

Wellbeing in the post-Covid world of work: why do we need a 4-day week?

A University of Sussex research project on the 4-day week

The **Sussex 4-day Week Study** is an exciting new research project, investigating how a 4-day week can benefit businesses and organisations looking to ‘build back better’ from Covid.

Our inter-disciplinary team is investigating why employees often perform better in their jobs when they switch from working full-time to 4 days a week, despite having less time to do them.

This is an exciting opportunity to take part in an innovative new research study to trial the 4-day week, and find out what benefits it could hold for you and your organisation.

What is the ‘4-day week’?

The 4-day week is a revolutionary but simple idea: full-time employees reduce their working hours to 4 days a week, while retaining full-time salary. Workers do not ‘make up the hours’ by working longer on the other four days.

Many businesses find that they have high employee absence due to stress and burnout, with 13 million working days lost every year to work-related poor mental health¹. At the same time, many organisations experience less-than-ideal productivity, and presenteeism. The 4-day week can be a solution to both these issues. Interestingly, studies show that productivity increases, despite reduced hours, because employees have enhanced motivation, higher wellbeing, and become more efficient at work^{2,3}.

In addition to increasing productivity, the 4-day week improves recruitment and retention, team work and creativity, and job satisfaction^{2,3}. It also significantly enhances a company’s reputation as a modern, flexible, desirable place to work, attracting the best job candidates. The 4-day week now features prominently in international news and media, and amongst business communities and policymakers, because of its highly significant economic and societal implications. It is also featuring heavily because many employers, in the UK and across the globe, are now formally implementing a 4-day week^{3,4}. Importantly, it has also been highlighted by cross-Party politicians as a key economic strategy to drive a post-Covid recovery.

However, the 4-day week is still not widespread across employment sectors. This is partly because organisations may not be sure how to adopt it, but also because we don’t yet know exactly *why* it can have such a transformative effect, in terms of employees’ psychological health and work performance. We also do not fully understand how its impact might be felt

¹ Health and Safety Executive Statistics - [Working days lost in Great Britain](#)

² [The 4 Day Week](#). Andrew Barnes and Stephanie Jones, Piatkus

³ [Shorter: How Working Less Will Revolutionize The Way Your Company Gets Things Done](#). Alex Pang, Penguin Business

⁴ <https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/workingtime-newsletter6.pdf>

outside of the workplace, for example in terms of better sleep, improved work and personal relationships, and healthier lifestyles.

What is the Sussex 4-day Week Study?

The **Sussex 4-day Week Study** will find out whether employees perform better in their jobs, even with less time to do them – and crucially, *why* – by studying workers switching from full-time employment to a 4-day week, with no loss of pay. We will use mental health assessments, cognitive tests, and MRI brain scans to see what changes psychologically. We will also investigate the benefits that employees see in their own lives, from mental health, to sleep, diet, and exercise, and immune system function. Alongside the psychological measurements, we will collect workplace data on what is changing for employees in their work performance, so that we can determine how improvements to mental health, cognition, brain function, and lifestyle might be driving these benefits in what happens at work.

Importantly, the kinds of biological data that we will collect alongside workplace performance have never been studied in any previous 4-day week trial. This project will first and foremost help you as an employer establish if a 4-day week could benefit your organisation, but will also give wider insights on how big the societal benefit of a 4-day week could be – and why.

What are the benefits to taking part?

If you have been thinking about trying a 4-day week, the **Sussex 4-day Week Study** offers the chance to do so, with the benefits of being advised and supported by us. You will gain unprecedented insights into the impact on your organisation and your workforce. Because we will also acquire psychological and lifestyle measures, we can give you additional unique insights into the wellbeing of your staff, which could be of further value for recruitment and retention. In addition, if a sufficient number of organisations take part, we can share data on how your organisation benchmarks against other employers, in how big the impact has been in your workplace.

Altogether, this will give you the knowledge you need to make an informed decision about whether a 4-day week is right for your organisation.

If this is the first time you have considered a 4-day week – why not try it now? From the potentially very significant productivity and wellbeing gains on offer, to being guided by us in implementing it and understanding the consequences, to the national conversations being held on how to ‘build back better’ from Covid: this is an ideal time to trial a 4-day week.

More broadly, collaborating with us on this research project will help inform national and international conversations on the future of healthy work, and there could be potentially significant reputational benefits to being a key player in shaping these discussions.

What we need from you

We are seeking to collaborate with organisations who can commit to a 12 week trial of the 4-day week. We will ask your participating employees to complete workplace-based

questionnaire assessments, and psychology and biology tests at the University of Sussex, to tell us about how their cognitive performance, brain function, immune system, and lifestyle relate to changes in the workplace when switching to a 4-day week. These psychology tests would take place once at baseline, before the trial starts, and then again at the end of the trial.

The number of employees that an organisation might enter to the trial will naturally vary according your individual circumstances, but it will help with our funding applications if you have a rough idea of the number of employees who you think are likely to participate.

If your organisation is interested in participating in this exciting research project, we ask that you first confirm to us your interest in writing. This will accompany our research grant applications to funding bodies, to show that we have sufficient interest from organisations to run the study. These grants will provide the funds to pay for dedicated research staffing and costs of conducting the project. If our funding applications are not successful, we aim to proceed with the project, but can only include a smaller number of participants and measures.

We can assist you in drafting this 'letter of support' for our funding applications.

What's the timeline, and what about Covid?

We are applying through 2021 to research funding bodies for the necessary funds to conduct the project. These will take several months until notification of outcome. We will know if we have secured funding in 2022, at which point we will re-contact you to ask if you would still like to proceed, and determine the optimum trial timing for your organisation. We anticipate results would be shared with you through into 2023.

Who are we?

We are an inter-disciplinary team of academic researchers at the University of Sussex, near Brighton, UK.

The lead researcher, [Dr Charlotte Rae](#), is a neuroscientist specialising in 'mind-brain-body' interactions, and how these processes are affected by lifestyle and mental health.

Our collaborators at Sussex and University College London (UCL) include:

- [Dr Emma Russell](#), a chartered occupational psychologist
- [Prof Tom Ormerod](#), an eminent psychologist in problem-solving and expertise
- [Prof Sarah Garfinkel](#), a renowned psychologist in how feelings impact on mental health
- [Dr Jessica Eccles](#), a psychiatrist working at the interface of physical and mental health
- [Dr Lisa Mullen](#), an expert biochemist specialising in blood-based immune molecules

Who to contact for further information?

If your organisation is interested in participating, please get in touch with the lead researcher:

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