

Talent Match Evaluation and Learning Contract: 2013-19

Partnerships and Service Delivery: an evidence review

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Summary

The Big Lottery Fund is investing £108 million in Talent Match, its innovative programme designed to address the problems of high levels of worklessness amongst 18-24 year olds. It is being delivered through voluntary and community sector led partnerships in 21 Local Enterprise Partnership areas in England.

This paper presents an evidence review around the role of partnership in service delivery, particularly focusing on the role of partnership in regeneration and local labour market initiatives.

The following ten lessons can be drawn from the review:

1. **Partnership is now a well-established part of public policy making and implementation in the United Kingdom.** For the purposes of this review, benefits have been identified around improvements to service delivery, the ability to tackle 'wicked issues' which cannot be solved by single agencies, operational benefits of cross-referral to help clients, and as a means to change mainstream services.
2. **The evidence of partnership benefits is however mixed,** and in particular around the ways in which partners from different sectors have been engaged. This includes public, private and third sectors. The review identifies some particular constraints.
3. **The engagement of third sector organisations has been particularly affected by what have traditionally been seen as complexity, diversity and capacity issues:** complexity because of the sector does not neatly align to traditional public service areas, diversity because simply the sector contains a huge array of organisations, and finally capacity reasons which for many smaller and medium sized organisation have presented some clear barriers to engagement (especially where partnership engagement is a prerequisite to funding).
4. **More recent approaches to third sector engagement in partnership have focused on the capability of organisations.** This is a more critical stance to capacity building per se: it brings a sharper focus on capability to achieve particular outcomes and a recognition of a more selective approach to engagement. The evidence of a more capability-based approach is mixed and clearly could be challenged for undermining the inclusivity of partnership as an ideal.
5. **Engagement of private sector organisations in partnership in the United Kingdom has historically been at best mixed and in many cases poor.**
6. Nonetheless, **there is evidence that certain approaches work better and provide positive outcomes.** These include the importance of outreach work at an early stage in partnership development and which is high quality, the need for specialist staff to undertake outreach work, and the acceptance of developing strong links with a relatively small number of employers which perhaps work through existing employer networks. Finally, employers need to see tangible benefits, which in previous labour market interventions have been shown to be: that the programme will address their skill

shortages, that there is support for employer-specific recruitment, that there are tangible benefits for corporate social responsibility, and that employees better reflect the local population.

7. However, **partnerships need to recognise that the engagement of small and medium sized enterprises can be particularly difficult**. If this is a priority of partnerships, areas of success are seen to emanate from offering very clear and low barrier packages to support to employers to engage them in programmes. An example here would be running a subsidised placement scheme.
8. **Key drivers for successful partnership working** lie include: development of appropriate organisational and governance structures (including the balance between formal governance and informal networks), ensuring that there are clear and shared objectives and time is given to the development of such shared vision; and time is given to the development of relationships, including practical steps such as co-location of services and regular and open communication.
9. **Partnership is not an end itself**. There remains limited quantitative evidence of what discernible outcomes are brought by partnership. Nonetheless there is some, notably from the New Deal for Communities evaluation. For instance this suggests that where agencies were involved to a significant extent on partnerships, then outcomes increased; and the more agencies involved on partnerships was correlated with local residents thought an area approved. These are of course not simple relationships. However, this evidence suggests that partnership is at least part of the solution to overcoming 'wicked issues'.
10. **The evidence review suggests a series of questions for further exploration**. These need to focus in particular on the benefits Talent Match Partnerships bring to the achievement of the programme's outcomes. This needs to consider the types of partnership practice which have worked, why they have worked and with what effect. This may then provide the basis for identifying areas of transferable practice.

Introduction

The Big Lottery Fund is investing £108 million in Talent Match, its innovative programme designed to address the problems of high levels of worklessness 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. Twenty-one 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.

This paper presents an evidence review around the role of partnership in service delivery, particularly focusing on the role of partnership in regeneration and local labour market initiatives. This document is intended to form the basis for further research with partnerships, through case study work, action learning and analysis of existing data. The outcome will be a series of lessons and examples for all partnerships and the Big Lottery Fund.

