UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

**SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS TRAVEL WORKING GROUP**

**Findings & Recommendations**

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# **INTRODUCTION**

1. As outlined in the [Aberdeen 2040 strategy](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/2040/), **the University of Aberdeen is committed to achieving net zero carbon emissions before 2040.** To support the achievement of this ambition, the University has set an intermediate target of a 40% reduction in carbon emissions from business travel by 2025[[1]](#footnote-1) (based on the 2018/19 baseline emissions figures[[2]](#footnote-2)). This commitment is set in the context of a wider range of external factors, including a recognition of the global and significant impact of climate change and the climate emergency, the expectations placed upon us to support the achievement of national emissions targets, statutory duties placed on public bodies, and the expectations of funders in this sphere. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly the changes which it necessitated in terms of travel behaviours and working practices (and the extent to which they are likely to be embedded as cultural norms), is also an important factor in considering the level and shape of future business travel.
2. Business travel (both domestic and international) currently underpins a cross-section of University activities, including education, research and student recruitment. However, the environmental impact of travel, particularly in relation to carbon emissions, has required us to consider the travel associated with all aspects of University activity, including these essential elements of our core business. Therefore, the Sustainable Development Committee established a [Sustainable Business Travel Working Group](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/governance/sustainable-business-travel-working-group-14064.php) to develop recommendations on the institutional approach to business travel in future.
3. This report outlines the findings and recommendations of the Sustainable Business Travel Working Group (Terms of Reference attached as [Appendix A](#AppendixA)). It also proposes a suite of **Guiding Principles of Sustainable Business Travel** (attached as [Appendix B](#AppendixB)) (i) to inform individual actions and decisions regarding business travel, and (ii) to encourage buy-in from the University community in relation to enhancing the future sustainability of business travel. To support individuals and line managers in reaching decisions relating to business travel that support business critical activity and the University’s commitment to achieving net zero carbon emissions, the Group encourages the widespread adoption of the principles of a **Travel Hierarchy** (attached as [Appendix C](#AppendixC)).
4. In encouraging colleagues to reflect on how and how often they travel as part of their roles, the Group recognises that **the change process and debate in relation to business travel are not unique to Aberdeen,** with all institutions facing similar pressures to reduce and prioritise travel. Therefore, although Aberdeen’s geographical position has historically placed staff at a disadvantage in terms of cost and length of journey times relative to other colleagues in the sector, the growing expectation that behaviour will change (from staff, students, the wider public and government), and an understanding of the need for that change, presents opportunities for a more ‘level playing field’ to emerge in the future. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that Aberdeen’s geographical position may mean that restrictions imposed on travel adopted by more centrally-located institutions may not automatically be suitable for Aberdeen.
5. In considering the parameters of its work, the Group identified the following **key themes** which underpinned the development of its recommendations and the Guiding Principles:
   * the importance of balancing the need to travel for business purposes with the imperative to reduce emissions in line with our obligations to act sustainably;
   * the importance of recognising the geographical challenges facing staff based in Aberdeen whilst also ensuring that the opportunities presented by the levelling of the playing field (as other institutions make similar changes) are fully exploited; and
   * the importance of ensuring equity in the approach adopted across grade boundaries and protected characteristics, including caring responsibilities.
6. The Group recognised that there is a growing expectation (internal and external to the University) that many of the changes in behaviour imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic e.g. online/hybrid activities, will become embedded as normal practice in moving forward. The Group also recognised the importance of travel (and particularly air travel) in successfully delivering some business-critical and/or academic development activities. Therefore, it has sought to achieve a **balanced approach which meets the expectations placed upon us as an institution by our staff and external bodies in relation to the journey to net zero, but also recognises the complexity of various factors governing the choices that have to be made about (i) whether to travel and (ii) travel modes if the travel is unavoidable.**

1. The following matters were agreed by the Group as **falling outwith its remit,** but will require further consideration elsewhere as part of the wider institutional consideration of travel and the commitment to net zero:

* student travel, especially at Undergraduate level e.g. field trips, exchanges etc.;
* carbon off-setting[[3]](#footnote-3); and
* staff and student[[4]](#footnote-4) commuting.

# **METHODOLOGY**

1. The Group met on 7 occasions between September 2021 and March 2022. Regular progress updates were provided by the Chair to the scheduled meetings of the Sustainable Development Committee.
2. In recognising the diverse views on business travel across the University community, the Group undertook a wide-ranging consultation process to gather as many perspectives and views as possible to inform the development of its recommendations. The consultation process comprised:

* a **survey** issued to staff and Postgraduate Research (PGR) students in both Aberdeen and Qatar (which attracted 223 responses) to (i) gauge views and attitudes across the University towards the role and importance of business travel and (ii) identify what incentives or other measures could be introduced to reduce the emissions impact of that travel, without undermining core activities;

* **Focus Groups[[5]](#footnote-5)** which considered the following themes:
  + - Incentives to Travel Less or to Travel via Sustainable Modes;
    - Hybrid Conferencing;
    - Equitable Travel;
    - Tackling Internal UK Flights; and
    - Authorisation and Management of Travel.
  + an opportunity to contribute ideas and opinions on sustainable travel via a **dedicated email address**.

# **SCOPE AND APPLICABILITY OF FINDINGS**

1. Throughout this report, ‘business travel’ has been defined as ***any travel by University of Aberdeen staff (regardless of destination, mode or class) away from University campuses, taken in association with University business, and for which the University pays directly. It is the expectation that all such travel will be undertaken within the ethos and framework underpinning the Guiding Principles of Business Travel.***
2. The definition of business travel includes, for example, travel to attend a conference, attending meetings, undertaking a recruitment trip, teaching at an overseas campus, visiting overseas research facilities, visits to use/view specialist equipment, attending fieldwork sites, visiting research archives etc.
3. However, it does not include commuting, nor does it include travel by University employees paid for by a third party to undertake activity on their behalf e.g. as an External Examiner - if individuals travel on business between the University and another organisation where that external organisation is responsible for funding/reimbursing travel, we will encourage members of staff to align their travel decisions with the Guiding Principles and Travel Hierarchy. However, it is recognised that this may require specific approval from the external organisation if, for example, the total sustainable travel cost is higher than it otherwise would be.
4. It is the expectation that the University’s approach to encouraging sustainable business travel (as outlined in the Guiding Principles and Travel Hierarchy) will be brought to the attention of individuals from external organisations prior to them undertaking any work for the University to enable them to reflect on the validity and proposed mode(s) of their travel to Aberdeen e.g. External Examiners and external contractors.

