



Talent Match



Achievements and lessons for policy and programme design



This briefing is aimed at those who wish to find out more about Talent Match, which is a unique youth employability programme initiated by and designed with young people and funded by the Big Lottery Fund. This briefing explains the principles behind the Talent Match approach and summarises key achievements from the first 3.5 years. We have also started to share our learning related to the design and implementation of services for young people who are considered furthest away from the labour market.

Keyword reference: Talent Match, young people, NEETs, youth employment, unemployment, employability, hidden youth, co-production, mental health, employer engagement

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Introduction

What is Talent Match?

Talent Match (TM) is a £106 million programme funded by the Big Lottery Fund¹ to support young people aged 18 to 24 who need extra support to help them along their path to employment².

Talent Match targets young people who are considered furthest away from the labour market. This includes long-term unemployed youth and young people who have complex lives and face multiple barriers to employment. Our partnerships also carry out outreach work to identify, engage and support so-called 'hidden youth' who are young people neither receiving benefits nor engaged in employment, education or training.

Talent Match builds on a youth-centred approach, which places the wishes and aspirations of young people first, before those of the services that are there to support them. Our local partnerships work with young people to stabilise their lives, support their aspirations and equip them with the skills and attitudes that will help them to take their first steps towards employment. In addition to practical support, the TM partnerships seek to improve local policy and practice around support for young people.

Talent Match takes place in 21 Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) areas across England which experience high levels of youth unemployment. The programme runs for five years from 2014 to 2018.

This briefing draws on results and learning from the first 3.5 years, using information from 2014 through to 2017³. We are working with the Centre for Regional, Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University and its partners to evaluate impact⁴.

Talent Match story

The Big Lottery Fund follows a 'People in the Lead' approach which puts communities

and service users at the heart of social change. Talent Match is a true representation of this approach. In 2012, the Big Lottery Fund invited 20 young people from all different walks of life to consult their peers to find out what really mattered to them and explore how Lottery funding could be used to help them to achieve their aspirations. Our youth panel consulted 2,000 peers and this culminated in two key messages for the Fund; they asked us to support young people's (mental) wellbeing and make it easier for young people to get a job. This is how Talent Match was born.

Since then, our beneficiaries have been involved in all aspects of the programme's design and our partnerships deliver their services *with* our participants rather than *to* them. Our young participants sit as equal partners in decision-making boards of local partnerships. They also design and implement campaigns and services, contribute to staff training in the partnerships and at partner agencies, carry out beneficiary research, evaluate youth services and interview candidates (staff and providers) who want to work with Talent Match. We believe this makes Talent Match a truly unique youth employability programme.

Talent Match principles

Participation in Talent Match is voluntary and our partnerships work flexibly with beneficiaries - for as long as needed, without penalising for missed appointments or setbacks in progression. The TM approach recognises that progression of young people who have lived chaotic lives is not linear.

Central to the Talent Match approach is belief in the ability of young people to improve their own circumstances and life chances with targeted support and personalised solutions. There is no standardised approach to support but partnerships provide individualised solutions according to the needs and aspirations of participants. All 21 partnerships designed their own approaches to meet the needs of their local areas, to complement existing local services and to identify and fill gaps in current provision.

Each delivery partnership is led by a voluntary or community led organisation, but brings together young people, employers, statutory agencies, education providers and charities.

Talent Match

A total of £106 million for 21 areas across England

5 year programme 2014-2018

A unique employability programme *initiated by* and designed and *delivered with* young people

Targets young people furthest away from the labour market

Voluntary participation

Offers non-standardised solutions that match needs and aspirations of young people

Partnerships led by voluntary sector bodies

What has Talent Match achieved in the first 3.5 years?⁵

1. Talent Match has engaged and supported over 22,230 young people who are furthest away from the labour market

Voluntary sector leadership and co-production with young people is at the heart of the success of the Talent Match in engaging and supporting over 22,230 young people who face multiple and complex barriers to employment. We are planning to engage a further 5,700 young people by December 2018.

Many TM participants have interlinked disadvantages:

-) 4,530 participants (20% of the programme total) are *young people not receiving benefits*, nor engaged in employment, education or training ('hidden youth').
-) Almost a quarter of participants *acknowledge having experienced mental ill health (24%)⁶*, although this could be as high as 50% because many do not disclose mental health issues before they have built up a trusting relationship with their mentor⁷.
-) Some have grown up in families where their parents have never worked, most of the participants have never had a job (62%) and one in ten (11%) have a history of substance abuse.
-) In some instances the ability to integrate into the labour market is complicated by offending background (12% have a criminal record), complex family situations (15% have been homeless) and health problems (15% have a disability that limits their activities and our partnerships report high levels of undiagnosed learning disabilities and neurological disorders)⁸.

TM partnerships have targeted those furthest away from the labour market from the beginning, but many have worked with higher volumes of highly complex cases than was envisaged. This includes young people who have attempted suicide and have experienced abuse and trauma. Symptoms of depression, anxiety and loneliness are disclosed regularly.

2. Talent Match has supported over 5,360 of young people into employment⁹

Talent Match has helped to secure employment/self-employment for 5,360 young

First achievements:

22,230 young people engaged to date

5,362 new jobs secured and recorded

This includes over 260 new businesses/self-employed

97% report that the TM support has been 'very' or 'quite' important in helping them to secure employment

Thousands of other young people have moved closer to employment

A high level satisfaction with the jobs (85%): most see their job as a stepping stone. However, 38% would like to work more or longer hours

Positive effects on confidence, outlook on life and wellbeing

Localised evidence of TM starting to influence local policy, practice and commissioning

people. Two thirds (69%) are permanent jobs and 40% have lasted over 6 months¹⁰. Over 260 young people have set up their own business or become self-employed.

The evaluators estimate that the total number of jobs could be much higher (even 2,000-3,000 more) than the official records show because many young people who have found a job do not return to their projects to have their jobs officially recorded.

Most young people are satisfied with their jobs (85%), with the majority viewing it as a stepping stone in their career which makes them feel 'worthwhile'¹¹. Many however would like to work more or longer hours (38%) and most of those on a zero hours contract would prefer a contract with guaranteed hours (84%).

