THE REAL VALUE OF RETURNING TO TECH

THE 2022 REPORT
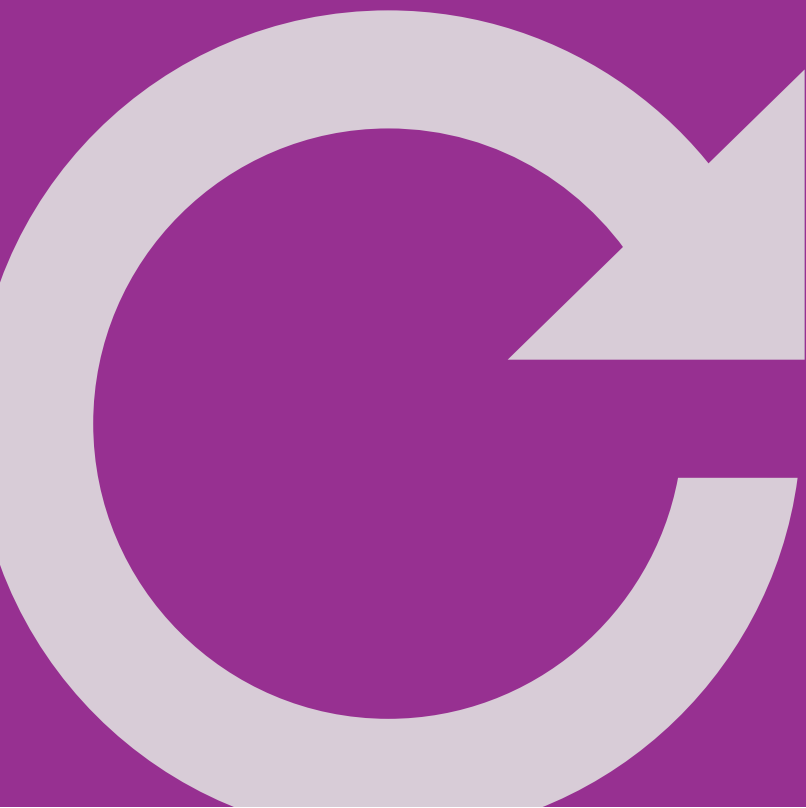
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"I feel ready for the next chapter of my career."

Maya, Returner and Software Engineer at BAE Systems

Introduction

Taking a career break is nothing new. Yet, a business that looks into that gap to understand the value it brings people, is a rarity. The impact? Experienced talent is overlooked and businesses lose out.

The journey of someone trying to return to a career in technology after a break - someone we'd call a 'tech Returner' - is filled with challenges. Individuals regularly experience barriers or stigma and the most bizarre thing is that these challenges often come from businesses that have been crying out for more tech talent, for years.

We know this because we've been working with Returners since 2017. As an organisation we provide talented tech professionals returning to the industry after a career break with inclusive programmes that refresh skills and build confidence. We partner with sponsor businesses, passionate about hiring diverse, experienced people and as a result we deliver a free 'Your Return to Tech' programme.

Looking at tech more generally, we see three major challenges facing the industry which, when assembled, form a pretty gloomy scene. Tech job opportunities hit an all-time high this year and in the same breath, there is a shortage of people with the right skills to fill those gaps. The cherry on top? The talent that does fill those gaps is rarely diverse, which can result in bias and a narrow perspective on consumer needs.

However, Returners are diverse, committed and importantly, experienced in software engineering. They've taken time out from their career to raise a family, look after their health or start a business but they're back and they want to be here. Stigma and (as a result) a lack of confidence is what's stopping them. Businesses often perceive Returner's skills as 'out of date' or 'junior' and assume they are no longer interested in full time work. These perceptions are unjustified and unfounded.

During career breaks, Returners learn new coding languages, build apps, websites and systems in their own time, and importantly, acquire invaluable human 'real skills'. Returners come from different backgrounds, they're inspiring and talented additions to any business. Returners can help solve challenges faced by the tech industry and at the same time, the tech industry gets to change a Returner's outlook and, more often that not, their life in the process.

The tech industry faces challenges

This conversation is not new. Researchers and employers have talked about a tech skills shortage since before 2015. Yet in 2022, we continue to struggle to recruit talent into the UK tech industry whilst we see technical job opportunities hit a 10-year high and there's no sign of slowing.

There were more than 64,000 vacancies for UK tech jobs in the third quarter of 2021. This is up by 191% on the same period in 2020.

BCS State of the Nation Report 2022

Shortage of talent

A shortage of tech talent could result in inadequately trained teams struggling to keep up with the rapid pace of innovation. Businesses are unable to fill tech roles and to continue on this trajectory risks an inability to keep up with demand in an industry which relies on satisfying consumer need for fast, digital convenience. Furthermore, we increase the likelihood of poor mental health, wellbeing and potential burnout within current tech teams as pressure and workload increases.

Lack of diversity

Lack of talent is exacerbated by a lack of understanding of how to recruit diverse teams. This risks digital products/services being built by the same demographic which may result in the tech we use being designed and built inappropriately for different people, or created with unconscious bias built in. A diverse team brings new perspectives, is more likely to understand a wider range of customer needs and motivations, and provides companies with increased access to talent.

Covid's impact

Whilst we enjoy a golden age in tech, the playing field is not level and is further tipped as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. During Covid digital transformation for organisations became fast-tracked and yet, fears around employment disproportionately impacted certain groups of people. For example, one in three mothers lost their jobs or number of hours due to childcare responsibilities.