# **SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

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| ***Data*** | |
| 1 | A clear communications plan should be developed to promote and embed the institutional expectation that (i) carbon emissions from business travel will not return to pre-pandemic levels, and (ii) alternatives to business travel will be adopted wherever they exist, are viable and/or are being widely adopted elsewhere in the sector e.g. online participation in conferences. |
| 2 | Effective recording systems should be established and maintained to support the collection of accurate data on a range of activities with a carbon footprint. |
| 3 | The twice-yearly publication of data at both institutional and School/Directorate level outlining the carbon footprint associated with business travel and progress towards the achievement of the net zero target should be made widely available across the University. |
| 4 | Schools and Directorates should be invited to consider their contribution towards sustainability and net zero (including how they intend to address business travel) as part of the annual School/Directorate Planning process. |
| 5 | The Sustainable Development Committee should be invited to give consideration to exploring further the implementation and impact of establishing School and individual ‘carbon budgets’ as a means of reducing the University’s business travel carbon footprint (especially if there is insufficient progress towards meeting the net zero target via the implementation of less restricting actions and/or incentives to encourage behaviour change). If taken forward it is recommended that it is done so by means of a pilot scheme to understand the impact of introducing such a scheme. |
| ***Travel Decisions*** | |
| 6 | The University should further develop the physical infrastructure and provision of support to hybrid/online events to embed the Travel Hierarchy principles and associated guidance and ensure that they become a genuinely viable alternative to business travel. |
| 7 | Policies to encourage sustainable business travel should be bespoke to institutional circumstances and consider the specific challenges (and potential opportunities) associated with Aberdeen’s geographical position, key business critical activities and their impact on individuals. |
| 8 | It should become the norm that prior to decisions being reached on business travel, all staff and Line Managers reflect on the Guiding Principles and Travel Hierarchy to reach an informed view that takes account of the requirements to (i) conduct business-critical activity efficiently and effectively, (ii) be cognisant of specific individual circumstances in relation to travel mode (e.g. disabilities, caring responsibilities), and (iii) the need to reduce travel where it is possible to do so. |
| 9 | Information sources should be developed about the environmental impact of travel and the choices which are available to staff/PGRs at the University of Aberdeen, including through the use of the Travel Hierarchy, case studies (including encouraging senior managers to ‘lead by example’), incentives and awareness-raising events. |
| ***Modes of Travel*** | |
| 10 | Awareness of the impact of business travel (and particularly air travel, including variances by class of air travel) on the environment should be raised across the University with a view to reducing emissions and minimising our environmental impact as an institution. |
| 11 | Line Managers should be reminded of their responsibility to only authorise First and/or Business Class air travel which complies with the Expenses & Benefits Policy. |
| 12 | It should be made clear that staff at all levels and across all areas of the University are expected to comply with the ethos and principles underpinning the Guiding Principles and Travel Hierarchy. |
| 13 | The expectation should be communicated across the University that where an activity can reasonably be undertaken without incurring the need to travel by air (i.e. there will be no significant detrimental impact), an alternative mode of transport and/or virtual participation will be used instead. |
| 14 | It is the responsibility of Principal Investigators (working closely with Heads of School and Professional Services advisers e.g. Research & Innovation) to ensure that options to reduce business travel are considered at an early stage of developing grant applications, and that where travel is planned the associated costs are based on accurately costed and sustainable travel options. |
| ***Travel Authorisation*** | |
| 15 | The expectation is that Line Managers discuss the utility and value of proposed business travel (particularly by air) with members of their team on a regular basis, and in line with the Expenses & Benefits Policy should be communicated across the University. |
| 16 | Awareness should be raised across the University of the current business travel and reimbursement claims processes. |
| 17 | A communications plan should be developed to regularly promote the services and benefits of the University’s appointed travel provider. |
| ***Incentivisation*** | |
| 18 | The opportunity to negotiate discounted travel for staff and/or students with public transport (especially rail) providers should be kept under regular review. |
| 19 | Rail travel should be considered the norm for all journeys which would take under 6 hours, unless there are exceptions for clearly defined extenuating circumstances. |
| 20 | Institutional support/encouragement will be provided to members of staff who are able and willing to adopt alternatives to air travel to do so where such travel is required e.g. subsidising time/costs if a rail journey costs more and takes longer. |
| ***Guiding Principles & Travel Hierarchy*** | |
| 21 | The Guiding Principles of Sustainable Business Travel and the Travel Hierarchy should be reviewed by the Sustainable Development Committee on an annual basis. |

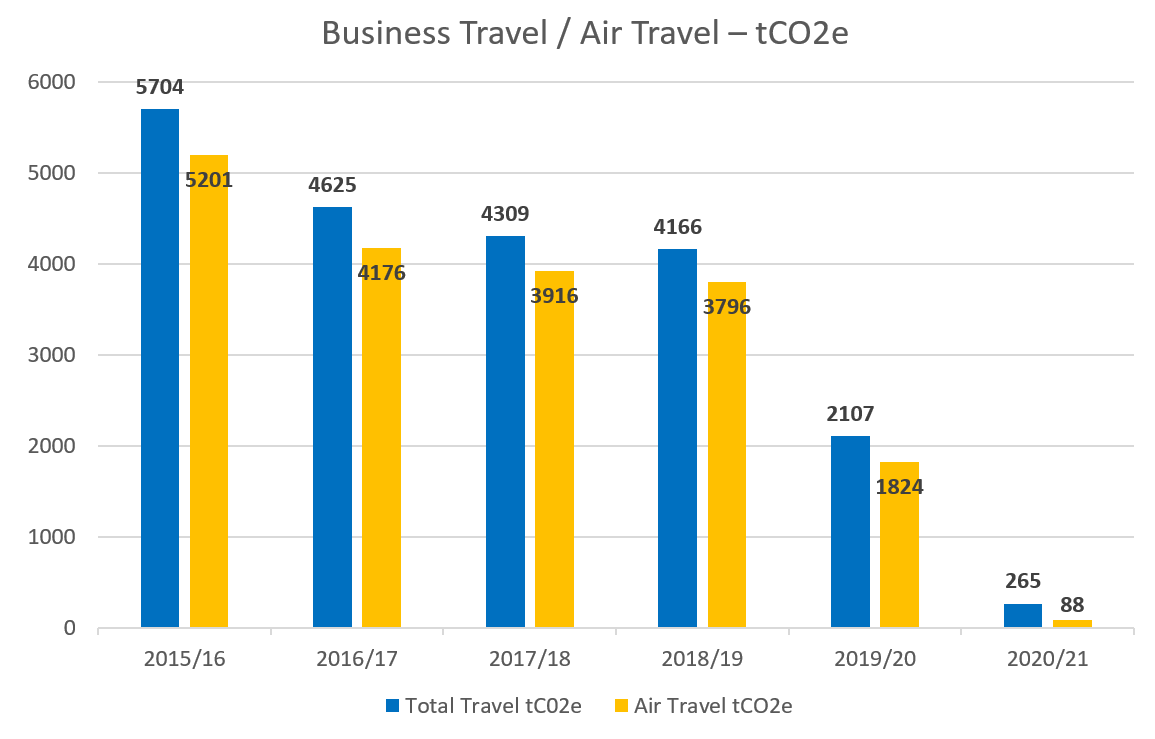
# **KEY FINDINGS**

# **Data**

1. **Business travel has accounted for c.20% of the University’s assessed emissions footprint in recent years.** While the overall proportion of emissions that business travel constitutes will decline as previously unreported emissions are added to our footprint in the coming years (e.g. procurement, commuting, student travel), tackling business travel emissions will remain critical and will require us to find a net-zero approach to these emissions in due course.

