

Part-time work involves less than the full-time weekly hours of duty of an employee as prescribed by the applicable award or industrial agreement. It may take a number of forms. For example, employees may work part of a day say from 10.00am to 3.00pm, or part of a week, say from Tuesday to Thursday or two days one week and three days the next week, or one week on and one week off and so on. Some part-time work arrangements provide for an employee to work a set number of hours each week, but it is left up to the employee to arrange a schedule to suit.

The particular arrangements are normally to be recorded in an agreement between the employer and employee that sets out the part-time employee's specified hours, the duration of the agreement and any other specific matters such as return to full-time work arrangements.

If the employee wishes to increase or decrease their working hours at a future point in time, the employer and employee may agree that the employee may do so as soon as practicable depending on prevailing work organisation factors and operational requirements.

All part-time work agreements must comply with the requirements of the relevant award or industrial instrument. Restrictions on the availability of part-time work and the setting of maximum or minimum hours of work for part-time employees are generally no longer a feature of awards and industrial instruments. So the pattern of hours and days to be worked are decided and may be changed by individual agreement between employer and employee.

Part-time work allows flexibility for businesses to better utilise employees and creative opportunities for effectively and efficiently managing productivity. It also offers greater flexibility for employees to balance their work and personal lives.

It is likely that an increasing number of older workers will be interested in part-time work as a flexible retirement option. This could involve interested employees moving from say, five days per week to four days per week, or six hours per day instead of seven and a half and gradually reducing their working hours as they progress towards fuller retirement.

From the employee perspective part-time work can be used to reduce working hours and income gradually so as to avoid income change and "connection to work" shock. For the employer, part-time work provides a cost effective means of retaining and transferring important corporate knowledge and specialist skills.

Part-time work opportunities may be created:

- By designing jobs to be performed on a part-time basis.
- As a result of current full-time employees seeking to work part-time on the same work or different work.
- By advertising for work to be performed on a part-time basis or full-time basis and designing work arrangements to suit the availability of the most meritorious applicant.

There are very few jobs that can not successfully be adapted to a part-time or job share basis. However, the success of part-time work arrangements will depend on the willingness of your managers and supervisors to make it work and their understanding of the issues involved. Managers may believe it is easier if everyone is working the same way and not actively encourage flexible work practices.

Training may be necessary to inform managers of the reasons for introducing regular part-time work and the potential benefits to all parties and to provide them with the skills to change attitudes and resolve any conflicts that may arise from the introduction of the new arrangement.

Part-time work should be designed so that the workload is proportionate with the number of hours worked, offers varied tasks and involves skill development. The basis for an employee initiated reduction from full-time to part-time employment is normally the conversion of the employee's working hours rather than the conversion of a particular job.

Possible strategies and actions include:

- Identifying ways and means of dispelling organisational perceptions that employees who choose to work part-time are less dedicated to their work or are not interested in a career or a varied workload.
- Applying lateral problem solving approaches to work-load management and design of part-time work opportunities.
- Ensure that company policy about part-time work includes information about:
 - how to apply and the rights of employees and managers to initiate requests for part-time work
 - providing feedback on reasons for non-approval and objective justification as to why jobs are not suitable for part-time work arrangements
 - the rights, responsibilities and processes involved in converting from part-time work to full-time work and vice versa
 - mechanisms for promoting the integration of part-time staff including access to development and training opportunities, career structures and communication and consultation mechanisms
 - designing part-time work opportunities and how to avoid creating mundane monotonous part-time jobs
 - the impact on superannuation
 - ways of addressing any grievances that may arise.

Source: Department of Employment and Industrial Relations 'A Guide for the Queensland Public Service: Managing an Ageing Workforce'