



A GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS

# ATTRACTING AND ENGAGING WOMEN RETURNING TO THE WORKFORCE

ROBERT WALTERS

EMPOWERING  
WOMEN

## INTRODUCTION

# ATTRACTING AND ENGAGING WOMEN RETURNING TO THE WORKFORCE

Women who have taken a break from their career (often to raise children but also for other reasons) represent a group that has the potential to make a huge contribution to individual businesses and fill skills gaps faced by employers.

Additionally, the benefits of a more diverse workforce are well established. Companies which have high gender diversity at board level are likely to financially outperform those which do not.<sup>1</sup>

We surveyed over 1,000 women working in professional disciplines on their attitudes towards career breaks, the support employers offer professionals returning to work and what they value in terms of career development. 48% of those surveyed had taken a career break and 52% had not, providing us with an understanding of both women's expectations and experiences.

This guide provides insights into what motivates women to rejoin the workforce and presents strategies that employers can use to attract, retain and develop women returning to the workforce.

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# KEY FINDINGS

74%



74% of women plan to return to the same employer following a career break

24%



Just 24% of women return to the same employer



84% OF PROFESSIONALS WANT THE OPTION TO WORK FROM HOME



39% OF EMPLOYERS OFFER IT

58%

of women would move into a more family friendly industry after a career break

## Mentoring



79% of women would consider a mentor helpful when returning to work but just 8% are offered one

## Top four priorities for women returning to work



## Channels women consider important during a career break



PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIPS



NETWORKING EVENTS

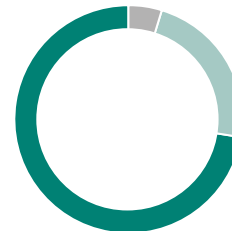


INDUSTRY BASED ONLINE COMMUNITIES



JOB BOARDS FOR WOMEN

## Who would women prefer to be mentored by?



4% Men  
23% Women  
73% Either

# 89%

of women believe personalised development plans are important to helping them succeed

LLOYDS  
BANKING  
GROUP



## CASE STUDY: LLOYDS BANKING GROUP

Lloyds Banking Group's 'Returners Program', launched in 2015, aims to help senior candidates who have been on a career break for two years or more return to the workforce.

Last year, from a pool of more than 200 applications, 15 candidates were selected for the Program, being assigned to a variety of positions within the Group's Retail and Commercial divisions.

The accepted applicants received line management, personal coaching and bespoke training sessions over the initial 10 week Program. This has resulted in these professionals transitioning into permanent employment with the Group.

Based on the success of the initiative last year, the scheme is being repeated in 2016 with the number of spaces increased to 40 and applicants having the opportunity to take positions in Retail and Commercial Banking and Group Operations.

# 1

## HOW TO ATTRACT WOMEN RETURNING TO THE WORKFORCE

Developing effective strategies for attracting women returning to the workforce begins with understanding what motivates them to return, what they look for in a job and what they want from an employer after a career break.

Understanding the value of the experiences women have gained while out of the workforce, recognising the importance that employer brand and reputation play, and knowing how and where women look for work are all key for employers hoping to attract professionals from this talent pool.

# 87%

of women consider a reputation for inclusive hiring and flexible working a top priority in a potential employer

# WHAT WOMEN RETURNING TO WORK LOOK FOR IN A JOB



52% of women changed industry or profession to find a more family friendly employer

Flexibility, a good salary, career progression, well-being initiatives and finding an employer with a good reputation for positive workplace policies are all important to women returning to the workforce.

With only 24% of women returning to the same employer after a career break, most women returning to the workforce are looking for a new job. Employers that understand what women in this situation are looking for are positioned to attract the best talent.

Salary and career progression are key priorities - 90% of women ranked a high salary as important when they returned to work after a career break, and 88% looked for an employer who could offer them a clear path to career progression when they returned.

79% of women said that finding a job with greater flexibility was a top priority, and 52% changed industry or profession to find a more family friendly employer. Good well-being initiatives, such as subsidised healthcare or the opportunity to exercise during the day, are also important, with 82% looking for these in an employer.

## Top four priorities for women returning to work



# IDENTIFYING TRANSFERABLE SKILLS IN WOMEN RETURNING TO WORK



22% of women  
started a business  
during a career break

Employers looking to recruit women who have taken a career break should be aware of the valuable skills these professionals may have developed during their time away from the workplace.

Experience in other areas, such as volunteering, pursuing higher education, freelancing or working in another field, means that they can offer unique perspectives when they return to their careers.

