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# Greater Manchester's Hidden Talent (2022): Final Evaluation and Assessment

Prepared by researchers from the Decent Work and Productivity Research Centre at Manchester Metropolitan University.

October 2022

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We are grateful to the young people, Talent Coaches, delivery partners, Advisory Group members and to the GMCVO project management team who so were so generous in contributing to this evaluation. In particular, we thank the GMCVO programme manager for inviting us to do this work. Thank you also to colleagues at Manchester Metropolitan University who supported the work in varied ways.

# Contents

<b>Abbreviations .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Summary and Key Findings .....</b>	<b>6</b>
How was the programme delivered?.....	6
What young people benefited from the programme? .....	7
What did the programme achieve? .....	7
Other insights.....	8
Project legacy .....	9
<b>Lessons for future policy and practice .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1. About the programme .....</b>	<b>11</b>
1.1. Introduction .....	11
1.2 Rationale for the programme – the importance of support for young people ..	11
1.3. About the stakeholders and beneficiaries .....	14
<b>2. About the evaluation .....</b>	<b>17</b>
2.1. Aims and Objectives .....	17
2.2. Targets for programme .....	19
2.3. Wider learning.....	19
<b>3. How was Hidden Talent delivered? .....</b>	<b>21</b>
3.1. Introduction .....	21
3.2. Administration, governance, and costs .....	21
3.3. What was provided to young people by delivery partners? .....	22
3.4. Who benefited from the programme? .....	24
3.5. Unique features of Hidden Talent .....	27
3.6. Conclusion .....	28
<b>4. What has Hidden Talent achieved? .....</b>	<b>29</b>
4.1. Individual outcomes (quantitative measures) .....	29
4.2. Strong relationships between young people and talent coaches .....	31
4.3. Other outcomes and impact for young people .....	32
4.3.1. Growing self-reflection and self-efficacy .....	33
4.3.2. Taking action .....	33
4.3.3. Responding to Adversity .....	34
4.4. Partnership working .....	35
4.4.1. Benefits of collaboration and partnership for delivery .....	35
4.4.2. Professional expertise of delivery partners and talent coaches .....	36

4.4.3. Other partnerships (DWP and employers) .....	36
4.5. Other insights about the context for youth employment .....	38
4.5.1. Perceptions of the Job Centre .....	38
4.5.2. Mental health as a major barrier .....	41
4.5.3. Time-limited vs open-ended support for young people .....	42
4.6. Legacy of the programme .....	45
4.7. Value for money .....	46
4.8. Conclusion .....	46
<b>5. Lessons for future policy and practice .....</b>	<b>49</b>
5.1. Introduction .....	49
5.2. Model of provision - collaboration and flexibility of delivery .....	49
5.3. Labour market barriers and challenges faced by young people .....	50
5.4. The role of employers .....	52
5.4. Measuring progression.....	53
5.5. Conclusion: sustaining activities .....	54
<b>Appendix 1.....</b>	<b>55</b>

## Abbreviations

<b>BCSA</b>	Bolton Community and Solidarity Association
<b>DLA</b>	Disability Living Allowance
<b>DLUHC</b>	Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
<b>DWP</b>	Department for Work and Pensions
<b>DW&amp;P</b>	Decent Work and Productivity Evaluation team
<b>ESA</b>	Employment Support Allowance
<b>GMCA</b>	Greater Manchester Combined Authority
<b>GMYN</b>	Greater Manchester Youth Network
<b>GMTM</b>	Greater Manchester's Hidden Talent
<b>HT</b>	Hidden Talent
<b>NEET</b>	Not in education, employment, or training
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>ONS</b>	Office for National Statistics
<b>PIP</b>	Personal Independence Payment
<b>VCSE</b>	Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise



## Summary and Key Findings

The Hidden Talent programme (January-June 2022) was managed by GMCVO and was funded by the Community Renewal Fund of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) acted as the lead authority for the programme. Hidden Talent was a youth employment project which provided support to young people who were not in education, employment or training (NEET) to progress into an education, employment or training outcome. The following are some key findings.

### How was the programme delivered?

1. The rapid establishment of the Hidden Talent 2022 project was remarkable and was possible due to existing strong relationships in the VCSE sector and the project management team's ability to build effectively upon learning from previous Talent Match and Hidden Talent projects (all run with funding since 2014).
2. Talent coaches were afforded considerable professional autonomy in how they flexibly provided services (albeit with requirement to complete standard reporting). Collaboration and dialogue were fostered across all partners and stakeholders with regular meetings.
3. Talent coaches adopted a flexible, person-centred approach in working with young people. In total 142 young people were supported in contrast to the 124 targeted. A diverse provision of support was created for young people reflecting their 'proximity to the labour market'.
4. Additional budget provision was allocated to mental health support as a key barrier to address for young people to pay for additional services in this area. The seriousness of concerns about young people's mental health requires urgent action above and beyond what can be achieved in an employment-focused project.
5. In-work support was provided to those more rapidly able to move into employment, which is of great value to both young people and employers.

6. A youth-led approach was modelled through the engagement of the GMYN Youth Panel creating an important legacy which aligns with a co-production model as a measure of good practice in public services.
7. There was an average cost of £2,200 per young person involved in Hidden Talent.

### What young people benefited from the programme?

1. Hidden Talent has been highly effective in reaching hidden young people. Of the 142 young people who participated, 51% were economically inactive (including hidden), 49% were registered as unemployed and receiving Benefits. 45% of the total were hidden, reflecting a proportion of the economically inactive 51%, the other 6% being those in receipt of Benefits but unable to work due to health or disability.
2. 61% of beneficiaries were men compared to 35% women. Why this is the case is complex to explore but may be associated with referrals which came through word of mouth, however, this contrast merits further research. National figures consistently report that more young men than women are NEET and Hidden Talent reflects this pattern.
3. 75% were White British and the remainder identified as from a variety of other ethnic groups. Young people from ethnically diverse backgrounds have a higher risk of becoming NEET so it is positive that 25% of the beneficiary cohort were from ethnically diverse backgrounds.
4. The highest number of declared disabilities were mental health (16%), social/communication disorder (10%) and learning difficulties (9%).
5. Many young people had characteristics and circumstances associated with major barriers to education, employment, and training. Notably, on self-disclosure, 30% declared they were neurodiverse, 27% had a mental health condition and 17% had experienced homelessness.
6. 94% of young people were from seven Greater Manchester boroughs; Manchester (n – 30), Oldham (n – 22), Bolton (n – 16) Rochdale (n – 18), Salford (n – 17) Stockport (n – 19) and Bury (n – 11). A small number of young people (n- 9) joined HT due to having strong links to those seven boroughs within the city region, although they lived in other Local Authorities.

### What did the programme achieve?

7. The project reached eighteen more young people (n – 142) than planned for (n – 124). Virtually all young people (95%) were supported with life skills (135 young people supported against a target 124). 85% were assisted with job search skills (120 against a target of 82). 26% of beneficiaries (37 young people) achieved an employment outcome (n – 41, against target of 32).
8. The timing of the project and young people's varied, and complex situations explain why some outcomes were lower than the original targets. 27% secured an education and training outcome (44 against a target of 54) and 6% gained an Ofqual qualification (8 against a target of 10). An additional 11 young people gained a qualification that advanced their progress to the labour market but was not Ofqual recognised (14 qualifications gained). 11% engaged with the Benefits system (16 against a target of 32), possibly an indicator of both an enduring



resistance to engage with the Job Centre, but also due to many moving into a more positive outcome in education, employment, and training.

3. Hidden young people achieved better employment outcomes than unemployed peers (34% against 17%). In contrast unemployed young people achieved better education and training outcomes (33% against 23%).
4. Using a proximity to the labour market (PLM) measure (adapted from Greater Manchester's Talent Match), generally young people made positive progress against twelve indicators. On average the distance a young person travelled was 1.09 points on a scale of one to five (relating to the twelve indicators), band one indicating greater distance and band five greater proximity to the labour market. This measure provides an alternative and more nuanced quantitative presentation of outcomes illustrating how the intervention nudges beneficiaries forward.
5. The development of strong and trusting relationships between talent coaches and young people was crucial as a basis to move forward. Engagement with talent coaches contributed to cognitive, emotional, and behavioural development.
6. There was mutual benefit for all parties through partnership working in enhancing both planning and delivery of the project. The engagement of a diverse group of delivery partners as well as Advisory Group members meant the project drew upon diverse skills, knowledge, and experience. These partnerships can continue beyond project-end.
7. Partnerships with employers and DWP representatives on the Advisory Group allowed the project to be informed by, as well as influence, these important institutions for young people's employment. Ongoing work is required with these groups to support the pipeline of young people who are NEET into the labour market.

### Other insights

1. Despite efforts by the DWP to improve take-up of Benefits and active engagement as a project partner, both young people and stakeholders had negative perceptions of the experience of making a claim for Universal Credit (or other Benefits) and attending the Job Centre before and during the programme. Barriers to claim included the social stigma associated with being a claimant, an inaccessibility in making and sustaining a Benefits claim, and fears about the repercussions of sanctions. With fears of poverty increasing, this low take-up of entitled Benefits is an urgent problem.
2. Mental health issues for young people are increasing. These have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Mental health and wellbeing are an important factor in the development of young people's sustainable employability and need to be recognised in any youth employment programme. Mental health conditions often intersect with other barriers such as being a care leaver, ex-offender, having a disability or being homeless.
3. Youth employment programmes should be allocated a minimum of twelve months funding and ideally have permanent, secure funding. Despite the good outcomes achieved by the project, there were serious misgivings about such important work being allocated short-term funding.

## Project legacy

1. Successive iterations of Hidden Talent support the importance of seeking out and working with hidden young people. Not only has the high number of hidden young people been recognised but the productive scope of working with them. In this project many of their outcomes exceeded unemployed young people.
2. Hidden Talent has provided a foundation for many delivery partners to continue their work through other funding (via GMCA).
3. The modelling of a youth-led approach is an important feature that will continue into other projects and influences how Job Centres and others approach youth employment provision.
4. GMYN's Youth Panel and GMCVO continue to work together having won a tender to carry out a Peer Evaluation of the Prince's Trust's *Future Workforce Fund* programme from July 2022 – Dec 2022.

## Lessons for future policy and practice

In Greater Manchester, the Young Person's Guarantee policy framework complements lessons learnt from Hidden Talent and recommendations that have emerged from the evaluation. Our lessons specifically relate to supporting young people to move towards active participation in the labour market and to be able to sustain decent work for the future.

Young people as early entrants to the labour market need tailored provision of relevant advice about education, employment, and training. This will have an important benefit for the economy and society as they move towards being active citizens and workers.

**Recommendation 1:** Building on the good practice model of delivery from Hidden Talent, establish a permanently funded careers advisory/employment support service for all young people (including those that are NEET). With varied provision depending on young people's circumstances, this could be co-ordinated via appropriate youth hubs in collaboration with Third Sector organisations and focus on advice for education, employment, and training.

The inter-relationship between education, employment, training, and other aspects of young people's lives needs to be recognised in youth employment programmes.

**Recommendation 2:** Ensure youth employment programmes have provision to support young people with varied barriers, e.g., available mental health support.

Very practical barriers reduce young people's ability to progress towards the labour market. This affects less well-off young people more.

**Recommendation 3:** Address the practical barriers that impede young people going into employment, e.g., introduce a young person discounted rate for both travel and ID costs.

**Recommendation 4:** Engage relevant transport authority (TfGM) as a partner in future youth employment projects to assist in improving access to travel.

Policymakers and employers can both create more strategies to help generate opportunities to support young people into education, employment, and training.

**Recommendation 5:** Build upon schemes such as KickStart to make work experience more widely available to young people (e.g., not just limited to those on Universal Credit). As part of this, appropriate opportunities need to be created for young people with disabilities who want to work.

**Recommendation 6:** Employers to strengthen good HR practices and engage with initiatives such as the Good Employment Charter in Manchester. The Youth Employment Charter and Youth Friendly Badge<sup>1</sup> also provide a way to evidence employer commitment.

Data used to understand the progress of young people is not adequate. Systematic ways to track young people as they transition into the labour market are absent. Traditional measures of desired outcomes in youth employment programmes do not recognise the complexity of young people's lives and what constitutes progress (the GMTM PLM measure is one solution to this).

**Recommendation 7:** Establishment of a robust system to monitor young people leaving education, training, and employment to ensure they do not get lost in transition. This could be administered by GMACS, with provision to direct to relevant careers advice.

**Recommendation 8:** Consideration of how diverse groups of young people are served effectively in appropriate projects. Scope to more explicitly appreciate how outcomes vary between different streams of young people facing different barriers.

Although officially adults (at least those over 18) young people have unique needs associated with their physical, emotional, and cognitive development. Dramatic and positive changes to young people's lives can be created by timely and appropriate interventions.

**Recommendation 9:** Recognition and appropriate funding in public policy of the unique needs of young people in the design and provision of support services in all aspects of their lives (e.g., careers and work, health, wellbeing, housing).

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<sup>1</sup> Youth Employment UK. (2021). Youth Employment Charter and Youth Employer Friendly Badge. Youth Employment UK. <https://www.youthemployment.org.uk/youth-employment-experts/>

# 1. About the programme

## 1.1. Introduction

The Hidden Talent programme (January-June 2022) was managed by GMCVO. It was funded by the Community Renewal Fund of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) acted as the lead authority for the project. GMCVO was able to build upon previous work that it had led for numerous years (since 2014), enabled by various sources of funding (from GMCA and the National Lottery).

Findings from previous research and evaluation in Greater Manchester has led to an emerging interest in hidden young people, i.e., those young people who are NEET but are not claiming Benefits<sup>2</sup>. In recent years, GMCVO's work has consistently given priority to trying to reach hidden young people hence the name of the current project.

