

MINUTE OF A MEETING of the *Travel & Aviation Working Group* held via Microsoft Teams on Thursday 4 June 2020.

- Present:** Sandy Tudhope (Convenor), University Lead on Climate Responsibility and Sustainability
Richard Anderson, Senior Lecturer, Architecture and Landscape Architecture
Kevin Ashley, Director, Digital Curation Centre
Chris Cox, Executive Director Development and Alumni
Gavin Donoghue, Deputy Director, Stakeholder Relations, Communications and Marketing
Dave Gorman, Director of Social Responsibility and Sustainability
Siôn Pickering, SRS Projects Coordinator
Rachael Robertson, Deputy Director of Finance
Rosheen Wallace, Students' Association VP Community
- In attendance:** Sarah Ford-Hutchinson, SRS Communication Manager
Amanda Scully, Incoming Students' Association VP Community
- Apologies:** Harry Campbell, Personal Chair of Genetic Epidemiology & Public Health
Sarah Cunningham-Burley, University Lead on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
Grant Ferguson, Director of Estates Operations
Bruce Nelson, College Registrar, Science and Engineering
James Smith, Vice Principal International

1 Minute

TAWG 21

The Convenor welcomed attendees to the fifth meeting of the Group and outlined virtual meeting etiquette. Members welcomed Amanda Scully, incoming Students' Association VP Community. The Convenor thanked outgoing VP Community Rosheen Wallace for her active support for this process.

The minute of 11 May 2020 was approved as a correct record, subject to one amendment. Under item 3, "it was appropriate to do a *partial* EIA at this stage" to be changed to "*initial* EIA".

2 Climate Conscious Travel Communications Plan

The SRS Communication Manager, in attendance for this item, outlined a draft communications plan for the Group's feedback. If TAWG's recommendations were approved by University Executive, careful thought would be needed on how best to communicate these, and the changes they would entail, to the wider University community. Members acknowledged that the Covid-19 situation had accelerated a longer term cultural shift where people were more open to virtual collaboration and more questioning of physical meetings as the default, which would increase familiarity and engagement with the issues under discussion.

The draft communications plan set out the context, possible objectives, key messages, primary and secondary audiences, stakeholders, timeline, questions, risks and mitigation, and how to evaluate success. Members agreed that a key objective would be for the University community to have a clear understanding of what changes were going to happen, a key message would be how to travel in a

more climate conscious way, and key audiences would include Heads of School, Heads of Department, and the unions.

Members discussed how much these communications should focus on areas in need of further development, such as the levy, versus firm proposals, and how communications around climate conscious travel would fit in with other ongoing communications, particularly around Covid-19. It should be made clear that the recommendations were not about locking in the current emergency measures around VCT and remote working, but about addressing UoE's carbon emissions in the longer term. The University's Adaptation and Renewal Team (ART) would be consulted as part of the communications process. Communications around the levy would be thoroughly reviewed in the light of the budgetary impact of Covid-19.

The Group flagged the importance of clarifying for staff and students that the required contribution would not apply to their own personal travel. The wording could be adjusted to 'University levy' or 'University required contribution', provided that this evolution of the terminology since the consultation was highlighted.

Communications within the Group would use the Teams channel from this point on.

Action – SFH to share the draft communications plan on the [TAWG Teams channel](#).

Action – All members to add their comments by 16 June.

Action – SFH to then feed back to the Group.

3 Final Equality & Diversity Impact Assessment Document

TAWG 22

TAWG noted this final draft of the impact assessment, building in recommendations from Sarah Cunningham-Burley at the last meeting, including expanding on intersections between groups, clarifying issues around race, and comparing the EIA with mitigations discussed in the full report. Some proposals would not have the negative impacts initially feared, and some groups would not be impacted to the extent initially thought. There were positive impacts on all groups, in terms of promoting virtual collaboration and work/life balance. On VCT, it would be important to flag issues of space, disability, and access. This would be an ongoing process, with further updates as proposals were finalised, and to reflect those that were ultimately taken forward.

