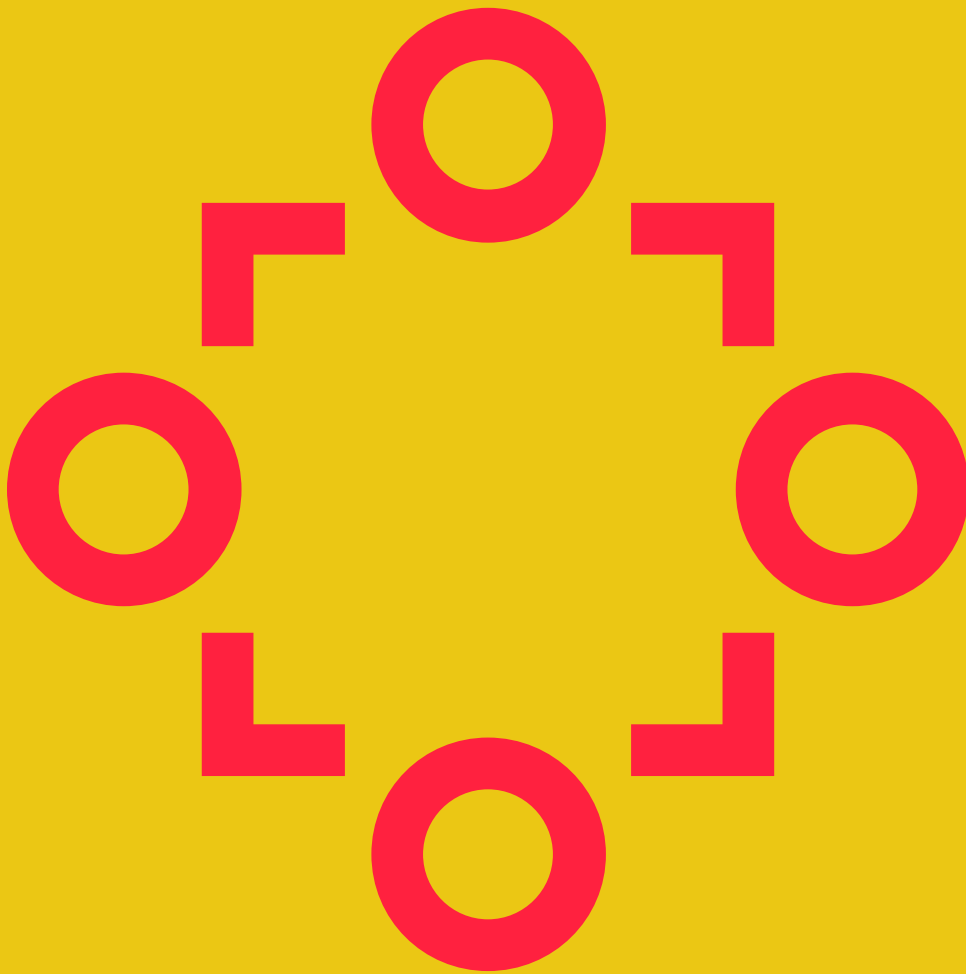


'People work' on campus

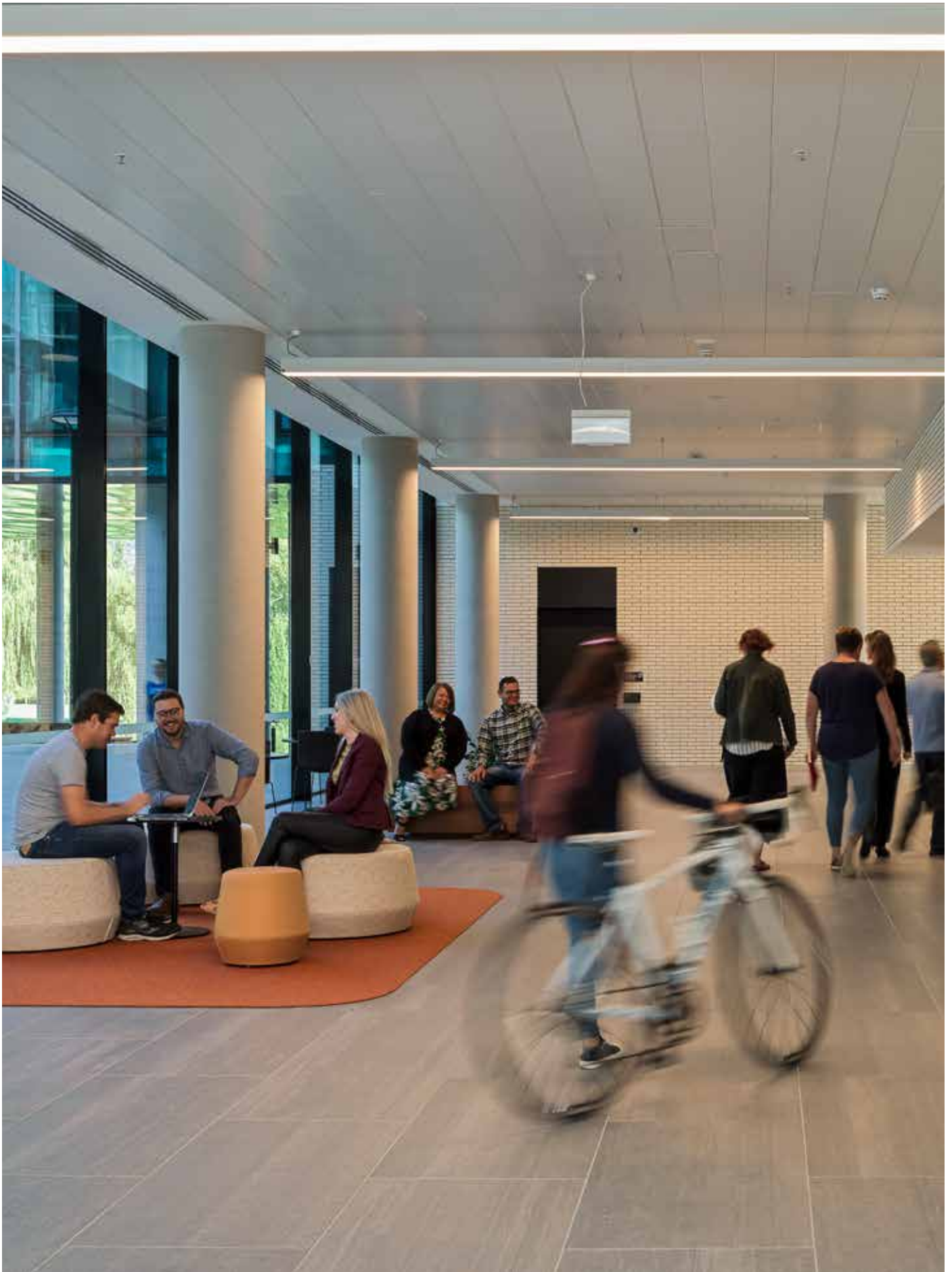
'Paper work' at home

A global view of the post-pandemic

academic workplace



Hassell



Research School of Social Sciences,
Australian National University, Canberra, Australia
Photography by Mark Syke

