

Greater Manchester Talent Match

Critical Learning - Working with employers

Executive Summary



This is an executive summary of one of five Critical Learning reports bringing to light essential learning from the Greater Manchester Talent Match programme. To view the other reports, please click

This is a summary of a report examining the approaches the Greater Manchester Talent Match programme took to engaging and involving employers. There were three initial aims:

- To show how Greater Manchester Talent Match worked with employers from both an *engagement* and *involvement* perspective
- To highlight the challenges the programme faced when working with employers
- To show how what success looks like by identifying employer engagement strategies/approaches that produce the best outcomes for long-term unemployed young people

The findings from these aims permeate the seven recommendations around which a full version of the report is structured. This Critical Learning can inform how future voluntary youth employment programmes work with employers and is also instructive for employers looking to broaden their talent pools and increase their social value impact. Each recommendation was arrived at with due consideration given to employers' growth needs.

The recommendations will feed directly into the employer engagement strategy for GM Talent Match's follow-up programme, Greater Manchester's Hidden Talent.

Critical Learning

1. Involve the right kinds of employers in programme partnerships and include them in key decision making. Establish clear communications between them and other stakeholder groups.

Partnerships should involve employers in strategic decision making. Doing so imbues programmes with a sense of business realism and demand-side reasoning.

Employers involved in programme governance should ideally advocate and adhere to programme principles. They should understand the approach of support workers, sympathise with young people's perspectives and lead by example in terms of exhibiting good practice.

Programme managers and their teams have a responsibility to ensure dialogue between involved employers and support workers is clear and regular.

2. Bring employers and young people together to create new networks and facilitate understanding.

Networking events should provide a stage for young people to promote their talents and ask questions of employers. When employers meet with young people, discover their backstories and listen to their aspirations, they are better able to sense their potential.

By breaking stereotypes, a 'fear factor' is removed. Networking events serve to 'humanise' employers in the eyes of young people, who realise that employers want to help. Conversely, employers understand that unemployed young people want to work and possess skills that can benefit them.

3. Channel programme resources in a way that maximises the potential for change. As part of this consider recruiting employer engagement staff with clearly delineated responsibilities.

Working with employers is the joint responsibility of lead partners and frontline support workers.

A clearly written employer engagement strategy (available at the earliest possible point) can ensure stakeholders recognise where their responsibilities start, end and overlap.

Such strategies should reflect the fact that youth employment programmes with limited resources – particularly those delivered by the VCSE sector - should look to work where the most gains can be made (brokering individual relationships on behalf of support workers can be time consuming)

Convincing companies to change recruitment practices represents a relatively 'easy-win'. Hosting workshops bringing employers together is also a good use of resources, as is coordinating World of Work visits whereby multiple young people gain vital insight into what a job looks like, and meet face-to-face with employers.

Having a designated member of staff on a programme to facilitate employer engagement activity is an effective way of building strong and fruitful relationships with employers.

4. Build a business case for employers that stresses the benefits of engaging with unemployed young people

Due attention to businesses' resourcing needs must underpin engagement work.

Support programmes must stress how providing opportunity positively impacts growth and productivity. There are many strands to this argument. Young people may be able to plug a skills gap, bring new ideas or represent a best-fit in terms of retention of staff.

Where support workers and young people agree to it, the availability and merits of in-work support (provided by support workers) can be conveyed to employers. Where workers have provided a lot of holistic and work-readiness support in advance of employment, this should be conveyed to employers - it can reassure them.

Inclusion and diversity interventions should be argued for on the basis they can benefit all employers. Support programmes should champion the fact that employing unemployed/marginalised young people contributes to employers fulfilling their social value responsibilities.

5. Strike the balance between engaging different sized employers

Different sized employers can facilitate different kinds of opportunity for young people and engage in different engagement activity.

Larger employers have the capacity to host workplace visits and attend workshops/discussions on pertinent topics. With knowledge gleaned from workshops and also by having their recruitment processes scrutinized by young people, representatives from larger employers can then make change or pursue the case for it with their colleagues.

Smaller employers on the other hand have the flexibility to respond to and accommodate more ad hoc requests from support workers and young people. Programmes should take advantage of local small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) networks – such as Chambers of Commerce - to gain access to these employers.

When engaging with all employers, engagement officers and support workers should be mindful of making initial ‘asks’ too demanding and risk employers disengaging.

6. Take advantage of existing employment pathways.

Creating sustainable pathways into work from the ground up is time consuming for youth employment programmes with limited time/resources. Well-developed relationships with employer representatives should be capitalized on to access pre-existing pathways.

Due diligence should ensure pathways are suitably pitched for young people and has necessary built-in support mechanisms.

7. Wherever possible evidence outcomes to shape future delivery and influence policy makers




Measuring the impact of engagement activities and drawing correlations to employment outcomes can be difficult. However recording where exactly young people entered work is more routine.

Detailed recording of employment outcomes (size of employer, sector details, apprenticeship type, wages) builds an evidence base from which to influence industrial strategies, employe charters and other inclusive growth initiatives.

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