



UCFS 13A WS The Commitment 04: Effective Work Related Activities

Facilitator Led Brief
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Effective Work Related Activities

Introduction

When accepting their Commitment the claimant is committing themselves to carry out specific work related activities.

It is important that the activities they commit to will make good use of their time and progress them in their journey towards finding work/sustaining work/increasing earnings.

It is also important that all work related requirements agreed in the Commitment are fair and reasonable.

Being an independent, effective jobseeker will give the claimant the best chance of competing in the job market and so the best chance of securing employment.



Ask the learners to work individually or in pairs for this activity.

They should use the Claimant Commitment guidance to find examples of work preparation, work search and other work related activities. Allow about 5 minutes for the activity and 5 minutes to share their answers.



Refer the learners to the Claimant Commitment Guidance as follows:

Claimant Commitment

DWP Home >>Social Intranet (top right) >>

Organisation: Universal Credit >> Universal Learning >>

Claimant Commitment

They should use the following sections:

- Work Preparation Activities
- Work Search Activities
- Other Work Related Activities and the Labour Market regimes



Ensure the learners are clear about the difference between work search and work preparation.

The purpose of work search is to obtain paid work, more paid work or better-paid work.

Work preparation is an activity that prepares them for work - it will not directly find a vacancy or get a job but will better prepare them to do this, for example preparing/updating their CV, attending an ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) course and so on.

‘Required’ and ‘Voluntary’ Activities

As we have discussed, it is a Universal Credit requirement that the claimant carries out a certain amount of work related activity every week, depending on the regime they are in.

For claimants in the All Work Related Requirements group, for example, the default number of expected hours is 35 hours per week.

It is your responsibility to designate the agreed work related activities as either ‘required’ or ‘voluntary’ in the Service. For each activity you add to the Commitment you must specify whether it is ‘preparation’, ‘search’ or ‘voluntary’. Activities marked as ‘preparation’ and ‘search’ are required and therefore sanctionable. ‘Voluntary’ must be selected where no sanction is to be possible.

You must ensure activities are described accurately on the Commitment.



If the claimant is in the intensive work search regime and has been set a work search requirement, it is always “required” and sanctionable. The activities may be general, for example “I will look for work in the papers/UJ/internet” or specific, for example “I will go to my local garage and ask for work/I will apply for this job/attend this interview”.

Claimants outside of the Intensive work search regime may also have work search activities set for them – but these must always be voluntary as they are not subject to work search requirements and they must not be sanctioned for not completing them.

For generic work search activity – the claimant may choose what particular activities they do to make up the expected number of hours (or do as many activities/hours as they reasonably could – they may have exhausted all options available before they meet the full number of expected hours).

If a claimant has been set a specific requirement (as work search or work preparation) they may be able to show “good cause” and avoid a sanction – if instead of the set requirement they can show they found and did something better instead – that gave them a better chance of finding work. The work coach or decision maker would need to consider this as part of considering whether a doubt/sanction should be pursued.

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It is important to stress the potential legal implications of setting requirements incorrectly. **Consider the following.**

If we sanction a claimant and it turns out that the requirement was not set correctly, for example because it was outside the claimant's conditionality, was not work related or the claimant was not aware of consequences, this could be legally challenged.

It causes obvious distress if we have withheld payment from the claimant unnecessarily. It could lead to embarrassment and potentially brings the department into disrepute if challenged at Appeal.

If the claimant fails to carry out 'required' activities this could result in a reduction in the payment of Universal Credit. The claimant needs to be made aware of this from the outset.

Voluntary activities must be work related; you cannot include activities that relate to other circumstances such as health, for example: 'I will continue to take my medication'.

If the claimant failed to carry out a voluntary activity, there would be no reduction in the payment of Universal Credit. However if they did not complete the voluntary activity they would be expected to make up the time on other work related activities so that they are still meeting the expected hours of work search.

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It is important the claimant is very clear about what they must do ('required' activities) and the consequences of not doing them. They must also understand that if they do not do what they have chosen to do ('voluntary' activities) that we expect them to use that time to complete other work related activities



How would you check the claimant understands their responsibilities?



