The 4-day week: a social partnership insight

Report and recommendations of the Workforce Partnership Council's 4-Day Week Working Group.

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Executive summary

1. In April 2023, a Working Group was established under the auspices of the Workforce Partnership Council (WPC) to consider issues relating to a 4-day week.

2. The Working Group is a social partnership response to calls for a pilot of the 4-day week in devolved public services. The Working Group is a vehicle through which the practical, people, and service delivery implications can be explored.

3. The Working Group met on 8 occasions and established 4 subgroups to take forward specific workstreams. The Working Group achieved consensus on its definition of a 4-day week, held a series of in-depth discussions and took evidence from 4-day week practitioners, academics and the Scottish Government.

4. The Working Group concluded the 4-day week is a progressive and innovative way of working which merits further consideration. Based upon the evidence it received and its own deliberations, the Working Group cautions against a top-down pilot imposed on employers and workers. The Working Group strongly believes any pilot that is successfully implemented must be based on:

   i. the presence of an employer or employers who are ready and willing to pilot the 4-day week; and that:

ii. those employers discuss, consult and negotiate with their workforce and trade unions, the design, implementation and evaluation of any pilot.

5. The Working Group's key recommendation is for devolved public sector employers, trade unions and the Welsh Government to work through the WPC, with the aim of identifying an organisation or organisations who are prepared to pilot the 4-day week, building on the learning captured in this report and the diverse nature of public services which include 24/7 operations.

6. The Working Group is mindful that any moves to a 4-day week are undertaken fairly and in ways that avoid the creation of a two-tier workforce of 4-day working week haves and have-nots. In addition to the conclusions and recommendations set out in this report, the Working Group has developed a set of principles which should be considered in the design and delivery of any future pilot.

Background

The 4-Day Week Working Group

7. The Working Group on the 4-day week was established in April 2023 and followed discussion and agreement at the WPC's Joint Executive Committee (JEC) on 27 January 2023 and at WPC on 29 March 2023.

8. The Working Group has a broad remit set out in its terms of reference. These include:

- Considering the strength of the underpinning rationale and evidence base for a 4-day week pilot in the devolved public sector.
- Evaluating the opportunities, risks and barriers to a 4-day week pilot.
- Making recommendations on the feasibility, suitability and acceptability of a

4-day week pilot in a devolved public service or services in Wales.

9. The Working Group is Chaired by Reg Kilpatrick (Welsh Government) and has representatives from the Welsh Government; Unison, GMB, and PCS trade unions; Powys, Flintshire and the Vale of Glamorgan councils; Natural Resources Wales, Hywel Dda University Health Board and Velindre NHS Trust.

Why the Working Group was established

10. The calls for a pilot of the 4-day week in the devolved public sector were a key driver for the formation of the Working Group.

11. This began with a **Plenary debate** on the 4-day week held in September 2021. The opposition motion (which was defeated) called upon the Welsh Government to establish a 4-day week pilot in Wales; the Government amendment (which was carried) called on the Welsh Government to:

> " "Consider the progress that is made through pilots in other countries and examine the lessons Wales can learn." "

12. Further calls for a pilot were made in a **report commissioned and published by the Future Generations Commissioner** in 2022. This garnered press and political interest, for example **4-day working week pilot bid for Welsh workers** - BBC News.

13. In January 2023, the Senedd's Petitions Committee published a **report on the 4-day working week** which called on the Welsh Government to:

> " "Develop a pilot to reduce working hours within the devolved public sector, with no loss of pay for employees. This pilot should be targeted at parts of the devolved public sector where it is more realistic to expect productivity

> will not be negatively impacted by reducing working hours of staff……
> [and that] … a robust and impartial assessment of this pilot is
> undertaken." "

14. The intention to form the 4-day week Working Group was referenced in the **Welsh Government's written response** to the Petitions Committee report; and the subsequent establishment of the Working Group was announced in the **plenary debate on the Petitions Committee report** held on 10 May 2023.

15. The Working Group is a mechanism for handling a complex issue, where there are some expectations upon Welsh Government to act, but on which the evidence is contestable, the implications uncertain, and the form of delivery is unclear. The Working Group reflects a desire to consider these issues in social partnership.

Working Group meetings

16. The Working Group has met on 8 occasions spread across 2023 and into this year. Meetings took place on 26 April, 26 May, 6 July, 28 September, 14 November, 15 December, 16 January, and 22 February. Each meeting has been constructive and productive.

17. The Working Group has facilitated discussions and outputs that have advanced understanding of the 4-day week and the opportunities, challenges, risks and benefits in the context of devolved public services. A summary of each meeting and its key outputs follows.

26 April 2023 meeting

18. The first meeting of the Working Group focussed upon agreeing a broad approach to the work and discussed and refined the Working Group's terms of reference. The Working Group identified the need to come to a shared understanding of its definition of a 4-day week and to establish workstreams to frame and steer the group's work programme.

19. The Working Group also discussed an 'Overview paper' produced by Welsh Government officials. The paper provided the Working Group with a briefing on the complex and inter-related issues relevant to the group's exploration of the 4-day week. The paper also summarised 4-day week related activity at a UK and international level.

26 May 2023 meeting

20. The Working Group held substantive discussions on defining the 4-day week and identified and discussed proposed workstreams.

21. The Working Group discussed and considered alternative definitions of a 4-day week and achieved consensus on a definition based upon, but not identical to, the so-called '100-80-100' model.

22. The '100-80-100' model denotes a situation where workers receive 100% pay for 80% of their normal contracted hours, in exchange for a commitment to maintain at least 100% productivity.

23. The Working Group felt the emphasis on productivity in the traditional '100-80-100' model needed to be adapted to meet the nuanced requirements of public sector organisations. In particular, it felt 'service delivery' would be a more appropriate indicator than 'productivity'.

24. The Working Group agreed a shared definition of a 4-day week as:

> "A 4-day working week means no loss of pay or benefits, combined with a 20% reduction to normal contracted hours, while maintaining current levels of service delivery."

25. The Working Group agreed its work programme should be shaped by four broad workstreams agreed as:

  i. Implications for Workers
 ii. Implications for Employers & Service Delivery
iii. Fairness, Equity & Optics
 iv. Pilot Design & Evaluation Framework.