22% of women who have taken a career break started a business while out of the workforce, while 23% volunteered for a charity, 18% took up freelance work and 25% pursued education.

However, this can mean that traditional recruitment approaches may not be as effective in uncovering the transferable skills developed while out of the workforce.

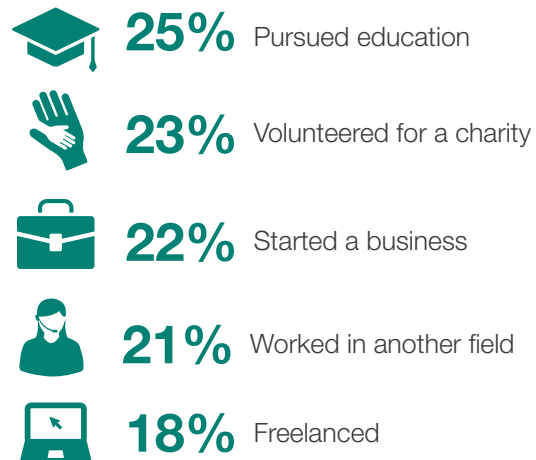


**Sally Martin**  
Director at Robert Walters

“Employers should consider whether their interview process will help them to identify valuable transferable skills in those who have taken a career break. Clarifying that examples of problem solving or other skills may not necessarily come from a professional environment will ensure that employers have the best chance of identifying high calibre candidates from this diverse talent pool.”

It is important to ensure that the early stages of the recruitment process (such as advertising the role and the interview stage) do not suggest to women that their experience makes them an unsuitable candidate.

## Experience women gained during a career break





# CREATING AN EMPLOYER BRAND THAT IS ATTRACTIVE TO WOMEN



62% of women want to work for an award-winning employer

Your employer brand and reputation are increasingly important in attracting the best people to your business.

For women returning to the workforce, finding an employer with a reputation for embracing inclusion and flexible working policies is especially important, with 83% of women who have taken a career break regarding this as a priority.

Additionally, the channels used by women to learn more about an employer are changing, with digital, online media and video playing an increasingly important role. 68% of women said that social media was important in learning about a potential employer, and a fifth use video in their research.

Nearly two thirds of women use online employer review sites to find out about potential employers, and six in ten consider employee testimonials important.

## How do women learn about your employer brand?



**Habiba Khatoon**  
Associate Director at Robert Walters

“Employers who have embraced flexible working policies such as allowing staff to work from home and structure their own working day must ensure that they make potential employees aware of this working culture using the right channels. Entering awards to highlight these policies will demonstrate your brand values to a wide audience, and employers can follow up by posting news of any successes via social media, then engaging with potential candidates through an active presence online.”



# KEY CHANNELS TO REACH WOMEN RETURNING TO THE WORKFORCE



44% of women use websites dedicated to women to find out about employers

The growth of online communities for women presents employers with an opportunity to reach an untapped pool of professionals returning to the workforce.

Nearly half of the women we surveyed said connecting with online communities for women in their industry during a career break is important.

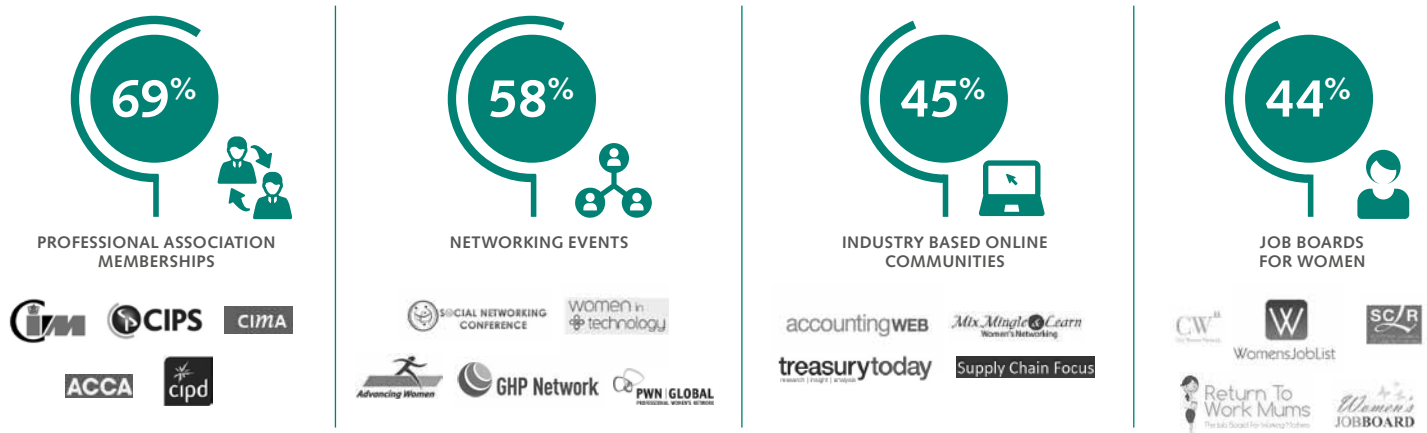
A third would use job boards dedicated to women to find a new job, and 44% would use these sites to find out about potential new employers.