You could ask:

What must you do in order to receive Universal Credit? What will happen if you do not do this?

This allows the claimant to explain their understanding and gives you the opportunity to correct any misapprehensions while giving very clear messages about what is required.

You must make sure that the claimant knows exactly what is expected of them from the start.

Earlier we discussed examples of work related activities. The work related activities set out in the Commitment must be the most effective activities which, when undertaken, give the claimant the best possible chance of getting paid work quickly. You must ensure that all the work related activities set out in the Commitment are fair and reasonable for the individual claimant.

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Ask the learners to imagine that the work related activities on an individual claimant's Commitment were being challenged in a court of law. Would they (the work coach) be able to say that they have taken into account all of the claimant's individual circumstances and that the requirements are fair and reasonable for that claimant?

Is all relevant information recorded in order to provide full rationale to defend the department's actions?

Would they be able to prove that? If they have truly considered all the circumstances and recorded all that they have considered, then they would be able to prove it.

Recording this information is vital. Labour Market decisions are often overturned because the considerations have not been documented or documented completely.



Where could you record this information?



In the Claimant Profile on the Service.

Supporting the Claimant

The claimant needs to understand that meeting the work related requirement for Universal Credit is challenging. They have to commit to carrying out work related activities which are appropriate to them and will progress them personally towards work.

For some claimants this may involve a radical change in how they prioritise their lives. They may not be used to the level of forward planning and organisation that is required of them under Universal Credit.

Through your discussion with the claimant, you should be trying to find out their level of skill around looking for work, planning etc so that you can support them to develop these skills.

By supporting them to identify and plan their work related activities in a joined-up way, you can encourage them to take responsibility for looking for work in a more pro-active way, rather than just meeting the 'minimum requirements'.



Facilitate a short discussion with the learners about how they could support the claimant to identify and plan a joined-up series of work related activities.

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Ensure the following points are covered:

- encourage the claimant to view work related activities as something to be developed on an on-going basis, rather than as a series of one-off activities
- coach them to identify how they can develop individual work related activities into a strategy, for example from 'visiting local employer' to 'what is the purpose of the visit?' 'what will you ask when you get there?', 'How can you use this information?', 'How will you take forward what you have learned from the activity?' etc
- make sure they can explain the purpose of the activity
 - if they can explain why they are doing something it will help them to view it as part of a meaningful sequence of activities rather than a one-off activity that they are doing just because it's written on their Commitment. For example, 'I will look at the recruitment section of some hotel websites to find out what sort of jobs are available. That will help me to decide the sort of job I want, what qualifications etc are required and how to apply. Then I will have a better idea of what they are looking for so that I know what information to put in my application'

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- encourage them to build contingencies into their work search, for example, 'if Tesco's aren't recruiting, what will you do then?'
- give positive feedback so that the claimant can see that they are making progress. This will build their confidence and help to motivate them.
- when reviewing an activity, coach the claimant to identify how useful the activity was and how they can use the experience to improve their skills for example, 'if you did a similar thing again, how would you do it differently/better?'

If you think a claimant needs extra support, contact them between meetings by telephone or via their journal to ask about their experiences so far and coach them in how to take their work related activities forward.

Other Considerations

Where the claimant does not have a permitted period, they are required to look for and take any job that they are capable of doing that pays the National Minimum Wage or above.

Looking for any job, and accepting the first job offered, will help the claimant back into work as quickly as possible.

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Once they are in paid work they can continue to look for their preferred job. All elements of the claimant's work related activities must be realistic and achievable. You need to consider the following:



Show Slide 08 – Other Considerations.

This slide is animated. Use 'enter' or the arrow keys to make each requirement appear.

- Capability for work - does the claimant have the relevant qualifications, experience, skills?
- Capacity for work - are there any health or social issues, or caring responsibilities that might make it difficult to find, obtain and retain the job in question?
- Wage expectations - does the job requirement pay the wages that the claimant is looking for and does the claimant know how much the National Minimum Wage is?
- The local Labour Market - consideration must be given to what jobs are available within that area. If the work the claimant is looking for is not available within the claimant's travel to work area, the job requirement is not realistic.



