, as a result, relationships on the partnership are good. Partners agreed that there is a strong and shared vision for Talent Match and were able to clearly articulate how that vision related to their own organisations’ aims and priorities.

Core partners were less clear about their role in overseeing the delivery of the programme. Some said that it had been agreed that it was not the partnership’s role to micro-manage the programme, but this meant that they were not sure how they could or should influence delivery. Some core partners suggested that they had knowledge and experience that was relevant to the delivery of Talent Match and that they were happy to share this, if asked. There was a feeling that core partners were underused, and some reflected that their contribution between partnership meetings was limited.

***“I work to boards in my role and there is not a huge amount of value in someone turning up to a meeting once a quarter and nothing happening in between. I wonder how much I contribute between meetings and it should be the other way around. I don’t feel it’s because I’m not volunteering.” (Stakeholder)***

The core partners are aware that Talent Match has not met its delivery targets in relation to the number of young people on the programme and the expected outcomes but they were unable to say exactly why this was. Other areas of concern for partners included high drop-out rates, whether Talent Match is reaching hidden NEETS and the extent of employer engagement. They identified a number of external factors which have had an impact on Talent Match including the large reduction in the number of young adults who are unemployed, improvements in the economy and an increase in the range of employment support initiatives. Core partners were also aware that the commissioning of wrap around support has been time consuming and that overall there has been a long lead-in to the programme becoming fully operational.

***“The concern is that the foundations are there and I think that they are solid, but we really need to ratchet up the number of referrals and the numbers going through Talent Match over the next year. That has to be an absolute priority.” (Stakeholder)***

Core partners were positive about the passion and commitment of the Talent Match staff team and saw this as a strength of the programme. They felt that the staff team understand and respond well to the needs of young adults.

***“The manager and coaches are very dedicated and committed to fixing the issues in the model whatever they may be.” (Stakeholder)***

Core partners all supported the Demonstrator Model and agreed it was the right approach. They said the most important elements are the personalised and holistic support provided by coaches, combined with the availability of wrap around support for those who need it. One partner described this approach as offering “real scope for genuine life change for young people.” They also described the Ambassadors role as innovative and as an approach to empowering young people that their organisations could learn from.

***“Ambassadors should be at the heart of Talent Match as it is all about reaching young people” (Participant)***

Some core partners were positive about the new opportunities developing in the local economy. Little evidence was available about the extent to which Core Strategic Partners have enabled Talent Match to be strategic in seeking to address the skills mismatch between the type of opportunities available and the skills of young people with complex needs.

Core Strategic Partners suggested there was more work to do to ensure Talent Match was not delivered in isolation but were not explicit about the role of the partnership in achieving this. Some suggested that the partnership needs to be more strategic, forward looking and proactive in connecting Talent Match to new initiatives such as the proposed £50 million Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) to be known as Youth Promise Plus.

***“This is a great programme but the strategic links need to be intensified - we know there is more to do on this. If this is delivered in isolation it will be just another programme.” (Stakeholder)***

Core partners expressed the importance of aligning Talent Match with Youth Promise Plus in particular in order to ensure there is synergy rather than duplication, or even competition, for both employers and young adults. They identified the challenge was to make sure both programmes are driven by needs of young adults rather than by quotas and programme targets. If this is to be achieved, effective protocols and mechanisms together with close joint working will need to be developed.

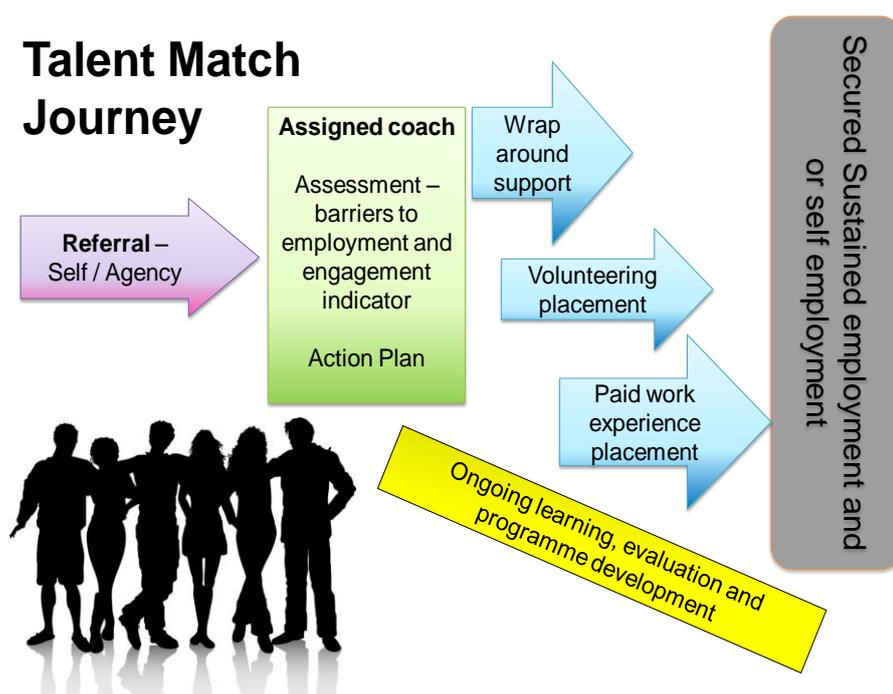
***“Our approach is we want to put clients where they are going to thrive best irrespective of who counts the outcome.” (Stakeholder)***

The strategic partners would like to be acting as advocates for Talent Match and most say they do try to promote the programme both within their own organisations and more widely. They would find good news stories and promotional materials helpful for this.

## 7. Review of the Demonstrator Model

A key aspect of the learning and review research has been the offer to participants described within the programme as the Demonstrator Model. This is the distinct approach Birmingham and Solihull has taken to delivering Talent Match and is its focus for 'test and learn'. Each element of the model has been explored through the research to see what is working well, what difference it is making and where improvements might be made.

Figure 5: Talent Match Birmingham and Solihull Demonstrator Model



### 7.1 Referral routes

Talent Match developed a process to formalise relationships with referral agencies that sign a referral agreement with the programme. Referral agencies should complete the Talent Match referral forms with appropriately detailed information to help the coaches gain an insight into potential participants before they meet them. Coaches may also liaise with referral agents beforehand to help provide a seamless referral process for the young adult. Coaches report that the process works well but they do not always get the information they need on the forms which can delay young adults' access to the programme. Talent Match also accepts informal referrals from other providers and self-referrals. It has been recognised by the programme management team that the referral process should be reviewed and may need to be refined to ensure a smooth flow of participants into the programme.

Young adults are eligible for Talent Match if they are aged 18-24 years, live in Birmingham or Solihull and have been unemployed for 12 months or longer. Within that cohort Talent Match has specific groups of young adults it is targeting: young offenders or those at risk of offending,

young adults with a learning difficulty or disability, care leavers and people who are unemployed and not in receipt of benefits (hidden NEETs).

Coaches take the lead in building relationships with referral agencies and they each have a sector which they champion. At the moment these sectors are probation, the Princes Trust, Job Centre Plus and Work Programme providers and housing providers. There is shared responsibility for developing links with referral agencies engaged with young adults with learning disabilities and core partners provide the key links to care leavers. Coaches also link with smaller organisations and tend to work with the referrals they generate.

Coaches have extended their outreach work to include visits to groups and organisations at evenings and weekends to help reach 'hidden' NEETs and by doing more geographically targeted outreach work, based on population/employability data and knowledge of potential partner organisations. Coaches are meeting young adults face-to-face and informing them about the programme. Talent Match is planning to expand the Ambassador role to support outreach work in the near future.

#### Referral routes

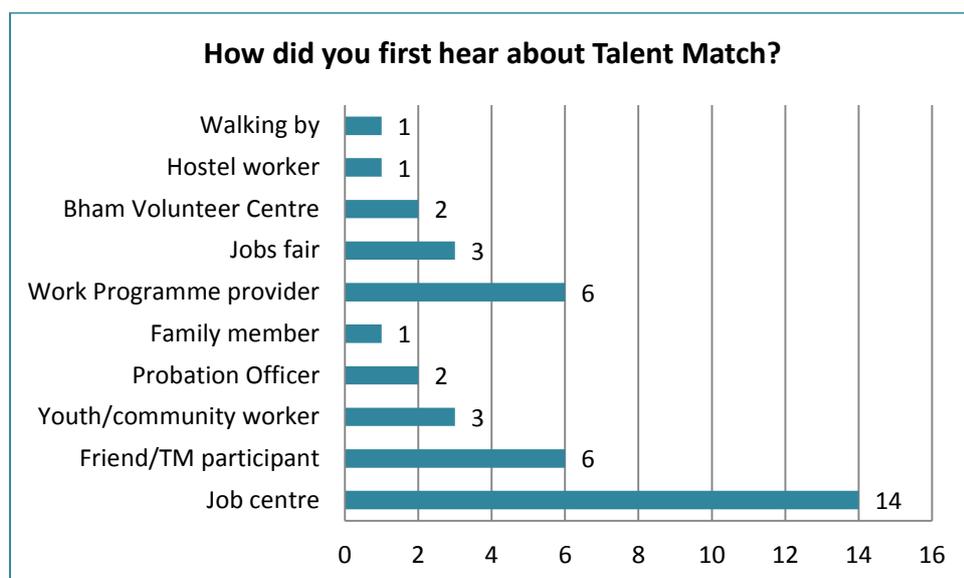
- Coaches via outreach work
- Email enquiries
- Self-referrals
- Volunteer Centre
- SUSTAIN
- DWP
- Probation

#### *Success factors in referrals into Talent Match*

- Coaches identified two key elements in building successful referral routes – having the time to develop and maintain relationships with key individuals in referral agencies and having a formal referral agreement in place that sets out the programme criteria and information requirements
- Coaches are 'on call' to take referrals that come in through the Birmingham Volunteer Centre on a daily basis
- There is a steady flow of referrals from probation
- There has been success with Work Programme providers, however referrals do drop off if time is not committed to maintain relationships
- Coaches have successfully utilised their own existing contacts and networks to generate referrals

Findings from the participant survey suggest that Job Centre Plus (JCP) referral pathways are working (Chart 1). Talent Match is on the JCP online system as an option for young adults and, if they are sufficiently informed about the programme, JCP work coaches can refer eligible clients directly to Talent Match instead of the Work Programme. Participants referred in this way can work through the Talent Match pathway more easily. Young adults who have already been transferred by JCP to a Work Programme provider can be referred on to Talent Match by the other provider who will then share in any job outcomes achieved by the participant.