Longterm solutions

Currently, solutions tend to focus on providing education, apprenticeships and promotion of future STEM careers. Whilst this is positive on a longterm basis, at present, the number of vacancies for mid-senior tech roles outweigh the number of suitable candidates. The industry is in need of more short-term solutions to employing diverse, skilled individuals with experience.
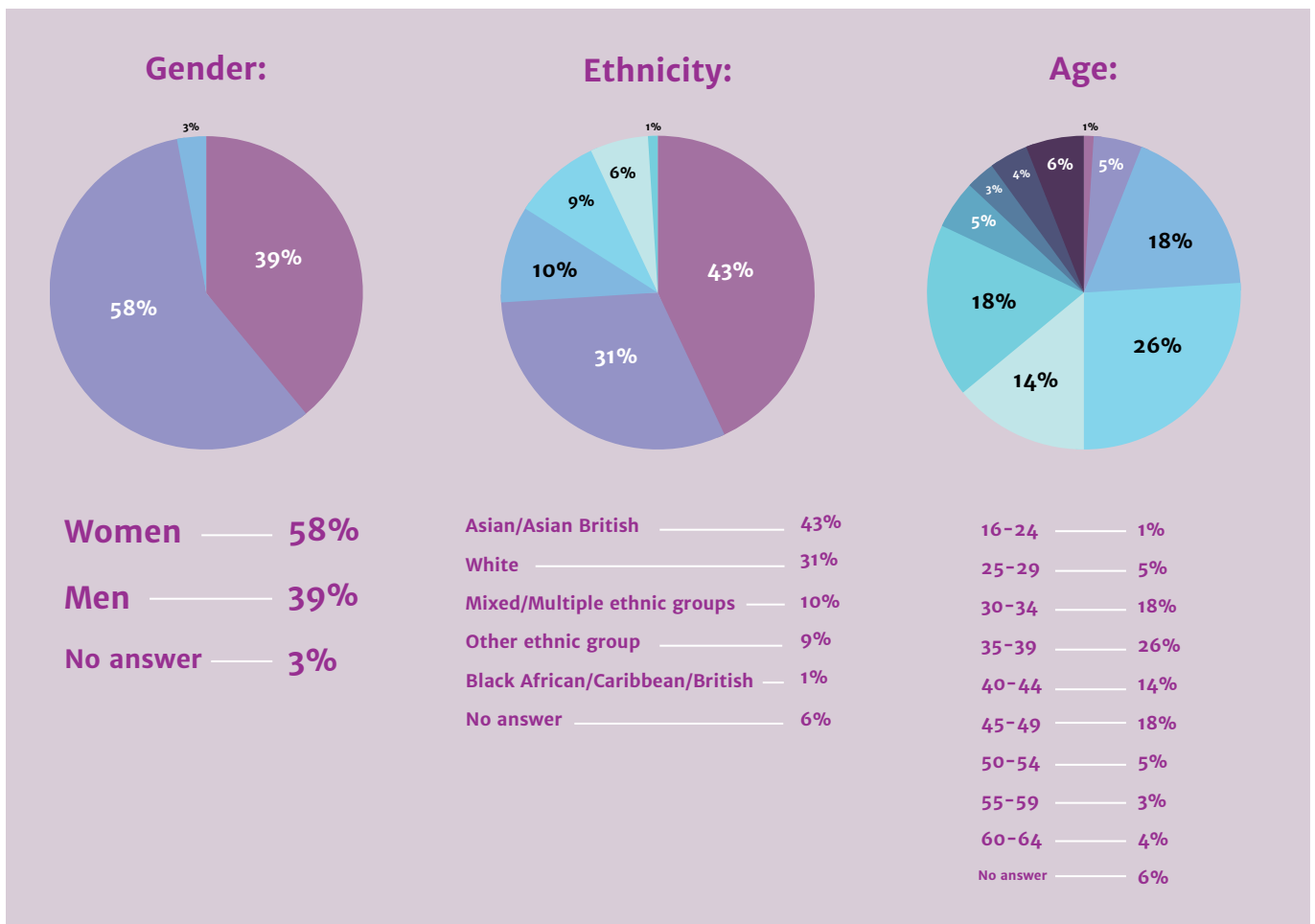
Who are Returners?

A life and a career rarely happen in a predictable, straight line. Family, health, education or relocation may all be reasons why someone might take a career break, or maybe it's a simple desire to take a period of time to one's self.

A 'tech Returner' is someone who has developed some years of experience in software engineering, taken a career break, and is now looking to return to a technical role longterm. Whatever the reason for that break, Returners are part of a demographic that is often overlooked by businesses. But, in reality, Returners are highly skilled individuals with years of software engineering experience and a strong desire to return to a technical career.

Returner statistics

During 2022, we gathered the following data from Returners taking part on our 'Your Return to Tech' programme:

Gender:

58%
39%
3%

Women	——	**58%**
Men	——	**39%**
No answer	——	**3%**

Ethnicity:

43%
31%
10%
9%
6%
1%

Asian/Asian British	——	**43%**
White	——	**31%**
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups	——	**10%**
Other ethnic group	——	**9%**
Black African/Caribbean/British	——	**1%**
No answer	——	**6%**

Age:

1%
5%
18%
26%
14%
18%
18%
5%
3%
4%
6%

16-24	——	**1%**
25-29	——	**5%**
30-34	——	**18%**
35-39	——	**26%**
40-44	——	**14%**
45-49	——	**18%**
50-54	——	**5%**
55-59	——	**3%**
60-64	——	**4%**
No answer	——	**6%**

"We believe that the lack of diversity in technology is dangerous and something we should work to improve.

Otherwise, it will result in non optimal and non inclusive technical solutions that will be divisive and reinforce existing bias and increase unfairness and injustice."

