



Government
Equalities Office

Quantitative analysis of those returning to the labour market following a break to care for others

Research report

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The Government Equalities Office (GEO) was allocated £5 million in the 2017 Spring Budget to support people back into work after time out from the labour market to care for others. This study seeks to build an understanding of the types of individuals that may be looking for and could benefit from such support.

The analysis uses historical data on ‘potential returners’ and ‘returners’ from ten years of the Labour Force Survey (LFS), covering 2007 to 2017. The LFS is a large-scale survey of the population in the UK collecting data on work characteristics and demographic for all individuals in the household. Households are interviewed for five consecutive quarters which means that individuals can be tracked over time, including any movements between inactivity (not in work nor seeking work), unemployment (actively seeking employment) and work (employment or self-employment). The analysis considers all working age individuals (defined as those aged between 18 and 64) to draw comparisons with potential returners and returners.

For the purposes of this work, potential returners were identified as those fulfilling four criteria:

- Are currently economically inactive (that is, not in work and not seeking work).
- Give “looking after family or home” as the main reason that they are not looking for work.
- Have previously had a job and have been economically inactive for at least one year.
- Report that they will definitely or probably work in the future (or would like a paid job even though not actively looking).

It was found that around 15 percent of all economically inactive individuals of working age meet the definition of “potential returners” outlined above, suggesting that there are approximately 1.2 million potential returners in the UK.

What are the demographic characteristics of potential returners? How do the characteristics of this group compare to the wider working age population? (Chapter Two)

Potential returners are overwhelmingly female (91 percent) and most are mothers with dependent children (84 percent). The remainder are fathers (6 percent) and men without children (3 percent). Many potential returners may also have non-child caring responsibilities: 47 percent of male potential returners and 15 percent of female potential

returners have an adult with health problems living in the same household. Health problems could also be important for potential returners themselves: 16 percent of female potential returners and 27 percent of male potential returners have a health problem which limits the amount or type of work they can do.

Using a multivariate regression analysis a number of further key characteristics associated with a greater likelihood of being a potential returner for the working age population were identified. Women and men are more likely to be potential returners if they:

- Have **dependent children**.
- Have **younger dependent children**.
- Have **more dependent children**.
- Live in a household with **other adults with a health problem**.
- Hold **lower levels of highest qualification**.
- Have a **health problem** which affects the amount or type of work they can do

Other characteristics had different associations for women and men. Women are more likely to be potential returners if they:

- Do **not have any of their own children aged 19 or over** living in the household.
- Do **not live in a household with children who are not their own**.
- Are **younger**.
- Are of **white ethnicity** and **not of black ethnicity**.
- Have a **partner who is not working**.
- Have a **partner with earnings at the bottom or top of the earnings range or a partner who is self-employed**.

Men are more likely to be potential returners if they:

- Are **single**.
- Are **older**.
- Are **not of Asian ethnicity**.
- Have a **partner who is not working or is working full-time**.

- Have a **partner whose earnings are at the top of the earnings range** or their partner is **not self-employed**.

Potential returners re-enter the labour market at a stable rate with steadily declining numbers as the period of inactivity lengthens. In response to questions as to whether and when they will work again, most potential returners (51 percent) see themselves as returning to work within one to five years and only one in five (20 percent) believe they will return to work within a year.

Which characteristics are associated with a greater likelihood of return to the labour market? (Chapter Three)

Potential returners can end their period of inactivity by either moving directly into work or beginning to actively seek employment as an initial step to work (that is, becoming unemployed). Overall, 8 percent of female potential returners and 9 percent of male potential returners return to the labour market each quarter either by entering work or by beginning to actively seek work (becoming unemployed). A high proportion of those that return are seeking work in the first quarter after returning:

- 54 percent of female returners are unemployed and 46 percent are in work upon return to the labour market.
- 69 percent of male returners are unemployed and 31 percent are in work upon return to the labour market.

Multivariate regression analysis identified the key characteristics associated with a greater likelihood of returning to the labour market (either directly entering work or beginning to seek employment and moving into unemployment) allowing for other related factors. Female potential returners are more likely to return if they:

- Are **single**.
- Have **older dependent children**.
- Have **fewer dependent children**.
- Do **not live in a household with other adults with a health problem**.
- Are **older**.
- Hold **higher levels of highest qualification**.
- Are of **white or Asian ethnicity** .
- Do **not have a health problem** which affects the amount or type of work they can do.

- Have a **partner who is working full-time**.
- Have a **partner who is self-employed**.

Most characteristics associated with a higher likelihood of return for female returners are also associated with a greater likelihood of being in work rather than being unemployed if they do return. Female potential returners are more likely to be in work upon return to the labour market (are less likely to be unemployed) if they:

- Have a **partner**.
- Do **not have dependent children**.
- Do **not live in a household with other adults with a health problem**.
- Are in the **middle age bands**.
- Hold **higher levels of highest qualification**.
- Are **not of white ethnicity**.
- Have a **working partner**.
- Have a **partner who is self-employed**.

The much smaller sample number for male potential returners means that identification of statistically significant associations with household and individual characteristics is much less likely and potentially less consistent than for female potential returners. The multivariate regression analysis identified only three characteristics associated with a greater likelihood of returning to the labour market for male potential returners¹. Male potential returners are more likely to return if they:

- Do **not live in a household with other adults with a health problem**.
- Are of **black ethnicity**.
- Live in a household with an **adult over the age of 64**.

Only one characteristic was associated with a greater likelihood of being in work rather than being unemployed for men if they do return. Male potential returners are more likely to be in work upon return to the labour market (are less likely to be unemployed upon return) if they:

- Are in the **youngest or oldest age groups**.

¹ The regression models could not be robustly estimated for differences by age of youngest child; by number of dependent children and for partners' work and earnings.

Returning to the labour market (into work or into unemployment) is less likely the longer that an individual is economically inactive. Returners are also more likely to be in work than in unemployment the sooner they return to the labour market.

What is the labour market position of those that return? Do those who return experience occupational downgrading? (Chapter Four)

Those who return to work tend to have poorer work characteristics than the general working population:

- Relative to other workers, **returners have lower weekly hours**, higher proportions in part-time work and underemployment, lower hourly wages, lower weekly earnings and lower proportions in permanent work or supervisory positions
- Relative to other workers, **returners are more likely to be self-employed and to work at or from home.**
- **Almost a third (30 percent) of potential returners experience occupational skill downgrading immediately as they return to work**, but almost a quarter (24 percent) experience upgrading in their occupation. There is also substantial change across all occupations. Potential returners are substantially more likely to be in lower skilled occupations than other workers *prior* to the period of inactivity but the break serves to slightly widen the gaps.

What is the experience of low-paid or low-skilled returners? (Chapters Two, Three and Four)

For the purpose of this work, those with lower levels of qualifications were treated as a proxy for the low-paid or low-skilled. Analysis of the return to the labour market and work characteristics upon return by qualification level for potential returners was limited to female potential returners because of the small number of male potential returners.

The key findings on the experience of those with lower levels of qualifications and their associated work characteristics are:

- **Women and men with lower levels of qualifications are more likely to be potential returners.** The likelihood of being a potential returner within the working age (19 to 64) population is greater at each qualification level than all levels above across six qualification levels; the one exception is that there is no statistically significant difference between those with A level or equivalent and those with other higher education qualifications.
- **Female potential returners with lower qualifications are less likely to return to the labour market.** The likelihood of return is greater for women with a degree or equivalent than for women in all other highest qualification categories and is

greater for women with other higher education qualifications than those with no qualifications of a highest qualification at GCSE A-C or equivalent.

- **Upon return to the labour market, female returners are more likely to be in work and are less likely to be unemployed if they have higher levels of qualification.** The likelihood of being in work is greater for female returners with a degree or equivalent than for women in all other highest qualification categories; is greater for women with other higher education qualifications or A level or equivalent than for those with no qualifications or other qualifications or GCSE A-C or equivalent; and is greater for women with GCSE A-C or equivalent than for those with no qualifications.
- **Upon return to work, female returners with lower qualifications tend to have less favourable work conditions than those with higher qualifications** in terms of receiving lower hourly pay and a lower likelihood of being in a supervisory position. They are also less likely to be self-employed or to work at or from home. However, *relative* to other female workers with the same qualification level, there is some evidence that returners with lower qualifications fair better upon return to work than those with higher qualifications in terms of higher weekly hours, lower proportions in part-time work and underemployment, higher hourly wages, higher weekly earnings and higher proportions in permanent work or supervisory positions.

Overall, while potential returners with lower levels of qualifications are less likely than those with higher qualifications to return to work, their work characteristics upon return are relatively better than those with higher qualifications.

Conclusions

Overall, a fairly consistent set of characteristics are associated both with a higher likelihood of being a potential returner and of a lower rate of return to the labour market and to work. The most dominant of these are being female and having child or adult caring responsibilities, while characteristics typically associated with limited work opportunities (such as low qualifications) are also significant. Indeed, the importance of limited work opportunities is supported by the fact that potential returners have poorer work characteristics (lower weekly hours, higher proportions in part-time work and underemployment, lower hourly wages, lower weekly earnings and lower proportions in permanent work or supervisory positions) when they do return to work and tend to be in lower occupations even prior to the period of absence from work.

Assistance for those with caring responsibilities to return to work would suggest a focus on means to address these responsibilities such as the provision and affordability of childcare or social care for adults, while policies to improve employment opportunities such as training and job search services would be more appropriate for those with limited or low opportunities to return. However, it should be considered that for any individual

potential returner, it may be a *combination* of caring responsibilities and limited work opportunities that is the key barrier to returning to work and a combination of support may therefore be the most effective approach.

There are no marked “critical” times when potential returners are more likely to return to work and the only strong pattern is that potential returners are more likely to return as children grow up. In addition, most potential returners appear to be prepared to re-enter work *soon*, but not just yet (within one to five years but not in the coming year). This suggests a potential “nudge” approach to encouraging potential returners to return to work around setting a critical timing point. For example, support could be offered at a specific time (such as age of child or duration of absence from work), backed by the sense of a social norm that this is the time to return to work.

1. Introduction

The Government Equalities Office (GEO) was allocated £5 million in the 2017 Spring Budget to support people back into work after time out from the labour market to care for others. This study seeks to build an understanding of the types of individuals that may be looking for and could benefit from such support.

For the purposes of this work, we class “potential returners” as those who are:

- Currently economically inactive because they are caring for family members.
- Have been inactive for more than one year.
- Interested in potentially returning to work in the future.

We class “returners” as those who have previously been in the above group, but have now returned to the labour market (that is, are now employed or looking for work) at any level.

