

## Young People's Resilience and Involvement: possible elements of the European Union's Structural and Investment Funds in addressing youth unemployment?

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### Abstract

This paper explores the role of the EU's Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) in addressing youth unemployment. This paper looks beyond the now well established repertoire of ESIF interventions. It considers evidence on two possible areas for intervention: the involvement of young people in the design and delivery of programmes, and the development of young people's personal resilience as a determinant of successful labour market outcomes. Findings are presented from a large scale evaluation of a €130m seven year programme (called Talent Match) in England which is being funded by the United Kingdom's Big Lottery Fund (the main distributor of Lottery funding in the UK). It outlines the opportunities and constraints from both involvement and resilience approaches, and how at first sight, the two approaches appear to stem from quite different conceptions of the determinants of youth unemployment. In conclusion, it suggests how by using Sen's capabilities approach, youth involvement and personal resilience may be reconciled and the possible response for the ESIF.

### 1. Introduction

This paper explores the role of the EU's Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) in addressing youth unemployment. Successive European Council conclusions have stated the need for concerted action between the EU institutions and Member States to address youth unemployment (European Commission 2013, 2014 and Council of the European Union 2011, 2014). Whilst such calls are welcomed, concern has been voiced that the proposals do not go far enough, either in the resources to be deployed or in recognising the scale of structural reforms to labour markets which may be required (Eichhorst et al 2013; Lahusen et al 2013).

Eichhorst et al (2013) also recognise that addressing youth unemployment is not simply an economic problem but may also be part of the crisis in the legitimacy of public and private institutions (see also Ritzen and Zimmermann 2013). The European Commission and Council of the European Union have not been silent on these issues. For instance, the 18 month work plan for the Council agreed in June 2014 sets clear priorities for not just youth employment, but also for the role of youth work in empowering young people and the development of political participation (Council of the European Union 2014. p. 99).

This paper looks beyond the now well established repertoire of ESIF interventions, set out in the European Commission's call for action on youth unemployment (European Commission 2013) and its memo on how the European Social Fund (ESF) can support the Youth Guarantee (European Commission 2013). The call for action recommends the front loading of actions to address youth unemployment (including the Youth Employment Initiative) as well as longer term structural reforms, notably around VET (Vocational Education and Training) and practices to encourage hiring by SMEs.

In response to the European Union policy positions for the use of the ESIF, this paper considers evidence on two possible areas for intervention: the involvement of young people in the design and delivery of programmes, and the development of young people's personal resilience as a determinant of successful labour market outcomes. The focus throughout the paper is on young people furthest from the labour market, for shorthand termed NEETs (not in Education, Employment or Training), but typically who may be confronted by a range of labour market barriers (including personal circumstances and a lack of qualifications and experience) and weak local labour markets.

This paper presents interim findings from a large scale evaluation of a €130m seven year programme (called Talent Match) in England which is being funded by the United Kingdom's Big Lottery Fund (the main distributor of Lottery funding in the UK). The programme runs from 2013 to 2020. The programme differs from approaches seen in many Structural Funds and national programmes in that it is administered and delivered by civil society organisations working as part of youth (18-24 year old) led partnerships. The evaluation uses a range of methods including an extensive monitoring system, collecting far more intensive data on beneficiaries that would be the norm, as collection of qualitative and secondary data. The programme and its evaluation are at an early stage. However, it can already provide some insights into the involvement of young people and the development of personal resilience.

The paper is structured as follows. It firstly considers the challenge of youth unemployment, drawing out evidence to highlight the complexity and severity of the challenge. Secondly, brief details about the Talent Match programme and its evaluation are outlined. Thirdly, evidence on youth involvement and resilience are considered. A discussion then draws out

the implications of the evidence for the ESIF, and suggests how youth involvement and personal resilience may be reconciled through Sen's capability approach.

## 2. About the Challenge of Youth Unemployment

With the so-called 'Great Recession' commencing in 2008 there was a sharp rise in unemployment in the across the European Union. This increase in unemployment was uneven both spatially (at both Member State and subnational levels) and by sub-group.

