

Talent Match case study theme report : "A challenge to the status quo" : early experiences of involving young people in the Talent Match programme

BASHIR, Nadia, CRISP, Richard, POWELL, Ryan and ATFIELD, Gaby

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Talent Match Case Study Theme Report

"A challenge to the status quo": Early experiences of Involving Young People in the Talent Match programme

Gaby Atfield

Nadia Bashir

Richard Crisp

Ryan Powell

December 2014

Contents

Acknowledgements	i
Summary	ii
1. Introduction	1
2. Methods	2
3. Qualitative findings from the case studies	4
3.1. Variable experiences of youth involvement prior to joining Talent Match	5
3.2. Involving young people as an opportunity and a challenge to partnership organisations ..	7
3.3. Young people and the shaping of the TM programme	9
3.4. Formal partnership meetings and the engagement of young people.....	10
3.5. Partnership methods for engagement and involvement	11
3.6. Diversity of those engaged	15
3.7. Maintaining engagement and turnover.....	15
3.8. Barriers to the engagement and involvement of young people	17
3.9. Benefits of involving young people	18
3.10. Learning from the experience so far.....	20
3.11. Looking ahead	22

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Summary

- Placing young people at the heart of Talent Match is its defining characteristic for most people involved, across all ages. It represents an ambitious and innovative approach with very few examples of similar approaches in past employment interventions for the 18-24 age group.
- The extent of partnerships' previous experience of involving young people in co-design varies greatly. For some, it is a new experience involving a steep learning curve and a great deal of testing and learning, while for others, the key issue is adapting already existing ways of working to the specific challenges of Talent Match.
- The involvement of young people is not 'all or nothing'. Identifying areas where young people's involvement is crucial is important, but so is identifying those areas where their involvement is less beneficial, or where there is less interest. The process of determining what constitutes both over- and under-involvement is ongoing in partnerships.
- Moving beyond simply consulting young people to facilitating young people's leadership is challenging, but provides an opportunity to make TM something that is genuinely unique and which makes a real difference in young people's lives.
- Buy-in from young people and organisations is a key issue. This involves clear communication of the rationale for involving young people and the benefits of doing so.
- Co-development and co-production are significantly hindered by both a lack of resources and a lack of ownership among those engaged. Successful engagement with young people takes a great deal of time and effort, and also a genuine desire to drive it forward.
- Some young people - including those with disabilities, issues with confidence and previously poor relationships with authority figures - require additional support if they are to be effectively engaged, but engagement with these groups is particularly important for Talent Match, as these are the people it hopes to benefit most.
- Participation in formal decision-making processes is a new experience for the majority of young people. Various initiatives can make this less daunting. These include providing dedicated time and space for young people to contribute, ensuring that there are enough young people involved that they do not feel out-numbered, paying attention to the language and methods used in presenting information.
- The establishment of youth boards and groups tasked with particular responsibilities has been found both to encourage engagement in a broad sense and to develop the personal, social and work-related skills of the young people involved.
- Peer-to-peer approaches encourage the involvement of young people in a way that more formal recruitment processes may not.
- Maintaining the involvement of young people can be challenging, but turnover of the young people involved is not necessarily a negative outcome. Care needs to be taken to ensure that turn-over is occurring for positive reasons, for example, because the young person has found employment, and not for negative reasons, for example, lack of reward.
- Barriers to engaging young people in co-design and co-production include: a lack of confidence on the part of young people; negative prior experiences of engagement with authority; accessing the most alienated and hard-to-reach; the capacity of the organisations

involved, particularly those hit by funding cuts; and issues concerning benefit payments and JSA for the young people involved.

- Benefits to engaging young people in co-design and co-production include: increased well-being and confidence on the part of the young people involved; training opportunities and skills development; new ideas and enthusiasm and energy brought by the young people; better outcomes for TM beneficiaries; a wider impact on partnership organisations in terms of adapting to intergenerational working practices; and, crucially, a sense of "being heard" and "listened to" which is often contrasted favourably with engagements with other organisations (e.g. Jobcentre Plus (JCP)).
- Approaches to involving young people are evolving and will continue to evolve as TM proceeds, with new opportunities, challenges and learning emerging as the programme progresses. For example, knowing when to involve young people, on which issues and accommodating different skills sets, capabilities and circumstances emerge as key challenges moving forward.

Introduction

This report summarises the findings from case study research on the theme of "involving young people" within Talent Match (TM) partnerships. 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 in 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 under specific themes to emerge from the discussions and analysis. Where relevant, key learning points are also highlighted and reflected upon; as well as ongoing issues related to the involvement of young people likely to continue as the programme progresses.

Methods

2

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

- Cornwall and Isles of Scilly
- London
- Northamptonshire.

A total of 25 individuals took part in the research: ten in Cornwall; eight in London; and seven in Northamptonshire. Interviewees typically involved a mix of:

- TM partnership Leads
- Youth Involvement Worker (or equivalent)
- (a minimum of three) young people engaged with the Partnership
- TM Apprentices
- representatives from core partnership organisations
- delivery partners.

Most interviews were one-to-one and face-to-face, although several interviews were conducted with more than one respondent present. One interview was conducted via telephone as the respondent was away at the time the researchers visited. All the interviews were recorded and over half were fully transcribed. Information from the remainder was captured through notes and re-visiting interview recordings where necessary.

The partnerships were selected on the basis of a number of characteristics, as well as other pragmatic criteria such as: their willingness to be involved as a case study; and the respective stage of delivery (i.e. some partnerships had not commenced delivery at the time of the fieldwork and were therefore excluded from the selection process). Table 2.1 below sets out the other criteria informing their selection.

Table 2.1: Rationale for inclusion of partnerships

LEP area	Rationale
Cornwall & Isles of Scilly	Rural, isolated area; whole county approach with town hubs; smaller grant funding; history of partnership working across the county; experience of engaging with young people.
London	Urban area; large grant award; spatially targeted; youth organisation with a history of engaging young people and youth involvement.
Northamptonshire	Urban, second tier (i.e. not a core city); smaller grant funding; low beneficiary target; less experience of engaging and involving young people.

Several key aspects are worth emphasising here:

- **Cornwall** is included primarily due to its rurality which presents a particular challenge to engaging young people and sustaining their involvement.
- **London** is included due to its urban nature and the experience of its lead partner in engaging young people as a youth organisation.
- **Northamptonshire** represents a partnership with less experience of involving young people in the design and delivery of interventions.