6 July 2023 meeting

26. The Working Group agreed subgroups should be established to take forward the workstreams agreed at the May meeting and considered how its approach to a 4-day week could link into the 'One Welsh Public Service' principles.

27. The Working Group agreed chairs for each of the subgroups and an approach to their membership. The Working Group agreed the subgroup chairs would be drawn from the Working Group, as would much of the memberships of the subgroups.

28. The Working Group also acknowledged the nature of the task and the time commitment involved would require each subgroup to be supplemented with members drawn from outside of the Working Group. The Working Group considered this would also help broaden the range of ideas, knowledge, and experience engaged on this work.

28 September 2023 meeting

29. The Working Group received updates from each of the subgroups and took stock of progress. The Working Group agreed this is a complex piece of work, with many interdependencies and the potential for some unintended consequences – whilst not overlooking the considerable potential benefits.

30. The Working Group concluded more time was needed to complete its work and the Working Group and its subgroups would continue to meet over the autumn and into the first quarter of 2024.

14 November 2023 meeting

31. The Working Group reflected on the discussion at the Workforce Partnership Council on 8 November and received an update on the activities of the subgroups.

32. The Working Group noted the evidence library that officials had collated and discussed ways in which some of the key messages could be adumbrated. The group agreed to explore whether an AI tool could be used for this purpose.

15 December 2023 meeting

33. The Working Group received evidence from Dr David Frayne, who shared his knowledge and experience as an Associate of the Autonomy think tank, as a contributor to the 'Roadmap to a shorter working week for Wales' for the Future Generations Commissioner, and in undertaking qualitative research on the private sector 4-day week pilot undertaken in the UK.

34. The Working Group discussed activity of the subgroups. It also discussed

timelines leading to the WPC meeting in March and the approach to the presentation of the Working Group's findings.

16 January 2024 meeting

35. The Working Group received evidence from Ruth Lewellyn, Assistant Director of People at Merthyr Valley Homes. Ruth provided the group with a presentation on Merthyr Valley Homes experience of implementing a 4-day week, the lessons learned and the outcomes.

36. The Working Group reviewed its deliberations to date and discussed its direction of travel and approach to compiling its final report.

22 February 2024 meeting

37. At its final meeting, the Working Group took evidence from Scottish Government officials (the Scottish Government have announced a **public sector pilot** based upon an existing trial of the 4-day week being undertaken by the South of Scotland Enterprise Agency).

38. The Working Group also discussed a draft of its final report and recommendations ahead of their finalisation and presentation to the Workforce Partnership Council in March.

Subgroup meetings

39. The Working Group established 4 subgroups, each chaired by a member of the Working Group as follows:

- Implications for Workers: Sharon Carney (Flintshire County Council)
- Implications for Employers & Service Delivery: Bethan Thomas (Unison)
- Fairness, Equity and Optics: Bethan Thomas (Unison)
- Pilot Design & Evaluation: Amanda Jenkins (Velindre NHS Trust)

40. The Working Group intended for the subgroups to meet over the summer months to maintain momentum. However, despite best efforts to convene the subgroups, the availability of members over the summer holiday season proved an insurmountable challenge.

41. The first meetings of the subgroups took place in September 2023. The exception was the Pilot Design and Evaluation subgroup, the Working Group having decided this should not meet unless a firm decision was made to proceed with a pilot.

42.The initial meetings of the subgroups focussed on familiarising those members drawn from outside of the Working Group with the nature of the task. The initial meetings also discussed and refined terms of reference for each subgroup.

43. Each subgroup approached its work in a way best suited to them – with some meeting more frequently and with greater regularity than others. There was also an instance where 2 subgroups met jointly, with the 'Implications for Workers' and the 'Implications for Employers and Service Delivery' subgroups holding a joint half-day workshop on January 11, 2024.

44. The chairs of the subgroups met separately on occasion to take stock of work across the subgroups, assign actions, and keep lines of communication open so as to reduce the risk of duplication or omission. The work of the subgroups, together with the discussions at the Working Group, informed the conclusions and recommendations of this report.

Conclusions and recommendations

45. The journey taken by the Working Group (and its subgroups) across the last 11 months has been a learning journey. Through the evidence taken from practitioners, academics, and the Scottish Government, the Working Group has discovered and explored layers of complexity and beneficial outcomes that are not always apparent at a surface level.

46. Whilst there was a range of opinion in the Working Group, differences were largely on points of emphasis, rather than on points of principle. For example, no member of the Working Group objected to the concept of the 4-day week in principle. However, there remained a range of views on how and when a 4-day week might be implemented and the circumstances that would be required for this to happen effectively.

47. The challenging public finance position became a growing feature of discussions. This was both in terms of the impact on the bandwidth of organisations to consider piloting a 4-day week and to look at issues around redesigning jobs and workloads around fewer available hours, but also concerns about the optics of how such moves would land with the general public at this time.

48. In its stimulating discussions, the Working Group were able to share these different perspectives, challenge assumptions, and form a broad consensus on its conclusions and recommendations. In doing so, the Working Group fulfilled its objective to consider the 4-day week through a social partnership lens and provide an objective, robust, and serious consideration of the issue.

49. The Working Group made the following central conclusions:

(i) The Working Group does not agree with those who argue the 4-day week is an idealistic but fundamentally misplaced concept, which is incapable of ever

being implemented at scale. However, the Working Group also cautions against the diametrically opposed view, which suggests the will to deliver the 4-day week at pace and scale is all that is required. Neither of these positions succeed in shedding light on the complexity of the issues or the nuances of potential approaches. The Working Group believes a binary framing of the debate between 4-day week proponents and opponents is unhelpful and simplistic.

(ii) The Working Group believes the 4-day week is a progressive and innovative way of working, which merits further consideration by devolved public sector employers and their recognised trade unions. The Working Group consider there are clear benefits to a 4-day week (assuming it is the product of consultation and negotiation between employer and workers).

