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**An evaluation of Talent 4...**

*Report for Rideout*

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# 1 Executive Summary

This report presents an evaluation of Talent 4..., a programme designed to help offenders define professional career choices and thereby increase their employability. Given the importance of employment in combating re-offending and the problems within the Prison Service of engaging offenders with appropriate training and employment, Talent 4... was designed, rooted in learning psychology, guidance studies, and arts practice using a range of exercises, games, role plays and videos.

In order to assess the effectiveness of Talent 4... in helping offenders identify their natural abilities and the career or profession their talents are suited to, a programme of research was commissioned.

Three prisons in the Midlands of England took part in this research: HMP-YOI Drake Hall; HMP Sudbury; and HMYOI Brinsford. The data presented in this report is based on eighteen individuals: six women and twelve men.

Using interviews with participants, assessments of change in motivation and thinking, observation, discussion, and analysis of project notes the research is able to demonstrate the following key findings:

- Talent 4... significantly increases confidence in the ability to tackle the challenges of finding work in the future.
- Talent 4... directly challenges negative cycles, increasing aspirations and confidence about work and employment.
- Talent 4... significantly increases individual's knowledge and understanding about their strengths and weaknesses in relation to work and employment.
- Talent 4... helps produce the right conditions for offenders to go on and achieve what is important for them.
- Talent 4... increases the value placed on achievement of future career prospects.
- Talent 4... provokes participants into in-depth consideration of their own skills and abilities.

The research also found that Talent 4... appears to have different effects on people, depending on personality type. For instance, for self-motivated, organised individuals the project had not, in general, re-shaped their future career plans to any significant degree. While they now felt more aware of their skills, they tended to see this new awareness as something that would fit into their existing plans. However, it should be noted here that participants were being asked to comment upon this immediately after receiving the feedback and so had no time to consider the feedback in the context of their future plans. The authors suggest that for those offenders with well-developed career plans more thought should be given to how to best provide guidance in making full use of feedback from Talent 4...

The authors made a number of recommendations, including the suggestion that the best results are likely to be obtained where, through careers advice providers, the prison service is fully engaged with Talent 4..., making use of individual results and helping them work towards capitalising on their strengths and abilities.

In sum, Talent 4... is an engaging project that offenders feel positive about, and experience positive personal improvements from. These positive improvements are likely to set many offenders on a positive path towards more fulfilling and appropriate futures. Overall, the results of this research demonstrate that Talent 4... has a positive impact upon participants, and given the right conditions this impact could be far-reaching for many offenders.

## 2 Context: Vocation and work in prison

It is widely accepted that employment is one of the major factors in improving rehabilitation and resettlement, and combating re-offending. Within the prison service there is considerable focus on education, training, and employment, and with significant recent public attention on the employment of prisoners, now seems an appropriate time for critical consideration of prison service strategies, and a practical time to evaluate what outside agencies can offer in this area.

While the prison service focus on education, training, and employment is an appropriate one, the current approach is not without issue. This issue is summed up by a particular statistic: according to the Home Office Annual Report 2005-6, 48% of those leaving prison did no work during the first year of release. In other words, the situation is not working as the government would like.

Aside from the very significant issues of resettlement and re-offending, lack of employment - and even the *wrong* employment - can have a number of far-reaching effects on individuals and their families, and so this issue becomes even more vital to address. Unemployment not only has a range of negative impacts upon an individual's mental and physical health, but also impacts negatively on the children of long-term, unemployed people. Indeed, Fryer (1995) suggests that children are likely to suffer socio-emotional problems and reduced aspirations and expectations.

Even where individuals do find employment, the suitability of that employment is important to consider. The background of employability and training in prison often focuses on what jobs might be available, rather than what is suitable for a particular individual. However, employment that utilises individual's skills and strengths is associated with much greater satisfaction, better employment stability, and greater mental well-being. Aspiring to achieve, and succeeding, is associated with significant well-being (Sheldon and Kasser; 1998). This issue has largely been ignored with the prison service, as even where offenders have a work history, many either do not know what their skills are or have been 'funnelled' into a career that they are not interested in or not suitable for. This can result in frustration and a lack of motivation and engagement.

Current government strategy for offender employment is focused on employer's needs and consequently offenders are often directed towards training that maximises their employability, whatever employment that may be. While there is much sense in this approach, it is also possible to suggest that exploring what offenders may be suited to or desire to do may also have some benefit. Furthermore, by focusing on training and employment opportunities within prison, with a view to planning for appropriate work and employment on release and for the future, success might be achieved.

In the context of these debates, this report presents an evaluation of one project aiming to challenge typical notions of offender employment.

### 3 Background to Talent 4...

Talent 4... was developed by Rideout (Creative Arts for Rehabilitation). Rideout was established in 1999 in order to develop innovative, arts-based approaches to working with prisoners and staff within U.K. prisons. Talent 4... is described as an innovative and unique project, using the arts background and skills of the Rideout team, and also using their years of experience working with offenders.