Table 2.2 below presents some of the key characteristics of the three partnerships. This gives an indication of the variation across them in terms of resources, delivery targets and spatial focus. Given this variation it is reasonable to expect some differences in terms of the experiences of involving young people in the TM programme so far, and this is evident in what follows.

Table 2.2: Context - key characteristics of partnerships

Characteristic	Cornwall & Isles of Scilly	London	Northamptonshire
<i>Lead organisation</i>	Real Ideas Organisation	London Youth	Enable
<i>Dedicated TM staff (FTEs)</i>	1.5	7	10
<i>No. of partners</i>	7	14	15
<i>Stage 2 grant award</i>	£1,728,085	£9,944,800	£1,794,918
<i>Beneficiary target</i>	1,075	2,500	500
<i>Employment target (%)</i>	27	25	20
<i>Cost per beneficiary</i>	£1,608	£3,978	£3,590
<i>Urban-rural classification</i>	Rural	Urban	Urban
<i>Geographic targeting</i>	Whole county: town hubs	Spatial targeting: wards	Spatial targeting: wards
<i>Job creation</i>	No	Yes	No

3

Qualitative findings from the case studies

Given the nature of TM it is inevitable that there will be a diversity of approaches towards involving young people. It is therefore useful at the outset to set out the formalised groups and boards through which young people engage at each of the three case study partnerships. Table 3.1 below presents a summary of this information by partnership. These different groups and structures are referred to throughout the remainder of the report.

Table 3.1: Examples of mechanisms for involving young people

Partnership	Group	Description
<i>Cornwall</i>	Generation E	All beneficiaries who sign up for TM Cornwall join the Generation E group. They work closely with the TM Apprentices and are also represented on the core partnership board with any issues emerging from the group fed in. As the project progresses there will be a Generation E group within each of the 8 town hubs identified across the county.
	TM Apprentices	There are six TM Apprentices involved in the delivery of TM Cornwall. Each has specific responsibility for recruitment within a defined area (town hubs); and each lead on different aspects of delivery in line with their skills and interests e.g. beneficiary journey planning.
<i>London</i>	Youth Boards	The main mechanism for engaging young people, the Youth Board works to fulfil the aims of the TM programme. A core TM Youth Board consists of representatives from each delivery partnership's Youth Board. Members of the Youth Board are paid an hourly wage for their time. Roles include: participation in meetings; steering the development of the project; training and peer facilitation; research with young people; and planning events.
<i>Northants</i>	TM Champions	TM Champions are young people who are employed as peer mentors. Two contracts were awarded (Groundwork for Kettering; Mayday Trust in Wellingborough), for hosting three TM Champions each. They provide training for them in using systems and mentoring.
	Challenge Group	Initially formed from the young people who were involved in early consultations, the aim is that TM beneficiaries should join the group "when they are ready". There will be "5 Challenges in 5 Years". Each year the Challenge Group will decide on an event or project that they would like to run and they will be given a specific budget to do it (of around £500).

3.1. Variable experiences of youth involvement prior to joining Talent Match

A key issue affecting the different approaches and progress of partnerships in terms of the involvement of young people was the nature and experience of the Lead organisation in terms of co-design with young people. The experience of the Enable in Northants, as is the case with several other TM partnerships, had been one of leading and managing contracts with a clear separation between that strategic function and delivery ensuring there was never a "conflict of interest".

"Prior to Talent Match involving young people in decision-making was not something that we'd done a huge amount of as an organisation ...[engagement] was something we'd looked to our partners involved, who were very much youth-orientated organisations...So I suppose for us Talent Match was a huge challenge" (Partnership Lead - Northants)

On the other hand, London Youth found themselves better placed to respond to the co-production ethos of TM from the outset, due to their differing position, approach and structure as a youth organisation.

"[There was] acknowledgement from day one that young people would be at the heart of this...If a different organisation had been awarded the contract, I'm not convinced it would have come out as clearly. I think it is particularly the case because they came from a youth work perspective and that's what's driven it" (Core Partnership - London)

Many of the staff at London Youth were immersed in these issues and had extensive experience of outreach with vulnerable young people.

"Yeah my background is as a youth worker and a careers advisor, so I basically have always worked with young people...who are in the NEET group" (Partnership Lead - London)

These experiences had prompted the inclusion of a youth involvement officer as part of TM with specific responsibility for the co-ordination and support of young people.

"It's important to have someone who holds the whole team to account and knows what is going on throughout the whole team....and to get young people to lead, some support to push them in that direction, if there wasn't someone committed to doing that, it wouldn't happen" (Youth Involvement Officer - London)

This was valued greatly by the members of the Youth Board who were appreciative of the steer provided by this support.

"[The Youth Involvement Officer] has been able to lead us and guide us and make sure that youth involvement is hard-hitting in the organisation" (Youth Board member - London)

"When we come to monthly meetings we have so many ideas, but it's like 'what do we do with it? Where do we start and stuff? And she kind of gives us like a straight pathway" (Youth Board member - London)

The Lead partner for TM Cornwall, the Real Ideas Organisation (RIO), were somewhere in between these two positions. Members of the RIO staff have experience of youth work, engagement and outreach, but the organisation itself was not a typical youth organisation.

"Real itself isn't particularly what you'd classify as a youth organisation ... My background is in youth work, I'm a qualified youth worker ...so what we bring to the fore is that knowledge and expertise of engagement and involvement with young people" (Partnership Lead - Cornwall)

Inevitably, there was further diversity of experience across organisations within the wider partnership in the three areas.

"It's mixed... [some] organisations have set structures that haven't necessarily involved clients in service design before as a concept generally...Other organisations are more used to working in that way, would get that straight away, but haven't done it as a board function or done it at the level that influences programme design" (Partnership Lead - London)

RECOGNISING A LACK OF EXPERIENCE AND ADDRESSING IT: THE EXPERIENCE OF TM NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

Recognising their lack of experience in working with young people, Northamptonshire put out a tender for an organisation to lead the young engagement aspect of the project. This involved managing not just young people's involvement in decision-making, but also engaging beneficiaries. This was awarded to Groundwork, a community and youth organisation with a lot of experience of engaging young people. One young woman was one of the four people on the interview panel for awarding this contract and this proved to be very beneficial as they saw in the interviews that there were some organisations who completely ignored her, addressing their responses (even to questions that she had asked) to the Enable Chief Executive and other members of the interview panel. Seeing this allowed them to weed out organisations who would likely not engage with young people as equals in guiding the project. The views of the young woman on the panel were given as much, if not more, consideration than the other members of the panel because as a young person she was very much the expert on what young people wanted and how they should be engaged.