(iii) Based upon the evidence provided to the Working Group and its discussions, the Working Group determines the benefits to a 4-day week include:

- Improved work-life balance: Shorter contracted hours, with no loss of pay, changes favourably the balance between the proportion of their time that workers spend at work, enabling workers to balance their responsibilities at work with their life outside of work.
- Reduced risk of worker burnout and better physical and mental health: Shorter working hours helps prevent burnout and affords workers with more time in which to rest and recover, with less fatigue and lower levels of stress.
- Improved recruitment and retention and job satisfaction: Adopting a 4-day week provides for a distinctive offer which sets the employer apart from others, it also provides workers with an effective increase in the hourly rate of pay (since they are working fewer hours with no loss of pay). The Working Group heard how employers had used both these factors in helping to recruit and retain workers.
- Greater inclusivity: The Working Group considered that a significant reduction on normal contracted hours could have a transformative effect on the workforce, leading to greater levels of inclusion for workers with caring

responsibilities in particular.

- Increased productivity and organisational performance: The Working Group heard how the benefits above had contributed to improved levels of productivity and reductions in sickness absences. The Working Group recognised the correlation between wellbeing and productivity, acknowledging that workers who are well rested, happy and who have high levels of job satisfaction are likely to be more effective in their roles.

(iv) The Working Group acknowledge there are potential risks for employers, service delivery and workers. However, the Working Group express their confidence those risks can be managed and mitigated, if a 4-Day Week is properly planned for, and if it is designed and implemented in full consultation with workers and their trade union representatives.

(v) The Working Group considers the risks to manage and mitigate include:

- Equality risks: The risk of widening existing inequalities between groups of workers i.e. office workers versus those on the frontline, particularly in 24/7 operations. Given the different gender, race and other characteristics of different workforces in the public sector, there is potential for negative and differential impacts on particular protected characteristics. In some circumstances, worker entitlements to welfare benefits may also be put at risk.
- Financial risks: The risk that employers may need to meet the costs of recruiting additional workers if these are needed to plug gaps in service provision following a reduction of working hours. For example, one member of the Working Group reflected that implementing a 4-day week in their organisation would require the recruitment of an additional 179 full time equivalent posts in order for service delivery to be maintained.
- Undeclared hours and work intensity risks: The risk of a rise in undeclared working hours, as workers try to fit the same workload into a smaller number of working hours. Alternatively, the risk of an increase in work intensity, as workers squeeze the same workload into a smaller number of hours.

- Workforce development risks: The potential for time allotted for learning and development to be squeezed by a combination of workload pressures and reduced working time.
- Service delivery risks: The broad concern around how 24/7 services could be maintained whilst reducing working hours and not increasing headcount, alongside the potential tension between a focus on saving time in order to get the job done and public services which are people centred and where the quality of the service is often dependent on the labour time allocated. For example, the Working Group reflected on the practice of so called 'call cramming' in social care, where homecare workers are routinely given too many visits, which means that clients do not receive the quality of care they are entitled to.
- Personal risks: The potential for 'hidden' personal costs of shorter working hours, such as heating a home during hours that would otherwise have been spent at work or the costs of undertaking leisure pursuits during the additional free time. More seriously, its acknowledged that for some workers, the workplace can be a source of refuge and respite for different reasons.
- Team management risks: Potential increased risks of managing teams working more complex shift schedules needed to maintain coverage. Maintaining communications and engagement may be more challenging and some workers may even feel under pressure to keep in touch when not in work.

(vi) The Working Group believes a top-down pilot imposed on employers and workers should be avoided. For benefits to be effectively realised and for implementation risks to be managed, it is critical that any pilot involves willing employers and that those employers are committed to working with workers and trade unions, fully involving them in the design, implementation and evaluation of any pilot.

(vii) The Working Group recognises that any pilot is unlikely to capture every devolved public sector workforce and every worker within those workforces. Inevitably, some cohorts of workers and employers would be included, whilst

others would not. However, the Working Group cautions against an approach which would create a clear divide between 4-day week 'haves' and 'have nots', with for example, front-line workers, particularly those in shift based and public facing roles being permanently excluded.

(viii) The Working Group is sceptical about the utility of a 'safe bet' pilot i.e. a pilot targeted only at functions which easily lend themselves to a 4-day week. Whilst such an approach may provide for a relatively risk free and easy means of delivering a pilot, the Working Group feel it will ultimately provide little evidence of scalability to wider working environments. Moreover, there is a risk that such an approach could be divisive.

50. The Working Group make the following recommendations based upon the conclusions above:

Recommendation 1

Public sector employers, trade unions and the Welsh Government should, through the WPC, redouble efforts to identify an organisation or organisations who are ready and willing to pilot the 4-Day Week.

Recommendation 2

If any pilot of the 4-day week takes place in devolved public services, the following eight principles should be considered:

I. Pilot(s) must not be imposed and must be the product of a willing employer or employers and their workforces.
II. Pilot(s) must be the product of consultation and negotiation between the relevant employer(s), workers and their trade union(s), designed, implemented and evaluated in full social partnership.

III. Pilot(s) must not put workers' terms, conditions and/or their welfare entitlements at risk.
IV. Pilot(s) must allow for maximum subsidiarity and variation in pilot design, implementation and timeframe, reflecting local needs and circumstances.
V. Pilot(s) must set out clearly intended outcomes and mutually agreed expectations of the employer and workers.
VI. Pilot(s) must be underpinned by fairness and equity and must not entrench existing inequalities or become a source of fresh division.
VII. Pilot(s) must not mandate or make assumptions around how workers should spend newly freed up non-working hours.
VIII. Pilot(s) must not take place without sufficient lead-in time – this is necessary to enable employers and workers to prepare and ready themselves, and for communications with service-users and stakeholders.

Recommendation 3

Consider the benefits and costs of engaging external expertise in the design and evaluation of any future 4-day week pilot.

Recommendation 4

The Welsh Government and Social Partners should note this Working Group's definition that a "4-day working week means no loss of pay or benefits, combined with a 20% reduction to normal contracted hours, while maintaining current levels of service delivery", whilst also recognising organisations may flex that definition in ways that work for them.

Recommendation 5

Consideration should be given to the use of the term 'shorter working week' or

'shorter working day' as opposed to '4-day week'. The latter is widely used by political and media sources, but it may not aid public understanding. It is often widely misinterpreted and taken in its literal sense to mean a shutdown on one of the 5 days of a traditional working week, potentially leading to inaccurate fears about access to and provision of services.

