

# Best Practice in Career-Break Management

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**The Institute of Physics guide to  
best practice in career-break  
management.**

A career break is a period away from what someone considers to be their main career. Its duration can range from a few months to several years, and examples include maternity leave and time taken off to look after children or elders. Other common reasons for taking a career break include travel or relocating with a partner. It may also comprise periods of paid work, which the person on the break does not consider to be part of their main career.

This report considers career breaks and the subsequent return to work for people from physics-based careers. It follows on from the survey on career-break management carried out by the Institute of Physics (the Institute) in collaboration with the Daphne Jackson Trust during 2003/2004. (The report may be downloaded from the Institute of Physics Diversity website at <http://diversity.iop.org/careerb/index.html>.)

A key issue to emerge from that study was that few people thought in advance about how they would manage their career break. The aim of this report is to help physicists to prepare and plan their career break. In particular, it outlines strategies and actions designed to make returning to a science, engineering and technology (SET) career a positive experience.



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# 1: Planning your career break

People take career breaks for a variety of reasons but, whatever your reasons are, it is important to make time to plan your break carefully. If you intend to return to the same job, you will need to have discussed with your line manager how long you intend to be away and try to make some arrangements for your return. Take some time to consider what suits you best and discuss this with your employer.

Planning is even more crucial if you are resigning from your job or intend to take a break of several years. No doubt you will have done some financial planning, so don't forget to do some career-break planning too. A career is a precious commodity that must be nurtured and carefully managed if it is to survive and flourish. You have already worked hard to gain qualifications and get a job; don't lose your career just because you have not taken the time to plan your break properly.

If you are leaving to have a child, the first few months will be taken up with child care. If you are moving to another country or area, the first few months will be spent settling in and establishing new contacts. Take this into account and ensure that your plans are realistic and achievable.

In planning your career break, the experiences of others indicate that it would be useful to consider in advance the following strategies:

### **Put some time and some money into managing your career break.**

It can be a shock at first having to pay to attend and travel to a conference yourself, but remember that this is an investment in your future. There are bursaries and schemes available that can contribute to the costs, so approach your institution or any professional societies that you belong to and find out how they can help.

### **Does your professional institution have a reduced membership fee for those on career breaks or on a low income?**

If so, remember to switch to this. Keep up your membership to your main professional institution, as it could be the only link you have with your profession, and it will enable you to remain part of the professional network.

### **Have you got Internet and e-mail access at home?**

If not, set this up while you're still earning – it's less painful.

### **If you are planning to return to your current employer, talk to them before you leave about how much contact you would like to have with them.**

For example, does your company have a newsletter that you could receive? Would you be interested in receiving occasional invitations to meetings and/or seminars? Consider these things in advance and discuss the matter with your employer. It will be easier to do this before you take your break and may well ease your return to work when you are ready to do so.

### **Find a mentor and make efforts to maintain contact with them.**

If you are planning to return to the same employer, ask them for help in this matter, as they may already offer a mentoring scheme. Alternatively, your professional institution may be able to help, or you could contact one of the many organisations listed in "Resources" (p9). Make sure that your mentor knows how much contact you would like to have during your career break, and think in advance about what you would like to achieve through this relationship.

### **Child-care planning.**

Make some arrangements to give yourself time to attend occasional meetings and/or read technical papers.



A career is a precious commodity that must be nurtured and carefully managed if it is to survive and flourish.

# 2: Managing your career break



Professional institutions offer several benefits to their members on career breaks, which can include reduced subscriptions, free or reduced conference registration fees, and financial aid to attend conferences.

Organisations and individuals can help, but ultimately the responsibility for managing your career break rests with you. However, remember that you are not alone, and that there are networks of people and organisations that can provide advice as well as other forms of support. These include your employer, (ex-)colleagues, friends, your mentor and the organisations identified in “Resources” (p9). There should be some emphasis on specific areas, such as keeping up to date and finding opportunities to have professional contact, both of which will help keep your confidence levels up. Finding the time to do this can be difficult, especially when caring for small children, but a degree of professional activity can help to make the return to your career considerably smoother.