Mariot Chauvin, Director of Engineering – Product & Engineering, The Guardian

The Guardian

The people behind the numbers

So much more than a set of statistics, the Returner market is made up of diverse, talented, passionate people. Meet some of our Returners.

Huma

**Java, JavaScript, C++, SQL.
Entrepreneur.
Mum to three children.**

Huma decided to return to tech after a career break, during which she raised three children whilst supporting her partner to set up an award-winning startup.

During that time, Huma learned the importance of leadership, good communication, better listening, patience and self-awareness.

Whilst running her own business, Huma learnt to focus on the lifetime value of a customer, always improving customer experience with the single focus of "creating customer delight".

Past experience:
- Senior software engineer at Zedo - the US and India-based advertising advertising and technology company acquired by Warner Bros. Discovery in 2021.
- Software engineer at Quinsteet Inc.
- GM at ManagemenD.

Career highlights:
- Spearheaded a structured and comprehensive training/mentorship programme for new joiners.
- Comprehensive deployment and integration of Ad serving technology, products and services as part of a major tech acquisition in US.

Career break highlights:
- Raised three children.
- Supported husband to launch training business including research, company vision, branding, office set-up, day to day operations, team and client relations.

Laura

Java, Kotlin, Python, JavaScript. Artisanal bakery business owner.

During her career break, Laura took time for herself and her family, starting a small artisanal bakery business that grew exponentially. This business venture taught Laura about managing time, finances and collaborators. She learnt that delegation to trustworthy people is essential to be able to run a successful business.

"Tech Returners helped me to rebuild my confidence and embrace a growth attitude about my job and myself in everyday life as well: I have skills, I am passionate about software and I am willing to learn and improve everyday."

Career highlights:

- Whilst working as a Java/ORACLE engineer at Sanpaolo Bank, Laura implemented rules and procedures to prevent money laundering and help fight crime. The average transaction amount was over 10 million data entries daily.

- Whilst at SCAI Spa, Laura completely renewed the company's intranet and set up the digital automated internal procedures to manage holiday bookings within the company.

- In another Java engineering role, Laura renewed an agricultural application distributing funds to farmers for a government agency.

Marcus

Java, JavaScript, Cold Fusion, ASP, VB Script, Model 204, JCL. Professional portrait artist and musician.

Marcus was trained as an analyst programmer. He worked at the Office of National Statistics programming large-scale IBM/MVS mainframe applications and later, as a contract analyst programmer in London and Australia.

Marcus took a four year break from coding to develop improved communication skills, stepping out of his comfort zone to become an IT Recruitment Consultant. He also set up and ran a marketing business and pursued his hobby as a portrait painter, reaching a professional level.

"During my time as an IT recruitment consultant, managing a small marketing business and working as a professional portrait artist, I developed communication, negotiation, presentation, people management and time management skills."

How businesses and individuals describe Returners

Since this talented demographic are so often overlooked, we wanted to explore the behaviours and character traits that Returners commonly possess. We asked a number of Returners from our programme, who have been surrounded by dozens of others like them, and the businesses who have sponsored their places on those programmes, how they would describe a typical Returner.

We think Returners is a pool of talent with better gender and age diversity than other more traditional pools, and with talented people that only need a bit of confidence to resume a successful career.

Mariot Chauvin, Director of Engineering - Product & Engineering at The Guardian
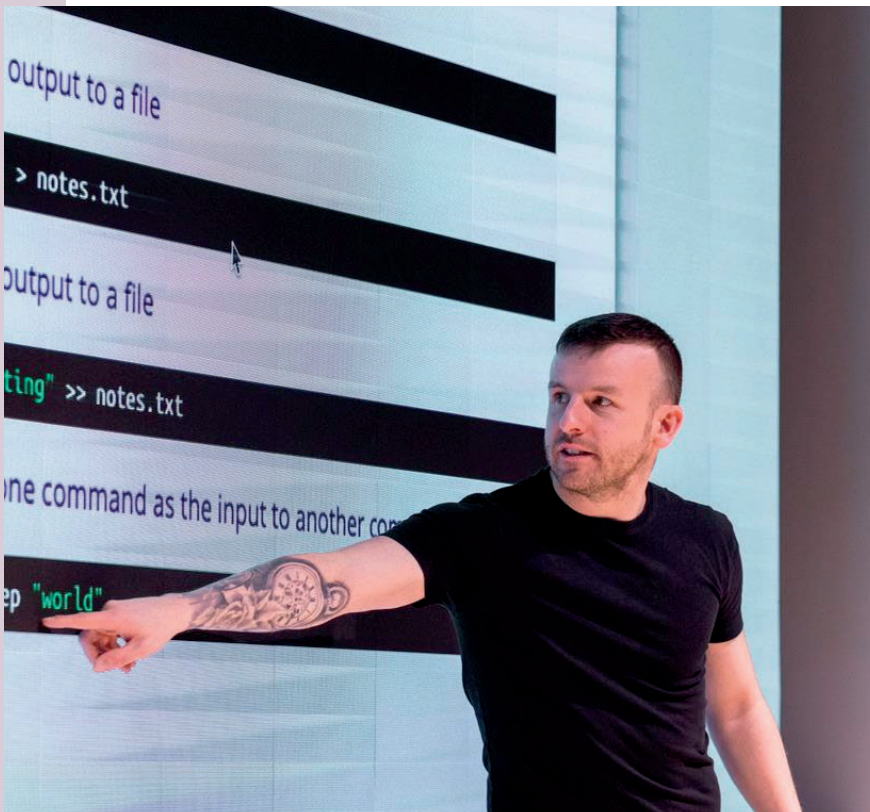
"Eager and enthusiastic."

