

Broadening the diversity of our new recruits is a key theme as Atkins undertakes ambitious growth plans. This requires recruitment of sufficient new staff to meet our business targets as well as replacing staff turnover. In order to achieve this, we introduced our innovative “flexible working for new hires” into our recruitment plan. HR and recruitment teams worked closely to implement a solution for flexible working that will both attract hires and aid retention, supporting our wider mission to be an employer of choice.

Atkins operates in many different sectors and the majority of its employees have niche skills. For an in-house recruitment team this poses many significant challenges as most, if not all, potential recruits are currently in employment.

For the past eighteen months two of our larger business units have been actively promoting flexible working to prospective employees. They advertised their vacancies as both full time and part time on our website to appeal to a wider audience and all of their job descriptions included the following statement:

“Atkins recognises that there are many well qualified people who are looking to further their career in engineering but who cannot commit to full time employment. We support flexible working arrangements and are interested to discuss how we can accommodate individual requirements.”

However in view of the significant numbers we require to meet our headcount targets, we decided that more work was required to highlight flexible working as a reason to join Atkins.

So, what did we propose?

- New search functionality/content on our careers website. Advertising vacancies as full time/part time didn't seem to fulfil our requirements and get the message across correctly to potential recruits. It felt dated and stigmatising, however that was all our applicant tracking system (Taleo) would allow at the time.
- Video profiles of existing employees who already have successful flexible working agreements in place.
- To gain support from our HR business partner community so that the majority of our business supported our new approach, as opposed to the minority.
- Up skilling our hiring manager community.
- Employee engagement – it was important to remind our current employees that they too can request flexible working and this was not just for new recruits.

Publicity – ensuring we had enough publicity however we did not want to alienate our current employees by raising awareness too much externally and not investing the same time and money raising awareness internally.

Our endeavours have demonstrated that we are prepared to push ahead and offer something new to prospective employees, which should help us stand out from our competitors. If a potential employee has a flexible working agreement in place with their current employer, this should not prevent them from moving elsewhere (as has historically been the case). We want prospective employees to approach us, as we truly believe that flexible working will enhance our attraction activities.

Widening the diversity of our recruits is particularly important to Atkins, however we have chosen to focus on gender diversity as it is a problem faced in the whole Engineering sector. We strongly believe that offering flexible working to new recruits will attract more women to the organisation as well as working dads, who may not be able to secure flexible working with their current employer. We also hope it will help attract more experienced engineers who may be looking to phase their retirement, but cannot do so with their existing employer. This is also extremely important in the engineering sector as we have an ageing population of experienced engineers.

#### Measures of success

Although success is still being measured we are extremely pleased to say we have already had 1,922 visits to our flexible working page since going live with our website. Our suite of videos on our YouTube channel has been viewed 2,007 times and we have been awarded two awards by [workingmums.co.uk](http://workingmums.co.uk) for this particular initiative. We have already had several success stories where we have hired new recruits with flexible working agreements in place from day one, and we will be adding these videos to our YouTube channel in due course.

By the end of the financial year we will be able to monitor what impact this has had on reaching our budgeted headcount for 2013/2014 and we will compare those figures to last year which were: 1,271 Full Time starters (98.3%) and 22 Part Time starters (1.7%). In Oracle (our HR system) the majority of those new starters with flexible working arrangements in place would be categorised as part time.

#### Why is this ground breaking?

We believe Atkins is the first engineering consultancy to offer flexible working opportunities to new starters. We also believe we are one of the first organisations outside of the retail and banking sectors where shift work and flexible working are commonplace to allow candidates to search for flexible working opportunities on their careers website..

It should also not be underestimated the challenges of influencing the business to adopt new ways of working (for new starters) outside the traditional approach of being office based and having set working hours.

#### How can this be applied across the profession/industry?

Atkins believes what we have achieved could be quite easily applied across the professions and industry that we operate in. This would certainly play a huge part in both retaining more qualified engineers within the industry, as often we find that female engineers in particular leave the industry when they have children, and b) encouraging more individuals to join the engineering profession and demonstrating that it can be family friendly and inclusive for both genders.