

# Re-imagining Massey Staff International Air Travel Practices: Summary report

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Ohu Toitūtanga/Sustainability Office

August 2022

## 1. Introduction

This report provides a summary of the findings from the internal ‘Re-imagining Massey Staff international Air Travel Practices’ project, which ran from August 2020 to June 2022.

The purpose of this project was threefold, in the context of Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa Massey University’s commitment to be net zero carbon by 2030, with a 30% reduction in travel-related emissions (See Massey’s [Climate Action Plan](#)). First, to improve the understanding of historical (pre-Covid) staff international air travel patterns; second, to categorize the reasons for such travel; and third, to identify opportunities to maximize the value of that travel, consistent with emerging sector trends and technological developments.

The purpose of this summary report is to provide aggregated university staff travel data, to inform discussions and decision-making internally within Massey, and externally across the tertiary sector and connected agencies. Currently, there is limited data available in the New Zealand/Australasian context, a unique place geographically. Details of the data sources are noted throughout the report and in Appendix A.

Since September 2020, much of the debate across Massey has focused on the need for staff to take responsibility of decisions regarding the purpose and impact of their travel on core business. Staff are mindful of the goals to maintain their research and teaching progress and productivity. Clarification of the role that international air travel plays in achieving these goals is needed, together with how the current momentum is sustained with reduced travel.

### 1.2 Key concerns<sup>2</sup>

- How Massey will maintain the quality and competitive advantage of staff research and teaching, with reduced travel. The impact of Covid-19 has exacerbated the long-standing sense of remoteness and sentiment held by some that ‘if we’re not in the room, we are forgotten’. International travel plays a key role in developing new relationships & collaborations, which is distinctly different from maintaining relationships once they are established. Staff consider that opportunities are likely to be missed as they watch overseas colleagues and competitors reengage kanohi ki te kanohi (face to face) and that the impacts from reducing kanohi ki te kanohi experiences will not be realised for two to three years, and

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<sup>2</sup> 2020 staff focus groups and staff submissions on 2020 report to Massey’s University Research Committee.

up to five years for research opportunities and collaborations. Some are concerned about the potential erosion of what they have worked hard to develop, whilst a small, vocal minority see this as a welcome opportunity to travel less. One suggestion is that staff self-regulating their international travel, with informed cost and emissions of travel, would be adequate to maintain standards; with perhaps, the provision of incentives for those who actively choose not to fly.

- The impact of developing a Massey-wide leave policy stipulating reduced travel, given the widespread belief that ‘no one policy fits all’. There is consensus for a responsive, flexible framework, with broad guiding principles, which caters for differing needs and unexpected high-value opportunities. The concern is how that can be achieved, whilst proving to be fair and equitable with regards to gender, seniority, and prioritization of who travels. Arguably, for example, early career researchers would most benefit from making connections *kanohi ki te kanohi*. Whatever application process is in place can be vulnerable to non-compliance, so it is key that Massey’s academic (and professional staff) community is consulted widely, and the ‘nuanced’ policy is co-created.

- The perception that staff international travel is being targeted and taken out of context. Some staff consider that, even though this work is framed within sustainability, it is a cost-saving exercise by senior management. There is a sense that financial savings from not travelling will fall to the bottom line rather than be reinvested at source or go towards, for example, investment in research capacity and capability. Other sources of Massey’s emissions need to be addressed, especially, for example, the farms, the size of our campuses and the recruitment of international students. A lack of information and transparency around decisions and plans for staff travelling overseas seems to be compounding the perception.

### 1.3 Supporting bodies

In October 2020, the International Air Travel Advisory Group (IATAG) was set up internally. The group included Massey staff from the five academic Colleges and the Global Engagement reporting line, following an invitation to join being sent to all focus group participants. The Group served two purposes: to provide discussion and advice regarding the project objectives, activities, and timeline, and to enable dialogue within departments, so enriching the process and subsequent findings.

In November 2020, the New Zealand Universities Air Travel Consortium (NZUATC) was established, with the aim of developing a collective academic voice to inform research, decision-makers and policy development in the region and further afield. It was considered that decisions made by Massey in this context would be strengthened by being positioned in the national domain. By April 2021, the membership included representatives from all eight New Zealand universities and, in June 2022, was extended to include Australian universities, being renamed the Australasian Universities Air Travel Consortium ([AUATC](#)). Refer to Appendix B for current membership.

## 2. 2019 Massey staff international air travel

Please note that these statistics relate to travel by Massey employees only.<sup>3</sup>

### 2.1 Overview of travel<sup>4</sup>

In 2019, 29.4% of Massey staff (academic and professional) travelled internationally. Refer to Figure 1. 83.3% of international air travel was by academic staff, equating to 43.2% of Massey’s total number of academic staff that year.

