

# Getting back into the workplace **IOP** | Institute of Physics Women in Physics Group

Hosted by IOP Women in Physics Group

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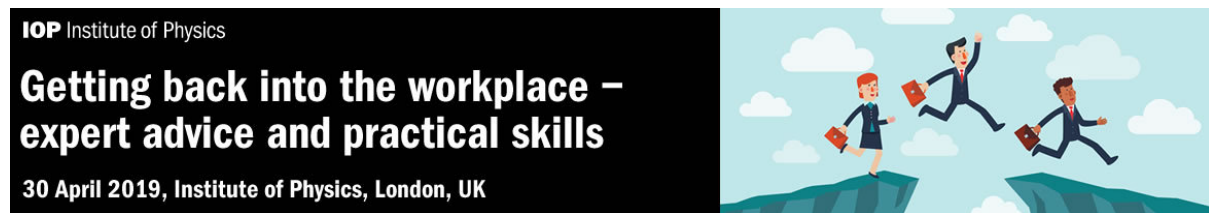
The opportunity to enhance our lives and communities through the understanding of physics is vast. The topic of physics helps to explain the big picture of life and the universe. Just as importantly this science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) capability is due to a very sophisticated and sustained technological employment capacity. We as individuals with this type of training have the scope to tap into this and develop, build and sustain meaningful careers across the STEM sectors. As part of recognising the contemporary need to establish a wider and more diverse community of STEM practitioners, the Institute of Physics (IOP) and the [Daphne Jackson Trust](#) (DJT) have recognised a number of key needs that help to enable this (Jennifer Dyer, [Levelling the physics field](#), *Physics World*, Jan 2019).



**We had an awesome talk by Katie Perry (DJT) sharing ways to approach returning to work.**

It has been recognised that we need to address gender and minority group stereotyping at all ages so that we create parity in our workplaces and subject choices for women and men. One of these is to provide and build the opportunity for people who have career breaks to return to work across the STEM platforms. We very much are aiming to create initiatives that will support and encourage especially women (given the current in-balance) and men to pursue a sustained career path across the physics and STEM fields.

With this aim in mind the IOP Women in Physics Group hosted, with the support of the Daphne Jackson Trust, a *Getting back into the workplace* workshop at the IOP on 30<sup>th</sup> April.



This offered expert advice and practical skill workshops across the whole day at the new IOP headquarters, 37 Caledonian Road. We emphasize that this workshop was open to all and we had a good representation of women and men and this was very much appreciated by the attendees. The resounding outcome was that there is a lot of positive development activity we can engage with and do to enable this part of our career paths. Whilst returning to work from a career break can appear to present many challenges, we can also look to transform these into opportunities that create work.

The day opened with a couple of speakers, a panel discussion and then we continued with a range of career skill workshops. Carolyn Devereux, a [Daphne Jackson Research Fellow](#) in Astrophysics started our meeting off. Carolyn shared with us a brilliant and personal journey view of resilience. She has chosen to raise a large and extended family, run a farm and recently created the research work opportunity through the DJT fellowship. Carolyn currently does radio galaxy research at the Centre of Astrophysics at the University of Hertfordshire. Billy Bone and Nigel Bowen then explained from the Department for Education the types of careers that are available to become teachers in the STEM fields. There is in particular [a well funded route](#) to become a Physics subject teacher at school. This resonates with the IOP strategy which aims to promote a much higher level of STEM educational training and career options across the UK and Ireland: there is a clear skills need here. The discussion panel was joined by Anna Barnes from UCL Hospitals Trust where discussion points on establishing your personal career journey, addressing perception boundaries and personal confidence were discussed.

The workshop and skills part of our day was led by Katie Perry – Chief Executive of the DJT on the theme of *Steps to returning to work*. She helped to frame the opportunities and challenges that we can all experience at these career stages. Awareness of the opportunities to choose and adapt your personal career pathway. Future planning can help to widen awareness of the options and we can seek constructive feedback from peers and support from a wide range of professional organisations. For example in this workshop: in addition to the DJT and the IOP we had the support of IMechE, IPEM, EPS, AWE, Department for Education, STEM Futures and the event was more widely supported by WISE and Returners.



Helen Marsh, the trust Manager at the DJT hosted the session on *self-reflecting, confidence building, barriers and goal setting*. The emphasis here was to personally show an awareness of the professional standards that are anticipated in the workplace settings you are targeting. This helps you to stand out

during the recruitment stages. The concept of *Imposter syndrome*, which is essentially a feeling of ‘*should I really be here – in this role?*’ was focussed on by Caroline Broad of [Broad Associates](#) Ltd. She shared personal strategies on how to identify and to constructively address this.

The afternoon skill sessions focussed on *CV writing* with Vishanti Fox of the IOP. Having a clear and concise CV is vital, and being aware of how employers read and what they are looking for was practiced in this group session. [Interview skills](#) and personal awareness in interview settings was hosted by Sarah Bakewell of the AWE. The topic of un-intentional career breaks due to illness and personal unexpected events was discussed. The advice here was to present a clear and well articulated job application and to focus on the positive messages that you have. STEM professionals have a wide range of very desirable skills and an opportunity can generally always be established. We all now interact with the social media world in our everyday lives. Erin Niimi of *Social Misfits Media* company took us through the essential personal image [awareness concepts](#) we need to be aware of. This was really valuable. Erin explained that even if we do not currently use LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter or use some of these occasionally the reality is that we need to ensure our active social media profiles are accurate, clear and up to date. Clarity and accuracy is essential for your professional social media platforms such as in LinkedIn. We were encouraged to have a think about what is expected of us. Some general advice was to keep your profiles tidy and up to date, be yourself and be aware of the way you address the world and others. It is recommended to keep your personal social media profiles private and separate from the professional one(s).

Jo Cole, Chair of the IOP Women in Physics Group wrapped up the very successful day. The feedback on the day and subsequently was that this was an excellent and very useful format. This workshop provided a set of training, skill awareness experiences and an IOP professional recognition certificate that can be used for continuing professional recognition and help to boost employment pathways. [Skill content from this can be found here](#) and details of the day are available that [include the programme](#). Tweets from the day can be found using #IOPReturntowork2019. We hope to repeat this event in the future. The overall message was that there are many positive and realistic career options in STEM that are potentially available, and we can enhance our employment opportunities through the themes touched on in our workshop.

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