1. The table below highlights the pattern of business travel (and associated proportion of air travel) in recent years:

Figure 1



1. The Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact upon the level of business travel as a result of travel restrictions and general changes in the wider patterns of behaviour and social interactions as outlined in [Figure 1](#Figure1). Furthermore, the Group noted that prior to the pandemic, travel emissions had already been reducing year-on-year: they had reduced (overall and also specifically with respect to air travel) by 27% between 2015/16 and 2018/19. The reasons for this decrease are not clear and it was recognised that there were issues around measurement, particularly in 2015/16 prior to the change of external travel provider. The Group concluded that in looking to the future, it will be important to ensure that the reduction in travel emissions continues and that **the lessons which have been learned from the ways of working that were successful during the pandemic, and which have had a significant positive impact on carbon emissions, are embedded as ‘business as usual’ processes.**
2. The Group recognised that clear communications and leadership by example at all levels and across all areas of the University will be key in reinforcing the **institutional expectation that (i) carbon emissions from business travel will not return to pre-pandemic levels, and (ii) alternatives to business travel are adopted wherever they exist, are viable and/or are being widely adopted elsewhere in the sector** e.g. online participation in conferences, using trains instead of domestic flights etc.

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| ***Recommendation 1*** | A clear communications plan should be developed to promote and embed the institutional expectation that (i) carbon emissions from business travel will not return to pre-pandemic levels, and (ii) alternatives to business travel will be adopted wherever they exist, are viable and/or are being widely adopted elsewhere in the sector e.g. online participation in conferences. |

1. The Group identified that **the accuracy of current data held in relation to the emissions associated with business travel would benefit from enhancement.** The University has access to a comprehensive suite of management reporting information from the appointed business travel provider (currently Diversity Travel). However, many members of staff do not book travel via the provider and as a result, some data has historically been subject to user input error (having been derived from claims submitted under the Expenses & Benefits Policy) which was recognised as being an inaccurate record of information.

1. **As part of tracking progress towards meeting institutional sustainability targets, enhancing the accuracy and availability of data on all business travel (whether booked via the University’s appointed travel provider or other sources) and its environmental impact will be critical.** The Group recognised that the mode of transport adopted can have a significant impact on the achievement of the net zero target e.g. the difference between first, business and economy class flights, or between electric vehicles and petrol/diesel cars. In monitoring progress towards net zero, it is important that, where statutory reporting frameworks allow, these nuances are accurately recorded.  Equally as importantly, a methodology for capturing the carbon footprint of overnight stays using hotels will have to be established to ensure that the carbon impact of ‘slow’ journeys is fully captured.

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| ***Recommendation 2*** | Effective recording systems should be established and maintained to support the collection of accurate data on a range of activities with a carbon footprint. |

1. Once more accurate recording systems are established, it will be essential to ensure that **the data which is captured is regularly monitored to ensure the accurate tracking of progress towards meeting the net zero target.** The Group recognised that **enhancing transparency and understanding of the impact of business travel by making accurate data more widely available is likely to positively influence attitudes and encourage behaviour change.** Therefore, the Group welcomed the intention to publish data outlining the carbon footprint associated with business travel and progress towards the achievement of the net zero target at both institutional and School/Directorate level on a twice-yearly basis.
2. The Group considered the benefits of also reporting data at an individual level but agreed that in view of the resource implications of collating the disparate information, this would not be recommended at this stage. Furthermore, the Group noted that there are plans to evaluate the deployment of an app to allow individuals to calculate their own carbon footprint. Therefore, consideration could be given at a future date to implementing a new monitoring/reporting system to capture individual data, particularly if insufficient progress is made towards meeting institutional net zero commitments.

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| ***Recommendation 3*** | The twice-yearly publication of data at both institutional and School/Directorate level outlining the carbon footprint associated with business travel and progress towards the achievement of the net zero target should be made widely available across the University. |
| ***Recommendation 4*** | Schools and Directorates should be invited to consider their contribution towards sustainability and net zero (including how they intend to address business travel) as part of the annual School/Directorate Planning process. |

1. The Group also considered whether **introducing School/departmental ‘caps’/budgets on CO2 emissions** would encourage individuals requesting and authorising travel to select more sustainable business travel options. Consideration was also given to allocating annual individual/personal business travel allowances in terms of e.g. number of miles travelled, CO2 emissions etc. It was suggested that these initiatives could place a real responsibility on both Schools/Directorates and individuals to ‘own’ their carbon impacts and potentially have a significant impact on carbon emissions. However, the consultation process elicited mixed views on both these issues. Furthermore, varying needs to travel were noted as being potential barriers to establishing such a ‘one size fits all’ approach and the Group noted the complexity of establishing budgets for individual areas in terms of numbers of staff, staff roles, research activity, external grant income etc.

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| ***Recommendation 5*** | The Sustainable Development Committee should be invited to give consideration to exploring further the implementation and impact of establishing School and individual ‘carbon budgets’ as a means of reducing the University’s business travel carbon footprint (especially if there is insufficient progress towards meeting the net zero target via the implementation of less restricting actions and/or incentives to encourage behaviour change). If taken forward it is recommended that it is done so by means of a pilot scheme to understand the impact of introducing such a scheme. |

# **Travel Decisions**

1. **The consultation process indicated that there are very strong views held by staff around travel, with 80% of survey respondents indicating a belief that the University should introduce measures aimed at reducing emissions from business travel.** However approximately two thirds of respondents indicated that this should be done without impacting air travel. Nevertheless, **approximately two-thirds of survey respondents indicated that they intended to travel less in future.** Therefore, in reaching decisions and recommendations in relation to business travel, the Group recognised that there is strong support from the University community in tackling this issue. Furthermore, the survey outcomes indicated there is an expectation that (i) there will be less travel in future, and (ii) behaviour change, including undertaking activities by other modes e.g. hybrid/online events, will continue beyond the Covid-19 pandemic.
2. The importance of travel, including air travel, in undertaking some clearly identified business critical activities and academic development (e.g. international student recruitment, fundraising, conferences and fieldtrips) was highlighted and there was a clear view amongst some respondents that commitments which would significantly hinder these activities should be avoided. There was a frequently articulated view that making such commitments could risk the University being perceived as a less attractive place to come (or stay) to work, relative to other universities. Furthermore, the Group recognised the strength of feeling about potentially longer journey times (as a consequence of adopting alternatives to air travel) articulated during the consultation process and the associated impacts on workload planning/modelling arrangements. Similarly, it was clear that individual factors relating to the person undertaking the activities was a key component in many travel decisions e.g. career stage (and associated importance of in-person networking), caring responsibilities (and associated impact of being away from home) etc.
3. **The Group concluded that the level of importance assigned by individuals to travel for specific activities is influenced by many factors and the balance of responses indicated that virtual activities are, in most cases, possible (albeit not always ideal) and in some instances were actually preferable.** For example, survey respondents and Focus Group participants identified the following activities as being possible (and in some cases desirable) to deliver on a virtual basis in future:
   * PhD vivas (internal and external);
   * Training for Doctoral Training Partnerships (DTPs);
   * routine meetings with established stakeholders e.g. research partners;
   * some administrative meetings;
   * small conferences/workshops;
   * External Examiner duties; and
   * external/invited lectures.