Ia, Returner and Software Engineer

"Their prior experience means they are in a strong position to thrive straight away."

Emma Blackburn, Senior Talent Mobility Advisor, Booking.com

"All the Returners I work with and know are very bright individuals, highly motivated to work to the best of their ability. They also want to naturally help others, an excellent trait."

Paul, Returner and Software Engineer

"They are highly motivated, driven, and, by virtue of their career break, they bring with them a fresh perspective and an energy that will enthuse and empower businesses."

Charlie, Returner and Consultant Software Engineer

"People who have gained valuable life experience. Returners bring a fresh perspective to the tech industry."

Clive, Returner and Software Engineer

Career breaks

Returners are skilful individuals with a wealth of experience. At Tech Returners, part of our role is to understand their career journey as a whole. These journeys are often complex but also inspiring. They are the key to revealing the complete picture of value within each person. Misconceptions around career breaks lead to knock-backs and rejection which results in Returners needing support to be able to recognise that value. But once uncovered, Returners are unstoppable. However, before a point is reached where every Returner feels empowered after a career break, there needs to be a shift in the perception of what a career break actually looks like.

Top 5 reasons for career break

Over the past year of working with Returners on our programmes, we've gathered the following data:

4%

10%

27%

13%

24%
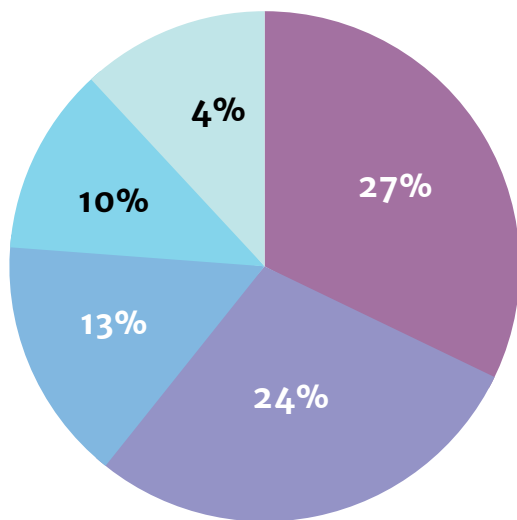
No.1 reason: Children/childcare

2. **Moving country**
3. **Career switch**
4. **Education**
5. **Health**

Career break misconceptions

There is clear evidence that there is stigma and misconception surrounding career breaks. Common assumptions that arise around a gap in someone's career include:

- Career breaks cause people to forget their skills and they don't train or practice code during this period.
- Transferable skills and behaviours are not developed during this period.
- People took a break because they're lazy or disliked their job and are reluctant to return.
- People aren't looking for a full-time role after a career break.

"A lot of talented people are being overlooked in traditional recruitment processes due to these gaps in their CV's.

It then becomes a vicious cycle for Returners of having to deal with rejections that knock their confidence which impacts the next interview or application they go through."

Chris McKenzie, Head Of Talent and D&I Champion at Daemon.

The vicious cycle

A prolonged period of time away from the workplace often creates a sense of anxiety when it comes to returning. This sentiment is often felt by mothers who are returning to work after having a baby: studies show that more than half (52%) expressed worry over the return and over a third (37%) confessed that they were dreading returning to work. It is often no different for Returners. Apprehension is felt by many after a career break, whether that time was spent having children, building a business, learning, travelling or otherwise.

In addition to anxiety, the pre-mentioned misconceptions surrounding career breaks only magnify the pressure Returners experience. Many of this demographic have applied for roles which they are fully capable of delivering, however continued rejection, because of their break, impacts confidence and self-belief further resulting in difficulties at interviews or potentially leading to an avoidance of applying for roles altogether. Giving up is not uncommon.

65%   A study by Linkedin showed that 65% of respondents believe that a stigma still exists around a career break

Charlie's experience:

"By an overwhelming majority, I felt that no one really understood or appreciated what I had to offer.

It was quite demoralising and demotivating at times because of the dichotomy in how I was perceived; either as a junior, that had to learn everything from scratch, or as a "dinosaur", that lacked current skills and would be hard to train because of my career break.

The expectations that I had for myself in terms of remuneration and level at which to re-enter tech were seen as, to quote one person, "totally unrealistic"."

Charlie, Returner and Consultant Software Engineer at Daemon

The Covid career break

When researching external statistics around career breaks, Google's suggested search terms strongly point towards concern and belief amongst the public, that career breaks might be detrimental to future employment or job progression.
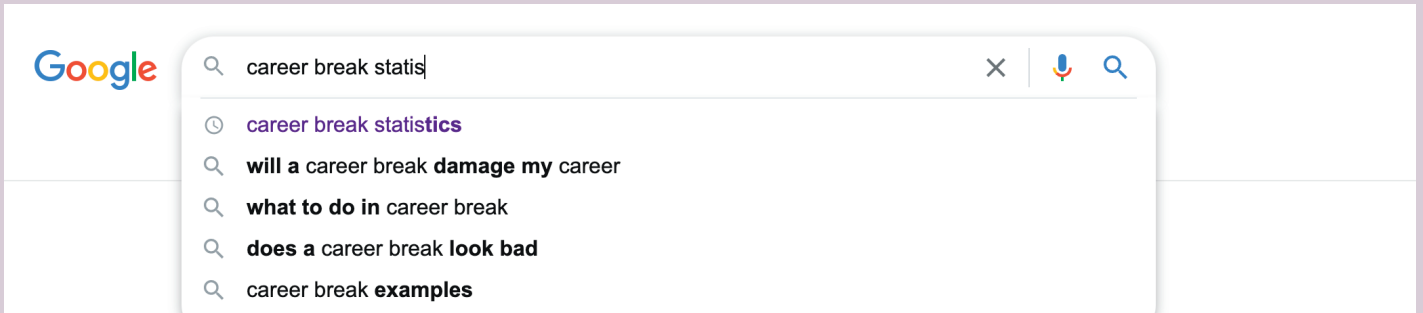

