

Employment Schemes

The lowdown on government employment schemes

If you're unemployed and looking for work, there's a range of employment schemes you can access. These aim to do a variety of things, including developing your skills and experience, to help you find and stay in work.

If you're claiming benefits such as Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) or you're a Universal Credit claimant who is expected to look for work, some of these employment schemes are compulsory. This means you could lose your benefits if you don't take part in an employment scheme you've been asked to attend by your local JobCentre Plus (this request is called a jobseeker's direction). You could also lose some of your money if you start a compulsory employment scheme but give up before completing it. These penalties are called benefit sanctions.

If you're invited to take part in a government employment scheme, always ask if it's compulsory. It's also a good idea to find out about the type of government employment schemes that are available in your area, as they may be able to help you find a job and make the most of your career.

Did you know?

Around 1.9 million people have joined and completed the Work Programme since its launch

in June 2011 up until December 2016 (Source: Department for Work and Pensions)

Work experience

Though strictly speaking this programme is for people aged 16 to 24, if you're older you could still be accepted for work experience in exceptional circumstances.

A work experience placement - which can last anything from two to eight weeks (with each week comprising 25 to 30 hours' work) - is designed to give you experience of a working environment, which can be helpful if you have little to no work history. And while it is a voluntary scheme, it becomes compulsory if you accept a placement.

While you're taking part in work experience, you'll still get JSA or Universal Credit. But you must still continue to seek paid work under the terms of your Jobseekers' agreement as well as sign on and attend any other necessary meetings at your JobCentre Plus.

The Work Programme

The Work Programme was designed to prepare you for, find and stay in work. However, it stopped taking new participants in April 2017. But if you were already taking part in a programme at that time, you can continue for up to two years from the date you joined.

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Help to Work scheme

Those who finished their Work Programme but are still unemployed and claiming JSA can move on to the Help to Work scheme. If you join the Help to Work scheme, you have to go to your JobCentre Plus every day or take up a Community Work Placement (see below). Alternatively, you could get extra help from JobCentre Plus with getting back into work, which may mean going on a training scheme or taking part in local work experience.

If you don't take part in the Help to Work scheme when asked, you may lose your benefits.

Mandatory Work Activity scheme

As the name suggests, this scheme is compulsory if you're invited to attend. If you're aged 18 or older, you may be asked to join this scheme if your JobCentre Plus advisor (or work coach) thinks you need to develop more of the job-related skills employers are looking for. You'll normally be asked to work for up to 30 hours a week for four weeks at a local placement, and can be referred to the scheme from the first day of your JSA or Universal Credit claim.

The idea of the Mandatory Work Activity scheme is to improve your chances of getting and keeping a job. What you'll end up doing will depend on the placement your JobCentre Plus advisor finds you. Again, you'll still have to sign up and attend any meetings you need to go to at your JobCentre Plus, as well as be actively looking for work while taking part. You'll also have to enter into a Jobseeker's agreement.

Work for your benefit schemes

In addition to the Mandatory Work Activity scheme, several other compulsory employment training schemes require you to work while claiming JSA or Universal Credit, including the following:

Sector-based Work Academies

This scheme lasts for up to six weeks and is designed to help you get work. It can include pre-employment training, a work experience placement, a guaranteed job interview and - for some - the chance to work towards a qualification. As well as those getting JSA or Universal Credit, people claiming Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) who are in the work-related activity group can take part in a Sector-based Work Academy.

Skills Conditionality

This scheme involves taking part in training to improve your work-related skills. After an initial assessment, you may be given training in skills such as literacy, maths and information technology.

Community Work Placements

This is also designed to help you develop the skills and experience you need to get a job. If you're claiming JSA and have taken part in the Work Programme, especially if you've been unemployed for a long time, you might be sent on one of these placements. You'll be expected to take part in a work placement for up to 30 hours a week for up to 26 weeks. You'll also receive a certain number of hours of assisted job search each week for up to 30 weeks, during which your work placement employer may help you to look

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for jobs online, work on your CV and learn interview skills.

According to the Department of Work and Pensions, the type of work you'll do will depend on what's most appropriate for you, where you live and the company giving you work experience.

New Enterprise Allowance

If you're 18 and older and are claiming JSA, ESA or Income Support, and you want to become self-employed, this scheme offers business mentoring and financial support (you may also be eligible if you get Universal Credit, including if you're already self-employed). You could get a business mentor to help you develop your business idea and start trading for up to 52 weeks, and a weekly allowance paid for up to 26 weeks. If you're already self-employed and claiming Universal Credit, you may also get mentoring support for up to 52 weeks.

If your business plan is approved, you can claim financial support if you start working at your business for 16 hours or more per week.

There's further help available if you're unemployed and want to start your own business:

England Visit www.gov.uk

Scotland Call Business Gateway on 0300 013 4753 or visit www.bgateway.com.

Wales Visit www.businesswales.gov.wales [NEW LINK] or call the helpline on 03000 6 03000.

Northern Ireland Visit www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk

Voluntary schemes

Some employment schemes are voluntary - though in some circumstances you may receive a Jobseeker's direction that makes your attendance compulsory. Here are two of the main ones you could find useful, though there may be more local schemes available where you live:

Work clubs

These are available in many places around the country. They can help with things like writing your CV or preparing for job interviews. To find out if there's one where you live, ask at your JobCentre Plus.

Work trials

You can spend a few days at a job where the employer has a work trial agreement with your JobCentre Plus to find out if it suits you. It also lets an employer see how you get on before deciding to offer you a permanent position. If things don't work out and you decide not to take the job offer, you won't lose any of your benefits.

Help if you're disabled

Specialist advice is available for disabled people at all JobCentre Plus branches via Disability Employment Advisers. Your DEA can help you find work as well as advise you on using the Access to Work scheme and supported employment.

Access to Work is a scheme that offers practical advice and support to people who have a disability, health or mental health condition to help them overcome obstacles in the workplace. For instance, if you have communication difficulties,

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Access to Work could find a communicator, advocate or interpreter to help you with a job interview. It can also help by providing a grant for specialist equipment you may need or alterations to your working environment to make it more accessible.

Find out more about Access to Work at [gov.uk](#).

Useful links

If you are experiencing any of the issues covered in this guide, in the first instance call our free helpline on 0808 801 0550. Our Advisors will listen without judging and will work with you as best they can to achieve a positive outcome. If you prefer you can email: helpline@ltcharity.org.uk Visit our website: www.licensedtradecharity.org.uk
It's full of useful information about the kind of issues we know people who work in the licensed trade face.

Other sources of information:

Gov.uk

www.gov.uk

There's lots of information and help on this government website, including information on JSA and Universal Credit back-to-work schemes.

Citizens Advice

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

For free practical advice on a wide range of issues, including information on government employment schemes.

Helpline: 0808 801 0550

Email: support@ltcharity.org.uk

licensedtradecharity.org.uk

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NOTE: This guide is not exhaustive. It has been produced by the Licensed Trade Charity to provide you with an overview of the issue in question. We are grateful to all specialist organisations who support our charity and are available to you should you be experiencing this particular issue.

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