The use of the language of 'hidden talent' reflects the ethos of the project which is to resist negative stereotypes of young people who are NEET and to view the potential of young people positively. The 2022 project itself coincided with a period in which the UK was emerging from the Covid pandemic. Considerable attention had been drawn to how young people as new entrants to the labour market had been adversely affected by the disruption to employment caused by Covid-19, which added to the importance of Hidden Talent at this time<sup>34</sup>.

## 1.2. Rationale for the programme: The importance of support for young people

There has been a longstanding interest amongst policymakers, practitioners and researchers in how young people are supported to make effective transitions into the labour market. There are particular concerns about how young people who are NEET are most effectively supported. Research consistently supports the positive impact that youth employment programmes<sup>5 6 7</sup> can have for young people who are NEET but recognises that structural factors may limit the effectiveness of any project. Important influences on young people include economic, spatial, and social

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<sup>2</sup> Jones, K., Martin, P., & Kelly, A. (2018). Hidden young people in Salford: exploring the experiences of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) and not claiming benefits. University of Salford.

<sup>3</sup> Christie, F., Swingewood, A. (2022) The impact of Covid-19 on Young Workers in England: young people navigating insecure work in Greater Manchester during the Covid-19 pandemic. Manchester: Manchester Metropolitan University.

<sup>4</sup> Henehan, K. (2021) Uneven Steps: Changes in youth unemployment and study since the onset of Covid-19. London: Resolution Foundation. <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2021/04/Uneven-steps.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Kluve, J., Puerto, S., Robalino, D., Romero, J. M., Rother, F., Stöterau, J., ... & Witte, M. (2019). Do youth employment programs improve labor market outcomes? A quantitative review. *World Development*, 114, 237-253.

<sup>6</sup> Mawn, L., Oliver, E. J., Akhter, N., Bamba, C. L., Torgerson, C., Bridle, C., & Stain, H. J. (2017). Are we failing young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs)? A systematic review and meta-analysis of re-engagement interventions. *Systematic reviews*, 6(1), 1-17.

<sup>7</sup> Sanderson, E. (2020). Youth transitions to employment: longitudinal evidence from marginalised young people in England. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 23(10), 1310-1329.

circumstances, meaning that individual characteristics are only one contributor in determining chances of moving into sustained employment. There has been research that highlights which groups of young people are more at risk of becoming NEET. These include a range of social and individual factors including disability, mental health<sup>8</sup>, ethnicity<sup>9</sup>, educational level and location<sup>10</sup>. Policymakers in Greater Manchester have made it a priority to find ways to prevent young people from becoming NEET <sup>11</sup>

Researchers have observed the risk of an over-emphasis on youth employment interventions on young people themselves which ignores social factors such as employer attitudes<sup>12</sup>, the local economy and family circumstances. Reviews of programmes do not always agree on the detail of 'what works' and there is a lack of clarity on 'what works for whom'. However, there is broad support for the effectiveness of high-contact multicomponent interventions in improving employment prospects for individuals who are NEET, although there are concerns that it is often the most disadvantaged groups that are not reached by targeted interventions. Research also criticises a preoccupation with economic and policy drivers and metrics that fail to explore wider personal, social or health issues in research about young people who are NEET.

Numbers of young people who are NEET remain hard to alter over time despite the work of youth employment programmes. National ONS figures in October to December 2021, estimated 10.2% of all people aged 16 to 24 years were not in education, employment, or training (NEET). This amounts to a total figure of 692,000 <sup>13</sup> This figure was largely unchanged on the previous quarter (July to September 2021) and down 0.9 percentage points compared with pre-coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic levels (October to December 2019). Nationally (between October to December 2021), there were an estimated 260,000 unemployed young people who were NEET and claiming Benefits, which is a record low for the series, with a record low for men (158,000) and a joint record low for women (102,000). However, there were an estimated 432,000 economically inactive young people who were NEET, up 11,000 on the quarter, with a record high for men (242,000). In other data sources,

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<sup>8</sup> Sehmi, R. and Slaughter, H. (2021) Double trouble: Exploring the labour market and mental health impact of Covid-19 on young people. London: Resolution Foundation.

<https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2021/05/Double-trouble.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Morris, M. (2015) Supporting ethnic minority young people from education into work. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation. <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/supporting-ethnic-minority-young-people-education-work>

<sup>10</sup> Everington, D., Feng, Z., Ralston, K. and Dibben, C. (2018) 'Risk factors for young people not being in education, employment or training (NEET): Longitudinal analyses over a 10 year follow up period in Scotland.' International Journal of Population Data Science, 3(2).

<sup>11</sup> Greater Manchester Employment and Skills Panel (2021). *Local Skills Report & Labour Market Plan*. Manchester: <https://greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/4348/greater-manchester-local-skills-report-and-labour-market-plan-march-2021.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Russell, L., Thompson, R. and Simmons, R. (2014) Helping unemployed young people to find private sector work. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation. <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/helping-unemployed-young-people-find-private-sector-work>

<sup>13</sup> ONS. (2022). Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), UK: February 2022. ONS. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/unemployment/bulletins/youngpeoplenotineducationemploymentortrainingneet/february2022#main-points>



the OECD<sup>14</sup> report North-West NEET levels to be higher (13.4% in 2021) than the ONS figure, while other UK Government statistics report NEET levels to be lower for the region at 9.7%<sup>15</sup>. City region data is harder to access but in 2019, OECD statistics report 15.1% of young people as NEET in Greater Manchester.

The term 'economically inactive' has different meanings in different contexts, (e.g., it can include students) but when referring to young people who are NEET, most commonly includes individuals signing on for Benefit but unable to work, as well as those who are hidden and not getting Benefits. ONS estimates illustrate that there are more 'economically inactive' than those who are officially unemployed (see appendix 1 for precise definitions). It is difficult to be sure of precise numbers of 'economically inactive' and hidden young people who are NEET. There were an estimated 21,890 hidden young people across Greater Manchester in 2018<sup>16</sup>. Lack of monitoring of young people when they leave education or training is a problem in capturing an accurate picture. GMCA are currently working to implement a system to address this. Questions arise about why young people remain hidden. There can be a range of reasons for this including cushioning by family as well as resistance to engage with the Benefits system.

The design of Hidden Talent recognised the learning gained from previous research into interventions and built upon previous projects with young people who are NEET regionally and nationally. Specifically, GMCVO was a lead partner of the national Talent Match programme, an employability project which was funded by the National Lottery and evaluated extensively by the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University. Talent Match was a £108 million programme which followed the financial crisis. From 2014-2018 Talent Match supported over 25,000 young people in 21 parts of England including Greater Manchester.

In their final assessment of Talent Match, the Evaluators<sup>17 18</sup> argued for some important features for successful youth employment initiatives. These include youth involvement in the design and delivery of projects; person-centred approaches and key working between participants and employment support providers; strong partnership and local employment support ecosystems; priority to those who need most help which tends to be those with multiple barriers; recognition of the scale of investment required: and more secure funding models to support this work. GMCVO

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<sup>14</sup> OECD Statistics: <https://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?queryid=90228>

<sup>15</sup> UK Government: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/neet-statistics-annual-brief/2021#dataBlock-999dae18-2b85-4a5a-f7f4-08d9df449e92-charts>

<sup>16</sup> Gaskell, A. (2018). Still Hidden. Talent Match. <https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/media/insights/documents/GM-Still-Hidden.pdf?mtime=20201117154923&focal=none>

<sup>17</sup> Damm, C., Green, A., Pearson, S., Sanderson, E., Wells, P., & Wilson, I. (2020). Talent Match Evaluation: A Final Assessment. Sheffield Hallam University. <https://www.shu.ac.uk/centre-regional-economic-social-research/publications/talent-match-evaluation-a-final-assessment>

<sup>18</sup> Talent Match Evaluation (2020). Evaluation Blog #14: Urgent Lessons from the Talent Match Programme to Avoid a Covid-19 Youth Unemployment Crisis. <https://blogs.shu.ac.uk/talentmatch/blogs/>

have embraced many of these recommendations in the 2022 Hidden Talent project, albeit some are outside their control, i.e., funding and investment decisions.

GMCVO have undertaken their own local evaluation of Hidden Talent projects managed by them. Much of this evaluation supports the findings from the Talent Match evaluation and in addition more recently explored themes around the impact of the Covid-19 shock in the city region. They highlighted the adverse consequences to mental health and wellbeing of the Covid pandemic on young people, making new demands on talent coaches in how they reach young people. Their recent reports explore the value of greater partnership between providers and youth engagement in the design and development of projects. Writing for GMCVO in 2021, Atkinson<sup>19</sup> highlights the important role of the Youth Panel in project design, the value of meetings for talent coaches/delivery partners to foster mutual support, and the role of talent coach autonomy in support provided. She also reveals enduring negative perceptions of the Job Centre which contribute to young people remaining hidden. GMCVO have also published outputs from the Youth Panel itself including peer evaluation<sup>20</sup> and an employer toolkit<sup>21</sup>. This work has been able to capitalise upon and feed into regional initiatives such as the Good Employment Charter and Young Person's Guarantee.

### 1.3. About the stakeholders and beneficiaries

Priority localities in Greater Manchester were Manchester, Bolton, Rochdale, and Oldham. However, the project also included Stockport, Bury and Salford due to the strong links with public sector bodies within those boroughs. The programme sought to engage 124 young people (16-24) resident in those locations who were not in employment, education, or training (NEET) or at risk of becoming NEET/ economically inactive. Hidden young people, i.e., those not claiming welfare Benefits to which they are entitled, e.g., PIP, DLA, Universal Credit were a priority). At the outset, the following groups of young people were recognised as of particular importance to reach:

- Hidden young people (Economically Inactive)
- Young people from ethnically diverse backgrounds
- Young people diagnosed with a long-term health condition (including mental health)
- Disabled young people (including Learning Disability and Neurodiversity)
- Ex-offenders
- Lone parents

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<sup>19</sup> Atkinson, L. (2021). GM's Hidden Talent Year 2 Evaluation. GMCVO. Manchester.

<https://www.gmcvo.org.uk/publications/gm%E2%80%99s-hidden-talent-year-2-evaluation>

<sup>20</sup> Hidden Talent Youth Panel (2021). Youth Panel Peer Evaluations Report. GMCVO. Manchester.

<https://www.gmcvo.org.uk/system/files/publications/Peer%20Evaluation%20Year%202%20Collated%20Report%20Final.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Hidden Talent Youth Panel (2021). Employer Toolkit: Adapting Recruitment Processes to Get the Most out of Young People. GMCVO. Manchester. <https://www.gmcvo.org.uk/publications/employer-toolkit-adapting-recruitment-get-best-out-young-people>

- Care leavers
- Young people vulnerable to substance misuse
- Homeless young people
- Carers

The GMCVO project management team co-ordinated relevant stakeholders to reach target beneficiaries. They contracted delivery partners to be responsible for provision of talent coach support to young people. These partners already had a strong presence in their respective communities and fields of expertise.

- The Broughton Trust – Salford
- Early Break – Bury
- Upturn Enterprises – Oldham and Rochdale
- Stockport Homes – Stockport
- Bolton Solidarity Community Association (BCSA) – Bolton
- Manchester Young Lives – Manchester
- United Response – Stockport, Salford, Bolton, and Manchester
- Reform Radio - Manchester

In response to the ambition to ensure youth involvement in the project design, another partner was Greater Manchester Youth Network (GMYN), from which a member of staff acted as the Youth Panel co-ordinator. The Youth Panel consisted of volunteers recruited from the existing GMYN network and selected for their relevant experience, albeit they were not beneficiaries of Hidden Talent. To foster employer engagement, Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce were enlisted as a partner with responsibility for employer links. Of the GM community renewal-funded projects, Hidden Talent was chosen for enhanced support from DWP, hence there were regular monitoring meetings with GMCVO as well as participation at stakeholder meetings and attendance at the employer recruitment event organised by the Chamber. GMCVO were also invited to speak about Hidden Talent to the DWP ‘Connecting Families’ team.

In addition, an Advisory Group for the project was set up to support the implementation and realisation of the Hidden Talent delivery. Members of the Advisory Group from the public, third and private sectors were asked to act as advocates for the programme, providing advice, and strategic insight to the project. Notably the Group included employer representatives as part of its ambition to ensure employers contribute to youth employment programmes.

- Bolton Council
- Bury Council
- Department of Work and Pensions
- Greater Manchester Autism Consortium project and NAS
- Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce
- Greater Manchester Combined Authority
- Good Employment Charter
- Greater Manchester Learning Provider Network
- Greater Manchester Youth Network (GMYN)



- Manchester Athena
- Manchester City Council
- Oldham Council
- Rochdale Council
- Salford City Council
- Stockport Council
- The Co-operative Group

The Chair of the Advisory Group was initially Bev Craig (leader of Manchester Council) and GM lead for skills and employment and digital, followed by Sarah Scanlon from Salford Council who stepped into the role towards the end of the project.

## 2. About the evaluation

GMCVO commissioned researchers with expertise in young people's employment from the Decent Work and Productivity Research Centre at Manchester Metropolitan University to assist in measuring the impact of the Hidden Talent (HT) project. The project required a 'live' external evaluation while it was being delivered from Jan 2022 until June 2022. Evaluators attended numerous stakeholder meetings to follow the progress of the project.

The live external evaluation ran alongside the collection of monitoring information and outcome measures to be reported to GMCA and DLUHC. This information was collected by talent coaches via forms and the Views database, which also records personal data including demographic information of the young people on the programme. The GMCVO project management team collated information collected by talent coaches across the eight delivery partners.

### 2.1. Aims and Objectives

The evaluation was informed by well-established evaluation methodology which seeks to consider appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability<sup>22</sup>. The GMCVO project management team and external evaluator collaborated in the design of the evaluation and generation of data to be utilised.

