

Talent Match Case Study Theme Report

Partnership Working & Development

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Summary

The success of the Talent Match Programme will largely depend on its ability to facilitate effective partnership working. Consequently, the evaluation team have conducted partnership theme-based research in the Greater Manchester; Leicester & Leicestershire and Sheffield City Region partnerships.

Origins and Current Structures

The partnerships vary in size, reflecting programme size, geography and existing structures. Most operate at two levels, strategically to co-ordinate a diverse array of funding and also in delivery. A key difference in Greater Manchester is the decision to not include front-line delivery organisations in the Core Partnership. All case study partnerships were established to develop and deliver the TM programme. Nevertheless, the way in which the composition of the partnerships has been determined has differed significantly and has had some impact on implementation:

- The composition of the partnership in Leicester & Leicestershire reflects a need to ensure an appropriate geographical and sector coverage and has been facilitated by the Partnership Manager's pre-existing knowledge and relationships.
- The TM lead was initially contested in the Sheffield City Region which led to a perceived need to placate a wide range of stakeholders. This has resulted in a Core Partnership that is too big.
- In Greater Manchester a key concern was to establish a strong but tight core partnership.

The Effectiveness of Partnerships

Most partnerships have only recently moved into the implementation stage and so it is still too early to make a robust assessment of their effectiveness. Nevertheless, the indications are that they are beginning to function well:

- Leicester & Leicestershire partners are well networked internally and with external organisations not involved in the partnership. There appears to be a genuine appetite to 'test and learn'.
- The establishment of a Strategic Steering Group comprising the TM Lead supported by five area co-ordinators has been instrumental in driving forward the large complex Sheffield City Region partnership.
- Business in the Community has played an important role in facilitating the active involvement of both private and statutory sector employers in Greater Manchester.

Nevertheless, partnerships have also faced a number of challenges:

- The **leadership of partnerships** has been an issue in the Sheffield City Region and Greater Manchester. In the former, the leadership was contested and the eventual lead was felt by some to lack legitimacy. Whereas in Greater Manchester one interviewee suggested that the programme lacked an 'obvious figurehead' to get the message out beyond key partners.
- There is a delicate balancing act between ensuring that **partnerships are inclusive but also manageable**. In Leicester & Leicestershire the focus is on one ward in the county but four in the city, and there is a need to ensure that the needs of the county are not overlooked. Some Greater Manchester board meetings have had very long agendas and little time for discussion.

Consequently, the four core organisations with delivery functions have addressed this by meeting prior to Board meetings.

- A relative lack of **employer engagement** has been a feature of both the Sheffield City Region and Leicester & Leicestershire partnerships. In the former, the priority has been to develop the partnership and the 'TM offer'. A wage incentive programme has been launched in Leicester city which may inform a longer-term employer engagement strategy.
- **LEPs** are not playing a significant role which compounds the problem of a lack private sector representation and contributes to an overly public sector feel of some partnerships.
- There are concerns with the **variable quality of delivery** in all partnerships.

Emerging Issues

Many of those interviewed identified significant problems caused by overly **long lead-in periods**. In Leicester & Leicestershire this posed a challenge in terms of maintaining the engagement of partners, especially smaller organisations and private sector bodies that tend to work on routinely faster turn-around times. Furthermore, the programme continues to be characterised by a **low profile** which can make it more difficult to market to young people and employers. More broadly, ongoing **welfare reforms** are raising important questions about the identity of TM and its relationship to national programmes.

The voice of **national programme providers** has been largely absent from partnerships although a number are developing closer working relationships. There is a need for some form of dialogue since many partnerships will work with individuals from such programmes. However, some interviewees were implacably opposed viewing Jobcentre Plus and national programmes as constituting conditional welfare which emphasises compulsion and sanctioning. Another argument was that working too closely with national programmes heightened the risk of duplication and undermined the distinctiveness of the TM programme. Others were wary of the danger of subsidising the job outcomes of Work Programme providers and were critical of their focus on profit maximisation.