Chart 1: Participant survey findings



No. respondents = 39

Young adults registered with job centres have to comply with certain mandatory requirements to prevent their benefits from being sanctioned. Talent Match is a voluntary programme and coaches explained that the programme elements have to fit flexibly around the other commitments of participants, such as completing set job-seeking hours each week.

Participants who are also on the Work Programme may be required to go on an 8 week mandatory work experience placement at any time. This can be problematic for Talent Match if a programme of support from an external provider has been agreed, the mandatory work placement takes precedence and coaches report that although only a small number of participants have been affected in this way, they often do not come back afterwards. Strong relationships with Work Programme providers can help to smooth connections between the two programmes and a coach is working in this role.

It might be interesting to explore whether participants being referred by job centres are mostly people who have completed 2 years on the Work Programme. Recent Work Programme figures show that 70% of completers moved back on to JSA/UC<sup>22</sup> as at June 2015<sup>23</sup>. These young adults would be likely to benefit from the intensive coaching on offer through Talent Match. Coaches, however, talked about young adults coming from job centres with the expectation of an immediate paid employment placement, as this is the key message that JCP work coaches have retained about Talent Match.

Coaches recognise they need to be aware of each referring agency's agenda when maintaining relationships, for instance employment is the main priority for JCP and Work Programme providers but agencies supporting care leavers are more interested in their general wellbeing, of which an employment pathway is only one aspect.

<sup>22</sup> Job Seekers Allowance / Universal Credit

<sup>23</sup> [Government statistics to June 2015](#) p.6

### *Approach in Solihull*

Talent Match partner agency SUSTAiN takes the lead in developing referral routes in Solihull. SUSTAiN employed a dedicated outreach worker until the end of August 2015 to promote the programme, make links with referral agencies and build relationships with employers. Coaches reported an increase in referrals while the worker was in post and it was reported to the Core Strategic Partners that the worker had been targeting groups with female members to help redress the gender imbalance in the Talent Match cohort. Interviewees mentioned a noticeable increase in young women joining the programme in July 2015.<sup>24</sup>

### *Challenges in reaching target groups*

- The conversion rate from referral to attendance at an initial appointment is estimated by coaches to be about 50%. The new database will help to identify how many referrals convert into programme starts. There are also challenges with retaining some groups of young adults on the programme, for instance there are increasing referrals from probation services but the dropout rate for this group is felt to be high.
- It is recognised that further outreach work is needed to increase numbers of young adults described as Hidden NEETs, a group that is also a priority for the national Talent Match programme.
- Care leavers are a group where there is a formal referral agreement in place but the number of referrals is low. This may indicate that the relationship with the referral agency needs to be refreshed.
- Ongoing communication with referral agencies is needed to ensure they are giving the correct information to young adults about Talent Match. For instance, if referral agencies think Talent Match just offer paid work placements this can raise unrealistic expectations for potential participants and also in the referral agency.

## **7.2 Talent Match coaches**

The role of the Talent Match coaches is a core element of the Birmingham and Solihull Demonstrator Model. It came directly from pre-application consultation work with young people where the support of a named person throughout the Talent Match journey emerged as a common requirement. Early indications are that this element of Talent Match which all participants experience seems to be making a difference for participants who actively engage with the programme.

There are 3 coaches in the Talent Match delivery team and they each support a caseload of participants. Two coaches have been in post since the programme launched, with one having worked with young adults in the earlier consultation and planning phase, and the third coach joined at the beginning of 2015.

Coaches work with participants on a one-to-one basis for the duration of their engagement with Talent Match. In addition, they develop referral routes with partner agencies, undertake

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<sup>24</sup> Unable to verify this report from profile data provided to the evaluation team

outreach activity to reach target groups of young adults and prepare case studies to showcase progress and results.

The pathway for each young adult is tailored to their individual needs and aspirations, however the broad process is summarised in Figure 6. A more detailed summary is in Appendix 2.

Figure 6: Generic participant pathway



Coaches report that they are experiencing no major issues with the Talent Match pathway so far. They work together to develop solutions to any difficulties encountered and are committed to streamlining the process for participants as the different elements of the Demonstrator Model become more embedded. They feel that the elements of the programme are working as a whole overall.

#### *Reflection on engaging and supporting participants*

In order to explore what it is about the Talent Match approach to coaching that is successful in engaging young adults, coaches were asked to reflect on how they introduce the Assessment SPOT to new participants and enable them to engage in the self-evaluation necessary to identify a realistic pathway towards employment.

Coaches felt that it is important to create the right environment with young adults from the start, to be professional but also to build rapport and create trust. The Assessment SPOT tool enables participants to be at the centre of a decision-making process from the start and it allows coaches to get to know them as people more holistically through exploring different aspects of their lives. Talent Match gives coaches the freedom to offer support with some of the external barriers that might be preventing young adults from moving into work, such as financial or

family issues or lifestyle choices which make them less ready for the workplace. Coaches liaise with other agencies that might be supporting participants where useful and can offer wrap around support at any point in a participant's pathway, including during a paid work placement.

Coaches articulated the difference between a coach and a key worker role; Talent Match is an employability programme, if a young adult has multiple or complex needs they may need to work with specialist agencies first and then come back to Talent Match when they are more able to engage with an employability pathway, the door is kept open. A coach might do some coaching with the young adult so they make this decision for themselves.

Coaches acknowledge that it may take time for participants to feel comfortable enough to open up about some issues; they may indicate difficulties at the initial assessment but not go into details until later. Coaches described the importance of creating space within coaching sessions

for people to share concerns or raise issues. Sometimes it is not until something does not go well, or a participant is not engaging with an opportunity that has been arranged to move them forward, that the coach will find out what is holding them back. Coaches report that some people come into Talent Match thinking they will go straight into a work placement and it is not until they experience a setback that they realise for themselves that maybe there is something else they need to work on first. Coaches explained that they need to balance enabling people to try things out and gain experience for themselves while not setting them up to fail.

One key point in the coaching relationship is preparing participants for the application and interview process to be taken on by the Talent Match Company. The HR officer reported that the pre-interview support work provided by the coaches is having an impact, as only one participant had been unsuccessful at the interview to be registered with the Talent Match Company. Coaches explained that unsuccessful interviews can help participants to become more resilient:

***“We create space for young people to talk about how disappointed they are at not getting the job and we can challenge them to think about how to do it differently the next time, rather than colluding in their disappointment.” (Stakeholder)***

### Challenges

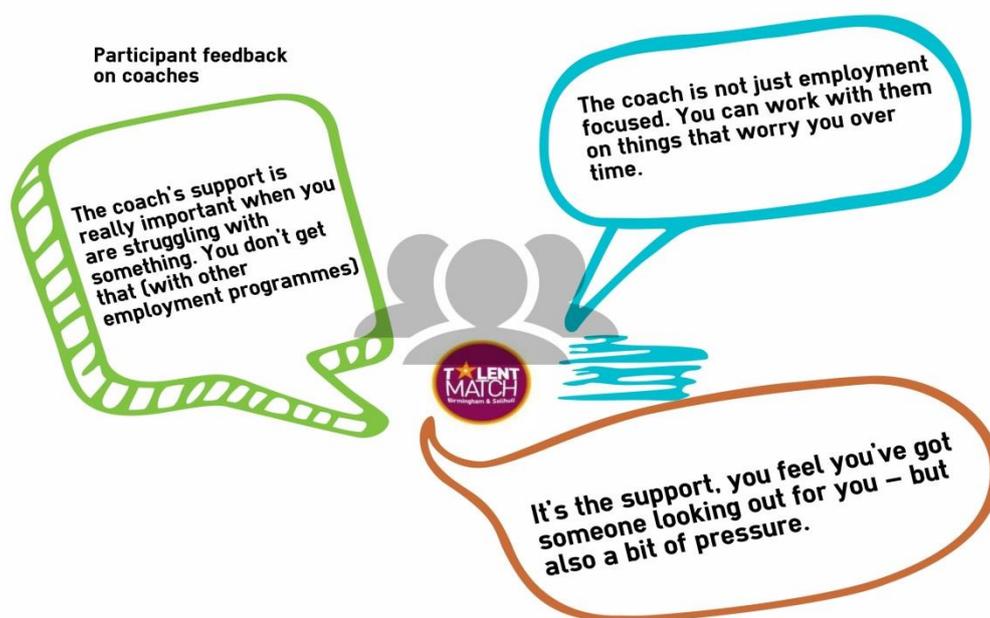
- Coaches described the difficulty of maintaining contact with participants once they move into work, especially when they are on limited hours contracts and working different hours every week. They also described experiencing difficulty in maintaining the motivation of young adults when they are doing jobs they are not enjoying. Where possible in these circumstances, coaches try to offer a more tailored Talent Match Company paid work option and help participants transfer to a different employer.
- Coaches recognised that some early participants in the programme may have experienced frustration that elements of the pathway were not in place when they started.
- Coaches balance a lot of competing demands – outreach work, caseload delivery, reporting and reviews with every participant, whether actively engaged or not, at 3/6/12/18 month points. There are also internal monitoring data requirements. They anticipate that the new database will help with the administrative tasks which have been very time consuming up to this point.
- There have been a number of staff changes and illness within the programme team that has delayed elements of the programme significantly.