Here are some suggestions for keeping in touch while on a career break. Carrying out at least some of these activities can help to reduce feelings of isolation, which was a serious issue highlighted in the Institute’s Career-Break Report.

### **Maintain membership of a professional institution, attend branch seminars, carry out committee work and submit articles for the institution’s magazine.**

Professional institutions offer several benefits to their members on career breaks, which may include reduced subscriptions, free or reduced conference registration fees, and financial aid to attend conferences. Careers guidance is particularly valuable for those on career breaks, and the Institute and some other institutions offer this as a service to all of their members. Make sure you know what is on offer and use it.

### **Check out the Professional Development website [www.pd-how2.org](http://www.pd-how2.org) run jointly by the Institute, IIE, IMechE, IEE and the Royal Aeronautical Society.**

This site is a valuable resource aimed at helping individuals to manage their own careers and to enable them to keep up to date professionally, whether they are working or not.

### **If possible, join a university library.**

Membership is often open to the public, and subscription levels depend on lending rights, alumni status, etc. This will give you access to scientific journals and other important publications. It is also worth investigating openings for visiting lectureships and honorary fellowships, as these can include free membership of the library.

### **Join your local public library.**

These are great information gateways, and main public libraries can offer free Internet use, and books on managing career breaks, writing CVs, applying for jobs, attending job interviews, etc. In addition to these services, libraries often have “story time” sessions for preschool children, which can release time for you to browse and explore job opportunities.

### **Consider doing voluntary work if you can find the time.**

As well as enabling you to make new friends and extend your support network, it will show a potential employer that you are an outgoing person who is keen to work. Be sure that you mention any such periods of work on your CV, and list any new skills that you develop as a result.

## 3: CV enhancement

Although you may not yet be ready to return to work, pay some attention to the development of your CV during your career break. What would you like to be doing when you return? And how can you use your break to develop skills in the right areas? If you have left your previous employment, make efforts to ensure that your CV doesn't just have a blank period. Try to show any potential employer the initiative that you took and efforts you made to develop yourself during your period away from work. Think about what new skills you acquired and be sure to list these.

**1. Attend a scientific conference during your break.** This will provide an opportunity for you to network, keep you in circulation with the community and help you to keep up to date with recent developments in your field. If you do attend a conference, make sure that this appears on your CV.

**2. Consider opportunities for teaching on an adult education course, applying for a visiting lectureship at the local university or becoming an Open University tutor.** Undertaking part-time work of this kind will enable you to develop new skills and help you to keep in touch with the workplace. It is also an excellent way of networking and broadening your horizons.

**3. List any publications that you have authored, such as articles for magazines or professional newsletters.** Be sure that any activity undertaken for your professional institution is also mentioned.

**4. For some people, and especially if you are considering a change of career track, it might be worthwhile studying for a further qualification.** This could help to increase and widen your employment options.

**5. Consider applying for chartered status while on your break.**



If you have left your previous employment, ensure that your CV doesn't have a blank period. Show potential employers the initiative that you took to develop yourself during your period away from work.

### Case-study: Hannah

My first son was born in October 2002. Six months before that I had been promoted to a management position in British Energy's Engineering Division, as a group head responsible for a team of 12 physicists and engineers supporting Sizewell B. As the major wage-earner, I decided to take only four months of maternity leave before returning to full-time work. Therefore I decided to work full time right up until my due date, to maximise my time at home with the baby – this was fine until the last week, which I found rather hard work.

In the time before my leave, I focused on setting up my new group so that it could run effectively without me. Although I was leaving the group in the care of an experienced group member, I cleared all of the appraisals and other tasks that I preferred not to leave to a stand-in. It was very important, both for the preparation and for my peace of mind, that while I was away I could trust my stand-in to look after the group well.