But traditional channels are still effective. Seven in ten women said they would leverage their existing social connections in their job search.

60% of women who have taken a career break maintained their professional association memberships while out of the workforce, and 58% of all women considered attending networking events to stay in touch with other professionals important during a career break.

By working with a recruitment consultancy, employers are able to acquire specialist knowledge of which channels will be most effective for their target audience.

## Channels women consider important during a career break





# 50%

of women believe family pressures and commitments outside work hold women back



**DIGITAL**  
MARKETING

## CASE STUDY

As part of its commitment to diversity a digital marketing firm takes an individualised approach to supporting employees who decide to have children.

When a member of staff announces that she is pregnant, she is offered a meeting with HR to discuss how she wants to manage her pregnancy and to confirm that she feels well enough to travel to the office and continue working, with the option to tailor her working hours and the choice as to whether she wants to work from home. The week before her final day of work, the employee is offered a meeting with her line manager to discuss performance and any promotion opportunities in the pipeline, as well as whether or not she would like to be considered for promotion or take part in any training while on maternity leave.

On completion of her maternity leave, the employee is offered the chance to stagger her return to work and will be provided with supplementary information on the company's flexible working policy.

# 2

## HOW TO DEVELOP POLICIES THAT WILL HELP WOMEN RETURN TO WORK

In addition to taking time out of the workforce to start a family, women are increasingly likely to take a career break for a wide variety of reasons, including traveling, starting a business, caring for relatives or pursuing education.

As a result, these professionals will have a diverse range of needs when they return to work depending on their motivation for originally leaving, the length of time they have been away and their reasons for returning.

# 79%

of women say finding a more flexible job is a priority after a career break

# FLEXIBLE WORKING STRATEGIES



88% of women want to work flexibly outside of core hours

To attract top talent, employers must be open to flexible working practices, particularly for professionals returning from a career break where other demands on their time make these policies even more important.

Women returning to the workforce regard the freedom to manage their own working schedule as the most important flexible working policy (88%), with the freedom to work from home for part of the week also a high priority (84%). 72% of those surveyed also said that the ability to buy additional days of annual leave was important when choosing a new employer.

**84%**  
OF PROFESSIONALS WANT THE  
OPTION TO WORK FROM HOME



**39%**  
OF EMPLOYERS  
OFFER IT



While 67% of women said that the option to work part time was important, just 35% of employers offer it. 43% want the opportunity to job share, however just 12% of employers give them this opportunity.



**Danika Jarmer**

Account Director at Robert Walters

“Flexibility around working hours is a priority for many women, but employers must also consider taking a flexible approach to how this policy is implemented. By giving managers the freedom to organise flexible working arrangements on a case-by-case basis with staff, employers can ensure that these arrangements work for each individual, rather than a blanket policy which may not be appropriate for some staff.”



**80%**

of women consider  
maternity leave above  
statutory requirements to  
be important

# CHILDCARE AND FAMILY FRIENDLY POLICIES



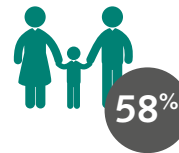
37% of women consider on-site childcare to be important but just 2% of employers offer it

Professionals expect their employer to have policies to help staff achieve a balance between work and family life, and businesses are increasingly responsive to these expectations.

50% of professionals regard financial support for childcare as important and 48% of employers offer it.

With almost half of employers offering a form of subsidised childcare, those which do not will inevitably struggle to attract professionals with young children as support from employers increasingly becomes 'the norm'.

Employers are realising that childcare issues are one of the biggest hurdles in attracting women who have taken a career break in order to have children. Ensuring that your policies in this area not only meet the standard but exceed it will be vital in securing top talent.