Coaches identified their priorities for the next 12 months are to increase referrals, particularly from the Hidden NEET group; to increase referrals into the Talent Match Company and volunteering placements; and to embed the refreshed Ambassador group.

## Participant feedback

Participants were asked in focus groups what it is about having a coach that makes Talent Match different. The consensus view was that coaches create a more personal experience for participants, they listen to what young adults say and take them seriously, which helps to build trust and a more equal relationship than young adults have experienced from other services. Participants like that coaching is broader than just what they need to do to get a job, they agreed that the support was more like having a life coach than just a work coach. Participants in the focus groups felt that their coaches were 'on their side' and rooting for them because relationships had been built. Conversely, participants felt they wanted to succeed to make their coaches proud and show they had been listening to the coaching support they had received. Participants reported that coaches help to keep them on track and cited having a coach as the main reason they keep engaging with the programme.

Figure 7:



Participant survey respondents are in regular contact with their coaches, 34 out of 39 see them once a week or once every 2-3 weeks, most also have regular email contact. 36 out of 39 reported that they have enough contact with their coaches.

Overall there were very positive responses from participants about their relationships with their coaches; they feel the coach listens to them, understands their individual situations, is helping them move towards their goals, keeps them motivated and helps them to overcome barriers to work. Importantly, participants feel they can trust their coaches, find them easy to get in touch with and feel that coaches care about what happens to them. A summary of survey findings are at Appendix 3.

### 7.3 Wrap around support

Wrap around support is an important part of the Demonstrator Model. It is designed to ensure the participants can access help with a potentially wide range of issues that prevent them from

achieving sustainable employment. Coaches work with young adults to identify what would help them but not all young adults want or need wrap around support. Coaches can suggest wrap around support at any point in the programme but the participant has to recognise and accept that it is something they would benefit from, which is not always the case. All the stakeholders interviewed agreed that the Talent Match model, including personalised wrap around support, is a good one.

Limited data about young adults' views of wrap around support is available. Young adults who participated in the focus group emphasised that the tailored support they receive is one of the key things that makes Talent Match different and better than other employment support programmes. They felt that Talent Match looks holistically at all their support needs, not just those that are directly related to employment.

***“The Assessment SPOT is much more user friendly than other programmes. It’s a discussion with your coach and not just form filling and that makes a difference. You get a chance to talk about what are the barriers to work. So that might be mental health, or housing. But you talk to one person and are not passed around.” (Participant)***

27 young adults who completed the online survey agreed with the statement ‘I have had help with some of the things that stopped me moving forward before’ and this could include wrap around support. 20 young adults rated ‘the support they had received from any organisations helping them with personal issues’ as good or excellent, suggesting the quality of the provision on offer is good.

Stakeholders who participated in the research and were directly involved in the process of applying to be on the framework said they found it time-consuming and bureaucratic. The initial level of interest in coming onto the framework was high, with 64 PQQs received by in-tend, the procurement portal, in July 2014. This resulted in 37 submissions in October 2014 in response to the ITT and 35 organisations signed framework agreements in April 2015. The agreements run until April 2017.

The framework has 7 headline categories (broken down into 18 individual 'lots' mapped against 54 sub categories), 6 of which are focused on support for young adults and these are:

- *Health and Wellbeing* which includes counselling on a range of issues; Information advice and guidance in a number of generic areas, e.g. housing; debt; employment; healthy lifestyle awareness training; sexual health awareness training and substance awareness training.
- *Housing and Safety* which includes diversionary services and activities for offenders and those at risk of offending.
- *Education, Employment and Training* which includes occupationally specific Boot Camps, careers advice and guidance, respect in the workplace training; job preparation and interview skills as well as specialist support for young adults with a disability.
- *Social and Personal Development* which includes group skills, such as team building and resilience activities, and individual skills such as leadership and communication. This category also includes gender identification support and sexual orientation support.

- *Enterprise Development* which includes setting up and growing an enterprise and incubating and supporting enterprise.

The final category, which is concerned with support to the programme as a whole, is focused on marketing, communication and employer engagement elements and includes promoting Talent Match with private sector employers and developing a marketing and publicity strategy for Talent Match.

The providers on the framework are mainly voluntary organisations. Early on in the design of the programme it was recognised that the voluntary sector had expertise in supporting challenging young adults. There was good engagement from the sector in the pre-programme consultation and this has inevitably raised expectations about the potential benefits of being involved, particularly as a wrap around support provider. Some stakeholders felt the considerable time organisations had put in to applying to get on the framework was disproportionate to the limited opportunities to deliver support that have been available to date, and that this had created some feelings of negativity towards Talent Match and this could potentially pose a reputational risk to the programme and, by association, to BVSC.

***“Looking back, the tendering process was quite intense, things took longer than expected – the (voluntary) sector are not feeling the benefit of it.” (Stakeholder)***

#### **7.4 Volunteering Placements**

BVSC commissioned Birmingham Volunteer Centre to lead on volunteering placements. The original intention was that participants would identify volunteering as part of their personal pathway to employment and that the coach would refer them to the Centre where the volunteer coordinator would act as the main point of contact for the placement organisation.

However discussions between the Talent Match team and the Volunteer Centre identified a number of system blockages responsible for creating delays or barriers for participants looking to volunteer. The blockages include: fewer volunteer placements than expected; participants not ready for placements; and some placement organisations requiring participants to go through their internal organisational recruitment procedures which created additional delays. It was also recognised that there had been a lack of clarity in the communication between volunteer placements, the volunteer coordinator and the coaches about where their roles intersect.

Talent Match has worked proactively to solve these issues and is currently revising the contract with the Volunteer Centre which will now work to develop a bank of organisations ready to offer placements and to support access for participants by, for example, providing training and support to potential placement organisations on working with young offenders. The Volunteer Centre will generate a matrix for coaches showing the application requirements of each potential placement provider; this will better inform the participants’ decision-making about placement opportunities. Coaches will be the main conduit for support for participants who are volunteering, and the main point of contact for placement organisations.

Two volunteer placement agencies responded to an online survey (both in Birmingham) so it is difficult to make generalisations about the experiences of volunteer placement providers overall.

However both organisations said that the pre-engagement information they received about Talent Match attracted their organisation to offer placements to young adults.

Both also said that the volunteer matching process was effective and that their organisation was supported well by Talent Match through the process. They also felt that young people were effectively supported by Talent Match while they were volunteering

The two survey respondents felt volunteering through Talent Match gave participants the opportunity to work as part of a team, develop skills, improve their confidence, get into good work routines and understand more about the reality of being in work, . They felt that it helped participants to become more ready for the workplace and clearer about what they wanted to do next.

To date 15 Talent Match participants have volunteered in 12 organisations and have been able to gain experience in a range of roles including customer services, cataloguing and archiving, office and general clerical work, and reception and telephone duties.

As part of the participants online survey, young adults were asked to rate their experience of volunteering and of the 18 who responded, 14 participants rated the support they received from their volunteering placement organisation as excellent or good, 3 rated it as fair and 1 rated it as poor.

Participants are positive about the opportunities offered by undertaking a volunteer placement as part of their Talent Match journey, 24 (65%) of those responding to the online survey identified that volunteering will help them move into work or training.

## **7.5 Paid work placements**

Six month paid work placements are intended to be a bridge for Talent Match participants, including those furthest from the labour market, to move into sustainable employment. Paid work placements are generated by the Employment Engagement Officer who approaches employers to seek placements and organises events and presentations to promote Talent Match with potential host employers. Talent Match aimed to develop a range of host employers from the voluntary, statutory and private sector.

Participants decide with coaches when they are ready for a paid work placement, they prepare to apply for registration with the Talent Match Company and the young adults then meet formally with the HR officer. Once registered, the HR officer matches them to appropriate roles and sets up interviews with employers, usually along with other suitable participants. Employers are responsible for the final selection to the placement opportunity. Some stakeholders highlighted that Talent Match is different from other programmes because it aims to move young adults into paid employment as soon as they are ready, rather than paid employment experience being the end or post-programme goal.

Employers appreciate the skills-matching service the Talent Match Company offers as it makes recruitment easier for them. The quote below also illustrates that the programme is able to open up opportunities for young adults by enabling them to gain pre-employment qualifications and preparing them for specific roles.

***“Talent Match said they could source me someone with a chemical licence, which is a good qualification in this business, and also driving ability. Those are unique skills that we’re looking for and when you are getting staff through the job centre or off the street they haven’t got those so much.” (Stakeholder)***

Initially Talent Match reported that it was difficult to match the needs of young adults ready for placements with the placements available. There is some evidence that young adults have to wait for appropriate paid placements. This is not unexpected in the early stages of a programme when some tension between meeting the expectations of both employers and young adults is inevitable, with the risk that both parties will disengage if their needs are not met in a timely manner.