Evidence Review

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2.1. Introduction

Partnership is understood differently across different contexts and by different actors: for the purposes here is defined as '**inter-organisation collaborative relationships** - both horizontal and vertical - to achieve outcomes in service delivery' (Rees *et al.*, 2012a: 4). Partners in horizontal relationships often operate as consortia on a broadly similar basis in terms of roles and responsibilities and are not necessarily bound together by formal contractual relationships. Vertical relationships are characterised by a clear hierarchy and include contractual relationships within a supply chain. Cutting across definitions is a sense that relationships are built upon 'some degree of trust, equality and reciprocity' (Rees *et al.*, 2012b: 9).

Partnership may take on a number of different forms. Most relevant to this review is partnership for service delivery but other forms include outsourcing back-office functions (e.g. finance or payroll), sharing resources (e.g. training or transport), co-locating premises; pooling and/or aligning funding, staff and other resources; and joint campaigning (Rees *et al.*, 2012a). This review focuses on partnership in co-ordinating services to tackle worklessness or broader forms of deprivation. It draws on evaluations of key programmes to tackle worklessness or to regenerate deprived areas from the last 15 years. The structure of most of these programmes differs from Talent Match in that it usually comprises public sector fund holders commissioning third or private sector providers to deliver services. However, many of the observations on partnership are relevant to Talent Match given the broad, multi-sector nature of local Talent Match partnerships. As always, it should not be assumed that lessons are directly transferable.

The remainder of the reviews consider four main areas:

- the **rationale** for partnership
- the **nature** of partnership in terms of engagement within and across sectors as well as with communities/service users
- the **process** of partnership (drivers and barriers to effective partnership)
- the **outcomes** of partnership.

2.2. The rationale for partnership

There has been a **growing emphasis on partnership** within the third sector in the UK over the last 25 years. This is due, in part, to the need to co-ordinate and deliver public services that have been fragmented by outsourcing and the break-up of large public providers (Rees *et al.*, 2012a). As part of this, third sector organisations have increasingly been commissioned or procured to deliver elements of major publicly-

funded programmes to tackle worklessness, most recently for example within the Work Programme. The sector itself has also taken a lead role through a number of Big Lottery Fund supported programmes to improve employability including the National Council for Voluntary Organisation's Volunteering for Stronger Communities programme (see Bashir *et al.*, 2013) and BLF's own Talent Match initiative. It is also worth noting that partnerships such as these have a strong local focus. The rationale here is that partners bring specific knowledge of local labour market issues.

Partnership has been justified for the following reasons:

- **improving the effectiveness of service delivery:** partnership is seen as way of ensuring that agencies can work together to develop integrated strategies, co-ordinate service delivery and avoid duplication, create opportunities for cross-referrals, align or pool resources, develop a 'seamless' client journey through provision, achieve greater efficiencies and benefit from returns to scale
- **tackling 'wicked issues' by providing a range of specialist support to marginalised groups':** partnership can support the most disadvantaged where partners can engage marginalised groups, provide specialist services to address particular issues such as addictions or homelessness, and can offer a range of services to tackle multiple forms of disadvantage that no single provider could deliver
- **providing greater opportunities for clients through links with other actors:** partnership within projects and programmes designed to tackle worklessness is considered a way of improving both employability and access to employment opportunities, through for example, creating links with training providers and engaging with employers
- **embedding new ways of working in 'mainstream' services:** partnerships resourced through time-limited programmes often seek to bring about sustainable change by encouraging mainstream providers to 'bend their spend' towards target groups or areas, redesign services where pilot or experimental initiatives suggest new and improved ways of working, and continue services in some form once partnerships end.

(DWP, 2006a; 2011; Sanderson, 2006; Meadows, 2008; DCLG, 2009a)

It is widely assumed that the benefits of partnership outlined above combine to improve outcomes although, as section five illustrates, there is comparatively little data which directly explores the benefits.

