

# MAKING IT STICK: THE UK FOUR- DAY WEEK PILOT ONE YEAR ON

February 2024



Autonomy

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**Autonomy**

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# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- » Of the 61 organisations that took part in the 2022 UK four-day week pilot, at least 54 have confirmed that they are still operating the policy one year later (89%). In addition, at least 31 have made the four-day week permanent - 51% of all participating companies.
- » Organisations were invited to participate in a follow-up study one year later, to see how the four-day week was taking effect. Almost half of the original cohort (28 organisations) agreed to take part in these follow-up research engagements, providing feedback on the policy itself, how to “make it stick” in the long term, and the lasting impacts of the four-day week.
- » 100% of managers and CEOs who were consulted said that the four-day week had a ‘positive’ or ‘very positive’ impact on their organisation. When asked what the shorter working week had changed, 82% of surveyed companies reported positive impacts on staff well-being. 50% saw positive effects on reducing staff turnover and 32% said the policy had noticeably improved their recruitment.

- » A separate follow-up survey with staff from 47 of the original pilot organisations also showed that the improvements in physical and mental health, work-life balance and general life satisfaction, as well as reductions in burnout, found at the end of the original pilot have all been maintained one year on. The survey also shows that work intensity is lower, and job satisfaction higher, than before the 2022 pilot began.
- » Additionally, through interviews with staff and managers, this report offers insights into the practicalities of maintaining a four-day week policy in the longer term.
- » Interviews revealed the many positive initiatives and strategies that organisations have used to maintain their four-day week policies, including revising the norms around meetings, communications, work prioritisation and more.
- » Interviews also suggested that staff in organisations where the additional day off was only weakly guaranteed (or conditional on meeting certain targets) had some concerns about the policy. Less committed forms of four-day week implementation leave staff less able to plan activities on their days off.
- » Finally, interviews and qualitative feedback also shed further light on what staff were doing with their days off. Themes were broadly consistent with those seen during the original pilot, including a focus on care responsibilities, hobbies, and clearing out chores during the week in order to have quality time on the weekend.



# **INTRODUCTION**

# INTRODUCTION

One year ago, in February 2023, results were published from the UK's four-day week pilot - the largest of its kind to date. This was a landmark moment for working time reduction in the UK. But for those organisations that took part, the four-day week did not end with the pilot's conclusion, and the vast majority (96%) have kept the policy in place.

## ONE YEAR ON

Beyond the pilot, the four-day week has continued to grow, and in the UK the policy is more popular than ever. Recent polling commissioned by the UK 4 Day Week Campaign found that 58% of the public expects the four-day week to be the standard way of working by 2030, compared to only 22% who think it will not.<sup>1</sup> In May 2023, a study found that 78% of UK workers want a four-day week and another 52% would actively seek four-day week employment,<sup>2</sup> while other research found that searches for four-day week jobs rose by 38% between June 2022 and June 2023.<sup>3</sup> The four-day week has also become a key demand in trade union negotiations in countries like the United States,<sup>4</sup> Germany,<sup>5</sup> and Italy.<sup>6</sup>

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1 The Mirror, "Four-day week will be norm for UK workers by 2030, most people believe", 2023. Available at: <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/four-day-week-norm-uk-29861791>.

2 YouGov and Startups UK, 2023. Available at: <https://startups.co.uk/news/four-day-week-uk-survey/>.

3 Flexa, 2023. Available at: <https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/four-day-week-jobs-searches-flexa/>.

4 NPR, "Why a 4-day workweek is on the table for autoworkers", 2023. Available at: <https://www.npr.org/2023/09/11/1198394085/uaw-big-3-automakers-4-day-work-week-shawn-fain-detroit>

5 Le Monde, "German steelworkers union pushes for a four-day workweek", 2023. Available at: [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/economy/article/2023/06/05/german-steelworkers-union-pushes-for-a-four-day-workweek\\_6029152\\_19.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/economy/article/2023/06/05/german-steelworkers-union-pushes-for-a-four-day-workweek_6029152_19.html)

6 Reuters, "Lamborghini introduces four-day week for production workers", 2023. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/business/autos-transportation/lamborghini-introduces-four-day-week-production-workers-2023-12-05/>



At the same time, new pilots have been multiplying in the UK and around the world. In 2022, the Scottish Government,<sup>7</sup> the Belgian Government,<sup>8</sup> and the Dominican Republic<sup>9</sup> all announced new government-supported four-day week trials in the public or private sector. In Spain, the Valencia City Council ran the first city-wide four-day week trial, with very successful results.<sup>10</sup> In our own workplace consultancy at Autonomy, we have directly overseen 17 new trials in 2023, and helped dozens more get closer to a pilot. As of early 2024, there were 152 official four-day week employers accredited by the 4 Day Week Campaign in the UK<sup>11</sup> - a 32% increase in just one year.

Of course, introducing a four-day week is not exactly the same thing as *maintaining it*. This report draws together a substantial body of qualitative evidence collected from 28 organisations that took part in the original UK trial, as well as quantitative data taken from across 47 organisations. In addition to the original six month trial period in 2022, this means that we now have an additional year of data from these organisations - the most substantial body of data which has been collected to date in the UK on shorter working hours.

This data offers us new insight into the impacts of a four-day week on workers over the longer term, as well as into the strategies used by organisations to make a shorter working hours policy work within their particular circumstances. Across participating organisations we have seen a number of changes to implementation models over time, as well as some common obstacles and innovative solutions. With this in mind, this report offers a 'nuts and bolts' exploration of working time reduction in practice. We review testimony from employees, managers and employers, and trace developments in implementation as they occurred. In the few cases where a reduction in working hours has not been successfully maintained, we examine what exactly might have led to this failure. There are clear lessons to be learned from the experiences of these early adopters.

Just as participating companies and organisations have now had more time to adapt to new working practices, staff have had more time to adapt to the three-day weekend (or to other expansions of non-working time). For many involved in the original pilot, expanded lives beyond work have become a new normal; personal and organisational stories continue to help show how the four-day working week can change lives and organisations for the better.

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7 STV News, "Scottish Government launches four-day working week trial", 2023. Available at: <https://news.stv.tv/scotland/public-sector-workers-in-scotland-begin-four-day-working-week-trial>

8 Belga News Agency, "Belgium to pilot four-day working week", 2023. Available at: <https://www.belganewsagency.eu/belgium-to-pilot-four-day-workweek>

9 Al Jazeera, "Dominican Republic to trial four-day work week: Can it work globally?", 2024. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/20/dominican-republic-to-trial-four-day-work-week-can-it-work-globally>

10 Euronews, "Workers in Valencia's 4-day week trial report less stress and more socialising", 2023. Available at: <https://www.euronews.com/next/2023/10/31/workers-in-valencias-4-day-week-trial-report-less-stress-and-more-socialising>

11 See <https://www.4dayweek.co.uk/employers> for a full list.

## THE STUDY

Following the publication of the UK pilot report in February 2023, our team designed a follow up study to take place approximately one year after the end of the pilot. The data presented in this report was gathered in November and December 2023, in a context where many of the organisations involved in the original programme had extended their pilot phase. Others have permanently adopted a working time reduction, and a very small number have returned to a five day week after the end of their initial pilot.

The study has four complementary components:

- » An updated assessment of staff wellbeing through an all-staff survey led by Prof. Juliet Schor and team at Boston College, covering 47 participating organisations.
- » A policy update form completed by managers responsible for the implementation and oversight of shorter working week policy at 20 participating organisations.
- » A feedback form completed by staff at 14 of the participating organisations addressing changes to working life, personal life and the organisational management of the transition to a four-day week.
- » Qualitative interviews with staff at all levels of 14 participating organisations.

Each part of the study is unpacked in more detail below.

The organisations included in this study cover a variety of locations, organisation types, sizes and sectors. For those that provided us with qualitative data, 79% were for-profit companies, while 21% were charities or nonprofits.

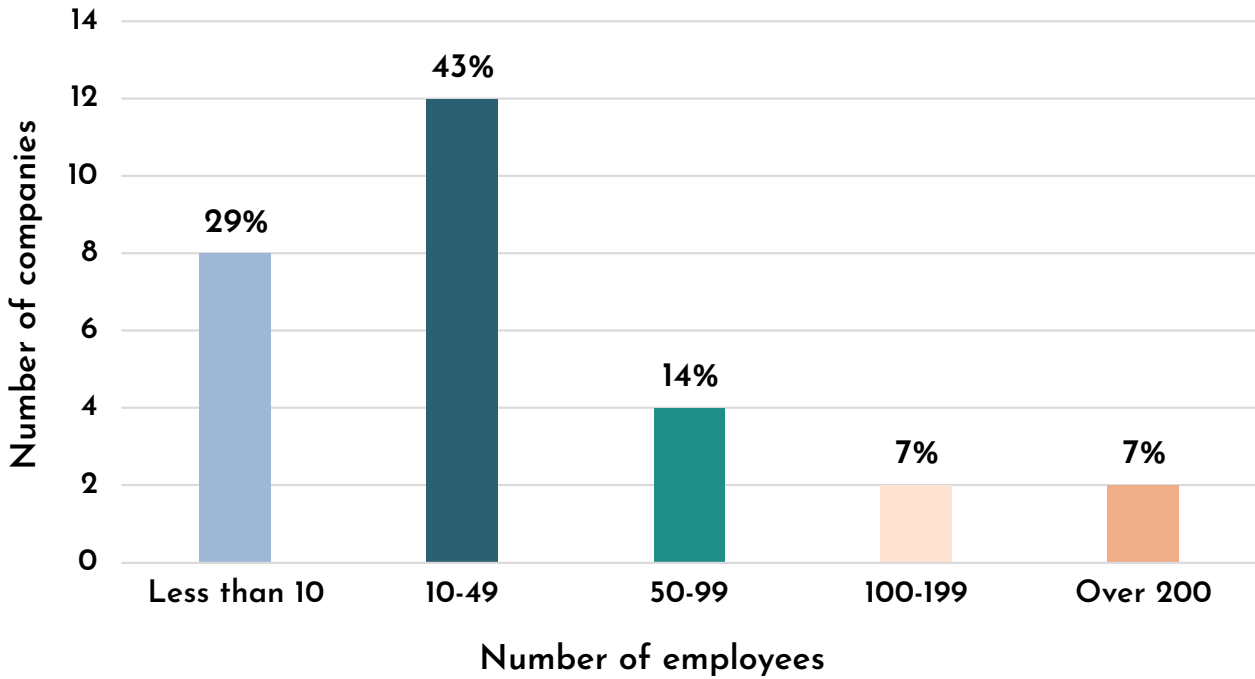


Figure 1: Distribution of four-day week pilot companies surveyed by size (number of employees)

Companies of various sizes participated in the study. The largest group was composed of companies of 10 to 49 employees (43%). 8 companies (29%) were very small organisations of less than 10 employees. Another 4 companies (14%) had between 50 and 99 employees, 2 companies (7%) had 100 to 199 employees, and 2 had over 200 employees.

