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Four-day work week



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Key issues

- Following the normalisation of flexible working arrangements post COVID-19, interest in a 4-day work week (4DWW) has been increasing, with trials being implemented globally.
- Trials to date have reported mixed results:
 - While successful trials point to positive social and economic outcomes, particularly for employees, most trials results are based on employee-reported data, and further research on the sustainability of outcomes is needed.
 - Unsuccessful trials cited implementation costs and the rigidity of a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach.
- For a 4DWW to be implemented nationwide, broader questions around equity of access and economic measurement remain.

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Introduction

The 4-day work week (4DWW) is [not a new concept](#), but interest in it has grown following the normalisation of flexible working arrangements post COVID-19. Trials of the 4DWW, in which participants work for 4 days while maintaining a full-time salary have been undertaken in Australia and internationally with mixed results. Proponents argue that the benefits include increased productivity and other positive social and economic outcomes. However, challenges remain, including condensed workloads, additional staffing and hiring costs, and equity of access across sectors.

This article examines the literature surrounding the 4DWW. While the broader impacts on employment patterns and flexible work practices continue to be assessed, evidence indicates a 4DWW:

- may support work-life balance and organisational efficiency
- requires careful consideration of industry-specific constraints and equity implications.

What is the 4DWW?

The most prominent 4DWW framework is the [100:80:100 model](#): employees receive 100% of their pay for working 80% of their previous hours while maintaining 100% output.

[Different arrangements](#) falling under this model, include (pp. 20–22):

- fifth-day stoppages
- overall reduction in annual working hours
- staggered days off
- conditional approaches tied to performance
- decentralised models that allow for a tailored approach.

This article focuses on models implementing reduced working hours without a loss of full-time pay, even if they do not exactly fit the 100:80:100 ratio. Other arrangements, such as a [compressed work week](#), where working hours remain the same overall but are compressed into a shorter period without a change to salary, are excluded.

Arguments for and against

Key arguments for and against a 4DWW relate to productivity, recruitment and retention, gender roles, structural imbalances in the economy, health and well-being and environmental sustainability. A [systematic review of academic literature](#) relating to the 4DWW noted (p. 1803) the need:

- to acknowledge participant bias in self-reported survey data

- for 4DWW-specific research, given numerous studies examined other flexible working arrangements that were still included under the 4DWW umbrella
- for longitudinal research analysing the longevity of outcomes for both employees and employers
- to increase the scale and heterogeneity of samples, given the current focus on small organisations.

Productivity and the 4DWW

[Productivity](#) measures how efficiently inputs (like labour) produce outputs (goods or services). Higher productivity [improves living standards](#), but [measuring it](#), particularly in services industries, is difficult (pp. 23–24).

Australia's [productivity growth](#) stagnated in the 5 years before COVID-19, reaching its lowest level since the 1960s (p. 3). A temporary productivity increase during the pandemic subsided by mid-2023, reflecting structural challenges [observed in other advanced economies](#).

Proponents argue a 4DWW is a '[powerful motivator](#)' for improving efficiency and reducing overwork. While [productivity declines](#) beyond a [threshold of working hours](#) (para 3.12, p. 20), evidence in favour of a 4DWW is mixed:

- Microsoft Japan's 2019 trial reported a [40% productivity increase](#).
- [Other studies](#) highlight challenges such as fatigue, scheduling issues and heavier workloads after breaks, and suggest some employees view reduced hours primarily as a way to escape work, rather than improve engagement (p. 1803).

While a 4DWW may counter diminishing returns from longer hours, its long-term impact on productivity and workforce outcomes remains uncertain.

As positive media coverage often relies on advocacy reports or self-reported data, not peer-reviewed research, further analysis is required to determine whether a 4DWW can sustainably improve productivity across diverse sectors.

Recruitment and retention

Employees are increasingly prioritising flexible working arrangements over salary alone. A 4DWW can boost employer competitiveness by offering attractive conditions beyond salary, with one Australian firm reporting a [600% rise in job applications](#) after adopting a 4DWW (p. 8). However, challenges exist:

- Employers may [increase monitoring, surveillance and micro-management](#).
- Client-facing industries may face higher [hiring costs](#) to maintain coverage.
- [Skills shortages](#) may complicate implementation.

While a 4DWW may increase labour costs, it may be feasible if profits continue to outpace wages, as [they have over the last 2 decades](#).

