



## The Office of the Future: Substance over Style

What do today's university students think about their future workplace?



74% expect to work in an office

**Over x10**

more students rank company culture as most important compared to office design



83% think that flexible working is important



79% expect to have their own desk



The future workforce places greater importance on workplace than salary

**44%**

want to work for a company of 11-100 people





## Introduction

Over the last thirty years we have seen a major shift in the way people view the workplace and how they envisage their 'dream job'. In recent years, managers and the media have been focussed on millennials in the workplace, but now the younger kids on the block are beginning to enter the office scene: Gen Z. This report explores what the workforce of the future value in their prospective workplace. The findings can be summarised by one phrase: substance over style.

Together with Hello Student, we surveyed nearly 400 university students across the UK to explore what the office of the future looks like. Thought it would involve sleep pods and ping pong tables? Think again. The future workforce are all about substance over style. They value authenticity, individuality and diversity, and these ideals translate into different workplace priorities. Over ten times more students rank company culture as most important compared to office design. Additionally, more think that their future workplace is of higher importance than their prospective salary.

The office features that the future workforce value most are not the 'fun' extras, but those such as comfortable work areas, high quality Wi-Fi, natural light, health insurance and a generous pension scheme. The vast majority of our respondents would choose to have their own desk rather than shared desks, and there was an even split for preferences for open plan and private offices.

All this aside, how many workers will be based in office at all in ten years' time? With flexible working becoming the norm rather than a luxury, only three-quarters of students expect to work in an office and just two thirds want to. In addition, technology advances in areas such as video conferencing are making flexible working a more seamless endeavour.

Research compiled by:

workthere 



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# Future office layout

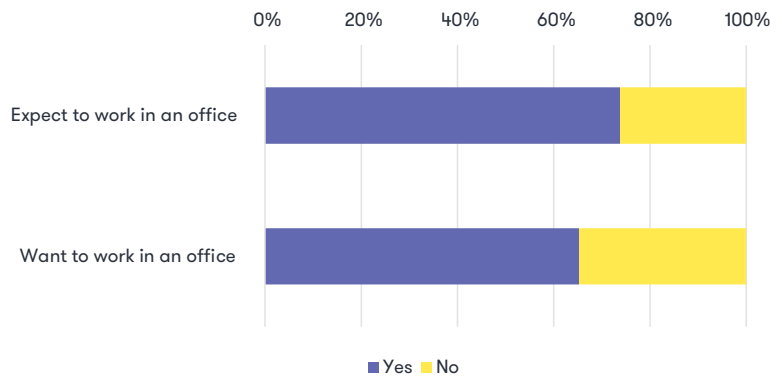
Before we get ahead of ourselves and look at the details of the office of the future, let's take a step back and consider what role a physical office will play. With advances in technology, there is arguably less need for some staff to be in a physical office to do their work.

A quarter of students questioned think that they will not work in an office and a third would prefer not to. However, social interaction and feeling part of a community is a fundamental human need. Anyone who has tried to revise alone for days on end will relate to the very real feeling of restlessness known as cabin fever. In addition, working in an office, and in a flexible office in particular, can help expand professional networks and improve productivity.

Open plan offices are more likely to promote collaboration and provide opportunities for learning by osmosis, but can be noisy and distracting. Private offices tend to offer fewer distractions, but result in lower levels of natural engagement. Clearly it is not black and white, which is why both office types are prevalent. The 'right' office layout depends on a multitude of factors. Preferences for being in an open plan or private office are evenly split, with 52% of our respondents choosing a private office as their preferred layout.

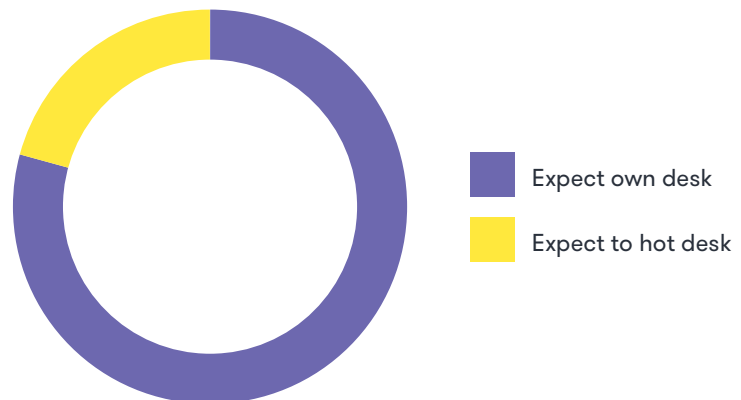
Hot desking has become more popular, going hand-in-hand with the rise of coworking spaces. However, students do not think it is a trend that is here to stay, with 79% expecting to have their own desk.

