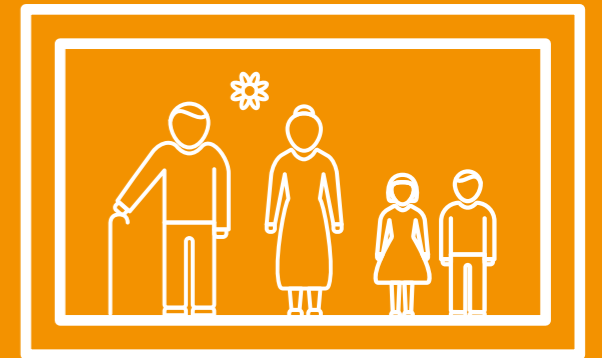
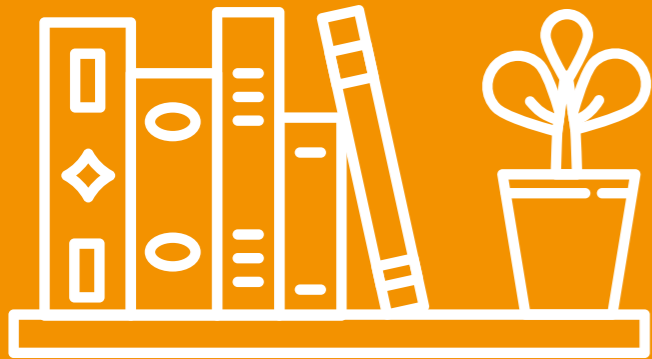




Government
Equalities Office

Women's
Business
Council



Rt Hon Amber Rudd MP
Home Secretary and Minister for Women and Equalities



I am delighted to launch this toolkit to support and encourage employers to increase opportunities for returners. These are people who have taken an extended career break, often to care for their children and other family members, and who would like to return to paid work. There are currently 2.1 million people out of the labour market caring for their home or family members, 89% of whom are women. Many of them have a wealth of skills, experience and talent. Despite this, they often struggle to get back into jobs at the right level. This is a huge loss for employers, the economy and those individuals.

That's why we allocated £5 million in the Spring 2017 Budget to support returners. We've created new returner programmes in the public sector and hope this toolkit will encourage more private sector employers to develop similar initiatives.

Organisations like Vodafone, Barclays and Deloitte are already running successful programmes and demonstrating their tangible

benefits. Running a returner programme is a practical step employers can take to address the gender pay gap and increase an organisation's gender and age diversity. As Vodafone's experience shows, returners can also bring new skills to an organisation and new ways of approaching challenges.

I hope the guidance offered here will encourage employers of all sizes and across all sectors to wake up to the talent that returners have to offer. By harnessing their experience, we can address skills gaps, increase the number of women in senior positions, and make the most of existing talent.

“There are currently 2.1 million people out of the labour market caring for their home or family members, 89% of whom are women. Many of them have a wealth of skills, experience and talent. Despite this, they often struggle to get back into jobs at the right level. This is a huge loss for employers, the economy and those individuals.”

Helen Lamprell, General Counsel & External Affairs Director, Vodafone UK



Helping more people return to work after a career break is becoming a key priority for UK businesses. At a time when many employers face skills shortages, recruiting returners – people with work experience who have taken a career break for caring reasons, and are looking to continue their careers – makes sense for businesses and benefits families as well as the UK economy.

That's why I'm delighted to introduce this best practice toolkit, created with the Women's Business Council and Government Equalities Office. The toolkit is based on best practice guidance developed by Timewise and Women Returners for the Government Equalities Office and is designed for businesses wishing to develop returner programmes of their own. This toolkit sets out the characteristics of a successful programme, clear guidelines on how to attract and recruit candidates, how to support returners, and more.

Vodafone aspires to be the world's best employer for women by 2025. Through initiatives like ReConnect, a programme which aims to hire 1,000 returners across Vodafone globally within three years, we are working to increase the proportion of women in management and leadership roles.

