



Working hard or hardly working? The TUC's four day working week proposal.

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By **Kate Potts** - 27 September 2018

The standard nine-to-five job, five days a week, has been commonplace since the early 20th century – the sanctity of the weekend being perhaps one of the trades union movement's most famous achievements. However, the Trades Union Congress ("TUC") has recently gone one step further and called for a four-day working week (equating to 28 hours). They indicate that new technological advances (in particular in relation to artificial intelligence) are leading to smarter working practices. The TUC suggests that these advances will lead to efficiencies and savings which should be shared with the workforce, rather than just business owners and shareholders. This proposal would mean staff working fewer hours for the same rate of pay.

Given that the TUC's proposal is that the four-day working week is implemented by the year 2100, this proposal is far from the minds of most employers. However, there are some employers trying out the concept including Perpetual Guardian, a New Zealand company which manages trusts, wills and estate planning. The company noted improved performance at work along with employees citing that they could better manage their work-life balance. Those in support of the proposal argue that reduced working hours are likely to lead to happier employees, which in turn will lead to a more productive workforce and greater commitment and loyalty to the employer.

If employers can get it right, there are clearly potential benefits of reduced working hours. However, the proposal will seem like a pipe dream for the majority of UK employers, particularly given the uncertainty around Brexit and the need for businesses to retain their competitive edge. In the UK competitiveness has often been based on low wages, low skills, low investment and long hours. At least in the short term we do not expect that employers will be making big changes to their working patterns. However, as we move into a post-Brexit era it may be a good opportunity for businesses to find a new differentiator. That could mean looking increasingly towards technology, which would (at least theoretically) lay the foundation for a four-day working week.

The full report from the TUC can be read [here](#).

