



QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST

SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS TRAVEL POLICY

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Lead Responsibility	Chief People Officer

Overview

Developed by Sustainable Travel Working Group

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1. Policy Rationale

The need to travel, whether locally, within the UK or internationally, is fundamental to the University and the broader academic community. Whether for shared learning, research projects or recruitment, or to promote the University, there will continue to be a need for travel. At the same time, the University has a responsibility to promote responsible travel, balancing strategic objectives with our commitments to meeting Net Zero.

This Policy defines the processes which apply to travel on University business and the sustainable travel principles which should be used by everyone when considering travel on behalf of the University.

2. Definitions

Business Travel is defined as any travel by individuals within the scope of this policy, away from the University campus, taken in association with University business for which the University pays, either directly or indirectly (e.g. through research grants).

It does not include:

- Commuting to the University by staff or students
- Travel between different parts of the University estate by staff or students
- Travel by staff paid for by a third party to undertake activity on their behalf

(note: even in these cases staff are encouraged to operate within the ethos of the sustainable travel principles and to encourage third parties working with the University to do so too).

3. Policy Scope

The Sustainable Business Travel Policy applies to all staff, students and visitors travelling on University business, which is paid for through the University. The sustainable travel principles in the Policy should be incorporated into the design of research applications, education projects and all wider engagement activities. The policy should also be brought to the attention of external organisations and individuals engaging with the University who should be encouraged to apply the guiding principles when working with the Institution. Where a third party is arranging or paying for travel, the University's duty of care to the traveller and our use of the sustainable travel guidance still apply.

4. Policy Statement

University strategy (Strategy 2030) makes a clear commitment to embrace the Sustainable Development Goals across all the University's activities. In support of this, the University's Net Zero Plan sets out the principles for achieving Net Zero carbon emissions by 2040 across all institutional activities including travel. The University is also committed to ensuring that the health and safety of staff and students is safeguarded when they undertake any work or study related activities on behalf of the institution.

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that:

- Travel is planned in a way which ensures the health, safety and wellbeing of staff and students, ensuring that travellers are safe and potential risks are minimised.
- Environmental impact associated with travel is minimised, through the adoption of the Sustainable Business Travel Guidance including a reduction in unnecessary travel.
- Equality of opportunity and accessibility are considered in the application of the policy and guidelines.
- Travel activities are undertaken against specific business objectives and in a way which takes cognisance of achieving good value for money whilst balancing other policy objectives including more sustainable travel practices
- Travel data is tracked to monitor progress against achievement of the Net Zero target, within which a reduction in business travel will contribute to the overall institutional reduction in emissions.

5. Procedures

5.1 Making Business Travel Arrangements

Figure 1 below sets the key steps which should be completed when undertaking business travel for the University.

Figure 1 - Steps for Making Business Travel Arrangements



5.2 Establishing Objectives and Necessity of a Trip

The University Net Zero Plan sets out the University's commitment to achieving Net Zero emissions by 2040, including the need to avoid unnecessary business travel.

The University has adopted a travel hierarchy to help staff and students determine the best travel options for their business trip (detailed in Fig 1 above). These are (where available):

- Avoid travel where possible e.g. use digital communication methods and tools
- Reduce the frequency of travel e.g. combine visits into a single longer trip
- Travel by the most sustainable mode e.g. train, bus, ferry
- Reduce the impact of high carbon modes e.g. on flights, flying economy class^{1 2}

The hierarchy is set out in the [Sustainable Business Travel Guidance](#) alongside advice on addressing sustainability within your travel decisions. A high-level overview of the hierarchy is shown in Figure 2.

¹ https://climateactionaccelerator.org/solutions/economy_class_tickets_only/#sources

² <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/141851468168853188/pdf/WPS6471.pdf>

Figure 2 Queen's Sustainable Travel Hierarchy



5.3 Risk Assessment and Ensuring it is Safe to Travel

The University requires all members of staff and students to ensure that travel arrangements are made with their health, safety and wellbeing as the ultimate priorities, it is imperative that the health and safety of the traveller is considered regardless of whether the trip is UK or overseas, a meeting, a conference, or any other type of activity. Travellers can be faced with unfamiliar situations and environments that have different risk profiles to those of their normal location and as such, are required conduct a travel risk assessment covering the potential hazards associated with their travel, and those of the country, or region they propose to visit. Staff and Students should familiarise themselves with the [University travel safety advice](#).

