

Air Travel FAQs

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Won't low carbon travel be more expensive?

Not always but train travel can be more expensive than flying on some routes.

Doesn't travelling by air save time?

Not necessarily, particularly if you take into account time travelling to the airport, duration of check-in and duration of transfer as well as length of flight.

However, there are times when air travel may be quicker than slower modes of transport, like train, bus or car sharing, and it is then that you must consider the actual benefits of saving time together with the environmental impact. Other benefits of slower travel include seeing more of a country and nearby areas and perhaps being able to work while you travel (with many trains being equipped with tables, sockets and even WiFi).

Summarised from [EAUC Travel Better Package Questions & Answers](#)

The University is committed to being a global leader on climate action – as part of this we accept that trips sometimes taking longer and that we need to reduce the number of flights we take. The impacts of changes in climate will be felt most acutely by the world's most vulnerable – this is the driving force behind us looking to do things differently.

I have to stay overnight if I travel by train, won't that increase my carbon emissions?

Carbon emissions from hotel stays are much lower compared to emissions from flights. The average benchmark for the hospitality industry is 31.1 kg CO₂ per room per night according to the [Hotel Carbon Measurement Initiative](#) (the accepted standard for the hospitality industry to measure and report their carbon footprint).

Estimating emissions for a return trip from Manchester to Paris shows that train and an overnight stay emits 79% less carbon than a return flight. In addition, the electricity and heat systems in hotels are already on a pathway of decarbonisation with low carbon technologies available to drive down emissions, this is not the case for aviation, so the gap between the two options will only widen.

Return train plus overnight accommodation: [11.47](#) (National Rail) + [4.2](#) (Eurostar) + 31.1 (Hotel stay) = 46.7 kg CO₂e

Return flight = [221](#) kg CO₂e

Won't reducing air travel impact my research?

Our understanding of academic success points to regular travel to attend or present at conferences and events where academics network with future collaborators or funders. In the past, travel has also been synonymous with participating in or leading international research projects or representing the University abroad.

However, individuals can still do meaningful work while reducing their air travel. Researchers at the University of British Columbia [published](#) preliminary findings illustrating the lack of relationship between emissions from air travel, distance of travel and number of flights taken and academic productivity. The study also finds that increased air travel does not account for increased collaboration on papers, offering insight into internationalisation in the sector alongside reduced air travel.

Although these findings are important in pushing for reduced air travel, we recognise it may be necessary for your career progression and research to fly sometimes, particularly in the case of early-career researchers establishing new relationships and presenting and promoting your own research.

We do not expect you to eliminate air travel entirely, but rather, to reduce air travel, choose low carbon travel options where you can and challenge the notion that we must regularly fly to contribute meaningful work. Additionally, more diverse forms of engagement may support international networking for some early-career researchers.

Summarised from [EAUC Travel Better Package Questions & Answers](#)

At the University of Manchester we are working to ensure that virtual activities are given parity with in person activities in promotions panels.

How do I determine whether the environmental impact of the trip is justified?

The [Tyndall Centre Travel Strategy](#) includes a table to help consider justifiable purposes for high-carbon travel with career stage weighting.

An [Air Travel Justification Tool](#), developed by the EAUC, is available to help determine the importance of attending a particular conference or event once you have established that there are no alternatives to flying.

It's too difficult to book international train travel.

Key Travel is the University's official travel management partner handling all bookings including flights, rail, Eurostar, accommodation, Visa and car hire.

[Online booking tool](#) for Eurostar and domestic rail travel. [European rail](#) has recently been added to the online booking tool with access to the full rail network within Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany and the Netherlands and certain cross-border trains through Italy, Spain and Switzerland.

For other travel requirements contact UoM@keytravel.com or 0161 819 9797.

For issues with bookings access, codes, approvals or rail bookings contact travel.helpdesk@manchester.ac.uk

[Seat61.com](https://www.seat61.com) is a very useful resource for planning train travel in UK, Europe and Worldwide.

We are working with Key Travel to provide better information for booking low carbon travel.

We are also working with schools to make local level plans for reducing aviation emissions and these will include guides, examples and where to seek support if you are facing difficulties.

I need to travel business class

Travelling business and first class has up to 4 times the environmental impact of economy travel.

We understand in certain exceptional circumstance it may be necessary to fly business class.

Isn't virtual conferencing technology difficult to use for meetings?

The response to the Covid-19 pandemic means that we are better placed than ever to make virtual conferencing a success. It is useful to not see virtual conferencing as a direct substitute to in-person meetings, but instead, as a different form of collaboration or a supplement to a reduced number of in-person meetings.

What if, instead of substituting in-person meetings with virtual conferencing, we closely consider the aims of meetings or our attendance at conferences? Sometimes we need to work side-by-side, and this may entail travelling to destinations, other times we don't. In these instances, we can utilise online meeting technology like Zoom.