58% of women would move into a more family friendly industry after a career break



**Janine Blacksley**

Associate Director at Robert Walters

“Providing on-site childcare is a big investment for an employer. However, given the extreme scarcity and high popularity of such facilities, employers who can offer them (potentially by collaborating with other businesses to share costs) give themselves a huge advantage in attracting professionals who have taken a career break to have children. For employers who cannot provide on-site childcare, offering other family friendly policies such as extended maternity leave can also be a key differentiator when competing for talent with other employers.”

# WELL-BEING INITIATIVES AND POLICIES



68% of women consider it important that an employer allow time to exercise at lunch

Health and well-being are important to women returning to the workforce, with many placing a priority on a work-life balance that gives them the opportunity to maintain their health and fitness.

Over two thirds of women would consider it a priority when returning to the workforce to find an employer who allows time to exercise during the day.

However, just 32% of employers have a policy of allowing staff the flexibility to do so.

Subsidised health insurance is also attractive to professionals when choosing an employer, with 80% saying that this would be important to them when considering returning to the workforce. However, just 50% of employers offer subsidised healthcare.

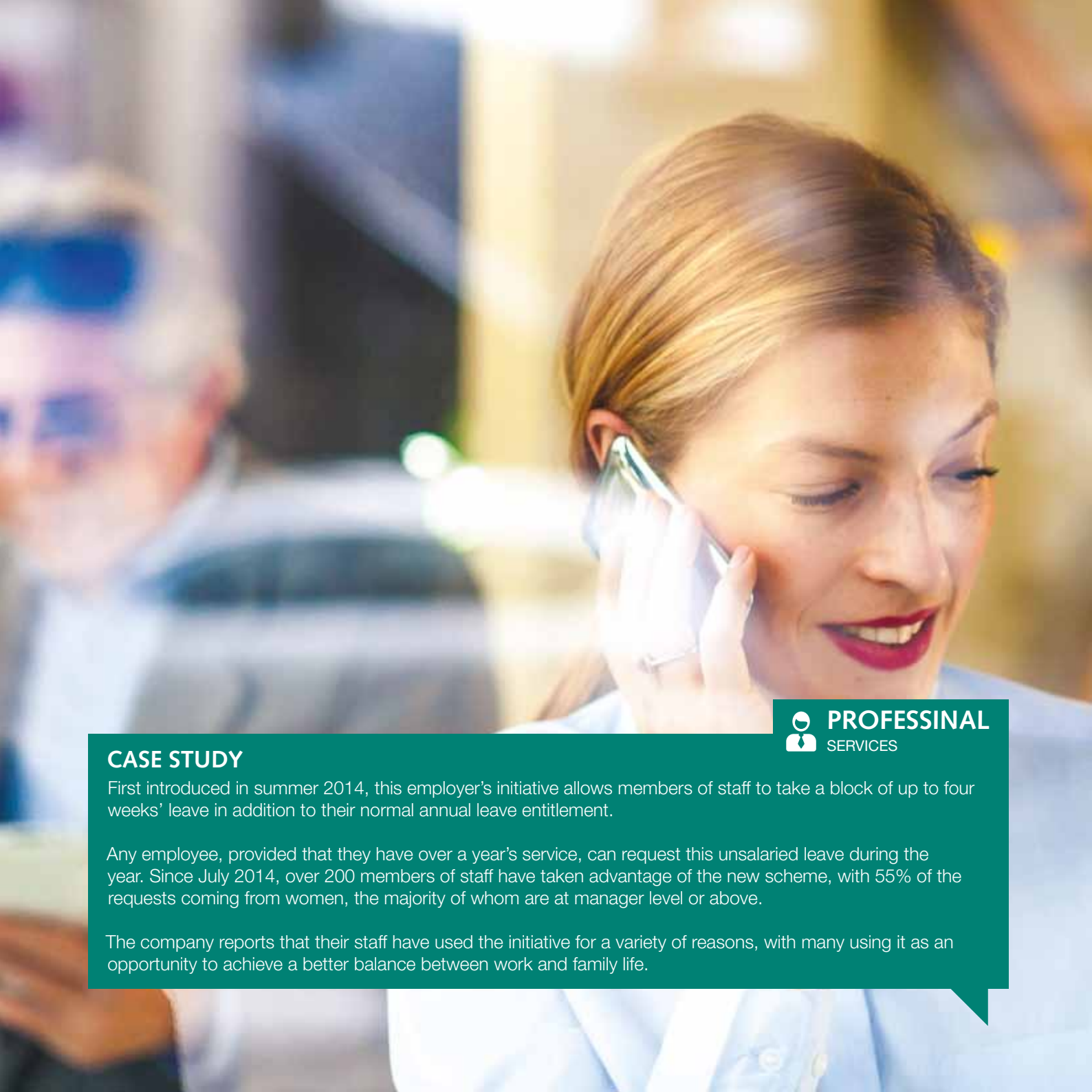
In addition to prioritising good health, women returning to the workforce also value the social aspects of their career. 60% said that they consider company social events to be a priority.



