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The Elephants in the Room
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Scotland **eauc**
The Alliance for Sustainability
Leadership in Education

Reducing Aviation in the Tertiary Education Sector

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The UK accounts for the third largest source of aviation emissions after the US & China and commercial flights are increasing.

Do you feel the need to fly? Is there the perception that it is an essential part of your job?

We need to remember that air travel is relatively recent. Would the University of Edinburgh close without large volumes of air travel?

In 2003 **Rachel Howell** made a commitment to not fly anymore. She has kept it and it hasn't impacted her career. But she would like to see a switch away from individual choice as some colleagues feel significant pressure to fly. We need to create a situation where this is not about academic choice.

What can be done to reduce the need for air travel?

By far the biggest source is international student travel. The University of Edinburgh needs to think about how it can carry out its core business without aviation because in 30-40 years time people will not be able to fly so frequently.

We need to consider more virtual learning and outposts around the world and we need to do conferences in different ways.

Jake Broadhurst: There are some hard decisions coming. How do we create a new narrative around what we can do rather than what we can't. Aviation could be reduced through legislation and social pressure.

Claire Booth: At the University of Leeds we have included business travel in our net zero commitments. We have 7 principles for responding to the global climate crisis and one covers travel. It prioritises local sustainable travel and states we need to manage and reduce international travel emissions while remaining competitive internationally.

We have developed an action plan to: improve data and annual reporting, improve analysis to identify highest frequency fliers, promote alternatives, decision tree etc, and then offsetting.

We acknowledge that offsetting is hotly contested and hugely controversial but we are considering it and certification & transparency are very important to us.

Rachel Howell: We recognise that travel & aviation has benefits but WHO estimates that 150k people are dying every year because of climate change.

Also historically it has been rich westerners who travel to undertake research but local expertise could be employed instead.

Travel is often seen as a perk so how do we persuade academics to give up that perk? Especially amongst early career academics. We need to reimagine what success looks like.

Perhaps longer trips should require a lot more justification and we should work hard to make it the norm to have virtual keynote speakers.

University of St Andrews has identified the 30 staff who travel the most and are considering having all rail travel come from a central budget as an incentive. They are also considering adding a carbon tax to all travel.

Rachel Howell likes the idea of the central budget incentive but thinks a carbon tax just normalises flying.

Claire Booth thinks that international field trips are a huge draw and it will take time to adjust expectations.

There will be social and economic impact of reducing aviation on students but the alternative is far greater losses. We tend to prioritise the far away and the exotic but you can have fantastic development opportunities without travelling far.

Younger generation are more comfortable developing and sustaining relationships virtually so should in theory be better suited to virtual conferencing & networking.