I thoroughly enjoyed my four months off – despite the fact that nothing can prepare you for quite how hard those first few months can be – and rarely even thought about work.

After four months away, I was definitely ready to come back and was glad that I had not taken longer. However, most of the mothers whom I met were not planning to return to work, which made it much harder to establish long-term friendships, as they were approaching things from quite a different perspective. Fortunately I had an understanding manager and was able to use my accrued leave to work pseudo part time until I had adjusted.

I had also decided to continue to breast-feed my son after returning to work. Prior to the maternity leave I had made arrangements to express milk in the Occupational Health Department and store it in their fridge. While not ideal, and requiring me to be very organised in the mornings, this allowed me to continue breast-feeding

as I wished, making me feel that I was still looking after my son in the best way that I could, even if I wasn't with him all day.

When my son started attending nursery in the mornings, my husband began working part time so that he could look after him in the afternoons. Finding child care that I was happy with was important, as it meant that I could concentrate at work, knowing that my son was being properly cared for without my feeling guilty.

Getting back into it was hard work. I found that a lot of changes had occurred while I'd been away that I had not kept up with (I would do this differently another time). I had also lost a lot of involvement in ongoing projects, which was hard to get back and meant that I had lost visibility within the organisation. However, after raising these issues with my manager, we were able to come up with a plan to address them, and I now feel very happy about the way everything has turned out.

"I cleared all of the appraisals and other tasks that I preferred not to leave to a stand-in."

# 4: Returning to work



It was not in Sami's career plan to become the father of five children.

### Legislation and finance

Legislation exists regarding equal pay, part-time work, arrangements for parents and family-friendly working. Legislation concerning parents is extensive and covers the right to apply for flexible working, longer maternity leave, paid paternity leave for fathers, paid leave for parents who adopt a child and parental leave that entitles parents to take unpaid leave. Details can be found on the Equal Opportunities Commission website at [www.eoc.org.uk](http://www.eoc.org.uk) and should be read in conjunction with your employers' policies on these matters.

Information about arrangements for child benefit, tax credits, National Insurance, the Child Trust Fund and home responsibility protection can be found on the Inland Revenue's website at [www.hmrc.gov.uk](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk). Make sure that you investigate what you are entitled to because it could be to your advantage.

### Returning to the same employer

Many companies and institutions have family-friendly policies in place. When a member of staff wishes to alter his or her working pattern, typically on return from a career break, discussions take place between Human Resources, the staff member and the line manager. Flexible working can take many forms; research what kind of arrangements would be suitable for both you and your job and be ready to present your case. Remember: not all jobs can be performed part time, so be realistic in your expectations and be prepared to be flexible yourself.

Most people need and desire some retraining on their return to work. When you do go back, consider requesting a meeting to discuss what you feel your requirements are in this area, and how your employer might help you to get back up to speed as quickly as possible. Again, think carefully, make a plan and be ready to justify your request.

## Case-study: Sami

It was not in Sami's career plan to become a full-time father to five children. So how did this talented researcher end up at home raising the family while his wife, Nadia, continued with her career as a schoolteacher?

"It really was the most logical decision," says Sami. He had been working at Imperial College for three years, and when the contract was not renewed he became the primary carer for the children while Nadia continued to work. However, he never lost his identity as a scientist and through hard work, determination and a little help from the Daphne Jackson Trust he is now back in research.

Sami is a qualified nuclear physicist who gained a BSc in physics from the Tennessee Technological University, followed by a PhD from Imperial College, London. He started his career break in 1998 when his youngest children, twins Anas and Assil,

were just two years old.

"Once the twins were settled in school, I decided it was time to look in earnest for opportunities to help me return to research. It was not an easy task though: evaluation of nuclear data is a specialised field and work in this area is not available everywhere.

