

# RETURN TO SOCIAL WORK EMPLOYER INFORMATION PACK



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## INTRODUCTION

This employer guidance pack has been developed to support prospective employers who are considering signing up to the Return to Social Work programme.

### WHAT IS THE RETURN TO SOCIAL WORK PROGRAMME?

The Return to Social Work programme is an initiative developed by the **Local Government Association** (LGA) and the **Government Equalities Office** (GEO). It will provide free, high-quality training to 200 social workers who have been out of practice for between two and 10 years, supporting them to get re-registered with the official regulatory body.

The experienced social workers carefully selected to join the scheme, will be offered a **free** gateway back into the sector.

As well as providing the necessary training, our programme is uniquely designed to mentor, coach and rebuild the confidence of these individuals. In doing so, the programme will increase their resilience, harness the wealth of their experience and knowledge, and ultimately bring them back up to speed so they are ready to join your organisation today.

Our programme includes work placements and supervised training, which gives our candidates the chance to get back into the workplace. By using real life case studies and work-based situations to develop their skills, candidates can refresh their knowledge of today's social work theory, policy, legislation and best practice.

The aforementioned placements will take place within councils that have signed up to the programme. Candidates will then have the opportunity to apply for permanent or temporary positions with participating councils in their chosen location/s, subject to available vacancies.

**This programme is free of charge for councils to sign up.**



## WHO ARE THE RETURN TO SOCIAL WORK CANDIDATES?

Our candidates are defined as ‘returners’.

### DEFINITION OF A RETURNER

Returners are defined as people who have previously qualified as social workers, who have work experience in the profession, and who have taken an extended career break for a variety of reasons, such as for caring responsibilities. Returners can be male or female, but data shows that they are predominantly women.

We are aiming to support 200 candidates on the Return to Social Work programme.

All candidates selected to participate will have:

- ✓ practised as social workers for at least two years after achieving their qualifications
- ✓ practised in a statutory setting within the UK
- ✓ the right to work in the UK
- ✓ been out of social care practice for between two and 10 years
- ✓ drive to return to the sector
- ✓ a wealth of past experience and invaluable knowledge
- ✓ an Enhanced DBS for both adults and children
- ✓ the wish to regain their professional identity

During their time on the programme the candidates will:

- ✓ **be placed into an Action Learning Sets (ALS)**
  - The aim of the ALS is to provide a space for candidates to work through case studies that are based on real life scenarios.
  - Candidates will draw upon knowledge gained from the programme’s workshops and work experience opportunities, as well as their own knowledge and skills to identify solutions to the scenarios.
- ✓ **be coached**
  - The aim of these sessions is to help candidates rebuild their resilience and confidence in order to prepare them for returning to social work.
- ✓ **attend workshops with Making Research Count**
  - Making Research Count (MRC) forms part of King’s College, London. It will provide workshops on key knowledge and theoretical input to enable candidates to meet the knowledge requirements for the:
    - Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF)
    - Knowledge and Skills Statements (KSS) for Social Workers in Adult Services
    - Standards of Proficiency (SOP).
- ✓ **develop their interview skills**
  - Candidates will attend an interview skills session, where they can take part in a mock interview and receive feedback.



## HEAR FROM OUR PAST CANDIDATES

Isabella completed the pilot of the Return to Social Work programme in 2016, after a four-year career break.



“Everybody has their own story as to why they left social work practice and now wish to return. The programme ultimately provided me with that possibility after a four-year career break.

“It catered for a high number of my learning needs and enabled me to think about the gaps that needed to be addressed before returning into practice. Initially, I was still unsure about the direction I would be taking in terms of my career path and timing. After completing the programme, I was armed with refreshed knowledge, renewed momentum and motivation, and, for the first time, an informed plan regarding my journey back.”

Anjali completed the programme in 2018, after a five-year career break



“I always enjoyed my work and never thought I would be out of practice, especially for more than five years. The gap in my career was because of a couple of losses in my family and then planning my own.

“When the programme was announced by the Government, I became hopeful and went through its selection process. Fortunately, I was a successful candidate. The programme is designed to help social workers like me who need support to develop their confidence and build on their knowledge and skills of social work. In my case, this was made possible by the variety of teaching modes like knowledge-based sessions, reflective supervision, active learning sets and supervised practice”.

## Sia completed the programme in 2018

“I left social work because of family commitments. The interesting thing is that, even though I physically left social work, I did not leave mentally and I always knew I was going to return to practice one day.

“This programme has given me the opportunity to embark on that journey. I would like to enhance my career and professional development by progressing my specialism beyond children, families and child protection.