Led by the GMCVO team the first stage was to collect and review the monitoring data collated by them from delivery partners/talent coaches. This comprised detailed data about participation and outcomes that was required by DLUHC. In addition, monitoring data collected, adapted items that had been developed as part of the Talent Match project data framework<sup>23 24</sup> and that was used to create a 'proximity to the labour market' (PLM) measure which estimates the different factors that contribute positively/negatively to young people who are NEET entering education, training, or employment. Twelve factors were identified (over and above standard demographic information) which the Talent Match evaluators concluded impacted on movement into the labour market (table 1). For Hidden Talent (2022), GMCVO decided to collect data about these factors as an additional way to help gather insights about progression of young people that do not fit the standard outcome targets. For the purpose of analysis, scores were grouped into five bands: band one indicates greater distance and band five greater proximity to the labour market. Some of these factors offered scope for development (e.g., job search skills), others not (e.g., caring responsibilities).

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<sup>22</sup> Markiewicz, A., & Patrick, I. (2015). Developing monitoring and evaluation frameworks. Sage Publications.

<sup>23</sup> Sanderson, E., & Wilson, I. (2015). Talent Match Evaluation and Learning Contract: 2013-19 - Common Data Framework: Annual Report. Sheffield Hallam University.

<sup>24</sup> Sanderson, E. (2020). Youth transitions to employment: longitudinal evidence from marginalised young people in England. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 23(10), 1310-1329.

**Table 1: Hidden Talent questions/indicators used to create Proximity to the Labour Market (PLM) measure (adapted from previous Talent Match project)**

1	Do you have caring responsibilities for a child or anyone else that may limit your ability to work?
2	Do you have a disability that limits your ability to work?
3	Do you have a mental health issue that limits your ability to work?
4	Do you have a drug or alcohol misuse problem that limits your ability to work?
5	Do you have English and Maths GCSE A-C or grades 4-9 or an equivalent Level 2 qualification?
6	Do you have a good enough level of reading writing, numeracy and IT skills to get by on a daily basis?
7	Have you ever undertaken work experience or volunteering?
8	Have you identified what type of employment you would like to do in the short and long term?
9	Do you know what skills, experience and qualifications you need to achieve your work goals?
10	Do you feel confident undertaking job search, writing CVs and undertaking job interviews?
11	Please rate your ability to manage your feelings (Dealing with issues, coping, managing problems) 1 = you really struggle to manage your feelings. 6 = you have no difficulty managing your feelings
12	Please rate your ability to manage your confidence level (Self-esteem, self-belief, self-respect, self-awareness, dealing with nerves) on a scale of 1= you really struggle with your confidence. 6 = you have no issues with confidence

The second stage was for the external evaluation team to undertake qualitative work to elicit the views of varied stakeholders and beneficiaries to evaluate the effectiveness of HT covering:

- appropriateness of initial design
- progress against targets
- delivery and management
- outcomes and impact
- value for money
- wider lessons learnt

In designing stage two of the qualitative work, the DW&P project team distilled these issues into the following high-level questions:

1. Has the Hidden Talent programme been effective in achieving its original goals? If so, in what ways?
2. How do varied stakeholders and beneficiaries evaluate the merits of the programme?
3. What lessons have been learnt from the Hidden Talent programme about the barriers and opportunities regarding young people's engagement with education, training, and employment?

4. To what extent has the design of the Hidden Talent programme assisted in responding to the needs of young people?

The second stage of the evaluation involved fully transcribed individual and group interviews with young people (n-15), GMCVO project management team (n- 4), talent coaches (n-6), delivery partners (n-3), and Advisory Group members (n-3). Some individuals held more than one role, e.g., acted as a talent coach as well as delivery partner. The Youth Panel (n-5) and Youth Panel co-ordinator (n-1) met more informally with the evaluator towards the end of the project to review themes and their own activities as volunteers.

Evaluation team members also attended various meetings to gain insights about the context and operations of HT.

## 2.2. Targets for programme

Initial numerical targets for the project were that it would reach 124 young people (aged 16-24), 54 of whom would go into education and training and 32 into employment. Other targets of priority to capture for beneficiaries included: gaining a qualification (n-10), engaging in job-seeking (n-82) and/or life skills (n-124) support, and engaging with the job centre (n-32). Targets were increased after an interim report in March based on month-by-month performance. The project outcomes went over initial targets in some areas and under in others, largely a reflection of the timing of the project, the nature of young people who came forward, and their readiness to progress. Details of outcomes are in section 4.1.

The project also aimed to generate positive outcomes for the wider community of stakeholders by building partnerships and capacity-building for delivery partners. The city-wide nature of the project facilitated this with engagement of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) allowing for two-way dialogue on how to improve access and provision to Benefits and Job Centre services for young people. The Chamber of Commerce representative on the Advisory Group acted as a conduit to employers with the aim of generating vacancies and influencing employer practices. In addition, the project aligned well with regional skills and labour market policy, the Good Employment Charter<sup>25</sup> and Young Person's Guarantee<sup>26</sup>.

## 2.3. Wider learning

Stimulated by questions raised in earlier evaluations, GMCVO also wanted the evaluation to explore the following issues:

- The process for young people to engage with their local job centre and initiate a Universal Credit claim

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<sup>25</sup> Good Employment Charter <https://www.gmgoodemploymentcharter.co.uk/>

<sup>26</sup> Young Person's Guarantee <https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/what-we-do/children-and-young-people/youth-task-force-and-young-persons-guarantee/young-persons-guarantee/>

- The difference in referral process for young people who do not currently claim any welfare Benefits (hidden young people) and those that do.
- Demonstration of the progress of young people when it does not match the outcome measures in the DLUHC's monitoring
- The Talent Coach intervention and how it compares to other employability programmes

Beyond this, the evaluation team was given scope to make new discoveries above and beyond original targets and areas of interest for GMCVO.

Despite the short duration of the project, the evaluation was conducted thoroughly with scope to contribute to the legacy of the project by creating in depth insights that could be of wider value and interest and inform future similar work.

## 3. How was Hidden Talent delivered?

### 3.1. Introduction

In addition to the core element of individual support for young people from talent coaches, the project sought to follow best practice in the delivery of a youth employment programme. Its aims included: to contribute to the capacity-building of delivery partners and talent coaches via use of training and resource-sharing; to ensure youth involvement in project development through the Youth Panel; and to foster employer engagement and support for young people via employer membership of the Advisory Group. In recognition of barriers for young people to engage with the Job Centre (especially hidden young people), a partnership was initiated with the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP). It also sought to contribute insights to wider agenda surrounding youth employment and skills, and was complementary to local policy regarding young people, e.g., the Young Person's Guarantee and its emphasis on reducing inequalities and supporting youth transitions.

### 3.2. Administration, governance, and costs

The overall value of funding for the project was £410,347 (around £7,000 of this went to GMCA to cover their costs as lead authority). Funding covered project management and payments to delivery partners. Delivery partner payments varied depending on numbers of young people they worked with. At a high level there was a cost of £2200 per young person involved in the project.

Administratively, the rapid setting up of a complex project to run for only six months required considerable and timely organisation. However, GMCVO were well-positioned with existing contacts with delivery partners to make the project happen efficiently. However, from the outset it was acknowledged that it might be harder to reach new young people and all partners were concerned about planning beyond the project to ensure supported young people were not left abruptly unsupported at the end of six months.

The smooth running of the project was ensured by the work of the project management team. Regular meetings of the Advisory Group, delivery partners and talent coaches assisted in keeping the project on track and facilitating capacity-building. A regular e-bulletin provided communications to stakeholders and interested parties.

In evaluative interviews, stakeholders reported that one of the main limitations of the six-month period was how much setting up and winding down the project ate into the delivery time. Almost all stakeholders reported that the time limitation of the project was their main concern in relation to organisational issues and the main barrier for supporting more young people or supporting existing clients in a more in-depth way.

*It's a lot of work setting up the project, it's a lot of work getting things in place, then you miss the first few weeks until you get everything moving, and if it's only for six months, it's made it so much more difficult just being a six-month project rather than fixed term. You just feel as though everything's flowing*

*really nicely, the young people, you're engaging, everything's moving on, and then boom, it's like, oh, that's it, finished. Delivery Partner 2*

Stakeholder opinions of GMCVO's management of the project, and previous projects, have been resoundingly positive. A high level of motivation amongst partners in rising to the demands of the project was evident.

*It has been like a real impressive feat from the team to get delivery up and running, and to be done in six months. It's been an enormous challenge. I think every step of the way, as one of the delivery partners, I felt really well informed. Delivery Partner 3*

*The support's been there from GMCVO. We've all worked really hard, the talent coaches have worked really hard, and the young people have benefited, so to me that's an achievement. Delivery Partner 2*

### 3.3. What was provided to young people by delivery partners?

Delivery partners were embedded in and trusted by their communities. Engagement with young people was often generated through word-of-mouth recommendations. Beneficiaries of Hidden Talent were both existing and new contacts for partners. Delivery partners sourced additional referrals through hostels, shelters, Connexions, Leaving Care teams, Troubled Families services, Local CVS organisations and housing associations. The highest number of referrals came through word of mouth (32%), and 16% came via the Job Centre, whilst 15% joined as they were already connected to existing delivery partner services. In contrast to their peers claiming benefits, a higher number of hidden young people were referred via word of mouth (45% against 22%) and outreach activity (11% against 4%).

Delivery partners kept young people engaged by working to an individual's holistic needs. Like detached youth work, talent coaches met young people where they were in terms of geography and development. Delivery partners had different specialisms regarding the type of young people who would be attracted to work with them (e.g., those who were homeless or had mental health issues).

Talent coaches had the flexibility to provide varied types and levels of support in recognition of how close a young person is to the labour market. This could include everything from support with CVs, applications, and interviews, finding opportunities, and making career decisions to in-depth support with managing mental and physical health, finance, the Benefits system, and housing. Specific activities provided by talent coaches included: individual employability/employment advice, mentoring and support (e.g., accompanying to training/interviews and providing transport options, job matching, interview technique); in-work support (addressing hiccups with employers, interpreting pay etc.); providing links to specific mental health support; family liaison as appropriate; sourcing training and educational opportunities (including literacy and numeracy skills); life skills support such as personal organisation, confidence building, travel training; support with Benefit claims and trouble-shooting with other public services. In total across the project, there were 1204 sessions/interactions with young people with an average (mean) number of 8 per young person. The mode and duration of interactions responded to the needs of

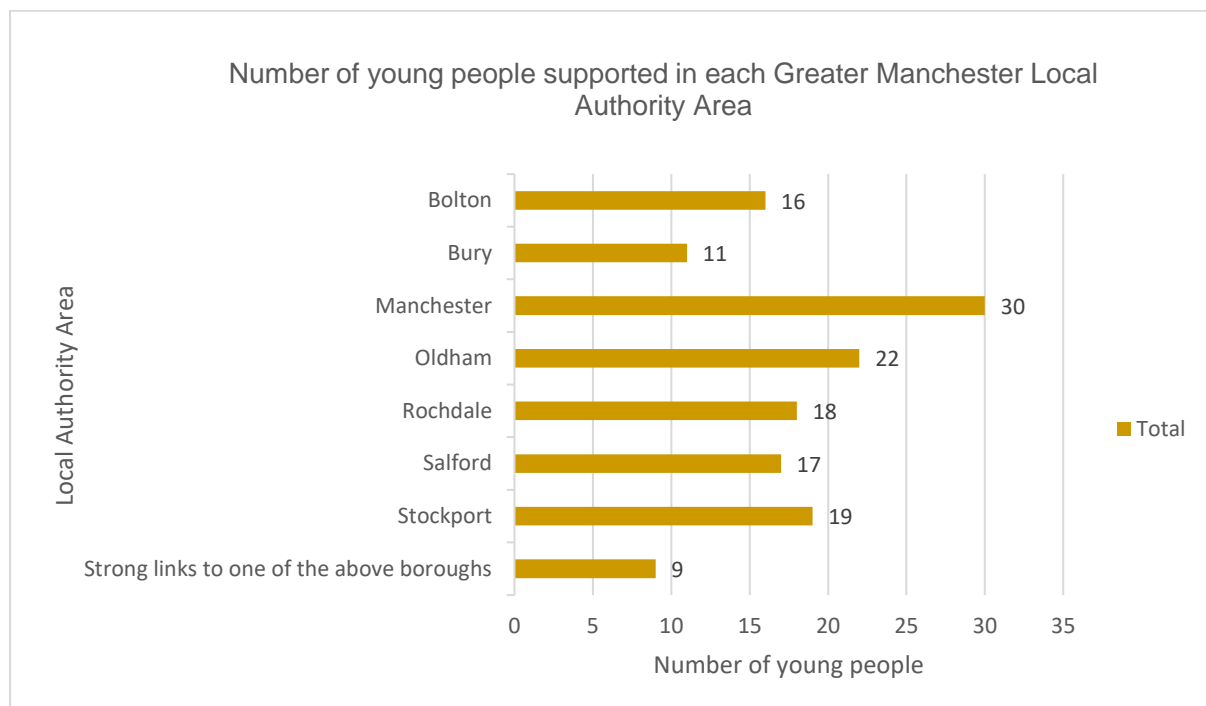


young people. Interactions were in person (47%), over the phone (30%), and virtually via video call or email/instant/text messaging (24%). On average (mean) each young person had nine hours contact time, over six hours of which was in person. Most young people had regular and intensive contact with talent coaches in the short time frame of the project.

Delivery partners also had responsibility for managing beneficiary expenses and there was some flexibility around this. Young people had access to £150 for expenses related to job seeking. This could include clothes, costs associated with obtaining formal ID, travel, food, toiletries, and training courses.

Collectively delivery partners reached the greatest number of young people in the primary target boroughs of Manchester (n=30), Oldham (n=22), Bolton (n=16) and Rochdale (n=18). Other boroughs also well-represented were Salford (n=17), Stockport (n=19) and Bury (n=11). A small number of young people (n=9) in nearby locations (Tameside, Trafford, Cheshire East, High Peak) also joined Hidden Talent, due to their strong links to one of the seven funded boroughs Greater Manchester (e.g., via work, family, or public services).