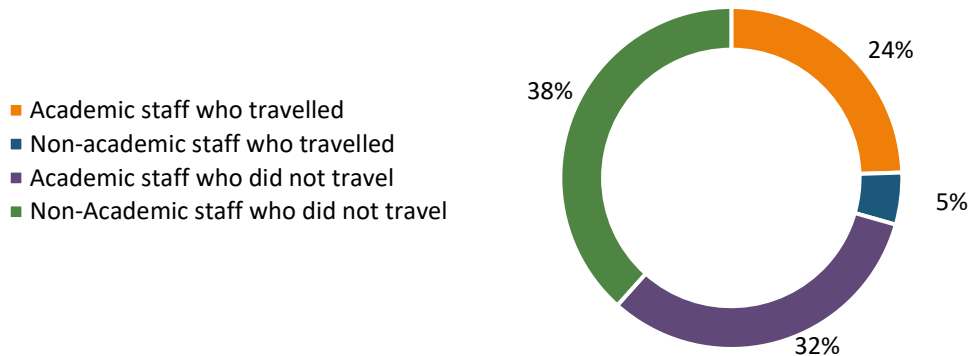


Figure 1. Overview of Massey staff international air travel in the 2019<sup>5</sup>

In total, 7,376 trips were completed by Massey staff, 76% of which were domestic. Refer to Figure 2. Due to the distance travelled, long-haul trips contributed 80% to Massey’s total emissions from 2019 air travel.

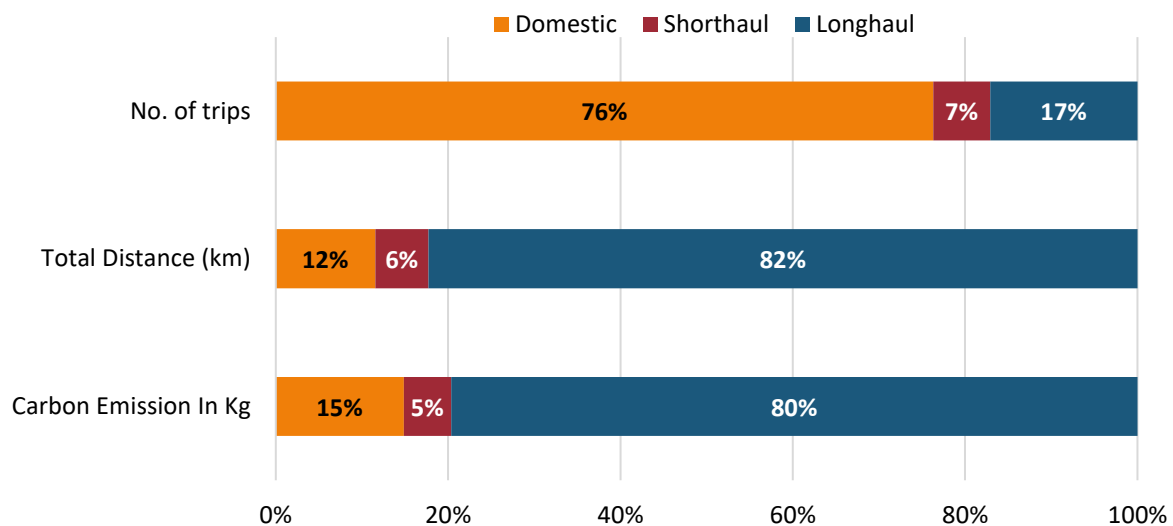


Figure 2. Percentage comparison between the contribution of domestic, short-haul, and long-haul trips to the number of trips, distance travelled and carbon emissions.

<sup>3</sup> Previous publications may include Massey employees and non-Massey employees’ travel. Appendix C details reasons for travel by non-Massey employees.

<sup>4</sup> 2019 Orbit travel data & 2019 Massey staff travel applications.

<sup>5</sup> Thanks goes to Marcus Richardson, Carbon Management Officer, Ohu Toitūtanga/Sustainability Office, for designing the figures in this report.

2.2 Where and how often staff travelled in 2019

Figure 3 shows the breakdown of staff international air travel by destination. Unsurprisingly, the biggest percentage was to Australia; travel to the Pacific Islands is included in the Other category.

