How would a four-day week impact Disabled people, and what would the benefits and challenges be?

An accessible work briefing

Disability Rights UK

4 DAY WEEK

Why have you produced this briefing?

The 9-5, five-day working week is a century-old model. Hundreds of companies and thousands of workers have switched to a four-day week. The evidence shows that their sleep improves, fatigue reduces, and wellbeing increases.

The 4 Day Week Foundation, Disability Rights UK and Patchwork Hub hosted a webinar in February 2026 with Disabled worker advocates and thought leaders. The agenda sought to discuss and explore the following question:

How would a four-day week impact Disabled people, and what would the benefits and challenges be?

Who are you?

The 4 Day Week Foundation leads the UK's national campaign for a four-day working week. They campaign for a four-day, 32 hour working week with no loss of pay. They believe that winning a four-day week for as many people as possible will make a drastic and permanent difference to communities across Britain.

info@4dayweek.co.uk

Patchwork Hub is a Disabled-led employment platform and jobs board, connecting Disabled and neurodivergent people, carers and others needing accessible work practices to job opportunities with inclusive employers. They also support employers to upskill around disability inclusion and work with partners and policymakers to shape the policy agenda around disability inclusion and work.

hello@patchworkhub.org

Disability Rights UK is the UK's leading Disabled People's Organisation (DPO), led by and for Disabled people. We work with other DPOs, public bodies, businesses and Government across the UK to influence policies for better rights, accessibility, benefits, quality of life and economic opportunities for Disabled people.

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What you want this briefing to achieve?

This document highlights how the four-day week can be helpful within accessible working. As an example of working time flexibility, the four-day week is well evidenced to reduce stress, fatigue and improve wellbeing.

Everyone's experience at work is different and is affected by working time flexibility to varying degrees. Working time flexibility is a hugely influential aspect of work for a large number of disabled people. This work has been produced to complement working time adjustment considerations - of which there are many - for Disabled workers.

Who is this briefing for?

This document is essential reading for people who:

1. want to create disability inclusive work environments; and
2. those already working a four-day week or beginning a shift towards a four-day week

Through a series of meetings and discussions, 4 Day Week Foundation, Disability Rights UK and Patchwork Hub have outlined where our movements align and where we can learn from each other. There has been agreement, challenge, and learning. We now want to share these perspectives with our respective audiences to improve the experience of work for as many people as possible.

The 4 Day Week Foundation will share this document with accredited four-day week organisations. Disability Rights UK and Patchwork Hub will share it among their networks too. If you're reading this and aren't part of either network, welcome, and thank you for being curious about our work. Our goal is to shape working conditions positively for as many people as possible, so please do share this document with your friends and colleagues.

We hope this work creates more inclusive environments for Disabled workers, improves workers' wellbeing, and enhances the experience of work for anyone affected. Thank you.

Why a Four-Day Week Matters for Disabled Workers

- A 32-hour week (not compressed hours) is an organisational-level intervention that **reduces structural barriers to employment** for many marginalised communities, including Disabled people.
- Research involving Disabled workers shows that more control over working time and place **improves health**, productivity and ability to manage impairments and caring responsibilities.
- This powerful organisational intervention aligns with the call for flexible working in the **Disability Employment Charter.**
- Evidence from studies on remote/hybrid working show Disabled and neurodivergent workers benefit from working in ways that enable them to **manage their health condition or impairment** - working time reduction helps meet those needs while maintaining or enhancing productivity.
- A universal four-day week within an organisation helps **embed** these benefits for disabled employees into **mainstream practices** that benefit everyone, rather than requiring individuals to request them as exceptions.

What is a Four-Day Week?

- A genuine **reduction in hours** (e.g. 32 hours) with **no loss of pay.**
- A working pattern that varies across organizations, with different **levels of flexibility** depending on staff choice and service needs, for example, 32 hours can be spread over 4 or 5 days.
- Designed to **complement**, not replace, **existing reasonable adjustments** and flexible working arrangements relating to working hours.
- Recognition that reduced hours models may work better for some people with fluctuating or energy-limiting conditions, or Disabled people who are also carers and parents.

A Four-Day Week is not...

