



# **DRAFT**

## **TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE ACADEMIA RESEARCH GUIDELINES**

### **Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences**

#### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide an equitable and evidence informed framework to facilitate the goal of reducing the environmental impact of research related academic work. These guidelines are part of a larger and ongoing project within HASS, UQ and at other universities to reduce the carbon footprint of all academic activity over time (research, teaching, engagement) through a shared responsibility framework, involving institutional and individual actions.

In implementing these guidelines HASS organisational units and the HASS Faculty Office will demonstrate effective leadership and meaningful action on reducing the carbon-footprint of research related activities, while working at multiple levels of the university to ensure a coordinated effort on promoting environmental sustainability. The guidelines will be adjusted as needed to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

#### **PREAMBLE**

Amidst the despair, the disruption caused by the COVID-19 global pandemic provides an opportunity for individuals and societies to question how much of what was prioritised before the crisis was necessary or desirable. A recalibration of values and actions is required as public organisations, governments and corporations take concrete steps towards an environmentally sustainable future. Universities have a key role to play in this process, in terms of knowledge leadership and as an exemplar of positive transformation.

The pandemic has prompted universities to re-examine *how* they teach, conduct research and collaborate with external partners. The rapid digitisation of teaching and learning in 2020, for example, demonstrated how academics can use more *bits* and fewer *atoms* in their everyday work. Online communication during the pandemic also revealed the limits of digital technologies and the ongoing value of face-to-face communication and collaboration.

In the 2020 HASS COVID-19 survey, staff reported on the key issues they would like the HASS Faculty and the wider university community to prioritise during the recovery phase of the pandemic. A high priority issue identified by nearly 450 professional and academic staff who completed the HASS COVID-19 survey was a desire for more action on climate change. The 2021 IPCC report heightens the urgency of the change that is required to avoid catastrophic climate change.

In terms of a commitment to the value of integrity, it is not enough to demand action on climate change among other organisations and institutions, such as corporations, markets and governments. The higher education sector needs to demonstrate its commitment to a low-carbon future. UQ has a lot to be proud of in terms of steps already taken toward sustainability policy and practice. UQ has the largest solar energy capacity of any Australian university, for example. The UQ solar farm is a major contributing factor to UQ being on track to achieving carbon neutrality by 2025.

UQ is also aligning campus goals with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as part of a wide coalition of universities that have signed onto the SDGs. These on-campus goals are critically important, however, more needs to be done to demonstrate leadership on both climate action and other sustainability issues such as biodiversity and resource use, particularly in terms of research related activities that take place off campus.

In 2021 there is an opportunity for the HASS Faculty and the wider university to demonstrate leadership and enhance sustainable research policies and practices. Local leadership and action will in turn drive the implementation of the 2022-2025 UQ Strategic Plan and the 2022-2025 UQ Sustainability Action Plan.

#### **DEFINING AND DEVELOPING A 'SUSTAINABLE ACADEMIA'**

In Australia, discussions are taking place within research funding bodies and disciplinary associations across HASS and STEM disciplines on how to promote sustainability at an individual and institutional level, which at its core is concerned



with reducing the environmental impact of academic work. As outlined in a recent discussion paper prepared by a group of Australian historians the demand for change stems from a growing recognition that:

Many academics have large carbon footprints – we are explicitly encouraged to travel for research, conferences and networking through our systems of hiring, performance review, promotion and career development. Increasingly, academic excellence is predicated upon internationalisation. The hypermobility that this demands not only has environmental impacts, but also exacts a human toll (Gaynor et al, 2020).

A number of universities in Australia and around the world have developed detailed guidelines and targets around reducing the carbon footprint associated with travel, data collection, conferences and other research related activities. ANU is the first university in Australia to take the step to remove more CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere than it puts out by 2030, with a carbon neutral target by 2025. ANU aims to achieve its targets through emissions reduction and sequestration technologies, rather than through purchasing carbon offsets. In terms of transport emissions, ANU is moving towards electric vehicles with its fleet and reducing work-related air travel. The reason for the focus on air travel is that flying contributes to roughly one third of the carbon footprint of a typical scholar or a typical university (see <https://hiltner.english.ucsb.edu/index.php/ncnc-guide/#intro>). The UQ Sustainability Action Plan includes a similar commitment to reducing business-related air travel.

