



WHAT SHOULD WE DO ABOUT STAFF AIR TRAVEL EMISSIONS?

A Polis conversation at the
University of Melbourne

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For internal
circulation only



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USING THIS REPORT

The purpose of this report is to **inform next steps** within the University of Melbourne on the staff air travel emissions issue.

The report is quite detailed so readers can delve into sub-topics of interest in different contexts.

It is for **internal circulation only** within the University of Melbourne, pending publication of findings.

GET IN TOUCH

Are you involved/interested in work relating to staff air travel at the University (within your team, Faculty or centrally)?

If so, please get in touch.

We'd like to hear about what you're doing, and we would be happy to discuss these findings further or help you to use them.

Contact

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In September 2022, all staff and students at the University of Melbourne were invited to have their say in an online discussion about how, collectively, we should navigate the issue of the climate impacts of staff air travel.

Using an innovative crowdsourcing platform called Polis, 173 people wrote 326 comments and voted almost 23,000 times over two weeks, watching the conversation evolve in real time. An [interactive automatic report](#) showing patterns of agreement and disagreement was shared immediately.

This report summarises the results of further analysis with the intent of guiding next steps within the University on this issue. It outlines how opinions were linked to participant demographics and circumstances, and presents an in-depth thematic analysis of the views expressed. It is for internal circulation only.

Two broad opinion groups emerged during the Polis conversation. Group A expressed more concern/resistance regarding possible changes/restrictions to reduce staff air travel, whereas Group B was more strongly in favour of a wide range of actions to reduce staff air travel emissions. Odds of belonging to Group A were higher for men, people who flew for work often, and those who said there were particular reasons their work needs to be conducted overseas.

Importantly, there was rough consensus *across* these opinion groups on some key principles and promising initiatives to pursue, as well as points of disagreement and uncertainty.

Most people agreed on the need to reduce emissions urgently, but opinions were more varied on implications for staff air travel (specifically and in relation to other emissions reduction options e.g., divestment). There was discussion of the need for more information to inform collective decision-making on this issue, and of questions of personal, professional and University responsibility.

There was rich discussion of principles and mechanisms for limiting lower value flying and prioritising the most worthwhile travel (based on purpose and fairness). Participants had diverse views on possible mechanisms for minimising non-essential travel, including provision of education, pursuing cultural change, implementing restrictions, and offsetting.

Participants also discussed a range of more specific initiatives the University could pursue to improve alternatives to flying (e.g., virtual conferencing, train travel), minimise emissions where air travel does proceed (e.g., encouraging multi-purpose trips, advocacy for cleaner aviation), and reduce pressures and incentives to fly (e.g., changing promotion standards, attitudes to local vs. international work, and funding systems).

Finally, this report outlines the discussion of potential co-benefits of reducing air travel beyond emissions reduction, and matters of equity that were raised across several elements of the conversation.

This report is intended support next steps within the University (centrally, and at Faculty, and team levels) on the issue of staff air travel emissions.

KEY POINTS OF CONSENSUS FOR NEXT STEPS



- ✓ General support for climate action
- ✓ The need for more information to support collective and individual decision-making
- ✓ Limiting low value air travel, while prioritising things like multi-purpose travel and work that can't be done virtually
- ✓ Spreading travel opportunities amongst staff
- ✓ Ensuring changes don't exacerbate inequities (e.g. ensuring junior researchers, staff with disabilities are not affected more)
- ✓ University advocacy for interstate rail and cleaner aviation
- ✓ Offsets can play a role, but require scrutiny
- ✓ Improving virtual/hybrid event **hosting** capabilities (views on improving virtual **attendance** options were more mixed)
- ✓ The need to reduce other emissions e.g. divestment and emissions from local commuting



KEY POINTS WHERE VIEWS WERE MIXED



The urgency of air travel reductions, and how this relates to other emissions sources

Matters of responsibility, autonomy, and where costs should be borne

Some aspects of travel prioritisation based on:

- purpose (e.g. meetings, sabbaticals, administrative travel, collaboration and stakeholder relationships)
- who is doing the travelling (e.g. career stage, 'under represented groups', academic or professional staff)

Reduction mechanisms e.g. education, cultural change, restrictions (e.g. caps and requirements to justify travel)

Offsets (some aspects)

Virtual meeting/conference attendance experience improvements

Incentives for interstate travel by train or electric car instead of flying

Changes to performance expectations, and to how international vs local work is valued

Time and cost savings as co-benefits of air travel reduction



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THE POLIS CONVERSATION

An innovative, interactive process

Over **two weeks in September 2022**, all **staff and students** at the University of Melbourne were invited to have their say in an online discussion about how, collectively, we should navigate the issue of staff air travel emissions.