The number of young people (aged 15–24) in the EU-28 who were unemployed rose to 5.6 million in 2012 (Eurostat 2014). Youth unemployment is also concentrated in those areas with a high general level of unemployment. The youth unemployment rate exceeded 50 per cent in 24 (NUTS2) regions in 2012, double the number of regions of 2011. These regions were located in Spain, Greece, France (its overseas territories) and Italy. There were 111 regions across the EU that had a youth unemployment rate of 25 per cent or more, and thus are eligible funding under the Youth Employment Initiative. However, there are also regions with relatively low youth unemployment rates. These are predominantly in Germany, Austria and the Netherlands.

Youth unemployment increased more rapidly from 2008 than the overall level of unemployment. In countries such as the UK it has peaked in 2011, albeit at a lower rate than in the 1980s and 1990s recessions. It is important to note that since those previous recessions the proportion of young people in the labour force has fallen, with rising participation in education.

The rise in youth unemployment in the 'Great Recession' was experienced across the European Union and remains, much worse in southern Europe, such that Simmons and Thompson (2013: 1) suggest that: 'Unemployment amongst young people is now at levels without modern historical precedent.' Moreover, focusing solely on unemployment statistics provides only a *partial* perspective on the position of young people vis-à-vis employment. Furthermore, there are concerns about the position of young people in employment across the European Union. Firstly, there are higher levels of *under-employment* amongst those young people in relatively stable employment (including those with higher level qualifications). Secondly, a 'low pay no pay' cycle persists for those young people who are moving in and out of unstable employment (often with low or no qualifications) (Shildrick *et al.*, 2012).

There were signs that the relative position of young people in the labour market was deteriorating before the 'Great Recession'(Gordon, 1999), suggesting that high levels of youth unemployment are not solely a consequence of recession, albeit they were exacerbated by it. Rather, the root cause goes beyond the state of the economy to

underlying structural issues in the youth labour market (House of Lords European Union Committee, 2014; Breen 2005; Moffat and Rother 2014; Manilio and Giugni 2013).

In the UK analysis shows that since 1998/99 young people not in full-time education have gone from being four percentage points more likely than average to be in work, to five percentage points less likely to be in work in 2012/13 (Wilson and Bivand, 2014). The only other 'disadvantaged group' to witness a relative decline in employment (and one that is starker than for young people not in full-time education) is people with no or low qualifications. By contrast older people (aged 50-64 years), ethnic minorities, lone parents and disabled people witnessed a decline in the 'employment rate gap' over the period from 1998 to 2013.

In the UK, unemployed people saw their likelihood of finding work fall by one-fifth during the recession and the falls were more than average for young people and the lowest qualified (Wilson and Bivand, 2014). This pattern was repeated elsewhere (Bell and Blanchflower 2011a; Brandt and Hank 2014)

Structural changes in European labour markets provide some explanations for why young people are faring relatively badly in the labour market. For the UK, 'the sorts of jobs that young people, particularly non-graduates, used to go into are declining. Those that are left are increasingly contested by older and more experienced workers' (UKCES, 2014a: 8) (including those 'bumping down' in the labour market). Cinalli and Giugni (2013) argue there are at least three youth unemployment 'regimes' in Europe, a conservative regime including in particular countries such as the UK, a Mediterranean regime and a social democratic regime. And so for the UK and other conservative regime countries, the structure of employment is changing to take on the shape of a so-called 'hourglass economy'. These trends are by no way confined to the UK (Cinalli and Giugni 2013; UKCES, 2014b).

Evidence suggests that in recent years a number of factors, including an increase in the number of small businesses with limited resources, have resulted in a move towards the expectation that people should be 'work ready' rather than trained 'on the job' (House of Lords European Union Committee, 2014). This disadvantages young people. The UK Employer Skills Survey 2013 shows that while the majority of employers find young recruits well prepared for the world of work, a significant minority do not. The main reasons for dissatisfaction do not relate to literacy or numeracy skills, but rather to lack of experience and poor attitude (UKCES, 2014a). This suggests that so-called 'soft skills' and work experience are becoming especially vital for young people in order to gain first employment as a precursor to sustained employment.