"It was while looking for fellowships, trusts or grants during an Internet search that I came across the Daphne Jackson Trust website. The trust offers part-time paid fellowships to help scientists to return to careers following a break for family reasons. It offers retraining and the chance to return to a different field of research, if that is what it will take to get back into the workplace. For me this seemed ideal, and I talked to a friend who was a medical physicist to help set up a project and decide the best area to go back into.

"I had to do a considerable amount of work myself to find a

suitable host institution and potential supervisor. I contacted and visited four universities and it was the University of Surrey that came out best. Many may consider what I did to be a brave step, seemingly choosing my family over my career, but in the end I am a winner on all fronts. I believe that the fellowship and associated research post will restore my confidence and lead me into future employment that is relevant to my professional and scientific status."

Sami started his Daphne Jackson Fellowship in September 2003 with a research project in positron emission tomography (PET). This nuclear-imaging diagnostic tool enables biochemical and physiological processes to be tracked *in vivo*, with the aid of tracer compounds labelled with positron-emitting radionuclides injected intravenously into the patient.

Sami is pleased now to be able

to make plans for his future career in medical physics.

"Having contacted and visited several universities and hospitals that are involved in research in PET and/or radiation imaging, I am aware that more PET units are planned in the next two to five years," he says.

"Although future employment is not guaranteed, planned funding by the Department of Health in expanding PET units should offer the opportunity for a permanent position. Should this not be possible, then the PET research under the fellowship would enable me to seek employment in specialised research institutions, such as the Institute of Cancer Research at the Royal Marsden Hospital, Imaging Research Solutions Ltd at MRC and Amersham, or the nuclear medicine sections at St George's Hospital or the Hammersmith Hospital in London."

# 5: Getting a new job

Searching for and then successfully obtaining a new job is a challenge for everyone. The following comments are intended to offer some general guidance for job seekers returning from a break:

### Start by reviewing your CV.

State clearly the dates and reason for your career break and include single-line descriptions of any relevant activities that you have undertaken during this period (see “CV enhancement”; p3). Ensure that you emphasise your responsibilities. For example, if you were on a committee, outline any budgets that you were responsible for or describe any large events that you organised (either social or professional). Also, provide examples of how you have

maintained your continuing professional development. You will also need to tailor your CV each time you apply for a job, to highlight your expertise in the employer’s field of work. The Professional Development website at [www.pd-how2.org](http://www.pd-how2.org) gives additional guidance.

### Careers guidance can be obtained through one-to-one advice from a specialist, or via self-help books.

Some professional organisations employ specialist careers advisers who can discuss your options and career aspirations with you in confidence (see, for example, [www.careers.iop.org](http://www.careers.iop.org)). Some higher education institution careers services are also made available to alumni.



“To return to academic work after a career break you need very helpful friends, both at work and at home, co-operative children, lots of energy and determination, and a lot of luck.”

## Case-study: Alison

My career is unusual among physicists, but it gives me direct experience of the problems facing women trying to follow an academic or research career. It started conventionally enough. I did O-levels at a single-sex private school but they were not interested in science, so I moved to a co-ed boarding school to do A-levels in physics, maths and chemistry.

I took a gap year, much of it as an au pair in Norway, and went to Bristol University to do a joint honours degree in maths and physics. Just after graduating I got married and my move to Oxford to do my DPhil was largely prompted by my husband also moving there to take a BPhil degree (in philosophy).

As my husband joined the Civil Service, we were tied to London. I took a two-year postdoctoral position at King’s College London and started my main research line, which is computational modelling of defects in semiconductors. Towards the end of that job I became pregnant and, slightly unwillingly, left work to bring up my son, and then subsequently my daughter, who is two years younger.

My DPhil supervisor recruited me to do a number of short

computational modelling projects – just a few hours per week on a freelance basis, which gave me access to an early modem (running at 60 bps) and a computer terminal. Later on that was upgraded to a PC. When my daughter started school I took on some part-time lecturing (again, only about three hours per week in term time) for a polytechnic that was quite close to where I lived. Throughout all this time I had kept in contact with King’s College, and I had also managed to get an invitation to attend a small annual conference in my research field.

