SWECO

University of Glasgow
VIA VERITAS VITA

COMPARISON OF BUSINESS TRAVEL POLICIES

FROM SELECTED HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND OTHER ORGANISATIONS

BACKGROUND

The University of Glasgow currently has a goal to reduce their business travel carbon emissions from 13,194 tonne CO_2e (**2018-19 baseline**) to 5,597 in 2029-2030[1]. This equates to an annual reduction of 7.5% from the 2018-19 baseline and coincides with the University's Net Zero target for 2030[2]. Unfortunately, the University's business travel emissions have been increasing since Covid-19, with emissions increasing to 13,311 tonne CO_2e in 2022-23[3]. This is causing a negative impact on the target goal of Net Zero by 2030 and, therefore, action needs to be undertaken to be able to make this target achievable.

This report aims to highlight practices from other institutions from around the UK, focusing on comparable institutions such as Russell Group Universities, as well as public and private sector organisations. These practices will help determine a set of recommendations that the University of Glasgow can adopt in their Sustainable Business Travel Policy.

1   *Glasgow Green: The University of Glasgow's response to the climate emergency*
2   *University of Glasgow's Guidance for sustainable business travel for staff and post-graduate researchers*
3   *Data collected from HESA at: https://www.hesa.ac.uk/*

METHODOLOGY

To collate examples of common practice, a survey questionnaire was issued to various universities, as well as other public and private sector organisations throughout the UK. This survey was focused on carbon reduction targets, sustainable travel policies and travel authorisations and restrictions.

In addition, a desktop review was undertaken to extract data for those universities which had publicly accessible travel policies.

Data collected from Russell Group Universities have been marked with an asterisk(*), to help identify universities comparable to the University of Glasgow. This is continued throughout the report.

In total, survey responses and data was collated for 18 universities and 5 other organisations.

The data was analysed to identify common themes within sustainable business travel policies and to benchmark the policies against each institution.

Universities

Responses from survey:
- Aberystwyth University
- Cranfield University
- University of Aberdeen
- University of Bristol*
- University of Cambridge*
- University of Exeter*
- University of Oxford*
- University of Reading
- University of Strathclyde
- University of Sunderland

Data collected from desktop review:
- Cardiff University*
- Imperial College London *
- King's College London*
- Queen's University Belfast*
- University College London*
- University of Edinburgh*
- University of Liverpool*
- University of Manchester*

Other organisations responding to survey:

- Scottish Parliament
- Aviva
- SEPA
- Luminate Education Group
- The James Hutton Institute

BENCHMARKING

CARBON REDUCTION TARGETS

13 organisations stated, or were found to have carbon reduction targets, either specifically for air travel or for business travel overall. The chart below shows that targets vary considerably by organisation. The James Hutton Institute aims to reduce their business travel carbon emissions by two thirds by 2030, whilst the University of Exeter* aims to reduce theirs by only 5% by 2030. The University of Glasgow's targets sits in the middle-upper end of the scale of having a target of 42% reduction by 2029-2030 (13,194 tonne CO_2e in 2018-19 to 5,597 in 2029-2030[1]).