Furthermore, increased inclusivity was cited as one of the main benefits of moving to more virtual meetings by staff with caring responsibilities and online/distance-learning PGR students.

1. However, **the complexity and perceived benefits associated with running and attending hybrid/online events were cited as issues affecting choices of whether or not to travel.** Specifically, a number of issues (including hardware/software infrastructure e.g. Wi-Fi connection/IT equipment, physical spaces to hold meetings and technical staff resource to run hybrid meetings in particular) were cited as inhibiting the perception of hybrid/online events as a credible alternative.
2. The consultation process also highlighted that **encouraging additional virtual activity may be more successful than persuading staff to change to more sustainable modes of transport.** The Group noted that a Project Board has been established to procure and implement a new institutional Events Management System and Virtual/Hybrid Conference Delivery Software Tool, with an anticipated launch date of July 2022. The Group welcomed the enhancement of the University’s digital infrastructure to increase the attractiveness of remote participation in meetings and events. However, the Group identified that the University’s physical infrastructure and resources available to support virtual/hybrid attendance would also benefit from further development, particularly in relation to the following areas:
   * Suitable physical space for conducting virtual meetings e.g. small meeting rooms or office space (especially for those in open plan/shared offices); and
   * Suitable physical space, equipment, support and training for conducting hybrid conferences.

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| ***Recommendation 6*** | The University should further develop the physical infrastructure and provision of support to hybrid/online events to embed the Travel Hierarchy principles and associated guidance and ensure that they become a genuinely viable alternative to business travel. |

1. There was broad agreement amongst respondents that **Aberdeen’s geographical location presented specific challenges in terms of reducing our carbon footprint.** Examples cited included (i) long rail journey times to other cities, (ii) the additional carbon impact of hotel stays which reduce the carbon use advantage of slower travel modes (e.g. rail over aeroplanes), and (iii) the increased use of accommodation away from home (resulting in an enhanced carbon footprint) and (iv) the high cost of rail travel.
2. The Group also noted the recent publication of [Public Sector Leadership Climate Emergency Guidance](https://www.gov.scot/publications/public-sector-leadership-global-climate-emergency/) which was developed to assist public bodies in framing their emissions reduction endeavours, particularly in relation to the suggestion that organisations should consider eliminating domestic UK air travel. It is anticipated that this currently non-statutory guidance may be updated and re-framed as statutory requirements in 2022. Therefore, the Group concluded that while it was important for the University to be cognisant of measures being implemented by other universities and that careful consideration should be given to recommendations from government offices/expert bodies, it would be important toensure that **policies to encourage sustainable business travel should be bespoke to institutional circumstances** and take into account the specific challenges associated with Aberdeen’s geographical position (and how opportunities can be exploited within a more level playing field as other competitors make similar changes), key business critical activities, and their impact on individuals.
3. Therefore, the Group concluded that in moving forward, it will be important to **ensure that it should become the norm that prior to decisions being reached on business travel, all staff and Line Managers reflect on the Guiding Principles and Travel Hierarchy to reach an informed view that takes account of the requirements to (i) conduct business-critical activity efficiently and effectively, (ii) be cognisant of specific individual circumstances in relation to travel mode (e.g. disabilities, caring responsibilities), and (iii) the need to reduce travel where it is possible to do so.**
4. The Group also highlighted the importance of **ensuring that detailed information is readily available to inform these decisions,** including about what business travel is required (i.e. where it is impossible to conduct an activity online without significant detrimental impact) and if such travel is deemed necessary, the most sustainable way in which it can be undertaken. In this connection, consideration could be given to (i) developing case studies which include examples of activities where it is expected that the most common format will be virtual, as well as ‘real-life’ examples of scenarios where individuals have made more sustainable travel choices or have ensured that travel events serve multiple purposes (including encouraging and publicising senior leaders/line managers who are ‘leading by example’ e.g. decisions to travel less, limiting the number of face-to-face meetings etc.), (ii) introducing incentives (both financial and non-financial) for making sustainable travel choices[[6]](#footnote-6), and (iii) establishing a series of regular awareness-raising events to highlight the importance of sustainable business travel.

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| ***Recommendation 7*** | Policies to encourage sustainable business travel should be bespoke to institutional circumstances and consider the specific challenges (and potential opportunities) associated with Aberdeen’s geographical position, key business critical activities and their impact on individuals. |
| ***Recommendation 8*** | It should become the norm that prior to decisions being reached on business travel, all staff and Line Managers reflect on the Guiding Principles and Travel Hierarchy to reach an informed view that takes account of the requirements to (i) conduct business-critical activity efficiently and effectively, (ii) be cognisant of specific individual circumstances in relation to travel mode (e.g. disabilities, caring responsibilities), and (iii) the need to reduce travel where it is possible to do so. |
| ***Recommendation 9*** | Information sources should be developed about the environmental impact of travel and the choices which are available to staff/PGRs at the University of Aberdeen, including through the use of the Travel Hierarchy, case studies (including encouraging senior managers to ‘lead by example’), incentives and awareness-raising events. |

# **Modes of Travel**

1. The Group recognised that **air travel is one of the highest contributory factors (c.90%) to the University’s business travel emissions** (see [figure 1](#Figure1)). Furthermore, **air travel via first or business class air travel results in higher carbon emissions than travel via economy class** e.g.a return flight to China that generates 2.6 tCO2e in Economy Class would generate 10.5 tCO2e in First Class (or 7.6 tCO2e in Business Class).[[7]](#footnote-7) The Group recognised that there may not be widespread recognition of these environmental impacts and concluded that **enhancing the availability of such information may have a positive influence on behaviour change.**

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| ***Recommendation 10*** | Awareness of the impact of business travel (and particularly air travel, including variances by class of air travel) on the environment should be raised across the University with a view to reducing emissions and minimising our environmental impact as an institution. |