People work on campus
Paper work at home

'PEOPLE WORK' ON CAMPUS, 'PAPER WORK' AT HOME

Campus has always been a place for talking, teaching, networking and socialising. Up until last year, many academics spent most of their time on campus and only a small amount of time working from home, to do 'paper work' – solo tasks like research and administration. Teaching was largely on campus.

But the collective experience of working off campus through the COVID-19 pandemic has changed attitudes, perceptions and habits in higher education across the world. And with that change comes an opportunity to reiterate the purpose of a campus – to bring people and ideas together.

WHAT WE DID

There are a lot of studies out there about how workplaces are changing after the upheaval of the pandemic, but very few of them are specific to universities.

We know that academic workplaces are different to commercial offices. We also know that academic activities can vary considerably across both the academic year and the type of faculty.

Hassell wanted to understand how university work patterns might change in the future. And to do this, we thought it was best just to go straight to the source.

We surveyed 571 academics from over 50 universities across Singapore, the UK, US and Australia about their experiences of working on and off campus before and during the pandemic.

This report details how they fared and what they hope for in the post-pandemic university workplace.

The sample was representative across gender, age, role and faculty, providing a broad data set that we split in various ways to reveal some interesting differences and some remarkably consistent themes.

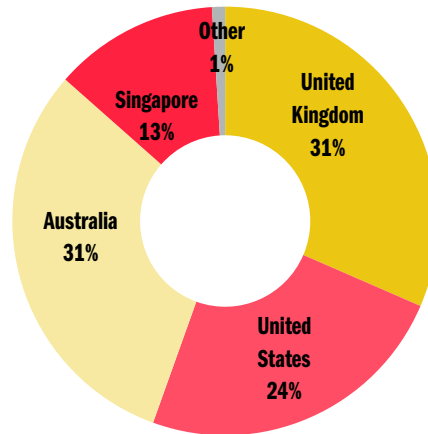


Figure 1. Participants by country

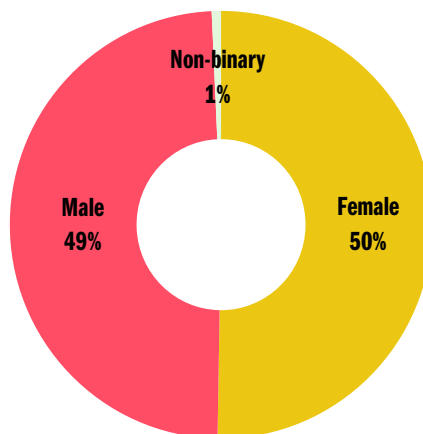


Figure 2. Participants by gender

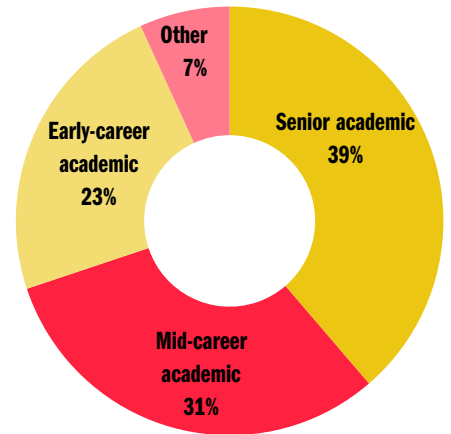


Figure 3. Participants by role

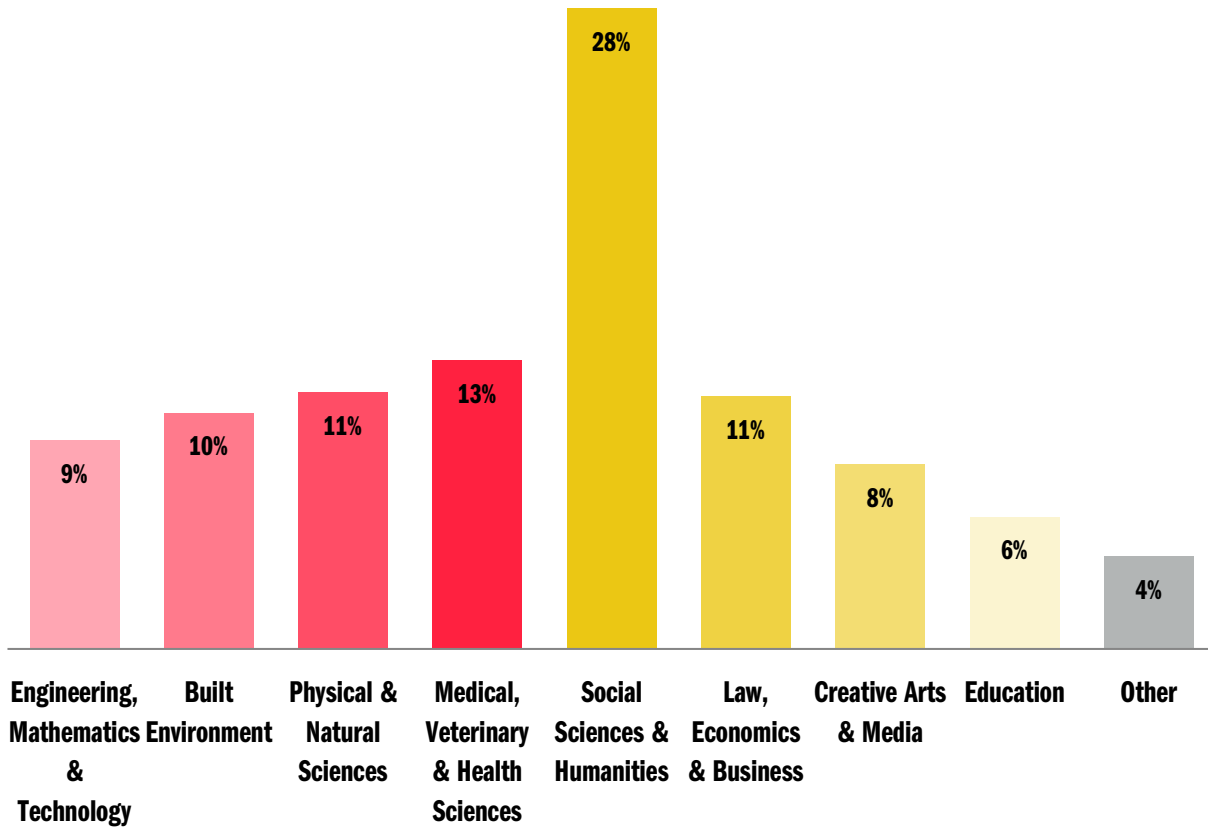


Figure 4. Participants by faculty

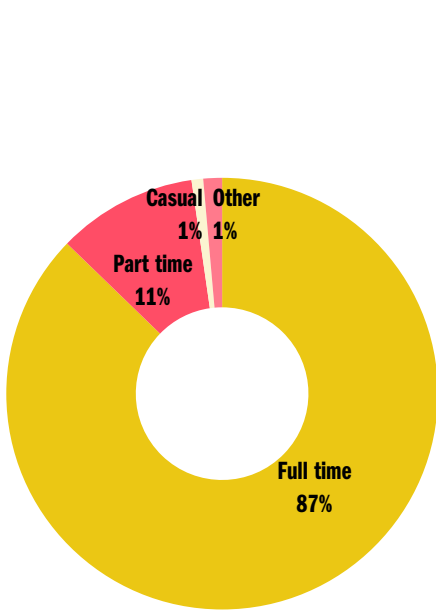


Figure 5. Participants by employment type

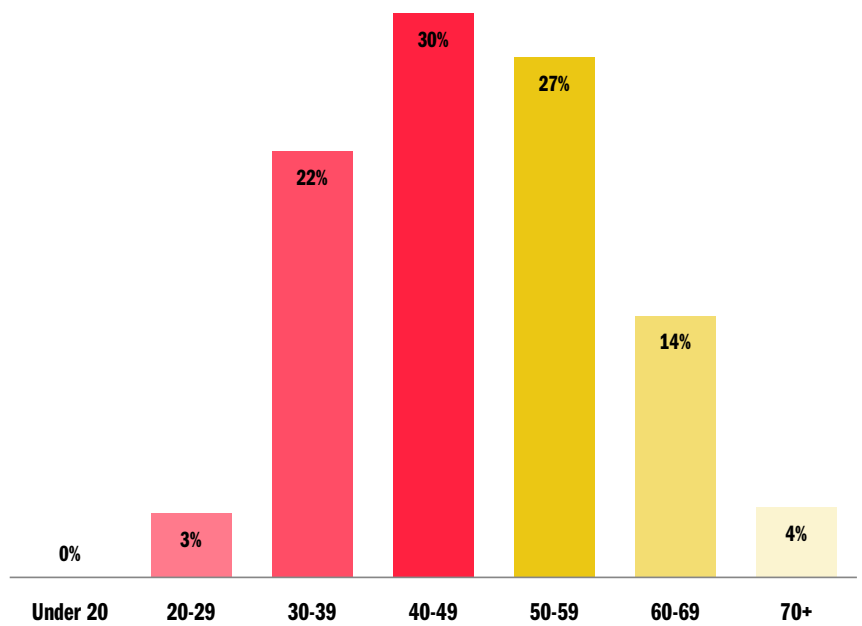


Figure 6. Participants by age

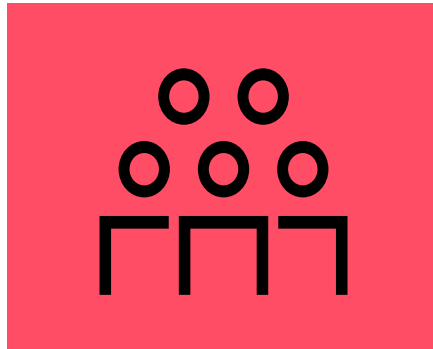
WHAT WE FOUND

Our research shows that campus is the place to talk and connect with students and colleagues, and, perhaps most importantly, to teach.



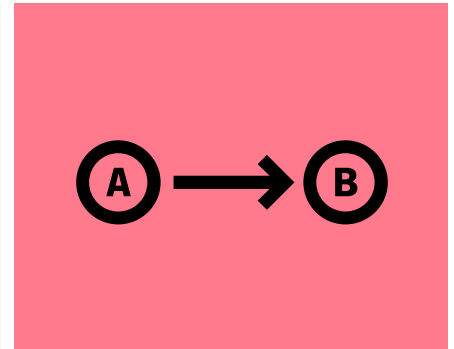
Campus isn't dead

Campus is the beating heart of a vibrant and interactive university community; a place for sharing ideas and developing important relationships. Academics want to return to campus, and need their students to be there too.



Teaching belongs on campus

While necessary and convenient during the pandemic, our research found that online teaching is detrimental to social and learning outcomes for students. While acknowledging some benefits, academics are wary of a substantial shift in delivery modes.



Compromise is coming to the academic office

The pandemic has given staff time to consider a more balanced working week. Some academics are willing to share their workspace in return for more time working at home, while others want to maintain a significant presence on campus.