For trips that pose further risks, such as travelling to remote or dangerous locations, or an individual's specific characteristics or needs, the generic risk assessment can be

adapted to include additional hazards or circumstances and the control measures implemented.

Prior to commencing a trip, travellers must check current travel advice from the [Foreign and Commonwealth Office](#).

If travel is being undertaken for the purpose of research/fieldwork in high risk locations or conflict zones, the [Fieldwork in Conflict Zone Policy](#) must be consulted and adhered to.

Further information on insurance is provided at Section 5.6 below.

5.4 Prior Approval for Travel on University business

Travellers must seek approval for travel, from an authorised signatory, who is of a more senior grade than the traveller, prior to booking.

It is the responsibility of each area to determine its internal process for obtaining and recording pre-approval for travel, including confirmation that sufficient budget is in place for the trip.

The following should be applied:

- staff up to grade AC2 (academic) / grade 7 (academic-related) – approval by line manager
- staff of grade AC3 (academic) / grade 8 (academic-related) and above – approval by either Head of School, School Manager, Director, or Line Manager.

Schools, Faculties and Directorates are responsible for ensuring compliance with the policy.

5.5 Booking Travel

5.5.1. Travel within UK & ROI

Whilst the use of the contracted Travel Management Company (TMC) is recommended for travel within the UK & ROI, domestic travel, accommodation and related services can be booked and paid for directly with providers via University Purchase Card. However, refer to for guidance on car hire at Section 5.5.4.

Miscellaneous eligible expenditure including subsistence, incurred wholly and exclusively on University business, can be reclaimed in line with the University Staff [Expenses Policy](#) through the staff expenses system.

5.5.2. International travel

The contracted TMC must be used for all international travel, unless an exception has been agreed by PVC or VP, following consideration of the impact on the University's ability to provide an appropriate duty of care.

The TMC offers an online booking system for point to point straightforward requirements, and person to person bookings via email and phone for complex and group travel. A single TMC has been put in place to ensure that, in the event of a travel related incident or international incident that may impact

travellers there is a clear record of who requires assistance along with the 24 hour and 365 days a year co-ordination of this assistance. This co-ordination extends to the Queen's Critical Incident Team if further action is required.

5.5.3 Flights

The most economical and carbon efficient fare available at the time of booking should be selected; 'economical' being defined as the lowest-priced fare that meets both the requirements of the traveller and the business needs of the University. This means economy class - particularly for travel within the UK and on short haul journeys within mainland Europe.

To achieve the best value for money and select the most carbon efficient flights, travel should be booked as far as possible in advance to avail of lower fares. In cases where flight prices are comparable, the option with the lowest carbon footprint should be selected.

All air travel should be in economy class. By exception, staff may book air travel in a higher class (i.e., Economy plus one - e.g., Premium Economy, Business Class) only with the prior permission of a line manager and where there are medical reasons or where total flight time is in excess of seven hours and there is little 'recovery' time between arrival at a destination and commencement of University business.

Staff travelling with a disability may require additional assistance by way of reasonable adjustment(s). These include the need to be accompanied, the need to take additional baggage due to medications, the need for additional space when travelling, or use of an airport lounge, reserved seating or priority boarding. Consideration of additional costs/needs associated with reasonable adjustments should be approved in advance by the Head of School/Director.

The booking of first-class travel is not permitted.

Internal flights

It is recognised that, in exceptional, unforeseen circumstances when travelling abroad, it may be necessary for a member of staff to book internal flights, i.e., a point-to-point flight within the country to which the staff member has travelled, or a flight to a neighbouring country.

In such circumstances, staff members are permitted to pay personally for the flight and must accompany their Staff Expenses Claim with supporting evidence of the circumstances which necessitated the booking.

5.5.4 Accommodation

Accommodation should be booked through the TMC. There is a presumption against booking accommodation directly with online providers such as Airbnb and Booking.com on the grounds of staff and student safety. If, following consideration of health and safety guidance, a formal risk assessment concludes that such booking accommodation through such a provider is safe, this must be approved by Head of School/ Director.

Accommodation booked with a letting agent is outside the scope of this policy and the services provided by the TMC.

Staff travelling with a disability may have additional accommodation requirements by way of reasonable adjustment(s). Consideration of additional costs/needs associated with reasonable adjustments should be approved in advance by the Head of School/Director.

