



General Information

Who are the different organisations involved in the delivery of this Fund?

The Government Equalities Office (GEO) is the Government department which leads work on policy relating to gender, sexual orientation and transgender equality. GEO is part of the Home Office.

Rocket Science UK Ltd is an experienced grant manager and public policy consultant that has been commissioned by the GEO to deliver the Returners Fund, in partnership with the **Employment Related Services Association (ERSA)**, the representative body for the employment support sector which supports jobseekers to gain, sustain and progress in work.

SQW has been commissioned by the GEO as the external evaluator of the Returners Fund and is a research and evaluation consultancy with a focus in social and economic development.

What do you mean by Returners, Returner Programmes and Returnships?

- **Returners** are defined as people with existing work experience who have taken an extended career break (for at least a year) for caring or other reasons and who are either economically inactive or now working in lower paid, temporary or part-time work or in home-businesses or freelance roles. Returners can be male or female, however are predominantly women. People taking maternity leave and other forms of paid leave are not considered to be returners under this definition.

Latest data shows that between November 2017 and January 2018, 2.1 million people were economically inactive due to caring for home and or family¹. Nearly 90% of those who are economically inactive due to caring for home or family are women². The programme will ultimately target those in this cohort who wish to return to paid employment

- **Returner Programmes** are programmes targeted at people returning to work after a long break. There are many forms of returner programme, including return to practice

¹ ONS Labour Market Statistics for November 2017-January 2018

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/march2018>

² Ibid.

and retraining programmes. This fund is focused on creating meaningful employment opportunities catered for returners, on a temporary or permanent basis, and providing a supported route back to permanent employment.

- **Returnships** is a fixed term contract for experienced hires, with a strong likelihood, but no guarantee, of an ongoing role at the end of the programme if the placement period goes well for both sides.

Challenges and opportunities for returners and employers

The GEO has been working with stakeholders, employers and returners, as well as exploring the current evidence base to understand the barriers that returners face. A number of key factors have emerged:

- Lack of flexibility in roles advertised
- Employer/recruiter attitudes
- Lack of current work experience
- Difficulties in finding care for children or others
- Lack of professional confidence due to being out of the workplace which can lead to a perceived erosion of skills

A further large-scale study on advertised jobs indicated that only 9.8% of the proportion of advertised jobs examined paying £20,000 and above (full time equivalent) offered flexible work arrangements⁶ (Figure 1). This shortage of flexible jobs (which varies from sector to sector) can be troublesome for many potential returners who would prefer flexible working patterns³. Just under 60% of women who had returned to work after a career break (of longer than a year) chose to return to a part-time job⁴.

³ Timewise (2015) What do Women Returners Want.
(https://timewise.co.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2018/02/What_women_returners_want-AM.pdf).

⁴ Ibid.

