



Government  
Equalities Office

# **Analysis of responses to the call for evidence on returning to work after time out for caring**

**March 2018**

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# Executive Summary

## 1. Introduction

In December 2017, the Government Equalities Office (GEO) commissioned York Consulting to review the responses to a call for evidence on 'Returning to work after time out for caring'. The consultation was aimed at gathering the views of:

- Returners - Those who have returned to work after spending at least one year out caring for children/family;
- Potential returners - Those who have been caring for children/family for at least one year, but who would like to return to work at some point in the future;
- Employers; and
- Organisations or other individuals with knowledge of returners.

A copy of the paper version of the consultation is available at Annex A.

## 2. Aims and objectives

The aim of the study was to provide an initial analysis of the responses from the call to evidence from the perspectives of returners, potential returners, employers and other interested organisations.

## 3. Methodology

Based on the primary objectives of the review, a thematic approach to the response analysis was undertaken. A draft coding framework was developed and revised as part of the initial coding process and in consultation with the department. The main limitation of this review was that those responding to the call for evidence were self-selecting and therefore not likely to be representative. As such, findings should be treated as qualitative research, and not as robustly representative of the populations under consideration.

## 4. Key findings

### Respondents

The call for evidence elicited 737 responses: most (90% of respondents) were from individuals, either returners or potential returners; within this, most responses were from women (95%). A small number of supporting organisations (7% of respondents) and employers (2%) also responded to the call. Both returners and potential returners were most likely to have taken a career break to care for children (85% and 78% of respondents, respectively). In addition, a third of potential returners were caring for relatives and partners and more than a tenth were caring for children and relatives/partners. Potential returners were also more likely to be caring for a child with

SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) and to have been out of the workplace for longer.

## Barriers

Returners and potential returners<sup>1</sup> identified both structural and personal barriers to returning to the workplace. The main structural issues identified were lack of flexible work opportunities, lack of suitable and affordable care, and attitudes/discrimination from employers and recruitment agencies and recruitment processes. The main internal/personal barriers identified were returners' lack of relevant and up-to-date skills and their low self-esteem and confidence. For potential returners, the lack of flexible work opportunities and suitable care for children with SEND were identified as particular challenges. In addition, individual respondents also felt that they had been discriminated against when seeking employment because of their age and/or disabilities (both their own disabilities and their children's disabilities). There was clear evidence of returners downgrading (i.e., taking lower skilled and lower paid jobs) to return to the workforce. Organisational views of the barriers facing returners were the same as those identified by returners and potential returners. The main barriers identified by employers in employing returners were their lack of relevant or up-to-date skills, knowledge and experience and their inability to offer returners flexible working opportunities.

## Support

Most returners and potential returners had not received any support to return to work. Furthermore, those who had not received support were unaware of any support or information available to help them to return to work. Most returners who had received support had done so via their employers, i.e. they were returners with a job to go to. For potential returners, support was most likely to have been provided by support organisations, e.g. those supporting carers, to help improve their readiness for work.

Over half of those individual respondents who received support were positive about it, identifying support from colleagues and/or employers and the quality of information and advice received as particularly helpful. Nevertheless, this did mean that over a quarter of returners and nearly half of potential returners expressed either mixed or negative views about the support they had received. The main areas for improvement identified focused on improving the offer (i.e., the quantity and quality of the support available), widening access to support (in relation to benefit entitlements and eligibility for support with caring) and increasing awareness (of the challenges carers face in returning to the workplace).

A small number of employers had received support to employ returners. This mainly focused on accessing information and support from support organisations to employ returners. When asked what additional support would be helpful to them in employing

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<sup>1</sup> Returners and potential returners are referred to collectively in the report as individual respondents

returners, employers felt that support and information on the barriers faced by carers in returning to work would be beneficial.

## 5. Conclusion

This call for evidence has provided useful insights into the views of returners and potential returners and, to a lesser degree, the views of organisations with knowledge of returners and employers.

Though this does not represent a robust survey of the returner population and those engaged with them, the evidence has offered insights into a range of issues and has highlighted how recruitment processes discriminate against people who have taken time out for caring. There was clear evidence of returners downgrading (i.e. in terms of taking lower skilled and lower paid jobs) to return to the workforce. It has shown that support needs to be tailored to the specific needs of this group, i.e. most will continue to have ongoing caring commitments when they return to the workforce, which is why the need for flexibility is so critical. Returners want practical support: to explain gaps in their CV, know how to obtain references, and complete online application processes. Support is also needed for older carers returning to the workplace.

Although only a small number of responses were received from employers, they highlighted the challenges they face in employing returners in terms of ensuring returners have the appropriate skills, knowledge and experience and the difficulties employers face in offering flexible working opportunities. Employers who responded to the call for evidence said they would like more information and support in addressing the barriers faced by returners.

The evidence provided here will be useful in supporting further research in this area and has identified the need for additional research on the needs of lower-paid lower-skilled returners.



# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

In the 2017 Spring Budget the Government committed to “promoting returnships to the public and private sector, helping people back into employment after a career break”<sup>2</sup>. Potential returners are defined as those who have taken time out of paid employment for at least a year to care for children or other family members and are potentially, or intending, to return to employment<sup>3</sup>. A returner is defined as someone who has now returned to employment<sup>2</sup>. This disproportionately affects women, with official statistics indicating that 88% of those currently economically inactive because they are looking after their home or family are women<sup>4</sup>. Research also suggests that in England an estimated 315,000 unpaid carers of working age, predominantly women, have left full-time or part-time employment to provide care<sup>5</sup>.

Barriers to returning to work include: lack of suitable jobs, lack of suitable and affordable childcare or social care support, returners’ concerns that their skills are not up to date, concerns that returners will not be financially better off in work<sup>6</sup>, and/or the culture of the workplace making it difficult to return to work<sup>7</sup>.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that returners are taking on jobs below their skill and experience level and are more likely to receive lower wages, with many returning to part-time work rather than full-time working. There is clearly a need for more flexible working opportunities to allow returners to accommodate their work and caring roles.

Furthermore, research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (2016) found that taking time out of paid work is associated with lower wages when women return to work. They found that hourly wages for women who return after a career break were, on average 2% lower for each year that they have taken out and for more highly educated women this rose to 4% lower per year<sup>8</sup>. This also has implications for the gender pay gap<sup>9</sup>. The pay gap widens as women get older due to their taking career breaks and being more likely to come back

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<sup>2</sup> <https://consult.education.gov.uk/government-equalities-office/returning-to-work-after-time-out-for-caring/>

<sup>3</sup> [https://consult.education.gov.uk/government-equalities-office/returning-to-work-after-time-out-for-caring/supporting\\_documents/Returners%20Call%20for%20Evidence%20Document.pdf](https://consult.education.gov.uk/government-equalities-office/returning-to-work-after-time-out-for-caring/supporting_documents/Returners%20Call%20for%20Evidence%20Document.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Economic Inactivity by reason (March 2018 data):

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/economicinactivity/datasets/economicinactivitybyreasonnotseasonallyadjustedinac01nsa>

<sup>5</sup> National Institute for Health Research. *Supporting Carers to Stay in Employment*.

<sup>6</sup> <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/8735/1/rrep481.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> [http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/81486/1/Orgad\\_Heading%20home\\_2017\\_author.pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/81486/1/Orgad_Heading%20home_2017_author.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/8428>

<sup>9</sup> The gender pay gap is an equality measure that shows the difference in median hourly earnings between women and men.

into work on a part-time basis. Statistics show that the gender pay gap for women in their 20s is less than 8% but widens to 25% for women in their 40s<sup>10</sup>.

Supporting women back into work at the correct level following a career break can be a way of helping to address the gender pay gap. Both within the private and public sector, support for returners is available. However, the extent to which returners can access these and other opportunities is extremely variable and dependent on support from employers, other constraints returners are likely to face (e.g. care commitments) and the nature of the job they are returning to. Most of these schemes are focused on professional roles and there is much less evidence of support available for lower-paid or lower-skilled roles. The need for flexible working opportunities which allow returners to accommodate work and caring has been identified by several studies<sup>11</sup>. The Modern Families Index 2017<sup>12</sup> found that the most common reason for working flexibly was to accommodate ongoing care commitments: the research found that 81% of women and 70% of men who worked flexibly did so to accommodate caring responsibilities.

In August 2017, the Government Equalities Office in the Department for Education (DfE) issued a call for evidence on 'Returning to work after time out for caring'. The consultation was aimed at gathering the views of:

- Returners: those who have returned to work after spending at least one year out caring for children or family;
- potential returners: those who have been caring for children/family for at least one year, but who would like to return to work at some point in the future;
- Employers; and
- Organisations or other individuals with knowledge of returners.

The aim of the consultation was to find out more about returners' experiences, employers' experiences of recruiting returners and to gather evidence on the barriers they face and support available to them.

## 1.2 Aims

The aim of the study was to provide an initial analysis of the responses from the call to evidence from the perspectives of returners, potential returners, employers and organisations. The primary objectives were to build the evidence base on:

- the barriers returners face in returning to the labour market

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<sup>10</sup> Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, 2017.

<sup>11</sup> Timewise, 2014, Working Families Index 2017

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.workingfamilies.org.uk/publications/2017-modern-families-index-summary-report/>

- the barriers employers face in employing returners
- the support that is currently available to help returners return to the labour market
- what interventions work in helping returners return to the labour market, and what support do employers and returners feel would be beneficial
- the extent to which returners occupationally downgrade (i.e., take on jobs at a lower skill level to enable them to access conditions that allow them to return to the labour market)
- what employers view to be the benefits and disadvantages of employing returners.

## 1.3 Report structure

This report covers the methodology used, the key findings from the analysis of the responses to the call for evidence, and conclusions arising from the research.

## 1.4 Methodology

There were four different versions of the survey, one for each of the groups identified (returners, potential returners, employers and organisations or other individuals with knowledge of returners). The surveys included a mix of open and closed questions and were available to complete online or on paper (the majority of responses were completed online). The paper version of the surveys is included in Annex A.

Based on the primary objectives of the review, York Consulting undertook a thematic approach to the analysis of the survey responses. Survey responses were uploaded into a draft coding frame. An initial 20 responses (five from each respondent type) were selected to review and revise the draft coding frame. Following this, we organised a briefing session for staff involved in coding the responses to talk them through the process, code example responses and discuss allocation of new codes and the highlighting of interesting findings. Our final coding frame is provided in Table 1 (Annex B).

## 1.5 Limitations

The main limitation for this review was that those responding to the call for evidence were self-selecting and therefore not likely to be representative. Nevertheless, they provide an insightful overview of the issues faced both by returners/potential returners, organisations supporting returners and employers seeking to employ returners. The majority of responses were from returners and potential returners, with a small number from employers and organisations.

Whilst individual respondents were not asked about the types of roles they were seeking to secure or were currently employed in, analysis of the responses suggests that there were relatively few responses from lower-paid returners.

## 2. Findings

This section presents the key findings from the analysis focused on the barriers and support identified by respondent type, along with areas for improvement.

### 2.1 Respondents

There were 737 responses to the call for evidence. Most (90%) responses were from returners and potential returners (see Figure 1 in Annex C). A relatively small number of organisations (7%) and employers (2%) also responded.

#### 2.1.1 Returners and potential returners

Returners and potential returners were asked how long their career break was for. Returners were most likely to have been away from the workplace for under a year and least likely to have been out for more than ten years. Whereas potential returners were most likely to have been out for one to five years<sup>13</sup> and least likely to have been out for under a year. Nearly half of all potential returners had been out for six years or more (see Table 2 in Annex C).

The majority of returners and potential returners had taken a career break to care for children (see Table 3 in Annex C). In addition, a third of potential returners and nearly a fifth of returners were caring for relatives (most commonly parents) and partners. Around a tenth of potential returners were caring for children and relatives.

Most respondents to this survey were caring for one category of person (i.e. just a child, or just an older person; see Table 4 in Annex C). The majority of returners' and potential returners' responses were from women (see Figures 2 and 3 in Annex C). This broadly reflects data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) which shows that 88% of those not working because they are caring for their home or family are women<sup>14</sup>.

Analysis showed that male respondents were most likely to be caring for relatives and/or partners: more than three quarters of male respondents were doing this. Only a small proportion were caring for children and two of these were also caring for partners or other

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<sup>13</sup> Due to a mistake when setting up the questionnaire for potential returners, the categories for length of time out of work differ from returners. Potential returners were given one to five years and three to five years categories, rather than one to two and three to five years categories. We therefore merged the one to five and three to five categories into a one to five years category for the potential returners.

<sup>14</sup> Economic Inactivity by reason (March 2018 data): <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/economicinactivity/datasets/economicinactivitybyreasonnotseasonallyadjustedinac01nsa>

relatives. Half of male returners had taken a career break of less than a year, compared to a third of female returners<sup>15</sup>.

