

VOCAL ABOUT LOCAL:

Parents Say Local, Flexible Working Offers Essential Support

New research from International Workplace Group shows the majority of parents believe access to local flexible workspaces would ease school holiday pressure.



Introduction

For anyone looking to maintain a healthy and productive work-life balance, the benefits of hybrid and more flexible ways of working have long been clear. Now, new research from International Workplace Group (IWG) has revealed the crucial difference flexibility can make at a time of year that people with families find both enjoyable and demanding: the school summer holiday.

“With many children and young people released from school for periods of up to 12 weeks, the challenge of balancing work and family life is thrown into very sharp relief,” says Fatima Koning, Group Chief Commercial Officer at IWG. “The benefits of hybrid working, and access to professional workspaces close to home, can be felt all year round – but they’re of particular value at this busy time of year.”



Minimising the juggle: how the hybrid model helps

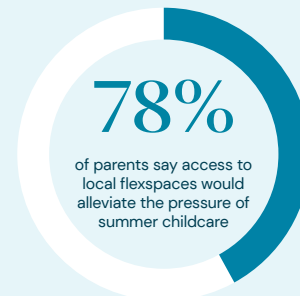
According to IWG's research, parents who have faced a reduction in flexible working policies in the past year have resorted to special measures to juggle childcare and their workload this summer. 55% said they needed to plan meticulously to manage the school holiday period in 2026 – up from 33% a year ago.

Meanwhile, more than a quarter of parents surveyed (27%) said they would be asking for favours and extra support from family and friends. 28% said they would be taking some of their annual leave to look after their child or children during the school summer break, with almost one-in-five (18%) admitting this would use up their entire holiday entitlement.

At the same time, more than three-quarters of those surveyed (78%) agreed that having access to local flexible workspaces would help alleviate the pressure of childcare over summer. In another survey that further underlines the importance of flexibility at this time of year, childcare provider Bright Horizons found that

42% of parents it surveyed ranked 'flexibility of days in the office' as their top priority. 39% said 'flexibility of hours' would help them to balance the different demands on their time.

Koning comments: "The need for flexibility is clear. Far from hampering performance, firms that embed policies that support their employees' health and wellbeing and minimise stress, stand to benefit from deeper, more productive relationships with their people, while also boosting job satisfaction, engagement and loyalty. It's a win-win in any season."



Cutting the costly commute



IWG's study emphasised another key concern for parents: the ever-increasing cost of summer childcare. "More than a quarter of the people we spoke to (27%) anticipate they will spend more on childcare this summer than they have previously," Koning explains, "and the average outlay has risen to \$908. That's a significant sum, given the ongoing cost-of-living pressures many are feeling right now."

But Koning argues that access to local, flexible workspace can help with this, too. "Empowering parents to work from calm, quiet and well-equipped offices close to home reduces the need for them to travel during the summer months," she says. "That means less money spent on public transport and fuel."

The parents IWG surveyed agree: more than two-thirds (69%) said that by working more locally this summer, they would spend less on commuting and thus offset at least a proportion of their family's extra childcare expenses.

"With economies around the world still struggling," Koning adds, "this financial benefit is just as valuable for people as the time-saving and stress-reducing advantages of hybrid working."

ANXIETY AND INEQUALITY

26% of the people IWG surveyed said forced central-office attendance was creating an imbalance of summer childcare between them and their partner.

Working mothers were disproportionately affected, being 8% more likely to feel added anxiety than working fathers.

Promoting productivity, supporting people

For working parents, some disruption to normal working life is inevitable during the summer holidays. IWG's study found that 75% said the school break affected the way they work, with 26% admitting they find it harder to focus when managing work and home life at the same time.

22% of parents surveyed said they schedule fewer calls and meetings over the summer, or

find themselves working later into the evening to make up time they've spent on childcare elsewhere in the day. 21% said they start work earlier in the mornings in order to stay on top of their to-do list.

"As a working parent myself, I know only too well that the summer months involve a shift in the usual family routine," says Koning. "Our study



75% of parents report that the school break affects how they work

26% of parents say the school break makes it harder to focus when managing work and home life



highlights a clear solution, though: 83% of the people we spoke to said they'd be likely to use a professional, flexible workspace closer to home if it were made available to them by their employer."

This aligns with wider evidence on the business case for the hybrid model. IWG research conducted in collaboration with Arup found that firms empowering employees to use local flexible workspaces could boost productivity

by up to 12% over the next five years. "As IWG has long argued, it is a fallacy to associate increased flexibility with reduced efficiency," Koning says. "In fact, the opposite is true. When people are trusted to work in the ways that are right for them, they're able to give the best of themselves consistently."

IWG and Arup's report also found that flexible arrangements can reduce voluntary turnover

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rates by up to 20% in the US. This could translate to annual savings of \$22 billion by 2030 and \$45 billion by 2045. “As previous research has shown, hybrid and flexible working options are must-haves for many people,” Koning comments, “and as our latest study shows, the benefits are particularly valuable for busy working parents. Companies will struggle to attract and keep top talent – particularly women – if the right ways of working aren’t on the table.”

Ultimately, argues Koning, the hybrid model can ease both financial and practical pressure on families over the summer, supporting people and their productivity. “Access to local, flexible workspaces will help to ensure employees’ mental and physical wellbeing, as well as their ability to work effectively,” she says. “Our research shows 69% of parents become stressed about arranging childcare ahead of the school summer holidays – but the evidence shows firms can provide opportunities that will alleviate that stress.

“It’s worth remembering, too, that 27% of parents told us being able to access local, flexible workspaces would help them spend more quality time with their children before school starts again in September. I believe enabling that sort of work-life balance should be a priority for any forward-thinking business leader.”

Conclusion

IWG's latest findings underline how important flexibility has become for working parents during school breaks. With millions managing childcare costs, family routines and changes to where and when they work, the ability to work more flexibly and closer to home can play a vital role in helping families navigate the summer period more effectively.

Fatima Koning says: "Workplace flexibility not only supports the wellbeing of families but also contributes to the overall mental health and job satisfaction of employees. By accommodating the needs of working parents through better access to a range of places to work, particularly local workspaces, employers can foster a more supportive environment and in turn drive productivity and talent retention."

Christian Schmitz, CEO of IWG, concludes: "Time and time again, our research has shown that hybrid and flexible working policies offer an array of benefits for firms and their people. The summer holidays highlight the difference that the right approach can make to bolstering the health and happiness of employees, as well as the ongoing effectiveness of a business, all year round."

We support more than eight million workers through our network of 5,000+ flexible workspaces in 130 countries. Find out more about what we do at iwgplc.com.