Internationally, The University of Copenhagen is a leader in reducing the carbon footprint of research activities through reduced air travel, low-carbon conferences and modelling sustainability on campus. Similarly, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) promotes a campus-city-global sustainability chain to achieve sustainability at scale through active partnerships with its students and external stakeholders. UQ can learn from these national and international case studies and demonstrate its commitment to action on climate change through, for example, leveraging the positive changes to mobility patterns and associated reduced greenhouse emissions of the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many academics are already changing their attitude to air travel in light of the pandemic and the digital transformation of academic work. The philosophy informing environmental sustainability within HASS is one that recognises the steps already being taken to reduce the carbon footprint of universities and academic work. The HASS guidelines seek to promote awareness and collective action, rather than pointing the finger at individuals or moralising about climate change inaction.

Measures put in place to promote sustainable academia at the university level need to be sensitive to and inclusive of demographic differences, disabilities, career level, employment type and geography. In terms of equity principles and research travel, scholars can be disadvantaged by a system that rewards hypermobility, particularly scholars with caring responsibilities, scholars at an earlier stage of their career, scholars outside capital cities and researchers in the Global South. As such, reducing the necessity of air travel for maintaining a successful research career may help to address structural inequalities within the academy (Gaynor et al, 2020). These equity considerations are important in implementing sustainable academia measures in HASS, recognising that some in-person networking in formal and informal academic settings remains critical to establishing a research profile, particularly for ECRs and MCRs.

In the following set of guidelines the primary focus is on promoting sustainability in research-related activities, such as conferences, data collection and events for academics and HDR students. For the reasons outlined above, the two main areas of focus in these guidelines are on reducing academic/HDR related air travel and designing environmentally friendly HASS in-person events. The guiding principles include:

- HASS organisational units will actively seek to reduce the carbon footprint of academic work, with an initial focus on research and research related activities.
- Digital modes of engagement will be promoted to complement in-person national and international conferences and workshops.
- HASS organisational units will seek to reduce the environmental impact of in-person events and conferences and workshops.
- Equity considerations will be taken into account in implementing these guidelines across HASS, with supervisor discretion exercised as appropriate.

We recognise that there are many other means by which environmental sustainability can be promoted at UQ, particularly in terms of micro-mobility to and from campus and procurement and purchase practices. The steps outlined in this document are intended to prioritise actions that have the greatest impact on improving sustainability outcomes in terms of research, while supporting complementary UQ sustainability initiatives.



## CONSULTATION AND TIMEFRAME

- In developing these draft guidelines HASS Directors of Research have sought feedback from their respective research committees on the principles and scope of the guidelines.
- Further feedback was sought from the HASS Faculty Executive, HASS ECR reps, the UQ Sustainability Office, the UQ Research Office and HASS academic and professional staff during September and October, 2021.
- Once finalised the guidelines will take effect from January 2022 and be formally reviewed in December 2022. Ongoing feedback will also be encouraged to ensure the guidelines are responsive and fit for purpose and recognised as a part of a bigger program of activity on environmental sustainability.

## IMPLEMENTATION

- The Sustainable Research guidelines will be incorporated into HASS schools/institutes procedures around research, data collection and conference travel. A HASS website will be developed with a link to the guidelines.
- The guidelines will be accompanied by an Implementation Guide that clearly outlines different levels of responsibility within HASS and across the university more broadly. The Implementation Guide will include further details on actions and a timeline for continued development of new priorities and actions.
- Travel forms and other approvals will be enabled to have a CO2 calculator.
- The HASS Sustainable Academia guidelines will be updated as required and evaluated annually by the Associate Dean Research, in consultation with the Faculty Executive and the HASS Research Committee.
- A 'Towards a Sustainable Academia' website will be developed on the HASS Faculty site to house the guidelines, resources and associated documents for ongoing reference.

## KEY LINKS AND RESOURCES

- UQ Sustainability Strategy 2021-2025 - <https://sustainability.uq.edu.au/uq-sustainability-strategy>
- UQ Sustainability Policies and Procedures - <https://sustainability.uq.edu.au/policies-procedures>
- UQ Sustainable Events Guide - <https://sustainability.uq.edu.au/files/7826/SustEventsGde.pdf>
- UQ Sustainable Purchasing Guidelines <https://sustainability.uq.edu.au/projects/recycling-and-waste-minimisation/sustainable-purchasing-guidelines>



## ACTION GUIDELINES

The approach to both business and research related travel is to distinguish between *high value academic travel* (eg consulting non-digital archives; maintaining field work sites) versus *low value academic travel* (eg flying interstate for a single short meeting). The class of travel and other travel principles will continue to be determined by the UQ Travel Policy and Procedures <https://ppl.app.uq.edu.au/content/1.90.01-university-travel-management>.

