

November 2023 Staff and Student Travel Survey: Key findings

Sustainability, June 2024

November 2023 Staff and Student Travel Survey: Summary of Key finding and next steps

Prepared by James Ryle, Sustainability Manager (Special Projects), June 2024

1. Background and method

The University commissioned transport consultancy AECOM in 2023 to undertake a combined staff and student travel survey with the aim of providing a comprehensive evidence base to inform operational travel planning.

The survey questionnaire was based on those used for previous staff and student travel surveys with some refinements to questions on mode choice and additional questions on business travel and termly commuting.

The survey was conducted using the JISC online survey platform over a three-week period from Wednesday 15th November to Wednesday 6th December 2023.

2. Key findings

Data were analysed for three main respondent groups: staff; postgraduate research (PGR) students; and undergraduate and postgraduate taught (UG and PGT) students.

i. Staff

The travel survey gathered a total of 3,144 staff responses, a response rate of around 36%. There was a slightly higher response rate among staff identifying as female compared with those identifying as male.

- *Day-to-day commuting*

The results indicate that 31% of staff working days were based at home in 2023, a significant increase on the pre-COVID level of 5% measured by the previous 2018 survey

Nearly half (45%) of staff commuting trips to the University were made by active travel (mainly walking and cycling), 27% by public transport, 23% by car as driver alone and 4% by shared car (either as driver or passenger).

These results suggest an increase of three percentage points in the commuting mode share of the car compared with 2018 (when a total of 24% of journeys to work were by car as driver or passenger), a reduction in commuting on foot from 32% in 2018 to 25% in 2023 and a slight increase in cycling from 17% to 18%.

Staff respondents working at Clifton Campus and Bristol City Centre Buildings had the highest active travel mode share with approximately 50% of trips to work by foot, cycle or e-scooter. Langford Campus had the highest proportion of staff respondents travelling by car alone and the lowest share using public transport as their main mode of travel to work.

The results show how mode choice varies with length of journey to work. Around a fifth (21%) of staff respondents travelled less than two miles to work and the overwhelming majority (91%) of these journeys were made by active travel. Meanwhile, 28% of staff respondents had a regular

commute of over 10 miles and more than half (55%) of these journeys were made by car (with 36% by public transport).

Staff commuting patterns were relatively stable over time with nearly three-quarters of respondents saying they had not changed travel modes in the previous year. Among those that had changed the way they travelled to work the most common factors were change of home address and changes in available travel options.

The survey included a number of questions how the University could help make sustainable travel a more attractive option for commuting. Key themes emerging in the responses included advocating for (or providing) better public transport and safer cycle routes, allowing greater flexibility in working hours, and investing in more and improved cycle parking facilities.

- *Business travel*

The survey included several questions on staff business travel. Responses to these questions indicate that while nearly 60% of staff travelled as part of their work, most did so only occasionally with just 11% making a work-related journey more than once a week.

Attendance at an external conference or event was the most common reason given for staff business travel, followed by attendance at an internal conferences or events, and other internal meetings.

Trips within the University and within the UK (but beyond Bristol and the West of England) were the most common types of business travel, both being undertaken by more than half (57%) of respondents who travelled for work. Around 31% of staff who travelled for work made business trips outside the UK (equating to around 18% of all staff respondents to the survey).

For staff who travelled within the University for work, 75% used mainly active travel modes and 12% used private vehicles. The great majority (84%) of staff undertaking business travel within the UK mainly used public transport while 92% of those travelling for work outside the UK mainly did so by aeroplane. Nonetheless, 7% of those travelling for work outside the UK went by train, a significant increase from 2% measured by the 2018 staff travel survey.

Staff who travelled for work were asked how they could be encouraged to use more sustainable business travel options. Common themes for local business trips included improved public transport, provision of pool vehicles and subsidised membership of Bristol's public e-bike and e-scooter scheme; for longer national and international trips, common themes included help with accommodating the extra costs and time required for overland travel, prompt reimbursement of travel expenses and improved travel booking services.

ii. PGR students

The travel survey gathered a total of 387 postgraduate researcher (PGR) responses, a response rate of around 15%. There was a slightly higher response rate among PGRs identifying as female compared with those identifying as male. Around three-quarters of PGR respondents were based at Clifton Campus.

- *Day-to-day commuting*

The survey results indicate that two-thirds of PGR commuting trips were by active travel (primarily walking or cycling), around a quarter (26%) by public transport and only 6% by car.

High levels of active travel were associated with the shorter commuting journeys typically made by PGRs compared with staff (half being less than two miles).

