

Sector-based Work Academy Programme

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What is a Sector-based Work Academy Programme?

The Sector-based Work Academy Programme (SWAP) is delivered by DWP for claimants on out of work benefits, including Universal Credit. See 'Eligibility and suitability' for list of qualifying benefits.

The programme lasts for up to 6 weeks and takes place in England and Scotland. The Welsh Government offers a similar programme for those who require this support in Wales. It enables claimants to gain the skills needed to move in to the workplace through training and a work experience placement linked to a genuine job vacancy.

DWP works with employers and training providers to create a suitable programme with a positive outcome for claimants.

Claimants who successfully complete the training and work placements, must be offered a job interview with an employer or support through their application process. This interview must be for either a job vacancy or apprenticeship.

A SWAP can take place in any business sector which has job vacancies available in the local labour market.

Each SWAP will be different but must contain all 3 of the following parts:

- pre-employment training (PET)
- a work experience placement (WEP)
- a guaranteed job interview (GJI) – including for an apprenticeship, with an employer in the sector

In exceptional circumstances where the employer is unable to offer a guaranteed job interview, due to 'fair and open' recruitment policies, the SWAP can be just pre-employment training and a work experience placement. These types of SWAP must include support to help the claimant through the employer's recruitment processes. See guaranteed job interview.

An opportunity is not a SWAP if it only offers pre-employment training and a guaranteed job interview.

The pre-employment training and work experience placement may be blended together or take place separately.

The 3 parts can take place in any order with the exception of the guaranteed job interview which cannot be held before the pre-employment training.

A single SWAP can have lots of claimants taking part at the same time.

Eligibility and suitability

To be eligible for a Sector-based Work Academy Programme (SWAP) a claimant must be:

- aged 18 or over from day 1 of their claim and fully-funded training is available
- meet the skills funding eligibility, this is confirmed by the training provider
- claiming Universal Credit or New Style Jobseekers Allowance (New Style JSA) or New Style Employment and Support Allowance (New Style ESA)
- non-claimants who are receiving DWP support via the Rapid Response Service (RRS) may also participate in a SWAP if this can help them find work

Suitable claimants are:

- unable to find work without support
- close to the labour market and have most of the necessary skills to be able to work
- interested in the sector in which the SWAP is taking place
- available to attend all parts of the programme

The aim of the SWAP is to prepare candidates who have not worked in a particular sector before to be able to compete for and gain the job on offer.

Claimants normally only take part in one SWAP. Where a claimant has already completed a SWAP in one sector they can participate in a different sector if their work coach believes this will be helpful.

If the claimant does not attend or is removed from a SWAP, that particular SWAP will no longer be available to them. The reasons for removal may include misconduct and long term sickness. In this case the claimant can then take part in a second different SWAP opportunity.

Conditionality and sanctions

The claimants' decision to take part in a Sector-based Work Academy Programme (SWAP) is entirely voluntary. This includes New Style Employment and Support Allowance (New Style ESA) and New Style Jobseekers Allowance (New Style JSA) claimants.

Universal credit claimants in the intensive or work-preparation regime are required to take certain steps to find work. If they agree to take part in a SWAP, it is set as a work-preparation requirement. They must then complete the pre-employment training and guaranteed job interview parts of the scheme to meet this requirement. New Style JSA claimants are also required to complete the pre-employment training and guaranteed job interview.

If Universal Credit or New Style JSA dual claimants fail to complete the pre-employment training or guaranteed job interview without good reason, a low-level sanction is applied. See Sanctions.

No sanction can be imposed for any failure to comply with the work experience element of the programme.

The claimant must fully understand this before they make a decision on whether to take part.

The correct SWAP referral letter must be issued. See Sector based work academy letters; UCD202 Sector Based Work Academy (All Work Related Requirements) - start details, 2a Sector Based Work Academy (Work Prep) - start details, 2b Sector Based Work Academy (Work Focused Interview) - start details and UCD382 Sector Based Work Academy open day, in Resources and notifications. Conditionality can only be enforced once a claimant has a tailored claimant commitment in place. Failure to meet the agreed commitments must be actioned by following the sanction assurance framework.

Once a claimant agrees to participate, Universal Credit claimants in the:

- Intensive work search regime, are required to complete the pre-employment training and guaranteed job interview
- Light-touch regime, can attend a SWAP on a voluntary basis for, this may be by attending part-time, if they are able to without jeopardising their existing work commitments
- Work-preparation regime, are required to complete the pre-employment training and the guaranteed job interview
- Work-focused interview regime, can participate in a SWAP on a wholly voluntary basis

The training provider must confirm that skills funding is available for in-work claimants, on the light touch regime, as this is not always the case.

Claimants in the intensive work search regime and work-preparation regime can be sanctioned if they fail to maintain standards of behaviour and are asked to leave because of gross misconduct. This applies at any time during their placement, including the work experience placement.

Claimants in the intensive work search regime and New Style JSA dual claimants, who refuse a reasonable offer of a job or an apprenticeship following the guaranteed job interview, may be sanctioned, for refusal of employment.

If a low-level sanction has been applied and the original SWAP is no longer running, an appropriate compliance condition is considered, this may be a new requirement for a referral to another SWAP or training opportunity.

Initial Sector- based Work Academy Programme discussion

The initial discussion is used to determine whether the claimant is suitable or would like to take part in a particular Sector-based Work Academy Programme (SWAP).

The claimant is provided with as much information as possible about the SWAP opportunity. This includes what is expected of the claimant, the potential impact of not participating and what personal data will be shared.