A key feature of all partnerships has been the active involvement of **young people**. This has taken many forms but it is the move to co-design and on-going youth involvement that marks a key departure from previous labour market programmes. This has secured many benefits. Nevertheless, the distinctive elements of the programme were not the direct result of the involvement of young people e.g. the voluntary nature of participation, the conduct of outreach work, the use of grant funding, and the low caseloads of front-line staff. Moreover, there was an undercurrent of opinion that the emphasis was excessive and: *'feels as though it is becoming and end in itself'*.

The **geography of partnerships** has the potential to have a significant impact. A lack of job creation in some LEP areas will make it more difficult to help participants into work. The approach to geographic targeting (based on hotspots) varies markedly between partnerships and commitment to it appears to be waning in some quarters. Some partners feel uncomfortable with what they view as a 'postcode lottery' of delivery especially if it means turning individuals away from support. The strength of delivery organisations (the supply-chain) differs widely across some of the larger partnerships. Some of the rural parts of the Sheffield City Region are, for example, characterised by small and weak VCS bodies and many beneficiaries have been Jobcentre Plus referrals.

An important issue going forward will be the extent to which partnerships embrace the **'test and learn'** ethos of the programme. It is understandable given the 'difficult childbirth' of some partnerships that attention has now shifted to programme delivery. Nevertheless, there is also a genuine desire to develop innovative approaches to combating worklessness. There is also a sense that by providing grant funding and involving young people in co-design the Big Lottery has provided the necessary conditions for innovation to flourish. A broader question is what has been the impact of co-design and on-going youth participation and what difference, if any, will this have on programme outcomes.

Introduction

Talent Match is a Big Lottery Fund strategic programme investing £108 million in 21 Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) areas which have experienced particularly high levels of youth unemployment. The focus of the programme is on developing holistic approaches to combating worklessness amongst long-term NEETs. The success of the programme will largely depend on its ability to facilitate effective partnership working.

This report summarises the findings emerging from case study research on the theme of partnership working and development. This research used qualitative methods and drew on the experiences and perspectives of interviewees from across three TM partnerships. The report focuses on the key issues to emerge from this discrete research and particular aspects of learning of relevance to the wider TM Programme.

The remainder of the report is divided into two sections. Section Two provides an account of the research methods used and the rationale for case study selection. Section three represents the main body of the report and presents the qualitative findings. Wherever possible the intention has been to highlight issues that will be of wider relevance to TM partnerships and identify key issues for the Programme going forward.

Methods

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The report draws on the findings from qualitative interviews across three TM partnerships conducted between July and September 2014:

- Greater Manchester
- Leicester & Leicestershire
- Sheffield City Region.

A total of 19 individuals took part in the research: eight in Greater Manchester; four in Leicester and Leicestershire and seven in the Sheffield City Region. Interviewees typically involved a mix of:

- TM partnership Leads
- Young people centrally involved in the partnerships (e.g. on the Partnership Board, or parallel Young Person's Board)
- Public sector representative from core Partnership organisations
- Private sector representative from core Partnership organisations
- Third sector representatives from core Partnership organisations
- Jobcentre Plus
- delivery partners.

Table 2.1 identifies the rationale for the inclusion of partnerships. It should also be borne in mind that pragmatic considerations such as the willingness of partnerships to become involved as case studies also played a role in the final selection.

