

BBC and Sky back 'returners'

Broadcasters set up schemes to help women get back into work after taking a career break

BY JESSICA GOODFELLOW

The BBC and Sky are turning to 'returnships' as a tool to help tackle their gender pay gaps.

The broadcasters are the first in the industry to link up with Women Returners, a consulting network that helps experienced professionals who have taken a career break of two or more years – to look after children or elderly relatives – return to work.

Sky is offering five placements for leadership roles across its advertising, sport, technology, finance and product departments, while the BBC's returner programme will offer mid-to-senior roles in its design and engineering department, including technical architects and software engineers.

The BBC roles will be based in its London, Salford or Glasgow offices. The six-month paid placements start in November and January respectively, with returners encouraged to apply for permanent roles following their placement.

The programmes are also open to men, although 89% of those taking a career break are women, according to the ONS.



The Replacement: BBC thriller was based around maternity cover

If you bring in women in leadership roles, that can significantly impact your gender pay gap

JULIANNE MILES
WOMEN RETURNERS

Women Returners co-founder Julianne Miles said the schemes are a shortcut to rebalancing businesses' gender diversity. "If you bring in women in leadership roles – which is normally where the issue is – then even a small number of appointments can significantly improve your gender pay gap," she added.

The TV industry's average pay gap was 14.8% for the year 2016/17 – broadly in line with the 14.5% national average. The pay gaps at Sky (11.5%) and the BBC (10.7%) were among the lowest in the sector.

Miles, who took a four-year career break before training as a business psychologist, said the goal for returner programmes is to mirror graduate schemes and become part of the annual recruitment process.

"These are not programmes to help out women, they are about bringing strong, diverse talent into your organisation, driven by your business needs," she said.

Recruitment processes often screen out candidates without recent experience, while returners can suffer from a loss of confidence, leading them to apply for more junior roles, Miles said.

Three in five professional women return to lower-skilled or lower-paid jobs after a career break, according to research Women Returners conducted with consultant PWC.

Sky head of women in leadership Tamara Kaye said its returner programme will recognise that talent extends beyond a CV.

"We developed this programme specifically to access what we know is a high-calibre but relatively untapped talent pool," Kaye added.

BBC design and engineering IIR business partner Sue Mosley, who joined the department in April with a remit to improve its gender diversity, said the scheme will address a lack of women in technology roles.

"We have a shared issue with so many other organisations who struggle to attract women into technology roles," she said in a blog announcing the initiative. "We all have to work together and take the necessary steps to change that." ☺

Pact briefs indies on improving cast diversity

BY JESSICA GOODFELLOW

Pact is to brief indies on inclusive casting practices as part of a drive to help embed diversity into the production process.

The trade body held a pilot briefing with 10 scripted indies in July, during which it highlighted the practical tools available to aid inclusive casting. These include Neropa, a piece of software created by German actor and researcher Belinde Ruth Stieve, which identifies gender-neutral parts in scripts.

Other measures include allowing disabled candidates to record audition tapes at home, and



Diverse talent: Paralympian Arthur Williams in Flying Across Britain

flexible casting calls for lower-income candidates.

The two-hour workshop, which took place at Hat Trick's Camden office, covered disability, gender, ethnicity, authenticity

and accessibility, and will form the framework for further sessions with unscripted producers, scheduled to take place over the next three months. The workshop was created with support from the BBC, TriForce Creative Network, trade union Equity and the ERA 50:50 campaign.

Endemol Shine UK head of online scripted video Cristen Caine, who attended the inaugural workshop, called it "refreshingly practical".

"It is interesting to see how reversing the casting assumptions can help make a show stand out," she added.

Pact head of diversity Anjani Patel said the workshop forms

part of the trade body's broader ambition to embed diversity and inclusion in production practices.

"We hope to empower producers – and the wider industry – to continue to take positive action by providing practical solutions and tools," she said.

She added that Pact will not issue strict guidelines for inclusive casting due to the nuances of the process.

"Casting is not a one-size-fits-all approach, every genre works in a different way and it depends on what the writer has laid out," she said. "All we are trying to do is give producers the framework so they can create their own strategies." ☺