



Government
Equalities Office



Last updated: 27.02.19

The Returners Fund Round 3: Policy context and FAQs

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 Department for International Development.

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 on 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, but tend to be 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

¹ ONS Labour Market Statistics for November 2017-January 2018

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

² Ibid.

programme will ultimately target those in this cohort who wish to return to paid employment

- Returner Programmes are targeted at people returning to work after a long break. There are many forms of returner programme, including return to practice and retraining programmes. The Returners Fund is focused on creating meaningful employment opportunities for returners, on a temporary or permanent basis, and providing a supported route back to permanent employment.
- Returnships are 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 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 as a consequence of 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 arrangements³ (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 patterns⁴. 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 job⁵.

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

⁴ Timewise (2015) What do Women Returners Want.
(https://timewise.co.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2018/02/What_women_returners_want-AM.pdf).

⁵ Ibid

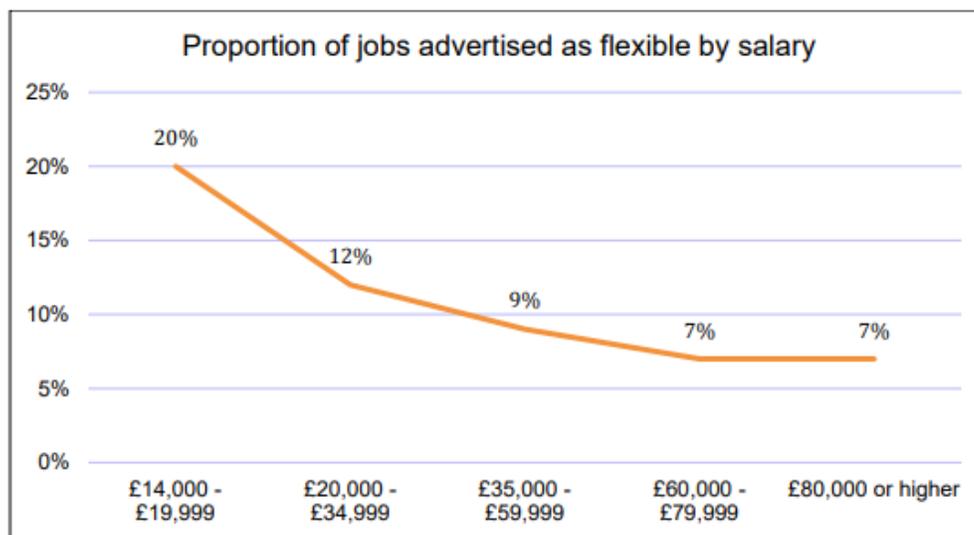


Figure 1: Graph showing the proportion of jobs advertised as flexible by salary (Timewise 2017)

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 unsuitable⁶. The economic inactivity rate of this older age group is 26%, compared to 13% between 35-49 and 13% between 25-34-year olds⁷.
- **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%)⁸.
- **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%)⁹. 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 creates a "talent bottleneck" for companies¹⁰. Increasing the availability of part-time and flexible jobs would allow businesses to access a greater pool of talented candidates¹¹.

⁶ Timewise (2017) Flexible Jobs Index. (<https://timewise.co.uk/what-we-do/research/flexible-jobs-index2017/>).

⁷ Centre for Ageing Better, 2017, Addressing worklessness and job insecurity among people aged 50 and over in Greater Manchester.

⁸ ONS Labour Market Statistics for November 2017-January 2018

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

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Timewise, Flexible Jobs Index, 2017, <https://timewise.co.uk/what-we-do/research/flexible-jobs-index-2017>.

¹¹ Ibid.

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 salaries¹². On returning to work, women earn around 2% less on average for every year spent out of paid work¹³. The situation is worse for highly qualified women who earn 4% less on average for each year they take out¹⁴. Creating and expanding returner programmes is a key recommendation of the GEO Gender Pay Gap team.