Talent Match has been proactive in seeking to engage a wide range of employers from different sectors. There is some evidence that engaging employers has been more difficult than originally anticipated, particularly in relation to specific sectors such as retail and warehousing. This may be partly because BVSC (and possibly the wider voluntary sector) has a relatively low profile with private sector employers. This presents an opportunity to raise the profile of the voluntary sector with private sector employers and to add value through the links Talent Match is developing.

There is a perception amongst a range of stakeholders that voluntary sector employers are likely to be more understanding about trying to make placements work and have a greater investment in being socially responsible. Voluntary sector employers are positive that the programme is led by BVSC, who is seen as ethical and not just ‘out to make a fast buck’. There is some evidence that the employers who have engaged are attracted by the Talent Match ethos, both at an individual and company level. They are motivated to give something back to society and to fulfill their corporate social responsibility goals.

***“As a company we do very well in trying to engage with bringing people from difficult lifestyles back into mainstream life and work ethic. I’m personally committed to doing it and it adds a bit of variety to my job.” (Stakeholder)***

Employers were encouraged and enthused by the progress that the young adults on placement with them made and commented that this was particularly rewarding when they had invested time and effort in developing their ability to be successful in the workplace. Employers interviewed described improvements in the social, communication and customer service skills, team working and confidence of the young adults on placement.

***“If X had been an ordinary employee he probably wouldn’t be with us now. He’s got autism and he’s been a big drain on all of us. He has come on in leaps and bounds though – he’s more confident and he’s learnt a lot.” (Stakeholder)***

## *Talent Match Company*

An innovative element of the Demonstrator Model is the Talent Match Company, a separate company limited by guarantee, which directly employs and pays the young adults on work placements. It offers wage subsidies to employers which are negotiated for each participant and the HR officer liaises with employers over issues related to employment and performance.

Setting up the Talent Match Company raised some unforeseen internal issues for BVSC, such as how to deal with payroll for participants on paid work placements. The Talent Match Company was incorporated in July 2014 and the Board met for the first time in September 2014. By the end of 2014 it was matching participants to opportunities and the first paid work placement began in January 2015.

Employers were attracted to Talent Match because of the wage subsidy and those interviewed appreciated this element of the scheme. It meant they were able to fill vacancies or recruit new staff that otherwise would have been unaffordable or which they would have struggled to find. Some employers recognised that having the young person employed by the Talent Match Company reduced the risk to them of accepting young adults with challenging issues onto placement.

***“Talent Match gave us the security that if the young person wasn’t the right person for us we could move on from that situation and that was key for my line manager. Happily it wasn’t the situation and the placement went well.” (Stakeholder)***

### *Employer feedback and suggestions*

It is important to employers that Talent Match understands and responds to the needs of their business in relation to both HR policies and work placements which may, for example, be seasonal. One employer experienced some difficulties with the difference between their employment terms and conditions and those of the Talent Match Company and commented that this required some flexibility and willingness to resolve the issues from both parties.

The employers interviewed appreciated the support available to young adults through Talent Match and in some cases this had been critical to maintaining the paid work placement. Some employers would have liked more opportunity to meet jointly with the young person and their coach to discuss and review progress. Some employers had not understood or appreciated the time commitment involved with the young adults they took on and would have liked clearer information about this in advance. Some also thought more information about the young person’s health and particular needs would have been helpful.

***“You need to know about any medical concerns. It’s not just about them managing the job but also about how they manage their own wellbeing – you need to know if they’re capable and can look after themselves.” (Stakeholder)***

One employer would have liked clearer information about the young person’s journey and how the paid work placement they were offering would contribute to the participant’s employment goals.

*“What you’re told is someone hasn’t had a job before or for a long time – you don’t know if they’re coming to you as a first step, or whether you’re part of their aspirations.”*  
(Stakeholder)

The pre-programme consultation involved a number of task and finish groups that helped to shape the Demonstrator Model. The private sector group stressed the importance of one point of contact for Talent Match, together with the need for local knowledge of the business community and co-ordination of different employment programmes. It is clear that the Employer Engagement officer is the initial point of contact for employers but they also have to liaise with the HR officer and possibly the coach supporting the young adult. From an employer perspective, the lack of a single point of contact may make it more difficult to build a strong and trusting relationship with Talent Match. It also means that there needs to be good communication between the different employer-facing roles in the team.

*“Talent Match could have been clearer how different roles in the team need to link together to make the whole thing work”* (Stakeholder)

There is evidence that there has been listening and learning in this element of the Demonstrator Model. For instance, in response to the differences in employer and Talent Match Company policies and procedures, an Employee Handbook was developed to support participants’ transition into the workplace, reduce policy confusion and increase understanding of policies and procedures in the workplace. Also, in response to feedback from employers that some would like the option to employ participants on placement directly, this option is now being explored with Talent Match Company solicitors.

## **7.6 Learning and Evaluation**

The concept of ‘test and learn’ was embedded in the national Talent Match programme by the BIG Lottery from the start. The response of the Birmingham and Solihull programme to the concept was to build a culture of learning and evaluation into every element of the programme. It appointed dedicated staff to oversee learning and evaluation activities; to collect and collate data; encourage reflection; and analyse learning to inform the programme, locally and nationally, offer learning opportunities for partners and potentially to influence wider policy.

Considerable time has been spent by the learning and evaluation team in setting up data capture systems, commissioning the new database and responding to the monitoring requirements of the national evaluation and programme management.

There are programme team meetings held monthly where staff are encouraged to reflect on practice and progress, for instance around the skills gained by the staff through working with young adults with complex needs.

### *Learning from participants*

The programme in Birmingham and Solihull was strongly influenced by the views of young adults gathered during the pre-application and start up phases. Participants and Ambassadors have since shared their experiences on the programme, and their achievements, with Core Partners and

wider audiences to help promote how Talent Match supports young adults into employment. The involvement of Ambassadors in more systematic consultation with participants is currently being planned and will enable learning from the programme to be shared with the participant cohort.

#### *Learning from programme development*

There has been significant learning for BVSC as the accountable body for Talent Match in the need to become a contracting authority within European commissioning regulations. This unexpected requirement required the development of a new, robust procurement process for external providers wishing to deliver elements of the programme.

External providers, many of them voluntary organisations, have been encouraged to apply for registration on the Talent Match providers' framework. In that process, some voluntary organisations could have gained useful experience of exacting procurement processes and built their internal capacity to provide evidence of their services and the outcomes they can offer to commissioners.

Further internal knowledge and capacity has been built with the development of the Talent Match Company as a separate entity and its successful operational launch.

The programme management team has drawn on the experience of other Talent Match programmes, for instance to inform the specification for the new database.

#### *Learning from programme delivery*

There is evidence within the programme reports of ongoing reflection and learning in each of the delivery strands of the programme. There is increasing recognition within the staff team of the importance of working closely together to provide a seamless service to participants. The bespoke nature of the programme means that the elements of the Demonstrator Model fit together in different ways to meet the needs of each participant. This requires flexibility and excellent communication between staff as new solutions are required on a regular basis.

There has been significant learning from working with employers such as the need to align policies and procedures and the development of appropriate communication to employers of participants' support needs to increase the sustainability of placements. Staff training has been provided, for instance on legislation relating to disclosure of information to prospective host employers, where gaps in knowledge were identified.

The programme has also responded to the desire of some host employers to employ participants directly, rather than through the Talent Match Company, and this option is being introduced.

Birmingham and Solihull has learnt from the experience of other Talent Match programmes that the judicious use of incentives is effective in retaining the engagement of young adults in follow-up reviews after they have left the programme and they have introduced this approach. They have also learnt that 'out of hours' contact, when former participants are more likely to be at home, is more effective in making follow-up contact.

## 8. Conclusions, reflections and conversation questions

This section presents the conclusions and reflections of the research team, including the peer researchers. Conversation questions have been presented instead of recommendations to stimulate and support the reflective learning approach of Talent Match and the BIG Lottery's test and learn approach.

Some of the questions have been designed to be addressed by the Core Strategic Partnership in conjunction with the BVSC strategic leadership team and the Talent Match Partnership and Delivery Manager; others are directed to the operational staff, and where the research team have potentially helpful insights to offer, we would welcome the opportunity to be engaged in these conversations.

There is no doubting the passion that the Talent Match team has for working with young adults and their commitment to delivering a programme that meets young adults' needs and helps move them into employment and training, this has shone through in all of the research activity with team members.

There is evidence to demonstrate that the Talent Match team are working hard to address supply issues in relation to employment and volunteering placements and have put systems in place to ensure that the commissioning of individual packages of wrap around support is done as quickly as OEJU legal requirements allow. This combined with the performance improvement planning already in place should see many of the previous barriers to performance addressed.

There is some evidence to suggest that Talent Match is committed to learning from 'what works' in other Talent Match programmes, for example the programme has recently started offering cash incentives to participants to complete review forms to comply with National Evaluation monitoring and tracking data requirements.

### The Talent Match Demonstrator Model

The volunteering and paid work placement elements of the model reflect what BVSC heard from young adults in the consultation phase about wanting to gain practical work experience. These elements, particularly the paid employment option, have a strong fit with what employers want from young adults in today's job market, "... 66% of employers say work experience is a significant or crucial factor in their recruitment...".<sup>25</sup> The views expressed during consultation are supported by reflections from the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (Feb. 2015) on the 'Catch 22' scenario that many young adults experience when trying to move into employment, namely that is difficult to get into work without experience and it is difficult to get experience without getting into work.