Including part-time workers is a challenge, with approaches ranging from pro-rata benefits to exclusion from reduced hours. A 4DWW may deliver only '[short-lived](#)' morale gains for organisations if underlying issues such as poor communication or underperformance persist.

Furthermore, [positive reactions may fade](#), especially among staff without a 3-day weekend (p. 1803).

Gender roles and structural imbalances

Reduced weekly hours could assist carers to [balance their career and caring responsibilities](#) and lead to a more equal redistribution of unpaid labour across genders (para 8.161, p. 193). To address gender equity and ‘boost record-low fertility rates’, the [Tokyo Metropolitan Government](#) recently introduced a 4DWW for government employees.

A 4DWW [may also reduce](#) unemployment, underemployment, insecure work and overwork by redistributing total working hours more fairly (paras 3.24–3.25, p. 22), with [media](#) reporting that ‘a quarter of Australian workers want to work fewer hours, and one in five are underemployed and would like more’. It could also ‘offer a [degree of flexibility](#) to employees in industries where remote work is not possible’, but ‘may be [more complicated to adapt to sectors](#) like health care or emergency services, where continuous coverage may be required’. As [most 4DWW trials](#) have focused on office-based [employees](#), which offer limited evidence of the impacts on casuals, contractors or the self-employed, there is a need to test the 4DWW across different jobs and sectors.

Health and well-being

Some 4DWW trials improved [employee well-being](#) by reducing work-related burnout, improving mental health, providing more time for leisure activities and enhancing sleep duration and quality. However, the long-term health impacts [remain inconclusive](#) (p. 1803).

Conversely, workers may experience additional pressure through condensed workloads. One [manager in a 4DWW trial](#) noted:

As opposed to 10 normal workdays, we found that employees would have nine extreme ones – once they got to their scheduled day off they were exhausted. Once we factored in holidays, sickness and caring responsibilities, we also struggled to find cover for an employee on their rest day.

Environmental sustainability

A 4DWW may reduce commuting, increase low-carbon activities and increase pro-environmental behaviours, [reducing emissions](#). For example, [Microsoft Japan’s trial](#) reported a 23% decrease in the company’s electricity use.

However, it [could lead to the reverse](#) as extended leisure time may also drive carbon-intensive consumption, such as international flights or long-distance travel.

The Australian perspective

Recent developments in Australia regarding the 4DWW include:

- In 2021, the ACT Legislative Assembly's [Standing Committee on Economy and Gender and Economic Equality](#) inquired into the future of the working week, with a final report published in September 2023. The [ACT Government](#) agreed to convene a working group in 2024 to develop a roadmap for a 4DWW trial within the ACT public service and a pilot program for interested private sector employers.
- In 2023, the Australian Parliament's [Senate Select Committee on Work and Care](#) recommended the Fair Work Commission (FWC) review standard hours and that the government partner with an Australian university to trial the 100:80:100 model (paras 8.166–8.168). The [government response](#) noted the recommendation and reaffirmed support for flexible work, but attempts to include a 4DWW in [federal public service](#) enterprise agreements in 2023 were unsuccessful (p. 74).
- In 2024, during negotiation of the Victorian Public Service's agreement, the Victorian Government agreed to work with the Community and Public Sector Union Victoria to develop a [joint feasibility study](#) examining alternative ways of working, which included a 4DWW. The [final report](#) is due in early 2026.
- The [Australian Greens' 2025 election platform](#) included a plan to introduce a national 4DWW test case through the FWC and to establish a National Institute for the Four-Day Work Week to plan and guide implementation.
- In 2025, the [Australian Council of Trade Unions](#) called for a shorter working week, arguing workers should benefit from productivity gains and technological advances.
- In 2026, the [City of Launceston Council](#) and the Australian Services Union reached in-principle agreement to implement a 4DWW in their proposed enterprise agreement. If endorsed by employees and approved, it will commence in July 2026.

4DWW trials: mixed results

Select 4DWW trials – both successful and unsuccessful – are detailed below with additional examples and perspectives included as further reading. Importantly, several prominent trials occurred during COVID-19, which adversely impacted [labour markets](#) globally.