Unless otherwise specified, all charts pertaining to ‘surveyed companies’ in this report cover the experiences of the 28 organisations that agreed to participate in the study.

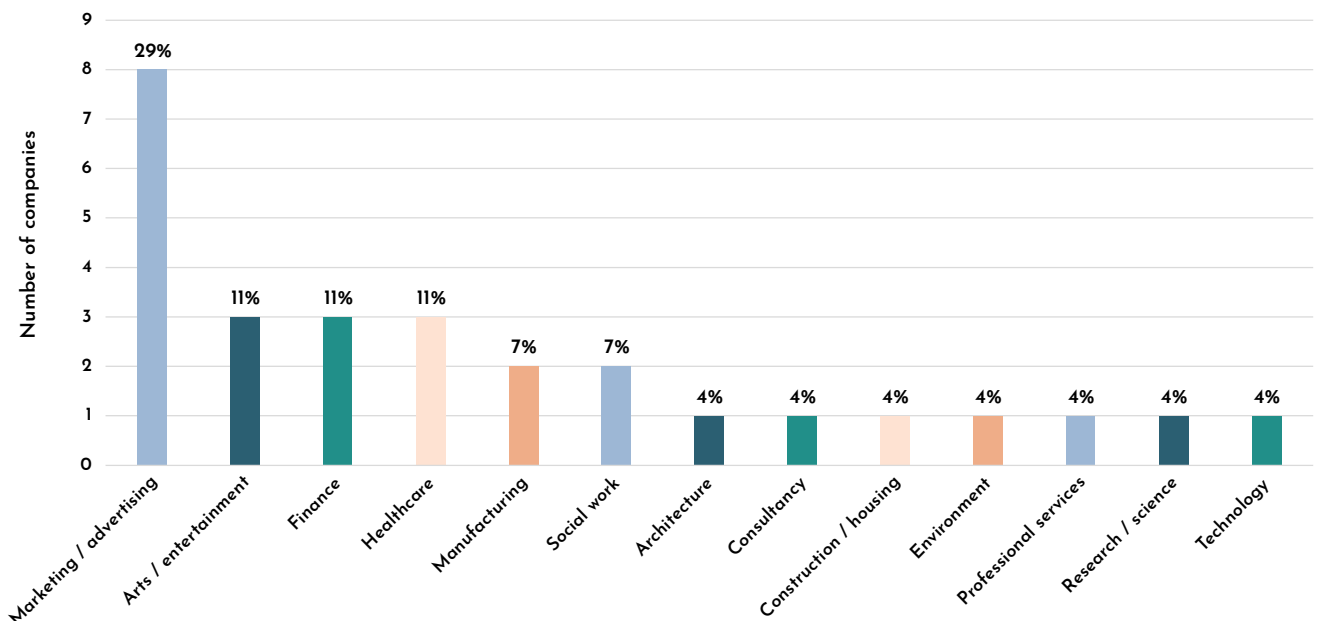


Figure 2: Distribution of four-day week pilot companies surveyed by industry sector

The most represented industry sector was the marketing and advertising sector, with 8 companies (29%). Arts and entertainment, finance, and healthcare were also well represented with 3 companies each (11%), while the manufacturing and social work sectors had 2 companies each (7%). The rest of the cohort came from various industries: architecture, consultancy, construction and housing, environment, professional services, research, and technology.

## ALL-STAFF WELLBEING SURVEY

Employees who participated in the 2022 pilot were invited to complete a follow-up survey. Following responses, data is now held on employee experiences before the trial, at the trial end, and twelve months on from the trial for just under 500 participants from across 47 companies.

The survey was administered through Qualtrix, and the research team at Boston College contacted employees directly via email using address lists supplied by the participating organisations. This separation of survey administration from the employer is an important part of the research method: by assuring employees that their answers are confidential and will be unavailable to their employers, we are better able to collect honest and accurate information. Only companies with enough employees to ensure the confidentiality of answers are receiving the survey results, and then, only in aggregated form. The employee survey includes questions covering work experience, well-being, family and personal life. Where available, the Boston team used existing, academically-validated scales to measure well-being, work situation, and other outcomes. In other cases, the team created their own questions.

## POLICY UPDATE FORM

Companies who had participated in the 2022 UK pilot were invited to complete a 'policy update form' between October and December 2023. The policy update form was administered through SurveyMonkey and was addressed to one key contact at each organisation - generally CEOs or HR managers. 20 companies completed this form in its online format, while another 6 agreed to a one-hour interview with a senior staff member to discuss the evolution of the policy.

## FEEDBACK FORM

Companies who participated in the follow-up study were asked to share a short feedback form with their staff. This consisted of four open-ended questions asking participants to provide feedback on how the shorter working week impacted their work lives, their personal lives, and on how the transition was managed at their organisation. The form was administered through SurveyMonkey and all the data was stored securely by our research team, assuring participants of their responses' confidentiality.

294 respondents from 14 organisations provided feedback through this form. The majority of these respondents were women (57%), with 39% of respondents self-identifying as men, 1% as non-binary, genderfluid or genderqueer, and 3% who declined to answer. In terms of ethnicity, 92% of the cohort self-identified as white, with 5% identifying as people of colour and 3% who chose the "prefer not to say" option.

Ethnicity composition of staff respondents (294 respondents across 14 four-day week pilot companies). Percentage of staff feedback form (294 respondents across 14 companies).

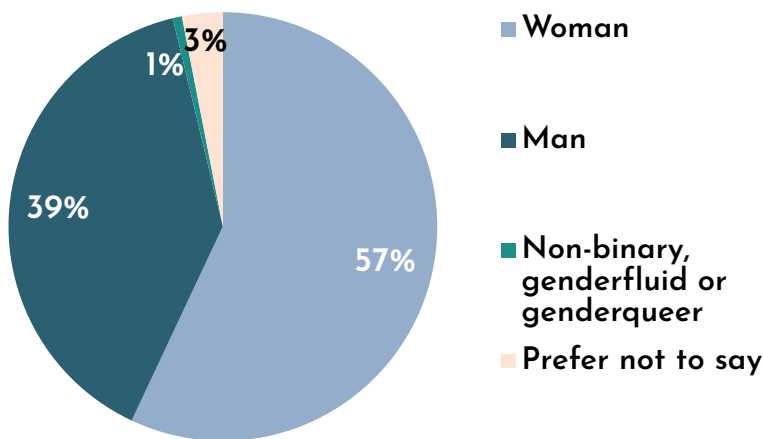


Figure 3: Gender composition of staff feedback form respondents (294 respondents across 14 four-day week pilot companies).

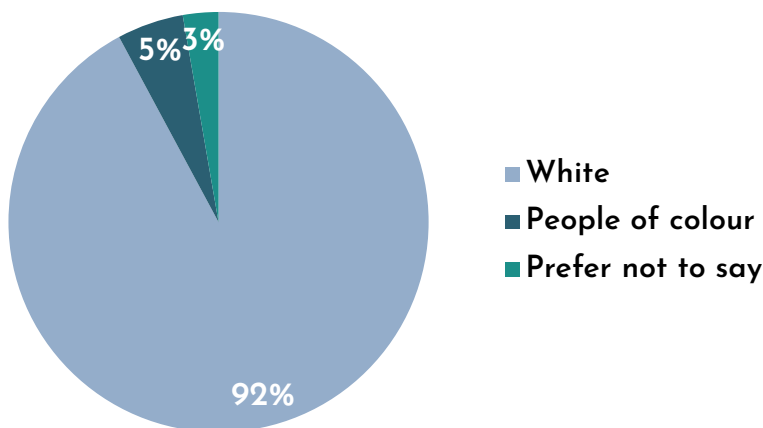
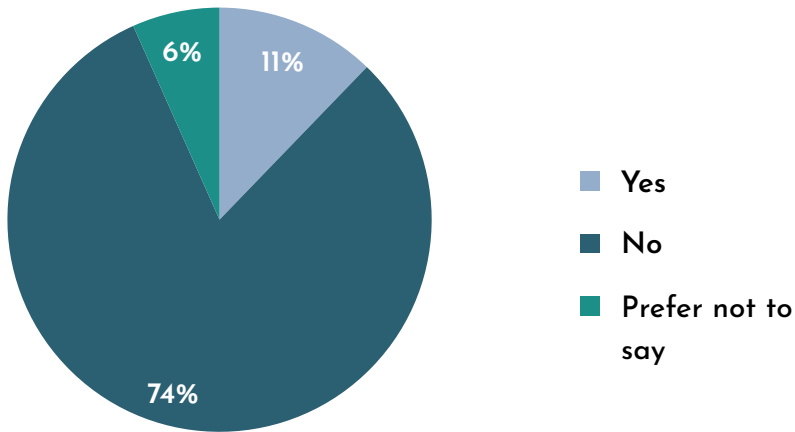


Figure 4: Ethnicity composition of staff feedback form respondents (294 respondents across 14 four-day week pilot companies).