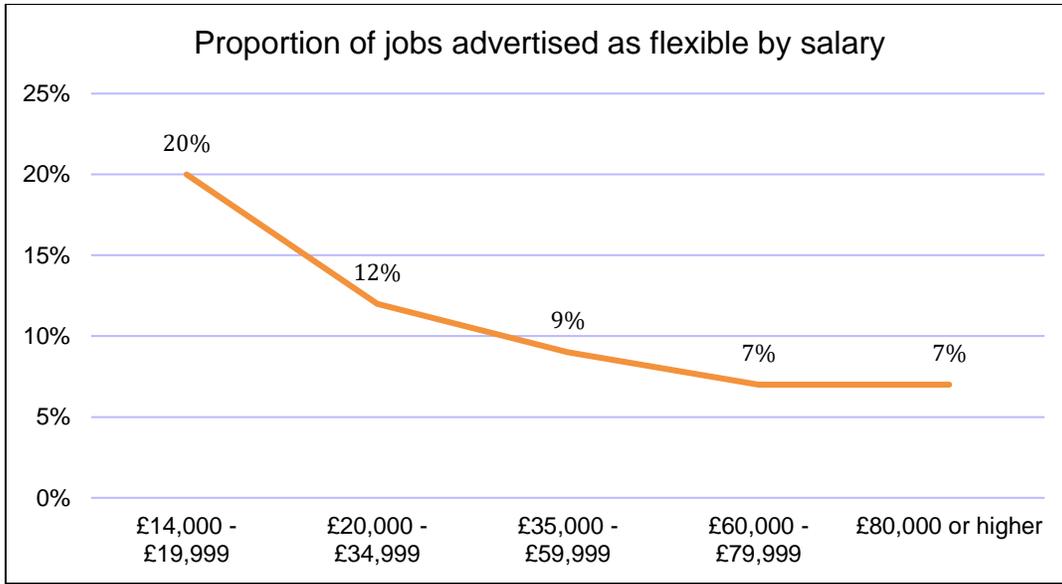


Figure 1: Graph showing the proportion of jobs advertised as flexible by salary (Timewise 2017)

There are also a number of specific population groups who can face additional challenges when returning to work:

- **Older people** (aged 50-64): People in this age group often face additional health issues, and local employment opportunities and employment services are often unsuitable⁵. The economic inactivity rate of this older age group is 26%, compared to only 13% between 35-49 and 13% between 25-34-year olds⁶.
- **BAME:** The economic inactivity rate for those with an ethnic minority background (aged 16-64) is considerably higher (30%) than those from a white ethnic background (17%)⁷.
- **People with disabilities:** The economic inactivity rate for those who are defined as disabled under the Equality Act is 45% higher than for those who are not (16%)⁸. The barriers faced by returners create, in turn, opportunities for businesses. The gap between people's preferences to work flexibly and the lack of available flexible jobs

⁵ Timewise (2017) Flexible Jobs Index. (<https://timewise.co.uk/what-we-do/research/flexible-jobs-index2017/>).

⁶ ONS Labour Market Statistics for November 2017-January 2018
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/march2018>.

⁶ Centre for Ageing Better, 2017, Addressing worklessness and job insecurity among people aged 50 and over in Greater Manchester.

⁷ ONS Labour Market Statistics for November 2017-January 2018
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/march2018>.

⁸ Ibid

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creates a “talent bottleneck” for companies⁹. Increasing the availability of part-time and flexible jobs would allow businesses to access a greater pool of talented candidates¹⁰.

Link to the gender pay gap

Analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies found that time out of the labour market has a substantial impact on women’s salaries¹¹. On returning to work, women earn around 2% less on average for every year spent out of paid work¹². The situation is worse for highly qualified women who earn 4% less on average for each year they take out¹³. Creating and expanding returner programmes is a key recommendation of the GEO Gender Pay Gap team.

