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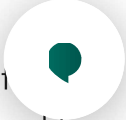
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A Sustainable, Inclusive Approach to Global Travel

 Article Tuesday, January 7, 2025

By Liz Warren, Dario tom Dieck, Hannah Holmes, Stewart Morrell

Manchester Metropolitan offers short international programs that are accessible to all students and designed to make a minimal environmental impact.

- The business school's international programs are scheduled to accommodate various religious celebrations, and half of the funded opportunities are reserved for students who receive financial aid.
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- Before embarking on trips, students participate in carbon literacy training and make personal pledges to mitigate the environmental impact of their travel.
- In surveys, students indicate that even brief experiences enhance their professional, cultural, and educational capital.

Human capital theory suggests that when individuals invest in education and training, they enhance their productivity and earning potential—and when they participate in international activities, they accumulate professional, cultural, and educational capital as well.

This means it is vital for business schools to provide students with opportunities for both physical and virtual mobility. However, business schools must make certain their international strategies maintain the core missions and values of their parent institutions.

This is not a simple task, but it's made somewhat easier because the traditional concept of mobility is evolving. In the past, the only international options most business schools offered were semesterlong or yearlong study abroad programs. While such experiences continue to be highly valuable, they also present significant challenges.

One problem is that some students can't afford longer international programs, which leads to disparities in the student experience. Even financial support—such as that offered in the United Kingdom through the [Turing Scheme](#)—is not always enough to ensure that all students have equal access to international opportunities. Another problem is that student travel can generate high levels of carbon emissions.

In response to these two challenges, today's business schools are offering more ways for students to gain international exposure. These include short-term physical experiences, on-campus international activities such as international weeks, and collaborative online international learning ([COIL](#)) projects.

One School's Approach

At Manchester Metropolitan Business School in the U.K., we are meeting both of these challenges through our GoGlobal Brand, which maintains a comprehensive mobility portfolio. While we offer COIL projects that are accessible to everyone and do not contribute to carbon emissions, one of our main focuses has been on short-term in-person travel options.

These physical mobility programs typically last seven to 10 days and provide students with industry expertise, cultural enrichment, and new knowledge in areas that include sustainability. We promote the programs through welcome sessions and a carefully planned communications strategy that is implemented throughout the year.

Business schools must make certain their international strategies maintain the core missions of their parent institutions. This task is easier because the traditional concept of mobility is evolving.

One of our goals is to offer programs across a range of countries and cultural contexts. For that reason, some of our international opportunities take place at other universities, where students enroll in bespoke programs and specialized courses and engage with peers from other nations. For these experiences, we draw from partner schools with whom we already have strategic relationships, including the American University in Cairo, Rabat Business School in Morocco, and NEOMA Business School in France. We know these institutions will work with us to curate programs that meet our needs and align with our values. Additionally, we organize our own visits to locations such as Switzerland, Athens, New York, and Dublin.

We have implemented a series of targeted solutions to ensure that our GoGlobal mobility programs are affordable and inclusive. One way we do this is by scheduling events throughout the year to accommodate students who observe different cultural and religious celebrations.

Another way we do this is by fully or partially covering some of the travel expenses. We offer funded opportunities to students who meet specific eligibility criteria based on extracurricular activity, grade point average, and attendance. To ensure fairness, we reserve 50 percent of fully funded opportunities for students who receive financial aid from the university.

We also have established a dedicated fund for students who want to create personalized international mobility experiences, and half of these awards are designated for those receiving financial assistance. Currently, the business school supports the fund internally, although we have plans to raise more money through philanthropic activities.

Over the past two years, we supported more than 400 students as they engaged in short-term mobility experiences, and we surpassed our goal of ensuring that 50 percent were from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

A Focus on Sustainability

We also have taken steps to make sure our GoGlobal mobility programs are sustainable. For instance, the business school curriculum now incorporates the Teach Carbon Literacy program that has been implemented by Manchester Metropolitan University. The program is part of the universitywide Leadership in Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy, which was implemented in 2022 and will be in effect through 2026.

In practice, this means that before students depart on GoGlobal visits, they must complete carbon literacy training that enables them to calculate the emissions of their trips. They

also make personal pledges to mitigate the environmental impact of their travel.

We encourage students to understand and make lifelong use of educational tools for reducing carbon emissions rather than to simply pay to offset carbon miles.

One student pledged to “swap the car for the bus more often and the bus for walking when I can. Although I use the bus often, my largest carbon emissions come from travel, so it’s clear I need to change something.” Another planned to reduce consumption of meat, which accounted for a high percentage of this student’s carbon emissions.

Where feasible, we also offer students opportunities to offset their carbon contributions through activities such as partnering with a local charity to plant trees. To date, our students have planted 116 new trees, which are expected to absorb two tonnes of CO₂ emissions over the next five years.

Through these measures, we encourage students to understand and make lifelong use of educational tools for reducing carbon emissions rather than to simply pay to offset carbon miles. Students come to understand that actively participating in lowering emissions not only mitigates harm, but also represents an essential aspect of global citizenship.

A Look at Impact

Because we want to ensure that our GoGlobal mobility experiences deliver long-term benefits to students, we ask them to complete feedback surveys upon their return. Recently, for instance, 26 of our students visited Rabat Business School. They were accompanied by three staff members who could provide support to individuals who had had limited experience traveling outside the U.K.

When we asked students to rate their enjoyment of the overall experience on a five-point scale, they gave it a score of 4.80. We also collected their impact ratings on three separate dimensions:

Professional capital. We asked students to gauge the impact of various opportunities such as networking, meeting future colleagues, meeting future employers, and getting insights into potential future careers. Respondents agreed that the networking opportunities were the most valuable. (Overall rating: 4.2.)

If we want to make student travel part of our international strategies, we must practice creative, inclusive leadership and allocate the necessary resources.

Cultural capital. We asked students which of these activities was the most powerful: meeting people from different cultures, having a chance to live in a different country,

engaging in new experiences, or stepping out of their comfort zones. Students gave the highest marks to engaging in new experiences. (Overall rating: 4.96.)

Educational capital. Finally, we asked students which of these aspects of the program was most impactful: experiencing the way other business schools teach, approaching education from different cultural perspectives, or placing their studies into real-world contexts. Students stated that experiencing education from different cultural perspectives was the most valuable. (Overall rating: 4.69.)

From these responses, we conclude that values such as sustainability and inclusivity can be effectively integrated into international travel experiences. We also conclude that, even when such experiences are relatively brief, students can derive significant benefits in terms of professional, cultural, and educational capital.

Prepared to Meet Challenges

If, as business school leaders, we want to make student travel part of our international strategies, we must practice creative, inclusive leadership and allocate the necessary resources. We must create engaging experiences for current students and incorporate issues that will matter to them when they become leaders.

At Manchester Metropolitan Business School, we believe that our two-pronged approach to international study can help us overcome some of the challenges now facing business education. By offering an inclusive portfolio of opportunities, we are expanding educational access, and by emphasizing environmental literacy, we are making our programs more sustainable.

Most important, we are working to inspire our students to step out of their comfort zones, seek out new experiences, and take steps to mitigate their environmental impact once they're in the working world.

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