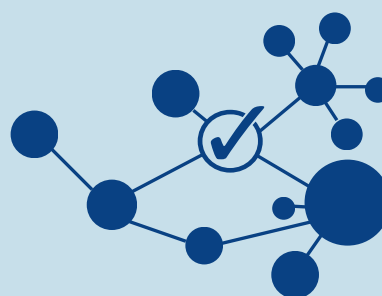
What should we do about staff air travel emissions at the University of Melbourne?

173 staff and students wrote **326 comments** expressing their views in response to this question.

They **voted almost 23,000 times** on each other's comments (agree, disagree or pass), and watched the conversation evolve in real time.

The conversation was run using **Polis**, an innovative crowdsourcing platform designed to help large groups discuss contentious issues and find points of **consensus**.

For more information about Polis@UOM, visit go.unimelb.edu.au/rg2s or contact Phoebe Quinn: phoebeq@unimelb.edu.au



The information that was provided to participants as they took part in the conversation can be viewed at: go.unimelb.edu.au/vm8s.

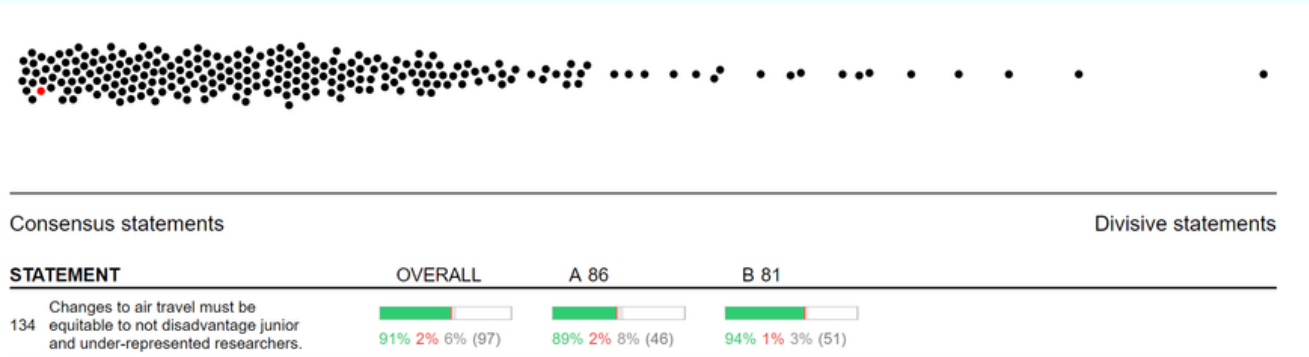
Participants answered some background questions before taking part in the Polis conversation, including questions about demographics and circumstances relating to air travel (see '*Participants and Opinion Groups*').

Real time analysis

Polis generated an interactive automatic report, based on the patterns of agreement and disagreement.

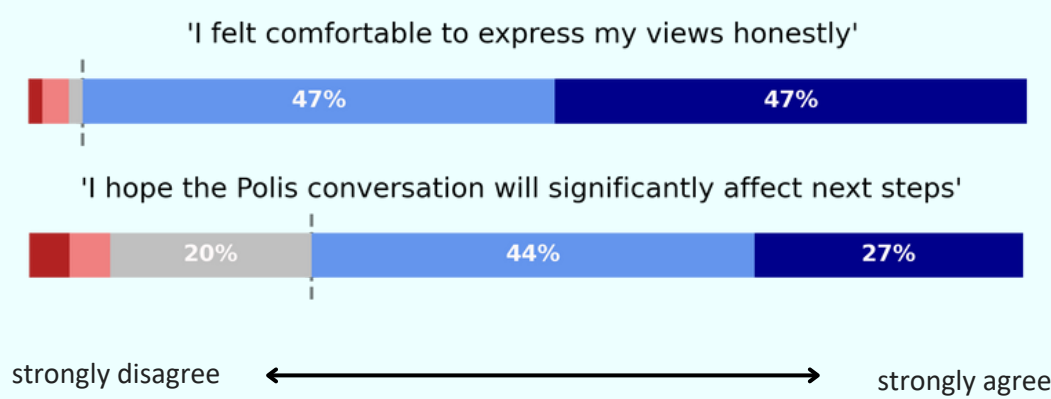
The automatic report was made available to all participants immediately, as the conversation was still unfolding, and participants could also see a simplified version of this automatic analysis directly on the webpage as they were voting and commenting.