The report is structured to help answer four sets of questions:

- What are the demographic characteristics of potential returners? How do the characteristics of this group compare to the wider working age population? (Chapter Two)
- Which of these characteristics are associated with a greater likelihood of return to the labour market? (Chapter Three)
- What is the labour market position of those that return? Do those who return experience occupational downgrading? (Chapter Four)
- What is the experience of low-paid or low-skilled returners? (Chapters Two, Three and Four)

A final chapter offers some concluding thoughts on what the analysis indicates for future policy consideration.

The analysis uses data from ten years of the Labour Force Survey (LFS), covering 2007 to 2017. The LFS is a large-scale survey of the population in the UK collecting data on work characteristics and demographic for all individuals in the household. Households are interviewed for five consecutive quarters, which means that individuals can be tracked over time, including any movements between inactivity (not in work nor seeking work), unemployment (actively seeking employment) and work (employment or self-employment). The analysis considers all working age individuals defined as those aged between 19 and 64. All statistics and regressions were weighted using the appropriate LFS weights. One drawback of this data is that it only permits a short window of time in

which to track individuals and the experience of potential returners. However, it has a key advantage that the survey provides consistent data across the ten year period.²

Data from the LFS was used in two ways:

- Chapter 2 uses data on working age individuals (aged 19 to 64) drawn from wave 1 of the LFS person datasets from across the ten years to explore the first set of questions regarding the characteristics of potential returners.
- Chapters 3 and 4 use a similar sample of working age individuals drawn from all waves of the survey and linked across consecutive waves to form a longitudinal data set.³ This data is used to answer the second and third set of questions on the likelihood that potential returners will return to the labour market and their employment characteristics upon return.

The final set of questions on the experience of low-paid and low- skilled workers is explored by considering the experience of low qualified individuals using both datasets and the findings presented across all three chapters.

Multivariate regression models were estimated to identify which characteristics are statistically significantly associated with the likelihood of being a potential returner using data on all working age individuals (defined as aged 19 to 64). Models were also estimated for the likelihood of return to the labour market using data for potential returners and for the likelihood of being in work upon return for returners to identify which characteristics are statistically significantly associated with greater likelihoods of return and work upon return. Finally, models were estimated for a range of work characteristics for all workers aged 19 to 64 to identify whether returners have statistically significant different characteristics from all other workers. All models were estimated separately for women and men and statistically significant differences between categories were noted at the 95 percent confidence level. The full specifications and results for these models are presented in the Annex.⁴

² The only inconsistency across the ten years was a change in occupation codes with meant that the top two categories needed to be merged into one category. All earnings and hourly wage measures were indexed to June 2017 using ONS seasonally adjusted average weekly earnings.

³ Individuals were matched across quarters using the variables QUOTA WEEK W1YR QRTR ADD HHLD and RECNO.

⁴ As the age of youngest child and number of children cannot be estimated in the same regression as the variable for the presence of children, additional models were estimated for parents with these variables. Similarly, because partner's work and earnings quintile cannot be estimated in the same regression as the partner variable, additional regressions were estimated for those with partners and those with working partners.

2. Characteristics of potential returners

This chapter presents a description of the characteristics of potential returners. The first section describes how potential returners were identified in the data. The following sections present the patterns in household structure, individual characteristics and partner's work for potential returners. Comparisons are drawn throughout with the wider working age population and regression analysis is used to highlight which characteristics are associated with a greater likelihood of being a potential returner (full regression results are documented in the Annex). The final section of the chapter examines the length of inactivity and the perceived likelihood of future return to the labour force and work for potential returners.

2.1 Potential returners and other inactive individuals

A potential returner is defined as an individual who is currently economically inactive due to caring for others and is looking to return to the labour market. Such potential returners have been identified in the LFS survey as those who:

- (a) Are currently inactive (not working and not available for or looking for work).
- (b) Respond "looking after family or home" as the main reason that they are not looking for work or the reason that they cannot start work in the next two weeks.
- (c) Have previously had a job but have been inactive for a year or more.
- (d) Think they will definitely or probably work in the future (or would like a paid job even though they are not looking) which provides a measure of interest in returning to work in the future.

Over the ten year period of the LFS data considered, almost three quarters (74 percent) of all individuals of working age (19 to 64) were in work. A further 5 percent were unemployed (available and looking for work) and 22 percent were inactive (not working and not available and looking for work).

Of all inactive individuals, 65 percent previously held a job one year or more ago.⁵ Of these, 31 percent report that they are inactive to care for family or home while the remainder report a different reason for their inactivity.⁶ Overall, 20 percent of those who

⁵ Almost a quarter (24 percent) of those inactive reported that they had never had a job. Within this group, 40 percent were not active because they were students, consistent with 59 percent being single without children, 49 percent being under the age of 25, and 74 percent being interested in working in the future. Only 30 percent had dependent children, but 28 percent had another adult in the household with a health problem affecting daily activities and 28 percent had a health problem themselves that affected the amount or kind of work they could do. Around 24 percent were Asian.

⁶ Most of those reporting a different reason report they are inactive because they are long term sick or disabled (45 percent) or retired from paid work (35 percent), while 5 percent report the reason as being a student, 3 percent as temporarily sick or injured and 5 percent as not needing employment.

are inactive are on a career break to care for others. Within this group, 73 percent are interested in returning to work. Thus, 15 percent of all inactive individuals are potential returners (16,732 individuals in the data sample). This is illustrated through the shaded cells in table 1 which summarises how potential returners fit into the entire population of inactive individuals.

Table 1: Potential returners among all inactive individuals

Proportions of all inactive												
Time since last job	Less than one year				One year or more				Never worked			
Proportion of all inactive	11%				65%				24%			
<i>Proportion with reason care of family or home</i>	24%				31%				7%			
Reason is care of family or home?	No		Yes		No		Yes		No		Yes	
Proportion of all inactive	8%		3%		45%		20%		18%		7%	
<i>Proportion interested in future work</i>	64%		90%		33%		73%		74%		55%	
Interested in future work?	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Proportion of all inactive	3%	5%	<1%	2%	30%	15%	5%	15%	5%	13%	3%	4%
Number of observations	115,564											

Source: LFS (2007- 2017)

Notes: Sample includes inactive individuals aged 19 to 64 in wave 1 of the LFS individual data over the ten year period 2007 to 2017. The shaded cell indicates potential returners. <1 denotes a positive percentage which is less than 0.5. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Applying the estimate that 15 percent of inactive individuals are potential returners, indicates that there are around 1.2 million potential returners in the UK.⁷

⁷ The most recent ONS figures indicate that there are 7.9 million inactive individuals aged 18 to 64 in the July to September quarter of 2017 (derived as 8.883 million aged 16-64 minus 0.957 million aged 16-17). (<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/dataset/employmentunemploymentandeconomicinactivitybyagegroupseasonallyadjustedada05sa>).

2.2 Household characteristics

This section presents the household characteristics of potential returners. It also draws comparison with the working age population (all individuals aged 19 to 64) to indicate which types of individuals are more likely to be potential returners relative to the broader population. Regression models were estimated to identify which of these characteristics were statistically significant drivers of being a potential returner while controlling for other characteristics.

Table 2 presents the profiles of potential returners by gender and the presence of dependent children.

Table 2: Gender and family structure

	Potential returners	Working age population
Women:		
- Single, no children	2%	13%
- In a couple, no children	5%	17%
- Single, dependent children	25%	5%
- In a couple, dependent children	59%	16%
Total for women	91%	50%
Men:		
- Single, no children	2%	17%
- In a couple, no children	2%	16%
- Single, dependent children	1%	<1%
- In a couple, dependent children	5%	16%
Total for men	9%	50%
Total	100%	100%
Number of observations	16,732	541,165

Source: LFS (2007- 2017)

Notes: <1 denotes a positive percentage which is less than 0.5. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. Potential returners consist of those who previously held a job and have not worked for more than one year, are inactive to care for family or home and are interested in returning to work. Dependent children are respondents' own children living in the household under age 19.

Potential returners are overwhelmingly female (91 percent) and mostly mothers with dependent children (84 percent); 6 percent are fathers and 3 percent are men without dependent children. In comparison to the working age population, women with children are substantially over-represented among potential returners.

Inactivity due to looking after family and home is likely to be related to the presence of an individual's own dependent children, but may also be related to the need to care for other dependent children (such as grandchildren), adults with health problems or elderly adults in the household. Very few potential returners (1 percent) have other dependent children in the household and a similar number (2 percent) have adults over the age of 64 in the household. However, 18 percent of potential returners have some other adult with health problems in the household. Table 3 shows the combinations of these potential caring responsibilities.

Table 3: Gender and caring responsibilities

	Potential returners	Working age population
Women:		
- None	4%	23%
- Only dependent children	74%	19%
- Only adults	3%	6%
- Both children and adults	10%	3%
Men:		
- None	1%	26%
- Only dependent children	4%	15%
- Only adults	2%	7%
- Both children and adults	2%	2%
Total	100%	100%
Number of observations	16,424	516,849

Source: LFS (2007- 2017)

Notes: Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. Dependent children includes own dependent children and any other in the household. Adult caring responsibilities could include another adult in the household with a health problem or an adult in the household over the age of 64. Numbers of observations are less than in the previous table due to missing household information.

While the vast majority of potential returners are mothers with dependent children, a substantial proportion (12 percent) also have other adults in the household who may require care. A smaller proportion (5 percent) only have such potential caring responsibilities related to adults. However, the proportion of potential returners with possible caring responsibilities related to adults (17 percent) is roughly the same as in the working age population (although more unevenly balanced towards women). This suggests that these other caring responsibilities are not a key driver of inactivity among potential returners.

70 percent of all potential returners have a partner and 89 percent have dependent children. Most of those who have children, have a child under the age of five (68 percent), although roughly even proportions have one, two or three or more children. As

noted above, very few have other potential caring responsibilities in the form of adult children, other children under the age of 19 or adults over the age of 64 in the household. Yet, 18 percent do have another adult with a health problem in the household. Table 4 describes these household characteristics for potential returners, alongside those of the working age population.

Table 4: Household characteristics

	Potential returners			Working age population	
	All	Women	Men	Women	Men
With partner	70%	71%	68%	64%	66%
Dependent children	89%	92%	65%	41%	34%
Youngest child age (for those with children):					
- under 5	68%	69%	50%	43%	45%
- 5 to 11	24%	23%	35%	32%	31%
- 12 to 18	8%	8%	15%	25%	24%
Number of children (for those with children):					
- one	30%	29%	33%	44%	41%
- two	40%	41%	35%	40%	42%
- three or more	30%	30%	33%	17%	17%
Adult child(ren) in household	7%	10%	7%	9%	11%
Other children under age 19 in household	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%
Adult(s) over age 64 in household	2%	2%	4%	2%	2%
Other adult(s) with health problem in household	18%	15%	47%	16%	19%
Number of observations	16,732	15,271	1,461	282,291	258,874

Source: LFS (2007- 2017)

Notes: Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. Dependent children are aged under 19 and adult children are own children aged over 18.