Do you have a disability or a long-term health condition?



*Figure 5: Proportion of respondents who indicated being disabled or having a long-term health condition*

## INTERVIEWS

Employee interviews were carried out by our research team, in order to complement and provide context to the data collected through online surveys. For the 2022 pilot, researchers had created a selective sample that included a spread of industries. Participants who had signed up for an interview during the original pilot were approached to conduct a follow-up interview. In addition, staff who completed the online feedback form were given the option to sign up for potential further conversations. 101 staff members provided their contact address.

The interviews took place between October and December 2023. 12 interviews were conducted with staff members, and 12 with managers and CEOs. The interviews provided additional context and feedback from 14 different companies in total.

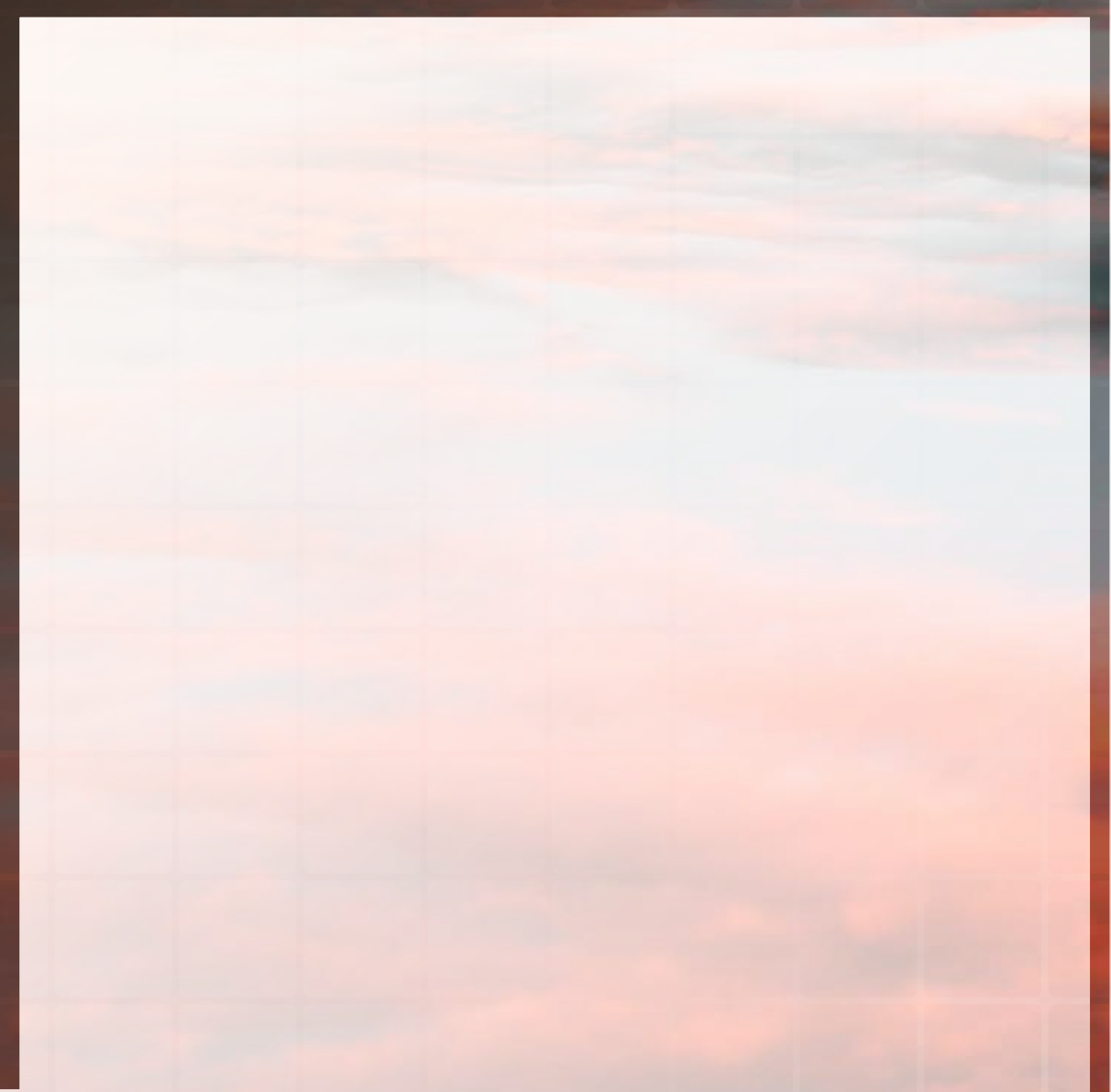
## THE TEAM

This follow-up report was delivered by a collaborative team.

**Autonomy** is an independent research organisation focused on the future of work. Drawing on six years of experience working with charities, companies, trade unions and governments, Autonomy's Workplace Consultancy and Shorter Working Week research strand build trials and pilots, support firms and other organisations, and refine best practice for working-time reduction. Through such trials and implementations, Autonomy has also made a significant contribution to the existing research in the area.

**Dr. David Frayne** is a sociologist based at the University of Salford. **Prof. Brendan Burchell** is a professor of Social Sciences at the University of Cambridge. Together, they offer extensive academic expertise on issues of working time. Prof. Burchell has published widely on work intensification and the effects of labour market experiences on psychological well-being, while Dr. Frayne has worked for over ten years developing theoretical and policy perspectives on the future of work and welfare. David and Brendan oversaw the interviews for the study.

**Prof. Juliet Schor** has been researching and writing on the topic of shorter hours and overwork for decades, and her *Overworked American* (1991) remains a landmark text. More recently, her 2022 TED talk setting out the case for a four-day week has been viewed over 2 million times. Her team at Boston college led quantitative work for this follow up report, collecting, processing and helping to analyse employee wellbeing survey data.



# **GENERAL FEEDBACK**



# GENERAL FEEDBACK

## HOW DOES THE FOUR-DAY WEEK FARE IN THE LONG TERM?

Following the 2022 six-month pilot, 92% of all participating companies had confirmed that they were continuing with the policy, with 30% (18 companies) announcing they would make it permanent.

One year later, the four-day week is still in place in at least 54 of the original 61 participating companies - a success rate of at least 89%. Of the remaining seven organisations, 5 have discontinued the policy (8%) and 2 did not get back to us. Furthermore, at least 31 companies have now confirmed that the policy has been made permanent (representing 51% of all participating companies).

28 organisations (almost half of the original cohort) agreed to participate in our follow-up research engagements, providing further details on their journey to a four-day week. The remainder of this report builds on their feedback to delve into the specifics of implementation, impacts on the organisations, and impacts on staff experiences.

- » Among the vast majority that confirmed the four-day week was now permanent, half have updated their Terms & Conditions to reflect the policy. The other half adopted the shorter working week permanently under a standing opt-in agreement or as a "gift" policy.
- » Another 5 companies have kept a four-day week in place by extending their trial period further.
- » In addition, one organisation that discontinued the policy provided feedback on their experience. This company - a small consultancy firm - appears to have encountered a number of issues, including accommodating different staff preferences, a certain lack of commitment from top management, and difficulties with sticking to shorter hours in an industry that has not otherwise adopted working time reductions. More details on this case are provided in section 3 of this report.

## What was the outcome of the trial?

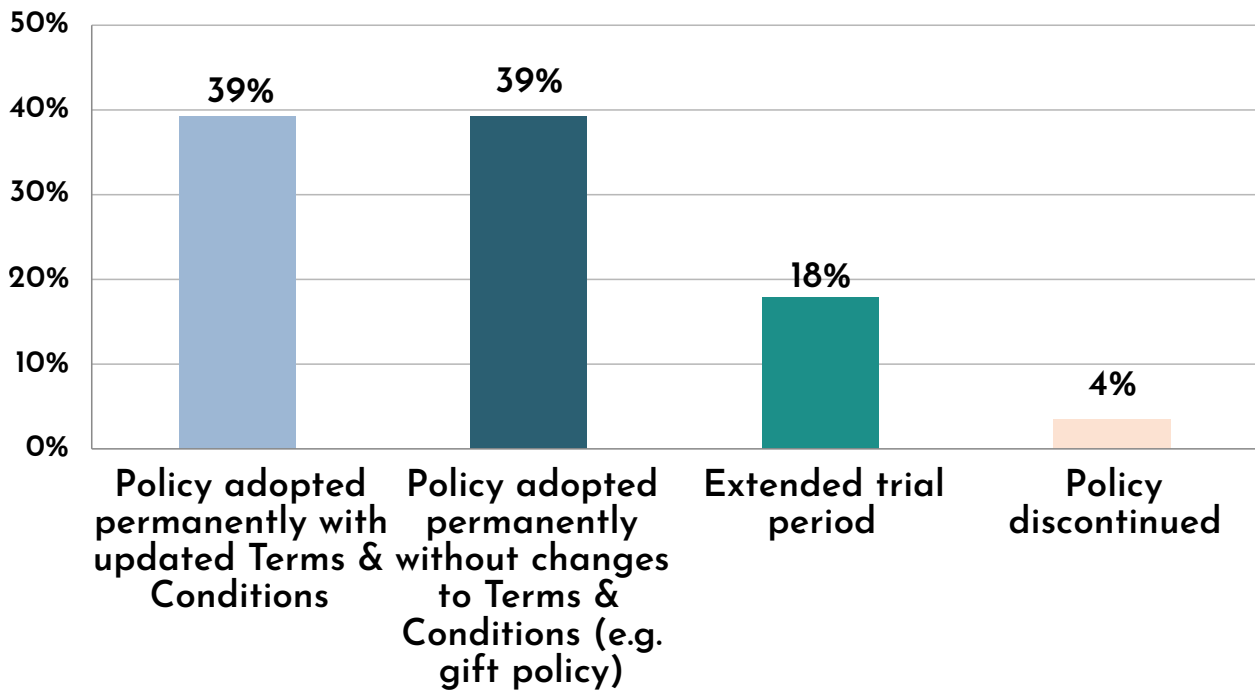


Figure 6: Outcome of the four-day week pilot at surveyed companies, one year on.