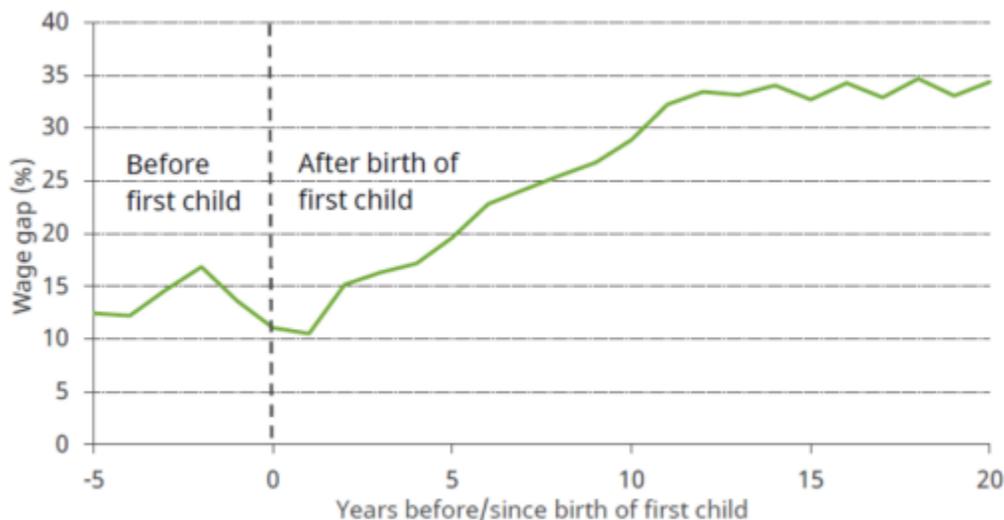


Figure 2: The gender pay gap between men and women before and after birth of first child (Institute for Fiscal Studies 2016)

¹² Costa Dias, Elming and Joyce (2016). The Gender Wage Gap. Institute for Fiscal Studies.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

FAQ Contents

Returners Fund – Headlines	5
Eligibility	6
Application.....	8
Financial and funding queries.....	10
Evaluation	11

Returners Fund Round 3 – Headlines

What funding is available under Round 3 of the Returners Fund?

- There is a total grant fund of £500,000 available
- We anticipate making awards to 5-7 projects in April-May 2019
- Bids cannot exceed £100,000 and we anticipate that the majority of successful projects will be awarded between £50,000 and £100,000.

What is the timetable for the Returners Fund Round 3?

- The online application portal will be launched on **7th February**. The application deadline for the submission of full applications on the portal is 17:00 on **19th March 2019**
- Project delivery should be scheduled to take place between **1st June 2019** and **31st May 2020**

What is Different for Round 3?

1. The application process

The application procedure has changed to a one-step process. There is no longer a requirement to submit an Expression of Interest. To apply for funding you will need to submit a fully worked up application detailing the full scope of your planned project activities by the publicised deadline.

2. The intended returner target group

The focus in Round 3 is on returners from marginalised groups who **face the greatest disadvantages in returning to the work place** (Please refer to the fund prospectus for further information).

3. Evaluation Plans

There is no longer a requirement to produce a full logic model at application stage, however, evaluation is still considered an intrinsic and essential part of project delivery. Successful projects will be required to work with the programme's external evaluators, SQW, to develop evaluation plans to measure and review the impact of their funded activities (Please refer to the evaluation section below for further information).

Eligibility

Who can apply for a Returners Fund grant?

All types of organisations that can demonstrate they can support Returners from marginalised groups (as identified within the prospectus) AND employers of Returners are eligible to apply. This includes voluntary and community sector organisations, social enterprises, training providers, local enterprise partnerships (LEPs), academic institutions, local authorities and private sector organisations.

As an employer, can we bid for funding?

Employers can bid for funding, however, part of the assessment criteria is the partnerships made with other employers and other organisations, as set out in the prospectus.

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 into paid employment outside of London. Proposed projects based in London will need to make a strong case for their proposal.

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 and employers 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 emphasised 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 employers 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.

Is this funding targeting a specific sector(s) (STEM etc.)?

No. This funding is not sector specific, however we welcome bids that focus on sectors, particularly sectors that may be under-represented by women.

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. It is focused on engagement with private sector employers in order to assist those who have taken a career break to undertake caring responsibilities (primarily to look after children) and want to return at a similar skill level. Projects also need to demonstrate the potential for replication and sustainability beyond the funding period.