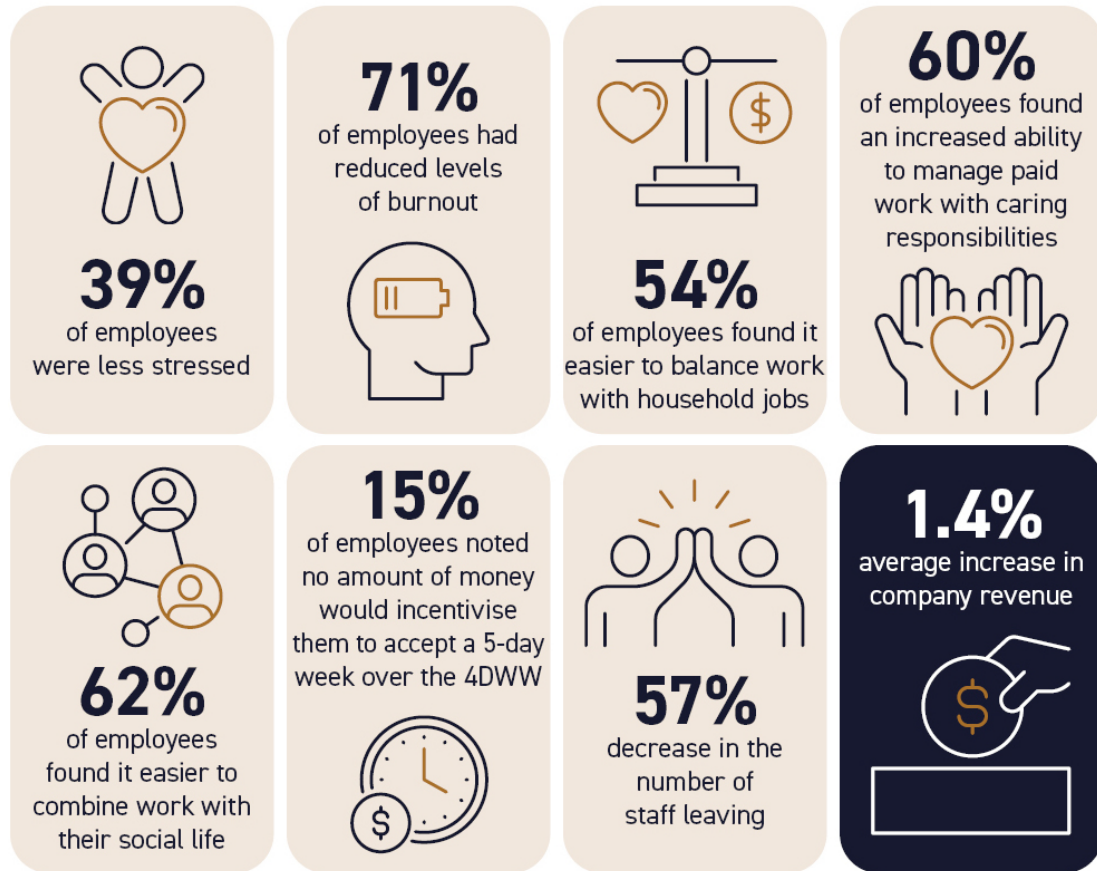
Successful trials

Successful trials of the 4DWW include those conducted in the UK, Australasia and Iceland.

United Kingdom

From June to December 2022, a [UK 4DWW trial](#) involving 61 companies and approximately 2,900 workers was conducted by a collaborative team of organisations, including [4 Day Week Global](#) (4DWG) – an organisation that advocates for a 4DWW. There was no 'one size fits all' model: each company tailored its approach to its industry needs, organisational challenges, structures and work culture. Figure 1 provides a selection of key outcomes from the trial.

Figure 1 Key outcomes from the UK trial



Note: the results of the trial were drawn from administrative and survey data, alongside interviews conducted during the trial period, with measurement points at the beginning, middle and end of the trial.

Source: adapted from Autonomy, [The results are in: the UK's four-day week pilot](#), (Autonomy, 2023), pp. 5–7.

A [follow-up study](#) of the 4DWW trial in the UK one year later found that 89% of companies that participated had continued a 4DWW (p. 5). All the managers and CEOs consulted in the follow-up study found the 4DWW had had a positive impact on their organisation. Eighty-two per cent reported positive impacts on staff well-being, 50% reported positive impacts on reducing turnover and 32% said it had noticeably improved recruitment (p. 19). They rated the trial's impact overall as 8.3/10.

A separate follow-up survey with staff from 47 of the original pilot organisations found they had maintained improvements in physical and mental health, work-life balance and general life satisfaction one year later (p. 6). Thirty per cent of staff reported increased levels of productivity and focus (p. 22), and work intensity decreased (p. 20).