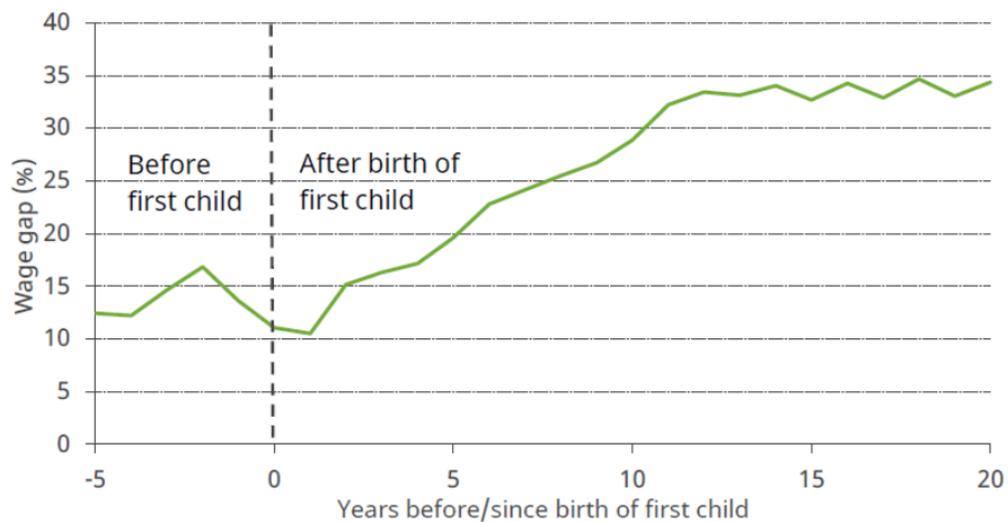


Figure 2: The gender pay gap between men and women before and after birth of first child (Institute for Fiscal Studies 2016)

⁹ Timewise, Flexible Jobs Index, 2017, <https://timewise.co.uk/what-we-do/research/flexible-jobs-index-2017>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Costa Dias, Elming and Joyce (2016). The Gender Wage Gap. Institute for Fiscal Studies.

¹²⁻¹⁵ Ibid

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Returners Fund - Headlines

What funding is available under the Returners Fund?

- There is a total grant fund of £1.5m available
- We anticipate making awards to 15-18 projects over the course of two rounds (spring and autumn 2018)
- Bids cannot exceed £300,000 and we anticipate that the majority of successful projects will be awarded between £50,000 and £150,000.

What is the timetable of the Returners Fund?

- Round 1 is open for Expressions of Interest from 5th March until 30th March. A proportion of bids will be invited in early April to prepare full applications to the Fund by 18th May 2018.
- The Fund will remain open to receive EOIs during the summer, closing on 16th August 2018. A second round of applicants will be invited to prepare full applications to the Fund by the closing date of 26th October 2018.

Eligibility

Who can apply for a Returners Fund grant?

All types of organisations that can demonstrate they can support returners and employers of returners are eligible to apply. This includes voluntary and community sector organisations, social enterprises, local training providers, local enterprise partnerships (LEPs), academic institutions, local authorities and private sector organisations.

Is this funding only available for organisations and activities in England?

Yes, this funding is only available for organisations and activities in England. Devolved administrations received separate funding at the 2017 Spring Budget through the Barnett Formula.

In addition, the prospectus document states that the fund will have a preference for projects looking to support returners to paid employment outside of London. Due to anticipated demand, projects based in London would need to make a very strong case by ensuring that several of the other areas target groups are covered. They would also have to demonstrate that their project is not already being delivered in London.

How big a geographical area should the project be operating across?

The Government Equalities Office is open to receiving applications from organisations looking to operate in a range of different communities, with no fixed geographical limitation as to the size of these communities. While the Fund is looking to support projects throughout England at programme-level, there is no expectation for your project to be country-wide.

You will need to demonstrate a good understanding of the target beneficiaries within the community you are proposing to support, whilst also being able to demonstrate that there is sufficient demand for the project you are proposing.

Is it important for projects to be working in areas of deprivation?

Areas of deprivation are not necessarily brought out in the policy objectives but if you can show that your project is addressing these areas, please do include this in the application.

Will you consider applications from partnerships and consortia?

Yes. We encourage partnerships and consortia to apply, not least as we appreciate supporting returners in particular target groups and industries may require specialist expertise from more than one organisation. However, each project must have a nominated lead partner organisation who will take on full responsibility for the grant, project delivery and keeping to the terms and conditions of the grant.

Will you consider applications from individuals?

No. The Returners Fund is designed to support projects run by organisations (in partnership with employers).

Can my project support people into self-employment?

This fund is not specifically designed to support helping people into self-employment. This is because the fund is designed to support both the Returners and the employers to improve their offer to Returners. The fund is focused on engagement with private sector employers (with a few other target industries) to assist those who have taken a career break to undertake caring responsibilities (primarily to look after children) and want to return at the same skill level. The projects also need to demonstrate potential for replication and sustainability beyond the funding period on a self-sustained basis.