Multivariate regression analysis identified the household characteristics statistically significantly associated with a greater likelihood of being a potential returner for the working age population even allowing for other related factors (regression results are

presented in tables A1 and A2 in the Annex). Women and men are more likely to be potential returners if they:

- Have **dependent children** (the likelihood is greater for those with dependent children than those without any dependent children).
- Have **younger dependent children** (the likelihood is greater for those with a youngest dependent child aged under 5 than for those with a youngest child aged 5 to 11 or aged 12 to 18 and is greater for those with a youngest child aged 5 to 11 than those with a youngest child aged 12 to 18).
- Have **more dependent children** (the likelihood is greater for those with two dependent children than those with one dependent child and is greater for those with three or more dependent children than those with one or two dependent children).
- Live in a household with **other adults with a health problem** (the likelihood is greater for those who live in a household with other adults with a health problem than for those who live in a household without any such adults).

Women are also more likely to be potential returners if they:

- Do **not have any own children aged 19 or over** living in the household (the likelihood is greater for women without own children aged 19 or over living in the household than for those with such children).
- Do **not live in a household with children who are not their own** (the likelihood is greater for women without other children than for those with other children).

Men are also more likely to be potential returners if they:

- Are **single** (the likelihood is greater for men without a partner than for those with a partner).

2.3 Individual characteristics

This section explores the individual characteristics of potential returners. Most potential returners are in the middle two age ranges (between the age of 25 and 44), with only 11 percent under the age of 25 and 18 percent aged 45 or older. Most have a highest qualification below A levels and almost one third have a GCSE level qualification as their highest qualification. Almost all potential returners are white (86 percent), although 8 percent are Asian. Finally, 17 percent have a health problem that affects work (either the amount or type or work they can do). Table 5 presents these individual characteristics of potential returners alongside those of the working population.

Table 5: Individual characteristics

	Potential returners			Working age population	
	All	Women	Men	Women	Men
Age group:					
- less than 25	11%	11%	4%	13%	14%
- 25 to 34	37%	38%	22%	22%	22%
- 35 to 44	34%	34%	34%	23%	22%
- 45 and over	18%	16%	40%	42%	42%
Highest qualification:					
- degree	16%	16%	10%	26%	26%
- higher education	6%	7%	4%	10%	8%
- A level	16%	16%	19%	19%	25%
- GCSE A-C	32%	32%	24%	23%	18%
- other	14%	14%	16%	10%	11%
- none	16%	15%	26%	13%	12%
Ethnic group:					
- white	86%	86%	88%	87%	87%
- black	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%
- Asian	8%	8%	6%	7%	7%
- other	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%
Health problem affecting work	17%	16%	27%	16%	15%
Number of observations	16,732	15,271	1,461	282,291	258,874

Source: LFS (2007- 2017)

Notes: Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. Highest qualification groups include all equivalent qualifications.

Multivariate regression analysis identified the individual characteristics associated with a greater likelihood of being a potential returner for the working age population even allowing for other related factors (regression results are presented in table A1 in the Annex). Women and men are more likely to be potential returners if they:

- Hold **lower levels of highest qualification** (the likelihood is greater at each qualification level than all levels above across six qualification levels of (a) no qualifications; (b) other qualifications; (c) GCSE A-C or equivalent; (d) A level or equivalent; (e) other higher education qualification and (f) degree or equivalent except that there is no statistically significant difference between those with qualification level (d) and those with qualification level (e)).

- Have a **health problem** which affects the amount or type of work they can do (the likelihood is greater for those with such health problem than those without such a health problem).

Other characteristics had different associations for women and men. Women are more likely to be potential returners if they:

- Are **younger** (the likelihood is greater for women under age 25 and those aged 25 to 34 than for those aged 35 to 44 or aged 45 or over and is greater for those aged 35 to 44 than for those aged 45 or over).
- Are of **white ethnicity** and **not of black ethnicity** (the likelihood is greater for women of white ethnicity than for those of black, Asian or other or mixed ethnicity and is greater for those of Asian or other or mixed ethnicity than for those of black ethnicity).

Men are more likely to be potential returners if they:

- Are **older** (the likelihood is greater for men aged 25 to 34, 35 to 44 or aged 45 and over than for those under age 25 and is greater for those aged 35 to 44 than for those aged 25 to 34).
- Are **not of Asian ethnicity** (the likelihood is greater for men with white, black or other or mixed ethnicity than for those with Asian ethnicity).

In terms of geographic regions, the distribution of potential returners is similar to that for the working age population for both men and women. The regression analysis controlling for all other household and individual characteristics showed that there were some statistically significant differences in the likelihood of being a potential returner across the regions and devolved nations (regression results are presented in table A1 in the Annex):

- **Women living in the North West and Yorkshire and Humberside regions are less likely to be potential returners** than those most other regions and the devolved nations. On the other hand, women living in London, the South East and East of England regions are more likely to be potential returners than those living in all other regions and the devolved nations, while those living in the South West are more likely than those in most other regions to be a potential returner.
- Men living in the North East region are more likely to be potential returners than those living in other English regions and Northern Ireland.

2.4 Partner's work

Almost three quarters (74 percent) have a partner who is working full-time and 20 percent have a partner who is not working. Of those with working partners, just over a quarter (28

percent) have a partner who is employed with earnings in the highest quintile and relatively low proportions have employed partners with earnings in the lowest quintiles, while one quarter have a partner who is self-employed. Table 6 describes the partner's characteristics for potential returners who have a partner, with connected comparisons for the working age population.

Table 6: Partner's work

	Potential returners			Working age population	
	All	Women	Men	Women	Men
Partner:					
- not working	20%	16%	57%	18%	28%
- working part-time	7%	6%	11%	6%	28%
- working full-time	74%	78%	32%	76%	44%
Working partner's earnings:					
- bottom quintile	7%	6%	24%	5%	24%
- 2 nd quintile	13%	12%	22%	10%	21%
- 3 rd quintile	14%	14%	13%	16%	17%
- 4 th quintile	14%	14%	12%	20%	15%
- top quintile	28%	28%	22%	25%	11%
- self-employed	25%	26%	7%	24%	12%
Number of observations	11,453	10,471	982	174,376	165,411

Source: LFS (2007- 2017)

Notes: Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. Earnings for the self-employed are not recorded in the LFS so this group is treated separately for the earnings categories.

Multivariate regression analysis identified the partner's work characteristics associated with a greater likelihood of being a potential returner for the working age population even allowing for other related factors (regression results are presented in tables A3 and A4 in the Annex). Women are more likely to be potential returners if they:

- Have a **partner who is not working** (the likelihood is greater for women with non-working partners than for those with a part-time or full-time working partner).
- Have a **partner with earnings are at the bottom or top of the earnings range or their partner is self-employed** (the likelihood is greater for women with working partners with earnings in the bottom two or top quintiles or who are self-employed than for those with working partners whose earnings are in the third or fourth quintiles and is greater for women with working partners with earnings in the

third quintile than for those with working partners whose earnings are in the fourth quintile).

Men are more likely to be potential returners if they:

- Have a **partner who is not working or is working full-time** (the likelihood is greater for men with non-working partners than for those with a part-time or full-time working partner and is greater for men with a full-time working partner than for those with a part-time working partner).
- Have a **partner whose earnings are at the top of the earnings range or their partner is not self-employed** (the likelihood is greater for men with working partners with earnings in the top quintile than for those with working partners with earnings in any other quintile; is greater for men with working partners with earnings in the second lowest quintile than for those with working partners with earnings in the bottom quintile; and is greater for men with working partners with earnings in the second, fourth and highest quintiles than those with working partners who are self-employed).

There could be different reasons why potential returners return to work depending on the income of their partner. For example, those with partners in lower quintiles might feel economic pressures to return to work, whereas those with partners in higher quintiles might not have such economic pressures but may be able to afford to pay for additional care support allowing them to return to work.

2.5 Duration of inactivity and future plans

This section explores potential returners duration of inactivity and their future plans.

Table 7 presents the duration of inactivity (time since last job) for potential returners. The “total” column shows the distribution across the periods recorded in the survey and the “yearly” column shows these proportions divided by the number of years in the category to allow annual comparisons across the different time categories.

The pattern in duration of inactivity is almost identical for female and male potential returners, with 16 percent having been inactive for between one and two years and the proportions declining steadily as the number of years of inactivity increases down to an average of 3 percent for each year among those inactive for between 10 and 15 years. This indicates the lack of any distinct “trigger time” when potential returners might return to the labour market.

Table 7: Duration of inactivity

Time since last job	All		Women		Men	
	Total	Yearly	Total	Yearly	Total	Yearly
1 to less than 2 years	16%	16%	16%	16%	17%	16%
2 to less than 3 years	13%	13%	13%	13%	12%	13%
3 to less than 4 years	11%	11%	11%	11%	12%	11%
4 to less than 5 years	10%	10%	10%	10%	9%	10%
5 to less than 10 years	26%	5%	26%	5%	26%	5%
10 to less than 15 years	14%	3%	14%	3%	13%	3%
15 years or more	10%	-	10%	-	10%	-
Total	100%	-	100%	-	100%	-
Number of observations	16,732		15,271		1,461	

Source: LFS (2007- 2017)

Notes: Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

One question of interest is how the length of inactivity relates to the time since the birth of the first child. Figure 1 gives some indication of this relationship by presenting the average age of oldest child (still living in the household) by the duration of inactivity for mothers and fathers. It should be noted that, for longer durations of inactivity in particular, the average age of oldest child may be understated by the exclusion of older children no longer living in the household. As would be expected, given the previous findings, the average age of oldest child increases with the length of inactivity. However, it is interesting to note that the average age is greater than the length of inactivity for women who have been inactive 5 years or less, indicating that, on average, the ongoing period of inactivity did not begin with the birth of the first child but may have begun after the birth of a subsequent child or when maternity leave ended (those on maternity leave are not classes as inactive). For men, the relationship is considerably weaker, indicating a lack of any substantial association between the birth of the first child and initiation of inactivity.