2.3. Engaging partners

Partnerships vary across (and within) programmes in terms of the number of partners and distribution across sectors and policy domains. It is often assumed that partnerships to tackle worklessness will benefit from engaging a mix of public, private and third sector providers to draw on their respective skills, expertise and capacity to improve the employment prospects of individuals supported. Evidence from existing evaluations shows there can be challenges, however, both in attracting 'desired' partners and ensuring that smaller providers are not 'squeezed out' by onerous procurement processes and delivery requirements. The role of each of three main sectors is considered in turn below.

Engaging the public sector

The lead role of public sector agencies in tackling worklessness would appear to make them **natural partners** for partnerships with an employment remit, especially in terms of providing referrals. However, the extent to which key public sector

agencies involved in tackling worklessness willingly engages with partnerships varies. Evaluations of two large-scale regeneration initiatives - the New Deal for Communities and Neighbourhood Renewal Fund - found that Jobcentre Plus (Jobcentre Plus) did not engage as fully as some other agencies with a more explicit neighbourhood remit such as the police or Local Strategic Partnerships (DCLG, 2008, 2009b). This could be a consequence of **divergent priorities and spatial remits**, as outlined below. Jobcentre Plus were also singled out as failing to provide **anticipated levels of referrals** in a Third Sector led employment programme (*Bashir et al.*, 2013, although the reasons for this are not clear. However, it should be noted that explanatory reasons for Jobcentre Plus's engagement in partnerships may be around their differing targets and in some cases geographical coverage. Equally, local statutory partners, such as local authorities, Police and health bodies may also struggle to fully engage in partnerships for a range of reasons including resources and competing priorities.

Difficulties in engaging Jobcentre Plus were noted in the Action for Team for Jobs programme despite the direct involvement of Jobcentre Plus staff (DWP, 2006a). Staff reported initial 'teething problems' such as a lack of awareness and understanding of the role of Action Teams by Jobcentre Plus staff that resulted in a lack of referrals. Action Teams subsequently worked to improve the relationship through running workshops to improve the understanding and awareness of Action Teams; making sure there was a clear distinction between Action Teams and Jobcentre Plus; and ensuring Jobcentre Plus advisers were credited with points to encourage referrals.

Evidence from third-sector led programmes to deliver employment support also suggests the relationship with Jobcentre Plus needs to be carefully managed. The evaluation of Volunteering for Stronger Communities programme run by volunteer centres in England found that Jobcentre Plus sometimes referred clients mandatorily who lacked the inclination to engage with the programme (*Bashir et al.*, 2013). A further issue was that clients faced barriers too severe for Volunteer Centres to address. These challenges were resolved through discussions with Jobcentre Plus who agreed to make more appropriate referrals. Some Third Sector providers choose not to work with Jobcentre Plus at all to avoid being 'tainted' by association where clients seen Jobcentre Plus seen as punitive, overly formal, inflexible or unresponsive by target groups (DCLG, 2009b). This reflects Jobcentre Plus' dual role in administering benefits and supporting job search. This function may make it a 'challenging partner' for experimentation around bottom-up labour market interventions.

Engaging the third sector

Third sector organisations are often seen as important partners because of their community-based approach which means they have the local knowledge, trust and networks to engage effectively in outreach work (Sanderson, 2006). They are also sometimes seen as a **'niche' provider** capable of providing innovative and specialist services for particular user groups (Rees *et al.*, 2012b). Despite these apparent strengths, smaller grassroots TSOs have expressed concerns that they are often 'squeezed out' of larger programmes including the New Deal for Communities, European Social Fund and Work Programme (DCLG, 2009b; Crisp *et al.*, 2010; Rees *et al.*, 2013). Reasons given include onerous procurement processes; a lack of understanding among public sector commissioners of their capabilities; an inability to fund provision upfront in programmes with end-loaded 'payment by results' structures; and a perception that TSOs are good at engagement but lack the capacity to deliver (Sanderson, 2006; Crisp *et al.*, 2010). This suggests a need for capacity building and additional resources to ensure that smaller groups have the ability to participate fully in partnerships and deliver provision effectively (*ibid.*). However, the efficacy of this

approach needs to be considered against the likelihood that for the foreseeable future performance-based payment systems will continue to be used.