The concern with scarring effects of youth unemployment (Gregg and Tominey, 2005; Bell and Blanchflower, 2011b; Brandt and Hank 2014) helps explain why past policy interventions have focused on the long-term unemployed and/or the otherwise most

disadvantaged, rather than on those who are cycling between short-term employment and unemployment, or who are under-employed (including some graduates). Traditionally, the dominant policy discourse has focused on deficits located within the individual – so foregrounding supply-side interventions aimed at improving employability. In a 'conservative' welfare regime such as the UK, the trend of successive welfare reforms has been towards greater conditionality, underpinned by sanctions or compulsory unpaid work for unemployment benefit claimants. Over time expectations of active job search have been extended to cover other groups of out-of-work benefit claimants, such as lone parents. In social democratic and Nordic welfare regimes, by contrast, reforms have tended towards models of work activation (Brandt and Hank 2014; Cinalli and Giugni 2013)

A key focus of this paper is with NEETS and those young people furthest from the labour market, and in particular long term NEETs. NEETs are a heterogeneous group, especially when the age group encompassed is extended to 24 years (EUROFOUND 2012; House of Lords European Union Committee, 2014). NEETs include graduates and the highly skilled, those who are less skilled and those who struggle most to access the labour market; so policy responses need to take account of these differences. In broad terms, EU variations in NEETs are explained by a range of factors, including economic performance, institutional or regime factors (such as labour market regulation, transition mechanisms from school to work, school quality and qualification quality, and models of VET) (Breen 2005; Pieche and Wescott 2014; Cahuc et al 2013; and Mourshed et al 2014) and how these together play out in local labour markets (including factors such as transport and social networks) (Gore and Hollywood, 2009; Lindsay, 2010; Green and White 2007).

A range of psychological factors - including self efficacy, confidence, motivation and aspirations - are also important in making a successful and sustained transition into employment (or further education and training). In the context of job search, self-efficacy refers to individuals' judgements about their skills to successfully perform search activities - such as looking for and applying for opportunities and performing at interviews, etc. (Green *et al.*, 2011). Research suggests that self-efficacy is a key psychological variable affecting job search behaviour and subsequent employment, albeit personal, behavioural and environmental factors can play a moderating role. As Brandt and Hank (2014) find early life experience, including childhood health, can influence self-efficacy and thus are predictors of labour market outcomes in later life.

The evidence presented suggests that an holistic approach is required for successful activation policies. There is increasing policy attention given to the empowerment of young people in the design and delivery of programmes (as a response to perceived and actual deficits in the legitimacy of public and private institutions) (Dunne et al 2014), and in the personal resilience of young people in securing successful labour market outcomes. These factors stem from markedly different understandings of the policy problem: one focused on problems with institutions and structures; the other with issues of agency and

problematization of individuals. Whether attention in either is warranted as a response to youth unemployment is considered in the following sections.

### **3. About Talent Match and its Evaluation**

Talent Match is a strategic programme of the Big Lottery Fund. The Big Lottery Fund is the main distributor of national lottery funding in the United Kingdom, with a particular focus on disadvantage and the support of civic society. The £108 million (€130 million) programme runs from 2013-2020 with a main delivery phase from 2014-18. It is a multi-annual grant funded programme targeted at 21 local areas (Local Enterprise Partnerships in England with high concentrations, or hotspots, of long term youth unemployment. The aim of the programme is to support around 25,000 people aged 18-24, with at least 20 per cent securing sustainable employment.

The programme intends to 'improve the pathways' for those furthest from the labour market group. To this end, the investment is designed around an analysis of the causes of these young people's circumstances, a set of principles or issues it wishes interventions in each of the areas to address, and a set of features that each intervention should embody.

Three aspects of the programme set it apart from other mainstream (UK Government) provision:

- Active involvement of Young People in the design of partnership strategies and the delivery of projects
- A strong emphasis on a youth work perspective to deliver the programme, rather than a more traditional work first or employment focus. It is here where the greater attention to intrinsic factors is considered.
- Coordination of partnerships by civic society organisations, including a mix of lead organisations. Some are local organisations whilst others are major national charities.

The first two are considered in more detail by this paper.

