

The recruitment process can be daunting for people who have had a career break, particularly those who have not interviewed for roles in a number of years. Even highly experienced people lose confidence in their professional skills and abilities after a long career break, so you want to ensure the recruitment process is not too intimidating. By making a few simple changes to your existing processes, you can reduce anxiety and ensure Returners have the opportunity to best showcase their skills and experience.

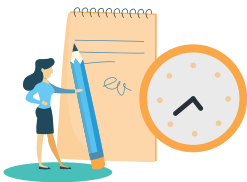
Some of the following information is found in [Returner Programmes: Best Practice Guidance for Employers, March 2018](#); and also the [Working Mums Returners White Paper, February 2019](#).

Keep in mind

Returners may or may not still be caring; the information in this checklist is equally applicable to both. Remember, you may not be aware prior to an interview whether a candidate is a parent or carer.

Before the Interview:

Be considerate



- Give candidates plenty of time to prepare by telling them what to expect well in advance. This can be helpful as Returners may not have recent experience of applying for roles.
- Try not to arrange interviews at short notice as candidates may need to arrange alternative care, and they may not easily be able to attend interviews that clash with the school run.
- Try not to re-schedule an interview for a Returner once confirmed, as they may have paid for alternative childcare/care for an adult for which cannot be reimbursed if cancelled.

Be clear...



- About who is likely to be involved in an interview panel.
- About any terminology used i.e. if using the term "assessment" then explain what this entails.
- About whether candidates are allowed to take notes into an interview.
- About the structure of what will happen on the day e.g. whether any preparation time is given, and the order of interviews, presentations and practical tasks.
- About timings. It is useful to know how long the whole process should last as this enables candidates to make necessary care arrangements if needed.
- About what to bring on the day. If candidates are required to provide ID documents, remember to take the necessary copies on the day to avoid a candidate having to return with them separately at a later date (as this may be an extra hurdle for someone caring).

Be inclusive



- Review assessments to ensure only skills directly required in the role are assessed. Do not demand or prioritise recent knowledge or experience that could unfairly disadvantage someone following a career break.
- Ensure there are questions relating to softer skills; personal values aligned with those of the organisation; and competency based questions that encourage Returners to use problem-solving examples from outside work which may be more recent than ones acquired before their career break.
- Invite Returners to draw upon their personal experiences or skills they may have developed during their career break that can be applied to the role e.g. prioritisation, empathy, listening or communication skills.
- If using scenario based questions, remember that you can ask what a candidate *would* do as well as what they have experience of doing.

Be aware



- Ensure that all staff involved in recruitment are aware of your organisation's recruitment policies and procedures, in order to ensure a fair and consistent process.

Gold standard



It is important that interviewers are aware of potential unconscious biases that could count against Returners. In order to combat this, ensure that all interviewers are aware of the benefits of hiring Returners, as well as the practicalities and benefits of having flexible working arrangements. More about this can be found [here](#).

It is important that interview panels are diverse and at least include women, and at best include Returners.

Consider whether conducting an interview is the best way of assessing a candidate's potential in the workplace, or whether a work trial is more effective. Considering the impact of the interview process logistics, could you:

- » offer a choice of interview time slots to candidates, which is helpful to those who need to make arrangements for the school run or other care commitments.
- » use Skype for one part of the process, particularly where multiple stages are required.
- » reimburse travel expenses if the process takes place at a regional, rather than local office.
- » notify candidates of a staff crèche that could be used during the interview process, if available.

During the Interview:

Discuss workplace culture



- Raise the topic of flexibility to check whether what's on offer is a suitable fit for the Returner. Remember to discuss whether a flexible working option has an impact on salary e.g. reduced hours to accommodate a job share request.
- Mention any existing organisational support, such as having a Carers Champion, a carers network, buddies/mentoring, a carers policy or paid time off for dependants.

Gold standard



Prior to the interview it can be helpful to be shown around the building by someone welcoming who isn't involved in the interview process. This can help to break the ice and relax the candidate so that they perform well during the interview. It can also reassure a Returner of the diversity of a workforce.

Give the candidate the interview questions half an hour prior to the interview, so that they have time to prepare their responses. Read GMCVO's case study [here](#).

Give interview panellists time to refresh their understanding of unconscious bias prior to interviewing. [See our [Interviewer Prompt Card](#) for more].

After the Interview:

Feedback



- Provide feedback after an interview, whether or not the applicant has been successful. Personalised feedback should include positives and constructive feedback as this allows Returners to prepare for future interviews.
- Formalise any agreements/discussions made around flexible working during the interview before the successful candidate starts work and inform relevant line managers.

Gold standard



Many organisations have accelerated their usual recruitment process to facilitate more rapid decision-making for Returner programmes. It is important to define roles in advance so hiring managers are involved in the assessment process. With such forward planning, offers can be made well in advance of the start date, allowing time for Returners with caring responsibilities to make arrangements before their start date.

Consider how you will support the Returner once they have started work. Are you able to provide coaching or buddying to help them settle back into work? If available, during their induction period introduce them to the Carers Champion and invite them to join the carers network.

Notes:



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