



Human Resources



Do you employ staff?

HR Update - January 2025

In this HR Update we discuss the current hot topic of working from home and hybrid working, and a recent update from the Four Day Week Foundation.

Working from Home and Hybrid Working

For many employees across the UK, working from home became a necessity during the Covid-19 pandemic. But since then, it has become the new normal and has also given rise to hybrid working; a combination of working from home, working from the normal workplace, and from other locations too. It is also referred to as agile or flexible working.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) have recently confirmed this in their 'Opinions and Lifestyle Survey' (conducted in October 2024) which stated that working flexibly and splitting working time between the office, home and another location, is now the new normal.

'Where' employees complete their work has now become a hot topic, and it has been suggested that the practice has shifted the balance of power between employers and employees. But now some employers are pushing back. Amazon, Boots, JP Morgan, BT, Sports Direct and the ONS itself (to name a few) are now requiring their staff to return to the office.

From 1 January 2025, BT told its 50,000 office-based workforce that they need to be onsite for at least three days a week, in what they describe as their 'three together, two wherever' new approach to working. To manage and enforce this, they are monitoring office entry and exit data. Amazon, Boots and Sports Direct have gone further, asking staff to return to the office full time.

But there has been a backlash to the requirement to return to the workplace. In November 2024, the ONS asked their staff to come back into the office two to three days a week but members of the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) Trade Union are taking industrial action and refusing to go back into the office, whilst still doing their work from home. The ONS are in talks with the union, which if not successful, the union say will result in a strike. The ONS say it believes a reasonable level of office attendance is in its best interests, and that face-to-face interaction helps to build working relationships, and supports collaboration and innovation.

In December 2024, within the Metropolitan Police, a PCS ballot showed overwhelming support for industrial action, with 85% of members who voted, saying yes to strike action after managers reversed an existing agreement on blended working which allowed staff to work from home for part of the week.

In January 2025, BBC Panorama reported that 26% of people in the UK hybrid-work, 13% of people never travel into work because they work from home all week, and 41% of people still attend the workplace every day. Nicholas Bloom, Professor of Economics at Stanford University, who has carried out research into the topic of 'working at home' for over 20 years, states that employees value working from home for part of the week, the same as an 8% pay increase, due to monetary savings and saving time. Some employees say that working from home for part of the week, also provides an opportunity for increased focus on admin for example, and to reset their 'social battery'.

However, some employers interviewed on BBC Panorama believe that working in the office enabled employees to communicate face-to-face with their colleagues, rather than through a screen, enabling them to build 'in person' relationships, which encouraged more learning from their colleagues, and more support and mentoring. Stuart Rose, Conservative Peer, former CEO at M&S and former Chairman at Asda, stated that productivity, personal development and possibly mental health suffer when an employee works at home.

The Employment Rights Bill

In the future it may be more challenging for employers to refuse requests to work from home. Employees already have the right to request more flexible working, and employers can currently refuse, with the refusal being based upon one or more of the eight existing business reasons; extra costs that will damage the business, the work cannot be reorganised among other staff, people cannot be recruited to do the work, flexible working will affect quality, flexible working will affect performance, the business will not be able to meet customer demand, there's a lack of work to do during the proposed working times, the business is planning changes to the workforce.

However, in addition, the forthcoming Employment Rights Bill, will require employers to only refuse a flexible working request if it is 'reasonable' for them to do so and they must state the grounds for refusal and explain why it is 'reasonable' to refuse the request on those grounds.

Four Day Working Week

Furthermore, it was reported in the Guardian on 27 January, that the 'Four Day Week Foundation' have confirmed that two hundred UK companies have signed up for a permanent four-day working week for all their employees, with no loss of pay. The 200 companies who together employ more than 5000 people, include employers in the marketing, advertising and press sector, charity, not for profit and social care sector, technology, IT and software sector, and business, consulting and management sector.

How can we Help?

If you have any queries relating to the content of this newsletter, or any other HR related topic, please don't hesitate to contact us via hradvice@hasslefreehr.co.uk.

Sources: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), BBC Panorama and the Guardian

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