



▶ Applied

# How to **End** Career Gap Discrimination

#DontMindThe **Career** Gap

in partnership with

WOMEN  RETURNERS

THE RETURN TO WORK SPECIALISTS

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 Applied

**Career gaps can  
make a person –  
but break  
a career**

#DontMindThe  Career Gap



# It's time for change...

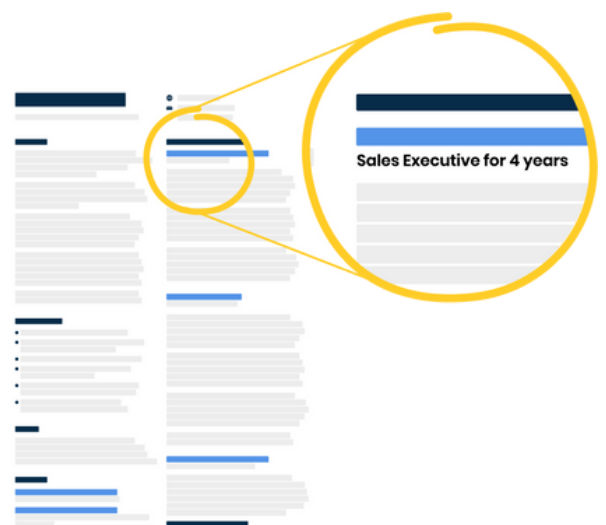
## About Applied and Women Returners

At Applied we champion ethical and inclusive hiring. At Women Returners, the team is on a mission to remove the career break penalty. We both believe unconscious bias has no place in recruitment - and that every candidate has the right to be judged based on their skills.

That's why we've joined forces to campaign to end the stigma surrounding career gaps this Autumn. And we've created this guide to help you do just that.

## What's the big deal about 'career gaps'?

'Career gaps' (which we define as six months or more out of work) have long been associated with a lack of ambition or a lapse in skills. This is despite the fact that according to our research, 51% of people with career gaps believe they gained new or transferable skills during their break. Yet the stigma persists and continues to hold people back.



A LinkedIn survey also found that 57% of working mothers feel that taking time out of work for childcare wasn't in fact a "choice". This is why it's critical that we create inclusive routes back into work for people with career gaps.

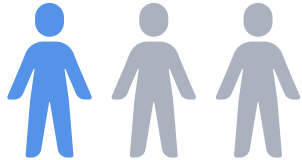
We also found that childcare is the most common reason for taking a career break: a responsibility which is more likely to fall on women.

According to our survey, 38% of women with career gaps took time out to fulfil childcare responsibilities, compared to just 11% of men.



# Results from our survey

1 in 3 Brits have had a career gap of 6 months or more



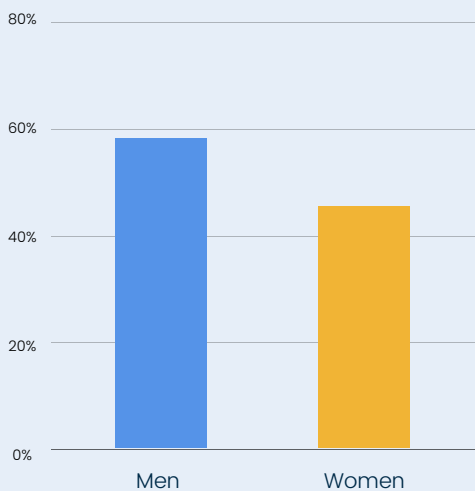
59% of C-suite executives have had a career cap of 6 months or more.



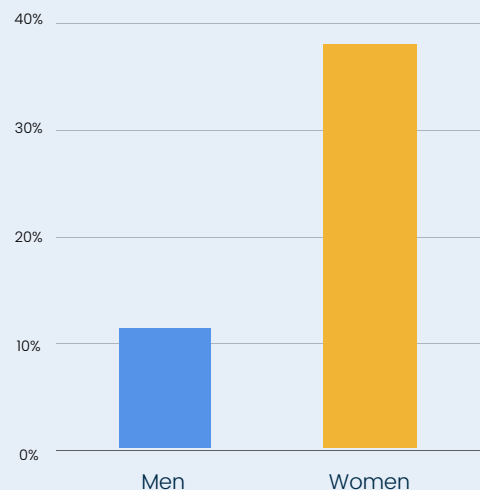
53% said they would feel more confident applying for a job if they didn't have to share their career gap, rising to 77% amongst C-Level Executives



58% of men believed they gained new or transferable skills during their career gap, compared to 45% of women



