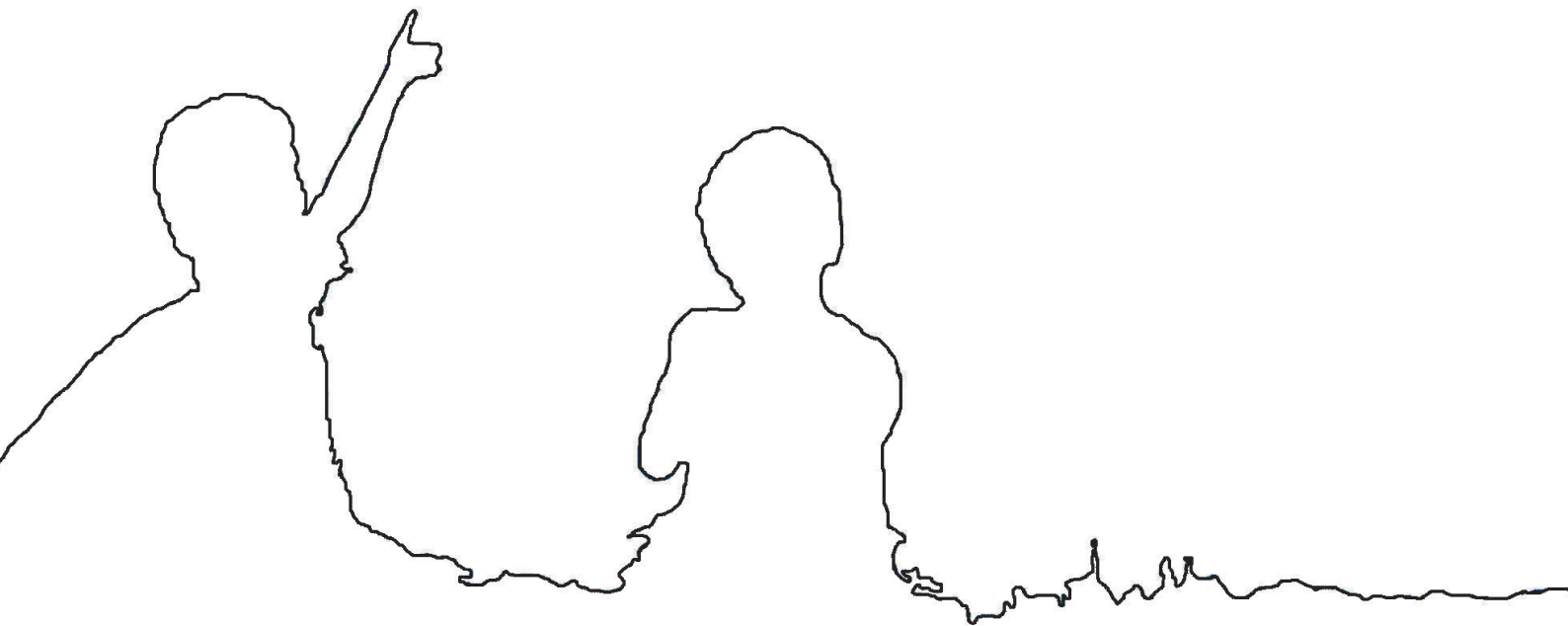




Sustainable Development,  
Corporate Social Responsibility and  
Aviation in the UK:  
Connecting Policy Perspectives





# Executive Summary

## **Aviation and sustainable development**

There has been much public discourse and debate on the emergence of low-fares airlines (LFAs, also known as low cost carriers) such as Ryanair, easyJet and Flybe flying to and from the United Kingdom. Much of this has centred on their contribution to sustainable development, specifically about their environmental impacts. However, in this regard, views of LFA operations that are fully-informed by both internal and external perspectives have been lacking.

## **Aviation and CSR**

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is an approach to business management that offers the potential for businesses to voluntarily deliver on commitments to sustainable development while avoiding the need for more formal regulation. Encouraging CSR across all business sectors is a policy concern of both the EU and the UK. However, policymakers do not appear to be actively encouraging CSR among airlines.

## **Aims of the report**

Conditions in the external business environment, such as the prevailing public policy agenda, can frame and drive decisions about CSR implementation and development. To date, there has been no examination of policy in the areas of sustainable development, CSR and aviation, nor the extent to which they are connected and mutually-reinforcing.

The aim of this report is to review recent policy documents produced by the EU and in the UK and its regions since 2000 pertaining to these three areas. In particular, it sets out to:

- Review the latest policy position in each area separately; and
- Investigate whether policy connections are made between them.

This report is the first output of a programme of work funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) in the UK under the title *Social Responsibility among Low-fares Airlines: Current Practices and Future Trends* (RES 185-3-0046). The main research for this report was conducted from August to November 2008.

## **Main findings**

Policy in the three areas of sustainable development, CSR and aviation has been siloed for the most part, with only a very limited level of linkage between them. This is despite the convenient connections that are made in public discourse.

The limitations of current policy statements are evident in so far as:

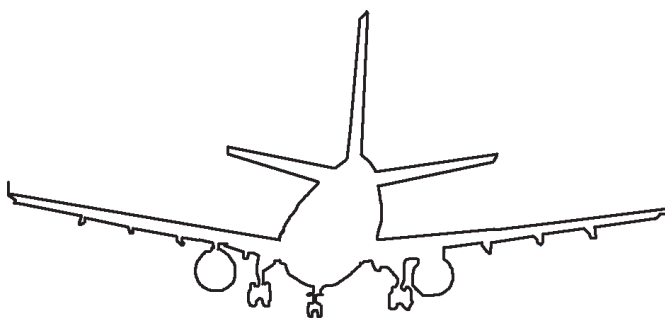
- CSR and sustainable development have not been linked beyond a somewhat superficial conceptual level.
- CSR policy at the EU and UK level has not developed significantly in recent years, and CSR is largely absent as a policy consideration or aspiration at the regional level.
- Aviation is tacitly recognised in EU and UK sustainable development policy, but only environmental impacts and the Emissions Trading Scheme are emphasized.
- Aviation policy recognises the importance of sustainable development but CSR is not identified or encouraged as a means by which to deliver this.

## **Implications**

This review raises four major issues of relevance to policymakers and practitioners for the future development and implementation of CSR among LFAs:

- CSR strategies among LFAs flying to and from the UK must, out of necessity, be informed by a complex array of policy statements pertaining to CSR and sustainable development.
- Future policy towards more sustainable aviation must fully acknowledge and integrate the 'triple bottom line' *and* encourage greater CSR.
- CSR offers an alternative means to facilitate more sustainable futures in the sector, but it has to be appropriately encouraged by complementary EU and UK policy.
- Opportunities exist to seize the initiative and to encourage greater adoption of CSR in the LFA sector, thereby obviating the need for formal regulation.





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