Additionally, some organisations have phased targets. The University of Reading has a 35% reduction target by 2025, but an overall 50% reduction target by 2035. However, despite the variation in timeframes and percentage reductions, the business travel contribution to overall carbon emissions can vary by organisation and, therefore, can influence the determination of targets. Additionally, baseline carbon emissions can vary by organisation, also influencing the carbon reduction targets.
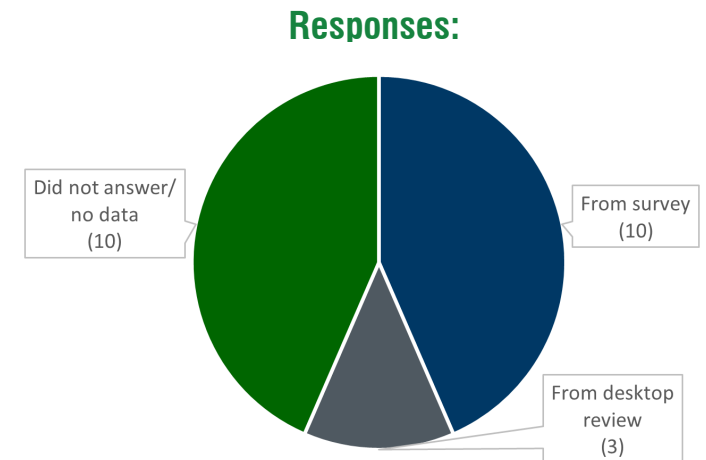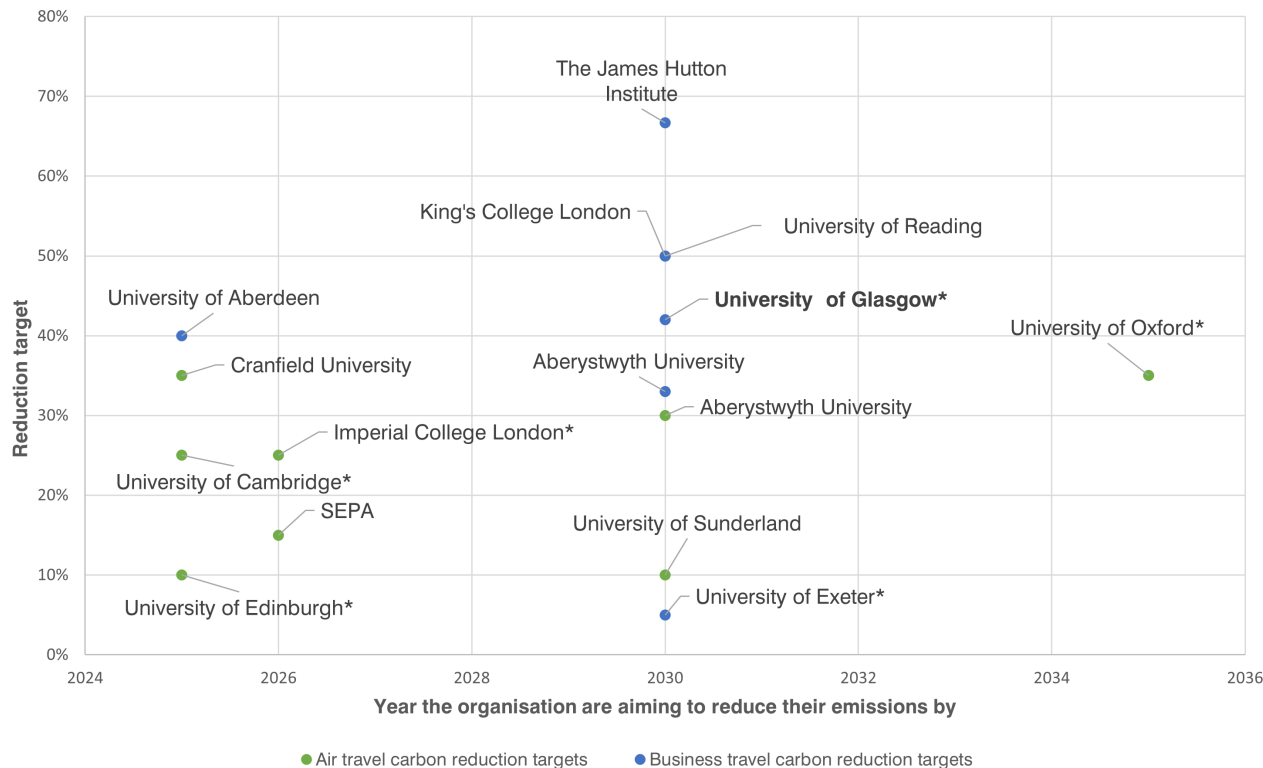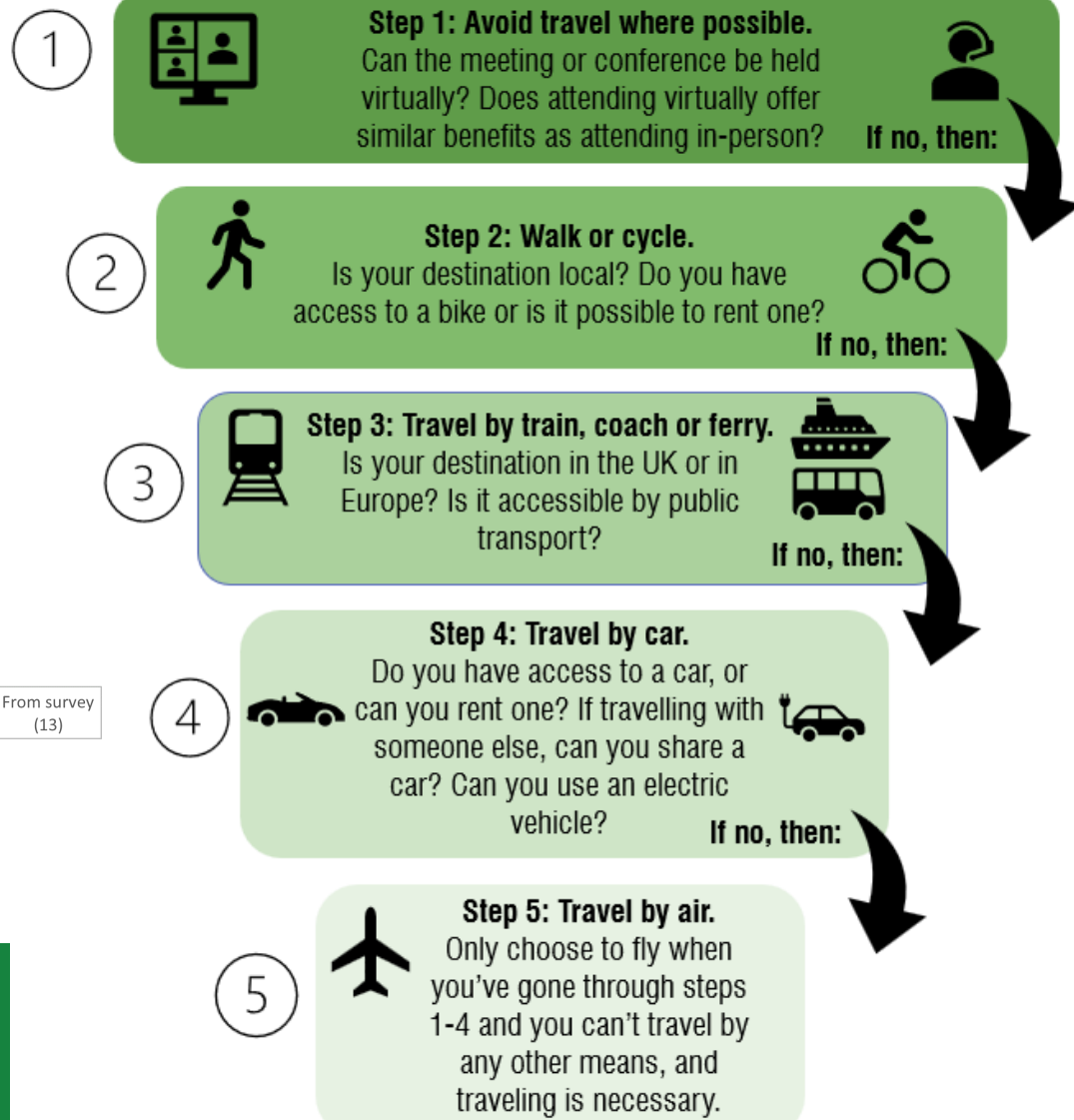
TRAVEL DECISION AID