1. A persistent belief was clearly articulated within the consultation process that flying is (and will in future remain) important to academic career development and to institutional growth, and that restricting flights unnecessarily may be detrimental to both individual and institutional ambitions. In particular, two thirds of survey respondents indicated a belief that air travel emissions should be reduced without reducing (or limiting) air travel itself. The Group also recognised that there are instances where air travel cannot be avoided e.g. academic staff who are required to deliver in-person teaching in Qatar.
2. This issue is common to other institutions within the sector, and the Group undertook a review of the approaches which have been adopted elsewhere. The Universities of Edinburgh and Strathclyde have worked closely with the EAUC in developing the[**Travel Better Package**](https://www.sustainabilityexchange.ac.uk/travel_better_package) **to support universities and colleges in addressing business air travel to reduce carbon emissions and the environmental impact of flying.** The Package aims to (i) support the reduction of air travel in the sector, (ii) support reflection on, and reconfiguration of, the sector’s relationship to air travel on an institutional and individual basis and (iii) encourage individuals to travel better i.e. being more knowledgeable about sustainable travel and actively choosing sustainable travel options. The principles underpinning the EAUC project feature heavily in both the Edinburgh and Strathclyde approaches and are also specifically referenced by both Glasgow and St Andrews. Furthermore, each university seeks to promote alternatives to air travel and encourages individuals only to fly where it is unavoidable, with the majority promoting and encouraging business travel by train rather than by air.
3. As part of this benchmarking process, the Group considered Aberdeen’s current [Expenses & Benefits Policy](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/documents/finance-policies-and-procedures/Expenses_Benefits_Policy_Feb_2019_Revised_May_2021.pdf) which states “*Employees, who need to travel by air or rail, should normally travel at tourist or economy class or standard class for rail fares, taking advantage wherever possible of any reduced rates. In relation to air travel, all domestic and short haul flights (less than 12 hours in length, inclusive of airport stop over time) should be economy or tourist class. Business Class travel (including premium economy services) may only be approved for flights of longer than 12 hours duration, inclusive of airport stopover time, and only granted for shorter flights on an exceptional basis e.g. health or disability reasons. All First or Business Class air or rail travel must be approved before reservations are made. All student travel should be at economy or tourist class.”* It should be noted that this approach of identifying journey duration as the basis upon which Business Class travel may be considered is being actively discussed in sector networks by several institutions.
4. The Group considered equivalent policies at the Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow, which make specific reference to first/business class air travel, with Glasgow highlighting that business and first-class flights carry considerably higher carbon costs so domestic and first class/business class flights should be avoided unless there are specific justifications, and Edinburgh not permitting first class air travel under any circumstances.
5. The Group concluded that this benchmarking exercise highlighted that the University’s current institutional position is both appropriate and robust in terms of seeking to minimise the environmental impact of essential air travel. However, **the Group highlighted the importance of consistent implementation of, and adherence to, the institutional position as laid out in the Expenses & Benefits Policy.**

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| ***Recommendation 11*** | Line Managers should be reminded of their responsibility to only authorise First and/or Business Class air travel which complies with the Expenses & Benefits Policy. |

1. The Group recognised that **although reducing air travel would reduce the University’s carbon emissions, it may also result in increased costs.** Data received from Diversity Travel comparing factors such as emissions, time spent travelling and cost on case study journeys between Aberdeen and other major UK cities regularly visited by academic members of staff highlighted that rail travel created lower emissions - but resulted in significantly more time being spent travelling and the journey being considerably more expensive than had it been undertaken by air. For example, this exercise indicated that travelling economy class on the cheapest (restricted) tickets would increase costs by an average of 50%, with first class travel trebling the cost.
2. In addition, most of the case study journeys would mean staff spending one or two nights (depending on destination and willingness to travel at late hours) away from home. The Group noted that although the sleeper service to and from London can have an impact in reducing the time spent away from home, (i) there is a considerable cost associated with it, and (ii) it does not have a direct impact on the University’s carbon footprint as emissions allocated to train journeys are calculated on the journey distance, irrespective of the type of train used.
3. However, it should be noted that this modelling exercise was undertaken at a time of considerable uncertainty as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and that changes may arise in future which could make air travel less attractive and more expensive than at present in view of changing consumer/company behaviours.
4. In considering this data, the Group concluded that although the mode of transport adopted can help reduce the University’s business travel carbon emissions footprint, **the fundamental behaviour change required to achieve our commitment to achieving net zero in this area is for institutional travel patterns to change, including far more virtual activity, with business travel not reverting to the levels seen before the Covid-19 pandemic.** Therefore, the Group noted that although switching modes of transport will support the achievement of the reduction required, this is only part of the solution and the adoption of the Guiding Principles and Travel Hierarchy whereby business travel is reduced, opportunities for virtual working are exploited further, and travel is only undertaken where it is unavoidable and/or not doing so would be detrimental to business-critical activities, is key to meeting net zero targets. Initial and ongoing refresher training for both members of staff and Line Managers will also be essential to the success of implementing a Travel Hierarchy process.

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| ***Recommendation 12*** | It should be made clear that staff at all levels and across all areas of the University are expected to comply with the ethos and principles underpinning the Guiding Principles and Travel Hierarchy. |
| ***Recommendation 13*** | The expectation should be communicated across the University that where an activity can reasonably be undertaken without incurring the need to travel by air (i.e. there will be no significant detrimental impact), an alternative mode of transport and/or virtual participation will be used instead. |

1. The Group recognised that there was an expectation from several external funding bodies that due consideration is given to sustainable business travel during the lifecycle of a research grant. In particular, it was noted that funders are moving towards the position that travel associated with a grant is expected to be net zero i.e. the travel impact of the research they fund will be offset or addressed in some other way. **The importance of ensuring that sustainable business travel options were accurately costed (and in line with funder expectations and requirements) at grant application stage was highlighted.**

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| ***Recommendation 14*** | It is the responsibility of Principal Investigators (working closely with Heads of School and Professional Services advisers e.g. Research & Innovation) to ensure that options to reduce business travel are considered at an early stage of developing grant applications, and that where travel is planned the associated costs are based on accurately costed and sustainable travel options. |

# **Travel Authorisation**

1. The current travel authorisation process, and the allowances and modes of transport for which reimbursement can be claimed, are articulated within the [Expenses & Benefits Policy](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/working-here/expenses-and-advances-582.php).
2. **There were strong (and contrary) views expressed during the consultation process in relation to how business travel should be authorised.** Views ranged from a belief that a Travel Authorisation Policy was essential to establish a culture of responsibility/encourage staff to carefully consider whether travel is necessary for both sustainability and health & safety reasons, to a view that the administrative burden of introducing such a system would outweigh its benefits and that a requirement to seek authorisation to travel constitutes an infringement of academic freedom. Furthermore, reports were received of the current travel authorisation process being “opaque” and inconsistently applied.
3. **The Group concluded that, on balance, the current procedures for authorising travel by modes of transport other than air should not be amended.** However, it will be important to ensure that Line Managers are provided with the necessary information to have discussions around sustainable travel options with their staff and that Schools should be provided with appropriate emissions data information on a twice-yearly basis as outlined in Recommendation 3. However, amending authorisation procedures could be reserved for potential future implementation, particularly if it were identified that insufficient progress was being made towards achieving institutional commitments.
4. Furthermore, the Group concluded that it may be beneficial for **promotion and awareness-raising activities to be implemented across the University in relation to the current business travel and reimbursement claims processes.**

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| ***Recommendation 15*** | The expectation is that Line Managers discuss the utility and value of proposed business travel (particularly by air) with members of their team on a regular basis, and in line with the Expenses & Benefits Policy should be communicated across the University. |
| ***Recommendation 16*** | Awareness should be raised across the University of the current business travel and reimbursement claims processes. |

1. The University appoints a travel provider (currently Diversity Travel) following a robust procurement process which includes quality assurance mechanisms. The Group received reports that awareness of the services offered by Diversity Travel varied across the University and that there were negative perceptions about aspects of the service, especially in relation to value for money and customer service. The Group met with representatives from Diversity Travel to explore in more detail the services which could support the institutional intention to reduce business travel emissions and noted the facilities within the booking system which could be utilised more extensively e.g. promotion of sustainability targets/policies, search tools to highlight where alternative/more sustainable options could be selected etc.
2. The Group concluded that uptake of the services offered by Diversity Travel (which would result in enhanced data on business travel being received) may be increased if the benefits of the service were more widely communicated e.g. provision of insurance, availability of exclusive academic fares etc.

