



Government
Equalities Office

Returning to work after time out for caring

A government call for evidence

**Launch date 28 August 2017
Respond by 23 October 2017**

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About this Call for Evidence

Who this is for

This consultation is for:

- those who have returned to work after time out caring for children or family
- those currently caring for children or family who would like to return to work
- employers
- organisations or individuals with knowledge of returners

Enquiries

If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation you can contact the team at returners.consultation@education.gov.uk

If your enquiry is related to the DfE e-consultation website or the consultation process in general, you can contact the DfE Ministerial and Public Communications Division by email: consultation.unit@education.gov.uk or by telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the [DfE Contact us page](#).

Additional copies of this document are available electronically and can be downloaded from <https://consult.education.gov.uk/government-equalities-office/returning-to-work-after-time-out-for-caring>

How to respond

To help us analyse the responses please use the online system wherever possible. Visit our consultations page at <https://consult.education.gov.uk/government-equalities-office/returning-to-work-after-time-out-for-caring> to submit your response by **23 October 2017**.

If for exceptional reasons, you are unable to use the online system, for example because you use specialist accessibility software that is not compatible with the system, you may download a PDF version of the form and email or post it.

Email: returners.consultation@education.gov.uk

Address:

Government Equalities Office
Department for Education
6th Floor, Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

Executive Summary

In the Spring Budget 2017, the government committed £5 million “to promoting returnships to the public and private sector, helping people back into employment after a career break.” The Conservative Manifesto 2017 then committed to “support companies to take on parents and carers returning to work after long periods of absence and back similar schemes in the public sector.”

These commitments drew on the experience of the private sector, where a small number of “returnships” have been offered in the UK since 2014. These programmes seek to support people to return to work after an extended gap in employment, by offering tailored support and experience.

Many of these programmes have been highly over-subscribed. Building on this demand, the government wants to extend support for returners across all sectors. On 28th August 2017, the government announced new programmes for returners in the public sector. This call for evidence will inform our work on returner programmes in the private sector, as well as those parts of the public sector which are not yet focused on recruiting returners.

The government is committed to ensuring that everyone has opportunities to develop, progress and utilise their skills in the workplace. Other policies in this area include introducing Shared Parental Leave, the provision of 30 hours free childcare, the right to request flexible working, and gender pay gap reporting.

The purpose of this call for evidence is to understand more about the specific barriers returners face in getting back to work, actions that are already in place to support people back to work, and what the government can do to support all employers to offer returners opportunities. We want to hear from those that have returned to work following caring, those who are currently caring but wish to return to work, organisations and academics working with these groups, and employers. Further background on returners and the questions we would like this call for evidence to answer can be found below. We are grateful to all those who respond to this call for evidence.

Background and Context

Who are returners?

For the purposes of this policy, we define returners as those who have taken a break from paid employment in order to care for children or other family members. We do not include those who have taken paid or unpaid leave for caring responsibilities without leaving employment e.g. those who take maternity leave and return to the same role with the same employer without a break in employment. Individual

returner programmes may use different definitions, for example, including those returning to work after ill health, depending on their specific objectives.

Returners can be men or women, but data from the Office for National Statistics shows that the majority (88%) of those not working because they are caring for their home or family are women.¹

Barriers to return

Although there is evidence that employers are struggling to recruit and fill key skills gaps², it is not always easy to return to work at the right level following a break for caring. A 2008 study by the Department for Work and Pensions found that barriers to returning to work included: a lack of suitable jobs, concerns about finding suitable affordable childcare, and concerns about whether returners would be financially better off back in work³. Research published by the London School of Economics found that partners' working conditions and workplace culture "had a major impact on the woman's so-called 'choice' to leave the workplace and to a large extent prevented the woman's return to work."⁴

Penalties faced by returners

Returners can also face penalties when they come back to work. Some studies have suggested that returners may take on jobs below their level of skill and experience in order to get back into paid work. A 2014 study of mothers looking for work found that "many women were prepared to downgrade their careers in exchange for flexibility."⁵

Research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies⁶ also shows that time out of paid work is associated with lower wages when returning. It finds that women earn around 2 per cent less on average for every year they spend out of paid work. For more highly educated women, the penalty is greater: they receive 4% less pay on average for each year they take out.