The evaluation of Talent Match involves a range of methods to make a full economic assessment of the impact of the programme. It includes the collection of longitudinal data on beneficiaries as well as comparator work. These methods are supported by qualitative research (with local partnerships and beneficiaries) and analysis of secondary data (particular at local level but also benchmarking to UK surveys). The evaluation does not include randomized control trial, in part due to the heterogeneity of the interventions and for ethical reasons. The long term nature of the evaluation is intended to address concerns raised in Card et al. (2010). For the purposes of this paper the evaluation evidence

presented is intended to provide initial insights into the programme, rather than a full economic assessment.

#### **4. Involvement of Young People**

There has been an interest in youth participation in designing policies and practices related to service delivery since the late 1960s (Sinclair, 2004; Carnegie UK Trust, 2008). From the 1990s onwards, there has been a commitment by many EU Member States to involving young people as active stakeholders with valid views and experiences, rather than simply as the passive beneficiaries of services and policies (Middleton, 2006; Cowan, 2009). Extensive guidance now exists on involving young people in decision-making (Gunn, 2008; Dunne et al. 2014).

Involvement of young people in the decision-making processes related to service design and delivery can take various forms, and it is important to note that different levels and forms of participation are valid for different groups of young people and for different purposes. Honesty and clarity about the extent of, and limits to, young people's involvement has been found in the literature to be as important, if not more so, than the level of involvement (see, for example Carnegie UK Trust, 2008). Nonetheless, since the mid-2000s there has been a growing emphasis on the involvement of service users in the service provision, variously termed co-design, co-production and co-delivery (Bovaird, 2013).

Evidence shows that young people can become involved in service design at both a strategic and an operational level. For example, they may take a strategic role in planning new service developments, in developing organisational policies or in evaluating existing services, or they may have a more operational focus in, for example, designing services, developing resources including videos and leaflets, or they may be involved in the delivery of the services themselves or in training others to deliver them (Big Lottery Fund, 2010; Cutler, 2008; Kirby *et al*, 2003). There is a large body of literature on methods used to engage young people (see, for example, Halsey *et al*, 2006; Sinclair, 2004; Larney, 2003; Thomas and O'Kane, 2000), with the appropriateness of different methods largely being seen to reflect both the purpose of engagement and the characteristics of young people involved (for example, there has been a reasonably large amount of work on using creative methods to facilitate participation of young people with learning disorders).

There have been various attempts to develop a theory of youth participation and conceptualise different types of participation. Evidence from the application of Hart's ladder of participation (Hart 1992) or modifications thereof shows that it is often difficult to distinguish at the operational level which precise 'rung' activities fall into and that the main benefits of the model are in prompting organisations to think critically about how they involve young people and in identifying and avoiding 'non-participation' (Treseder, 1997;

Bovaird, 2007). In practice, it is more beneficial to divide the types of involvement of young people in decision-making process related to service provision into three groups: processes in which young people are consulted, but professional staff make decisions; processes of co-production, in which young people and professional staff work together; and processes which are wholly or mostly led by young people with professional staff providing support.

Co-production in decision-making, in which service users and professional staff work together, with both groups having substantial input and approximately equal power in the decision-making process, has become increasingly common (Bovaird, 2007; Lyons 2006; Kelly, Mulgan, and Muers, 2002). However, evidence of this type of work between NEETs (or other young people beyond school age) and professional staff remains relatively rare. Evidence suggests that the most common methods used for co-production in decision making are group discussions, forums and councils and conferences, in other words methods that bring together young people and service providers face-to-face to promote in-depth discussion and learning (Bovaird, 2007; Kirby *et al*, 2003).