After a career break of 12 years (not counting those part-time jobs) I returned to a full-time position in the Physics Department at King’s College London as an experimental officer. It is a position that I might have expected to get 12 years before, if I had not had the career break. By this time my children were reasonably responsible, and a neighbour and I shared an after-school childminder for a year or two, and then abandoned the two families to look after themselves, which they did without any serious problems.

It took quite a few years to build up my research again. After four

years I was transferred onto the academic staff as a lecturer, and since then I have been promoted twice (most recently to reader) and have built up a strong research base.

I now lead three UK-based major research projects, the budgets for which amount to nearly £1.4m, and a European Union-funded Research Training Network that comprises eight institutions around Europe. One research assistant and four PhD students (plus one who has just finished, in South Africa) work for me. I have organised international conferences in my field of research and have presented invited and contributed papers all over the world. I was elected a fellow of the Institute of Physics a few years ago.

My children both did extremely well at school and university. My son is now doing a DPhil at Oxford (in the philosophy of physics) and my daughter works in the theatre.

In conclusion, to return to academic work after a career break you need very helpful friends, both at work and at home, co-operative children, lots of energy and determination, and a lot of luck.

“It took quite a few years to build up my research again.”

## 5: Getting a new job

Inform your professional and social networks that you are looking for work, as they might be able to let you know of posts coming up or introduce you to colleagues who may wish to employ your talents in the future.

Many offer online services, so even if you do not live close by, you may still have access to the available resources. Specialist recruitment agencies may also be worth investigating.

### Confidence building

If you have been out of the workplace for some time and/or have had limited contact on a professional basis with others, your confidence may, understandably, be low. You need to give your confidence a boost so that when you see a likely job advert or hear of a good opportunity you can say: "I can do that." Confidence-building courses can help you view yourself and your skills in a more positive light, so research what courses are available in your area.

### Job searching

Your new position could be obtained through a returners scheme (there is more about this in the next section), by applying for an advertised job or through a speculative application to an employer. In any case, this is the time when networking pays off. Inform your professional and social networks that you are looking for work, as they might be able to let you know of posts coming up or introduce you to colleagues who may wish to employ your talents in the future. Ask for advice and recommendations from friends and others concerning family-friendly employers. Check out universities that have signed up to the SWAN Charter (see [www.athenaswan.org.uk](http://www.athenaswan.org.uk)), which recognises excellence in employment practices that assist the recruitment, retention and progression of women in SET. Scan job websites, national and local newspapers, and relevant journals and magazines regularly.

### Applying for jobs

You may wish to work part time even though the job is not advertised as a part-time post. It is worth weighing up whether to request part-time working or job sharing in the covering letter that accompanies your application, or whether to wait until you are offered the post, when you may be in a stronger negotiating position. Do not be scared to apply for a position even if you do not match all of the criteria listed in the job advert – remember, many employers will be happy if applicants match 70% or less of their requirements. If you do apply speculatively, make sure to explain in your covering letter why you are doing so and what you feel you could offer the prospective employer.

### Interviews

Preparation is vital. Take up any opportunities that might be offered for informal talks or visits prior to the interview. Get your mentor or a trusted friend to carry out a mock interview: think of what the difficult questions might be, and prepare and practise the answers. You may be asked to give a presentation as part of your interview, so spend some time researching the material and practise delivering the presentation. If you do not have a laptop computer to take with you for a PowerPoint presentation, you can print out your slides on acetate for an OHP presentation, or ask your local photocopying shop to do this for you. Alternatively you can put the material on a disk, CD-ROM or USB memory stick.

