

# Four-day working week will not be imposed on employers, says Government



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A minister has warned four-day weeks will not “apply to everybody”, including teachers, as she vowed her [Government](#) would “encourage workers to be able to ask” for flexible working.

Education minister Baroness [Jacqui Smith](#) did not say whether her Government would give workers rights to demand a four-day week in law, as reported by [The Telegraph](#).

A Government spokesperson earlier denied ministers would “impose” the working pattern on businesses.

Baroness Smith told LBC: “We think that flexible working is actually good for productivity. The four-day week that I know is on the front of quite a lot of newspapers today, what we’re actually talking about there is the type of flexible working

that enables you to use compressed hours.

“So perhaps instead of working eight hours a day for five days, you work 10 hours a day for four days.

“You’re still doing the same amount of work, but perhaps you’re doing it in a way that enables you, for example, to need less childcare, to spend more time with your family, to do other things, that encourages more people into the workplace.”

Asked whether teachers could take a four-day week, Baroness Smith replied: “It’s not something that’s going to apply to everybody, and what we’re doing is we’re saying where people and their employers think this makes sense, we actually want to encourage workers to be able to ask.”

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.

We are working in close partnership with business and civil society to find the balance between improving workers’ rights while supporting the brilliant businesses that pay people’s wages

Government spokesperson

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 choose to over fewer days.

A Department for Business and Trade spokesperson said: “We

have no plans to impose a four-day working week on employers or employees. Any changes to employment legislation will be consulted on, working in partnership with business.

“Our Make Work Pay plan is designed around increasing productivity and creating the right conditions for businesses to support sustained economic growth. Many employers already provide good, family-friendly conditions for their workers because they know that doing so improves morale and retention.

“We are working in close partnership with business and civil society to find the balance between improving workers’ rights while supporting the brilliant businesses that pay people’s wages.”

The Department for Business and Trade vowed to set out further details of its approach within 100 days.

Labour released a document titled Labour’s Plan To Make Work Pay in May.

It did not propose a four-day week but committed the party to banning zero-hour contracts, replacing them with documents which reflect the number of hours an employee regularly works.

It also proposed a “genuine living wage”, and an end to “fire and rehire” practices where workers are laid off and then re-employed on new terms.

Mr Hollinrake told The Telegraph: “Despite warning after warning from industry, [Angela Rayner](#) is pressing ahead with her French-style union laws that will make doing business more expensive in the UK.

“Labour must listen to businesses who are petrified about day one employment rights and bringing in the four-day week through the back door.”

The Telegraph cited a Labour source as saying: “The Conservatives pledged to make flexible working the default

then failed to do so.”

This is a reference to the party’s winning 2019 manifesto which Boris Johnson fronted, which read: “We will encourage flexible working and consult on making it the default unless employers have good reasons not to.”

The Labour source also told the newspaper: “We’ll build on their existing legislation to ensure flexibility is a genuine default, except where it is not reasonably feasible for employers to agree.”

Joe Ryle, director of the 4 Day Week Campaign, said allowing workers to compress their hours into four working days would be a welcome move.

Mr Ryle said: “However, these proposals would only allow workers to compress their working hours rather than reduce them, which we have found is key for improving work-life balance and also maintaining productivity.

“Compressing the same amount of hours into four days rather than five can be an important first step on the road to a true four-day week but reducing overall working hours is crucial.”