Sarah Cunningham-Burley had provided the Convener with some additional comments, including proposing minor changes for clarity, while expressing strong support overall for the document.

Action – ST to forward on SCB's further comments to SP.

Action – SP to update the EIA in the light of these comments.

Members highlighted the need to balance the positive impact of reducing travel on work/life balance with the challenges associated with virtual participation in meetings in other timezones. The Group was also aware of the need to take into account the further work required to appropriately support home working.

Broadly, members were confident that the issues under discussion were being taken forward by various thematic groups across the University, with the exception of the impact of a levy on academic career progression, where there was no natural process currently in place to feed the recommendation into. Further work and follow up discussions would be needed, and would depend on how global conferences and research-related travel evolved over the next few years. The issue could be

managed at School level, ensuring support for early career researchers was prioritised. To ensure consistency, UoE should also consider virtual participation when hosting events, including keynote speeches and the awarding of honorary degrees.

TAWG discussed whether there any wider efforts ongoing to develop a set of principles around climate conscious travel that institutions could sign up to. This was something UoE could advocate for within the sector, building on the UoE-funded Responsible Universities Group Scotland internship on climate conscious travel.

Action – SP to update the mitigation table in the main report with the changes discussed.

4 Final Report

TAWG 23

As this report was not going to University Executive in June, there was more time to finalise it. Members were asked for high level comments at this stage, and the SRS Projects Coordinator would then rework it, based on the finalised covering paper. The report was intended as a statement of record, to share with any member of University Executive requesting more detail, and to share more widely within the sector, and perhaps publicly, in due course.

The SRS Projects Coordinator talked members through changes made since February, including switching the order of sections on EDI and consultation, to improve flow. The EIA mitigation table had been added, as well as additional content on home working. Section 8, rather than looking at implementation, had been changed to 'additional steps and further work.' However, this content could be included under final proposals and the section removed.

The Group agreed to aim to make the document open, for ease of sharing, and decided to leave section 8 in to make space for those considerations that had not yet been fully worked through.

Action – SP to reference the model used for future projections for the table in Appendix 2.

Action – SP to share the latest version on SharePoint.

Action – All members to share any further comments on SharePoint by 16 June.

Action – ST & DG to inform members of the outcome from University Executive.

Action – SP to update section 7 based on what was agreed at UE.

5 Covering Paper to University Executive

TAWG 24

The Director of SRS introduced this paper for final comments before submission tomorrow, 5 June. The Convener and Director of SRS had recently briefed the Principal, sharing an earlier version of the paper which he was reasonably content with.

One aim of this paper was to remind people of other aspects of the overall Climate Strategy beyond forests and aviation (including heat decarbonisation) that would require additional resource (shown in Figure 1). The paper also made the point that the issues consulted on in March and April were still solid and sensible, while adding some post-Covid contextualisation. It then summarised the work of the Group, and its proposals and recommendations, including flagging that more could be done to cut University expenditure on taxis (currently £800K p.a.), as well as highlighting opportunities to look at the size of the estate and working practices, which should be

part of the Adaptation and Renewal process going forward. The rest of the paper covered ongoing collaboration with others. As the only output from the Group that University Executive would see, it was important to get this paper right.

Members felt that further work was needed on positioning of the required contribution in the light of the Adaptation and Renewal process and challenges on spend, including expanding on where these funds would come from, and what they would be used for. There could be value in going back to a subset of survey respondents with a clearer vision of what the levy would mean in practice, to see if, in the light of Covid-19, support for it had increased. Like any capital spend, the projects supported would need to align with the Strategic Plan. The timing of a levy would have to take into account implementation of the People & Money system, as financial activity would be heavily focused on embedding that. In order to succeed, the mechanism for any levy should be automatic, rather than left as an additional step which would require active policing. This could be implemented through the University's travel management company, though it may add to the temptation to bypass Key Travel (or equivalent), and Finance would still have to extract the charge from research spend.

Action – DG to firm up wording to emphasise links to Zero by 2040 and Strategy 2030.