**Figure 1: Location of young people supported by the project**



Stakeholders had very positive views about how the design of Hidden Talent allowed them to provide diverse support to young people and noted that the success of the design was visible in progress against targets. Delivery partners noted that in comparison to other employability programmes, Hidden Talent provided more time for talent coaches to work with each young person; this meant that it was possible for talent coaches to develop more comprehensive working relationships.

*[...] the talent coach position is excellent at being able to be flexible and have the time to really get to know that young person, what's going on in their lives,*



*and be around to be able to help and support them in whatever it is that's going on, compared to some of the other projects. Delivery Partner 2*

These relationships were enhanced by talent coaches' ability to respond to the needs of individuals more flexibly in comparison to other programmes. Talent coaches reported that young people welcomed the opportunity to seek advice and guidance from them whenever they needed it, and it helped young people to know that talent coaches were always there to offer support.

*[...] some of the comments that come back from the young people have been saying, just to know there's somebody there for advice, just to know that I can just send a text and you're going to answer me. Delivery Partner 2*

In addition, delivery partners and talent coaches stated that the reduced number of young people they were asked to engage with, compared to other employability programmes, contributed to their increased capacity to do in depth work, and offer flexible provision to young people.

### 3.4. Who benefited from the programme?

Hidden Talent reached a diverse pool of young people including those that were in the hard to reach and hidden categories. All stakeholders acknowledged the limitations of a short project in reaching most marginalised young people. A more permanent funding stream for this work would be necessary to maximise reach to new young people who by their hidden nature were harder to find. Some beneficiaries were already known to delivery partners and identified as eligible, but some new young people contacted delivery partners because of widespread promotion of the project through various channels.

Of the 142 young people who participated in Hidden Talent, 51% were economically inactive (including hidden), 49% were unemployed and 45% hidden. The following tables outline further details of activity status based on age (table 2), gender (table 3), ethnicity (table 4), disability (table 5) and major barrier categories (table 6).

A much higher proportion of men participated (61%) compared to women (35%). Why this is the case is complex to explore although does reflect national gender patterns of young people who are NEET. For Hidden Talent, it may also be associated with word-of-mouth referrals (i.e., young men referring one another), however, this contrast merits further research. Regarding ethnicity, 75% were White British and the remainder identified as from a variety of other ethnic groups. Young people from ethnically diverse backgrounds have a higher risk of becoming NEET so it is positive that 25% of the cohort were ethnically diverse. Regarding disability, the highest number of declared conditions were mental health (16%), social/communication disorder (10%) and learning difficulties (9%).

**Table 2: Age and activity status**

Age	Number of young people	Percentage of total number	Economically Inactive (including hidden)	Unemployed	Hidden
16-17	31	22%	21	10	17
18-20	51	36%	24	27	22
21-24	59	41%	26	33	24

**Table 3: Gender and Activity status**

Gender	Number of young people	Percentage of total number	Economically Inactive (including hidden)	Unemployed	Hidden
Man, including trans man	87	61%	45	42	40
Non-Binary	2	1%	1	1	0
Prefer not to say	4	3%	3	1	2
Woman, including trans woman	49	35%	23	26	22

**Table 4: Ethnicity and Activity status**

Ethnicity	Number of young people	Percentage of total number	Economically Inactive (and hidden)	Unemployed	Hidden
Asian/Asian British – Bangladeshi	3	2%	1	2	1
Asian/Asian British - Chinese	1	1%	0	1	0
Asian/Asian British - Pakistani	9	6%	5	4	5
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British - African	11	8%	5	6	7
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British - Any other	2	1%	1	1	2
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British - Caribbean	2	1%	2	0	1
Mixed Ethnic Groups - Mixed ethnic background	6	4%	4	2	2
Other ethnic group - Any other ethnic group	2	2%	1	1	2
White - English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/UK	106	75%	53	53	44

**Table 5: Disability and Activity status**

Declared Disability	Number of young people	Percentage of total number	Economically Inactive (including hidden)	Unemployed	Hidden
Learning difficulty (e.g. movement co-ordination difficulty (Dyspraxia, Dyslexia, etc.)	13	9%	4	9	4
Learning impairment/disability (e.g., Down's syndrome, etc)	1	1%	1	0	1
Long term illness (e.g., cancer, HIV+ etc)	1	1%	1	0	1
Mental health condition (e.g., depression, schizophrenia etc)	23	16%	16	7	9
Other	5	4%	2	3	3
Physical impairment - ambulant (I do not use a wheelchair)	2	1%	2	0	1
Physical impairment - wheelchair user	4	3%	0	4	0
Prefer not to answer	6	4%	3	3	3
Social/communication impairment (e.g., autistic spectrum disorder, Asperger's syndrome etc)	14	10%	7	7	4

**Table 6: Target characteristics (major barriers) and Activity status**

Barrier	Number of young people	Percentage of total number	Economically Inactive (including hidden)	Unemployed	Hidden
Care Leaver	9	6%	6	3	4
Carer	3	2%	1	2	1
Disabled	14	10%	8	6	6
Long term health condition	14	10%	3	11	2
Long term mental health condition	38	27%	18	20	12
Learning Disability	21	15%	11	10	9
Neuro-diverse	43	30%	18	25	14
Ex-offender	17	12%	8	9	9
Lone Parent	7	5%	0	7	0
Vulnerable to substance misuse	12	8%	7	5	9
Have experience or experiencing homelessness	24	17%	12	12	8

It was noteworthy how long some young people had been NEET. The highest number of days was 2618 (over 7 years), although the median number of days was 216. 24 young people reported being NEET for over 1500 days (over 4 years). Such

a prolonged experience of unemployment or economic inactivity for young people needs to be urgently addressed.

### 3.5. Unique features of Hidden Talent

The essentials of what a good youth employment project includes have been reported well in existing research about good practice. Therefore, it is hard to make claims about what might be defined as unique. However, this does not detract from blend of features integrated into Hidden Talent that the project management team highlighted as innovative from the outset, not to mention features observed by the evaluators that are explored in this report.

In their original bid, GMCVO highlighted three areas they considered particularly innovative: work with 'hard to reach' young people; model an innovative youth-led approach; and embed innovative mental health support. These three aspects built upon previous learning and expertise of partners.

The name of the project 'Hidden Talent' evokes the priority given to that group of 'hard to reach' young people. Partnership with a diverse group of delivery partners embedded in their communities allowed for this. Other 'hard to reach' young people were also targeted. Details of participation are included in section 3.4. The project successfully reached many hidden (45%) young people as well as those with characteristics/circumstances associated with representing barriers to entering the labour market (see section 3.4).

Modelling a youth-led approach was less easy given the duration of the project. This meant that none of the Youth Panel were direct beneficiaries of the 2022 Hidden Talent project. However, the Youth Panel co-ordinated by GMYN were able to contribute to wider learning about the Youth employment and skills eco-system as a stream of work in the project. Youth Panel members were consulted on the appropriate design of Youth hubs in the city region and presented their feedback to the DWP. They also commented on evaluation design and emergent themes. The experience of doing this added value to the personal/professional development of Youth Panel members.

A foregrounding of the importance of mental health support was stressed by GMCVO, and some delivery partners had a specialism in this area. The project design appreciated that some young people need to address mental health and wellbeing issues before they can move closer to entry to the labour market. Delivery partners were allowed to seek out locally the most appropriate mental health provision, although GMCVO were able to direct young people to a range of counselling services within each of the seven boroughs. Talent coaches provided appropriate support and signposting to young people, some who had very serious mental health issues. A budget of £14,700 was allocated for beneficiaries to spend on mental health support. The budget enabled those who were unable to access timely NHS Mental Health support to find appropriate support. Slowness of access to relevant mental health support meant that this budget continued to be spent after official project end. 27% of beneficiaries reported that they had a long-term mental health condition (see section 3.4).

As evaluators, notable features of the project stood out as innovative. These included the scope to offer in-work support for young people which is different from many other employability-related programmes that stop at the point an individual has got a job. Regarding processes to support young people, both the autonomy of talent coaches to flexibly provide services to young people as well as the collaboration fostered across all partners illustrated a desire to enact best practice learnt from previous research. Such active implementation of learning from earlier experiences does not routinely happen in youth employment initiatives.

### 3.6. Conclusion

Hidden Talent 2022 was set up rapidly, building on existing good work and relationships between stakeholders. Its ability to move quickly to create an effective project to support young people was remarkable. A diverse provision of support was created for young people reflecting their 'proximity to the labour market'. Everything from rapid support into employment to intense mental health and wellbeing provision was required due to the diverse nature of young people referred to the project.

Talent coaches adopted a flexible person-centred approach in dealing with young people. In total 142 young people were supported in contrast to the 124 targeted.

Of the 142 young people who participated, 51% were economically inactive (including hidden), 49% were registered as unemployed and receiving Benefits. 45% of the total were hidden, reflecting a proportion of the economically inactive 51%, the other 6% being those in receipt of Benefits but unable to work due to health of disability. The project was successful in reaching hard to reach young people. In addition to just under half of the project's beneficiaries being hidden (45%), many young people had characteristics and circumstances associated with major barriers to get into education, employment, and training. Notably, 30% reported they were neurodiverse, 27% a mental health condition, and 17% had experienced homelessness.

Core and unique features of the project included its modelling of a youth-led approach through the engagement of the GMYN Youth Panel. It also foregrounded the importance of mental health support as a key barrier to address for young people with budget provision for additional services in this area. For those able to move more rapidly into employment, the project included the offer of in-work support, which is different from many other employability-related programmes that stop at the point an individual has got a job and has great potential value to employers too. Regarding processes to support young people, talent coaches were afforded considerable autonomy in how they flexibly provided services (albeit with requirement to complete standard reporting). Collaboration was fostered across all partners and stakeholders with regular meetings and GMCVO adjusted project administration and activities if this was deemed appropriate by delivery partners.

## 4. What has Hidden Talent achieved?

### 4.1. Individual outcomes (quantitative measures)

Detailed monitoring data was collected by talent coaches and collated by GMCVO to capture the individual outcomes of beneficiaries. Box 1 presents a summary of overall outcomes against targets (actual number and percentage of young people included).

#### Box 1: Final outcomes (actual and percentages) for the project against initial targets<sup>27</sup>

- 142 people supported (target 124)
- 44 education and training outcomes were achieved (target 54) by 38 individual young people (27%)
- 135 young people (95%) were supported with life skills (target 124)
- 16 young people (11%) were supported to engage with the Benefits system (target 32)
- 8 young people (6%) gained an Ofqual qualification (target 10)
- 14 non-Ofqual qualifications were achieved by 11 young people (8%) (no target set)
- 120 young people (85%) were support to job search (target 82)
- 41 employment outcomes were achieved (target 32) by 37 young people (26%)

Due to the project's focus on hidden young people, outcomes across the different activity groups were compared. Table 7 illustrates what percentage of each group achieved a certain outcome. The outcomes of hidden young people surpass their unemployed peers in engagement with job searching (91% compared to 84%), gaining an Ofqual qualification (9% compared to 4%) and most notably 34% achieve an employment outcome compared to 17% of the unemployed. Figure 2 depicts this data graphically. Unemployed young people had higher outcomes than their peers in relation to education and training (33% compared to 23% of hidden). The outcomes achieved by hidden young people supports the urgency of actively seeking out these young people who are NEET with scope they can make more movement than those already engaged with the Benefits system.

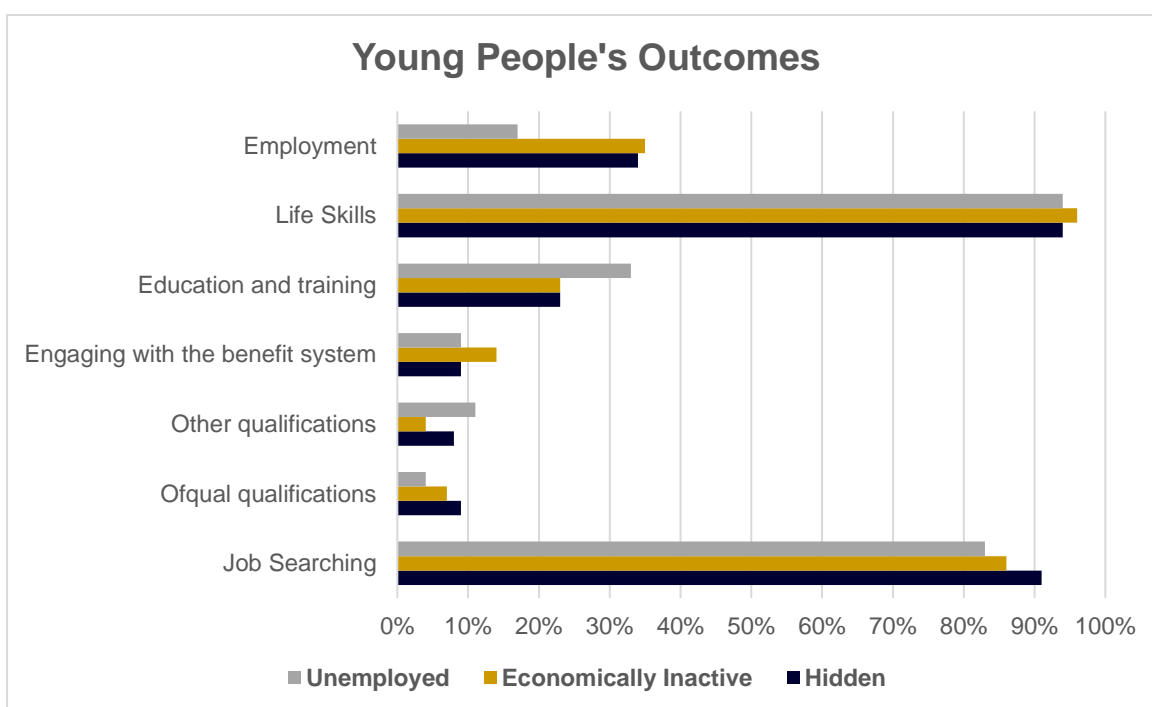
**Table 7: Young People's Outcomes: Comparing hidden, economically inactive (including hidden) and unemployed**

Outcome	Hidden	Economically Inactive (including hidden)	Unemployed
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<sup>27</sup> For the following outcomes, some young people have achieved more than one outcome: 44 education and training outcomes were achieved (38 young people); 14 non-ofqual qualifications were achieved (11 young people); 41 employment outcomes were achieved (37 young people)

Job Searching	91%	86%	83%
Ofqual qualifications	9%	7%	4%
Other qualifications	8%	4%	11%
Engaging with the benefit system	9%	14%	9%
Education and training	23%	23%	33%
Life Skills	94%	96%	94%
Employment	34%	35%	17%

**Figure 2: Young People's Outcomes: Comparing hidden, economically inactive (including hidden) and unemployed**



In addition to this outcomes data, GMCVO were able to analyse data about beneficiaries using the Proximity to the Labour Market Measure (PLM) (see section 2.2). This provides a valuable addition to standard outcome measures. This data illustrates that on average beneficiaries moved forward 1.09 points on across the bands from one to five, (one indicating greater distance and band five greater proximity to the labour market) (Table 8<sup>28</sup>). This varied across young people, with those with a long-term mental health condition having the lowest score for 'distance travelled'. Men appear to make slightly more progress than women, and scores

<sup>28</sup> The PLM is based on a scale of one to five with one indicating greater distance and band five greater proximity to the labour market. The distance travelled is the difference between the two and shows how much further towards the labour market a young person has progressed.



across all ethnic groups are similar. This variety of scores reflects the complexity of young people’s circumstances, but overall illustrates how beneficiaries moved closer to the labour market during their time on Hidden Talent. Table 8 illustrates the differences in ‘distance travelled’ for hidden young people and others and indicates that those defined as hidden made greater movement on the PLM (1.33) scale than those who are unemployed (0.90).