## 2.1.2 Organisations

The main types of organisations or individuals with knowledge of or supporting returners that responded to the call for evidence were:

- supporting returners within individual organisations (private, public and voluntary) (13)
- charitable and voluntary organisations supporting specific groups, most frequently carers, but also bereaved parents, individuals with life-limiting illnesses and black and minority women (12)
- training providers and recruitment specialists focused on supporting returners (9)
- individuals with knowledge of returners (9)
- organisations and professional bodies providing sector-specific support for returners e.g. education and health (5)
- social enterprises and organisations with a specific focus on providing/promoting flexible working opportunities (4)
- Government-funded programmes with a focus on supporting people into employment e.g. the troubled families programme (3).

## 2.1.3 Employers

Half of all employers that responded were from organisations with more than 500 employees (six from the private sector and three from the public sector). The remaining responses were evenly divided between employers with 1-9, 10-49, 50-249 and 250-449 employees (see Figure 4 in Annex C).

Most (11 out of 18) employers that responded to the call for evidence were from the private sector, with a small number of responses coming from the public (4) and voluntary sector (3) (see Figure 5 in Annex C).

In terms of geographical location, employers who responded to the call for evidence were most likely to be nationwide employers or located in London and the south east. There were no employer responses from three Government Office Regions (North East, East

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<sup>15</sup> Some caution in interpreting these findings is required given the variation in the numbers of male and female respondents, though as mentioned previously, this response rate is likely to be broadly reflective of the gender balance of the returner population. Additionally, although these respondents do not fit the proposed criteria for a returner (being on a career break for over a year) it was felt their contribution and insights would still be valuable.

Midlands and the South West). Annex C contains graphs (1-6) for the above employer data (see Figure 6 in Annex C).

## **2.2 Barriers**

This section explores the barriers returners and potential returners face in returning to the labour market and the barriers employers face in employing returners.

### **2.2.1 Barriers returners and potential returners face in returning to the labour market**

The barriers can be broadly categorised into structural/external barriers and internal/personal barriers. The main structural/external barriers identified (see Table 5 in Annex C) from the responses received were:

- lack of flexible working opportunities and suitable jobs
- lack of suitable and affordable care/support for the cared for person
- attitudes/discrimination from employers/recruitment agencies and recruitment processes.

The main internal/personal barriers identified were:

- lack of relevant /up to date skills
- low self-esteem/confidence.

#### **2.2.1.1 Lack of flexible working opportunities and suitable jobs**

Lack of flexible working opportunities were identified by a third of returners and potential returners and was the most common barrier identified by returners. Most of these respondents were continuing to care and, therefore, wanted flexible working opportunities which could accommodate these commitments.

Lack of suitable part-time jobs at the level which respondents were working prior to taking time off for caring was identified as an issue. Finding part-time or flexible employment opportunities that were financially viable to enable people to pay for care and travelling costs was a huge challenge. Finding permanent, part-time employment was a further barrier raised by respondents. Many said they needed jobs in school hours which were not available or needed flexibility to take time off if children were ill, or to take unpaid leave in holidays.

Returners also stated that they had been unable to return to their previous roles because of the lack of flexible working opportunities available (see, culture of the organisation section 2.2.1.4). Geographical restrictions on job search due to caring commitments also limited the jobs that were available to returners and potential returners. Partners' working

patterns also restricted the employment opportunities returners and potential returners could access.

Those wanting to work full-time also identified a lack of flexibility in terms of opportunities for compressed hours, working from home, gradual return to full-time hours, or different start and finish times so that they could accommodate their caring responsibilities.

Many potential returners highlighted the difficulties they experienced in returning to their previous career because they were unable to find employment that was flexible enough to accommodate their need to care for children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND). Those respondents with children with SEND found this to be a considerable barrier due to the need to take time off for hospital appointments, meetings with specialist agencies, and when their child was ill or excluded from school.

A further issue identified by respondents was that many employers will only consider flexible working once an employee has been in a job for a while, meaning returners and potential returners were even less likely to be able to secure flexible working opportunities.

### **Barriers: lack of flexibility and suitable opportunities**

*“I quit my well-paid job of eight years which I absolutely loved.... They couldn't offer a phased return to work or any flexibility on returning gradually back up to full-time hours.”* (Potential returner)

*“Employers I have had interviews with have openly told me they cannot be flexible around my continuing caring duties meaning I have not been offered the positions I applied for.”* (Potential returner)

*“Flexibility of hours to fit around young children/school... I find it very depressing that as a skilled person I have to choose between my career or my children. I genuinely believe the flexibility I need to do both is possible especially with all the technology available today. It seems that we are stuck in a tradition of 9-5 in offices rather than working to ensure we have the right people in the right roles and working together to achieve the right flexibility for everyone.”* (Potential returner)

*“Fitting in work with childcare and lack of flexible working hours/home working. I returned to private practice initially (now work in the public sector), and started part-time, gradually building up but cover for school holiday periods was difficult and no-one kept an eye on my files while I was away on leave. In the end (in private practice) I was effectively squeezing a full-time job into a part time day, working through lunch hours, and working at home in the evening, to keep up.”* (Returner)

*“Finding a part time job during school hours is difficult. Finding a company flexible with various appointments relating to a child with severe learning difficulties is very difficult.”*



(Returner)

*"Finding an employer who was actually open to offering part-time work (four days a week). I had three job offers all said they were open to discussing it but when it came down to it two of the three wouldn't offer any flexibility at all - including starting early and leaving early (i.e. still doing a full working day) for nursery pick up."* (Returner)

*"Location was also an issue in that it was hard to find a provision near home which ticked all the boxes."* (Returner)

### **2.2.1.2 Lack of suitable and affordable care**

Lack of suitable, affordable, and good quality care was identified by half of potential returners and around a third of returners as a barrier to returning to work. This was the most common barrier identified by potential returners, many of whom were caring for children with SEND. The cost of appropriate childcare meant that for many respondents it was not financially viable for them to return to work, particularly given the challenges of returning to employment at their former level. A lack of childcare within rural areas, a lack of wraparound care and finding provision that was faith and culturally appropriate were also identified as additional barriers by individual and organisational respondents.

The availability of childcare, which could meet the needs of children and parents' work commitments, was identified as a further barrier. For many, the inflexibility (and cost) of current childcare provision made returning to work challenging. For shift workers, this was further compounded by the lack of childcare available which fitted in with their shift patterns. A number of respondents stated that they would like to work full time, but the lack of affordable childcare made this impossible and had a negative impact on family finances.

For respondents with children with SEND, the main issue was a lack of suitable childcare that could meet their child's needs. A number of parents stated that their child's needs were such that they would not be able to access any form of childcare. Even where SEND childcare was available, the costs of such care made it prohibitively expensive for parents. Similarly, issues of finding suitable care for adult children with disabilities meant that respondents had been unable to return to the workforce.

### **Barriers: lack of suitable and affordable care**

*"Childcare costs made it not worthwhile to return to work."* (Potential returner)

*"Cost of childcare means that jobs paying less than 1.5 times the minimum wage are not worth taking, so retraining or finding any low-level job is not an option, which limits opportunities."* (Potential returner)

*“The cost of care that is appropriate to my child's needs is too much and as a single parent it would not be financially viable to return to work whilst paying out so much for childcare.” (Potential returner)*

*“I would like to work full time which financially I really need to, but the childcare costs would be more than my pay.” (Returner)*

*“After school club and breakfast club should be available at all schools, my children's school has neither.” (Returner)*

*“Childcare only available at set times. No flexibility so paid for days it was not needed. Unable to get set shifts at work and flexible working request turned down.” (Returner)*

*“More access to either childcare that does school pickups or afterschool clubs that finish later and breakfast clubs that start earlier to support shift workers. Finding work that allows for flexibility in a 24-hour working world is impossible, so childcare needs to change.” (Returner)*

*“I need a childcare provider who can cope with my SEN child.” (Potential returner)*

*“Lack of carers available to care for my adult child while I am at work.” (Potential returner)*

*“Finding affordable care options to be virtually non-existent as my son is disabled and requires continuous one to one care which childcare providers in the area cannot accommodate.” (Potential returner)*

### **2.2.1.3 Attitudes/discrimination of employers and recruitment agencies**

Another key structural barrier identified by individual respondents was regarding the attitudes and discrimination of employers and recruitment agencies and recruitment processes. Just under a third of returners and potential returners identified this as an issue. The main forms of discrimination identified through the responses focused on:

- securing interviews
- employers' unwillingness to consider requests for flexible or part-time working
- recruitment agencies unwillingness to put candidates forward who asked potential employers to consider flexible working (including job shares and part-time contracts)
- employers' and recruitment agencies' unwillingness to consider applicants because of gaps in their CVs.

## **Barriers: attitudes/discrimination of employers**

*"I was not permitted to return to my job part time: a deputy head teacher. The head refused my request to go down to three days a week. There was a protracted process, after which I was told to take up my full-time post or leave. Career wise I am now back eight years." (Returner)*

*"My employer's policy on career breaks was very clear and after 15 years continuous employment and a good track record performing in a range of management roles I felt justified in applying. My seniors were supportive and followed the process, but my sense was that they thought I was disloyal and that I should have been able to cope without the break. I applied for a new job a few weeks after returning (with a different employer) because I felt that the career break was detrimental to my progress." (Returner)*

*"Employers claim to be understanding but aren't - once you have been out of the working environment it is incredibly difficult to get another job at the level you were previously at. Even if you do, you are at a disadvantage to those who don't have children and can travel with work or work long hours as required, making it difficult to progress." (Returner)*

*"I have an excellent record of attendance and punctuality; my performance has always been good and prior to maternity leave had been identified as having high potential to progress quickly to senior leadership roles. In trying to return I felt like a very low priority who nobody really knew how to deal with, rather than someone who might be able to make a positive contribution to the business. When I didn't receive information on internal vacancies it made me feel like it wasn't worth applying for them as it was likely that they'd already been deemed unsuitable for flexible working. It felt like the only job I was approached about was one that no one else wanted to do, and even then, I wasn't contacted until the very last minute." (Returner)*

*"A big stress is handling employers' expectations... it still feels like a request to work part time is inconvenient and a problem to the organisation, resulting in being 'dumped' in areas that are less high profile or valued." (Returner)*

## **Barriers: attitudes/discrimination of recruitment agencies**

*"Almost none of the recruitment agents I spoke to were willing to put me forward for roles and suggest a role share for full time roles." (Returner)*

*"Recruitment Agency unwilling to put forward CV due to gap of three years, lack of guidance on CV & interview preparation; it had been over ten years since last interview. Agencies try to exploit situation by trying to lower salary." (Returner)*

*"Whenever they saw I had a career gap, the recruitment agencies weren't interested and wouldn't engage with me." (Returner)*

*"Employers look at the gap in employment and don't look at your application." (Potential returner)*

Both returners and potential returners felt that they had been discriminated against because of gaps in their CV. They felt that their lack of recent employment experience meant that they were not considered for roles by employers or recruitment agencies as they were not seen as viable candidates. They felt that they had to provide validation for gaps in their CV and justify their career break; their caring skills were not valued, and caring was not classed as work.

Respondents stated that when applying for vacancies they could not get through initial screening processes, especially computer screening, because they were unable to provide a current position or select caring as their most recent work history. Online job sites require a seamless work history, which people who have had time out for caring cannot provide. Furthermore, application processes do not provide the opportunity for candidates to explain why there is a gap in their CV. Linked to this were issues about providing references as those individuals who have been out of work for a period of time are unable to provide work-related references, only a personal reference, which excludes them from many job applications. Furthermore, whilst their experience might be highly relevant for the post applied for because it was prior to taking up their caring responsibilities, it was discounted as being out of date.

In addition to gaps in their CV, respondents also felt that they faced discrimination from employers and recruitment agencies due to their age, their disabilities and their children's disabilities. Health issues (physical and emotional) directly linked to their caring responsibilities also restricted the types of employment opportunities respondents could seek.

## **Barriers: references and age discrimination**

References: *“Although I did voluntary work during my time out these are not considered good enough for my current employers.”* (Returner)

References: *“[Public sector employer] won’t employ anyone without two recent years work references.”* (Returner)

Age discrimination: *“I can’t even get an interview, let alone a job. It’s my age, 57, I suspect. I’m well qualified, but people don’t see that. They see a middle-aged woman.”* (Returner)

Disability discrimination: *“I was diagnosed with High Functioning Autism and suffer with Anxiety and I go through bouts of depression. 80% of adult people on the autism spectrum are out of work. I am over 50. The outlook for me is not good.”* (Potential returner)

### **2.2.1.4 Culture of the organisation**

Linked to employers’ attitudes and discrimination within the workplace, returners also identified the culture of the organisation as a significant barrier once they had returned to work after time out for caring. Returners identified fewer opportunities for career progression and lack of understanding and empathy from line managers and peers. It was suggested that ‘junior’ staff felt threatened and employers felt that returners would only stay in the role for a short time. A number commented that they had effectively been demoted or side-lined on returning to work and had been ‘passed over’ for promotion in favour of less experienced colleagues or those working longer hours or in full-time posts. Similarly, they stated that because of their caring responsibilities they were excluded from activities which would help embed their position within work and build professional networks and relationships. For example, they were unable to attend social events in the evenings or courses involving nights or weekends away.

Part-time employees also stated that organisational systems did not accommodate their working patterns, so for example departmental meetings were scheduled for their non-working days, which had a negative impact on their sense of belonging to the organisation. They also suggested that staff who requested time off for family reasons or who left work on time were seen as lacking commitment. Several respondents had changed the sector in which they worked because of the long hours they were expected to work.

