



Recruitment  
& Employment  
Confederation

CAREER   
RETURNERS



Career returners  
recruiter guidance:  
Part one

# The barrier in recruitment for career returners



Supporting individuals re-entering the workforce allows recruiters to offer clients highly adaptable, resilient talent, ready to make an impact and to enhance workforce diversity and inclusion.



## The challenges faced by career returners in recruitment

Career returners can be heavily disadvantaged in mainstream recruitment in the UK and globally. Their relevant experience is often disregarded simply because of their career break.

“I have 16 years’ experience in the accounting industry but as I had a career break, I feel my qualifications are not worth the paper they are written on. No recruitment agents are even calling me to discuss my CV. I have applied for hundreds of roles, varying from basic entry level to slightly more senior, all with no joy.”

Quote from a returner in Career Returners Indicator 2024.



## Why be inclusive of career returners?

This is an enormous opportunity to demonstrate the value-add of your firm. By focusing on experience and skills in your talent search, rather than prioritising recency, you demonstrate that your business is innovative and truly dedicated to finding the right candidates for your client.

“Finding diverse and experienced talent is always challenging – returners offer a pipeline of new talent”

Employer on hiring career returners.

Instead, think about the immense experience career returners can bring. Consider the talents they’ve developed before and during their career breaks, such as skills developed through caring responsibilities, freelance consultancy, entrepreneurship, relocation or adult learning.

Increasingly, leading in-house recruiters are developing dedicated career returner programmes as part of their talent strategy to plug those hard-to-fill skill gaps. To maintain your advantage in a competitive and crowded market, being inclusive of returners is one of the tactics that could make you a recruiter of choice.



## The Career Break Penalty persists

“Due to my lack of recent experience, I was almost immediately rejected for a banking job for which my level and experience were an exact match.”

Quote from a returner in Career Returners Indicator 2024

Recruitment bias against a CV gap was rated as the biggest challenge in returning to professional roles by 40% of returners in the **Career Returners Indicator 2024**, an annual research study conducted by Career Returners.

But it's not all bad news. It's important to note that attitudes are shifting in the UK, albeit slowly. More employers and recruiters are recognising the value of people who have taken career breaks. Some recruitment businesses now specialise in career returner candidates, and have built successful client relationships, and many employers run targeted returner programmes.



# How to lead the way and supporting career returners?

## Showcase best practice

- ▶ Engaging with career returners offers recruiters a unique opportunity to lead by example, **showcasing recruitment best practices that actively reduce biases** and that dismantle barriers faced by a highly skilled yet often overlooked group.
- ▶ By championing the inclusion of career returners, recruiters not only drive greater diversity but also **help employers adopt more inclusive practices**, making workplaces stronger and more representative.
- ▶ As advocates for this untapped talent pool, recruiters can enhance their value to clients, positioning themselves as **forward-thinking partners committed to equality, diversity, and genuine talent development**.

## Highly rewarding

- ▶ By helping skilled professionals re-enter the workforce, recruiters not only fill roles with motivated talent but also **empower individuals to rebuild their careers and confidence**.
- ▶ Engaging with career returners is incredibly rewarding for recruiters, as it gives them the chance to **make a profound, positive impact on someone's life**.

“Returners have valuable past work experiences, together with skills that are in short supply in the open recruitment market. This, coupled with their enthusiasm and energy, has made the investment in a Returners Programme very worthwhile.”

Employer on hiring career returners

Read guidance number two of the collection on **“Why be inclusive of career returners?”**



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