

# Supporting claimants with their basic and employability skills needs and digital capabilities

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## Introduction

Many claimants are close to the labour market and only need direction and encouragement to successfully move from benefits into sustained employment or progress into better paid work.

Other claimants may find it difficult to complete for jobs due to a lack of employment knowledge and / or skills that employers are looking for. This may include a lack of essential skills such as English, maths and digital capabilities.

These claimants may find themselves at risk of long-term unemployment or in a cycle of low paid work mixed with periods of inactivity which can make progression very challenging.

There are many ways to support claimants to improve their employment prospects by helping them identify potential skills gaps and determine how best to address their learning needs.

Some claimants will be aware of their own learning needs and be ready to discuss them; while others may be reluctant to admit they need help or acknowledge skills gaps.

## Skills categories

Skills generally fall into the following categories:

- basic essential skills
- vocational skills
- employability skills

Basic essential skills include spoken and written communications in English, maths, digital and IT.

Vocational skills are practical skills that help a person to get, perform, and perfect a job or trade.

Employability skills are the core traits required to succeed in any job. They are the soft skills that make you desirable to an organization regardless of your previous training or professional experience. Employability skills increase your verbal communication, work-readiness, and teamwork ability.

### **Identifying skills gaps**

Identifying skills gaps, sometimes called skills screenings, is an integral part of meetings with the claimant. This includes observing the claimant and having discussions to gather evidence on skills, qualifications, previous training and work history. The information gathered will help to determine whether the claimant has any potential skills gaps in relation to:

- their job goals
- what the local labour market is looking for
- progressing into better paid work

Each claimant should establish, early in their claim, whether they have the skills required for jobs in the immediate local economy and for their future career.

It is therefore imperative all claimants complete a stocktake of their skills and check they have essential basic maths, English (spoken and written) and IT skills. This stocktake takes place during the claimant's first commitments meeting. See: Building the claimant commitment.

Some claimants will need to focus on keeping their skills current and up to date, others may have been out of the labour market for some time and need to refresh their skills. Certain claimants may also need to learn new skills to help them to compete in the current labour market.

This identification process involves gathering evidence on skills, qualifications, previous training, and work history.

The information gathered will help determine whether the claimant has any potential skills gaps in relation to their current and career job goals.

Reviewing current skills and identifying gaps will help the claimant consider their immediate, short term and longer-term requirements and start them on a learning journey where needed.

### **Addressing skills gaps**

Where a skills gap is identified, claimants can benefit from a range of support options, including contracted or non-contracted provision, work experience or voluntary work.

Any provision or support must target a claimant's individual skills gaps and help them to develop their basic, vocational, or employability skills.

If a claimant has a basic essential skills gap, this will always be addressed first to ensure that they have the best chance of success moving forward.

For more information on provision, see:

- Introduction to provision
- Programmes and Provision
- provision: developing employability skills and work experience
- provision: choosing a career and developing work search
- provision: supporting claimants with health conditions

Where a potential skills need is identified, claimants in England may be referred to an initial assessment with a learning provider to confirm their skill level. The aim is to identify any learning or training which may help them find work.

Where further investigation of basic literacy and numeracy skills is needed, the claimant can be asked to complete the Fast-Track Screening Tool in England and Wales or the Literacy and Numeracy Alerting Questions in Scotland.

A claimant may also be referred or signposted to one or more of the following:

- in depth diagnostic skills assessment, giving a specific breakdown of claimants' skills needs and identifying their skill levels to make appropriate decisions about training courses for claimants
- basic skills training
- English Speakers of Foreign Languages (ESOL) training
- Information and Communication Technology (ICT) training
- essential digital skills training
- employability training
- vocational training
- Sector-based Work Academy programme placements
- training funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency
- training funded by the Scottish and Welsh governments
- training courses offered by organisations locally found on the District Provision Tool

These are examples and not a full list.

If the provision the claimant requires is not available, the District Employer and Partnership team can consider sourcing and funding the training to support your claimant. Work coaches should discuss this initially with their line manager.

Claimants can find more information about the different types of government-funded provision available in their area through the following links:

## **England**

[Skills for Life](#) - links for young people and adults to different types of Department for Education training provision available to them in England.

## **Scotland**

[My World of Work](#) - shows training for people in different age groups/situations.

## **Wales**

[Plan your Career | Careers Wales](#) - shows training for people in different age groups/situations.

## **Claimant commitments**

A claimant's basic skills and employability skills are assessed at their First Commitments Meeting to help identify any potential gaps and opportunities to address those gaps.

See: Building the claimant commitment.

If the claimant is referred to any provision or are required to take specific actions help address their skills gaps, these are recorded on the Claimant commitment. Some actions may be voluntary, others may be mandatory and could lead to the claimant being sanctioned if they fail to complete the action without good reason.

## **District Provision Tool**

The District Provision Tool (DPT) provides access to the full range of provision and support delivered by:

- Jobcentre Plus
- Education Skills Funding Agency
- Skills Development Scotland
- Careers Wales other national and local providers
- local authorities
- independent, volunteer and charity organisations, for example the Prince's Trust programmes.

It hosts all the available provision and support in the district and nationally.

It helps work coaches to explore the full flexible menu of support, maximise the opportunities to develop the claimant's skills and enable them to obtain and retain a job and progress within their employment. It covers contracted, non-contracted, community and local groups as well as national support organisations.

It also includes specialist and local support information and signposting details including for those disadvantaged or at risk.

## **Claimant self-referrals**

A claimant may 'self-refer' themselves to training. They may voluntarily approach a college or other provider to take up a course without being directed to do so.

Claimants must inform DWP if they take up any additional training. Self-referrals would normally remain voluntary (so no sanctions would apply if the claimant failed to complete the training). However, a self-referral to training can be recorded on the claimant commitment as work preparation activity.

## **Job goals**

Part of working out whether a job goal is realistic and achievable for a claimant is understanding whether they have the skills necessary to perform that role.

There are some skills that all employers will look for and there are others which are more specialised to certain vacancies.