## **Barriers: culture of the organisation**

*“I have had to give up the idea of a career. I have too many responsibilities at home and cannot progress within the company.” (Returner)*

The main internal /personal barriers identified by individual respondents focused on lack of up to date experience, skills and knowledge and respondents' lack of self-esteem and confidence about returning to the job market after time out for caring.

### **2.2.1.5 Lack of up-to-date skills, knowledge and experience**

Nearly a third of returners and nearly half of potential returners identified concerns that their knowledge, skills and experience were not up to date and that the skills developed whilst on their career break were not valued. As previously highlighted, individual respondents stated that when they were going through the recruitment process their voluntary work and caring experience and skills were not valued by employers (or they did not feel they were valued by employers) and not classed as work.

For many individual respondents, a particular issue was that they felt that they had not been able to keep up to date with developments in IT and technology or sector-specific innovation and therefore they did not have the right skills as technology had moved on. Individual respondents noted that the main challenge in updating their skills was that support and/or advice available largely focused on low-skilled jobs and was predominantly targeted at 'younger people'. This was also the case with funding available to update skills or qualifications, with most funded training available for younger people with lower levels of experience, or for those on benefits. The costs of funding training to update their skills was prohibitive for most individual respondents. In addition, being able to fit training around their caring responsibilities was problematic. The lack of information and advice available, particularly in relation to the specific needs of older potential returners, was also identified as a barrier by individual respondents. On returning to work, returners highlighted that employers had not given them sufficient time to update their skills and become proficient in using new technology and had unrealistic expectations about their performance.

Both returners and potential returners highlighted the dichotomy of being told by employers and recruitment agencies that they did not have relevant, up-to-date skills and experience. Yet, when they applied for lower skilled positions, they were told that they were over qualified for the roles they were applying for. This meant that some respondents lacked up-to-date skills and experience to return to work at their former level but were also unable to secure lower level positions.

The challenge in maintaining membership of a professional body whilst out of work was also identified as an issue by some respondents: the main barriers were the cost of maintaining membership and the lack of opportunities to keep up to date with practice.

Furthermore, respondents identified a lack of professional networks which they could draw on to access work opportunities because of the time they had spent out of the workplace. There was also a feeling that recent developments in professional networking, such as LinkedIn, meant that they struggled to quickly and effectively re-establish their professional networks.

Although most individual respondents seemed to indicate a high level of education and a professional background, some noted that their lack of qualifications and skills meant that they were not in a strong position to apply for jobs. This barrier was often linked to age, as training and funding opportunities were limited for those nearing retirement.

### **Barriers: lack of up-to-date skills, knowledge and experience**

*"I found the competency-based interview challenging - it was hard to provide the level of detail required as many of my examples were 6-7 years old, so a lot harder than when you are already working and living and breathing a role. On the other hand, I didn't want to draw attention to my length of time out of paid work. Or rely too much on examples from during my career break as I felt these would highlight my domesticity too much rather than show my professional experience."* (Returner)

*"[The barrier was] employers believing that I was still able to do the job of a chartered accountant. But if I went for jobs that just needed a bookkeeper or someone with a lower professional accountancy qualification I was told I was too senior/experienced for the role."* (Returner)

*"All the careers advice assumed that you were not a highly qualified professional."* (Returner)

*"Many employers ignored any voluntary work that you had done (e.g. as a treasurer which used my accountancy skills) and the fact that to retain membership of my professional body I had to do CPD [Continuing Professional Development]."* (Returner)

*"Employers and agencies not willing to acknowledge quality experience prior to time-off for caring duties."* (Returner)

*"I cannot retrain or do a refresher course because there are none available without me having to spend large amounts of money and time away from home - which I cannot do because 1. No money 2. Need to be near my husband to continue caring for him."* (Potential returner)

*"Under qualified for jobs I'm trained to do as I've been out of work for so long."* (Potential returner)

*“No certificates to prove I have certain skills (e.g. first aid) and expected to pay a fortune for a training course and certificate. If I was under 25, I'd get it for free.”*

(Potential returner)

*“The world has moved on in the 26 years I have been full-time caring... I was a printer, there's very little printing done now.”* (Potential returner)

### **2.2.1.6 Lack of self-esteem and confidence**

Individual respondents identified further internal/personal issues with lack of self-esteem and confidence because of being out of the job market for an extended period of time. Nearly a quarter of returners and potential returners identified lack of confidence as a barrier to them returning to the workplace. This was particularly linked to length of time out of the workplace, with those out for longer more likely to suffer from lack of self-esteem and lower levels of confidence. They also described lack of social interaction whilst being a carer impacting severely on their levels of confidence.

Lack of confidence (due to time away from the workplace) was also highlighted as having a detrimental impact on potential returners' performance during job interviews. Rejection and an inability to gain employment also had a negative impact on their levels of confidence, and in some cases, led to lower levels of motivation to return to work. Respondents also described high levels of anxiety (associated with returning to work), issues of isolation and mental health issues. Many were also coping with bereavement issues after the loss of the person they cared for.

#### **Barriers: lack of up self-esteem and confidence**

*“Anxiety after being a full-time carer for 15 years, being socially isolated and then experiencing loss of my child the thought of socially interacting with people was scary. I struggled with confidence to apply, interview etc. too as I felt I lacked the skills for the work environment due to having been out of it for so long.”* (Returner)

*“Knocked my confidence to the point that I have taken a job I don't want just so I can pay bills.”* (Returner)

*“[Barriers to returning] a lack of CONFIDENCE and a need to re-socialise into workplace culture.”* (Potential returner out of the workplace for nearly 20 years)

*“Social barriers - being at home means you lose social skills so find fitting in with a team more difficult, going out with workmates is too expensive/no time. You forget how to be a member of the human race.”* (Potential returner)

*“Lack of confidence. I am sure when I read some job descriptions I would like to give it a go but lack the confidence.”* (Potential returner)



*"I have found staying at home a very isolating experience. I am a qualified solicitor and teaching assistant so have lots of skills, but they are being wasted which is a shame."*  
(Potential returner)

### 2.2.1.7 Other barriers faced

A small number of returners and potential returners mentioned barriers which did not fit into the categories highlighted previously, these included:

- Disability of the potential returner: a few potential returners noted that their own health problems were a barrier to returning to work.
- Self-employment, including additional barriers faced in terms of lack of support and loss of contacts/networks. Some respondents also felt that becoming self-employed was the only option to overcome barriers to return to work.
- Social pressure to remain at home or return to work: two returners mentioned that they either felt pressure from friends, family etc. to remain at home, or conversely to return quickly to the workplace.
- Provision of equipment and facilities: including space for breastfeeding and provision of computers before the return to work. Two returners highlighted this as a barrier to returning to work.
- Issues with part-time or other flexible working options: including annual leave and pension provision. Two returners highlighted this as a barrier to returning to work.

### 2.2.1.8 Male respondents

Only 31 of returners' and potential returners' responses were from men<sup>16</sup>. We reviewed their responses specifically to see if there were any particular issues raised by this group. Analysis showed that male respondents were most likely to be caring for relatives and/or partners: more than three quarters of male respondents were doing this. Only a small number were caring for children and of these some were also caring for partners or other relatives.

Half of male returners had taken a career break of less than a year compared to a third of female returners<sup>17</sup>. The most common barrier highlighted by male returners was employers' attitudes. The main barrier highlighted by women returners - lack of flexibility - was not highlighted as a barrier by any of the male returners. The main barrier highlighted by male potential returners was the lack of relevant/up-to-date skills, knowledge and experience, with three quarters of those respondents identifying this as a

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<sup>16</sup> As covered in section 2.1.1, official statistics indicate that this response rate appears roughly proportional to the number of men who are economically inactive because they are looking after their home or family.

<sup>17</sup> Some caution in interpreting these findings is required given the variation in the numbers of male and female respondents.

barrier. For women potential returners, the main barrier highlighted was a lack of suitable childcare, with over half identifying this as a barrier. This compares to only one (out of 16) male potential returners identifying childcare as a barrier.

A greater proportion of male potential returners were concerned about age discrimination, with more than a third of men identifying this as a barrier, compared to less than 5% of women respondents.

## **2.2.2 Organisational views on the barriers facing returners and potential returners**

The barriers identified by organisational respondents are highlighted in Table 6 in Annex C. They similarly reflect the main barriers identified by the returners and potential returners. Employers' views are examined in the next section (2.2.3).

### **2.2.2.1 Lack of flexible working opportunities and suitable jobs**

Organisations and individuals with a knowledge of returners felt that lack of flexibility was the main barrier faced by people returning to work after time out for caring. This was identified as a barrier by more than three quarters of organisational respondents. As identified by returners and potential returners, ongoing caring commitments means that returners might require time off for emergencies and other caring commitments.

Organisational respondents highlighted the lack of flexible working opportunities for people returning to work and that employers were reluctant to offer them. It was noted that flexibility is rarely mentioned within job adverts, potentially increasing the opportunities for inappropriate applications. It was also noted that opportunities for flexible working are only available to those already in employment, potentially limiting the ability of those attempting to return to work. Lack of flexibility in higher skilled jobs was also noted, resulting in people returning to lower skilled and lower paid jobs in order to secure the flexible hours they require.

#### **Organisational views on barriers: lack of flexibility and suitable jobs**

*“Segregation of women into low paid jobs occurs when they are either caring for children and/or other family members or when they return to work after a period of doing so. It is almost entirely due to them having to work part time because of the lack of availability of well-paid and senior jobs advertised as flexible to meet the employees’ needs, coupled with a poor availability of high quality affordable child care or adult social care.” (Organisational response)*

### **2.2.2.2 Lack of skills, knowledge and experience**

The second most frequently identified barrier by organisational respondents was returners' lack of up-to-date or relevant skills, knowledge and experience. This barrier

was identified by nearly two thirds of these respondents. Some professions, for example those requiring IT, medical and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) skills, were particularly highlighted as difficult to return to after a period out of work because in these areas employees are required to keep up to date with their practice and/or undertake regular training. Organisational respondents also noted a lack of refresher courses, and high associated fees, as a barrier to regaining skills in these areas; this reflected the views of individual respondents.

Softer skills were also highlighted as often lacking for those returning to employment by organisational respondents. For example, client management or managing work-based politics, are often areas where those who have had time out of the workplace feel less confident about. Returners' lack of confidence and self-esteem was identified by over a third of organisational respondents.

### **Organisational views on barriers: lack of skills, knowledge and experience**

*"Lack of experience, employers do not want unexperienced professionals."*  
(Organisational response)

*"Internal barriers' - lack of confidence, change management, time management skills, career management skills (visibility, relationship management, managing upwards, politics management etc.)."* (Organisational response)

### **2.2.2.3 Employers' and recruitment agencies' attitudes and discrimination**

More than a third of organisational respondents highlighted employers and recruitment agencies' attitudes, including discrimination, as a further structural barrier for individuals seeking to return to work. They highlighted the outdated attitudes of employers and recruitment agencies towards returners and the poor understanding of the needs of a carer with ongoing care commitments. There was also felt to be a lack of understanding amongst employers and recruitment agencies about the carer role and the transferable skills that are developed during the period of caring.

In terms of recruitment agencies, organisational respondents also noted that agencies struggled to support people who do not have a standard CV and recent experience. This means that returners are often rejected for positions because they do not fit within the strict criteria set by agencies.

### **Organisational views on barriers: attitudes and discrimination**

Employers: *"The main challenge in the private sector is helping businesses, particularly small businesses, to understand the needs of returners and giving them the skills to enable them to both recruit and retain this untapped group of people. It is also*

*important for employers to identify the transferable skills and knowledge that a returner brings from their periods of absence from the workplace.” (Organisational response)*

Recruitment agencies: *“They don't make it on to recruitment short-lists as they are usually rejected before even being able to pitch themselves to an employer.”*  
(Organisational response)

#### **2.2.2.4 Lack of suitable and affordable care**

Just under a third of organisational respondents highlighted lack of suitable and affordable care as a barrier for people looking to return to work. Affordable, flexible and good quality care was highlighted as a major barrier to people returning to work, as organisational respondents felt that this type of care was not currently available. Lack of wrap-around and flexible care made it difficult to plan work and care, making it very difficult for returners to juggle their responsibilities. Knowing that good quality care was in place was key to a carer's decision to return to work, as it was important to know that the cared-for person had appropriate support in place.

#### **Organisational views on barriers: lack of suitable and affordable care**

*“Families with disabled children often find it difficult to access childcare. There are many reasons for this: they may not be able to find a childcare provider to suit their child's specific needs, many childcare settings are not inclusive, and many don't offer childcare at times that are suitable.”* (Organisational response)

*“Care solutions: when the career break has been because of a care commitment - either childcare or eldercare, then having the right care in place is fundamental to returning. The right care is essential to apply and interview for roles (or for returner programmes). And a proper, reliable care solution is also essential for a new role. Navigating the childcare and eldercare maze isn't always easy.”* (Organisational response)

#### **2.2.2.5 Other barriers identified by organisational respondents**

Further additional barriers identified by organisational respondents focused on:

- financial barriers: four organisational respondents identified barriers linked to benefits received and the impact returning to work would have on those benefits, confusion about the tax system, and problems moving from supported living into employment
- coping with loss and grief: two organisations noted that people often struggled to cope with the personal and mental impact of a prolonged period of caring. This included both those whose caring commitments ended in bereavement and those with on-going caring responsibilities who were concerned about the future.