Table 2.1: Rationale for inclusion of partnerships

Partnership	Rationale for inclusion
Greater Manchester	The core partnership is small but strategically very strong with cross sector representation from key stakeholders within the youth sector and economic development. It works with a large number of delivery organisations. The intention is that Talent Coaches in delivery organisations work with a maximum of 10 young people at a time so that they do not become 'faceless' and impersonal. Greater Manchester provides an opportunity to look at how a model of tight, strategic partnership meets the challenge of managing a large number of delivery organisations.
Leicester & Leicestershire	Leicester and Leicestershire are led by a national VCS organisation (the Prince's Trust). The Trust has a strong track record of delivery of projects and programmes for young people and was identified early on as an appropriate lead organisation. A full-time Manager is employed by the Trust to work on Talent Match. The partnership is spatially targeted on five wards, each of which has an organisation acting as a 'community anchor'. Four of these wards are in Leicester and the other is in Coalville (Leicestershire).
Sheffield City Region	Sheffield City Region has had a difficult gestation. The leadership of the partnership was originally contested by several different organisations and the legitimacy of the chosen TM lead (Sheffield Futures) was questioned in some quarters. Furthermore, the partnership is one of the biggest outside London and comprises local authorities that differ widely in terms of the size and nature of their labour markets, experience of partnership working and VCS infrastructure.

Qualitative findings from the case studies

3.1. Origins of the Partnerships

The case study partnerships were all established to develop and deliver the TM programme. Nevertheless, the way in which the composition of Partnerships has been determined has differed significantly which has had some impact on implementation.

Leicester & Leicestershire

The partnership was shaped by guidance from the Big Lottery and its composition reflects a need to ensure an appropriate geographical and sector coverage. Some core partners were 'obvious' such as the local authority, others put themselves forward. The Prince's Trust is the lead organisation and is widely respected for its work with young people. It was already active in the area. The TM Partnership Manager is employed full-time, is well regarded and has pre-existing relationships with several local partners. The general feeling was that there was a good range of delivery partners including 'charismatic personalities' and of 'vibrant activities' with which young people can engage. Nevertheless, the resignation of the organisation commissioned to support the Youth Panel has been a challenge. Budgetary issues and insufficient capacity to undertake the necessary work were contributory factors. The strength of the partnership was illustrated by the TM delivery partners coming together at short notice in an extraordinary meeting and undertaking to share responsibility for youth engagement.

Sheffield City Region

The aim of achieving an appropriate geographical and sector coverage was also the key consideration in the determination of the Sheffield City Region partnership. However, an additional factor was the perceived need to placate a wide range of stakeholders. The TM Lead was initially contested by several organisations across the City Region. Consequently, Sheffield City Council became involved and led a selection process that resulted in Sheffield Futures being given the lead. This had caused some discontent given the close links between the two organisations and the feeling that Sheffield Futures are not natural partners to the third sector.

The result is that the Core Partnership Board is too big. *'They tried to keep everyone happy but it does not work'*. The partnership has also been adversely affected by the departure of its chief architect from Sheffield Futures. However, the replacement TM Manager is widely regarded as being instrumental in recovering the momentum of the partnership following a protracted and difficult start.

Greater Manchester

The composition of the partnership was determined by the Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisation (GMCVO) at the Expression of Interest (EOI) stage following a period of consultation. In contrast to Sheffield a key concern was to establish a strong but tight core partnership. It was pointed out that: *'you can't have 20 people round the table. You can always name someone else who should be involved'*. There is a strong tradition of partnership working in Greater Manchester and many of the partners have excellent working relationships which made building the partnership relatively straightforward. GMCVO was nominated as lead partner by majority vote at the bidding phase. It is widely acknowledged to be an appropriate lead for the programme.

3.2. Current Structures

The partnerships vary in size, reflecting programme size, geography and existing structures. Table 3.1 presents data on the number of core partners and the composition of the case study partnerships in terms of the split between organisations from the private, public and VCS sectors. The average number of partners per partnership for the programme as a whole is 14 and most have strong public and VCS representation. The comparatively small size of Greater Manchester's core partnership and the lack of private sector representation in the Sheffield City Region are both apparent.