Around the same time, two contracts were awarded for hosting the TM Champions (young people who are paid mentors). These contracts were awarded to Groundwork for Kettering and the Mayday Trust in Wellingborough and they each host three TM Champions and provide training for them. These developments have been positive in ensuring that there is someone for whom the involvement of young people is a central issue and who has access to young people who they can involve. It has also shifted the balance at the core partnership meetings, because the TM Champions now attend. So, instead of there being one or two young people alone in an intimidating "roomful of men in suits", there are now 6 to 8 young people in the room and an agenda item at every meeting to allow the TM Champions to speak. The TM Champions were very positive about the opportunities available to them to present ideas and have those ideas refined and acted upon.

Some partnership member organisations *were* very much youth-led and brought with them specific expertise and knowledge in this area that enhanced the partnership overall. The strong history of partnership working within Cornwall, for instance, proved a benefit to TM Cornwall.

"Cornwall is a very small county, small and long, and very much dependent on partnership working...so what we also have is a range of strong links and partnerships with what you would call traditional youth work organisations, which enables us not only to tap into young people but also the skills, knowledge and expertise that those organisations bring" (Partnership Lead - Cornwall)

Of course, in most cases young people themselves were also new to this kind of engagement and partnership working, but the experience of those interviewed was more one of positivity, rather than challenge. The young people we spoke to who were engaged had really embraced TM.

"Other companies and agencies have structures and you have to just go along with it, but this is shaped by the young people" (TM Champion - Northants)

"Having this much like influence, to influence this cool project, and all this money and everything like that, it gives you a lot of confidence first of all, and I think everybody has started to own it a lot more now...I think everyone's really come out of their shell" (Youth Board Member - London)

"It's one of those things, it does not matter how young we are, because it is designed to be young person-led, and I think they take that on board as well" (TM Champion - Northants)

3.2. Involving young people as an opportunity and a challenge to partnership organisations

Placing young people at the centre of the programme is the defining feature of TM for the vast majority of people involved in the programme. The concept of a programme for young people that was *genuinely youth-led* was seen as an exciting opportunity to be innovative and a departure from past projects: *"instead of being a staff continuity tool it's actually delivering something new"* (Core Partnership - Cornwall). It also represented a particular challenge for organisations across the three partnerships however. TM was invariably viewed as something "completely new", which went far beyond some people's understanding of what "youth involvement" was. Ultimately, TM is a new way of working for the vast majority of individuals and organisations involved, to a degree.

"What struck me at the residential is this vast void between involving young people, which lots of people do... but then moving from that youth participation to young people actually leading something is, I think, beyond most people's comprehension. If you talk to the majority of people involved in anything to do with youth I don't think that will have been their experience" (Core Partnership member - London)

"It didn't fit people's comfort zones or understanding, it was something different so I think people were struggling...this was all new...using young people to connect with other young people, so I think that was something that wasn't quite within all our experience" (Core Partnership member - Northants)

While the issues presented by differing experiences, work practices, structures and organisational resources and capacity were by no means insignificant, the challenge of communicating the approach and securing buy-in was embraced across the three partnerships. Some key lessons were learned early on about how to bring other organisations along.

"I suppose the lessons are how to communicate this type of approach, relationship based or asset based to other organisations who don't always know what that means. That's an educational and awareness raising issue, because it is very different and it has to be different because what's gone before hasn't perhaps worked so well and in itself was marginalising young people or isolating and not giving hope perhaps to many" (Core Partnership member - Northants)

In London, for example, a great deal of effort was put in early on in establishing Youth Boards and thereby embedding the voices of young people into various partner organisations.

"A lot of the focus for us at London Youth has been supporting [the development of Youth Boards] because quite a few of the organisations in the partnership don't identify as youth-led organisations in any way, or have very little experience of youth involvement" (Partnership Lead - London)

However, interviewees still reported tensions within partnerships in terms of articulating the benefits and rationale of a youth-led approach. This also raised issues around a "clash of cultures" between young people and professionals, with pressures on the latter to be more flexible in their approach.

"I think some of the flexibility we have with Talent Match is really stressful for some of our members of staff... we're not used to being able to work with that amount of flexibility. Once you get your head round the way the Lottery works and how they want the funding to be used it's a really positive experience because you're no longer constricted by funders" (Partnership Lead - Northants)

These tensions were neatly summed up in the following quote where the respondent distinguishes between subscribing to the philosophy of TM and actually translating that into practice.

"Subscribing to the philosophy of Talent Match is easy to do and it's seen as being quite progressive and all that stuff, but at the end of the day they are going to need to come to terms with the fact that they're involving people in decision-making who are essentially going to offer an alternative perspective based on experience and instinct, they're not going to be trained or have the critical analysis skills of a professional who's been in the business for a while, and that's what they have to come to terms with and be able to reconcile: Do we want to hear and act on what these young people are saying? Or are we only going to do it lip service because actually we don't respect them as critically aware decision making entities in their own right?" (Interview respondent)

Many respondents also spoke of the limits to young people's involvement in the sense that some aspects of the programme were of less interest and better led by professionals. This emerged as a key issue across the three partnerships (and also in various discussions with those not included as case studies). There appeared to be a tension between the requirement to involve young people in every aspect of partnership decision-making and the fact that some issues are of less interest, or are more difficult for young people to grasp (e.g. the technicalities of European funding). This was a key learning aspect in Northamptonshire and is an issue that is likely to be prominent across partnerships moving forward.

"We learnt quite rapidly that we need to consider where young people could and should and where it's an absolute deal breaker for them to be involved, and where their expertise is not necessarily the right place to share" (Partnership Lead - Northants)

There was therefore a balance to be struck with young people and professionals working in tandem, but there was also recognition that there were timescales to the delivery of the programme. This called for a flexible and pragmatic approach.

"There might be tasks or activities that need to be less led by young people and more about consultation depending on what the activity is, so it's quite a fluid

approach...sometimes to get things done in the right timescale we need to get that balance right" (Partnership Lead - London)

As partnerships had developed and there was a relationship of trust between young people and professionals, then the former were more comfortable with deferring to the latter on more technical issues.