“I can do this now that I have completed the Return to Social Work programme, as I have become equipped with a wide range of resources that are relevant to both adults’ and children’s social care”.



## PROGRAMME TIMELINE

20 NOVEMBER 2019 -  
30 APRIL 2020

### STAGE 1 – Sign-up

To sign up to the programme, councils should register their interest via the 'Information for Councils' page on our website. They will then be asked to complete an online application form.

The deadline for councils to sign up to the programme, in order to offer placements and/or vacant roles, is 30 April 2020.

If councils would like more information before they sign up to the programme, they are welcome to contact the LGA's returner support team via [returntosocialwork@local.gov.uk](mailto:returntosocialwork@local.gov.uk).

MARCH - APRIL 2020

### STAGE 2 – Attend Information Sessions (optional)

The LGA's returner support team will deliver a number of online webinars to provide councils with more information about the programme and what their participation involves.

The webinar schedule will be circulated to those who have formally registered their interest in the programme.

30 APRIL 2020

### STAGE 3 – Submit Placement Offers

The deadline for councils to sign up to the programme is 30 April 2020.

Once registered, councils will be asked to provide details on what placements and/or vacant roles they can offer our candidates. Councils are requested to supply this information by 30 April 2020.



## MAY - JULY 2020

### STAGE 4 – Candidates Complete Placements

During this time, candidates will complete placements with participating councils. The specific dates are dependent on the availability of councils and candidates, and the social care specialism offered.

Placement length will differ depending on how long a candidate has been out of practice for, but as a minimum all candidates must complete 10 days. If possible, we would like councils to offer between 10 and 20 days.

Longer placements can be negotiated with individual candidates.

## JULY 2020

### STAGE 5 – Submit Employment Vacancies

Councils will be contacted in July and asked to submit the number of vacancies they have available, which our candidates can interview for. They will also be asked to specify what social care area they would like to recruit into.

## JULY - SEPTEMBER 2020

### STAGE 6 – Interview Candidates

Councils will receive expressions of interest from candidates, accompanied by covering letters and CVs. They will then have the opportunity to shortlist the candidates and arrange interviews with those that best fit their criteria.

Following successful interview, councils can make candidates an offer of employment and fill their social worker vacancies.

## SEPTEMBER 2020

### Stage 7 – Attend Returners' Ceremony (Optional)

Councils will be invited to a returners' ceremony where they can network with other councils that have taken part in our programme.



## PLACEMENT PROCESS

Social Work England has taken over from HCPC as the specialist regulator for social workers. They require returning social workers to undergo basic retraining for a **minimum of 10 days**, including supervised practice.

Our programme caters for candidates who have been out of practice for between two and five years, and five and 10 years. Some candidates, therefore, may benefit from more supervised days than others.

Placement periods are set by the availability of councils and candidates, with both parties offering a degree of flexibility where possible.

## THE PLACEMENT PROCESS

- The placement period for this programme will take place between 18 May and August 2020. We ask councils to offer a minimum of ten days for each candidate. Councils can offer multiple placements and more days if they wish.
- Within the application form to sign up to the programme, councils will be asked to provide their available dates and desired length of placement in advance.
- Candidates will be matched to councils based on their location and preference. As our candidates will not be paid travel expenses to attend their placements, matching them with their preferred councils will help to alleviate, as much as possible, any financial burdens related to travel.

- Once the matching process has been completed, councils will be given a candidate's personal statement and contact details. The council will then need to contact the candidate to arrange the logistics of the placement.
- Some councils may wish to informally meet candidates before the placement begins. We are happy for councils and candidates to work together to make the placement process as comfortable and beneficial for all as possible.

Councils who sign up to the Return to Social Work programme do not have to offer placements; however, we strongly encourage councils to do so.

The benefits of offering a placement to a returner are listed below. Offering a placement:

- Allows you as an employer to assess the returner's skills, experience and motivation on the job before considering their suitability for any vacant posts.
- Creates a learning environment for returners to assess whether the fit and timing is right for them.
- Gives the returner the opportunity to assess what flexibility options and type of work would suit them in the long term.
- Provides the opportunity for experienced practitioners in your council to provide supervision and mentoring to the returner, thus developing their own careers at the same time.





## VACANCY PROCESS

Once our candidates have completed their placements, councils will have the opportunity to interview and recruit them into their vacant social worker positions.

Re-entering the workplace after a career break can be daunting for candidates, especially for those who have been out of work for 10 years. The Government Equalities Office has developed a useful **toolkit** with guidance for how employers can best support returners during this process.