Annex 1: Terms of reference

1. Background

1.1 The Workforce Partnership Council (WPC) is a tripartite social partnership structure comprised of the Welsh Government, trade unions, and employers across the devolved public services in Wales.

1.2 This Working Group on the 4-day working week has been established following discussion and agreement at the WPC's Joint Executive Committee (JEC) (27 January) and at WPC (29 March). The JEC is responsible for delivery of the WPC work programme and has established this working group to bring together relevant expertise.

1.3 A 4-day working week is generally understood to mean a 32-hour week with no loss in pay or benefits. There have been calls for a pilot of the 4-day working week in the devolved public sector in Wales. These have included:

- The report from the Senedd's Petitions Committee following its evidence gathering (**From Five to Four? P-06-1247 Support trials of a four-day week in Wales** - senedd.wales).
- Work commissioned and published by the Future Generations Commissioner (**A Future Fit For Wales: The roadmap to a shorter working week**).
- A **Senedd opposition Plenary debate**.

1.4 The WPC has determined the 4-day working week gives rise to a range of considerations that must be explored in social partnership.

2. Purpose and remit

2.1 This Working Group is established on a Task and Finish basis. It will provide its final report and recommendation to the WPC meeting in November 2023.

2.2 The Working Group will undertake the following:

- Consider the strength of the underpinning rationale and evidence base for a 4-day working week pilot in the devolved public sector.
- Define its understanding of a 4-day working week.
- Evaluate the opportunities, risks and barriers to a 4-day working week pilot, including potential unintended consequences and impact on service delivery, productivity, work intensity and resourcing.
- Assess whether the 4-day working week is best advanced through negotiations at a local level (i.e., individual employer and workforce negotiations) rather than through a national pilot.
- Make recommendations on the feasibility, suitability and acceptability of a 4-day working week pilot in a devolved public service or services in Wales.

2.3 In undertaking its work, the Working Group will be aware that any pilot would need to be delivered within existing financial and staffing resources.

2.4 In the event a pilot is recommended, the Working Group will consider the:

- Scale and timeframe of any pilot.
- Which cohorts of employer(s) and workforces would be involved.
- Fairness and equity implications and safeguarding against the pilot being a further source of inequality, injustice and division.
- How the pilot would be evaluated – including the impact on workforces and

service delivery.

3. Membership and Chair

3.1 The Working Group's membership is set out at Annex A and is drawn from nominations provided by WPC members.

3.2 At least 6 members comprised from 2 each from the Welsh Government, employers and trade unions must attend meetings for them to be considered quorate.

3.3 The Working Group may agree to invite additional input from beyond its membership to aid or add to the group's discussions and deliberations. Those providing such additional input would not be considered to be members of the Group.

3.4 The Working Group will be chaired by Reg Kilpatrick (Judith Cole will be the alternate). A deputy chair will be sought from non-Welsh Government members of the Working Group.

3.5 Members of the Working Group are expected to have the designated authorisation to reflect and communicate the views and perspectives of the constituent group they represent with regards to this work.

4. Meeting frequency and methods

4.1 The Working Group will meet a minimum of 5 times on a monthly pattern, with the exception of a break during July and August, when the availability of members is likely to be limited.

4.2 It is proposed the Working Group meets in April, May, June, September and

October, prior to it submitting its report and recommendations to the WPC meeting in November. However, the Working Group may agree to additional meetings as required.

4.3 Work will be undertaken outside of meetings by and with members as necessary to maintain progress and achieve best value from meetings.

4.4 All meetings will be held in an accessible format and typically, meetings will be held on-line. However, in the event the Working Group wishes to meet in-person, arrangements will be made to ensure such meetings take place in a hybrid format that allows members to join on-line should they wish to do so.

4.5 In keeping with the social partnership way of working, the principle of achieving general consensus amongst Working Group members will be adopted.

5. Secretariat

5.1 The Welsh Government will provide the Working Group with a secretariat drawn from the Social Partnership, Employability and Fair Work Directorate. The secretariat will organise meetings, circulate papers and provide a record of discussions and any actions. Papers will be circulated no less than 7 working days in advance of any meeting in all but the most exceptional of circumstances.

6. Governance arrangements

6.1 The Working Group will provide updates to the JEC on progress and provide a draft of its report and recommendations to the JEC for consideration. If endorsed by the JEC, the report and recommendations will be provided to the WPC for formal approval. If the report is not endorsed by the JEC, the reason for this should be reported to the WPC.

6.2 These terms of reference are effective immediately following their agreement by the Working Group. The terms of reference may be amended, varied, or modified in writing with the agreement of the Working Group.

Conflicts of interest, media

7.1 Any conflicts of interest will need to be declared at the start of each meeting. It will be for the group to determine whether such declarations prevent a member from participating further with the work of the group.

7.2 Documentation may be subject to access to information requests made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Where such requests are received the Welsh Government's standard Freedom of Information procedures will be followed.

7.3 Any communication to the media or to third parties regarding the work of the group must be agreed by members of the JEC.

Annex 2: Summary of evidence generated with the aid of MS Co-Pilot

(The longer form published reports and articles from which this summary is drawn were provided to the Working Group).

Summary

The 4-day work week (4DWW) is an alternative working arrangement that reduces the weekly working hours of employees from 5 to 4 days, without affecting their salaries or benefits. The 4DWW has been proposed to improve

the well-being, productivity, and sustainability of workers and organisations, as well as to address the social and environmental challenges of the 21st century.

However, the empirical evidence on the effects and implications of the 4DWW is still scarce and fragmented. This paper summarises and analyses recent research and evaluation reports from different countries and sectors that have experimented with the 4DWW, to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of knowledge and practice on this topic. The paper covers evidence from Portugal, South Africa, Iceland, South Cambridgeshire District Council, and New Zealand (Perpetual Guardian), as well as additional evidence from a Senedd Petitions Committee and **Autonomy**.

Overall, these pilots, as well as the Autonomy report on AI and shorter working hours, concluded that a shorter work week (e.g. the 4DWW) has positive impacts on both workers and businesses. The studies found improvements in workers' mental health, work-life balance, productivity, and satisfaction, as well as benefits for businesses such as increased revenue and reduced absenteeism and resignation rates.

