Hospitality SWAP pilot: Customer feedback research

In-house research report

December 2024

Executive summary

This qualitative customer feedback research aimed to understand customer views and experiences of the Hospitality SWAP (Sector-based Work Academy Programme) pilot. The Hospitality pilot aimed to combine a bespoke, standardised programme of learning in collaboration with UKHospitality to assess whether DWP customers would benefit from gaining an industry recognised accreditation, endorsed by lead employers in the hospitality sector. The pilot was delivered in 5 locations between September 2023 and March 2024.

The research was carried out through a combination of a questionnaire and follow-up interviews with 31 customers (3 in-depth follow-up interviews). As the number of survey responses and interviews is low, the responses have been treated as a non-representative qualitative sample and all findings are limited to the respondents of the research itself. They may not be representative of all customers participating in the pilots or all locations in which the pilots were carried out.

When asked to rate their overall experience of the programme, all the respondents thought that their overall experience was good or very good. Respondents gave the highest overall ratings to industry visits and 'preparing for work' training. One-to-one support from the provider, practical hospitality skills training and CV and interview training were also rated highly by respondents. Training that was technical or directly relevant to the role was valued more highly than generic training by some respondents. Some respondents reported less satisfactory experiences when they had difficulty securing a role after the programme or when the work placement was less relevant to their progression into employment.

Many respondents said that they faced at least one challenge in taking part. Most of these respondents said that they had received some support to overcome their difficulties. Though one or two respondents did have unresolved difficulties. Most respondents also received support either from their training provider or Jobcentre plus to find a job after the end of the programme.

Most of the respondents reported several positive outcomes as a result of taking part in the programme. Most respondents had applied for a job or jobs and many respondents reported that they had improved their skills or gained new skills, gained qualifications, certificates or licenses, felt more confident about looking for work or about their ability to work or had made new contacts with employers as a result of taking part in the programme.

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Introduction and Methodology

This section introduces the policy development and the methods used to gather customer feedback from DWP customers referred to the provision.

About the policy

Developing the concept

The Hospitality Pilots were initiated following a meeting between the Department for Work and Pensions and representatives from UKHospitality, a national trade body representing businesses and employers in the Hospitality industry. The pilots were developed in response to high vacancy numbers within the sector and perceived low skills levels for new joiners to the sector.

The aim of the Hospitality pilots was to combine a bespoke, standardised programme of learning in collaboration with UKHospitality to assess whether DWP customers would benefit from gaining an industry recognised accreditation, endorsed by lead employers in the hospitality sector.

Delivery of the pilot

The pilot was intended to be very small scale to test the model, in particular the standardised training. Five pilot areas were selected to try the new standardised approach, across three different providers.

Table 1: Locations, providers and dates of pilot

Locations	Provider	Date range
Liverpool, London and Manchester	Springboard	September to November 2023
Coventry	Pet-Xi	October to December 2023
Cardiff	Cambrian Training	January to March 2024

The general structure of the pilot was 3 weeks of training including employability skills, technical skills and industrial visits, followed by a 1-week work placement, guaranteed job interview and end of programme event. The training programme was put together with reference to a specification of essential training modules identified by UKHospitality as important for entrants to the hospitality sector.

Methodology

Steering group

A small steering group was established to coordinate collaboration on evaluation of the pilot and in order to secure subject expert input into the research instrument design. The steering group included DWP analytical officials, and representatives from UKHospitality, BBPA and Springboard. DWP analysts retained independent oversight on research method decisions.

Online Survey of customers

Customers who had been referred to the programme by jobcentre staff were invited to complete a survey to share their views about their experiences of the programme, including the training, work placement, guaranteed interview and about their progress toward employment. Customers were invited by email soon after their 4-week programme. Where possible, provider trainers were also asked to distribute a QR code to encourage participation by customers. Follow up reminder emails were distributed to customers who had not yet replied, or who had replied anonymously.

A total of 75 customers were invited to respond to the questionnaire, and 31 responses were received (41% response). There was no facility in the online survey application to record partial completions.

Survey responses were initially analysed using the Microsoft Forms software and shared in interim format with the steering group. Subsequently, all responses were analysed descriptively using Microsoft Excel.

Customer Interviews

Customers were invited to opt in to sharing their survey responses and contact details to aid a follow up interview by DWP researchers. 13 customers were contacted to try to arrange a follow-up interview. 9 were reached by telephone, though only 3 progressed to a full-length customer interview. In the interests of confidentiality, all customer interview responses have been combined with qualitative responses received through the survey in the analysis process. Participants were not recorded, so quotations may be from notes taken rather than being 'verbatim'.

Limitations

As the number of survey responses and interviews is low, the responses have been treated as a non-representative qualitative sample for the purposes of this report. As such, all findings are limited to the respondents of the research itself, they may not be representative of all customers participating in the pilots or all locations in which the pilots were carried out.

Furthermore, responses were not distributed evenly across all locations or providers and cannot therefore be seen as representative of any particular DWP location or provider's services.

Experiences of joining and taking part in the pilot

Respondents' views of joining

Many respondents heard about the pilot through their work coach either through their Universal Credit journal or at a routine appointment. Some respondents heard about the pilot at a jobs fair, and a few heard about the pilot from another member of staff at the jobcentre or through the provider directly. Most respondents were looking for a variety of work or training when they heard about the SWAP; only a few were looking for apprenticeships. Many respondents were looking for work or training in a specific job or any job within the hospitality sector. Some respondents were looking for work or training in other sectors, usually in addition to looking for work or training in the hospitality sector.