Table 3.1: Partnership composition

Talent Match Partnership	No. of core partners	Private-public-VCS-other split
Greater Manchester	8	2-2-2-2
Leicester & Leicestershire	14	3-6-3-2
Sheffield City Region	14	0-6-5-3

Most operate at two levels, strategically to co-ordinate a diverse array of funding and also in delivery. A key difference in Greater Manchester is the decision to not include front-line delivery organisations from the Core Partnership (see later). There is also considerable variation in the level of strategic involvement. In Sheffield City Region, for example, organisations such as Jobcentre Plus and some local authorities appear to be playing a largely passive role.

Leicester & Leicestershire

Initially, the core and delivery partners worked together on TM decision-making in a single group. When TM became operational the delivery partners formed a separate Delivery Partner Group, but with representation on the Core Group. The TM Manager chairs both groups. Some interviewees felt that it would be helpful for both to meet together more regularly to help provide a more holistic view. The size and balance of the partnership (public/private/VCS) was reported to be appropriate and the different experiences and viewpoints of partners made for 'interesting discussions'. However, Work Programme providers (there are two in Leicester & Leicestershire) are not represented. A Memorandum of Understanding is being prepared such that TM representatives could go to Work Provider premises and eligible young people could be mandated to attend a TM interview. A view was expressed that the private sector was under-represented and that greater employer involvement would be more appropriate later when the benefits of their involvement

would be more readily apparent. It was felt that recruitment agency might be a useful addition to the partnership.

The attendance of young people at partnership meetings was beneficial because *'it reminds you constantly why we're here, to discuss how we can support people and make it work'*. But there needs to be clear parameters about the extent of such involvement, how this would be achieved and how young people would gain from it.

Sheffield City Region

The Core Board was widely felt to be unmanageable. A key interviewee ruefully noted that: *'Trying to get a meeting is a joke'*. Furthermore, there are 54 delivery partners spread across a wide geographical area. Consequently, a Strategic Steering Group has been formed with the TM Lead and representatives from five distinct geographical areas to drive implementation forward. There was no private sector representation on the Core Partnership which was acknowledged to be a problem and Work Programme providers have not been involved to any significant degree. Referral routes with the Work Programme provider are being developed.

Greater Manchester

The core partnership is small but strategically strong and has a good mix of organisations. It is chaired by the Chair of the Greater Manchester "Skills and Employment Partnership", the LEP committee overseeing the skills and employment strategy for Greater Manchester. It also includes the Greater Manchester Youth Network which is a key youth organisation in the sub-region and New Economy who provide information, research, and links to other employment and training programmes and networks. The focus is on governance and commissioning.

A key departure from other TM Partnerships is the decision not to include front-line delivery organisations within the Core Partnership. They are seen as 'host organisations' of Talent Coaches rather than as delivery partners within the overall partnership, although two Talent Coaches from host organisations do now attend the Steering Group which has a more operational role. One of these roles is rotated to ensure a number of different host organisations can take part in steering group meetings. This clear separation between governance/commissioning from delivery functions is argued to provide strategic coherence and clarity to the programme. However, one partner observed that this meant that front-line organisations were not represented at a strategic level. Smaller community and voluntary sector host organisations were not always represented. One of the key partners noted: *'Someone from the grassroots might be useful'*.

Greater Manchester has been proactive in involving the private sector. It has two major employers on the Core Partnership as well as the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce and Business in the Community (BITC). BITC has been instrumental in engaging the wider business community (see Box 3) and facilitates the Employer Champions group (which is chaired by the BBC).

3.3. The Effectiveness of Partnerships

Most partnerships have only recently moved into the implementation stage and so it is still too early to make a robust assessment of their effectiveness. Nevertheless, the indications are that partnerships are stable and beginning to function well:

- The TM Manager in Leicester & Leicestershire is well regarded and the internal diversity of the partnership and the fact that partners listened to others' views were highlighted.

- The Sheffield City Region partnership had: '*started messily but is now in a good place*'.
- The Greater Manchester partnership was reported to be: '*bedding down well*'. '*Everyone is empowered to say what they want, even youth members*'.