Engaging the private sector

Working with the private sector can be important in helping to understand the requirements of employers and in providing direct opportunities for training, work placements and employment. Evidence presented in a previous evidence review produced for the Talent Match programme shows that engaging employers is not always straightforward. They may be resistant to anything that is **time consuming** and does not have clear outcomes that directly benefit businesses (Meadows, 2008; DCLG, 2009b). Fletcher (2001) discovered that many New Deal Innovation Fund projects had encountered problems establishing productive relationships with local businesses due to:

- a failure to involve employers in the design of pilots
- poor local labour market knowledge leading to limited relevance to key local issues
- inadequate assessment of employer needs
- the client-focused outlook of some providers and their limited experience of working with employers
- inappropriate marketing techniques e.g. 'cold-calling' or large-scale mailshots.

These issues suggest a limited appreciation of demand-side issues as a key barrier to effective engagement of the private sector.

Further barriers to employer engagement identified by an evaluation (DCLG, 2009b) of New Deal for Communities worklessness projects included:

- companies having well-established recruitment channels and therefore not needing local support
- competition from other local providers (including Jobcentre Plus) to secure opportunities from employers
- a reluctance by programmes to engage with private sector organisations perceived to provide 'poor quality and low paid work'
- a lack of willingness among employers to consider local people, especially those from 'hard-to-reach' groups
- cultural barriers between sectors with public sector agencies wary of working with profit-making organisations.

However, it should be noted that with the emergence of LEPs new or different organisations may be interested in working with employers, suggesting a need for a local partnership approach.

Engaging employers is a form of **outreach work** which requires high levels of interpersonal skills and good organisational support (Meadows, 2008). Employers must be involved as early as possible, and the process must be simple and straightforward (Meadows, 2008). Involving employers on the board of partnerships can help focus attention on employer needs and labour demand issues more generally (DWP, 2011).

The evidence is that engagement is best facilitated through **specialist staff** (Fletcher, 2001; DWP, 2006a, 2007a; DCLG, 2009b). Private sector providers may also be more effective in employer engagement than public sector counterparts (DWP,

2006a). A key lesson for relatively small locally focused partnerships is that it is better to have **strong links** with a few genuinely committed employers than weak links with many (Fletcher, 2001; Meadows, 2008). Many interventions have made use of **existing employer networks** and met employer needs. In terms of the latter, an evaluation of the Fair Cities programme (2007b) found that the key attractions to employers becoming involved were:

- to overcome **skill shortages**
- the provision of targeted, employer-specific **recruitment**
- to fulfil **corporate social responsibility** objectives
- to ensure that the workforce reflects the **local population** and key service users.

Engaging small and medium-sized organisations can be particularly difficult. Many find recruitment expensive, and interventions can exploit this by offering a **job matching service** and by ensuring that follow-up support is available (Meadows, 2008). One possible approach is to offer employers the possibility of free or low-cost **trials** before they decide whether to take someone on (DWP, 2005). Projects working with specific disadvantaged groups have found that they can help individuals into work if they can also provide a service for employers in terms of helping them to find staff. This has been found to be true for **offenders** (Fletcher *et al.*, 2001) **substance misusers** (Sutton *et al.*, 2004) and **people with learning difficulties** (Simons 1998; DWP, 2005). However, some employers will have concerns about the job-readiness of such individuals and will need to be assured that recruitment will not lead to further costs resulting from high turnover and high risk behaviour (Fletcher, 2001).

Good relationships with employers not only help with immediate placement into jobs taking account of the 'fit' between the individual placed and the opportunity provided by the employer, but also with post-employment support and the potential to influence recruitment practices in the longer term (Sanderson, 2006; DCLG, 2006a). The evidence consistently suggests that interventions with employer-placements and work-based training are more successful in leading to employment (Meadows, 2008). These interventions put participants in contact with employers and help develop more general employability skills, as well as enabling the individuals concerned to demonstrate work experience to potential employers.