The automatic report allows people to explore the full set of comments in the Polis conversation in a range of ways. This includes exploring seeing which comments were most divisive and which received rough consensus:



Feedback on the process

Seventy-five of the participants also completed a feedback survey. This showed that the vast majority **felt comfortable** expressing their views through the Polis process, and that the majority **hoped the conversation would significantly affect next steps** taken on this issue within the University (centrally and within Faculties). Further research on the process is underway.



PARTICIPANTS AND OPINION GROUPS

Overall, who participated?

Of the 173 participants, **61% were women**. Most participants were **staff members**: 64% were academic staff, 20% were professional staff, 24% were postgraduate students, and only 1% were undergraduate students.

Among the staff, there was a relatively **even spread across early/mid/senior career stages**. There was representation from **all Faculties and within Chancellery**, with the largest numbers from Faculties of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences (n=45) and Science (n=21).

More detailed data is provided in the description of the two opinion groups in the following pages

Two opinion groups

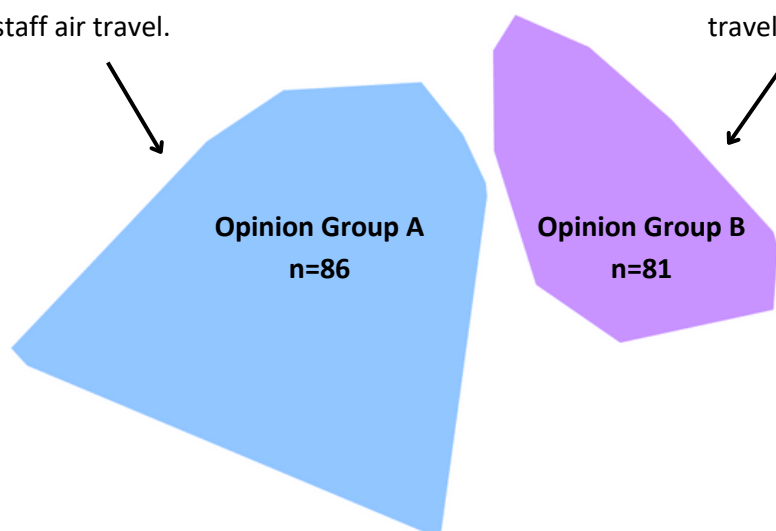
Polis automatically identified that two 'opinion groups' emerged during the conversation – **clusters of people** who tended to agree/disagree/pass on comments in similar patterns as each other.

This grouping of participants is displayed below by collapsing the votes data from all the comments into a two-dimensional '**opinion landscape**'.

The two opinion groups were roughly equal in number (note: the shapes in the image below show the *spread* of each group's members on the abstract 'opinion landscape', rather than illustrating group size).

Group A expressed **more concern/resistance** regarding possible changes/restrictions to reduce staff air travel.

Group B was **more strongly in favour** of a wide range of actions to reduce staff air travel emissions.



