Polis pilot: crowdsourcing consensus on contentious issues
Plain Language Statement – Polis conversation

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Thank you for your interest in participating in this project. Here, you can find further information so you can decide if you would like to take part.

What is this project about?
This project is piloting the use of *Polis*, an **innovative online platform for research and digital democracy**, amongst University of Melbourne staff and students.

Staff and students at the University are invited to participate in an online 'Polis conversation' about issue of staff air travel and its climate change impacts. The output from the conversation will inform policy decisions within the University on this issue. Polis is designed to help us have **more productive and nuanced online discussions about contentious issues.**

It highlights points of **consensus**, while respecting **diversity of opinion** amongst **large groups** of people. It combines qualitative, quantitative and participatory methods to do this.

You will be able to see a **visual map of patterns of agreement and disagreement in real time as the discussion evolves**.

Tools like this are highly valuable as communities try to work through **complex decisions on issues like climate change**. The use of Polis is growing internationally, but so far it has barely been used in Australia, in universities, or in contexts relating to climate change or disasters.

Based on what we learn from this pilot, **we will provide training for staff and students** interested in using Polis.

Do I have to participate?
Participation is completely voluntary. Your participation in this project or lack thereof will not have any negative impact on their employment or scholastic endeavours. You have the right to withdraw from the project at any time without explanation. If you do so, the data you have provided will be retained, but no further data from or about you will be collected.

If I decide to participate, what will I do?
You will be asked a few simple questions about yourself on the next page. Then we will send you an email with a link to the online Polis 'conversation' about the issue of staff air travel and its climate change impacts. On the Polis webpage, you will be shown statements that

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other people have written about this issue, and you can vote either 'agree', 'disagree' or 'pass'. You can also write a new statement if you like, which other participants can then either agree or disagree with. Your votes and comments will be anonymous.

As time goes on, you'll be able to see a map of the opinion groups that emerge, so you can see patterns of agreement and disagreement. The Polis online 'conversation' will stay open for two weeks, and we will email you every few days reminding you to check back in and vote on new comments, if you wish.

Once the conversation closes, the results will be shared within the University to inform formal decision-making processes. These processes will focus on points of consensus: that is, statements that were agreed upon by most people from *all the different opinion groups*. If you wrote one of these statements, you may be invited to take part in these formal decision-making processes.

You may also be contacted to invite you to participate in an interview or survey about your experience of the Polis conversation. If you are contacted about this, it is completely optional

What are the possible benefits?

By participating in this project, you will have the opportunity to express your views alongside other University of staff and students. The collective result will meaningfully inform formal decision-making on the issue of staff air travel emissions.

Participating is also an opportunity to learn directly about the Polis platform. Insights we gain through the piloting process will be shared with University staff and students in early 2023, for those interested in using it in future.

What are the possible risks?

There are no direct risks of participating in this study. However, if you do experience distress, we encourage you to make use of the support services available to [staff] and [students]. You can also withdraw from the project at any moment.

Will I hear about the results of this project?

Yes. As the Polis conversation progresses, you will see a real-time map of the 'opinion landscape' on the webpage. After the conversation closes, you will receive more detailed information about the findings. We will also produce training materials to guide future uses of Polis based on the insights from this pilot project.

What will happen to information about me?

Any comments you make in Polis are anonymous, unless you choose to share information that identifies, or may identify, you. The data from the Polis conversation will be analysed and summarised in real time, so you will be able to see how the conversation is progressing.

The identifiable data you provide when you register to take part will be stored securely and password protected so that only the researchers can access it. This data will be linked with the Polis data and used for analysis. Findings will be used to develop training materials for

staff and students about using the Polis tool. The data may also be used in research publications and potentially student theses.

Your email address may also be used to notify you of opportunities to take part in related processes after the Polis conversation is over. For example: to be interviewed about your experience of the process; to discuss your ideas with formal decision-makers; or to participate in another online Polis conversation at the University.

In any publications, data will be presented in a de-identified form. Anonymised data will be shared openly through an online repository after the completion of the project, and it may be used in future research. Identifiable data will stored securely for a minimum of 5 years after the research is completed, and during this period you may request to access the information held about you. After this, data will be permanently deidentified.

Please refer to our [Privacy Collection Notice](#) for further information about how we will collect and otherwise manage your personal information.

Who is funding this project?
This project is being funded by the Researcher Development Unit at the University of Melbourne.

Where can I get further information?
If you would like more information about the project, please contact: Phoebe Quinn, +61 3 8344 3097, phoebeq@unimelb.edu.au

Who can I contact if I have any concerns about the project?
This research project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of The University of Melbourne. If you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of this research project, which you do not wish to discuss with the research team, you should contact the Manager, Human Research Ethics, Office for Research Ethics and Integrity, University of Melbourne, VIC 3010. Tel: +61 3 8344 2073 or Email: [HumanEthics-complaints@unimelb.edu.au.](mailto:HumanEthics-complaints@unimelb.edu.au) All complaints will be treated confidentially. In any correspondence, please provide the name of the research team or the name or ethics ID number of the research project: 23743.