Would a Returner be eligible for the programme if their previous work was cash-in hand?

No, a Returner would need to have had some form of paid employment previously.

Would a Returner be eligible for the programme if they are a migrant now living in the UK?

They would be eligible if they:

- 1) Were in paid employment in their previous country; and
- 2) Have taken time out of work to undertake caring responsibilities

Would a Returner be eligible for the programme if they were self-employed previously?

The Returner would only be eligible if their intention was to move into employment with an employer (and not back into self-employment).

Can Returners move into employment in the voluntary sector? Does employment have to be in the private sector?

The aim of the fund is to provide paid employment opportunities to Returners, however, we will consider bids from those who can strongly demonstrate the reasons why moving into non-paid voluntary work would benefit Returners.

Are there any limitations around the type of contract Returners are employed on (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.

This Fund is NOT designed to support people into volunteer roles as the focus is paid employment outcomes. However, if your project proposes volunteer work as a stepping stone in the early stages of the project, the GEO would be willing to consider this providing there is a strong justification and clear progression to a paid opportunity that will be taken up before the end of the funded project.

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 their 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, 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 preparation and additional-lead in time involved before the delivery phase with the returners' cohort begins. We also anticipate that projects will allow sufficient time at the end of the delivery phase of the programme in order to capture the learning and input to the evaluation. 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 employers are integrating new practices into their organisations in a sustainable, long-lasting way. However, it is worth bearing in mind that successful projects in Rounds 1 and 2 all demonstrated a strong link with employers to enable a good rate of clients back into paid employment.

Application

Do I have to apply online?

Yes. We can only accept applications via the on-line application portal <https://returnersfund.flexigrant.com>. 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

Round 3, unlike previous rounds, is a one-step application process. Applicants will therefore be required to submit a full application form on the portal.

Can I submit multiple applications?

Yes. You are able to submit multiple applications, however interest in the fund is high and competition is strong. Please bear in mind that the Government Equalities Office is only looking to fund up to 7 projects. The GEO will be looking to support a range of target groups and a good geographic spread of projects. It is unlikely therefore that two projects from the same lead organisations would be selected for support.

Can I apply to the Returners Fund for Round 3 if I was unsuccessful in Rounds 1 and or 2?

Yes. Please be aware however, that we will not be able to provide individual feedback on previous submissions, because of the volume of applications received. We can however, provide generic feedback on common reasons for why bids were unsuccessful.

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 Round 1 and Round 2?

The application process is completely confidential. Once decisions have been made regarding awards, the GEO will make a public announcement, and outline details of successful projects will be made public. Details of projects supported under Round 1 have been made public.

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 can 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 Round 3 of the Returners Fund cannot exceed £100,000. However, we anticipate most grants awarded to be £50,000-£100,000, 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 can include in-kind support as well. We do not have a standardised rate for in-kind or pro-bono contributions, so the applicant organisations needs to cost 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 is by no means the only indication of value for money.

What would you consider value for money, e.g. how many clients would you expect to be supported with £100,000?

The GEO values the evidence around practice that will be generated by the funded projects; it will be looking to support the most effective and innovative programmes rather than necessarily those with 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. Your reserves are an indication of the organisation's financial security. The Fund payments will be made in arrears so you will need to have sufficient funds to be able to cover your project costs until you receive your grant payments. The GEO is also keen to ensure the sustainability of the project after the one-off grant funding.

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, but you will need to allocate project staff time to working with SQW.

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

Please note that as a one-step application process has been introduced for Round 3, applicants will not be required to produce full logic model evaluation plans prior to application. Please read the following guidelines to understand the evaluation expectations for Round 3.

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. GEO has 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 post application to develop a customised evaluation plan for 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.
- 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 should I consider in terms of evaluation when completing a full application?

The GEO require all successful applicants to participate fully in the evaluation post approval. At application stage you need to demonstrate how you will support the evaluation process and work with the external programme evaluators, SQW, in the event your application is successful. SQW

will not be involved in the assessment of the applications. In your application you should comment on:

- Your willingness to participate in the evaluation post approval
- How you have taken evaluation on board, in designing your approach
- 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/Department for International Development), 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.