

Sustainability Sharing Series

Encouraging Virtual Meetings

Business travel in universities and colleges is a large contributor to the environmental footprint of the sector, but doing something about it can be difficult. Encouraging the institutional use of virtual videoconferencing tools as an alternative to travel for both administrative and academic meetings, and as a platform for research collaboration with other institutions, can create substantial savings both in money, carbon emissions and work-life balance.



Getting virtual meetings right at your institution

- Videoconferencing (VC) needs to be supported at the central/executive level — there must be a strategic desire to do this
- Resources must be dedicated to implementing VC at an institution — it takes the right tools and time commitment to set-up the system
- Tech support and training needs to be on-going and consistent — include tips and ethos at student and staff inductions and offer continued support and communication
- Need appropriate scale and good connectivity — infrastructure needs to be aligned with institution requirements
- Identify opportunities for promoting change — refurbishment or moving of offices is a good opportunity to assess and incorporate better infrastructure and resources to promote virtual meetings

Encourage the use of virtual meeting tools across your institution

- Provide good in-person training for staff — this leads to early adoption and better continual uptake and use
- There needs to be an expectation in the work culture that meetings will happen virtually — begin to use VC for routine meetings which is particularly useful for institutions with multiple campuses
- Engage directly with staff and communicate good virtual meeting etiquette — advise staff to avoid backlighting, distracting background noise and take into account open office plans

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Benefits

- Flexible working arrangements
- Reduce carbon emissions related to staff business travel — can also be tied into health, safety and well-being for staff (reduces overnight stays, long journeys and stressful commutes)
- Increase reach of engagement to further afield in terms of remote presentations, external speakers and wider audiences

Institutions need a strong travel policy and to set expectations for avoiding travel as well as the proper tools, support and training to help embed virtual meetings into the culture of the organisation

Challenges

- Increased pressure on meeting rooms with VC capabilities — ensure priority is for meetings requiring the tools
- Too many choices with various platforms, such as Microsoft Teams, Skype for Business, Zoom, etc., which requires additional conversations with relevant attendees — the key is to find something that is easy to use
- Staff feelings of alienation — need to listen to staff and recognise need for in-person interactions
- Interactive meetings or meetings that are split between groups and individuals can be difficult to facilitate or manage
- Ownership of the promotion of the virtual meetings — needs to be a cross-departments including HR, IT, Sustainability and Academics

Interesting Resources and Guides

- [SUSTE-TECH Project](#) — Resources and tools to improve ICT related energy consumption in UK HEIs by encouraging the use of alternative sustainable ICT equipment, examining sustainable alternatives in ICT design, manufacture and disposal and look at behavioural change in ICT users
- [IT Department Sustainability Engagement Guide](#)
- [Sustainable Procurement and the SDGs with Electronics Watch Webinar](#)
- [Sustainability Sharing Series: Integrating Sustainability into Staff and Student Inductions Guide](#)
- [Jisc Guide: Using videoconferencing to reduce travel and carbon emissions](#)