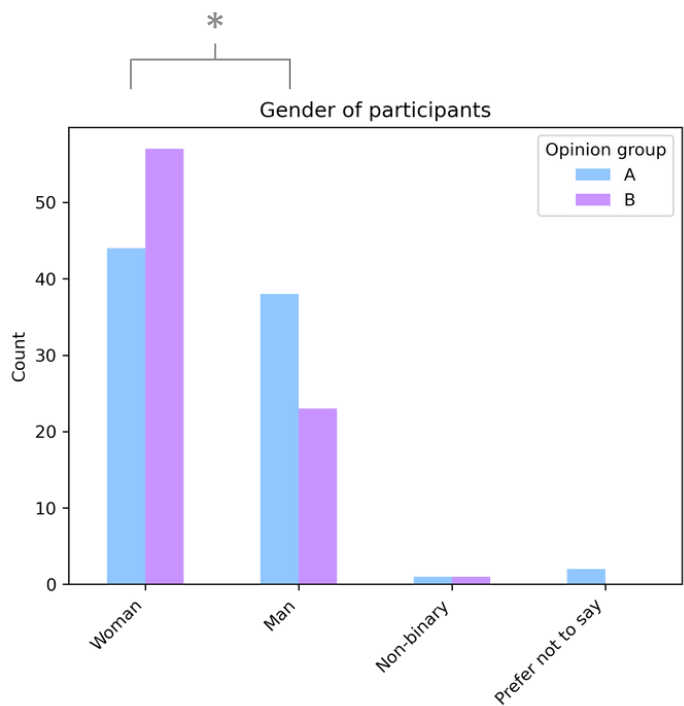
There were important points of '**rough consensus**' across these groups, as well as differences of opinion. The **nuances of opinions** – including patterns of agreement and disagreement within and between these groups – are explored in greater depth in the 'Thematic analysis of opinions' section of this report.



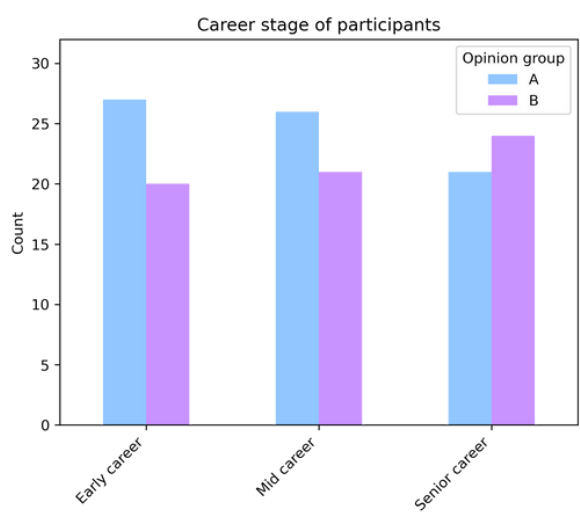
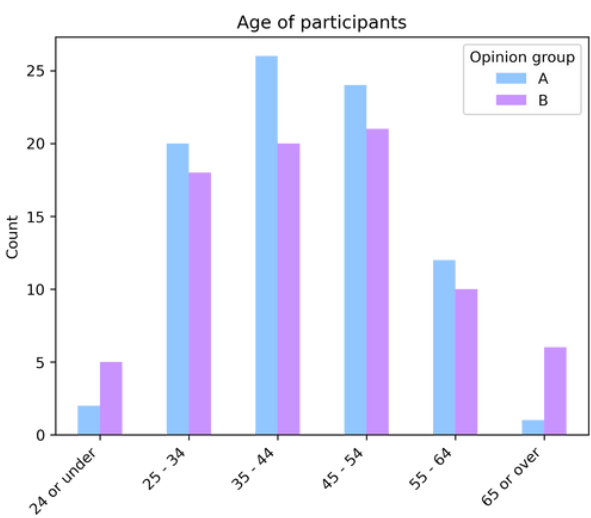
COMPARISON OF DEMOGRAPHICS

Were there demographic differences between Group A and B?

