

Case study: CIPD Parent Returner Programme

Jacobs

Profile

Size: 10,000 UK employees (55,000 worldwide).

Location: 26 offices in the UK.

Sector: Jacobs provides a full spectrum of professional services including consulting, technical, scientific and project delivery for the public and private sector.

People function: Includes HR, D&I, and Learning & Talent Management teams. D&I is central to the brand, values and strategy, with 'We live inclusion' as a core value.

Key fact: There are currently 180 UK employees who are eligible to take part in a returner programme.

Operational context

Jacobs is committed to recognising, harnessing and nurturing diverse talent, and is clear about the role this plays in ensuring a pipeline of senior women, closing the gender pay gap and attracting the very best candidates.

The company is keen to create a working environment in which all employees are welcome, can bring their whole selves to work, and can achieve their full potential. Recognising that working and returning parents encounter specific challenges, the leadership team appointed an employee to spearhead work to help overcome these challenges.

Problem

Returnees were not always able to slot back into the team and project they left. This is due to a number of factors including the nature and scope of some major programmes, the need to travel to project sites, the expectations that employees will work full-time and the inflexibility of traditional ways of working. This can make the transition back into work particularly challenging.

Additionally, there was a clear sense that some employees, including those previously identified as future leaders, were settling for less fulfilling roles on

their return which limited their ability to fulfil their potential. There was also a recognition that to attract senior female talent, more flexible roles needed to be accommodated.

These issues were seen as contributing to the company's gender pay gap in England, Scotland and Wales, (26% in 2019).

What they did

Led by a longstanding employee who had been through two returns to work herself, Jacobs launched a UK returner programme at the end of 2019 called *Bridge the Gap*, and is looking to take this global in 2021. The programme is aimed at current working parents and those who were on, or planning to take, maternity, adoption or shared parental leave.

Bridge the Gap offers a package of support for employees and their line managers that helps deliver a smooth transition out of, and back into, their careers at Jacobs. It encourages employees to evaluate their goals, make considered decisions and manage the specific challenges of being a working parent.

It also seeks to create a sustained cultural shift within the business by redefining and challenging the 'norms' for expectant/new parents, their colleagues, the business and clients. This includes a focus on flexible working, including how to design flexible roles and support team leaders to manage flexible employees.

Critically, the work of *Bridge the Gap* includes supporting employees *before* they go on leave, as well as during their break and on their return. It offers a safe space to think about what their future career path might look like, and practical help such as getting their CV ready to help them come back. The programme also supports them to:

- explore different career paths and types of flexible working
- decide which route or routes best matches their plans
- boost their confidence in skills and experience ready for their return to work
- reconnect with the business (and vice versa) during and after their break.

A buddy system and parental forum have also been put in place, creating space for parents to share experiences and tips with each other. Returnees are invited to take part in a 'juggling act' workshop on their return, and receive 1-2-1 coaching as well as group support.

Outcomes

So far, 40 of the 180 eligible employees have taken part in *Bridge the Gap*, and have given it 100% positive feedback. The remaining employees will be invited to take part on a rolling basis.

Qualitative feedback to date includes:

'It's such a great course and I'm so pleased the company is taking the time and resources to invest.'

'I enjoyed all aspects of the workshop and found it to be a very positive experience. It is reassuring to know that support and guidance for working parents is out there and being developed.'

'The session encouraged me to look at the transferable skills I have learnt that I can apply to my work. It has also made me consider how I could manage my work-life

balance better by taking a step back and seeing things from a different perspective.'

The team plan to run regular pulse checks to assess the impact of the programme.

Top tips

- Don't underestimate how powerful this kind of programme is and the difference you can make to people's lives.
- Start by looking at the situation from all angles, not just the parent perspective. Go out to stakeholders to explore their challenges before, during and after employees take a career break.
- Buy-in at all levels is critical – make sure you engage line managers and leaders as well as talent teams.
- Get fathers involved. As well as benefitting from the programme, fathers returning from shared parental leave can be excellent advocates and visible role-models for others.

Hannah Turner, Returner Champion (Jacobs)

'The creation of Bridge the Gap was a much-needed step for Jacobs and one which is already delivering positive outcomes for our employees and our business. Having the support of the CIPD at the development stage was instrumental in its success.'

'The project leads shared excellent insights, advice and research, and prompted us to explore critical issues, such as tackling the barriers that materialise when you challenge the status quo. The programme also offered a supportive forum for bouncing ideas and sharing advice and experiences with other HR leaders who were going through a similar process.'

Supported by



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