

Returning to work after a career break

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Returning to work after a career break can be a daunting prospect regardless of your age, gender, the sector in which you work or the reason for your break.

A successful return requires time and commitment. Here are a few things you may wish to consider before getting back to work:

Make a 'return-to-work' plan

Regardless of the reason for your career break, even the thought of returning to work can be a job in its own right. To make the process more manageable, break it down into smaller steps and set yourself achievable goals e.g., update your CV, complete a skills assessment, review your options for child / family care, etc. And remember to track your progress. Even achieving the smallest tasks can make a big difference and boost your confidence in the process.

Make time

Many of us take time away from work to concentrate on caring responsibilities, which means that, effectively, other people's needs come before our own.

As you begin to prepare to return to work, it's important that you try to reverse this scenario and begin to put yourself first. Make time – even just an hour – for yourself on a daily basis to concentrate on your plan. Think about whether you can find support or to whom you can delegate some of your responsibilities. Working on these skills now will also help you when you're back at work.

Frame of mind

It's important to recognise that it can take a while to settle back into work but there are some practical things you can do to help keep yourself motivated. Patience is a virtue and returning to your old job or finding a new one can be a challenge. Try and look upon the situation as just that – a challenge to be overcome, not a reason to give up. It's also completely natural to feel guilty about going back to work, especially if you've had time off to raise a family. In this instance it's important to remember the reasons you want or need to return to work and, ultimately, going back to work could help you to create a more positive work / life balance for you and your family.

Remember to reach out to friends and family for support and encouragement. Talk to them about your plans and build up a network of those who can provide practical help if you need it. You can also reach out to fellow professionals on social-media sites such as LinkedIn, to gain insight into their experiences.

Building confidence and addressing self-doubt

It's natural to feel a lack of confidence when thinking about returning to the workplace. You may be wondering if you have the same skills as you did before. Start by reminding yourself of your skills and strengths – these should also include things you are naturally good at, such as being creative and well-organised, as well as skills you have learned e.g., coding or speaking a language, etc. Transferrable skills, which you may have gained during voluntary work or during a career break, are also important to highlight along with those you have gained in practice. These can include things such as time-management and multi-tasking, etc.

Mentoring is a good way to re-build confidence. Signing up to [Career Connections](#), the new ICAS career mentoring programme and engaging with a mentor who has experience of returning to work after a break could help to overcome both the psychological and physical barriers you may experience.

Don't question yourself – we all suffer from feelings of self-doubt now again, but these feelings can be particularly strong when starting a new job or returning to your old job. It's natural to feel that you've been out of the workplace for too long, that you might have lost the skills to do your work effectively or that you won't be able to understand advancements in technology or changes in practice. However, in reality, returners usually find that their skills come back very quickly when they start using them again. It may be worthwhile attending CPD courses or networking events to update your knowledge base in certain areas, and if technology is worrying you, consider taking a refresher course or reviewing some online tutorials in advance of your return.

Preparing for interviews

The thought of an interview is enough to make most people nervous, whether or not we've had a career break, so make sure you're as well prepared as you can be. It's important to think about what questions you might be asked and practice your answers, specifically those relating to your career break. Be as confident as possible about what you did during your time away from the workplace and the reasons for your return.

It's also key to research the organisation you have applied to. This will include not only the specific role you have applied for but also the organisation as a whole, its values and staff. This process will help you to decide if the employer is right for you and also show the employer that you are passionate about the position and eager to get back to work.

Take a phased approach

If you've been away from work for quite some time or have a lot of caring responsibilities, it may be worth considering a phased return to work. If you feel you need time to adjust, consider part-time options of flexible working if these are available.

Returner Programmes

Returnship programmes are paid, fixed-term contracts with an employer which have been designed to help people who have taken an extended career break get back to the workplace. Programmes are specific to the organisation running the programme and are designed to provide on-site training along with individual and group coaching and mentoring. Returner programmes are open to both men and women, however, the majority of those who undertake the programmes are women.

A job at the end of the programme is not always guaranteed but you will have gained valuable experience to assist in the process of securing employment.

[Women Returners](#) is a consulting, coaching and networking organisation specialising in enabling women professionals to return to work after an extended career break through the provision of advice, support and information, retraining opportunities and [returner programmes](#) which are open to both men and women.

Further information

Further information regarding returning to work can be found via the links below:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/help-and-support-for-returning-to-work>

<https://www.gov.scot/news/helping-women-return-to-work/>

Disclaimer:

This help sheet is designed to assist members with an important issue of general application and is not intended to be a definitive statement covering all aspects of this area. No responsibility for any person acting or refraining to act as a result of any material in this help sheet can be accepted by ICAS.



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