



UK trials four-day week

In April 2021 we reported on the [SNP's manifesto pledge to trial a four-day working week](#) in Scotland, with no reduction in salary. Whilst no formal Government backed trial has as yet materialised in Scotland, this has not stopped some Scottish employers running their own trials, and even introducing the four-day week as a permanent feature: see for example [here](#) and [here](#).

It is important to note that this is not giving employees an extra day's holiday a week. The quid pro quo for the reduction in hours is that productivity is to remain at 100%, that is as if the employee were working full-time. The main principle behind this is that the reduction in working hours leads to an increase in productivity. The potential benefits that have been publicised from trials include better employee engagement, better work-life balance, and a lower carbon footprint.

Now, with the challenges of Covid and running a business (hopefully) behind employers, the forward-thinking employer will be re-thinking ways of working and what constitutes the 'employee experience'. Issues of employee mental health, productivity, motivation and so on ought to be at the forefront of an employer's mind. We have all heard about the 'great resignation' and how employees are being much more influenced by 'soft benefits' that give them the flexibility that they see and improve their well-being, both mental and physical. Cash is no longer king and potential recruits are looking beyond salary and bonus and making decisions based on other factors such as flexibility around working from home, holiday and so on. The attraction and retention of talent may be greatly influenced by an employer's attitude to the four-day week and in September 2021, Personnel Today [reported](#) that working a four-day week was the most highly sought-after benefit by employees.

Not-for profit organisation, 4 Day Week Global, has been spearheading [a global campaign](#) since June last year which is now coming to the UK big-time. The six-month pilot is being carried out in conjunction with researchers at Oxford and Cambridge Universities. Personnel Today [reported](#) that around 70 UK employers had already joined the pilot, due to run from June to November 2022.

Despite the potential benefits, the four-day week may not be for all employers or sectors of the economy or even employees. Some prominent figures appear not to be such big fans of giving so much flexibility to employees. Take, for example Jacob Rees-Mogg and Elon Musk, both of whom have been reported to have made comments that would suggest they prefer a more traditional 5 day a week arrangement with employees physically present in the workplace. We are still waiting to see how the pilot scheme works in practice and employers should start to think about how the potential benefits of offering additional flexibility to employees balances against concerns or administrative challenges.