Despite this concern, we are seeing that the Covid-19 pandemic has sparked 'the Great Resignation'. Not only are people leaving their old jobs in search of new roles - potentially that fit in with their desired lifestyle or are more purpose driven - Covid has also caused the number of people taking career breaks to increase rapidly. This will have a knock-on effect which will mean that employers need to remove bias around career breaks in coming years, as we see those individuals attempt to return to work. Regardless, the changed attitude that Covid has prompted is a positive shift. Career breaks are becoming more common and Linkedin's 2022 survey supports this trend, revealing that 62% of employees worldwide had taken a career break.

However, there is still more work to be done across businesses and society to completely eradicate the stigma associated with taking time away from work.

Huma's experience:

"I have come across many women who could really use a career break either for nurturing their young ones, or caregiving to their loved ones, or simply because they could use that time to focus on their mental or physical wellbeing.

But unfortunately, very few actually take the break they deserve because of the fear of not being able to get back. Sadly, the few who do take the break end up not being able to get back after the gap because of loss of confidence."

Huma, Returner and Software
Engineer, Booking.com
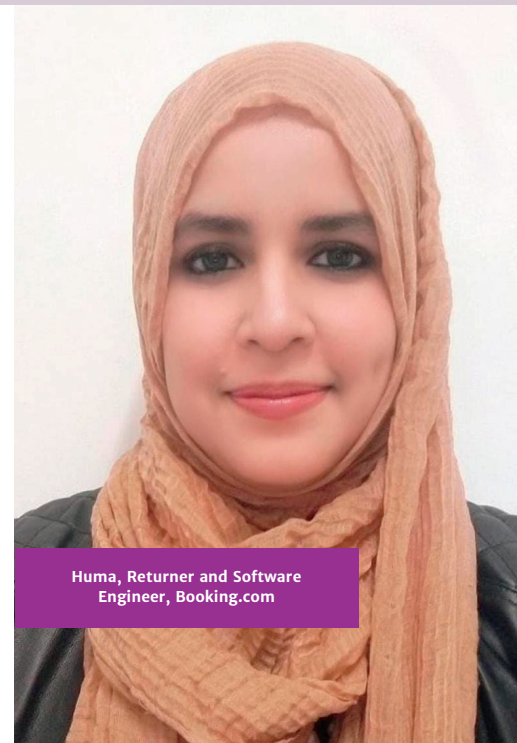
The reality of a career break

Years of developing genuine relationships with Returners teaches us that career breaks are far from a holiday. Individuals that take a hiatus from work are a long way from complacent or lazy. Here is the reality of what a career break looks like...

Meet Ia

"During my break I was more 'courageous' in pursuing things and activities I enjoyed. I did more travelling, studied data science and worked on projects. I learned Python and Data Science Tools."

Ia, Returner and Software Engineer, On the Beach

Transferrable skills

During a career break from tech, individuals might raise a family, study for a PhD or re-train in another skill. A consistent theme we see across the Returner demographic is the amount of transferable skills gained during their break as a result. Returners improve communication, learn active listening, negotiation, leadership, teamwork and more.

Kept up to date

It is very common for individuals to learn new technical skills or continue practicing current skills during a break. Often Returners have completed certifications, courses and programmes that serve them well when returning to tech. It is common to see a good level of understanding around current technologies despite being 'out of the tech industry' for potentially years.

Built a business

Many Returners spend time during their career break building a business, whether that's with a family member or solo. Businesses we've seen, ranged from an IT consultancy, to a mental health app, to an independent bakery. These endeavours help develop invaluable skills and behaviours, which Returners may not have developed in a day to day software engineering role.

Gained clarity

After a career break, with the aid of some support and coaching, Returners come back with drive and determination to succeed in their tech career. We've seen that time away from software engineering, and a period of focusing on something else can bring clarity. Plus, that career break often makes their passion for coding stronger than ever.

Break the stigma

To eradicate the career break stigma, it is essential that businesses and society recognise the achievements of people. Here are some of the incredible career break accomplishments which Returners from our 'Your Return to Tech' programme shared with us.

Paul

"I helped the local swim club with a class/registration system learning JavaScript, Google Sheets and dabbling with Angular web programming."

Charlie

"I was a parent volunteer at a school, mid-day assistant, cover supervisor and data analyst. I spent time on self-training in technical skills and self development."

Clive

"I raised my daughter and worked as a domicilliary care worker. I developed excellent communication skills, patience, understanding, empathy and ability to adapt rapidly to situations."

Mariot Chauvin, Director of Engineering at The Guardian told us, "Returners usually have skills, sometimes unknown to them, that they have acquired in their previous work experience, during their break, or through life events, for instance parenting! Being technical skills or soft skills, those are transferable to modern technologies and day to day collaboration with colleagues, stakeholders or customers."

More than just tech

"To return to my career and thrive, I needed help to change my perspective and attitude. I haven't succeeded 100% as sometimes I still feel like I'm not enough. Not skilled enough, not smart enough... but I remind myself this is just a coping mechanism to deal with fear of failing and rejection. Now I know I can fail, I can learn from failing and I can improve. I also have a little sticker on my laptop that says "you are enough" just in case I forget."

