



Stewart McDonald MP
Member of Parliament for Glasgow South
House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA
stewart.mcdonald.mp@parliament.uk

Rt Hon Therese Coffey MP
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions

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Dear Minister,

I wanted to write to you regarding the Department for Work and Pension's 'Sector-based work academy programme' and 'JobCentre Plus Work Trials'.

A recent column in the New Statesman (August 19th 2020) highlighted the case of a young Universal Credit claimant, who lost their job as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and was subsequently asked to work two weeks unpaid as part of the 'Sector-based work academy programme'.

Having looked at it, I can see there is no guarantee of a wage or a job at the end of either the 'Sector-based work academy programme' or 'JobCentre Plus Work Trials', which can last anywhere up to six weeks.

That cannot be right.

Jobseekers and those on benefits participate in these programmes out of good faith, sometimes for weeks at a time, and to receive no wage and face the threat of no job at the end of it is extremely unfair.

As you are aware, I have long campaigned, and even presented a Bill to ban unpaid work trials, and I see this issue as no different.

Whilst it is important that we do what we can to help businesses get back on their feet after full lockdown, this cannot be to the detriment of potential employees, many who will be suffering mentally and financially as a consequence of the effects of the pandemic.

I would therefore urge you to change the terms of the programme and work trials to ensure that everyone is paid fairly and properly for the work that they do.

If that means financially supporting businesses that the DWP partners with to carry out these programmes to ensure people are properly paid, then that must be done.

It is estimated that £3billion worth of wages are lost every year in the UK, with unpaid work trials contributing to this total.

This is a national scandal and it is more important than ever, in a post-COVID world and the recovery that goes with it, that it cannot be allowed to continue.

I have said it many times before, and I shall continue to do so – a fair day's work deserves a fair day's pay.

Yours sincerely,