However, there were also challenges, including pushback on the ability to complete existing volumes of work within a shorter timeframe, lack of viability across some sectors (especially for low-paid, low-security jobs, or vital services such as the health sector), and working against an established culture and pattern of a 5-day working week. Alternative models, such as a shorter working day, might be more deliverable and realistic. The role of the trades unions is seen as crucial important to securing equitable conditions for workers in different industries – particularly where employers have little incentive to improve working conditions.

NB. 4 Day Week Global is involved in several of these pilots (highlighted). There may be inherent biases as a result. That said, they will also have learned a lot of these lessons of what's working/not working.

Evidence

Portugal: 4-day week pilot project

The Portuguese pilot project on the 4-day week

The document describes and evaluates the second phase of the 4-day week pilot project in Portugal, which started in June 2023 and involved 41 companies and more than 1,000 workers who reduced their weekly hours without wage cuts.

The companies that took part in the pilot are representative of the business structure in Portugal, with a majority being smaller companies, but also include medium-sized companies and larger companies. They include a kindergarten, a social centre, a research centre, a stem cell bank, entities from the social sector, manufacturing, and many training and management consulting companies.

The preparation and evaluation of the trial

The companies that joined the pilot project received support from the project coordinators and the 4 Day Week Global organization, which provided training sessions, platforms, and questionnaires to help them design and implement the 4-day week. The workers' effects were assessed by comparing surveys before and after the trial, as well as with a control group of workers from 14 companies that did not reduce their working hours. The surveys covered aspects such as mental health, work-life balance, productivity, and satisfaction. The effects obtained in the experimental group of 21 companies were compared with the results of a control group, made up of workers from 14 companies that decided not to test the four-day week

The implementation and challenges of the 4-day week

The companies adopted different formats of the four-day week, depending on their sector, size, and needs. Some opted for a uniform model of 4 days a week, while others chose a 9-day fortnight, alternating a 4-day week with a 5-day week. Some also coordinated the day off on Fridays, while others created mirror teams or shifts to ensure a continuous operation. The companies also made organizational changes to improve efficiency and communication, such as reducing meetings, creating blocks of work, or adopting new software. The main difficulties faced by the companies were defining productivity metrics, managing holidays, and changing the internal culture to avoid wasting time.

The benefits and satisfaction of the 4-day week

The companies and workers reported positive impacts of the 4-day week on stress levels, mental health, work-life balance, and motivation. The workers also reduced their weekly hours by 11.3%, from 41.1 to 36.5 hours on average, and spent more time on family, hobbies, and personal care. The frequency of negative mental health symptoms decreased significantly, as well as the levels of work exhaustion. The percentage of workers who found it difficult to reconcile work and family responsibilities fell from 46% to 8%. Most workers would only move to a 5-day week job if they received a pay rise of at least 20%.

Workers think that the 4-day week has had a positive impact on their performance. Around 40% say that it has improved meeting deadlines, executing projects, relationships and attracting clients. Creative work has improved for more than 70% of relevant workers, and more than 85% of care workers say their performance has improved. Only a minority of workers say that their ability to meet deadlines, carry out projects or relate to clients has worsened because of the change.

The reasons for not starting the trial

Some companies that expressed interest in the pilot project decided not to start the trial, mainly due to the timing, the lack of approval from headquarters, or the difficulty with clients. Some of them had other ongoing projects, were moving premises, or had lost some key employees, so they decided to postpone the start of the test. Some of them also faced resistance from their international headquarters or had contracts with clients that required a 5-day week availability.

The next steps of the project

The final report, scheduled for April 2024, will present the main findings and recommendations of the project. The final report will also include the experiences and testimonies of the employers and workers who participated in the pilot project.

4 day week pioneer pilot in South Africa

The document is a report of the first 4 Day Week Pilot Program in South Africa

The report presents the results of a 6-month trial of the 4-day week initiative in 28 organizations across various sectors and sizes in South Africa and Botswana, conducted by 4 Day Week Global and local partners. The business sectors that were involved in the 4 Day Week Pilot Program in South Africa were social services and law enforcement, healthcare or social assistance organizations, finance and insurance industry organizations, and other services except public administration. The trial took place for a period of 6 months from

March to August in 2023.

The pilot program involved quantitative and qualitative research methods

The research team collected baseline and endpoint data from 470 employees using surveys, and conducted interviews with managers and employees to gain insights into the implementation and impact of the 4-day week. The surveys measured various indicators such as work time, work intensity, work stress, work ability, work-life balance, life satisfaction, mental health, sleep quality, exercise frequency, travel time, and environmental awareness. The interviews explored the motivations, challenges, and outcomes of the trial from different perspectives.

The results show positive effects on business performance, employee well-being, and sustainability

The process for gathering metrics for the 4 Day Week Pilot Program in South Africa involved collecting baseline data in March and endpoint data in September by the research team. Success in the 4 Day Week Pilot Program in South Africa was measured through various metrics, including:

- A 10.5% average increase in revenue over the course of the trial period.
- Productivity was positively impacted by the trial, both from an employee and company perspective.
- Employee well-being was measured subjectively, with significant changes in work-life balance, satisfaction with time, and life satisfaction.
- Rates of stress and burnout dropped for a significant number of people.
- There was a reported increase in the frequency of exercise for 35% of people during the trial period.
- Resignation rates decreased by 11% during the trial, and the number of sick and personal days taken by employees also decreased during the trial, with

a 9% weighted decrease in absenteeism.
- Sleep was also positively impacted, with a third of participants experiencing less sleep problems during the trial, and 36% reporting that they slept more hours.

The results were consistent with prior research in other regions, demonstrating the universal applicability of the 4-day week policy.

The 4-day week needs leadership and commitment

The successful implementation of the 4-day week depended on the clear communication, planning, and leadership of the managers and owners, as well as the buy-in and engagement of the employees. The trial also involved learning and adapting along the way, and addressing some challenges and unintended consequences.

Some of the challenges included dealing with client expectations, managing leave arrangements, ensuring work coverage, and maintaining work quality. Some of the unintended consequences included increased work intensity, reduced work time flexibility, and increased work-life conflict for some employees.