Thoroughly research the employer through their website and make sure that you are aware of their current activities, and any news stories, etc that might be relevant. Be sure you know what their major concerns and projects are, and try to think up a few pertinent questions in advance so that you are prepared with some well considered enquiries. Find out who will be on the interview panel and, if possible, check out their backgrounds and interests before the interview. Most important, be enthusiastic, smile and look at each interviewer individually.

Another important issue to bear in mind is to remember to check that your interview suit still fits, or treat yourself to something new to wear that will boost your confidence. Finally, check and double-check your journey details to ensure that you arrive on time for your interview.

Having obtained a job, if you feel you require some updating or retraining, do not be afraid to ask about training options. It is in the interest of your new employer to make sure that you are brought up to speed as soon as possible. Even new employees who have not just returned from a career break will need, and benefit from, an induction and training programme.

# 6: Returners schemes

The following returners initiatives are available in the UK:

### The Daphne Jackson Trust

This implements a fellowship scheme that is aimed at women and men who have taken a break of at least three years from a SET career. With some guidance from the trust, the applicants must find and identify their own academic department, research project and supervisor. Most fellows are in academia, but the trust also considers industry-based placements. Most of the fellows work part time. More information can be obtained from the website at [www.DaphneJackson.org](http://www.DaphneJackson.org).

### The UK Resource Centre for Women in SET (UKRC)

The UKRC is based in Bradford and is funded by the DTI until 2007. Its core objectives include supporting women entering and progressing in professions within SET and the built environment. See [www.setwomenresource.org.uk](http://www.setwomenresource.org.uk).

### Healthcare scientists in the NHS

Healthcare scientists are eligible for free refresher training, and also a payment of £1000 to support retraining, assistance with childcare, travel and books. There is a return to practice coordinator in each area of England. Anyone interested in applying for the posts of clinical scientist, medical laboratory scientific officer or medical technical officer should contact the coordinator. This scheme is open to past employees of the NHS. See [www.nhs.uk/careers](http://www.nhs.uk/careers) for details.

### The Open University

A course to help women back into a SET career has been developed by the Open University in collaboration with Return, a national scheme created and run by the UKRC. The free 10 week course is designed to develop skills and confidence through online activities, tutorials and discussions. There are opportunities to meet potential employers, role models and mentors from the world of SET. For additional information, visit [www.open.ac.uk/courses](http://www.open.ac.uk/courses) and follow the link to the T160 course.

**Many universities and industrial employers now have schemes to help employees to return to work and/or re-establish their research careers.** Contact the relevant human resources department for information about any schemes that might be running.

### The Laura Ashley Foundation

This provides one PhD scholarship at three-year intervals to someone who has achieved a first or upper second in his or her first degree in science, before taking a break of at least three years to care for a parent or child. The award is worth £25 000 each year for up to three years and covers fees. The scholarship is only advertised when there is a vacancy. See [www.laf.uk.net](http://www.laf.uk.net) for more details.

### The Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council (PPARC)

PPARC has adopted the following arrangements: all fellowships are available on a part-time basis and fellowship schemes have been redefined to enable and encourage returners to apply. Institutions are encouraged to provide appropriate support for returners to research, such as mentoring or role model schemes. [www.pparc.ac.uk](http://www.pparc.ac.uk) has more information about the schemes and initiatives.

### The Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC)

Doctoral-level studentships (except EngD) can be undertaken part time: part-time awards are intended solely for candidates returning from a career break for family commitments and are not available for those in part-time employment. Part-time students will be allowed an additional year to write up and submit a thesis. Also, the First Grant Scheme for young researchers applying to be principal investigators usually has an upper age limit of 35. This can be raised for those returning to academia after a career break. The EPSRC website has more details (see [www.epsrc.ac.uk](http://www.epsrc.ac.uk)).

### L'Oréal and UKRC

L'Oréal and the UKRC are funding three bursaries of £10 000 each year to women scientists and engineers returning to academic careers. Applicants should have a PhD and have taken a career break of at least 12 months. There is no age limit. (Contact: [fwisbursaries@loreal.co.uk](mailto:fwisbursaries@loreal.co.uk).)



