

THREE SCIENTISTS WALK INTO A BAR...

One's a parent, one's a carer and one's a cancer survivor....



Dr Katie Perry, Chief Executive, The Daphne Jackson Trust.

Katie is a physicist with a background in science communication and holds a degree and PhD in Physics from the University of Surrey. In 2022, Katie was awarded an honorary degree by the University of Surrey in recognition of her unwaveringly commitment to securing the legacy of Daphne Jackson's vision – supporting research returners.

Forgive the title – although it reads like the start of a bad joke, it's just the reality of our wonderful STEM research workforce.

The majority of us think of researchers as being super-human, squirrelled away in a lab, working tirelessly day and night as they inch towards their 'eureka!' moment. But if you ask anyone that has worked in research, they will probably tell you the reality is very different. Researchers are people, just like you and I, and we all have lives inside and outside of work that shape what we do, where we do it and how we work.

In research, there's a pervasive expectation that every researcher should follow a linear path... completing University, gaining their first position in a lab to eventually reaching fruition decades later as a fuzzy-haired Professor. But life isn't always so linear – and many researchers take unexpected turns in their work and personal lives that don't follow traditional 'norms'. Career breaks happen surprisingly often. Some are short and specific, such as a gap between grants, or pivoting research interests and switching to a new field. Others are longer and might be related to having a family, caring for a relative or dealing with a health issue.

In this latter group, it can be almost impossible to pick up your career where you left off. Knowledge is no longer cutting edge, skills might have waned and lack of confidence is often an 'Achilles heel' in job interviews. Does that mean they should suffer a penalty for not following a designated career route? Should they be 'kicked out' of science and banished to the wilds?

In this piece, I argue that the opposite should happen. We should embrace non-linear research career paths, welcome diversity in all its guises, and support every brilliant mind that wants to contribute to our fantastic research ecosystem. No matter where they come from, what they studied, nor how convoluted and disjointed their career might have been...every mind matters!

RETAINING TALENT IN THE SECTOR – THE 'OTHER' BRAIN DRAIN

We have highly skilled and talented researchers, scientists, and academics in the UK. But for the UK to be seen as 'the hub' to invest in for global research, we need to make sure we maximise the best research talent. The loss of this talent is a significant concern for the UK as it can result in a brain drain and weaken the country's research capacity, innovation, and competitiveness. It's also morally the right thing to do, to form a country's culture where you aren't punished when you take time off. We still haven't progressed yet to be fully flexible around non-linear paths.

At the Daphne Jackson Trust we often hear about the relentless efforts of scientists trying to re-enter their careers, but there just isn't the flexibility or potential to retrain. In the ever developing and fast-moving world of research, highly skilled and qualified individuals who take a career break often find themselves lagging their peers when returning to research. It can be incredibly difficult to find suitable employment that utilises their knowledge and experience.

A HELPING HAND – FOR THE WIN

That's where Daphne Jackson Fellowships come in. We offer career break researchers the opportunity to undertake a Fellowship on a part-time, flexible basis in universities, research institutes and in industry across the UK and Republic of Ireland. Our Fellowships combine a



Over the last two decades, Daphne Jackson Fellowships have **saved over 1250 years of research experience** and talent from being lost from the sector.

tailored retraining programme with a challenging research project in an inclusive environment. Alongside the unparalleled support and mentoring offered by our staff, the Fellowships provide returners with the confidence and skills they need to return to research.

We support and champion a better work/life balance more suitable to a modern-day research workforce. We work with highly skilled researchers from many backgrounds and specialisms across STEM, arts and humanities and social sciences who almost certainly would not have been able to return to their careers without their Daphne Jackson Fellowships. This benefits the individual, the research community, and the wider society.

CHANGE LIVES - INVEST & RETRAIN

To us, impact isn't just about academic papers or journals or conferences our Fellows have spoken at. It's about helping people to return to research and to stay in research careers for the longterm. Taken from our 2021 Impact Report; 9 out of 10 Daphne Jackson Fellows stay in research or teaching at least 5 years after their Fellowship.

Daphne Jackson Fellowships also contribute to the wider economy having saved £37m of gross institutional costs that may otherwise have been lost.*

For every £1 invested in a Daphne Jackson Fellow, they secure nearly £2 in future research funding.

SUCCESS STORY – PROFESSOR PIA OSTERGAARD



Pia undertook her Daphne Jackson Fellowship between 2005-2007 at St George's University of London after a career break for childcare reasons. Her Fellowship was sponsored by the Medical Research Council. She now works as a Professor in Human Genetics at St George's University of London and was, until recently a Trustee of the Daphne Jackson Trust.

Talking of our Impact Report, Pia notes; "It is an opportunity to remind ourselves that although many things have changed over the last 30 years, other things sadly have not. Only relatively recently have we started tackling cultural issues like gender diversity, equal pay, and inclusion. We are on a journey, moving towards a culture that recognises the role that everyone plays in making research happen. But there is so much more to do. Research returners are still hugely under-represented in the research community. Every person that is lost from our sector because they do not feel that they can return to research after a break is a knowledge, skills, financial and moral loss that we need to address."

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE - INVEST IN THE BEST!

A standout for the Daphne Jackson Trust in the Government's UK Science and Technology Framework is within Section 4, 'Talent and Skills'... "Giving people the opportunity to train, retrain and upskill throughout their lives to respond to changing needs". This is extremely positive, and there is no better time to be part of this sector. We hope this will drive the movement towards a more modern working world, which has certainly changed and will continue to do so.

For the UK to continue the path to becoming a science superpower I would like to see further investment in the almost untapped talent pool of researchers that have diversified off the linear path. A portion of the funds delivered to the UK Science and Technology Framework should be going to those that support the return and retraining of the already incredible talent pool we have in the UK.

At the Trust, we are the UK's leading organisation dedicated to realising the potential of returners to research after a career break for family, caring or health reasons. If you think you could support us in any way, please do get in touch. It's through our partnerships with universities, industry, charities, learned societies and government funders that we are able to operate.

Help us to continue to support and champion a better work/life balance to a modern-day research workforce by doing these four things:

1. Tell three people about Daphne Jackson Fellowships.
2. Ask research funders how they are supporting returners...and if they aren't then we are here to help them!
3. Ask us to put you on our list for event invitations, come to an event to meet a Fellow and you will see first hand why this matters so much.
4. Read our Impact Report available at www.daphnejackson.org and please follow us on social media.

Thank you for reading,

Dr Katie Perry, Chief Executive, Daphne Jackson Trust.

*Taken from our 2021 Former Fellows survey.