ANU Below Zero University-Related Travel Policy Review

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Introduction

Below Zero Commitments

Transformational change is required to limit climate change to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, as agreed in the Paris Climate Agreement. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions to zero is vital, but this effort alone is no longer enough to limit global temperature increases to meet acceptable standards. Under the [1]Below Zero program, the Australian National University (ANU, the University) commits to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) by 2025, and below zero emissions by 2030. Currently, it is estimated that total ANU emissions are approximately 55,800 tonnes carbon dioxide equivalent for a business-as-usual (i.e., non-pandemic) year. It also is estimated that university-related travel (excluding local commuting) accounts for more than half of the ANU emissions profile. It is therefore vital that ANU explores ways to reduce emissions associated with travel. Crucially though, ANU must also undertake this transition without negatively impacting its ability to operate as a leading institution in research and tertiary education. ANU is also a national university, and staff expect, and look forward to, partaking in events across Australia and the world. Visibility for both ANU and its staff is important, and travel inevitably plays a significant role in that.

So, how can ANU encourage climate-friendly travel behaviour amidst a climate crisis if its staff and the credibility of the institution are dependent on participating in global events?

Travel in the University Sector

Academics are central to the performance and quality of any university. For both teaching and research, they are also the public face of the sector. They have a role to play in encouraging public debate and contributing to public discussion. Yet, to undertake research, advance their careers and be promoted, academics are traditionally expected to travel nationally and internationally

(Nursery-Bray et al. 2019). Universities may also want its academics and professional staff to travel to maintain its international presence and uphold the reputation of the university.

Interestingly, however, Wynes et al. (2019) study of air travel at a major Canadian university showed that air travel, distance and number of flights taken were unrelated to academic productivity. The same study also revealed that academics who were further in their careers and those with higher salaries were responsible for more travel-related emissions than their colleagues. The results pose an interesting question: do academics actually need to travel to advance their careers?

But the answer to that question may be irrelevant. Staff may not need to travel, but as long as they believe that travel is important for their careers, they will travel. And the actual or perceived benefit travel offers has traditionally outweighed the concern for sustainability. Bushell et al. (2017) describe this as an action gap. Their studies show that neither pro-environmental attitudes, nor working on sustainability-related topics, discourage academics from flying. Ultimately, as long as this disconnect between behaviour and attitude of air travel exists, staff and universities will remain hesitant in making meaningful change to current levels of university-related travel.

Importance of Review

This review seeks to identify areas where travel behaviour may be able to be influenced without sacrificing opportunities for both staff and the core missions of the University. ANU cannot, nor should not, simply tell its staff to stop travelling. Rather, the underlying motivations for staff travel need to be identified and analysed to determine whether these incentives can be leveraged to encourage more climate-friendly travel behaviour.

To do this, the review will examine six key areas of human resources (HR) policy that encourage or incentivise travel. For example, a key criterion of the academic staff promotion policy at ANU is the level of international engagement by the staff member. Identifying the policies that incentivise or encourage travel and examining whether they can be altered/leveraged towards more sustainable behaviour is therefore a crucial step. The areas of HR that will be explored are:

- Performance Management

- Staff Promotion
- Contract Negotiations
- Recruitment
- Performance Incentives, and
- Leave

Each area will be discussed in relation to travel, highlighting policies or procedures that may be leveraged to incentivise better travel practices for staff.

To place the ANU policies into context and facilitate comparison, the review will also examine the performance of other universities across these six areas and travel policy more broadly (see Appendix 1). The universities examined include the Australian universities comprising the Group of 8 (GO8), the 15 universities in the Global Alliance of Universities on Climate (GUAC), and Massey University (NZ). Such analysis will give ANU a more comprehensive understanding of where it can demonstrate leadership in reducing its travel emissions whilst maintaining the competitiveness of its staff and sustaining the reputation of the institution.

Based on the review of the University's current HR policies and those of its competitors, the report will then propose recommendations for change in HR and travel policy. These recommendations will build on and integrate information from critical literature, staff consultation and prior Below Zero work. To successfully implement effective policy change, the recommendations must take an evidence-based approach that is holistic, considerate and nuanced and addresses the motivations for university-related travel.

Likewise, it is critical to ensure that these recommendations are equitable and do not inadvertently disadvantage certain groups of people. The impact of policy changes needs to be assessed relative to all relevant groups and stakeholders and assessed for potential inequities. For example, implementing a policy that prohibits all non-economy class travel may be prejudicial to those who have health issues and require the amenities of business class. The recommendation process will therefore consider this concept and seek to ensure policy change suggestions are as equitable as possible.

The hope for this review is that it will spur discussion across ANU, other institutions and the world into tackling the inertia and structural difficulty associated with reducing air travel. With this report

and subsequent action, ANU has the opportunity to take a leading role in driving reform agenda and promoting sustainable academic and university-related travel.