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| ***Recommendation 17*** | A communications plan should be developed to regularly promote the services and benefits of the University’s appointed travel provider. |

# **Incentivisation**

1. The Group recognised the importance of **incentivising the use of sustainable modes of transport**. There were repeated calls during the consultation process for the University to lobby public transport (especially rail) providers to negotiate discounted travel for staff and/or students. It was noted that from January 2022, all individuals under age 22 became entitled to free bus travel and that ScotRail will soon revert to government ownership. Therefore, the Group concluded that it is not currently an opportune time to seek to negotiate contracts/discounts with providers and that a collaborative approach to transport providers from a group of universities may achieve more success than one institution acting alone.
2. The consultation process indicated a high level of **support amongst those who expressed an opinion for prioritising rail travel over flights for any journey that could be achieved within six hours**, with views on extending that to eight hours or even to an effective ban on UK air travel more or less evenly split**[[8]](#footnote-8)**. In view of the significant impact of domestic air travel on carbon emissions, the Group concluded that consideration should be given to implementing a policy which would embed the principle that train travel would be the norm for all journeys which would take under 6 hours by train (unless there were clearly defined extenuating circumstances which would result in domestic air travel being approved e.g. medical/caring responsibilities, flying to connect with a flight at the destination etc.).

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| ***Recommendation 18*** | The opportunity to negotiate discounted travel for staff and/or students with public transport (especially rail) providers should be kept under regular review. |
| ***Recommendation 19*** | Rail travel should be considered the norm for all journeys which would take under 6 hours, unless there are exceptions for clearly defined extenuating circumstances. |
| ***Recommendation 20*** | Institutional support/encouragement will be provided to members of staff who are able and willing to adopt alternatives to air travel to do so where such travel is required e.g. subsidising time/costs if a rail journey costs more and takes longer. |

# **GUIDING PRINCIPLES & TRAVEL HIERARCHY**

1. In considering how to present its recommendations on enhancing the sustainability of business travel in moving forward, ensure that the University’s carbon emissions are reduced and support the institutional objective of achieving net zero, the Group concluded that developing **a suite of Guiding Principles would be helpful in terms of (i) informing individual actions and decisions, and (ii) encouraging buy-in from the University community.**
2. The Guiding Principles of Sustainable Business Travel are attached as [Appendix B](#AppendixB). They are designed to reflect the institutional expectation that all staff and external visitors routinely consider sustainable business travel options and reach decisions on whether (and how) to travel within the framework and ethos underpinning the Guiding Principles.
3. The headline Guiding Principles are as follows:

Guiding Principle 1

*Informed choices about what travel is required, and the way in which it is undertaken, will be made within a framework which takes account of the importance of business travel, its environmental impact, and consideration of alternative ways of undertaking the activity.*

Guiding Principle 2

*Informed choices about business travel will be taken within the context of the Aberdeen 2040 strategy and our commitment to achieving net zero carbon emissions before 2040. We will adopt a fair and transparent approach to monitoring our progress to meeting this commitment.*

Guiding Principle 3

*Our business travel procedures will be underpinned by a fair, transparent, inclusive and accessible process that takes account of the needs of the individual, teams and the University.*

Guiding Principle 4

*We will ensure that our approach and expectations in relation to sustainable business travel are communicated in an open and transparent way.*

1. **The Group also recommended a Travel Hierarchy to support individuals and line managers in reaching decisions relating to business travel that supports business critical activity and the University’s commitment to achieving net zero carbon emissions (attached as** [**Appendix C**](#AppendixC)**).**
2. **It is anticipated that the Guiding Principles and Travel Hierarchy will support the implementation of a change process which will encourage a positive change in both individual and institutional behaviours in relation to future business travel.** Furthermore, the Group concluded that the Guiding Principles and Travel Hierarchy should be kept under regular review and be subject to ongoing development to ensure that they continue to effectively underpin the University’s efforts to reduce carbon emissions associated with business travel.

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| ***Recommendation 21*** | The Guiding Principles of Sustainable Business Travel and the Travel Hierarchy should be reviewed by the Sustainable Development Committee on an annual basis. |

# **CONCLUSION**

1. The findings and conclusions outlined within this report aim **to support the Sustainable Development Committee in reaching decisions on future policies, procedures and targets in relation to business travel and the University’s commitment to achieving net zero.**

1. The engagement of staff and PGR students with the consultation process has been instrumental in enabling the Group to identify and analyse potential options to enhance the sustainability of business travel. Therefore, it is essential that the findings arising from the Group’s work are implemented in the same spirit of **openness and transparency**. In this connection, it will be important for senior leaders across the University and for the Sustainable Development Committee to regularly monitor the consultation and implementation processes which will be required to take forward the actions arising from both the report and the Guiding Principles, and **to ensure that positive change is embedded and sustained**.
2. The Group would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the development of this report. Particular thanks are extended to individuals who responded to the survey, participated in the Focus Group discussions and/or provided written submissions during the consultation process.

**Further information is available from Gary Macfarlane, Chair of the Sustainable Business Travel Working Group (email:**[**g.j.macfarlane@abdn.ac.uk**](mailto:g.j.macfarlane@abdn.ac.uk)**) or Heather Crabb, Clerk to the Sustainable Business Travel Working Group (email: h.crabb@abdn.ac.uk).**

**6 May 2022**

**Updated 8 September**

**FOI Status: OPEN**

APPENDIX A

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

**SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS TRAVEL WORKING GROUP**

**TERMS OF REFERENCE**

# Overall Purpose

As outlined in the Aberdeen 2040 strategy, the University of Aberdeen is committed to achieving net zero carbon emissions before 2040. Travel (both domestic and international) currently underpins a cross-section of University activities, including education, research and student recruitment. However, the environmental impact of travel, particularly in relation to carbon emissions, means that a fresh approach to how we conduct these essential elements of our core business is required.

Therefore, the Sustainable Business Travel Working Group has been established to make recommendations to the Sustainability Steering Group on (i) a revised institutional approach to ensuring that travel identified as being essential to University core business is undertaken in a sustainable manner and (ii) ensuring that appropriate carbon off-setting activities are implemented where required.

Specifically, the Sustainable Business Travel Working Group will:

* 1. Consider the links between, and impacts arising from, University travel for business purposes and carbon emissions;
  2. Consider the findings and recommendations arising from internal and external reviews of sustainable travel e.g. carbon-offsetting for business travel to support research grant applications (in line with new funding body requirements) and the Aurora Network Travel Codex;
  3. Develop a suite of Guiding Principles to underpin and inform the institutional approach to travel for business purposes and the associated approach to carbon off-setting;
  4. Draw on input from internal and external stakeholders and oversee the commissioning of any external specialist support as appropriate to:
* Identify core essential activities which will involve a partial or full requirement for staff/students to travel (domestic and/or international) on University business;
* Identify core essential activities which could successfully be delivered via an alternative approach not involving travel; and
* Consider recognised best practice, legislative requirements and the expectations of external funding bodies in relation to reducing carbon emissions and carbon-offsetting practices associated with business travel.
  1. Recommend appropriate communication, consultation and staff engagement mechanisms to support the implementation of the Guiding Principles of Sustainable Business Travel.

