



Recruitment  
& Employment  
Confederation

CAREER   
RETURNERS

Career returners  
recruiter guidance:  
Part two

# Why be inclusive of career returners?



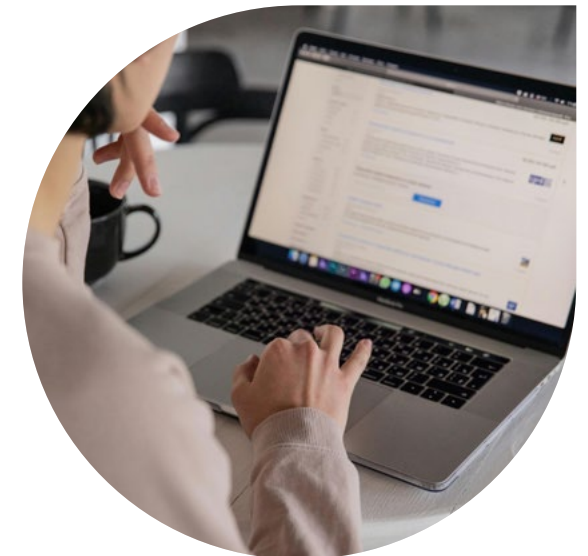
When the concept of career returners is new to your clients, you might need to highlight the value that this pool of candidates has to offer. This guide is designed to equip you with figures and arguments to back this up.

**In a recent survey carried out by the REC in July 2024, which asked a range of recruiters which factors they considered most important when screening candidates for a position, the data shows that the recentness of experience remains a top priority factor.**

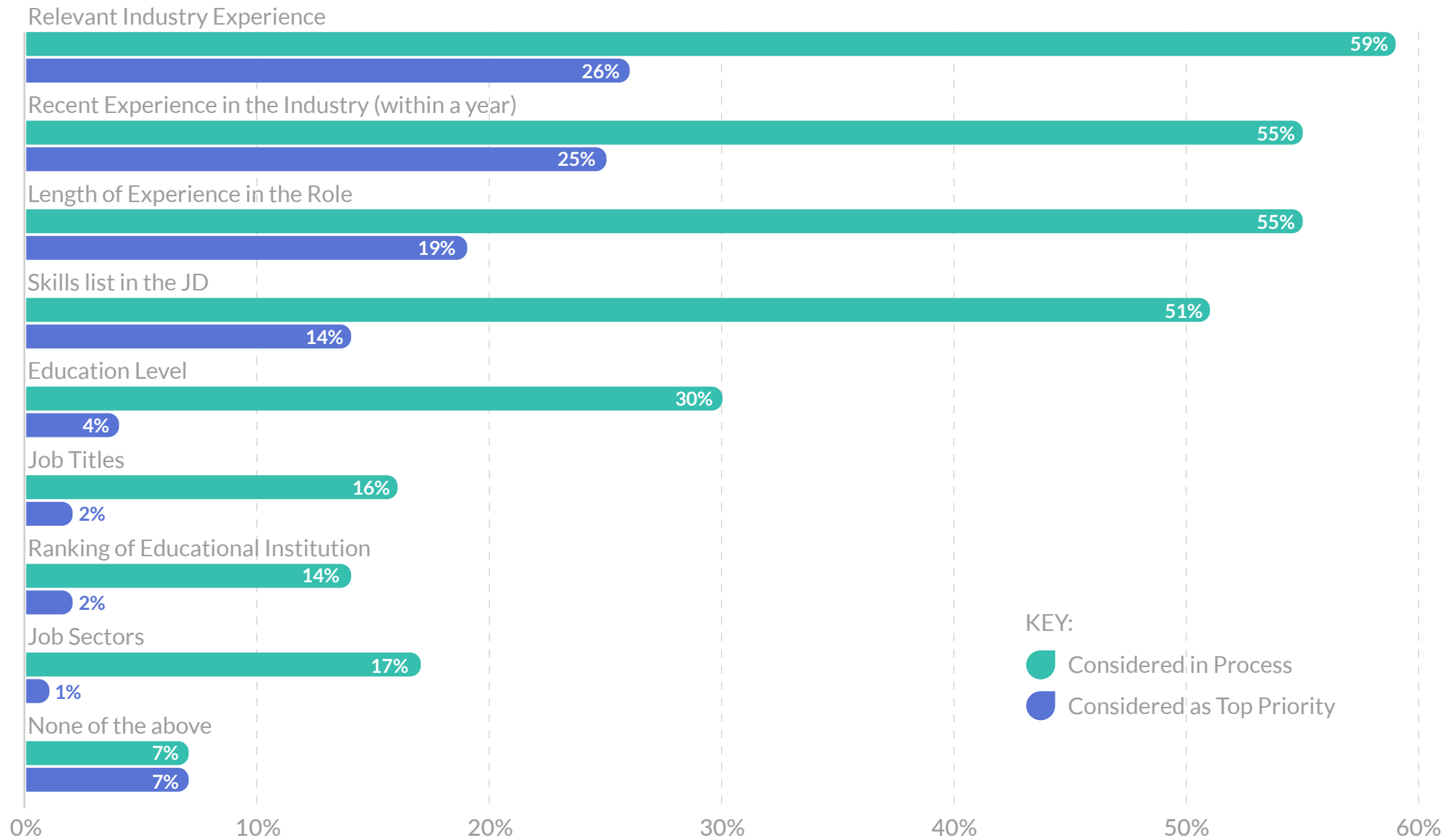
Recentness of experience is ranked as more important to recruiters across the UK than length of experience and relevant skills.