Current Travel Landscape in the University Sector

As part of the review process, an analysis of competing Australian and global universities was undertaken. The purpose of the analysis is to examine general policies regarding university-related travel, and scope whether any universities have used/are using HR to leverage positive travel behaviour. By doing such, ANU has the opportunity to take a leadership role by identifying existing policy gaps and implementing innovative polices/procedures.

The 25 universities examined included the Australian G08, GUAC universities, and Massey University (NZ). The full table can be seen in **Appendix 1.**

What Other Universities are Doing

On a broad scale, the analysis of 25 universities across the globe found:

- The majority of the universities analysed do not have any HR policies that encourage/promote positive travel behaviour
- Specific travel policies are much more common and almost every university has some sort of positive travel behaviour policy; for example, an offset scheme or measurement system
- Potentially negative travel behaviour such as airline lounge salary packaging, and choosing the cheapest airfare, was present throughout

In relation to each HR policy area examined:

- Performance management:
  - Berkeley is going to develop performance measures for sustainable practices
  - Massey will formalize travel planning as part of annual Performance Development Process (PDP) and develop a post-travel process

- UNSW (University of New South Wales) is developing an SDG module that staff can complete/are assessed on
- University of Melbourne is trying to promote increased awareness of sustainability focused activities in day-to-day activities
- Canterbury is developing reports/dashboards to increase the management of air travel

- Staff Promotion: no university has any measures directly linking promotion and positive travel behaviour.
    - Massey is going to explore relative value of overseas conferences in relation to stage of career
    - University of Melbourne and Berkeley are looking expand professional development opportunities in sustainability to staff

- Staff Contracts: no university has positive travel-related policies in relation to staff contracts

- Recruitment:
    - University of Melbourne want to employ sustainability-focused or contributory staff in each academic division and portfolio
    - UQ do not pay for interviewees travelling to UQ to visit
    - Oxford do not pay for staff relocation flights

- Performance Incentives
    - USYD are looking to support the development of innovative ways of collaboration; understand the need to reduce travel but also recognising importance of international collaboration for academic goals
    - Massey are trying to develop specific incentives for reduced travel; i.e., financial savings from not/reducing travelling are reallocated close to source of saving
    - Sciences Po- you can get compensated for choosing greener forms of travel

- Leave: no university has positive travel-related policies in relation to leave

In relation to travel-specific policies:

- Most universities have policies that specifically seek to reduce travel emissions

- Several universities have specific travel reduction targets

- Three universities (Oxford, Cambridge, Sciences Po) have geographical limitations

- Only Oxford and Imperial College have a sustainability levy/tax on travel

- Almost every university has a 'lowest fare of the day' policy (or equivalent)

- Increasing/developing videoconferencing capabilities is a common behaviour

ANU Travel

ANU currently has very few policies, schemes or goals that encourage positive travel behaviour. The only behaviour-related measures in place is the best practice travel guide put out by ANU Below Zero as a guideline for undertaking low carbon travel in 2021.

Upon review of the University's HR policies and practices, it seems as though travel is implicitly encouraged in some circumstances. There are still several practices in place likely encourage staff travel-related emissions. Some staff at ANU can salary sacrifice membership fees to airline lounges and achieve a tax benefit. For flights over 6 hours, select senior staff are able to travel in business or premium economy class. Given current dynamic of ANU travel, there is significant scope for change towards more climate-friendly HR and travel policies. The section below identifies these areas and suggests opportunities for change across the six areas of HR and travel policy more broadly.

ANU Policies and Opportunities for Change

Performance Management

ANU staff are expected to undertake an annual Performance Development Review (PDR), as part of a broader Performance Development Process. Here, supervisors and staff members discuss measurable performance objectives, relevant indicators of performance and career development goals for the review period. The PDR is designed to assist the staff member to meet career goals and determine how they can contribute to the ANU's strategic goals.

Opportunities for Change

- Forecasting travel for 12 months is formalised as a part of the staff Annual Performance Meeting at beginning of year

- Include benchmark(s) for environmental compliance in initial performance objectives
    - Need to design these benchmarks

- Environmental performance is contributes to performance ratings

- Assessment of environmental compliance relative to opportunity in review against PDR criteria

- Change to PSDEF (Professional Staff Development Endowment Fund) to reward online/local development
    - i.e., the PSDEF is prioritised for online/local courses

Staff Promotion

Promotion procedures and requirements at the ANU varies depending on the level of promotion the staff member is applying for. However, international recognition is a significant factor in academic promotion assessment. Indicators for promotion, such as peer recognition, professional leadership and outreach and public policy, include extensive international requirements (see

appendix 2). Notably though, physical presence at international conferences is considered equally significant to attending a remote conference in the eyes of ANU recruitment for new staff.

Examples of these promotion indicators include:

- Invited speaker at conferences
- External appointments at other universities
- Chairing and leading discussion at international conference
- Leadership role in collaboration, strategic alliance, or network
- National and international media appearances
- Public lectures
- Invited research visits at leading institutions
- Commercialisation activities

International referees are also required for promotion to levels D and E.