Laura, Returner and Software Engineer, Booking.com

As an organisation that predominantly specialises in providing individuals with technical coaching after a career break - to refresh their skills and abilities - we cannot overemphasise the power that comes with shifting their mindset. Technical skills are easily taught, or in a Returner's case, refreshed. But if self-belief is low (which it often is) progress may be hampered. It is extremely common for Returners to join our programmes with their confidence on the floor, having been out of the workplace for some time and potentially enduring unjustified rejection from previous interviews in which career breaks are not considered valuable.

Career and mindset coaching plays an integral part of the process that leads to Returners being successful in new software engineering roles. When interviewing Returners that are fully integrated in their new workplaces and asking them to reflect on their journey, it is undeniable that career and mindset coaching was that final piece to the puzzle.

"I had pretty much given up on returning to tech, and then Tech Returners threw me a lifeline... the support that I needed; people displaying confidence in me, re-building of my self belief."

Clive, Returner and Software Engineer, DabApps

"The Tech Returner programme let me know that I still have a chance. It gave me a safe place to grow personally and technically and restore my confidence in myself and my abilities."

Marwa, Returner and Software Engineer, Holiday Extras

What Returners bring to businesses

"We started working with Returners, in all honesty, by chance.

We hired someone who had a three year break from work due to ill health and thankfully we overlooked that gap as it became apparent, very quickly upon them joining, that they were someone who was going to add value to the business and our customers' projects."

Chris McKenzie, Head Of Talent and D&I Champion at Daemon

The Returner market consists of experienced and committed software engineers that require some aspects of support around refreshing confidence and technical skills. Once that training and support is provided, and a Returner is in a software engineering role, they contribute, lead and excel. However, the Returner market is largely untapped by businesses despite a constant need for more diverse candidates for the growing number of software engineering vacancies. At present, there is a select group of progressive and inclusive companies that benefit hugely by hiring from this pool of talented individuals.

77% of Returners have <u>at least</u> four to six years of development experience

"With Tech Returners, we can tap into a pool of talent that has a passion for tech and already demonstrated that they have the skills to succeed.

Their prior experience means they are in a strong position to thrive straight away."

Emma Blackburn, Global Senior Talent Mobility Advisor at Booking.com

The value of Returners

Commercial experience

A large majority of Returners bring with them a wealth of commercial experience. Plus, a quarter of Returners we've surveyed have more than 10 years experience in software development.

Diversity of thought

Diversity of thought is important to build successful teams, products and services. It enables a broader range of perspectives in addition to a more accurate understanding and representation of consumers.

Positive retention

We experience Returners as committed and driven. The challenges of re-entering tech often creates a high level of loyalty and willingness to apply their skills and experience for a significant period of time at an organisation that believes in them.

97%

of Returners offered a job with one of our sponsor businesses, were still in role six months later

89%

of Returners offered a job with one of our sponsor businesses, were still in role a year later

"The skills shortage in the technology industry is well documented and as an employer we know we have to be creative in attracting new talent.

This means engaging with people from a wide range of different backgrounds and ensuring that we remove any barriers that might prevent people from taking a job in tech."

Emma Blackburn, Global Senior Talent Mobility Advisor at Booking.com

"During my 10 year gap I sometimes dreamt that I was back working as a software engineer and I often woke up disheartened, as I always felt that I had reached a point of no return.

But my dream turned into a beautiful reality."

Huma, Returner and Software Engineer, Booking.com

A route back to tech

Armed with new skills, a clear vision of career objectives and a desire to learn, Returners like Huma, Charlie and Clive needed a route back into tech.

But it's not as straightforward as it might sound. Refreshing tech skills is one thing, but confidence around interviewing and rejoining a large organisation or team may be low. It's important to nurture all angles of an individual in order to set them up for success in their career. At Tech Returners, we've developed a combined curriculum which focuses on tech and mindset coaching - a combination which produces inspiring results.

Tech

Refreshing in tech

The core concept is in the word 'refresh'. Returners are not taught to code. Instead the focus is on refreshing and renewing past skills, updating on enterprise development frameworks and processes like test driven development, pairing and group work: all in place to ease a transition from a learning environment to a commercial one.

Mindset

Career and mindset coaching

The Career and Mindset curriculum focuses on addressing the unique challenges Returners navigate when coming back to their dream career. From rebuilding their confidence, improving their self awareness and resilience, to refreshing their communication and teamwork skills, the Returners are prepared to pass interviews and succeed in their new role.

Beyond coaching, there are considerations which make a Returner's route back to tech more comfortable and realistic. This goes further than a 'programme' that a Returner can enrol on, stretching on into the future workplace.

Inclusivity

A sense of belonging

It is important that Returners recognise people like themselves and feel welcome within potential new workplaces or Returner programmes. When confidence is low, a sense of safety, inclusive ways of working and gender-neutral language goes a long way in allowing individuals to step into their potential.

Flexibility

Considering circumstance

A post-pandemic shift has happened within the workplace and more often than not, it benefits Returners. Breaking down rigid ways of working has become the norm for many businesses and employees. It's important to consider your ways of working because, for Returners, flexibility may be a necessity.

"What I needed..."

Don't take our word for it. The Returners we interviewed are acutely aware of what was necessary to ensure a successful and confident return to the tech industry.

Charlie, a Consultant Software Engineer at Daemon, needed...

- Technical training in the current technologies specific to the role being applied for
- Training on how businesses utilise tech in how they work today, especially remotely
- Training and support with building up confidence, and preparing for interviews

Paul, a Software Engineer at The Guardian, needed...

- A solid relearning program (in React rather than Angular)

- Access to unbiased interviews where commercial experience was not the foremost pre-requisite rather the ability to learn

Laura, a Software Engineer at Booking.com, needed...