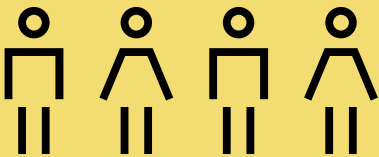
“I want my academic life back, 100%”

2.9 days

the average amount of time academics want to spend on campus in the future, down from 3.8 days pre-pandemic

571

survey participants

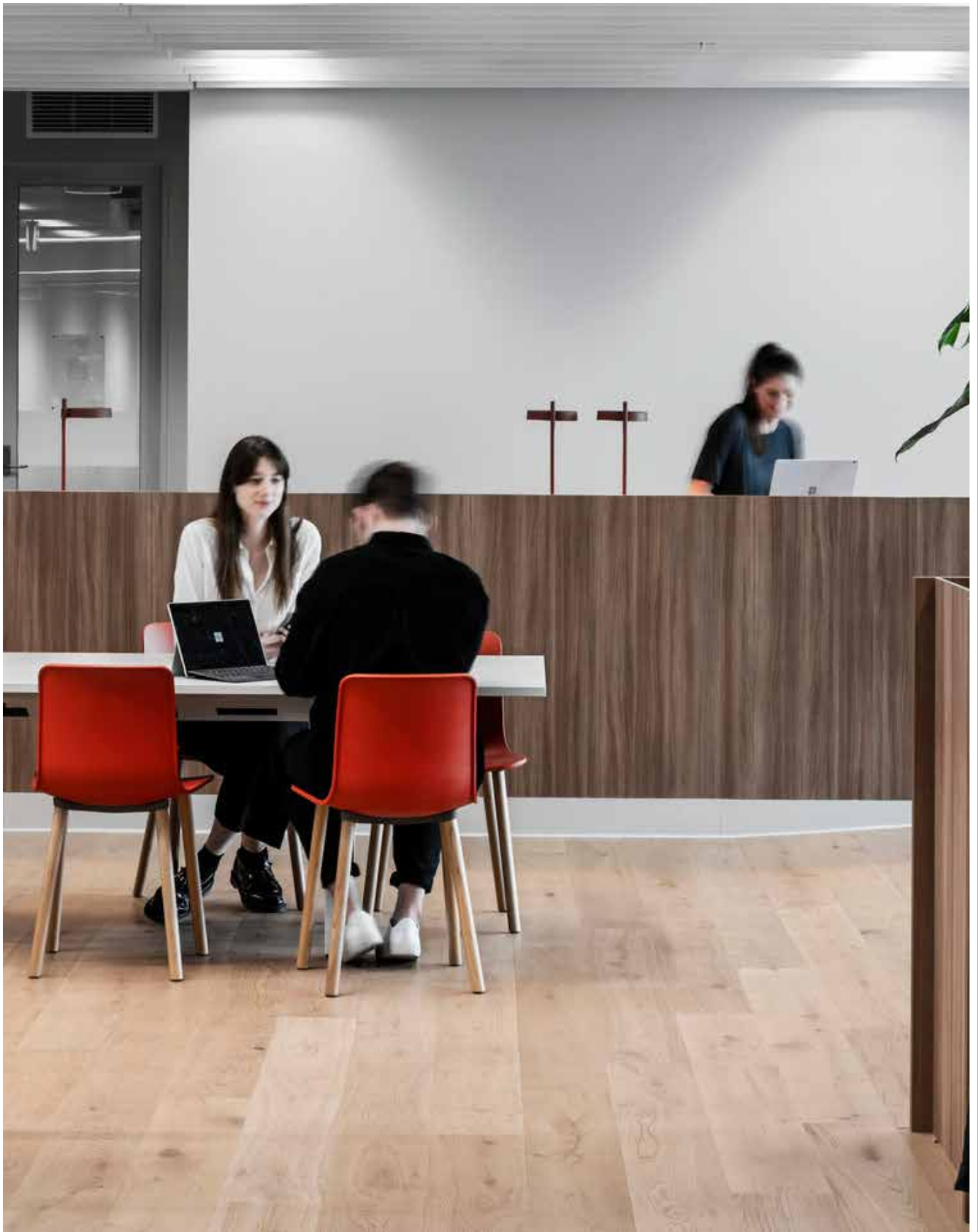


“Universities are a site of conversations about ideas and thoughts. ‘I can’t hear you, you’re on mute’, challenges this.”

“Working from home is a great 1 or 2 day option to concentrate on writing etc, but departments are better run as teams, not individuals.”

75%

of survey participants believe their connections to colleagues suffered while they worked off campus



Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology,
The University of Melbourne, Australia
Image by Tom Blachford



Li Ka Shing Library
Singapore Management University
Photography by Hassell

Advanced Engineering Centre
University of Brighton, United Kingdom
Photography by Jim Stephens



CAMPUS ISN'T DEAD

The campus was, and will remain, central to the identity and activity of a university. It is a practical and symbolic embodiment of the importance of sharing ideas for the advancement of human knowledge.

Academics took the opportunity in the survey, as might be expected after a period away from campus, to reflect on all of the benefits of being physically together with their students and colleagues.

They believe that being on campus is an essential component of the intellectual and social experience of a university education and career. In-person interaction is fundamental to the development of strong and productive connections between people that enable the sharing of ideas, and the learning of skills.

And of course, there are some things you just can't do at home, like lab work, wind tunnel testing, or theatre performance.

"We can do a lot online, but building a sense of community is important and very difficult to replicate without in-person meetings."



Moreton Bay Campus, University of the Sunshine Coast
Brisbane, Australia
Photography by Tom Ross

Academics were already working flexibly

As the pandemic took hold around the world, working from home became the norm across many industries. Since then, there has been an equally dramatic uptick in interest in whether this new way of working would be permanent.

The year 2020 has been touted as a transformative moment in the workplace. But it turns out that academics were in some ways already ahead of the curve.

At the beginning of the pandemic, most universities effectively closed their campuses and mandated that many, if not all, students and staff worked from home for varying periods of time.

By April of 2021, Singaporean and Australian universities had largely reopened their campuses, while the US and UK were still partially closed.

We mapped the self-reported amount of time academics spent working from home before and after lockdowns, and their future preferences as a percentage of their work time each week.

Most academics were already doing some work at home (51 per cent were working from home one day a week, and only ten per cent were working on campus at all times).

This contrasts with Hassell research (ref) that shows almost 70 per cent of commercial office workers in Australia were working primarily in the office before the pandemic.

Looking at it another way, a lot of academics still want to spend the majority of their time on campus. On average, academics spent almost four days a week on campus before the pandemic.

In the future, that average falls to just under three days. Women are less likely to want to spend time on campus (around two days compared to three for men), and this holds true across countries, although men in the US were already spending less time on campus compared to the other three countries.

This finding also reflects attitudes in a recent Hassell survey of commercial office workers, (ref) which showed that women were less inclined to want to return to the office than men.

