

## Transitions Stakeholders Seminar #24

# Returner Programmes: Engineering, Architecture and Business Services Talent

**Seminar objective:** *to share good practice and challenges related to Returner Programmes aimed at attracting diverse talent (including refugee professionals) and filling skills gaps*

### Group discussions

#### Objectives:

- To assist participants to reflect on what they've heard
- To assist employers in considering skilled refugees for inclusion in Returner Programmes
- To share good practice and challenges related to Returner Programmes

### 1. Candidates and employers: what do you hope to gain from a Returner Programme?

#### Candidates:

- To overcome the technical gap as a result of changes in the industry while being out of work
- To refresh skills in doing calculations, especially using software when used to doing hand calculations
- Hands-on, real-life experience which reduces impact of gap in employment
- Increased confidence
- Break cultural barriers
- Understand the UK workplace
- Be able to continue what can often be an already lengthy career
- Learn terminology and technical vocabulary
- Relevant UK work experience
- Boost to CV
- Support around language, networking and coaching

#### Employers:

- Accessing people with a strong work ethic
- Diverse candidates with diverse experiences
- Talent Diversity Inclusion: work force will be more inclusive

### 2. Candidates and employers: what makes a good Returner Programme? How can the success of a Returner Programme be measured?

- The team and line management need to be invested in a Returner Programme
- Companies should be aware of refugee status and what it means
- Candidate should be doing the right work and with the right manager

- A good programme enables the candidate to give back and add value and output
- Candidates should be open to constructive feedback and understand there may be lots of things to learn, even if very experienced in home country
- A programme should be for a least 6 months, not just a few weeks, in order to be able to understand the business
- A programme should benefit the client and focus on the individual (mentoring for example). It's not a way of getting cheap labour.
- Include reverse mentoring
- Share best practice with other companies
- Measuring: establish KPIs at start of programme
- Measuring: share info about which Placemetees were offered permanent roles, and after how long
- Measuring: measure soft outcomes

**3. Employers: If you are already running a Returner Programme, or considering running one in the future, what do you want to see from a Returner Placemetees? How can you ensure your Returner Programme is open to different types of Returner?**

- Employers want to candidates to take the time to research a company, demonstrate a genuine in it and the desire to work for it. This includes being aware of the company's values.
- Open and honest communication is beneficial for all.
- Employers should realistic re. what is on offer and being asked for.
- To ensure a Programme is open to different types of Returner employers should realise that skills are transferable.
- Nothing needs to be different, would ask for same type of skills and qualities as from any other candidate
- Sharing case studies and success studies encourages applications
- Programme should be open, flexible, not rigid

**4. Candidates and employers:**

**Is there anything specific to refugees that would be useful to include in a Returner Programme?**

- Support around security clearance for roles which require it (e.g. info security)
- Awareness of meaning of Leave to Remain and refugee status
- Ability to have Chartered status from Institute overseas recognised as level footing with UK level
- Support: financial, pastoral, language, culture
- Provide a technical buddy or mentor
- Assistance in developing a network

**What challenges may refugee returners face that other groups may not?**

- To keep professional experience and knowledge going so there are no gaps in the CV.
- Changing mindsets, educating employers
- Some tools are difficult to access if you're a refugee
- For some roles you need to be a British citizen or have a DBS certificate

**5. Employers: How can line managers and buddies of Returner Placemetees best be supported by the wider business?**

- Establish available support for staff before starting the programme
- Webinars, training to prepare staff
- Educating staff on the benefits of having a diverse workforce
- Allow placemetees to get used to the culture, give them a mentor

Natalie Desty of [STEM Returners](#) was unable to attend the seminar, but kindly emailed with a summary of the key issues she encounters when working on Returner Placements:

- *Not getting the buy in from hiring managers who ultimately make the decision*
- *Lack of unconscious bias awareness before the programme starts*
- *Having a definitive of what a returner looks like- returners are very diverse- returning mums/ dads/ people returning from caring, redundancy, graduates who might be neuro-diverse, candidates with experience from other countries, candidates returning from illness- don't just target one group such as 'returning mums'*
- *Not being open minded in how skills can be transferred*
- *Don't recruit to job specs- which tend to rule people out rather than in!*
- *Have a perm role in mind- work experience is useful but the returner ends up in the same position 3 months later if no ongoing role is available.*

Natalie says: "Broadly the programmes have been hugely successful with 97% of people going in to perm work - for us this is what it is all about - returning people permanently."