Nearly all organisations were found to use a Travel Decision Aid or implement a hierarchy of travel options for determining suitable methods of sustainable business travel.

Does your organisation implement a sustainable travel decision hierarchy?

No (2)

Yes (21)

'Yes' Responses:

From desktop review (8)

From survey (13)
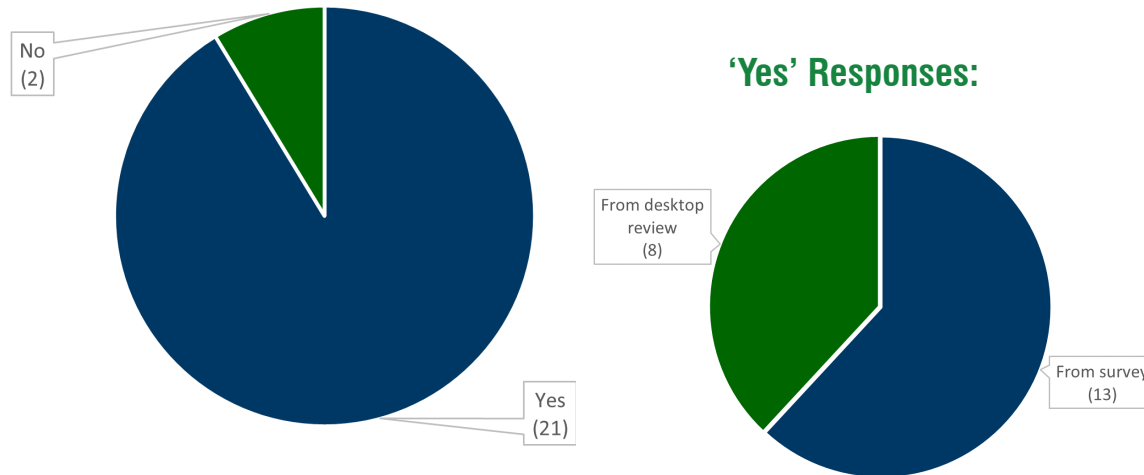
Details on the different approaches to travel decision making, that the various organisations are implementing, are detailed on the following page.

Example of a travel decision aid

1 **Step 1: Avoid travel where possible.** Can the meeting or conference be held virtually? Does attending virtually offer similar benefits as attending in-person? **If no, then:**

2 **Step 2: Walk or cycle.** Is your destination local? Do you have access to a bike or is it possible to rent one? **If no, then:**

3 **Step 3: Travel by train, coach or ferry.** Is your destination in the UK or in Europe? Is it accessible by public transport? **If no, then:**

4 **Step 4: Travel by car.** Do you have access to a car, or can you rent one? If travelling with someone else, can you share a car? Can you use an electric vehicle? **If no, then:**

5 **Step 5: Travel by air.** Only choose to fly when you've gone through steps 1-4 and you can't travel by any other means, and traveling is necessary.

