

## In praise of flexible working

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[Straight from the Guardian editorial this morning](#), without much apology:

*Radicals have long understood the importance of the garden. Now the [New Economics Foundation has](#) got the numbers to back up the sentiment.*

We and the national economy would be better off for a day in the garden. Ideally a communal garden, since volunteering is probably the only other activity that can be as conducive to a feeling of wellbeing.

NEF has quantified the impact of a shorter working week (spreading the available work around) and the personal benefits of spending the spare day digging, planting, pruning and potting. Time outdoors is a stress-busting, calorie-consuming, mobility-enhancing, all-round good thing, and time spent growing stuff you can eat is just the proverbial icing on the homegrown strawberries. It makes economic sense too: from Utrecht to Utah, four-day working week experiments (not necessarily involving fewer hours worked) make people more productive, happier, and thinner.

It could be said I'm not an exemplar of this - but actually that's not wholly true. My garden is tended during breaks from work - and most pruning is done whilst talking to journalists (sorry, but the two tasks are so different they can be done simultaneously). And I agree wholeheartedly with the need for time off - which is why I don't blog much at weekends. I also warmly recommend lunchtime and a quick snooze straight afterwards - the biggest boost to my productivity I ever found.

The point I'm making is a straightforward one: conventional models of time input productivity just don't work. But that's something that Tories don't realise. In 'Britannia Unchained' new Tory MPs demand longer working hours. We now know they are planned for the civil service, where flexible working is also to be reduced.

This is crazy: NEF have this one right. It is flexibility and shorter hours that focus effort on the quality of output and not the time in attendance that help people realise potential. But those in power (and that's the key word) don't like such thinking: it threatens them. And that's exactly why we're seeing the planned moves in the civil

service and beyond that are designed to reduce the quality of people's lives all to satisfy a few at cost to many.