- Support in changing her perspective and attitude

- To rebuild confidence and embrace a growth attitude about work and everyday life
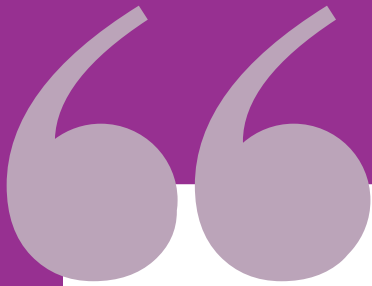
"The industry is constantly changing and advancing and there may be concerns from both employers and Returners that they have been 'left behind' during their time out of work.

While we are always pioneering new advancements we know many of the fundamentals remain the same, so their existing skills and knowledge give them the foundations that we can quickly build on with the right support and training."

Booking.com

The Impact

Over the last 12 months, we have been gathering data which demonstrates the true impact and value of Returner talent: from increasing diversity within teams to bringing a wealth of experience to software engineer roles.

62%

of Returners on our programmes are people of colour

59%

of those who completed the Returner Programme identify as women

72%

of Returners who identify as women are proficient in agile development

1 in 4

Returners who identify as women, have leadership experience

Diverse talent

Opening the business door to Returner talent brings with it many benefits. As an organisation with technical teams, it's no secret that building a diverse team of software engineers can feel like an impossible task. However, the Returner demographic is exactly that: diverse.

With a high percentage of participants on our Returner programme being women and people of colour, we've seen tech teams go from strength to strength as they recruit talented individuals from different backgrounds that bring with them diversity of thought.

Strong foundations

Chris McKenzie, Head of Talent and D&I Champion at Daemon shares his experience of hiring a group of Returners into the tech consultancy.

"One of the things that has been great to see is how quickly they have adapted to returning to a career in tech. Each Returner has their own story, with some having not worked at all in many years, but that hasn't stopped them.

Some have been working on our internal engineering frameworks projects, some have gone to work in a Daemon team on customer projects and a handful have continued their development in the form of training and certifications. However, all have added value to our culture since joining."

Returner impact

In addition to the aforementioned business benefits of recruiting from the Returner pool, there is an undeniable impact that is made to people's lives through supporting their return to tech. Providing an opportunity to refresh tech skills and demonstrate value to a business can literally turn a life around, rebuild self-belief and act as a catalyst to positive change.

92%
of Returners reported an increase in confidence post-programme

The UK economy also benefits from Returner employment as we see more and more Returners hired into permanent roles. During their time out, or period of searching for opportunities, some Returners may be receiving financial support from the UK Government. Once in permanent employment, the need for financial support ends and individuals gain autonomy and independence through a salary. In addition, the UK economy benefits from another person in employment.

£18,483
is the average increase in salary for Returners when hired post-programme

In 2022, our 'Your Return to Tech' programme generated salaries totalling

£2.5 million

Changing a life

Shahzadi Saira Awan arrived in England from Pakistan with her young son in 2018. She came to the UK, seeking asylum as a survivor of domestic abuse. Her status and parental responsibilities meant that getting a job as a software engineer was very challenging. She found our 'Your Return to Tech' programme, applied and successfully secured her place.

"My refugee status meant I faced a lot of challenges trying to find a job. I worked in a number of voluntary roles but needed a job with an income to support myself and my son. I knew I had desirable tech skills but opportunities were hard to come by.

Tech Returners helped me to refresh my skills and gave me the confidence to go back into the workplace.

Shahzadi completed the programme, interviewed with Booking.com and on the day she was offered the job of a software engineer at one of the most exciting travel tech companies in the world, she was also officially offered asylum in the UK as a permanent resident.

Since I joined the Booking.com team in June, they have been flexible around my childcare needs and supportive of me in every way.

Recently I attended a conference in Amsterdam with my son – the small things make a big difference in making sure I can progress my career."

Businesses can hire diverse, experienced tech teams and change lives. All in one go.

What we're working on now

Let's take a look at what the everyday working lives of our Returners look like now...

Marcus

"I'm thrilled about my new position as a consultant software engineer. My projects use Java, Spring, AWS, Docker and Kubernetes.

There is opportunity to learn Python & Go.

Since joining, I've passed the AWS Certified Cloud Practitioner exam and am currently studying for the AWS Solutions Architect Associate exam."

Laura

"I work in a backend role that is invisible to customers and often to other teams as well, but it's actually the core of the business! It's where everything happens, under the hood, and it's so rewarding.

It's an extraordinary moment to be part of the travel business."

"Our Tech Returner employees work in a variety of frontend and backend tech roles across our engineering departments such as insurance, cars and data engineering.

Each team is different and to support each employee with their development and progression within the business, they all have a mentor outside of their team, along with their buddy and manager within their team and self paced learning resources they can access at a time that suits them."

Emma Blackburn, Booking.com

"I can barely recognise the person I used to be.

They taught me I can achieve my goals, even those I thought were unreachable, one step at a time."

Laura, Software Engineer, Booking.com

Recommendations

Having delved into the authentic experiences of Returners, showcased their expertise and understood the support they seek, there are recommendations which businesses can consider in order to begin or ramp up the hiring of diverse, accomplished talent like Returners.

Be open

Speaking to Chris McKenzie, Head of Talent at Daemon, he highlights how it's important to look at the potential of the Returner, rather than the person you meet at the beginning of the hiring process:

"These people are typically lacking confidence due to the stigma that is attached to gaps in career but with the coaching and mentoring we have seen that they will develop at a quicker rate than some of the people we have hired at the same level through the perceived 'traditional' hiring process."