38% of women said childcare was the main reason for their career gap, vs. 11% of men



For men, mental or physical health was the most common reason for taking a career break, cited by 23% of male respondents compared to 18% of women



# An opportunity to end the stigma

## Enough is enough

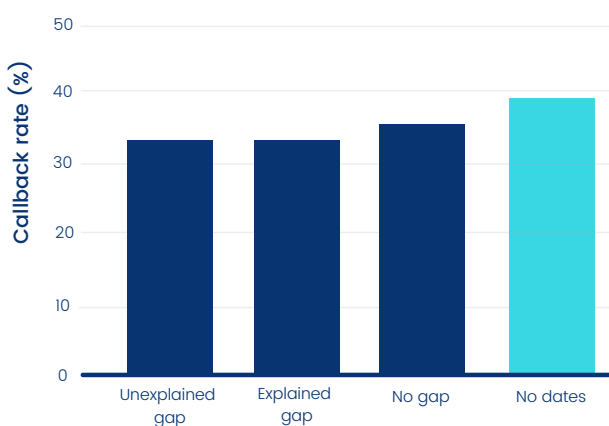
Whether you've taken time out of work to have a baby, are recovering from illness or have travelled the world, we believe you should never have to discuss or justify your career gap to an employer.

We're launching #DontMindTheCareerGap in partnership with Women Returners to change how employers assess candidates' employment histories, so that unconscious bias around career gaps doesn't impact who gets hired.

At Applied, we recognise that people take time out of work for many reasons and that a gap on a CV does not equal a lack of skills or ambition. We want to ensure all candidates entering and returning to the workforce are given an equal chance. So, we're asking employers to assess employment histories 'blind'.

This means evolving the application process so that candidates aren't asked to specify the dates attached to their previous roles, but to disclose the 'number of years' they spent in each role instead. For example, instead of saying they worked in a job from February 2020 to April 2022, they'd say they worked in that job for two years.

### How removing career dates on CVs can improve callback rates:



We know that this works. Research from the government's Behavioural Insights Team found that when CV dates are replaced with number of years experience, call-back rates for candidates improved by 14% compared to candidates with an 'explained' or 'unexplained' gap on their CV. This is one of the best ways to end the stigma around career gaps at its source. It's as simple as that.

# How to end career gap discrimination... for good.

It's easier than you think to remove unconscious bias from your recruitment process. And ending the stigma around career gaps is an important place to start.

The first step to moving the dial is to stop asking candidates to disclose the start and end dates attached to their previous roles. Just ask them how long they were in each role for instead. This means candidates cannot be screened out early due to unconscious bias about their break away from work.

## Step 1: Get your team on board

Meaningful change requires company-wide buy-in.

Depending on the size of your organisation and your level of seniority, set a meeting with relevant colleagues to discuss your proposed changes to your recruitment process. There are lots of useful facts, figures and ideas in this guide to help you make a business case for embracing career returners. Women Returners can also offer support and guidance to employers interested in embracing candidates with career breaks.



#DontMindThe  
Career Gap



## Step 2: Review and update how you're currently asking candidates to submit job applications

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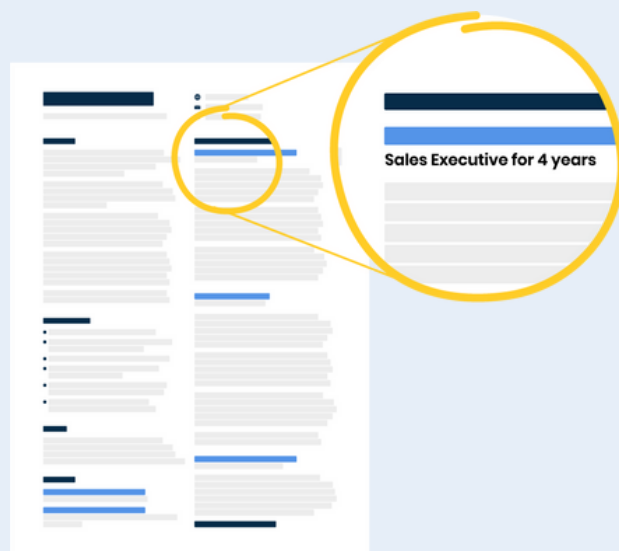
Every company is different and will have its own system for receiving and assessing job applications. Often, companies will ask candidates to fill out an online form powered by a specialist portal, whilst also asking them to attach a separate CV and cover letter. Review the system you're using and identify the section where candidates are asked to submit information about their previous employers.