Figure 1: Mean age of oldest child by inactivity duration

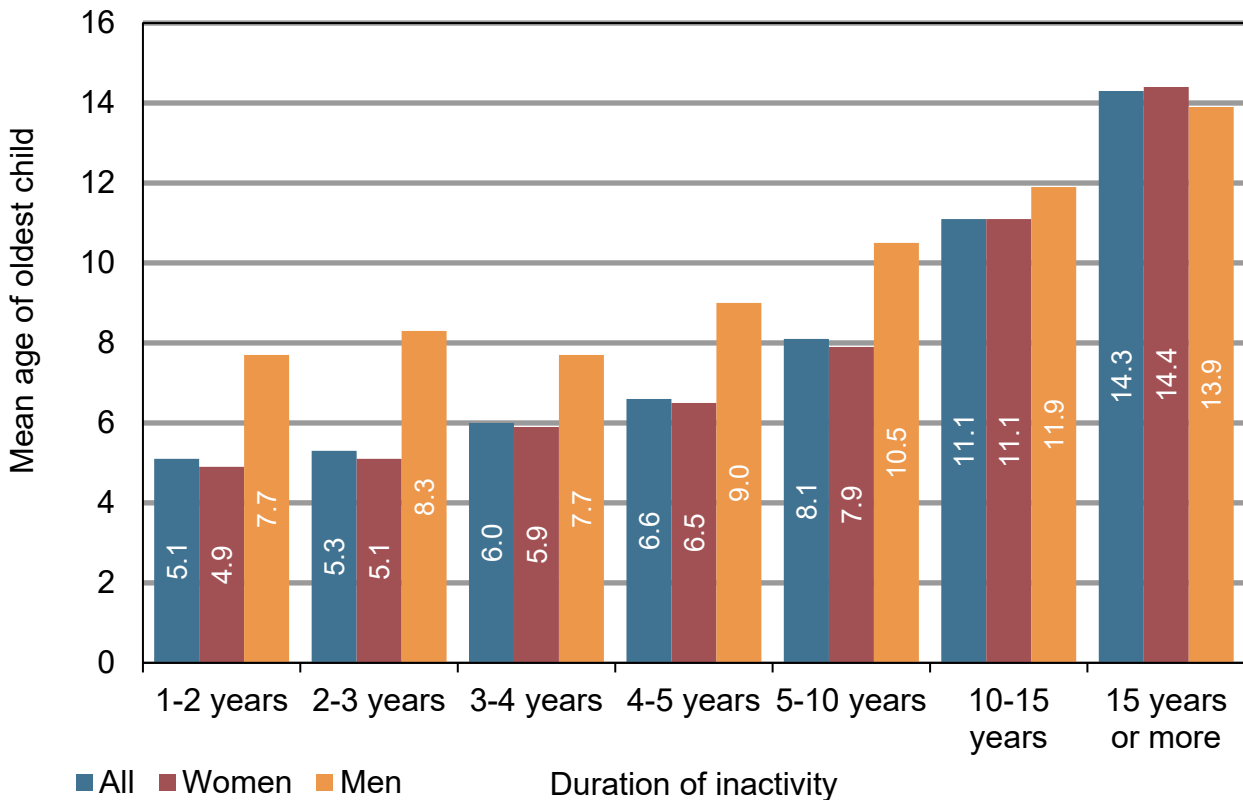


Table 8 presents the combined responses to questions about the likelihood of returning to work and when might return to work. The broad patterns for female and male potential returners are similar. Most potential returners report that they will definitely work again (66 percent for women and 50 percent for men), while around a third report that they will probably work again (29 percent for women and 34 percent for men). The similarity for men and women and the high proportions giving these responses is not surprising given that these responses are one of the required criterion used to classify someone as a potential returner.

Most potential returners see themselves as returning within one to five years and less than a quarter within one year (19 percent for women and 23 percent for men if both definite and probable returns are included). In addition, male potential returners are more likely than female ones to report that they do not know either when they will return or whether they will return at all. It should be noted that those in the potential returners group reporting that they probably or definitely will not return or don't know whether they will return are those who reported that they would like a job even though they are not looking for one.

Table 8: Future work plans

Whether / when will work again	All	Women	Men
Definitely work again:			
- next year	17%	17%	18%
- in 1-5 years	36%	37%	21%
- in more than 5 years	7%	7%	3%
- don't know when	5%	5%	8%
Probably work again:			
- next year	3%	2%	5%
- in 1-5 years	15%	15%	12%
- in more than 5 years	7%	7%	6%
- don't know when	6%	5%	11%
Probably not work again	2%	1%	5%
Definitely not work again	1%	1%	3%
Cannot say / do not know when will work again	3%	3%	9%
Total	100%	100%	100%
Number of observations	13,343	12,177	1,166

Source: LFS (2007- 2017)

Notes: Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. Potential returners include some who say they will probably or definitely not return to work if they also responded that they would like a job even though they are not working.

3. Likelihood of return to the labour market and work

This chapter examines the likelihood of return to the labour market and to work for potential returners. The first section considers the rates of return to the labour market and to work across potential returners with different household characteristics while the second considers the relationships with individual characteristics. The third section examines the patterns across partners' work behaviour while the final section analyses the associations with time out of the labour market and expectations about the time of return. Throughout, regression analysis is used to identify which characteristics are associated with a greater likelihood of a return to the labour market and a greater likelihood of being in work upon return.

3.1 Proportions returning by household characteristics

Table 9 presents the rate of return to the labour market and proportion in work upon return by gender and family structure.

Table 9: Proportions returning each quarter by gender and family structure

	Proportions returning to the labour market		Proportions of returners in work	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Single, no children	7%	8%	46%	27%
In a couple, no children	7%	7%	53%	34%
Single, dependent children	8%	11%	30%	20%
In a couple, dependent children	8%	10%	53%	32%
All	8%	9%	46%	31%
Number of observations	51,215	5,138	4,003	451

Source: LFS (2007- 2017)

Notes: Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Overall, 8 percent of female potential returners and 9 percent of male potential returners return to the labour market (either entering work or unemployment) each quarter. This rate of return is slightly higher for those with dependent children than those without dependent children but the rate is very similar for those with and without a partner. A high proportion of those that return are unemployed in the first quarter after returning (that is, they are seeking work, rather than going directly into a job):

- 54 percent of female returners are unemployed and 46 percent are in work upon return to the labour market

- 69 percent of male returners are unemployed and 31 percent are in work upon return to the labour market.

The likelihood of being in work within the quarter of return is higher for those with partners.

Table 10 shows how the likelihood of return and proportion in work upon return varies by potential caring responsibilities. The likelihood of return to the labour market is slightly lower for those with potential adult caring responsibilities (alone or in combination with dependent children), while women with dependent children are slightly less likely to be in work upon return than those without children.

Table 10: Proportions returning each quarter by caring responsibilities

	Proportions returning to the labour market		Proportions of returners in work	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
None	8%	11%	54%	24%
Only dependent children	8%	12%	46%	34%
Only adults	6%	6%	49%	35%
Both children and adults	6%	7%	41%	23%
Number of observations	52,637	5,284	4,125	469

Source: LFS (2007- 2017)

Notes: Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Table 11 presents the proportions returning and in work upon return across all household characteristics.

Table 11: Proportions returning each quarter by household characteristics

	Proportions returning to the labour market			Proportions of returners in work		
	All	Women	Men	All	Women	Men
No partner	8%	8%	9%	30%	31%	24%
With partner	8%	8%	9%	51%	53%	33%
No dependent children	7%	7%	7%	44%	51%	30%
Dependent children	8%	8%	10%	45%	46%	31%
Youngest child age:						
- under 5	8%	7%	10%	46%	47%	35%
- 5 to 11	10%	10%	9%	44%	46%	27%
- 12 to 18	8%	8%	10%	40%	42%	28%
Number of children:						
- one	9%	9%	10%	41%	41%	39%
- two	9%	8%	11%	47%	49%	29%
- three or more	7%	6%	9%	46%	48%	24%
No adult child(ren) in household	8%	8%	9%	45%	47%	31%
Adult child(ren) in household	7%	7%	7%	38%	39%	[32%]
No other children in household	8%	8%	9%	45%	47%	31%
Other children in household	7%	7%	11%	[37%]	[42%]	[11%]
No adult(s) over age 64	8%	8%	9%	45%	46%	31%
Adult(s) over age 64	7%	6%	10%	45%	47%	[38%]
No adult(s) with health problem	9%	8%	12%	46%	47%	32%
Adult(s) with health problem	6%	6%	6%	39%	43%	29%
Number of observations	59,057	53,653	5,404	4,662	4,186	476

Source: LFS (2007- 2017)

Notes: Proportions in square brackets are based on subsamples of less than 50 and should be treated with caution.

Multivariate regression analysis identified the household characteristics associated with a greater likelihood of returning to the labour market (either directly entering work or beginning to seek employment and moving into unemployment) allowing for other related factors (regression results are presented in tables B1 and B2 in the Annex). Female potential returners are more likely to return if they:

- Are **single** (the likelihood is greater for women without a partner than for those with a partner).

- Have **older dependent children** (the likelihood is greater for women with a youngest dependent child aged 5 to 11 or aged 12 to 18 than for those with a youngest child aged under 5).
- Have **fewer dependent children** (the likelihood is greater for women with three or more dependent children than for those with one or two dependent children).
- Do **not** live in a household with **other adults with a health problem** (the likelihood is greater for women who do not live in a household with other adults with a health problem than for those who live in a household with any such adult).

Most characteristics associated with a higher likelihood of return for female returners are also associated with a greater likelihood of being in work rather than being unemployed if they do return (regression results are presented in tables B5 and B6 in the Annex). Female potential returners are more likely to be in work upon return to the labour market (are less likely to be unemployed upon return) if they:

- Have a **partner** (the likelihood is greater for women with a partner than for those without a partner).
- Do **not have dependent children** (the likelihood is greater for women without dependent children than those with any dependent children).
- Do **not** live in a household with **other adults with a health problem** (the likelihood is greater for women who do not live in a household with other adults with a health problem than for those who live in a household with any such adult).

The much smaller sample number than for male potential returners means that identification of statistically significant associations with household characteristics is much less likely and potentially less consistent than for female potential returners.⁸ The multivariate regression analysis identified only three characteristics associated with a greater likelihood of returning to the labour market for male potential returners (regression results are presented in tables B1 and B2 in the Annex). Male potential returners are more likely to return if they:

- Do not live in a household with **other adults with a health problem** (the likelihood is greater for men who do not live in a household with other adults with a health problem than for those who live in a household with any such adult).
- Live in a household with an **adult over the age of 64** (the likelihood is greater for men who live in a household with an adult over the age of 64 than for those who live in a household without such an adult).

⁸ The regression models could not be robustly estimated for differences by age of youngest child; by number of dependent children and for partners' work and earnings.

3.2 Proportions returning by individual characteristics

This section explores the variation in the likelihood of return and the proportion in work across individual characteristics. Findings are presented in table 12.