- **Compressed hours** or compressed working weeks.
- A **uniform** practice - it can be implemented in different ways that may help or hinder Disabled employees depending on the model used.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF 4-DAY WORK WEEKS

Based from UK's largest 4 day work week trial

Fifth Day Stoppage
Companies **close an extra day,** in addition to Saturday and Sunday (e.g. every Friday)

Staggered
Teams take **different days off** to keep things running all week (e.g. Team A takes Mondays off, Team B has Fridays off)

Conditional
Earning a 4-day week is **tied to performance** (e.g. meeting productivity and customer satisfaction targets)

Annualised
Over a year, employees average **32 hours per week,** with adjustments made for busier and quieter months

Decentralised
Different departments adopt unique work schedules **based on their functions** (e.g. each department creates its own 4 day work week schedule)

Source: 4 Day Week, Glasgow

Main Benefits for Disabled People

When done right, evidence suggests that a 4 Day Week can lead to:

Better Health, Rest & Recovery

- Reduces fatigue and burnout.
- More time for medical appointments, rehab, exercise, personal care and rest.
- Improves mental health, physical health and work sustainability—especially for people with energy-limiting conditions.
- Creates "buffer time" across the week to decompress, transition between tasks and deal with flare-ups or unexpected events, instead of constantly "borrowing" time from evenings and weekends.

Improved Work–Life Balance

- Reduced working time relieves the pressure during the week and on weekends, making more time for activities associated with health, wellbeing and household tasks. It acknowledges the extra time involved in living with a disability: increased travel times, time needed to manage access arrangements, support provision, benefits entitlements as well as time spent on treatment and rehabilitation programmes that make work sustainable. More time to complete these activities enables paid work.
- Unpaid carers benefit from additional time to balance caring responsibilities with their personal needs, without sacrificing work or feeling guilty.
- If implemented carefully, a four-day week could support workers in foundational sectors with chronic understaffing, for example social care.

Greater Work Accessibility for All

- Reduces the need to disclose a disability to justify a request for reduced hours because reduced hours are universal rather than exceptional.
- Normalises flexibility for everyone in an organisation—removing stigma and suspicion when Disabled workers need adjustments.

Main Benefits for Disabled People

Positive Recruitment and Retention

- Attracts more Disabled job applicants.
- Workers have reported higher loyalty, job satisfaction, and a stronger intention to stay.
- Increases worker productivity.

Career Progression

- If flexible working is universal, Disabled staff are less likely to fear that flexibility is interpreted as lower commitment.
- Career progression can increase expectations of constant availability; a normalised four-day week enables talented Disabled people to progress without being penalised for boundary-setting.
- Helps Disabled workers stay in work long term—improving retention and progression.

More Inclusive Work Cultures

- A four-day week redefines what "full-time" work looks like in the 21st century. Today's workforce includes many people managing long-term health conditions, and modern gender equality norms recognise that caring responsibilities are shared across households. A four-day week complements other models of disability inclusive flexible working, such as Flex Plus (a combination of reduced hours, remote working and worktime flexibility).
- Creates a more equitable environment and better quality jobs.

Main Problems and Risks Identified

Work Intensification

A risk that the four-day week prompts tighter oversight of employees' time and a heightened emphasis on measuring productivity per hour. This could be especially harmful for:

- neurodivergent people who may think and work in non-linear ways
- people with fluctuating conditions.
- workers in manual or frontline roles who may be at risk of physical strain.
- people whose value comes from deep thinking, relationship-building, or work that does not fit narrow productivity metrics.

Overlooking Part-Time Workers

A risk that moving from a five-day to a four-day structure could unintentionally disadvantage part-time workers. For example, if their hours or pay are not recalculated fairly as a proportion of a new, shorter full-time working week in line with strong existing evidence and guidance on how to do this effectively, which is outlined below.

- It could create inequalities between part-time and full-time staff.
- It may pose distinct workload challenges for Disabled workers who rely on flexible part-time arrangements.
- Depending on the model adopted, the transition to a four-day week could create direct additional staffing costs for employers with part-time staff:
    - For example, someone working 2 days out of 5 a week (0.4 FTE), if their hours are held stable, would then work 2 days out of 4 a week (0.5 FTE).
    - This model would create an uneven transition path - full-time staff carry no direct increased cost to an employer, but part-time staff do.
    - And so, under this model organisations who may be most aligned with a four-day week already - working flexibly and with a high proportion of part-time workers - would have the highest direct cost in transitioning.