**2. COMPOSITION AND MEMBERSHIP**

2.1 The Sustainable Business Travel Working Group will comprise the following:

* Gary Macfarlane, Dean of Interdisciplinary Research & Research Impact (Chair)
* Alan Speight, Vice-Principal (Global Student Recruitment)
* Adam Price, UCU Representative on Sustainability Steering Group
* Nadia Degama, Qatar Campus Representative on Sustainability Steering Group
* Josefine Bjorkqvist, PGR Representative on Sustainability Steering Group
* John Barrow, Dean for Employability & Entrpreneurship
* Liz Rattray, Director of Research & Innovation
* Helane Gannicliffe, Head of Procurement
* Fraser Lovie, Policy Adviser
* Chris Osbeck, Transport & Waste Manager
* Joe Whimster, Head of International Recruitment
* Sacha Nicol, HR Partner
* Heather Crabb (Clerk)

APPENDIX B

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

**GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS TRAVEL**

# **Introduction**

As outlined in the [Aberdeen 2040 strategy](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/2040/), the University of Aberdeen is committed to achieving net zero carbon emissions before 2040. To support the achievement of this ambition, the University has set an intermediate target of a 40% reduction in carbon emissions from business travel by 2025 (based on the 2018/19 baseline emissions figures[[9]](#footnote-9)\*). This commitment is set in the context of a wider range of external factors, including a recognition of the global and significant impact of climate change and the climate emergency, the expectations placed upon us to support the achievement of national emissions targets, statutory duties placed on public bodies, and the expectations of funders in this sphere. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly the changes which it necessitated in terms of travel behaviours and working practices (and the extent to which they are likely to be embedded as cultural norms), is also an important factor in considering the level and shape of future business travel.

Business travel (both domestic and international) currently underpins a cross-section of University activities, including education, research and student recruitment. However, the environmental impact of travel, particularly in relation to carbon emissions, has required us to consider the travel associated with all aspects of University activity, including these essential elements of our core business. Therefore, the Sustainable Development Committee established a [Sustainable Business Travel Working Group](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/governance/sustainable-business-travel-working-group-14064.php) to develop recommendations on the institutional approach to business travel in future.

We recognise that a ‘one size fits all’ approach to decisions about business travel is not appropriate in view of the diverse nature of the activities undertaken in each area of the University and the unique personal circumstances of each individual. Nevertheless, establishing a framework to underpin the decision-making process (where it is possible and appropriate to do so) is important in terms of ensuring transparency, effectiveness and consistency across the University as we continue to reduce our institutional carbon footprint.

We anticipate that the Guiding Principles of Sustainable Business Travel and accompanying Travel Hierarchy will support the implementation of a change process which will encourage a positive change in both individual and institutional behaviours in relation to future business travel. This guidance will be regularly reviewed and updated by the Sustainable Development Committee to ensure that it continues to effectively underpin the University’s efforts to reduce carbon emissions associated with business travel.

**Karl Leydecker**

Senior Vice-Principal and Chair of the Sustainable Development Committee

3 November 2022

**GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF SUSTAINBLE BUSINESS TRAVEL**

# **Section 1 - Aims & Objectives**

The Guiding Principles of Sustainable Business Travel aim (i) to inform individual actions and decisions regarding business travel, and (ii) to encourage buy-in from the University community in relation to enhancing the future sustainability of business travel. Both the Guiding Principles and accompanying Travel Hierarchy were developed by the Sustainable Business Travel Working Group following a University-wide consultation process involving a diverse range of members of staff and Postgraduate Research (PGR) students.

The Guiding Principles and Travel Hierarchy are underpinned by a recognition of the importance of (i) balancing the need to travel for business purposes with the imperative to reduce emissions in line with our obligations to act sustainably, (ii) the context of the geographical challenges facing staff based in Aberdeen whilst also ensuring that the opportunities presented by the levelling of the playing field (as other institutions make similar changes) are fully exploited, and (iii) ensuring that there is equity in the approach adopted across grade boundaries and protected characteristics, including caring responsibilities.

The Guiding Principles & Travel Hierarchy reflect a growing expectation (internal and external to the University) that many of the changes in behaviour imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic e.g. online/hybrid activities, will become embedded as normal practice. They also recognise the importance of travel (and particularly air travel) in successfully delivering some business-critical and/or academic development activities. Therefore, they set out a balanced approach which meets the expectations placed upon us as an institution by our staff and external bodies in relation to the journey to net zero, but also recognises the complexity of various factors governing the choices that have to be made about (i) whether to travel and (ii) travel modes if the travel is unavoidable.

# **Section 2 - Scope & Definitions**

‘Business travel’ has been defined as ***any travel by University of Aberdeen staff (regardless of destination, mode or class) away from University campuses, taken in association with University business, and for which the University pays directly.*** It is the expectation that all such travel will be undertaken within the ethos and framework underpinning the Guiding Principles of Sustainable Business Travel.

The definition of business travel includes, for example, travel to attend a conference, attending meetings, undertaking a recruitment trip, teaching at an overseas campus, visiting overseas research facilities, visits to use/view specialist equipment, attending fieldwork sites, visiting research archives etc.

It does not include commuting, nor does it include travel by University employees paid for by a third party to undertake activity on their behalf e.g. as an External Examiner - if individuals travel on business between the University and another organisation where that external organisation is responsible for funding/reimbursing travel, we will encourage members of staff to align their travel decisions with the Guiding Principles and Travel Hierarchy. However, it is recognised that this may require specific approval from the external organisation if, for example, the total sustainable travel cost is higher than it otherwise would be.

It is the expectation that the University’s approach to encouraging sustainable business travel (as outlined in the Guiding Principles and Travel Hierarchy) will be brought to the attention of individuals from external organisations prior to them undertaking any work for the University to enable them to reflect on the validity and proposed mode(s) of their travel to Aberdeen e.g. External Examiners and external contractors.

# **Section 3 - Guiding Principles**

***Guiding Principle 1 - Informed choices about what travel is required, and the way in which it is undertaken, will be made within a framework which takes account of the importance of business travel, its environmental impact, and consideration of alternative ways of undertaking the activity.***

* 1. Prior to decisions being reached on business travel, all staff and Line Managers will be expected to reflect on the Guiding Principles and Travel Hierarchy to reach an informed view on travel decisions. These decisions will take account of the requirements to:
     1. conduct business-critical activity efficiently and effectively;
     2. be cognisant of specific individual circumstances in relation to travel mode (e.g. disabilities, caring responsibilities); and
     3. reduce travel where it is possible to do so.
  2. We will promote and embed the institutional expectation that:
* carbon emissions from business travel will not return to pre-pandemic levels;
* alternatives to business travel will be adopted wherever they exist, are viable and/or are being widely adopted elsewhere in the sector e.g. online participation in conferences.

* 1. Information about the environmental impact of business travel and the choices available will be developed and publicised via a variety of media, including the use of the Travel Hierarchy, case studies (including examples of senior managers ‘leading by example’) and awareness-raising events.
  2. We will continually review and enhance the University’s physical infrastructure and provision of support to hybrid/online events to embed the Travel Hierarchy principles and associated guidance and ensure that they become a genuinely viable alternative to business travel.
  3. Every effort will be made to incentivise and reward sustainable business travel choices to encourage positive and sustained behaviour change across the University.