"As relationships have developed we find we don't need to explain the minutiae of every detail and technicality to YP...they accept they don't need to know the intricacies of funding and finance for instance and they trust us to" (Core Partnership member - Cornwall)

3.3. Young people and the shaping of the TM programme

The project plan documents submitted by partnerships in the development phase evidence the extensive involvement of young people in the design of the 21 TM projects. Interviews across the case studies supported this assertion and evidenced the role of young people in shaping projects.

"At the moment I'm part of London TM Youth Board, before that I was involved in creating the whole programme...we went away for a residential and thought about things that would be useful for young people. We came up with a journey of change" (Youth Board member - London)

The consultation groups established in Northamptonshire were said to have been critical in improving their proposal; as was the case during the development phase in London.

"The young people made a very powerful resume of where they are in their lives and the things that haven't worked. [One young woman] was explaining how they seemed to be given the same initiatives over and over again and they go round and round and get nowhere, so it became apparent that they didn't want more of the same, they didn't feel engaged with employment services, or didn't feel helped" (Core Partnership member - Northants)

"There had been loads of work done particularly in the development phase and business planning around how things would work and involving young people" (Partnership Lead - London)

Interviews also uncovered a number of issues and learning points that emerged as this key development stage progressed. The length of time involved in the development phase was seen as both a positive and a negative in some cases. On the one hand, it stalled momentum as the young people engaged moved on to education or employment:

"The project lost a bit of momentum because there were issues of amounts of funding and the targets and it had to be tightened up, so I think that affected the involvement at that time" (Core Partnership member - Northants)

On the other hand, however, the long lead-in time was beneficial in some cases and reinforced the notion that to genuinely involve young people takes greater time and effort. There was recognition that relationships had to be built and that young people would not be taking control of projects and leading activities at the very outset.

"I think that's where you get to, I think you start off listening to a young person and being really polite and then you get to hopefully a place where they have an

equal standing and partnership in the group" (Core Partnership member - London)

Indeed, there was widespread acknowledgement across the partnerships that co-production inevitably takes longer and this was viewed as inevitable by most. For example, in Cornwall there was a commitment to inclusive consultation and engagement across the range of beneficiary types that the programme was intending to target. Some individuals had particular barriers to overcome and therefore had greater support needs. In this sense, development time was recognised as a necessary and key part of the process if it was to be done properly.

"The interesting things for us and one of the things it shows is the idea that the time it takes to actually begin to do something like this, to do it properly... because of that engagement they've had in designing and being involved at every level and every stage of development of the Talent Match programme" (Core Partnership member - Cornwall)

"We know how much time and effort it takes, and because we know young people are going to need all those phone calls, they're going to need more support, we knew there needed to be a resource...we've made a massive resource for youth involvement and it's been a massive priority for us" (Youth Involvement Officer - London)

Ultimately, across the three case studies, the extensive involvement and diversity of young people in the design and development phase had brought major benefits and raised issues and considerations that would not have been addressed otherwise. As well as better responding to the needs of local young people and instilling ownership in the programme, it also represented the start of a trusting relationship between young people and professionals within partnerships. This was seen as a critical aspect of genuine co-production.

"One of the things I think it began to build was a level of trust which could ultimately lead to co-dependence that you wouldn't get in any other way. Maybe London Youth would have come up with that way of doing it, but it struck me that that was largely to do with young people saying what's really important at the beginning of this programme is these different providers need to work well together cos otherwise this isn't going to work" (Core Partnership member - London)

3.4. Formal partnership meetings and the engagement of young people

Across the three case studies respondents spoke of the formal nature of meetings as a potential turn off for young people without previous experience of that environment. This was a common theme, particularly given the low levels of confidence among many young people.

"One of the issues we're going to have is the steering groups at the moment are very formal... We can't expect young people to just come into that and fit in, in actual fact what we need to be doing is doing it the other way round so the steering group fits around the young people... so it's about how we move that forward" (Partnership Lead - Cornwall)

In Northamptonshire it was recognised that the number of young people represented on the partnership board was initially too low. This was considered quite intimidating for young people and countered against their full engagement and contributions at meetings:

"With just a small representation you're overwhelmed, you don't have a voice, you feel it's more oppressive, it's not meant to be but it is, confident people in leading positions putting their point of view forward in a very affirmative way, not meaning to be disrespectful but it does oppress and maybe that's where it could have been different" (Core Partnership member - Northants)

In the 'test and learn' spirit of TM, Northamptonshire had sought to redress the balance by not only including more young people on the partnership board but by changing the way meetings functioned.

"I'm hopeful that by doing things a bit differently, and being a bit more fun and a bit more user-led, I think there's a danger that sitting in a panel in a board meeting is not something that's exciting to all young people and then you end up with a very narrow view" (Partnership Lead - Northants)

One particular innovation was to get young people to make a short video which was then played at the meeting rather than them presenting to a full room. This served to ease young people into the more formalised environment and was seen as very successful.

"On Channel 4 they do these mini monologues so they came up with this idea that they'd do their own and present it, so rather than clamming up and not talking, they'd done it already so rather than having to stand up and present it, they did it in the safety of their own environment and then they could just talk about it, so they filmed it and played it at the meeting, it was quite powerful" (Partnership Lead - Northants)

Putting young people at ease in more formal settings was also an important aspect of encouraging them to speak up if they did not understand things. Where new and sometimes complex issues and topics were discussed, young people were more likely to admit not being able to follow things where they felt the confidence to do so. This then had knock-on effects by triggering some information to be presented in a different way.

"X is great, he's more likely to say 'I've not got a clue what you're talking about it' which is brilliant and that's what we need through all of them. I'm getting reports through that I'm sending off... I then have to reframe that and one of the suggestions has been use infographics, so we're now using infographics as a way of presenting some of the statistics which are easy to digest" (Partnership Lead - Cornwall)

3.5. Partnership methods for engagement and involvement

Beyond formal meetings there were many and varied opportunities for young people to engage with the TM programme. For instance, in Cornwall, all TM beneficiaries become members of the Generation E group which meets separately to the partnership steering group. The views of Generation E are then fed into the partnership board with the generation E group represented on it.

"Each young person who is signed up to Talent Match automatically becomes a member of Generation E...The expectation will then be that those young people who attend those meetings, anybody who's particularly keen or motivated to attend the steering group meetings will then be asked to attend" (Partnership Lead - Cornwall)

In London the established approach of Youth Boards was seen as a key way of facilitating the wider involvement of young people across the different areas in which

TM London operated. The existence of different youth boards in different boroughs of the capital meant they could respond better to local needs and issues and they would develop organically.