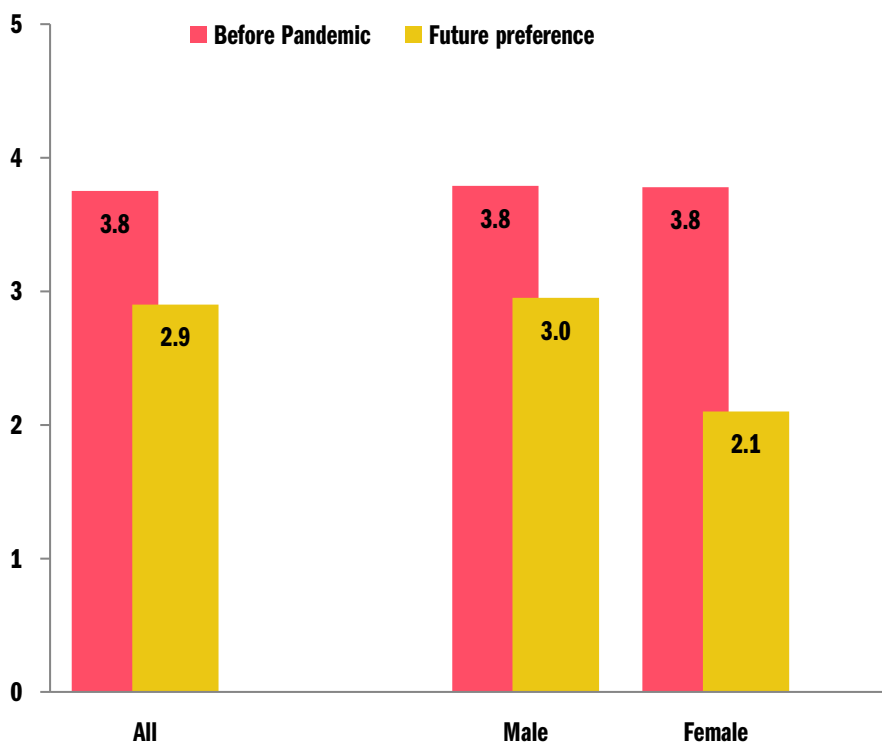


Figure 7. Days on campus - average

Figure 8. Days on campus - gender

Practical learning needs practical spaces

Preferences for working on campus differ across faculties, which underscores the need for universities to address workplace issues from a strategic, user-centred perspective.

Science and creative arts disciplines that require practical, lab-based and performance learning and research are more likely to want to spend time on campus than the social science disciplines.

The exception in the data to this is the Medical, Health and Veterinary Sciences. Academics in those fields would like to spend an average of 1.4 days less on campus, coupled with a smaller increase in either time spent working from home or working in a third location, which is likely to be a clinical setting or lab.

In fact, more than half of all academics from all the faculties except Law, Economics and Business indicated that they already worked in a third place (neither on campus nor at home) for, on average just under a day a week.

Beyond clinical settings these other locations could include co-working spaces, cafés, smaller work hubs or off-campus university buildings.

There was however, no significant demand for more time in these locations in the future. The change in preferences for work location is entirely toward working from home.

"Being an anatomy educator, face-to-face practical laboratories can never be replaced and causes much difficulty creating an equivalent experience for students overseas."

"Teaching practical subjects like drama is possible online, but really not easy with students working in their bedrooms."

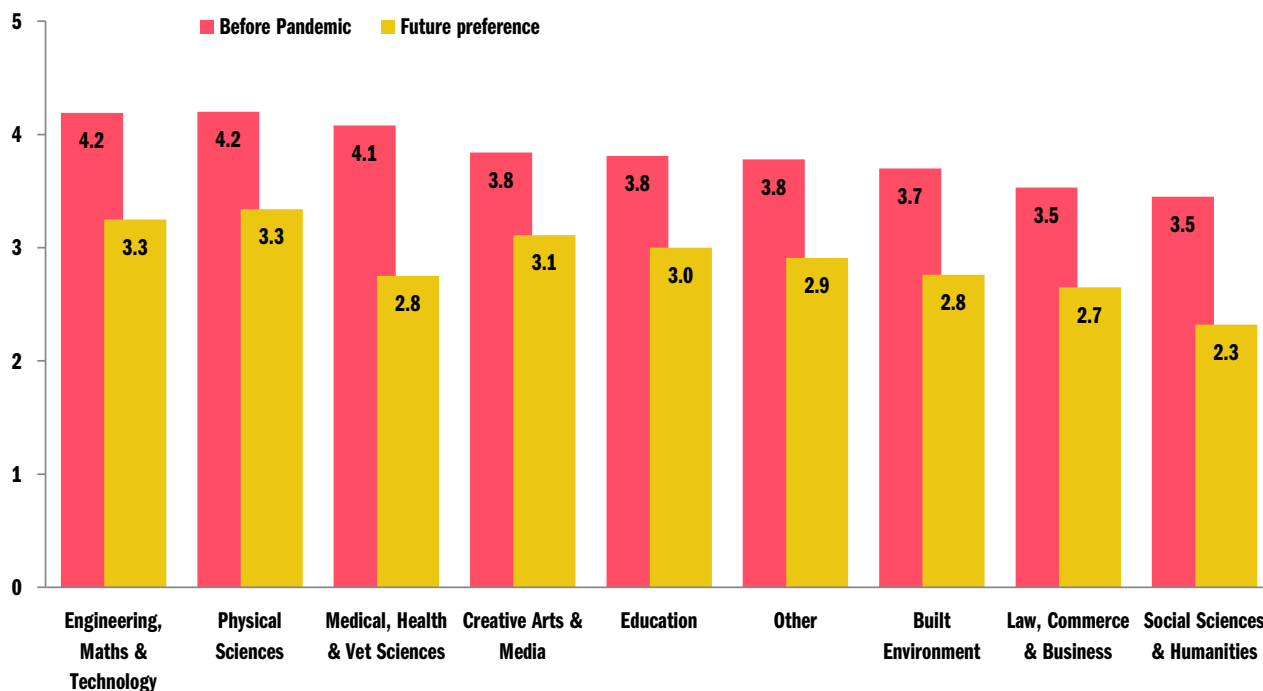


Figure 9. Days on campus by faculty



“The pandemic has demonstrated why there is the need for campus universities. You cannot replace everything with distance learning, particularly in science and medicine.”



