



Great jobs for bright people



A University buyers guide to Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS)



2 How does an ATS help the recruitment process?

Whatever the size of your university, an Applicant Tracking System, also known as an ATS, is easy to use, easy to implement and undoubtedly one of the most cost effective tools available to help you manage the recruitment process from initial vacancy brief through to onboarding.

An ATS helps in maintaining the database of applicants and vacancy information at different stages of the recruitment process. The ATS automates each part of the process to allow for a detailed yet highly efficient results based recruitment process.

Some of the benefits to gain from automating the recruitment process through an ATS include:

- Removing laborious administration tasks
- Encouraging and developing interdepartmental communication
- Providing management information and ROI statistics
- Promote applicant communications and improve employer brand
- Build talent pools to reduce advertising costs further
- Manage recruitment agency suppliers and retain control over quality
- Streamline or centralise all recruitment activity with ALL hiring managers
- Reduce & control costs

1 What exactly is an Applicant Tracking System?

Simply put, an Applicant Tracking System is an online software application that can efficiently and electronically manage your university's recruitment process. It pulls every part of the process into one place and allows the user(s) to review their talent from initial applications through to hire in real time, whilst also building a database of potential talent.

The database where all the information is held is a bit like a sales or CRM (customer relationship management) database. It allows you to extract information on a variety of searches relating to candidates and vacancies. You can also keep track of and manage the workflow, communicate easily with the applicants and pull off tailored reports.

Imagine that every job seeker (even those coming from recruitment agencies) had to go through the same process when enquiring about working for your institution, regardless of which department head or line manager is recruiting. The job seeker has been directed to your system from your careers site or other online recruitment jobsites such as jobs.ac.uk and their details are stored in an online database. The process is automated and form filling is completed by the job seeker who expresses their preferences and experiences.

3 How does an ATS work?

The online ATS is hosted by a provider, such as WCN, Lumesse or Euro RSCG. This is then linked to a university's website through either an RSS feed or a careers site. The hiring university will then have passwords to log in and access the database. Various levels of access can also be created for different job roles when appropriate.

Although most ATS's essentially do the same job and work on similar principles, the growth in the number of vendors available and the rapid development of online technology means that there will be a system to suit most specific requirements.

4 What are the essential features of a good ATS?

There are many ATS vendors in the market place and most have very similar features grouped into headings such as: **vacancies, candidate, activity / history, reports** and **careers site**. But, what do you want it to do and why do you want it to do it?

There are expensive systems, there are very low cost systems, (such as [jobs.ac.uk's own e-jobs](#)) and there are systems that are better placed for certain industries.

To try and help you as a starting point, some of the key areas that a system could include are:

Vacancies:

- Does the system allow you to post to all your job board sites at the click of a button?
- Does it have customisable job templates to help with the repetitive vacancies?
- Are there job specific application forms?

Applicants:

- How visible are the applicants and how quickly does it allow you to view current status, history, CV's / application forms & cover letters
- What marketing suite / templates / social media widgets does it have so that you can enhance recruitment communications?
- Does it have the capability to export data to your HR System?

Activity:

- Is the work flow status customisable? Can it fit in to your institutions work culture?
- Can you assign tasks to users?
- Will the system provide an easy to use internal communications platform?
- Does the system provide an activity audit trail?

Agency Manager:

- Do you need a system that will support agency applications and allow recruitment agencies to see where their candidates are in the process?
- Do you want to be able to track who are the best performing recruitment agencies & does it have the ability to do this?

Did you know?

[jobs.ac.uk](#) and e-recruitment provider, [WCN](#), offer **e-jobs** – a “low-cost, low risk” Applicant Tracking System designed specifically for universities, HE colleges and other education providers with less than 1200 employees?

Visit [jobs.ac.uk](#) for more information.

Reports:

- What reporting do you require?
- Are the reports customisable or tailored to your institution? i.e. equal opportunities, return on media investment etc.
- Can you export reports to CSV?

Careers Site:

- Will it encourage people to apply & are your current vacancies easy to spot?
- Will you need to add on extra media streams, like video, social networking etc.?
- Does it provide candidate auto job alerts or an RSS feed for jobs?