Make sure that the learners are aware of the difference between ‘capability’ and ‘capacity’ as follows:

For the purposes of work related activity, Capability is defined as everything from skills, qualifications, relevant experience to ability to travel to a work location; all the practical things that need to be in place for an individual to perform a job successfully.

For the purposes of work related activity, Capacity is defined as a person’s physical or mental ability to perform a specific job. For example, a person with limited mobility may not have the capacity to perform a job which requires lifting. Someone with a history of severe anxiety may not have the capacity to work in a high stress environment.

(Reference: ‘Jobseeking Behaviour’ October 2010 Roger James.)

By the end of the Commitment Meeting, the intention is that the claimant is committed to complying with their work related requirements and is motivated to find work.

When setting work search and work preparation requirements it is also important to consider the following further factors:

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Show Slide 09 – Further Considerations.

This slide is animated. Use ‘enter’ or the arrow keys to make each requirement appear.



The learners should complete the following activity in pairs or small groups.

Ask the learners to reflect on the eight considerations shown on the slide. For each one they should be able to explain what is about and why it is important.

Allow about 15 minutes in total for discussion and feeding back to the group.



Use the following note to support the discussion.

- self-perception - the claimant believes that they can work, find specific jobs, have the capability to do those jobs, and are confident of being able to gain and keep employment
- specific job requirement -the claimant knows their job requirements
- knowledge, skills and experience - the claimant has the knowledge, skills and experience that match their job requirements

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- commitment to undertake work related activities - the claimant knows how to access the resources required to undertake sustained work related activities
- demonstrating capability for a specific job - the claimant is able to demonstrate their capability effectively to employers
- presenting themselves to an employer - the claimant is able to present themselves effectively to potential employers
- keeping a job - the claimant could keep a job offered by an employer
- managing personal circumstances - the claimant is able to successfully manage anything that makes it harder to get and keep paid work.

Ensuring Work Related Activities are Effective

Your input is vital to coach the claimant to identify what would be an effective use of their time. For example, looking at internet recruitment sites is a useful activity. But a claimant could spend a whole day on a recruitment website and genuinely feel they have done something positive yet found no jobs to apply for.

Work related activities must be tailored to the individual claimant to make sure they are challenging and the claimant is capable of achieving them. Remember also that the amount of time required to carry out a particular activity will vary from person to person, depending on the individual's circumstances and capability.

Evidence confirms that if we want the claimant to be committed to these actions they have to work this through for themselves and they have to explain to you the advantages and outcomes that their actions will produce.

You may need to coach the claimant to do this.

The Commitment **must be claimant led** and clearly state the actions the claimant will take to reach their job goal. You must ensure that the work related activities in the Commitment are SMART:

SMART



Ask the learners if they know what SMART stands for.



Show Slide 10 – SMART.

This slide is animated. Using the ‘enter’ or arrow key once will make all the letters in the acronym ‘SMART’ appear. Use the keys again to make each word appear separately as you take them through the following:



Put the learners in five groups. Allocate ‘Specific’ to the first, ‘Measurable’ to the second and so on. Give them one to two minutes to explain in detail what each one means in terms of work related activities.

Ask them to share their findings with the whole group and discuss. Ensure the following points are brought out in the discussion.

Specific:

A specific goal has a much greater chance of being accomplished than a general goal.

To set a specific goal you must answer the six “W” questions:

- who: Who is involved?
- what: What do I want to accomplish?

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- where: Identify a location
- when: Establish a timeframe
- which: Identify requirements and constraints
- why: Specific reasons, purpose or benefits of accomplishing the goal

EXAMPLE: A general goal would be, “Get in shape.” But a specific goal would say, “Join a health club and work out three days a week.”

Measurable

Establish concrete criteria for measuring progress toward the achievement of each goal you set.

When you measure your progress, you stay on track, reach your target dates, and experience the exhilaration of achievement that spurs you on to the continued effort required to reach your goal.

To determine if your goal is measurable, ask questions such as ‘How much...?’, ‘How many?’, ‘How will I know when it is accomplished?’

For example, instead of ‘I am committed to losing weight’, try ‘I will aim to lose X number of pounds by the end of the month’.