Perhaps even more importantly, this study demonstrates that the benefits of the shorter working week are not short-lived. Both company metrics and feedback from the project managers and CEOs of participating organisations demonstrate overwhelmingly positive outcomes.

## HOW DOES THE FOUR-DAY WEEK IMPACT ORGANISATIONS?

- » At the end of the original 2022 pilot period, the cohort had rated their overall experience of the pilot an average of 8.3 out of 10.
- » One year later, 100% of consulted project managers and CEOs said that the four-day week had a positive impact on their organisation, with 55% saying the impact was "very positive".

How would you evaluate the overall impact of the shorter working week policy on your organisation?

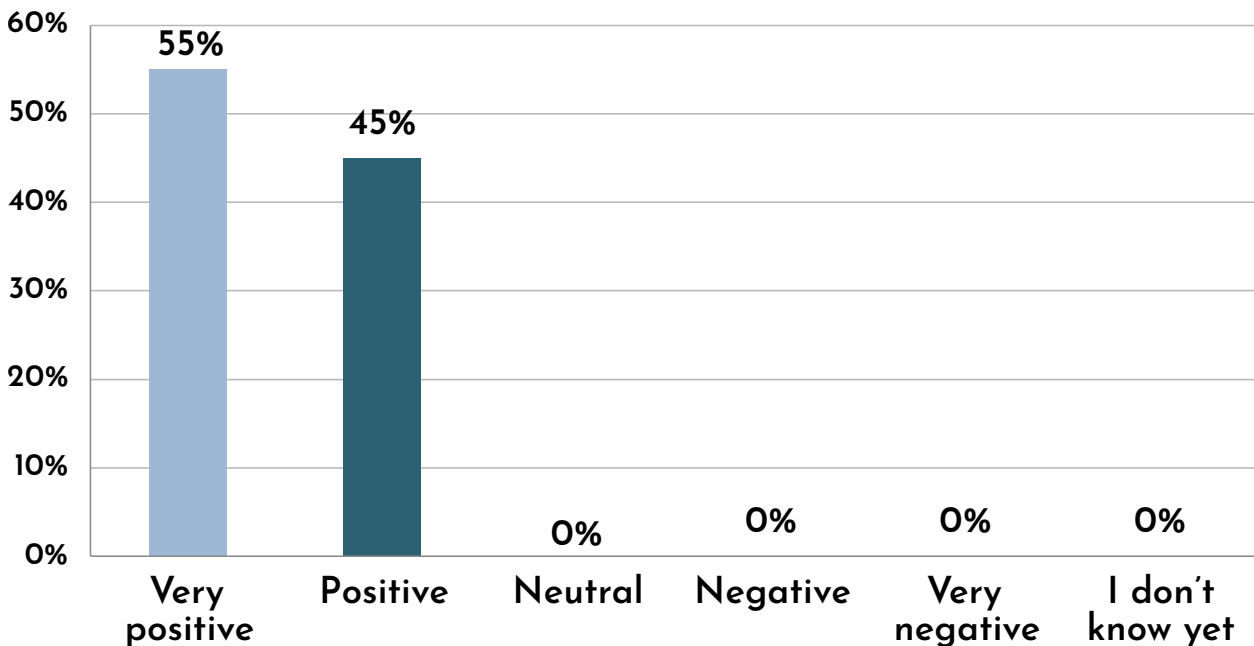


Figure 7: Overall impact of the four-day week on surveyed organisations one year on, as evaluated by project managers.

- » When asked what the shorter working week had changed in their organisation, in an open, unprompted question, 82% of surveyed companies reported positive impacts on wellbeing. In addition, 50% saw positive effects on reducing staff turnover and 32% said it noticeably improved recruitment.
- » 46% of organisations also described positive change in terms of ways of working and productivity, leading to maintained or increased overall performance.

## HOW DOES IT IMPACT STAFF?

In addition to the research conducted by Autonomy, a research team at Boston College also re-administered the staff survey used in the original 2022 UK pilot. Findings from 47 companies show that:

- » The improvements in physical and mental health, work-life balance, and general life satisfaction, as well as the reductions in burnout found at the end of the pilot have all been maintained one year on.
- » A further twelve months into working a four-day week, work intensity has decreased and is now even lower than it was before the pilot.
- » Job satisfaction is slightly lower when compared to the endpoint of the pilot, but nevertheless remains significantly higher than it was prior to the introduction of the four-day week.

A summary of this data can be seen in Table 1, below.

VARIABLE (WITH NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS)	BEFORE PILOT	AFTER PILOT	ONE YEAR ON FROM PILOT	P-VALUE (AFTER PILOT VS ONE YEAR ON FROM PILOT)	P-VALUE (BEFORE PILOT VS ONE YEAR ON FROM PILOT)
	Mean score of all respondents			+p<0.1, *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001)	
<b>Working hours</b> Average number of hours worked per week. (n=489)	38.12	33.79	33.13		***
<b>Work intensity</b> 'Never' to 'all the time' (1-5) on two items: 'working at very high speeds' and 'working to tight deadlines'. (n=490)	3.49	3.53	3.39	***	*
<b>Burnout</b> Never to always (1-5) over the past four weeks on seven items: incl. exhaustion, frustration, "burnt out" from work, etc. (n=494)	2.79	2.28	2.31		***

<b>Job satisfaction</b> Not satisfied at all to completely satisfied (0-10) (n=484)	<b>7.19</b>	<b>7.88</b>	<b>7.62</b>	<b>***</b>	<b>***</b>
<b>Work-life balance</b> Ability to combine paid work with social life: very difficult to very easy (1-5) (n=483)	<b>2.94</b>	<b>3.87</b>	<b>3.97</b>	<b>*</b>	<b>***</b>
<b>Physical health</b> Self-rated, poor to excellent (1-5) (n=486)	<b>2.98</b>	<b>3.27</b>	<b>3.35</b>	<b>**</b>	<b>***</b>
<b>Sleep problems</b> Insomnia or sleep difficulties, never to daily (1-4) (n=486)	<b>2.28</b>	<b>1.90</b>	<b>1.97</b>	<b>*</b>	<b>***</b>
<b>Mental health</b> Self-rated, poor to excellent (1-5) (n=486)	<b>2.89</b>	<b>3.27</b>	<b>3.34</b>	<b>*</b>	<b>***</b>
<b>Life satisfaction</b> Not satisfied at all to completely satisfied (0-10) (n=484)	<b>6.63</b>	<b>7.50</b>	<b>7.56</b>		<b>***</b>
<b>Overall experience with the trial</b> Very bad to very good (0-10) (n=547)	<b>n/a</b>	<b>9.03</b>	<b>9.02</b>		<b>N/A</b>

Table 1: Key measures in staff wellbeing from across 47 four-day week pilot companies before pilot, at end of pilot, and one year on.

**“The key point is that the strong findings at six months are not due to novelty or short-term impacts. These effects are real and long-lasting.”**

*Professor Juliet Schor, Boston College research team*

- » In our online, open feedback form, 96% of 294 surveyed staff members reported a positive impact on their personal lives. This figure reaches 97% for women and non-binary people, and 100% for people of colour as well as people who indicated being disabled or living with a long-term health condition.
- » 53% shared feedback about the policy improving their sense of wellbeing and personal happiness. 41% of respondents added that the shorter working week had reduced their stress levels, and another 9% that it improved their mental health.
- » The policy had positive effects beyond individuals too, with 24% of respondents explaining that it helped them balance their caring responsibilities with work. Another 13% said that the shorter working week had not only improved the amount of time they could spend with friends and family, but, in many cases, the quality of their relationships as well, due to them being more available, less stressed and generally happier. 3% of respondents mentioned taking on other activities outside of work, such as volunteering.
- » When it comes to work lives, 87% of staff survey respondents reported the policy having a positive impact in their work as well. Interestingly, this number rose to 91% among managers - an important finding, which shows that introducing a shorter working week does not negatively impact those in charge of management.
- » Increased efficiency at work was the most widely reported benefit of the shorter working week on respondents' work lives (38%). Another 30% reported increased levels of productivity and focus at work. Lastly, 13% explained that the policy had led to better organisational efficiency through the implementation of smarter ways of working.