After ten years of working, Rideout proposed a new emphasis to tackle what they believe is a key yet unrecognised issue within offender resettlement: vocational self-determination - offenders defining for themselves (or redefining) 'work/life choices'.

Rideout's observations were that inmates display widespread disaffection towards the world of work. They suggest that the majority appear to feel that the stigma of prison is a profound one that will disenfranchise them permanently from the constituency of workers. One job appears as worthwhile (or worthless) as any other, so they go along with whatever is proposed. In consequence, the courses on offer in the prison are often entered into reluctantly. It is only a minority, Rideout find, who have anything like a positive or confident attitude towards their future employment. And this minority are often relying upon relatives who have businesses of their own, to help provide career opportunities.

Given the importance of employment in combating re-offending, and the issues identified by Rideout with government's preferred strategy for getting offenders into jobs, they began to develop Talent 4..., working with a number of skilled partners and advisors, including prison education specialists, ex-offenders, careers guidance consultants, and the Institute for Employment Research at the University of Warwick.

The programme is particularly intended for those within the prison system who are considered 'hard to motivate'. It is not intended for individuals who already have a clearly articulated drive to achieve within a given profession. The programme is rooted in learning psychology, guidance studies, and arts practice using a range of exercises, games, role plays and videos. The programme does not involve ticking boxes.

The overall aim of Talent 4... is to help offenders define professional career choices and thereby increase their employability.

## 4 Research aims and objectives

The aim of Talent 4... is to help participants on the course answer two important questions:

*'What are my natural abilities?'*

*'What career or profession are my talents suited to?'*

The first of these two questions is about the discovery of participant's individual skills and abilities. Talent 4... assesses strengths in respect of the following areas:

- Learning Style
- Communication Style
- Problem Solving Style
- Capacity for Connectedness
- Natural Viewpoint
- Capacity for Collaboration
- Natural Skills
- Group Roles
- Mode of Engagement with Tasks

The second question is about potential for personal development within a professional arena. Answering it is very much a matter of proceeding from an acknowledgement of the answers to the first question. But it is also about inspiration - *'What kind of work or activity inspires you?'*

The research aimed to investigate how far participating in a Talent 4... project helped offenders answer these two questions. Using a range of data collection and analysis techniques, the research sought to measure the effects of participating in a Talent 4... project on offenders' self-belief in their capacity to gain employment, strengths and weaknesses, ability to work with others, natural skills, competence, and aspirations.



## 5 Methodology

### 5.1 The research process

The research used a variety of methods to evaluate the impact of Talent 4..., including interviews with participants, assessments of change in motivation and thinking, observation, discussion, and analysis of project notes. Within the context of work with offenders, evaluation of individual and group change can provide effective evidence of cause and effect. Collecting baseline data from participants and assessing this data against that collected at project completion allows change to be monitored.

The research was conducted in the following stages:

- Ethics approval granted from Birmingham City University.
- Design of bespoke change measurement assessment, based on existing validated assessment tools.
- Identification of Talent 4... projects to take part in the research.
- Collection of base-line data from participants immediately prior to project start. This data consisted of the four scales discussed below and was collected from all participants prior to beginning Talent 4...
- Approximately ten days after completing Talent 4... and after receiving feedback from Rideout, participants completed the scales and then took part in a semi- structured interview with one of the researchers.
- One of the research team discussed the Talent 4... project and each individual participant with Rideout.
- Project notes taken by Rideout on each participant were reviewed by the research team.
- Data was collated and analysed to provide robust evidence on the effects of participating in a Talent 4... project.

The research team believe that the most informative and robust methods of research utilise both quantitative and qualitative measures, allowing measurement of change but also allowing an understanding of the mechanisms by which change occurs. The initial section of the research, presented below, took a primarily quantitative approach, using robust measurements of motivation, aspiration, and perceived competence. Measured pre- and post-project, this quantitative aspect to measuring the participant journey allowed for each participant to act as her/his own control 'subject'. The quantitative element of the research was complemented and extended by short, structured interviews with participants that investigated a range of issues, including: what participants aim to achieve in the future; how they might aim to achieve this; understanding of natural abilities; belief in capacity to gain future employment and potential issues associated with this. Analysis of the structured interviews was complemented by review of the project notes taken

by Rideout staff. The research team are highly skilled in the quantitative and qualitative methods outlined above.

## 5.2 Participating prisons

Three prisons in the Midlands of England took part in this research: HMP-YOI Drake Hall; HMP Sudbury; and HMYOI Brinsford. Data was collected from two Talent 4... projects at HMP Sudbury, one project at HMP-YOI Drake Hall, and one project at HMYOI Brinsford.

### **HMP-YOI Drake Hall**

HMP-YOI Drake Hall houses up to 315 sentenced adult women and young women. Drake Hall has been a women's prison since 1974 and prior to 2002 was an open prison. Following the construction of a perimeter wall in January 2002 it was re-designated as semi-open, and from March 2009 has been re-designated a closed prison. Prior to this research taking place, Talent 4... had been run at HMP Drake Hall and Rideout reported that the women had responded responsively to the project.