Achievable

When you identify goals that are most important to you, you begin to figure out ways you can make them come true. You develop the attitudes, abilities, skills, and financial capacity to reach them. You begin seeing previously overlooked opportunities to bring yourself closer to the achievement of your goals.

You can achieve almost any goal you set when you plan your steps wisely and establish a time frame that allows you to carry out those steps. Goals that may have seemed far away and out of reach eventually move closer and become achievable, not because your goals shrink, but because you grow and expand to match them.

When you list your goals you build your self-image. You see yourself as worthy of these goals, and develop the traits and personality that allow you to possess them.

Realistic

To be realistic, a goal must represent an objective toward which you are both *willing* and *able* to work. A goal can be both high and realistic; you are the only one who can decide just how high your goal should be. But be sure that every goal represents substantial progress.

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A high goal is frequently easier to reach than a low one because a low goal exerts low motivational force. Some of the hardest jobs you ever accomplished may actually have seemed easy simply because they were a labour of love.

Your goal is probably realistic if you truly *believe* that it can be accomplished. Additional ways to know if your goal is realistic is to determine if you have accomplished anything similar in the past or ask yourself what conditions would have to exist to accomplish this goal.

Time bound

A goal should be grounded within a time frame. Without a time frame there is no sense of urgency. If you want to lose 10 pounds, when do you want to lose it by? “Some day” won’t work. But if you anchor it within a timeframe, “by September 1st”, then you’ve set your unconscious mind into motion to begin working on the goal.

Activities may:

- be regular, for example weekly and reviewed within work search reviews
- be one-off, time bound and reviewed within work related conversations, work search reviews or on-line



Ask if there are any questions and discuss before continuing.

Behaviours for Quality Work Related Activity

When discussing work related activities with a claimant you both need to be clear about what they will do to look for work. This means thinking about the quality of the activity as well as the quantity.

Looking for work is a skill and we should not assume that our claimants have that skill. You may need to help them develop the skill of looking for work.

Some claimants who have previously been long term employed or who have never worked before may find it difficult to carry out work related activities effectively. We can support claimants to continuously assess and improve on their work search.

From the start you need make expectations clear; the claimants should be acting independently and their activity should be focused on doing things that get them the best prospects of getting a job.



Ask the learners to work in small groups for this activity.

They should note down the behaviours and skills that claimants would need in order to look for work effectively.

Allow about 10 minutes before bringing the group back together to share their responses.



Responses should include:

- **effective use of time**
- **set clear goals for themselves. There is evidence that setting goals increases clarity of purpose (why am I doing what I am doing (and what do I need to do in the future?)) and the drive to gain employment**
- **plan how, where, when they are going to complete the activity (we will look at this in more detail in a moment)**
- **prioritise activities (What do they need to do first?)**

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- **reviewing activities:**
 - **recognising and persisting with worthwhile activities**
 - **recognising when an activity is not productive and stopping the activity**
- **keep a detailed record of what they have done (which employers have they contacted? What was the outcome? Which jobs did they apply for? When? How did they adapt their CV?)**
- **prepare thoroughly, for example planning questions in advance of visiting employers**
- **ensure application forms/letters provide concrete evidence of the key competencies required by each employer**

This list is not exhaustive.



What questions could you ask the claimant to support them in assessing the quality of their work related activity?

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Answers could include:

- “What did you learn from visiting the website?”
- “How did it help you progress your work search?”
- “To what extent do you think that activity was an effective use of your time?”
- “How could you improve the way you do that?”
- “How will you know if that activity has helped you?”

It is important that the claimant learns from what they have done and acts on the lesson learned.

You can support them in this by helping them to understand:

- what they have done well; and
- what they could do better next time.

The focus is on recognising what is good, providing rewards and aiming to improve the things that could be better. This generally has a positive impact on individuals.

You will identify early on what the claimant’s strengths are and where they need support in developing their work search skills. Coaching techniques, praise and reassurance will help to build their confidence.

Planning Work Related Activities Effectively

In the previous activity we mentioned planning. It is important that the claimant has a clear idea about how they are going to carry out the work related activities on their Commitment.