2.4. Making partnership work

Partnerships vary hugely in terms of their aims, composition, target groups, geographic scope as well as the economic, political and institutional context they operate in. Consequently, there is no single approach that can be singled out as being particularly effective and transferable to all types of partnership. Nonetheless, existing literature points to a number of different 'drivers' and 'barriers' to good partnership working which may, to different degrees, provide valuable guidance or how to establish and maintain partnerships.

Drivers of partnership

Research has identified the following factors as playing an important role in effective partnership:

Structure of Organisation and Governance

- **Leadership:** 'Visionary' leaders within partner organisations can help secure organisational commitment and resources to achieving the aims of partnerships

(DCLG, 2010b). Senior and experienced members of partner organisations often provide effective leadership as Chairs of boards (DCLG, 2010a). Leadership roles include giving political direction; identifying and acting upon opportunities; coalition building; lobbying; building institutional capacity; and driving decision making (DCLG, 2011). Leadership needs to be exercised both within individual partner organisations and across partnerships as a whole (DCLG, 2011).

- **A combination of formal and informal structures for partnership:** establishing a partnership board and thematic working groups was seen as an important element of partnership working in the NDC programme (DCLG, 2009b). At the same time, it was seen as useful to supplement these with informal meetings between smaller numbers of partners to build mutual understanding of activities and to develop personal relationships.
- **Established partnerships and networks:** partnerships can take time to become effective but this process is accelerated when built around established relationships, networks and commissioning links. (DWP, 2006a, 2007a; DCLG, 2010b).
- **Representation:** securing representation from the public, private and voluntary sector on the board was considered critical to the effectiveness of partnerships within the City Strategy Pathfinder programme (DWP, 2011). Active participation of key organisations such as local authorities and Jobcentre Plus is also essential (DCLG, 2009b).
- **Conflict resolution mechanisms:** Quick resolution of any tensions that arise is important (Meadows, 2008). Agreements over sharing outputs can help reduce potential tensions (DCLG, 2009b).
- **Identification of clear roles and responsibilities:** Drawing up agreements to ensure clarity around roles and responsibilities can help partnerships function more effectively (DWP, 2006a; DCLG, 2009b, 2011).
- **Governance:** The size of the board may make a difference to the effectiveness of partnerships (DCLG, 2010d). Larger boards may be unwieldy and hamper decision making whilst smaller boards may lack the necessary range of skills and expertise (*ibid.*). The *quality* of partnership governance has also been given some attention, although there remains no consensus about what constitutes good governance. This may range from a set of principles to encourage genuinely collaborative working or, more minimally, to respect the contracts to which partners are legally committed (Rees *et al.*, 2012b)

Clarity of Objectives

- **Shared vision, commitment, objectives and spatial remit:** Mutual agreement of, and commitment towards, key aims is a vital prerequisite of successful partnership (Meadows, 2008, DWP, 2011). Alignment of organisational priorities with those of partnerships also increases the effectiveness of partnership working (DCLG, 2010d, 2011). For example, the police actively engaged with New Deal for Communities partnerships because of their growing focus on neighbourhood policing under Home Office guidelines (DCLG, 2010d). District level partners including local authorities and LSPs have also proved natural external partners to NDC partnerships because of their similar spatial remit and shared priorities around tackling worklessness (DCLG, 2009b).
- **Clear divisions in strategic and operational responsibilities:** The City Strategy Pathfinder evaluation suggested that a division in responsibility whereby the partnership board focused on strategy and delivery details were delegated to sub-groups helped the partnership work more effectively (DWP,

2011). Central 'core teams' took the lead in orchestrating and servicing of partnership working, spotting potential linkages between activities, and to identifying and acting upon opportunities for joint working/funding (ibid.).