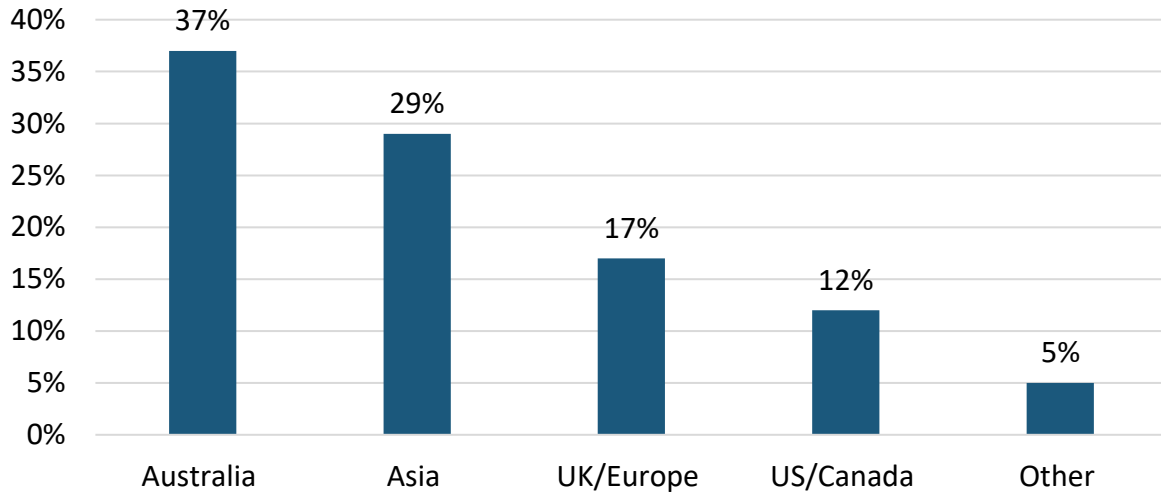


Figure 3. Proportion of international air travel made to different destinations by Massey Staff

Figure 4 shows the frequency of international air travel by staff who travelled in 2019, as a percentage of those who flew, and of all Massey staff. 77% of staff who flew internationally, did so once or twice that year.

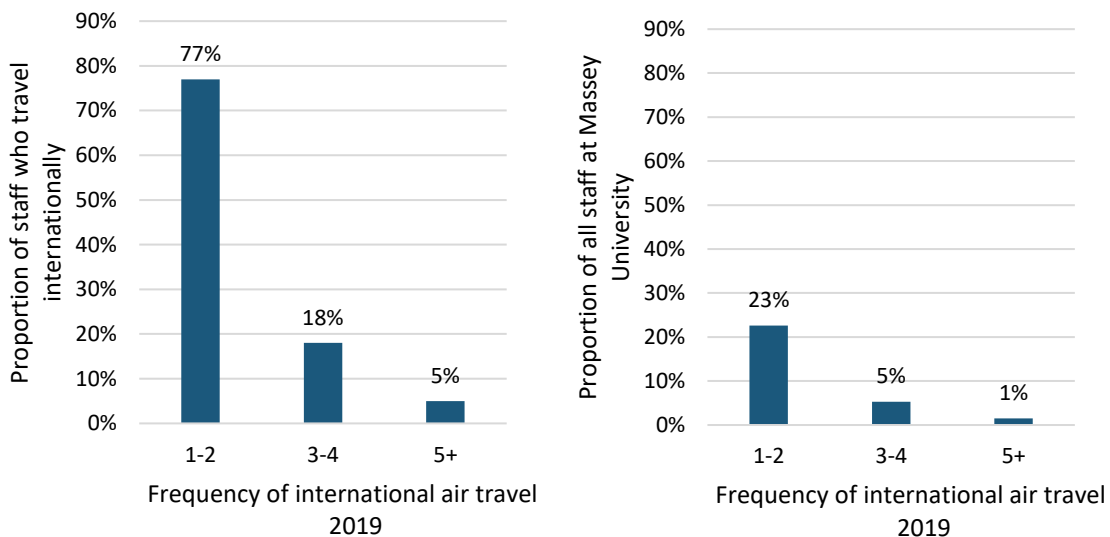


Figure 4. Frequency of travel of the 29.4% of staff who undertook international air travel in 2019 (left) and the frequency of travel of all staff at the university (right)

### 2.3 Why staff travelled in 2019<sup>6</sup>

- 1) *Relationship building and exposure* - developing trust, socializing, overcoming cultural and language barriers, visibility & being available for new opportunities, whole person interactions, forging and maintaining relationships leading to research projects, collaborations & funding, business & institution Partnerships and exhibiting work.
- 2) *Access to resources* - artefacts, archives, collections, buildings, fieldwork/primary data collection, technology/equipment not available domestically, hands-on experience & joint teaching programmes, laboratory work, Fellowships/awards, and residences.
- 3) *External drivers* - funder requirements, Performance-based research fund, legislation, rankings, cultural/political expectation of kanohi ki te kanohi contact e.g. remote or sensitive communities, in the US & Asia, invitations to speak, exchange students/staff, work-integrated learning opportunities.
- 4) *Building capacity* (individual/institution/global) - experiences & immersion, innovation, staff enrichment and well-being, develops skillsets, knowledge & techniques, diversifies global experiences, builds capability, and enables career progression.
- 5) *Marketing Massey/recruitment* (staff/student t/funder) - competitive market requiring kanohi ki te kanohi contact, promoting Massey brand & the Aotearoa New Zealand experience.