**Table 8: Hidden Talent Proximity to the Labour Market measure (PLM) – distanced travelled**

Target Group	Average PLM band at Start-up	Average PLM band at Exit	Distance travelled across the bands
Hidden	2.15	3.44	1.33
Economically inactive (including hidden)	2.07	3.32	1.28
Unemployed	2.31	3.21	0.90
Learning Disability	1.25	2.05	0.80
Long term Mental health condition	1.81	2.50	0.69
Neurodiverse	1.84	2.88	1.05
Disability	1.71	2.71	1.00
Women	2.51	3.49	0.98
Men	2.05	3.13	1.11
Ethnically diverse groups	2.2	3.24	1.06
White - British	2.19	3.26	1.09

#### 4.2. Strong relationships between young people and talent coaches

Evidence emerged from interviews that the successful outcomes were largely grounded in the strength of relationships young people had with talent coaches. The professional skills and qualities of coaches appeared significant in encouraging and supporting young people. Across the delivery organisations, talent coaches had different areas of specialism, e.g., mental health, disability, ex-offenders, and there was diversity in how and what talent coaches were able to do. However, the professionals involved had the ability to inspire trust amongst young people, many of whom reported the talent coach relationship as being one that was much better than others they had had with authorities (including in education, employment, and other public services). Many, though not all the young people interviewed had had a previous relationship with talent coaches, who had identified them as eligible for Hidden Talent. Relationships built up over time added to the positivity expressed. When asked what they would be doing differently now if it wasn’t for the talent coach, many of the young people indicated that the talent coach support had a transformational impact for them.

*Because I didn't really have anything when I came and to be honest it was a last resort because I was struggling with my mental health and things like but in here I know I can... the staff, they talk to you on a personal level. So, I can just talk to them on a personal level. I don't have to worry about any third*





*parties or anything like that. It's just a very good place to be. They've also helped me get back on my feet because I've been going through a lot since I'm with them. Pretty much they know a lot, like I've been struggling with housing, and I was nearly homeless, and I could speak to them about that. They gave me the confidence really just to get that help that I needed.* **Young Person Participant 12**

Young people described many examples of activities undertaken by coaches who adopted a flexible youth work approach in what they did. Activities described included everything from helping sort out ID, CV preparation, developing strategies for good wellbeing and mental health, giving lifts to interviews and relevant events, navigating bureaucratic systems such as at job centres, and proactively advocating with other public services. Interestingly, young people sometimes struggled to articulate the specifics of how talent coaches had helped them. This is an indicator of the holistic approach of the talent coach model.

There was a strong endorsement of talent coaches from young people and disappointment that the relationship might end at the end of Hidden Talent, though many delivery partners were planning to transfer young people onto other supported provision if possible. In general, talent coaches appeared to protect young people from worrying too much about the implications of the short-term nature of Hidden Talent funding.

*Yes, the scheme's finished now. Yes, he seemed very knowledgeable about ... What he was doing.... he recommended a few other things afterwards as well. Like there's supposed to be another job Fair, an IT based job Fair... in the near future. Yes, I would've liked for contact with talent coach to have continued. Yes, because he had other stuff planned.* **Young Person Participant 15**

Questions are raised about the sensitivity required when coaches may have to end such relationships when funding is discontinued. This was not explored in interviews but may be a particular challenge in a short-term project and limit coaches' ability to reach out to new young people rather than existing contacts.

The importance of creating successful relationships between talent coaches and young people was recognised by stakeholders as crucial and that talent coaches needed to be enabled to do their job well.

*The feedback we get from the young people who do really well is that they really do value the relationship with the talent coach, sort of like, 'Somebody being for us', and being there for them and being supportive. That person who quite often is battling for them on their side, and sometimes, in some of the young people we work with, that's not what they've got every day in their life. It's heart-breaking, isn't it, but not every young person has that?* **Delivery Partner 3**

### 4.3. Other outcomes and impact for young people

In addition to more measurable outcomes reported in section 4.1, the following themes emerged from interviews with young people about their experience of Hidden

Talent. The strength of relationships built with talent coaches provided an important basis for the outcomes. These are more subjective than the objective measures above. Conducting interviews with young people allowed for a more nuanced exploration of the impact of Hidden Talent for its beneficiaries.

#### 4.3.1. Growing self-reflection and self-efficacy

The interaction with talent coaches led young people to be able to reflect upon themselves and their circumstances allowing them space to consider their own personality, skills, abilities, and values and how these influence next steps for them. Having the opportunity for such self-reflection in a safe environment is fundamental in developing self-confidence, motivation, and self-efficacy.

Some young people reported that their work with the coach had developed their confidence and motivation. They had also begun to evaluate their own circumstances and make decisions. There was evidence that for some, the positive encouragement of the talent coach had contributed to their optimism about what was possible, while others facing multiple barriers were anxious about the future, albeit they were grateful for talent coach support.

*Basically, coming here I literally had no confidence whatsoever. I think I used to sit and cry if someone said anything good about me. Since being here I just feel like my confidence is up there. Just speaking to them, they make you believe that you can do things. I was motivated before, but they make me want to do everything - like I said, just make me believe in myself.*

#### **Young Person Participant 10**

There are many instances of talent coaches going above and beyond what might be expected. This strength of relationship enhanced young people's own interpersonal skills because of regular coach interactions, as well through other people they met through Hidden Talent (e.g., for employment and education purposes). Especially, for those who may otherwise be isolated the social interaction afforded by Hidden Talent was important.

#### 4.3.2. Taking action

Talent coaches were able to spur young people to act. Many young people reported that they had been stuck and floundering before they got the help of the talent coach, not knowing what to do to move forward, whether they had ideas for the future or not. Talent coaches were able to listen to young people's concerns and help channel appropriate actions to assist them in next steps, whether in relation to employment, mental health, wellbeing, housing, or finance. For many young people, knowing how to channel their energies into appropriate and productive action was something they struggled with. This is not surprising given the complexity of work and life administration that is part of developing independence as a young person. For many, the ability to take action was inhibited by both practical challenges such as over-reliance on a mobile phone as well as more existential questions about not knowing what to do.

Action facilitated by coaches included very practical tasks such as applying for ID or a bus pass, going to a foodbank, getting clothes for a job interview, creating a CV, or going to a careers event. Action was also required on complex issues such as moving out of unsafe accommodation, dealing with immigration regulations, or persevering in completing a qualification. For many of the young people on Hidden Talent, being able to take action was crucial. Talent coaches did considerable but appropriate 'hand-holding', carefully judging what actions they should take on behalf of young people and when they should step back and ensure young people take action for themselves.

*He got me a job interview the other week...he come to pick me up and I'd forgot all about it. I was still in bed. That's what I mean. Even when, you forget about and it's, you're not answering the phone or something, he'll still come and try to make sure that you're going. He is good with how he helps you. He's one of them...Couldn't ask for more, really.* **Young Person Participant 5**

Talent coaches proactively supported appropriate actions even when these did not align to standard outcomes. This included facilitation to access and enrol into training courses that were not Ofqual recognised but still gave relevant knowledge, confidence, and experience. These courses included financial planning, and cookery courses, and were relevant to individual development towards gaining new skills and confidence but could not be recorded in the formal training outcomes.

#### 4.3.3. Responding to Adversity

Many of the young people interviewed had experienced adversity in their lives, in addition to the disruption that the pandemic had caused for them at a relatively young age when none were in a secure working (and for some living) situation.

In interviews, many reported challenging circumstances including issues associated with mental and physical health, disability, caring responsibilities, poor quality work, housing, homelessness, low qualifications, and immigration bureaucracy. Insights emerged from interviews about how talent coaches had acted as important safety nets in helping young people make sense of adverse circumstances and to persevere in overcoming barriers and obstacles. In some cases, talent coaches went over and above what might be typical in conventional employment support and intervened to both encourage young people as well as protect them from the possibility of adverse circumstances being repeated.

Young people reported that they found talent coaches to be very approachable and available and they could communicate with them about anything important at any time. Talent coaches were depicted by young people as genuine, honest, and caring which was important in responding to adversity. There were numerous statements that indicated that some young people would not have been able to cope with some of their adverse circumstances if it was not for the talent coach.

*She's always there ready to help me... Oh, my God, I want to cry! Yes, like, I'm here, I have been through a lot, but I'll say basically, she was there with me. We fight everything together. I'm thankful to have her... I can't say much, because I can't say everything, but yes, I am grateful to have that... because*

*right now... I am working part-time, and she helped me with my CV.... She helped me apply for college, like personal skill level, which I will start very soon.* **Young Person Participant 13**

#### 4.4. Partnership working

##### 4.4.1. Benefits of collaboration and partnership for delivery

Partnership working was at the heart of the project, bringing a range of delivery partners together, with the scope that this could contribute to learning across organisations through meetings and other shared activities. Delivery partners were entrusted to do their work in the most appropriate way while ensuring contract obligations about data collection and reporting were followed. The facilitation of regular interactions between stakeholders was a notable part of the project with regular meetings of delivery partners, talent coaches and the Advisory Group. This contributed greatly to shared learning but offered scope for collective influence upon the Department for Work and Pensions, GMCA as well as Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce as an employer umbrella organisation.

*...thinking about some of the sustainability. A little bit of that as well is sharing best practice of how is Hidden Talent set up. How is that different to other programmes and trying to work collaboratively around what are the right...Let's make sure the right young people get into the right programmes, but let's also make sure that they're all learning from each other on the best way to deliver.* **Advisory Group Member 3**

Wherever possible, GMCVO was a responsive contract leader, and adapted processes and systems. Building upon the approach of previous projects in relation to how workers were engaged with, Hidden Talent fostered a culture in which delivery partners and talent coaches were encouraged to be honest about concerns and suggest improvements.

Stakeholders were also very positive about the diversity of the Hidden Talent delivery partner cohort. Not only did they feel this was beneficial for building relationships with young people from different communities, they were also positive about the learning opportunities this diversity presented at the project meetings and felt that this diversity was fundamental to the success of the project.

*There's a lot of diversity when we have the meetings, the Talent Coach meetings, of experiences, of backgrounds, of people, and I think you wouldn't get that in a corporate or a formal setting.* **Talent Coach 4**

The project was able to draw upon a high level of skills, knowledge and experience from talent coaches and delivery partners. However, the time-limited nature of the project meant that less sharing of good practice could occur between partners in comparison to longer projects led by GMCVO. Some stakeholders also observed that opportunities for cross-referrals of young people between delivery partners was not practicable in the project timeframe, meaning that expertise in working with certain types of clients (e.g., ex-offenders or those with mental health needs) tended to be concentrated in certain locations.

#### 4.4.2. Professional expertise of delivery partners and talent coaches

Delivery partners and talent coaches appreciated the autonomy they were given in managing work with young people which they said was much better than similar projects they had been involved in. They were able to manage the reporting required by GMCVO and it was not onerous. The implication was that they valued being trusted as professionals and that knowing this contributed to them wanting to do a good job for the young people they were working with. They appreciated how the project allowed for different approaches but were aware that this may mean that some providers deal with far fewer young people though receive the same funding.

Talent coaches felt that the flexibility they were afforded through the Hidden Talent model more effectively responded to the varied and complex needs of young people as individuals. This autonomy appeared especially important due to the varied communities that talent coaches worked in, and the necessity for them to use their own social and cultural knowledge of such communities to support young people in different ways, and successfully build relationships with them.

*the fact that the project is made to give us the freedom to act is what makes it so successful. If we had a rigid framework to work with, it would probably be a bit of a failure, but it's the fact that we've got, we can make up our own mind and make it tailored to each individual is what is the most successful thing about it.* **Talent Coach 5**

This afforded talent coaches the opportunity to prioritise working on barriers that were impacting young people most at that time and change their priorities as and when necessary. Stakeholders also discussed the significant impact that addressing what may be perceived as relatively small barriers (such as getting I.D., bus passes, or interview clothes) had on young people's confidence, progress, and sense of self.