- *Business travel*

More than two thirds (70%) of PGR respondents indicated they undertook business travel on behalf of the University, the most common reasons being attendance at external conferences or events, or for research. Around 40% of PGRs undertaking business travel did so internationally, representing nearly 30% of all PGR respondents.

iii. UG and PGT students

The travel survey gathered a total of 2,359 UG and PGT student responses, an overall response rate of nearly 8%. Around 80% of respondents in this group were UGs. There was a slightly higher response rate among UG and PGT respondents identifying as female compared with those identifying as male. Almost 80% of these student respondents studied primarily at Clifton Campus and 70% lived in University-allocated accommodation during term-time.

- *Day-to-day commuting*

Student respondents were asked if they owned or had access to a car, bicycle, e-scooter or motorbike during terms-time. Around 16% of all student respondents had access to a car compared with 12% to a bicycle. Levels of car access ranged from 12% for students based at Clifton Campus compared with nearly half for those based at Langford.

Nonetheless the survey data indicated that on average across all campuses, just 8% of student daily commuting trips were made by car either as driver or passenger, with 60% by active travel modes and 28% by public transport. Langford Campus had the highest proportions of student respondents who travelled by car as driver alone (24%) and by public transport (33%), whilst Clifton Campus had the highest proportion (65%) of respondents who used active travel modes.

The high levels of active travel recorded by UG and PGT respondents in 2023 corresponded with the shorter commuting journeys typically made by this group compared with both staff and PGRs. Some 58% of daily commuting trips to study amongst this group were less than two miles, with over 80% of these short trips made on foot or by bike. While most travelled only once to campus on an average study day, around a quarter of these student respondents typically made two or three return journeys to and from their term-time home address each day.

Students were asked what the University could do to support more daily travel to study by non-car means. The majority of responses to this question related to improvements in the reliability, frequency and affordability of local public transport services.

Nonetheless a comparison with the results of previous student travel surveys in 2015 and 2018 indicates significant growth in bus use on levels seen in previous years, and a corresponding fall in the mode share of walking for student daily commuting.

- *Termly travel*

The survey included several questions on travel between the University and students' addresses outside term time. The results indicate that while just over half normally travelled by rail or other public transport, a quarter travelled by car and nearly the same proportion (22%) by aeroplane. Of those not travelling by plane, more than half (54%) made at least five return journeys to/from

the University each academic year. Of those travelling by air, 70% flew to destinations outside the EU, but just over half of these made no more than one return flight in a typical academic year.

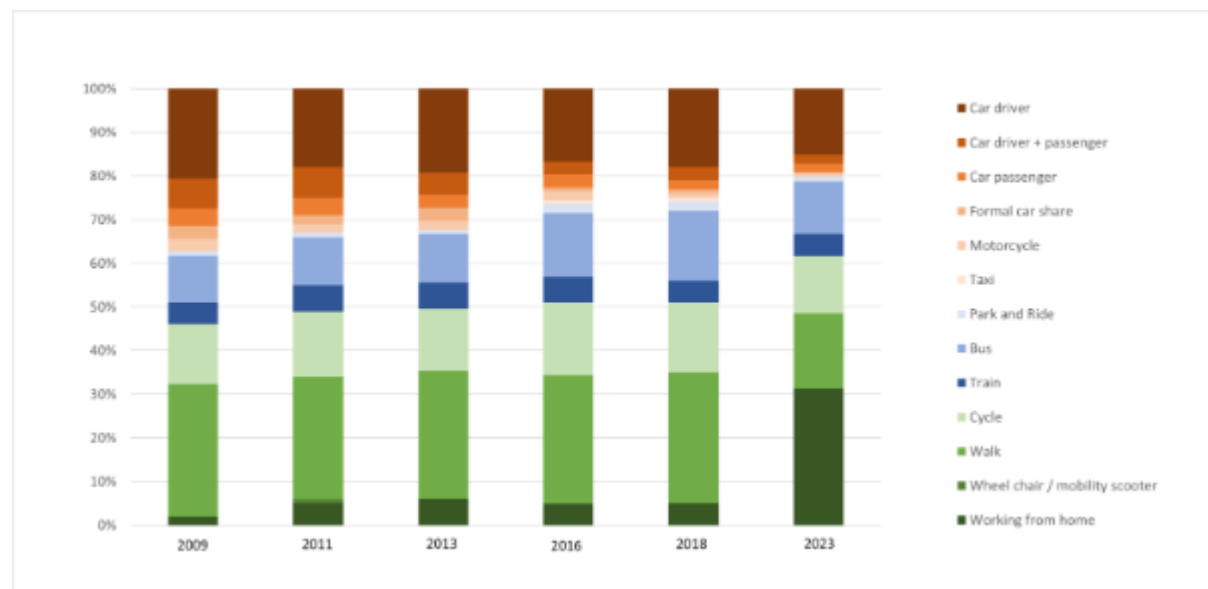
3. Comparison with previous years

The findings of the 2023-24 travel survey provide for some comparison of day-to-day commuting patterns with previous years.