Placing young people at the heart of Talent Match is its defining characteristic for most people involved, across all ages (Wells and Powell 2014). 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 following are the main findings from the Talent Match programme, and focus in particular on a phase of the programme concerned with the design of partnership strategies and interventions:

- The involvement of young people was not 'all or nothing'. Identifying areas where young people's involvement was crucial is important, but so to was identifying those areas where their involvement was less beneficial, or where there was less interest. The form of involvement had to be determined by young people in conjunction with partnerships, and recognise that this would take different forms.
- Moving beyond simply consulting young people to facilitating young people's leadership was found to be challenging. This recognised that many of those involved had faced considerable barriers and challenges. However, it was also noted that Talent Match represented something of a 'different approach' due to its youth-led approach and that it was operated by civil society organisations.
- 'Buy-in from young people and organisations' was found is a key issue. It required a clear communication of the rationale for involving young people and the benefits of



doing so. This again was reflected in the youth-led approach and that this approach was embedded in the organisations delivering the programme.

- Co-development and co-production can be 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. This involves considerable 'up front' costs for the programme.
- Some young people - including those with disabilities, issues with confidence and previously poor relationships with authority figures - required additional support if they were to be effectively engaged, but engagement with these groups was particularly important for Talent Match.
- Participation in formal decision-making processes was a new experience for the majority of young people. Various initiatives can make this less daunting. These included providing dedicated time and space for young people to contribute, ensuring that there are enough young people involved that they do not feel outnumbered, and paying attention to the language and methods used in presenting information.
- The establishment of youth boards and groups tasked with particular responsibilities was found both to encourage engagement in a broad sense and to develop the personal, social and work-related skills of the young people involved. However, in terms of the total targets for young people to be supported by the programme, those involved actively in this way was relatively small.

Approaches to involving young people are evolving and will continue to evolve as Talent Match proceeds. For example, knowing when to involve young people, on which issues and how to accommodate different skills sets, capabilities and circumstances will be common challenges faced by each of the 21 partnerships delivering the programme.

## **5. Intrinsic Factors: the role of 'grit' and resilience**

EU funds have traditionally focussed on extrinsic factors such as qualifications and experience in their attempts to tackle youth unemployment. There is however a growing consensus that intrinsic factors are also fundamental in determining positive employment outcomes for young people. The Young Foundation (McNeil et al 2012) points to a growing evidence base linking social and emotional capabilities, such as determination, self-control, persistence and self-motivation, to positive outcomes for young people. Studies have linked intrinsic capabilities such as 'grit' and 'resilience' to successful life outcomes. Research has shown that possessing grit, defined as perseverance and passion for long-term goals, can be

linked to successful outcomes including educational attainment (Duckworth et al., 2007), while resilience has also been identified as a factor in determining positive outcomes. Benard (2004) points to 'personal resilience strengths' and their association with healthy development and life success.

This growing evidence base suggests that there may be a need to extend the focus of EU funds to a more explicit consideration of intrinsic factors. The traditional focus has been on harder extrinsic factors which are generally easier to measure and quantify. Whilst intrinsic measures are less straightforward to capture this should not prevent them being considered. Intrinsic and extrinsic outcomes are invariably linked. For example, providers may value a programme in terms of numbers of young people gaining employment but this approach fails to acknowledge that some extrinsic employment outcomes may not have been achieved without developing a young person's social and emotional capabilities first.

Talent Match intends to move young people closer to the labour market and improve their employability, as well as increase employment. It recognises that a range of intrinsic and extrinsic factors play a part in engaging young people in the labour market and that interventions therefore need to be designed with this in mind. Talent Match aims to develop interventions which are holistic, person-centred and take a long term approach. Accordingly the programme evaluation appreciates that intrinsic factors need to be captured as well as conventional hard outcomes such as numbers entering employment, training or formal education. If a young person has not yet gained employment but their social and emotional capabilities have developed they may be closer to achieving employment than previously, whilst also improving their life in other ways.

The Talent Match evaluation uses an extensive monitoring system designed to collect standard monitoring data from all Partnerships on all beneficiaries. This 'Common Data Framework' (CDF) allows monitoring of: who has participated in Talent Match; what they have done; what difference it has made to them; and what impact it has made on their labour market outcomes. A number of questions explore intrinsic factors with established psychological 'wellbeing' measures a key component. At each stage of data collection young people are being asked four subjective questions regarding their well-being. These questions are taken from the UK's Office for National Statistics (ONS) Annual Population Survey and have been designed to provide an alternative fuller picture of how society is doing beyond the usual socio-economic measures.