## THE VACANCY PROCESS

**Step 1:** From July, we will ask all councils who have signed up to the programme to provide:

- The number of vacant roles they have available in social care
- A document that provides the following information for each vacancy:
  - Job description
  - Contract duration: permanent or fixed term
  - Job specifics: full-time, part-time or negotiable
  - Salary
  - Location/s
- A document outlining the benefits of working for your council

We will then condense this information into regional packs for the candidates to select from.

**Step 2:** Candidates will be given a form to select the vacancies they wish to be put forward for. They will then compose a CV and a generic cover letter, outlining their suitability for a role in social care and what they can offer councils as a social worker.

**Step 3:** In August, the Return to Social work team will send councils a list of interested candidates, with their CV and covering letter.

**Step 4:** The council will review the list of candidates and coordinate interviews directly with their shortlisted individuals.

**Step 5:** The council will proceed with their internal process for recruiting and on-boarding. In the event that a candidate is unsuccessful at interview, councils are asked to provide them with constructive feedback in order to support their development and the next steps of their journey back into work.



## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF EMPLOYING A RETURNER?

### 1. TACKLE AGENCY SPENDING

Signing up to this programme will give councils access to a national pool of skilled, diverse and committed social workers, who have been through a learning and development programme designed to refresh their skills and knowledge base. The aim is to help councils avoid the costs associated with recruitment drives and hiring agency staff, which cost councils £335 million in 2017/18.

### 2. COST-EFFECTIVE RECRUITMENT

Signing up to our programme is a cost-effective way to bring a number of experienced employees into your organisation, compared with using a recruitment agency, as organisations do not incur percentage-based success fees for successful hires.

### 3. IMPROVED GENDER, AGE AND COGNITIVE DIVERSITY

Returner programmes can support the drive for diversity in a number of ways:

- 89 per cent of people who are out of paid work for caring responsibilities, are female\*. Hiring returners is a way to expand your female talent pipeline and boost the presence of women in your organisation. It can also have a positive effect on your gender pay gap.

- Hiring returners can improve the age diversity of an organisation, bringing in individuals with high levels of experience, maturity and commitment.
- Employers report that returners tend to offer a different way of looking at problems and situations, which can help enhance an organisation’s cognitive diversity.

\*ONS Labour Market Statistics, December 2017.

### 4. ACCESS TO A NEW HIGH-CALIBRE TALENT POOL

There are a large number of returners that come with high levels of professional/managerial experience, skills and education. Taking a career break has enabled them to gain new skills and experiences outside of social care, which can broaden the skill-set of your teams. Many of those who have been economically inactive for caring responsibilities, bring the added benefit of enhanced life experience that can be used to build relationships with families and individuals.

### 5. IMPROVED EMPLOYER BRAND/IMAGE

Employing a returner can have a positive impact on your image as an employer, signalling that you are a flexible organisation that supports parents and carers in the workplace. It also shows that your organisation is open to and accepting of non-linear career pathways, and values the role that caring plays in society. These images can play a key role in both the recruitment and retention of talented employees.



## HOW TO SIGN UP TO THE PROGRAMME

Social workers and their support staff do one of the most important and rewarding jobs in local government. Yet, 74 per cent of councils report they have difficulty recruiting social workers, and as many as 60 per cent say they have issues with retention.

This programme offers councils a **free** and simple way to hire experienced social workers without the cost or time required to run a recruitment campaign themselves. By signing up to our programme, you will have access to a national pool of social workers, selected by the LGA, who are highly skilled and committed to returning to work.

Use this opportunity to fill your vacancies, while also supporting social workers living in your area to return to practice.

To sign up to the programme, please visit our [website](#).

## WHAT NEXT?

Once you have signed up to the programme, we will ask you to help us encourage returning social workers in your area to apply for the programme. You will be provided with a 'How-to' communications toolkit with ready-made social media posts, intranet posts, and a press release to make sharing this opportunity as easy as possible.



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### GENERAL QUESTIONS

#### WHY SHOULD MY AUTHORITY SIGN UP?

Councils across the country have raised concerns over the challenge to recruit social workers, with 74 per cent struggling to recruit them and 60 per cent struggling with their retention.

This programme offers councils a simple way to hire experienced social workers without the cost or time required to run a recruitment campaign themselves. By signing up to our programme, you will have access to a national pool of social workers, selected and trained, who are highly skilled and committed to returning to work.

Use this opportunity to fill your vacancies, while also supporting social workers living in your area to return to practice.