**Katy Friedman**  
Group Talent Director at Robert Walters

“Particularly for professionals with young children, time to exercise and maintain their health is hard to come by, as childcare issues often take priority before or after work hours. Employers who are flexible with allowing staff to take time during the day to exercise can set themselves apart from employers who enforce more rigid working hours.”





**PROFESSIONAL**  
SERVICES

## CASE STUDY

First introduced in summer 2014, this employer's initiative allows members of staff to take a block of up to four weeks' leave in addition to their normal annual leave entitlement.

Any employee, provided that they have over a year's service, can request this unsalaried leave during the year. Since July 2014, over 200 members of staff have taken advantage of the new scheme, with 55% of the requests coming from women, the majority of whom are at manager level or above.

The company reports that their staff have used the initiative for a variety of reasons, with many using it as an opportunity to achieve a better balance between work and family life.

# 3

## HOW TO RETAIN AND DEVELOP WOMEN IN YOUR BUSINESS AFTER A CAREER BREAK

Women returning from a career break may have developed new priorities, but our research indicates that they remain ambitious and committed to developing their career.

Providing women returning from a career break with appropriate training and support can help businesses to develop them into highly effective and motivated employees and leaders, retaining them long term.

# 24%

of women return to their original employer after a career break, despite 74% planning to

# RETAINING STAFF ON A CAREER BREAK



53% of women who took a career break felt they were disadvantaged when they returned

The majority of professionals (74%) intend to return to the same employer following a career break. However, just 24% of professionals go on to do so.

Evidently, employers are struggling to retain staff who take career breaks.

Simple initiatives such as office visits, email newsletters and invitations to events arranged by employers can help retain women on a career break, with two thirds of women considering them important.

Employers should also consider using less formal social channels to stay engaged with women temporarily out of the workforce, with 76% of women stating that maintaining social relationships with colleagues was important.



76% of women said it was important to them to maintain contact with their colleagues when they were on a career break



**Lucy Bisset**  
Associate Director at Robert Walters

“Businesses are missing a valuable opportunity by failing to capitalise on the intention among their employees to return to the same employer after a career break. Maintaining email contact with employees during their time away and inviting them to visit the office should form part of your strategy, in addition to encouraging colleagues to maintain personal relationships by inviting the individual taking a career break to attend company social events as well.”

# RETURN-TO-WORK SCHEMES



52% of women consider structured return-to-work schemes to be important

For women who have spent time out of the workforce, a dedicated programme of training and support designed to help them manage the process of returning to their career can be a major draw.

Return-to-work schemes or 'returnships' are a priority for over half of women planning to take a career break.

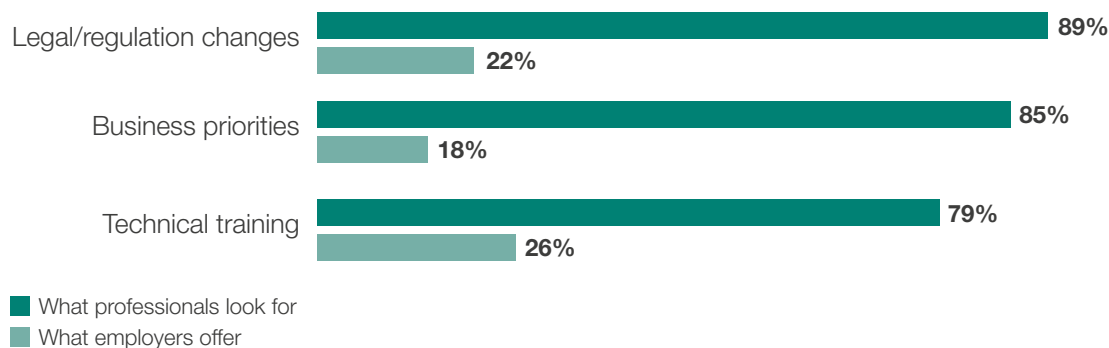
These programmes typically include refresher training on legal or regulatory changes, updates on any shifts in business priorities and technical training to familiarise

professionals with changes that have happened in their absence.

Despite the high popularity of such programmes (52% of women regard a return-to-work scheme as helpful when they rejoin the workforce), very few employers offer them.