Can my project support Returners into the public or third sector organisations?

The Returners Fund is designed to focus on returner programmes within the private sector and those industries (e.g. academia) which are currently underrepresented in terms of returner opportunities. The focus is to establish **new** opportunities within these underrepresented sectors rather than develop opportunities that are already in existence.

The Government Equalities Office is running a number of other strands of work to develop public sector returner programmes, but these will not be supported through this particular fund. The [Government Equalities Office website](#) will have more information about the work they are doing in this area.

Is there any limitations around the type of contract Returners are employed in (e.g. zero-hours, part-time)?

The Fund is looking to support people into paid quality employment opportunities. There are no limitations on the type of contract, but applicant organisations should be able to show that the

Returners that they are working with are going into employment opportunities at the appropriate skill level for them.

Are pilot projects supported?

Yes. The Returners Fund is able to cover pilots or experimental approaches as long as there is a clear plan for sustainability and replication beyond the funding period. As funded organisations will be expected to move quickly with a relatively large investment over a short period of time, it is anticipated that most of the successful organisations will already have a strong track record in supporting returners and the capacity to deliver.

The guidance states that projects can be up to 12 months long but it is expected that most returners programmes will be 3-6 months in length. Can you explain further about this timescale?

The typical length of a Returnship opportunity is 3-6 months in length. As the projects will be new, we anticipate there will be some additional lead in time involved before the delivery phase with the returners cohort begins.

A shorter timescale than this reduces the chance that meaningful opportunities are offered. Any longer than this prolongs the uncertainty for the returner and increases the pressure they are under to prove themselves.

What is the incentive for employers to create jobs?

The Returners Fund is not designed to encourage employers to create new vacancies, but to make existing opportunities available to Returners. This could include making employers aware of this pool of talent or working with employers to shape opportunities to make them suitable for returners' skillsets, experience and/or requirement for flexibility.

What % of clients would you like to see go back into employment?

This has not been defined because one of the key success factors of the fund is to produce evidence around best practice and to ensure that the employers are integrating new practices into their organisations in a sustainable, long-lasting way.

Application

Do I have to apply online?

Yes. We can only accept applications via the on-line application portal. You can save what you've done and return to your application at any time. If you have any access requirements please contact us at returnersfund@rocketsciencelab.co.uk

The application is a two-stage process. We initially require you to submit an Expression of Interest. We will subsequently invite a proportion of these application to submit a full application. We feel this is the most efficient way of securing a good range of quality project proposals, without asking large numbers to spend considerable resources submitting ultimately unsuccessful applications.

Can I submit multiple applications?

Yes. You are able to submit multiple applications, even if they are for the same round. However, please bear in mind that the Government Equalities Office are only looking to fund up to 18 projects and therefore we anticipate it will be a highly competitive fund. The GEO will be looking to support a good range of target groups and a good geographic spread with these projects. Multiple projects from the same organisation should also be clearly distinct from one another. A similar total amount of funding will be available in each round.

Can I apply to the Returners Fund for Round 2 even if I am unsuccessful in Round 1?

Yes. If you submit an expression of interest or full application in Round 1 and are unsuccessful then you are able to apply again for Round 2. Though we will not be able to provide individual feedback due to the volume of expressions of interest anticipated, we will be providing generic feedback on common reasons for an unsuccessful bid to this programme. Please note these and address in your bid before you reapply.

When will I know the outcome of my application?

Please refer to the indicative timetable in the Prospectus. If the timings deviate from these advertised dates, applicants will be informed via email as quickly as possible.

Can I see who else is applying, or who has been successful in securing funding in Round 1?

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The application process is completely confidential. Once decisions have been made regarding Round 1 grantees, the GEO will make a public announcement.

Following Round 1, Rocket Science will be conducting some analysis around 'cold-spots' left to be addressed (e.g. in terms of geographical coverage or sectors or types of returners) and will market Round 2 to focus on reaching projects in these areas.