National Centre for Motorsport Engineering,
University of Bolton, United Kingdom
Photography by Mark Cocksedge

Moreton Bay Campus, University of the Sunshine
Coast, Brisbane, Australia
Photography by Tom Ross

Creative Industries Precinct Phase 2, Queensland
University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia
Photography by Peter Bennetts

CAMPUS IS THE BEST PLACE TO TEACH

Academics still want to be on campus for a majority of their working week, and they want their students to be there too.

Online learning is challenging for everyone

The survey revealed overwhelming support for in-person contact between students and with staff as a means to communicating ideas, teaching practical skills and forming friendships and future professional networks.

There are definite advantages to online learning, some well-established and others only coming to light through the experiences of the pandemic. Digital platforms enable a much wider range of knowledge leaders to contribute, and are convenient for students who are unable to make it to campus for work, family, or geographical reasons.

In Australia, the loss of international students due to border shutdowns has been damaging, but could have been far worse had those students that were already enrolled not been able to continue to learn online.

So, while online teaching was convenient and necessary during 2020, it is viewed almost universally to be unsatisfactory overall. Most academics cannot wait to get back to in-person contact with their students.

Academics across all regions consistently expressed reservations about their inability to connect with students in any meaningful way online.

They were concerned about a loss of the students' social and professional skills as they study at home in their pyjamas, and a more general foreboding that it may become the dominant or default teaching method for all the wrong reasons.

Online delivery is perceived by academics to be the cheap option for universities, and therefore potentially attractive to university management in this period of funding and economic pressures.

Recorded lectures and online tutorials reduce the need for teaching space on campus, but also paves the way for larger class sizes that will bring in more fees. Recorded lessons can be used repeatedly over time, reducing the need for teaching staff.

All of these potential money saving opportunities have inherent risks. Academics are very concerned that students are more disengaged at home, more easily distracted (by pets!) and will miss out on the crucial learning and social opportunities that on-campus learning offers.

“We need to reinforce the importance of personal connection to students or we will end up with a generation of workers who cannot work in teams, cannot interact with people in a shared work place, and have limited hands-on practical skills.”

“Students are short-changed by online teaching. And they realise this. Ultimately this will mean declining enrolments – why pay thousands to take online courses?”

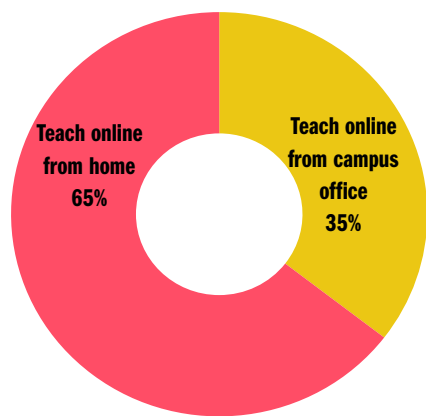


Figure 10. Preferred location for online teaching

Finding the right balance

They may not have enjoyed some aspects of the big switch to online learning, but overall, academics did a magnificent job of delivering it at short notice. And this gave them an opportunity to see which teaching locations worked best in which situation.

In the future, when campuses are fully open and not subject to periodic lockdowns, universities will need to finely balance how much learning is done online and from where the lecturers will deliver it.

Most academics would like to teach in-person, on campus, but if it is delivered online, they would prefer to do it at home. If online teaching increases (as many expect it will), campus activity may decline in both student and staff numbers.

Academics are concerned that enrolments could decrease as students' expectations of education rise in line with tuition fees, and as the quality of the university experience suffers. They believe that larger online class sizes diminish the number and quality of interactions between students and with teachers.

There are professional concerns too – the student/teacher relationship has eroded in the past year without in-person contact. Valuable teaching and communication skills will be lost to the profession (or concentrated in the few still delivering education in-person) as libraries of online materials grow.

Our survey respondents indicated that in-person teaching on campus is vital, with a resounding endorsement of the need for teaching spaces on campus.



Advanced Engineering Building, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia
Photography by Peter Bennetts

“The sooner we get back to unrestricted face-to-face teaching, the better.”

“The student experience is a prime concern. Student life is more than just online teaching and the social component must not be underestimated.”



Moreton Bay Campus, University of the Sunshine Coast,
Brisbane, Australia
Photography by Tom Ross



Creative Industries Precinct Phase 2, Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane, Australia
Photography by Peter Bennetts

"The experience of 2020 let the cat out of the bag – that it is indeed POSSIBLE to operate the key functions of any university almost entirely online.

This, however, had the important side effect of forcing the academic community, including students, to clearly articulate the value of face-to-face learning and the campus-based experience. This is extremely valuable and we are already seeing more nuanced perspectives towards learning technology and blended learning."

Survey participant



Research School of Social Sciences,
Australian National University, Canberra, Australia
Photography by Mark Syke

TIME FOR AN OFFICE COMPROMISE?

Is it time for a compromise in the tussle for academic office space? Despite increased interest in working from home, private offices are not redundant. But who gets one, and why, might alter as academics rebalance their campus and home work schedules.

Underutilisation of academic office space is a long-standing issue for facilities management teams at universities, compounded by funding and space pressures on campus.

Most academics (72 per cent) in our survey work from a private office, varying from a low of 55 per cent in the UK to a high of 83 per cent in the US.

In contrast, comparable data from a recent Hassell study about commercial workplaces shows only 32 per cent of office workers around the world worked in a private office.

While universities can no longer justify policies that preclude working from home on the basis of productivity, neither can academics justify an exclusive space on campus to be occupied for half a working week.

Academic offices are prized and private spaces where confidential conversations, deep thinking, research and administration tasks can and do get done.

They also provide convenient storage for books, files, equipment and other academic paraphernalia. In the fierce competition for academic talent, they are sometimes seen as a useful enticement.

“Campus office space is a luxury which helps attract and retain research academics.”