Inter-relationships

- **Personal qualities and relationships:** NDC partnerships have attributed successful relationships with external service providers to the qualities and commitment of the individuals involved (DCLG, 2009b). Effective partnerships are dependent on good relations between particular individuals and can be fragile where there is a change in personnel (DWP, 2011). Trust within relationships was also seen as important prerequisite for service improvement and increased efficiency (ibid.). Softer, generic skills are also important to manage the challenges of working in partnerships (DCLG, 2010d).
- **Regular communication:** frequent contact and communication with external partners helped to clarify the function of Action Teams and to allay potential concerns within the Action Teams for Jobs programme (DWP, 2006a).
- **Co-location of services:** programmes where a range of providers delivered from a single site ('One-stop shops' or 'Multi-Access Centres') were seen to provide a more joined up and tailored service for individuals who benefitted from opportunities for providers to share information and cross-refer clients. (DWP, 2007a, 2011; DCLG, 2009b). It can also provide a site for the delivery of specially commissioned services or for established providers such as Jobcentre Plus to work on an outreach basis (DCLG, 2009b). This model is also associated with greater engagement with community partners and higher rates of retention as clients are less likely to 'drop out' if referrals take place in the same building (DWP, 2007a; DCLG, 2009b).
- **Tapping into other partnerships and strategies:** developing relationships with other partnerships operating in the area around complementary agendas can help increase access to specialist services and generate referrals (DWP, 2006a).

Barriers to effective partnership

Building successful partnerships can take time and effort and there are a number of factors that can constrain their effectiveness:

- **Time and resources:** Building relationships and mutual organisational awareness can take time (Meadows, 2008; DWP, 2011; Rees *et al.*, 2012b). It is also a process that may need to continue through the lifetime of programmes. **Relationships may also have to be 'built anew' as partnerships evolve when they move from a strategic to an operational role (Meadows, 2008).** This has been true of previous programmes and appears very relevant to Talent Match. Partnership can be burdensome for smaller voluntary and community organisations if it involves several informal or formal meetings (Meadows, 2008). The formal requirements of partnerships such as maintaining audit trails may also impose significant costs and time pressures on smaller TSOs (Rees *et al.*, 2012b). Resource demands on community members, small organisations and employers may be more acute where more than one partnership operates in an area (Meadows, 2008). Partnerships that are co-located can also be resource intensive because of the time and money needed to locate and refurbish property (DWP, 2007a).

Whilst important to allow sufficient time to build stable relationships, this has to be balanced against a need to establish basic operating procedures and put protocols in place within a reasonable timescale. Failure to do so in some NDC partnerships led to

project delays, cynicism within communities, the disengagement of potential delivery partners and a perceived risk that monies were not being spent well (DCLG, 2010d).

- **Operating procedures:** The timing of meetings can be an issue where meetings are held outside of office hours to accommodate the working patterns of community members as this may be inconvenient for agency members (DCLG, 2009b).
- **Skills and expertise:** The NDC evaluation found that resident members of NDC partnership boards found the experience positive on the whole, but many expressed frustration at times and a sizeable minority (29 per cent) felt 'out of their depth' (DCLG, 2010d). Resident board members had been supported by training at both national and local levels, visits to other partnerships as well as through pre-board meetings to clarify issues about to be discussed. However, evaluators felt more could have been done to induct and train residents more systematically at the outset of the programme. Smaller third sector organisations may also lack experience of working as part of consortia or working with large lead partners (Rees *et al.*, 2012a)
- **Staff turnover:** organisational restructuring and staff change are sometimes perceived as barriers to partnership working given the time it takes to build personal relationships based on trust and mutual understanding (DCLG, 2009b, 2011; DWP, 2011). Staff turnover can disrupt effective links between individuals and lead to institutional 'memory loss' (DCLG, 2011). This is, though, seen as a normal 'fact of life' inherent in partnership work rather than a feature of a specific initiative (DWP, 2011).
- **Organisational culture:** partners may find it difficult to align cultures with potential flashpoints including 'whose systems and processes' are adopted; the extent of common branding and identity; and the importance attached to independence. (Rees *et al.*, 2012b). Different cultures in hierarchical relationships have been evident in the Work Programme and can undermine trust (*ibid.*).
- **Competition over funds and outputs:** partnership does not always work well if partners compete for limited resources. NDC worklessness projects reported difficulties where external, public sector partners 'grabbed' funding or proved reluctant to make referrals because of fear of losing outputs (DCLG, 2009b). There is also evidence from the Flexible New Deal programme that poor performance was blamed by larger partners upon the smallest and least powerful partner (Rees *et al.*, 2012b). Partnership may also lead to 'freeloading' where one partners draws heavily and, sometimes, even covertly on the resources of another to achieve outputs. Work Programme providers and Jobcentre Plus have both been identified in evaluations, for example, as using third sector provision to improve clients' employability to achieve internal targets (Bashir *et al.*, 2013). Trust, commitment and establishing procedures for sharing outputs is therefore required to avoid 'gaming' and 'credit claiming' within partnerships (Rees *et al.*, 2012b: 56).
- **Lack of alignment of priorities or spatial remit:** 'Silo' thinking was identified as one of the biggest barriers with the City Strategy Pathfinders programme (DWP, 2011). Scale can also be an issue if spatial remits do not align. Neighbourhood-based NDC partnerships often found it difficult to engage agencies which had a regional or sub-regional remit such as Regional Development Agencies, transport authorities, Business Link/Small Business, Connexions and Learning and Skills Councils (DCLG, 2009b).