Consulting with employees and arriving at a solution that works for as many part-timers as possible is key.

Some options are:

- Increase the pay of staff working part-time if the organisation is in a financial position to.
- Reduce the hours of part-time staff in line with reductions for full-time staff.
- Adjust annual leave entitlement to recognise the large uplift created by a four-day week.
- Allow part-time staff to accrue extra days/time off*.
- A combination of the above.

One-Size-Fits-All Models Could Harm Fluctuating Needs

A universal four-day week model risks becoming:

- rigid and non-flexible with regard to hours and location of work.
- another "standard" that excludes Disabled people unless personalised flexibility is recognised and protected.
- reliant on 'hidden overtime' where staff work more than 32 hours. This undermines the health/wellbeing benefits of a four-day working week.

Small Organisations

Small organisations face specific challenges, however, they are more typically suited to being four-day week organisations because of the ease at which they can bring teams together.

Smaller organisations may:

- experience lower output or higher costs if they cannot absorb reduced hours.
- Lack resources to evaluate the outcomes of four day week pilots.
- have less capacity, runway and appetite to take risks when trialling new working patterns.

* For example, you could permit part-time staff to accrue hours in such a way that they would be entitled to a half-day off every 2 weeks or 1 day a month (depending on the number of days/hours they work). This option can also be incorporated into any active flexi-time working policy.

Unequal Implementation Across Work Teams

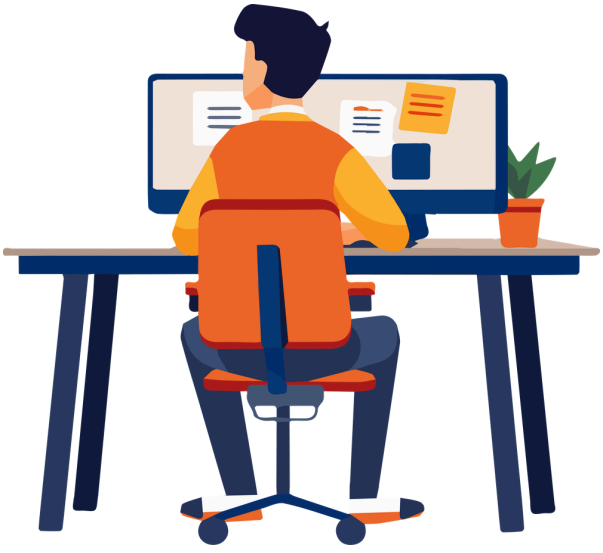
Without a regular review of flexible working policies and four-day week practices:

- Line-managers may lack understanding of how practices should be implemented. It is vital to recognise that a 4-Day Week, as with everything, is only 'good' when done well.
- Some people may benefit more than others due to inconsistent implementation across and within work teams.
- Frontline roles that do not offer hybrid working, or which require a certain level of coverage at all times, may carry extra workload pressure, or have different implementation considerations.
- Work intensification may occur with poor implementation, which could be particularly detrimental to Disabled workers with energy-limiting conditions. Consultation and co-production is essential to mitigate these risks.

Misinterpretation by Employers

A four-day week could be:

- misinterpreted as reduced commitment.
- framed as compressed working hours.
- used to justify limiting development or progression opportunities.
- Used to crowd out other flexibility and adjustment considerations ('we already do a 4-Day week for you!').



Summary

According to all the discussions and evidence shared within the four-day week workshop, there are real, significant potential benefits of a four-day week for Disabled workers if done right.

A four-day week should be treated as an organisational-level intervention that redesigns workload, staffing, jobs and culture, not just a HR policy change.

Well evidenced benefits include: improved health, less fatigue, better inclusion, reduced admin pressure, and stronger retention and recruitment. Many Disabled workers experience disproportionate time pressures and fluctuating symptoms, a shorter week can support them to navigate their lived realities.

However, **successful implementation of a four-day week is crucial.** The biggest risks concern intensifying workloads, disadvantaging part-time staff, generating tensions between Disabled and non-Disabled staff members and creating a rigid model that ignores the fluctuating needs of the people it was initially designed for.