Strengths

The evaluation has identified a number of strengths:

- Leicester & Leicestershire partners are well networked internally and with other organisations not involved in TM.
- There appears to be a genuine appetite to 'test and learn' in Leicester & Leicestershire.
- The establishment of a Strategic Steering Group comprising the TM Lead supported by five area co-ordinators has been instrumental in managing a large complex partnership in the Sheffield City Region (see Box 3.1).
- Some dynamic delivery partners have been commissioned that are having some success in engaging hidden NEETs (see Box 3.2).
- Business in the Community has been instrumental in facilitating the active involvement of both private and statutory sector employers in Greater Manchester (see Box 3.3).

Box 3.1: The Management of Large Complex Partnerships

The Sheffield City Region encompasses more than 1.8 million people and approximately 700,000 jobs. It is centred on the city of Sheffield, includes several towns and has a significant rural economy. The Talent Match Partnership covers much of the City Region and comprises three distinct geographical areas: Sheffield; Rotherham, Barnsley and Doncaster; parts of North Derbyshire. They differ widely in terms of the size and nature of labour markets; experience of partnership working; and VCS infrastructure.

The TM Lead and five local co-ordinators form a Strategic Steering Group which meets monthly. This gives each area an equal voice around the table which is vital because: 'smaller areas will feel swamped by Sheffield'. The Derbyshire interviewee reported that their voice had been heard and valued. The Group acts as both a 'sounding board of ideas' and fulfils co-ordination and project management functions. The devolution of these functions means that the centre has ceded some control over what is being delivered 'on the ground' but it has been instrumental in fostering a collaborative approach. The strong working relationships established offers the potential of further collaborative funding bids and puts the VCS in the City Region in a stronger position to influence regional debates about how public funds are spent.

Box 3.2: The Engagement of Hidden NEETS

'I have been pleasantly surprised by our ability to reach hidden NEETs'. The outreach work undertaken by 'Football Unites Racism Divides' and the 'Really NEET College' was highlighted by several interviewees in the Sheffield City Region. FURD have a well established reputation for engaging young people through sport. They are currently engaging black and minority ethnic young people in the Central and Darnall areas of Sheffield.

The Really NEET College was established in 2011 to engage vulnerable young people who struggle in mainstream education. The College seeks to provide a safe learning environment for young people, who are not in Employment, Education or Training. It is salient to note that the founder was born in difficult circumstances which led to her becoming disengaged from

school. By 16 she had left home and spent two years homeless. She was able to re-engage in education through athletics and has subsequently led many projects engaging disadvantaged young people and has won two national prizes for her endeavours from Barclays and Crisis.

The Really NEET College are responsible for engaging and mentoring homeless young people across Sheffield. At the time of interview (August 2014) they were exceeding targets for engaging hidden NEETs. Their readiness to conduct outreach work in local communities; a willingness to work independently of mainstream government agencies; and an ability to deploy young coaches with first-hand knowledge of the difficulties faced by the target group appear to be key ingredients of their success. The high number of individuals referred through word-of-mouth is a testament of their excellent reputation in the communities that they serve.

Box 3.3: Securing Employer Involvement in Partnerships

It is difficult for individual private sector employers to represent the business sector as a whole because it is so diverse. Consequently, Business in the Community (BITC) has played an important role in Greater Manchester. BITC supports employers to achieve Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) objectives and has extensive contacts in the business community. It has been critical to securing the on-going participation of private and public sector employers. BITC also facilitates the Employer Champions Group.

The Employer Champions Group is made up of 17 employers. All have pledged opportunities (jobs, apprenticeships and other work related opportunities) once delivery begins because *'they feel ownership of the group and want it to succeed'*. The Group have also advised on commissioning processes and got involved in training Talent Coaches. They have also challenged misconceptions that formal recruitment processes exclude NEETs from employment in large employers. A major construction company has, for example, alerted Talent Coaches to the possibility of using the CSR programmes to provide mechanisms through which to recruit the hard-to-reach. Involving BITC has also expanded the reach of the programme to engage additional employers who are not directly involved.

