



## 'CONNECT: Learn, Share, Improve' Project Summary

**Greater Manchester Talent Match** (GMTM) was a Big Lottery-funded, five-year programme bringing together the private, public and voluntary sectors to support young people aged 18-24 who had not been in employment, education or training for twelve months or more and who needed extra support to help them along their pathway to work. The partnership was led by **Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisation** and included **Greater Manchester Youth Network**, who hosted the **GM Talent Match Youth Panel**; young volunteers aged 18-24 who had experienced barriers to employment. The programme ended in December 2018.

One of the key strategic aims of the programme was to, “enable young people across Greater Manchester to access the opportunities and services that increase their employability”, whilst a principle of the programme was to “enable young people’s involvement in the design and delivery of services that affect them.”

In 2017 GMTM commissioned Youth Employment UK to support the Youth Panel to identify a current issue within the youth employment space and develop an initiative or project which would aim to influence policy and decision-makers. The timeline for the entire project was August 2017 to November 2018. Difficult experiences of claiming out-of-work benefits had been identified as a barrier by young people during the 2013 consultation phase of GM Talent Match and this was reflected in the personal experiences of many members of the Youth Panel. In response, the [Youth Panel chose a project focusing on Jobcentres](#), with the following aims:

**Aim 1: Support Jobcentres to improve their services by understanding young peoples’ needs**

**Aim 2: Support disengaged young people to find out more information about Jobcentres and their services**

Earlier that year, GMTM had published the first of two [research reports](#) examining the needs and circumstances of hidden young people; those not in education, employment or training and not claiming the welfare benefits to which they are entitled. This research identified difficulty in claiming and maintaining welfare benefits (either actual or perceived) and associated stigma as barriers for young people to engaging with the employment support provided by Jobcentre Work Coaches. As a response, representatives of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) expressed an interest in working with the Youth Panel to address young people’s negative perceptions of Jobcentre services. In working towards making services more youth-friendly, it was felt that the Youth Panel’s project would support the interests of both GM Talent Match and DWP.

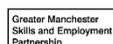
### The Research

The Youth Panel decided to conduct research with Work Coaches and young people in order to pinpoint what specific issues might be at play, with the aim of then focusing on *one* aspect of the findings to develop a pilot project in *one* Jobcentre. They worked with representatives of DWP to create online surveys for young people and Work Coaches. Additionally, Youth Panel members interviewed six Work Coaches and eight young people to get more in-depth data. After reviewing all the data, recommendations were put forward to DWP by the Youth Panel under four themes (their detailed [recommendations can be found here](#)):

**Information about services:** The main issue expressed by young people was that it was really hard to for them know what the Jobcentre provided or how they can be of help. Echoing the views from the research, the Youth Panel were unclear on what was available to them at their local Jobcentre and what they could expect. It was felt that information about the Jobcentre is difficult to access without having to visit a branch.

**Enabling young people to feedback on services:** The Youth Panel made a number of suggestions around how young people’s experiences of the support offered could be fed into Jobcentres to facilitate change.

**Specialist training for Jobcentre Plus staff:** Being able to share their experiences, challenges, hopes and aspirations is an important part of young people ‘buying in’ to the process and achieving their desired outcome. Young people are facing many challenges and the world is changing rapidly for them. Therefore, creating a better understanding of what they face and training staff in dealing with this is an important consideration.



**The Jobcentre environment:** The Jobcentre can be an intimidating place for young people and the Youth Panel suggested some positive steps that could be taken to make the process more comfortable for both sides

## The Pilot Project

The Youth Panel met with DWP to look at the recommendations and to decide which to focus on for the pilot project. The DWP representatives talked to the Youth Panel about what work was already underway to address some of the recommendations. It was agreed to focus work on the recommendation of 'improving information about Jobcentre services' by looking at the information and services specific to one Jobcentre. An article, infographic or video would then be created by the Youth Panel to convey this information in a youth-friendly way.

Issues around communication, staff availability and co-ordination began negatively impacting on the overall project from June 2018 and caused considerable delay in starting work on the pilot project. As a result, a planned visit to the identified Jobcentre did not take place until September 2018 and time constraints meant that the visit had not been as well-prepared for as it could have been. A member of DWP staff created a video on the day, which was edited and provided to the Youth Panel in October. The Youth Panel made a number of recommendations of how the video could be made more appealing and useful for young people. Unfortunately, by this point, the YEUK project and the GM Talent Match programme were drawing to a close, and there was no further opportunity to work on implementing recommendations around the video.

## Learning

**Project design/approach:** The project was designed around monthly meetings between YEUK (based in Newcastle) and the Youth Panel over the duration of the project, however it was felt that the long gaps between meetings contributed to a lack of ownership of decisions and a losing of momentum. Similarly, it was felt that the length of the project meant that it was unable to respond quickly to external changes and that it was too long for participants to see any tangible results. Future projects could benefit from a more 'agile' approach to project design, with shorter, more responsive and iterative projects delivering incremental changes that are recognised and celebrated.

**Expectations:** In response to some of the issues that occurred, a Co-Production Agreement was developed which was endorsed by the Youth Panel and DWP. It was felt that if that had been in place from the outset, some of the issues could have been avoided. The delay in launching the pilot project caused some Youth Panel members to disengage and it was felt that better dialogue about what was feasible in the time-frame would have helped. Furthermore, it became apparent that there was a difference in expectations around what could be achieved from a pilot project; whilst valuable learning was identified from the pilot which would be used to improve future projects, some Youth Panel members were disappointed with the result.

**Training:** An evaluation of how 'youth-led' the project was found that many elements were youth-led, or had shared control between the Youth Panel and project staff, however some elements, particularly some meetings with DWP and the production of the video, were not. Training around co-production for all participants could further the extent to which future projects are youth-led.

## Next Steps

Whilst the GM Talent Match programme came to an end in December 2018, GMCVO has secured funding from the **National Lottery Community Fund** and **Greater Manchester Combined Authority** to deliver **Greater Manchester's Hidden Talent**, a two-year programme building on the legacy of GM Talent Match to provide support to hidden young people across Greater Manchester. One of the intended impacts of the programme, launching in Spring 2019, is to help Jobcentres adapt their offer and make their services more accessible to young people.

GMCVO and DWP will work together over the course of the new programme to achieve this aim. A joint meeting between the Youth Panel and DWP in early 2019 led to further recommendations around how to improve future collaboration. Both parties committed to work together to develop a strategy and a plan to incorporate learning from 'Connect: Learn, Share, Improve' into future co-produced projects.