Organisation	Travel decision approach	Further details *(Where travel hierarchies are used, the preferred option is shown in **bold** with remaining options shown in order of decreasing preference)*
Scottish Parliament	Uses guidance from the National Transport Strategy	N/A
SEPA	Travel hierarchy	**Digital Communication** > Active Travel > Public transport > Low Emission Fleet Vehicle > Private Vehicle (shared) > Private Vehicle (alone) > Air Travel
University of Edinburgh*	Travel hierarchies for local, national and international travel	Travel hierarchy for local travel: **Video Conference** > Cycling > Public Transport > Taxi (shared) > Taxi (alone) Travel hierarchy for national travel: **Video Conference** > Public Transport > Car (shared) > Car (alone) > Air Travel (in limited exceptions). Travel hierarchy for international travel: **Video Conference** > Public Transport > Air Travel
University of Oxford*	Travel hierarchy	**Avoid travel** > Reduce Travel > Travel Without Flying > Fly
University of Reading	Travel guidance	Digital communication preferred. No flights permitted in mainland UK and no flights permitted in Europe within 8 hours by train from London. All flights shall be economy class and to be booked through contracted travel provider.
University of Bristol*	Travel decision aid	1. Can you achieve your objectives without travelling, e.g. by connecting remotely instead. 2. Can you reduce the impacts of your journey, e.g. by taking the train instead of flying. 3. Can you reduce the need for further travel, e.g. by arranging follow-up meetings etc to be online.
Aberystwyth University	Travel hierarchy	**Digital Communication** > Walking and Wheeling > Cycling > Public Transport > Electric Vehicle and Car Sharing > Petrol / Diesel Vehicle and Car Sharing > Air Travel
University of Cambridge*	Essential versus non-essential travel	Essential versus non-essential travel (digital communication preferred). Rules / guidelines differ on the seniority of the staff member. When it is essential to travel, staff and students should prioritise available modes of travel that have the lowest carbon impact.
University of Sunderland	Travel guidance	Where travel is required, the lowest carbon option should be prioritised.
University of Exeter*	Travel hierarchy	**Digital Communication** > Active Travel > Public transport > Car Pooling > Car Travel > Air Travel
University of Strathclyde	Travel guidance	Avoid travel where possible (digital communication preferred). If travel is required then aim reduce number of people, reduce frequency, and use sustainable modes where needed. Aim to minimise air travel wherever possible.
Imperial College London*	Travel decision hierarchy	Climate-conscious decision hierarchy should be used and should support the more sustainable travel option even if it costs more or takes more time.
Cardiff University*	Uses Tyndall Centre Travel Strategy	N/A
King's College London*	Travel decision tree	1. Can I carry out my work virtually rather than in person? 2. Is my destination in mainland UK? 3. Can I reach my destination by train, ferry or coach within 5 hours? 4. Is a low-carbon travel option still viable? 5. Does the purpose of this trip justify the carbon cost of flying?
University College London*	Travel hierarchy	**Digital Communication** > Active Travel > Public transport > Car (shared) > Car (alone) > Taxi > Air Travel
University of Manchester*	Travel rule	Traveller must demonstrate that alternatives to travel, such as video-conferencing, has been fully considered.
Queen's University Belfast*	Travel guidance	Avoid travel where possible. If travel required, implement a travel hierarchy: Active Travel > Public transport > Car (shared) > Car (alone) > Ferry > Train > Air Travel
University of Liverpool*	Travel decision tree	Can I attend without being physically present? If yes, attend virtually. If no, is the destination in the UK? If yes, then travel without flying. If no, is the destination in Europe? If yes, consider travelling by train. If no, then flying is the only option, but is there a way to maximise travel?

SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL INCENTIVES

8 organisations stated or were found to have incentives to travel using a less carbon intensive mode.

Does your organisation have incentives to promote the use of more sustainable travel?

'Yes' responses:
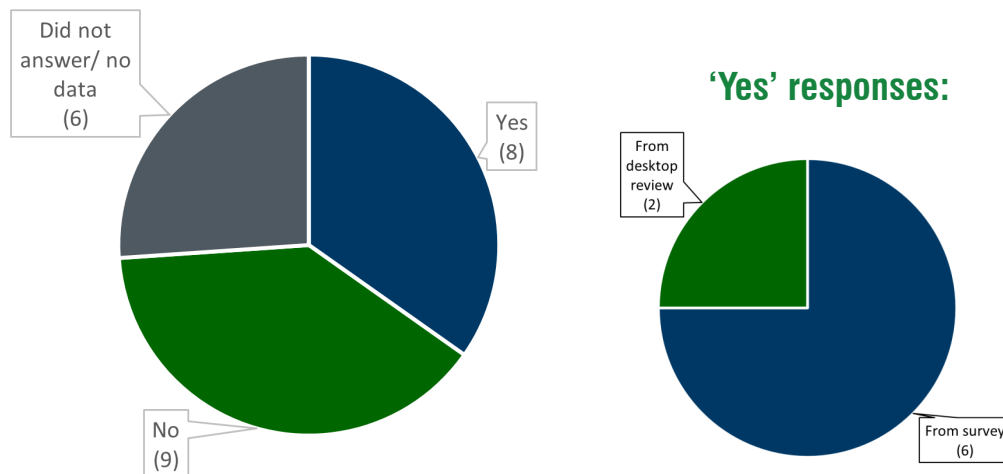
The organisations that stated / were found to not have any incentives were:

Aviva, SEPA, University of Oxford*, Luminate Education Group, Aberystwyth University, University of Aberdeen, University of Sunderland, Cranfield University The James Hutton Institute

The organisations that did not answer / had no data:

Scottish Parliament, Cardiff University*, University College London*, University of Liverpool*, University of Manchester*, Queen's University Belfast*

Some incentives were as follows:

- First Class rail travel allowed on journeys longer than a certain number of hours (ranged from 2.5 to 4 hours), to accommodate the option to work whilst travelling (University of Edinburgh*, University of Bristol*, University of Strathclyde, Imperial College London*)

- Support for sleeper trains where applicable (University of Edinburgh*)

- Travellers allowed to claim additional subsistence expenses such as accommodation, food and drink when travelling by less carbon-intensive modes that necessitates more travel time (King's College London*)

- Additional costs allowed to enable the more sustainable option (University of Cambridge*)

- Additional time for overnight stays permitted, if taking rail over flying (University of Reading)

AIR TRAVEL

Restrictions on Domestic Air Travel

12 organisations stated or were found to have restrictions on domestic air travel.