Australasia

In August 2022, the 4DWG group supported a 4DWW trial in 26 companies, 10 of which were in [Australia](#). Companies did not have to implement a particular 4DWW model to participate in the trial so long as 100% of pay was maintained and employees were given a meaningful reduction in work time. Forty-one per cent of companies arranged for workers to take off different days.

Figure 2 provides a selection of key outcomes from the trial. The companies rated the trial’s impact as 8.3/10 for attracting new employees, 7/10 for productivity and 6.8/10 for performance (p. 6). Most companies rated the overall impact of the trial as 8.2/10, with only one organisation choosing not to adopt the model post-trial (p. 6).

Figure 2 Key outcomes from the Australasian trial



Note: the results of the trial were drawn from administrative and survey data using a pre- and post-methodology approach.

Source: adapted from 4 Day Week Global(4DWG), [Experimenting with a 4 day week in Australia](#), (4DWG, 2023).

Iceland

The Icelandic Government and Reykjavik City Council, with support from trade unions, implemented a [reduced hours trial](#) between 2015 and 2019. This involved moving over 2,500 workers from a 40-hour work week to a 35-to-36-hour work week, with no reduction in pay.

The trial found reduced hours had a positive impact on employees’ well-being, leading to improved work-life balance and increased job satisfaction, while maintaining or improving productivity and service provision. Unlike other studies, it [provided clear data](#) regarding productivity (for example, time to process marriage and birth certificates, pp. 66–67).

By 2021, some 86% of Iceland’s workforce had either secured the ability to work fewer hours for the same pay or were already working shorter hours (p. 10).

Unsuccessful trials

Not all 4DWW trials have been successful. [Proponents of a 4DWW](#) note that unsuccessful trials were ‘due to a lack of clarity about how the company defined productivity and performance’. Other issues have also been raised regarding the feasibility or desirability of a restructured work week.

Australia

[Unilever and Bupa](#) abandoned their 4DWW trials. [Unilever called the 4DWW model ‘rigid’](#), stating that ‘there’s no one-size-fits-all approach to flexibility’. Bupa echoed this, noting that while the pilot was successful, it had chosen other flexible working options as a ‘one-size-fits-all approach won’t suit our workforce going forward’. [Unilever said](#) the trial challenged them to ‘work more efficiently and focus on tasks that drive the most value’, while Bupa stressed it was ‘not a reflection on the success of the pilot’ and that insights gained from the trial will ‘help shape potential future flexible work options’.

Sweden

In 2015, [Gothenburg in Sweden trialled 6-hour workdays](#) (down from 8-hours) for 80 hospital staff over 2 years, supported by additional funding from the local government. The trial improved work-life balance, job satisfaction and mental and physical health, but led to increased wage costs and was not renewed.

Conclusion

While the benefits and challenges of a 4DWW are recognised, key questions regarding its implementation remain, including:

- how can diverse occupations and public services, such as schools and hospitals, be included?
- if hiring additional staff is required, will benefits such as reduced unemployment or underemployment outweigh the additional costs, and what if skill shortages prevent hiring additional staff?
- if some industries are unable to offer a 4DWW, how will they remain competitive?

Broader economic implications also arise: if a 4DWW ‘leads to a shift from [quantity to quality](#)’, indicators of well-being and sustainability may be needed in addition to traditional economic measures such as GDP. Future trials and research must address these issues to ensure equitable restructuring of the working week.

Further reading

- [‘4 Day Week Research’](#), 4 Day Week Global.
- Henley Business School, [The Four-Day Week: the Pandemic and the Evolution of Flexible Working](#), white paper, November 2021.
- John Hopkins, Anne Bardoel & Nikola Djurkovic, [Emerging Four Day Work Week Trends in Australia: New Insights Based on Interviews with Australian Firms Who have Already Adopted 4DWW Arrangements](#), Preview report (Melbourne: Swinburne University of Technology, 2023).
- [‘Shorter Working Weeks’](#), The Autonomy Institute.
- Wen Fan, Juliet B. Schor, Orla Kelly & Guolin Gu, [Work Time Reduction via a 4-Day Workweek Finds Improvements in Workers’ Well-Being](#), *Nature Human Behaviour* 9, (October 2025): 2153–2168.
- Zara Abrams, [The Rise of the 4-Day Workweek](#), *Monitor on Psychology* 56, no. 1 (January/February 2025): 26.

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