#### 4.4.3. Other partnerships (DWP and employers)

The goodwill and efforts of partners to enact best practice (e.g., via employer engagement) was on occasion let down by organisations outside the project. The collective action of stakeholders resulted in a recruitment day organised by the Advisory Group member from Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce. Delivery partners and talent coaches were hopeful and excited for the prospect of a recruitment event where employers could learn more about young people's needs and be open to supporting them into work. Unfortunately, all but one employer failed to attend the recruitment event which was very disappointing for the talent coaches and young people that attended, especially considering the planning and consideration required to support young people in travelling to and attending such an event. Employers did not subsequently send vacancy details to talent coaches to share with young people. One talent coach compares this disappointment with bigger events which succeeded in getting greater employer support.

*I think yesterday's a really good example of all those stakeholders trying to do a good thing and then let down by the end point which is the employers... Before this project when we had the bigger one, we used to take over the Lowry, etc., and because it was all singing, all dancing and probably right up*



*there publicity-wise, a lot of people turned up. We've now got a smaller, scaled down model and we ask them to do the same thing and I think, as a result... we've ended up with what we ended up yesterday. There's no prestige behind it. Talent coach 6*

One stakeholder observed that the good practice of Hidden Talent relating to 'in-work support' could be promoted and utilised more with an increase in specific marketing materials that could be presented to employers; such in-work support could really help employers and young people in contributing to a smoother transition between economic inactivity and work.

*I think one of the comments from me is obviously because we look after the employer engagement side, is having more content and marketing material to share that with employers. Having that open dialogue with employers to be able to say, this is exactly what the project is. This is how you're going to support the young people, and this is the opportunities that you as an employer can provide for them. Advisory Group Member 2*

Despite serious reservations about how Job Centres treat young people, stakeholders appreciated that the DWP had joined the project as a partner and that there was a willingness to listen to feedback. They valued that the DWP was present at the Recruitment event and actively advocated for young people who had attended the event. The increase in staffing during Covid-19 was seen to have improved some services.

*My view has changed because, in actual fact, as a result of Covid, they employed loads of extra coaches. I think there's going to be a stinker coming soon because there's not as many people as they thought that they needed to support, but anyway, they brought all these coaches in to help young people... Young people will through their own reasons, sign on or not sign on... I'm not an advocate of the Benefits system, I never have... I don't like the way they treat young people. That's the experience I've had in the past, but I do know they're changing, and I know they're changing because of lobbying and reports written by the likes of Talent Match and the Young People's Panel.... Talent Coach 6*

Talent coaches commented on practical areas of work for which having an infrastructure to capitalise on tasks that many of them had to do would have been helpful to avoid duplication of effort. The administration surrounding getting travel passes from Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) was an example of this. Each partner had to deal with the same processes and there is scope this could be administered more efficiently for the benefit of all. Transport is an important issue for young people and one talent coach suggests inviting TfGM to be integrated as a partner more effectively in any future project.

*[...] we're trying to get bus passes or concessionary bus passes, each individual Delivery Partner has to go towards transport for Greater Manchester, go through all that fuff. They don't really know who we are, they don't really know what GMCVO is, but if they're integrated as part of the*

*project, it would just streamline that all and cut through a lot of the waiting around and red tape and uncertainty and stuff. Talent Coach 5*

## 4.5. Other insights about the context for youth employment

### 4.5.1. Perceptions of the Job Centre

GMCVO asked the evaluation team to explore the perspectives of young people and stakeholders about the Job Centre. Many young people had had experience of the Job Centre and all stakeholders had experiences and opinions on the role of the Job Centre for young people who are NEET. This area of enquiry was of particular interest in relation to hidden young people and finding out why they didn't claim Benefits, with fears of adverse economic consequences if they were not claiming. On registering for Hidden Talent, 61% reported having claimed at some point in the past. 39% never had. On commencement of the project 46% reported they were in receipt of some Benefits.

On registration, talent coaches asked young people about their reasons for not claiming Benefits. Responses in initial data monitoring revealed perceptions that being on Benefits meant a lot of 'messaging about', negative previous experiences of claiming, lack of clarity about entitlement due to age if too young etc, enduring negative image and stigma of signing on, and a positive sense of not wanting to get embroiled in the bureaucracy due to just wanting to get into work soon. From the outset, despite the apparent good work of DWP representatives who wanted to improve the Job Centre experience for young people and who joined meetings with stakeholders to get feedback as part of the project, the suspicion and reluctance to claim was hard to shift and emerged in evaluative interviews with all parties. In interviews with young people, these initial insights were confirmed; most comments about the Job Centre were not positive and there was evidence that talent coaches played an important role in ironing out any difficulties experienced by young people. For many, claiming Benefits was a stressful experience and was considered a necessary evil at best.

Despite efforts of DWP staff (who attended stakeholder meetings) to find ways to encourage young people to take up Benefits they may be entitled to, many young people expressed misgivings about their Job Centre experience. Those who were hidden were often reluctant to go to get help due to the poor reputation associated with signing on, though talent coaches were able to encourage a small number to engage with the Benefits system. Those who were claiming described confusing interactions and bureaucracy. The following is an example of one young person (with learning needs) who is bemused by the Benefits system and relies on others to make sense of it.

*No. They don't help. I'm on Universal Credit, and I'm not on the working bits. I want to be, but I'm actually not. They really don't help....I'm just like, confused. It's just like, why is there non-working base Benefit, and working base Benefit? Why can't it just put people on working bits instead of non-working bits?... They're rubbish. I went to a careers event in Manchester the other week. I was talking to a lad, basically because he has connections with*

*Rochdale JC, and he was going to catch it up with them, saying why is he on non-working bits when he's physically going out there looking for jobs. The Jobcentre's not doing the best in helping...* **Young Person Participant 9**

Like young people, stakeholders' views of the process for making a Universal Credit claim were negative. Delivery partners and talent coaches gave varied examples of the ways they felt that the DWP failed to deliver adequate support for young people through the Job Centre via work coaches and providing access to Universal Credit. They also detailed how young people's preconceived opinions or previous interactions with the Benefits system forced many to actively reject the prospect of claiming Universal Credit and therefore remain hidden. Stakeholders outlined the multiple barriers that young people face to make a Universal Credit claim; these include but are not limited to social stigma, inaccessibility throughout the application process, and the impact of repercussions by way of Universal Credit sanctions.

Stakeholders reported personal influences that created a barrier for young people to make and maintain a Universal Credit claim. One important issue was parent/carer influence. Stakeholders reflected that young people who live with parents/carers who are claiming Benefits may be discouraged from making a Universal Credit due to the impact it would have on the wider household's Benefit status and household income. This risked preventing young people from developing their social confidence and independent living skills, especially for young people who tended to stay at home for a lot of time; an issue that was compounded by the pandemic which added to delaying some young people's capacity to develop skills such as independent budgeting and using public transport. For some this was associated with social anxiety.

Several stakeholders commented on the perceptions that the Job Centre appeared a hostile environment due to the inaccessible application and claiming process. Issues noted included that some young people struggled to manage and understand systems due to a disability or mental health condition. In addition, lack of access to home Wi-Fi and/or appropriate device (e.g., laptop or tablet) for managing the administration of a claim and any required job applications were common. Delivery partners and talent coaches also commented on inconsistent staff attitudes, and it was stated that there was a greater need for advisers to recognise the specific needs of young people, the barriers they face, and adapt to the ways they may present or communicate.

*I think for a lot of young people as well, it's how the advisors are with them. They're very, the looks and the comments and things like that...they need to be more open and understand to young people and how young people are, and especially those with learning needs as well. They really need to up their game in understanding young people, the way in which young people talk and respond.* **Delivery Partner 1**

Many stakeholders also felt that Job Centre workers often failed to show an appropriate level of understanding about disabilities and the comprehensive personalisation required to assist young people with additional (and sometimes less obvious needs). This applied to communication with Job Centre advisers but also the



Universal Credit application process. Stakeholders reported that many young people who want to get into work, may need additional support and personalisation to find a work opportunity in which they can use their skills effectively. Many felt that the rigidity of the application process meant that it was not fit for purpose in supporting many young people into work.

*...if you've got someone with very complex autism, or someone who's never really even used a computer before, there's no real... You can't then walk into the Jobcentre and go, can we just do this individually for this one person, because they'll refer you back to the computer, so it's that rigidity, and the fact that it's not based on each individual person's needs. It's already biased towards an individual who's basically in good health, good English, and knows how to use a computer. **Talent Coach 5***

This lack of knowledge and understanding often translated into negative experiences for young people, and ultimately created an additional barrier to making successful Universal Credit claims. Several stakeholders explained the specific and comprehensive ways they support young people through the Universal Credit process, and noted how, without professional support, they believe it would be impossible for many young people to make a successful claim. Another barrier for young people was the digitisation of the Universal Credit application process which posed significant issues for those with intermittent access to technology due to lack of appropriate devices (e.g., desktop computers) or Wi-Fi access. Digital connectivity was important in being able to maintain a claim.

It was also highlighted how the necessity for claiming Universal Credit in order to access accommodation support created a barrier for a number of young people, who feared entering employment might mean losing Benefits and potentially losing their new, stable home. This concern was compounded by lack of budgeting skills amongst young people who, with the help of talent coaches, are just learning how to budget and run their home for the first time.

*[...] now he's too scared to come off his credit. He's scared that if he doesn't have his Universal Credit and his Benefits, he's going to lose his accommodation. He's going to then have to earn enough money to have his own accommodation and pay his bills, etc., when he's only just starting to understand how to do budgeting [...]* **Delivery Partner 1**

Stakeholders also discussed how the financial shock of sanctioning has a significant impact on young people's quality of life, impacting their access to necessities such as food and utilities, and having a negative impact on their mental health. As access to accommodation and housing benefit are linked to Universal Credit, young people risk going into debt to pay for housing costs during a period they are sanctioned. This can create a negative spiral for them and contribute to prolonged periods of stress that adversely impact mental health.

At the recruitment event organised for Hidden Talent the DWP hosted a stand so that young people could ask the DWP representative questions about claiming benefits and the support they should expect from the local Job Centre. The nature of

the queries highlighted to the representative who attended that some young people had not had positive experiences of claiming Benefits and the support of talent coaches with their claims was crucial to overcoming challenges.

#### 4.5.2. Mental health as a major barrier

In line with wider research, talent coaches reported mental health as a very important pre-requisite for young people getting on track. The priority given to this in project plans was appropriate and 27% of beneficiaries reported a long-term mental health condition on commencement of the project. However, providing a smooth path to access mental health support proved to be less straightforward than helping young people access standard employment-related help, despite widespread agreement of its importance.

GMCVO developed the offer of support based on feedback from previous GMTM and Hidden Talent projects. A specific amount of funding was ringfenced for individual access to mental health support. This was welcomed by delivery partners and talent coaches. However, issues with setting up the support meant that the delays were significant despite the best efforts of the management team and delivery partners to rectify administration issues with the counselling provider.

*it's [mental health support] been slow to progress, which is difficult when we see the figures of the number of young people who've said that their mental health is a barrier to employment, then that's been a bit frustrating.*

#### **Management Team Participant 1**

The management team also reflected upon complex sensitivities surrounding the referral of young people to mental health support. Unlike activities such as recommending attendance at a Jobs Fair, suggesting therapy/mental health support to young people was something that talent coaches had to manage in a sensitive and timely way, due to the stigma associated with mental health. It is also possible that as 27% (n=38) disclosed they had a long-term mental health condition, some young people were already receiving some treatment or were reluctant to engage in therapy if they had previously had unhelpful experience.

The new access to mental health support for young people provided by Hidden Talent was welcomed by stakeholders. Many stated that many young people they supported would require access to such provision. For many, access to this support stood out as a major strength of the Hidden Talent model. It was often cited as an example of GMCVO's willingness to listen and respond to feedback in an efficient and proactive way, as this element had been increased based on learning from previous Hidden Talent projects. They also recognised the grey area between serious mental health issues that required medical intervention, and less serious wellbeing issues which they were better equipped to deal with, and which the budget could support.

A small number of young people interviewed for the evaluation brought alive their own challenges regarding mental health which often intersected with other issues such as homelessness or being a care leaver. Based on their own words and those of their coaches, a small number of young people appeared to be struggling to get

through every day and engagement with employment, education or training was a remote possibility. Talent coaches had an important role in helping young people to keep going.

*Well, basically because of my vulnerability and my housing and everything, I wasn't ready to start work and get into work, so [the talent coach]'s been helping me with my mental health and well-being, and she's been helping me to get a supported accommodation. Hopefully now in the next couple of weeks I'll be getting somewhere safe to live, because my house at the moment it's not very safe where I am. Loads of people coming in and I'm getting taken advantage of, and loads of wrong things are happening, so she's been really good on that side of the front, so, yes. **Young Person Participant 14***

Stakeholders commented on the tendency for the structure of other employability programmes to focus on facets of employability such as CV writing without addressing enduring barriers that young people face to becoming economically active, and how these barriers impact and are impacted by young people's mental health needs.

They also highlighted the impact of Universal Credit and Benefit claims on vulnerable young people's mental health. They commented that the complexity of the Universal Credit application process means that some young people fail to meet application requirements despite their best efforts. Without the support of talent coaches to liaise with staff at the Job Centre, young people without personal support may struggle to navigate the Universal Credit system successfully.

*We had some computers in here and they used to be able to come in and do the job search on here if they didn't have any internet at home. He was 23. He sat there one day, he'd just come back from the Jobcentre and he just burst into tears. I said, 'What's the matter?' He said, 'They've sanctioned me.' I said, 'They've done what?' I said more than that but, anyway he sat there and he cried. I looked through his job applications and there were hundreds that he'd applied for but never got any. **Talent Coach 1***

#### 4.5.3. Time-limited vs open-ended support for young people

A recurring topic of concern especially for stakeholders was the shortness of a six-month project. All expressed willingness to engage in the project and for some a short-term uplift in funding allowed an increase in existing services. However, all expressed misgivings about such important work being allocated short-term funding. These concerns resonate with existing research which argues for the importance of secure and longer-term investment to support young people who are NEET. Interestingly, stakeholders skilfully protected young people from the worry of the project ending and most planned ways to transfer young people into new projects in the city, but this was not the case for all delivery partners as not all were parties in

the next major project in the city region for young people who are NEET led by Ingeus<sup>29</sup>.