The 4-day week has different implications for different groups of employees

The trial revealed that the 4-day week had different implications for different groups of employees, depending on their personal and professional circumstances. Some employees used their extra day off for education, entrepreneurship, or volunteering, while others simply relaxed and rested. Some employees faced more work pressure and less flexibility, while others felt more motivated and creative.

South Cambridgeshire District Council

A Corporate Peer Challenge process took place at end October 2023 to review and drive further performance improvement. It focused on 5 core themes, i.e. local priorities and outcomes, organisational and place leadership, governance and culture, financial planning and management, and capacity for improvement.

Following the pandemic and a prolonged period of difficulty recruiting to a number of job vacancies the council initiated a 4-day working week pilot, where colleagues work 80% of their contracted hours with no reduction in pay or benefits. The pilot of the 4-day working week has attracted a significant amount of media attention and concerns from the Minister for Local Government at DHLUC with him instructing the council to cease the pilot.

The peer team were mindful of the 4-day working week arrangements and ensured the focus remained on the 5 core areas of the Corporate Peer Challenge process. Therefore, validation and a robust review of the 4-day working week was not part of the Corporate Peer Challenge scope.

GPT-4 (4 Day Week): Great Britain edition

The main goal of the paper

The paper is not an evaluation, but more of a think piece, which offers a vision of an equitable route for the deployment of artificial intelligence (AI) in the pursuit of greater productivity. It builds upon leading analyses of the potential impacts of new AI technologies, specifically Large Language Models (LLMs), which can generate natural language and perform complex tasks. It analyses the potential eligibility for a 4-day work week across local authorities in Great Britain, driven by AI-enhanced productivity gains over the next decade.

The data sources and methods used

The paper uses data from the UK Census, the Annual Population Survey, the Department for Education, and other sources to estimate the potential impact of AI on productivity and working hours across different occupations and regions. This dataset was updated with long-term employment projections for Great Britain. The paper also uses a crosswalk tool called ASPECTT, developed by Autonomy, to match the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes for UK occupations with the Artificial Intelligence Exposure Indices (AIOE) built by Felten et al., as used by the IMF. This index measures how various occupations are impacted by generative AI.

The 2 scenarios considered

The paper considers 2 scenarios: one where AI leads to a 20% reduction in working hours, enabling a 4-day work week, and another where AI leads to a 10% reduction in working hours, enabling a shorter work week. The paper assumes a 1.5% annual productivity increase due to AI, as estimated by Goldman Sachs in their study on the topic. The paper also uses O*NET's AI exposure evaluations, which were utilised by the IMF in their own analysis. The calculations are based on a 32-hour full-time equivalent for a 4-day work week, and a proportional reduction for a 10% shorter work week.

The paper finds that, by 2033, 20% of the UK workforce (8.8 million workers) could have a 4-day work week, and 88% of the workforce (27.9 million workers) could have at least a 10% reduction in working hours, if AI is used to augment their productivity.

The paper also identifies the local authorities with the highest and lowest potential for working time reduction. The paper finds that the City of London, Kensington and Chelsea, Westminster, Elmbridge, Richmond upon Thames,

Wandsworth, St Albans, and Wokingham are among the local authorities with the highest proportion of workers that could work 4-day weeks within the next decade. The document does not provide specific information about the occupations that have the highest potential for working time reductions.

The paper also finds that Gwynedd, Torridge, Allendale, Pembrokeshire, Copeland, Barrow-in-Furness, Northeast Lincolnshire, Blaenau Gwent, Kingston upon Hull, and Boston are among the local authorities with the lowest proportion of workers that could work 4-day weeks within the next decade. It does not expand on the reasons for this conclusion.

It posits that a shorter work week, enabled by AI-driven productivity gains, can offer several benefits to workers. These include avoiding mass unemployment, reducing widespread mental health illnesses, and physical ailments associated with overwork. It can also create significant additional free time for democracy, leisure consumption, and social cohesion in general.

It suggests that a shorter work week, enabled by AI-driven productivity gains, can offer several benefits to businesses. These include improved staff health, loyalty, and retention, and reduced sick days, which could boost performance for businesses. The gains accrued through better work-life balance could give a significant boost to performance.

The main recommendations of the paper

The paper recommends that public and private sector employers take advantage of the opportunity to use AI for good and improve the lives of workers by implementing a shorter work week.

The paper also suggests that a robust industrial strategy and a strong worker voice are needed to ensure the equitable and sustainable deployment of AI in the workplace. It argues that a shorter work week is a way of tangibly delivering

benefits to workers whose workflow has been augmented by these new tools.

Perpetual Guardian's 4-day workweek trial: Qualitative research analysis

Trial overview

The report describes the qualitative research findings from Perpetual Guardian's reduced working hours trial, which aimed to evaluate the impact of a 4-day workweek on employees and the organisation. Perpetual Guardian is a New Zealand-based company that specializes in estate planning, providing services such as wills, trusts, and investment advice. The report is structured into 3 parts:

- The impact of reduced working hours on workplace dynamics
- The impact on non-work lives, and
- On the future of reduced working hours.

Workplace dynamics

The trial resulted in various improvements in workplace behaviours, relationships and environment, such as increased intellectual engagement, innovation, collaboration, trust, focus, goodwill and motivation. Some challenges and frustrations were also reported, such as increased stress and pressure, workload incompatibility, skill variation and lack of significant innovation. The improvements were attributed to the planning discussions prior to the trial, the micro-initiatives to work smarter and more efficiently, the increased level of teamwork and information sharing, the upskilling and cross-training opportunities, the sense of voice and empowerment, and the shared commitment to the trial's purpose. The challenges were mainly related to the difficulty of completing work tasks within a shorter timeframe, especially for

teams or individuals with higher workloads, more complex roles, or less flexibility.

Non-work lives

The trial enabled employees to have more time and quality in their personal lives, such as accomplishing tasks, participating in family life, restoring and reconnecting, learning and contributing, and exploring and imagining. Few employees reported struggles or concerns with the additional time off, such as existential questions or boredom. The benefits of the trial included having more time to do chores and errands during the week, freeing up the weekends for leisure and social activities, being more involved and supportive of children and extended family members, having more time for oneself to relax, reflect, or pursue hobbies and interests, having more time for formal or informal study and professional development, having more time for volunteer and community work, and having more time to try new things and imagine new possibilities.