3. Talent Match has moved thousands of others closer to employment

A measure of 'proximity to the labour market' has been created to quantify the extent to which young people have been supported to move closer to employment¹². This measure assesses how likely a young person is to be in work given their characteristics, experiences and competencies, to provide a single indicator of how close they are to the labour market.

Proximity to the labour market
Proportion in 2 categories furthest from labour market:



Early findings show that over half of all TM participants (55%) are in the two categories classified as furthest away from the labour market at the start of their time on the programme. After three months, this goes down to 43% of participants, and reduces further to 35% after 6+ months on the programme.

This means that more young people are better prepared for the world of work as a result of their time on TM. Nearly four out of five TM participants (78%) have applied for a job and 64% have attended at least one job interview. Nearly half (48%) feel their communication skills and ability to manage feelings have improved¹³. Many others (40-42%) are of the opinion that TM has helped them to work with others and be more goal-orientated about what they want to achieve in life.

Our experience shows that the right support can reduce these barriers even for the most marginalised youth. However, for many the journey is a long one requiring multiple interventions addressing the most pressing problems, such as addictions, first before their integration to employment can begin.

Beneficiary experiences - Hayden's story (TM [Lincolnshire](#))

"I'd been a full-time carer for my mum ever since her accident. I started looking for jobs, but found that most required work experience that I just didn't have. I heard about TM through a friend... and decided to get involved myself.

I met my Youth Advocate in local cafes and he worked with me to access training and work experience. We also practiced interview techniques. With his support, I applied for a job in Lincoln and got the job! It was a great feeling... Finding paid work has given me so much more independence. My plan now is to keep working hard and progress within the company.

The support from TM has been outstanding. TM has given me the confidence to

progress. I now believe in myself and it's made me realise that there are plenty of jobs available that I'm good at."

4. Talent Match has had a positive effect on the confidence, outlook and wellbeing of participants

Young people feel listened to and valued within the programme. They have appreciated having someone, usually a mentor, who takes time to listen, who cares about their situation, and gives them confidence that they are not alone and confidence to deal with the challenges they face in accessing employment.

Many feel less anxious as a result. Nearly half (44%) of participants give a 'very low' rating on a question about 'how anxious they feel' after 6+ months on TM. This compares well against the national average of 39% for 20-24 year olds, especially when considering that only 32% felt this way at the start of the programme.

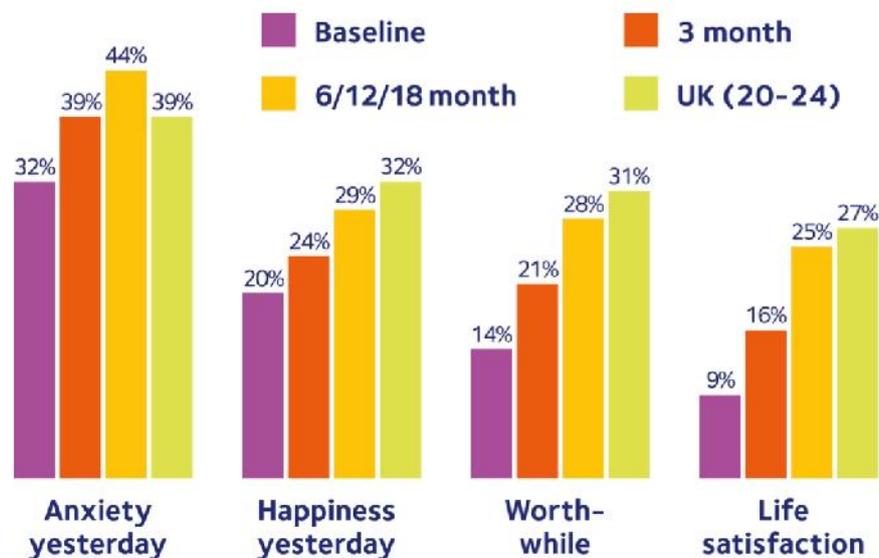
TM has had a positive influence on life satisfaction of participants. The proportion of young

people with a 'very high' score on life satisfaction almost triples during their time on TM, growing from a very low base of 9% at the start of the programme to 25% after 6+ months' participation. This brings them almost in line with the national average for 20-24 year olds (27%).

The partnerships also report increased levels of motivation and self-confidence among participants. This is supported by evidence from the national evaluation which shows that the share of young people who give a 'very high' score to how 'worthwhile' they feel doubles during their time on Talent Match (starting from a low base of 14% at the start of the programme but doubling to 28% within 6+ months, again bringing the TM participants closer in line with the national average of 31%).

Well-being measures

Proportion giving a very high score (or very low score for anxiety):



Beneficiary experiences:

"Without Talent Match... I wouldn't have been able to leave my bedroom and would have become more and more isolated", TM Liverpool City Region

"The team gets you out of your comfort zone and builds your confidence. It makes young people realise what is possible", TM Nottingham (D2N2)

"I felt suicidal; when I came in, but now I don't and I am a new person. If I didn't come to counselling I wouldn't be where I [am] today. I would not be working", TM Liverpool City Region

“In a year, my life’s completely changed... I was a young carer. I wanted to get a job but I found it very difficult but [Talent Match partner organisation] helped and made it very easy... It makes you a stronger person having that kind of family, as everyone’s nurturing you. Especially when I had a lot of anxiety it helped my confidence. Before Talent Match I barely opened my curtains. I’m a changed person. I always wanted to work in the NHS and last Thursday I got offered a permanent job as a Medical Receptionist...”, TM Sheffield City Region

“Before TM I was nervous to go to the Job Centre. I felt anxious and didn’t know what to do with my life. Now my life has turned around and I’m even involved in training our local Job Centre staff”, TM Humber

5. Talent Match has encouraged civic engagement and improved the qualification and skills levels of thousands of young people¹⁴

Our partnerships have helped young people see that volunteering is valuable and is valued in the eyes of future employers and their peers. So far, 5,860 TM beneficiaries have been involved in volunteering and most of them (70%) volunteer regularly.

Many TM participants have taken the opportunity to gain new qualifications. In total, 1,490 participants have moved into formal education, 844 have taken up an apprenticeship and 1,780 have taken / are taking basic skills training.

Lessons for policy and programme design

1. Young people should be set up on a long-term sustainable pathway

We launched Talent Match over three years ago as an employment programme targeting long-term unemployed youth. The programme is successfully helping vulnerable young people into and closer to employment; however we under-estimated the level of chaos, trauma and disenfranchisement in many young people’s lives. Those furthest from the labour market require a whole range of specialist support and resources to be able to progress to a place of stability, self-confidence and engagement.