Summarised from [EAUC Travel Better Package Questions & Answers](#)

At the University of Manchester there is internal support for [videoconferencing](#) including Zoom and [Microsoft Teams](#).

What if there's an emergency?

The Travel Policy applies to all pre-booked trips.

In the event of an emergency whilst travelling you should follow [University guidance](#).

Can't technology mitigate the environmental impact of flying?

Although there have been advances in technology that can theoretically reduce the environmental impact of air travel, one of the most important reasons why we cannot rely on technology to make air travel cleaner is that demand for flights is [accelerating](#) quickly and technological advancements can currently only work on smaller scales.

Technological solutions to the environmental impact of air travel take time. Scientists are still trying to understand how we can produce enough biofuel to meet increasing consumption of goods and services without compromising food supply or more greatly contributing to climate change through deforestation. Additionally, batteries improve on average 3-4% per decade; Academics writing for the Conversation estimate that at this rate, we may only develop the batteries needed to fully run a commercial aircraft by 2050. We don't have that much time.

Summarised from [EAUC Travel Better Package Questions & Answers](#)

What if I reduce my environmental impact in other ways?

It is commendable to lower individual carbon emissions through any means, like reducing your use of single-use plastics, walking or cycling to work and consuming less meat. However, for frequent flyers, in a year-long period, the environmental impact from individual air travel is far worse than other behaviours.

For example, one return flight from London to New York City accounts for [986](#) kg of CO₂ which roughly equates to 30% of our annual individual carbon budget (the amount of CO₂ an individual can emit in a year if we are to limit climate change to 1.5°C¹).

Summarised from [EAUC Travel Better Package Questions & Answers](#)

Can I continue regular air travel if I offset my emissions?

Carbon offsetting refers to the consumption of a tradeable carbon unit, representing emissions rights or emissions reductions, to balance the climate impact of an organisation, activity or individual. It is a form of carbon trading and is often associated with the interchangeable concepts of 'carbon neutrality', 'climate neutrality', 'carbon compensation' and 'carbon balancing'.

Carbon offsetting can be misleading; it can lead to an increase in emissions and can be seen to endorse carbon emissions/activities. Carbon offsetting cannot guarantee long-term reduction, due to changes to political regimes/land policy/cultures all of which could influence the original intentions of the offsetting project.

The University of Manchester is concerned about the efficacy and legitimacy of paying others to reduce their impact on the climate, whilst not actively and significantly reducing its own. Instead our primary focus is to directly minimise our carbon emissions, particularly when we use energy in our buildings and when we travel.

Where funders (e.g. Wellcome Trust) require us to offset we will provide guidance on high-quality schemes that support environmental protection and communities that best align with our values.

Where staff wish to purchase offset from external suppliers they will be directed to [50,000 Actions](#), [Team Actions](#), [LEAF \(Laboratory Efficiency Assessment Framework\)](#) and other [environmental management resources](#) and be asked to directly engage with these efforts on campus.

Will reducing air travel affect women and groups underrepresented in the sector?

Research on how regular travel in academia may affect equity and diversity in the sector is sparse. However, there are some findings and news reports that indicate a reduction in air travel and an institutionalised inclusion of other forms of communication and collaboration may improve equity in academia.

Various articles have explored the demand for individuals working in FHEIs to regularly travel for business and the differing implications this expectation has for men and women. [Research](#) has found that at the early-career stage, male and female academics are equally mobile. However, after a certain point, on average the mobility of female academics lowers.

These findings highlight barriers female academics may face in accessing travel opportunities to advance their careers, including accumulating social capital from networking, exposure, research opportunities etc. If we were to reduce our reliance on air travel in the sector and encourage more varied and flexible forms of collaboration, women may be able to more easily participate in the FHE sector without having to decide between their careers and their personal ambitions.

Although there is not much research on the matter, it is important to note that recognising the value in multiple ways of collaborating, instead of placing emphasis on flying to international meetings, may improve academia's accessibility. Additionally, reducing air travel and consequently diversifying methods of research, networking and collaboration will improve accessibility for all individuals in the sector, including neurodiverse individuals or people with disabilities.

Summarised from [EAUC Travel Better Package Questions & Answers](#)

¹ This percentage was calculated roughly using [Carbon Brief's tool](#) to determine the size of each individuals 'carbon budget' and the Guardian's estimate of CO₂ emissions from return flights.

How do I know if it's making a difference?

The University is committed to reporting our impacts from air travel and make public [carbon emissions data](#) from our activities.

We are also working on more detailed school level aviation reports to identify our impacts and target interventions as appropriate.

More information

Please contact ES@manchester.ac.uk if you require any more information.