## Office expectations and preferences



Source: Hello Student, Workthere

## Desk type expectations



Source: Hello Student, Workthere



Open plan offices are more likely to promote collaboration and provide opportunities for learning by osmosis



The vast majority of our respondents would choose to have their own desk rather than shared desks



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# Future workforce values

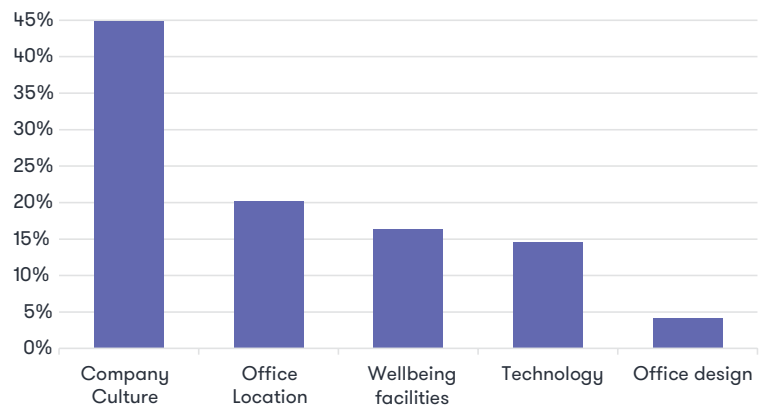
Values are particularly important to the future workforce, as somewhat ironically staying true to what they believe in is a key value in itself for Gen Z. Nonmonetary workplace benefits are more important to this generation than any before: 52% of students think that workplace is more important than salary.

Other core values of the future workforce include authenticity, individuality and diversity, so it makes sense that workplace culture is, by far, the most essential characteristic of a prospective workplace. Nearly half of students ranked this number one in terms of importance. Celebrating diversity and cultivating a workplace where employees feel safe to freely express themselves will be even more crucial going forwards.

Location ranked second in terms of importance, followed by health and wellbeing, which is an increasingly important component of an office. Sustainability is another cause that the younger generation feel passionately about. Despite a lot of time and effort being spent on office design, only 4% of students ranked this as the most important feature of a prospective workplace. Over ten times as many students ranked culture as most important compared to office design. If this does not scream substance over style, then what does?

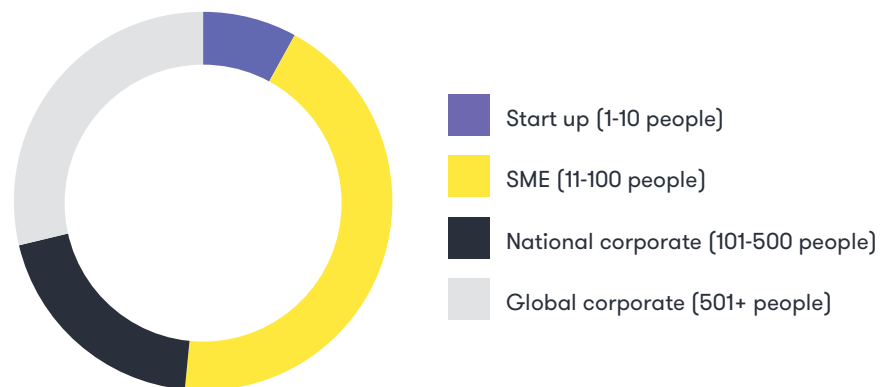
Working for a small or medium sized enterprise of 11-100 people is preferred, with 44% of students choosing this option. Companies of this size are typical of those found in coworking spaces. Companies of this size often offer a balance between security and unique cultures that can promote individuality.

