

CAREERING FORWARD

RETURNING TO WORK AFTER A CAREER BREAK AND DEALING WITH AN UNCERTAIN MARKET? HERE'S HOW THE INSTITUTE CAN HELP YOU



BDO Stoy Hayward has made 10% of its partners redundant, KPMG has encouraged employees to work a four-day week, financial services companies have shed thousands of workers – and these are just the most visible tip of the iceberg. The job market is tough, and now is not an easy time to re-enter the workforce, whether you are trying to move on from redundancy or return after a planned career break. But the ICAEW and its members are taking a proactive approach.

'Members have made it clear that they want access to employers, recruiters and job opportunities,' reports Rhonda Martin, the development manager for Narrowing the Gap, the ICAEW programme designed to support members who are planning for a career break or returning to work after one. 'Members want to stay on top of technical developments, be up to speed on technology, and get support to help them overcome the practical barriers to finding a job,' she adds.

This has resulted in a number of targeted initiatives from Narrowing the Gap such as seminars and workshops, conferences for employers, and an online community and web-based advice from experts on a broad range of career-oriented topics. These are supplemented by resources such as a comprehensive e-library.

'By working in partnership with employers and other influencing organisations we aim to give members the tools they need to enhance their career potential,' says Martin. 'We want to help members to better understand their personal strengths, boost their confidence, and develop their technical skills for the new world.'

Visit www.icaew.com/narrowingthegap for more on networks, upcoming events, and access to a range of online resources.

TECHNICAL UPDATES AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

When you are planning a return to work after a career break, it's important to make sure that your skills are up to date – whether you've been out of employment for three months or three years. But figuring out where to begin can be a challenge.

'I don't know what I don't know,' says one member who wants to re-enter the workforce. A two-year career break left her feeling isolated from the rest of the profession, out of touch with technical developments, and uncertain about where she should be focusing her efforts.

These concerns are not unique, so the institute has made it easier for members to figure out what they need to know and where to find it. 'We've collected technical update material together from a variety of sources and made it available in one place, online,' explains Martin, 'and it's grouped by subject, with lots of signposting.'

Find technical update material in the 'Keeping up to date' section of the Narrowing the Gap site.

ONLINE CAREERS SUPPORT AND NETWORKING

Careers support from the institute now takes many forms, including the recently launched online careers community following demands from members.

The community is open to ICAEW members and non-members and, since its launch in July 2009, it has attracted more than 2,000 visitors.

Forum discussions have helped members with problems ranging from dealing with unemployment to how to move up the career ladder. The community's expert bloggers have provided insights on issues including strategic networking, making a good first impression, communicating technical information to a non-technical audience, and how to beat psychometric tests. Attracting the most interest have been blogs on 'Do female finance professionals get a fair deal at work?' and 'The salary question: how to negotiate on your salary expectations at a job interview.'

So if you are thinking about changing jobs, trying to manage a career break, facing the prospect of redundancy, or struggling with any other career-related issues, the community could provide you with much-needed support.

For details of the careers community, visit www.ion.icaew.com/careers

DEALING WITH PRESSURE AND STRESS

Stress management and well-being courses have been offered across England and Wales by CABA for nearly five years. Attendees are helped to differentiate between pressure and stress, spot the causes, and symptoms and provide strategies to manage it.

This year, some 600 members have been helped, generating comments like 'So often training is about technical or specific skills. This was about the whole person,' and 'It taught me to look at others that may need help and learn what stresses me.'

In 2008, CABA took the training to Cyprus with great success. Seminars were also provided in-house for staff at the Big Four firms. Nicos Syrimis, chairman of KPMG Cyprus and an ICAEW council member, attended both of the courses to 'look at the lessons learnt from the UK market to help prevent the stress sick note culture in Cyprus'.

In a new development, CABA has started offering the courses in Hong Kong together with the Hong Kong Institute of CPAs with whom the ICAEW has a strategic partnership.

The stress management and well-being programme will be developed in 2010. Details will be posted in due course on the CABA website www.caba.org.uk or email training@caba.org.uk. Details of the courses in Hong Kong are at www.hkicpa.org.hk

BACK TO THE WORKPLACE



Photography: Bill Stover

Back to work: no need to go the full monty

The Chartered Accountants' Benevolent Association and the ICAEW are working together, offering events around England and Wales to help members during the downturn.

'Back to the Workplace – New Directions' is a series of seminars under the 'Narrowing the Gap' programme for members wishing to return to work following a career break or long-term unemployment. They offer guidance on CV updating, skills auditing, interview technique and keeping up-to-date technically, as well as supporting members wanting to set up their own accountancy practice.

Career clinics have been provided in most areas of England and Wales for members who have recently been made redundant. More will follow in 2010. These focus on finding a job, networking techniques, making your CV work for you and interview and presentation techniques.

'It was scary, but I found the career clinic very useful,' says one member who was surprised by how much she learnt, in particular, from recording and then watching herself in a mock interview. 'It came at just the right time for me, as I am seeking a new job,' she says, 'and now that I have rewritten my CV, and worked on how I come across at interview, I am armed for action.'

'We want these events to be as accessible to as many people as possible,' says Pamela Wood of CABA. 'In providing financial support for these events, we are keeping costs for delegates to a minimum and we can pay the fee and associated costs for unemployed delegates and anyone in financial hardship'.

Back to the Workplace seminars are planned for Bristol (March 2010) and the West Midlands (April 2010), with additional venues to follow later in the year. Career clinics are also being planned for next year. For more information on these and other CABA events, visit www.caba.org.uk or email training@caba.org.uk



FLEXIBLE WORKING

Finding the right balance between the personal and the professional can be difficult for employers and employees.

'Men and women both want a more flexible lifestyle, and businesses want a

more diverse workforce,' says Kathryn Britten, who has been involved in flexible working initiatives as a BDO partner and a member of the ICAEW Narrowing the Gap steering committee, but she fears that diversity and flexibility may now be seen as less important than cost cutting.

If they are, this will impact significantly on women with children, particularly those who are re-entering the workforce after a career break. 'When you come back it's important to articulate how flexible working benefits the business as well as you,' she suggests.

This can be challenging if you are lacking in confidence or returning to a workplace where there is an ethos of long hours and a lack of flexible working, and many women

prefer to start their own business.

'Professional women tend to be very highly committed to their employers, but they often feel as if they lack the support they need to manage their many different roles,' says Amanda Alexander, a coach who specialises in helping executives integrate work and life and one of the team of careers experts blogging on the institute's online careers community.

'Women often fall off the glass cliff and into self-employment, taking their skills and experience with them,' adds Alexander, because this is more flexible, 'and they prefer to be mistress of their own universe.'

The ICAEW provides information on flexible working, support for fathers, getting a practising certificate, the services of the Chartered Accountants' Benevolent Association, and more. Employers may benefit from the ICAEW publication *The flexible and profitable workplace: a guide to implementing flexible working practices in professional services*.

For details, visit www.icaew.com/returningtowork