### **HMP Sudbury**

HMP Sudbury is a male Category D prison, housing up to 581 adult men. Brinsford has been a prison since 1948, with extra accommodation added in 2003. Prior to the research, Rideout staff explained that HMP Sudbury staff were engaged with the project and a specific link person had been identified to liaise between Rideout and project participants and to make use of the feedback provided to project participants.

### **HMYOI Brinsford**

HMYOI Brinsford is a young offender institution and remand centre for males up to the age of twenty-one. Brinsford was purpose built to hold up to 577 young people either on remand or sentenced under detention training orders (DTOs). Prior to this research, Rideout staff explained that organisational issues at HMYOI Brinsford had negatively affected previous Talent 4... projects planned there.

## 5.3 Participants

The data presented in this report is based on eighteen individuals: six women from HMP Drake Hall; nine men from HMP Sudbury; and three men from HMYOI Brinsford. These eighteen individuals are those for whom data was available at both data collection points. Only partial data was available for a further eight participants and thus their data were not included in the final analysis: the reasons for this are outlined below.

All five participants that began the project at Brinsford completed, but two were at court or legal visits on the day of feedback and follow-up data collection. Thirteen men began the two separate projects at Sudbury, two of whom did not complete the full course. One of these failed to fully engage and missed sessions, while the other could not attend one day of the course due to another appointment and reported being disappointed at this. Additionally, data was not available for two men who had completed the course at Sudbury: one did not attend the feedback session and the

data for a further man had to be excluded as the scale completion was illegible. Eight women began the course at Drake Hall. One did not complete the course after becoming distressed that her court appeal had been unsuccessful. One further woman failed to attend the feedback session. The reason for this is unknown.

The age range for the sample was 18 to 39 years, with an average age of 27.4 years. Broken down by gender, the women ranged from 20 to 39 years, average age 28.8 years. The men ranged in age from 18 to 34 years, average age 26.75 years. Broken down further by establishment, the age range for men at HMP Sudbury was 24 to 34 years with an average age of 29.2 years. At HMYOI Brinsford age ranged from 18 to 20 years, average 19.3 years.

## 5.4 Data collection measures

Four scales and a semi-structured interview schedule were used to collect data. Three of the scales were pre-existing and adapted for use in this research: Part A consisted of the 'personal growth' subscale of the Aspirations Index (AI: Kasser & Ryan, 1996); Part B was the General Causality Orientations Scale (GCOS: Deci & Ryan, 1985); Part C was the Perceived Competence Scale (PCS: Williams & Deci, 1996). Part D consisted of a series of statements designed by Rideout to assess participants' understanding of their strengths and weaknesses and to record their approach to tasks and personal skills. Parts A, C, & D were completed by participants both before the project and after completing the project. Part B was completed before the project only. The language used throughout the scales was mildly edited from the original versions.

### **Aspirations Index**

The Aspirations Index was developed to assess people's aspirations. There are seven categories of aspirations within the full scale with five specific items within each category. The intrinsic aspirations scale of personal growth was used in this research. Participants rate: (1) the importance to themselves of each aspiration, (2) their beliefs about the likelihood of attaining each, and (3) the degree to which they have already attained each. For example, participants are asked to consider the life goal 'To learn more about why I do the things I do' and rate the importance of this, likelihood of attaining this, and current level of attainment on a seven-point Likert scale. As noted above, attainment of personal growth is positively associated with well-being (Ryan *et al.*, 1999; Sheldon and Kasser, 1998).

### **General Causality Orientations Scale**

The GCOS is a measure of personality that assesses what motivates individuals. The GCOS measures three aspects of motivational orientation: autonomy; control; and impersonal. Individual scores on these subscales tell us a number of things. For example, high scores on the autonomy subscale have been associated with high levels of self-esteem, while high scores on the impersonal subscale predict self-derogation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). For the current research, the GCOS allows assessment of how Talent 4... works with different personality types. It also allows for measurement of how instrumental individuals are, how much responsibility they take over their own decisions, and how able they are to cope with demands or changes. The GCOS is well-validated and has been widely used in research.

### **Perceived Competence Scale**

Competence is proposed to be a fundamental psychological need (Williams & Deci, 1996), and perceptions of competence facilitate goal attainment. Additionally, perceived competence is predictive of maintained behaviour change and effective performance in activities. Thus, any significant changes in participant's scores on the PCS would indicate changes in the likelihood of behavioural changes and levels of effective performance. The PCS is a short, four-item, questionnaire devised to be specific to the behaviour or activity being studied. In this research the PCS assessed participants' feelings of competence in finding future employment and doing well at work.

### **Bespoke questions**

Rideout designed five bespoke questions aimed at investigating participants' perceptions of: work and employment strengths and weaknesses; problem-solving style; working style; communication style; and personal skills.

