

Part Time Work

How to navigate part time work arrangements

Why part time works – in a nutshell

Part time work is work performed on a permanent basis and usually expressed as a percentage of full time hours and paid on a 'pro rata' basis of the full time equivalent (FTE) role.

Part time work suits employees who wish to work a set number of reduced hours per week in exchange for reduced (or pro rated) remuneration. It can suit parents who have a set but limited number of child-care days, or are available during school hours only.

Employers can more easily tailor part time roles to suit jobs with limited budgets and that do not require a full time work commitment.

How to make it work

Part time work can take a number of different forms and meet a variety of employer and employee needs.

- Two part time employees can be employed to meet the requirements of one position in a job-sharing arrangement.
- One part-timer can be employed for positions or tasks not requiring a dedicated full time role.
- A part time role may complement a large team working on a particular project.
- A part time position may be able to be performed within set hours or flexibly, in the office or remotely, as negotiated.

The manager and employee should discuss their expectations of the part time role, especially when a full timer is transitioning to part time. In that case, the role should be redesigned to fit the part time arrangement and the parties should ensure it can be sustained on that basis.

Points to consider:

- How should the part-timer's budget be structured?
- Who will manage incoming tasks – urgent or otherwise – when the part time worker is off duty?
- What level of flexibility can be built into the arrangement; for example, will the lawyer be able to swap workdays according to demand?

- How will extra hours worked be treated with respect to payment or time in lieu?
- How much of the part-timer's role will be dedicated to billable/file work, and how much to non-billable work, such as mentoring, business development, and staff meetings?
- How will the part time worker be supported by administrative staff?
- How will the part time nature of the role be communicated to clients and colleagues (e.g. via an automated email message)?
- Is the employee receiving correct benefits and entitlements (eg superannuation, long service leave, etc)?
- What are the part-timer's professional development needs? A part-timer will continue to have Continuing Professional Development (CPD) obligations.

Tips for part time employees

Lawyers wanting to transition to part time should reflect on their role and whether, or how, it can be redesigned to be sustainably performed on a part-time basis.

They should also reflect on their work style. Part-timers should be comfortable to delegate and refrain from working on non-work days. Part time work may therefore not suit supervisors with a high need for control.

Tips for employers

- Begin as early as possible in redesigning roles for employees transitioning to part time. For instance, discussions can be had with employees taking parental leave before their leave period begins.
- Keep in mind that part-timers are usually as loyal and committed as full time employees, and have not given up on their career ambitions.
- The status of part time employees should be maintained, ensuring they are offered or exposed to quality work, continued professional development and business development opportunities.
- Part time arrangements should be available to be negotiated across the organisation, if possible
- It is important to stay abreast of relevant laws, such as the Fair Work Act 2009, which regulate part time work entitlements.
- Ensure important meetings or in-house CPD activities are held at times that suit part-timers.
- Provide tools to support part time arrangements such as:
 - administrative staff access to the part-timer's emails and calendar when the part-timer is not in the office

- use of 'out of office' automated email reply, telephone message-bank options and other mechanisms to communicate availability and alternative contacts for urgent matters
- devices and technology to enable part-timers to handle urgent tasks or queries remotely
- training in skills that support a sustainable part time practice, such as efficient and effective time management, email management and self-management skills.

Benefits of part time arrangements

- Part time staff may be less likely to experience burn-out, leading to increased productivity, morale and well-being.
- Part-timers can benefit from having well-rounded lives, which in turn can translate to employer benefits such as low staff turnover, higher productivity and transferable skills developed in other interests outside of work.
- Offering the option of part time work allows organisations to retain experienced, skilled and dedicated professionals. It also helps in promoting the organisation as a model employer.
- They promote a culture of loyalty within an organisation.

And some of the challenges ...

- Not all full time roles can be redesigned to be performed sustainably on a part time basis (e.g. roles requiring regular or frequent court attendance). If a part time arrangement does not meet the business's needs, a different arrangement – such as job share – should be considered.
- There may be a tendency for part-timers to prioritise core responsibilities – such as fee earning work – at the expense of career-enhancing work such as business and professional development. This can be detrimental to business growth and the employee's career, and should be monitored, so that an appropriate amount of time is available for a broad range of work opportunities.
- The risk of 'work creep' – where a part-timer ends up effectively working full time but is not properly remunerated, leading to pay parity issues, burnout and resentment.
- Part-timers can suffer from a lack of visibility, and thus opportunities for promotion. Employees and employers need to make an effort to ensure they remain visible as part of the team and deserving of recognition.