

Present: Jon Furley (JF), Rob Thompson (RT), Alex Ryan (AR), Josh Clare – SU CEO (JC), James Seymour (JS), Miriam Webb (MW), Andy Simpson (AS), Annette Benson (AB), Sam Williams (SW), Beth Arefi (BA), Julie Scourfield (JS), Gideon Capie (GC), Matt Reed (MR)

Apologies: Nigel Wichall, Camille Stallard, Stewart Dove, Roman Kirby (student officer), Louise Painter, Sarah Jones, Rob Blagden, Steve Rossley, Andrew Misiura (UCU representative), Joe Sucksmith (UNISON representative), Steve Rosslee

1. Progress update

1.1 Energy savings

JF noted the emissions savings that had been generated YTD through returning building heating settings back to pre-pandemic levels, recorded at end March, totalled 254 tonnes CO₂. An initial news item had been circulated on Staffnet prior to planned heating switch off at Easter break.

AB requested that an end of year update be circulated to staff about what had been achieved with these changes as this has been a good news story.

1.2 SSEM post

JF noted that Steve Rosslee had joined the Estates team and begun to work on implementation of energy consumption and efficiency initiatives including the set of actions taken in spring 2023.

1.3 External funding

The Heat Decarbonisation Plan funded by the latest Salix grant (£113K) to decarbonise the estate has been delivered by Arup in draft. The plan goes beyond our Net Zero Strategy and is focused on detailing the capital projects that would enable maximum progress.

The HDP forms an optimal road map for sustainability and estates teams to inform planning and to get as close as technically possible to zero emissions from heating. The projects delivered in line with the plan will need to be reviewed annually according to available funding and in line with any changes to the organisational footprint.

1.4 Policy updates

JF noted the suite of policy changes and upgrades currently in development to support delivery of an effective cross-business approach to net zero objectives. An additional prompt for this is the upcoming Environmental Management System audit for recertification in June 2023 which is seeking alignment of the EMS with associated policies for delivery on our net zero objectives:

- 1.4.1 Addendum to Carbon Net Zero Strategy – providing detail regarding policy alignments, scope 3 targets, including a breakdown of these against specific activities such as emissions related to water consumption, and long range forecast against historical emissions plus note of the HDP.
- 1.4.2 Procurement Strategy – to add detail to sustainability section providing clear links to the scope 3 procurement objectives and targets in the Carbon Net Zero Strategy.
- 1.4.3 Waste Management Policy – Stating policy commitments and targets which support Carbon Net Zero Strategy objectives in relation to scope 3 emissions.

- 1.4.4 Travel Plan – to provide an update to the current travel plan, incorporating actions identified through discussion of our approach to reducing travel related emissions as part of the Carbon Net Zero Strategy and changes that have occurred since the Covid pandemic.

2. Travel emissions

JF introduced the discussion paper developed to provide joined up analysis of survey insights over the past 5+ years of commuting patterns, with the emissions impact picture required for focus on net zero targets.

SW noted about the routes from station to campuses, with the journey to Park being less easy to use crossing the Lansdown Road without coherent cycle routes. As this is potentially our weakest one and well used by students and visitors this is worth advising as a priority to Cheltenham Borough Council.

JC mentioned our student body and their accommodation choices and the challenge of locating suitable family accommodation, this being one of our growth markets whereby students might be potentially forced further afield in choice of residence thereby increasing commute emissions over time.

JF asked JS how our changing recruitment patterns and target markets might generally affect our net zero aims (e.g. increase in longer distance commuting students with higher travel impacts) and where our focus is for new recruitment, as this could go against our carbon emissions objectives.

JS noted the trend for more hybrid learning and attendance on campus only certain days in the week or in phased activity periods, which could alter the emission impact picture. Our location means students do commute as we are on various borders. International student intake is rising and over 1000 likely for 23/24, representing 20-25% of the intake overall.

JS also noted that international recruitment now involves less travel (in country agents, etc) so reduced emissions overall is an expected outcome over time in how this core activity is delivered by staff.