### **Interview Schedule**

Short, semi-structured, interviews were conducted to complement and extend the quantitative data gathered through the scales, providing a depth of information on the experiences of project participants. The interview schedule was designed to investigate a range of issues and experiences, including: what participants aim to achieve in the future; how they might aim to achieve this; understanding of natural abilities; belief in capacity to gain future employment and potential issues associated with this; perceived impact of taking part in Talent 4...; reflection on the activities and feedback from Talent 4...

### **Other data**

The measures discussed above were supplemented by one morning of project observation at each of the establishments, through review of the project notes taken by Rideout staff, and by short feedback sessions with a member of the Rideout team. This additional supplementary data is discussed throughout the findings and discussion sections where relevant.

## **5.5 Ethical Issues**

The research was conducted by a highly trained researcher who is experienced in conducting research in prisons and with vulnerable populations. The research proposal was granted ethical approval on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2011 by Birmingham City University's Psychology Divisional Research Ethics Committee (DREC). The DREC assesses research against the British Psychological Society's code of ethics and Birmingham City University's ethical framework.

Birmingham City University's ethical framework states that:

The University expects that staff will behave professionally and ethically in all its activities. This implies that staff and students who are engaged in research and other activities are aware of the ethical implications of such activities and are committed to

discharging their responsibilities to the University, to clients and to research participants in an ethical manner, conforming to the highest professional standards of conduct.

#### BCU Principles for the Consideration of Ethical Issues

- Staff and students shall be made aware of their responsibilities and obligations to consider ethical issues arising from their research at or on behalf of the University.
- The dignity, rights, safety and well-being of participants must be the primary consideration in any research study.
- Informed consent is at the heart of ethical research.
- The ethical implications of research shall be assessed through a consideration of, for example:
  - the sensitivity of any data that may be collected, with particular regard to matters such as age, colour, race/ethnicity, nationality, disablement, religion, sex, gender, sexual orientation, personal medical records and political beliefs;
  - the transparency to junior research staff and participants as to the purpose and possible uses of the research;
  - the research methods and any risks involved;
  - the confidentiality of information provided by research participants;
  - the security and well-being of participants and data collected;
  - arrangements for the publication of research results, including issues of co-authorship and acknowledgement;
  - the ethical issues/guidelines of any third party involved in the University's activities, such as professional bodies or providers of research funding.

The British Psychological Society has four main ethical principles: respect; competence; responsibility; and integrity. The full British Psychological Society's Code of Ethics can be found here: [www.bps.org.uk/the-society/code-of-conduct/code-of-conduct\\_home.cfm](http://www.bps.org.uk/the-society/code-of-conduct/code-of-conduct_home.cfm)

## 6 Findings

Analysis of the quantitative data collected pre- and post-project shows how participants' outcome scores changed between both data collection points. Analyses of the interview data provides an in-depth understanding of the mechanisms by which these changes occur. This is supplemented by feedback from Rideout and review of the project notes collected by Rideout during the project. The quantitative and qualitative data are presented separately below.

### 6.1 Scale measurements – changes over time

Participant's scores were analysed using the statistical package SPSS to identify whether there were any statistically significant differences between participant's scores on the scales before and after taking part in a Talent 4... project. The results for each section were analysed using a related paired sample t-test.

#### **Part A (Aspiration index: AI)**

A related paired sample t-test was conducted on participants' overall scores on the AI and on the subscales: (1) the importance to themselves of each aspiration, (2) their beliefs about the likelihood of attaining each, and (3) the degree to which they have already attained each.

- The mean overall aspiration score before taking part (M= 80.39, SD= 14.51) and after taking part (M= 86.72, SD= 11.53) differ significantly ( $t = -2.88$ ,  $df = 17$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ).
- The mean 'importance' aspiration score before taking part (M= 30.61, SD=5.83) and after taking part (M= 32.28, SD= 3.88) differ significantly ( $t = -2.38$ ,  $df = 17$ ,  $p = 0.02$ ).
- The mean 'likelihood' aspiration score before taking part (M= 27.17, SD= 5.53) and after taking part (M= 29.83, SD= 4.93) differ significantly ( $t = -2.40$ ,  $df = 17$ ,  $p = 0.02$ ).
- There was no significant difference for 'attainment'.

These results demonstrate that after taking part in a Talent 4... project participant's saw greater importance in personal growth and achievement, and believed they were more likely to attain this. Participants did not feel that had attained any further personal growth and achievement during this time.

#### **Part C (Perceived Competence Scale: PCS)**

A related paired sample t-test was conducted on participant's scores on the PCS.

- The mean PCS score before taking part (M= 5.19, SD= 1.32) and after taking part (M= 5.97, SD= 0.85) differ significantly ( $t = -2.24$ ,  $df = 17$ ,  $p = 0.03$ ).

These results demonstrate that after taking part in a Talent 4... project participant's felt more competent in their ability to find suitable employment in the future, and in their ability to do well at work.

### Part D (Bespoke questions)

A related paired sample t-test was conducted on participant's responses to statement one of part D: 'In terms of work and employment, I have a good understanding of my strengths and weaknesses'.