Their restrictions were as follows:

- **SEPA:** All air travel has to be approved by the Corporate Leadership Team.

- **University of Edinburgh*:** Air Travel is not permitted within Great Britain.

- **University of Oxford*:** If the domestic travel destination can be reached within 7 hours on the train then flying is not allowed.

- **University of Reading:** No flights to mainland UK allowed.

- **Cranfield University:** Ban on domestic flights within 7 hour train journeys.

- **Aberystwyth University:** No domestic flights allowed.

- **University of Sunderland:** UK destinations and Eurostar destinations to be taken by rail, not by flying.

- **University of Exeter*:** Flights to domestic and Eurostar destinations are not allowed.

- **University of Strathclyde:** Mainland UK travel should be taken by rail.

- **Imperial College London*:** Not permitted if journey can be reached within 5 hours.

- **King's College London*:** Ban on domestic air travel.

- **UCL*:** Recommended that if travel is under 6 hours (door to door), then travel should be by rail.

- **University of Liverpool*:** No domestic flights allowed.

Does your organisation have restrictions on domestic air travel?

'Yes' Responses:

Did not answer/ no data (5)

From desktop review (3)

Yes (12)

From Survey (9)

No (6)
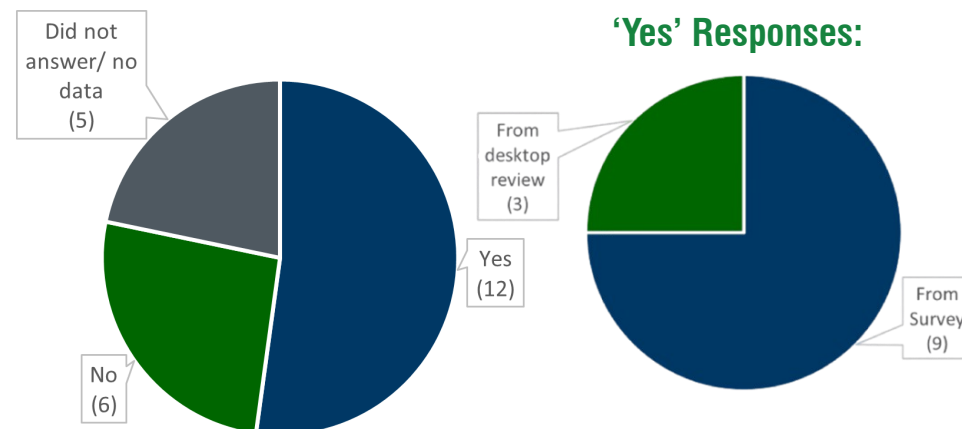
Exceptions:

Most institutions that were found to have restrictions on domestic flying, also had exceptions when circumstances allowed flying to be permissible:

- When there is an immediate international connection (University of Edinburgh*, University of Strathclyde)

- For health/disability reasons (University of Edinburgh*, University of Exeter*)

- Allowed if travelling by train would prevent attending an essential event (University of Exeter*)

- For childcare or other caring responsibilities (University of Edinburgh*)

- If travelling to British Isles such as Shetland or Outer Hebrides (University of Edinburgh*)

Allowance of Air Travel over Rail Travel

10 organisations stated or were found to implement a decision making process to allow air travel, in circumstances where rail travel is not convenient: 3 organisations used a destination-related process and 7 organisations used a rail travel journey duration process to decide if flying is allowable as a travel mode. These rail travel journey durations ranged from 5 to 8 hours, which can be seen in the graph to the right.

The University of Aberdeen and the University of Cambridge* use this as a guideline and it isn't mandatory for their staff. For all others this is a mandatory policy.

Does your organisation have a minimum rail journey time or distance over which flights are allowed to be booked?


'Yes' responses:
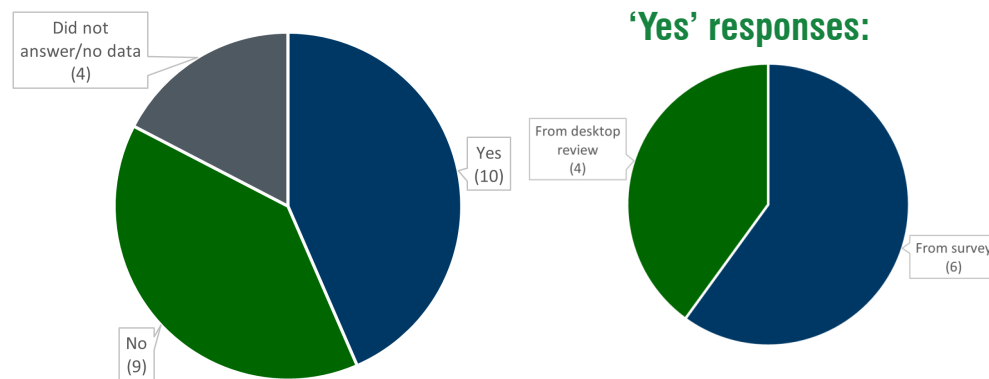
The organisations that did not have a rail journey time / distance when flying is allowed:

Aviva, SEPA, Luminate Education Group, Aberystwyth University, The James Hutton Institute, University of Bristol*, University of Edinburgh*, University of Strathclyde, University of Manchester*

The organisations that did not answer / had no data for:

Scottish Parliament, Cardiff University*, University College London*, University of Liverpool*
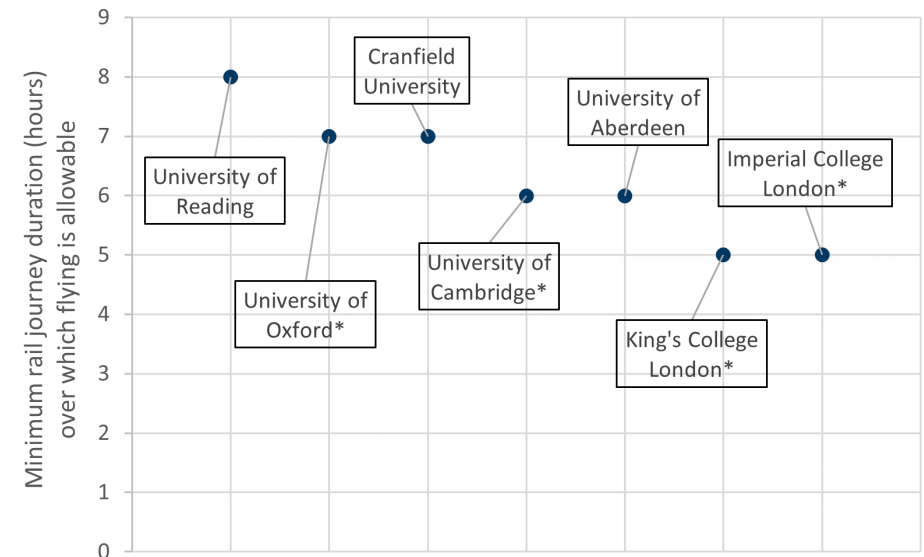
Other institutions also have guidelines stating that if you are travelling to a Eurostar destination, you must travel by train. This policy applied to the University of Oxford*, Cranfield University, University of Exeter*, Imperial College London*, University of Sunderland and University of Manchester*.

Air Travel Cabin Class Restrictions

13 organisations stated or were found to have cabin class restrictions on air travel.

Does your organisation have cabin class restrictions when booking air travel?


'Yes' responses:
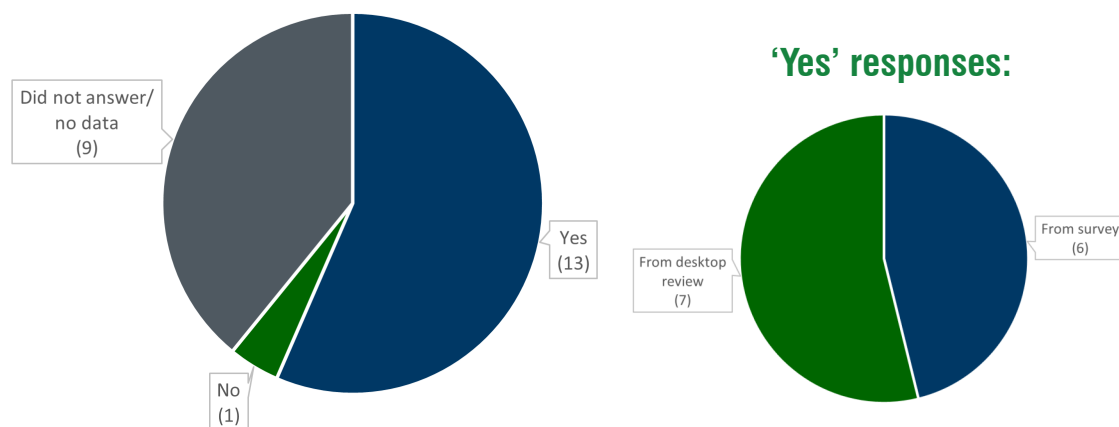
Economy Class is the default for all organisations that had restrictions, which is more economical but also more sustainable. Economy seats take up less space, compared to Business or First Class, and therefore use less carbon per passenger.

First Class is not allowed by the following organisations:

- University of Edinburgh*
- University of Oxford*
- University of Reading
- University of Cambridge*
- University of Exeter*
- Queen's University Belfast*
- University of Manchester*
- Cardiff University*
- Cranfield University