## 7: Child care



When you have devised your child-care plan, have a trial run to iron out any teething troubles and to allow you to recover from the emotional upheaval of someone else caring for your children.

Child care affects all working parents and will not be dealt with in detail here. Make sure that you research child-care arrangements of different types, and mix and match these to suit your family's working patterns. The website at [www.childcarelink.gov.uk](http://www.childcarelink.gov.uk) is a good place to explore the options that are available. Other parents are a great source of information and personal recommendations are invaluable. When you have devised your child-care plan and checked that all of the provisions meet current standards, have a trial run for a few weeks before you return to work to iron out any teething troubles and to allow you to recover from the emotional upheaval of someone else caring for your children.

You also need to appreciate the changes that occur when your child starts school, as you now have to arrange child-care around school hours and holidays, and be prepared for the unexpected, such as the school closing for the day

for teaching-staff training days, which can occur with only a week's notice. Also, many schools now offer a gradual introduction to school life so that your child attends school part time for a period. Use your professional skills to manage these periods of change and have back-up plans ready for when the normal routine breaks down.

Changes to child-care arrangements on return to work are often the main focus of changes within the family dynamic. Don't forget that such a major change can be a shock to all members of the family, but the disruption can be lessened if you have planned how other domestic tasks will be shared. Not every family contains a "superwoman" or a "new man". Be kind to yourselves and give yourselves three months or so for new arrangements to settle down before reviewing them to see if improvements can be made.

### Case-study: Carolyn

"One of the most important things that I learned during my period of retraining was that most things are possible."

My first degree was in chemistry. When I graduated I got a job doing mass spectrometry for Kodak Ltd, where I stayed for three years. During that time I married Paul, who was training to be a pilot for the Royal Air Force. On leaving Kodak, I returned to chemistry to do a DPhil using NMR spectroscopy to study small molecules, and at the end of this I was expecting my first child.

The combination of being a mother and being married into the RAF meant that working full time in chemistry was not practical, so I applied to work from home as a patent abstractor. Although not particularly well paid, the job enabled me to keep in touch with science and it combined well with the fact that we moved house every two to three years. I was away from full-time work for just over 10 years.

As well as my abstracting job, which took about 10 hours a week, I was, at various times, the treasurer of a mother and toddler group, the

secretary of a PTA and on the committee of a wives club. I was also responsible for designing, purchasing and organising the floral decoration for a summer ball, which I think I rank among my most rewarding achievements of that period (apart from producing two children, of course). During this time I learned how to work on committees and how to organise teams of people to arrange flowers, man stalls at fetes, or whatever.

When my children started full-time school I began to look for a chance to return to work. Just as I was beginning to despair of ever getting an interview, I read about the Daphne Jackson Fellowship scheme. I applied and, after the somewhat lengthy application process, I began a two-year, half-time research fellowship back in chemistry, again using NMR spectroscopy, but this time studying larger biological molecules.

During that time I began to act as

a consultant for a university spin-out company, and when it moved into its own premises I went with the firm to run a mass-spectrometry service. It ran out of funding after two years, but I applied for a postdoctoral position using MRI to study heart failure, which is where I am now. Over the last six years I have moved from physical organic chemistry through biological chemistry into biochemistry and physiology.

One of the most important things that I learned during my period of retraining was that most things are possible. I came back from the world of Postman Pat to revise NMR spectroscopy and to learn about everything that had come along in the intervening 10 years, and then gradually I learned about proteins, peptides and neuroscience, and now MRI and cardiac metabolism. I have also found that the skills I learnt working on committees during my break are far from wasted back in the world of work.

# 8: Resources

Listed below is a non-exhaustive list of organisations that provide relevant support. Many of their websites contain further links that may be of interest.