## 2.2.3 Barriers faced by employers in employing returners

The main barriers in employing returners, identified by more than half of employers, was returners lack of relevant or up-to-date skills, knowledge and experience and the challenges employers faced in being able to offer flexible working opportunities (see Table 7 in Annex C).

### 2.2.3.1 Lack skills, knowledge and experience

The main barrier identified by employers in recruiting returners was their lack of relevant and up-to-date skills, knowledge and experience. Just over half of employers who responded to this question identified it as a barrier. They identified that returners required additional support that was sometimes difficult (particularly for smaller firms) to accommodate. The pace of work and level of output of returners was also highlighted as a barrier, as initially they required more time to become proficient with recent technology/projects, and to regain their confidence in the workplace. Lack of references was also highlighted as a barrier resulting from a long time out of the workplace, and this can lead to problems completing standard recruiting procedures.

#### **Barriers for employers: lack of relevant skills, knowledge and experience**

*“Returners often need greater support to bring themselves up to date in terms of some practical skills like IT, professional development and building confidence.”* (Public sector employer, 250-499 employees)

*“As a small business, finding the time and resources to support learning/training /refreshing professional skills and re-building professional confidence and competence when a returner has been out of professional practice for a long period (10 years+). Getting up to speed with changes in IT, processes, law and professional standards.”* (Private sector employer, 1-9 employees)

### 2.2.3.2 Lack of flexible working opportunities

The second main barrier highlighted by employers was around flexibility, with almost half of the respondents to this question highlighting it as a barrier. Employers suggested that employees with caring commitments often required flexibility above and beyond other employees, for example to attend medical appointments or to leave a short notice to attend to the cared for person. This need for flexibility was interpreted by some employers as leading to unreliability, which in turn meant that employing returners was incompatible with the running of their business. This was particularly the case for smaller firms. One employer also noted that there could be issues around administering flexible working practices and ensuring that consistency was applied to all employees.

## **Barriers for employers: lack of flexibility**

*“I need someone to come in and do the job. That's why I employ people. Of course, there is a lot of give and take. A good employee and a good employer are fabulous together. So many people seem to think it's their right to automatically get flexible working, time off for tiny things, unlimited time off and preferential treatment because they have children. That is not how small/medium or in fact, any businesses can operate. I'm a good employer. I'm a decent person. But someone demanding to work when it suits and taking weeks and weeks off due to small issues with their children are not compatible with my running a business that employs people and pays their wages. I say that as someone who did all they could for an employer with a seriously ill child a couple of years ago. Now the child is fine, the employer is productive and loyal, and the business is running and making profit.”* (Private sector employer, 10-49 employees)

*“We have found that mothers of young children can be unreliable, because they need to take time off not only when they are ill, but also when their children are ill.”* (Private sector employer, 1-9 employees)

## **2.3 Difficulties**

This section explores how the barriers identified above by individual respondents affected their ability to return to the workplace. The main difficulties identified were in relation to financial and personal difficulties (see Table 8). The financial difficulties identified focused on the challenges that ongoing care commitments and returning to employment can cause and the difficulties of negotiating the benefits system, resulting in:

- lack of suitable jobs / an inability to get jobs
- lower skilled and lower paid jobs
- fewer hours
- timing of return to the workplace.

The personal difficulties identified focused on the impact of mental and physical health due to their inability to return to employment, and the isolation and lack of support available. The main personal difficulties identified were:

- continued care commitments
- lack of recognition / feeling unwanted
- lack of support / understanding
- organisational / personnel changes.

### 2.3.1 Financial difficulties

There was evidence that returners had occupationally downgraded in order to return to work. A small number of returners and a fifth of potential returners highlighted that there was a lack of suitable jobs available for those returning from a break for caring and for those who had ongoing care commitments. This meant that people were returning to lower skilled and lower paid jobs, often meaning they were taking a step back in their career and so lacked opportunities for promotion. Nearly a fifth of returners said they had to take a lower skilled job in order to get back into employment and a small number of potential returners said they were going to have to consider it.

The types of employment opportunities that returners were able to access or the restrictions they had on working whilst receiving benefits, resulted in financial hardship and respondents often noted feeling trapped in poverty.

Taking agency work with lack of job security, pension contributions and holiday pay was also a common outcome for those returning to work after time out for caring because of the need for flexible or part-time working opportunities. Several respondents also noted that they were undertaking or considering, volunteer work to bridge the gap between caring and employment, and hopefully aid their return to work.

A considerable number of respondents said that the barriers they faced had influenced the timing of their return to work and they had delayed returning to employment because of the difficulties they faced.

#### **Difficulties: financial**

*“I have spent the last five years in a job paying one tenth of my former salary, doing work I could do in my sleep. What a waste of an education.”* (Potential returner)

*“Returning to work on a lower status job than I left, in order to have work, so career progression halted.”* (Returner)

*“Finding part-time roles at senior level almost impossible so had to take administrative roles that were part time.”* (Returner)

*“It took three years from starting to look for work in HR in 2011 to get back to earning what I had earned 12 years previously. I probably still haven’t caught up with that salary in real terms.”* (Returner)

*“I have applied for customer service jobs, paying NLW [National Living Wage] in the hope of gaining a way in. So far, I have been unsuccessful. In some cases, I have been told that I am overqualified. The majority of applications go unanswered [former HR Manager with postgraduate qualifications].”* (Potential Returner).

*"Difficulties finding a permanent post, so resorting to long-term agency work, which is fraught with lack of sick pay, pension contributions and holiday pay, as well as lack of job security." (Returner)*

*"Not going back to paid work as my part time wage would be sucked up by childcare so I would just be working to pay someone else to look after my children." (Potential returner)*

*"Simply not worthwhile, more than one child preschool age so career break is forced. We had our three children close together to minimise this period when earning is impossible." (Potential returner)*

### **2.3.2 Personal difficulties**

Many of the individual respondents, both returners and potential returners, highlighted the personal impact on them of trying to return to the workforce whilst continuing with a caring role. Others highlighted the difficulties they faced trying to gain employment after spending a long time out of the workforce caring for others. These personal difficulties included issues with their mental and psychological health and wellbeing. Many respondents had ongoing care commitments, which placed additional burdens on them and increased the difficulties they faced when returning to work. Ongoing care commitments were reported to have a negative impact on potential returners' and returners' mental health and, in some cases, led to a worsening of their physical health. This in turn increased the challenges returners faced when trying to return to the workplace.

Furthermore, a small number of returners noted that, once back in the workplace they faced discrimination and bullying, in the form of lack of recognition and feeling like an outsider within the organisation. They reported being treated differently and being excluded (both intentionally and unintentionally) from the team. This led to feelings of inadequacy and loss of confidence. It was felt that this treatment by employers and colleagues largely stemmed from a lack of understanding within organisations about the caring role and the challenges carers face.

Organisational and personnel changes (whilst returners were out of the workplace) were also reported by a very small number of returners, who felt that the lack of familiarity and changes to relationships within workplaces whilst they were away made the transition back to work more difficult.



## **Difficulties: personal**

*"I ended up with depression due to the frustration and futility of trying to get back to work, as well as issues with my caring role. I feel this could have been avoided if more support was available."* (Returner)

*"I am a confident and capable person, but I certainly had to be thick skinned as there were thinly veiled negative or jokey comments about my 'time off' ... Ultimately I decided to leave and within ten weeks of my return I started a new job in a different organisation."* (Returner)

*"I cannot return to work. I am too ill to do so and am not able to access any support for caring with/without work."* (Potential returner)

## **2.4 Support**

This section explores support available for returners to return to work and includes the views of returners, potential returners and organisations supporting returners (not employers).

### **2.4.1 Individual respondents' views on support**

Most of the returners and potential returners responding, had not received any support to return to work (see Table 9 in Annex C). Furthermore, over three-quarters of returners who had not received support were unaware of any support or information available to help them to return to work (see Table 10 in Annex C). For those respondents who had received support, the main types of support are summarised in Table 11 in Annex C.

#### **2.4.1.1 Support received from employers**

Returners were most likely to have received support from their current employer (in the majority of cases they were returning to their previous employer). More than half of returners who had accessed support had done so from their employers. Many of the respondents were on a career break to undertake their caring responsibilities and therefore intended to return to their former employer.

Maintaining communications with their employer, particularly their line manager and team, was highlighted as support that made the transition from caring to employment smoother and easier to manage. Types of communication that was particularly beneficial was regular 'keeping in touch days', contact from their assigned manager, and regular updates on the team, work and organisational changes. Returners also suggested that maintaining communications helped them to negotiate flexible working and a phased return to work.

The ability to negotiate flexible working arrangements was also a comparably common type of support accessed. Such support included the ability to return part-time, have a phased return, job-share, and have time off for personal commitments. This support helped ensure those with continuing care commitments were able to manage these, whilst remaining in employment. It also had a positive impact on helping respondents to retain a work-life balance.

### **Support received from employer**

*“My employer generally: accepted and arranged my application for part-time working on return to allow me to maintain my work-life balance. I had been full time previously.”* (Returner)

*“The team arranged regular face-to-face meetings to ensure my requirements were recorded when I returned to work. I was advised on being more flexible to suit the team’s needs and perhaps it would help my return to the team.”* (Returner)

*“My employer supplies a one-day training/seminar by a consultant for mums returning to work. Topics discussed: separation anxiety, child development, importance of networks.”* (Returner)

*“My employer has allowed me to take a career break of up to one year. It is however without pay and there is no government assistance so having to rely on other family members to support us while I care.”* (Potential returner)

#### **2.4.1.2 Information and support from support organisations**

For potential returners, the main type of support accessed was information and support from support organisations. More than three quarters of potential returners who had accessed support had done so from support organisations. Individual respondents highlighted that information from support organisations largely focused on improving readiness for work, for example helping with the preparation of CVs (including recognising the transferable skills arising from caring and how to deal with any gaps in employment history), and where to search for job opportunities. Support given around improving readiness for work also led to increased confidence in applying for jobs and returning to work.

Support organisations were also seen as an initial point of contact, who could direct returners to more specialist support if required, for example information around flexible working entitlements, and financial/health advice. Support organisations were also seen as helping respondents gain access to more structured returners’ programmes and volunteering opportunities and providing careers advice and coaching.

## Information / support from a support organisation

*“...I received [support] from a local charity to volunteer there. [It] was instrumental in building up my confidence and opportunities.” (Returner)*

*“Online information about rights when returning to work and requesting flexible working.” (Returner)*

*“I received support from [name of organisation] to help me recognise the value of my personal experiences, as well as work and educational experiences in applying for work.” (Returner)*

*“Before returning to work the last time I received support from [support organisation]. They helped carers trying to get back to work and provided free jobs coaching. I was helped to update my CV, complete application forms, role play interviews and feel more positive about my skills, as being out of the workplace had made me feel a bit useless.” (Potential returner)*

### 2.4.1.3 Returners’ programmes

Individual respondents discussed their participation in returners’ programmes and their views of such programmes. Those individual respondents who had participated in a returners’ programme felt that it had supported them in applying for jobs because it had given them experience and boosted their confidence. They also felt returners’ programmes were helpful in providing short-term employment to bridge the gap between caring and a permanent return to work. As well as helping people return to work, it was felt that returners’ programmes also opened up networks and reconnected people back to their industry. Respondents noted that the programmes also offered support in the form of resources, for example improving CVs and reskilling in specific sectors. However, respondents did also comment on the limited coverage of these programmes in terms of geographical location and the sectors in which they were available, as well as most being focused on full-time roles.

### Returners’ programmes

*“Once I had taken a break to care for my children... it was very difficult to get in the door for even an initial interview. Thank goodness for returnship programs, which avoid this issue. I've been the incredibly fortunate beneficiary of two of these programs.” (Returner)*

*“The companies I applied for were running "returnship" programmes, so I used their resources as fully as possible.” (Returner)*

“[The returners programme] *got me two job offers at the level I left the City at.*”  
(Returner)

“[The returners programme has] *given me back my confidence.*” (Potential returner)

#### **2.4.1.4 Legal and financial advice**

A small number of individual respondents had accessed legal and financial advice to give them a better understanding of their position. Financial advice related to the fiscal benefits and drawbacks of returning to work and benefit entitlements, whilst legal advice was sought in cases of discrimination by previous employers.

#### **2.4.1.5 Healthcare support**

Five respondents had accessed support via healthcare professionals, for example through their GP, counsellor or occupational therapist. Respondents felt that this helped them address ongoing healthcare problems, as well as improving their confidence and mental wellbeing.