Accommodation for Conferences

It is recognised that conference organisers negotiate special rates with the conference hotel and/or other hotels in the vicinity of the conference and also, that the cost of accommodation is sometimes included in the delegate fee. Where possible, the TMC should be approached and will endeavour to match, or better, the rate negotiated by the conference if they are provided with the attendee's details or voucher code. If the TMC is unable to match or better the conference accommodation rate, then the accommodation should be paid for either by Purchase Card or by purchase order.

Accommodation Rates

A maximum allowable rate for hotel bookings in major cities must be observed. At times there might be location differentials, seasonal or market adjustments, safety and cultural considerations which necessitate booking in excess of the rate caps. Should this occur traveller line management approval is required. Accommodation must not exceed the following hotel rates:

- London and major cities across the globe: £250 (room only basis, per night, including VAT)
- Elsewhere: £180 (room only basis, per night, including VAT)

5.5.5 Car Hire and Personal Car Use

UK car hire must be booked directly with the University contracted Car Hire service provider. Car hire in the ROI may be booked via the TMC or directly with a car hire company. All international car hire must be booked through the TMC.

Authorised Car Hire from within the UK is covered by University motor insurance. Cars hired internationally (including from within ROI/EU) are not covered by the University motor insurance and cover should be sought from the hire company. Further details can be found on the Insurance intranet: [QUB Travel Insurance Information](#)

Staff travelling with a disability may have additional requirements for car hire or may need to use other forms of transport (e.g. taxis). Consideration of additional costs/needs associated with reasonable adjustments should be approved in advance by the Head of School/Director.

No cover is afforded under the University's Motor Policy for claims arising from personally owned vehicles being driven on university business. If a personal vehicle is used for the purposes of university business the driver must notify their own insurer of this. Further details can be found [here](#).

5.5.6. Group travel

Where group travel is required for study trips, clubs and society trips etc. it is recommended that a consideration is given to the use of a specialist travel tour operator, as the TMC is not obliged to facilitate such requirements. Information can be found at [QUB Travel Insurance Information](#)

5.6 Insurance

The University holds a travel insurance policy which provides worldwide cover for staff and students travelling on authorised University business. For the most up to date information and guidance and a number of policy exclusions check the University's Insurance intranet: [Queen's Travel Insurance Information](#)

Within UK & ROI

Travel cover is automatically provided for authorised business travel within the UK and Ireland, and these journeys are not required to be notified to the University Insurance Section.

Outside UK & ROI

Prior to departure travellers must notify the University Insurance Section of the relevant details of the trip by completing an online travel notification form at [Online Travel Notification Form](#)

Travel to a high-risk destination, as defined by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, or to a conflict zone can only be undertaken if, after due consideration, written approval is provided by the Head of School. Queen's Insurance should also be contacted at insurance@gub.ac.uk at the earliest possible stage. Travel to a high-risk destination without prior approval from the Head of School or Director is not authorised by the University and, therefore, not covered by the University's travel cover. Where travel is to a conflict zone or high risk locations for the purpose of undertaking research/fieldwork, the [Fieldwork in Conflict Zone](#) policy should be adhered to.

Where travel by University staff or students is paid for by a third party to undertake activity on their behalf, the University still has a duty of care for the staff member and Queen's health and safety and insurance procedures should be followed. For clarification Queen's insurance policies will only apply to staff and students on approved Queen's business. Business undertaken for a third party (paid or unpaid) should be insured by the third party - even if the business has been appropriately risk assessed and approved by the University

5.7 Prepare and Undertake Travel

The University aims to ensure that its staff remain safe and healthy during any trips in connection with University business. The University expects staff and students to ensure that comprehensive travel arrangements are made on a timely basis with their safety and wellbeing as the ultimate priorities.

Well in advance of travelling, staff should make themselves aware of any visa requirements, either for entry to a country or for travelling between certain countries, and of the specific vaccinations required for travel to that particular region. The appointed TMC will provide advice on visas and vaccinations for overseas business travel, including ESTA requirements for travel.

Individuals travelling on University business overseas must have passports valid for at least 6 months after their return to the United Kingdom. Travellers are responsible for requesting travel be booked and for ensuring travel profiles match the name listed on the formal identification intended to be used during the trip.

Sponsored staff should contact the International Staff Support team for advice about travelling outside the UK on university business and international students should contact International Student Support team at internationalstaff@gub.ac.uk for

equivalent advice.

5.8 Other Considerations

5.8.1 Family member and Private Travel

Combining travel for University purposes and personal travel is acceptable where the traveller meets all the costs relating to the 'personal' element of the trip and the primary reason for the trip is for University purposes. Travellers are not covered by the University insurance for the personal element of a trip and must arrange their own insurance for this portion of their trip prior to departure.

