



University travel research snapshot

ANU Travel Lab

May 2024

At ANU, travel emissions for University-related activities (not including commuter travel) accounts for a large proportion of our greenhouse gas emissions. The ANU Travel Lab has undertaken exploratory research to understand the role of flying in universities and the measures that universities are putting in place to reduce flying emissions. We summarise key findings from this research below.

Introduction to the literature

Literature on academic flying points to the fundamental, but also contested, role and importance of travel in academic life. There is a wide array of institutional norms at play and responses for reducing travel in the literature is equally diverse.

- While flights are a small share of global emissions, they are typically a large share of university emissions.
- Sustainable fuel and net zero are not on the short-term horizon for aviation.
- University travel emissions are unequally distributed geographically.
- Within universities there is a category of frequent flyers, who are most often at higher pay levels within universities.
- Gaps in the values of universities and goal conflicts are becoming increasingly criticised within the literature.
- Air travel for research, networking, conferences, sourcing funding and recruiting of international students is seen as fundamentally important and essential for academic careers and university standing.
- Beliefs about the importance of travel in building academic careers are challenged by some empirical research.
- The drivers of, and responses to, travel operate at multiple scales – sector, institutional, discipline, individual.
- Responses for reducing air travel range from mandatory to voluntary, top down to bottom up and, networked to centralised.
- Efficacy of travel reduction strategies is so far limited in the literature, and results appear mixed.
- Adopting purely voluntary measures may build engagement with university staff and students without necessarily translating to tangible results.
- There is a clear complementary role for institutional action and collective action within organisational areas.
- Fundamental review of the system, culture and norms of academic travel is required to create meaningful change.

Visit the ANU [Travel Lab](#) for further detail along with the full report and associated references.