Figure 1 below shows data collected during the first three quarters of the programme. The four measures are shown and the well-being of Talent Match beneficiaries at both the baseline, 3 month and 6 month follow-up stages is compared with that of the UK adult population as a whole (age 16 or over). While this is not a like-for-like comparison, it is illuminating all the same and the gaps in well-being of the beneficiaries compared to national averages is striking, particularly when looking at the baseline scores. Encouragingly

results generally improve at the follow-up stages although a noticeable difference still remains across the first three measures at the 6 month stage.

**Figure 1: Well-being**

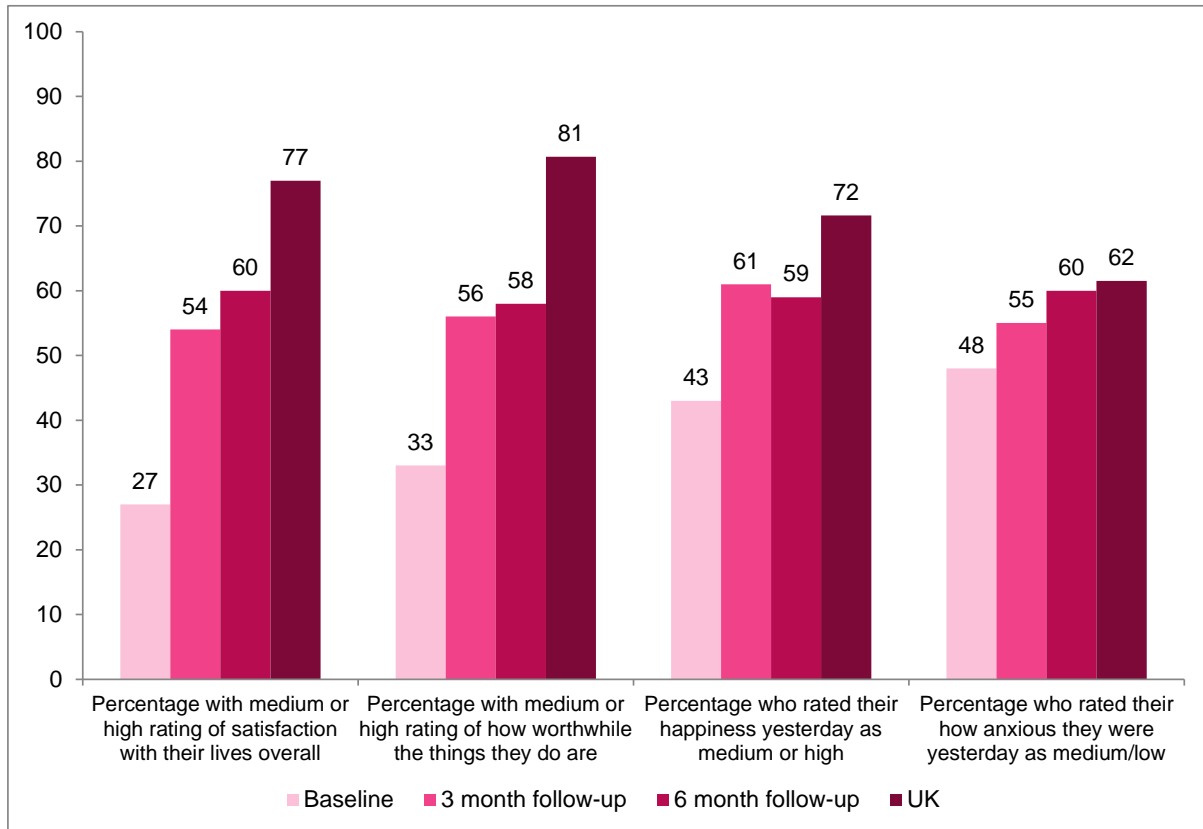
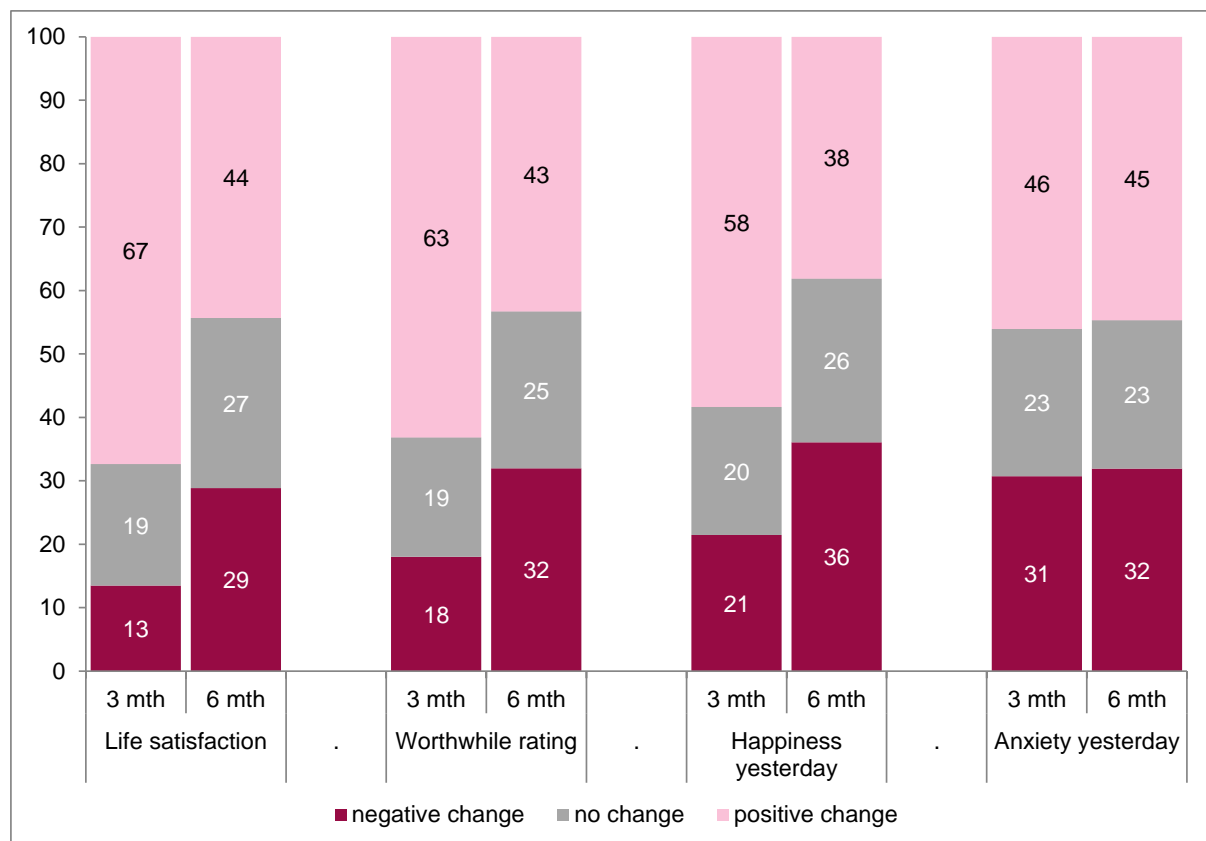