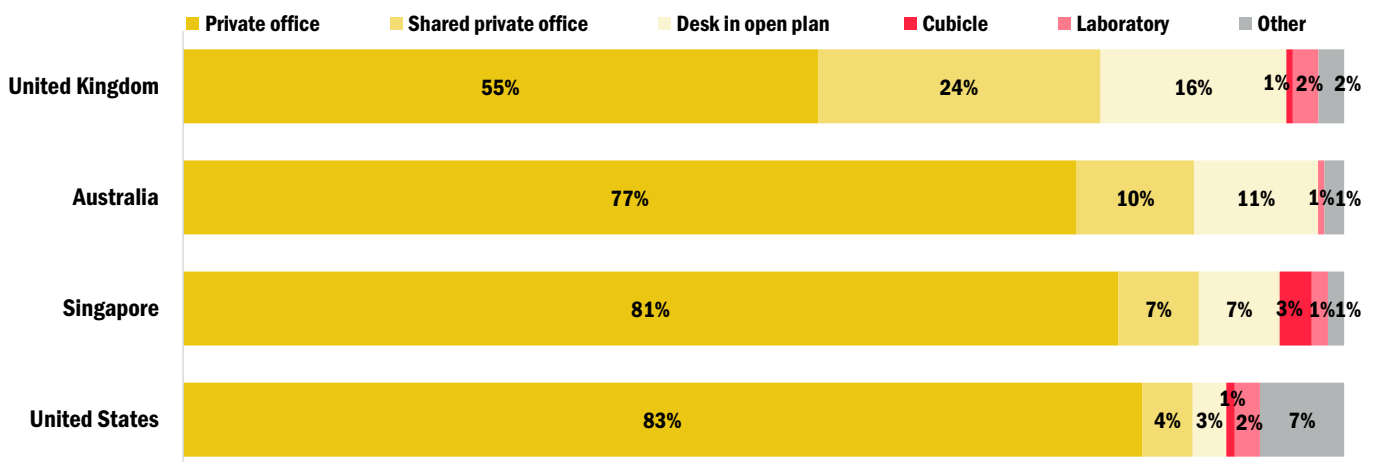


Figure 11. Primary workspace on campus - country

An uncomfortable truth

There are good reasons for many academics to have a private office, and there will be resistance, as there often is, to changes in space allocations and policies. While a compromise is in order, change will not be simple, nor is it likely to be uniform across the board.

Because our survey uncovered an uncomfortable truth:

The faculties that have the highest proportion of academics in private offices (compared to shared work spaces) want to spend the least amount of time on campus.

This adds fuel to the fire of the debate about space utilisation and an academic's need for dedicated quiet workspace.

Should academics that spend more time on campus get priority for private offices over those that have alternative preferences and options for places to work?

Or perhaps, less controversially, can universities negotiate with those academics open to working from home to use shared workspaces?

While almost half of all academics want to have their own space on campus (Figure 13), a third of those with a private office were willing to share their workspace in return for more time working at home.

This is a potentially significant and logical trade-off for universities seeking to improve their space utilisation, and for academics seeking to work more flexibly.

“I sincerely hope the pandemic is not used as an excuse to compound the drive to push us out of our offices and into open-plan, or worse, home office work.”

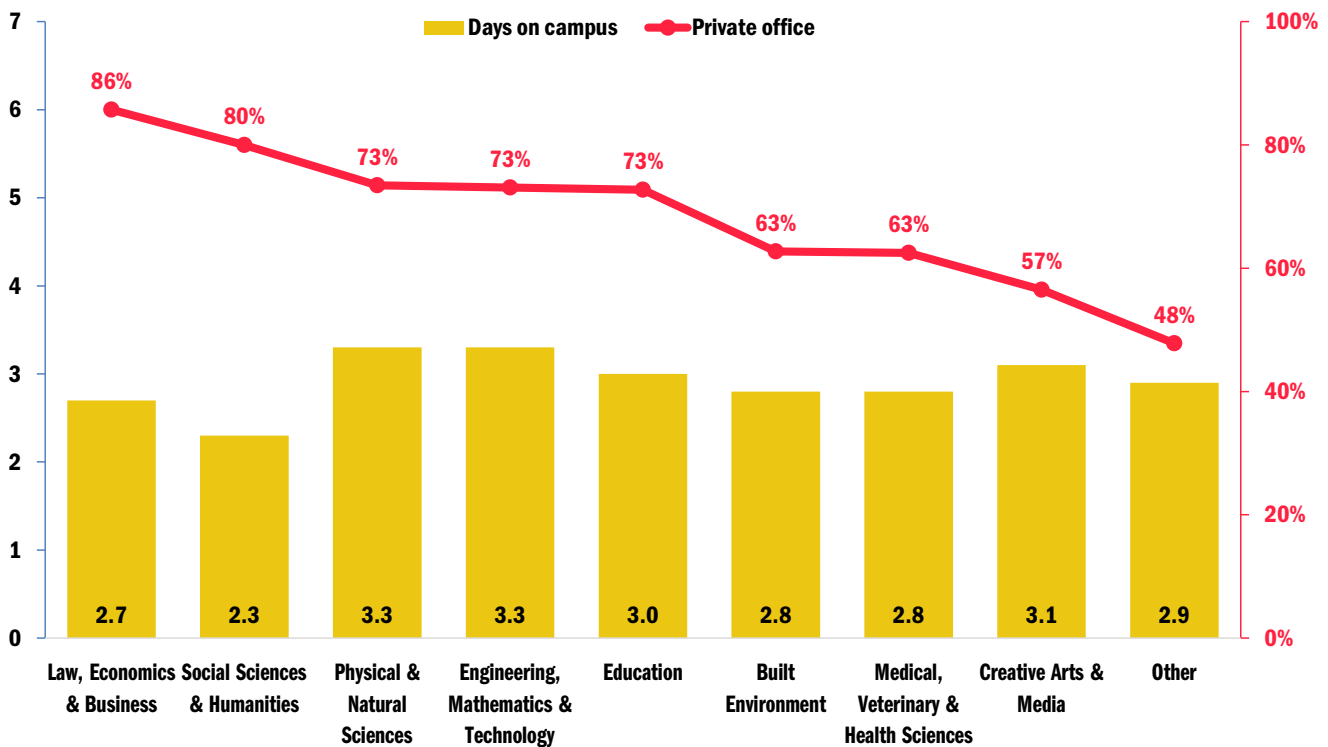


Figure 12. Proportion of private office to preferred time on campus, by faculty

Where to do what?

The high proportion of staff working in private offices in universities undoubtedly contributes to the sentiment in our survey of the campus as a productive workplace that enables concentration and connection to colleagues. Curiously, that does not necessarily translate to a perception of productivity. (Figure 13)

To understand why academics need and want private offices, we looked at the tasks that they would like to do on campus and at home in the future.

Most academics would prefer a combination of working both at home and on campus to undertake all three tasks of research, teaching and meetings. (Figure 14)

This makes perfect sense because teaching is rarely a full day activity, and there will often be time in between lectures and tutorials to complete other tasks, including research, management and administration.