Edit this section (or ask the person responsible to make the agreed changes) so that rather than asking candidates to specify the dates attached to each of their former roles, they need only disclose the number of years they were in each role for. Career gaps be gone!

## Step 3: Review how you ask for CVs

It's all well and good executing Step 2. But if candidates are still submitting CVs with dates that highlight career gaps, the job is only half done.

If/when you ask candidates to upload their CV, make it clear in your instructions that they should remove the dates attached to previous roles and simply state the number of years they were in each role for instead. You might also wish to explain why this is. This will help you ensure your process is watertight and the playing field is levelled.



## Step 4: Check the entire application process for consistency - and use 'structured' interviews that focus on skills

Review your entire application process in the round to ensure there are no other instances where candidates are being asked about whether they've taken or are planning to take a career break. (This doesn't apply if you're advertising a role specifically for returners as part of a Returner Programme - see page 8). This means reviewing your interview questions, too, ensuring all candidates are being asked the same set of questions (we call this a 'structured' interview) designed to test for skills. Rather than focusing on career history and experience, you should be using the interview to give candidates opportunities to demonstrate role-relevant skills that qualify them for the job in question.

# What else can you do to make your hiring process fairer?

## Anonymise applications

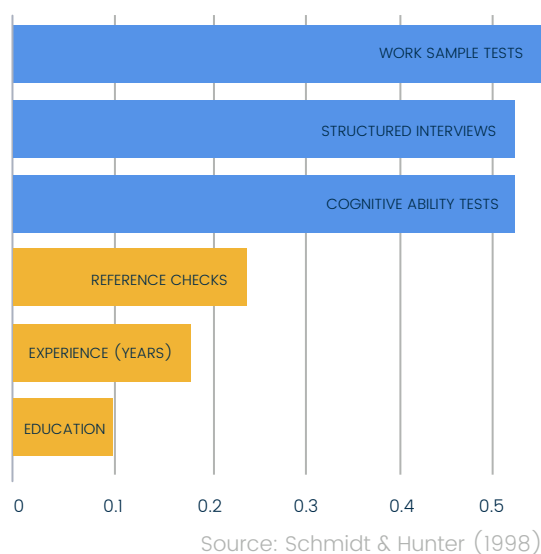
Since most bias is unconscious, the most effective way to reduce its effects is to simply remove any identifying information - names, photos, addresses etc - from the application process.

In one of the earliest trials of anonymous hiring, orchestras managed to double the number of women getting through auditions by doing auditions from behind a curtain.



## Use predictive assessments to test for skills, not experience

Predictive validity of assessment methods



Removing dates from CVs is a solid step in the right direction... but it's just the tip of the iceberg.

The truth is: someone's education and experience don't tell us very much about how they'll actually perform on the job...

And socioeconomic background plays a significant role in where someone studies and works.

So, we recommend testing directly for skills using work sample questions, rather than making judgements based on proxies on CVs.



Proven to be 3x more predictive than CVs – work samples are job-specific questions designed to test how a candidate would think and perform in the role.

They simulate small parts of the job by getting candidates to think as if they were already in the role.

### Question

After working for our company for a couple of months, you've started identifying some frequent needs and features loved by customers.

What would you do in order to create value from this information? What skills from members of other teams do you think would complement your own skillset to maximise this value?

Customer Success Manager

### Skills / Aptitudes

Strategic thinking

Initiative

Communication

Teamwork

Try asking candidates 3-5 work sample questions either alongside or instead of your usual CV process.

### Use review panels

On average, collective judgment is more accurate than that of an individual.

So, by inviting other team members to review candidates, you're more likely to find the best possible person for the job.

Three is the magic number of reviewers – after this you'll likely see diminishing returns as groupthink starts to cloud individual decision making.



60% of people hired through Applied's work sample process would've been missed in a traditional CV sift.

And whilst there might be some candidates who stand out on paper and deliver in real life, many gems are hidden. By looking past background and career gaps and skipping straight to skills-based assessments, you're likely to find talent that you would otherwise have missed out on.

To data-fuel your decision-making, try scoring candidates' answers using a simple scale and a rough-and-ready scoring matrix.

Your criteria doesn't need to be too detailed, just bullet point what a good, bad and average answer would look like.

What should candidates have taken into consideration? Should they be scored higher if they've done their research?