- Responses to the question before (M= 4.83, SD= 1.58) and after taking part (M= 5.83, SD= 0.79) differ significantly ( $t = -2.29$ ,  $df = 17$ ,  $p = 0.03$ ).

This result demonstrates that after taking part in a Talent 4... project participant's felt a greater level of understanding of their strengths and weaknesses in relation to work and employment.

## 6.2 Scale measurements – personality factors

Prior to taking part in a Talent 4... project, participants completed the GCOS. Analysis of the scores identified that the majority of participants (12/18) presented personality traits more in-line with the autonomy orientation of the GCOS. This is the most psychologically healthy motivation and suggests that these people are open and willing to engage with change. Six participants scored very high in autonomy orientation: four from HMP Sudbury and two from HMP Drake Hall. These people tend to display greater self-initiation, seek activities that are interesting and challenging, and take greater responsibility for their own behaviour. These results are discussed below in relation to the interview data.

While high scores on the autonomy subscale have been associated with high levels of self-esteem, high scores on the impersonal subscale predict self-derogation. People who score high on this orientation are likely to be anxious and to feel very ineffective. They typically have no sense of being able to affect outcomes or cope with demands or changes. They tend to be unmotivated and to want things to be as they always were. No participant scored very high on this motivation orientation, but three presented this as either their main orientation or joint-main orientation. 'Impersonal' was the main orientation for one participant at Drake Hall, and joint with 'autonomy' for another. One participant at Sudbury presented a joint-main orientation of 'impersonal' and 'control'.

With reference to the motivation orientation 'control', one participant at Sudbury presented this as joint-main orientation. One participant at Brinsford presented 'control' as joint-main orientation with 'autonomy' and one further participant at Brinsford presented 'control' as the main orientation. While none of these participants scored very high for control, individuals high on the control orientation are likely to be dependent on rewards, and may be more attuned to what others demand than to what they want for themselves. They may also place extreme importance on wealth, fame, and other extrinsic factors.

## 6.3 Discussion of scale results

The results above demonstrate that after taking part in a Talent 4... project, participants' attributed greater importance to personal growth and achievement, and believed they were more likely to attain this. Participants did not however feel that they had attained any further personal growth and

achievement at this point. That participants felt more able to attain personal growth and achievement after taking part in the project is a very positive finding: a major aim of Talent 4... is to help people identify their own personal strengths and target appropriate future training, employment, and career opportunities, with the hope that individuals will be able to work towards more positive futures. Knowing where our abilities lie and having the belief and desire to achieve is highly important in future achievement, and the results here suggest that Talent 4... helps produce the right conditions for people to go on and achieve what is important for them. Achievement of these goals is also associated with personal well-being (Ryan *et al.*, 1999). However, many people in prison are unaware of their own potential – whatever area that might lie in – and so have never aspired to anything. The prison environment is likely to exacerbate this lack of aspiration. In addition to being negative in their own right, lack of aspiration and lack of self-belief are associated with poor well-being.

The finding that participants did not yet feel they had attained any further personal growth and achievement compared to before the project is entirely to be expected. This is primarily due to the context of these projects – i.e. offenders in prison. Questions on the AI asked about goals such as:

‘At the end of my life, to be able to look back on my life as meaningful and complete.’

While there was an increase in the importance attributed to these life-goals and participants’ belief in being able to attain these, within prison we would not expect to see an increase in attainment of this goal. However, the identification of personal skills and strengths coupled with an increased belief that these things can be achieved is likely to result in positive longer-term outcomes for individuals.

As highlighted above, the results from the PCS demonstrate that after taking part in a Talent 4... project participants’ felt more competent in their ability to find suitable employment in the future, and of their ability to do well at work. This demonstrates that not only do participants place higher value and belief in achievement after taking part in Talent 4..., but also that this positivity is specifically targeted towards future career prospects. Participants answered questions on: ability to find the right job for them in the future; work capability; achievement of employment goals; and ability to meet the challenge of seeking employment in the future. For individuals in prison the prospect of future work and employment often seems daunting and provokes negative thought cycles. In light of this, the finding that participating in Talent 4... significantly increases confidence in the ability to tackle the challenges of finding work in the future is extremely positive.

In addition to the above, participants felt their understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses in relation to work and employment had significantly improved during the Talent 4... project.

Long-term unemployment is associated with decreases in physical and mental health (Linn, Sandifer, & Stein, 1985). Indeed, any significant time away from work increases generalised anxiety and hopelessness about the future. For those in prison, who may have poor (or indeed non-existent) work histories, thoughts about the future and the impact of having a prison sentence on finding work lead to more negativity and further loss of confidence. Even those in prison who have strong work histories are likely to feel some anxiety about the effects of a prison sentence on their future



prospects. For many individuals these factors create a cycle of negativity, creating further anxiety about work and resulting in avoidance of realistic planning for the future. The findings presented here show that Talent 4... directly challenged the negative cycles of the participants involved in this research, increasing their aspirations and confidence about work and employment.