Table 12: Proportions returning each quarter by individual characteristics

	Proportions returning to the labour market			Proportions of returners in work		
	All	Women	Men	All	Women	Men
Age group:						
- less than 25	9%	8%	15%	34%	33%	[53%]
- 25 to 34	8%	8%	10%	44%	46%	22%
- 35 to 44	8%	8%	9%	49%	51%	28%
- 45 and over	8%	8%	8%	44%	46%	35%
Highest qualification:						
- degree	9%	9%	12%	60%	63%	38%
- higher education	9%	9%	7%	52%	52%	[39%]
- A level	9%	9%	9%	46%	49%	27%
- GCSE A-C	8%	8%	11%	40%	41%	29%
- other	8%	8%	8%	40%	41%	34%
- none	6%	6%	7%	30%	31%	26%
Ethnic group:						
- white	8%	8%	8%	46%	48%	31%
- black	12%	12%	17%	34%	35%	[24%]
- Asian	8%	7%	11%	42%	42%	[24%]
- other	10%	10%	15%	41%	41%	[41%]
No health problem	8%	8%	10%	46%	47%	32%
Health problem	6%	6%	7%	39%	41%	25%
Number of observations	59,057	53,653	5,404	4,662	4,186	476

Source: LFS (2007- 2017)

Notes: Proportions in square brackets are based on subsamples of less than 50 and should be treated with caution.

Multivariate regression analysis identified the individual characteristics associated with a greater likelihood of returning to the labour market (either directly entering work or beginning to seek employment and moving into unemployment) allowing for other related factors (regression results are presented in table B1 in the Annex). Female potential returners are more likely to return if they:

- Are **older** (the likelihood is greater for women aged 45 or over than for those aged under 25, 25 to 34 or 35 to 44).
- Hold **higher levels of highest qualification** (the likelihood is greater for women with a degree or equivalent than women in all other highest qualification categories and is greater for women with other higher education qualifications than those with no qualifications or a highest qualification at GCSE A-C or equivalent).
- Are of **white or Asian ethnicity** (the likelihood is greater for women of white or Asian ethnicity than women of black or other or mixed ethnicity).
- Do **not have a health problem** which affects the amount or type of work they can do (the likelihood is greater for those without such health problem than those with such a health problem).

Most characteristics associated with a higher likelihood of return for female returners are again also associated with a greater likelihood of being in work rather than being unemployed if they do return (regression results are presented in table B6 in the Annex). Female potential returners are more likely to be in work upon return to the labour market (are less likely to be unemployed upon return) if they:

- Are in the **middle age bands** (the likelihood is greater for women aged 25 to 34 or 35 to 44 than for those aged under 25 and is greater for those aged 35 to 44 than for those aged 45 or older).
- Hold **higher levels of highest qualification** (the likelihood is greater for women with a degree or equivalent than for women in all other highest qualification categories; is greater for women with other higher education qualifications or A level or equivalent than for those with no qualifications or other qualifications or GCSE A-C or equivalent; and is greater for women with GCSE A-C or equivalent than for those with no qualifications).
- Are **not of white ethnicity** (the likelihood is greater for women of black or Asian or other or mixed ethnicity than women of white ethnicity).

For the smaller sample of male potential returners, only one individual characteristic is associated with a greater likelihood of returning to the labour market (regression results are presented in table B1 in the Annex). Male potential returners are more likely to return if they:

- Are of **black ethnicity** (the likelihood is greater for men of black ethnicity than for men of white ethnicity).

Only one characteristic was associated with a greater likelihood of being in work rather than being unemployed for men if they do return (regression results are presented in

table B5 in the Annex). Male potential returners are more likely to be in work upon return to the labour market (are less likely to be unemployed upon return) if they:

- Are in the **youngest or oldest age groups** (the likelihood is greater for men aged under 25 than for those aged 25 to 34 or aged 34 or 35 and for men aged 45 or older than those aged 25 to 34).

There are only a few differences in the rate of return across regions (not shown in the table) (regression results are presented in table B1 in the Annex):

- Women and men in Northern Ireland are less likely to return than those in all the English regions and other devolved nations.
- Women in the East Midlands are more likely to return than those in all other English regions and devolved nations (with the exception of Wales).
- Women in London are less likely to return than those in most other English regions and devolved nations.
- Men in the East of England are less likely to return than those in three other English regions and devolved nations.

There are even fewer differences in the proportion in work across regions (also not shown in the table) (regression results are presented in table B5 in the Annex):

- For women, **the proportion in work upon return is lowest in the North East** (and lower than in all other regions and devolved nations with the exception of Yorkshire and Humberside) **and highest in Northern Ireland** (and higher than in several other regions).
- There were no differences across regions for men.

3.3 Proportions returning by partner's work

This section examines partner's work, where applicable, and returners returning to the labour market and work. Table 13 shows the variation in the likelihood of return and the proportion in work across partner's work and earnings level for those with potential returners with partners.

Table 13: Proportions returning each quarter by partner's work

	Proportions returning to the labour market			Proportions of returners in work		
	All	Women	Men	All	Women	Men
Partner:						
- not working	6%	6%	6%	28%	28%	26%
- working part-time	8%	7%	14%	41%	44%	35%
- working full-time	8%	8%	11%	56%	57%	41%
Working partner's earnings:						
- bottom quintile	9%	7%	20%	[38%]	[42%]	
- 2 nd quintile	6%	6%	5%	32%	33%	
- 3 rd quintile	10%	10%	[20%]	45%	44%	n/r
- 4 th quintile	7%	7%	[8%]	53%	52%	
- top quintile	8%	8%	4%	59%	58%	
- self-employed	9%	9%	16%	67%	67%	
Number of observations	40,171	36,551	3,620	3,112	2,802	310

Source: LFS (2007- 2017)

Notes: Proportions in square brackets are based on subsamples of less than 50 and should be treated with caution. n/r denotes not reported because all categories have subsamples of less than 50.

Multivariate regression analysis showed that female potential returners are more likely to return if they (regression results are presented in tables B3 and B4 in the Annex):

- Have a **partner who is working full-time** (the likelihood is greater for women with a partner who is working full-time than for those with partner who is not working).
- Have a **partner who is self-employed** (the likelihood is greater for women with a partner who is self-employed than for those with a partner who is employed and has earnings in the second lowest or highest quintiles and is also greater for women with partners who are employed with earnings in the middle quintile than for those with partner who are employed with earnings in the second lowest quintile).

Female potential returners are more likely to be in work upon return to the labour market (are less likely to be unemployed upon return) if they (regression results are presented in tables B7 and B8 in the Annex):

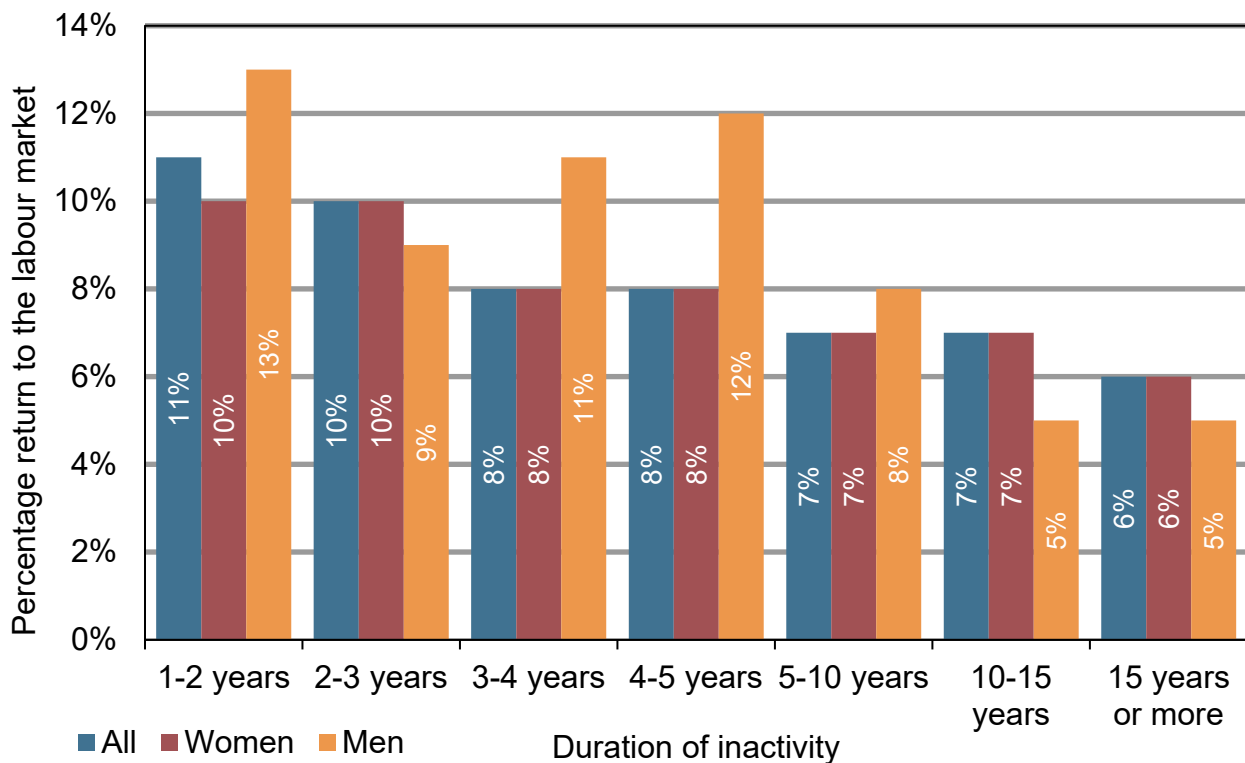
- Have a **working partner** (the likelihood is greater for women with a partner who is working part-time or full-time than for women with a partner who is not working).

- Have a **partner who is self-employed** (the likelihood is greater for women with a partner who is self-employed than for those with a partner who is employed and has earnings in the second lowest to highest quintiles).

3.4 Proportions returning by duration of inactivity and future work plans

This section explores the rates of return and proportions in work by the duration of inactivity and future work plans. As shown in figure 2, the rate of return declines with the duration of inactivity from 10 percent to 6 percent for women and from 13 percent to 5 percent for men. For women, the two shortest duration groups (1-2 years and 2-3 years) have higher rates of return and the longest duration group has the lowest rate of return than other groups. For men, the pattern is more mixed: men in the shortest (1-2 years) and middle duration (4-5 years) have higher rates of return than those in the three longest duration groups. Regression results are presented in table B1 in the Annex.