Opportunities for Change

- Promotion criteria should be reframed from a focus on international recognition to 'recognised excellence' more broadly
  - 'International' wording to be replaced with 'recognised excellence' or 'best in field'
    - Simply being 'international' does not always mean it is the best

- By implementing the above, several changes to promotion indicators can be made to reduce the reliance on international travel. For example:
  - Promotion to level D requires 2 'leaders in field' referees instead of 2 international referees
  - Chairing and leading discussion at international conference is altered to chairing a sector leading conference
  - National and international media appearances changed to 'influential' media appearances

Staff Contracts

Contract negotiations take place on a case-by-case basis, there are no specific policies and contracts are managed by local areas. Where staff are allowed to travel as part of contract, it is ad hoc and individually negotiated based on requirements of role. Generally, executives usually pay for their own travel if they want to work outside of Canberra and travel to Canberra. ANU also offers relocation assistance, where approved, which is made up of travel costs and a removal allowance. Another relevant characteristic of contract negotiation is that support packages are often awarded to academics. These funds are generally used for equipment, although more research into how this money is spent is needed to determine if this is spent on travel.

Opportunities for Change

- If a staff member decides to choose a lower-carbon form of travel for relocation, they could have the option to increase removal expenses budget or include allowance for purchases relating to relocation.

- Undertake research into how often academic staff receive support packages, how the package is spent and whether it is used for travelling.

Recruitment

ANU seeks to attract, select and retain the highest standard of staff. Inevitably, this may often involve recruiting staff from outside Canberra or overseas. In some roles, staff recruited from outside of Canberra are still required to be on-site, and therefore must frequently travel. However, the shifting culture towards online/remote interviews has somewhat reduced recruitment travel over the years, particularly at the early interview stages. Although there is no standard practice, the preferred candidate(s) are usually invited to travel to campus once the applicant pool is narrowed down.

Opportunities for Change

- Establish a specific criterion for when prospective staff can be flown to the campus

- Design and integrate an environmental awareness assessment into application process

- Investigate how to integrate Below Zero principles and actions into position descriptions and recruitment activities

- Investigate how the emissions of fly-in-fly-out workers can be accounted for

Performance Incentives

ANU currently has no performance incentives for exhibiting positive travel behaviour. But policies such as the ability to salary sacrifice airline lounge memberships, may incentivise people to travel even more.

Opportunities for Change

- If staff member limits travel to an amount determined in annual development meeting, they can choose to have one of the following credited to them:
    - Leave
    - Research funding
    - Credit for carbon removal

- Reduce the opportunity for lounge membership salary sacrifice

- Review frequent flyer policy and investigate the development of an incentive program that rewards lower-carbon options

- Stimulate interdepartmental competition to reduce air travel emissions

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Leave Procedures

Likewise, ANU has no leave procedures specific to travel. However, staff members are able to purchase up to 12 weeks of additional leave over 1 year.

Opportunities for Change

- Offer in house conference leave

General Travel Policies

ANU currently has no policies targeted at reducing emissions from air travel. General travel policies that may increase emissions or encourage travel include:

- The 'best fare of the day' should be selected for the type and class of travel
- For air travel over 6hrs, some senior staff can travel premium economy/business

Opportunities for Change

- Have individual dashboards that enable people to see their individual travel emissions
  - Can track their own emissions against their annual 'budget'
  - Encourages better decision making regarding whether to travel and/or how to travel

- Develop a travel decision hierarchy/decision framework for when to travel and what the best method of travel is

- Emissions need to be incorporated into flight booking decisions

- Apply financial incentives to discourage air travel. i.e.:

  - Levy a sustainability charge on flights

  - Set target for air travel reduction (i.e., number of flights per year, emissions reduction etc)

- Make it compulsory for university-related travel to be booked through university travel booking system to enable proper tracking and monitoring

- Economy class flights are standard across the university (bar exceptional circumstances)

Recommendations Summary

Ultimately, the review finds an overall lack of actual policy or procedures in the university-related travel space. While ANU is not alone in its inaction, multiple universities are starting to move towards applying more positive travel policies and behaviours. By implementing appropriate policy changes regarding travel, ANU can take significant steps to reduce its travel emissions and assume leadership in sustainable university travel. Furthermore, the policy recommendations chosen align with the principle of equitable academic performance. The recommendations should have no impact on the ability of staff to meet their career goals, nor on the ANU to meet its strategic goals. Furthermore, the recommendations seek to be considerate of and equitable to all stakeholders.

Future Work and Implications

Findings from this report have already had tangible benefits for the Below Zero travel working group. The university comparison spreadsheet (Appendix 1), is currently being used in a paper to be delivered to the senior management group of Below Zero. The primary hope for this report is that it will spur further discussion of the university-related travel dilemma. Reducing air travel is associated with significant inertia and structural difficulty, so increasing awareness of the issue is an important first step. In the long-term, this may translate to policy change and implementation at the ANU. And if ANU can take an effective leadership role in this space, it may encourage other universities to follow suit.

Appendices

Appendix 1: University Comparison

Appendix 2: Academic Promotion Indicators

Reference List

See Appendix 1 for references relevant to the comparison table

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