



Productivity

Thousands of UK workers to take part in four-day week trial

With work changed forever by the pandemic, firms say shorter week could help attract and retain staff

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More than 3,000 workers at 60 companies across Britain will trial a four-day working week, in what is thought to be the biggest pilot scheme to take place anywhere in the world.

Employees from a wide range of businesses and charities are expected to take part in the scheme, which will run initially from June to December, including the Royal Society of Biology, the London-based brewing company Pressure Drop, a Manchester-based medical devices firm, and a fish and chip shop in Norfolk.

It comes as the push for companies to adopt a shorter working week - crucially with no loss of pay while aiming for higher productivity - gains momentum as a way of [improving working conditions](#).

The pilot is being run by academics at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, as well as Boston College in the US, in partnership with the campaign group 4 Day

Week Global, the 4 Day Week UK Campaign and the Autonomy thinktank.

Launching the trial to examine how such employment patterns might work at a broad range of companies across the economy, the participation of 3,000 workers means it is larger than a previous pilot in Iceland by Reykjavík city council and the national government that included more than 2,500 workers.

The research comes after the Covid pandemic led many people and companies to re-examine their working patterns, with a **marked rise in hybrid and flexible practices** that eschew the standard nine-to-five, five-day work week.

Joe O'Connor, the chief executive of 4 Day Week Global, said there was no way to “turn the clock back” to the pre-pandemic world. “Increasingly, managers and executives are embracing a new model of work which focuses on quality of outputs, not quantity of hours,” he said. “Workers have emerged from the pandemic with different expectations around what constitutes a healthy life-work balance.”

Other companies to have tried the four-day week who are not part of the latest trial include the FTSE 100 consumer goods firm Unilever, the Japanese electronics firm Panasonic, and London’s app-based Atom Bank.

Mark Downs, the chief executive of the Royal Society of Biology, said the decision to trial the four-day week was partly a response to an “incredibly competitive” labour market.

“It’s about trying to do more to be a good, innovative employer to attract and retain our current staff,” he said. “These sorts of possibilities make a massive difference. It’s great for everybody.”

The society’s 35 staff mostly work in King’s Cross, London, but some have moved to remote working during the pandemic. Employees were told about the trial last week and responses so far have been universally positive, Downs said.

The society will remain open five days a week, but with workers generally split between Monday-to-Thursday and Tuesday-to-Friday shifts.

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