

# News

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## **Our second returnships programme is now open**

Morgan Sindall Construction & Infrastructure has recently opened its second Returnships programme for applications. The initial scheme, which was successfully launched in October 2017, saw more than 90 applicants with a range of skills and experience apply to return to employment after a career break of 18 months or more.

The Morgan Sindall Construction and Infrastructure programme is similar to an internship – an initial three month paid placement will be offered, with a view to securing a permanent position. The placement will serve as a staged return, offering the opportunity for individuals to re-engage with working life, initially on a part to full time basis, all the time developing skills and competencies required to work with a leading UK contractor.

As part of their Returnships programme, the company is looking for people at all levels, who have taken a voluntary career break of at least 18 months or more. Applicants may have left the industry to run their own business, raise children or care for a relative. They may have had an illness themselves which stopped them from working, but are now well enough to return to work.

Historically, the construction and infrastructure industry has been characterised by long working hours, difficult site conditions and a culture which has not always been appealing to those needing to balance family life with a career, or where those from any other background other than white-male have felt that they can feel respected and included. In addition, a national skills shortage in many key areas has meant that roles for many construction companies and their supply chain have been difficult to fill. The Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) has reported that the industry will need to find 157,000 new recruits by 2021 in order to keep up with demand.

Morgan Sindall has recognised this and has received commendation both from within the industry and externally for their strategy to resolve this. A significant part of which has been the Returnships Programme, which has been shortlisted at this year's Working Mums Top Employer Awards for the Best Returnships Programme. The company has also been shortlisted at the same awards in the Best Family Support category – further commendation of the work they have been doing to ensure that once people are employed by the company they feel supported and encouraged to stay within the industry.

One of the many benefits of the Returnships programme is its core message – that at some point in time many people have had to take an unexpected career break and that no one should be penalised for this. In their 2016 report Women Returners, PwC states that three in five professional women return to lower-skilled or lower-paid jobs following their career breaks and resolving this could boost the UK's GDP (Gross Domestic Product) by £1.7 billion.

A significant feature of Morgan Sindall's Returnship programme is that it is not gender specific. Many of the 2017 applicants were male, who for a number of reasons had taken a career break and had received negative reactions from other businesses and recruiters when they wished to return to employment.

This experience was shared by many of the Morgan Sindall applicants, male and female, and many could recall conversations or interviews, where despite years of management and leadership experience, multiple professional qualifications and an ongoing commitment to their development

- even during career breaks - they were simply overlooked due to their career break.

MEng graduate, Linda Pritchard, who applied for the 2017 Returnships programme, had had a varied career including six years in the construction industry, 18 years caring for her children, had retrained and worked as a secondary school teacher, and spent a period of time living in Spain. Linda wanted to return to her roots in civil and environmental engineering, which is one of the industry's skills shortage areas. Linda said, "I am enjoying working in a professional environment, working as part of a team with a real purpose. I take great pride when I tell friends I am working for Morgan Sindall Construction & Infrastructure on the HS2 project and it makes me realise how much I have missed it."

Linda is one of the five people who were offered a place on the programme, all of which are still with the business; and this year Morgan Sindall Construction and Infrastructure hope to offer more roles. HR director, Dawn Moore says, "Our scheme is unique in the industry in that we are open to applications from any gender and we do not post particular roles for people to apply to. This has meant that we have seen a real range of applicants and can be flexible in the way we create or place people into roles that fit their skills and experience."

"Many of our applicants, who decided not to proceed with the Returnships programme have since been placed into roles in the business and it's been very rewarding to see people who may not have previously considered a role in the construction and infrastructure industry thriving in this environment."

Morgan Sindall's Returnship programme as part of its overall diversity strategy has received a number of awards and commendations in the past year. Award wins include, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) - Best Diversity and Inclusion Initiative, the Inspiring Change Awards - Inspiring Change in the Workplace Awards and a commendation at the National Diversity Awards. Morgan Sindall Construction and Infrastructure is also looking forward to the Construction News Talent Awards on November 21, where its commitment to diversity and inclusion has seen them shortlisted in three categories. The company hopes to lead the way in changing external perceptions of the sector from many under-represented groups thanks to its embedded diverse and inclusive culture.

Anyone interested in participating in the Returnships programme can find out more on the Morgan Sindall website - [morgansindallgroupcareers.com/morgansindall/experienced-appointments/returnships/](https://morgansindallgroupcareers.com/morgansindall/experienced-appointments/returnships/). The site also hosts the latest vacancies, so if a Returnship is not appropriate to your situation, available vacancies can also be found here. The closing date for the programme is 31 December 2018.

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