### How has the shorter working week impacted your personal life?

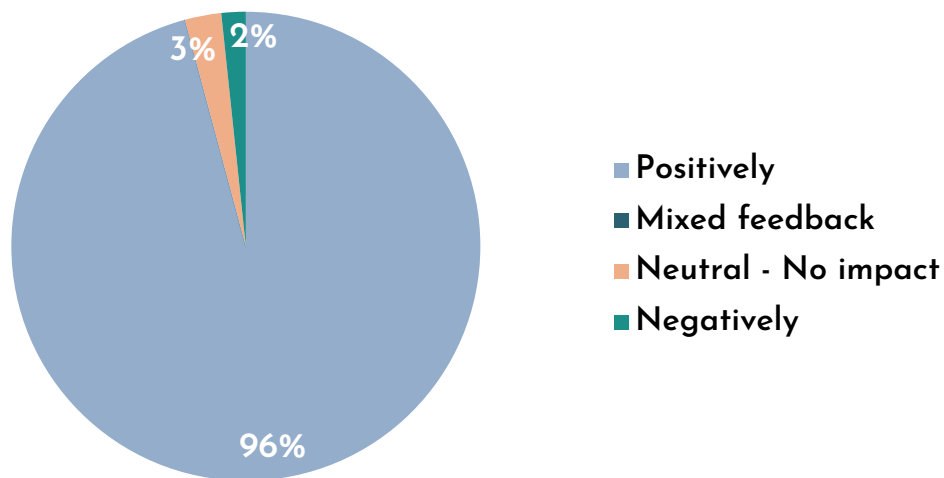


Figure 8: Impact of the shorter working week on personal life for 294 respondents across 14 organisations, one year on.

### What has the shorter working week changed in your work life, or in the way you do your work?

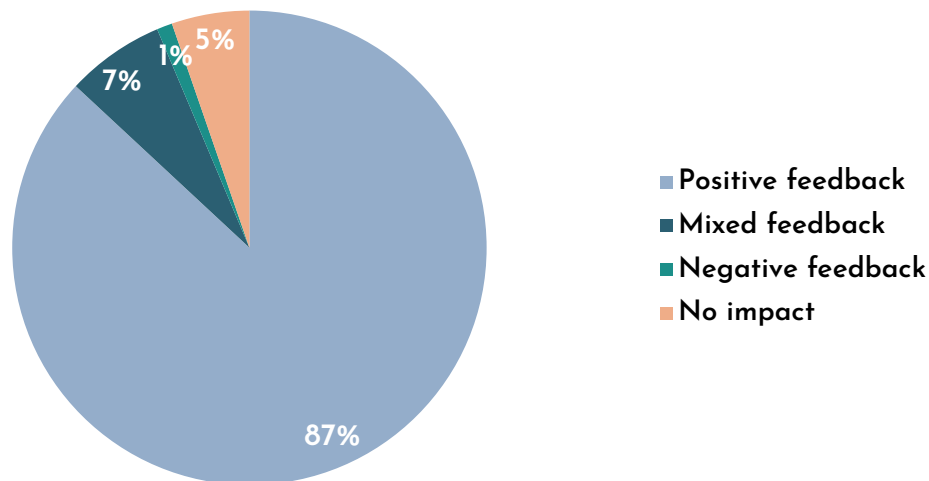



Figure 9: Impact of the shorter working week on work lives for 294 respondents across 14 organisations, one year on.



# **POLICY MODELS**



# POLICY MODELS

## SHORTER WORKING WEEK MODELS

At the time of our study, the average weekly hours worked in participating organisations was 31.6 hours. This represented an average reduction in working hours of 6.6 hours per week compared to the pre-trial period.

### Average reduction in working hours

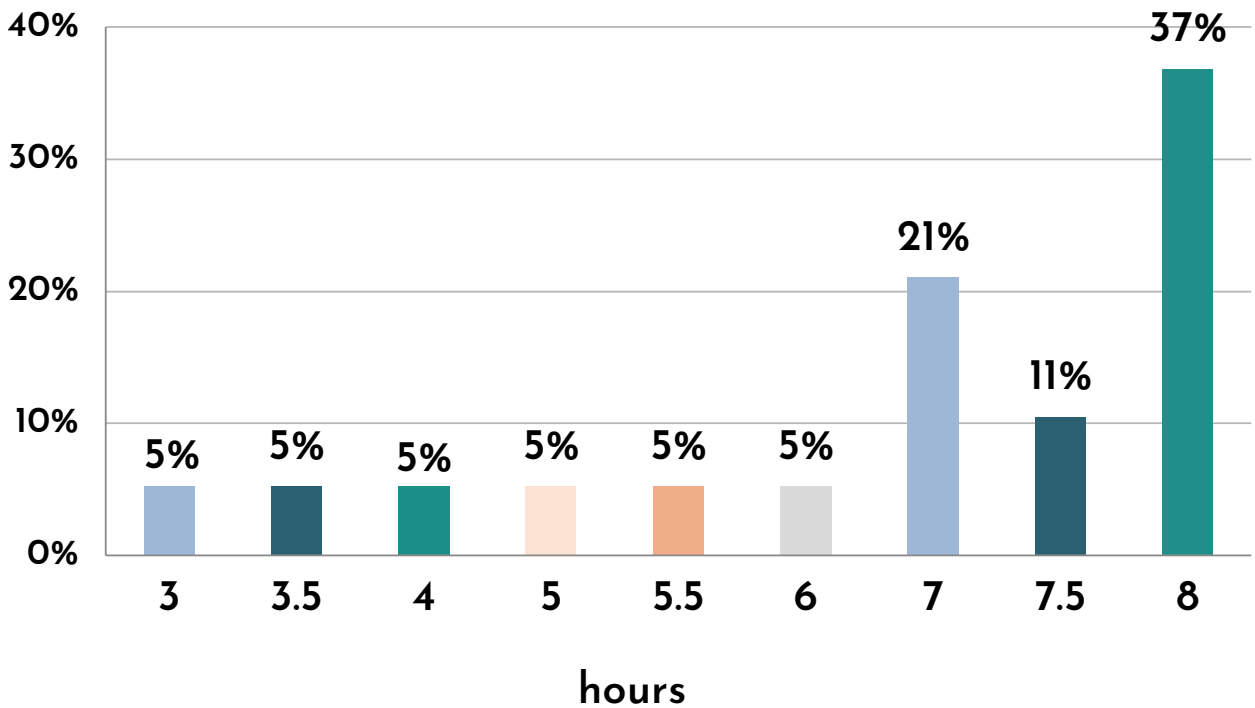


Figure 10: Average reduction in working hours for surveyed companies one year on, compared to pre-pilot.

The majority of companies (69%) reduced working hours by 7 to 8 hours per week, or one full working day. For 68% of participating organisations, this represented a reduction of around 20% compared to previous working hours. 16% reduced working hours by around 15%, and another 16% by 10% or just under

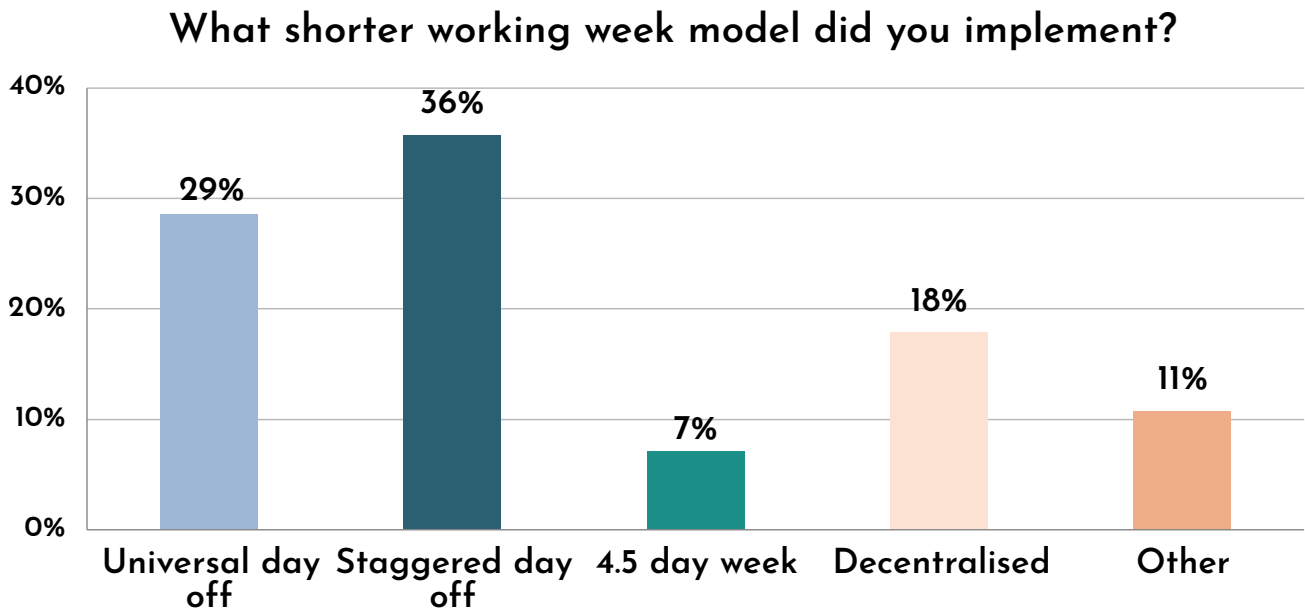


Figure 11: Shorter working week models used by surveyed companies, one year on.

Most participating organisations implemented a straightforward four-day week policy with a full day off every week, either through a universal day off whereby the organisation effectively closes for one day (29%) or by staggering the day off in order to ensure five-day coverage (36%). 7% chose a 4.5-day week, in one case operating as a 9-day fortnight - meaning employees have a full Friday off every other week.

In 18% of cases, organisations adopted a decentralised approach allowing different teams to choose what model would suit them best. The remaining 11% designed a bespoke model or used a combination of models, for instance trialling different working time reduction options in different parts of the business.

In our sample, the universal or staggered day off models had the highest success rate: 95% of companies who implemented one of these models for their trial have since made the policy permanent. More flexible models led to the policy being made permanent in 60% of cases, with two companies choosing to extend their trial instead. The companies trialling a 4.5-day week are still in an extended trial period.