2.5. Outcomes of partnership

It is often taken for granted that partnerships deliver beneficial outcomes because of the assumed advantages of close, collaborative working to realise efficiencies and synergies. Enhanced partnership is often identified as an outcome in itself from programmes to tackle worklessness (DWP, 2006a, 2007a). For example, the evaluation of City Strategy Pathfinders (DWP, 2011) observed improvements in: links between organisations including 'joint commissioning' and referrals; enhancing local service delivery infrastructure; implementing wrap-around services to complement local provision; successful joint funding bids; and developing new tools such as directories of local employment services and Performance Rating systems.

However, there is surprisingly little research that systematically evaluates the wider outcomes of partnership, not least because it is harder to identify and assess than organisational change (Rees *et al.*, 2012b). There is qualitative evidence from the Working Neighbourhoods Pilots that partnership increases access to specialist support for beneficiaries with intensive needs such as the homeless and ex-offenders (Sanderson, 2006). One of the few examples of systematic quantitative analysis of the outcomes of partnership was undertaken as part of the national evaluation of the NDC programme (DCLG, 2010c). This found that:

- the number of agencies with which NDC partnerships engaged significantly in 2008 helps account for 25 per cent of the variation in the three place-based outcomes (crime, community, and housing and the physical environment)
- the number of agencies represented on partnership boards is positively associated with whether residents think their local NDC has improved the area.

One further measure of the outcomes of partnerships is the extent to which their activities are 'mainstreamed' when programme funding ends. The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (DCLG, 2010a) evaluation reported difficulty in influencing mainstream modes of delivery because of both the national priorities and targets of Jobcentre Plus as well as the resource intensive nature of worklessness projects (DCLG, 2010a, 2010b). However, the NDC evaluation paints a more positive picture of the influence exerted by NDC partnerships. Looking across the programme in 2004, a survey undertaken by the National Audit Office found that nearly half (41 per cent) of local service providers considered 'NDC partnerships to have been very or extremely influential with regard to their own policies, plans and service' (DCLG, 2010d). Maintaining the interest of both residents and agencies became more difficult, though, towards the end of the programme as NDC funding declined at the same time as cuts in funding for many agencies reduced their interest in or capacity to, mainstream activities (DCLG, 2010d).

Key Research Questions

The review raises a series of questions for further research with the partnerships:

1. What are the key drivers and barriers to partnership working?
2. What are the opportunities and barriers partnerships have encountered in relation to communication?
3. What are the outcomes of partnership?
4. What resources have been committed to partnership working?
5. Are partnerships new or build on some pre-existing activity?
6. Is the partnership simply for TM, or does it bring together other activities?
7. What form does the partnership take?
8. Identify and assess relations with other sectors:
 - a. other VCS organisations?
 - b. public sector organisations?
 - c. private sector organisations?
9. How have strategic and operational relationships with the Work Programme providers developed (or not)?
10. To what extent has there been, or is there desire for, the development of some form of more formalised partnership with a specific legal form? How might this come about?

The aim of this work is to distil a series of lessons for partnerships around how partnerships may be developed over the course of the programme.

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