Review your hiring process

If your hiring processes haven't been reviewed for some time, before trying to appeal to the Returner demographic, we'd recommend reviewing how your organisation approaches recruitment as a whole. Is it an inclusive process? Here are some questions you can ask to establish how to make it so:

- Are you communicating about your diversity and inclusion initiatives?
- Do you have flexible working in place?
- Do you check your job descriptions in a language decoder to eliminate bias and use language/terminology that's inclusive to all?
- When detailing role requirements, do you focus on the human 'real' skills that are transferable?
- Are your hiring tasks inclusive? For example, a take-home tech task is more inclusive than an on-the-spot task, particularly for neurodivergent people or those who struggle in pressured situations.
- Are your hiring managers naturally curious and able to ask the right questions to get the best out of individuals?

These are considerations that could make all the difference when hiring - not only Returners - but diverse engineers in general.

Look into the gap

There is little to no point considering interviewing Returners if your hiring team have rigid or negative preconceptions about career breaks.

Companies that look into that gap and are curious to learn what the individual achieved, learnt and experienced in their time away from tech, will see the real value and expertise that they could add to their organisation. Instead, be inquisitive and don't feed the stigma. If we hadn't explored career breaks we wouldn't have learnt that Returners used their break to become a helicopter pilot, a figure skater or fought back from a life-threatening illness.

Partner up

It's not always easy or even feasible to start a Returner recruitment strategy alone! Collaboration is a key way we see businesses and Returners succeed in hiring long-term. Speak to businesses that are leading the way with Returner recruitment such as Daemon, The Guardian, Booking.com, On the Beach and BAE Systems DI. There is enough Returner talent to go around. Alternatively, partnering up with organisations that specialise in coaching and mentoring Returners to get to a stage where they are up to date and interview-ready is a great way to get the support that your hiring team needs.

Take a flexible approach

Speaking to Emma Blackburn at Booking.com, she shares how essential it is to create an environment that considers both work and life.

"An important way to harness talent is to create an environment that enables Returners to balance a successful career with their responsibilities outside of work, such as childcare. These challenges can often be the reason people take a career break in the first place, so businesses must find a way to help Returners navigate them. Every Returner will have different needs, so it is important for employers to be flexible and tailor their support as far as possible and create an environment that welcomes and values people who have had a break from Tech."

"Returners are overlooked in traditional talent acquisition due to the perception and the biases people may have. I encourage everyone to think about the value a Returner can bring to your business: previous experience, transferable skills, diversity of thought and the ability to create value and make an impact instantly."

Beckie Taylor, CEO and Co-founder of Tech Returners
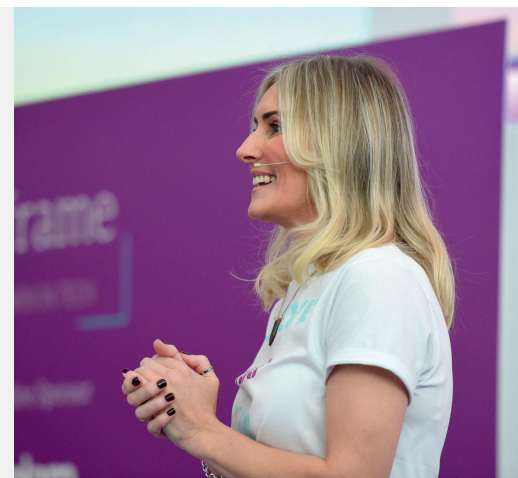
About Tech Returners

Tech Returners is an inclusive, positive and empowering organisation. We provide skilled tech professionals returning to the industry with inclusive opportunities to refresh their skills.

We work with sponsor businesses to identify hiring needs, and deliver our 'Your Return to Tech' programme at no cost to the Returner. This programme provides coaching, resources and development tools to support software engineers to refresh, get interview-ready and return to their careers in technology.

Our organisation is committed to removing the barriers which Returners face after career breaks. Simultaneously, we tackle the digital skills shortage by empowering skilled people back into technology careers. We provide continuous support on their journeys - all the way through technology and into leadership.

Thank you to our 2022 hiring partners:

The Guardian

DAEMON

On the Beach

BAE SYSTEMS

Booking.com

checkout.com

holiday extras

If you would like to enquire about sponsoring a 'Your Return to Tech' programme, please get in touch below:

www.techreturners.com

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References:

- [Tech Nation People and Skills Report 2022](#)
- [Fawcett Society: Equal Pay Day Report 2020 report](#)
- [TechMonitor: UK tech job vacancies grow 191% but skills shortage still hampers recruitment](#)
- [Gov.uk press release: New report shows STEM workers twice as likely to miss job opportunities due to lack of skills](#)
- [Robert Walters: SOLVING THE UK SKILLS SHORTAGE](#)
- [Spiceworks: How Digital Transformation Impacts Technical Skills Gap](#)
- [BCS State of the Nation Report](#)
- [HR Review: Over a Third of Working Mothers Struggle to Adjust When Returning From Maternity Leave](#)
- [www.unleash.ai Over 50 are fearful about career break stigma](#)
- [FastCompany.com: Taking a Career Hiatus is now perfectly okay](#)
- [Linkedin Talent Blog: LinkedIn Members Can Now Spotlight Career Breaks on Their Profiles](#)

If you have any questions regarding the content within this report, please contact hello@techreturners.com.

Thank you to the businesses that saw potential and invested in Returner talent. We appreciate how you worked tirelessly on welcoming and integrating Returners into their new workplaces.

Thank you to individuals who were brave in seizing an opportunity to get back to your career. We acknowledge your commitment and unwavering courage throughout the Your Return to Tech programme and in your new roles.

We thank you for your continued support in our efforts to support a diverse and inclusive technology industry.

Contact

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