Figure 2: Proportions returning each quarter to the labour market by inactivity duration



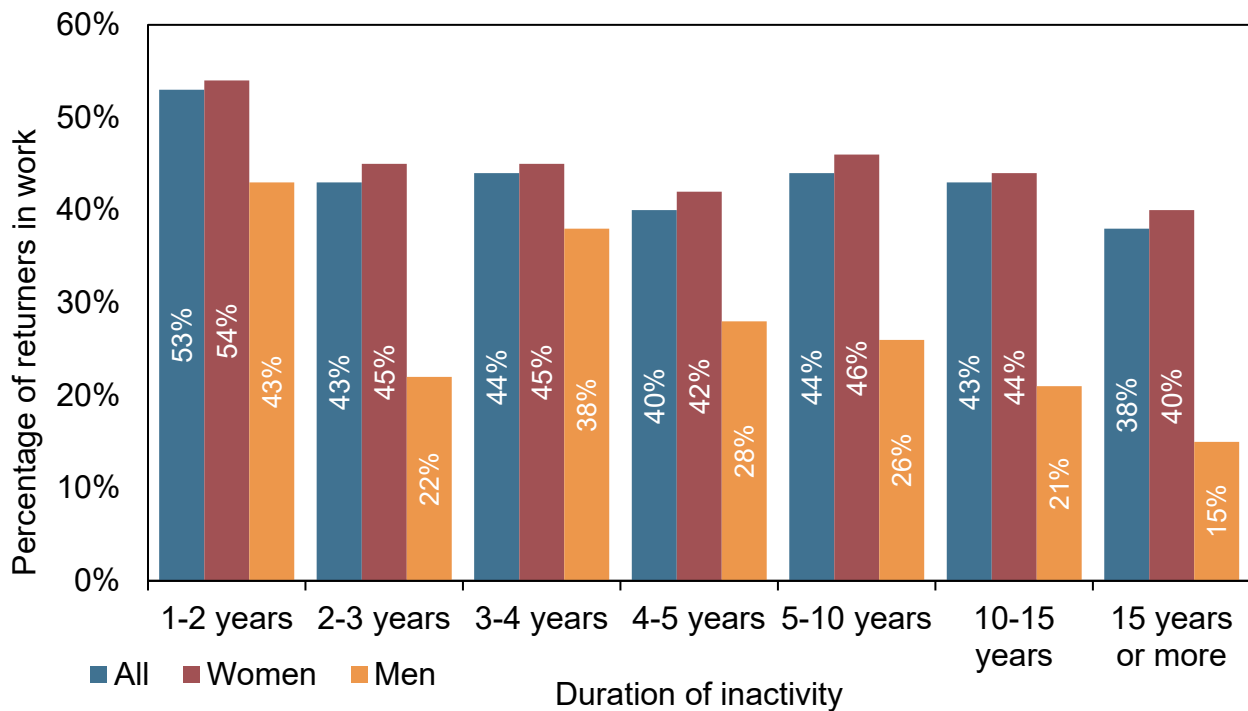
Source: LFS (2007- 2017)

Notes: Sample sizes are 59,057 (all), 53,653 (women) and 5,404 (men).

There is a weaker relationship between the proportions in work upon return by the duration of inactivity (figure 3). For women, those returning between 1 and 2 years are more likely to enter directly in to work (as opposed to looking for work) than those returning after longer absences. For men, the proportion in work generally declines with

the length of absence, but the differences between the shortest duration on the one hand and the second shortest (2-3 years) and longest duration on the other are the only statistically significant ones. Regression results are presented in table B5 in the Annex.

Figure 3: Proportions of returners each quarter in work by inactivity duration



Source: LFS (2007- 2017)

Notes: Sample sizes are 4,662 (all), 4,186 (women) and 476 (men). Subsample sizes are less than 50 for men with 10-15 years and 15 years or more and the proportions should be treated with caution.

The patterns of proportions returning to work across future work expectations are broadly as might be expected (table 14). Those who expect to work again (definitely or probably) in the next year are notably more likely to actually return than those who expect to return in 1-5 years or in more than 5 years. The rates for those who believe they will probably work again are slightly lower than those who think they will definitely work again. On the other hand, those who expected to return later or only considered the likelihood of return probable are more likely to be in work rather than unemployed if they do return.

Table 14: Proportions returning each quarter by future work plans

	Proportions returning to the labour market			Proportions of returners in work		
	All	Women	Men	All	Women	Men
Definitely work again:						
- next year	18%	18%	22%	37%	38%	29%
- in 1-5 years	6%	6%	7%	46%	47%	31%
- in more than 5 years	4%	4%	4%	55%	55%	[60%]
- don't know when	9%	8%	10%	37%	43%	[12%]
Probably work again:						
- next year	12%	12%	16%	45%	49%	[28%]
- in 1-5 years	5%	5%	6%	49%	52%	[20%]
- in more than 5 years	3%	3%	3%	68%	69%	[58%]
- don't know when	5%	5%	7%	38%	39%	[33%]
Probably not work again	3%	2%	5%	[41%]	[48%]	[32%]
Definitely not work again	1%	1%	0%	[58%]	[58%]	n/a
Cannot say / do not know when will work again	4%	4%	4%	46%	[50%]	[39%]
Number of observations	47,456	43,172	4,284	3,687	3,303	384

Source: LFS (2007- 2017)

Notes: Proportions in square brackets are based on subsamples of less than 50 and should be treated with caution.

4. Work characteristics following return

This chapter considers the work characteristics for potential returners who return to work and whether the position of returners is substantially different from other workers.

Regression models were estimated for all work characteristics (with the exception of occupation) separately for men and women to identify whether differences between returners and other workers are statistically significant controlling for other related factors. With one exception⁹, all differences were statistically significant and are therefore not individually noted. The Annex presents the full regression results in tables C1 to C10.

4.1 Hours and pay

This section explores the work hours and pay for returners who enter work upon returning to the labour market (rather than entering unemployment) and the comparative statistics for other workers. Table 15 shows that¹⁰:

- Mean usual weekly hours are substantially lower for returners than other workers: 18 hours compared to 31 hours for women and 26 hours compared to 40 hours for men.
- Relatedly, 80 percent of female returners work part-time compared to 38 percent for other female workers, while 56 percent of male returners work part-time compared to 9 percent for other workers.
- Some 22 percent of female returners and 25 percent of male returners are underemployed (report they would like to work more hours) which is more than double the rate for other workers.
- The mean hourly wage is considerably lower for returners than other workers. There is a gap of just under £4 for women and a slightly smaller gap for men of just under £4.
- The combination of fewer hours and a lower hourly wage means that the mean weekly earnings for female returners is just 47 percent of that for other workers (£198 as a proportion of £419) while the mean weekly earnings for male returners is 57 percent (£377 as a proportion of £661) of that for other workers. Moreover, 74 percent of returning women are in the bottom earnings quintile and only 3 percent in the top two quintiles.

⁹ The probability of working in the private sector for men was not statistically significantly different between returners and other workers. In addition, the difference in the hourly wage was only statistically significantly different at the 10 percent level for men rather than the 5 percent level.

¹⁰ The smaller sample sizes hourly wage and earnings is due to the fact that the LFS only collects earnings information in the first and fifth waves which means that only one quarter of the sample of returners have an earnings measure. In particular, there were only 16 male returners in the data with earnings information.

Table 15: Hours and pay upon return

	All returners	Women		Men	
		Returners	Other workers	Returners	Other workers
Mean usual weekly hours	18	18	31	26	40
Proportion working part-time	78%	80%	38%	56%	9%
Proportion underemployed (would like more hours)	22%	22%	11%	25%	9%
Mean hourly wage	£9.97	£9.76	£13.48	[£13.10]	£16.82
Mean weekly pay	£209	£198	£419	[£377]	£661
Proportion in earnings quintile:					
- bottom quintile	72%	74%	28%		8%
- 2 nd quintile	14%	13%	24%	n/r	15%
- 3 rd quintile	7%	7%	19%		21%
- 4 th quintile	3%	3%	16%		25%
- top quintile	3%	3%	12%		31%
Number of observations for all in work	2,111	1,962	650,571	149	680,727
Number of observations for wage and pay data	255	239	93,510	16	84,915

Source: LFS (2007- 2017)

Notes: Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. Proportions in square brackets are based on subsamples of less than 50 and should be treated with caution. n/r denotes not reported because all categories have subsamples of less than 50.

4.2 Sector and occupation

Just over three quarters of returners work in the private sector, with a slightly higher proportion of women than men returning to work in the public sector (table 16). Returning women are more likely to work in the private sector than other female workers, while the proportion of returning men working in the private sector is similar to other male workers.

Table 16: Work sector upon return

	All returners	Women		Men	
		Returners	Other workers	Returners	Other workers
Private	78%	78%	61%	85%	83%
Public	17%	18%	34%	10%	14%
Other	4%	5%	5%	5%	3%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Number of observations	2,111	1,962	650,571	149	680,727

Source: LFS (2007- 2017)

Notes: Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. Private includes nationalised industries.

A key point of interest is whether returners experience occupational downgrading relative to their position prior to their absence from the labour market. As the LFS collects information on the occupation in last job for those not currently working, it is possible to analyse the change in occupation for those who return to work. Almost a third (30 percent) of potential returners experience occupational downgrading (they are in a lower occupational group¹¹) when they return to work but almost a quarter (24 percent) experience upgrading in their occupation (table 17). These proportions are very similar for women and men.