5 organisations allow upgrades to Premium Economy or Business Class if the flight duration was longer than a certain number of hours. This ranged from 4 to 12 hours, which can be seen in the graph below. The University of Manchester also stated that Business Class may chosen, if the flight destination is outside Europe and the traveller has received written permission from the Head of School / Director of Professional Services.
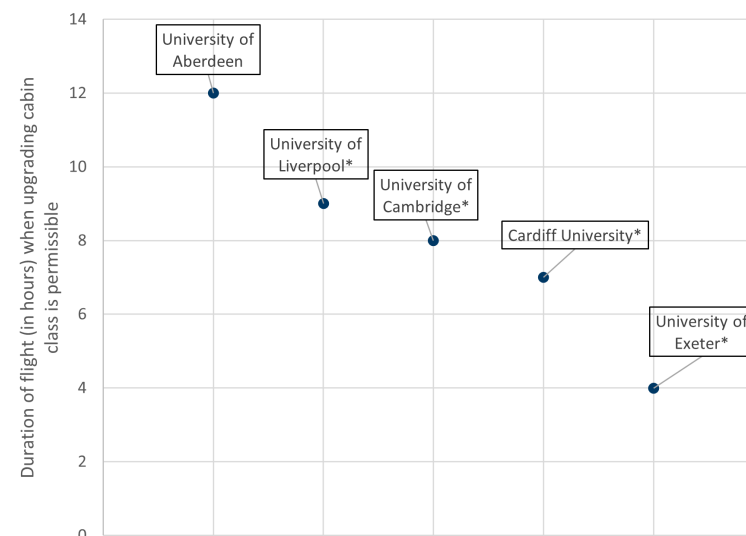
**Other conditions that allow upgrading from Economy:**

- For disability or health related reasons (University of Edinburgh*, University of Cambridge*)

- Prior approval needed (University of Oxford*, Cranfield University, Cardiff University*, University of Manchester*)

Additionally, Imperial College London* and Queen's University Belfast* have guidelines in their travel policies stating that direct flights should be taken where possible, as flying directly is more fuel efficient and more sustainable.

Travel Authorisation

14 organisations stated or were found to have travel authorisations in place for air travel bookings.

Does your organisation have any policies on authorisation for air travel bookings?

'Yes' responses:
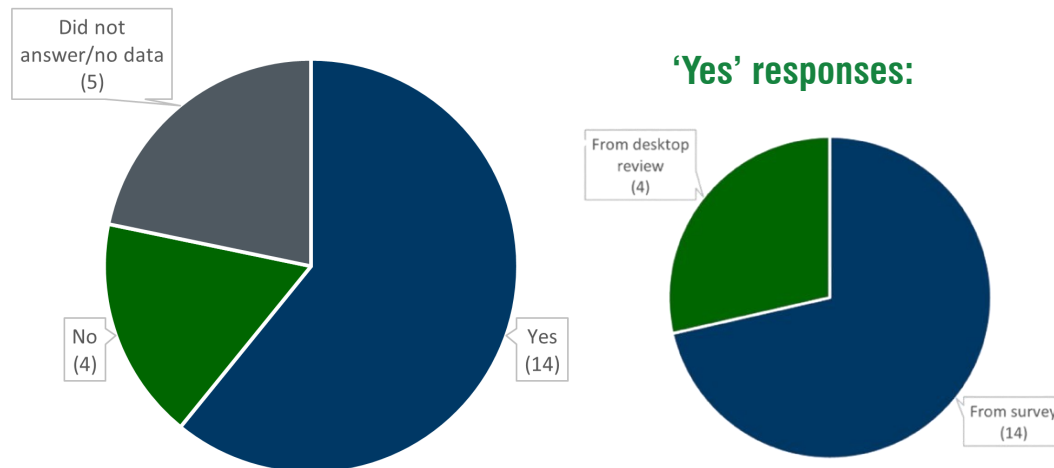
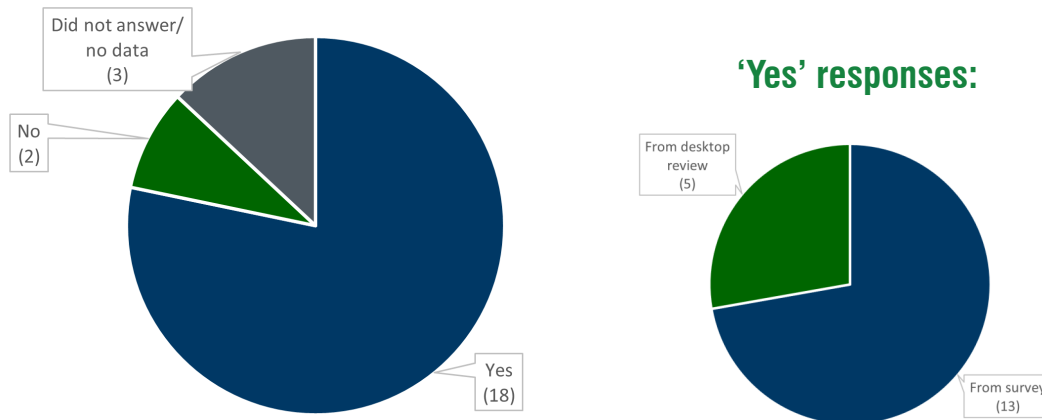The Travel Authorisation process for 11 of the organisations were as follows:

- **Aviva:** Internal approval required from line manager and for restricted countries additional approval is required from Travel Security team.

- **University of Edinburgh*:** Authorisation must be granted from Head of School or Director of Professional services for air travel within Great Britian and international air travel.

- **University of Reading:** Air travel must be booked through the Travel Management Company and policy exceptions must be signed by Head of School.

- **University of Bristol*:** The University has 4 steps of authorisation: Confirm objectives and travel hierarchy followed, full traveller and itinerary details, risk assessment and insurance and line manager or budget holder approval.