Financial and funding queries

My organisation has been trading for less than a year. What kinds of alternative means of demonstrating financial status are acceptable?

You could demonstrate financial status with bank statements over the period in which you have been established.

My activities will cost more than the Returners Fund is looking to grant. Can I include any additional funding in my budget?

Yes. You may include additional or match funding from other sources in your budget, but the Returners Fund should be the principal funder.

The total grant requested from the Returners Fund cannot be more than £300,000. However, we anticipate most grants awarded to be £50,000-£150,000 and the Returners Fund should be the majority investment.

Is match funding required?

No. You are able to include funds from elsewhere (which may include in-kind funding, other Trusts and funders, including government) if you wish to do so as part of your overall project budget. However, it is not a requirement. Again, the Returners Fund should be the principal funder of the project.

When you ask about match funding, is this limited to cash match-funding?

No. Match funding as asked in the expression of interest can include in-kind support as well. This will be further examined should you be invited to submit a full application. We do not have a standardised rate for in-kind or pro-bono contributions, so the applicant organisations would put a price on these goods or services.

Would it improve your chances if your project has match funding?

One of the criteria the fund is looking for is value for money, which may be assisted by match funding. However, match funding in itself is by no means an expectation.

What would you consider value for money, e.g. how many clients would you expect to be supported with £150,000?

The GEO values the evidence around practice that will be generated by the funded projects; therefore, it will be looking for the most effective programmes rather than the lowest-unit costs.

When you ask about having at least three months operating costs in reserve, is this for the applicant organisation as a whole or only for the project?

You will need to demonstrate financial security for the whole organisation, not the new project for which you are requesting funding. Please use the last complete financial year as an indicator for your organisation's operating costs.

The reserves are to show that your organisation is financially secure. This is because the Fund payments will be made in arrears, and also to ensure the sustainability of the project after the funding period, which is key to the Returner's programme.

Can grant funds be spent on staff salaries or on management costs?

Yes, they can be used to cover salaries of staff from your organisation or partnership. They cannot be used to pay for salaries of Returners. Reasonable management costs that are clearly shown to be related to the delivery of the project are eligible.

Can underspend be rolled forward?

This could be possible should the project encounter difficulties during delivery, but would be determined on a case-to-case basis.

Evaluation

Should the applicant source an external evaluator themselves and budget for this?

No. The external evaluator has been commissioned by the GEO and is called SQW. It is a requirement of the grant that grantees participate fully in the evaluation work being carried out by SQW to capture the programme wide impact. Similarly, you do not need to budget for self-evaluation.

Will our bid need to include evaluation?

You should follow the Returners Fund programme guidance when describing your approach to project monitoring and evaluation. You should have considered how your project will be evaluated and what it will contribute to the evidence base on supporting returners. Should you be awarded a grant, you will have to work closely with the external evaluator (SQW) and meet all monitoring and evaluation requirements.

What will we be expected to do as part of the evaluation?

The GEO requires an evaluation to examine all projects supported by the Returners Fund, identifying best practice across funded projects in working with employers, training providers and returners themselves to create opportunities for returners to re-enter the workforce. They have appointed a company called SQW to undertake an external evaluation of the Fund and work with providers to ensure a consistent and robust approach to evaluation.

Each project is different and the approach to evaluation will be tailored to suit, but each of the funded projects will be expected to support the following activities:

- Capture management information and report it at the required intervals covering basic information about the types of employers participating, participant numbers and characteristics, attendance, engagement, and achievements.
- Work with SQW to tailor a full logic model to the specific nature of your proposed project.
- Support the gathering of feedback from all businesses. For smaller projects with up to ten employers, SQW will require introductions and contact information to allow them to invite all the businesses to take part in telephone interviews. Where more than 10 employers participate, SQW will design a self-completion online survey for all businesses and will also undertake telephone interviews with a sample of the businesses. You will be expected to forward the survey links and accompanying email and reminders to all businesses that you are working with as part of the project.