Flexible working

A number of studies⁷ stress the importance of flexible working in allowing returners to accommodate work and caring. The Modern Families Index 2017⁸ found that the most common reason for working flexibly was to accommodate childcare or eldercare: 81% of women and 70% of men who worked flexibly and who participated in the research did so to accommodate caring responsibilities. The findings suggest

¹ ONS [Economic Inactivity by reason](#), August 2017

² https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/resourcing-talent-planning_2017_tcm18-23747.pdf

³ <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/8735/1/rrep481.pdf>

⁴ http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/81486/1/Orgad_Heading%20home_2017_author.pdf

⁵ Timewise [Jobs not Careers](#) 2014

⁶ <https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/publications/bns/bn186.pdf>

⁷ Timewise, 2014, Working Families Index 2017

⁸ <https://www.workingfamilies.org.uk/publications/2017-modern-families-index-summary-report/>

that more parents would work flexibly if obstacles such as hostile work culture were removed.

Call for Evidence

The evidence outlined above shows that there is a role for government in supporting people to return to work, and to overcome existing barriers. This is why £5 million was allocated to supporting returners in addition to existing government action to increase free childcare provision and support flexible working. This call for evidence focuses on that £5 million, as other elements have been consulted on previously. It particularly asks for information about returners' experiences, employers' experiences of recruiting returners, and evidence on the barriers returners face and support available to them.

In order to respond to this call for evidence, please complete our online form wherever possible. This can be found at:

<https://consult.education.gov.uk/government-equalities-office/returning-to-work-after-time-out-for-caring>

If you submit your evidence online, it will reach us automatically. Otherwise, please send the relevant form below to:

Email: returners.consultation@education.gov.uk

Address:

Government Equalities Office
Department for Education
6th Floor, Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

Anyone may respond to this call for evidence, but it is primarily targeted at those groups stated above.

This call for evidence will close on **23 October 2017**. After this date, we will assess the evidence submitted and look to publish the findings in 12 weeks.

Handling of information from individuals

The purpose of this call for evidence is to gain anonymous information on returners' experiences and employers' experiences of recruiting returners, as well as evidence on the barriers returners face and support available to them. In order to maintain this anonymity, we do not wish to receive any information that could be used to identify individuals. We therefore request that individuals do not supply us with any information that could identify them or anyone else. Any information we do receive which identifies individuals will be deleted and will therefore not form part of this call for evidence.

Participating individuals will not be identifiable from any published reports. As a public authority, the Department for Education (of which the Government Equalities Office is a part) is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000. This means that non-personal information collected for the purpose of this call for evidence may be disclosed in accordance with that Act. Non-personal information may also be used in full or in a summary of responses to this call for evidence.

Please note that, unless specifically requested, contributions to this consultation will not be acknowledged as having been received.

Form 1: People who have returned to work

Please complete this form if you have returned to work following a break from paid work to care for others

<p>To begin with, we would like to ask you some questions about you and your circumstances. Please mark the relevant box on the right with an X.</p>	
<p>1. What is your gender?</p>	
Woman	
Man	
Other (if you wish to specify, please do)	
Prefer not to say	
<p>2. Are you:</p>	
Currently working full time, having returned from a break from paid work to care for others	
Currently working part time, having returned from a break from paid work to care for others	
<p>3. How long was your most recent break in paid work to care for others?</p>	
Less than one year	
One to two years	
Three to five years	
Six to ten years	
More than ten years	
<p>4. Who were you caring for during your most recent break from paid work? Please tick all that apply.</p>	
Children	
Partner	
Another relative	
Somebody else	
<p>5. What difficulties, if any, did you face in seeking to return to work after time out caring for others?</p>	

6. How did those difficulties affect your return to work?	
7. Did you receive support or information to help you return to work? This could be from employers or any other organisation.	
Yes	
No (continue to question 12)	
<u>If you did access support:</u>	
8. What type of support or information did you receive, and who provided it?	
9. What do you feel worked well about the support or information you received?	
10. What do you feel could be improved about the support or information you received?	
11. What other support or information, if any, would have been useful in helping you return to work, and why? Please continue to question 14.	