### 2.4 Who travelled in 2019?<sup>7</sup>

Figure 7 shows the breakdown of international air travel by staff grouping. Senior Lecturers and Professors make up just under half of the total staff travel in 2019. Staff groupings totalling 5% or less are not shown.

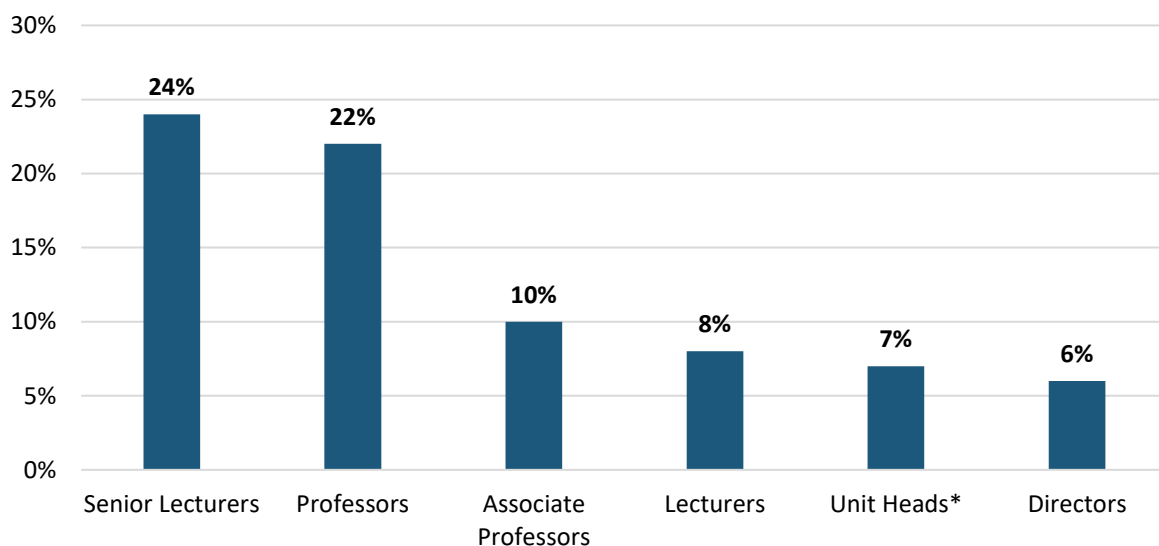


Figure 7. Proportion of each staff grouping who flew internationally in 2019  
 \*including heads, deputy, acting, and associate heads

<sup>6</sup> 2020 online staff survey (academic and professional).

<sup>7</sup> 2019 Orbit travel data & 2019 Massey staff travel applications.

### 2.5 International conference travel in 2019<sup>8</sup>

Figure 5 suggests that around 63% of staff international air travel was to attend/participate or present at a conference. Staff could indicate multiple purposes on their travel application and these two purposes were indicated most frequently. Because these take precedence over other purposes, it is difficult to make direct comparisons on the frequency of different purposes. Note that it is likely that ‘Researcher’ refers to staff attending/participating a conference, and ‘Guest’ may be when a staff member is invited to a conference that they would not otherwise be attending.

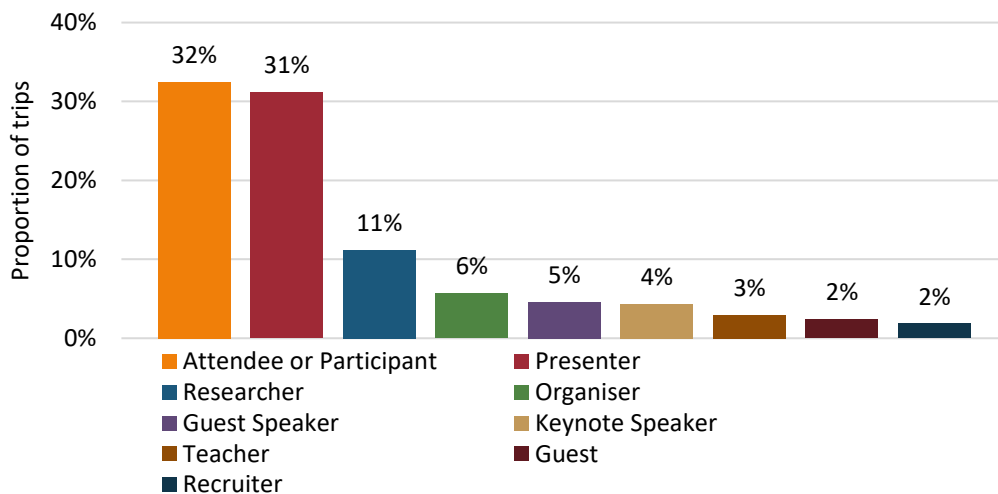


Figure 5. Proportion of staff international air travel to conferences, by purpose as listed in their travel application

Figure 6 suggests that those staff who travelled most frequently in 2019 took trips to attend conferences more often than staff travelling to present at conferences; the opposite is true for staff who took one or two international trips. Also, staff travelling to be a keynote speaker at a conference is the third equal highest purpose for travel amongst those who took five or more trips. Additionally, staff in this group travelled for the purpose of student recruitment more than staff in both less frequent flying categories.