Action – DG to update the phrasing in paragraph 15 on the required contribution to clarify that this was not generating new funds, and to consider the most effective and efficient way to deliver a reduction in business travel emissions without introducing an additional administrative burden that may not drive the desired changes.

Action – DG to add a further point of conditionality that, depending on how the pilot year went, the conclusion may be that a levy was not required.

This should be balanced against the views of survey respondents who noted the levy as potentially having the greatest impact on their behaviour, and the Principal, who remained supportive of the idea. It would take some time to build the necessary evidence before a final decision could be made.

At present TAWG were minded to suggest that a levy was still going to be an important way to incentivise behaviour change, however the Group recognised it came with an overhead, particularly a human resource overhead, and agreed to assess through the pilot study period and make a decision at a later point during this coming academic year as to whether or not to go ahead.

Action – DG to include links to the SDGs and Social and Civic Responsibility Plan.

Action – DG in paragraph 21 to change “the Infrastructure and Digital group” to “the Estates and Digital Infrastructure Group”.

Action – DG to follow up on the latest developments around home working and update paragraph 22 accordingly, including not seeking to ‘lock in’ home working environments that were currently subpar for many people, as well as noting that in Part 3 – Post-Covid-19 Recommendations, the Group was going beyond its original terms of reference and making additional comments for inclusion in other processes.

Action – DG in paragraph 1 to update “the University’s commitment to reach net zero carbon by 2040” to “University Executive has made a strong commitment...”

Action – DG in advance of the University Executive meeting, to source figures on the relative carbon footprint of online activity compared to flights.

Action – DG to amend the typo in item 3 “working work” to read “working group”.

Action – DG to strengthen links to Strategy 2030 throughout, and reiterate the ongoing importance of UoE being proactive in this space in order to meet its well-established commitments.

6 Discussion on Taxis

This had been included in the Group’s remit, but had not yet been substantively discussed. It would be informed by discussions with the Principal on this topic, as he had been particularly struck by the size of current spend (approx. £800K per annum). A sizeable proportion of this was thought to be on travel between campuses. Members agreed that this issue would come under TAWG’s existing commentary on internal culture change, as part of the Adaptation and Renewal process.

Action – All members to pass on any further comments to ST or DG.

7 Implementation Plan & Immediate Next Steps

Members agreed the following list of next steps:

- *Ban on domestic flights from 1st October*

This would involve creating a relatively simple exemptions process (covering flights to the islands, Northern Ireland, internal flights with onward connections, urgent business, and E&D considerations including disabilities and caring responsibilities). Exemptions would be signed off at senior level (Directors or Heads of School).

- *Levy/Required Contribution*

This would aim to identify three to four management groups willing to participate in a pilot, starting in the first half of next year, and working towards a decision point. In the meantime, discussions with Finance about data and process would continue, sensitive to the need to prioritise implementing the People & Money system.

- *Post-Covid Lessons*

Further work was needed to follow up on the survey with more information gathering, and feed issues around virtual collaboration, taxis, and home working into the Adaptation and Renewal process, perhaps becoming part of the remit of the Estates and Digital Infrastructure Group.

- *Climate Conscious Travel Tools*

Efforts to develop a series of support tools including carbon calculators would continue.

- *Expenses Policy*

In partnership with Finance, work would continue to iterate the Expenses Policy to reflect these issues.

- *Sector Leadership & Collaboration*

Wider sector discussions would continue, looking to agree best practice and reach similar guidelines and a common standard.

- *Equality Impact Assessment*

The EIA recommendations would need to be followed up.

- *Deeper Questions*

Debates would remain around how to conduct research, the student experience, academic promotion, and the future of conferences, and UoE would need to be involved in these discussions.

- *Communications*

Ongoing work and decisions around how best to communicate all this.

There were no plans at present to seek additional resources to support this work.

The Convener thanked members for their input, reflecting that the Group had worked well during a very disruptive period, having reached a logical conclusion and developed a substantive proposal to take to University Executive which included both immediate recommendations on how to support reduced air travel as well as joining in with wider reflection on how University life was going to change as a result of Covid-19.