### **2.4.1 Organisational views of the support available**

As part of the call for evidence organisations were asked about the available support they were aware of for those looking to return to work to scope the level of support available. The main types of support identified were:

- Information and support from support organisations. This included information and guidance from local and national organisations, working on things such as confidence building. Support groups were also noted as providing valuable information and giving returners opportunities to talk things through in a comfortable environment.
- Private and government sector-funded returners’ programmes. These were noted by respondents as providing opportunities for people to return to work in a safe environment, where expectations were effectively managed and greater opportunities for flexible working opportunities were provided.
- Employer support. This included flexible working opportunities, ‘keep in touch days’ and phased returns. Respondents also felt that employers’ understanding of returners’ needs was an essential element of current support but was extremely variable across employers and managers within organisations.

### **2.4.2 What works well about current support**

Individual respondents who received support were asked about what was helpful and worked well about the current support available. Returners were more positive about the help they had received, with just under three quarters (see Table 12 in Annex C) stating that the support they received was beneficial. Potential returners were less positive, with

just over half being positive about the support they had received. Nevertheless, this did mean that over a quarter of returners and nearly a half of potential returners expressed either mixed or negative views of the support they had received.

Support from colleagues/employers was highlighted by returners as the most positive aspect of the support they had received (see Table 13 in Annex C), with just under half of individual respondents positively highlighting this area. In comparison, potential returners were most likely to identify that the support they received (mainly from support organisations) improved their confidence and provided increased opportunities for employment. The quality of the information and advice received was also highlighted as an area of support that is currently working well. These aspects are explored further in the next subsections.

#### **2.4.2.1 Support from colleagues / employers**

Support from colleagues/employers was highlighted as the main positive in current support amongst returners. As noted above, returners were complementary about the nature of support received from employers suggesting that it meant that they returned to work up-to-date with any changes. This also helped to ensure a smoother and easier transition back to the workplace.

#### **2.4.2.2 Quality of information**

The second main positive aspect of support from a returners' perspective was the quality of information provided. It was felt to be up-to-date and providing good advice and support. Some respondents benefited from the personalised nature of the information or advice, as it helped them to manage their personal situation and made them feel listened to and respected. Sector-specific information was also useful in helping people return to work, especially in those more technical sectors such as STEM.

#### **2.4.2.3 Provided confidence and increased opportunities**

Potential returners were most positive about the support in improving their confidence and increasing the range of opportunities available to them. For example, by improving their work readiness or helping with the search for opportunities, respondents felt that they were in a better position to access employment opportunities. Feeling in a better position to apply for work also led to increased confidence. Individual respondents also suggested that support they received enabled them to consider different avenues for securing employment, and helped them to explore other options, for example voluntary work and self-employment.

#### **2.4.2.4 Provided by an external agency**

Some returners highlighted that the support they received worked well because it was provided by an external agency. It was felt by these respondents that this advice and

support was impartial and provided another perspective on their situation. They noted feeling reassured by external, third-party support that they received.

#### **2.4.2.5 Meeting other people in a similar situation**

A small number of returners and potential returners noted that meeting people in a similar situation helped as it gave them support and reassurance. Respondents felt that peer support provided opportunities to share information and advice and that listening to others facing similar situations provided hope and motivation for the future.

Other positive aspects of current support identified by respondents mainly focused on improving returners' knowledge of their rights and entitlements.

#### **What works well about current support**

**Support from colleagues and employers:** *"It felt like a 'soft landing' back into the workplace I did not feel as though I was suddenly meant to be operating at 100%. I also felt as though I did not have to justify why I had had so much time off before returning to the workplace, which previously I had been self-conscious about and felt as though it would be interpreted negatively."* (Returner)

**Quality of information:** *"It provided useful up to date information about teaching and learning, gave me an opportunity to get back in the classroom with mentoring, feedback and the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues. It boosted my confidence prior to applying for teaching posts."* (Returner)

**Provided confidence and increase opportunities:** *"That I could talk through my experience and transferable skills which was put into updated form and language. This helped with my job applications."* (Potential returner)

**Provided by an external organisation:** *"I was able to get external reassurance that my employer was actively trying to support me to return to work and to help improve communications."* (Returner)

**Meeting other people in a similar situation:** *"Meeting others in the same situation, being able to discuss difficulties in a confidential environment, getting advice on some of the common problems and pitfalls that can occur when returning to work after a career break."* (Potential returner)

## **2.5 Areas for improvement**

This section of the report looks at how current support can be improved and incorporates responses from returners, potential returners, organisations and individuals with

knowledge of the issues faced (not employers). Table 14 (see Annex C) identifies the main areas for improvement identified by returners and potential returners.

### **2.5.1 Improving the offer**

Returners were most likely to suggest that current support could be improved by improving the quality and/or quantity of information and support available to returners. Over half of returners felt that this could be improved. Respondents (individual and organisational) were particularly interested in specific advice that was more targeted and personalised for carers and tailored to meet the bespoke needs of others, such as Muslim and minority ethnic women wanting to enter or re-join the labour market. This included requests for more returner programmes and employment opportunities that fitted with the demands of ongoing caring commitments. It was also suggested that support was needed around improving work readiness, confidence building and providing help for training and reskilling. It was also felt that support should be available from the beginning of the period of caring and continue through into the return to employment.

### **2.5.2 Widening access to support**

Potential returners felt that widening access to support was the primary area that required improvement, with over half of respondents feeling that this was an area for improvement - a small number of returners also identified this. Individual respondents suggested that there was a clear need for better quality information and advice on benefits as the current information on rights and entitlements was seen as lacking and often confusing for returners or potential returners to understand (particularly for those who were carers). Support with ongoing caring commitments was also requested by individual respondents due to the current lack of adequate and affordable support.

### **2.5.3 Increasing awareness**

Increasing awareness was highlighted by some returners and potential returners as an area where support could be improved. These respondents felt that lack of awareness was a problem amongst colleagues, employers and the general population, and was primarily focused on lack of understanding about the role of carers and the emotional challenges/factors that are associated with caring. This lack of understanding was noted as leading to a lack of sensitivity, for example with unkind or unhelpful remarks, which made the returner feel uncomfortable or upset. It also led to employers failing to manage expectations and placing too much pressure on returners to perform at their former level; this particularly highlighted to respondents, the lack of understanding around caring amongst employers. It was also felt that increasing understanding amongst employers would help to support requests for flexible working, and in ensuring that employers are more accepting of time pressures placed on those with ongoing care responsibilities.

## 2.5.4 Organisational views of areas for improvement

When asked how useful current support was for those seeking to return to work most organisational respondents either had negative or mixed views. They felt that current support was lacking, suggesting that provision was ‘patchy’ and not accessible to enough people. They indicated that information and advice provided was also not practical enough to meet the needs of returners and support was often ‘deficit based’ and reactionary, offering support once difficulties had arisen. They also suggested that the information provided for returners only deals with the symptoms of the problem and does not address the root cause of the difficulties faced. For example, support helps returners to write a CV, but does not address the fact that employers will not hire someone with a large gap on their CV. Those who had mixed views of the support provided, suggested that whilst it was improving, there was still a long way to go and that support might be working for some groups, such as those with a professional background and qualifications, but is not supporting those without qualifications and professional experience.

Organisational respondents were most likely to identify the following areas for improvement and/or additional support:

- more support from and for employers to employ returners (87%)
- the need to improve the current offer (63%)
- widening access to support and increasing return to work initiatives (37%)
- improved government assistance, including improving information on benefits and entitlements, addressing financial constraints, improving affordability of care, increasing respite provision and research to identify innovative schemes supporting returners (27%).

### Areas for improvement

**Improving the offer:** *“More accessible help for accessing specific guidance on help for carers. Searching a needle in a haystack sometimes. Perhaps a specific person could be available to contact and advise.”* (Returner)

*“Information is often overwhelming, what people want/need is one to one support to navigate the information and then individual support to guide them through their first steps back into employment.”* (Organisational respondent)

**More support for employers:** *“Employers need to be equipped and to fully understand the process, just as the individual does, rather than some approaches we have seen where the individual goes off site for some support/training, but nothing changes at work because the employer is unaware of that support / training. The employer needs to be equipped to be part of the solution.”* (Organisational respondent)



**Widening access to support:** *“Out of work mums need support and advice. Most of us have been out of work for many years and applying for jobs is a total minefield without help and support.”* (Potential returner)

*“I feel there was a lack of advertisement and awareness for this support. It was only by chance I came across it and inquired to get it.”* (Returner)

**Increasing awareness:** *“Possibly a greater awareness by my team would have made it easier, but when you are constantly under pressure to make targets, everyone is under pressure.”* (Returner)

*“Managers need to be made more aware of the issues facing carers.”* (Organisational respondent)

**Improved government assistance:** *“The government should also lead by example when advertising jobs and designing public sector returnship programmes, by ensuring jobs are able to operate on a part time or flexible basis.”* (Organisational respondent)

## 2.6 Employers' views

This section focuses on employers' responses to the call for evidence and their experience of employing returners.

### 2.6.1 Employers' views of the benefits of employing returners

Employers identified two main benefits in employing returners: tapping into otherwise unused skills, knowledge and experience and the personal attributes of those returning to the workplace (see Table 15 in Annex C).

#### 2.6.1.2 Using otherwise unused skills, knowledge and experience

The main benefit of employing returners, identified by the vast majority of employers, was that it enabled them to tap into otherwise unused skills, knowledge and experience.

Employers felt that returners had significant life experiences that, alongside their previous work experience, they could add value to a company. Furthermore, the skills learnt whilst caring, for example organisational skills, were also seen as beneficial to employers. It was felt that there was a significant amount of untapped potential that was lost to the labour market if carers were unable to return to the workplace.

#### 2.6.1.3 Personal attributes

Employers also identified the personal attributes of returners, for example loyalty and determination, which were key to running a successful business. Employers also suggested that due to their personal experiences, carers bring stability and positive life

experiences to the workplace. Employers also felt that returners provided flexibility, as they often required it in return and were therefore willing to put in extra hours when necessary.

Without accessing this talent, employers felt other employers were significantly missing out on the benefits that a diverse workforce can bring. Employers also felt that employing returners enhanced their reputation, as it showed goodwill and commitment to equality and diversity.

### **Benefits for employers**

*“They are unbelievable multi-taskers!”* (Private sector employer, 500+ employees)

*“This group are usually very loyal and flexible. They are usually a little older, so often have good experience, even if it is not recent. If we show flexibility in their working hours, etc, they will often reciprocate. Stability in their work is often important to them, so they will want to remain in our employment for a number of years, rather than moving on elsewhere after training.”* (Private sector employer, 1-9 employees)

*“There is such an amazing amount of untapped talent out there. Parents who maybe had cracking careers before they had their families - the workforce is truly missing out - I took on two people who I can think of specifically who were exceptionally well qualified prior to having their families and whom both had amazing careers going somewhere. This was a huge benefit to my business; which was before being bought out a medium sized business.”* (Private sector employer, 50-249 employees)

*“The main benefit we have observed through our return to work scheme is in being able to access a large and typically untapped pool of talent; participants bring excellent skills whether gained within or outside the workplace. The philosophy behind our programme is that whatever the candidate has done during their time away from work is likely to have enriched who they are and what they can offer our clients and our business.”* (Private sector employer, 500+ employees)

### **2.6.2 Support received by employers to employ returners**

Only a few who responded to the call for evidence had received support to employ returners (see Table 16 in Annex C).

For those that had received support, this fell under the following categories:

- information provided by support organisations: these organisations provided support on how best to employ and support returners, this included information on establishing returners programmes

- financial and legal advice: one employer took advice to understand their legal requirements and how the company could best support these financial and flexible working commitments.

It was felt that such support worked well as it enabled employers to support returners and established partnerships between support organisations, employers and returners. It was also felt by two respondents that the support enabled them to establish their own returners' programme and recruit candidates for these programmes.

### **Support received by employers**

*"We worked with a firm who specialised in designing Returner programmes."* (Private sector employer, 500+ employees)

*"I took financial and legal advice with regard to actually helping my employee with a very sick child, and how much I could afford to pay and outsource."* (Private sector employer, 10-49 employees)

### **2.6.3 Additional support needed by employers**

Employers were also asked what additional support would be helpful to enable or encourage them to employ returners. These respondents felt that additional support around the barriers faced by carers in returning to work, and with on-going care commitments, would make them feel more confident in tackling any issues that might arise. More information on how to establish returner programmes, and how they might benefit employers, was also seen to be useful.

Support with recruiting carers returning to work was also an area identified as requiring improvement, for example help with targeting job adverts and in establishing procedures around obtaining references. They felt this could be complemented by specific guidance from professional bodies about reskilling and updating qualifications. This would make things clearer for returners, particularly for those people who have been out of work for a longer period of time.

The government's role in leading the initiative to employ carers returning to work was also noted and included the suggestion for increased funding to encourage employers to employ those returning from a period of caring.

## **Additional support needed by employers**

*“There has got to be a significant shift in the workplace for employees and employers to reap the benefits. The only way to make this happen would be to incentivise people.”* (Private sector employer, 50-249 employees)

*“More, clearer information from DWP on the ‘watch outs’ for employing someone who’s had a break for a long time, e.g. what they will find daunting etc.”* (Private sector employer, 500+ employees)

### **2.6.4 Returners’ programmes**

Employers were asked for details of their returners’ programmes so that additional research could be undertaken in this area. Some employers said they ran returners programmes. Most of the returners’ programmes were established by large organisations, with more than 500 employees and were mainly nationwide companies. They were also sector specific programmes and targeted specific groups of returners.

