



Many happy returns

Going back to work in the sciences after a career break takes planning, but there are sources of help for a successful return, explains Dr Catherine Ball

A returner is not a type of boomerang or an affliction you can't get rid of. It is someone – woman or man – who has taken an extended career break and wishes to return to their profession. A career break can occur for many reasons, such as caring responsibilities, illness, unemployment or a desire to change career paths.

There are a number of reasons why taking an extended

period of time out can be particularly problematic for scientists. First, science is, by its very nature, a rapidly evolving and progressing subject. Techniques, theories and equipment can change dramatically in a matter of years. This means that returners can face real difficulties in remaining up to date.

The very culture of the academic science community can also be a problem – the competitive nature of science

can leave part-time workers or returners feeling shut out.

Microbiologist George Carnell took a four year break from science after completing his undergraduate studies to pursue

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a career in the army. When he realised that he was more suited to life as a scientist than as a soldier, he found it difficult to get back into science.

"It is crucial to maintain contacts with previous supervisors and colleagues," says Carnell. "Returning to science was very difficult for me as I lacked a scientific referee."

Despite this, he successfully managed to get accepted on a master's course and is now working towards a doctorate at the University of Kent. He

FIND OUT MORE

**SOCIETY OF BIOLOGY
RETURNER'S RESOURCES**
[www.societyofbiology.org/
returners-resources](http://www.societyofbiology.org/returners-resources)

**DAPHNE JACKSON TRUST
FELLOWSHIPS**
www.daphnejackson.org

**ROYAL SOCIETY DOROTHY
HODGKIN FELLOWSHIPS**
[royalsociety.org/grants/schemes/
dorothy-hodgkin](http://royalsociety.org/grants/schemes/
dorothy-hodgkin)

**WELLCOME TRUST CAREER
RE-ENTRY FELLOWSHIPS**
[www.wellcome.ac.uk/Funding/
Biomedical-science/
Funding-schemes/Fellowships/
Basic-biomedical-fellowships](http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/Funding/
Biomedical-science/
Funding-schemes/Fellowships/
Basic-biomedical-fellowships)

feels strongly that returners must not be shut out of the science community and offers advice to anyone considering making a return.

"I would recommend long term planning well before taking a break and, if possible, seeking advice and opinions on your plans. Make sure you are up to date with the key literature and, if possible, start to get involved online prior to making applications, using tools such as Twitter or ResearchGate."

A number of schemes also exist to help people back into an academic research career. The Daphne Jackson Trust runs a fellowship scheme that enables scientists to return to research after a break of two or more years. The fellowships balance an individually tailored retraining programme with a research project in a suitably supportive environment. Fellowships can be based in a university or research institute anywhere in the UK.

The Wellcome Trust has a similar scheme, the Career Re-entry Fellowship, and the Royal Society's Dorothy Hodgkin Fellowship helps those who require flexible working arrangements to fit in with their personal circumstances such as parenting, caring responsibilities or health issues. All of these schemes are open to men and women.

However, more needs to be done to support returners and to convey the message to employers and higher education institutions that returners are an untapped talent pool. The Society has established a Returners to Bioscience group to examine the experiences of those who face barriers returning to a career in the biological sciences.

This move is in light of our continued concerns about the loss of trained and committed scientists from the bioscience workforce. As part of an ongoing programme of projects, we have developed a Returner's Resources web page, containing useful information and resources for those wanting to return to work.

For further information about the Society's Returners to Bioscience group, or to provide a case study, contact policy@societyofbiology.org

Dr Catherine Ball is a policy analyst at the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee and was previously a science policy adviser for the Society.

POLICY UPDATE

PPCs urged to support science

The Society wrote to as many new Prospective Parliamentary Candidates (PPCs) as possible in advance of the general election, drawing their attention to the importance of science in policy making, and asking them to support UK science and commit to the necessary investment if



elected. We also asked the PPCs to consider the many ways in which science and

science evidence will be relevant to policy making, and offered to be a link to expert advice.

LeSPAR events to address superbug resistance



Antimicrobial resistance workshops

The Learned Society Partnership on Antimicrobial Resistance (LeSPAR) is holding three interdisciplinary networking workshops. These events will bring together researchers from all career stages who have an interest in fundamental or translational research on the

evolution and transmission of antimicrobial resistance. The workshops will take place at Charles Darwin House in London on Thursday 25th June, the University of Dundee on Friday 3rd July and BioCity Nottingham on Tuesday 7th July.

The Society is part of LeSPAR in collaboration with

the Biochemical Society, the British Pharmacological Society, the British Society for Antimicrobial Chemotherapy, the Royal Society of Chemistry, the Society for Applied Microbiology and the Society for General Microbiology.

See www.societyofbiology.org/amr for more information