"If you want to have a say in the delivery of Talent Match you can join one of the delivery partners in the area, join the Talent Scouts, or the Youth Boards that are up and running" (Youth Board member - London)

"On a programme level, I guess the youth board is the central point at which [involvement] happens and then locally there'll be differences in what that youth board decides is needed in order to engage other young people in it, that sounds really woolly but there isn't a set answer to that" (Partnership Lead - London)

There was then a central Youth Board that oversees the programme London-wide, with different teams taking the lead on particular aspects of delivery.

"Our youth board that we have at London Youth that oversee the London programme, there's 18 young people on that youth board and they're split into three teams, one team is programmes, one team is communications and policy and one is employer engagement" (Partnership Lead - London)

There was a general consensus across respondents that the most effective means of engaging young people was through a **peer-to-peer approach**. Experiences in this area had been extremely positive and had surprised some of those involved.

"When we first started a couple of us thought that us being young people, why are they going to listen to us? It's the complete opposite, they do listen to us and it's awesome!" (TM Apprentice - Cornwall)

In London there was more recent experience of this approach, prior to TM, and this informed the view that young people were best placed to recruit beneficiaries and to "sell" the project to them.

"One thing we've known through the youth work we've been doing for the past couple of years is that peers are the best people to speak to their peers...we've tried to do it on a one-to-one basis and it just doesn't work, they've got their language, they know the angle to sell the project" (Delivery partner - London)

This aspect of TM was viewed as particularly innovative and the presence of young people who had been in similar circumstances to beneficiaries was deemed essential.

"If you walk into the Job Centre, they are all quite a bit older, whereas if you go in somewhere and there are people on your level, you don't feel as judged. Coming in here, being out of employment for two years could embarrass some people, so being able to speak to someone who has been there and done it, being on your level and not feeling looked down on" (TM Champion - Northamptonshire)

"What's really amazing is the opportunity to be genuinely innovative and to meet needs...it's very difficult to do that without people with lived experiences of being in that world and needing that support...it makes the programme exciting and it makes the right young people want to engage" (Partnership Lead - TM London)

PEER-TO-PEER ENGAGEMENT: THE EXPERIENCE OF TM CORNWALL APPRENTICES

In Cornwall, the early work of TM Apprentices in engaging and recruiting young people had brought much success. Apprentices had their own town hubs where they sought to recruit to the programme.

"The engagement with young people as far as the apprentices goes I think has worked particularly well, primarily because what we were able to do through a course that was funded through ESF, we were able to give them a youth work qualification over a period of weeks which was almost a precursor to interview, and what that did was exposed those young people to a range of organisations and also the principles and practices of good youth work" (Partnership Lead - Cornwall)

Apprentices received formal training and gained a youth work qualification and a consequence felt well-equipped to go out and recruit.

"Five of us six did a level 2 youth worker course before we started our apprenticeship...we also had some money management training and how to spot people in the community, so for us it would be Talent Match members that might be in financial trouble and you can help them to deal with and manage debt and consolidate it all" (TM Apprentice - Cornwall)

The particular advantages of this being led by Apprentices were very apparent. It was felt that young people were more open and willing to engage with Apprentices than they were with older professionals. A key consideration here was the sense of being equals, the non-mandatory nature of TM and the fact that Apprentices were there to help rather than push young people into doing something they might not necessarily want to do.

"What I think we found is that young people are much more ready to engage with young people than they are with some of the adult workers in Cornwall in services cos they feel that we're young people that they can relate to and talk to and not feel like either they're being looked down on or pressured into doing something" (TM Apprentice - Cornwall)

The Apprentices were aware of the different expectations in their dealings with professionals and young people and had developed their communication skills - adapting their approach depending who they were talking to.

"I think all six of us have a very good understanding of having a professional boundary in a sense of when we go to partners and we ignore the fact that we're young people, we are employed, we are trying to help young people, pay attention to us and don't think we're kids, but at the same time when we approach young people we kind of keep that laid back, relaxed, not dropping any swear words or anything" (TM Apprentice - Cornwall)

These experiences had also led to wider benefits within Cornwall as TM had led to the development of interest in the co-production and peer-to-peer approach from other organisations. TM Apprentices were already sharing their knowledge and experience with other organisations.

"I had an organisation asking me to give them a hand...they were struggling to engage young people so they were asking if the new approach of Talent Match might really make a difference...with young people sometimes some of the barriers they put up are not up when they talk to us" (TM Apprentice - Cornwall)

In Northamptonshire the peer support provided through TM was offering something completely different that was not available in the area. It therefore represented genuine and exciting innovation. Feedback to date had been positive with scope for this to grow as the project developed.

"So it's very new but it's something we see as quite exciting because I don't think there's much provision for 18-24 year olds in the way we operate, in that

sense of informal mentoring approach and I think it's something that's really needed so I think it's got a lot of scope and we're getting some good feedback" (Youth Engagement Delivery Partner- Northants)

It was also hoped that this would prove a particularly effective means of engaging those young people furthest from the labour market.

"We also feel that will be our way to ensure that our commitment to the very disengaged in the community, so our targets around ex-offenders, care leavers, homeless, will be achieved through that method, we feel that's a much more effective method than something a bit colder and drier" (Partnership Lead - Northants)

As well as outreach work young people were also playing key roles in engaging beneficiaries through Job Centre Plus for instance. In London, TM Scouts had built on an existing relationship between a delivery partner and JCP:

"We had a relationship at our local job centre anyway and we were working on a potential smaller project...so we said we want to bring Talent Match to the job centre so we can recruit people to the project, they were fine with it cos it would support them in hitting targets" (Delivery partner - London)

Such outreach work was just one element of the work of the TM Scouts and they also had key responsibilities in terms of communication, events planning and engaging employers.

"We decided we were going to offer them the role of talent scouts with the idea of bridging the gap between employers and young people. So what they do at the moment is they're responsible for four key areas, communication, outreach, events planning and employer engagement, so they split into those teams and on a weekly basis update communication, sending out jobs or recruiting young people to the project" (Delivery partner - London)

Social media was used by all partnerships in attempting to engage and maintain engagement. There was general agreement however that there were limits to what can be expected of social media.

