



# Same Job New Balance

A GUIDE TO RETURNING TO CONSULTING

BY  **Alvarium Talent**  
The consultancy growth partner



## Hello from Sam

*“At Alvarium Talent, we’ve worked embedded within some amazing talent acquisition teams, and we know that one of the most underrated things about talent is their life experience. Even if someone’s been away from consulting for a while or had other priorities, taking a break can give them a fresh perspective, make them more creative and be better at developing professional relationships.*

*We also know that finding the right fit is just as crucial as recognising strengths. That’s why we’ve put together this guide - to help people see a future in the industry and to help the industry create an environment where returners can thrive.”*

- Sam Newell, Founder of Alvarium Talent

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# Foreword

*“The traditional view of a career path is that it is a straight line leading from your first job to retirement. Nowadays though, it is increasingly common for people to take a more flexible, organic approach to their careers, exploring different opportunities and taking twists and turns along the way.*

*Sometimes these changes happen when we learn new things about ourselves or have a major life event, like becoming a parent. But considering going back to consulting after some time away can be scary. But don't worry; these feelings are totally normal, and you don't have to let them hold you back. The first thing to remember is that change is possible, and the second is to start taking small steps towards making that change. Don't wait until you feel completely ready to act, instead, act to get yourself ready.*

*The world of work is changing fast, especially after the global pandemic. Many consulting organisations are adapting to this by providing more predictable schedules and flexible working arrangements. If you're someone who loves solving problems, learning about business, and working with smart people, consulting could be a great next step for you.*

*Ultimately, what really matters is that you're passionate about what you do, not about whether your career follows a straight line. This guide from Alvarium Talent is here to help you understand the current landscape for returning to consulting. They have asked working consultants and talent teams to share their real-life experiences and compiled industry insights and statistics from a range of referenced sources to give you all the facts.*

*Whatever your reason for wanting to come back to consulting, we hope this guide helps you feel inspired and equipped to design a future that works for you.”*

- Lizzie Martin, Founder of Work Life Mother, return-to-work coaching expert



# The Perceived Challenges for Returners

Consulting firms have historically been challenging places to work for people with caring and parental responsibilities. So much so, that in a 2018 survey, **only 18% of women said they felt happy and confident about returning to work**<sup>i</sup> after maternity leave.

Factors such as long hours, including weekends and holidays, client demands, and frequent site visits have contributed to an inflexible working environment. Add to this the fact that **9 in 10 (90%) women were not offered any formal support through a returner program**<sup>ii</sup>, and it's not hard to see why **31% of mothers found it harder than they expected to return to their job**<sup>iii</sup> after an average of 10 months of maternity leave.



## What the consultants say:

*"Pre-Covid, there have been times where travel has been tough, particularly when my boys were younger. This is going to be a double challenge for anyone returning to the workplace because of the demands on family life. So it's right that we're revisiting and evaluating."*

- Clive, Partner and Managing Director, AlixPartners

Overall, the demanding nature of consulting work and lack of family-friendly policies and practices have made it challenging for parents and carers to balance their work and family life. **37% of women felt so unsupported and isolated on their return to consulting they considered handing in their notice**<sup>iv</sup>.



## What the consultants say:

*"I have had concerns about consulting as a career choice due to the inflexibility, as it's very reactive to client needs and deadlines. I do still have occasional times when the client needs something now, and I'm personally not available to do it. But I have a joke about who's shouting the loudest, at the moment it's my 18-month-old daughter. She will always be my priority and that's okay."*

- Elizabeth, Senior Vice President, AlixPartners

**One in five (18%) UK working mothers have been forced to leave their jobs because their flexible working requests have been turned down**<sup>v</sup>, and consulting has been just as guilty of this as any other industry. However, there have been efforts within the industry to address these issues and create more supportive and inclusive workplaces.



# Covid as a Reset

The COVID-19 pandemic was dreadful for many reasons, with nearly **82% of women surveyed reporting the pandemic negatively disrupted their lives**<sup>vi</sup>. This massive upheaval put many things about the status quo into sharp relief - for example, the disproportionate burden placed on women for unpaid labour, such as childcare and home-making.

A 2021 study by McKinsey & Company in collaboration with LeanIn.org found the **pandemic pushed more women out of high-ranking jobs in the long term than the previous average**<sup>vii</sup>. Researchers found that women were more burned out than before the pandemic – and more so than men and that the burnout gap between women and men has almost doubled, with **one-in-three women considering leaving the workforce or downshifting their career**<sup>viii</sup>.