In the Midlands and London, 'recent experience' was rated the top priority factor by the highest number of respondents. 31% of small recruitment business (less than 50 employees) also said that 'recent experience' was their top priority when placing candidates.

There are further compelling arguments that challenge this narrative and this guide will carefully examine them, providing detailed analysis and counterpoints to offer a comprehensive understanding of the issue.



# Which of the following factors, if any, do you consider most important when screening candidates for a position?



# Widen your candidate talent pool and gain a competitive advantage

- ▶ The returner community is a relatively untapped talent pool.
- ▶ Returning professionals are experienced and well-qualified, with skills from before and during their career breaks.
  - ▶ **60%** of Career Returners Community have **professional or postgraduate qualifications**;
  - ▶ **80%** have **5+ years of work experience**;
  - ▶ **50%** have **10+ years**.
- ▶ Returners offer a unique and fresh perspective and diversity of thought and experience, and this type of cognitive diversity is proven to increase innovation and productivity.
- ▶ Returners are mature, motivated and committed to finding employment and relaunching their career.
- ▶ Returners help to build a **gender diverse shortlist** for clients wanting to increase gender diversity and tackle the gender pay gap.
  - ▶ **89%** of the 1.7m UK people who are economically inactive for caring reasons **are women** according to ONS data from 2024.
- ▶ A career returner may possess other characteristics that contribute to building inclusive teams, such as disability, age, socio-economic status, and even experiences such as being an offender.
- ▶ Returners help to build an **ethnically diverse shortlist** for clients wanting to increase ethnic diversity.
  - ▶ **50%** of the Career Returners Community are from **minority ethnic backgrounds**.
- ▶ Returner initiatives help to meet social value requirements of public sector, civil service and other clients.

“Hiring returners gives us an opportunity to tap into an under-utilised talent pool.”

Employer on hiring career returners

“Returners are an important aspect of improving our gender diversity and helping us reduce our gender pay gap.”

Employer on hiring career returners

## Improve your client relationships

Recruitment agencies often cite their clients' preference for candidates with recent work experience as the reason for their reluctance to consider returners. This may be the case in many situations, but it's not across-the-board.

Since 2014, over 200 leading UK employers across a variety of sectors have actively targeted returning professionals through returner programmes. These programmes are hiring initiatives providing a supported route back to skilled roles at mid to senior level for professional candidates who have taken extended career breaks.

These are **primarily returnships** or **supported hiring programmes** (see below for definitions of what these are). Your clients may already be working with returners and, if not, you can open their eyes to these ideas to bring in a hidden talent pool of experienced professionals in a lower-risk way. That way you will be positioning yourself as a meaningful partner on your client's talent development journey, as opposed to a one-off supplier.



### What are Returnships?

Returners are hired into professional roles, initially on a 3–6-month fixed term contract, with a strong intent to hire into a permanent role at the end, provided the placement is successful for both sides.

With well-structured programmes, the aim is for at least 80% of participants to gain ongoing roles.

With most returnships, support in the form of mentoring, training and/or coaching is provided.

Most returnships occur annually with a cohort, however they may be ‘rolling returnships’ with rolling applications through the year.

### What is Supported Hiring?

Returners are hired directly into permanent professional roles. As with returnships, they are provided with support in the form of returner coaching, mentoring and/or training the first six months.

A Supported Hiring programme involves recruiting for multiple (potentially ringfenced) roles either starting on a fixed start date with a cohort or as part of ongoing recruitment on a rolling application basis.

Supported Hiring Jobs are ad-hoc roles which are usually open to any applicants, however applications are welcomed from people who have taken a long career break and coaching support is provided if a returner is the successful candidate.

Read guidance number three of the collection on **“Addressing your concerns about returner”**



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