In this toolkit we share experiences from ReConnect as well as from organisations that have run returner programmes, including Golin and Enfield Council. By sharing what we have learned, we can benefit from each other's experiences and do more to help people return to work when the time is right for them.

“Vodafone aspires to be the world's best employer for women by 2025. Through initiatives like ReConnect, we are working to increase the proportion of women in management and leadership roles.”

The benefits of returner programmes

Returner programmes are recruitment programmes targeted at people returning to work after a long break (typically two years or more). They offer real benefits to employers and employees alike. As well as helping people who have taken a career break to return to work, they can also deliver real competitive advantage for employers.



The Business Case

Increased diversity

Returner programmes can support the drive for diversity in a number of ways:

- As 89% of people out of paid work caring for family or the home are female², returner programmes can support greater gender diversity across an organisation.
- Hiring returners can also improve the age diversity of an organisation, bringing in individuals with high levels of experience, maturity and stability.
- Returners often offer a different way of looking at problems and situations, which can help enhance an organisation's cognitive diversity.

"I recruited my Marketing Director through a returner programme and it was one of the best hires I've ever made. She's now been on the team for two years and has brought the energy of a graduate and the wisdom of senior-level experience to her department." **Bibi Hilton, Managing Director, Golin**

A way to tackle the skills shortage

- Some sectors, such as retail, hospitality and the tech sector are experiencing or facing a shortage of workers. A returner programme creates access to an extra pool of people who either have the right skills or could easily be trained to develop them.

Access to a high calibre talent pool

- There are a large number of women with professional/managerial experience who are economically inactive for caring reasons. The right programme could attract this talented pool of women back into the workplace.
- The majority of women aged 28 - 40 on a career break want to return to work at some point³, but many employers are not targeting this group. Those that do, get access to high-calibre employees.



Cost effective recruitment

- A returner programme can be a cost-effective way to bring a number of experienced hire employees into the organisation in comparison with using a recruitment agency, as organisations do not incur percentage-based success fees for successful hires.

Support for the female talent pipeline

- Hiring experienced returners is an innovative way to expand your female talent pipeline and boost the presence of more senior women in your organisation. This can also have a positive effect on your gender pay gap.

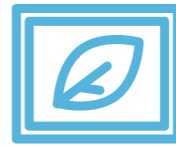


Improved attraction and retention rate

- A successful returner programme can have a positive impact on brand image, clearly signalling your organisation's support for parents and carers in the workplace.
- It shows that your organisation is open to and accepting of non-linear career paths, and values the role that caring plays in society. This can play a key role in both recruitment and retention of talented employees.

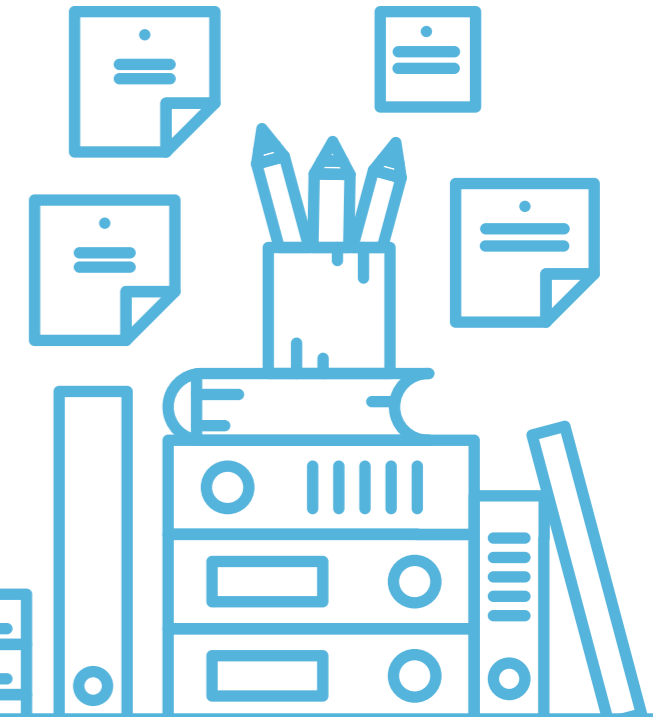
² December 2017 ONS Labour Market Statistics