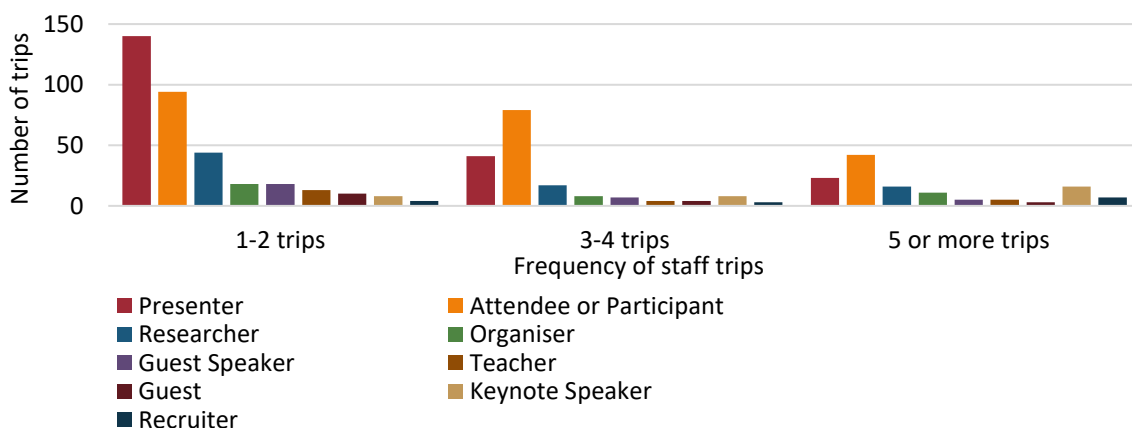


Figure 6. Number of international trips taken in 2019 categorised both by frequency of staff trips and by purpose listed in their travel application

<sup>8</sup> 2019 Orbit travel data & 2019 Massey staff travel applications.

### 2.6 Impact of restricted international travel on early careers researchers<sup>9</sup>

Figure 8 shows the responses by Massey’s early career researchers regarding the impact of not being able to travel internationally during the period when the national borders were closed due to Covid-19. Additional comments from respondents regarding the impact include not being where they wanted to be in their career, having reduced ambitions, their networks becoming increasingly tenuous, having a knock-on effect for the coming years, and having no new projects lined up.

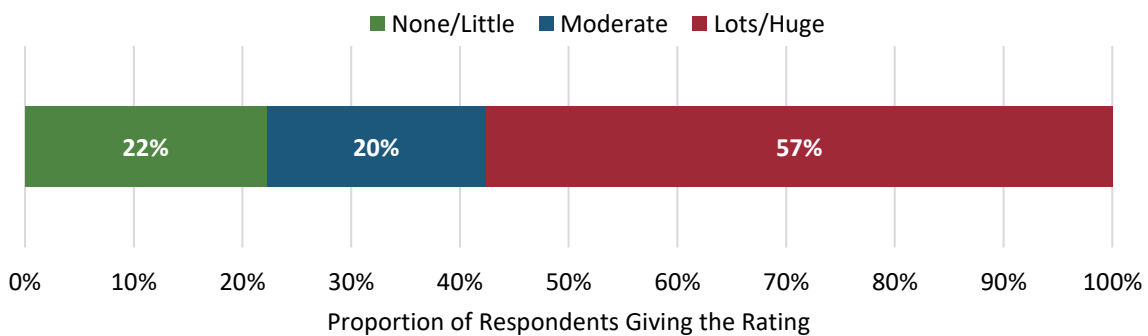


Figure 8. Responses by early career researchers, as a percentage, to the prompt “How much of an impact has no international air travel for the past two years had on your career?”

Figure 9 shows the responses by Massey’s early career researchers regarding how they felt they had managed their research during the period when the national borders were closed due to Covid-19. Additional comments from respondents regarding management of their research include putting their research activities on hold, having difficulty disseminating their work and shifting their focus to reporting & publishing.