## What the Talent teams say:

*“Whilst home working can offer more flexibility, sometimes people have felt that their days had no official start and end time – one day just rolled into the next one. We recognise those challenges and continue the conversations to make sure that we maintain the benefits that we can get from the new way of working.”*

- Angela Newman, People Operations Director UK & EMEA, AlixPartners

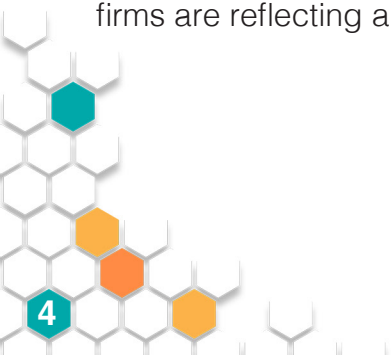


## What the consultants say:

*“There have been good and bad parts to working from home. I think sometimes you can find yourself working extended hours because you know you're at home and it's easier just to do it. I think some people work extended hours because they don't need to worry about certain things, like missing their scheduled train and being late for dinner or bath time for their child”*

- Ajay, Principal Consultant, Finyx Consulting

But despite its challenges, the pandemic had its silver linings. With the benefit of hindsight, people are now re-evaluating their priorities and how they want to work and live. And consulting firms are reflecting and evolving too.





### What the Talent teams say:

“Pre-pandemic, we would have consultants on client site, five days a week. Post-pandemic, everyone, including our clients, realise it's not needed, and actually virtual meetings help everyone.”

- Joanne Wareing, HR & Recruitment, Finyx Consulting



During the shift towards remote work required by the pandemic, many consultants found that they were both more productive from home, they had more time for personal activities, and that it was possible to achieve a better balance between the two.



### What the consultants say:

*“The most challenging part of returning to work was, I think balancing the childcare and the stress of commuting. Pre-COVID I'd have to leave the office at four o'clock and race to the train station, knowing if I didn't get back in time, I'd be charged more by the childcare provider at an increasing rate. That's all changed now.”*

- Victoria, Management Consultant, The Berkeley Partnership

While there were challenges in not being able to work in person with colleagues and teams, consultants found that they could work just as effectively and Covid finally proved that the industry's culture of presenteeism was unnecessary.



### What the consultants say:

*“Through that time, it was hard to be away from people all the time, and only seeing people on Teams and not in person. But we found that we did still work incredibly effectively. And I think that has changed the culture of being in the office between certain hours to be thought of as doing your job.”*

- Elizabeth, Senior Vice President, AlixPartners







**What the Talent teams say:**

*"I think we've all learned as organisations that actually, particularly since COVID, people can work effectively and efficiently remotely."*

- Julie Hyam, Director, Talent Acquisition Strategy, 6point6



**What the Talent teams say:**

*"I think what is highlighted is people like choice, and people like to choose where they work and decide where they're going to do the best work from."*

- Lianne Barker, Head of People, Enfuse



**What the Talent teams say:**

*"We've been able to really embrace different technologies and collaboration tools to work with our clients, resulting in outcomes that are just as good."*

- Kaitlyn Dalterio, Head of People Experience, Magnetic



For some consultants, the shift to remote work during COVID-19 was a game-changer. Working from home allowed them to balance their work and personal life in a way they thought was previously impossible. The pandemic has given them the confidence and trust to work remotely, which they would never have done before.



**What the consultants say:**

*"The changes in working patterns after Covid are like night and day. I would have never done it otherwise, had I not had the option to work remotely. I wouldn't have trusted the system."*

- Andrea, Independent Consultant, Executive Advisor & Strategic Management Consultant



# So, What's Changed?

Having recognised that different working patterns can be just as productive as the traditional model, many consulting firms have embraced accommodating different requirements, implementing various policies and benefits to support, retain and attract their people.

One of the most significant changes has been the adoption of flexible working arrangements. This can include allowing parents and carers to work from home, work part-time or have flexible hours to accommodate their family responsibilities, reducing overall stress.



## What the consultants say:

*"Being able to work from home twice a week, means that I am more able to be part of my children's lives, especially during the school holidays."*

- Clive, Partner and Managing Director, AlixPartners



## What the consultants say:

*"I kept in regular contact with my employer. They made sure they always included me or asked me if I wanted to come to things like the Christmas party or the summer sports day. That helped me feel supported."*

- Isobel, Data Scientist, 6point6

Adapting an open and empathetic culture of understanding around parents' and carers' challenges has also had a profound impact. Having a good support network in the workplace helps new parents navigate the seismic change in their personal lives. Transparency is crucial and making managers and colleagues aware of parents' needs allows the whole team to support and adapt as necessary, fostering diversity and inclusion within teams.