*"Other programmes do not give you the experience that helps you get work. You need to show you have experience to get the job" (Participant)*

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<sup>25</sup> Catch 22 16-24 UK Commission for Employment and Skills Feb 2015

Participants identified that the Talent Match approach feels personally tailored to their needs and aspirations. Due to small numbers, however, it is not yet possible to give an evidence-based and therefore robust view of whether or not the model is successful at getting young adults into sustainable employment. The first 3 participants into the Talent Match Company have recently exited, of which 2 have moved into sustainable jobs. To date 29 participants have moved into the Talent Match Company and/or employment which indicates that the model does address the barriers young adults face in moving into the labour market and suggests that the approach will deliver results.

There are currently three key challenges for Talent Match:

- Reductions in the number of young adults claiming work-related benefits.
- Reaching those Hidden NEETs who are not engaged with the benefits system
- Strategically positioning the programme against the other initiatives in Birmingham and Solihull that are likely to be 'competing' for the same cohort of young adults.

### **Conversation questions**

*One core partner<sup>26</sup> has offered to share insights into the changing landscape for providers at a CSP meeting. How does Talent Match draw more on the experience, skills and knowledge of Core Strategic Partners to ensure that Talent Match is well positioned in relation to the other initiatives aimed at its target groups of young adults?*

*Given the reduced number of unemployed young adults in the economy and anecdotal evidence about young adults entering the programme with more complex needs than may have been originally anticipated, can Talent Match use the information generated from the new database and the National Evaluation datasets about the needs of participants to further develop and hone support pathways to support young adults with more complex needs (as identified through the RAG rating process) who may eventually make up the majority of the cohort?*

*Could a better understanding of the needs of the Talent Match cohort to date help to strategically position the programme in a distinctive 'niche' that may enhance collaboration with other initiatives for this client group?*

*What other partners (outside those already involved in the CSP) may Talent Match need to engage with strategically to understand more about reaching and working with 'hidden NEET' young adults?*

### **The coach role**

There is evidence that the support on offer from coaches works to help increase the motivation and engagement of young adults and that this role is a vital part of the Talent Match offer to young adults. Placing this role centrally to participants' experience of Talent Match in response what young people said in the consultation period highlights a commitment to not just listening to young adults but acting on what they say.

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<sup>26</sup> Lindsey Shackleton; In-Training

Coaches perform a pivotal function in the Talent Match model - maintaining relationships with participants, referral agencies and delivery agencies as well as being involved in relationship management with volunteer and employment placement providers.

Evidence from this research suggests that travel is a significant barrier for some young adults, many of whom may rarely travel out of their local area. They may lack confidence in finding their way around or find the costs prohibitive. Talent Match coaches assess a willingness to travel in to the central location as a sign that participants are willing to travel for work; it is one of the signs of readiness for work. Coaches are a small team and the time costs involved in travelling to outreach locations could be considerable, especially if participants fail to attend sessions.

Coaches may go out to for an initial meeting with a new participant at the offices of a referral agency but expect participants to travel into the centre for subsequent sessions. Some young adults drop out at this point. Some participants are provided with travel passes to get in for sessions, others are able to reclaim travel costs, however any time lag in reimbursement can create a significant cash shortfall for people on Jobseekers Allowance.

### **Conversation questions**

*What can coaches do to remove barriers to travel for young people? We know that when a young person is on the programme they can access support from their coach about how to get to support services and volunteer and employment placements - is it reasonable for this support to also be offered getting young adults from referral point to participant? What could the team do to gain a deeper understanding of what causes young adults to successfully convert from 'interested in being involved' to participants?*

*Would it be practicable or advantageous in terms of overcoming travel barriers and removing potential drop out points to establish outreach posts in a number of key areas such as the north of Birmingham and Solihull?*

*What are the implications of changes to the coaches' workload in terms of relationship development and management across referral agencies, young adults, delivery partners and internal and external stakeholders? How feasible is it to maintain the current caseloads? Which elements of the role should be prioritised?*

### **Wrap around support**

Procurement processes for wrap around support have been challenging and are only just starting to bed in. There is some evidence to suggest that wrap around support providers do not feel as involved or well informed about the progress of Talent Match as they would like to be. Some do not understand that because this element of the programme has only been fully operation for six months, limited support has been commissioned to date.

It was reported that Talent Match is in the process of developing a delivery partners' bulletin. Strong communication can help ensure that good relationships are maintained with providers; enable them to more fully understand how the Demonstrator Model works in practice and help ensure that in 2017, when provider contracts are open for re-tendering, that providers are willing to continue to offer services to meet the needs of participants.

### **Conversation questions**

*How does Talent Match and BVSC balance their organisational preferences for following good practice and minimising organisational exposure to risk with allowing the flexibilities needed for commissioning innovation? Is this a conversation where CSP members may be able to share insights about their own organisational approaches to OEJU commissioning processes?*

*How could more interactive communication channels be developed to offer wrap around support providers an opportunity to feedback what is working well and what has not worked so well?*

### **Paid Work Placements**

The employment landscape has changed since the assumptions underpinning employer engagement activities were first made at the time the bid was being developed. As a result, some employers who may have been interested in joining the Talent Match pool have become involved with other employment programmes in the time it has taken Talent Match to get up and ready. Moreover, assumptions at the bid writing stages around the willingness of employers to engage with the programme may have led to some complacency in the early stages of mobilisation and delivery that have impacted on the number of employers engaged to date, although this is no longer the case and work with employers is moving forward rapidly.

Additionally there is review evidence to suggest that employers are not necessarily able to differentiate between programmes supporting young adults, for example, all the employers interviewed had some experience of other supported employment programmes.

### **Conversation questions**

*What could Talent Match do to ensure that engaged employers, delivery partners and CSP members who engage with public, voluntary and private sector employers all have a good understanding of what Talent Match is offering across Birmingham and Solihull in order to champion the programme and attract more employers to participate?*

*How can Talent Match refine mechanisms to gather and analyse feedback from employers in a consistent way to ensure their views are taken into account as the programme develops?*

*What can Talent Match learn from the employers currently engaged about what motivates employers to become involved? How can the imminent communications support be best utilised to develop targeted information that connects to these motivations?*

*What can Talent Match learn from employers who have signed onto the database but have not yet offered a placement?*

*How can Talent Match work with the Core Strategic Partners to align and streamline the different youth employment programmes, particularly the approaches that are made to employers?*

### **Volunteer Placements**

This element of the Demonstrator Model is currently being refreshed and as such it is not possible to draw any conclusions about the way in which this is working.

## Learning and Evaluation

At present the strategic influencing aspect of the learning and evaluation role is under-developed because of the focus to date on embedding operational systems. There is however is evidence from across the programme team of operational learning taking place and of Talent Match using this learning to improve performance. The programme is beginning to share learning with other Talent Match areas.

### Ambassadors/Participants ongoing influence on the programme

Working with young adults to co-design<sup>27</sup> the Talent Match offer both nationally and locally is a core part of the BIG Lottery's expectations for the programme. It is a dynamic process and one that BIG expects to continue for the life of Talent Match, as stated on their website: "*The investment was co-designed with young people (...), and will continue to have young people at the heart of decision making throughout the programme.*"<sup>28</sup>

The Ambassadors group is currently being refreshed and there are now two Ambassadors on the Core Strategic Partnership. This signals the strong commitment that Talent Match and the CSP have to engaging young adults. It is perhaps more challenging to understand how the experiences of participants can systematically influence the design and the delivery of the programme at present, however the appointment of a volunteer Ambassador Coordinator is expected to address this challenge.

If effective communication mechanisms between participants, Ambassadors and the CSP can be established they will strengthen the credibility of Ambassadors on the CSP and create more dynamic dialogue between participants and stakeholders.

### Conversation questions

*How can Talent Match extend the influence on the ongoing design and delivery of the programme of young adults outside the Ambassador role?*

*What systems need to be in place for young adults to connect with and share their views with Ambassadors so that Ambassadors are able to draw on these views to influence the future development of the programme? Is there learning from other Talent Match areas that could help?*

*Does Talent Match in Birmingham and Solihull have learning to share with other Talent Match areas, for instance about the contribution of young adults to the Core Strategic Partnership?*

*How can the feedback loops from Ambassadors and other young people through to the learning and evaluation team be developed; and conversely what then needs to happen for the learning and evaluation team to use this information to influence change in delivery?*

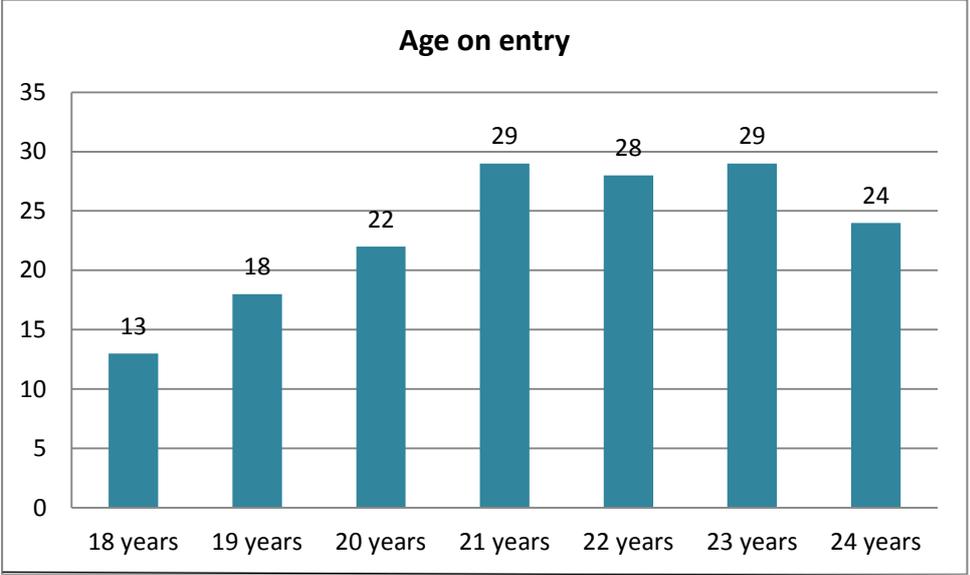
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<sup>27</sup> Co-design is a process that allows for those developing services and those using services to jointly create solutions more likely to be acceptable to and more appropriate for the end user - in this case the young adults participating in Talent Match.