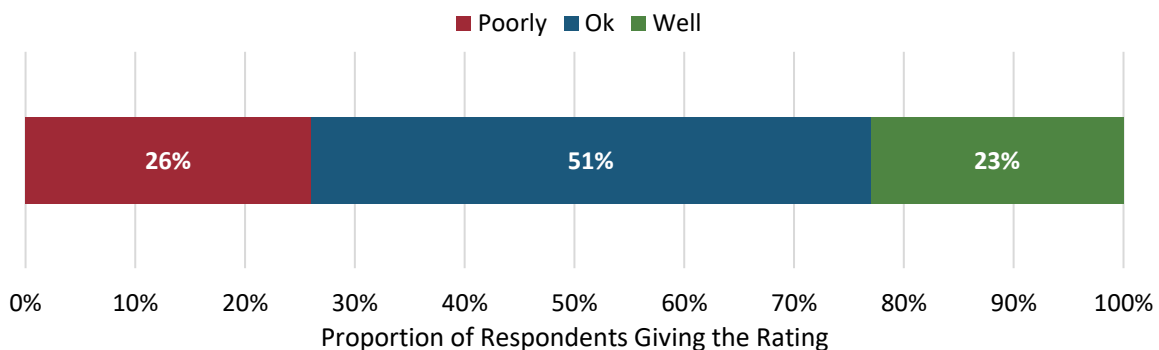


Figure 9. Responses by Massey’s early career researchers, as a percentage, to the prompt “How well have you managed your research over the past two years, with no international air travel?”

<sup>9</sup> 2022 online early career researchers survey.

Table 1 shows a summary of the responses by Massey’s early career researchers regarding the perceived positive and negative impacts of no international air travel during the period when the national borders were closed due to Covid-19.

*Table 1. The perceived positives and negatives of no international travel for early career researchers*

**Perceived positives of no international air travel**

- **Greater access** to events (more held online & can attend during teaching periods), ‘difficult to get to’ people, training opportunities overseas, and meetings with overseas colleagues (easier to arrange)
- **More time** to develop teaching resources & reviewing papers, writing and reading
- **Improved well-being**, as more time with family, weekends freer, no travel time or jet lag, caring for the environment
- **New Zealand focus**, with increased creativity with colleagues in department, finding alternative research methods and/or solutions, more senior/junior staff interactions and a strengthening of New Zealand based relationships and research focus
- **Increase in financial resources** available for other work
- **Improved online skills** regarding presenting and working with established networks and collaborations
- **Greater creativity & innovation** “Taught me to think outside the box”

**Perceived negatives of no international air travel**

- **Compromised quality of research**, e.g., no access to offshore equipment & experiments, work missing international context, reduced expert feedback & intellectual stimulation
- **Reduced ambitions** as an academic, due to lack of immersion and reduced motivation & validation of purpose and/or role
- **Reduced ability** to maintain networks or communicate, to be productive as a collaborative team as not ‘in the room’, resulting in a sense of disconnection and reduced competitiveness globally
- **Progress/Flow stalled** due to not attending conferences and/or key workshops, not accessing sites and archives, not developing networks for future work and funding applications, not collecting data, not meeting or having to push back grant obligations, a delay in publications, more teaching requirements
- **Increased marginalization** of women/minority groups & researchers who rely on kanohi ki te kanohi
- **Increased mental stress** and anxiety due to uncertainty, burn out, isolation, no contact with family and friends overseas and anti-social zoom call times



### 3. Changing staff international air travel practices<sup>10</sup>

Figures 10 and 11, respectively, show the staff responses regarding whether or not reducing international travel should be a strategic priority for Massey, and the percentage of activities that previously involved international travel, which are now considered to be achievable without that travel. 40% of respondents who flew internationally in 2019 and who agree that reducing international air travel should be a strategic priority, state that they can now do at least 40% of previously travelled for activities without the need for travelling overseas.

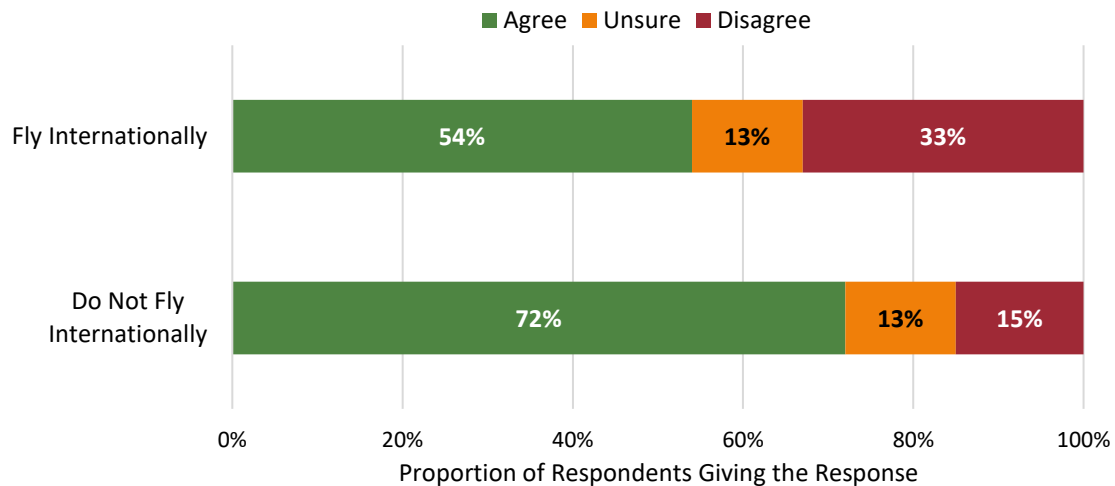


Figure 10. Responses by staff who flew internationally in 2019, and those who did not, to the prompt “Should reducing international air travel be a strategic priority for Massey?”