Future of reduced working hours

Most employees expressed their hope and support for the reduced working hours to become an ongoing reality, as long as they met the agreed productivity measures. Some managers preferred other flexible working arrangements or had some caveats for the implementation of the reduced hours.

Two main areas of feedback were clarifying the expectations of the additional time off and investing in organisational development. Some employees and managers had different perspectives on whether the time off should be seen as a day of annual leave, a flexible working day, or an optional bonus. Some employees and managers also suggested that more training, support and resourcing would be needed to ensure sustainable changes and benefits, such as more advanced information technology, more structured guidance and

training on lean management principles, and more organisational redesign and investment.

Going public: Iceland's journey to a shorter working week June 2021

Iceland's experiments with shorter working hours

The report describes 2 large-scale trials of reducing working hours in Iceland, which involved more than 2,500 workers from various sectors. The trials aimed to improve work-life balance and productivity and were successful in both aspects.

Key stats and background of Iceland

The report provides some key statistics and contextual information about Iceland, such as its population, GDP, working hours, and productivity. It also highlights the country's poor performance in work-life balance compared to other Nordic countries, and the growing demand for shorter working hours from civil society and unions.

According to the document: Here are some key stats about Iceland:

- Population (1 January, 2019): 356,991
- Land area: 102,775 km2
- Official language: Icelandic
- Working population (Q4 2019): 196,700
- Workforce participation (15–64 year olds): 87% — highest within OECD
- Unemployment: 3.4% — 6th lowest within OECD
- Total GDP (2018): 2.8 trillion ISK / 17.6 billion GBP / 22.7 billion USD
- GDP per person (2017): 46,981 USD — 6th highest of OECD countries,

higher than other Nordic countries

The trials involved a wide range of workplaces, including offices, playschools, social service providers, and hospitals. The trials were conducted by both Reykjavík City Council and the Icelandic national government. The workplaces involved in the trial were diverse and included service centres, child protection services, accountancy departments, police stations, and directorates of internal revenue and immigration, among others.

The report shows that they had positive effects on both employees and businesses. Workers reported improved work-life balance, reduced stress, more time for family and hobbies, and better cooperation at work. Service provision and productivity remained the same or improved across most workplaces, and some workplaces saw increased efficiency and customer satisfaction.

The benefits included less stress at home, greater time spent with family and friends, increased time for oneself, greater time for chores and domestic activities during the working week, men in heterosexual partnerships taking on greater domestic responsibilities, positive effects on single parents, more exercise, and wider social wellbeing. These effects were profound and sustained over the trials' long time span. The data was collected through a range of indicators including wellbeing, performance, and work-life balance. This was done through both qualitative and quantitative data, providing a holistic picture of the trials' effects on workers and their organizations.

The trials of shorter working weeks in Iceland showed that businesses benefited from the reduction in working hours. Productivity and service provision remained the same or improved across most trial workplaces. This means that businesses were able to maintain or even increase their output while providing their employees with a better work-life balance. The benefits to businesses were measured through the maintenance or increase of productivity and service provision across the majority of trial workplaces.

There were no significant negative outcomes mentioned in the trials of shorter working weeks in Iceland. The report states that the trials led to historic contracts that guaranteed shorter working hours for tens of thousands of workers in Iceland, covering about 86% of the working population. The report also notes that the trials have received positive feedback from politicians and civil society, and that they can serve as a model for other countries that want to pursue working time reduction.

Petitions Committee: 27 June 2022

Evidence heard from:

- Joe O'Connor, Global 4 Day Week
- Mark Hooper, Petitioner
- Shavanah Taj, TUC Cymru

The committee heard that a 4-day working week could have benefits for workers, including improved work-life balance, increased productivity, and reduced carbon emissions.

The TUC supports a 4-day working week based on asking workers what they want. Shavannah Taj noted:

> " "technology is changing, and as technology increases productivity, we want to see the profits that then come about as a result of that shared equally and fairly with workers, and that includes less time at work. Now, of course, just like with the real living wage campaign, the four-day work is a simplified approach to improving workers' terms and conditions."

> " "…the TUC … did a bit of research and we know that eight in 10 workers want to reduce working time in the future, with 45% of workers opting for a four-day working week. I think the four-day working week campaign

> should then be seen within the wider context of trade unions' work to reduce working hours for the same overall levels of pay." "

Joe O'Connor noted that 4 Day Week Global is a not-for-profit organisation that supports companies to trial or transition to a reduced hour, productivity-focused approach. The organisation is currently coordinating a series of pilot programmes internationally, with 160 companies and roughly 8,000 employees participating in the first six months of this year alone.

The benefits of the 4-day work week

There is a body of evidence that suggests that reduced work time can lead to improved worker well-being, reduced burnout, reduced stress, and better work-life balance. From an employer perspective, companies that have implemented the 4-day work week have reported that they have been able to maintain or improve business performance or productivity. what these companies are managing to achieve is that they're using the four-day work week as tool to align individual employees' interests and the company's interests, and to provide a real sharp focus not on the number of hours that people are spending in the office, at the desk or on the clock, but actually on the results that are being achieved and the output that's being produced.

The 4-day work week might also provide a competitive edge for companies in terms of recruitment, retention, and quality of life. E.g. companies doing this because maybe they can't compete in the top 1% of compensation, but the four-day work week means they can compete in the top 1% of work weeks. We've (4 Day Week Global) seen lots of examples, such as Atom Bank in the UK, who have done this and have reported that their job applications have gone up 500%, giving them a huge edge when it comes to recruitment.

The challenges and the role of government

The 4-day work week is not equally accessible to all sectors of the economy, and some industries may face more barriers than others. In tech, in finance, in ICT and software, that this has really become a huge growing trend, to the point at which it might become the norm or the standard in a matter of years. Government can play a role in supporting trials, facilitating legislation, conducting research, and engaging with stakeholders to ensure that the benefits of this transition can flow to all segments of society.

He noted that the 5-day work week didn't happen overnight in every country in every industry in parallel; this was a long, 20 to 30-year process. Before legislation was introduced to make this mandatory across the economy, it was a gradual process, through unions winning this through collective bargaining processes, pioneering business leaders like Henry Ford introducing this in his own firm.

