

Returning to work after time out for caring: Government call for evidence

Response from the Universities and Colleges Employers Association

1. What sector is your organisation from?

UCEA is a membership organisation for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), the majority of which are exempt charities. While HEIs are constituted by a variety of means (for example, Royal Charter, incorporation by statute or under the Companies Act, or charitable trust) they are all defined in the national statistics as autonomous not-for-profit private corporations. HEIs are not part of the public sector.

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

UCEA represents 171 organisations in the higher education sector, employing approximately 410,000 members of staff in total.

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”.

HEIs exist nationwide.

Some employers run programmes that support people who are looking to return to work following a break from paid work for a caring responsibility.

4. Has your organisation run a scheme of this type, or are you currently doing so?

UCEA received a limited number of responses to this call for evidence. One respondent had such a scheme for returners, as opposed to the more prevalent programmes for existing employees returning from statutory leave.

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)

One HEI has highlighted the Daphne Jackson Fellowships; it hosts two fellows under this scheme. The fellowships are designed to return scientists, technologists, engineers or mathematicians who have had a career break of two or more years for family, caring or health reasons to return to research. Fellows normally carry out their research part-time over 2 years, in a university or research establishment in the UK. The Fellowships are flexible and include a tailored training programme designed to update skills and knowledge and support

fellows in their return to research. The University has acted as both a host and a sponsor. More information on Daphne Jackson Fellowships is available online: <http://www.daphnejackson.org/fellowships/eligibility/>

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:

N/A.

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?

The HEI with the two Daphne Fellows mentioned a number of hidden costs, which should be clarified at the outset. Any other challenges have related to the individual staff, rather than to their status as a returner.

More generally, HEIs highlighted the management of any ongoing care responsibilities, such as the need for staff to work flexible hours, change working hours at short notice and to attend appointments, as a potential difficulty.

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?

None of the responding HEIs had accessed any such support or information.

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

N/A

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

N/A

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

N/A

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.

HEIs' answers to this question focussed on the provision of training and support for staff in relation to closing skills gaps and re-entering the workforce and an individual's ability to demonstrate their skills, including transferable skills, perhaps developed during their time out of work.

The HEI with the two Daphne Fellows highlighted that it is critical individuals have time to review any skills gaps and knowledge because science is a fast changing subject area. Additionally, it would recommend a mentoring/sponsorship scheme to ensure the returners are provided with appropriate support in re-engaging with the employment market. It points out that providing these would require funding. One HEI noted that, as a large employer, it has good training interventions available to assist returners. Others said that it would be helpful to have more information on the support and funding available for retraining and addressing any skills gaps. It would also value more promotion of, and signposting to, any external support networks that could be accessed by staff.

HEIs mentioned that they would be encouraged to employ staff from this group if they had access to more information on the benefits of employing them, including in relation to the life skills that the individuals had developed as a result of their caring responsibilities. It would help if the individuals were able to demonstrate transferable skills through examples.

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

The HEIs responding to this call for evidence consider that individuals returning to work after time out for caring are likely to demonstrate high levels of motivation and enthusiasm in their jobs because they are keen to get back into the workforce. They also mention the transferable skills that this group may bring, such as time management, budget management, prioritising, organising, managing competing pressures and demands and the ability to use initiative.

Individuals who have been in caring roles may also bring with them a more mature perspective, experience and resilience.

Such transferable skills and personal qualities are in addition to the job-related skills, knowledge and experience from previous work experience, which will be an asset to the sector, particularly in areas where HEIs have more difficulty recruiting.

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

One institution has pointed out that most carers who have to give up work to care for dependents are in the 45 or older age bracket. Any work to encourage employers to hire returners could be supported by wider campaigns about the benefits of an age diverse workforce.