## 6.4 Interview data

The scale data presented above identified that participating in Talent 4... resulted in increased motivation to achieve, increased belief in personal ability to achieve, and increased confidence in the ability to tackle the challenges of finding work. The interview data presented below adds depth to these facts by investigating what the project was able to teach people about their own skills and abilities, and whether this translated into the ability to identify realistic plans for the future. Interviews were conducted directly after participants had been given individual feedback from Rideout.

### **Individual feedback**

Participants were first asked to comment on the feedback they had been given from Rideout about their personal learning style, abilities, and strengths. All participants stated that they felt the feedback they had received was either entirely or mostly accurate. Indeed, several participants used the term 'insightful' and were 'surprised at the level of detail' provided. The only challenge to this was a participant at Drake Hall who was surprised to be described as assertive, but found it interesting that she now came across this way to new people. A number of participants commented that they had not previously given much thought to their own skills, style, and abilities, but that the feedback described them very well and they enjoyed absorbing this information. Despite finding the information accurate, for most participants this was the first time they had focused on an understanding of their own abilities. While this data was collected immediately after participants were given feedback, and some participants felt they needed to reflect on this for longer, some did feel able to comment on how this feedback may affect their future training, work, and employment plans. The potential effects of the feedback ranged from participants stating that they could now see that a focus on working with others could be beneficial, to very concrete discussions of possible career pathways. One participant commented that he had hoped to find that he was suitable for something other than his previous career, but the project feedback reinforced that his skills set was in fact well suited to this previous career. The primary finding from this section of the interviews was that the project and feedback provoked participants into in-depth consideration of their own skills and abilities.

### **Future prospects**

While the scale data showed that participants felt more able to face the challenges of seeking work in the future, the interviews explored the practicalities of this. When asked about their personal work prospects for the future, several participants expressed that although they understood the problems of having a criminal record, they felt positive they would be able to find employment. A number of participants spoke about plans they had held for some time, some aiming to take any job, others planning to return to previous work, and others planning to train for new roles. For these individuals the project had not, in general, re-shaped their plans to any significant degree. While

they now felt more aware of their skills, they tended to see this new awareness as something that would fit into their existing plans. However, it should be noted here that participants were being asked to comment upon this immediately after receiving the feedback and so had no time to consider the feedback in the context of their future plans. Indeed, as noted above, the project had clearly prompted in-depth consideration of their own skills and abilities, and so it is reasonable to expect that this would later be applied to their work plans, given the focus of the project and feedback discussions.

Where participants did discuss some level of employment plans for the future, this in turn helped contextualise the post-feedback discussions between participants and Rideout. Rather than generic careers advice, where participants already had some plans Rideout were able to discuss how their strengths and abilities could work well within a particular element of their plans, or how plans could be amended to make best use of their natural abilities. It is likely that this structured guidance will prove beneficial for participants, although it was not possible to assess the impact of this through this short-term research evaluation.

Of note is that the future plans of the participants differed substantially by age. Older participants typically had some work history and some had previous work contacts that they suggested may help them find employment again on release from prison. However, not unusually for young people in prison, two of the three men at HMYOI Brinsford had no previous work experience. These men had no concrete plans for employment on leaving prison, but did comment that based upon their Talent 4... feedback they may consider 'hands-on' jobs, such as mechanics or plumbing. Aside from having little previous experience to shape and inform any future plans, the men at HMYOI Brinsford all had between eighteen months and two years left to serve and felt that it was too soon for them to be considering employment on release.

### **The project**

Importantly, participants were also asked to discuss their experiences of the project, both as a way of providing feedback to Rideout and as a mechanism through which to explore elements of the project that may particularly relate to successful outcomes.

All of the participants at HMPs Drake Hall and Sudbury expressed feeling very positive about Talent 4... and felt they would recommend it to others if asked.

'This project was different. It teaches you more about your inner-self, like looking in a mirror. It's good to know what other people think about your strengths.'

*Female participant, HMP Drake Hall*

While some participants felt Talent 4... may be best suited to particular types of people (for example one suggested it may have the greatest impact for those who had not previously held employment), the general consensus was that it could teach most people a lot about their own strengths and abilities. A number of participants also felt that the project could be an excellent confidence and self-esteem booster for those lacking in this area:

'It (the Talent 4... project) was really good. It really does help you as a person. Some people don't know who they are, but this boosts them up when someone else sees them.'

*Female participant, HMP Drake Hall*

A number of participants were also keen to point out the importance of 'getting involved' in the activities, suggesting that the project is suitable for everyone, but that to a degree you 'get out of it what you put in'. Two men commented on how difficult they found getting involved in the group tasks as this was not something they would typically do, but saw that this was a positive challenge for them.

The projects included a variety of activities and tasks and participants were asked to comment on their experiences of these. After reviewing the interview and project notes it is not possible to suggest that any part of the course is more favourable or has greater impact upon individuals than any other. Most participants had clear views on what they enjoyed and felt was useful to them, but this was typically based on the activities that best matched their own learning styles and skills set. However, on broadening this out to the Talent 4... project as a whole, it is the post-project feedback provided by Rideout that was reported to have the most impact upon participants. That the impact be useful to participants is clearly a significant aim of the project, and this was clearly expressed by the majority of participants. As discussed above, participants found the feedback 'insightful' and the individualised nature of the feedback is crucial.