It's important the claimant considers and understands what's required and that, their labour market regime may determine that some parts of the programme are mandatory once they start it.

The claimant will be officially referred when they have been offered and accepted a place on the SWAP.

Pre-employment training

The pre-employment training is tailored to help the claimant develop transferable skills, to succeed in a specific sector.

The skills and help will be determined by the claimant's work experience placement and job vacancy on offer. The claimant will be able to demonstrate these skills to the employer in the work experience placement.

The training can be full time or part time depending on what is appropriate and meets the needs of all parties involved.

This part of the Sector-based Work Academy Programme (SWAP) may be conducted by a training provider, college or an employer.

The pre-employment training in the programme may be part time. Where this is the case, claimants will need to complete other work related requirements in addition to the SWAP. A claimant's work related requirements will depend on their market regime and personal circumstances. See labour the Claimant Commitment and Work-related activities and the Labour Market regimes.

Work experience placement

The work experience placement provides specific skills and knowledge to help claimants work within a sector. The claimant's role on the placement must also give them the best chance of succeeding in the guaranteed job interview.

Work experience does not have to last for a specific period of time or have a minimum number of hours that the claimant has to work.

However, they must provide experience of the work routine and last long enough so the claimant:

- gets meaningful first-hand experience of what it is like to work in the sector
- can demonstrate their skills and value to the employer

Work experience placements can take place on evenings and weekends if this is the normal working pattern of the employer.

The working pattern is established at the start of the programme to make sure the claimants circumstances are taken in to account and it is possible.

Where work experience cannot be delivered normally due to the Covid-19 pandemic, alternative arrangements may be made. These must provide participants with a proper practical understanding of what the job involves. This may include: a comprehensive tour of the workplace, job shadowing or a simulated workplace environment.

Guaranteed job or apprenticeship interview

Each guaranteed job interview (GJI) must be for an actual job or apprenticeship vacancy. It must not be a mock or practice interview.

In exceptional circumstances some employers may not be able to offer a GJI due to 'fair and open' recruitment policies. If this is the support must be provided to help the claimant through the employer's recruitment process. See exceptional circumstances.

The guaranteed job interview does not have to be provided by the same employer that conducted the work experience placement. If the interview is provided by a

different employer, they must be in the same sector in which the claimant completed their pre-employment training and work experience.

Where more than one claimant takes part in a Sector-based Work Academy Programme (SWAP), there must be a guaranteed interview for each claimant who completes the training and work experience elements.

The number of jobs available does not have to be the same as the number of participants, but there must be a job available that all the participants can be interviewed for.

Flexibility locally will determine the types of vacancies secured and the activity on the SWAP. The vacancies secured will take account of the local need and local labour market to find the types of vacancies that will lead to claimants obtaining work.

The types of vacancies can include:

- part-time contracts
- zero-hour contract vacancies where appropriate
- self-employment vacancies

SWAP placements can be linked to Kickstart Scheme jobs.

When a participant believes they are not receiving the right support

At any stage during the programme, the claimants may believe that they are not receiving the agreed level of support or experience from the employer. This may be that the training provider is not delivering the quality or extent of training that was agreed. Or the employer may not be giving the claimant the level of opportunities required to gain a sufficient level of experience in the sector.

If this is the case, where possible, claimants must take this up with the employer directly. See the Complaints about employers process which supports this.

If it's not possible to take it up with the employer, the claimant raises their concern with either their Sector-based Work Academy Programme (SWAP) single point of contact or their work coach. Which person they raise it with will depend on what was agreed at the start of the programme.

Absence and sickness

Claimants must make DWP, providers and employers aware of any unplanned absences as soon as possible. See Reporting a health condition or disability.

Sanctions may apply for claimants taking part in the Sector-based Work Academy Programme (SWAP) on a mandatory basis, if they fail to report an absence.

If a claimant has an extended period of absence from a SWAP, DWP contact the provider or employer to see whether it is reasonable for the claimant to continue the programme.

Claimants who have a holiday planned during the period of the SWAP, must not be referred.

Travel, childcare and replacement care costs

Claimants can be supported with travel, childcare and replacement care costs through the Flexible Support Fund (FSF) where it applies.

Some claimants may be able to access support for travel costs through Access to Work during the work experience placement stage of Sector-based Work Academy Programme (SWAP). See the Fact sheets.

Data sharing

Section 3 of the Social Security Act 1998 allows the DWP to process and share the personal data of claimants taking part in a Sector-based Work Academy Programme (SWAP), with those providing services to DWP. Information held for social security purposes is shared, in this case: with employers, training providers, colleges and other organisations involved in supporting delivery of SWAP.

To ensure the exchange of information with third parties is lawful, DWP must inform claimants that their personal data will be shared with organisations supporting the delivery and the reasons why. The data is also shared in compliance with Departmental security policies and procedures.

Disclosure and Barring Service or Protecting Vulnerable Group check

If an employer identifies that the claimant needs a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check in England or Protecting Vulnerable Group (PVG) check in Scotland, it is the duty of the employer to fund the check.

The employer may be reimbursed for the cost of the check in exceptional circumstances. This will only be known after the claimant has agreed to take part in the SWAP. For further information see the Disclosure and Barring Service, and Protecting Vulnerable Groups checks.

Other information

Sector-based Work Academy Programme Hub

Delivery and support includes; an overview, legacy advice, employer guide, Frequently asked questions and more.

SWAP performance includes, information on how to record a referral or start.