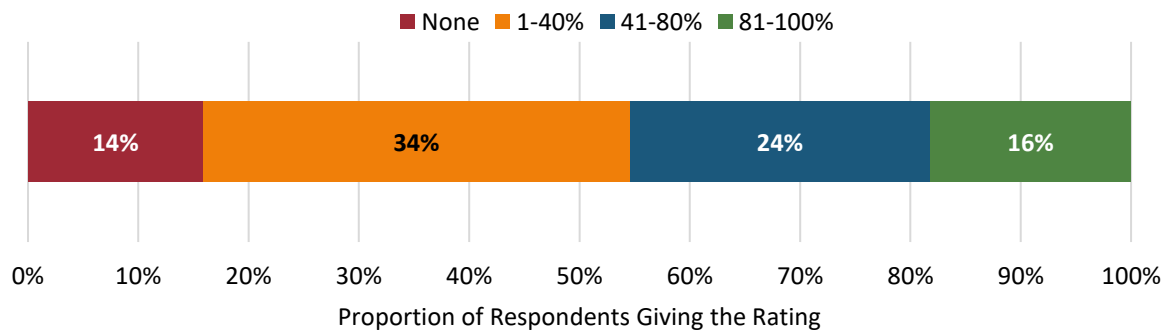


Figure 11. Proportion of staff who travelled internationally in 2019, who considered what percentage of their activities are now achievable without that travel

The types of activities considered by Massey staff to be achievable without travelling internationally include sharing information, administration, PhD vivas, writing joint book chapters and articles, attending/presenting at conferences that are now online, discussions in small groups (two-four people), Committee meetings and responsibilities, seminars, presentations & keynote addresses, networking with friends & close colleagues, progress meetings and planning of established research groups and collaborations, and collaborating with colleagues proficient with working in the online environment.

<sup>10</sup> 2020 online staff survey (academic and professional).

### 3.1. Opportunities for change

Table 2 summarises the three opportunities for change that were identified during the 2021 consultation process<sup>11</sup>

*Table 2. Opportunities for change in travel practices, identified by Massey staff*

<p><b>Travelling smarter</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Travel must be driven by research outputs and learning outcomes</li> <li>• Consider a shift to longer, less frequent, multi-purposed trips; suggestions of international travel occurring once every 1-3 years</li> <li>• Review current distinction between short (up to 23 days) and long leave (23+days) applications</li> <li>• Establish criteria for when travel is not normally approved</li> <li>• Create flexible working patterns to increase ability to attend ‘out of NZ hours’ events and approach whereby teaching is continued during trips overseas</li> <li>• Strengthen data collection and visibility of Massey-wide travel practices</li> <li>• Planned travel for the coming 12 months is a formalized part of the staff annual Personal Development Plan</li> <li>• Improve online facilities, e.g., booking system, room facilities, staff training &amp; support.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Conference travel practices</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Conference-only’ trips approved within short haul distance or conditional on a specific output agreed with manager</li> <li>• Explore the relative value of conferences in relation to stage of research career and subject area/disciplinary expectations</li> <li>• Advocate for continuing hybrid/blended conferences globally, so staff can choose the option that best facilitates their work</li> <li>• Consider the introduction of caps on conference attendance, e.g., attendances per year, staff attending same event, per research team, per subject group.</li> <li>• Pursue viability of regional hubs e.g., tertiary sector staff congregate in Australasia or Asia to connect with conference in UK/Europe; New Zealand hotel provides facilities for multi-events in the US or UK/Europe, in destination time-zone.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Travel application process</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase connectivity and visibility of university-wide international travel taken by staff across the university to inform individual trip planning and improve outcomes from travel</li> <li>• Massey-wide leave policy to include flexibility for exceptional cases and cater for specific College requirements</li> <li>• Nuanced Massey-wide system with a percentage of applications approved automatically, within a framework of caps, and a Massey-wide Committee for the rest of the applications</li> <li>• Incentives built in, e.g., financial savings from not/reducing travelling are reallocated close to source of saving</li> <li>• Metrics that could be considered for capping travel within application criteria/process financial budget, emissions budget, per unit, per discipline.</li> </ul>

<sup>11</sup> Staff workshops, staff submissions, and consultation with College & Global Engagement committees (January – September 2021).