While these results are not statistically significant given the size of the cohort, qualitative feedback provides some insight into why some models might fare better than others. For example, the 4.5-day week appears to have been chosen in some cases as a “first step” towards greater working time reduction, or as a way to mitigate apprehensions from management regarding productivity or client expectations. In such cases, it is expected that the culture shift would take longer to occur and more careful reviews need to be conducted before a decision can be made to adopt a work-time reduction on a permanent basis.

## CONDITIONALITY & PROTECTION OF TIME OFF

Experiences of the pilot can vary depending on a number of other factors beyond the work schedule itself. In particular, we found that the level of ‘protection’ or guarantee provided for the additional time off, along with the presence of any conditions tied to the policy, could create important differences between organisations - and, in some cases, between staff members within an organisation.

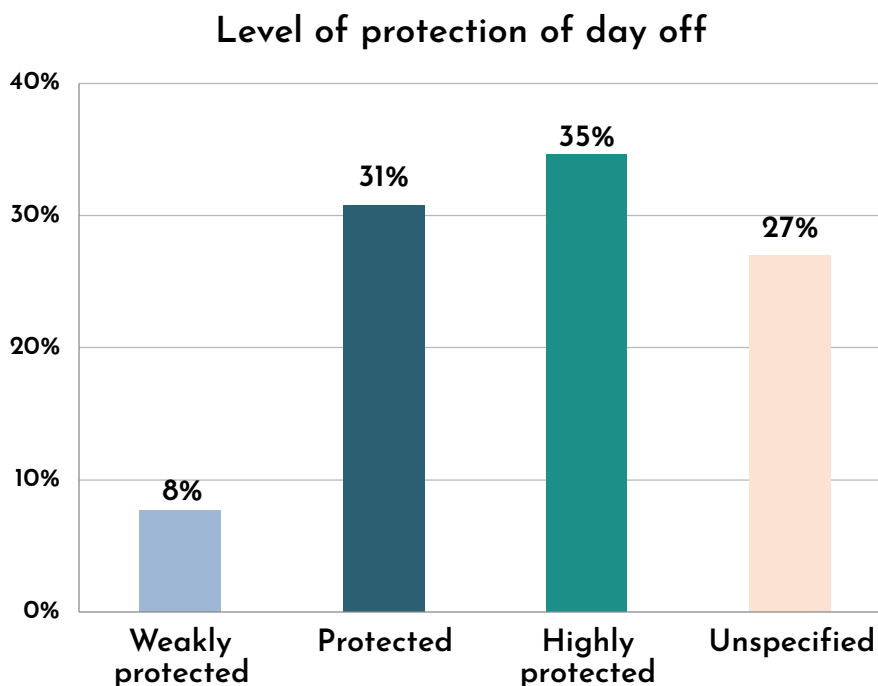


Figure 12: Level of protection of day off used by surveyed companies, one year on.

In terms of their commitment to 'protect' the additional time off, organisational approaches can roughly be grouped into three tiers:<sup>12</sup>

- » **Highly protected.** In this case, the day off is treated similarly to a weekend day or a day of annual leave, and measures are taken to ensure that staff will not be contacted or required to work.
  - » *For example, in a small charity, a TOIL (time off in lieu) system has been introduced and employees are encouraged to claim the time back if they sometimes do work on a Friday.*
- » **Protected.** In this case, staff expect to take their day off, but there might be cases where working on that day might be required. Staff are asked to pledge to come in for work in certain exceptional circumstances.
  - » *For example, a small manufacturing company asked staff to work a five-day week once during their pilot. This was in order to offset the loss of production resulting from an unexpected power outage.*
- » **Weakly protected.** This is a rare occurrence (8% of the organisations we talked to for this study), where the day off is seen as a benefit that is conditional on work demands being met. Staff can be asked to work on their allocated day off at short notice.
  - » *For example, in a large organisation, staff in certain roles are expected to remain contactable on their day off and have to book annual leave if they want to guarantee that they will not be disturbed.*

While feedback remains generally positive, more weakly protected policies appear to yield less benefits than better protected models. A lack of predictability means that it becomes difficult for staff to plan activities for their time off. This includes scheduling caring responsibilities (valued by 24% of our respondents) such as childcare or supporting sick relatives for medical appointments. We found that a weakly protected model can even discourage staff from opting into the policy: one worker doing four days as a part-time worker declined to move on to full pay as part of their company's four-day week policy because they did not believe their fifth day would be sufficiently protected.

Other comments also highlighted a feeling of stress and an inability to properly disconnect on the day off, with the knowledge that work may be required. In contrast, staff who enjoy a highly protected day off are able to schedule appointments, care for loved ones and take on new activities on that day.

In addition to the level of protection of the day off, organisations participating in this study have adopted different approaches to embedding the policy in their work culture. While in most cases the policy is unconditional - meaning that it becomes part of the company's ways of working and is not contingent on any other conditions being met - in 25% of cases, the shorter working hours are conditioned on specific elements.

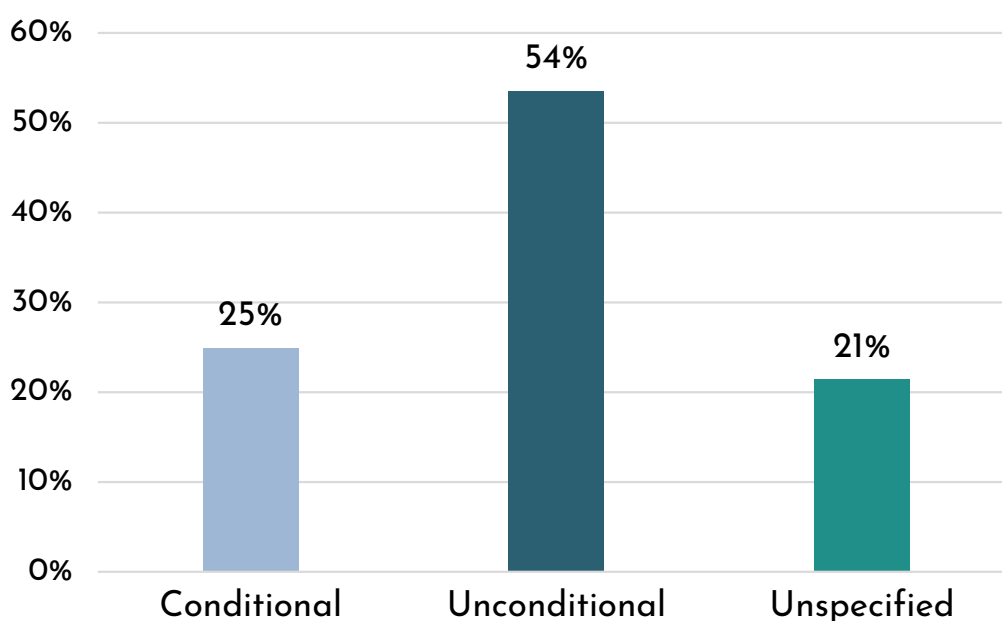


Figure 13: Conditionality of the shorter working week policy used by surveyed companies, one year on.

For those organisations who opt for a conditional model, conditionality may vary according to several factors:

- » **Whether the conditions are set at organisational level** (collective conditionality, for example, where the continuation of the four-day week is contingent on the company meeting its business goals or on its financial situation) **or at the level of the individual** (individual conditionality, where the four-day week can be taken away for individual staff members if their performance is deemed unsatisfactory or if the demands of their work requires it)
- » **The degree of conditionality** (how likely it is that the policy will be taken away)
- » **The transparency** of how these decisions are made
- » **Fairness within the organisation** (for example, whether only certain teams or roles are subject to conditionality, or whether the conditions apply equally to all).

Among organisations who made the policy conditional, collective conditionality was more common than individual conditionality. In some cases, this conditionality was seen as an understandable trade-off in exchange for getting the benefit of a four-day week while protecting the business. However, models that were highly conditional sometimes yielded more mixed feedback, including added stress to meet the deadline, resentment against others for not doing their part in completing shared work in time, and feelings of inequity between staff based on the nature of their role or their relationship with their manager. In one organisation that introduced a productivity monitoring framework as part of their conditional shorter working week policy, some staff have chosen to opt out due to not wanting to subject themselves to this additional scrutiny.

The variety of policy models we observed, even among a relatively small cohort of 28 organisations, shows that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to a shorter working week. Each organisation will design its own model, pilot parameters, and the supporting measures that come with it. In cases where the day off is more weakly protected, or where the policy is conditional on individuals or teams meeting certain expectations, transparency, clarity, and staff input on these rules are key to mitigate feelings of inequity among staff. Whilst these concerns should be raised in the trial design and preparation phase, the pilot period itself is also an opportunity to tweak the model and make adjustments to find the model that will work best in each context.



# **ORGANISATIONAL STORIES**

## ORGANISATIONAL STORIES

As we have explained, introducing a working time reduction is different for every organisation. The brief organisational stories in this section offer a view into the experiences of a variety of organisations spanning sectors, sizes, charities and companies.

One year ahead, these organisations have learned much not only about implementing a four-day week but also about how to sustain it long-term. 40% of organisations changed their policy in some way over time, and 30% extended their pilot beyond the initial six months to test new solutions or gather additional data. Many of the lessons learned are embodied in this study. These are success stories, but they are also representative of the kinds of strategies that can work at different scales: from flexible adaptation, to a strong leadership, passionate about a four-day week, to new working patterns and ways of working.

As mini case studies, these stories demonstrate the wide range of locations in which the four-day week continues to succeed, but they also offer lessons of how (and occasionally how not) to make it work smoothly.



