



Flexible Work Arrangements

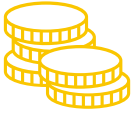
Victorian Institute of Sport

Women in High Performance Coaching



Flexible Work Arrangements

Victorian Institute of Sport



Salary supported role
Maternity leave replacement



Collaboration with Hockey Australia



8 months mat. Leave
3 days / week 8 mo.
12 months mat leave
4 days / week



Individual Coach
Assistant Coach

Aim and Objectives

The Victorian Institute of Sport (VIS) recognised the challenge of retaining an experienced high-performance coach while supporting her through maternity leave and her return to coaching.

The initiative created an opportunity to demonstrate that coaching leadership and parenthood can coexist through flexible work arrangements and organisational support.

Description

The VIS implemented flexible work arrangements to support Stacia Strain, Head Coach of the VIS Women's Hockey Program, through maternity leave and her return to coaching. Working collaboratively with Stacia, the organisation introduced a part-time assistant coach, flexible working hours, and tailored work plans that enabled her to retain her leadership role while balancing family commitments.

The approach was underpinned by a simple question - *"What do you need?"* - and a commitment to adapting organisational practices rather than expecting the coach to fit existing systems.



Challenges / Considerations

Balancing the needs of a high-performance program with flexible work arrangements. Ensuring athletes continued to receive consistent coaching and leadership. Redesigning roles, contracts and staffing to support part-time work. Challenging traditional assumptions about motherhood and high-performance coaching.

Building trust through ongoing communication and a willingness to adapt as needs changed.

Outcomes

The initiative successfully retained a highly valued coach, strengthened her confidence and sense of belonging, and created a development opportunity for an emerging assistant coach. It also demonstrated that motherhood and high-performance coaching are compatible, inspiring other women coaches and contributing to two additional female coaches returning from maternity leave into part-time coaching roles at the VIS.



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Recommendations

- Create flexible work arrangements that support coaches through major life transitions, including parenthood.
- Ask coaches what support they need and co-design individualised solutions.
- Retain coaches in leadership roles while adapting workloads and support structures around them.
- Use assistant coach roles to support both coach retention and the development of emerging coaches.
- Foster an organisational culture that values flexibility, inclusion, and long-term coach wellbeing.
- View parental support as an investment in retaining coaching talent rather than an additional organisational burden.

Application for others

The VIS discovered that retaining talented coaches requires an organisational commitment to flexibility, rather than relying on individual goodwill. By listening to coaches, asking what support they need, and being willing to create new ways of working, organisations can improve coach retention, build confidence, and create a culture where staff feel genuinely valued and supported.

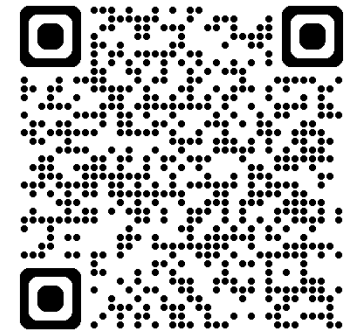
Other sports and organisations can learn that retaining talented coaches often requires flexibility, creativity, and a genuine commitment to understanding individual needs. Rather than expecting coaches to fit existing systems, organisations can achieve better outcomes by asking "What do you need?" listening carefully and being willing to create new approaches that support both performance and life commitments.



LINK: [VIDEO](#)

STORY: [Jillaroos Appointment](#)

STORY: [Balancing Motherhood and Elite Coaching](#)





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“I've always felt genuinely valued at the VIS, especially when I returned from maternity leave after both of my children - my confidence was low and I assumed the VIS (like many organisations) would see me differently or be dismissive of what I needed. Instead, they did the opposite. I was always treated as the Head Coach, and the conversations were about how they could make things work around me. That gave me confidence and made me feel trusted and valued.

At times I felt like I was creating extra work...with part-time arrangements, assistant coaching support and contract changes, but I was never made to feel like a burden. My managers always reassured me that supporting me was part of their role and that backing gave me the confidence to keep leading.

What I appreciate most is that they genuinely listen to my challenges and aren't afraid to find a different solution. Supporting a part-time assistant coach after I had both of my children...despite no other NAPP hockey program doing it before...showed they were willing to adapt so I could continue leading the program.”