

# Focus on Retail and Sales

Oxfordshire Labour Market Information, Winter 2016  
Produced by Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership



Oxfordshire has a huge range of shopping experiences. From the famous Bicester Village, with its 120 luxury boutiques and 6.3 million visitors a year, to the thriving farmers markets across the county, we sell it all.

Recent retail construction developments around the county include, in Oxford City, the Westgate Shopping Centre re-generation that will sit alongside the Clarendon Centre, Queens Street, Cornmarket Street and the popular covered market. Banbury Gateway Shopping Park has extended the Castle Quay shopping experience north of the county. The Marriots Walk development in Witney has brought large names in retail to sit alongside the Woolgate and High Street shops in the West, and the Orchard Centre has been expanded in Didcot to the South.

<sup>1</sup> ONS BRES, 2015

<sup>2</sup> ONS Business Activity, 2015

## Did you know?

In 2014, consumers in the UK spent around £378 billion. For every £1 spent in the retail sector (online and in shops),

- 42p was spent in food stores,
- 41p was spent in non-food stores and
- 11p on automotive fuel.
- The remainder was spent in other types of retailers, such as market stores or mail order catalogues.

Source: The retail industry: statistics and policy, ONS, 2015

- There are 32,000 employees in retail in Oxfordshire and just under half (14,400) of these are Retail and Sales Assistants<sup>1</sup>,
- working in 1,800 (6%) retail enterprises<sup>2</sup>. The biggest retail employers in the county are Mid-counties Co-op, Waitrose, Blackwells and Aurora Fashions Group.

From the period to 2024, employees in sales occupations are set to rise by a third. However this is due to replacement demand from those leaving the labour market, rather than due to net growth. Customer service occupations, that have seen continued increase year-on-year, will rise by 50%.

The 'High Street' is declining overall with a loss of over 500 stores in the first half of 2016 in the UK, the highest loss since 2012. Tobacconists, health clubs, jewellers, coffee shops and dining outlets grew at the fastest rate during the first half of 2016. Fashion shops, banks, mobile phone shops, and recruitment agencies have been amongst the hardest hit. This is largely due to the rise in online shopping.<sup>1</sup>

### *Did you know?*

*Online shopping now represents 12 per cent of all retail spending with the UK. The UK represents the quickest and biggest online growth in Europe.*

*Retail Economics.co.uk*

### *Did you know?*

*The retail sector has a low-qualified workforce. Just over a fifth of its workforce hold a qualification to NVO level 4. By 2022, a third will need to up-skill to this level.*

*UKCES*

The sector has long-relied on young people to fill roles and usually with no formal qualifications required. Training is often basic and on-the-job. This reflects the low-qualified, low salary reputation of the sector. The image of a retail sector career has been one of 'stop-gap' employment rather than a stepping-stone to a long-term career.

The sector is being affected by policy changes, in the raising of the participation age to 18 for those staying in Education and Training, the changing attitude to working part-time while studying (fewer people now work and study) and demographic changes with an ageing workforce.

Young new recruits will be highly sought after and much is being done to promote the 'hidden' careers in retail with graduate schemes, the focus on 'brand pride' and training programmes run by several big retailers like Morrisons and Asda.

<sup>1</sup> PwC, Retail report, 2016, [http://pwc.blogs.com/press\\_room/2016/10/retailers-closing-15-stores-a-day-as-the-high-street-continues-to-reshape-says-pwc-and-the-local-data-company.html](http://pwc.blogs.com/press_room/2016/10/retailers-closing-15-stores-a-day-as-the-high-street-continues-to-reshape-says-pwc-and-the-local-data-company.html)

Retail roles are changing due to customer behaviours changing. Customers are becoming more discerning and conduct higher levels of research before making a purchase. They view, handle and talk about products in retail outlets, then often find the best price and buy online, sometimes from overseas, hence there is more competition for retailers. There has significant growth in 'Click and Collect' services in the first half of 2016.

The onus is on retailers to provide exceptional customer service experiences to stand out from the competition, with businesses looking for a consistent customer experience across its branches, brands and channels of sale. Sales Assistants may be required to become product experts in discussing and demonstrating products. Workers will need to diversify as products are sold online as well as stores.

Requisite skills for a variety of retail occupations are:

- Sales
- Store management
- Product knowledge
- Key performance indicators
- Customer handling
- Customer service skills
- Meeting goals and targets
- Visual merchandising
- Data mining and analysis
- Infonomics (information economics)
- Cyber security and management

Plus, selling to a global market will need knowledge of languages and cultural understanding

<i>Vacancies, 2016</i>	<i>No. of postings</i>
Managers and directors in retail and wholesale	509
Sales and retail assistants	274
Sales Supervisors	264
Business sales executives	129
Sales related occupations	116
Customer service occupations	101
Bank and post office clerks	75
Stock control clerks and assistants	48

### *Did you know?*

*The Oxfordshire retail sector employs the largest number of part time workers. 57% of workers are part-time. Nearly a third of retail workers live in the Cherwell district.*

*1 in 4 workers in retail sell food, drink or tobacco.*

### **Retail and Sales Assistant**

*Often the first point of contact between the customer and business, a retail and sales assistant's role is to make the customer experience enjoyable. It is people skills that are important to success in this role. Customer service skills include having strong communication skills, patience and attentiveness with a customer, the intuitive ability to read the customer and know when to adapt your service accordingly, good time management to plan your day around the needs of customers, a willingness to listen to instructions and a competent knowledge of the products you are selling. Employers therefore look for a positive attitude over academic qualifications although all employers will be looking for a good standard of literacy and numeracy (to GCSE grade C level). A friendly, polite and tactful disposition are essential to this role. Flexible work patterns usually apply. Starting salary: £12,000*

### **Customer service manager**

*A step-up from a Retail and Sales Assistant is the Customer Service Manager, who will promote the businesses customer service ethos and manage a team of sales assistants. Customer service skills are essential as Managers may be called to deal with complaints and problems that are outside an assistants remit.*

*Many Managers work their way up through the ranks but HND or degree level qualifications are often sought in business, marketing, management or customer service, plus a proven experience in managing staff and dealing with customers. Other attributes are leadership skills, the ability to manage a diverse workforce, team-building, handling difficult situations, decision making, taking initiative and meeting targets or deadlines. Starting salaries are around £20,000, but typically rises to £40,000 with experience.*

### **Retail buyer**

*In this an autonomous and responsible role, Retail Buyers plan and select which products are sold in stores. This analytical person will understand the needs of the customer, know the merchandise available and analyse market trends in order to maximise profits.*

*This is largely an office based role where liaison with wholesalers, manufacturers, suppliers, retail branches and retail managers is part and parcel of a lively and pressurised environment. Buyers are usually retail or business graduates with communication skills, commercial awareness and drive and determination. Starting salaries are typically £22,000. Senior retail buyers can earn over £50,000 although it usually takes at least 6 years to get to this level.*