### Communication

Proposed actions are blunt

### Empathy

Doesn't give room to discuss further, with little sensitivity to the circumstances

### Creativity

Does not provide solutions

### Prioritisation

Does not have a clear plan



### Communication

Attempts to provide context for stakeholders

### Empathy

Begins to acknowledge the difficulties, little sensitivity

### Creativity

Provides some solutions

### Prioritisation

Has a plan, but it isn't clear or fully logical



### Communication

Provides context for the stakeholders

### Empathy

Awareness of the potential difficulties

### Creativity

Provides creative options

### Prioritisation

Logical and balanced

A Returner Programme is a supported route back to work specifically for candidates who have taken a career break

Removing the start and end dates attached to employment histories will ensure candidates with career breaks do not face unconscious bias or an implicit disadvantage during the CV screening process.

A Returner Programme is another approach, which enables employers to actively seek out career returners and their skill sets – and offer support and mentoring to help returners successfully transition back into work.

You can still recruit for Returner Programme roles using the principles of an ethical and skills-based recruitment process outlined in this guide.

For more information on implementing a Returner Programme, visit [womenreturners.com](https://www.womenreturners.com).



# The business case for embracing career returners

Not only is building an ethical and inclusive recruitment process the right thing to do, it also makes business sense. Candidates that are returning to work following a career break bring myriad skills, experiences and insights that bring immeasurable value to organisations. Here are some of the key ways in which embracing returners should be a business imperative.

## A way to tackle skills-shortages with high-calibre talent

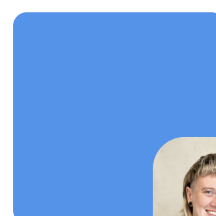
The war for talent is real, with many sectors experiencing an ongoing and chronic shortage of workers. Embracing career returners gives employers access to a diverse, talented and committed pool of candidates who either have the right skills to flourish or could easily be trained to develop them.

## An authentic way to champion age and gender diversity

Given that 89% of people out of paid work caring for family or the home are female, building a recruitment process that's inclusive to candidates with career breaks will have an automatic impact on your female talent pipeline. It will also improve your team's age diversity, by attracting the increasing numbers of older candidates who are looking to 'unretire' and return to work, who possess high levels of skill, maturity and commitment.

## Attracting and retaining great candidates

By embracing and supporting candidates with career gaps, you're demonstrating that you champion skills over experience and recognise that careers are not always linear. You're also demonstrating that you're an organisation that takes diversity seriously. This will have an impact on your talent pipeline, helping you attract and retain strong candidates who support your values.



# Additional information and resources

## Free resources

We've built all of the tools, templates and guides you need to build a fair, data-driven hiring process - all of which are available for free via our resources hub.

[beapplied.com/resources](https://beapplied.com/resources)



## Video library

Browse our extensive library of webinars and videos to deep dive into all things hiring.

[beapplied.com/events](https://beapplied.com/events)

## Returner support

Explore the advice, support and services offered by Women Returners, including specialist advice on how to set up a dedicated Returner Programme.

[womenreturners.com](https://womenreturners.com)

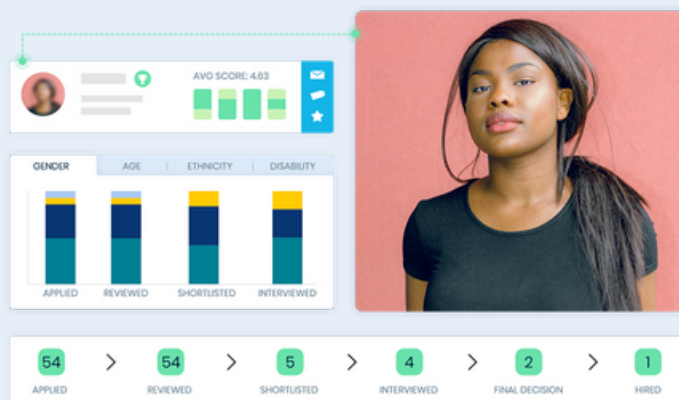


## Ethical and inclusive hiring support

Want to find out how Applied could help transform your hiring?

Take a no-strings-attached tour of our platform via our on-demand demo.

[beapplied.com/applied-on-demand-demo](https://beapplied.com/applied-on-demand-demo)



## Make a pledge

Whether you're an organisation, recruiter or HR professional, you can help us end the stigma around career gaps for good by pledging to assess employment histories blind.

# 305

Have pledged to support us.  
Join them and make your pledge.

Visit our website to make your commitment, and count yourself among our community of career gap supporters.

[Click here to pledge](#)

# Applied is the essential platform for ethical hiring.

Push back against conventional hiring  
wisdom with a smarter solution: visit  
[www.beapplied.com](http://www.beapplied.com) for a FREE demo