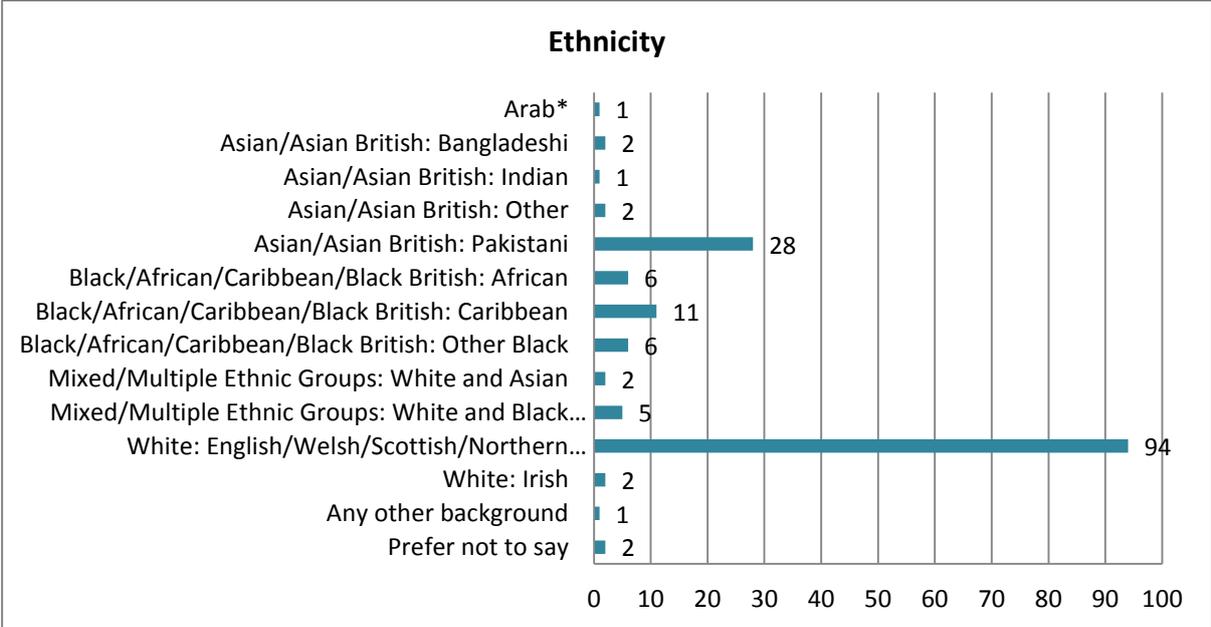
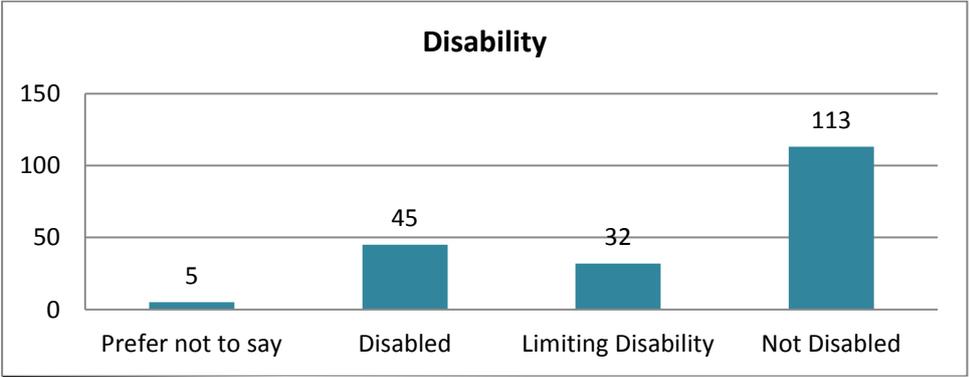
<sup>28</sup> Accessed October 2015

**Appendix I: Talent Match Birmingham & Solihull Participants Profile (at August 2015)**

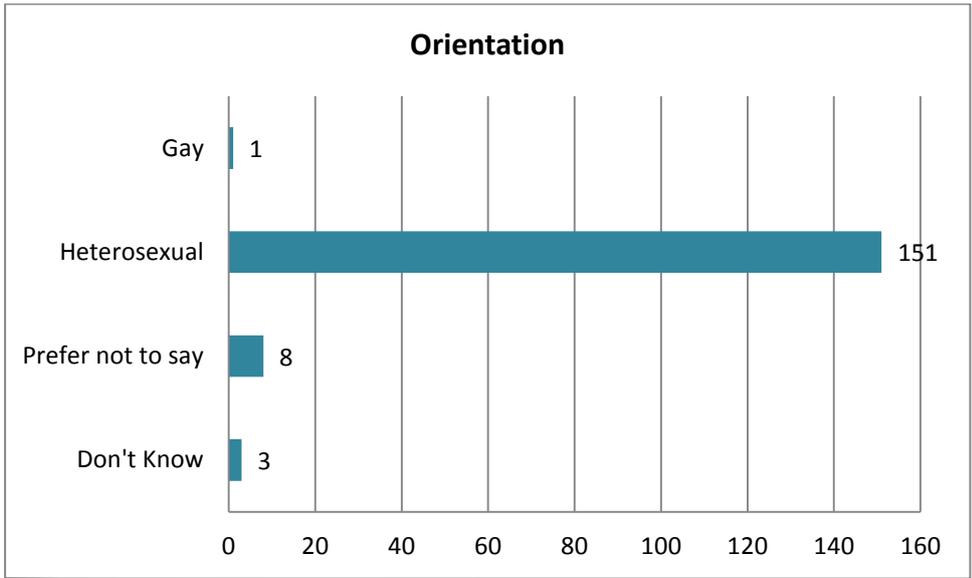
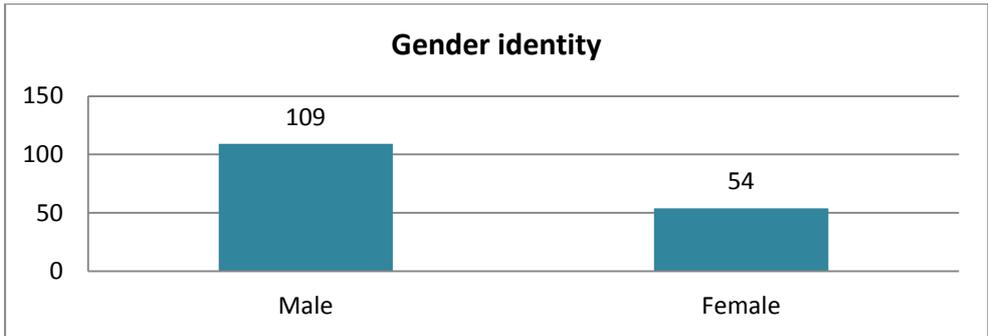
Total participants registered = 163