The benefits of a 4-day work week

A 4-day work week can improve productivity, employee well-being, and environmental sustainability, according to the document. They claim that reducing work time by 20% can lead to a 16% reduction in carbon emissions, as well as lower costs for recruitment, training, and sick leave. It also states that a four-day work week can enhance work-life balance, gender equality, and mental health for employees.

The challenges and opportunities of implementing a 4-day work week

Joe O'Connor noted that some sectors, such as healthcare, may face difficulties in adopting a four-day work week without increasing staff or costs. However, he

also suggested that a government-led program could help to address these challenges and explore the broader impacts of this policy on the economy, society, and environment. E.g. spending less on recruiting, retraining and upskilling staff, because you've a lower level of turnover, if you've reduced your sick leave bill, if you've less single-day absenteeism. These all contribute to better chance of better patient and learner outcomes due to lower levels of unplanned disruptions.

The global movement towards a 4-day work week

Joe notes examples of countries and regions that have launched or are planning to launch trials of a 4-day work week, such as Spain, Scotland, New Zealand, and the UAE. It argues that this is a timely opportunity for Wales to join this movement and become a leader in this space. He also suggests that Wales could learn from these experiences and tailor its own programme to suit its specific needs and goals.

Petitions Committee: 11 July 2022

Evidence heard from:

- Professor Abigail Marks, Professor of the future of work and director of research at Newcastle University Business School
- Cheney Hamilton, Find Your Flex, member of the all-party parliamentary group on the future of work
- Dr Will Stronge, Autonomy
- Louisa Neale, The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales's Office

Abigail Marks contribution

The challenges of implementing a 4-day week: She expressed her doubts about the feasibility and desirability of a 4-day week in the UK context. She argues it not viable across all sectors, especially for low-paid and precarious workers who are already struggling with work insecurity and low wages. She also cautions that a four-day week could lead to more work intensification and overwork, as workers would have to cram more tasks into fewer hours, and that employers need to take responsibility for reducing workload and increasing flexibility before considering a shorter working week.

The need for infrastructure and universal basic income

She suggested that a 4-day week would require a significant change in the social and economic infrastructure of the country, including the introduction of a universal basic income (UBI) to ensure equality of opportunity and access to reduced working hours. She also says that the current low levels of trade union density and surplus labour force make it difficult to negotiate and implement a shorter working week, as workers have little bargaining power and employers have little incentive to improve working conditions. She points out that the 5-day week was achieved through trade union campaigns and collective action, which are lacking in the present situation.

The alternative of a 6-hour day

She noted that a 6-hour day might be a more realistic and beneficial option than a 4-day week, as it could reduce work input and increase well-being without creating more pressure and inequality. She refers to the Gothenburg trial of a 6-hour day for nurses, which showed positive impacts on health, productivity and patient care. She also says that other forms of flexibility, such as outcome-based working and remote working, need to be embedded before the 4-day week. She

stresses that the 4-day week is an idealistic vision, but not a fit for the current work environment.

Cheney Hamilton contribution

The limitations and drawbacks of a 4-day week

Cheney criticised the 4-day week as a limited and insufficient solution to the challenges of the future of work. It does not go far enough to address the issues of overwork, work insecurity, automation, cost of living, and access to work. She also says that the 4-day week is not flexible, inclusive, or realistic for many sectors and workers, especially those who are low-paid, precarious, or platform-based. Cheney Hamilton did not provide any specific evidence or data to substantiate her claims, but rather presented her opinions and observations based on her experience and conversations with businesses.

The alternative of outcome-based working

She proposed outcome-based working as a better alternative to the four-day week, as it focuses on the outputs and results of work rather than the hours and inputs. She also says that outcome-based working can help businesses reduce costs, increase productivity, and compete with digital workers, as well as help workers increase their wealth, well-being, and skills.

The need for organisational change and universal basic income

She argued that the organisational change required may not be feasible or desirable for many businesses and sectors. It would increase the overheads and staff costs for businesses and create inequality for workers who cannot afford to work less. She does not believe it addressed the impact of automation and the

loss of jobs that it may entail. It would require introducing a universal basic income that would supplement any working income and provide a basic level of security and dignity for all.

Will Stronge contribution

The challenges and solutions for different sectors

He acknowledged different sectors have different challenges and needs for implementing a shorter working week, e.g. healthcare and education, would need greater investment and employment to reduce working hours without compromising service quality. He argued that the shorter working week is not a silver bullet, but a part of a broader strategy to improve the quality of work and life.

He challenged the claim that the UK has low unemployment, and says that there is a lot of hidden underemployment and low-quality work that could be improved by a shorter working week. He says that the shorter working week is not a rigid or fixed model, but a flexible and adaptable one that can suit different needs and preferences.

Petitions Committee Report - From Five to Four? - P-06-1247 Support trials of a four-day week in Wales

Published January 2023

The petition, which collected 1,619 signatures, argued that a 4-day week would boost workers' well-being, productivity, and the environment, citing successful trials in Iceland and other countries that are planning or implementing similar pilots.

Most of the committee members were in favour of developing a pilot to reduce working hours within the devolved public sector, with no loss of pay for employees. They argued that this could be a valuable part of the solution to address overwork, improve well-being, and enhance Wales' attractiveness to workers.

They acknowledged the need to address the practical barriers and concerns raised by some witnesses, and to involve the workforce and its representatives in the development of the pilot. One committee member was opposed to a 4-day week, as he believed it was not realistic or viable across all sectors and would create division and injustice in society. He also questioned the evidence for improving productivity and the competence of the Welsh Government to implement such a scheme.

The committee made four recommendations to the Welsh Government, which are:

i. To develop a pilot to reduce working hours in targeted and discrete areas of the devolved public sector, where productivity can be maintained or improved without increasing staff numbers.
ii. To liaise with organisations that have run or participated in similar pilots, and to learn from their experiences and best practices.
iii. To require participating organisations to meet certain criteria, such as taking a flexible approach to how employees reduce their hours, developing plans to avoid overwork and address practical challenges, and securing agreement from trade unions or employee representatives.
iv. To ensure a robust and impartial assessment of the pilot, which includes analysis of the economic, social and environmental impacts of the pilot.

For more information refer to our **accessibility statement**.