Participants at HMYOI Brinsford felt less enthusiastic about the project than other groups. This may in part be due to the point discussed earlier; that they did not feel it was yet time to think about employment plans. There were also issues in the way that this prison identified participants for Talent 4... As opposed to seeking to match individual need to appropriate programmes, it seems these men had not yet had their education induction and so were placed on Talent 4... while awaiting this. This is clearly not a positive start to the course or one that is likely to result in lasting positive impact. Despite this, all three men said they had enjoyed the project, although two said they could not see the point and so would not encourage others to participate.

### **Links between personality factors, interview data, and project outcomes**

Assessment of interview notes against the personality factors discussed above highlighted an interesting finding: all of the six participants who scored very high in the autonomous orientation of the GCOS had relatively well-developed plans for their future employment and careers and had spent their time in prison constructively. In addition, the four males in this group all suggested that although they felt Talent 4... would be suitable for anyone, it would be most useful for those who do not have clear plans for the future. Indeed, this is consistent with the original aim of the Talent 4... programme and is also entirely consistent with this personality type. As noted before, these people tend to display greater self-initiation, seek activities that are interesting and challenging, and take greater responsibility for their own behaviour. Participating in Talent 4... forms a part of their broader constructive activities, and this, coupled with their well-developed career plans, means that more thought should be given to how best people who fall into this group can be guided in making full use of feedback from Talent 4...

As discussed earlier, while none of these participants scored very high for the control orientation of the GCOS, four showed some personality focus in this area. Interestingly, the interviews highlighted that the future career plans of these individuals were far less structured than those classed as 'autonomous'. Indeed, some of the ideas these men presented seemed quite unrealistic, and during interview they all moved between discussion of these unstructured ideas to suggesting they were unsure what to do or 'might take some time out'. These finds are not uncharacteristic of those who measure high on the control orientation, who tend to have less initiative. They are also likely to be dependent on rewards, and may be more attuned to what others demand than to what they want for themselves. This suggests that emphasis should be placed on the way feedback is utilised by the prison in order to help structure their future plans.

Of interest is that the participant who expressed surprise at being considered assertive was the only participant to measure mainly in the impersonal orientation of the GCOS. People high on this orientation are likely to be anxious and to feel very ineffective, and this came across in her interview. However, she also stated that despite feeling apprehensive about group work in particular, she found this ok in the context of the project and 'the course leaders made her feel comfortable'. She also felt that as she was coming towards the end of her sentence this was the right time to participate in this project as it would 'help with planning and thinking about the future'.

## 6.5 Project and research context

### **HMYOI Brinsford**

Brinsford is a YOI so to some degree it is not surprising that at first most participants said they did not want to be there and that they would rather be at the gym. This group appeared far harder to initially engage than either the female group or the adult male groups. There is often a certain amount of bravado in groups of young men and in this case the initial lack of engagement was exacerbated by the fact that the prison had not matched these participants to the course and they were not given a choice whether to attend.

Attendance was also reported to be problematic at times as participants had legal, and other, visits to attend. While the course typically runs over two and a half or three days, the course at Brinsford ran over only two days. Rideout staff felt this was due to the group being less verbally communicative than the older adult groups. Additionally, break times were not scheduled into the course as at other establishments as the regime at Brinsford did not allow for this.

There were particular issues at Brinsford in terms of who was identified to participate in the course, with participants reporting they knew nothing of what to expect from the course on arrival. When probed, it transpired that these were young men who had not yet completed induction and so little was known about them or their suitability for the course. Additional problems were encountered that may have affected group size, as a last minute room change for the course was not fully communicated to potential participants.

There were further issues at Brinsford as the course was very much viewed by the prison as standalone and not linked to careers guidance. Indeed, after the completion of the research, Rideout

took the decision to cease running Talent 4... at Brinsford, feeling that the prison was not fully engaged with the project and that this limited the value of Rideout's work.

The men at Brinsford were also notably more difficult to engage in discussion during interviews. This is likely in part to be due to the interview settings, where out of necessity these took place in a room where their fellow project participants and prison officers were nearby and hence they may not have wished to talk at length.

### **HMP Sudbury**

Sudbury presented an excellent model of engagement with Talent 4..., with each individual's course feedback directly linked to the careers team. At the first observed project at Sudbury feedback was provided in written and verbal form to a member of the careers staff, while at the second observed project a member of the careers staff attended the feedback sessions. Through this they were able to listen to the feedback for each individual and consider how this could be taken forward with future training and work opportunities. This represents an example of good practice in terms of building the project into resettlement and careers services within the prison.