Our partnerships have found that basic needs such as housing and mental ill health are not always addressed. Many need help in developing the appropriate attitudes, resilience and behaviours to cope with typical work patterns. Life skills, such as knowing how to open a bank account or what to wear for job interviews, and a better understanding of the expectations of employers are important too.

Quick-fixes that push young people into work when they are not ready do not work. TM experience shows that many young people have been mandated to attend programmes which were not suitable for them. They either did not last long enough for progress to be made, or required participation in training and work experience in a sector they did not wish to pursue.

In our experience employment retention (and progression) of young people improves when they are recruited and trained into job roles they are suited to and have an interest in¹⁵. Our participants describe ‘a good job’ as something that is, “*enjoyable, interesting, respected and stable... gives opportunities for progression and provides a reasonable income*”¹⁶. Commitment to support and sustain the individual in a particular

post is equally important. Employers can demonstrate commitment by providing employment security, training and on-going support (through in-work mentoring for example).

Our key messages about creating sustainable pathways to employment:

First labour market experiences can have a profound impact on young people's lives and progression; the quality and 'fit' of first jobs and placements do matter

Make sure you understand your target audience of young people; not only their needs and barriers but also their strengths, wishes and aspirations

Start building relationships with local employers as early as possible, show them the skills and capabilities of local youth and give them a range of different ways to get involved in your work.

Address the root causes of problems that are barriers to employment and start with basic needs; pay particular attention to mental well-being

Today's labour market is complex: Guide young people through their journey into/towards employment or make sure you are providing a seamless pathway of services so that no one falls through the net

Voluntary organisations, such as youth organisations and community groups, can lead large, strategic youth employment partnerships. They are also in a unique position to act as advisors, advocates, role models, promoters, mentors, connectors, outreach workers, feedback facilitators and trainers.

When deciding on the composition of a youth employment partnership, do not only consider what different partners can bring in to the table, but also consider the consequences of leaving them out; it may be helpful to look at the issue from the perspective of 'a life of a young person' and all the organisations that are involved in it.

Employment support needs to stretch all the way into employment: In-work support improves retention

Key work approaches built around youth-work principles is a powerful way to reach and engage young people with complex needs and barriers, before moving on to support them to develop life and work-specific skills.

Supporting young people to build their confidence, resilience and work-related networks empowers them to find work, and might be more effective than focusing solely on practical tasks like CV writing.

Young people are experts in their own lives: use this expertise to inform your policy and practice

2. Trust young people as experts in their own journeys

The success of Talent Match rests heavily on the genuine involvement of young people in the design and delivery of services as equal partners.

We have identified four key benefits from co-producing TM with young people who are furthest away from the labour market:

Co-production broadens the reach of your services ("Outreach and retention effect")

Co-production is one of the key reasons TM has been successful in reaching and retaining significant numbers of ‘hidden’ youth. For example, the youth panel of TM [Leicestershire](#) undertook a ‘root and branch’ review of the original project in year 2 and changed the model - this resulted in the numbers of young people engaged increasing by over 50% in the same period. Examples of the changes made, include: 1) involving young people when contracting services to ensure external organisations were responsive to young people leading decision making; and 2) improving public transport access to delivery locations to allow more young people without a car to attend.

The youth leaders of TM [North East](#) have improved awareness of TM by championing and promoting the services to their peers both face to face and through social media and have co-designed key promotional materials. The Young Ambassadors of TM [Leeds](#) co-deliver induction days that are open to all young people who join the programme.

Co-production ensures your services respond to the needs and wishes of target audiences (“The fit-for-purpose effect”)

Co-producing employment services with those who need those services the most helps to ensure the services are appropriate for their intended audience. We have supported hundreds of TM participants to take part in partnership boards and youth panels. In this way they are able to monitor, scrutinise and provide feedback on new plans and are involved in key decision making regarding commissioning, service design and delivery, and quality assurance.

As an example, the Youth Panel members of TM [Greater Manchester](#) sit on the Partnership Board, Steering Group and Commissioning Panel. They also evaluate the performance of their front-line staff by interviewing beneficiaries and challenge staff to look at things differently. The youth leaders of TM [North East](#) have been involved in recruiting staff across management teams and partner organisations. TM [New Anglia](#) introduced a ‘New-U’ enterprise offering access to smart work clothes for young people directly as a result of feedback from participants.

The Young People’s Panel of TM [Middlesbrough](#) has led the commissioning process and funding of new services based on the issues and gaps they have themselves experienced and through understanding the needs of their peers. *“I believe without young people’s input, feedback and influence the funding decisions made would have been completely different and perhaps not as beneficial as we think to unemployed young people”*, explains a project representative.

Co-production helps with your efforts to improve policy and practice (“Policy effect”)

We think that Talent Match is unique in its ability to involve and draw on experiences of young people from diverse backgrounds when many other youth-led bodies tend to bring

Examples of how TM beneficiaries are involved in design and delivery of TM

They take part in partnership, management and commissioning boards of TM partnerships as equal partners

Research and evaluate existing services

Design and review plans, interventions and service models

Run campaigns and promote services among peers and employers

Train staff (TM partnerships and partner agencies, including job centres)

Interview candidates (staff and providers) who want to work for/with TM

Speak at conferences and events

Promote TM and young people’s voice in the youth employment policy arena

together young people from comparatively privileged backgrounds. For this reason commissioners, LEPs, councils, job centres and private employers have started to invite and even commission TM youth panels to give feedback on their strategies and services.

For example, TM [Cornwall](#) young people's group [Generation E](#) has been paid to advise the food company Ginsters on employment issues. Job Centre Plus in Middlesbrough have established a service user group as a result of the engagement and feedback of TM Middlesbrough (Tees side) [youth panel](#).

The Deputy Leader of Manchester Council, Councillor Sue Murphy explains, "the most significant difference in the way Greater Manchester TM works compared to other schemes is the involvement of young people in the design, delivery and monitoring of the project".

Involving young people has a positive effect on the transversal skills of young people ("Skills effect")

Co-production can have a positive effect on the transversal and soft skills of young people who are involved in co-designing and co-delivery. This includes leadership, teamwork, decision making and communication skills. Positive effects on self-belief, well-being and confidence have also been reported.

