Talent Match Evaluation and Learning Contract: 2013-19

Summary for Partnerships - February 2014

Introduction

The Big Lottery Fund is investing £108million in Talent Match, its innovative programme designed to address the problems of high levels of unemployment amongst 18-24 year olds. It is being delivered through voluntary and community sector led partnerships in 21 Local Enterprise Partnership areas in England. It seeks to support those furthest from the labour market in their journey towards sustainable employment. 21 local partnerships have now had their grant funding approved and are starting in early 2014.

To support the delivery of this programme, the Big Lottery Fund has commissioned an Evaluation and Learning contract. This contract is being led by the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (CRESR) at Sheffield Hallam University with its partners the Institute for Employment Research (IER) at the University of Warwick and Cambridge Economic Associates. This team has delivered similar contracts for central government departments and the Big Lottery Fund and works extensively with the voluntary and community sector.

The Rationale for the Evaluation

A key rationale for the evaluation is to support and help the Talent Match partnerships. This is through the sharing of good practice and evidence around what works. The evaluation is also a key part of informing future policy and practice to address youth unemployment, and in particular, the effectiveness of an approach which places young people at the heart of the programme.

Aims and Objectives

The overall requirements for the contract are as follows:

- to track the success of the programme and projects and interventions within it
- to identify what works well, for whom and in what circumstances
- to share learning and improve practice (including amongst grantholders).

Key aspects of the evaluation for the Big Lottery Fund include:

- estimates of the costs and benefits to society and the state of intervening with young people aged 18-24 who have been out of education, employment or training for 12 months or more
- an evaluation of whether the principles in the programme have made a difference

- a better understanding of the kinds of approach to intervention that work well, with whom and why, at different stages of the young person's journey toward and into sustained employment

- a better understanding of how those approaches can be implemented.

Overarching Research Framework

The over-riding aim of the research is to provide a robust assessment of what works in assisting unemployed young people into sustainable employment and to disseminate this knowledge and evidence more widely.

There are five guiding principles of the Talent Match programme:

- engaging young people in all aspects of delivery and evaluation

- providing structured opportunities for young people

- a person-centred approach

- supporting local solutions

- strong and positive communications.

These principles call for a responsive approach to capturing change. The 21 partnerships are operating in widely differentiated labour market contexts, focus on different issues and barriers, and are vary in terms of their experience and delivery capacity.

The evaluation of Talent Match is multi-faceted and involves the following components:

- Collection of information from each partnership in the form of a **Common Data Framework (CDF).** This has been a key area for engagement with partnerships to date. An agreed framework is now in place: including common questions, systems for collecting and transferring data, and data sharing agreements. The common data framework will be used to provide each partnership with summary information as to the progress they are making against key indicators. The CDF is vital for the evaluation to understand the progress individual beneficiaries have made in progressing towards the labour market. The CDF questions are based on ones used in other surveys. This does not preclude individual partnerships supplementing these with their own questions.

- **Local labour market profiling and benchmarking.** We are currently profiling the local labour market conditions for each Talent Match partnership. Our aim is that from June 2014 we will provide regular information to each partnership. This information will also be vital in helping us understand the contexts in which each partnership is working and how these change over time.

- **Typology of Interventions and Partnerships.** A key aspect of Talent Match is the 'Test and Learn' approach BIG are using across its strategic programmes. To understand the approaches partnerships are taking in the first quarter of 2014 we are developing a typology both of interventions and partnerships. This will inform how we engage with partnerships over time, identify some key questions to ask and identify some of the areas of innovation.

- In each year of the evaluation we will be taking a **thematic approach**. This provides the most sensible approach for organising a programme of research and supporting learning and development activities with partnerships. At the Big Lottery Fund's grant induction events in Autumn 2013 we consulted partnerships of the themes they would like to consider. The two most prominent ones were around partnership development and the involvement of young people. Both are wide ranging and we

will be consulting partnerships in early 2014 through a partnership survey the specific questions they would like to explore further and the types of support they may need.

- **Involving Young People** is at the heart of the Talent Match programme. To provide the support to partnerships in this area we are proposing that our initial focus is on two issues: understanding how young people have been involved across the partnerships, what has worked well and what have been the challenges; and how partnerships are involving young people to collect information and research information. From these we anticipate that further issues will arise.

Each of these areas of research components will involve specific research methods, including:

- Discussions through interviews or focus groups with each partnership (the lead partner, the partners and young people)

- Case study based research (for example around the specific research themes)

- Collection and analysis of administrative and monitoring data (the Common Data Framework)

- Analysis of secondary data from national statistics (the Local Labour Market profiling)

- Undertaking evidence reviews around specific themes to support and challenge practce

Evaluation Outputs

Specific outputs from the evaluation will include:

- summaries of existing evidence (undertaken as part of a thematic study)

- initial and ongoing support to all Partnerships in the implementation of a Common Data Framework - with all data quality assured and checked

- a series of Quantitative and Qualitative reports to BIG and Partners which include:

  - quarterly progress reports allowing for analysis by Partnership

  - detailed annual reports on economic impact including analysis by groups, project types and partnerships

  - summative economic impact reports (2015, 2017 and 2019)

  - synthetic reports drawing together the range of findings at June 2014, 2016, 2018 and 2020.

- thematic reports around specific topics which link together different forms of evidence

- working with the Big Lottery Fund's Communications team to provide multimedia Case Studies of individuals benefiting from the programme

- a series of good practice guides

Learning

We have divided the stakeholders into four main groups, each with their own specific learning needs:

- **Local Talent Match Partnerships:** this group is the main focus for the **learning activities in this contract** and includes the lead partner, VCS delivery partners and other local stakeholders including young people. The main points of engagement will include: support from a contact point in the evaluation team; participation in case studies and action learning sets; and participation in programme-wide events.

- **National stakeholders** ranging from government departments, parliament through to other funders and the media. This group is subject to the **Influencing Plan** for this contract and involves the evaluation team work with the Big Lottery Fund to run a range of different events for national stakeholders.

- **BIG** itself as client is also a major stakeholder in learning

- **Young people** are at the heart of Talent Match and distinguish the programme from other national programmes. Our work with young people will be primarily through the local partnerships: involved and consulted in the analysis and reporting of the findings of the findings.

Feedback

We welcome your feedback. Please contact us if there is anything which is unclear. Areas we would particularly welcome feedback on our:

- Further suggestions for the thematic approach to the evaluation

- Specific aspects of your partnership's work which are particularly innovative

- Local research and evaluation activities you are undertaking

- Examples of initiatives you are supporting which you believe are having a significant impact

- Specific areas of support your partnership may need and which is currently not being met

- Areas you believe you could offer something to support other partnerships, the evaluation or the Big Lottery Fund

Contact Information

The main contacts for the evaluation and learning contract in the business planning phase will be Peter Wells and Ryan Powell, both at Sheffield Hallam University. Their contact details are below. Please feel free to contact them to discuss any aspect of the evaluation and learning contract.

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