### **HMP Drake Hall**

The Rideout team spent time during feedback with the women ascertaining any training needs that they may have in order that this could be fed back to the education department within the prison. Given that Drake Hall did not have a member of staff allocated to make use of the feedback from Rideout, the team spent more time giving specific work and training focused guidance to participants. The women were all very engaged with the project and, importantly, they had been identified as suitable and it was their own decision to attend. Indeed, as noted earlier in this report, one woman who had not been able to attend all of the project had wanted to attend the feedback session.

## 7 Conclusions

The findings from this research demonstrate that Talent 4... increases participant's belief that they can achieve, and increases the importance attached to self-development and achievement. Talent 4... does this through identifying individual strengths, and begins to provide direction for future education, training, employment and career possibilities. The results here suggest that Talent 4... helps produce the right conditions for people to go on and achieve what is important for them: that not only do participants place higher value and belief in achievement after taking part in Talent 4..., but also that this positivity is specifically targeted towards future career prospects.

The research team were particularly impressed to see that Talent 4... directly challenged the negative cycles of anxiety around work prospects typical of offenders, increasing their aspirations and confidence about work and employment. In particular, the finding that participating in Talent 4... significantly increases confidence in the ability to tackle the challenges of finding work in the future is extremely positive.

In addition to the above, participants felt their understanding of their strengths and weaknesses in relation to work and employment had significantly improved during the Talent 4... project, and the project and feedback provoked participants into in-depth consideration of their own skills and abilities.

The project activities work well as a whole, engaging different individuals to a greater or lesser extent in the various activities, but engaging the majority for the entire course. This in itself is a success in working with offenders. Where the project may work less well is with individuals who have not been given the choice over attendance. Those participants who very much wanted to attend and appreciated the experience also felt they took the most from it.

The results of this research also suggest that Talent 4... is likely to impact differently upon different personality types. For self-motivating individuals who had clear career plans, the project had not, in general, re-shaped their plans to any significant degree. While they now felt more aware of their skills, they tended to see this new awareness as something that would fit into their existing plans. However, it should be noted here that participants were being asked to comment upon this immediately after receiving the feedback and so had no time to consider the feedback in the context of their future plans. For those with well-developed career plans thought should be given to how best to guide them in making full use of feedback from Talent 4... For those with little or no idea of their future work and employment strategy, emphasis should be placed on the way feedback is utilised by the prison in order to help structure their future plans. For all groups the individualised nature of the feedback is likely to be crucial to the impact and success of the project.

Given the short-term nature of this research it was not possible to assess the full impact of the project. As highlighted above, at interview many participants spoke about existing work plans, and while some spoke about how being aware of their skills might affect these plans, most would need more time to consider this and plan for the future. This highlights the importance of prison involvement and engagement with the course. For example, at HMP Sudbury, where feedback from the project was used to directly influence careers guidance and planning for resettlement, it is likely that the impact of the project will be more far reaching. Where this is not the case, it may be difficult

for participants to make full use of their feedback and new found awareness of their skills. However, being aware of this, in addition to feedback on skills and abilities, Rideout provided more structured career-focused suggestions in the feedback sessions in establishments that were less engaged with the project.

Outside of the prison context, where people are more able to take control of their own choices and futures it may not be as vital to take professional advice on future education, training, and employment opportunities as individuals can make their own choices. However, using feedback from Talent 4... as a basis in professional careers advice sessions outside of prison may of course prove beneficial.

In sum, Talent 4... is an engaging project, and one that offenders feel positive about and experience positive personal improvements from. These positive improvements are likely to set many offenders on a positive path towards a more fulfilling and appropriate futures. Overall, the results of this research demonstrate that Talent 4... has a positive impact upon participants and given the right conditions this impact could be far-reaching for many offenders.

## 8 Recommendations

The project is clearly a positive experience for offenders, but a number of factors are worthy of consideration to increase the impact of the project:

- Although the numbers of participants in this research were small, it seems that younger offenders may be less likely to engage with Talent 4... However, in the circumstances here this may have been due to inappropriate targeting of participants on the part of the prison rather than solely age. Had the young men been closer to release and/or wishing to consider future plans It would also be useful to investigate whether having some previous work experience enables participants to better contextualise feedback from Talent 4...
- The authors of this report recommend that Rideout give thought to how those who already have clear plans for their future employment can be guided in making full use of feedback from Talent 4... While the project is not primarily aimed at this group, it appears likely that they will continue to attend.
- The authors also suggest that the best results could be obtained where, through careers advice providers, the prison makes use of individual's results from Talent 4... and helps them work towards capitalising on their strengths and abilities.



## 9 Caveats

The short-term and relatively small-scale nature of this research means that the results cannot be reliably generalised to other populations. However, as a proportion of the number of participants who have taken part in Talent 4... projects, the sample is large, and so the results are likely to apply to UK prison populations more broadly. Outside of general prison populations, these results cannot be generalised given the very specific conditions of prison.

In order to further investigate some of these issues highlighted in this report and to provide more generalised findings, future research utilising a larger sample would allow for an analysis broken down further by:

- Personality
- Gender
- Prison type
- Age

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