Weaknesses

However, partnerships have also exhibited a number of weaknesses:

- The **leadership of partnerships** has been an issue in both the Sheffield City Region and Greater Manchester. In the former, the leadership was initially contested and the agency eventually chosen was felt by some to lack legitimacy. Whereas in Greater Manchester GMCVO was nominated by majority vote at the bidding phase but one interviewee suggested the programme lacked an 'obvious figurehead' to get the TM message out beyond key partners, particularly to private sector employers.
- There is a delicate balancing act between ensuring that **partnerships are inclusive but also manageable**. Political considerations and the need to cover a large geographical area have meant that there are too many representatives on the Sheffield City Region Core Board. In Leicester & Leicestershire TM is focused only on one ward in the county but four in the city, and there is a need to ensure that the needs of the county ward are not overlooked, even though there are more economic opportunities in the city. The Greater Manchester partnership is still 'finding its feet' in terms of providing the right level of information to Board members: *'you don't need 30 page reports'*. Some board meetings have had very long agendas and working through them can leave little time for discussion. Consequently, the four core organisations with delivery functions have addressed this by meeting prior to Board meetings. This has provided a forum for open and honest reflection.

- A relative lack of **employer engagement** has been a feature of both the Sheffield City Region and Leicester & Leicestershire partnerships. In the former, the priority has been to develop the partnership and the 'TM offer'. It was frequently pointed out that it is dangerous to engage the private sector when there is little to offer them. More recently, Sheffield Wednesday Football Club has become involved as a private sector partner. A wage incentive programme has been launched in Leicester city, initially to see what employer expectations are when working with 18-24 year olds furthest from the labour market. It is envisaged that this will help inform a longer-term employer engagement strategy developed by private sector partners. Greater Manchester has addressed this issue by getting employers to make an input into the training of Talent Coaches.
- **LEPs are not playing a significant role in most partnerships.** This compounds the problem of a relative lack of private sector representation and contributes to an overly public-sector feel of some partnerships. Sheffield City Region interviewees highlighted several barriers to effective partnership working with LEPs including their focus on inward investment; their targeting of comparatively well qualified young people in specific sectors such as advanced manufacturing; the recent refresh of the LEP Board and the small size of their team which compromises an ability to get involved in any meaningful way. *'It is difficult to get a dedicated input because this is not high up their agenda'*. By contrast, Greater Manchester have a strong commitment from the LEP. The Chair of the LEP's Skills and Employment Partnerships sits on the core partnership and Talent Match is also seen as a key project in the LEP's strategy for enabling young people to access employment.
- There are concerns with the **variable quality of delivery** in all partnerships. In Leicester & Leicestershire one interviewee raised the issue that it was not clear that quality standards had been incorporated when commissioning delivery partners (as would have been the case in a conventional tendering process). The variable quality of VCS infrastructure across the Sheffield City Region and absence of any single cross-city-region infrastructure body also emerged as a key issue. Whilst Sheffield has an array of high quality third sector organisations parts of Derbyshire are characterised by small and weak VCS providers. The high number of delivery partners and their exclusion from the Core Partnership were also raised as a potential issue by one interviewee in Greater Manchester.

3.4. Emerging Issues

Several issues have been highlighted that will warrant further attention as implementation progresses. These can be grouped into eight broad themes:

- The operational difficulties generated by long bidding and development periods.
- The low profile of the programme in some areas.
- The impact of austerity measures on partners and partnerships.
- The most appropriate ways to involve young people.
- Joint working with Jobcentre Plus and national programmes.
- Geographical differences.
- The balance between meeting programme targets and 'test and learn'.
- The importance of identifying and sharing learning.

