

1 July 2024

Mythbuster: The Four-Day Week

Working 80% of hours for 100% of pay? How would it work and how can we achieve it?

PCS Efra group is leading the charge on campaigning for a trial of a four-day week. Members are gathering evidence and support to show it's a win-win for workers and employers alike. Our national campaign demands already include a shorter working week with no loss in pay. Other UK employers and employees have been shown to benefit from a four-day week, which is now being piloted in parts of Scottish Government. It proves that there's an adult conversation to be had about what gets the best for everyone.

A four-day week isn't in the pay remit - how could this happen?

The remit does not prevent trials, so there's nothing stopping our employer testing the idea. The remit isn't set in stone, so a successful trial would provide the justification to change it.

How will ministers ever accept this?

Ministers aren't our employers, but we recognise there could be a strong pushback. Public opinion is much more positive; many workers see the common sense behind the idea. Industrial action has a track record of changing the government's mind.

Isn't this just asking for a 20% pay rise?

Up until now the conversation has been that with salaries not increasing, we are expected to maintain productivity for wages that are worth less. Employers pay us for our skills and to get the job done. If there's a better way to do the job, why not explore it?

Wouldn't it be too inflexible?

A range of four-day weeks could be developed, from classic 'Friday off' models, to 'staggered', 'decentralised', 'annualised', and 'conditional' structures.

How would this fit with seasonal work?

This would need to be considered in terms of business needs to work out the best application of 80% of hours, 100% of pay.

How would this work in an emergency situation?

Emergency response continues to be in line with standard policy overtime.

How would this affect part-time staff?

This could be done via a reduction of hours or increase in pay, taking business needs into consideration.

How would areas already under-resourced cope?

Areas shouldn't be under-resourced in the first place. Expecting staff to pick up the slack unpaid isn't a sustainable workforce strategy. A four-day week will help with staff retention and begin to address the problem of under-resourcing.

I can barely fit things into five days, how can I fit it into four?

We need to move away from constantly struggling to meet deadlines. This will mean examining the way we work and finding ways of planning better.

How will this impact my annual leave allowance?

We're not proposing any changes to annual leave allowances.

Won't the press have a field day?

So far, the press has responded neutrally. We should remember parts of the press didn't want us to have a pay rise that was still below inflation.

Won't productivity be negatively impacted?

Not according to the evidence so far. But that's why we're arguing for a trial, so we can examine how it impacts our output.

Isn't it the wrong time to make such an ambitious demand?

The four-day week is an innovative step to address some of the long-term, systemic issues impacting the public sector. Though we expect some sceptical voices we believe that a pilot would help prove that this is the future, not a pipe dream.

If our employer won't agree, how can we persuade them?

As with our 2023 industrial dispute on pay, we have shown that through joining together to demand change, we can persuade our employer to change even the most stubborn position.

Why is this not being discussed in my area?

The Efra campaign came from a PCS conference motion. Other areas are also pursuing this so you may wish to talk to your reps if you are interested.