

Written Response by the Welsh Government to the Petitions Committee Report - From Five to Four? P-06-1247 Support trials of a four-day week in Wales

Recommendation 1.

The Welsh Government should develop a pilot to reduce working hours within the devolved public sector, with no loss of pay for employees. This pilot should be targeted at parts of the devolved public sector where it is more realistic to expect productivity will not be negatively impacted by reducing working hours of staff.

Response: Accept in principle

There are no current plans to deliver a pilot in Wales, but this does not mean that it is something we would not consider in future. We are interested in pilots that are either in development or which have taken place elsewhere and we are reviewing the evidence and absorbing the lessons Wales can learn. Consistent with our social partnership way of working, it is important that our approach is informed by the views and considerations of social partners and that is why we will seek the agreement of the Workforce Partnership Council to establish a working group on the 4-day working week.

Financial implications

If a pilot were to be implemented there are likely to be financial implications. The scale of those financial implications are unknown at this stage and would be dependent on a number of variables. These would include the depth and breadth of the pilot, the cohorts of workers and employers it would capture, and the timeframe over which it would run. As an indication, the Spanish pilot is a three year €50million project, whilst Scotland initially announced plans in 2021 for a £10million pilot which has yet to be developed.

Recommendation 2.

In developing this pilot, the Welsh Government should liaise with organisations that have run pilots to reduce working hours, and organisations that have implemented them for their own staff.

Response: Accept

While there are no current plans to deliver a pilot in Wales, we are examining the lessons Wales can learn and this involves liaising with relevant organisations, the Scottish Government who are committed to develop a pilot, and importantly with social partners who represent the views of employers and workers. We will continue with that engagement.

Financial implications

No financial implications since discussions with relevant organisations and with social partners are part of our broader work.

Recommendation 3.

If the Welsh Government decides to run a reduced working hours pilot, it should require devolved public sector organisations who wish to take part in a reduced working hours pilot to:

- Take a flexible approach to how employees reduce their hours, while ensuring that organisational needs and levels of service to the people of Wales can continue to be met.
- Develop plans to show how they have taken into account the possibility of reduced working hours unwittingly leading to employees being overworked, and how they will mitigate against this risk.
- Set out plans they have put in place to meet the practical challenges associated with participating within a reduced working hours pilot.
- Secure agreement from recognised trade unions, or employee representatives where there is no recognised trade union, and involve the workforce throughout the development of proposals.

Response: Accept

It is for reasons like those included in this recommendation which underline the importance of social partners informing any steps that we decide to take. That is why we are seeking the agreement of the Workforce Partnership Council to establish a working group on the 4-day working week.

Financial implications

As above, if a pilot were to be implemented there are likely to be financial implications. The scale of those financial implications are unknown at this stage and would be dependent on a number of variables. These would include the depth and breadth of the pilot, the cohorts of workers and employers it would capture, and the timeframe over which it would run.

Recommendation 4.

If the Welsh Government opts to develop a reduced working hours pilot, it should ensure that a robust and impartial assessment of this pilot is undertaken, which includes analysis of the economic, social and environmental impacts of the pilot.

Response: Accept

In the event that we decided to proceed with a pilot, the issues raised in this recommendation around independent and impartial assessment and evaluation are amongst those we would need to consider.

Financial implications

There are likely to be financial implications in procuring independent and impartial evaluation of any pilot and/or procuring independent and expert advice in the design phase of any pilot. These financial implications are unknown at this stage and would be dependent on a number of variable, not least the scale of any pilot.