5 How do I select the best ATS System?

Firstly, decide what your organisational needs and objectives are and structure the decision making process as you would any other buying decision. It is essential to form a collaboration of stakeholders, involve HR, IT & Marketing, and even the insight of some of your employees.

Speak to experienced consultants from the ATS companies who can demonstrate the system at your university and answer all your questions.

Questions to ask an ATS provider

The following are some of the vital questions you should ask a provider when you meet them to discuss buying an applicant tracking system. They are split into 4 key areas:

The company

- How big is the company, do they have adequate resources to manage your account?
- Are they financially stable?
- Are any other HE institutions already using them, do they have experience in this field?

Their service

- Do they provide training on their product?
- Are there named contacts or dedicated account handlers who will provide you with personalised support if any problems or questions arise before, during or after implementation?
- Will they make the time to understand how your organisation works and suggest ways to integrate the system that will help make the transition easier for you?

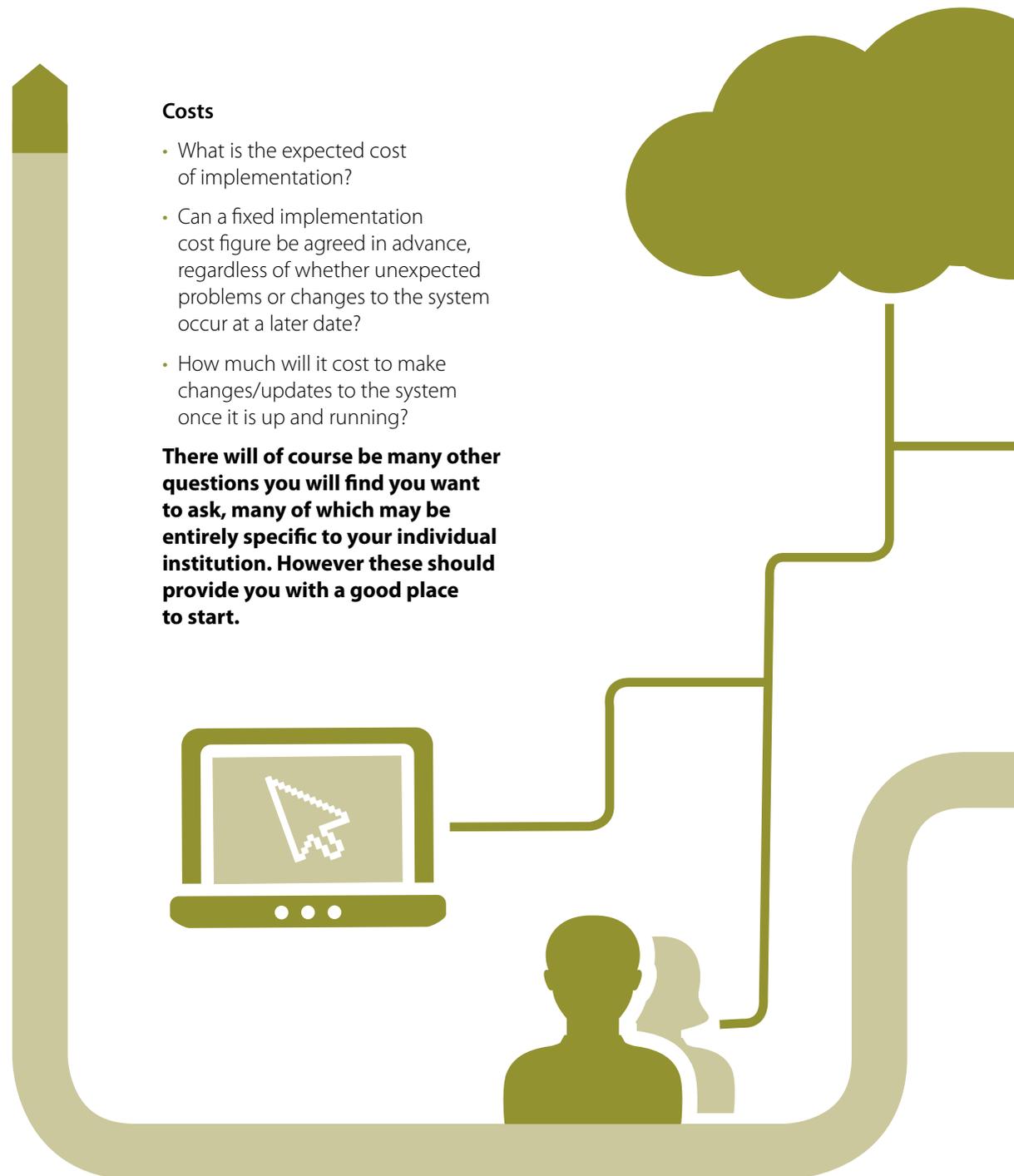
The system

- What volumes of applications and vacancies do they deal with, is the system able to cope with existing and increased levels?
- Do they have the latest, up-to-date technology?
- Will they offer system updates further down the line to keep up with technological developments?
- What is the expected time-scale for system implementation?

Costs

- What is the expected cost of implementation?
- Can a fixed implementation cost figure be agreed in advance, regardless of whether unexpected problems or changes to the system occur at a later date?
- How much will it cost to make changes/updates to the system once it is up and running?

There will of course be many other questions you will find you want to ask, many of which may be entirely specific to your individual institution. However these should provide you with a good place to start.



6 Checklist of recommendations

The following is a checklist of recommendations for any university considering introducing an applicant tracking system:

A: Writing the business case

This should be centred around four main areas:

- Efficiency savings** – in terms of the man hours spent on recruitment and amount of paper used
- Cost savings** – regarding improvements in efficiency and being able to run system reports on the value for money of recruitment media
- Improvement of the candidate experience** – with easy-to-use online processes applications can be increased, improving the range, and potentially the quality, of applicants
- Improvement of customer service** for internal customers such as managers with features such as online shortlisting



