

REIGNITE

ACADEMY



Introduction to the REIGNITE ACADEMY

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The Reignite Academy is a unique membership organisation that provides law firms with access to an untapped talent pool: experienced lawyers who are ready to return to the profession after a career hiatus.

The academy sources lawyers who are ready to return and matches them with opportunities at member firms. Candidates are provided with a six month period of paid training and work experience, whilst member firms have the opportunity to plug their talent gaps with well qualified professionals who are ambitious to reignite their city careers.

Providing opportunities for lawyers whose careers have not followed a traditional, linear path, is an innovative yet highly practical way for member firms to demonstrate their commitment to gender balance at a senior level.



Why is the Reignite Academy Needed

Two thirds of law students are women and figures from the Law Society in England and Wales indicate that 60% of newly qualified lawyers are female. And yet a 2017 report by PwC found that this drops to 18% of partners in the top 10 UK firms 19% in the next 15 firms.

Many women leave for various reasons, including the difficulty in balancing the demands of a city law career with personal ambitions and commitments. Research by She's Back, found that many women do want to return after a career break but they face significant obstacles. Recruiters and hiring managers shy away from a CV that has gaps or seems to follow an unusual path.

"Each year, too many talented lawyers are lost from the profession. It is our hope that through the Reignite Academy we can help provide meaningful paid work experience, training and a confidence boost to those wishing to return."

Tamara Box, Managing Partner, Reed Smith

Over the last four years, return to work programmes have been used in a number of sectors to help organisations tap into this hidden talent pool. Whilst not exclusive to women or an age-set, such programmes have been very successful in supporting female returners who have paused their careers to start a family or take on caring responsibilities.



What does a typical Reignite Academy candidate look like?

Our pilot programme proved that there is no typical profile. Our candidates had career breaks ranging from 2 years to 18; on average they had around 6 years PQE experience, but this ranged from 1 year to 17; their expertise covered a wide range of disciplines: corporate, banking and finance, FS Regulatory, commercial, real estate and employment.

What they shared in common was a love of the legal profession, a desire to learn, grit, determination and above all an ambition to get their careers back on track.

What are the benefits to member firms

Hiring returning talent has an immediate effect in helping member firms address the imbalance in their pipeline of future female leaders. For more junior female staff, bringing returners back demonstrates a commitment to the varied career paths women often have and ensures a strong cohort of senior female role models with a variety of experience. Returners, be they male or female, bring maturity and life experience with is often valued by younger staff members.

"The Reignite Academy is taking a practical and incredibly thoughtful approach directly – by giving women the full support they need to return to work successfully and giving law firms a path to recruit from and integrate this incredible senior talent pool."

Nell Scott, Partner, Orrick



"I had been freelance for a while and just couldn't see how to get my career back on track. I have twenty years ahead and am ambitious to do more with my expertise. This programme is helping me do just that."

Reignite Academy pilot participant

What are the benefits to programme participant

Traditional recruiting processes do not typically work well for people returning after a career hiatus. Recruiters prefer to see a straightforward, linear career path and are adept at placing people quickly into roles that look similar to their current job. By understanding the different career paths that people take and by screening and interviewing in a different way, the Reignite Academy team are able to provide opportunities for people who would otherwise find their way back blocked.

A tailored programme of induction and training, where participants are taught how to create their own 90 day plan

helps ensure that returners are adequately prepared for the transition back to work. Whilst participants eventually complete their work experience at different firms, they conduct the initial induction as a cohort and are encouraged to support each other during the period of the programme.

The provision of a coach and support network, and the ability to be part of a cohort of people going through a similar experience has been proven to help people be ready to transition to permanent roles at the end of the programme.

Meet Our Founders

The Reignite Academy was founded by Melinda Wallman, Lisa Unwin and Stephanie Dillon. The combination of their skills and experience is what helps to make Reignite unique in the legal sector.

Melinda is a former corporate lawyer and one of the leading legal search consultants in the London market, and known for the placement of senior women. She also leads XX Advantage, a specialist diversity consultancy.

Lisa is former consulting partner at Arthur Andersen and Director of Brand and Communications at Deloitte, Lisa is the founder of She's Back and co-author of *She's Back: Your Guide to Returning to Work*

Stephanie is a former Director with international recruitment agencies Hudson and Michael Page. She is the founder of Inclusivity Partners which provides clients with high quality, flexible returner programmes.



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