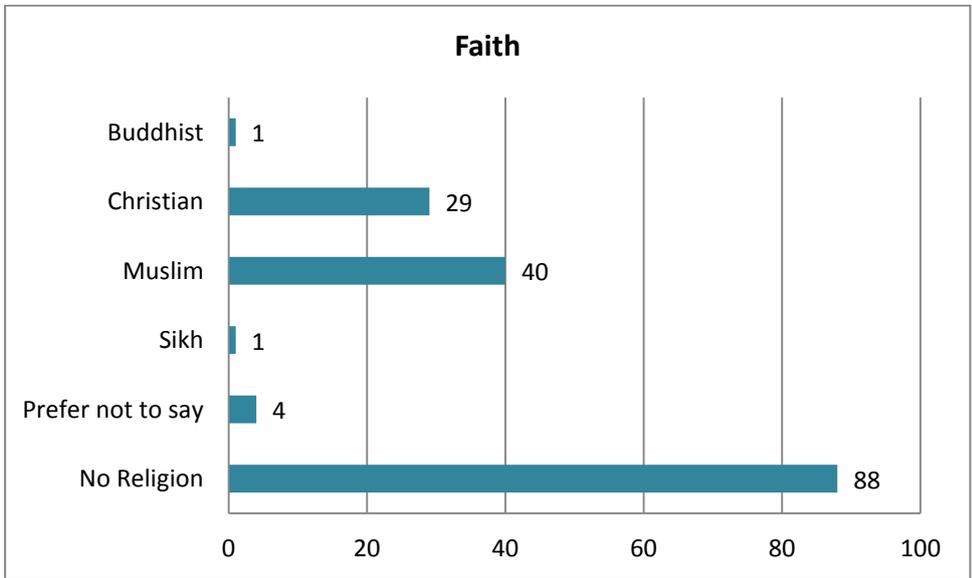
Nil return = 25 years

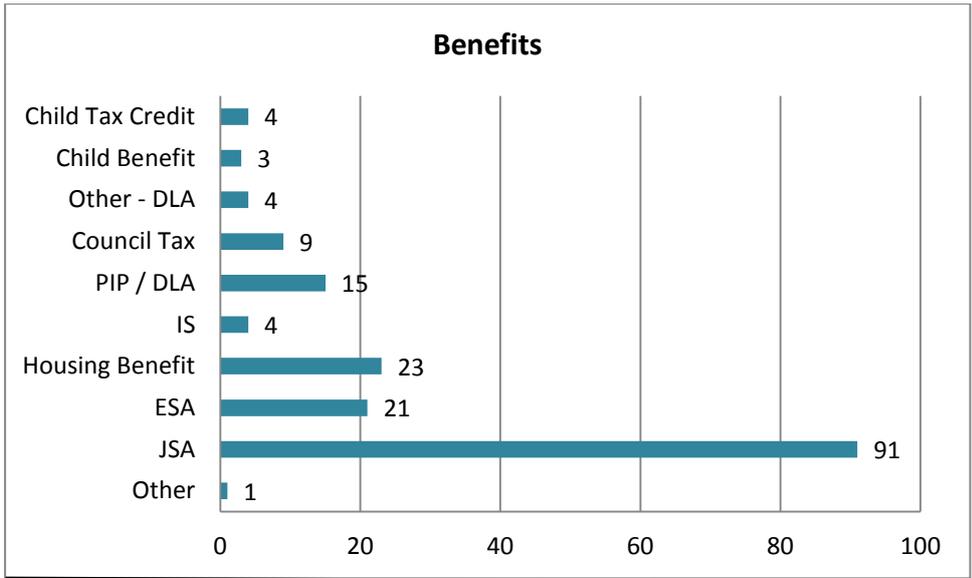


Nil return = Chinese, Gypsy/Irish Traveller, Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups: White and Black African, Other Mixed Background, Other White Background

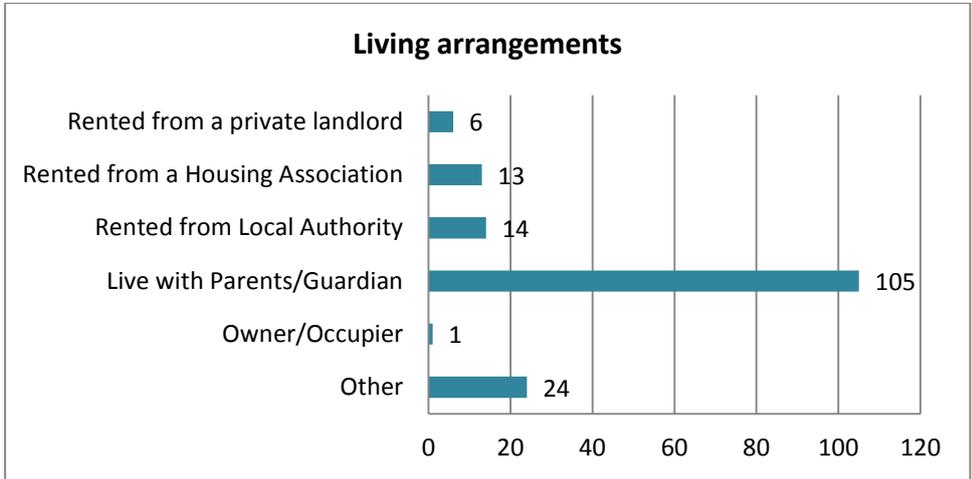


Nil return = Lesbian, Bisexual

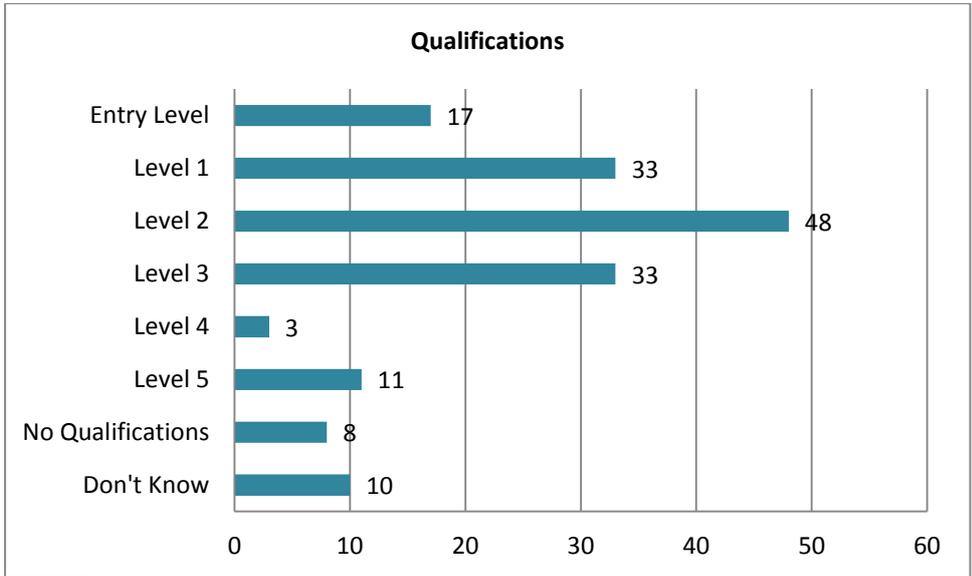




Nil returns = JSA Severe Hardship , IS for Lone Parents , Carer's Allowance  
 Participants could be in receipt of more than one benefit



Nil returns = Sleeping Rough, Friends/Relatives/Sofa surfing, Settled accommodation, Home office accommodation, Hostel

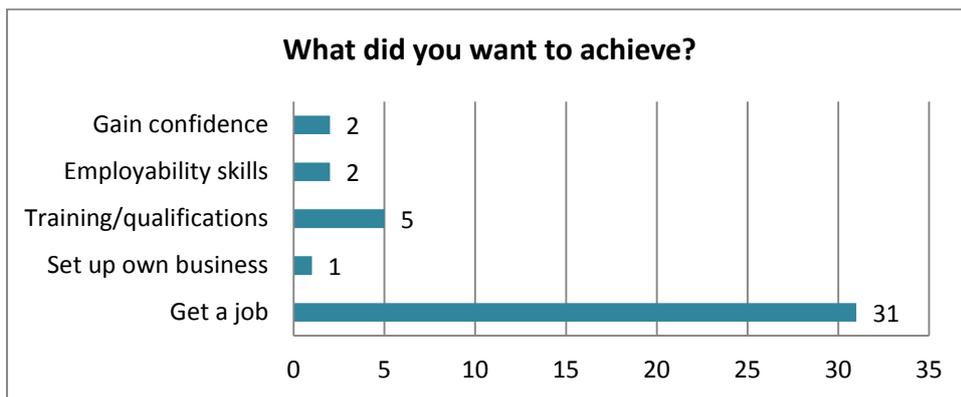
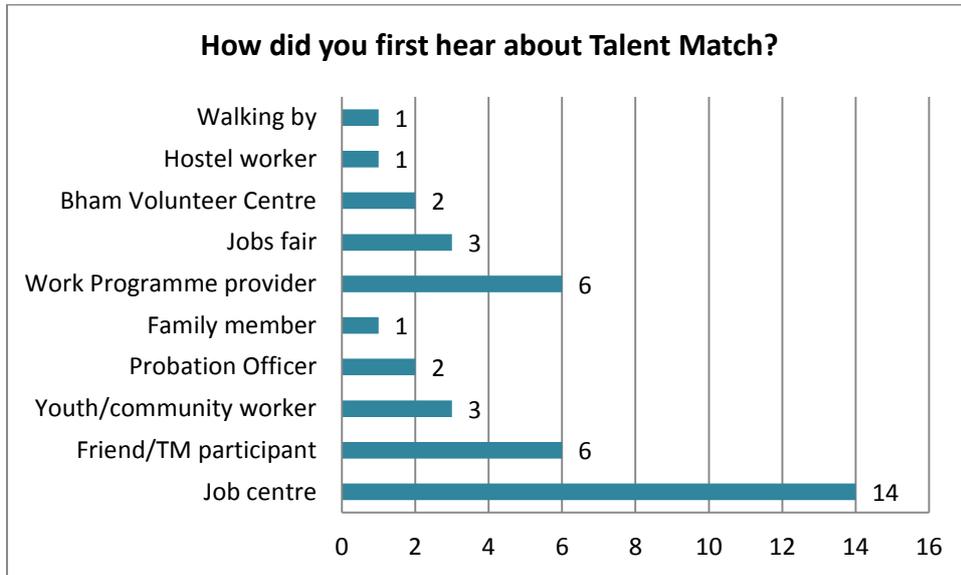


## Appendix 2: Generic Participant pathway

- Coaches take incoming referrals which should include information about the needs of the young adult that have been identified with the referral agent. This initial information helps to inform an assessment of how far the young adult might be from being ready for the workplace and, therefore, indicate to the coach how intensively they may need to be supported.
- Participants are invited to an initial appointment which is often held at BVSC in Birmingham city centre; the need to travel into the city helps coaches to assess how ready young adults are to travel for work and also if they may have any travel barriers. The first meeting is designed to build rapport, inform young adults about the programme and talk through the process, explaining the flexibility of the programme to meet their individual needs. Depending on the young adult, coaches may also complete baseline questions for the national evaluation if the young adult is ready to engage with Talent Match.
- Coaches take a participant-centred approach to delivery. They explore barriers to employment and gain a sense of any other issues young adults may be facing using a tool called the Assessment SPOT. This enables participants to identify for themselves any issues they might need to work through and informs the development of a personal action plan. Wrap around support from an external agency may also be triggered at this point.
- Participants decide their own Talent Match pathway and have specific actions to move themselves forward. They are supported by coaching all the way through, with more intensive weekly sessions at first and regular reviews of progress. The intensity of support often reduces once participants move into a volunteer or work placement, with regular contact by phone or email rather than face-to-face.
- Coaches can liaise directly with volunteer placement providers, paid placement providers communicate through the Talent Match Company who act as a link between host employers and coaches.
- When participants move into jobs after a paid work placement, coaches follow them up for 12 months to offer hands-off support if needed and monitor the sustainability of employment. Participants are asked to complete a final review for the national evaluation.