Head of Student Accommodation may be able to supply further information as they support students in finding housing beyond our residences. AB commented that students have to enrol with home and correspondence addresses but we don't verify this. Student Finance have a flag that categorises for HESA although it may not include international students and categorisations are subjective (e.g. 'family home').

JF invited the group to respond to the issues within the analysis around carbon-intensive aspects of the commute and distance travelled in solo cars which is a key journey. The following discussion was wide ranging with key points noted around choices made by commuters:

- i. The impact of train infrequency on commute decisions particularly for staff in rural areas (MR).
- ii. An increase in staff from outside the county in recruitment due to the onset of flexible working –we are targeting this and will continue to for talent reasons and the capabilities we need to develop in the workforce. This may lead to longer commutes and increased emissions (BA).
- iii. A large proportion of emissions arising from solo car use by students. Suggestion to look at ways to incentivise/encourage these people to commute in a different way (cash, railcards, etc) (JC).
- iv. Increasing the availability of showers, changing areas and lockers encourages low carbon travel (JS).
- v. The provision of information on the impact of individual journeys towards reduction targets may motivate people to choose low carbon travel modes - we need to make this change as a society, and not expect to be rewarded for that (GC). Suggested that perhaps an online tool could be used to show the benefit of travel choices – noting that convenience often drives habits (AB).

- vi. Research grant sponsors are asking about sustainability of travel more often now – but they also want bidders to go cheap on price in their costings which counters that message. Hire car company often struggles to provide EVs and if they are provided they are more expensive (MR).
- vii. Researchers are using technology more for research team meetings, but there is status associated with certain kinds of academic travel in our sector e.g. global keynotes delivered in person via trips, and this runs counter to low carbon objectives. Staff also have decisions - and potential objections - for lower carbon journey choices that take more time when travelling on non-working days (MR).
- viii. For student travel and field trips, overseas trips have some guidance but there is little guidance for field trip leaders regarding sustainable travel – additional guidance would help. Although UoG uses approved suppliers, field trips are a complex situation involving experience, budget and price equality, appeal of the experience on offer, as well as sustainability (JS).
- ix. EV charger provision across campuses, including future requirements, is worth keeping in review to ensure we are aligned to needs and changes. Having an EV salary sacrifice scheme as the purchase support scheme would be an interesting possibility for the future (GC).

ACTIONS

The draft actions suggested in the briefing paper were agreed, to be progressed:

1. To further explore the reasoning and potential for mode change amongst users with longer journeys and realistic options e.g. focus group dialogue to better understand choices and how those staff and students might be supported towards permanent changes.
2. To continue liaison with MobilityWays and GCC in relation to the findings of the cross-employer surveys and the potential negative impacts of changes to bus services and the planning priorities to best serve delivery on net zero objectives at the regional level.
3. To work with selected academic colleagues and students to develop guidance and good practice examples of how research projects, academic collaborations and field trips can be delivered using lower carbon modes without compromise to academic objectives.
4. To work with the University Funding Office on guidance and sample text for use in bidding, to demonstrate an ability to set and deliver on lower carbon approaches in academic travel and to help acquire competitive grants and support funders to meet their net zero goals.

Additional actions agreed, arising from the discussion around factors influencing scope 3:

5. JF to work with relevant teams (CMSR, Student Services) to obtain further data that can help to evaluate how student number forecasts and housing distribution may impact future emissions.
6. CCRI agreed to draft some tenets of good practice by academics in their academic travel decision-making, to be taken forward as a next steps discussion with relevant colleagues.
7. Future travel communications to add focus on explaining how small, individual changes can benefit both the individual and UoG and to explore the potential of interactive tools for awareness raising.
8. Work with colleagues involved in planning field trips to develop or share guidance for field trip leaders – and liaise with Jenny Hill in ADU on relevant good practice guidance developments.
9. JF to work with Estates Team to assess shower and changing facilities across the estate and evaluate gaps.