

## Supporting new parents back to work

**Achieving a healthy work-life balance is not as easy as it sounds, especially when a new baby joins the family.**

The needs and demands of a child, coupled with the requirements of work is a daunting prospect, often invoking feelings of guilt, impacting on confidence and personal wellbeing.

As a large employer with people at the heart of its operation, Atkins, a member of the SNC-Lavalin Group, one of the world's most respected design, engineering and management consultancies, recognised the issue.

Atkins approached Skills 4 to design and deliver a Returners' Programme targeted at new mums and those who had returned to work after parental leave within the previous six months.

The programme explores personal motivation for returning to work and adjusting to the demands of being a working parent. It reviews values, priorities and time management skills. It also identifies the right work/life fit through detailed gap analysis and individual career goals; looks at adjusting to part-time work; dealing with negative emotions and creates an effective support network.

Gila Stockell, Learning and Development consultant at Atkins said: "We had started a project looking at buddying and mentoring for women so the Skills 4 Returners' Programme really brought things together and gave us structure.

"We have had nothing but positive feedback from a morale and staff engagement point of view. The returners feel valued and supported. A lot of the themes are around confidence and this programme demonstrates that far from losing confidence, returners have acquired new transferable skills – the logistics of managing a family and



**Katy Barnes**  
**Engineering Manager**  
**Atkins**

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better time management. The programme supports them to apply these skills in the workplace as well as at home.

“The feelings of guilt that are never spoken about now get an airing thanks to an extended network from across different functions, which also helps give women the confidence to challenge those who might be less supportive.

“The recruitment team has started sending new parents baby grows with “Atkins the next generation” on the back along with novelty cakes rather than just flowers. It has been very well received and is another way to show employees how they are valued.”

The women who have completed the training are overwhelmingly positive about it. HR Manager Helen Regent said: “After having 13 months out of the business on maternity leave, the thought of returning to work was more than a little daunting.

“Being able to complete the Skills 4 Returners' Programme came at exactly the right time for me and gave me a real boost in confidence and equipped me with many practical tools to help ensure my return to work is a success for myself, my family and Atkins.”

Katy Barnes, Engineering Manager, said: “I returned to the business after 17 months out, to a promoted role and on a part-time basis, so I had many adjustments to make. I finished the Skills 4 Returners' Programme one month after returning to work, it has been fundamental to my adaptation to new working arrangements. I have successfully used a number of the tools that the very knowledgeable and inspirational trainer Jayne taught, particularly with regards to prioritisation of tasks and effective time management. The programme also instilled confidence, self-belief and established a network of new working parents in the business.”

As legislation changes, Atkins is getting more requests from men for extended parental leave and support when returning to work so it has come up with a process to meet their needs on an individual basis.

Atkins is the first company to send employees on the Skills 4 Returners' Programme which is available as an online open programme to any organisation. Each employee can work flexibly around their family commitments to complete the course over several months.

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Gila Stockell  
Learning & Development  
Manager  
Atkins

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Helen Regent  
HR Manager  
Atkins

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