A representative of the Young People's Participation group at TM [Nottingham](#) (D2N2) explains, "*At Project Board meetings there is no condescension from Managers towards the young people. They treat us as adults... Everything the young people say is listened to and we get recognition for the things we achieve*".

Our 'top tips' on how to involve young people on design and delivery of services

Do not underestimate the task ahead: Service user involvement is a simple concept but can be tokenistic - genuine co-production takes some time and resource to set up.

Start by making sure all staff and partners understand both the benefits and the subtle, but important differences in different types of service user involvement, for example 'consultation' (young people asked what they think but have limited influence) and 'participation' (young people can make suggestions and influence outcomes) vs. 'co-production' (young people working as equal partners, sharing decision making)

Establish key principles for the involvement of young people in design & delivery:

-) Involve young people at a level that they feel is appropriate to them at the time
-) Make young people feel welcome, encourage them to challenge existing ways of working; respect their contributions
-) Ensure participation is voluntary and they need to be able to change their mind
-) Build in flexibility - young people will not be able to make all meetings
-) Consider incentives or payments for some young people taking part in co-production.

Some of our partnerships have found that putting young people in unpaid leadership roles meant that they were excluding those who could not afford to attend sessions and some missed out on paid employment because of this. Consequently some have employed their former beneficiaries or taken them on as apprentices so as to ensure they can contribute to all aspects of design and delivery.

-) Meetings are run and written information is provided in jargon-free Plain English and in an age-friendly format that is easily understandable

Make sure your target audience of young people understand how they can benefit from getting involved in co-production. For example, highlight the opportunities to influence the services they and their friends could make use of, new skills and experiences, and opportunity to meet new people and get involved in fun group activities

Make sure staff, partner organisations and young people know what has changed as a result of their contributions.

Think how to gather the views of people from different backgrounds and with different experiences. But if they are expected to represent a wider ‘constituency’ of young people, then this needs to be factored in.

3. Consider integrating mental health support with employment support

We have found that one of the biggest personal challenges that young people are currently facing are associated with conditions like autism or they suffer with mental ill health, ranging from clinical mental health problems to high levels of anxiety and depression. Many are not receiving the support they need. Even when they are, a lack of integration between mental health support and employment support often makes the journey to work much harder.

Talent Match has some excellent examples of delivering mental health support and ensuring unemployed youth do not fall into the gaps between mental health and employment services when seeking work. For example, TM [Liverpool](#) offers in-house therapeutic support through the recruitment of dedicated practitioners. One of their representatives wrote, *“we have found that young people need access to counselling at the moment when they need it, not when the next course is run or when the waiting list has been addressed.”*

A MIND support worker visits the [Northamptonshire](#) TM project regularly and runs support sessions with young people in the same building. This helps the young person to feel safe and secure, gives them easy access to their peers and key worker. Young people on the [Black Country](#) TM advocated for the introduction of Mental Health First Aid training for all staff to increase their awareness and understanding.

Integration of mental health and employment support does not need to be complex or costly. For example, employment programme providers could ask participants about their mental health needs and provide dedicated support for those experiencing common mental health issues (e.g. anxiety or depression) to assist them in finding work. While this approach may require significant re-alignment of the current funding and design of health and back-to-work support, the Government has already acknowledged the benefits of holistic support in its Troubled Families programme¹⁷.

4. One-to-one support plays a fundamental role in helping young people transition into the labour market

Many young people know little about the process to secure and sustain employment and their existing networks often lack the capacity to help. Support built on a one-to-one trusted relationship is essential to help those furthest from the labour market into work, therefore almost all TM projects include a ‘key worker’ model.

A key worker is a trusted advisor for young people to confide in, who will provide support and guidance. From the experience in TM a number of characteristics of a successful key

worker have emerged, including the ability to...

...build rapport and trust with young people, listening and understanding their point of view	...provide intensive, longitudinal support	...set boundaries and avoid creating dependencies
...focus on motivating, supporting and challenging young people, treating them as equals	...be flexible and committed to a person-centred approach, providing support tailored to the individual	...have awareness of employability development context, e.g. qualified in the Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) approach

One key worker described the required skills as follows, “...I think it’s very important to have my kind of characteristics where you build up a friendship, build a relationship first and then get onto the nitty gritty, this is what we should be doing, can we push you a little bit further”¹⁸.

As TM participants get closer to employment, the skills that key workers need change: moving from a youth work approach that focuses on emotional, personal and social development¹⁹, to a greater emphasis on employability and careers guidance.

A participant from the TM [Black Country](#) described his experience with his key worker as follows, “*if other people say stuff to me and I don’t understand. I just ask him and he will make a point to phone them, find out and explain it to me. He gets the difficult things, breaks it down and makes it easy for me. It’s making me a better person in myself. I used to act and then think. Now I think more before I act*”. However, the right balance needs to be found between spending time helping someone into employment and encouraging and enabling change and development. For example, the [TM Humber](#) team have found that, “*participants do better when we work with them, not for them*”.

5. In-work support can improve sustainability of employment outcomes²⁰

Labour market programmes can focus solely on getting people into work, with little thought for the support people need once they are in work. Without appropriate support, young people furthest from the labour market tend to experience unemployment on a long-term basis or ‘cycle’ in and out of employment. This can lead to them being viewed less favourably by employers, their skills and confidence worsening over time, and their expectations of work being damaged²¹.

TM experience suggests that in-work support can help support sustainable employment: 81% of TM participants who have received in-work support have held onto their job for 6 months while only 75% of those who have not received such support have stayed in their role.

Young people who require the most intensive support to secure a job outcome are also more likely to struggle to retain employment in the short-term. Those who most need in-work support tend to be young people with low confidence, hidden disabilities, learning difficulties and chaotic/complex lives. The intensity of in-work support required can vary widely, and it can include the following aspects:

- J Practical support e.g. help with arranging transport to work, appropriate clothing or assistance with organising caring responsibilities
- J Support with non-work related issues that impact on keeping a job e.g. advice about making hospital appointments, dealing with probation
- J Guidance on work-related matters including work appropriate behaviour and managing working relationships
- J Assistance provided to an employer to support a beneficiary's job retention

Successful in-work support provides a sounding-board for the TM participant, giving advice on a range of issues rather than taking action on behalf of young people. In-work support needs to be tailored to the TM beneficiary and employer, with good communication between the three parties involved. One beneficiary spoke of his employer developing his skills and his key worker supporting his emotional side, *“It’s like a ping pong table if you like, [with my key worker] on one bat and [my employer] on the other bat and I’m just being flung and they won’t let me fall off the table if that makes sense. That’s how I think of it anyway”*.