GMCVO and its partners had to be nimble in responding to immediate and short-term needs. For example, GMCVO had late confirmation that one partner would not be able to deliver and had to quickly secure and incorporate a new partner in the area. Stakeholders observed that such one-off examples of disruption ate into the beginning of the project with implications for young people. More widely, the work required to set up the project at every level is considerable, and therefore stakeholders reported that the level of in-depth engagement captured on previous, longer projects was not possible this time around. One example of this was how the management team also compared Hidden Talent 2022 to previous longer projects in which they were able to allow time to review whether employment outcomes were sustained and if the work obtained could be considered 'decent work'.

There were comments that it is harder to meet the needs of young people during a six-month project, especially hidden young people who experience multiple barriers to education, training, and employment, e.g., complex mental and physical health conditions, addiction, and caring responsibilities.

*Usually, what I tend to do is look at their mental health first. If you try and get somebody into work straight away and they've not tackled these issues, they're not going to be able to cope with the work, even the getting up the same time every day, going somewhere every day on time. It's the mental health and then building things up to do things during the week, to be able to manage this. **Talent Coach 1***

Stakeholders reported on the length of time needed to build strong and trusting relationships with young people who can be very sceptical of professionals due to negative previous experiences, for example, if they have spent time in care or had traumatic school experiences.

*'I think sometimes if it hasn't worked out for them well at school, then they see that as authority and then there is that mistrust. I know that some of the Talent Coaches have said that as well as that mistrust of other organisations, that would extend to health services as well, so mental health organisations' – **Management Team. Participant 1***

Young people may also need significant and ongoing support with practical and social skills such as budgeting and timekeeping, they may be living in poverty, or not have consistent access to phones or other technology. All these factors and more may contribute to intermittent engagement with delivery partners as part of Hidden Talent. For the most marginalised, six months is unlikely to be long enough to get them on track, with the potential risk of support ending abruptly when funding ends.

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<sup>29</sup> Ingeus <https://ingeus.co.uk/services/youth/futureyou>

The length of Hidden Talent in 2022 put time limitations on talent coaches to create relationships with young people and help them to develop the life skills that could enable them to engage more consistently with the programme. Many stakeholders noted one of the main benefits of the Hidden Talent model is meeting young people where they are and the flexibility to offer personalised and timely support to them. Whilst some young people could be rapidly supported into work, more time is required for young people who are further away from education or the labour market. Even for a young person who has less complex support needs, there can be a long journey from basic life skills provision, e.g., accessing financial and practical support, to developing skills enough to begin work or enrol on a course, not to mention the desirability of providing in-work or in-education/training support to help them overcome emerging barriers.

Although the level of engagement from young people was good in Hidden Talent, and all delivery partners were confident that they would meet their targets, they reflected upon time limitations in their ability to maximise the number of young people, especially those harder to reach, or those completely new to their organisation, that they could engage with. Whilst recruitment remained open throughout the project, some talent coaches admitted being reluctant to take on new young people at a later stage because they may not be able to achieve tangible outcomes in the shorter time period left.

Stakeholders were very conscious of project aims to engage with ‘hard to reach’ young people within the timeframe. Many discussed the ways in which they sought to engage with young people not already connected to them directly, often using existing networks. Their embeddedness in their community meant word of mouth referrals were high (32%), although on registration only 15% were reported as being known to the organisation. They noted that the most marginalised were hardest to find and reaching them was particularly difficult due to the time sensitive nature of the project. As a result, many of the eligible young people engaging with Hidden Talent were already connected in some way to the organisation they worked with.

*most of our young people that we've got on the Hidden Talent contract are young people that we've known throughout the organisation. Whether we worked with them through our employability sector, or we have a youth engagement team who spend a lot of time out and about on the streets, and a lot of our referral routes have come through that engagement as well. **Delivery Partner 1***

*When Hidden Talent stopped last time while we were waiting for the next, so like hopefully we were waiting on another tranche of funding, and we were lucky to get that, we kept all of those clients because we could do because we'd got an employment and a training team. We still can keep the service running. We can still keep people like achieving. **Delivery Partner 3***

Young people sometimes did not understand where funding was coming from and just knew that they were attached to a certain delivery partner. Often partners used different programmes' funding to maintain a consistent funding stream to support staffing and service provision. They remained flexible in getting suitably skilled and



qualified new workers where necessary to act as a Hidden Talent 'Talent Coach', making sure workers were able to undertake all relevant work and were familiar with all project processes and expectations, e.g., attending talent coach meetings, filling out weekly logs about young people to capture their progress. Even after the project is finished, some delivery partners reported that they would continue to support young people as consistently as they are able to, although some were not in a position to, which emphasises the necessity for a more permanent provision.

*My phone number's out there, and they just continue to ring me. Just because it ends in June doesn't mean to say that I won't get the phone calls and I still won't get the text messages, so we'll just continue to work with those young people until they've hit their goal.* **Delivery Partner 2**

#### 4.6. Legacy of the programme

Many of the delivery partners and talent coaches have been working in this field for many years and organisations and individuals are adept at adapting to the next round of programme funding. Some but not all delivery partners are continuing their work with young people through a new ESF/GMCA Future You project managed by Ingeus<sup>30</sup>.

The Youth Panel stream of activity of Hidden Talent have been active in consulting and advising the DWP on Youth Hub developments. Youth Hubs were announced as a new policy by government<sup>31</sup> but are in early stages and despite good intentions have faced criticism of their slowness to craft an attractive identity to young people. Members of the Youth Panel attended Job Centre Plus Youth Hubs in Oldham and Rochdale to see how they are run, what support and services are available and how easy they are to access, with the aim of ensuring young people living in different areas of Greater Manchester get a consistent support offer from the hubs. Following the visits, the Youth Panel created and delivered a presentation to share their feedback, their experience, and their thoughts at a workshop in July 2022, with attendees including Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Job Centre Plus, Council skills and employment leads and the Prince's Trust. The Youth Panel have also published their own report about barriers to employment for young people<sup>32</sup>. The model of youth participation has also been embraced in a new Prince's Trust employability project<sup>33</sup> in the city which is engaging a Youth Panel to undertake peer evaluation work. That Panel is co-ordinated by GMYN who facilitated the Youth Panel for Hidden Talent.

The recognition of the importance of an innovative model of youth involvement in programme activities, continues the work of previous Hidden Talent Youth Panels

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<sup>30</sup> Ingeus <https://ingeus.co.uk/services/youth/futureyou>

<sup>31</sup> Youth hubs news story <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/150-new-jobcentres-and-youth-hubs-now-open>

<sup>32</sup> GMYN Youth Panel Employability Report (2022) <https://gmyn.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Employability-Pack-Campaign-22.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> Princes Trust project <https://manchester.princes-trust.org.uk/young-person>

who for example, created relevant resources such as an employer guide to youth-friendly employment<sup>34</sup>.

Hidden Talent aligns with the aims of both the Young Person's Guarantee and Good Employment Charter in Greater Manchester. Notably, none of the young people interviewed as part of the project had heard of the Guarantee but welcomed the idea and had their own ideas about what they would like it to include. They strongly recognised the importance of having safety nets for young people in all four areas of the Guarantee (keeping connected, staying well, managing transitions, reducing economic inequalities). The findings from evaluation of successive Hidden Talent projects suggest that having a more secure and open-ended provision for young people should be part of a Guarantee. Hidden Talent illustrates the remarkable impact interventions with young people can have even in a short space of time.

#### 4.7. Value for money

With a high-level cost per young person of £2,200, stakeholders thought that Hidden Talent was good value for money as the flexibility and comprehensive nature of support offered meant that they could support young people in a variety of areas from mental health support to substance misuse treatment and stable accommodation. Many stakeholders commented on the capacity for this level of support to alleviate some of the barriers they faced and protect them from harm; they felt that this may reduce the likelihood of such young people needing more intense support and interventions, ultimately alleviating some of the financial and practical burden on public services. However, some stakeholders questioned the value for money of the project due to its length; they discussed the capacity of a six-month project to offer sustainable support to young people which had a robust, long-term impact.

Numerous stakeholders pointed out the specific wider spin-off value of the project above and beyond outcomes for young people, e.g., reduced costs to the NHS if health concerns are caught early. Others discussed a reduced risk of young people being tempted into crime and therefore saving money for the criminal justice system. Even more widely, the social value in relation to families and communities of young people was mentioned as important. Moving young people onto the path to work also contributes to future tax revenue and reduced Benefits' costs.

#### 4.8. Conclusion

The project was a success in the outcomes it achieved especially in a six-month period. It reached eighteen more young people (n – 142) than planned for (n – 124). Virtually all young people (95%) were supported with life skills (n - 135 young people supported against a target 124). 85% were assisted with job search skills (n -

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<sup>34</sup> Hidden Talent Youth Panel (2021). Employer Toolkit: Adapting Recruitment Processes to Get the Most out of Young People. GMCVO. Manchester.



120 against a target of 82). 26% (37 young people) of beneficiaries achieved an employment outcome (n – 41, against target of 32).

Where outcomes were less than targets, this can be attributed to the situation of young people who participated and the longer time frame likely to achieve a qualification or enter education (most college start dates did not synchronise well with project timeline). 27% (38 young people) secured an education and training outcome (n - 44 against a target of 54) and 6% gained an Ofqual qualification (n - 8 against a target of 10). 11% (16 young people) were supported to engage with the Benefits system (target n- 32). This is an indicator of the enduring resistance to engage with the Job Centre, but also due to them moving into other education, employment, and training outcomes. With hindsight, the target for engagement with the Job Centre was perhaps too high as it was set in September 2021, a time of semi-lockdown, following a previous cycle of Hidden Talent which had coincided with major pandemic lockdowns. The target emerged from that time at which levels of Benefit-claiming increased due to job losses amongst young people and processes for claiming are widely considered to have been more flexible due to the extraordinary conditions in Society. Covid regulations resulted in strict social distancing, as work coaches interacted with claimants on the phone and online rather than expecting in-person attendance at appointments.

GMCVO collected data based on Talent Match's proximity to the labour market measure which gives a more nuanced insight into progress. All young people in the project made progress (1.09) based on that scale which is a powerful indicator of how interventions contribute to nudging young people forwards in their movement to the labour market.

The development of strong and trusting relationships between talent coaches and young people was crucial for young people as a basis to move forward. Engagement with talent coaches contributed to cognitive, emotional, and behavioural development. Young people demonstrated enhanced abilities to reflect and a growth in self-efficacy. Clear evidence of coaches prompting young people to take action about their situation was clear, as well as how their support contributed to young people's resilience in often difficult circumstances.

There were benefits to all parties of partnership working in enhancing both planning and delivery of the project. The engagement of a diverse group of delivery partners as well as Advisory Group members meant the project drew upon diverse skills, knowledge, and experience. The professional expertise of delivery partners and talent coaches was excellent in responding to the required work and the trust they were afforded worked well in motivating them to seek out and secure young people to participate. Other partnerships such as with employers and DWP representatives on the Advisory Group allowed the project to be informed by as well as influence these important institutions for young people's employment.

The evaluation highlighted that despite efforts by the DWP to improve take-up of Benefits, both young people and stakeholders had negative perceptions of the experience of making a claim for Universal Credit (or other benefits) and attending the Job Centre. Barriers to claim included the social stigma associated with being a

claimant, an inaccessibility in making and sustaining a Benefits claim, and fears about the repercussions of sanctions. Young people who live with parents/carers also claiming Benefits may be discouraged from making a Universal Credit due to the impact it would have on the wider household's Benefit status and household income. Some stakeholders reported perceptions that the Job Centre was a hostile environment due to the inaccessible application and claiming process (e.g., due to disability, lack of access to home Wi-Fi or suitable digital device) and inconsistent staff attitudes. Many stakeholders also felt that Job Centre workers often failed to show an appropriate level of understanding about disabilities and the comprehensive personalisation required to assist young people with additional needs.

In line with wider research, the evaluation findings support the project's emphasis on mental health. Talent coaches reported mental health as a very important barrier for young people in getting on track. However, it was also recognised that providing timely access to this support was difficult. A small number of young people interviewed for the evaluation brought alive their own challenges regarding mental health which often intersected with other issues such as homelessness or being a care leaver. The tendency of other employability programmes to focus on facets of employability such as CV writing without addressing enduring barriers that young people face to becoming economically active was criticised. Problems in accessing Universal Credit and Benefit claims were viewed as adding to the mental health challenges of vulnerable young people.

The qualitative evaluative work with stakeholders concluded that youth employment programmes of this kind should be allocated a minimum of twelve months funding and ideally have permanent, secure funding. Despite the good outcomes achieved by the project, there were serious misgivings about such important work being allocated short-term funding. More widely, the work required to set up the project at every level is considerable, and therefore stakeholders reported that the level of in-depth engagement captured on previous, longer projects was not possible this time around. There were comments that it is harder to meet the needs of young people during a 6-month project, especially hidden young people who experience multiple barriers to education, training, and employment, e.g., complex mental and physical health conditions, addiction, and caring responsibilities. Those young people closer to the labour market were easier to support in the timeframe.

The project legacy aligns with the longer-term work of Hidden Talent managed by GMCVO. Many of the delivery partners have been contracted to continue their work via Ingeus. The argument for the importance of seeking out and working with hidden young people has been won and not only has there been a recognition of their existence and the scale of their number, but the productive scope of working with hidden young people whose outcomes in this project exceeded unemployed young people. The modelling of a youth-led approach is an important feature that will continue into other projects and influence how Job Centres and others approach youth employment provision.