- **University of Aberdeen:** First or Business Class requires approval.

- **University of Cambridge*:** Overseas air travel requires written approval.

- **University of Exeter*:** 3 step authorisation: Line Manager approval, Budget Holder approval, Insurance Risk assessment approval.

- **University of Strathclyde:** An Approval to Travel (ATT) form must be completed before booking travel. Business class air travel requires approval from Head of Department.

- **Imperial College London*:** Business class requires Head of School or Department approval

- **University of Liverpool*:** Travel must be booked through Clarity Travel (Travel Agent Portal).

- **University of Manchester*:** Travelling overseas requires approval from line manager or supervisor.
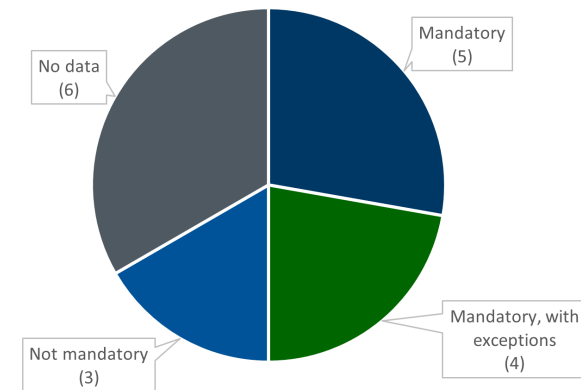
TRAVEL BOOKING PORTALS

18 organisations stated or were found to use Travel Agent Portals.

Does your organisation use a Travel Agent Portal?

Is it mandatory to book travel through a Travel Agent Portal?

Did not answer/ no data (3)

No (2)

'Yes' responses:

From desktop review (5)

Yes (18)

From survey (13)

No data (6)

Mandatory (5)

Not mandatory (3)

Mandatory, with exceptions (4)

Organisations were asked if the Travel Agent Portal promoted less carbon intensive travel options. The following Universities detailed how their portal promoted sustainable travel:

- **University of Bristol*:** The portal promotes train travel over flying and also shares carbon footprint data.

- **University of Strathclyde:** The portal automatically shows the lowest carbon flight option when choosing flights and will suggest rail for domestic travel.

- **Imperial College London*:** The portal (Egencia Booking Tool) shows the CO_2 for both rail and air travel options.

- **University of Liverpool*:** The portal (Clarity Travel) records the carbon emissions from the mode chosen.

Organisations that use Travel Agent Portals to book travel:

- 5 are mandatory– SEPA, University of Reading, Aberystwyth University, Cardiff University*, University of Liverpool*

- 4 are mandatory, except under certain conditions - University of Bristol*, University of Exeter*, University of Strathclyde, University College London*

- 3 are not mandatory – University of Edinburgh*, University of Aberdeen, University of Cambridge*

Most common portals

- Egencia Booking Tool
- Clarity Travel
- Key Travel
- Click Travel

ADDITIONAL POLICIES

Organisations were also asked if they had any other policies in place to reduce carbon emissions from business travel. The following organisations had these additional policies:

- **University of Oxford*:** Flight levy of £30 per CO2 tonne.

- **University College London*:** Encouraging staff to carbon offset their travel emissions when air travel is unavoidable. This can be done through UCL's Trees for Life tree grove. The staff member can offset their carbon emissions by paying for a tree to be planted in the grove. It costs £6 per tree and would be paid by the staff member.

- **University of Sunderland:** The University is considering adding a carbon tax to departments who frequently travel by air, with the money being put towards sustainable projects at the University.

- **Imperial College London*:** Endeavour to upgrade meeting room facilities with high quality video and audio equipment to support virtual meetings. When hosting an event, Imperial will strive to always make it hybrid (in-person and online).

OBSERVATIONS

Based on the review of survey responses from the UK universities and other organisations and data collected from the desktop review, the most common business travel policy aspects have been identified:

Nearly all institutions implement a travel decision aid or hierarchy that is either mandatory or a guide.

Institutions have guidance on how staff decide to travel and which mode is best in terms of sustainability. Some institutions require proof that the traveller has picked the lowest-carbon travel option.

Most institutions use a Travel Agent Portal and establish a 'line of authorisation' for air travel.

Travel Agent Portals such as Egencia and Clarity Travel enable monitoring of carbon footprint and promote sustainable travel choices. Having authorisation for flying has the potential to reduce the number of air travel journeys taken.

Majority of institutions have restrictions on domestic air travel to mainland Britain.

These restrictions can vary from institution, with a selection of organisations banning domestic air travel completely.

Some organisations have a minimum rail journey duration or travel distance over which air travel is allowable.

The minimum rail journey duration, over which air travel is allowable ranged from 5 to 8 hours. If a rail journey is longer than this time, then the traveller is allowed to book a flight. Some institutions also state that direct flights should be booked, when possible.

Nearly all organisations have restrictions on cabin class.

Economy is the default option in nearly all cases, with Premium Economy / Business only being allowed for health-related reasons. First Class air travel is not permitted to be booked for nearly all institutions. However, in some cases, First Class rail travel is allowed if the journey is longer than 2.5 to 4 hours (varies by institution), to enable working whilst travelling.