

Connect to Work - England: Guidance

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Introduction

Connect to Work is a voluntary programme for anyone with a disability, health condition and other complex barriers to employment. It is available to both claimants on Universal Credit (UC) and those not in receipt of DWP benefits.

Connect to Work services will be delivered by Local Authorities (Accountable Bodies) across England and Wales. This rollout will be led by Accountable Bodies on a phased basis throughout 2025 and 2026. The support provided may vary across each local area.

Universal Credit claimants can be signposted to Connect to Work opportunities through Manage Jobs and Opportunities (MJO).

Those not in receipt of DWP benefits should be directed to their local Accountable Body to discuss support.

Details on local Connect to Work opportunities can also be found on the District Provision Tool (DPT).

Eligibility

Participants for Connect to Work must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- in England they must be aged 18 or over
- have the right to work in the UK
- have the right to live in the UK and resident in England or Wales
- have recourse to public funds
- not already be participating in other DWP employment provisions, including Restart

- not doing any paid work or, if in work, at risk of losing their job due to a health condition or complex need
- not about to start work

If they fulfil the above eligibility criteria, they must also meet one of the following criteria:

- have a health condition or disability as defined in the Equality Act 2010 or the Social Model of Disability
- be in one of these early access disadvantaged groups:
 - ex-offenders, someone who has completed a custodial sentence or a community sentence
 - offenders, someone who is serving a community sentence
 - carers
 - ex-carers
 - homeless people
 - former members of HM Armed Forces
 - members of the HM Armed Forces reserves
 - partners of current or former HM Armed Forces personnel
 - people for whom a drug / alcohol dependency presents a significant barrier to employment, including in the past
 - care leavers
 - refugees
 - an Afghan resettler
 - a Ukrainian evacuee
 - victims of domestic abuse
 - young people identified as being involved in or at risk of being involved in gangs or serious violence
 - a victim of modern slavery

Suitability

Those considered eligible must also be suitable to participate in Connect to Work and must meet one of the following criteria:

- out of work (be economically inactive or unemployed) or
- in work but at risk of losing their job due to a health condition or complex need

If they fulfil the above suitability criteria, they must also meet one of the following criteria:

- need more support than can be provided within the standard Jobcentre Plus offer or through other available services and provisions including Restart

- have previously, or are expected to, struggle with learning new skills or adapting to new environments
- require flexible role and/or workplace adjustments to support their disability or health condition
- need more integrated employment support for their other needs (such as health services, probation, social care)
- require additional support to find sustained work

Connect to Work support

Participants who are out of work will receive up to 12 months of intensive employment support.

Those in work but at risk of losing their job due to their health or complex barriers will be provided with up to 4 months of support.

Work Search Review requirements for Connect to Work claimants

Claimants in the Intensive Work Search Regime that start on Connect to Work will continue to attend Work Search Reviews with their work coach. This must be at a minimum of 4-weekly, consistent with the approach for claimants on other National DWP provision, for example Restart.

Claimants who have any earnings but remain below the Administrative Earnings Threshold (AET) will have 20-minute interventions 8-weekly at a minimum, in line with business as usual guidance.

Note: This excludes sites participating in the Universal Credit Work Search Review (WSR) Frequencies Trial.

For young people taking part in the DWP Youth Offer, please follow DWP Youth Offer guidance.

Change of circumstances

Change of Location:

- if a participant moves outside England and Wales, the support will end.
- if they move to a different Connect to Work Delivery Area within England and Wales, they can choose to continue or leave the support with the same Accountable Body.
- the Accountable Body must ensure they can still provide effective support in the new area. If not, the participant should be re-referred to the new Delivery Area.

Change in Employment Status ('Transition'):

If a participant receiving 'In-Work' Retention Support loses their job and needs more help to find work, they can continue receiving support for the remaining time on the programme.

The support should follow the five stages of Supported Employment, and the Vocational Action Plan should be updated to reflect their new employment status.

If they still need support to return to or sustain employment, the Accountable Body can use the flexibilities outlined or re-refer them, starting with the 'Expression of Interest' process, once the current support duration has ended.

Flexibilities:

The time a participant spends on Connect to Work can be adjusted by the Accountable Body based on individual needs and available funding. Funding for these adjustments is included in the Maximum Sum set out in the Grant Funding Agreement.

Flexible options include:

- Pausing
- Extending
- Re-referral

Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)

If a claimant with Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) restrictions expresses an interest in Connect to Work, they can be considered for signposting if eligible and suitable. A MAPPA claimant's eligibility and suitability is confirmed by the office MAPPA Single Point of Contact (SPOC).

The work coach will then either signpost to Connect to Work by whatever pathway the Accountable Body has set up or look for more suitable provision that meets MAPPA restrictions. Where the potential MAPPA participant is signposted to Connect to Work, they will then contact the Accountable Body to register an interest through the Accountable Bodies routeway.

Deciding between Connect to Work and Restart for claimants in the Intensive Work Search regime

People can express interest in Connect to Work at any time, regardless of their economic status or benefits. The programme primarily helps inactive people with disabilities, health conditions or complex barriers to work, but claimants in the Intensive Work Search regime can also join if eligible and suitable.

Work Coaches can signpost Intensive Work Search claimants to Connect to Work from day one. This would be suitable if a work coach considers the claimant at high risk of moving further away from the labour market and they would benefit from intensive employment support.

Intensive Work Search claimants considered capable of searching for work should not be signposted to Connect to Work.

Universal Credit claimants and non-claimants can also self-refer and be considered eligible by the local area.

Restart Consideration

At the 6-month stage of a claimant being in the Intensive Work Search regime, claimants must be considered for the Restart Scheme first.

Where a claimant has been selected for Restart and the work coach confirms they meet the eligibility and suitability criteria, they must be referred to Restart.

If the work coach considers the claimant is not eligible or suitable for Restart, they may then signpost them to Connect to Work, if they think the claimant is eligible and suitable for Connect to Work.

If the claimant is already on Connect to Work, they should not be considered for Restart until they leave the programme.