Initiatives which focus on specific groups have also been found to have a positive impact. People’s Awareness of Disability Discrimination (PADD) is a group developed from TM [Humber](#) that supports the employer and employee during recruitment and employment, resolving practical barriers that could lead to a breakdown of communication, and redesigning interview processes to give disabled young people the best chance to demonstrate their skills and abilities.

6. A real step change is needed in the relationship and engagement between employers and young people

Youth employment partnerships can do a lot to prepare young people for the world of work but their efforts are in vain if employers do not see the potential in local youth or are not willing to give ‘first-job’ experiences for them. Building meaningful relationships with employers from the very beginning is important, rather than it being a tokenistic after-thought.

Talent Match has many positive examples of local partnerships working with employers to address barriers to employment for this group of young people:

Involving employers in design of your services

Some employers have told us of their desire to support more young people from different backgrounds into employment. But they have also told us of their frustration at being at the ‘end of the chain’ from many work-related programmes²².

The engagement of employers has been central to TM [London](#). The original Steering Group included representatives from Business in the Community and the London Chambers of Commerce. Large employers such as Barclays, British Land and Microsoft, were also consulted in the planning process to understand their needs and how the programme can fit within their corporate responsibility objectives. They also connected with the Chartered Institute for Professional Development (CIPD) through their Learning to Work network, linking in to their work on closing the gap between young people and employers.

Creating more constructive job application experiences

Many young people have negative experiences of applying for jobs. It is very common not

to receive any feedback after unsuccessful applications or interviews, leaving many applicants frustrated²³. One TM participant explains, *“I was sending job and apprenticeship applications every week for a year. I was always unsuccessful and I didn’t know why”*.

Also, traditional recruitment structures disadvantage some applicants. Those with a learning disability or autism spectrum disorder find interviews particularly challenging, but are much more comfortable demonstrating their skills during a work trial.

Young people from TM [Humber](#) have hosted events to showcase the skills of young people with hidden disabilities to local employers. One event gave businesses an opportunity to speak to [Disability Confident](#) employers and their employees, experience what it is like to be in the work environment when you have autism (through a unique simulation room), do some myth-busting around what ‘reasonable adjustments’ mean in practice and how to access key services that are dedicated to supporting businesses.

Employer experiences - hidden disabilities

“Katie and Talent Match have taught me we don’t have to change a lot we just have to be aware and have understanding”, Mark Henderson, MPH Fulfilment (TM Humber)

“...Having people with learning disabilities working with us breaks down barriers... otherwise you become a group of very similar people, with a very similar skill set and that’s boring quite frankly”, Andy Crossland, Humber Learning Consortium

“Being Disability Confident sends a signal to employees, clients and stakeholders about the type of organisation we are”, Marek Tokarski, CDC Enterprise Agency

Offer a ‘menu’ of options for employers to get involved

Employers vary in their motivations and resources to get involved in youth employment programmes and TM partnerships have responded to this.

[Talent Match Mark](#) was initiated by our partnerships and was co-developed by TM [London](#) together with Youth Employment UK and Movement to Work. It is an award framework that recognises and celebrates small and large employers who support young people. It has involved 1,800 employers so far - this includes large international and national organisations as well as SMEs.

The Mark offers three main routes for employers to get involved in Talent Match:

First, employers can offer light-touch job/career exploration opportunities for young people, such as hosting workplace visits, taking part in career days, offering mock interviews, taking part in Q&A’s and coffee & chat sessions with potential applicants. These do not require big investment from employers but are important for young people: the majority of our participants have never worked which means that there is a lack of basic understanding of the variety of roles available within different sectors. Also research shows that a third of our beneficiaries (38%) do not understand what skills employers are looking for²⁴.

Second, the [Mark](#) also encourages employers to provide two to six week work experience placements to allow young people to delve into a particular career path whilst developing skills. As an example can be mentioned the collaboration of TM [London](#) with Centrica/British Gas to recruit for their work placement programme that they have previously struggled to fill. On paper the opportunity was great: a two week work experience where participants shadow a British Gas engineer on site with a guaranteed

interview and about 70% participants going into paid employment at the end. The TM team worked hard to convince the company to improve physical access to these training places for young people and cutting the placement from a seven week traineeship to shorter two to three week work placements.

Finally, employers can get involved by offering employment opportunities, including apprenticeships or entry level roles that young person can sustain for at least six months, with support from their TM support worker. As an example, TM [Nottingham](#) project runs the apprentice recruitment scheme for Eon in the city. By teaming up with local referral partners and an accredited training provider they are making apprenticeships accessible to those with fewer qualifications, as well as successfully meeting both the recruitment and Corporate Social Responsibility requirements of a major employer.

Reviewing expectations of employers for entry level jobs

An important barrier to securing employment for young people is the expectation of candidates to have previous work experience and/or a minimum level of qualifications: 63% of employers countrywide require previous experience for entry level roles²⁵. This results in a vicious cycle - if an entry level job requires past experience how can young people get that initial experience? Many young people also lack the confidence to apply for a job when the job advert includes jargon and intimidating phrases like ‘outstanding organisational skills’²⁶.

Our partnerships have shown employers how recruiting for entry level roles can be based on behaviour and attitude rather than experience and qualifications, and providing young people with work placement opportunities are some of the ways in which our partnerships have tackled this problem.

For example, in return for taking part in [Talent Match Mark](#), young people from TM help employers by reviewing their recruitment and employment practices (e.g. in relation to jargon-free communication and structured training opportunities). They have also reviewed videos used by employers to advertise their work placement opportunities to make them more appealing²⁷.

Our ‘top tips’ on employer engagement

Consider offering a portfolio of different ways to get involved; from light-touch options (e.g. helping young people with mock interviews, workplace visits) to more time and effort intense options (e.g. providing work placements, apprenticeships)

Tap into existing schemes, such as [Talent Match Mark](#), to ensure employers are not ‘bombarded’ with too many different ‘employability’ programmes.