#### IS THERE ANY FUNDING AVAILABLE FOR COUNCILS WHO SIGN UP TO THE PROGRAMME?

There is no direct funding available but we would expect the participating councils to gain all of the benefits outlined in this pack. There are no additional or hidden costs that come with taking part.

#### WHAT SUPPORT WILL COUNCILS BE GIVEN DURING THE PROGRAMME?

Support will vary between councils. Please contact the LGA's **returner team** with your support requirements and they will try to address your needs.

#### HOW WILL THE PROGRAMME BE REVIEWED AND EVALUATED? CAN WE FEED INTO THIS?

The programme will be evaluated by a dedicated research team after the programme has finished. As part of the evaluation, we will ask councils for their feedback on the process. The report will be available to councils in late 2020.

### PLACEMENT QUESTIONS

#### HOW LONG DO WE NEED TO OFFER A PLACEMENT FOR?

We are asking councils to offer placements for a minimum of 10 days, as this is a requirement set by the official regulator.

As our programme aims to support candidates who have been out of practice for more than five years, we are encouraging these candidates to consider a placement of 20 days but this is subject to council and candidate availability.



## WHO WILL BE PLACED WITH US?

Candidates will be matched according to their preference and their location. This is because we are unable to reimburse candidates for travel expenses on the programme.

## HOW MANY PLACEMENTS DO WE HAVE TO SUPPORT?

There is no minimum or maximum to the number of candidates that you are able to support via a placement. As mentioned previously, candidates will be matched according to their preference and location. We would welcome any council who can support multiple candidates.

## WILL OUR COUNCIL GET TO MEET THE CANDIDATES BEFORE THEY START THEIR PLACEMENTS?

Once we have matched you with a candidate, we will provide your selected placement coordinator with the candidate's contact details and personal statement. It is then for your placement coordinator to arrange a suitable pre-meet or telephone conversation to arrange logistics and to ensure your council is happy with the match. All candidates will have an Enhanced DBS.

## WHEN DO WE NEED TO OFFER PLACEMENTS?

Placements should take place between May and August 2020. Specific dates will vary depending on the availability of both candidates and councils.

## DO CANDIDATES NEED TO BE FORMALLY SUPERVISED AND ASSESSED WHILST ON PLACEMENT?

We would recommend that candidates have a named person (e.g. a team leader or an experienced practitioner) who can provide onsite support and produce a very short report on the candidate at the end of the placement. We will provide a short template for you to follow for this report.

## VACANCY QUESTIONS

### WHY ARE WE BEING ASKED TO SEND OVER DETAILED INFORMATION ABOUT OUR VACANT POSITIONS?

As part of the recruitment process, candidates will have the opportunity to review the vacancies available in all councils. Councils are asked to send their vacancy information so it can be consolidated into a pack to better support candidates with their decision about who to apply for.



## CAN A CANDIDATE COMPLETE OUR COUNCIL'S APPLICATION FORM?

If you have signed up to this programme, we ask that you do not ask candidates to complete your council's application form in addition to our own. Our programme has been carefully designed to support returning social workers, and additional application forms can cause undue pressure on our candidates.

If a candidate does decide to directly apply for a role at your council through your own vacancy pages, then this is the candidate's preference and we are pleased to see that they have grown in confidence to embark on their own journey to apply for vacant roles.

## WHEN CAN THE CANDIDATE START EMPLOYMENT?

Many of these candidates are not currently working, so they will not have a notice period. Once they have completed the requirement of training and re-registering with the regulator, they will be able to return to work. However, candidates should be considered on a case by case basis using your normal recruitment processes.

## HOW DO I INTERVIEW AND ASSESS CANDIDATES?

We would encourage you to interview and assess the candidates in a similar way to how you would a typical candidate for a social work role, as it is

important that you find the best candidate that fits your council. We advise that you may need to adapt your existing interview process to take into account that our candidates may not have had an interview for a long time.

Candidates will still need to hand in their reflective log as part of the programme's quality assurance. The reflective log is not a SWE/HPC requirement; however, it will provide valuable insight into a candidate's progress throughout the programme, and highlight their strengths and development needs against the PCF and KSS.

## SUPPORT AND FURTHER QUESTIONS

Please contact [returntosocialwork@local.gov.uk](mailto:returntosocialwork@local.gov.uk) if you have any more questions related to signing up to the Return to Social Work programme.

For an informal discussion, contact Avril Mayhew: [avril.mayhew@local.gov.uk](mailto:avril.mayhew@local.gov.uk)

For guidance on how to support social workers return to work, please see the employer's **toolkit** created by the Government Equalities Office.





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REF 40.9