³ Opportunity Now Project 2840, 2014 a survey of over 25,000 women between 28 and 40 (<https://gender.bitc.org.uk/all-resources/research-articles/project-28-40-report>)



Developing a returner programme

Having decided that you would like to bring one or more returners into your organisation, you need to decide which kind of programme to offer, and how it will be delivered. Here are some guidelines for designing a returner programme that suits your business.



1. Decide what type of programme

Returner programmes can take different forms, the majority are usually 'returnships'³ or supported hiring programmes:

Returnship – a fixed term contract for experienced hires, with a strong likelihood, but no guarantee, of an ongoing role at the end of the programme, if the placement period goes well for both sides.

Supported Hire – involves hiring returners directly into permanent experienced hire roles.

With both types, returners are paid competitively and given additional support such as coaching, training and/or mentoring to help them make a successful transition back to work.

“We know returners have a lot to offer employers in terms of skills and experience but lack flexible working opportunities. By sticking to the traditional 9-5 model, employers are missing out on the wealth of talent that’s out there. By making what are often minor adjustments to allow flexibility, many more returners will be able to simultaneously access work and manage their caring commitments.” **Jemeela Quraishi, Senior Development Manager, Member, Branch & Community Engagement, CIPD**

2. Build in flexibility

Flexibility is likely to be high on the list of priorities for candidates wanting to return to work following a break due to caring responsibilities. Here are three core elements to keep in mind to ensure that your returner programme is designed on this basis:



WHERE people need to work

Can the programme accommodate a degree of working from home, across different offices, or from a variety of other locations?



WHEN people need to work

Could the programme incorporate flexibility around start or finish times, compressed hours or, if it is a supported hire, annualised flexibility (such as term-time only)?



HOW MUCH people need to work

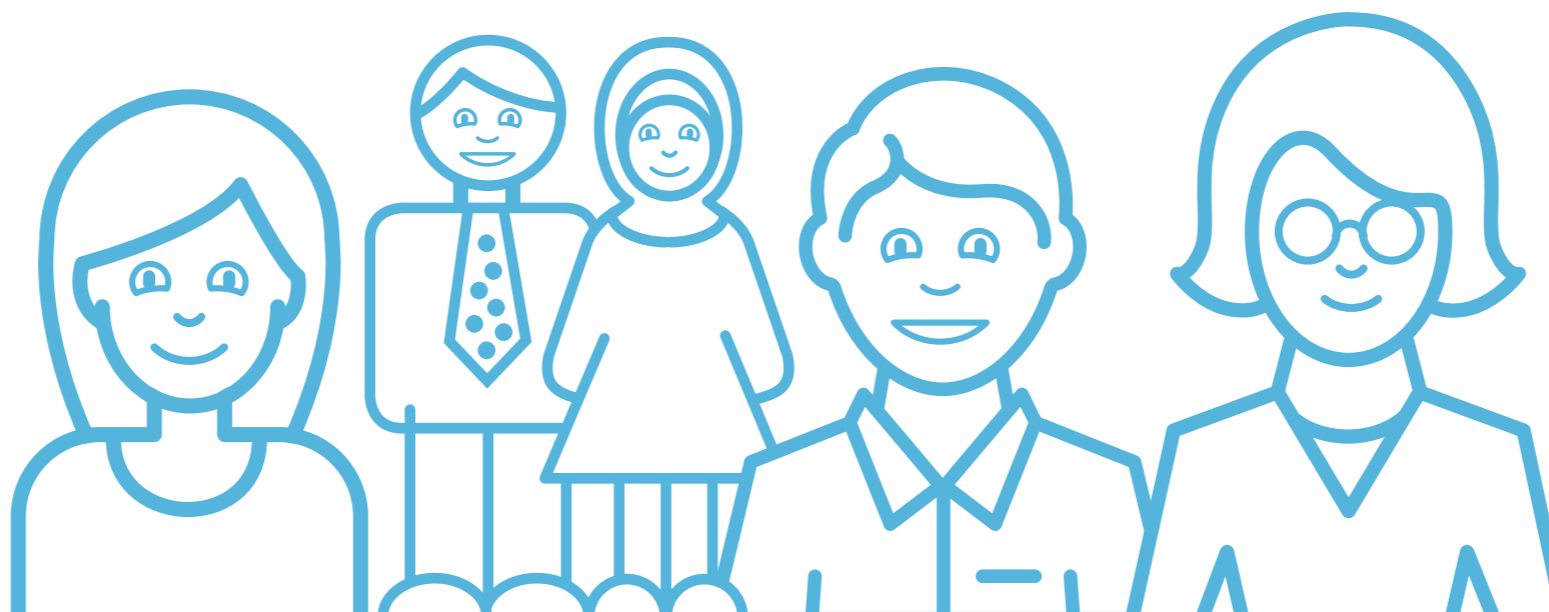
Could this programme be fulfilled on a part-time basis or, if it is a supported hire, include an element of unpaid leave?

