

Press release: £500,000 awarded to organisations helping to tackle causes of the gender pay gap

Five organisations in England have been awarded £489,050 from a new government start-up fund to help people who have taken lengthy career breaks to care for others get back into work, the Minister for Women Victoria Atkins announced today (22 September).

In the UK, nine out of ten potential returners are women. Studies have shown that time out of work and fewer years of full-time work are two of the reasons women struggle to progress at work – contributing towards the gender pay gap.

The five grant recipients from a £1.5 million government start-up fund will support parents and carers back into the workplace through training, refreshing skills and facilitating work placements.

They will also work directly with 79 employers from a range of sectors including law, finance, tech, retail, communications, advertising and marketing.

Minister for Women Victoria Atkins said:

For too long, taking time out of work to care for others has cut short careers and brilliant, talented women are unable to re-enter industries which will not support them to return. This is a huge loss not only to those individuals, but to our economy and businesses all over the country.

We are investing in returners to work – giving them the opportunity to refresh and grow their skills and encouraging employers to change their outdated recruitment processes. By taking action on this issue we can grow the economy and achieve true equality in our workplaces.

McKinsey research found that if women stay in the labour market, work in more productive sectors and work longer hours, there is the potential for £150 billion to be added to the annual GDP in 2025.

This pilot funding will demonstrate to companies that government means business – and inspire them to take their own steps to encourage returners with a vast array of skills back into the jobs market.

The support will help people with caring responsibilities from across the country to return to work – boosting the economy and helping to tackle the gender pay gap.

Launched on 4 March 2018, the government guaranteed £1.5 million to get people with caring responsibilities back into work. £1,010,950 more funding will be awarded this autumn.

Notes to editors:

Winning organisations:

Changing Lives: £95,000

Changing Lives is a national charity that provides specialist support to vulnerable people and families. With our grant they will help 80 returners in the North East who have complex needs such as: homelessness, sexual exploitation, addictions, mental and physical health problems, long-term unemployment and poverty.

Women Returners: £110,000

Women Returners is a social consultancy supporting returners. They are the established experts in this area, have supported over 50 employers to develop their own returner programmes and developed our Best Practice guidance.

Our grant will allow them to support 100 returners through workshops and training in the legal sector in the North West and Leeds. They will also reform the recruitment and support practices of 12 law firms to enable them to target returners in the future.

St Helens Chamber: £187,000

St Helen's Chamber is a chamber of commerce that places emphasis in the role the private sector can play in supporting the broader community, particularly in an area of high unemployment.

Our grant will support them to engage 120 returners through career coaching using a pop-up classroom. They will equally engage employers in the local area to identify suitable job opportunities and broker recruitment.

Creative Equals: £65,000

Creative Equals is an organisation supporting returners in the creative sector. Our grant will allow them to run workshops for 30 returners and support them into roles with 15 employers that will have their recruitment and support practices reformed.

Back2businessship delivered by f1 Recruitment: £32,000

Back2businessship has a track record of getting returners back to work in the marketing, PR and communications sectors. This includes career changers, parents, carers, returners and flexible workers. With our grant and match-funding from our Employer Company Ambassadors, back2businessship will work with 25 employers in the Thames Valley, including SMEs, to target job opportunities for 40 returners in the technology, FinTech and financial services sector.

Quotes from winners

Stephen Bell, OBE, Changing Lives CEO, said:

We are delighted to have been successful in securing funding from the Returner's Fund. Here at Changing Lives we are dedicated to supporting those with multiple and complex needs to overcome the barriers they face. This fund will allow us to develop our Employment Services to empower women to move back into employment and fulfil their potential.

Ali Hannan, Creative Equals Founder and CEO, said:

We are so honoured to receive this fund, which will mean we can build more bridges back to work for creative women. It will mean we can scale up our returnship programme to accelerate the number of senior women, as currently only about 14% of Creative Directors in the UK are women, and just 1-2% are BAME women.

Without women curating, editing and director advertising and media, we believe work often fails to resonate with our powerful audience of female consumers (women make 85% of all purchasing decisions, yet 55% of mothers feel advertisers don't understand them).

At the moment, with out-dated portfolios, a biased recruitment sector, and a CV-gap, returning mothers find it difficult to regain their place on the career ladder.

In partnership with progressive agencies and companies in the sector who are committed to inclusion and diversity, we hope this will rebuild careers, close the sector gender pay gap (up to 45% in some advertising agencies) and reshape the future of advertising to reflect the audiences we serve.

Julianne Miles, Women Returners Managing Director, said:

We are delighted that this government funding will enable us to kick-start a much-needed initiative to enable legal professionals to resume their careers at a suitable level after an extended career break.

Women Returners, in partnership with The Law Society, will pilot Law Returners, a cross-company returnship in Manchester and Leeds in early 2019. The aim is to create a sustainable business-led model to apply across other regions.

Following the rapid growth of returnships in sectors such as

financial services, telecoms and construction, we are excited to be extending a concept with proven success into the law sector in Northern England.

Liz Nottingham, founder of Back2businessship and Amanda Fone, co-founder Back2businessship and CEO of Delivery Partner f1 recruitment & search ltd, said:

Back2businessship has been committed to helping women get back to their careers in marketing and communications since 2014.

We are thrilled that the funding from the Government Equalities Office (GEO), which will be match-funded by local corporate employers, including Oracle, will help us take our programme for marketing and comms returners to Reading and the M3/M4 corridor with a focus on the technology, FinTech, telecommunications and financial services sectors.

The Back2businessship programme not only re-orientates our returners back to the workplace but helps them find paid contract and permanent work as an outcome. Our hugely popular speed dating event will showcase the calibre and standard of our returners to local businesses.

Tracy Mawson, St Helen's Chamber Deputy Chief Executive, said:

Local businesses tell us that difficulties in recruiting staff is holding back their growth and making them reluctant to create new jobs.

We are delighted that through this project, we will be able to work with returners – in our view a valuable and untapped resource in the local labour market.

We are very excited about the prospect of supporting both businesses and returners to create new job opportunities.

Further information

- A further £1 million of funding will be awarded later in the year.
- The government is committed to building a society where gender has no bearing on a person's pay or opportunity, and is encouraging employers to take targeted actions to close the gaps in their organisations. Greater support for potential returners, combined with increased provision of flexible working and shared parental leave, are part of a range of measures that can eliminate inequality in the workplace.
- Returners are defined as people with existing work experience who have taken an extended career break for caring or other reasons and who are

either economically inactive or now working in lower paid, temporary or part-time work or in home businesses or freelance roles.

- Returner Programmes are programmes targeted at people returning to work after a long break (typically 2 years or more). There are many forms of returner programme, including return to practice and retraining programmes.
- For more details, please call the GEO press office on: 0207 023 0600