A potential four-day week has to be paired with **flexibility, co-production, worker voice, consistent implementation across teams, hybrid options, good tech, good management and cultural change within the workplace.**

Employer Recommendations for Implementing a Four-Day Working Week

1. Ensure **genuine reduction** in working hours.
2. Keep **flexibility** at the core by co-producing design and evaluation plans with **DDPOs** and Disabled workers.
3. **Protect part-time workers** from disadvantages. Explicit design and consultation with part-time staff is essential.
4. Conduct **workload reviews** for all Disabled workers before implementation of a four-day week.
5. Invest in four-day week **pilots** combined with accessibility, good technology and hybrid working.
6. Embed the four-day week in any **Equality, Diversity & Inclusion** (EDI) Strategy.
7. Tailor your approach to organization size by working with **DDPOs** and Disabled workers.
8. **Collect data** to monitor impact. There is a need to explicitly monitor work intensity and collect data by impairment type and neurodivergent status in pilots in a way that is sensitive to employees, that builds trust, and demonstrates a commitment to disability inclusion. Break down findings by disability type, neurodivergence, gender, ethnicity, age, caring status, contract type (part-time/freelance/self-employed) and seniority.
9. Model the effects of a four-day week on the **disability pay gap**, recruitment of Disabled people and organisational costs. This modelling could calculate:
   - The **immediate** impact on the organisation.
   - The **long-term** impact as the four-day week becomes embedded.
10. Ensure four-day week pilots n**ever water down rights to individual reasonable adjustments.** Instead, they can create a more enabling baseline, making it easier for adjustments to work: less fatigue, fewer clashes between medical appointments and work, more energy to advocate for and implement adjustments.

How to Implement the Four-Day Week Inclusively

Consultation. The best implementations of the four-day week are well planned and involve a thorough consultation with staff beforehand. There is no one-size-fits-all model. Implementation will need to be flexible and carefully calibrated.

Talk to your staff. Discuss why the company is introducing a four-day week and how it could be implemented. Make sure to get feedback. It is important to address any questions before going ahead.

Launch a trial. If there are concerns about permanently committing to a four-day week, an organisation-specific trial, designed collaboratively with staff and management, will answer the question of how a four-day week can be the best way forward for the specific firm.

Assess processes and results. If your organisation has taken the plunge and started implementing the four-day week, monitoring its implementation is an effective way of addressing bumps in the road as they arise. Organisations can then decide whether to implement permanently.

Job crafting. Employees will benefit from the work reorganization process that has to be undertaken to ensure an effective four-day week. This is well-evidenced to improve both the collective and individual sense of how employees perform their jobs (i.e., their work ability), which can contribute to their improved well-being. This is related to the concept of job crafting - the extent to which employees optimise their practices, such as working more efficiently and limiting unproductive work to meet evolving job demands.

Technology

A four-day week will be affected if:

- remote working tools are poor.
- remote and hybrid working practices and processes are under-developed.
- office equipment is inadequate.
- hybrid-working technology is not accessible.

Tailor to your sector and size and learn from the experiences of others.

The 4 Day Week Foundation has accredited over 250 businesses who have successfully made the switch. That encompasses a range of organisations of different sizes, sectors, work patterns and commitments to disability inclusion efforts.

There is a range of individuals spread across different role types, impairment types, barriers faced and working patterns. Connections can be made upon request.

What Organisations Can do Next

- Book a free 15 minute consultation with the 4 Day Week Foundation.
- Pilot a 32-hour week in your own organisation (over 4 or 5 days), with strong protections against work intensification and overwork.
- Collect feedback and data from staff on benefits, downsides and ways to improve.
- Partner with the 4 Day Week Foundation to co-design pilots.

What the 4 Day Week Foundation Will Do Next

- Sign the Disability Employment Charter.
- Embed Disabled worker advocacy into our campaigns.
- Pursue further research, focused on the experiences of Disabled workers.

Recommendations For Future Research

- Reviewing 'what good looks like' in the context of four-day week pilots for Disabled workers. For example, in organisations with large numbers of part-time staff, or with highly individualised work-patterns where universal policies can be more difficult to implement.
- Understanding whether the four-day week can help address wider challenges, such as:
    - The disability pay gap.
    - Higher rates of part-time work for Disabled workers.
    - The "disability admin tax" of extra life-admin, appointments and managing access to work requirements.

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- Paula Holland, Lancaster University
- Emma Hughes, University of Manchester
- Colleagues from numerous organisations who attended a webinar in February 2026