Respondents' experiences of the programme

When asked to rate their overall experience of the programme, all the respondents thought that their overall experience was good or very good, including many respondents who thought it was very good. Most respondents also rated the length, relevance and speed or pace of the training as good or very good, though one or two thought rated these as fair.

Different aspects of the programme

Respondents were asked to rate their experience of the following aspects of the programme:

- One-to-one support from provider
- Group face-to-face training
- Industry visits
- Practical hospitality skills training
- CV and interview training
- Preparing for work training
- E-learning
- Work Placement week
- Guaranteed Job Interview

Respondents gave the highest overall ratings to industry visits and 'preparing for work' training, which all respondents rated as either good or very good. One to one

support from the provider, practical hospitality skills training and CV and interview training were also rated highly by respondents. Just a few respondents rated these as fair and the other respondents all rated these aspects of the training as good or very good. Looking at the mode of training, more respondents rated the group face-to-face training as very good, compared to the e-learning. Respondents' views on their work placements and guaranteed job interviews were more mixed, with some respondents rating these as either fair or even poor.

Most respondents were positive in their feedback.

> "Overall, it's been a great start into the hospitality industry."
> (Pilot participant 1)

> "It was fantastic."
> (Pilot participant 2)

> "All the training and experience was helpful the whole time. The work experience was most useful. The length was good for most people, but I would have liked it to be longer to add more experience to my CV. I loved working there."
> (Pilot participant 3)

Respondents' poor ratings related to unsuccessful employment outcomes at the end of the job and in some cases, how relevant or new the experience was.

> "There was a work placement that was kind of pointless for me. It might be good for someone that hasn't done this work before, but for me it was just a few shifts that I didn't get paid for."
> (Pilot participant 4)

Training that was technical or directly relevant to the role was valued more highly than generic training by some respondents.

> "We had a lot of important practice: holding trays for waitressing roles, learning how to make cocktails and how to pour pints. All pretty important basics."
> (Pilot participant 5)

> "We visited hotels, pubs and different establishments. In some of them, we saw how they operate and spoke to people that managed them. At others we just did the lesson of the day there."
> (Pilot participant 6)

> "The e-learning covered a massive range of things, it was easy to do and was useful. The most useful e-learning was definitely the things that directly linked to the job rather than the general things that you learn everywhere."
> (Pilot participant 7)

Difficulties faced and support received

Many respondents said that they faced at least one challenge in taking part. The most comment difficulties experienced by respondents were transport costs, the location of the training or finding the training / online training difficult. Other

difficulties that respondents shared were that the work placement or working with others was difficult or that they found it difficult to find the time to complete online training.

As mentioned above, many respondents rated the support from their provider as very good. Most respondents who felt that they needed help with a difficulty said that they received some support to overcome their difficulties. In common with earlier research on the wider Sector-based Work Academy Programme[1], some respondents would have valued more flexibility in the design of the programme to fit their personal circumstances. One or two respondents did not receive any support with their particular difficulty.

> "Everybody else was given a 1-month travel card but my work coach didn't do that. It was difficult for me."
> (Pilot participant 8)

> "It would be improved if you… make the hours within school times. For training and work-placements to be acknowledged that you need to be flexible with school runs."
> (Pilot participant 9)

Support received by respondents included being provided with access to a laptop, one-to-one support with the training outside of the main classes, support relating to a health condition, and jobcentre support with transport costs.

> "I have some mental health challenges. It doesn't help getting employment, but it was not an issue at all on the Destination Hospitality course."
> (Pilot participant 10)

> "Online training was good because the timing was flexible. You could to it weekends or whenever you're free. They had assessments at the end which you could redo if you didn't pass."
> (Pilot participant 11)

Respondents' views on the results of the programme

Support received after the programme

We asked those respondents who were still looking for work after the programme about the support they had received either through their training provider or through Jobcentre Plus. Most respondents had received support looking for other jobs. A few respondents had also received support with CV and interview practice, more work experience, or training in either hospitality or another sector.

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[1] Sector-based Work Academy Programme: qualitative case study research - GOV.UK

Some respondents were particularly complimentary about the support received from their training provider to support their job search after the programme.

> "Right after the course ended, Springboard would do a job search every week with me, talking about their business partners and available positions. Even now they do this every fortnight for anyone that still hasn't found employment. The Jobcentre support isn't really support. It's more like you have to present yourself and explain yourself."
> (Pilot participant 12)

> "I heard from Springboard yesterday, they are still trying to help and have forwarded on my CV. They have links with the hotel industry, and I have applied for one or two of the jobs. At the jobcentre it is more for you to do it yourself. The work coaches will see you for 10 minutes." (Pilot participant 13)

Achievements as a result of participating

Most of the respondents reported several positive outcomes as a result of taking part in the programme. Most respondents had applied for a job or jobs and many respondents reported that they had improved their skills or gained new skills, gained qualifications, certificates or licenses, felt more confident about looking for work or about their ability to work or had made new contacts with employers as a result of taking part in the programme.

Some respondents had learned more about training or apprenticeship opportunities or attended a job interview. At the time of the survey, immediately after the work placement, only a few respondents had found a job, and only a few respondents were more likely to apply for an apprenticeship.