These programmes can be tailored to suit individual roles, with emphasis on particular areas that will be of greater significance to professionals in certain fields.

## Return-to-work schemes: What kind of training women want vs. what employers offer



# MENTORING AND LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES



79% of women would consider a mentor helpful when returning to work – just 8% are offered one

## Mentoring programmes geared towards women returning from a career break are popular, but few employers offer them.

Mentoring relationships are valuable to all professionals, but women who are returning from a career break may find them particularly helpful in adjusting to their return to the workforce.

In particular, offering a mentoring arrangement with a senior member of staff who has also taken a career break can help provide them with a road map for developing their career.

Women who have taken a career break remain highly ambitious when they rejoin the workforce.

However, just 27% said their employer offered a structured scheme for career progression for professionals returning to work.

Women returning to the workforce also regard high earning potential as a priority, with 90% saying that a high salary and benefits are important.

However just 44% said that roles offering high financial rewards were available to women returning from a career break.



84%

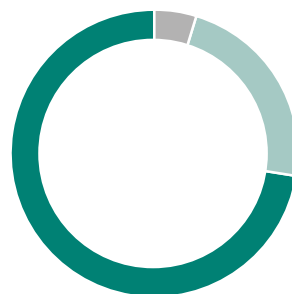
of women want to discuss long term career goals with a mentor



65%

of women want to see their mentor once a month

## Who would women prefer to be mentored by?



4% Men  
23% Women  
73% Either

# KEY FINDINGS - 10 POINT PLAN



## **1. Understand what women returning to work look for in a job**

While flexibility and family friendly policies are often key considerations for women returning to the workforce, employers must remain aware that competitive salaries and potential for career progression will still be very important for ambitious professionals.



## **2. Develop a flexible recruitment process**

Tailor job adverts to encourage professionals on a career break to apply, and train hiring managers to shape interview questions to give professionals the opportunity to discuss skills they have developed outside of the workforce.



## **3. Build your employer brand**

Women returning from a career break regard a reputation for flexible working and inclusion as paramount in a potential employer. Strong positive testimonials from current staff and a range of media including video can communicate your brand effectively.



## **4. Utilise new channels to reach women taking a career break**

Communicate your brand by achieving recognition through industry awards. Use these achievements to create content which can be shared on social media and engage with professionals on a career break through this medium.



## **5. Consider flexible working policies**

Embrace flexible working policies and be adaptable in how you implement them: avoid a 'one-size-fits-all' approach. Provide line managers with a framework but allow them the freedom to develop flexible working arrangements with their team members on an individual basis.



## **6. Develop childcare and family friendly policies**

Financial support for childcare is increasingly common, and employers must do more if they want to differentiate themselves from other businesses. Additional maternity leave can be a helpful policy in attracting professionals who plan to have children.



## **7. Implement well-being initiatives**

Businesses that support health and well-being initiatives have an edge over competitors. Providing health insurance can be viewed as a long term investment to attract and retain the best staff while allowing time to exercise during the day shows recognition of the time pressures they face outside work.



## **8. Retain staff on a career break**

Employers are failing to capitalise on women's plans to return to the same employer after a career break. Maintaining electronic and face-to-face contact with women while they are away from the office is an effective way to improve staff retention.



## **9. Offer return-to-work schemes**

Structured return-to-work schemes are extremely popular among women but few businesses offer them. While these schemes remain uncommon, employers who offer them have a huge advantage over rivals when looking to attract and retain professionals on a career break.



## **10. Provide mentoring and leadership programmes**

The experience of existing employees, particularly those who have taken a career break themselves, is a hugely valuable resource. By connecting professionals returning to the workforce with a mentor, employers can ensure that their knowledge is shared with those who need it.



## ABOUT THE EMPOWERING WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE PROGRAMME

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The Robert Walters **Empowering Women in the Workplace** programme is designed to create conversation and connect professionals, provide advice to help women achieve career success, as well as deliver insight to employers and businesses on how they can best create strategies and policies to ensure gender diversity in the workplace.

[www.robertwalters.co.uk/empoweringwomen](http://www.robertwalters.co.uk/empoweringwomen)



# CONTACT US

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To join the conversation, attend events or access the latest advice and research produced as part of the Empowering Women in the Workplace programme, or to discuss your recruitment needs in more detail, please contact your Robert Walters recruitment consultant, email us at [contact@robertwalters.com](mailto:contact@robertwalters.com), or get in touch with one of our offices below:

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