Long lead-in periods

Many of those interviewed identified significant problems caused by what were perceived to be overly long lead-in periods. In Leicester & Leicestershire this posed a challenge in terms of maintaining the engagement of partners, especially smaller organisations and private sector organisations that tend to work on routinely faster turnaround times. This has also stymied efforts to engage the private sector in Sheffield City Region because there has been little hitherto to offer them.

Similarly, frustration was expressed by the Employer Champions Group in Greater Manchester about the time taken for the programme to start engaging young people. This has been partly addressed by getting employers to deliver workshops to newly recruited Talent Coaches. This has given employers a renewed sense of purpose. The involvement of BITC as an employer intermediary organisation has been critical to maintaining the on-going involvement and commitment of the private sector, especially when employers felt that the programme was slow to start.

Low profile of partnerships

The programme continues to be characterised by a low profile. This is understandable to a certain extent where partnerships have only very recently been officially launched as is the case in the Sheffield City Region. There was an implicit recognition of this problem in Greater Manchester exemplified by the calls for a 'figurehead' in the sense of a widely-recognised figure such as a high profile business leader who could spread the message about TM beyond organisations directly involved in implementation. The low profile of pilots can generate operational problems, a delivery partner in Sheffield reported that it was more difficult to market the programme to young people and employers.

Austerity

TM has been launched at a time of unprecedented public expenditure reductions and welfare reform. The indications are that this is not yet having a significant impact on implementation. Nevertheless, a delivery partner in Leicester has had its public sector funding cut which may have consequences for staffing levels and thus delivery. Similarly, another partner had merged resulting in coverage of a larger geographical area which might compromise the need for consistent representation on the TM Partnership. In the Sheffield City Region the parlous finances of some delivery partners has made it necessary to: *'front-load some providers with cash for delivery'*. More broadly, ongoing welfare reforms are raising important questions about the identity of the programme and its relationship to national programmes such as the Work Programme (see later).

Youth involvement

A key feature of all partnerships has been the involvement of young people. This has taken many forms but it is the move to co-design and on-going youth involvement that marks a key departure from previous labour market programmes. This was specifically identified as a positive feature of the Leicester & Leicestershire programme which it is anticipated might lead to something different from previous initiatives. This was reflected in the words used to describe the partnership with "innovative" being the most commonly used descriptor.

The Greater Manchester Youth Network has played an important role in securing the involvement of young people. The Youth Panel has been represented on every single group within the partnership. They have played an important role in the design of the programme; the idea for Talent Coaches emanated from young people.

Furthermore experience has also demonstrated the value of involving young people in co-design. The Youth Panel was, for example, the first to highlight the potential conflict of interest when the idea of deploying young people from delivery organisations to get involved in 'mystery shopper' evaluation activities was mooted.

Similarly, young people have played a significant role in the design of the Sheffield City Region intervention identifying the need for a trusted individual to help guide them; scoring bids in commissioning activities and selecting TM Coaches. However, it is salient to note that key elements of the programme that make it distinctive were not the result of the involvement of young people e.g. the voluntary nature of participation, the conduct of outreach work in deprived communities, the use of grant funding, and the low caseloads of front-line staff. Moreover, there was an undercurrent of opinion amongst some of those consulted that the emphasis on young people was excessive and: *'feels as though it is becoming an end in itself'*.

Joint working with national programmes

The alignment, co-ordination and joint working with national programmes such as the Work Programme and the Youth Contract are topics deserving of further attention. The voice of national programme providers has largely been absent from partnerships although a number are developing closer working relationships now that TM has become operational. There is a need for some form of dialogue since many partnerships will work with individuals from such programmes. Nevertheless, the fieldwork has revealed a range of opinions regarding the necessity and desirability of fostering closer joint working with national programmes:

- Some of those interviewed acknowledged that the realisation of targets would necessitate working with Jobcentre Plus and Work Programme providers and sought positive working relationships.
- Others were implacably opposed viewing Jobcentre Plus and national programmes as constituting conditional welfare which emphasises compulsion and sanctioning. From this perspective TM was viewed as a positive alternative to 'punitive' national programmes.
- Another argument was that working too closely with national programmes heightened the risk of duplication and undermined the distinctiveness of the TM programme. Such interviewees often stressed the importance of outreach working designed to reach those not engaging with mainstream support.
- Others were wary of the danger of subsidising the job outcomes of Work Programme providers and were critical of their focus on profit maximisation.