Be proactive and reach out to employers in their own territory, do not expect them to come to you - this involves linking with them at business forums and events, making connections with local business associations, etc.

Recognise, celebrate and ‘share’ messages about the contribution of employers, for example through awards and employer charters

Be professional and make the involvement of employers as easy and smooth for them as possible: think about appointing a single contact point for employers with whom they can communicate with (our South East TM partnership have established a dedicated network of employer coaches to facilitate relationships between employers, young people and training providers)

Consider offering employers something in return for their involvement (e.g. youth panel or staff to review the company’s recruitment policy and practice)

Train and develop front-line staff to understand employer needs and opportunities

Help young people build their own knowledge of the workplace and broader labour market through multiple work experience opportunities - from tasters through to longer placements.

Involve employers in the designing and development of employment support services

7. The stark reality behind statistics: the risk of headline findings masking the growing problem of ‘hidden youth’

Youth unemployment was one of the most pressing policy priorities at the height of the financial crisis. One in five young people were looking for a job and even the most qualified were struggling to get interviews.

The good news is that the economy has grown and youth unemployment has fallen over the last five from nearly a million to 343,000 (4.8% of the youth population)²⁸. The latest claimant count shows that there are 163,800 for young people who are claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance or Universal Credit and are required to look for work²⁹.

The growing economy has helped those young people who were nearer the labour market but the concern is that policy makers, funders and commissioners see youth unemployment as a problem that has been ‘solved’ when those on the front line are witnessing some young people, especially those who face multiple or complex barriers to employment, drifting even further away from the labour market than before. They fear that there will be no money to support those who need longer and more intense interventions to support their journeys to work.

There is also a growing concern over increasing number of young people who are no longer ‘just’ NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) but they are becoming ‘hidden’ - neither receiving benefits, nor engaged in employment, education or training. It is difficult to access data on ‘hidden’ young people as there is no longer a requirement to keep track of young people post-18, unless they meet certain support requirements (i.e. they are care leavers). The national statistics however suggest that ‘hidden’ youth unemployment has doubled to 168,000 since 2012³⁰. The proportion of unemployed young people who are not claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance and therefore are not receiving official help with job search is now 52%.

The experience and research of our partnerships support these findings. [Greater Manchester](#) TM partnership have estimated that there were 15,000 hidden young people in the Greater Manchester region alone in March 2016, up from an estimated 10,000 in 2013. [TM London](#) estimated in 2015 that there were over 35,000 hidden young people in the boroughs that they work in.

There are many reasons why young people are ‘hidden’; some are not eligible for benefits and others do not feel able to apply. This may be due to bad experiences with statutory services in the past or due to practical reasons which hinder their ability to claim, such as low literacy or IT skill levels, a lack of access to a computer or a lack of an email address or working telephone. For some, it is stigma, or peer or family pressure that leads them not to sign-on³¹. Some are relatively highly skilled and some have made an assertive choice not to engage and have found alternative ways of supporting themselves informally (family, friends, cash in hand work or illegal activity)³². One TM participant said, *“I don’t want to be one of them...I’m not a scrounger”*. Indeed, TM learning is that in general, far from the myth that young people do not want to work, many simply have lost the hope and do not know where to get the support to help them

get their first job³³.

‘Hidden youth’ profiles

Greater Manchester identified that the average ‘hidden’ young person is male, living with parents or friends or sofa surfing, and an early school leaver with lower qualification levels. ‘Hidden’ young people can become more isolated, rarely leaving the house, or find a place in the ‘grey economy’, gang culture or offending. They may have alternative means of accessing financial support but this is often temporary and becomes an additional barrier to accessing long term support and appropriate, permanent work.

Whatever the reason that someone becomes ‘hidden’, this disengagement means they cannot access support from statutory services and they are unable to access in-work support if they do find work, which means they are more likely to fall back into unemployment. The lack of support for this group is likely to lead to further disengagement from routes to employment and therefore an increased likelihood of remaining unemployed and isolated and/or continuing to offend.

The lack of data about this group (the depth and breadth of the problem, cost implications) means it is difficult to ensure that there will be policies or services to meet their needs.

Peer-to-peer outreach in places that young people go (youth clubs, leisure centres, cinemas, etc.)³⁴, community-based approaches led by youth organisations or community groups and one-to-one support have helped ‘hidden’ young people to access TM support, *“They come to us, a lot of people come in and ask for help, they’ve heard about us through word of mouth. We’re well known in the community as we’re always out and about. Parents also know about us, sometimes through the adult classes we do”* (TM Greater Manchester).

8. Investment in youth employment needs to be long term to make a real difference

We have already learned that Talent Match partnerships work with many young people who have lived chaotic lives for years or have suffered years of neglect. Many have told us about their negative experiences with statutory services, highlighting lack of compassion and understanding of how poor mental wellbeing or hidden disabilities affect them. Penalties and sanctions have had a negative impact on their lives and they have lost their trust in services which are there to support them. They have felt like activities which are provided to support them into work are ‘tick-box exercises’ especially when they have been expected to attend the same course (e.g. CV writing, first aid) a number of times. They have not been able to access employment support complemented with mental health and substance misuse support or just some hand-holding (‘caring’).

Our partnerships have learned that the lives of these young people cannot be turned around in a matter of weeks. They might need time, resources and multiple interventions to achieve sustainable change. Four issues are important here:

Prevention is cheaper than ‘cure’

It needs to be recognised that supporting some of those who are genuinely furthest away from the labour market is costly, but those costs need to be seen in the context of the severity of the economic, social and health impacts of extended periods out of work. The cost of youth unemployment over the next decade has been estimated at £28 billion³⁵.

Long periods spent NEET can have a negative impact on a young person's mental and physical health and can have a significant impact on future earnings - to the tune of £225,000 over a lifetime³⁶.

Local partnerships need to work across sectors to ensure services are seamless and no one is left behind

Given the diverse nature of the needs that young people have, one organisation or approach cannot effectively find or open up to all young people who need TM services.

Providing seamless provision has been central to enabling a consistent service and enhancing retention rates amongst the most vulnerable participants in TM [Liverpool](#). Mentors have acted as a lead professional coordinating and supporting young people into external services as well as their own support. Their own services address short-comings in the mainstream provision especially in relation to therapeutic support because thresholds and waiting lists are too high to support timely access to mainstream counselling services. This two-pronged approach has been important to their successful outcomes³⁷.