*“We run a programme which supports those facing barriers to getting into work for the first time or returning to work after a period of unemployment. We target the programme at those with disabilities or health conditions, those who are single parents, young people, and those who are/are at risk of homelessness.”* (Private sector employer, 500+ employees nationwide)

*“Radiographer return to practice initiative for all radiographers who have taken an extended break from radiography, for whatever reason.”* (Private sector employer, 500+ employees nationwide)

*“[Name of company] was the first major professional services firm to offer a Return to Work scheme. Our scheme is open to anyone, regardless of age or gender, who has at least five years’ experience in professional services and taken a career break of at least two years.”* (Private sector employer, 500+ employees nationwide)

*“[Name of programme] was launched in 2017. It was conceived as a bridge back to senior roles for experienced professional women who had taken an extended voluntary career break of over 18 months. Our target group was mid- to senior-level career returners and this target population is predominately made up of females aged from early 30s to early 50s. We worked in partnership with [name of company] to devise a targeted recruitment campaign using social media.”* (Private sector employer, 500+ employees nationwide)

*“Last year we ran a returner programme focusing in women returners to work. This was partly in response to our lack of senior female women but also because we wanted to support those who had taken time out and still had much to offer but were finding it*

*difficult returning to work. We provided a three-month internship with full-time roles available at the end. Working practices were completely flexible to the individual and we hired four of the five full time.*” (Private sector employer, 50-249 employees, London)

### 3. Conclusions

This call for evidence has provided useful insights into the views of returners and potential returners and, to a lesser degree, the views of organisations with knowledge of returners and employers. As the call for evidence respondents were self-selecting this analysis cannot be treated as representative of the groups consulted: however, the responses have highlighted issues which serve to reinforce current thinking and identified areas for further exploration.

The responses have shown that both returners and potential returners were most likely to have taken a career break to care for children. In addition, a third of potential returners were caring for relatives and partners and more than a tenth were caring for children and relatives/partners. Potential returners were also more likely to be caring for a child with SEND and have been out of the workplace for longer. This highlights the need for a range of different types of support to meet these diverse caring needs.

Returners and potential returners identified both structural and personal barriers to returning to the workplace. The main structural issues identified by both returners and potential returners were lack of flexible work opportunities, lack of suitable and affordable care for the cared for person and the attitudes and discrimination of employers and recruitment agencies. For potential returners, the lack of flexible work opportunities and suitable care for children with SEND were identified as particular challenges.

The evidence has shown that recruitment processes discriminate against people who have taken time out for caring. Challenges with explaining gaps in CVs, lack of flexible working opportunities being advertised and completing online application forms prevented many potential returners from applying for jobs. In addition, individual respondents also felt that they had been discriminated against because of their age and/or disabilities (both their own disabilities and their children's disabilities). There was clear evidence of returners downgrading (i.e. taking lower skilled and lower paid jobs) to return to employment.

Most returners who had accessed support had done so via their employers, i.e. they were returners with a job to go to. For potential returners, support was most likely to have been provided by support organisations, e.g. those supporting carers to improve their work readiness. The key issue for returners was not only the lack of support available, but also the lack of awareness of the support that was available. There was a lack of support available at the local level, focused on the specific needs of returners and returners' programmes offering flexible opportunities. Support should be tailored to the specific needs of this group i.e. most will continue to have ongoing caring commitments when they return to the workforce which is why the need for flexibility is so critical. Returners want practical support in terms of how to explain gaps in their CV, how to obtain references and complete online application processes. They also identified a lack of training to bring skills up to date/ lack of funding for retraining or to update skills. Much

of the support focused on younger job seekers. There is a need for support specifically focused on older carers returning to the workplace.

Although only a small number of responses were received from employers, they highlighted the challenges they face in employing returners in terms of ensuring returners have the appropriate skills, knowledge and experience and the difficulties employers face in offering flexible working opportunities. Employers who responded to the call for evidence said they would like more information and support in addressing the barriers faced by returners.

The evidence provided here will be useful in supporting further research in this area and has identified the need for additional research on the needs of lower-paid and lower-skilled returners.

## Annex A: survey

The survey was distributed and formed the basis of the call for evidence. To note, not all respondents responded to all questions. The survey was designed to only ask the relevant questions for each respondent type.

### 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 work to care for others**

<b>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.</b>	
<b>1. What is your gender?</b>	
Woman	
Man	
Other (if you wish to specify, please do)	
Prefer not to say	
<b>2. Are you:</b>	
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	•
<b>3. How long was your most recent break in paid work to care for others?</b>	
Less than one year	•
One to two years	•
Three to five years	•
Six to ten years	•
More than ten years	•
<b>4. Who were you caring for during your most recent break from paid work? Please tick all that apply.</b>	
Children	
Partner	
Another relative	
Somebody else	



<b>5. What difficulties, if any, did you face in seeking to return to work after time out caring for others?</b>	
<b>6. How did those difficulties affect your return to work?</b>	
<b>7. Did you receive support or information to help you return to work? This could be from employers or any other organisation.</b>	
Yes	
No (continue to question 12)	
<b><u>If you did access support:</u></b>	
<b>8. What type of support or information did you receive, and who provided it?</b>	
<b>9. What do you feel worked well about the support or information you received?</b>	
<b>10. What do you feel could be improved about the support or information you received?</b>	

**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><b>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.</b></p>	
<p><b>1. What is your gender?</b></p>	
Woman	
Man	
Other (if you wish to specify, please do)	
Prefer not to say	
<p><b>2. How long have you been on a break in paid work to care for others?</b></p>	
Less than one year	•
One to two years	•
Three to five years	•
Six to ten years	•
More than ten years	•
<p><b>3. Who are you caring for during this time? Please tick all that apply.</b></p>	
Children	
Partner	
Another relative	
Somebody else	
<p><b>4. What difficulties do you face seeking to return to work?</b></p>	
<p><b>5. How do those difficulties affect your ability and/or intention to return to work?</b></p>	

<b>6. Have you received any support or information to help you return to work? This could be from employers or any other organisation.</b>	
Yes	
No (continue to question 11)	
<b><u>If you have accessed support to help you return to work:</u></b>	
<b>7. What type of support or information have you accessed and who provided it?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>	
<b>8. What do you feel worked well about the support or information?</b>	
<b>9. What do you feel could be improved about the support or information?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>	
<b>10. What other support or information would be useful to help you return to work, and why? Please continue to question 12.</b>	
<b><u>If you have not accessed support:</u></b>	
<b>11. What support or information, if any, would be useful in helping you return to work, and why?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>	

**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**

**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.**

**1. What sector is your organisation from?**

Public	
Private	
Voluntary	

**2. How many employees does your organisation have in the UK? If you are unsure, please give your best estimate.**

1 to 9	•
10 to 49	•
50 to 249	•
250 to 499	•
500+	•

**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”.**

Nationwide	•
London	•
North West	•
North East	•
Yorkshire and the Humber	•

West Midlands	•
East Midlands	•
East of England	•
South West	•
South East	•
<p><b>Some employers run programmes that support people who are looking to return to work following a break from paid work for a caring responsibility.</b></p> <p><b>4. Has your organisation run a scheme of this type, or are you currently doing so?</b></p>	
Yes	
No (continue to question 7)	
Don't know (continue to question 7)	
<p><b>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)</b></p>	
<p><b>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:</b></p>	

**If you have not operated a returner programme or do not know:**

**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?**

**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?**

Yes

No (skip to question 12)

Don't know (skip to question 12)

**9. What type of support or information did you access, and who provided it?**

**10. What worked well about the support or information you accessed?**

**11. What could be improved about the support or information you accessed?**

**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.**

**13. What do you feel are the main benefits to employers of employing from this group?**

**14. Is there anything further you would like to tell us about your experience employing, or considering employing, people from this group?**

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

**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**

**1. Please give a short description of the capacity in which you have experience or knowledge of this group.**

**2. In your experience, what are the key barriers or difficulties faced by this group?**

**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).**



**4. How useful do you feel the current support or information available to this group is?**

**5. What do you feel works well, and what could be improved?**

**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.**

## Annex B: coding frame

Table 1: Coding frame

<b>1. Respondent Type</b> (returner, potential returner, employer, support organisation)
Employer type /size / region
Organisation experience/knowledge of returners
<b>2. Gender</b>
<b>3. Current employment status</b>
<b>4. Length of career break</b>
<b>5. Who cared for</b> (children, partner, relative, somebody else)
<b>6. BARRIERS - Nature of Barriers</b>
Lack of suitable jobs
Lack of suitable childcare/ lack of affordable childcare
Lack of support for cared for family member
Lack of flexibility/unable to provide flexibility
Lack of relevant/up to date skills, knowledge & experience/skill fade
Partners working conditions
Culture of the organisation
Gaps in CV
Caring skills not valued/caring not classed as work
Employers' (& recruitment agencies') attitudes
Low self-esteem/confidence
Lack of work readiness e.g. poor CVs, presentation/interview skills
Other
<b>7. BARRIERS - How difficulties affected return to work</b>
Lower skilled job
Lower pay
Fewer hours
Timing of return
Personal impact
Financial impact
Number /appropriateness of job applications

Other
<b>8. SUPPORT RECEIVED /AWARENESS OF SUPPORT AVAILABLE</b>
Received support to return /to employ returners
Awareness of support available
Types of support received/aware of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government-funded returners programmes</li> <li>• Private sector-funded returners programmes</li> <li>• Information/support from support organisations</li> <li>• Refresher courses</li> <li>• Professional network opportunities</li> <li>• Flexible working opportunities</li> <li>• Access to affordable childcare which reflects working patterns</li> <li>• Access to support for cared for relatives</li> <li>• Financial advice</li> <li>• Legal advice</li> </ul>
What worked well about support received
Usefulness of current support/information
Areas where support could be improved
Other support/info useful in helping returners return/employ returners
Benefits to employers of employing returners
<b>9. Employers' Returner Programmes</b>
Details of programme & contact details
<b>10. Other comments on returning to work /employing returners</b>
<b>12. Maternity leave</b>
<b>13. Government policy</b> e.g. Carers Allowance
<b>14. Other issues</b>

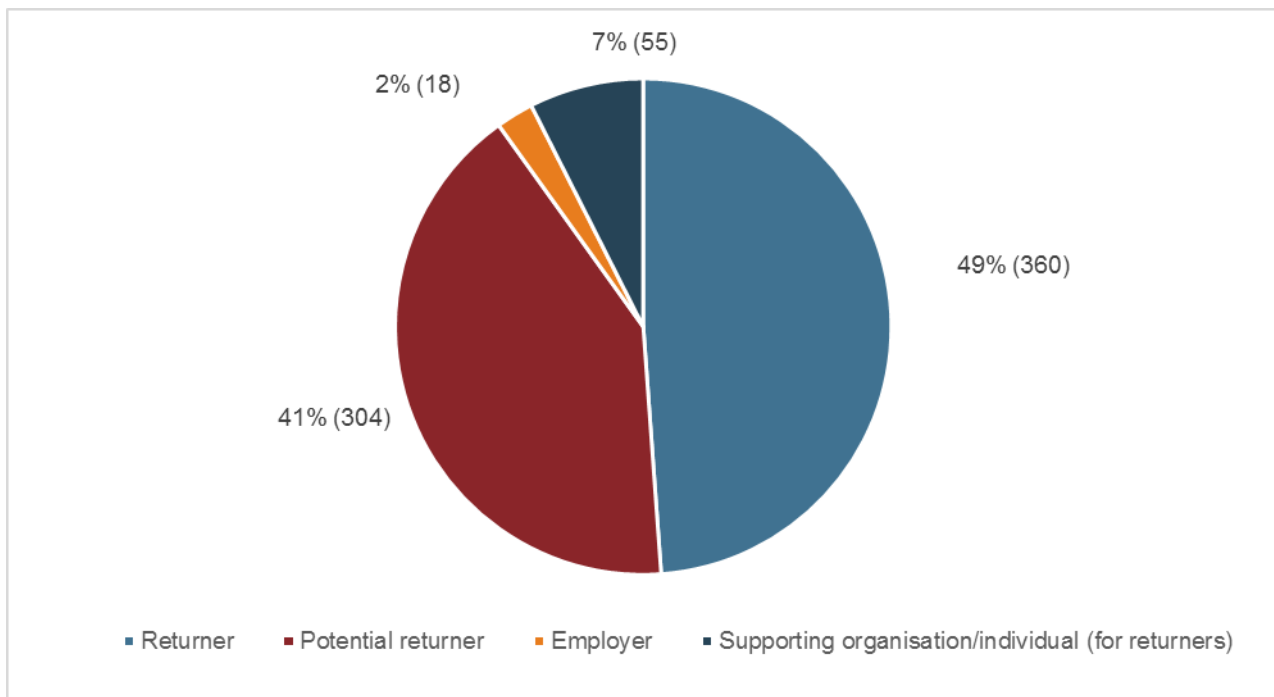
Source: YCL, 2017

## Annex C: graphs and tables

Caution should be taken when examining these graphs and tables as the percentages and counts were derived from coded qualitative data, and not from a robust quantitative measurement.