³ The term 'returnships' was coined and trademarked by Goldman Sachs

3. How to attract and recruit candidates

The advert that you create, and the channels through which you promote it, can have a big impact on the quality and quantity of applicants. These principles will help you ensure that you are attracting high-calibre returners to your programme.

- Describe clearly what you're offering.
- Don't be too prescriptive on candidate requirements but be clear what the role entails.
- Target channels where returners are likely to be looking.



During the attraction and recruitment process you may want to:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Demonstrate your flexible credentials up front. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Understand your limits – what flexibility will or won't work. |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Raise it during the application process or interview. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Consider a trial period. |

The assessment process can be daunting for people who have had a career break, particularly those who have not applied for roles for a number of years. By making a few simple changes to your existing recruitment processes, you can reduce any anxiety and ensure returners have the opportunity to showcase the skills and experience that they bring:

- Keep the application process simple.
- Provide as much information as possible.
- Keep assessments straightforward.
- Discuss salary and flexibility during the interview process.
- Provide interview guidance for all interviewers.
- Follow up promptly.

Developing a programme – FIVE key questions

- 1 What is the business case for the programme?
- 2 Is there buy-in from senior management?
- 3 Is the programme positioned internally primarily as a talent attraction strategy with clear business benefits?
- 4 What type of programme is the best fit – a returnship or supported hire?
- 5 Can you structure the programme to offer the returners flexibility whilst meeting business needs?

4. How to support your returners

Providing a strong support framework helps to maximise the likelihood of a successful permanent hire. These are the key support elements:

Line Manager support is critical to ease returners back into work to provide structure, feedback and make connections.

Other support roles and components you may wish to consider are:

Programme Manager: to be the primary contact for returners and manage any issues.

Human Resources: for general support, including on-going roles.
Buddy: to help with day-to-day questions.

Induction and training: to help the returners to deliver in the new role.

Delivering the programme – FIVE key questions

- 1 Are your attraction and recruitment methods appropriate for returners?
- 2 Have line managers and staff been briefed on the programme?
- 3 Is there a support structure in place for the returner?
- 4 Has a mechanism for evaluating the programme been developed?
- 5 Have you considered how you can embed returners into your wider talent management strategy?

Have you checked that your programme meets the best practice guidelines?

Oluyemisi's story



I've spent my working life as a Project and Programme Manager. After five years out of the workplace caring for our foster child,

I started looking for work and soon realised that I had a serious obstacle – my CV was 'not current'. I didn't want to re-train as I wanted to go back to doing what I had been doing and had kept abreast of changes to the sector and attended networking events.

I came across the *Career Returners @ Enfield Council* programme in my local paper. Re-joining the workplace as a returner really worked for me. I had a post-holder to shadow, a

network of supportive returners, and coaching which enabled me to determine if the post was a good fit for me and for the organisation.