Figure 2 shows how individual's scores changed over the period. Sizeable proportions across all four measures reported a higher score at the initial follow-up stage with notable proportions also reporting a positive change at the 6 month stage. However almost one third (31 per cent) actually reported a more negative score for how anxious they felt yesterday at the 3 month stage and almost the same proportion again gave a negative score at the 6 month stage. In addition the proportion reporting a negative score increased noticeably across the other 3 measures at the 6 month stage. These results suggest that while the interventions have tended to yield positive interim outcomes in terms of reported wellbeing, there is some evidence that wellbeing for many within the study group is far more fragile than expected. Indeed, engagement in the programme may surface an individual's previously hidden vulnerability.

**Figure 2: Well-being - individual change**



Growing evidence surrounding the importance of intrinsic factors in shaping positive employment outcomes for young people, alongside the data from the Talent Match evaluation highlight the low levels and fragility of well-being among beneficiaries, suggests shortcomings in current support provided to young people as they grow up. This chimes with cohort studies such as Brandt and Hank (2014). This raises questions for the role of how EU funds complement what have traditionally been Member State responsibilities, ostensibly through their primary and secondary education systems. The challenge appears to be the ability to address both extrinsic and intrinsic factors as young people progress, something which should perhaps be considered in the allocation of future EU funds.

## **6. Discussion and Conclusion: implications for the EU Structural and Investment Funds.**

The interim findings presented here are from a particular labour market context (the United Kingdom) although the findings may be of relevance to countries with similar 'conservative' welfare regimes, rather than to Mediterranean welfare regimes with very high levels of youth unemployment.

Involvement and resilience are concerned *a priori* with two very different understandings of youth unemployment. Youth involvement is situated very much within a structural and

political critique of labour markets, and in particular that voice in all market and social activity is fundamental to an inclusive society. Conversely, personal resilience is concerned with individual agency, either as necessary parts of progression in the labour market, or as a possible critique of the youth unemployed, in which young people are blamed or stigmatised for being unemployed.

Involvement and resilience activities may be eligible for support under the European Social Fund. The following measure descriptors could support youth involvement measures (European Commission 2014):

- *Outreach strategies and focal points*
- *Strengthen the capacities of all stakeholders ... in order to eliminate any internal or external obstacles related to policy and to the way these schemes are implemented.*

Similarly, the development of personal resilience could be supported under:

- *Provide individual action planning*
- *Enhance mechanisms for supporting young people who drop out from activation schemes and no longer access benefits.*

The findings from Talent Match suggest that youth involvement is very much seen as a capacity building activity. The evaluation found that youth involvement measures worked better where civic society organisations had youth involvement as part of their mission, they had staff trained in outreach and involvement, and they were able to cede control in the design and delivery of the programme strategy and projects. Conversely, youth involvement did not work where organisations saw it as a 'bolt-on' to their existing work, and that it was a requirement of a programme which had to be complied with.

The findings suggested that effective involvement increased the legitimacy of programmes, especially for those involved in partnership working. This was through the development of their skills, experience and social and professional networks.

At this stage of the Talent Match programme we have not sought to relate specific interventions to the development of personal resilience and self-efficacy. The numbers supported by the programme are too small to do this.

What we have explored for a small set of measures is how resilience develops through the initial engagement in the programme. In part the findings are positive. The support for young people seems to have been reflected in some overall positive improvements in terms of general wellbeing. However, it should be stressed that overall levels of wellbeing on initial engagement in the programme are (worryingly) low compared to the general population. This is perhaps not a surprise but does provide some insight into the extent of

the challenges labour market programmes face in addressing youth unemployment amongst the hardest to reach.

However, the findings also raise concerns, notably that the wellbeing of around a third of those engaged in the programme worsened in the six months after initial engagement. This may be because the intervention in effect surfaces or reveals what were hidden or latent issues facing a young person. What we cannot know yet is how wellbeing changes as the young person continues on the programme, enters the labour market or remains outside the labour market.

It is here that there is some convergence between youth involvement, personal resilience, and the role youth work may play in job activation (Council of the European Union 2014; Dunne et al 2014). The relationship between job activation, access to rights and personal self-efficacy are complex and probably lie outside traditional linear models in work-first type programmes.

One approach which has sought to reconcile these issues is the capability approach (CA). CA stems from Sen's seminal work on capabilities (Sen 1985 and 1998) and more recent work relating capabilities to a society-level theory of justice (Sen 2009). In brief, this work considers the scope individuals have to make choices in their participation in society, rather than focusing on their ability to maximise utility (for instance maximise earnings). It is beyond the scope of this paper to consider the full implications of this relationship.

Pilot studies by Egdell and McQuaid (2015) suggest that the CA approach may be a fruitful one to consider. However, they point to similar constraints and those surfaced in this paper: for instance the need for delivery organisations to be committed to the CA, and for programme designers to reconcile investment in capability, with the typical prerequisites of job outcome measurement. Exploration of the CA issues in the context of the ESIF appears a fruitful way of incorporating youth involvement and personal resilience into debates on youth unemployment in the European Union.

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