

Wales Skills to Employment Pathway

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Introduction

Wales Skills to Employment Pathway (WSEP) is delivered by DWP and is available to claimants who are receiving Universal Credit.

Note: Guidance for Employment and Partnership teams see details in Wales Skills to Employment (WSEP).

WSEP must consist of 3 components:

- pre-employment training – funded by non-contracted provider, employer or potentially the Flexible Support Fund
- work experience placement
- employer Interview or by exception support with application process if the employer's recruitment policies cannot provide an advance interview

WSEP enables claimants to gain the skills needed to move into the workplace through training and a work experience placement.

It is expected that most employers will want short focused WSEP to fill their vacancies. However, in exceptional cases where an employer requires a longer period training, DWP Train and Progress flexibilities mean that UC claimants can take part in full time, work related training of up to 16 weeks (until March 2025). Work experience placements last between 2 and 8 weeks.

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

Participating claimants must be notified by letter or online journal as this provides them with the conditions of the Pathway.

On completion of the WSEP, the work coach must ensure that they give the claimant support to:

- remove any barriers to taking up a job offer
- undertake further job search if there is no job offer
- identify ways to move them closer to work or to progress further in work

Eligibility and suitability

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

- aged 18 or over
- work ready or near work ready
- in receipt of Universal Credit, including where New Style Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) or Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) are also in payment (dual claims)

Claimants who are receiving JSA or New Style JSA only will not be eligible to participate in WSEP. This is because their conditionality limits them to 2 weeks full time pre-employment training in a 52 week period. The work coach should consider other pre-employment training instead of WSEP.

Claimants who are entitled to Rapid Response Service (RRS) support are in scope. However, if those receiving RRS support go on to claim Universal Credit or Legacy benefits, they will be subject to the eligibility rules for the benefit they claim, so those claiming New Style JSA will no longer be eligible to participate in WSEP.

Employer support

For claimants participating in WSEP, job support by the employer must be:

- evident throughout the pre-employment training element
- offered as part of the Programme (for example, job interviews, mock interviews, selection Criteria and preparation for interviews)

This support doesn't always result in a job start with the employer supporting the Programme and this must be made clear to participants.

If the Employer is unable to offer Interview support due to their 'fair and open' recruitment policies, support should be given to help the claimant through the employer's recruitment processes.

There must always be a clear route to a job vacancy.

There does not need to be a job vacancy for every person who participates in WSEP, but there must be an improved chance of them getting a job.

Job vacancies available as part of a WSEP can be an apprenticeship, full-time or part-time and temporary positions.

Conditionality

WSEP is a voluntary programme offered to improve and enhance a claimant's employability skills and support them on their journey into paid work. Key points to note include:

- the decision for a claimant to start on WSEP is entirely voluntary.
- once the claimant agrees to start, has been issued with the correct WSEP referral and a tailored Claimant Commitment has been put into place, Universal Credit claimants in the Intensive Work Search and Work Preparation regimes will be subject to conditionality
- conditionality can only be imposed once a claimant has a tailored Claimant Commitment in place and the correct notification letter has been issued (if the claimant fails meet the agreed commitments, the work coach takes action as per the Sanction Assurance Framework

The correct WSEP referral letter must be issued. See Wales Skills to Employment Pathway letters in Resources and notifications:

UCD685 AWRR (All Work-related Requirements) - start details

UCD685W AWRR (All Work-related Requirements) Welsh – start details

UCD685a WPG (Work Preparation) - start details

UCD685aW WPG (Work Preparation) Welsh - start details

UCD685b WFI (Work Focused Interview) - start details

UCD685bW WFI (Work Focused Interview) Welsh – start details

UCD685c NWRR (No Work-related Requirements) – start details

UCD685cW NWRR (No Work-related Requirements) Welsh – start details

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

If WSEP 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 Work Search or Work Preparation regimes are required to take certain steps to find work. If they agree to take part in WSEP, 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.

If a claimant fails to complete the pre-employment training or guaranteed job interview without good reason, the work coach must refer to a decision maker to consider 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 either the All Work Related Requirements or Work Preparation regimes.

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

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 WSEP 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 WSEP on a wholly voluntary basis

Claimants in the Intensive All Work Related Requirements and Work Preparation regimes 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 who refuse a reasonable offer of a job or an apprenticeship following the guaranteed job interview, may be sanctioned for refusal of employment. See Setting specific Labour Market requirements and decision maker referrals: Bitesize learning.

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

See the following for important information about referrals to WSEP and recording details:

- Programmes and job schemes video and
- Skills and Provision: Empower your claimant to improve their skills to increase employability: Bitesize learning

Initial Wales Skills to Employment Pathway discussion

The purpose of the initial discussion is to determine whether the claimant is suitable or would like to take part in a particular WSEP.

The work coach must provide the claimant with as much information as possible about the WSEP opportunity including:

- 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 it is started.

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

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. They 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 the parties involved.

There is no minimum period of time for the PET, but it must be enough time to give the claimant the information they need.

It is expected that most employers will want short focused WSEP to fill their vacancies. However, to respond to the needs of the sector / employer / claimant where a longer period of training is required, Train and Progress flexibilities mean that UC claimants can take part in full time, work related training of up to 16 weeks (until March 2025).

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

Work experience placement

The work experience placement is to provide specific skills and knowledge to help the claimant to work within a particular sector. Their own role on the placement must also give them the best chance of succeeding in the guaranteed job interview:

- Work experience placements should be between 2 and 8 weeks and should aim to give the candidate a meaningful experience of the job on offer based on the needs of the individual and employer and to prepare the WSEP participant for paid work

- the number of hours of the work experience placement are to be agreed in advance with the Employer, DWP and the individual (but the minimum is 25-30 hours but in certain circumstances can be a minimum of 16. For claimants with health conditions the minimum can be 10 hours)
- 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 ensure that the claimant's circumstances are taken in to account and that these make it possible.

If travel expenses or childcare costs are incurred, these can be reimbursed through the Flexible Support Fund following the correct procedures.

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 employers recruitment process.

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 WSEP, 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 WSEP. 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

If at any stage during the Programme, the claimant thinks 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 is not possible to take this up with the employer, the claimant should raise their concern with either their WSEP single point of contact (SPOC) 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

The claimant 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 WSEP on a mandatory basis if they fail to report an absence.

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

Claimants who have a holiday planned during the period of WSEP 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 WSEP. See the Fact sheets.

Disclosure and Barring Service or Protecting Vulnerable Group check

If an employer identifies that a claimant needs a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check, it is their duty to fund the check.

Only in very exceptional circumstances would DWP fund a DBS check. See Disclosure and Barring Service, and Protecting Vulnerable Groups checks.