## A SMALL CHARITY: "IT DOESN'T HAPPEN BY MAGIC"

<u>COMPANY INFO</u>	<u>MODEL USED</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conservation charity</li> <li>• &lt;10 employees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Universal day off, highly protected</li> <li>• Policy adopted permanently</li> </ul>

This small (fewer than ten employees at start of trial) UK-based conservation charity introduced a universal day off on Fridays, reducing total working hours from 40 to 32 hours during the initial pilot programme in 2022.

The pilot lasted six months, but was extended to a year to assess the impact on seasonal workload. After the full year, according to all metrics the charity was tracking, there were no overall negative consequences - only clear benefits to staff morale and organisational finance.

On the basis of these perceived benefits, the charity decided to keep the policy permanently in place. This takes the form of a voluntary agreement in addition to the existing employment contract, but is offered to all employees without conditions and new staff have it written into their contracts. The universal day off is generally protected in all cases other than days where media engagements are scheduled, and time off in lieu (TOIL) is offered to employees in the (relatively rare) cases that they do end up working on a Friday. There are some (informal) expectations for things like health appointments to be booked on Fridays, and these seem to have been accepted by staff.

Six months on from the end of the extended trial, the CEO is "immensely proud" of the efficacy of a four-day week at the organisation and envisages introducing it at other charities later in their career. Their assessment of this success is reflected in the views of employees, who note a range of benefits, including additional free time, better work-life balance and more time to spend with their partners. While the introduction of the four-day week has changed patterns of work (notably increasing the intensity of work from Monday to Thursday), it has not had a measurable negative impact on productivity.

At both a managerial and individual level, the charity has been very active in developing mechanisms to help adoption go smoothly, including but not limited to: caps on the number and length of meetings, action-oriented email etiquette, agenda reviews, and changes to personal planning and self-management. It also considered other policy models before settling on the universal day off.

Externally, the charity has tracked the number of emails and calls they receive on a Friday, and found these have dropped dramatically over the past year. Clients, it seems, have begun to adapt to working with the four-day week; if anything, the transition has offered a reputation boost in these relationships.

The organisation attributes some of its success to its willingness to put work into trialling new methods of work in order to find the best way forward. While there has clearly been some trial-and-error during the transition, a willingness to try a few different solutions has led to a successful and lasting adoption of the four-day working week which is now celebrated by both staff and management.

## A LARGE CARE SERVICES COMPANY: "A PRIVILEGE, NOT A RIGHT"

<u>COMPANY INFO</u>	<u>MODEL USED</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Care services company</li> <li>&lt;1000 employees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decentralised model, weakly protected</li> <li>"Gift" policy adopted permanently</li> </ul>

For this large company with several internal divisions, the four-day week was implemented according to a decentralised model. Employees are given a "rest day" which they can take if their work is completed and if operational conditions allow. While feedback from employees is largely positive, there continue to be some challenges in implementing the policy: in the most centralised parts of the company, uptake has been enthusiastic and universal, but for staff working on site the results have been mixed.

One explanation for this partial uptake could be the conditionality of the policy, described as “a privilege, not a right”. The day off can only be taken once work is completed, and this appears to be implemented differently between teams: some have effectively created a four-day week culture and take their day off every week, while others clearly prioritise work commitments. It is clear that some staff are expected to remain conscious of work communications on their day off, for instance.

In addition, different parts of the business have very different requirements: for example, some working locations require strict minimum staffing levels, which make implementation of a four-day week more difficult. The organisation also does not appear to have implemented any new measures of support to enable the new shorter working hours schedule. In some parts of the organisation, this has led to certain feelings of resentment among staff who either are not able to take their rest day or feel that other people's attitudes might jeopardise the entire policy.

Even so, employees are generally very positive about the benefits of a four-day week for both their productivity in work and their quality of life beyond work. The business has benefitted too, with much better recruitment despite operating in a competitive sector. While not solely down to the four-day week, the year since implementing the pilot is described as the “best” the organisation has had.

This company demonstrates an application of the four-day week at a not often seen scale and illustrates both the viability and the benefits of adopting it in large and complex organisations. At the same time, it also reflects that a “light-touch” approach to implementing a working time reduction policy, especially when the policy is conditional on work requirements, can create “pockets” of challenges that need addressing in order to avoid creating inequities among staff.

## A SMALL CONSULTANCY: "THE MOMENTUM HAS BEEN LOST"

<u>COMPANY INFO</u>	<u>MODEL USED</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Small consultancy</b></li> <li>• <b>&gt;10 employees</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Universal day off</b></li> <li>• <b>Policy discontinued</b></li> </ul>

Only one of the twenty-eight organisations in this study discontinued the four-day week at the end of its trial. Surprisingly, considering this decision, the feedback we were given from the pilot appears to be overall positive: for staff there were morale and wellbeing benefits, and for the organisation there was an efficiency boost.

However, we were told that this organisation in particular struggled with managing client and stakeholder expectations in an industry which has not otherwise adopted working time reductions. It is also indicated that the organisation struggled to apply the policy equitably among its small team. Some employees seem to feel especially let down by the decision, understanding it as an indication of the general inflexibility of the industry on the issue. There is a suggestion that the organisation did not give the policy enough of a chance, and indications of a change of heart on the issue from management.

What can we learn from such a case? Other organisations present methods for dealing with external communications - setting clear expectations, defining working hours in emails, introducing flexibility for certain communications - although these examples are taken from different industries. Likewise, both prior planning and flexibility during a pilot have helped other organisations adapt a policy to challenging conditions.

What this example makes particularly clear is the importance of having both staff and management on board with the change before and during the trial process - if momentum is lost it is easy to be left with sub-optimal or even unworkable solutions.

## A MEDIUM-SIZED CHARITY: "IT'S BEEN A HUGE SUCCESS"

<u>COMPANY INFO</u>	<u>MODEL USED</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public support charity</li> <li>• c.150 employees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decentralised model with a staggered day off, protected</li> <li>• Opt-in policy adopted permanently</li> </ul>

This regional branch of a large national charity is a medium size organisation in its own right. Staff retention was a clear motivator for the organisation, along with work-life balance for staff. At the outset of the programme it adopted a four-day week, and, after a brief extension to the initial pilot to collect additional data, the policy was subsequently adopted permanently. The four-day week is described as a "gift" to staff and contracts have not been changed.

For a large organisation like this one, especially one which offers services directly to the public, introducing a four-day week for all staff was not straightforward. Questions were immediately raised as to how services could be maintained throughout the week; in this case the four-day week became a core motivating factor for moving from a five-day service to a seven-day service, allowing a thinner spread of days off throughout the week and a more even service. The organisation found itself in a position to offer additional services, and reached more users than ever before. Managers largely attribute this success to the new work schedule and the transformations of ways of working brought about by the policy.

Several mechanisms were pursued to make the policy possible, including new divisions of labour, a commitment to more efficient meetings, automation deployed for specific productivity gains and coaching for staff to help them with prioritisation. In this case, the four-day week has been a route to greater operational flexibility - achieved through a number of smaller changes at all levels of operation, and via buy-in from both management and staff.

There is also some conditionality to the four-day week in the organisation, with managers reserving the right to return individual workers to a five-day week temporarily when productivity is low. At the same time, however, it's clear that this mechanism is used sparingly, and an explicit distinction is drawn between worker "productivity" and "workload". Only the former is taken as a valid reason for action, whilst keeping workloads manageable is the responsibility of the manager. Although not all staff members agreed to the policy at first, participation has been growing as benefits became clearer, and staff remain positive in their outlook about the transition overall.

## A SMALL INVESTMENT FIRM: "IT'S THE FUTURE OF WORK"

<u>COMPANY INFO</u>	<u>MODEL USED</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial firm</li> <li>• c.30 employees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Universal day off</li> <li>• Policy adopted permanently</li> </ul>

This small financial investment company (around 30 employees at the start of the pilot) moved from a 40 to a 32-hour week at the beginning of the pilot. Success was monitored not on an individual level, but through overall key performance indicators of the business - revenue, sales and staff retention. The organisation reported improvements across all of these metrics, with positive responses to the pilot throughout the organisation.

Working with external parties – content publishing and supporting partners - has been a challenge, but not an insurmountable one. According to firm managers, these challenges are far outweighed by benefits to organisational efficiency, pushed forward by the transition.

After the pilot, the firm has become convinced that the four day week is here to stay and now advocates for other organisations to follow suit.



# **PERSONAL STORIES**

## PERSONAL STORIES

In addition to these organisational stories, interviews and surveys offer us a view into the experience of workers as they adjust to a four-day week (or other working time reductions). Across individuals' work and home lives, and in the community, working time reduction is clearly making a real impact.

### WORKING LIFE

Individuals involved in the trial have reported a range of changes to their working lives, from better time management and prioritisation, to more positive attitude to work and better focus. It was very common for participants to describe a reduction in unnecessary meetings, as well as a more organised and/or flexible work week. In some cases, these changes were led by the organisation through the introduction of new ways of working, but individuals also found ways to "work smarter" as they adapted to a shorter working schedule.

"Less stress" is a throughline: for some, a more even balance between work and personal time helped to alleviate weekly stress associated with the work week, and brought an end to the mid-week fatigue ("oh no, it's only Wednesday") or the apprehension associated with Sunday night.

There were, of course, also some difficulties managing the reduction in work time: many participants note a more intense workload on the days they are working, although there is some variation as to whether this is interpreted as a positive or negative thing. Ultimately, for several respondents, a more intense focus on work left them with satisfaction as it also meant less procrastination-related anxiety: "more focus, more productivity, more enjoyment".