Geographical differences

The geography of partnerships has the potential to have a significant impact on implementation:

- A comparative lack of job creation in some LEP areas will make it more difficult for some partnerships to help participants into work.
- The approach to geographic targeting varies widely and appears to be in a state of flux.
- The strength of delivery organisations (the supply-chain) differs widely across some of the larger partnerships.

The approach to geographic targeting (based on hotspots) was considered to be a defining feature of Talent Match. However, the extent of geographic targeting varies markedly between partnerships and commitment to it seems to be waning in some

quarters. In Leicester & Leicestershire the model is founded on 'localism' with local community engagement in defined areas. The rationale for selecting 'hotspots' was to develop a strong understanding of community needs and target resources accordingly. Yet questions have already been raised by some interviewees about whether this strong geographical focus should continue. Some partners feel uncomfortable with what they perceive as a 'postcode lottery' of delivery especially if it means turning individuals away from support.

Outreach in defined communities is also a key component of the Sheffield City Region model. However, the capacity to engage in effective outreach work varies markedly across the area. Parts of Derbyshire are characterised by small and weak VCS bodies and it is salient to note that the early indications are that many beneficiaries may have been Jobcentre Plus referrals. It is perhaps not a coincidence that core partner here felt it was important to ensure that delivery partners do not concentrate on those easiest to reach.

Programme delivery and 'test & learn'

An important issue going forward will be the extent to which partnerships embrace the 'test and learn' ethos of TM or view it predominantly as just another programme to deliver. It is, perhaps, understandable given the 'difficult childbirth' of some partnerships that attention has now shifted to programme delivery. Nevertheless, the present research has also identified a genuine desire to do something different and develop innovative approaches to combating worklessness amongst long-term NEETs. There is also a sense that by providing grant funding and involving young people in co-design of the intervention the Big Lottery has provided the necessary conditions for innovation to flourish. A broader question is what has been the impact of co-design and on-going youth participation. What differences, if any, will this have on programme outcomes. It is still 'too early' to come to any definitive conclusions about these issues.

The need to capture and share learning

A key feature of the programme is the testing of different local approaches and the sharing of experience to improve practice. There is a general recognition of the importance of sharing information about what works but partnerships differ in the extent to which they have put the necessary systems in place:

- There have been bilateral visits involving delivery partners in Leicester & Leicestershire so that they can learn from each other. The TM Manager has also instituted a system of quarterly reports to document activities and whether they are successful. This enables the Lead to ascertain whether common issues are arising and facilitates more general learning. Members of the Greater Manchester team have also visited projects in London, Liverpool and Hull to share learning.
- The Strategic Steering Group in the Sheffield City Region discusses implementation issues including what is working well/not working well. However, a delivery partner reported: '*All delivery partners are doing their own thing*'. A key priority was the establishment of systems to allow delivery partners across the area to share their experiences.
- The exclusion of frontline delivery partners from the Greater Manchester Core Partnership raises potential issues about how information and learning is fed upwards from grassroots delivery of the programme. Frontline organisations and Talent Coaches are represented on the Steering Group and Employer Champions group so effective communication between these levels of

governance and the Core Partnership Board will be crucial in ensuring their voice is heard.

- It is possible that commercial considerations may make some organisations wary of sharing 'best practice'. There was some tacit acknowledgement that this sort of information might be invaluable in informing future funding bids.