The University insurance policy does not extend to cover family members or others travelling with staff or students.

Spouses, partners or family members should not travel at the University's expense, except when their presence is required and authorised for a bona fide business reason or where medical circumstances would require a carer to travel in support of a member of staff attending a conference or related event. The travel must be wholly, necessarily and exclusively in the performance of the employee's duties. In all cases, the Head of School/ Director must provide details of the business reason, clearly stating how the presence of the spouse/partner is in support of the strategic interests of the University. Cases must be presented to the Vice Chancellor or Deputy Vice-Chancellor for approval. Retrospective authorisation will not be accepted. Regardless of funding source, there are personal taxation implications if the University pays for family members to accompany staff on University business. Such personal tax implications should be confirmed with Finance before final authorisation is granted.

On an exceptional basis, and where a strong rationale is provided, and following Head of School approval, a booking can be made through the TMC for family members, and paid for by the University. The staff member must, through their School or Directorate office, reimburse the University for the difference between the full cost paid and the cost that would have been incurred had the staff member travelled alone, within 10 working days, and before the trip commences.

5.8.2 Carbon Offsetting

Reducing our emissions as far as possible by 2040 is the focus of the University's Net Zero Plan.

As outlined in the University's Net Zero Plan, the University is developing an appropriate and robust mechanism for off-setting which considers quality over quantity of offsets.

5.8.3 National Security/Trusted Research

When undertaking travel for University business, consideration should be given to national security/Trusted Research implications and the legislative requirements such as Export Control. Further information and useful resources on these items can be found at the below links.

<https://www.npsa.gov.uk/trusted-research-academia>

<https://www.npsa.gov.uk/system/files/trusted-research-countries-conferences.pdf>

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/export-controls-applying-to-academic-research>

Where appropriate, the [University's Export Control](#) policy should be consulted to provide guidance in relation to compliance with this legislation.

6. Consultation

To inform the review of the Travel Policy, specifically the elements on sustainable travel, a programme of staff engagement, including recognised unions, was undertaken which consisted of an online survey of all staff and a series of workshops. The consultation process helped inform the development of the sustainable business travel guidance, which supports the policy objectives, and aims to provide support and encouragement to all those who are required to travel as part of their role at the University.

7. Relevant legislation and National Guidance

The following guidance relates to the delivery of this policy:

[Climate Change Act NI 2022](#)

[Travel Better EAUC Scotland](#)

[Higher Education Sector Guidance on Health and Safety in Fieldwork and Travel](#)

[Concordat for the Environmental Sustainability of Research and Innovation Practice](#)

8. Implementation and Monitoring Plans

The People and Culture Directorate is responsible for implementing, and communicating this policy.

Monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of the policy and how it is being put into practice will be put in place. The TMC will, as part of their Service Level Agreement with the University provide data to support achieving the aims and objectives of this policy. Specific emissions reporting will be developed by the Sustainability team.

Whilst it is recognised that the best way to obtain institutional level data on carbon impacts is by booking all travel through the TMC, for administrative effectiveness this policy current permits UK and ROI travel to be booked directly with third party providers such as airlines and hotels.

An annual report on travel impact on the Net Zero Plan will be considered by University Management board.

9. References

Any reference to other University policies or associated documentation, not usually legislation but can be Protocols, other policies and procedures.

This policy is intended to complement and be read in conjunction with the following policies and procedures:

- [Staff Expenses policy](#)
- [Net Zero 2040 Plan](#)
- [University Travel Plan 2023 - 28](#)
- [Guidance on Sustainable Business Travel](#)
- [Fieldwork in Conflict Zones policy](#)
- [Queen's Insurance procedures](#)
- [Health and Safety policy and procedures](#)
- [Queen's Modern Slavery Statement](#)
- [QUB Preventing Harm In Research and Innovation Activities](#)
- [QUB Export Control Policy](#)
- [QUB Policy & Procedure for the Duty of Care of Staff and Students Traveling for Research Purposes](#)
- [Carer's Research Support Fund](#)

This policy supports the review and enhancement of the University's physical infrastructure and supports use of hybrid and online events as viable alternatives to business travel.

10. Approval and Review

The policy was approved by University Management Board on 10 September and will be reviewed every two years.

Hotel rates quoted in section 5.5.4 may be reviewed by UMB on a more frequent basis.

11. Document Change Log

The following changes have been made as part of the update of the policy.

Date	Change	Page or Section Number