How will universities balance staff preferences to work from home and on campus while maintaining a vibrant campus and apportioning workspace fairly and efficiently?

The answer is likely to be more shared spaces, where staff can work, meet and socialise, and which will come in a variety of shapes and sizes: bookable or co-working spaces, shared offices, team zones, quiet hubs, or cross- departmental drop in lounges.

Universities can also work toward agreed minimum benchmarks of office use for staff who want flexible work arrangements. This must be accompanied by more bookable work and meeting space, and generous provision of secure storage for academics without a private office on campus.

While the office perks of personal book shelves, private space and the prestige that comes with having an office on campus may not be replicated in a shared space, other benefits (working from home, equitable space allocations, window views for all, and better collaborative and social spaces) may go some way to compensating for the loss of a room of one's own.

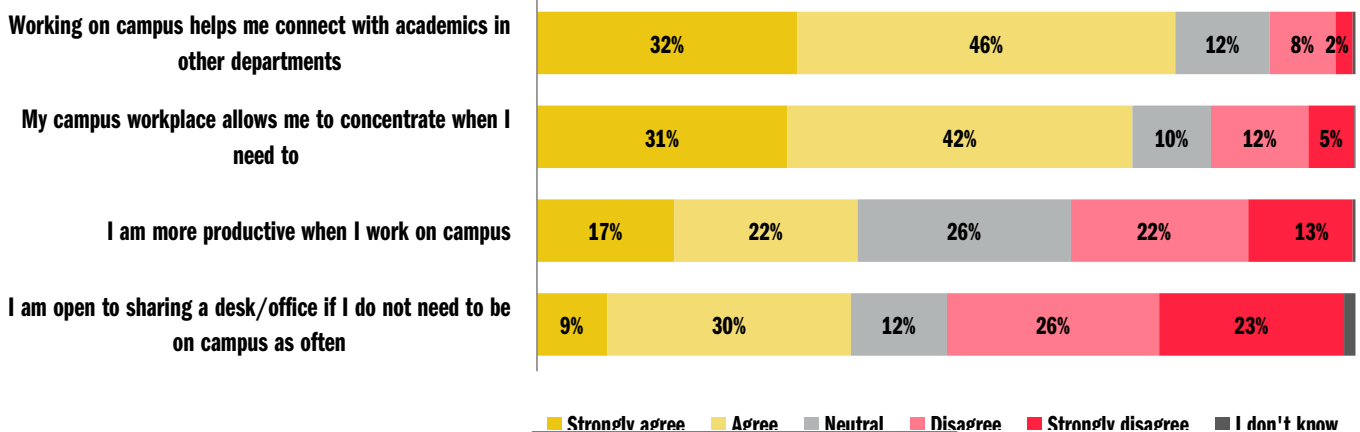


Figure 13. Academic sentiment about the campus environment

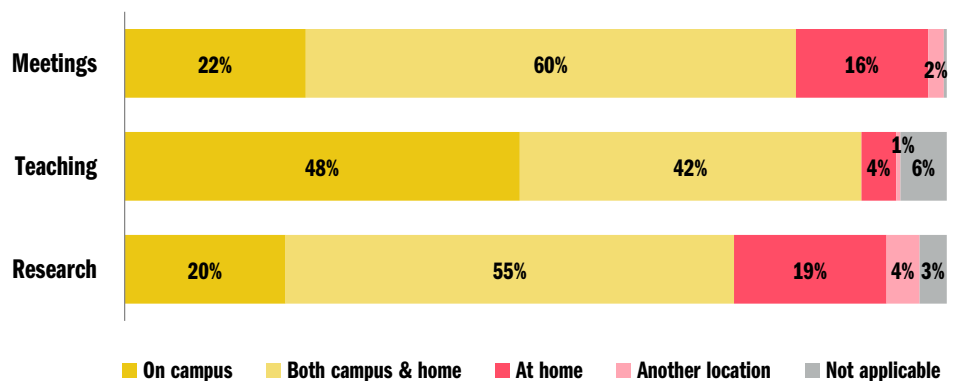


Figure 14. Preferred locations for tasks

A PLACE FOR PEOPLE

There is a very real possibility of less people on campus unless universities act decisively to develop policies, programs, timetables, partnerships and spaces that allow people to come together.

Universities face many challenges to retain campus activity and use space to best effect. Our research suggests that their efforts should focus on the development of places and spaces for 'people work' because that is what academics and students are keen to do on campus. And that is what will entice people back together.

Individual preferences for workspace and location should be balanced with the need to bring teams together. And perhaps the pandemic is the impetus required for universities to develop a more diverse cross section of campus users — not just students and staff, but importantly, industry. If ever there was a time to invite industry partners onto campus, this is it.

Yet our research indicates many academics are ambivalent about external engagement. This may reflect a well-known wariness that commercialisation could undermine academic freedom and the benefits of basic and theoretical research.

But stronger links between academia and industry has long been a strategic goal of universities, in the interests of translating ideas into reality, developing research talent and attracting increasingly scarce funding. There's now another reason to promote the benefits of industry engagement — the reinvigoration of campus.



Li Ka Shing Library, Singapore Management University
Singapore
Photography by Hassell

A campus people love

The post-pandemic campus will be a place for academics, students, professional staff and external partners to learn, share ideas, create friendships and develop professional networks.

The good news is that for many universities, the work to make this happen started well before the pandemic hit.

Spaces for students to collaborate have proliferated over the last decade in informal learning hubs, libraries and other innovative group-oriented spaces. The same must now happen for university staff, including academics.

These places might be new shared office workspaces, or upgrades to social areas within faculty buildings. Some universities may need to focus on facilities for networking events, or coworking and bookable meeting rooms across campus for staff filling in work time between teaching sessions.

As for the 'paper work' that supports all the 'people work', some will be delivered at home, some on campus, and almost certainly most academics will do a bit of both, wherever and whenever it is convenient.

But campuses that prioritise people will deliver the greatest rewards to staff and students, and help universities make good on their mission to research and educate for the benefit of the communities they serve.

“I am looking forward to returning to live classrooms and the hectic demands of navigating a workday among panicking students and departmental politics.”



Melbourne Life Sciences Precinct
The University of Melbourne, Australia
Photography by Earl Carter

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