Figure 1 shows the number of respondents who replied to the call for evidence in terms of whether they were a: returner, potential returner, employer or organisation or individual with knowledge of returners.

**Figure 1: Type of respondent**



Source: Analysis of the Call for Evidence, YCL, 2017

Table 2 shows the length of career break that returners and potential returners responding to the call for evidence had taken.

**Table 2: Length of career break**

Length of career break	Returner (N=360)		Potential returner (N=304)	
	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number
Less than one year	30%	108	9%	27
One to two years	28%	99	n/a	n/a
Three to five years	16%	59	n/a	n/a
One to five years <sup>18</sup>	n/a	n/a	44%	135
Six to ten years	17%	61	24%	73
More than ten years	9%	33	23%	69

Source: Analysis of the Call for Evidence, YCL, 2017

Table 3 shows who returners and potential returners were caring for: child, relative, partner and/or someone else. Table 4 shows whether they were caring for one or more category of person e.g. children only or children and relatives.

**Table 3: Person cared for**

Person cared for	Returner (N=360)		Potential returner (N=304)	
	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number
Child	85%	306	78%	236
Relative	15%	53	21%	63
Partner	4%	16	12%	37
Someone else	1%	4	2%	6

Source: Analysis of the Call for Evidence, YCL, 2017

**Table 4: Types of individuals respondents were caring for**

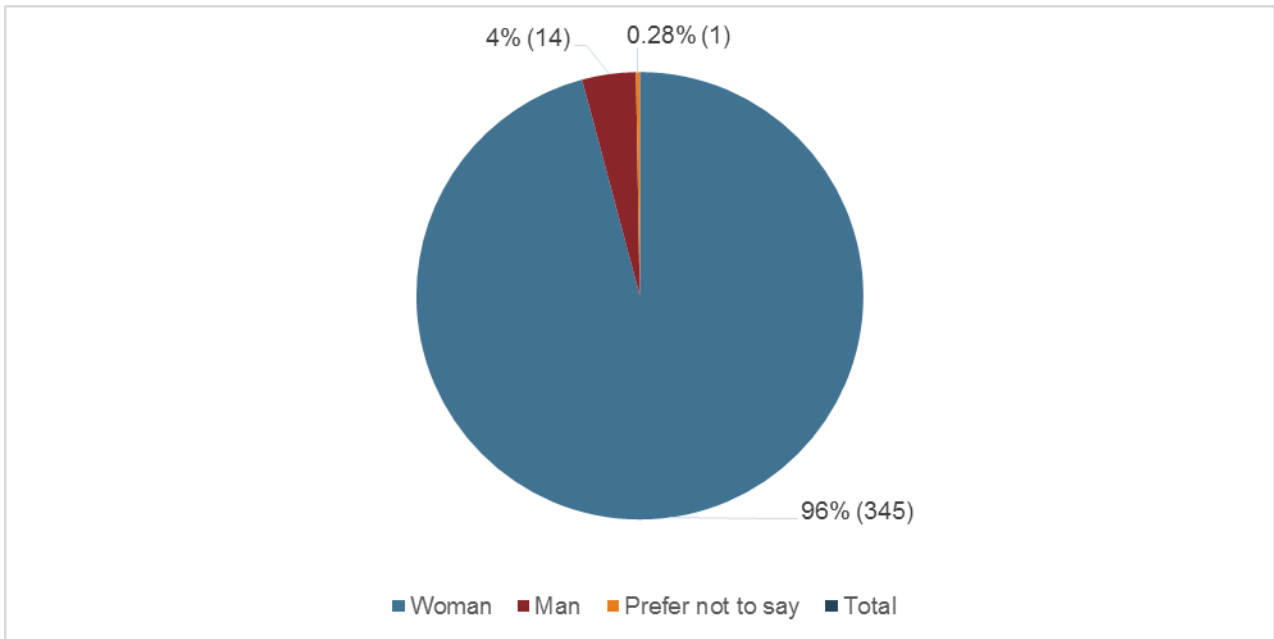
	Returner (N=360)		Potential returner (N=304)	
	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number
1 group	95%	341	88%	268
2 groups	5%	19	11%	34
3 groups	0%	0	1%	2

Source: Analysis of the Call for Evidence, YCL, 2017

<sup>18</sup> As noted previously, due to an error when setting up the online version of the survey, the categories of length of career break for returners and potential returners are different.

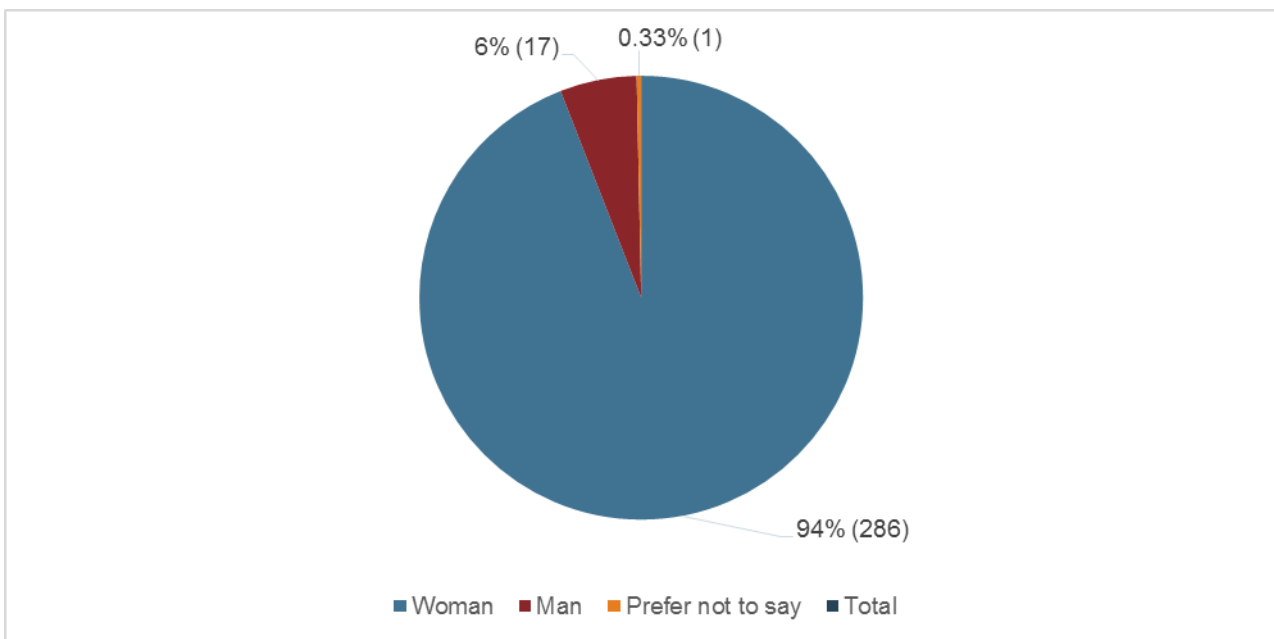
Figures 2 and 3 show the gender of returners and potential returners.

**Figure 2: Gender of returners**



Source: Analysis of the Call for Evidence, YCL, 2017

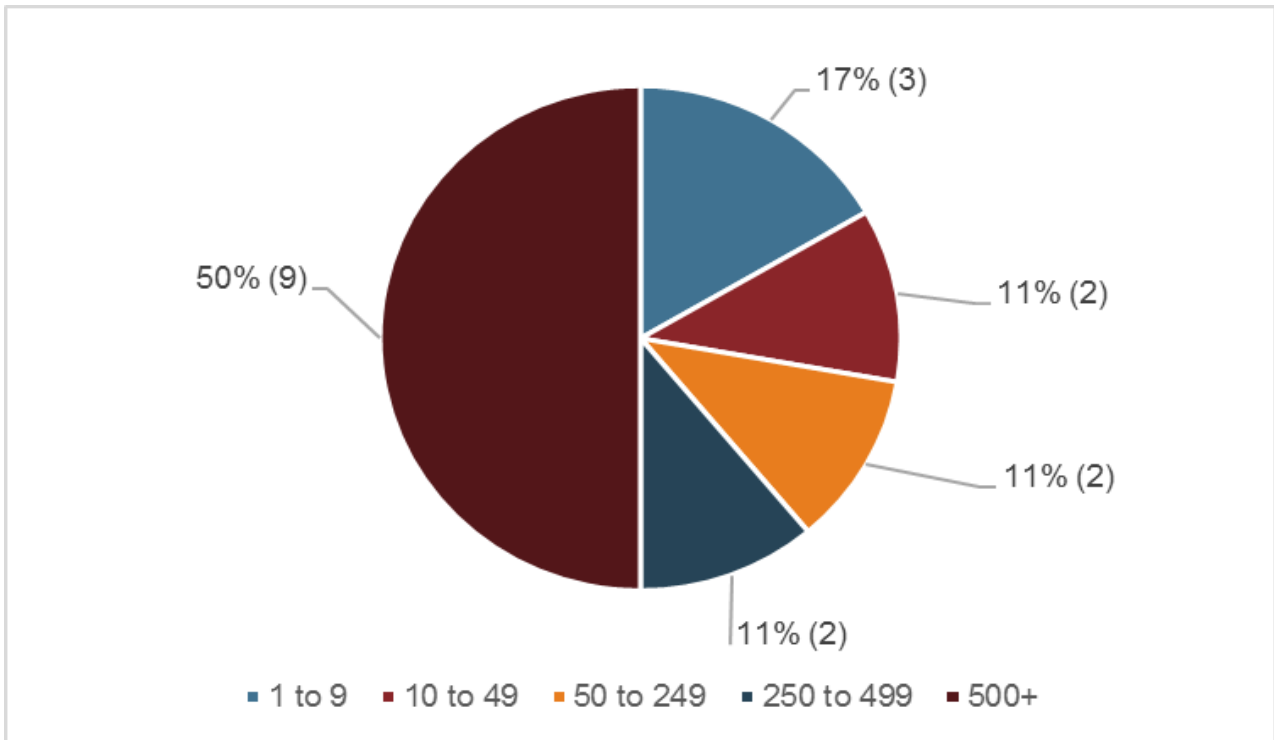
**Figure 3: Gender of potential returners**



Source: Analysis of the Call for Evidence, YCL, 2017

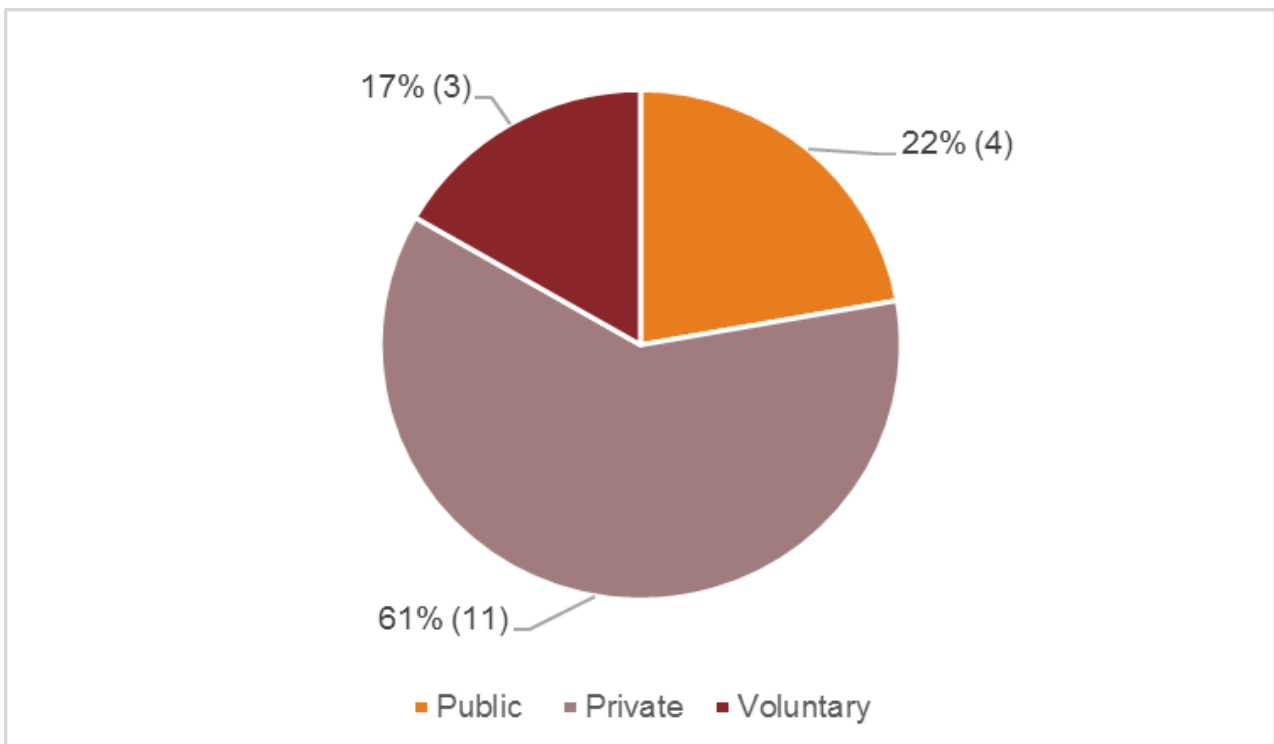
Figures 4, 5 and 6 show the characteristics of the employer organisations that responded to the call for evidence in terms of: the number of employees, the employer sector (private, public or voluntary) and their geographical location.