*"I was definitely more efficient and rigorous with my work and prioritisation of work. I spent less time procrastinating and always looked for the most efficient way to carry out my tasks."*

*"I am more proficient in my role and tend to get more work done as I want to be up to date so that I feel as though taking my rest day is deserved."*



*"Streamlined my working day as we have taken away meetings we don't need to be in. Smarter working, happier team."*

*"I feel I am more productive and able to complete tasks without being overburdened or burnt out. Having that extra day off means I am able to concentrate more and feel more motivated during my working week."*



*"What has transformed is how people feel about work - it's not a dread to come into the office and the additional time people have gained (based on their weekly emails) is filled with joy, family and friends."*

## PERSONAL LIFE

The four-day week also of course gave people more time outside of work. Across participants we see “better work-life balance” unsurprisingly repeated as one of the biggest benefits of working time reductions.

But what do people do with this new free time? Participants’ accounts of their time off were broadly continuous with what we heard during the original pilot. For many, an extra day is an opportunity to carry out domestic labour previously relegated to the weekend, including household chores and general “life admin”. It is noted repeatedly that doing this during the week frees up the weekend for other activities, which many have found to be enriching. Perhaps a less obvious aspect to this is that many find that stress reduction allows them to engage more frequently with family and friends even beyond the simple time-gain.

“Time with the family” appears again and again in the testimony of participants; care responsibilities and quality time with relatives or friends take up a significant portion of this time. However, just as important is “me time”, with many respondents highlighting that this gives them a chance to breathe outside of work and home commitments, pursue hobbies, or just relax. Other common uses for time off included exercise, creative pursuits, and personal interests. Some participants also told us they were pursuing part-time education as a result of the four-day week.



*“It's so nice to have an extra day off to get life admin done. I take every Monday off, so I have a long weekend every weekend which is fabulous! A day to recover from a heavy weekend if it has been one, or to catch up on chores, errands and exercise - I love having my Mondays off!”*

*“I like to cycle and this year I have done more cycling miles than ever before, due to the four-day week. Also in the afternoon I get to go with my wife to exhibitions or cinema.”*





*"It has had a huge impact. I am now able to spend a day a week with my daughter. This made transitioning back to work from maternity leave much easier. It has also saved us childcare costs"*

*"I took up golf when [the four-day week] started so I get to spend more time with my husband playing golf."*



*"I have had time to spend with my partner, when everyone else is at work/school, which has meant more quality time. I have also taken some time to go swimming or do a yoga class which I do not always get time to do at the weekend, when other people are around and I have other responsibilities... I have had a health diagnosis this year too, so have been able to fit in appointments and therapy sessions without this affecting my working week, as well as better manage my mental and physical health."*

*"The shorter working week allows me to undertake personal education and professional training on my Friday off, which allows me to stay sharp and continue formal learning, without this infringing on my personal life and relaxation time."*



*"My mental health is substantially improved and the balance between work and personal life has made me incredibly happy. I have time to do chores, take care of my wife and also enjoy myself and pursue my hobbies. I got married and moved house in the same week and it would not have been possible without the extra sanity, time and mental strength the four-day work week gave me."*

## SOCIAL VALUE & IMPACT BEYOND THE INDIVIDUAL

We should also consider the wider social impact the four-day week might be having. Many participants said they were keen to use their day off for community contributions.

Some said they had begun volunteering in the local community, discussing charity and sports events. The social impact of the four-day week is also represented in the high amount of care labour that individuals describe doing on their day off work - from dropping kids off at school, to looking after elderly or sick relatives. Interestingly, many respondents also noted that the quality of their relationships with others has improved: these respondents not only spend more time with their loved ones, but they also feel equipped with more patience and enthusiasm, which they often link to feeling more rested and generally happier.

*"This has given me the opportunity to spend more time with family & friends. I can now attend appointments on my rest day as opposed to taking time out of my working week. I also have the opportunity to volunteer in my local community."*



*"I have extra time to do things around the house, book appointments and do life admin. I can take/pick my children up from school. I am also a qualified umpire so it allows me time on Wednesdays to officiate university sports matches."*

*"This has made me see that I'm not 'living to work' and that I do actually have a life of my own and time to pursue my hobbies and volunteering options which I enjoy."*





*"It has made my life much easier as my Dad is unwell and unable to do things for himself, so I spend my non-working day doing things around the house for him."*

*"It's really helped me to do things that I never get to do. I'm volunteering in a local Netball club, I'm having free time at the weekends to spend time with my family as well as have that break that I need which is just for me."*



*"I don't say this lightly, the 4 day week will save lives. It will improve overall wellbeing, much more than it was intended to achieve. When first joining my organisation I was extremely sceptical on the 4 day week and what it would achieve overall. However, it has far exceeded what myself and my immediate family and friends were expecting. The time I get to spend with family is now so much more as I use my wellbeing day for me to do my hobbies and interests where previously I would be trying to juggle and balance. It is important to realise that the 4 day week not only has a positive impact on you but those around you. If you use the multiplier effect, it has a significant wellbeing impact on thousands."*



**CONCLUSIONS**

## CONCLUSIONS

One year on from the publication of the first results from 2022's groundbreaking UK four-day week pilot, shorter working hours are becoming an increasingly established practice in many of the country's workplaces. In this study, by drawing on quantitative and qualitative data from a wide range of companies, now one year on from the initial pilot period, an even richer picture of the effects has emerged. This includes impacts on workers, management, organisational performance and beyond.

Encouragingly, many of the significant benefits found during the initial trial have persisted twelve months on. Against the contention that past findings might have been fleeting 'honeymoon' effects, a range of quantitative and qualitative data shows that the strong improvements to physical and mental health, work-life balance and general life satisfaction have all been maintained - alongside reductions in burnout - while measures like work intensity have fallen, suggesting growing adaptation to the new working structures.

As a result, it is not surprising that the vast majority of the companies that took part in the UK pilot decided to keep the policy in place - 54 out of 61 organisations, with 31 confirming that the change is permanent. Managers from the 28 organisations involved in our study overwhelmingly backed the four-day week: 100% of consulted project managers and CEOs believed that the four-day week had had a positive impact on their organisation.

One of the specific strengths of this follow-up study, however, has been the possibility of diving deeper into the different strategies and models pursued across the participating companies in their implementation of the shorter working week. Extensive interviews with staff and managers, in particular, helped us further our understanding of the relative strengths and weaknesses of different implementation types.

For instance, this study has shown that companies who opted for a 'universal' or 'staggered' day off model had the highest success rate in making shorter working hours permanent, with 95% now committed to a four-day week. More flexible models, by contrast, led to the policy being made permanent in 60% of cases, with two companies choosing to extend their trial instead. While figuring out the right parameters for the policy might take longer in such cases, taking the time to find the right model for each business is key to making the four-day week sustainable long-term.

In addition, this report has also seen how the level of protection provided for the additional time off, and the level of conditionality attached to the policy, sometimes altered the effects of a four-day week. While feedback remained generally positive as a whole, staff in organisations with more weakly protected policies appeared to enjoy fewer benefits than those experiencing better protected models. The level of protection and conditionality around a four-day week policy shape the degree to which staff are equipped to make full use of their 'day off'.

What can be taken from these lessons going forward? First, companies who make sure their move to a four-day week is clear, confident and well-communicated are usually more likely to see their policy thrive - and 'make it stick' once their trial period concludes. For instance, opting - where possible - to have a single, 'all-staff', protected and unconditional day off, can help to much more rapidly embed the four-day week as part of an organisation's culture and workplace practices. There is, of course, no single route to an effective, sustainable four-day week, and this pilot programme has seen success occur via alternative paths: shorter working hours can be adapted to fit a range of different contexts and imperatives.

Many organisations in this study also attribute their success in part to the co-design of the most suitable model with staff and management, and the implementation of supporting measures to enable working time reduction. Thoughtful preparation as well as a willingness to adapt work processes during the pilot itself are therefore key elements of success. This is a trend detected not only among companies participating in this follow-up study, but also across Autonomy's work helping a wide range of organisations who have moved to shorter working hours over recent years. Across industries, clarity, pragmatism, and confidence have proven effective means to introduce successful change.



More broadly, the study has also seen that more still can - and needs to - be done to spread shorter, more effective working hours around the UK economy. Difficulty in coordinating with a wider sector still tied to existing working patterns was one of the major reasons that one company left behind their four-day week. Nevertheless, many staff and managers at companies participating in our study were confident about the prospects for a widespread rollout and adoption of the four-day week across the UK, in a variety of different organisation types and contexts.

With a public sector pilot soon to arrive in Scotland, alongside the established success of shorter working hours at the local level in South Cambridgeshire, there have been the beginnings of support for the four-day week at different levels of government. However, a firm commitment to the policy - particularly from the UK Government - is still yet to be seen, even as the evidence continues to mount for the four-day week's benefits and feasibility.

To help spread the benefits of shorter working hours across the UK population, and embed the four-day week as a wider workplace norm, greater political backing is urgently required. In 2023, for instance, the 4 Day Week Campaign launched a mini-manifesto, calling on political parties to back:

- » A reduction to the maximum working week from 48 hours per week to 32 hours per week by 2030.
- » An amendment to official flexible working guidance to include the right for workers to request a four-day, 32-hour working week with no loss of pay.
- » A £100 million fund to support companies in the private sector to move to a four-day, 32-hour working week.
- » A fully funded four-day week pilot in the public sector.
- » A Working Time Council bringing together trade unions, industry leaders and business leaders to coordinate on policy and implementation of a shorter working week.

In this study, it has been clear the four-day week is not just a flash in the pan: companies around the UK have successfully been 'making it stick'. As a result, we look forward to more and more organisations bringing the benefits of shorter working hours to their workplaces.



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