For those on career breaks the Institute offers reduced membership fees; career-break grants for conferences; and individual careers advice. For those who require financial aid to maintain their technical currency during a career break, applications can be made to the Institute's benevolent fund. See [www.diversity.iop.org](http://www.diversity.iop.org) and [www.careers.iop.org](http://www.careers.iop.org).

The Institute and the Daphne Jackson Trust survey of career-break activity can be downloaded from <http://diversity.iop.org/careerb/index.html>.

The Institute's publication *New Directions* is a guide for those wishing to change career. This can be downloaded from the Institute website.

The Equal Opportunities Commission provides useful information regarding the rights of employees. Look at its website for details of employment legislation: [www.eoc.org.uk](http://www.eoc.org.uk).

The Inland Revenue website gives details about entitlement to benefits: [www.hmrc.gov.uk](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk).

A website on professional development can be accessed at [www.pd-how2.org](http://www.pd-how2.org).

LearnDirect has details about courses in several areas: [www.learnirect.co.uk](http://www.learnirect.co.uk).

The Daphne Jackson Trust: [www.DaphneJackson.org](http://www.DaphneJackson.org).

The UK Resource Centre for Women in Science, Engineering and Technology: [www.setwomenresource.org.uk](http://www.setwomenresource.org.uk).

The Open University: [www.open.ac.uk](http://www.open.ac.uk).

The Laura Ashley Foundation Returners Scheme: [www.laf.uk.net](http://www.laf.uk.net).

The Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council: [www.pparc.ac.uk](http://www.pparc.ac.uk).

The Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council: [www.epsrc.ac.uk](http://www.epsrc.ac.uk).

The national mentoring scheme website: [www.mentorSET.org.uk](http://www.mentorSET.org.uk).

To find childcare in your area, go to [www.childcarelink.gov.uk](http://www.childcarelink.gov.uk).

Details of the women in physics group at the Institute can be found at <http://groups.iop.org/WP/>

ITEC Career Opportunities for Women Returners 2005: [www.portiaweb.org](http://www.portiaweb.org).

[www.women-returners.co.uk](http://www.women-returners.co.uk).

[www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk](http://www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk).

The Women's Engineering Society has some bursaries to allow members to attend conferences. See [www.wes.org.uk](http://www.wes.org.uk).

The Association for Women in Science and Engineering: [www.awise.org](http://www.awise.org).

Daphnet is the UK based mailing list for and about women in SET. See [www.wes.org.uk/daphnet.html](http://www.wes.org.uk/daphnet.html).



## 9: Action plan



Use this section to list your actions. Use suggestions from this report and review your progress at regular intervals. Space has been left for you to add your own items.

Planning your career break	
Action	Achieved
Discuss your career-break arrangements with your employer and let them know in advance how much contact you would like with them during the break.	
Check out your finances and whether you are entitled to any benefits from the state or your employer.	
If it is available, change to a career-break grade in your professional institution.	
Ensure you have Internet and e-mail access at home, with up-to-date software.	
Join a mentoring scheme if you don't already have a mentor.	
Research child-care options.	

## 9: Action plan

Managing your career break	
Action	Achieved
Maintain membership of your professional institution.	
Join a university library.	
Maintain your continuing professional development.	
Join a public library.	
Set up child-care arrangements and have a trial run.	
Attend a conference in your field.	
Look into options for working on a part-time or occasional basis, or studying for a further qualification.	

Returning to the same job	
Action	Achieved
Discuss arrangements with your employer, including retraining requirements.	
Review with your employer how well you are settling in after an initial period and whether, for example, your hours of work might need adjusting.	

## 9: Action plan

Getting a new job	
Action	Achieved
Arrange a career-guidance session.	
Make a plan for job searching, including application criteria of returners schemes.	
Update your CV.	
Arrange a mock interview with your mentor.	
Apply for jobs.	



# Best Practice in Career-Break Management

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