- *Trends in staff commuting patterns*

Figure 1 shows how mode choice for day-to-day staff commuting has changed since 2009. This indicates a steady decline in travel to work by car. Until 2018 this was due to increasing rates of active travel and public transport use, after which further reductions in car use can be attributed to a significant jump in working from home triggered by the COVID pandemic.

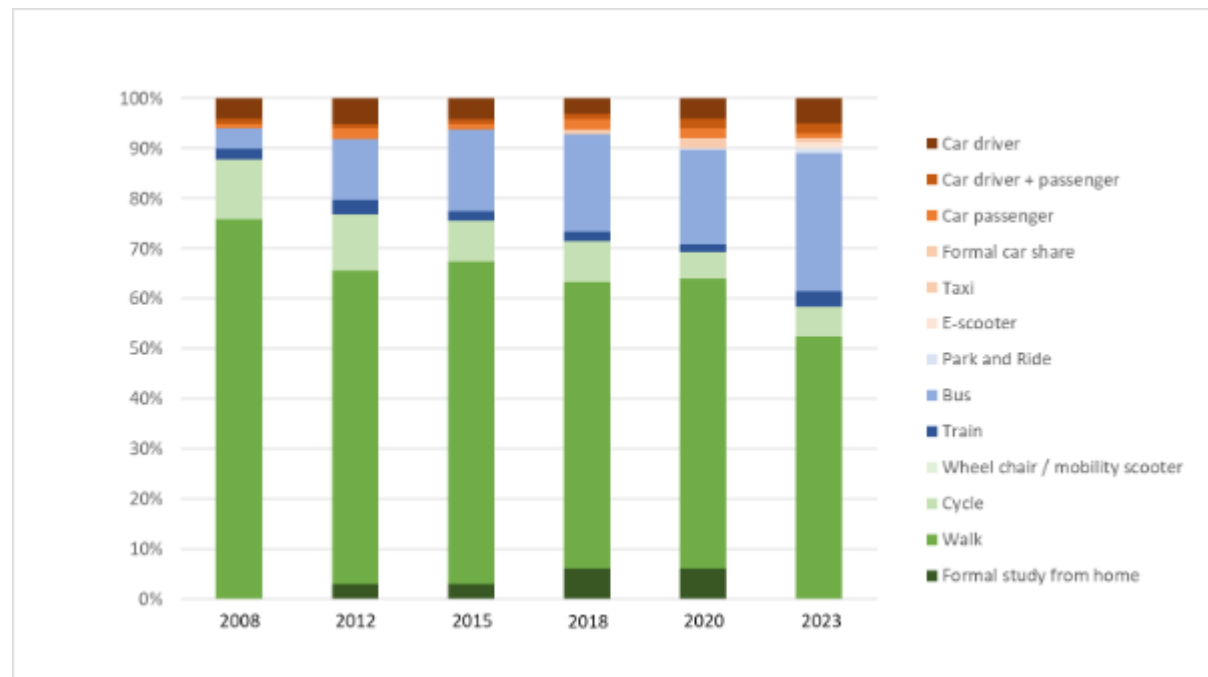
Figure 1: Staff travel to work by main mode (% of trips) 2009-2023



- *Trends in student commuting patterns*

Figure 2 shows how mode choice for day-to-day student commuting has changed since 2008¹. This indicates a steady increase in bus use while car use has remained largely static and levels of active travel have declined.

Figure 2: Student travel to study by main mode (% of trips) 2008-2023



4. Next steps

The survey data will be used for several purposes over the next 6-12 months, including:

- Shaping priorities for the University's transport team, including its support for sustainable travel on campus and partnership work with local authorities and transport providers;
- Providing a baseline for travel mode choice targets to be set as part of new travel plans for Temple Quarter Enterprise Campus and North Somerset Campus;
- Refining estimates of CO₂ emissions from staff and student commuting and student termly travel used to help measure the University's Scope 3 carbon footprint;
- Informing reviews of transport-related University policies, e.g. on car parking, business travel.