

Starting up

- What changes have you had to make in your job as a result of Covid-19?
- Is travel important for anyone in your workplace? If so, why?
- How have people adapted to do business without travelling?

Vocabulary 1 – travel and work

Choose the best ending for each sentence.

- 1 A *fleet* is a group of vehicles owned or controlled by one company. An *airline fleet* is a group of ...
 - a travellers.
 - b planes.
 - c airlines.
- 2 *Remote* means *far away*. *Remote working* means ...
 - a business travel.
 - b losing your job.
 - c not coming to the office.
- 3 *The ground* is the surface of the earth. If a plane is *grounded*, it ...
 - a isn't allowed to fly.
 - b is taking off.
 - c is arriving soon.
- 4 *Domestic* means *at home*. The opposite of *domestic travel* is ...
 - a holiday travel.
 - b business travel.
 - c international travel.
- 5 A *long-haul* flight is longer than seven hours and is often international. A *medium-haul* flight is three to seven hours. A *short-haul* flight lasts up to ...
 - a seven hours.
 - b three hours.
 - c one hour.

Level: B1**Reading 1**

Read through the article quickly. Are these sentences true (T) or false (F)?

- 1 Domestic business travel is returning more quickly than international business travel.
- 2 The author believes that online meetings make international business almost impossible.
- 3 The Covid crisis has only harmed business. Nothing good has come from it.
- 4 The author says that some international business travel is necessary and will return.

Vocabulary 2 – vocabulary in context

Match the words in bold in the article (1–7) with the definitions (a–g) below.

- a slow or not willing
- b filled with people
- c succeed at getting
- d people who take part in an activity or event
- e start again
- f interested
- g start

Reading 2

Choose the best answer to each question.

- 1 How many companies don't expect to resume international travel this year?
a) nearly half
b) about a quarter
c) more than half
- 2 Before the lockdown, what did the writer think about face-to-face meetings?
a) They're nice, but not essential
b) Webinars are just as good
c) Business is difficult without them
- 3 What was good about online course the author recently taught?
a) the low cost of delivering it
b) the wide variety of participants
c) the contracts he landed as a result
- 4 What does he say about online training after Covid-19 has passed?
a) It won't be necessary.
b) He's not sure what will happen.
c) It will continue.
- 5 What is now guiding businesses' understanding of their international markets?
a) online research
b) past experience of visiting them
c) lots of reading

Frequent flyer: is business travel dead?

In early March, while the world's airline fleets were being grounded, I wrote that, when the Covid-19 crisis was over, business travellers would be back. They needed the personal contact and Zoom wasn't the same.

Four months later, some of the planes are flying again. Several readers have reported to me that, while the airports are largely empty, short-haul aircraft are often ¹**packed**. But that may be because there are far fewer flights.

Many companies still seem ²**reluctant** to allow their staff to travel, at least internationally. A June poll of members of the Global Business Travel Association found that while 60 per cent thought their staff would restart domestic trips in the next three months, only 24 per cent thought international trips would ³**resume** in that time. As many as 44 per cent said they would not restart international business trips over the next six months, or were unsure whether they would.

Much of that reflects how prevalent Covid-19 infection still is around the world. But many are rethinking, during this remote-working period, how necessary business travel really is. I too have moderated my views.

When I travelled for work before the lockdown, it was to organise and deliver programmes for the FT's executive education business. I wrote back in March that, while the webinars I had done until then seemed reasonably effective, they were no substitute for being in the room, where you could judge the impact of your delivery by the facial expressions and your jokes by the laughs. I said it would be hard to ⁴**land** contracts without having met people in real life.

What do I think now? You can ⁵**strike up** relationships with people you meet on video calls and even get them to sign contracts. And while webinars are not the same as in-person events, you can do different kinds of work. For example, I have just completed a 10-part online programme for an international business organisation in which I interviewed FT colleagues on developments in five regions of the world — Asia-Pacific, China, North America, Africa and Latin America — and five business sectors: automotive, retail, healthcare, mergers and acquisitions, and financial services.

