

Women Buoyed up to Return to Work at the Women Returners Conference 2019

London, 15 May 2019 – This year's third annual Women Returners conference, supported by 30% Club, was hosted on Monday 13 May at Rooms on Regents Park.

The sold-out event welcomed 200 women with a professional background returning to work after multi-year career breaks and was sponsored by 10 leading employers: BBC Design & Engineering, Bloomberg, Credit Suisse, EY, FDM Group, Fidelity International, J.P. Morgan, Morgan Stanley, O2 and St James's Place Academy.

The keynote speaker was BBC Woman's Hour broadcaster Jane Garvey, who urged women to put themselves forward and "Big themselves up more!" as a group of skilled, experienced individuals who bring value to the UK job market.

Women Returners is the leading UK champion of getting women professionals back into work after an extended career break. A social business, they work with individual returners and employers to achieve their mission. They run a free professional network to provide a large-scale support system, community and guidance on successful re-entry into a corporate career.

Women Returners also partners with top employers to create supported routes back to mid-senior level roles and has led the introduction of 'returnships' and 'supported hiring' returner programmes into the UK and Ireland.

Returner programmes are becoming ever more essential to the economy as businesses recognise the benefit of employing highly-skilled, educated individuals with sought-after experience and industry knowledge. The 'returnship' market grew from three programmes in 2014 to involve over 60 employers in 2018, in response to market demand.

The profile of the Conference attendees demonstrates the high-calibre of this talent pool. 98% were graduates and 72% had postgraduate degrees and/or professional qualifications. 37% had 15+ years of pre-break work experience, 30% had 10-14 years, and 24% had 5-9 years.

Despite this calibre, the need for returner programmes was evident in the stories of the returner panel at the Conference, demonstrating the bias in traditional recruitment against older candidates without recent experience. An HR returner with over 30 years' experience called the EY returnship a 'lifesaver', as she had previously applied for 500 roles with only one interview. Yemi, a Strategic Programme Manager said she had felt her career was over at 52 after a five-year break before returning to work on the Enfield Council returnship.

This year's conference featured panel sessions from conference sponsors on why they are targeting returner hires, as well as from returners explaining how they personally got back into the workforce. There were also practical sessions on developing career direction (your 'Career Compass'), boosting professional

confidence, self-marketing and writing CVs, together with the opportunity for returners to network with each other and the sponsoring organisations.

Julianne Miles, Co-Founder and CEO of Women Returners, commented:

“The business case for getting professional women back into suitable-level roles is undeniable. These women are highly skilled and experienced, providing a wealth of knowledge and a fresh perspective to an organisation. I’m excited that so many leading employers are starting to recognise and support this substantial talent pool, helping us to realise the full potential of UK business and the economy.”

The appeal of partnering with Women Returners for employers is the expert help they receive in accessing and supporting this attractive pool of talent, enabling them to create returner programmes which work effectively for both the business and the returners.

Returner attendees said:

“After 18 years at home I no longer feel so lost at sea. I’ve a lot of work to do but I feel buoyed up now on this journey.”

“This was a very inspiring day. Ever since I discovered Women Returners I have gone from hopeless to dynamic, with a clear mission of returning to work.”

“After the Conference, my To Do list got longer, but hope is restored and my motivation levels are high!”

“If there was a day that could change mindsets, empower and embolden great women to enter the workplace and employers to search for them, then this was it.”

“Women Returners has offered me a lifeline as I embark on my return to work”

Tace Houston, Executive Director, Head of Learning & Development for Asset and Wealth Management, EMEA at J.P. Morgan, said: “Women Returners is an exceptional initiative and the conference this week provided a huge amount of food for thought. From a business perspective, it’s a very valuable resource and underlines our sense that there is still a huge pool of untapped talent out there that businesses would benefit from.”

Justine Campbell, Managing Partner for Talent, EY UK&I, which sponsored the Conference and partners with Women Returners, said: “EY is proud to sponsor this year’s Women Returners Conference as it provides brilliant people who have taken a career break with an opportunity to learn, connect with and be inspired by like-minded individuals and employers. We have seen first-hand how diverse teams working in an inclusive environment can drive better business performance. That’s why, through EY Reconnect, our own returnship programme, we are committed to creating more career opportunities for those re-entering the workplace after an extended break.”

Sheila Flavell, COO at FDM Group, which sponsored the Conference and works with Women Returners, said: “It is becoming increasingly important that organisations realise the full potential of returners. Currently, many businesses are not doing enough to tap into this network of highly-skilled, motivated individuals that are keen to develop exciting new careers. FDM is excited to have the opportunity to sponsor the Women Returners conference to promote this cause as it’s exceptionally close to our hearts. We run our Getting Back to Business campaign to help provide support for women and men returning to work after a career break and encourage confidence when moving into a new career path.”

Fari Rome, EMEA Diversity & Inclusion Manager at Morgan Stanley, which sponsored the Conference and works with Women Returners, said: “The Women Returners conference is such a valuable event for engaging with experienced professionals interested in rejoining the workforce after a career break. We’re proud to be a sponsor of this unique event that succeeded in both informing and inspiring this diverse audience. It was valuable for us to have the opportunity to connect with this group and to educate them on the various opportunities available at Morgan Stanley. Not only is this the sixth year of Morgan Stanley’s London Return to Work programme, but we are excited to be welcoming returners directly into permanent opportunities through our supported hiring efforts.”

Jason Flood, Academy Director at St. James’s Place, which sponsored the Conference and works with Women Returners, said: “We are delighted our association with The Women Returners’ events is giving us an opportunity to connect with women who should be candidates for our two-year career change and development programme. The events and Women Returners network attract women with a variety of backgrounds who are highly professional and determined to rejoin the UK economy. The key to their success will be using their very many transferable skills and the support of organisations like Women Returners UK.

Ann Pickering, HR Director and Chief of Staff, O2, which sponsored the Conference and works with Women Returners, said: “Business needs to wake up to the power of returnships. Not only are they the right thing to do to help address gender inequality in the workplace, they also have a real business benefit. Our Career Returners programme has been running for three years and seen a 300% increase in applications since launch - helping address a skills shortage in our business, particularly in operations. I’m proud to support the Women Returners Conference, which champions a huge pool of talented women out there. I’d encourage all of my HR peers to look seriously at returnships too.”

Brenda Trenowden, Global Chair of the 30% Club, which supported the Women Returners Conference, commented: “We see returner programmes as a key means of refilling the female executive pipeline to senior levels in organisations. We are encouraged by the increasing focus that corporates are putting on accessing this neglected talent pool, demonstrated by the rapid growth of returnships and the popularity of the Women Returners Conference among both returners and employers.”