



University travel research snapshot

The ANU Travel Lab has undertaken interviews with 15 universities to understand how they were approaching their goals of reducing academic travel emissions, as well as any outcomes of their efforts. We summarise key findings below.

Lessons from other universities

Our research suggests there is no silver bullet strategy to reduce travel emissions. Rather, the approach must be a suite of top-down and bottom-up, voluntary and mandatory interventions enacted in combination with each other to increase the likelihood of effective impact from the institutional, through schools and disciplines, and ultimately to the individual. Universities around the world are currently working to implement these approaches and learnings are still emerging.

Enablers for change

- Reporting and visualisation of travel emissions data assists with engaging staff on the topic and their travel decision making, and organisational emissions reduction.
- Support, resourcing and commitment from leadership to reduce travel emissions was considered important, as was the ongoing engagement with staff over time.
- Many universities had targets or restrictions in place to reduce travel emissions and several universities had some form of carbon budget, pricing or offset measures. There was limited information about the effectiveness of each approach.
- Cross university networks (institutional and discipline-specific) were seen to provide opportunities for collective action and support.
- There is improved capacity to connect online as a result of the COVID pandemic, however and safe, equitable, low carbon travel is also desired.
- The majority of universities discussed a need for a collective, multi-faceted and multi-scale approach to university travel emissions reduction (e.g. at level of university sector, whole of university, college, school, discipline or program), due to the complexity and goal conflicts inherent within university cultures.

Barriers to change

- Measures of academic success, rankings and the ability to attract international students create conflicts in the pursuit of reducing air travel.
- Internationalisation and networking are prioritised as measures of academic success.
- Concern about reduced opportunities for early career researchers (ECRs) and discussed tailored solutions to ensure that ECRs, women, people with disabilities, families and LGBTQI+ staff were not disadvantaged with travel restrictions.
- Many universities had decentralised/devolved structures in place, which contributed to difficulties with decision making and the implementation of initiatives. This was likened to a top down (command and control) and bottom-up approach, which lacked authority.
- Digital fatigue is a reality.
- Significant organisational barriers were discussed, relating to the goal conflicts with internationalisation, decentralised structures and decision making, and implementation often being limited to voluntary measures.

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