



## Quality Part-Time Work in Retail

### Assisting with work and family balance

An effective solution to balancing work and family creates a productive workplace and a rewarding family life.

Today's workplace must respond to a changing labour force, the need for increased workplace flexibility and the importance of a skilled and engaged workforce.

Quality part-time work helps attract and retain skilled workers who have family responsibilities. Putting quality part-time work firmly on the agenda is one step towards an effective response to contemporary needs and demands.

The information set out below is designed to encourage businesses to consider quality part-time work to assist with the balance between family and work.

Women returning from maternity leave and others whose family requirements mean that working part-time is a short or long term strategy to assist the balance between family and work may benefit from quality part-time work.

However, quality part-time work is not just for people with family responsibilities. It can assist staff combine work with study or other life pursuits or can be used to assist in graduated retirement.

We encourage you to think about the information within these guidelines and to use it to assist your staff with balancing work, family and other life matters.

Putting quality part-time work in place is good for everyone.



This guideline has been developed by Industrial Relations Victoria in partnership with the Masters Grocers' Association Victoria, the Australian Retailers Association Victoria and the Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The Shop Distributive and Allied Employees Association (Victorian Branch) also provided input. The guideline provides information to employers in the retail industry about how to put in place quality part-time work arrangements to assist employees with family responsibilities. It is not meant to be prescriptive. The ideas and industry examples are meant to stimulate interest in and commitment to quality part-time work.

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## Part-time work in retail

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*"Don't look at what the person is costing you; look at what she costs if she leaves."* Retail employer

Customer demand ebbs and flows over the work day and work week. Part-time workers are vitally important to business in covering these ebbs and flows. And many workers, particularly those with family responsibilities, appreciate being able to work less than full-time hours.

Part-time work is here to stay and in retail, part-time workers are critical to a profitable business. They must be taken seriously. Many want a career in retail and many will move around to find a good employer.

Good jobs, whether part-time or full-time, attract good people.

And while there is a lot of part-time work in retail, much of it is not quality part-time work.

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## What makes for a quality part-time job in the retail industry?

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While all workplaces are different, the one thing that does distinguish *quality* part-time jobs from other part-time jobs is that people doing them are *part of the regular workforce*.

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## Myths about quality part-time work in retail

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There are lots of views about part-time work – many of these have no basis in fact. Here are just a few that may apply to the retail industry:

- **Staff who work part-time aren't interested in getting ahead.**  
Staff who work part-time are like everyone else. Some will want to move ahead in their careers and others will not. There should be no disadvantage in working part-time. Don't assume people who are working part-time aren't interested in promotion – either to a full-time position or a part-time position. And certainly don't assume that their experience and commitment are less than those of full-timers. Give them an equal chance.
- **Store managers can't be part-time**  
Quality part-time work should be available to all staff, except where genuine job requirements make this unreasonable. With supervisors or managers a job-share arrangement might make good sense, or perhaps jobs could be redesigned to accommodate part-time work.
- **Only women want to work part-time**  
Men have family responsibilities too. They are increasingly choosing to work reduced hours to help with family care responsibilities.
- **Part-time work is very hard to set up and manage**  
Quality part-time work is all about fairness, transparency and consistency. See below for some steps to ensure success.

Use the following checklist to see if the part-time jobs in your store are quality jobs.

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## The quality part-time work checklist

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- ✔ **Our business gives both men and women the opportunity to work part-time. Depending on organisational requirements, people can work part-time across all the areas of our business.**  
What sets businesses with quality part-time work apart from others is that part-time work can be found at all levels of the business and both men and women work part-time.
- ✔ **People who work part-time in our business have the same protections as the full-time workforce, including job protection, predictability of hours, protection against discrimination and protection under the relevant awards.**  
Job security and predictable rosters and shifts are particularly important to people with family responsibilities, for example those with children in child care may need to fit their work around the child care centre hours.
- ✔ **People who work part-time receive pro-rata wages and access to benefits**  
This includes any benefits full-time staff doing the same job might accrue, such as holiday and sick leave, salary bonuses and access to other job-related benefits, such as company cars.
- ✔ **People who work part-time in our organisation are encouraged to participate in training programs and can apply for promotion if they wish. They will be genuinely considered.**  
Quality part-time work means equal access to training and promotion. Part-time staff bring a full set of skills to the workplace. Organisations with quality part-time work in place don't assume staff working part-time cannot increase their skills or do not want to advance in their careers.
- ✔ **People can move between full-time and part-time work as they require.**  
While the option to move between full-time and part-time work will depend upon organisational and job requirements, the option should be there. For people with family responsibilities, the need to work part-time changes across the life course. For example, when babies are small, parents may wish to work part-time, but as children go to school, longer hours might be preferred.
- ✔ **Part-time staff are treated the same as those who are full-time.**  
In organisations with quality part-time work in place, managers and other work colleagues see part-time workers as valuable contributors. Their work is challenging, meaningful and satisfying – not just the bits and pieces or the shifts that no one else wants.
- ✔ **We recognise that our staff have a life outside work.**  
Better balance between work and other things in life, including family, is important for everyone. A growing number of women in the paid workforce and an ageing population means most staff will have child care or elder care responsibilities for at least a part of their working lives.