## 5. Lessons for future policy and practice

The following sections highlight key themes that are of relevance to future policy and practice. Also included are some recommendations for consideration by policymakers and employers.

### 5.1. Introduction

Hidden Talent built upon the learning of previous youth employment projects that GMCVO had led contracts for. Arguably, what constitutes good practice in youth employment programmes is well-known. The lessons from this project confirm much of what is already known and serve to illustrate the problems of volatile and short-term funding to support young people into employment, as well as the extraordinary energy and goodwill by organisations operating in this environment. Fortunately, much of the good work done with young people by Hidden Talent can continue into the new Ingeus-managed project.

Ongoing concerns remain, e.g., the lack of a substantial system to monitor young people coming out of education, training, and employment. The establishment of such a system possibly co-ordinated under the umbrella of the Greater Manchester Apprenticeship and Careers Service (GMACS) would have great benefit to young people and society as a whole. This would reduce the risk of young people becoming hidden in the first place. It is likely that Hidden Talent in 2022 has scratched the surface of numbers of hidden young people in the city region.

### 5.2. Model of provision - collaboration and flexibility of delivery

The model of provision of delivery partners embedded in their communities co-ordinated by GMCVO has worked well and partners have been able to respond speedily and flexibly to the needs of young people. There was evidence of the breadth of skills across talent coaches, and also a diversity of approach and expertise. There was a culture of trust in the autonomy of talent coaches to adopt appropriate methods to work with young people. Some talent coaches dealt more

with young people who were ready to get into work, whereas others managed those who teetered precariously in getting through each day.

Questions are raised about whether all such young people belong in the same project, as some are so much further from being able to enter the labour market. So, should such young people even be in an employment project and is the fact they are, an indicator of gaps in more specialist public services? However, many stakeholders thought that having such an open approach to the types of needs young people might bring to the project was good and reflected the more generic 'youth work' (and related) skills of talent coaches.

The time limitations of the project meant that delivery partners proactively secured young people to join Hidden Talent in a variety of ways. Some eligible young people were already known to partners, and other leads were generated by word of mouth. New referrals came from other public services and even through social media advertising. A small number of economically inactive and unemployed young people were referred by the Job Centre. Broadly, mechanisms for referral were similar for hidden and unemployed young people, though hidden beneficiaries were more likely to come from word of mouth and outreach referral.

Delivery organisations gained from being part of a project that brought them into contact with others doing similar work in the city region, to share concerns and expertise. The project also gave them the opportunity to interact with Advisory Group members and partners, i.e., the DWP and the Chamber of Commerce, not to mention policymakers from different local authorities.

**Recommendation 1:** Building on the good practice model of delivery from Hidden Talent, establish a permanently funded careers advisory/employment support service for all young people (including those that are NEET). With varied provision depending on young people's circumstances, this could be co-ordinated via appropriate youth hubs in collaboration with Third Sector organisations and focus on advice for education, employment, and training.

### 5.3. Labour market barriers and challenges faced by young people

Much is known from existing research about the circumstantial and demographic barriers to young people entering the labour market. Participation data from Hidden Talent highlighted the high numbers from disadvantaged groups including those from: ethnically diverse backgrounds; diagnosed with a long-term health condition (including mental health); Disabled (including Learning Disability and Neurodiversity); Ex-offenders; Lone parents; Care leavers; Vulnerable to substance misuse; Homeless; Carers. The project successfully reached both hidden and economically inactive young people as well as those who were more formally registered on Benefits as unemployed. Interestingly, more men were in this Hidden Talent cohort, and the reasons for this is something that deserves further research.

Young people and stakeholders spoken to as part of the project revealed the very practical issues that can inhibit movement into education, training, and employment. These included travel and transport accessibility and costs, delays in dealing with immigration and ID requirements, limited access to the internet and appropriate



devices for job searching and online learning. For some young people education level was a barrier for progression in education, e.g., requirements to get basic English and Maths qualifications before progressing to a higher-level vocational qualification. Others, without appropriate qualifications drifted into poor quality work. Those with higher qualifications taking part in Hidden Talent could move more rapidly into work.

Interestingly, supported by talent coaches many young people illustrated considerable resilience, especially as they reflected upon the disruption of the pandemic. Mixed views about that time emerged. While some were disappointed that it had interrupted progression to planned careers, others (perhaps related to disability or mental health) had welcomed the opportunity to reduce what they did to move forward into education, training, and employment.

The Proximity to the Labour Market (PLM) measure illustrates clearly how barriers vary across young people who are NEET. Some young people had multiple barriers. Arguably, within the project there were three streams of young people.

1. Those for whom there was a very likely prospect of getting into education, employment or training within the six-month project timeframe, and even allow time for in-work support.
2. Those who have more significant barriers but with tangible support have the potential to enter or be close to education, employment, and training by the end of the project.
3. Those who are nowhere near getting into education, employment or training, although they will gain from participation and a positive outcome may be getting stability to move to the next stage.

One of the concerns of stakeholders was the capacity to reach headline targets within the six-month time frame. As well as dealing with some young people in very difficult circumstances, practical barriers existed including e.g., most education courses have a longer run-in time (commonly starting in September) which did not fit with the January-June project timeline. Whilst they welcomed the flexibility afforded by GMCVO and the design of the project, they struggled to get some of the young people they worked with to achieve specific outcomes due to the time it takes to interact with young people and build relationships, especially when those young people are suspicious of professionals due to previous experiences.

Much of some talent coaches' work, especially during the beginning of the project, is around stabilising young people's lives by assisting them to achieve consistent access to food, accommodation, healthcare, and Benefits. Many of the most hidden young people that delivery partners worked with were very far away from the labour market, and could not conceivably reach education, training, and/or employment by the end of the project. The time limit of the project meant that this impacted some delivery partners' recruitment processes, as they were conscious of inviting young people that could conceivably achieve the aims of the project within the six-month time frame.

**Recommendation 2:** Ensure youth employment programmes have provision to support young people with varied barriers, e.g., available mental health support.

**Recommendation 3:** Address the practical barriers that impede young people going into employment, e.g., introduce a young person discounted rate for travel and ID costs.

**Recommendation 4:** Engage relevant transport authority (TfGM) as a partner in future youth employment projects to assist in improving access to travel.

**Recommendation 5:** Build upon schemes such as KickStart to make work experience more widely available to young people (e.g., not just limited to those on Universal Credit). As part of this, appropriate opportunities need to be created for young people with disabilities who want to work.

#### 5.4. The role of employers

Existing research about employment programmes for young people confirms the important role of employers. Employer engagement in the project was limited in Hidden Talent 2022 although they were represented on the Advisory Group. Employers face difficult choices as they tend to want entry level candidates who can rapidly move into productive work. Many young people who are NEET will need considerable mentoring and support to become productive workers, and this does not align easily with commercial pressures. Questions remain about the alignment between what employers say they are committed to in terms of a diverse work force (including the employment of young people with complex needs) and what they do in practice.

Initiatives such as the Good Employment Charter and Young Person's Guarantee provide incentives for employers to consider carefully how they engage with young people with more complex needs who may be less job ready. The 'in-work support' component was a facet of Hidden Talent envisaged to help deal with such issues. Stakeholders argued for an increase in such support in future projects and the generation of appropriate marketing to employers, so they know such assistance exists.

Unfortunately, the poor engagement of employers with the Chamber of Commerce recruitment day epitomises how some employers have yet to fully prioritise their social responsibility. It may have been just bad luck that so many had to drop out at the last minute, but it is disappointing that they then did not follow up with potential opportunities that young people could apply for.

Earlier work from previous Hidden Talent projects has made valuable progress in highlighting how employers can make recruitment practices more young person-friendly. This kind of activity may be more relevant as labour shortages in many areas increase. These resources are an important part of the legacy of successive Hidden Talent projects. Employer organisations such as the Chamber and the CIPD can do more to encourage members to give young people a chance by routinely offering more work experience opportunities across the board.

**Recommendation 6:** Employers to strengthen good HR practices and engage with initiatives such as the Good Employment Charter in Manchester. The Youth Employment Charter and Youth Friendly Badge<sup>35</sup> also provide a way to evidence employer commitment.

#### 5.4. Measuring progression

Stakeholders were very positive about the overall progress against targets that Hidden Talent had achieved; they felt that this progress demonstrated the appropriateness of the project design and its capacity to be successfully transformed into a long-term project. Many stakeholders acknowledged their difficulty in capturing the more intangible progress young people had made against targets, although they welcomed softer target outcomes such as engagement in life skills and job searching. However, there were concerns about the most marginalised young people whose progress did not always meet target criteria. Also, some stakeholders explained that the recording of intangible progress young people have made can be difficult in comparison to ticking boxes on more tangible, hard targets such as education, training, and employment. They also worried about the hierarchy of targets and that ultimately the harder outcomes such as moving into employment had greater value than being able to stabilise the life of a young person with mental health problems.

There was also discussion about how talent coaches and the project can evidence its work and the progress young people made. Whilst some discussed the benefits of using case studies, others noted that young people's confidence and communication barriers meant they might be reluctant to get involved e.g., by recording videos of their experience. There was also some regret that due to the shortness of the project, it was not possible to track whether outcomes into education, employment, and training were sustained and in particular, if outcomes for employment represented 'decent work'.

Stakeholders were generally positive about logging progress using the 'Views' system, and welcomed changes made by GMCVO that allowed them the flexibility to track varied targets. Stakeholders also shared how important they felt many of these less tangible targets were to young people's progress and welcomed further developments that may capture the weight of such targets in relation to more tangible outcomes such as education, training, and employment.

Many stakeholders discussed how outcomes might be further developed to expand upon the more nuanced progress of some young people, especially those who would need more time and support to achieve the necessary skills to sustain outcomes such as employment, training, or education.

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<sup>35</sup> Youth Employment UK. (2021). Youth Employment Charter and Youth Employer Friendly Badge. Youth Employment UK. <https://www.youthemployment.org.uk/youth-employment-experts/>



**Recommendation 7:** Establishment of a robust system to monitor young people leaving education, training, and employment to ensure none get lost in transition. This could be administered by GMACS, with provision to direct to relevant careers advice.

**Recommendation 8:** Consideration of how diverse groups of young people are served effectively in appropriate projects. Scope to more explicitly recognise how outcomes vary between different streams of young people facing different barriers.

## 5.5. Conclusion: sustaining activities

All the stakeholders interviewed as part of the evaluation agreed that the design of the Hidden Talent project should form the basis of a more permanent service for young people. They stressed that a permanent service must retain all the facets of Hidden Talent that they found were very beneficial to young people, including individual funding that could be allocated flexibly, and improved access to mental health support without extensive waiting times. They reported that GMCVO were very willing to develop the project, support delivery partners on an individual basis, and respond to the changing needs of young people. Delivery partners and talent coaches shared that they always felt listened to and supported. Stakeholders also discussed GMCVO's willingness and capacity to outline lessons learned from previous projects and felt that their progress against targets was clear.

As the Hidden Talent project (or equivalent) is developed further, it should be considered whether support for hidden young people could be further enhanced to support a more diverse range of needs. One way this could be achieved would be to assess young people's distance from the labour market at the beginning of the project. Those deemed to be a significant distance from the labour market (for example, due to mental health needs) could be referred to other projects. Alternatively, it may be possible for Hidden Talent (or equivalent) to create multiple project streams to work with young people at different stages from the labour market, adapting targets and expectations for each stream. This may enable talent coaches to cast the net further and engage with more hidden young people.

Whilst stakeholders were understanding about the reasons for it, most stated that the six-month time frame was a limitation of the project for the reasons outlined elsewhere in this report. Some also mentioned their concerns for what would happen to young people after the project had finished, when delivery partners in some cases would be unable to continue supporting them. Thinking about the long-term goals of young people, and those supporting them, they also discussed some potential effects of implementing a period of intensive support that ended somewhat abruptly for some, and what the impacts could be for some young people. Whilst many talent coaches were happy to connect with young people who called or texted them for support after the project had finished, in some cases this was more of a gesture of goodwill on their part, rather than specific post-project support, and there was no guaranteed financial support allocated for work done in this capacity.

The lack of secure funding and investment for youth employment projects is a major cause for concern. There is a strong evidence base for the value of such interventions which this report adds to. Central and regional governments have variable powers for funding and investment decisions. A long-term strategy of investment into employment support especially for those further from the labour market is necessary. There is also an opportunity to systematically address wider public policy for young people and how employment support intersects with other major issues such as housing and health.

**Recommendation 9:** Recognition in public policy of the unique needs of young people in the design and provision of support services in all aspects of their lives (e.g., work, health, wellbeing, housing).

## Appendix 1.

**Definitions of unemployment and economic inactivity (adapted from DLUHC source):**

Status	Definitions
<b>Unemployed</b>	<p>As defined by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), unemployed persons are those:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Without a job, have been actively seeking work in the past four weeks and are available to start in the next two weeks.</li> <li>• Out of work, have found a job and are waiting to start it in the next two weeks.</li> <li>• Not all unemployed persons claim unemployment-related benefits. This is due to either not being entitled to claim unemployment-related benefits or choosing not to do so. Here, unemployment-related benefits is defined as those in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) or are in the Intensive Work Search Regime within Universal Credit (UC).</li> </ul>
<b>Economically Inactive</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economically inactive individuals are those not in work and not actively seeking work (unlike unemployed individuals who are actively seeking work).</li> <li>• Not all economically inactive individuals claim benefits (i.e., hidden)</li> <li>• For those that do, this would include those claiming either “legacy” benefits or those within specific conditionality regimes in UC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The former here includes Employment Support Allowance (ESA), Incapacity Benefit (IB) and Income Support (IS).</li> <li>• The latter here includes claimants within the Preparation Requirement or Work Focused Interview Requirement conditionality regimes.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



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