

Business groups say Labour should be cautious over four-day working week plan



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[Business](#) groups have called for caution over potential [Labour](#) plans to open up a “compressed hours” four-day work week to more of the workforce.

Ben Willmott, head of public policy for the CIPD, the professional body for human resources, said the [Government](#) should “take stock” of recent rule changes around employment, which allow people to request flexible working when they start new jobs, before making more changes.

He said: “Flexible working arrangements such as compressed hours, job sharing and term-time working can help people balance their work and home life commitments, while also supporting employer efforts to recruit and retain staff.

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Ben Willmott

“However, flexible working has to work for both the business and workers if it’s to be sustainable and this needs to be recognised in any changes to regulation.

“It would make sense for the Government to take stock of the impact of recent changes introduced only in April to enable people to request flexible working from day one of employment, before seeking to make further changes.”

Earlier on Friday, the Government denied it will force businesses to allow staff to work a four-day week but said it supports flexible working.

Education minister Baroness [Jacqui Smith](#) dismissed a report in The Telegraph that Labour’s Make Work Pay plans could force businesses to accept employees’ demands for a four-day week.

It comes after The Telegraph reported “compressed hours” could feature in a new law which could shift the balance of power so companies would be legally obliged to offer flexible working from day one except where it is “not reasonably feasible”.

Conservative shadow business secretary Kevin Hollinrake claimed businesses are “petrified” about Labour’s Make Work Pay plans.

But a Department for Business and Trade spokesperson denied claims that the Government would “impose” the working pattern on businesses.

The PA news agency understands any plan to open up “compressed hours” to more workers would not result in bank holiday-style weekends each week, and that employees would usually need to work their contracted hours, even if they chose to over fewer days.

Paul Nowak, general secretary of the Trades Union Congress, said: “Good employers already recognise the benefits flexible working can bring to their workforces and businesses, whether it’s through increasing staff productivity or higher retention.

“Offering people flexible working arrangements makes good economic sense.

“It helps more people back into work and keeps more people in work, allowing workers to balance their professional and personal lives.

“This is about developing patterns of work needed for a modern economy and a modern workforce. The bad faith arguments being advanced by the likes of the Conservatives are simply out of date and do not stack up.”

Matthew Percival, director of Future of Work at the CBI, said flexible working “depends on the job”, and some workforces might not all be able to have flexibility at the same time if it means they cannot meet customer demands.

He said: “[Businesses](#) supported making asking for flexible working a day one right because good conversations about what can be mutually beneficial shouldn’t be unduly delayed.

“When the Government sets out how it wants to change this law, businesses will be looking to see that it doesn’t become prohibitively difficult or expensive to say ‘no’ to unreasonable requests.”