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## The advantages of quality part-time work in retail

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*"Part-time workers know they are an important part of our organisation and in organising training, meetings and other workplace engagements, their needs and requirements are carefully considered." Retail employer*

### The ability to recruit and retain experienced and skilled staff

The big advantage of quality part-time work is that it helps to retain experienced and skilled staff who may not wish to work full-time. Staff returning from parental leave might return to work earlier if opportunities for quality part-time work are available, while those nearing retirement may continue in the workforce if they can cut back their hours.

### Flexibility and improved customer service

In the retail trade, ebbs and flows in customer demand are constant. Quality part-time work will enable you to cover peak times more easily and improve customer service with more motivated and satisfied employees.

### Increased morale, productivity and efficiency

Morale, productivity and efficiency increase when staff know their employer has invested in them. And that's got to be good for business. Putting quality part-time work in place can also help reduce employee stress and unplanned absenteeism.

### Becoming employer of choice

Employers can benefit from being known in the community as family friendly. This could mean attracting better staff and an enhanced reputation among potential customers.

#### **Ritchies Supermarkets and quality part-time work**

*With 33 stores across metropolitan and country Victoria and over 3600 staff, Ritchies is the largest independent licensed supermarket group in Australia.*

*Ritchies has an 85 per cent return rate from maternity leave and approximately 70 per cent of these staff come back to part-time work, gradually increasing their hours to full-time when their babies are a little older.*

*When it comes to negotiating a return to work, while the family needs of staff are emphasised, everyone recognises that the customers also have priority. If a staff member wants to cut back their hours, the business needs are considered, options are presented and after a discussion, if it's not possible to offer part-time hours immediately, then a plan for the future is discussed and agreed by everyone.*

*And quality part-time is not just something that is available on the shop floor; Ritchies have senior women working part-time too, in their administration office, and even as part-time job sharers managing stores.*

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## It's also about risk management!

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*"In assessing requests it's really important to talk about requirements, not necessarily wants." Retail employer*

Both Federal and State legislation promote equal opportunity in the workplace and outlaw discrimination on the grounds of parental or carer status or family responsibilities. Reasonable accommodation of employee requests for flexible work arrangements to assist them balance their work and family responsibilities is important where this is possible.

This does not mean that employers have to agree to every request for part-time work. However, it does mean that before making a final decision, you should seriously consider requests case-by-case in the light of genuine work requirements, and creatively explore how the job could be performed under alternative work arrangements.

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## So what do I do when someone asks to work part-time to accommodate family responsibilities?

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*"It's really not that hard. Make sure you communicate and when someone asks if they can work part-time, focus on requirements not necessarily wants." Retail employer*

As with all other issues at the workplace, the real key to success in quality part-time work is open communication between staff and managers.

### Be prepared

Every request for part-time work will be different. If you already know the steps you will take to consider a request, the process will be clear and consistent. Consider developing a written policy, including the steps you take in considering a request. This could speed up decisions and help ensure consistency and transparency.



### **Suggest the staff member develop a formal proposal**

Before you meet to consider a request, ask the staff member to write down what they want to achieve by working part-time, the impact this might have on those they work with and what it might mean for the job they do and the retailer.

### **Consider each request objectively and sensitively**

Seriously consider each request. Be flexible and creative. There are not many jobs in retail that could not be adapted to part-time work. Think about and plan for how the part-time work arrangement might be best managed. Make sure you think through and plan for the reduction in the staff member's work load, as well as any impact on the work of colleagues and on your business requirements. If it is not possible to meet the request for part-time work, consider other flexible work options that could assist the staff member to balance work and family responsibilities.

### **Write down what has been agreed**

Agree in writing to a regular pattern of work, including changes to working hours and other terms and conditions of employment, length of time the arrangement will be in place, as well as the dates for regular review. And remember, if you turn down a request from someone who wants part-time work to assist with family responsibilities, explain your reasons in writing, giving clear business reasons.

### **Ensure part-time staff are part of the regular workforce**

Include part-time staff in all communication, consultation processes and social activities. As far as possible ensure that training, information sessions and meetings are scheduled when part-time staff can attend. Put in place a planned process to ensure that work colleagues are aware of changes to work hours and have a plan of action to deal with any problems should these arise.

### **Monitor part-time work arrangements**

Make a time for regular review of the part-time work arrangement to make sure it is working for everyone – if there are any doubts about whether it will work consider putting the arrangement in place for a trial period.

#### ***Myer and the structured approach to quality part-time work***

*With 40 per cent of the 22,000 team members and six per cent of managers working part-time, quality part-time work is an important issue at Myer. To ensure that quality part-time works well for people returning from maternity leave, Myer has developed a comprehensive set of Parental Leave Guidelines for team members and managers. Including information on graduated return from maternity leave, these Guidelines were seen as best practice in the Coles Myer Limited (CML) group. They are not only in place at Myer, but are now promoted throughout CML.*

### **Right to Request and the Family Provisions Test Case**

In August 2005 the Australian Industrial Relations Commission handed down its decision in the Family Provisions Test Case. One of the relevant provisions is an employee's 'right to request' a return from parental leave on a part-time basis until a child reaches school age to assist an employee reconcile work and parental responsibilities. An employer will need to consider such a request having regard to the employee's circumstances, provided it is genuinely based on the employee's parental responsibilities. The 'right to request' also means that an employer has a right to refuse the request but only on reasonable grounds related to the effect on the workplace or the employer's business such as cost, lack of adequate replacement staff, loss of efficiency and the impact on customer service.

## **For Further Information**

For more information, go to the Industrial Relations Victoria website at [www.irv.vic.gov.au](http://www.irv.vic.gov.au)