B: Selection and development of the system

- Write a comprehensive specification of what is needed from the system with:
 - A list of functionality the system should have
 - A list of the processes that will need to be completed
 - The improvements that will be expected over the existing system
 - Stipulations about cost
- Involve managers to ensure the system satisfies everyone's needs
- Research what systems other institutions are using
- Decide whether to develop a system internally or buy an off the shelf system, considering:
 - In-house IT capability
 - Budgets and resources available
 - The best matched suitability for your needs
 - The benefits it will provide
 - What the system can and can't do
- Ask for as many meetings with providers as you need before making a decision
- Build time into the process for customising letters and forms to suit your organisation and individual roles
- Consider the use of applications such as 'killer questions', online tests and automated responses to candidates to further improve efficiency
- Consider what reports and statistics you want the system to produce so that they can be built into the system design

C: Implementation of the system

- Obtain the support of senior management early in the process to help secure funding and promote the system to the rest of the organisation
- Allocate as many resources as possible to increase the ease and effectiveness of implementation
- Engage the IT team in the process early on so they are on board if any technical issues arise
- Develop a structured plan for implementation with timings and deadlines, making it clear who is responsible for which tasks
- Decide whether to adopt an incremental implementation or whether to implement to the whole institution at once, considering:
 - An incremental approach will allow any issues or resistance to be dealt with on a small scale as they come up
 - Full implementation may be simpler and less time consuming
- Consider whether to retain paper-based processes for some managers and/or candidates – this may reduce resistance but will mean not as great efficiency savings will be achieved



D: Communications and Obtaining employee engagement

- Write a communications plan to ensure users are fully aware of the system
- Provide sufficient training and support to users according to how complex the system is and how technologically-experienced they are
- Consider management processes as the movement to an e-recruitment system can be a significant culture change
- Use seminars, workshops, emails or newsletters to communicate with users
- Focus on the positive aspects of the system and the advantages for managers in communications
- Make support and help for users of the system readily available
- Use 'champions' who are well-engaged with the system to encourage other employees to accept it



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