"I'm not convinced that social media is the be all and end all, it has its place but I also think that the best way of engaging young people is sitting down face-to-face and having a conversation" (Partnership Lead - Cornwall)

Social media was seen as something that young people could take ownership of and develop themselves and this was the hope in Northamptonshire.

"I think it's a powerful tool as long as it's used in the right way. Eventually we want to get to the point where young people manage Facebook pages and twitter pages and they're updating it and have a bit of ownership over that as well" (Youth Engagement Delivery Partner - Northants)

Ultimately, there was acknowledgement that a variety of methods were required as different people would respond to different approaches.

"Different approaches work for different people so it's finding those on Facebook and getting them involved on Facebook, finding them in the street, looking for jobs and catching them half way, even having a desk at the job centre" (TM Apprentice - Cornwall)

3.6. Diversity of those engaged

The commitment of TM towards genuine diversity of engagement was also reported as a particular benefit. As TM was as much about moving people closer to work, or setting people on their journey, it was not as target-based as previous programmes. The emphasis on employability skills and "softer" outcomes meant that TM had the potential to be far more inclusive in terms of the engagement of young people.

"I think that will have huge dividends as well because young people with learning disabilities, under these schemes that exist, the work based schemes, target based, are way at the back...this is really exciting because it offers something completely different...softer measures are there to look at, confidence, self-esteem, skills, communication and not just getting a job, it's about developing people" (Core Partnership member - Northants)

At TM London the Talent scouts were from a broad range of backgrounds, though it was acknowledged that young women were over-represented in comparison to men.

"We've got more female at the moment, about 10-12 females and the rest are young men, but different backgrounds, some go to University, some have been unemployed all their life, mental health, a big range, former gang members" (Delivery partner - London)

The desire to capture that diversity in young people's involvement was apparent across all three partnerships. It was recognised however that genuine diversity brings with it challenges. In Northamptonshire there was awareness of the need to put safeguarding and support at the top of the agenda in order to ensure that engagement was a positive experience for all.

"It's about understanding who's involved and making sure they're all safe and supported because we want our Challenge Group to be really diverse and that in itself has its own challenges, particularly as well with clients with disabilities and learning difficulties" (Partnership Lead - Northants)

A diversity of young people also brings with it diversity of experience, interests, skills and behaviours:

"We've definitely got people from a lot of backgrounds. We have people from different ages, we have someone who was as young as seventeen...and we have people with different abilities, and different cultural backgrounds and from the different areas across London" (Youth Board member - London)

It was recognised that while many of the young people engaged are treated as professionals and adults, at times there was a need for a greater degree of tolerance as they learn what is expected of them in particular situations and settings. In this sense there was a balance between tolerance and preparing young people for the work setting.

"There were some young people on that residential who demonstrated what some people would call typical young people's behaviour... but that was partly about learning about the appropriateness of behaviours too. So it does mean everybody has to have a level of tolerance to that but equally, it doesn't make it ok, it's got to be dealt with" (Core Partnership - London)

3.7. Maintaining engagement and turnover

Many respondents mentioned the problems encountered in maintaining engagement.

"It's one thing to recruit them and it's another thing to maintain their interest, even if they're being paid sessionally some of them don't really care, so you need someone who can engage with the young person on that level" (Delivery partner - London)

For many young people the issue was one of time and balancing their TM involvement with their other responsibilities.

"Myself and another apprentice are going to be doing our 'petals' [preparing to teach in the lifelong learning sector: PTLLS] because we want to get into the teaching stuff, it's like a teaching degree in a sense, so you've got petals, nettles and nettles, it sounds hilarious but it's three stages of being able to do different teaching" (TM Apprentice - Cornwall)

"Fitting in some of the Youth Board to have responsibilities, they're starting to move into part time jobs or full time jobs so balancing all that and making sure it's still youth led while you're doing that is quite a challenge" (Partnership Lead - London)

It was noted by several respondents that maintaining the involvement of the same individuals is not necessarily a good thing as them moving on to employment and/or other things is a positive outcome. It also frees up the space on boards and other formalised groups for another young person to develop their skills and have that experience. This appears to be a key issue that should be returned to as the programme progresses.

"We're building up Generation E...there were nine or ten Generation E members that would meet in Truro, they helped shape the bid, a lot of them are no longer involved for various reasons, got a job, moved on, college" (Enterprise Co-ordinator - Cornwall)

Rewarding time and input was viewed by all partnerships as a key factor which could maintain the involvement of young people. TM Apprentices in Cornwall and TM Champions in Northants were paid and trained, and the members of the London Youth Boards and Talent Scouts in Hackney received payments too.

"The whole approach of paying young people to be talent scouts I think is important, it gives them a sense of self-worth and that their time is valued, I really do like that and that's helped us which is why we feel we might be able to expand this whole talent scout model or idea" (Delivery partner - London)

The Generation E group, the beneficiaries of TM in Cornwall, were not rewarded for their involvement in the same way, which led one Apprentice to reflect on the need to perhaps introduce some sort of reward. This is far from straight forward for many partnerships, given the different levels of resources and grant awards.

"Having some sort of reward system for their time might need to be put in place... to avoid that barrier of 'this is a waste of my time'" (TM Apprentice - Cornwall).

A similar view was expressed in Northamptonshire.

"It's a huge job to mentor another young person and we feel that should be rewarded, I think it's a huge ask and I think there needs to be a really strong reward there" (Partnership Lead - Northants)

At the same time, some young people had been involved in TM for extended periods of time and were more than happy to maintain their involvement despite ongoing commitments and responsibilities

"I've been involved in Talent Match for quite a long time. I was involved with TM from the beginning from when the BIG Lottery Fund was recruiting young people... The 21 young people who did the research, who launched TM in different areas across the country. It was perhaps two years ago" (Youth Board member - London)

3.8. Barriers to the engagement and involvement of young people

As noted above, initial engagement in TM had served as a stepping stone to employment, further education or other opportunities for some young people. A key factor in this was the confidence that young people had gained through their engagement. However, low confidence levels prior to engagement were cited as a barrier across all three partnerships.

"I'd say confidence is probably quite a massive thing, I think walking into a strategic environment is daunting for anyone... I think another barrier is just basic skills like mutuality, time management, things like that, which is obviously things that we work through on a one to one level" (Youth Engagement Delivery Partner - Northants)

Low confidence was more problematic where young people's prior engagement with adults and authorities was decidedly negative.