After four months, I was appointed as Strategic Programme Manager for the division. I now find myself in a very happy place, doing work I know how to do, and do well. I would recommend a returner programme to anyone contemplating returning to work after an extended break. It will help you adjust to the new realities and find that place you feel fulfilled.

Oluyemisi Morgan-Raiwe,
Strategic Programme Manager
Enfield Council

“Re-joining the workplace as a returner really worked for me. I now find myself in a very happy place, doing work I know how to do, and do well.”

Ali's story



Returning to work after an extended period of leave can be daunting. Having taken a three-year break from a successful career in the IT industry to refocus my time and energy on my family, I

was unsure if employers would still see me the same way – if they would recognise the value and talent that I could still offer. I know many women just like me, struggling to find a balance between supporting their family and furthering their professional career in a way that supports their need for flexibility.

Getting this balance right is important to me, which is why I chose to join the Vodafone ReConnect programme. ReConnect's primary goal is to recruit and re-engage professional men and women into roles that reflect their experience and expertise. When I first heard about ReConnect, I thought: how refreshing to find a business that sees value in attracting talent back into the workplace! The recruitment process enabled me to engage with members of the existing Vodafone community to really gain an

insight into the level of passion behind ReConnect. Vodafone have shown me just how committed they are to building a flexible, motivating environment where I can transition back into work in a supportive and structured manner.

ReConnect has helped rebuild my confidence. I feel empowered to achieve my goals and aspirations and relaunch my career. Getting to know Vodafone has been an engaging, inspiring process, and I'm excited to contribute to its future success.

Ali Davies, Senior Manager, Customer Experience, Vodafone UK

“My goal is to attract the very best people to work in Vodafone's Enterprise business. To do that, we have to explore every possible avenue to find the right people, and that's where the ReConnect programme comes in. Thanks to ReConnect, we have discovered great candidates with exactly the skills and experience we need.”

Andy May, Head of Enterprise Transformation, Vodafone UK

Returner programmes &

SMEs

While returner programmes are less frequent within small and medium sized businesses the experience, skills, perspective and flexibility that returners bring can be of particular benefit to SMEs.

Here are some specific points for SMEs to consider:

- **Supported hiring might work best.**
- **Consider returners for senior roles** – SMEs targeting returners usually report that they attract higher-calibre candidates than usual.
- **Recognise a returner's broad skills** – This breadth and flexibility of skills can be of real benefit in a smaller organisation.
- **Flexible hiring can have budget benefits** – Considering flexible working options at the point of hire may be particularly applicable for SME budgets.
- **Local roles in a supportive culture can appeal to returners.**
- **Gaining buy-in for a returner programme can be more straightforward** – Once the business rationale is clear and the senior management team are on board, implementing the programme should be much more straightforward for SMEs.

Laura's story



The first time I met a cohort of returners in 2015, I was blown away by their calibre and energy. I was also struck by the potential economic waste if they were not able to get back into work.

Since then, Golin has welcomed three returners on placement. Laura Weston, our first, has now had two phenomenally impactful years as our permanent marketing director. Our MD refers to her as “our best hire ever.” The Golin role has taken her out of her comfort zone and similarly, she has brought something relevant but very new to us.

We found that three months to be an ideal contract length for our returnship placement and that discrete, well-defined projects make for mutually successful outcomes.

For us, it is vital to secure senior buy-in upfront, to devote time upfront to meticulous job design, thorough line management, objective setting and coaching, and comprehensive on-boarding and to ensure that all parties involved are appropriately briefed. In return, you'll get someone with a lot to offer and an ambassador hugely committed to the success of your organisation.

Jane Fordham, Executive Director Marketing & Talent, Golin

“I was blown away by their calibre and energy. I was also struck by the potential economic waste if they were not able to get back into work.”

**To find out more visit:
womensbusinesscouncil.co.uk**