In some places the biggest problem is not a lack of services for young people, but a difficulty in navigating the changing provision of services for young people and access thresholds. For example, TM for [Leeds City Region](#) have focussed on helping young people to navigate the existing system of services with the help of TM mentors and strategically influencing provision that is not fit for purpose, rather than reinventing existing programmes. This has been an important factor to the low unit costs and high progression rates³⁸.

Commissioning and funding needs to change

There is a need for longer contracts for providers of youth employment services to give them room to achieve sustainable outcomes. Short term contracts promote quick-fixes which might end up being more costly in the long term or encourage providers to work with young people who are more employment ready, leaving the most vulnerable ones without any support ('creaming effect'). TM partnerships have five-year contracts and this time period is needed to embed new approaches and achieve some systemic improvements. We are funding some partnerships for a further five years.

Local problems require local solutions

Successful youth employment programmes need to be developed locally to address the barriers young people in each area face. For example, the access barriers experienced by young people in our rural areas may differ from those faced by youth in urban areas or young people in coastal towns and agricultural hubs where the economies are dominated by seasonal employment and/or a growing gig economy.

The experience of BAME young people

TM [London](#) have found that young people from BAME communities can experience barriers to employment because of the negative effects of a culture of intolerance and in some instances racism. In some cases, while organisational policy at a senior level shows a commitment to providing employment opportunities for young people from all backgrounds, this has not been reflected in the supervisory or recruitment practices of the organisation or the experiences of young people.

TM delivery partners have played a role in providing young people with the support they need to deal with these issues as they arise. To help with this, London TM have been delivering racial identity theory training for TM support workers and managers, which has increased awareness about how to approach the challenges facing these groups.

They are exploring ways to adapt the training for use with employers in the future.

9. Voluntary and community organisations can successfully lead strategic youth employment partnerships

A broad partnership approach to the delivery of youth employability programmes is not new, but Talent Match is unique in its scale and the role of the voluntary sector as a lead partner. Local employment programmes are typically run by local authorities or larger private providers but TM shows that youth and community groups can successfully lead and deliver large, high-quality, outcome focused contracts. The programme has also been instrumental in supporting a range of delivery partners to introduce and embed the systems, processes and organisational culture required to deliver contracts in this way, something that many have cited as key to securing other contracts³⁹.

Community and youth organisation also have a role to play act as trusted advisors, advocates and promoters. At a beneficiary level, they contribute as mentors, connectors, feedback facilitators and trainers. Locally based organisations often have the trust of young people that JobCentre Plus deem ‘hard to reach’, and therefore they are in a strong position to identify and engage those individuals.

For example, TM [Leeds](#) is the only strategic programme run and delivered solely by the voluntary sector within this field in West Yorkshire. It was first received with some scepticism and many were concerned about the programme’s ability to engage young people. As a result of the success, there is a change in how voluntary programmes are perceived and what impact these programmes can have.

Sources

This briefing draws on facts, figures and findings from the work of the Centre for Regional, Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University and its partners who are in the process of evaluating Talent Match.

Those findings have been complemented with evidence and insights from evaluations and sustainability reports of local Talent Match partnerships and experiences of funding staff at the Big Lottery Fund.

Talent Match partnerships

LEP	Lead Organisation	Website
Black Country	Wolverhampton Voluntary Sector Council	https://www.bctalentmatch.com/
Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly	Real Ideas Organisation Community Interest Company	http://www.talentmatchcornwall.org/
Coventry and	Warwickshire CAVA	http://www.wcava.org.uk/talent-match

Warwickshire		
D2N2	Greater Nottingham Groundwork Trust	https://www.groundwork.org.uk/Sites/nottingham/pages/yas-tm
Greater Birmingham and Solihull	Birmingham Voluntary Service Council	https://www.talentmatchbirminghamsolihull.org/
Greater Lincolnshire	The Prince's Trust	https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/about-the-trust/initiatives/talent-match
Greater Manchester	Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisation	https://gmtalentmatch.org.uk/
Humber	Humber Learning Consortium	https://www.hlc-vol.org/partner/talent-match-humber
Leeds City Region	Your Consortium Limited	http://yourconsortium.org/projects/talent-match/
Leicester and Leicestershire	The Prince's Trust	https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/about-the-trust/initiatives/talent-match
Liverpool City Region	Merseyside Youth Association Limited	http://www.talentmatchlcr.co.uk/
London	Federation of London Youth Clubs	http://talentmatchlondon.org/
New Anglia	The Prince's Trust	https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/about-the-trust/initiatives/talent-match
North East	The Wise Group	https://www.talentmatchne.co.uk/
Northamptonshire	Nottingham and Nottinghamshire VCS	http://www.talentmatchnorthants.org/
Sheffield City Region	Sheffield Futures	https://www.sheffieldfutures.org.uk/category/talent-match/
South East	The Prince's Trust	https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/about-the-trust/initiatives/talent-match
Staffordshire	Lichfield District CVS	https://www.talentmatchstaffs.org.uk/
Tees Valley (Middlesbrough)	The Prince's Trust	https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/about-the-trust/initiatives/talent-match
The Marches	Herefordshire Vol Orgs Support Service	http://www.hvoss.org.uk/about-us/talent-match-herefordshire-and-telford.aspx
Worcestershire	The Shaw Trust Limited	http://www.talentmatchworcestershire.org.uk/

END NOTES:

- 1 The Big Lottery Fund is the largest community funder in the UK. Last year the Fund awarded £713m of good cause money raised by National Lottery players to more than 13,000 community projects.
- 2 It is one of the five strategic investments of the Big Lottery Fund which include a combination of high investment over a long period of time and a commitment to influence and improve policy and practice.
- 3 All figures quoted in the report are subject to change. Programme delivery is due to finish in December 2018.
- 4 Partners include the Institute for Employment Research (IER) at the University of Warwick and Cambridge Economic Associates. They produce interim reports throughout the course of the programme, building towards a concluding report in 2019. Please see <https://blogs.shu.ac.uk/talentmatch> for further information about the evaluation.
- 5 All figures and facts in this section come from Talent Match Factsheet, Q1 2014 - Q3 2017, prepared by Sheffield Hallam, CRESR and IEF, unless otherwise stated.
- 6 Headline report - Q1 2014 - Q3 2017 from the Talent Match Common Data Framework, Sheffield Hallam.
- 7 See for example, Merida Associates (2016) Talent Match Coventry & Warwickshire: Year 2 evaluation report.
- 8 Headline report - Q1 2014 - Q3 2017 from the Talent Match Common Data Framework, Sheffield Hallam.
- 9 Employment = working 16 hrs per week or more, or working less than that due to caring responsibilities, ill health, disability or education commitments which limit the number of hours they can work.
- 10 Definition of sustainable employment is an employment relationship of 6+ months or 12+ months for the self-employed
- 11 Unpublished data analysis by CRESR and IER
- 12 The national evaluators of Talent Match have used statistical modelling to identify young people's distance from the labour market. This measure assesses how likely a given young person is to be in work given the young person's characteristics (e.g. self-confidence, ability to manage feelings, drugs and alcohol abuse, etc.), experiences (understanding of skills that employers want, etc.) and competencies (e.g. previous work experience, job specific skills, etc.) to provide a single indicator of how close they are to the labour market. The greater a young person's score on this measure the closer to the labour market they are judged to be. This modelling - and our practical experience - indicate that when young people are facing several barriers to work, their journey to employment will be longer. These factors include: being disabled, having mental health issues, substance misuse, being responsible for children, having a lower level of educational attainment, and having no previous work experience. We also considered factors such as: not understanding the skills that employers want, not having specific skills for a desired job, challenges setting and achieving goals, and managing feelings, low confidence and self-esteem, and not owning appropriate clothes for an interview. See Appendix 2 of Sanderson, E., Wilson, I. (2015) [Talent Match Evaluation and Learning Contract: 2013-2019](#). Common Data Framework. Annual Report. SHU, CRESR and IEF.
- 13 Headline report - Q1 2014 - Q3 2017 from the Talent Match Common Data Framework, Sheffield Hallam.

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- 14 Headline report - Q1 2014 - Q3 2017 from the Talent Match Common Data Framework, Sheffield Hallam.
- 15 TM for Herefordshire and Telford, sustainability plans of TM partnerships (2017) and Green, A. et al (2016) *In-work support: What is the role of in-work support in a successful transition to sustained employment?* [Talent Match Case Study Theme Report](#). Sheffield Hallam University, CRESR, Warwick Institute for Employment Research on behalf of the Big Lottery Fund.
- 16 See, for example, Kennedy, K. (2015) Young Lives Bradford NEET Research 2015.
- 17 See for example, Department for Communities and Local Government (2017), *Supporting disadvantaged families, Troubled Families Programme 2015 to 2020: progress so far*.
- 18 Green, A. (2016) *In-work support: What is the role of in-work support in a successful transition to sustained employment?* [Talent Match Case Study Theme Report](#). Sheffield Hallam University, Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research, Warwick Institute for Employment Research on behalf of the Big Lottery Fund.
- 19 A youth work approach is based on the principals around non-judgemental approach that does not exclude anyone, taking the time to build relationships and trust with young people, meeting them where they are at and in places they trust.
- 20 Sustainability plans of TM partnerships (2017) and Green, A. (2016) *In-work support: What is the role of in-work support in a successful transition to sustained employment?* [Talent Match Case Study Theme Report](#). Sheffield Hallam University, Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research, Warwick Institute for Employment Research on behalf of the Big Lottery Fund.
- 21 McQuaid, R. (2014) [Youth unemployment produces multiple scarring effects](#), LSE
- 22 Talent Match London (2017) Reach out, Enable, Connect, so more young Londoners can help themselves into employment.
- 23 See for example, Access Generation (2016) Youth employment accessibility research, Kennedy, K. (2015) Young Lives Bradford NEET Research 2015 and Greater Manchester Talent Match, Legacy Proposal, 2017
- 24 Groundwork, Greater Nottingham, Talent Match - Developing the legacy, 2017
- 25 BiTC, 2016, quoted in Greater Manchester Talent Match, Legacy Proposal, 2017
- 26 Greater Manchester Talent Match, Legacy Proposal, 2017
- 27 TM participants have worked with Centrica/British Gas, BAE Systems, Unilever, Bupa and HM Treasury who have all commissioned TM participants to create these promotional videos that explain, on a practical level, what to expect if the commit to a placement with them.
- 28 Learning and Work Institute (2017) Monthly labour market analysis; October 2017. (also quoted in the presentation of Peter Wells from the Sheffield Hallam University)
- 29 Presentation of Peter Wells from the Sheffield Hallam University (November 2017) and are based on the latest LWI (monthly analysis) and Impetus-PEF Jobs Index.
- 30 Based on a calculation that 340,000 young people are unemployed but only 163,800 people aged 18-24 are claiming Jobseeker's Allowance or Universal Credit and required to seek work. Learning and Work Institute (2017) Monthly labour market analysis; October 2017. (also quoted in the presentation of Peter Wells from the Sheffield Hallam University, using the latest LWI monthly analysis data and Impetus-PEF Jobs Index)
- 31 Turn2Us, (2012), Benefits stigma in Britain, University of Kent:
<https://www.turn2us.org.uk/About-Us/Research-and-Insights/Benefits-Stigma-in-Britain>
- 32 Renaisi and IPPR (2017) Hidden young Londoners report for London Youth.

³³ Talent Match London (2017) Reach out, Enable, Connect, so more young Londoners can help themselves into employment.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Based on 2012 figures, The ACEVO Commission on Youth Unemployment (2012) Youth unemployment: the crisis we cannot afford. ACEVO and Deloitte.

³⁶ Impetus (2017) Youth Jobs Index 2017

³⁷ Liverpool City Region, Sustainability Plan, 2017

³⁸ Talent Match Leeds City Region, Legacy and sustainment proposal, 2017

³⁹ Talent Match Leeds City Region, Legacy and sustainment proposal, 2017

The [Knowledge and Learning](#) team at the Big Lottery Fund share insights from the experience of our funding and the difference it makes. If you would like to tell us what you think of this report, or share relevant findings and learning, please email us at knowledge@biglotteryfund.org.uk

If you would like further information about Talent Match, please email us at TalentMatch@biglotteryfund.org.uk

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