

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 receiving out of work benefits including Universal Credit. See 'Eligibility and suitability' for list of qualifying benefits.

Note: Guidance for Employment and Partnership teams see details in Sector-based Work Academy Programme.

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 into 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
- a work experience placement
- a guaranteed job interview (including an interview 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 many claimants taking part at the same time.

Eligibility and suitability

To be eligible for a SWAP, a claimant must be:

- aged 16 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 may also participate in a SWAP if this can help them find work

Suitable claimants are those:

- unable to find or progress in 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 SWAP is to prepare candidates who have not previously worked in a particular sector to be able to compete for and gain the job on offer.

Claimants will normally only participate in one SWAP. If 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.

A claimant cannot do a Work Trial following completion of the Guaranteed Interview element of a SWAP with the same employer who provided the work experience part of the SWAP.

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

When claimants complete SWAP and have not been successful in gaining employment, they must continue to be supported so that learning is not lost.

Contracted Provision

Claimants are not able to access a SWAP while taking part in DWP Contracted Provision (example, Restart, IPES, Work and Health Programme), even if they have disengaged from that provision.

This is because the administration of SWAPs is funded by DWP.

Contracted Provision providers are expected to engage with employers to identify forthcoming job opportunities, and design interventions to align with local growth sectors, opportunities and challenges. This could include work-based sector training and guaranteed interviews for participants but not DWP SWAP.

Sector-based Work Academy participation for 16 and 17 year olds

Young people aged 16 and 17 are eligible to participate in SWAP if they are receiving Universal Credit in their own right (it does not include those who are named as dependents on a parent or guardian's claim).

It must be made clear to the participant, in discussion with their local authority adviser and work coach, that they must consider the education they need alongside that work until they are at least 18 years old.

The job vacancy/SWAP must be suitable for someone of their age and is either:

- an apprenticeship, or
- any other sustainable employment which allows the young person to continue in part-time education or training leading to relevant regulated qualifications

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.

Work coaches must support customers throughout SWAP. If elements of SWAP are part-time and it is possible for them to attend face-to-face appointments in the jobcentre as per their current regime, then the claimant should do so.

If SWAP is full-time and it is not possible for the claimant to attend as per their current regime, work coaches must support them via a different channel (for example, journal, telephone or video).

Universal Credit claimants in the Intensive or Work Preparation regimes are required to take certain steps to find work. If they agree to take part in SWAP, it is set as a work preparation requirement in their Claimant Commitment. 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. However, sanctions must be considered if the claimant is dismissed from the work experience due to gross misconduct and they are in the All Work Requirements Regime or the Work Preparation Regime.

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. If the claimant fails to meet the agreed commitments take action as per the Sanction Assurance Framework.

Once a claimant agrees to participate, those 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 (this may be by attending part-time) if they are able to do so 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 SWAP on a wholly voluntary basis

The training provider must confirm that skills funding is available for in-work claimants in 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 a 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 SWAP.

The claimant is provided with as much information as possible about the SWAP opportunity. This must include:

- what is expected of them
- the potential impact of not participating, and
- what personal data will be shared

It is important that the claimant considers and understands what is 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 SWAP.

See the Programmes and job schemes video for important information about referring to SWAP and recording the information.

Pre-employment training

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

The skills and the help provided 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 if this meets the needs of all parties involved.

This part of SWAP may be conducted by a training provider, college or an employer.

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

Work experience placement

The work experience placement is to provide specific skills and knowledge to help the claimant work within a sector. Their own 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 consist of a minimum number of hours that the claimant has to work. However, it must provide experience of the work routine and last long enough for the claimant to be able to:

- get meaningful first-hand experience of what it is like to work in the sector
- 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 claimant's circumstances are taken in to account and that these make it possible.

Guaranteed job or apprenticeship interview

Each guaranteed job interview 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 guaranteed job interview due to 'fair and open' recruitment policies. If this is the case, 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 who 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.

If more than one claimant takes part in SWAP, there must be a guaranteed job 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.

Local flexibility will determine the types of vacancies secured and activities on SWAP. The vacancies secured will take account of the local need and the 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

When a participant believes they are not receiving the right support

At any stage during the programme, the claimants may think that they are not receiving the agreed level of support or experience from the employer. This may be because 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 (and where possible), the claimant 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 should raise their concern with either their 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 SWAP on a mandatory basis if they fail to report an absence.

If a claimant has an extended period of absence from a SWAP, the DWP must 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 where this applies.

Some claimants may be able to access support for travel costs through Access to Work during the work experience placement stage of 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 SWAP with those providing services to DWP. In this case, information held for Social security purposes is shared with:

- employers
- training providers
- colleges
- other organisations involved in supporting delivery of SWAP

To ensure that 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 a 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.