

Return to Work for those who have been on a work break

We are all aware of the shortage of staff and the need for businesses to be as flexible as possible in their employment practices and many organisations are now actively looking at Return to Work programmes for those who have been on an extended career break to ensure that those returning to work are given the support to refresh their knowledge and skills and boost their personal confidence.

Many yards have introduced different working patterns and practices within recent years and those who may have been out of racing for some time may not be aware of all the benefits and good practices in place.

And if they are a parent looking to return to work, they may be able to get up to 30 hours free childcare via the Government scheme if they have a child aged 3 – 4. There is also a Government Tax-free child care scheme.

So, could your business actively support someone returning to work and how can you attract them to you?

It may be that the normal recruitment procedures are not catching the eye of those not pro-actively thinking about returning to racing but who have valuable skills and experience that you would welcome. Perhaps they worked in a yard in the past where they had no part time staff and think that if they cannot be there for 6.30 am, there is no place for them.

Many trainers advertise through word of mouth or on social media – if you feel that you can offer the support and training to someone returning to racing after an extended period out, ensure that is mentioned along with what your yard can offer. Just putting “stable staff required, part or full time, usual duties” is not selling the job or career in the best way.

If you use Racing Groom to promote your yard and the benefits of working for you then point any applicants towards that or if there is more information on your website about the benefits of working for you, again point them towards that.

If you have an online application form or a paper application form make sure that it doesn't discourage those who have not been working recently – perhaps work through it yourself as if you were coming back after a couple of years break. Is there anything in it which would make you give up at that point?

To encourage those returning to work keep the criteria as open as possible whilst ensuring that you are clear about any essential experience and skills you require. Remember, it could be quite daunting for someone who has been out of work for a while to return to work so making the application and interview process as straightforward as possible could help widen the pool of applicants.

If you can offer flexible working - it may be that even a few hours a week from a returner can help relieve the pressure on your full time staff and help their work life balance - ensure the advert makes that clear – perhaps put that you are open to discussing flexible working or

that you can offer support to someone returning to work to help them transition back into the workplace.

If flexible working is offered the availability of the organisation to do this and the limitations should be fully discussed during the interview process. Remember, though that all employees have the right to unpaid time off for dependants should an emergency arise.

How can you make your business stand out to a returner?

Surveys have shown that returners are likely to want support to help them re-integrate - whilst money is important, returning to work is also related to identity and satisfaction – so having a good team ethos where there is a real sense of achievement is important

Ensure that they are aware they will not be thrown in at the deep end and that they will be given the opportunity to refresh their skills, knowledge and confidence with support to do that.

Provide support

It can be daunting enough changing jobs let alone returning after a long period out – yards have different ways of doing things and a person out of practice could start doubting their ability to do even the most simple thing if they have always done it a different way.

We all know that everyone is very busy and generally you will be short staffed if recruiting but try to time the person joining you when you have the time and opportunity to provide the support.

The induction process will be important and it is likely this will need to be more detailed than with an employee coming straight from another yard.

Ideally have a job description in place so that the employee knows what is required and work through that with them to see where they feel they may need any particular support or training to bring them up to date.

If doing a trial period then consider how long that will be and confirm that in writing - ensure it is long enough for the person to get up to speed and show they can do the job and give you a proper opportunity to assess their work. Also ensure that the support you have offered will be available during that time.

Once the trial period or initial returning programme is over, remember to provide ongoing support as you would with any employee. Ensure that their aspirations are discussed and training opportunities are made available be that internal training within the yard or external training such as through the industry Regional Staff Development programme.

And don't forget how important the moral support will be to help the person fit into the team particularly if they are working part time and may not be around at times such as the breakfast break when other staff get together.

Your team

If you are taking on a returner, then ensure that your existing team know the rationale and benefits of what you are doing and that the person may be lacking in confidence and need support from everyone whilst they get back up to speed.

Depending on the size of your yard the support you can put in place will vary but as well as their main manager who will provide guidance and feedback, you could look at having another employee as a buddy who helps with day to day questions.

The Government Equalities Commission and other organisations have detailed information available, links to which are provided below

Returner Programmes – Best Practice Guidance for Employers

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/685064/Returner_Programmes_-_Best_Practice_Guidance_for_Employers.pdf

Returners: An Employer's toolkit

<https://www.womensbusinesscouncil.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/toolkit-Women-in-businessv.7.pdf>

Returners : An Employee's toolkit

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/839371/6.5922_GEO_returners_toolkit_v6_WEB.PDF