### Travel

- When conference or workshop participation involves air-travel, only one academic will be funded (regardless of funding source) for the purposes of presenting a co-authored conference-paper. More than one academic can be funded if a case is made that all participants are integral to the integrity of the delivery of the whole presentation/paper and/or if participants are also engaging in the conference or workshop as part of broader project-related collaborative work, particularly for ECRs and MCRs in which research networking is critical to researcher development.
- Conference participation will not be funded (regardless of funding source) without a formal conference paper, unless the participant acts as either organiser or convener at the conference or has formally accepted to participate in an officially scheduled panel, roundtable, research workshop, masterclass or an equivalent formal conference activity.
- HASS will promote efficient air-travel when travel is necessary, such as combining conference or workshop travel with fieldwork, student recruitment activities or being asked to represent the HASS Faculty or university at an alumni event.
- All air-travel will include carbon offsets with an ethical and effective provider. Details on offset options will be outlined in the accompanying Implementation Guide.
- HASS organisational units will prioritise low CO2 emissions over lower airfares when there is a trade-off, for example, when a ticket including a stop-over is cheaper than a ticket not including a stop-over.
- Encourage the conduct of PhD vivas and HDR milestones by Zoom or similar remote platforms where the reader/examiner is not based in South-East Queensland.
- HASS organisational units will limit inviting international visitors/speakers for the sole purpose of a key-note presentation or limited participation to a single event or activity. Visitors/speakers will be supported if they are involved in capacity building activity within UQ e.g. public lecture and pre-lecture forum with HDR students.
- Any planning of travel expenses will be accompanied by a calculation of the CO2 footprint resulting from the planned travel. This information will be used to track carbon emissions from year to year, which will be reported at the annual HASS Faculty Board meeting.

### Data Collection

- Where appropriate, academics will consider employing local Research Assistants for research outside of south-East Queensland (eg for accessing non-digitised archives or undertaking fieldwork). HASS will develop its own database of HDR students, casual academics and honorary staff who are willing to be engaged as researchers for data collection and research activity.



<b>HASS in-person events</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• HASS staff organising conferences/workshops will seek to find venues that are accessible with the lowest CO2 footprint, taking into account the expected number of participants. Further details on organising low carbon events will be outlined in the Implementation Guide.</li><li>• HASS supports the use of digital or electronic materials to support event promotion and activity and does not recommend the production of physical merchandising, brochure printing, name tags.</li><li>• HASS encourages and supports environmentally friendly catering at HASS functions (eg locally sourced), including seminars, conferences, workshops and other events.</li></ul>
<b>University wide measures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Encourage the university to update and ensure the UQ sustainability training module is compulsory for all staff.</li><li>• Encourage the university and disciplinary associations to advocate for sustainability measures in ARC and NHMRC research funding guidelines.</li><li>• Promote active travel and environmentally friendly micro-mobility transport options.</li><li>• Encourage UQ to invest in research databases that would reduce the need for travel to access secondary research data.</li><li>• Encourage UQ to invest in software, tools and equipment that allows for seamless remote interactions.</li><li>• Liaise with the UQ Research Office, other Faculties and Institutes to promote Sustainable Research Guidelines that can accommodate staff diversity and disciplinary differences.</li><li>• Encourage and support research that advances sustainability outcomes.</li><li>• Encourage UQ to explore options for fully divesting from fossil fuels.</li></ul>

## FEEDBACK

Please email the HASS Faculty Research Office ([research@hass.uq.edu.au](mailto:research@hass.uq.edu.au)) with any feedback, questions or comments on these draft Sustainable Research guidelines by **Friday 19<sup>th</sup> November**.

Members of the HASS Sustainable Academia Working Party include:

- Professor Greg Marston (Chair) – Deputy Executive Dean and Associate Dean Research (Acting)
- Professor Kelly Fielding – School of Communication and Arts
- Dr Ray Maher – Centre for Policy Futures
- Dr Franzisca Weder – School of Communication and Arts
- Associate Professor Martin Crotty – School of Historical and Philosophical Inquiry
- Ms Rachel Smith – Senior Advisor, Research Management, HASS Faculty Research Office