"I suppose some of the challenges with that is you are treating young people like adults and with that comes certain expectations and responsibilities which can be quite challenging...particularly the young people we tend to work with who...have generally found their engagements with adults to be, on the whole, negative" (Partnership Lead - Cornwall)

It was encouraging to hear from several respondents however, that the very act of engaging brought with it more and more confidence. As one Youth Board member in London noted.

"In the past, I wasn't able to be involved that much because of College, but now I'm finishing College I'm coming here more and more...the more experience you gain, the more confident you become" (Youth Board member - London)

One of the key characteristics of TM is that it attempts to engage those who face the most severe barriers to employment, often termed the "hardest to reach". Partnerships inevitably reported more difficulties in accessing people from those groups.

"Another barrier is trying to get the hard to reach young people, at the moment we're targeting particular estates, gang members and that's quite difficult...Another barrier is the turnover time, if you're not quick you can lose young people just because they change their numbers or change contact" (Delivery partner - London)

Partner organisations themselves could also represent a barrier to involvement for young people. Some interviewees reported that delivery partners were not progressing as they would like and were struggling to engage with the project and/or access beneficiaries.

"We've also had personal barriers with some of our partners as well, we felt that some of our partners are not, for example X haven't done anything on the ground for us, they're finding it difficult to engage with the project, for us it feels like it's not a priority for them" (Delivery partner - London)

Some delivery partners had also been impacted by recent austerity measures with funding cuts translating into staff cuts which meant limited capacity.

"We have another partner who's literally having difficulties because they've just lost a lot of their staff and that's posed a lot of difficulties for them being able to meet their targets, they just don't have the capacity to do it" (Delivery partner - London)

Where those on TM are paid for their contribution the issue of benefits rules was often problematic. This is captured in the following quote below reflecting on the Talent Scouts in London. Encouragingly, despite the loss of some benefit payments, it appears that the young people in Hackney were still committed to their role, which is testament to the level of enthusiasm there.

"One of the main barriers we found initially was the issue of payment, especially those who are receiving housing benefit, the first thing we were told is they weren't able to, it would have an impact on their JSA, any income they get would be deducted...but they managed to get around it by making the decision that they'll take the hit basically and focus on talent scouts" (Delivery partner - London)

One of the most obvious barriers, and arguably one of the most difficult to overcome, was the issue of transport in Cornwall. All Cornwall respondents spoke of the challenge this represents: it's simply not feasible to get people together centrally on a regular basis. That said TM Cornwall were attempting to overcome this by allocating TM Apprentices specific areas for which they were responsible for recruiting beneficiaries.

"Expecting a young person from who has some quite complex needs to get on a train or whatever to attend a meeting in Truro with a group of young people they don't know just isn't going to work. So each apprentice has been allocated a key target area, it's their responsibility to then sign up young people to Talent Match in that target area, with the support of partnership agencies" (Partnership Lead - Cornwall)

3.9. Benefits of involving young people

Interviewees were asked to reflect on the benefits to the Partnership from involving young people. In several cases it was considered "too early to tell", but many respondents spoke of benefits already apparent. An obvious benefit was to the young people who were now involved in TM, who had benefited personally.

"I think a big one for me is probably confidence. I was a volunteer with Real [Ideas Organisation] way before TM first started. I was really quiet and didn't really talk to anyone and now I'm happy going out talking to anyone really, it's really helped with that" (TM Apprentice - Cornwall)

"General wellbeing, happiness...you feel like you're making a bit of difference, which is good" (Youth Board member - London)

Many of the young people had also received formal training, such as the TM Apprentices in Cornwall (see the summary box above) and the Youth Board members in London.

"We've had media training opportunities, and we've done employability training and I suppose to an extent these meetings are sort of like opportunities as well continue to shape Talent Match" (Youth Board member - London)

Several young people had progressed on to employment relatively quickly. For instance, the Talent Scouts approach in London seemed to be acting as a trigger for people to go on to find work, with the result that TM London were seeking to broaden this initiative.

"So we're thinking now what we want to do maybe is offer, expand the talent scout model, maybe every young person we see that's unemployed that fits the criteria, employ them as a talent scout, because what we're finding is that they're quickly gaining confidence, gaining the transferable skills that they need, plus it's giving them a little bit of money and they're quickly finding jobs" (Delivery partner - London)

The enthusiasm and energy brought by young people was cited by many respondents, while others spoke of the way in which young people are better able to engage with employers and policy-makers - where professionals had previously not been so successful. Young people had developed relationships with other organisations that were previously lacking.

"Their enthusiasm is definitely infectious for the rest of the team which I think is the main thing" (Youth Engagement Delivery partner - Northants)

"In terms of how it benefits Talent Match as a wider concept and programme, the stuff about getting in touch with employers, getting in touch with policy makers, if young people do that it happens, if we did that people aren't really that interested" (Partnership Lead - London)

"Through having the talent scouts we developed a closer relationship with other partners in the borough" (Delivery partner - London)

Thinking more widely, the involvement of young people and their constant presence was said to have an impact on values and identities of organisations; and to have affected change that simply cannot be achieved without young people at the centre.

"A lot of it would be about transforming identities, contributions, values, you can't do it without young people being involved otherwise you're second guessing, so I think then all the participants have a clear understanding of where young people are at and their aspirations and a momentum in the direction of travel that wouldn't otherwise be there" (Core Partnership member - Northants)

The most often cited benefit however was "new ideas". Young people brought with them a whole set of ideas and creative thinking that had enriched and enhanced the TM programme.

"All our ideas are chucked around all the time; weekly meetings, we are always talking to each other, texting each other, seeing each other, so it is just deciding when to take it forward" (TM Champion - Northamptonshire)

At this early stage of delivery these ideas had been brought to fruition most clearly in terms of outreach and engagement, but it was hoped that they would continue as delivery progressed.

"That's one of the main benefits is there's a million ideas that we would never have had as a team without that aspect" (Partnership Lead - London)

"I think we've gained tremendously by having young people involved...the young people bring an energy to the organisation but mainly that they've come up with ideas... because of the young people testing and learning and trying out things so there's some stuff, in terms of outreach we wouldn't have met any of our targets if it wasn't for the young people first and foremost, they're the ones going out, we don't have the capacity or the time to do it, that's a major benefit because without the young people you have no project" (Delivery partner - London)

It was also cited as important that these ideas are always taken on board discussed and, where there is support and available resources for them, acted upon.