Table 17: Proportions upgrading and downgrading occupation

	All	Women	Men
Upgrading occupation	24%	24%	24%
No change in occupation level	45%	45%	42%
Downgrading occupation	30%	30%	33%
Total	100%	100%	100%
Number of observations	1,696	1,562	134

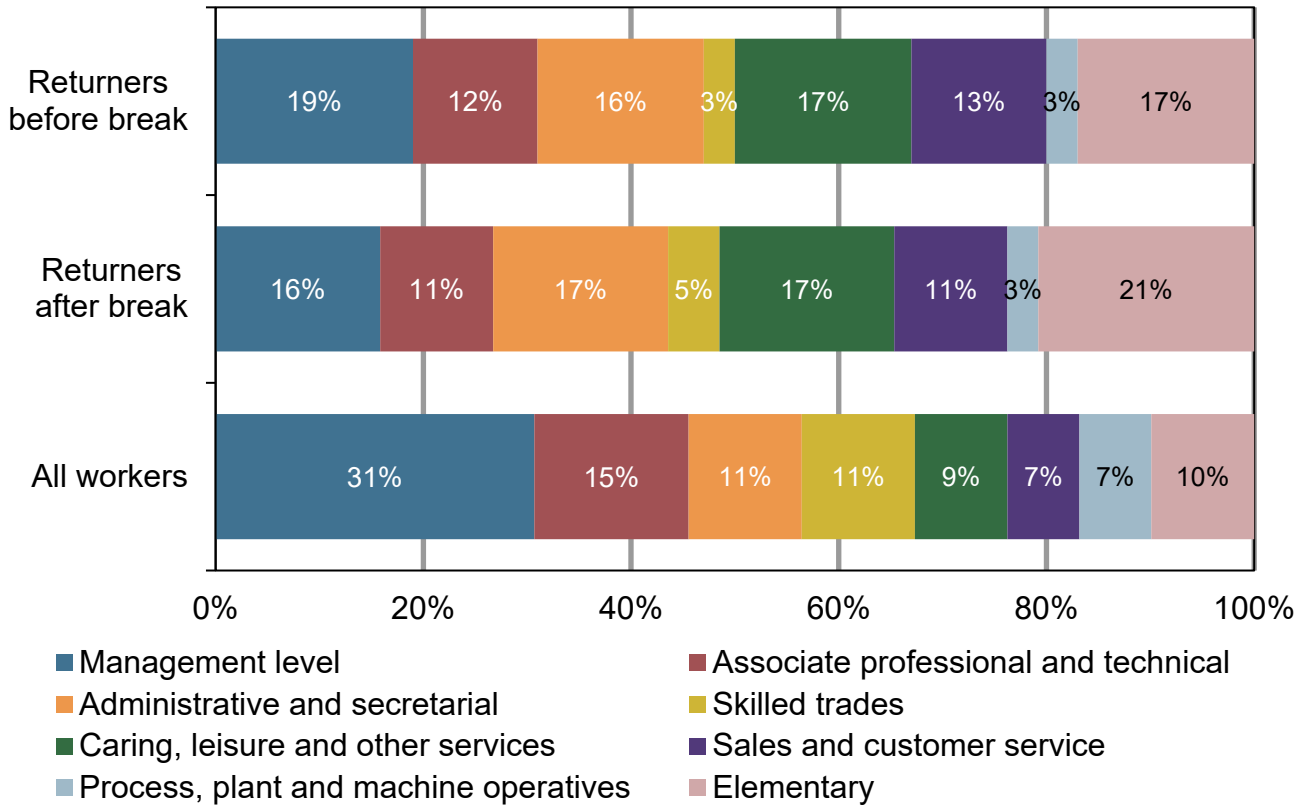
Source: LFS (2007- 2017)

Notes: Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Figures 4 to 6 present the occupational distributions for returners before and after their absence from work and draws comparisons with the distribution for all other workers.

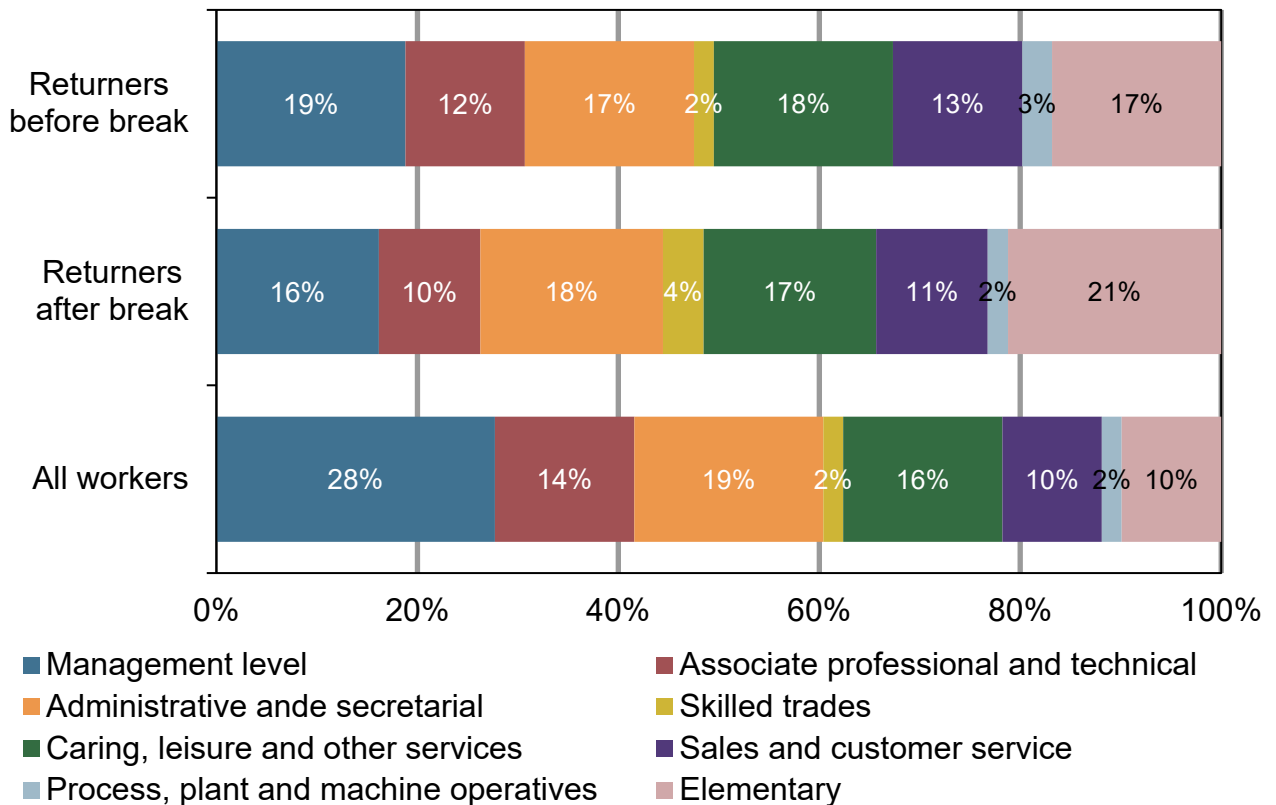
¹¹ The ONS classify occupations hierarchically which allows for an assessment to be made on whether a returner returns to work at a different level of occupation – either upgrading, downgrading or no change.

Figure 4: Occupation before and after the break: all returners



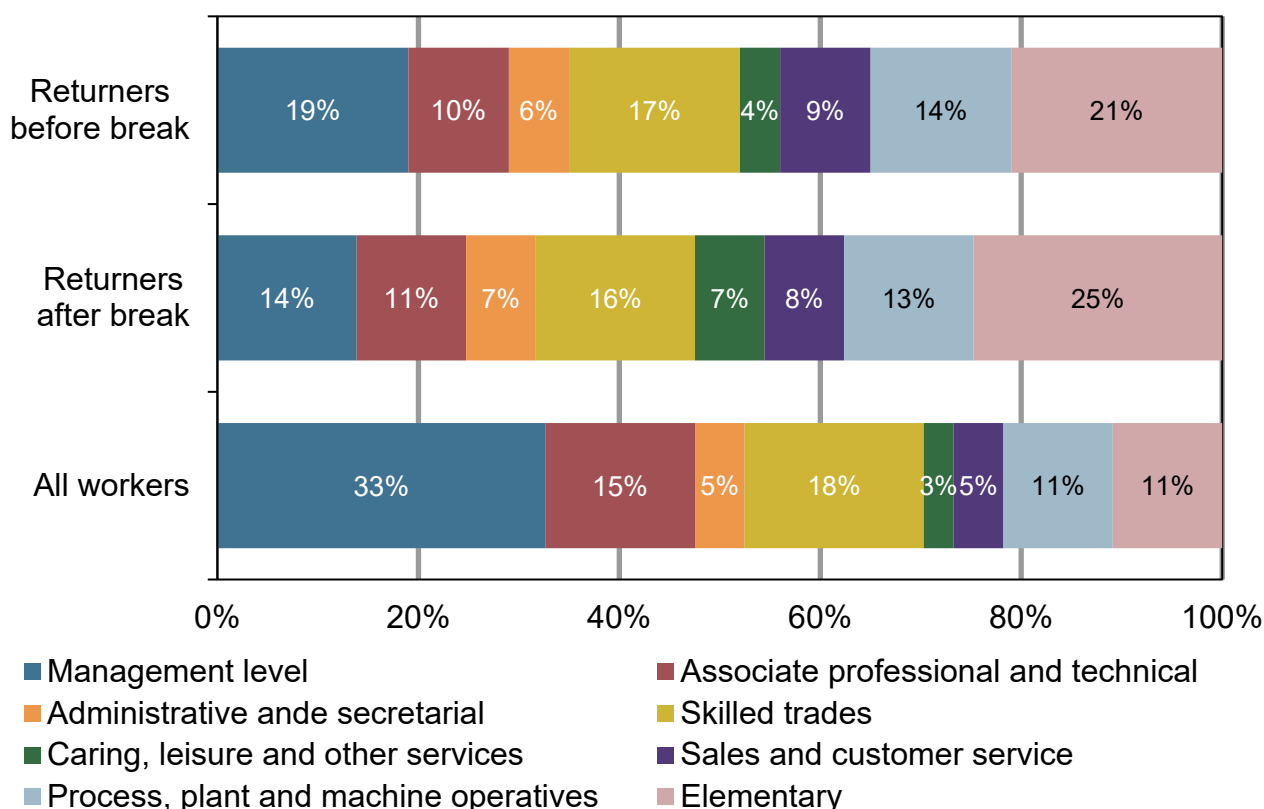
Source: LFS (2007 to 2017)

Figure 5: Occupation before and after the break: women



Source: LFS (2007 to 2017)