***Guiding Principle 2 – Informed choices about business travel will be taken within the context of the Aberdeen 2040 strategy and our commitment to achieving net zero carbon emissions before 2040. We will adopt a fair and transparent approach to monitoring our progress to meeting this commitment.***

1. Effective carbon emissions recording and monitoring systems will be established and maintained to support the collection of information on a range of activities with a carbon footprint.

2.2 Schools and Directorates will be invited to consider their contribution towards sustainability and net zero (including how they intend to address business travel) as part of the annual School/Directorate Planning process.

2.3 We will raise awareness of the impact of business travel (and particularly air travel, including variances by class of travel) on the environment with a view to reducing emissions and minimising our environmental impact as an institution.

2.4 We will clearly communicate our expectation that where an activity can reasonably be undertaken without incurring the need to travel by air (i.e. there will be no significant detrimental impact), an alternative mode of transport and/or virtual participation will be used instead.

***Guiding Principle 3 – Our business travel procedures will be underpinned by a fair, transparent, inclusive and accessible process that takes account of the needs of the individual, teams and the University.***

3.1 Policies, processes and procedures underpinning business travel will be bespoke to Aberdeen’s institutional circumstances and will consider the specific challenges (and potential opportunities) associated with Aberdeen’s geographical position, key business critical activities, and their impact on individuals.

3.2 We will raise awareness of the relevant key processes and services available to support staff and line managers in reaching sustainable business travel decisions, including:

* the business travel and reimbursement claims processes;
* the services and benefits offered by the University’s appointed travel provider.

3.3 We will ensure that, through training and the provision of regular reminders, Line Managers are made aware of their responsibility to:

* discuss the utility and value of proposed business travel (particularly by air) with members of their team on a regular basis, and in line with the Expenses & Benefits Policy; and
* only authorise First and/or Business Class air travel which complies with the institutional Expenses & Benefits Policy.

3.4 We will ensure that Principal Investigators (working closely with Heads of School and Professional Services advisers e.g. Research & Innovation) are made aware of their responsibility to consider options to reduce business travel at an early stage of developing grant applications, and that where travel is planned the associated costs are based on accurately costed and sustainable travel options.

***Guiding Principle 4 – We will ensure that our approach and expectations in relation to sustainable business travel are communicated in an open and transparent way.***

4.1 We recognise that enhancing transparency and understanding of the impact of business travel by making accurate data more widely available is likely to positively influence attitudes and encourage behaviour change. Therefore, we will ensure that information and data outlining the carbon footprint associated with business travel and our progress towards the achievement of the net zero target is published in an open and transparent way via:

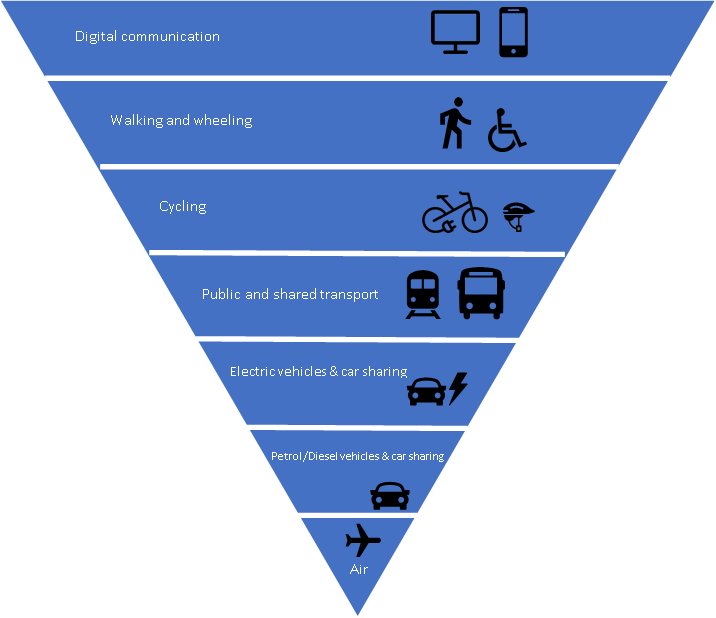
* Twice-yearly publication of data at School/Directorate level; and
* An annual report at institutional level.

4.2 The Sustainable Development Committee will review the Guiding Principles of Sustainable Business Travel on an annual basis to ensure that they continue to effectively underpin the University’s efforts to reduce carbon emissions associated with business travel.

4.3 The outcomes of the review process, and any changes made to the Guiding Principles, will be communicated to the University community in an open and transparent manner.

APPENDIX C

# **Travel Hierarchy**

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Based on Sustainable Travel Hierarchy, Energy Saving Trust

APPENDIX D

**Other Sources of Information**

[EAUC Travel Better Package](https://www.eauc.org.uk/shop/mms_single_event.php?event_id=6927) – designed to support the further and higher education sector in addressing flight emissions.

[An introduction to the sustainable travel hierarchy - Energy Saving Trust](https://energysavingtrust.org.uk/an-introduction-to-the-sustainable-travel-hierarchy/) – an example of a well-recognised Travel Hierarchy.

[Greenhouse gas reporting: conversion factors 2021 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/greenhouse-gas-reporting-conversion-factors-2021) – UK Government emission conversion factors for use by UK and international organisations to report on greenhouse gas emissions.

1. Target outlined in the Aberdeen 2040 Implementation Plan. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 2018/19 was the last full year of carbon emissions data pre-Covid 19 pandemic. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In September 2021, an interim amendment to the Expenses & Benefits Policy was endorsed by SMT permitting limited off-setting e.g. in the case of a research funder requiring it as a condition of grant. Until a formal institutional policy on off-setting is agreed, it remains institutional policy not to off-set emissions on a local or individual level. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Student travel includes (i) travel required to complete a course, and/or (ii) journeys to/from the institution at the start and end of term. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The in-depth Focus Groups comprised four sessions of 90 minutes each and were open to all staff, with a further two allocated for the views of Early Career Researchers (ECRs) and two for PGRs. They were attended by 22 participants – 15 staff members and 7 PGRs – with a broadly equal gender balance. The aim of the Focus Groups was to explore attitudes, ideas and strategies for sustainable business travel in depth. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Survey respondents and Focus Group participants identified the following potential incentives which could be offered: (i) a central fund for sustainable travel, (ii) allowing First Class rail travel to facilitate work during the increased travel time, (iii) travel time being taken account of in the workload model, (iv) a rewards scheme for non-air travel and (v) senior staff being seen to undertake non-air travel. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Calculations based on the 2021 DEFRA emissions factors. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. There was support for prioritising rail travel for journeys of less than six hours from those who expressed a clear opinion (59% in favour, 26% against), and a reasonably balanced split of opinion for (i) raising the bar to journeys of less than 8 hours (42%/42%) and (ii) a full ban on UK air travel (42% for, 43% against). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. \* 2018/19 was the last full year of carbon emissions data pre-Covid 19 pandemic. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)