#### 4. Concluding remarks

There is a need to review Massey's staff international air travel practices, based on the contribution that historical patterns make to Massey's carbon emissions inventory. As shown in this report, the project has touched on a range of issues integral to the purpose of Massey staff travelling internationally, at the core of which is the high quality of the institution's research and teaching.

The ambition for change in staff, primarily academic, travel practices across the tertiary sector globally needs to be maintained, even though the complexities are evident. The Massey data in this report, from a relatively remote university geographically and relating to a two-year period when international travel was heavily restricted, contribute to the global knowledge base. Massey will continue this work around re-imagining staff international air travel practices, internally via the Finance & Procurement stream of work, and externally in the context of the New Zealand tertiary sector and associated agencies, including the AUATC.

Te Ohu Toitūtanga/ The Sustainability Office is continuing work to promote VLT facilities and collate experiences from Massey staff regarding online events (attending and/or organising), stories when things did not go to plan, and lessons learnt.

##### 4.1 Recommendations

- 1) Completion of the leave policy review, based on a contemporary and innovative approach co-created with key stakeholders and Massey-wide consultation to develop a flexible and equitable framework regarding frequency and purpose of approved travel, including the function of caps and incentives.
- 2) The introduction of a software product that manages travel, which works alongside Orbit. This can raise the visibility and connectivity of staff and student travel and enable people to manage trips from anywhere in the world, as well as indicating opportunities to streamline practices, informing decisions regarding future travel needs and cost/carbon budget development into 2023.
- 3) Massey-wide consultation to develop a 'post-travel' process that maximises the value and dissemination of international travel experiences, enhancing inter- and trans-disciplinary work and creating a positive and inclusive culture to inform the decisions and value of subsequent trips.
- 4) Ongoing consultation with the wider New Zealand tertiary sector, overseas stakeholders, and event organisers regarding the role and importance of establishing a global culture of online and hybrid conferences, including the viability of regional hubs.
- 5) Massey, as the AUATC Chair, hosts an online conference in 2023 focusing on the opportunities to re-imagine work-related international air travel practices, when located in Australasia.

## Appendix A: Summary of data sources

Date	Activity	Description
August-September 2020	Analysis of 2019 staff international air travel data	2019 Orbit travel data and 2019 Massey staff travel applications, analysed by Strategy Enablement & Delivery team
September 2020	Staff online survey	Assessing historical international air travel patterns, impact of restricted travel & capacity to change practices. 17% of staff completed survey
October-November 2020	Staff focus groups  Staff submissions on report to Massey's University Research Committee	3 x one-hour online sessions exploring travel and survey data; led and analysed by external consultant. 28 staff attended 158 submissions received
January-September 2021	In-person workshops. Staff submissions on three internal reports pertaining to the Re-imagining Massey staff international air travel practices' project. Consultation with College Research & Executive committees & Global Engagement senior management	Three x one-hour workshops; 43 staff attended. 23 submissions received  Analysis of meeting discussions
February 2022	Early career researchers online survey	Assessing impact of restricted international air travel during period when New Zealand borders were closed. 350 ECRs completed survey

## Appendix B: Membership of the Australasian Universities Air Travel Consortium

(as of August 2022)

Prof. Quentin Atkinson (University of Auckland)  
Prof. Susanne Becken (Griffith University)  
Sarah Boddington (PhD researcher, Australian National University)  
Assoc. Prof. Alessandra Capezio (Australian National University)  
Prof. Jan Evans-Freeman (University of Canterbury)  
Dr. David Hall (Auckland University of Technology)  
Prof. Bronwyn Hayward (University of Canterbury)  
Prof. James Higham (University of Otago)  
Prof. Lynda Johnston (University of Waikato)  
Dr. Sal Lampkin (Chair, Massey University)  
Prof. Gillian Lewis (University of Auckland)  
Dr. Simon McCallum (Victoria University of Wellington)  
Dist. Prof. Robert McLachlan (Massey University)  
Dr. Leanne Morrison (University of Tasmania)  
Dr. Brendan Moyle (Massey University)  
Dr. Sylvia Nissen (Lincoln University)  
Dr. Carla Pascoe Leahy (University of Tasmania)  
Dr. Lin Roberts (Lincoln University)  
Prof. Tim Ryley (Griffith University)  
Hsueh-Yu Tseng (PhD Researcher, University of Otago)

## Appendix C: Types of non-Massey staff travel

- Speaker or guest at Massey organised talk, conference, event etc
- Board member (other than University Council) e.g., Riddet Institute
- Affiliate to research that is Massey-led
- Student e.g., PhD; recipient of award or scholarship
- Former Massey staff
- PhD examiner
- Family member of Massey staff