If you did not access support:

12. Were you aware of any support or information available to help you return to work?

13. What support or information, if any, would have been useful in helping you return to work, and why?

14. Is there anything further you would like to tell us about your experience of returning to work?

Form 2: People who would like to return to work

Please complete this form if you are currently not working because you are caring for others, but want to return to work at some point in the future

<p>To begin with, we would like to ask you some questions about you and your circumstances. Please mark the relevant box on the right with an X.</p>	
<p>1. What is your gender?</p>	
Woman	
Man	
Other (if you wish to specify, please do)	
Prefer not to say	
<p>2. How long have you been on a break in paid work to care for others?</p>	
Less than one year	
One to two years	
Three to five years	
Six to ten years	
More than ten years	
<p>3. Who are you caring for during this time? Please tick all that apply.</p>	
Children	
Partner	
Another relative	
Somebody else	
<p>4. What difficulties do you face seeking to return to work?</p>	
<p>5. How do those difficulties affect your ability and/or intention to return to work?</p>	
<p>6. Have you received any support or information to help you return to work? This could be from employers or any other organisation.</p>	
Yes	

No (continue to question 11)

If you have accessed support:

7. What type of support or information have you accessed and who provided it?

8. What do you feel worked well about the support or information?

9. What do you feel could be improved about the support or information?

10. What other support or information would be useful to help you return to work, and why? Please continue to question 12.

If you have not accessed support:

11. What support or information, if any, would be useful in helping you return to work, and why?

12. Is there anything further you would like to tell us about your experience?

Form 3: Employers

Please complete this form if you are an employer

<p>To begin with, we would like to ask you some questions about your organisation. Please mark the relevant box on the right with an X.</p>	
<p>1. What sector is your organisation from?</p>	
Public	
Private	
Voluntary	
<p>2. How many employees does your organisation have in the UK? If you are unsure, please give your best estimate.</p>	
1 to 9	
10 to 49	
50 to 249	
250 to 499	
500+	
<p>3. In what region(s) does your organisation have staff presence? Please tick all that apply: if you have staff in all regions, please tick only "Nationwide".</p>	
Nationwide	
London	
North West	
North East	
Yorkshire and the Humber	
West Midlands	
East Midlands	
East of England	
South West	
South East	
<p>Some employers run programmes that support people who are looking to return to work following a break from paid work for a caring responsibility.</p>	
<p>4. Has your organisation run a scheme of this type, or are you currently doing so?</p>	
Yes	
No (continue to question 7)	
Don't know (continue to question 7)	

<p>5. If your organisation has run a programme of this type or is currently doing so, please provide details of the programme, including the type of support you provided and details of who you targeted (e.g., gender of participants, types of career break included)</p>	
<p>6. We are planning to undertake additional research with employers who have operated returner programmes. If your organisation has operated a returner programme in the past, or are currently doing so, and would be willing to participate in this research, please supply your organisation's contact details below:</p>	
<p>7. What, if any, issues or difficulties have you faced when employing or seeking to employ those who are returning to work, following an extended break to care for others?</p>	
<p>8. Have you accessed any support or information designed to help you employ people who have been on a break from paid work for a caring responsibility?</p>	
Yes	
No (skip to question 12)	
Don't know (skip to question 12)	

<p>9. What type of support or information did you access, and who provided it?</p>
<p>10. What worked well about the support or information you accessed?</p>
<p>11. What could be improved about the support or information you accessed?</p>
<p>12. What support or information would encourage and/or make it easier for you to employ this group, and why? In responding, please consider specific interventions focused on this group as opposed to more widespread policy reforms.</p>
<p>13. What do you feel are the main benefits to employers of employing from this group?</p>
<p>14. Is there anything further you would like to tell us about your experience employing, or considering employing, people from this group?</p>
<p>15. We may undertake future research on this topic. If you would be interested in participating, please supply your organisation's contact information below.</p>

Form 4: Organisations or individuals with knowledge of returners

Please use this form if you represent an organisation, or are an individual, with experience or knowledge of the challenges faced by those returning to work following a break in paid work to care for others

<p>1. Please give a short description of the capacity in which you have experience or knowledge of this group.</p>
<p>2. In your experience, what are the key barriers or difficulties faced by this group?</p>
<p>3. What support or information are you aware of to help this group to return to work? This could be from employers or other organisations (including your own).</p>
<p>4. How useful do you feel the current support or information available to this group is?</p>
<p>5. What do you feel works well, and what could be improved?</p>

6. What other support or information do you feel would be useful in helping this group to return to work, and why? In responding, please consider specific interventions focused on this group as opposed to more widespread policy reforms.

7. Is there anything further you would like to tell us about your experience or knowledge of the challenges faced by this group in returning to work?

8. We may undertake future research on this topic. If you would be interested in participating, please supply your organisation's contact information below.

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