

News story: Career break returner programmes launched to help people back to work

New initiatives to help people return to work after career breaks have been launched today by the Minister of State for Apprenticeships, Skills and Women Anne Milton.

The returner programmes – part of the [£5 million fund announced in this year's Budget](#) – are formal schemes offered by employers to provide training and support to people who have taken time out of the workplace. The Government Equalities Office will be establishing four new returner schemes across the public sector.

They will be open to women and men, with the aim of giving people who have taken career breaks the opportunity to refresh their skills and build professional networks.

According to research by PwC, addressing the career break penalty could provide a £1.7 billion boost to our annual economic output. For female professionals, that could increase the annual earnings of that group by an average of £4,000 per woman.

Later this year, returners will be able to apply to programmes for social workers, allied health professionals, and civil servants.

It is part of the government's work to support parents and carers returning to work, build home-grown skills, and close the gender pay gap.

Minister of State for Apprenticeships, Skills and Women Anne Milton said:

We want to help people who are looking to get into work, which is why we are going to do more to help people get back into work after a career break.

Millions of us need to take time out from our careers, but it can be really hard to return. This is bad for the people affected, and the businesses who miss out on their talents. Women in particular find the routes back into employment closed off after taking time out to start a family.

These returner programmes will make it routine for women to go back to the workplace and get on with their careers. It ultimately should also help us to tackle the gender pay gap. I think it's important that the public sector leads by example and introduces programmes to support people returning to the workplace.

Working alongside the Local Government Association, Health Education England and Civil Service HR, the Government Equalities Office will look to establish returner programmes for:

- **Civil servants:** Civil Service HR will launch an initial returner programme for 50 returners across the UK this October. Returners will be offered paid placements between six weeks to six months, which will include a bespoke learning and development opportunities.
- **Social workers:** The Local Government Association (LGA) will build on the success of its Come Back to Social Work pilot and this November will partner with three regions across England to offer placements to 100 social work returners. The placements will include tailored training and development to prepare them to return to practice.
- **Allied health professionals:** The Department for Health will build on the existing nurses scheme and run a returner programme with Health Education England for 300 allied health professional returners across England, including physiotherapists, podiatrists, dietitians, and radiographers. The placements will include education, re-training and tailored support with the aim of returners ready to practice within six to 12 months.
- **Teachers:** GEO will also work with the Department for Education to explore a returner programme for teachers.

The government will also be working with business groups to identify how to boost further the opportunities for women returning to work.

The career returner programmes also form part of the government's work to tackle the gender pay gap, which is at a record low of 18.1%. By next April, the government is requiring all employers with 250 or more staff to report their gender pay gap and bonus gap.

Statistics show that the gender pay gap for women in their twenties is less than 7 per cent, but widens to 25% for women in their forties. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has found that women who take time out of work earn less when they return, receiving around 2 per cent less for every year spent out of paid work.

The new programmes will help develop best practice on what works to support career returners back to work most effectively. The Government Equalities Office has also launched a [public call for evidence](#) to allow individuals and employers to contribute to its understanding of how best to support people returning to work, particularly within the private sector. The call for evidence will run for eight weeks, concluding on 29 October. It will be an opportunity for returners, employers and the wider public to inform the government's future plans on returners.

Minister of State for Health Philip Dunne said:

Former allied health professionals have the talent and experience the NHS needs so we absolutely want to encourage them to return to work.

A new programme run by Health Education England will offer returners tailored education and re-training, so they feel confident and supported to return to providing outstanding patient care.

Professor Lisa Bayliss-Pratt, Director of Nursing and Deputy Director Education and Quality at Health Education England said:

Health Education England is extremely pleased to be able support AHPs back into our NHS as we know they contribute expert skills across the whole health and care system. Clinicians of all backgrounds returning to practice have a vital role to play in our NHS, as they tend to be more experienced and highly skilled.

In our work with AHPs, HEE will seek to build on our successful "Come Back to Nursing" campaign focused on nurses who have left the nursing profession but would come back if the right training and support was available. Over 2445 nurses have successfully completed a returner programme ready for employment on the front line to provide care and support for patients.