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- Encourage all individual returners to participate in the evaluation. As above, for smaller projects with up to 20 individuals SQW will invite telephone interviews with them all. Where more than 20 individuals participate projects will be expected to forward survey links to all individuals enrolled in the project. You will be expected to forward the survey links and accompanying email and reminders to participants as part of the project.
- Host a visit from the evaluation team to speak with project managers and participants. This will be organised at a mutually convenient time over one day. This visit should include an opportunity to interview some returners face to face.

Anonymised feedback from these activities will be shared with the project in the form of a short report.

What is a logic model?

A logic model is a visual way of demonstrating the thinking that underpins a project, setting out the resources available to the project, the activities these resources will support, and how these activities will ultimately ensure the project achieves its strategic goals and objectives. A logic model helps demonstrate that a project is based on a clear and credible delivery plan, as well as being a useful planning tool for those involved in the design of that project.

Useful resources on creating logic models (including illustrative guides and templates) can be found online (for example, resources from My Community are available [here](#)). The external evaluators (SQW) can be contacted during the full application process for advice on logic model purpose and content, and ‘critical friend’ appraisal of a logic model you have drafted. Their evaluation team can be reached at: RF.Evaluation@sqw.co.uk.

What should I consider in terms of evaluation when completing a full application?

The GEO require all projects to participate fully in the evaluation. As part of the project development process, you should access support from the SQW team to develop your evaluation approach. SQW will not be involved in the assessment of the applications. In your application you should comment on:

- Your willingness to participate in the activities outlined above
- Your use of evaluation evidence to design your approach
- A logic model outlining the design of your approach and how the activities involved will lead to the successful outcomes envisioned, indicating any inputs, outputs and assumptions being made. Further guidance will be made available for applicants proceeding to full application stage.

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- Systems and procedures that you will use from the outset to ensure that data protection, securing informed consent from employers and returners, and systems for data sharing that are compliant with the requirements of GDPR are in place. Whether you have any additional evaluation activities planned, perhaps as part of your routine organisational practice.

What monitoring data will I be required to return?

You will be expected to collect data, store data and share data between the Funder (GEO/Home Office), the grants management team (Rocket Science), and the programme evaluator (SQW). Data must be managed by funded organisations in a GDPR compliant manner. Full clarification of what this entails will be provided once the funded projects are selected.

Are there other measures for success other than job creation, for example around wellbeing?

SQW will work with successful applicants to determine the outcomes (both hard and soft) that the project is looking to produce and measure success against.

Evaluation support for the full application:

SQW will provide assistance to applicants preparing their response to the Evaluation section of the application form. This will include advising applicants on suitable approaches to:

- Working alongside SQW to facilitate the evaluation of their project (if funded)
- Collecting monitoring information that will be of use to an evaluation
- Securing informed consent from returners and employers to participate in the evaluation.

They will also help applicants think through which elements of their project plan fit in which sections of a logic model, where gaps exist in their planning, and undertake a 'critical friend' review of an applicant's draft logic model.

Applicants will be able to access phone and email support from a named member of the evaluation team. Applicants can contact SQW using the email address: rf.evaluation@sqw.co.uk. They will have to make contact with the team at SQW as early as possible and no later than Thursday 3rd May to plan evaluation support.

SQW will not design applicants' logic models, evaluation approaches, consent processes or other elements of their bid for them. They will also not give advice on meeting scoring criteria, beyond suggesting evaluation approaches that they (as evaluators) consider to be robust and credible.

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SQW is not involved in assessing and scoring any final application forms. They will only report issues to the assessment panel in instances where we have concerns about evaluation viability, data security or integrity.

Timing of support for applicants

Support	Date for engagement
Availability at supplier event	<i>Thursday 26th April</i>
Last date by which projects have to indicate they want support	<i>Thursday 3rd May</i>
Date of completion of all support	<i>Thursday 17th May</i>