"We all had ideas about what training we wanted and the ideas were so vast, from admin to drugs and alcohol to first aid, everything, and not one idea, nobody said 'you can't train in that, there is no need, it's not useful'. Every single idea was taken on board and taken away" (TM Champion - Northants)

There were also knock-on effects from TM which were already starting to emerge. For example, in Cornwall the Council had taken a keen interest in the approach and it was seen as a potential means of developing more efficient interventions by engaging young people more directly in them.

"I think the added value is that, I think a lot of money can get wasted on projects because we think we know what young people want... it's one of the reasons why the Council are so interested in it as a way of looking at can they develop more services using this kind of approach" (Core Partnership member - Cornwall)

In London, a play performed by young people about their engagements with JCP had made an impact on a senior DWP official. He was seeking to use the play as a training device for frontline JCP staff.

"Quite senior in Jobcentre Plus, he was able to hear from the talent scouts about some of their experiences when they were on JSA and that touched him, they put on a piece of drama and it was the young people doing that, and he now wants to use that to train their staff so they can see what impact their service is and the way they respond to young people, the impact is has on them" (Delivery partner - London)

Though still very early on, it was hoped that wider benefits of this nature could continue to accrue and there was real hope that the co-production approach of TM - and of genuine youth-led development - could have an impact beyond the immediate field of youth unemployment. As one Cornwall respondent put it: TM was "a challenge to the status quo".

3.10. Learning from the experience so far

Interviewees were asked to reflect on any learning aspects from their experiences of engaging and involving young people. For Enable in Northamptonshire, the experience had been a very new one, but also a very *positive* one, given the progress made. The 'test and learn' approach had certainly been embraced there and respondents were open and honest about the steep learning curve involved. This is precisely the desired approach hoped for by the Big Lottery Fund. Staff and

partners were very much supportive and passionate about the co-production approach on the whole.

"So it's been a very steep learning curve for us, I think we found it I guess quite a positive experience. It's allowed us to develop Talent Match in a very different way and to have our users at the heart of how something develops, has given it a really strong identity for us and something that the project team is now incredibly passionate about" (Partnership Lead - Northants)

Northamptonshire had come a very long way since first becoming involved with TM and the challenge posed by this new way of working was not under-estimated. Having already benefited from the space allowed to innovate and change tack (e.g. the contracting out of the support for TM Champions), the TM Programme was expected to be an ongoing learning experience.

"It is an ongoing piece of learning for us...that equally has challenges when you've got members of staff that have spent 10 years working with very structured, rigid and specific funders and then going to something that's a bit more fluid and able to be influenced, and it's had a lot of challenges" (Partnership Lead - Northants)

One key aspect of learning for Northamptonshire was achieving the appropriate level of involvement for young people. Having recognised they needed to do more in this area, they "went too far the opposite way" and started consulting young people about everything. In hindsight, this was seen as **over-consultation**. It worked poorly because the young people could not understand why they were being asked about things that did not really interest or concern them.

"[Young people should be involved in] 80% of the decision-making. The other 20%, the set-up of the companies and stuff, that is quite boring for us...But the rest of it is all about the young people" (TM Champion - Northants)

Over-consultation made their involvement seem very tokenistic: they were not being consulted because consulting with them was useful and their input important, they were being consulted for the sake of it. It was quite burdensome, time-wise, for the young people.

"I think we made the mistake of asking for so much consultation that they felt rather than them saying they're asking too much, they felt I can't answer it so I shouldn't be doing this and stepped away. So that was a big lesson learnt for us" (Partnership Lead - Northants)

Such openness and a willingness to change course was very much in keeping with the TM ethos and is a clear positive moving forward.

Another learning point, common across partnerships, was the difficulties in **communicating the co-production approach** to organisations and how that cascades down internally. This had emerged as a key challenge for partnerships and especially lead partners in continuing to support adaptation and change in accommodating genuine co-production.

"The delivery partners who are on the core partnership at senior manager level will get it, but it's whether it filters down and they apply it in the same way...I see some of our job as supporting those organisations to make the change that's needed to be youth led more widely than Talent Match and that's a big job" (Partnership Lead - London)

For respondents engaged in outreach and delivery, lessons had been learned early on about the need for timely responses to beneficiaries. **Keeping in contact** was a challenge in itself given the frequency with which some people changed contact details. Consequently, at TM London, a procedure to ensure that people newly recruited to TM were contacted within two days was put in place.

"I think the issue we are finding with the job centre is once they leave if they put down a number wrong or their hand writing's not legible then you've almost lost contact...So what we've learnt from that is once we get the information within two days we must give them a follow up phone call so it's still fresh in their mind" (Delivery partner - London)

Many respondents spoke about the **varying support needs of young people involved** in TM. A particular area for learning in this regard was how to ensure there are varied engagement opportunities for young people, in terms of the level and nature of any involvement. That is: some people would be more work ready and confident; others would need much more support to get to that level. In this sense, the diversity of young people should be reflected in the development of different methods for involvement.

"They're really varied and one of the main things we've learnt and that we're looking to change next year is there's a whole spectrum and we want to get better at assessing how a young person can best get involved and creating opportunities that fit better with that rather than having the same expectations and opportunities for all young people" (Partnership Lead - London)

3.11. Looking ahead

All three partnerships had ideas about how they would like their projects to develop. Invariably the desire for ever greater responsibility and independence for young people in the ongoing delivery, management and agenda-setting of TM was seen as a hallmark of progress.

"In a year's time, I hope that we will be able to demonstrate the positive benefits of having young people involved" (TM Champion - Northants)

"I would love for it to get to the point where we can just chat as peers and colleagues and bounce ideas around...so neither of us has that power in the conversation, I'd like to be able to bounce ideas around and for it to feel more of a partnership. But I think that's a longer term thing and will need to be us working really closely with the youth team and the challenge groups" (Partnership Lead - Northants)

"I think because we'll always be able to do better. I'll be happy about young people's engagement when young people are not only at the steering group but they are running the steering group, setting the agenda" (Partnership Lead - Cornwall)

In London, where the experience and resources of the partnership in relation to youth involvement were far greater, the key point was said to be when the role of the youth involvement officer was no longer needed, "when youth involvement has become fully embedded within the programme".

Though all three partnerships recognised there was some distance to travel before these desires could be realised, there was a real sense of confidence and positivity that this could be achieved. The openness, flexibility and willingness to adapt and

learn in Cornwall, London and Northamptonshire evidenced above would seem to support this confidence.