### Appendix 3: Participants survey summary data

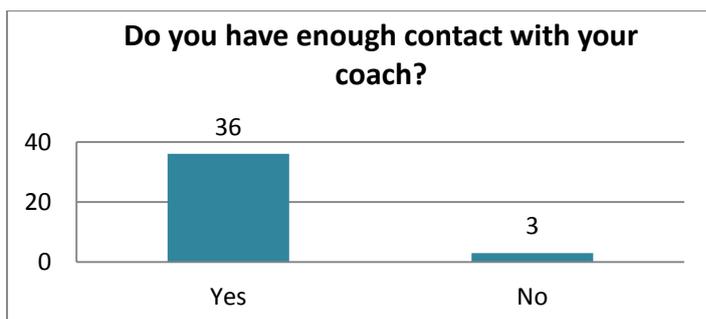
Total no. respondents = 39



Includes 2 'Other' responses

#### How often are you in touch with your coach?

Answer Options	Face-to-face	On the phone	By email
Once a week	18	2	12
Every 2-3 weeks	16	11	10
Once a month	6	5	8
Every 6-8 weeks	4	5	7



Everyone on the Talent Match programme has a coach and we'd like to know a little more about how this relationship is working for you.

Answer Options	Yes	Sometimes	No	Not applicable	Response Count
I have a good relationship with my coach	33	4	0	2	39
My coach is helping me to look at what I need to do to move into work or training at the end of the programme	35	2	0	2	39
My coach is helping me deal with problems that have stopped me from getting a job in the past	31	4	0	4	39
My coach gives me support when I need it	35	3	0	1	39
I find it easy to get in touch with my coach	36	2	0	1	39
My coach understands what I want to achieve	35	3	0	1	39
My coach is good at listening to me	38	0	0	1	39
My coach understands about my situation	37	1	0	1	39
I trust my coach	36	2	0	1	39
My coach is more interested in getting all the paperwork done than listening to me	8	0	26	5	39
I'd rather not have a coach as it doesn't seem to be working for me	6	0	27	6	39
My coach helps to motivate me	34	4	0	1	39
My coach really cares about what happens to me	33	5	0	1	39
My coach knows about Talent Match and how it can help me	36	2	0	1	39
My coach knows what opportunities there are on offer for me	34	4	0	1	39

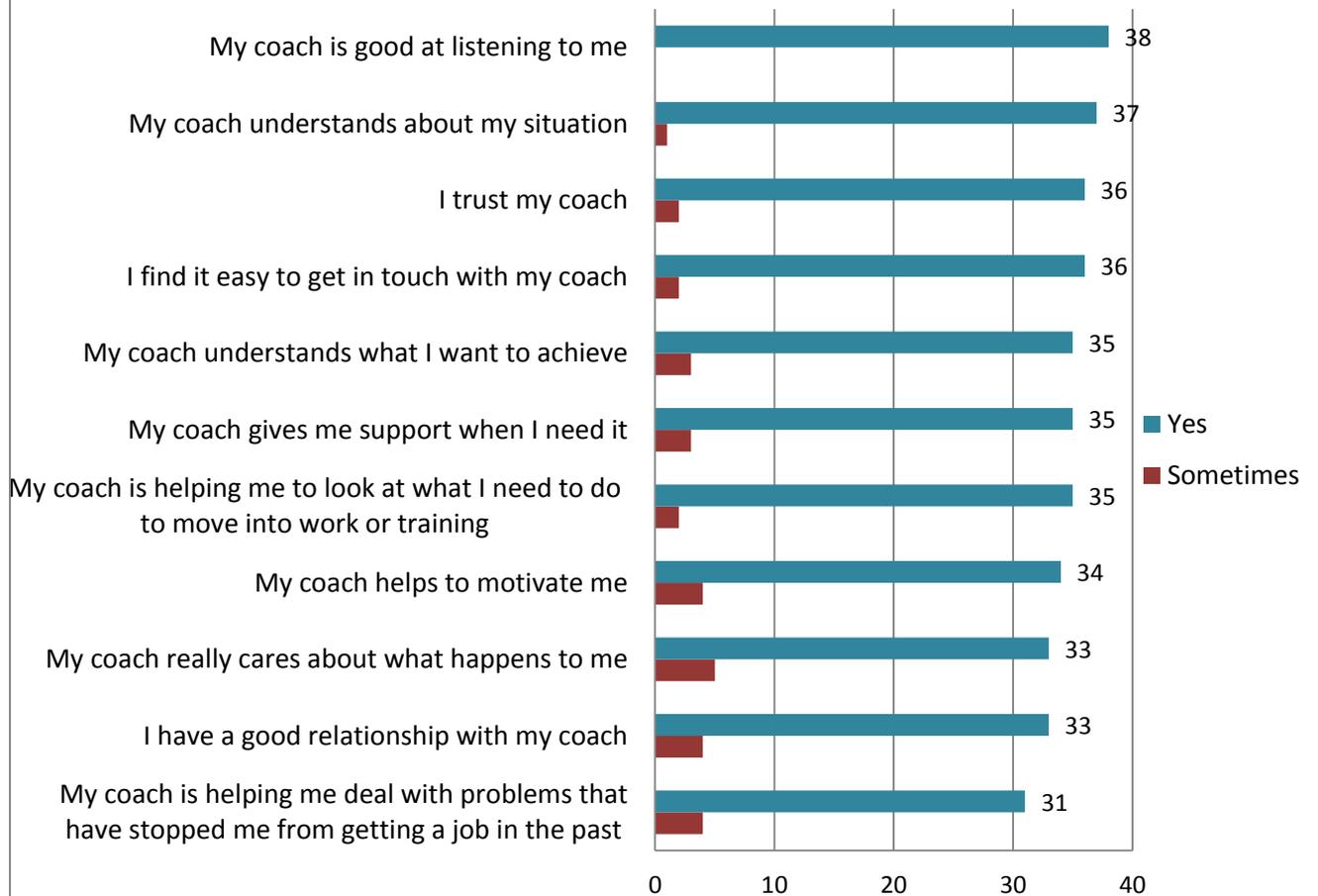
Overall how would you rate the support you have received:

Answer Options	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Not applicable	Response Count
From your coach	22	13	1	0	1	37
From any organisation helping with personal issues	8	12	2	2	13	37
From any training courses or skill development sessions you've attended	9	9	5	1	12	36
From your volunteer placement	7	7	3	1	19	37
From your paid work placement	4	7	2	1	23	37
From the Talent Match programme as a whole	19	15	1	0	2	37

Thinking about your overall experience of Talent Match so far, how much do you agree or disagree with the following?

Answer Options	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Not applicable	Response Count
I know more about what employers are looking for	28	6	2	1	37
I am clearer about what I want to do next	29	7	1	0	37
I feel more positive about my future	32	5	0	0	37
I feel confident that I will be able to move into a job or training when I finish Talent Match	31	5	0	1	37
I have got into a good routine that will help me when it comes to a job, apprenticeship or training in the future	26	7	1	3	37
My volunteer placement experience will help me move into work or training	24	2	0	11	37
Having a paid work placement feels like a real job	13	4	1	19	37
I have had help with some of the things that stopped me moving forward before	27	5	1	1	34
I am proud about what I am achieving as part of Talent Match	33	2	0	2	37
Talent Match hasn't been able to offer me anything that I want to do	4	5	21	7	37

### Participants feedback on TM Coaches



No. respondents = 39, 1 responded 'not applicable' to all questions, 0 responded 'No'

#### **Appendix 4: Wrap around support procurement purchase process**

There are currently 59 different services that can be procured from the framework. The coaches discuss young adults' needs with them and may show participants the framework and ask them if there is anything that could be helpful. There are several stages to the process of procuring wrap around support:

1. Talent Match identifies whether there is anything in house that has already been bulk purchased (anger management, for example). Bulk purchases happen when a number of young adults identify similar support need.
2. If not then the next step is to identify the organisations who are eligible and ask them if they are still willing and able to provide the service – this is called the pre order check and it takes 24 hours.
3. Talent Match asks for more details that are specific to the young person e.g. if delivery is within one bus journey from City Centre. Providers have 3 days to respond to specific questions. This then forms the supplementary tender and becomes part of the criteria for evaluating proposals, along with information on cost.
4. Then final details are sent out as call for competition setting out what Talent Match is seeking to commission
5. Tender are then evaluated against strict criteria the successful organisation gets an order form. Talent Match aims to evaluate these supplementary tenders within 2 working days.