Figure 6: Occupation before and after the break: men

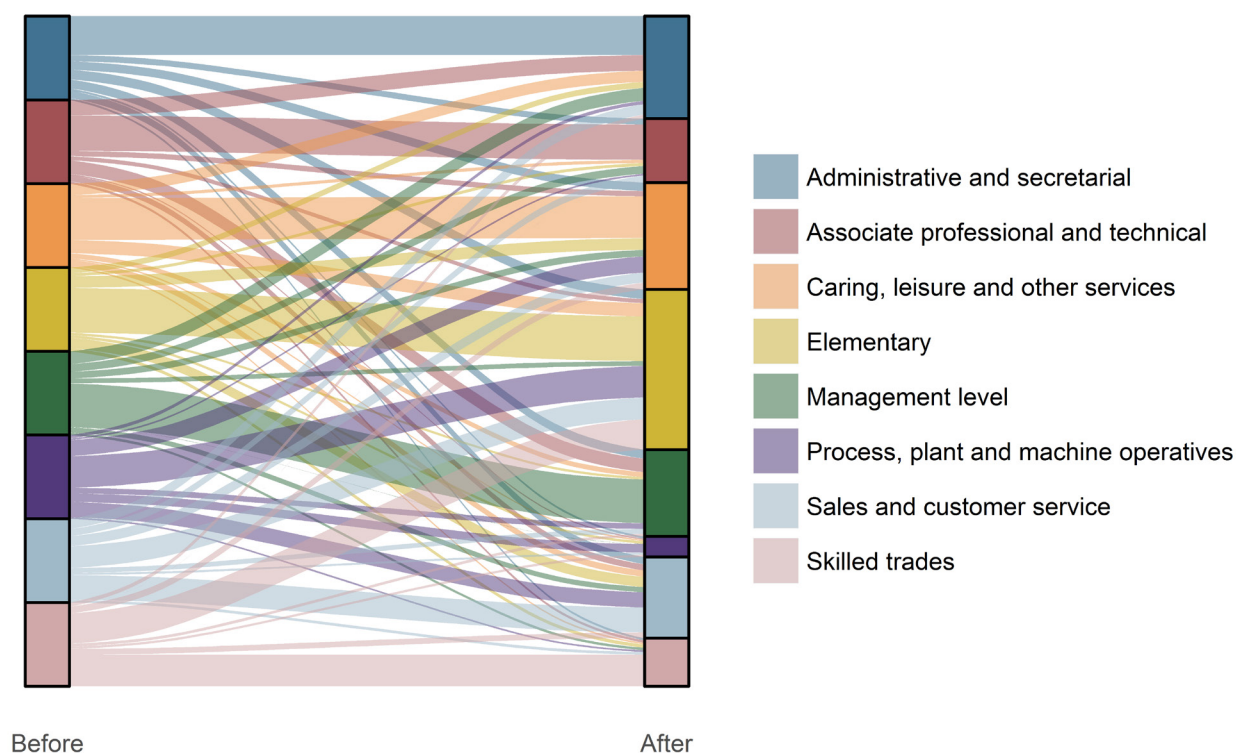


Source: LFS (2007 to 2017)

The tendency towards occupational downgrading can be observed in the differences in the occupational distribution for returners before and after the break. For women (figure 5), the largest falls in proportions are for the top two occupation groups (and for sales and customer service) while the largest increase is for the lowest occupation. In comparison to all female workers, however, potential returners have lower proportions in the highest occupations and higher proportions in the lowest occupations and the break serves to widen these gaps. The picture for men is broadly similar (figure 6) except that there is a larger fall in the proportion in the highest group and the disparity with all male workers is slightly greater.

Figure 7 presents a more detailed breakdown of the changes for female returners by directly comparing occupations before and after the break. This figure highlights the changes between occupations for those who return to work: the proportions changing are around a half or more across all the initial occupations. Although there is a greater tendency towards downgrading rather than upgrading, it is notable that there are quite high proportions of substantial transitions both up and down occupational levels.

Figure 7: Returning occupation compared to occupation before break



Source: LFS (2007 to 2017)

Notes: Subsample sizes are less than 50 for the skilled trades and the process, plant and machine operatives categories and the proportions should be treated with caution.

4.3 Job characteristics

Table 18 presents the job characteristics of returning women and men. Only 78 percent of female returners and 71 percent of male returners are in permanent work and only 12 percent and 19 percent respectively are in supervisory positions. This is substantially lower than for other workers, indicating that returners are in lower status work than other workers. However, around one third of both female and male returners are self-employed and similar proportions work at or from home (but are not necessarily the same individuals). These proportions are notably higher than for other workers, suggesting that this type of work is conducive to helping return from a career break caring for others.

Table 18: Job characteristics upon return

Proportions with job characteristic	All returners	Women		Men	
		Returners	Other workers	Returners	Other workers
Permanent work	78%	78%	94%	71%	95%
Supervisory position	12%	12%	34%	19%	44%
Self-employed	32%	31%	9%	38%	18%
Working at or from home	33%	33%	10%	35%	16%
Number of observations	2,111	1,962	650,571	149	680,727

Source: LFS (2007- 2017)

4.4 By highest qualification

This section considers whether the generally low work status of returners relative to other workers varies by highest qualification level. This analysis could only be undertaken for women due to the much smaller numbers of male returners.

Table 19 compares the hours of work for female returners with those for other female workers by highest qualification level (again, the number of male returners is too small to present this for men). The final column shows the ratio between returners and other workers to highlight the relative position of returners at each qualification level. There is little difference in absolute terms in the hours measures across qualification levels. Yet, relative to other workers with the same qualification levels, returners with higher qualifications fair more poorly: they have shorter average weekly hours and are more likely to be part-time or underemployed than those with lower qualifications.

Table 19: Hours upon return by highest qualification for female potential returners

	Returners	Other workers	Ratio of returners to other workers
Mean weekly hours:			
- degree and higher education	17	32	0.53
- A level	17	30	0.57
- GCSE A-C	17	29	0.59
- other and none	19	28	0.68
Proportion part-time:			
- degree and higher education	81%	31%	2.61
- A level	82%	41%	2.00
- GCSE A-C	81%	44%	1.84
- other and none	78%	48%	1.63
Proportion underemployed:			
- degree and higher education	21%	9%	2.33
- A level	22%	13%	1.69
- GCSE A-C	24%	13%	1.85
- other and none	21%	14%	1.50
Number of observations	1,962	650,571	

Source: LFS (2007- 2017)

Table 20 presents the equivalent picture for hourly wage and weekly pay. In this case, those with the lowest qualifications do unexpectedly well even in absolute terms. Moreover, relative to other workers with the same qualifications, returners with the lower qualification levels tend to have higher hourly wages and earnings than those with higher qualifications.

Table 20: Pay upon return by highest qualification for female potential returners

	Returners	Other workers	Ratio of returners to other workers
Hourly wage:			
- degree and higher education	£12.16	£17.34	0.70
- A level	£10.38	£11.04	0.94
- GCSE A-C	£7.80	£10.58	0.74
- other and none	£10.02	£9.30	1.08
Weekly pay:			
- degree and higher education	£230	£560	0.41
- A level	£174	£333	0.52
- GCSE A-C	£165	£310	0.53
- other and none	£235	£263	0.89
Number of observations	239	93,237	

Source: LFS (2007- 2017)

Interestingly, even among all workers, women with higher qualifications are slightly less likely to be in permanent work than those with lower qualifications (table 21). However, this pattern is even more marked among returners so that, relative to other workers at the same qualification level, returners with higher qualifications are less likely to be in permanent work than their less qualified counterparts.

In contrast to the other work outcomes, the pattern of rising proportions in supervisory positions with qualification level among all female workers is mirrored for the returners and there is no marked variation across qualification level. Finally, the proportions of returners both in self-employment and working at or from home rise substantially with qualification level, and are more likely at the higher levels relative to other workers with the same qualification levels.

Table 21: Job characteristics upon return by highest qualification for female potential returners

	Returners	Other workers	Ratio of returners to other workers
Proportion in permanent work:			
- degree and higher education	72%	92%	0.78
- A level	78%	94%	0.83
- GCSE A-C	83%	96%	0.86
- other and none	83%	95%	0.87
Proportion in a supervisory position:			
- degree and higher education	17%	47%	0.36
- A level	10%	29%	0.34
- GCSE A-C	11%	25%	0.44
- other and none	7%	19%	0.37
Proportion self-employed:			
- degree and higher education	41%	10%	4.10
- A level	32%	9%	3.56
- GCSE A-C	24%	8%	3.00
- other and none	22%	9%	2.44
Proportion working at/from home:			
- degree and higher education	43%	11%	3.91
- A level	34%	9%	3.78
- GCSE A-C	26%	9%	2.89
- other and none	21%	8%	2.63
Number of observations for all in work	2,111	1,962	

Source: LFS (2007- 2017)

Overall, returners with lower levels of qualifications tend to have a better *relative* experience than those with higher levels when they return to work across the work characteristics considered in this section. However, this should be weighed against the fact that potential returners with lower qualifications are less likely than those with higher qualifications to return to the labour market and are less likely to be in work if they do return.

5. Conclusions

This analysis has found that there are approximately 1.2 million are potential returners in the UK. They are overwhelmingly female (91 percent) and most are mothers with dependent children (84 percent). Many potential returners may also have non-child caring responsibilities: 47 percent of male potential returners and 15 percent of female potential returners have an adult with health problems living in the same household. Health problems may also be important for the potential returner themselves: 16 percent of female potential returners and 27 percent of male potential returners have a health problem which limits the amount or type of work they can do.

Overall, a fairly consistent set of characteristics are associated both with a higher likelihood of being a potential returner and of a lower rate of return to the labour market and to work. The first and most dominant of these are directly related to being female and having caring responsibilities especially having dependent children (particularly younger or more children) or having another adult in the household with a health problem (and a potential need for care). A second group of characteristics are those typically associated with limited work opportunities: low qualifications; a health problem limiting the ability to work; or a non-working partner (indicating broader contextual factors, which may limit labour market activity). A final group are less typical: even when controlling for the first two sets of characteristics, younger women and women of white ethnicity have a greater tendency to be potential returners and a lower rate of return to the labour market and to work.

Assistance for those with the first group of “caring” characteristics to return to work would suggest a focus on means to address the caring responsibilities such as the provision and affordability of childcare or social care for adults. For those in the second group with limited or low opportunities to return), policies to improve employment opportunities would be more appropriate such as training for the low qualified or possibly health services or job search services to find appropriate work for those with health problems. Addressing the barriers for the final group initially appears more challenging as the drivers of the lower return rate for this group is not so clear.

However, it should be considered that for any individual potential returner, it may be the combination of factors which is the reason they are inactive. In the same way that many of those with caring responsibilities for adults also have dependent children. It may therefore be a *combination* of caring responsibilities and limited work opportunities that is the key barrier to returning to work. The potential importance of the role of limited work opportunities is supported by the fact that potential returners have poorer work characteristics when they do return to work and tend to be in lower occupations even prior to the period of absence from work.

There are several points to note around the timing of potential assistance. First, the relatively smooth distribution of durations of inactivity for potential returners indicates that there are no marked “critical” times when they are more likely to return to work. Second,

the only strong pattern over time is that potential returners are more likely to return to work as children grow up, consistent with other evidence.¹² Third, most potential returners appear to be prepared to re-enter work *soon*, but not just yet (within one to five years but not in the coming year). This suggests a potential “nudge” approach to encouraging potential returners to return to work around setting a critical timing point. For example, support could be offered at a specific time (such as age of child or duration of absence from work), backed by the sense of a social norm that this is the time to return to work.

¹² For example, see figures 1 in Paull, G., (2006), “The Impact of Children on Women’s Paid Work”, *Fiscal Studies*, vol. 27, no. 4, December, pp. 473-512 <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1475-5890.2006.00043.x/abstract>



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