We couldn't see the ⁶**participants**, but I could see how ⁷**engaged** they were from the questions they submitted and from the feature on my screen telling me how many were present and how many were dropping out — fortunately few. They were a different kind of event from the ones we had attempted in the face-to-face days. They were more international, with people logged on around the world — and the questioning reflected that. I suspect we will carry on doing programmes like this when the crisis is over.

Other industries have made similar discoveries. L'Oréal believes consumers will continue to use its online make-up try-on tools. "We achieved in eight weeks what it would otherwise have taken us three years," Lubomira Rochet, the company's chief digital officer, told the FT. My colleague Martin Wolf has written that with worldwide physical supply chains in decline, we may see an increase in "virtual globalisation" as businesses internationalise their online activities.

But we will still need to resume travelling. At present, we are drawing on the past, on memories of the places we once visited. Speaking at our webinar series, the FT's Latin America specialist recalled past trips to Brazil and Chile. Our motor correspondent reflected on Detroit factory visits. In all companies, as that knowledge fades, so the reading of markets will decline and acquisition mistakes increase. We won't need to travel as much as we did but cross-border business (and there will still be plenty) requires the crossing of borders. Yes, the business travellers will be back.



Grammar – linking words for time

Complete the texts with the linking words.

as soon as	before	during	until	when
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¹..... the Covid-19 pandemic, I travelled internationally about six times each year. Of course ²..... lockdown began, travel stopped. ³..... lockdown, I've managed a lot of communication online, but it's been difficult. One big problem is time zones. ⁴..... it's the start of the day here in Japan, it's the middle of the night in Europe, so scheduling meetings is difficult. But ⁵..... we can travel again, we will continue working this way.

after	as soon as	before	until	while
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⁶..... the pandemic, I attended very few online meetings. Now I have one almost every day. ⁷..... attending a lot of online meetings, I've noticed some things about communication. First, people don't interrupt as much online. We wait ⁸..... someone finishes speaking, because two people can't talk at the same time on Zoom. However, ⁹..... one person finishes, someone else starts to speak, so you have to be quick! Another thing is that we record meetings now, so ¹⁰..... the meeting, you can watch the recording. That's useful in case you missed something or couldn't attend.

Further discussion

Do you think the world will return to normal in the next couple of years, or will the pandemic bring permanent change? Explain your answer.

Group work

Work together to answer these questions.

- 1 Lubomira Rochet of L'Oréal says, "We achieved in eight weeks what it would otherwise have taken us three years." What does she mean? What has the company achieved? Why did it happen so quickly?
- 2 Martin Wolf has talked of "virtual globalisation" in which businesses internationalise their online activities. What do you think this will involve?
- 3 What changes brought on by Covid-19 will you take into the future? Think about working practices, work travel, and so on.

ANSWER KEY**Starting up**

Students' own answers

Vocabulary 1

- | | |
|-----|-----|
| 1 b | 4 c |
| 2 c | 5 b |
| 3 a | |

Reading 1

- | | |
|-----|-----|
| 1 T | 3 F |
| 2 F | 4 T |

Vocabulary 2

- | | |
|-----|-----|
| 1 b | 5 g |
| 2 a | 6 d |
| 3 e | 7 f |
| 4 c | |

Reading 2

- | | |
|-----|-----|
| 1 a | 4 c |
| 2 c | 5 b |
| 3 b | |

Grammar

- | | |
|--------------|--------------|
| 1 Before | 6 Before |
| 2 as soon as | 7 While |
| 3 During | 8 until |
| 4 When | 9 as soon as |
| 5 until | 10 after |

Further discussion

Students' own ideas and answers

Group work (possible answers)

- 1 They've got consumers using online tools to try make-up. It happened quickly because it was necessary.
- 2 Students' own ideas and answers; possible answers: There will be more online buying and selling across international borders. Companies may start to relocate more business activities to low-wage time zones.
- 3 Students' own ideas and answers

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