### What the Talent teams say:

*"If I look at our demographic, we hire experienced consultants who are 7-10 years into their careers, which means they may have young children or be about to start families. What's important to them is flexibility and good family benefits. We really pride ourselves on attracting top consultants with families or who are carers."*

- Ria Barnes, Head of People, The Berkeley Partnership



### What the Talent teams say:

*"We have a very strong Return to Work programme that is geared around working parents, but we have used it for returners from long-term sick leave too. Our specialist coach offers support to both the individual and the line manager during periods of leave and as required or on people's return, that's a differentiating point and absolutely key to make this work, the organisation has to be ready to change too."*

- Caroline Chamberlain, EMEA Head of People, AlixPartners



This openness also helps solve people's challenges on a case-by-case basis - there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Coaching or support for new parents or parents-to-be can be an invaluable resource. Employers need to ensure that their policies are inclusive of all parents and carers, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Having policies that can flex to differing requirements allows firms to hire from a wider pool of experienced professionals and helps ensure they don't disadvantage non-parent employees through any policy changes.



### What the consultants say:

*"So now I work four days I realised that the ability to take a Friday off, for example, didn't really work for me. I would often log on those days and end up working so I changed my working pattern to have two afternoons off instead of one day off. And that enabled me to collect the children from school twice a week and still be available to the client every day."*

- Ami, Management Consultant, The Berkeley Partnership



Creating a better workplace for parents and carers requires a collaborative effort between employers, managers, and colleagues. Through flexibility, an open culture of understanding, and tailored policies and benefits, consulting firms are building more supportive environments for their employees, parents and non-parents alike.



**What the Talent teams say:**

*“We are more mindful that everybody's an individual with differing support needs. Listening to people, understanding their experiences, and offering the support where we can is what our team is here to do.”*

- Rachel Graham, Lead Recruiter, EMEA, FTI Consulting



**What the Talent teams say:**

*“Have those open discussions. If you're having doubts or if there's something niggling away, talk it through with us and we'll find a way to support you.”*

- Joanne Wareing, HR & Recruitment, Finyx Consulting



# Advice for Returners

## Talk to people who are already doing it

Reach out to former colleagues or industry contacts and ask about their experiences. They can offer valuable insights into the industry's current state, what skills are in demand, and what clients are looking for in a consultant.

## Be open in your discussions with your manager, team and talent team

Be upfront about your concerns and any gaps in your knowledge or skills. This will help you to identify areas where you may need additional support or training. Be clear about your availability and priorities, and make sure you have a plan for managing your workload and balancing your responsibilities.

## Take advantage of the tools and resources available to you

Coaching and Return to Work programmes can be incredibly helpful in preparing you for your new role and ensuring a smooth transition. As a starting point, we've provided a handy list at the end of this guide.

## Take the leap!

The only way to truly know if consulting is still right for you is to give it a go.



### What the consultants say:

*"The skills you acquire as a parent - organisation, focus and tenacity - are all valued and transferable to consultancy. So, do it! It's demanding, exciting and challenging."*

- Jo, FTI Consulting, Cybersecurity Consultant



# Thank You and Resources

Huge thanks to everyone that gave their time and wisdom to help us create this guide, with particular thanks to everyone at 6point6, AlixPartners, The Berkeley Partnership, Enfuse, Finyx Consulting, FTI Consulting, Magnetic and Work-life Mother. Below is a collated list of all the resources gathered from all our contributors:

**6POINT6**

<https://6point6.co.uk/careers/>

**AlixPartners**

<https://www.alixpartners.com/careers/>

The **Berkeley** Partnership

<https://www.berkeleypartnership.com/careers>

**ENFUSE**  
group

<https://www.enfusegroup.com/diversity-equity-inclusion>  
<https://www.enfusegroup.com/life-at-enfuse>

**FINYX**

<https://finyx.com/id-e/>  
<https://finyx.com/why-finyx/>

**FTI**  
CONSULTING

<https://www.fticonsulting.com/careers>

**magnetic**

<https://wearemagnetic.com/careers>

If you are returning to work and looking for help and support please reach out to Lizzie Martin, Founder of Work Life Mother and return-to-work coaching expert.

**WLM**  
Empowering returns. Retaining talent.

<https://www.worklifemother.com/>

For enquiries about this guide or for more information about Alvarium Talent's embedded talent acquisition, executive search, recruitment, and talent advisory services please click below, or contact [sam.newell@alvariumtalent.com](mailto:sam.newell@alvariumtalent.com)

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