## Most important feature of an ideal job



Source: Hello Student, Workthere

## Preferred company size



Source: Hello Student, Workthere







# Future office features

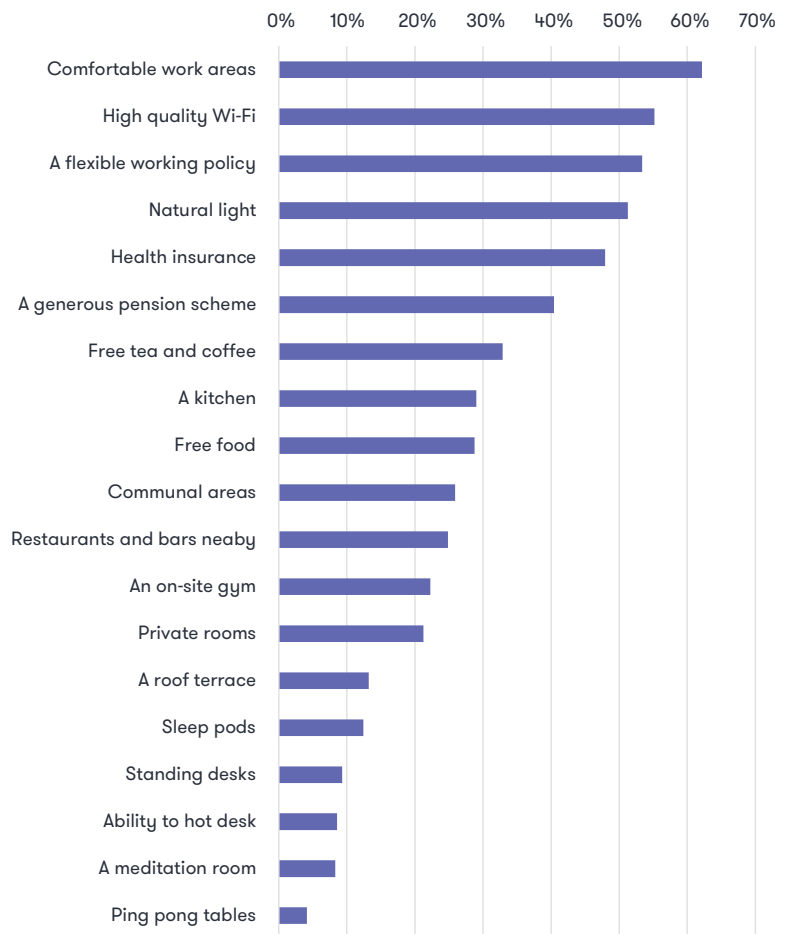
Numerous offices are popping up with various amenities such as table tennis and rooftop mini golf, but how valued are these bonus features? Ping pong tables, a meditation room and sleep pods were all ranked low in terms of importance. Of course, it does not hurt to include them, but there are other offerings to prioritise ahead of the 'fun extras'.

We asked students to highlight their top five features of an ideal office. A comfortable work area came out top, followed by high quality Wi-Fi. Natural light, health insurance and a generous pension scheme also ranked highly. All very sensible and consistent with the substance over style theme.

Flexible working is also key for the future workforce, with 83% of students viewing it as important. However, this is not specific to the future workforce. The flexible working revolution is well underway, with the previous generation paving the way, assisted by advances in technology that have made it possible from a practical perspective.

The vast majority of the working week is spent sitting down, with disastrous effects on our health. Humans have not evolved to sit down for such long periods of time. Despite this, standing desks were ranked the fourth lowest in terms of importance for an ideal office.

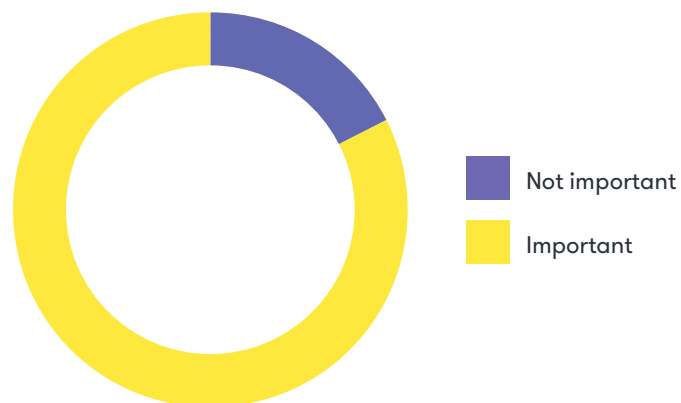
## Top features of an ideal workplace



Source: Hello Student, Workthere

## Views on flexible working

The flexible working revolution is well underway, with the previous generation paving the way



Source: Hello Student, Workthere



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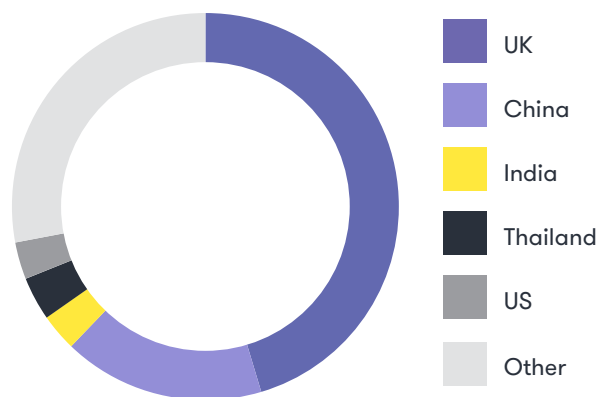
Location ranked second in terms of importance, followed by health and wellbeing



## Methodology

We surveyed 386 university students living in student accommodation provided by Hello Student. The average age of students living in Hello Student accommodation is 24. All of the students attend UK universities and their home country split is as shown below.

### Respondents by home country



Source: Hello Student, Workthere



Workthere.com

Workthere is a business by Savills focused solely on helping businesses find flexible office space, whether that's a serviced office, co-working or shared space.

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