This is a vital part of your discussion with them and will help you identify what support they need in developing work search skills.

Let's think about the importance of planning.

We all have goals in life. We may want to lose weight or learn to drive. But both of these require a great deal of effort and will-power. However, it is human nature that we lack will-power at times and that our self control lapses especially when we are tired, upset or stressed.

Evidence from a number of areas suggests that people are far more likely to achieve their goals if they make a plan for what they will do, and how, when and where they will do it.

Making a plan and agreeing on specific activities can help claimants to get back to work more quickly. Studies that specifically looked at claimants found that planning increased the number of work related activities they completed and the number of job offers they received. (Source: Cabinet Office Behavioural Insights Team).

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Effective Work Related Activities

You have an important role here. You coach the claimant to plan their activities effectively and to keep them motivated by:



Show Slide 11 – Planning Work Related Activities Effectively.

This slide is animated so each example appears using the mouse or ‘enter’ key.



Use the following information to expand and explain the information on the slide.

- ask coaching questions:
 - where can you find out more about that job?
 - who could help you with that?
 - how could you explain your suitability for that job?
 - when could you do that?
- encourage them to build the activity into part of their daily routine. For example, ‘I’ll check the on-line agencies I am registered with every morning after I’ve walked the dog’. This makes it more likely that they will do it because it will become part of their routine

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- encourage the claimant to allocate a specific convenient time to do a particular activity. For example, the claimant's child is at nursery from 10am – 12 every day. The claimant could designate that time to a specific work related activity
- ensure the claimant has ownership of the agreed plans. Ideally you should encourage “I want...”, “I need...”, “I must...” type declarations from the claimant, as opposed to “I agree”, “I suppose so” or “that makes sense”
- link activities together. For example: “When I have finished my job search, I will adapt my CV and covering letter to each vacancy I have found to make sure it is relevant.”
- encourage them to think of contingencies, for example ‘If my laptop breaks then I will continue to work on my CV at the local library.’

Make sure you praise claimants for successfully completing activities. This motivates them and builds their confidence.



Ask the learners to work in pairs for this activity. One of them should think of something which they would like to do but have never got around to, for example learning to play the piano or clearing out their garage. Their partner should then help them to develop a plan to achieve it using the techniques on the slide. Allow about 10 minutes.

Bring the learners back together to share their experiences and good practice from the conversation.

If there is time, they can swap roles so that they both make a plan.

Reviewing Work Related Activities

Once the claimant has work related activities set down in the Commitment, you will review how well they have completed these activities at every meeting.



What is the purpose of the review?

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- to ensure the claimant has met the requirements to receive Universal Credit
- to identify if any changes are required to their Commitment
- to provide support to develop / strengthen the claimant's work related activities
- to coach the claimant in planning next steps.
- to maintain the claimant's motivation
- to review the quality of their work search so far and identify how it can be improved.



What sort of evidence can a claimant show for their work related activity?



Answers could include:

- a completed CV (if they did not have one previously)
- notification of enrolment/acceptance on a course
- confirmation of an application to employment agency
- print outs of jobs to apply for
- print outs of completed applications (or on smart phone if emailed)
- record of researching employment websites on smart phone

This list is not exhaustive

Claimants may also tell you about some of the activities they have carried out, which they have not got evidence for.



How could you validate these activities?



By asking probing questions. For example:

- who did you speak to when you cold called the contact centre? What questions did you ask? Did they refer you to somebody else? What additional information did you find out?
- which companies did you send your CV to? Did you send them by post or via email? Did you send a covering letter? What sort of acknowledgement did you get?
- when you researched the apprenticeships website, what did you find out about requirements/application processes/who to contact?
- when you went to the jobs fair, which stalls did you visit? Did you gather any leaflets? Were they helpful? What further information did they provide which would help you? How will that help you?

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It is important that you use the review of work related activity to coach the claimant to:

- assess the effectiveness of what they have done so far
- identify how they can build on it/improve on it
- address any setbacks to ensure the claimant does not become demotivated (by focusing on the positives, what lessons they can learn and take forward)
- identify and plan effective next steps



Ask if there are any questions and discuss before moving on to the next part of this learning – 05: Final Discussions.