**Figure 4: Employee numbers**



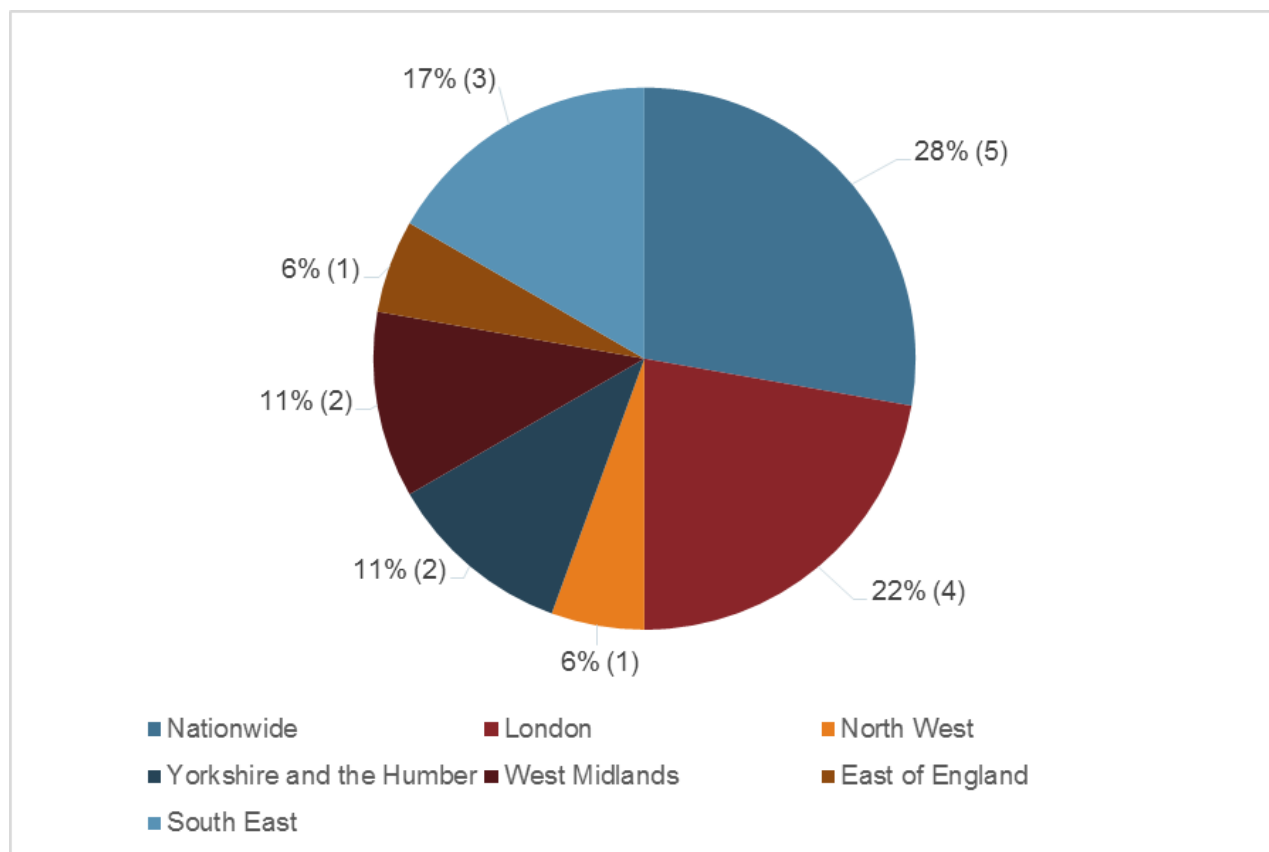
Source: Analysis of the Call for Evidence, YCL, 2017

**Figure 5: Employer sector**



Source: Analysis of the Call for Evidence, YCL, 2017

**Figure 6: Employer geographical location**



Source: Analysis of the Call for Evidence, YCL, 2017

Table 5 highlights the main barriers to returning to work identified by returners and potential returners.

**Table 5: Barriers to returning to work**

Barriers to returning to work	Returner (N=349)	Potential returner (N=297)
Lack of flexibility/unable to provide flexibility	123	96
Lack of suitable and affordable care	114	148
Lack of relevant/up to date skills, knowledge & experience	111	141
Lack of suitable jobs	107	110
Employers (& recruitment agencies) attitudes incl. discrimination	103	96



Culture of the organisation incl. lack of career progression / reputation	94	0
Low self-esteem/confidence	85	70
Gaps in CV incl. lack of references and work readiness	56	102
Caring skills not valued/caring not classed as work	22	19
Managing continued care whilst working	19	27
Different type of job / no job to return to / change of organisation	19	9
Age discrimination	9	13
Partners' working patterns	8	4
Other	16	6

Source: Analysis of the Call for Evidence, YCL, 2017

Table 6 shows the main barriers to returning to work identified by organisations or other individuals with knowledge of returners.

**Table 6: Barriers faced: organisational views**

<b>Barriers to returning to work</b>	<b>Organisations (N=55)</b>
Lack of flexible working opportunities and suitable jobs	42
Lack of relevant/up to date skills, knowledge & experience	36
Employers (& recruitment agencies) attitudes incl. discrimination	21
Low self-esteem/confidence	19
Lack of suitable and affordable care	17
Other	6

Source: Analysis of the Call for Evidence, YCL, 2017

Table 7 highlights the main barriers identified by employers when employing returners.

**Table 7: Barriers faced by employers in employing returners**

<b>Barriers faced by employers</b>	<b>Employer (N=11)</b>
Lack of relevant/up to date skills, knowledge & experience	6
Lack of flexible working opportunities	5

Source: Analysis of the Call for Evidence, YCL, 2017

Table 8 shows the difficulties in returning to work identified by returners and potential returners.

**Table 8: Difficulties in returning to work**

<b>Difficulties in returning to work</b>	<b>Returner (N=336)</b>	<b>Potential returner (N=286)</b>
Personal impact	118	82
Financial impact	87	97
Lower skilled job	59	22
Timing of return	55	33
Fewer hours	54	8
Lower pay	47	28
Lack of suitable jobs / inability to get jobs	38	60
Continued care commitments	25	12
Lack of recognition / feeling unwanted	17	0
Lack of support / understanding	12	15
Organisational / personnel changes	3	0

Source: Analysis of the Call for Evidence, YCL, 2017

Table 9 shows how many returners and potential returners had received support to return to work.

**Table 9: Support received to return to work**

Support received to return to work	Returners (N=360)	Potential returner (N=304)
No	263	243
Yes	97	61

Source: Analysis of the Call for Evidence, YCL, 2017

Table 10 highlights returners' awareness of support or information available to help them to return to work.

**Table 10: Awareness of support**

Awareness of support	Returners (N=263)
No	204
Yes	41
Don't know	2
Not answered	16

Source: Analysis of the Call for Evidence, YCL, 2017

Table 11 shows the support received by returners and potential returners and Table 12 shows their views of the support they received.

**Table 11: Type of support received**

Type of support received	Returner (N=96)	Potential returner (N=59)
Employer	55	6
Information/support from support organisations	34	46
Private sector-funded returners programmes and refresher courses	17	13
Legal and/or financial advice	6	1
Healthcare support	4	1
Government-funded returners programmes	2	0
Other	2	3

Source: Analysis of the Call for Evidence, YCL, 2017

**Table 12: Experience of support**

Experience of support	Returner (N=89)	Potential returner (N=58)
Positive	66	31
Negative	12	10
Combination (incl. adequate)	11	17

Source: Analysis of the Call for Evidence, YCL, 2017

Table 13 provides returners' and potential returners' views on what worked well about the support they received and Table 14 highlights where they feel the support could be improved.

**Table 13: Positives of current support**

What worked well about current support	Returner (N=89)	Potential returner (N=58)
Support from colleagues / employers	37	0
Quality of information / advice	33	14
Provided confidence and increased opportunities	12	23
Provided by an external organisation	7	0
Meeting other people in a similar situation	5	4
Other	8	5

Source: Analysis of the Call for Evidence, YCL, 2017

**Table 14: Areas where support could be improved**

Areas for improvement	Returner (N=64)	Potential returner (N=44)
Improving the offer	46	16
Increasing awareness	23	12
Widening access to support	15	23

Source: Analysis of the Call for Evidence, YCL, 2017

Table 15 highlights employers' views of the benefits of employing returners and Table 16 shows how many employers who responded to the call for evidence had received support to employ returners.

**Table 15: Benefits of employing returners**

<b>Benefits of employing returners</b>	<b>Employer (N=15)</b>
	<b>Number</b>
Using otherwise unused skills / knowledge / experience	13
Personal attributes	4

Source: Analysis of the Call for Evidence, YCL, 2017

**Table 16: Employers in receipt of support to employ returners**

<b>Employers who received support</b>	<b>Employer (N=18)</b>
	<b>Number</b>
No	13
Yes	4
Don't know	1

Source: Analysis of the Call for Evidence, YCL, 2017

## Annex D: additional information

### D.1 Maternity leave

Although maternity leave was not the focus of this call for evidence, as it sought to gather the opinions of those who had been out of work for a longer period of time, or for reasons other than having a child, during our coding of responses we noted where maternity leave was mentioned.

Maternity leave was mentioned by some returners, and potential returners, and only one employer. The majority of these comments were in relation to longer periods of absence from work associated with having a child. Barriers and difficulties associated with returning to work after maternity leave largely mirrored those discussed in detail previously, including discrimination, lack of promotion and issues with childcare. Further personal barriers were also highlighted including the guilt and stress of leaving a child and the impacts of 'baby brain'.

Several themes emerged from respondents, including the importance of 'keeping in touch days', as people often felt forgotten and this increased the barriers associated with returning to work, for example in relation to their confidence. Respondents also noted that more help needed to be provided for women returning from maternity leave, including ensuring that they were aware of their rights.

#### **Maternity leave**

*"Since returning I have found out that there have been various "talent" programmes which I would've liked to have been considered for but because I was on Maternity Leave I was missed out. And now that I'm back, senior managers are assuming that just because I have a child I'm not interested in career progression."* (Returner)

*"Knowing your rights to return to same job if any after 1 yr. mat leave."* (Potential returner)

*"We consult with people returning from maternity leave and often bring them back on flexible arrangements, reduced hours etc. Challenges are around administration of these schemes, ensuring communication is maintained during the absence, ensuring managers are aware of and supportive of our flex working policies."* (Private sector employer, 500+ employees)

### D.2 Other government initiatives

Although not a specific question within the call for evidence, during the coding of responses we noted when specific government initiatives were mentioned so that themes regarding them could also be drawn from the data.

The main government initiative mentioned in the survey was the Carers Allowance. A number of issues were raised by individual and organisational respondents, particularly relating to the limited numbers of hours that can be worked whilst still claiming the allowance or the need to find a sufficiently well-paid job to cover the costs of care required and the loss of benefits. This was seen as a particular barrier to people returning to work. Respondents also noted that the amount of Carers Allowance received was very low and did not financially support carers to undertake their caring responsibilities. Respondents also noted that there was a lack of information surrounding entitlement to Carers Allowance, and that it can take too long for the money to be received.

A number of individual and organisational respondents also mentioned the 15-30 hours free childcare that is available for children aged 3 to 4 years old. It was felt that there was a lack of information about who qualified for this support and difficulties in applying for the funding. Furthermore, respondents also identified that many nurseries were not offering this support because of the financial impact on their business. Respondents also noted that this initiative resulted in a lack of support for children under the age of three, which can influence the timing of people returning to work.

Additionally, it was noted that different benefits initiatives were not able to be used together, for example working and child tax credits and Carers Allowance. This was seen as disadvantaging carers in terms of the government financial support they could receive. Overall, it was felt that the government should be leading the way in terms of improving support and recognising the role of carers.

Lack of awareness within job centres of support that is available to returners such as older workers champions and fuller working lives schemes were identified as additional barriers.

## **Government initiatives**

*“The limitations set by Carers Allowance (to earnings and hours), have prevented me maintaining links with the working world and past career contacts, and from maintaining skills and knowledge, and credibility in a familiar industry. Without those limitations, my approach would have been to work or “Temp” whenever possible, with added benefits to my own confidence and health. Plus maintaining contributions to Family finances might have had less impact on siblings.” (Potential Returner)*

*“Need to work 16 hours to claim working tax credits which then puts me over the earnings threshold for carers allowance so can’t claim both at the same time.” (Potential returner)*

*“I have lost a £35k salary and I am only receiving £35pw carers allowance and middle rate DLA and low rate mobility for our disabled son. It is a pittance to live on... I also lose my carers allowance if I earn more than £110 pw.” (Potential Returner)*

*“My eldest child is three and is in preschool which is open in term time only. He is not eligible for his free 15 hours until January and his preschool has decided not to accept the 30 hours entitlement as this would create financial difficulties for them.” (Potential returner)*





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