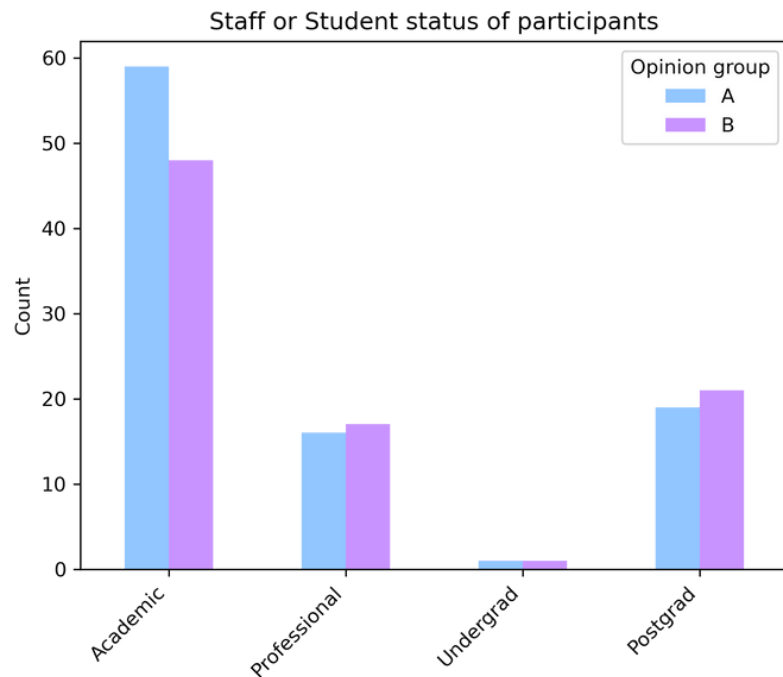
Gender was linked with opinion group. Participants who were **men had over twice (2.14 times) the odds of belonging to Group A** than women did ($p=0.02$). That is, men were more likely than women to express more concern/resistance around changes to reduce air travel emissions.



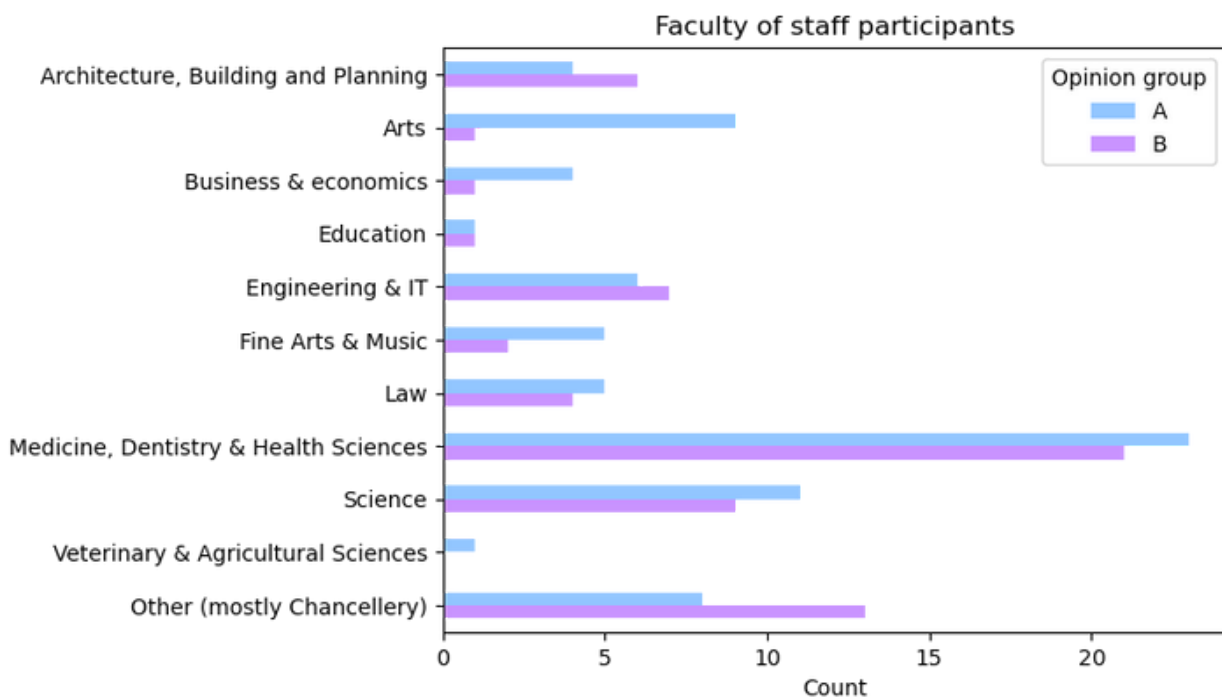
Differences in **age** distributions of the two opinion groups were not statistically significant ($p=0.8$), and neither were differences in **career stage** amongst staff ($p=0.3$).



Similarly, the opinion groups were not significantly different in terms of the proportions of **academic staff, professional staff or students.**



There was a **spread of participants across faculties**. This meant there were low counts in several faculties, so faculty representation in Groups A and B **could not be compared statistically**.



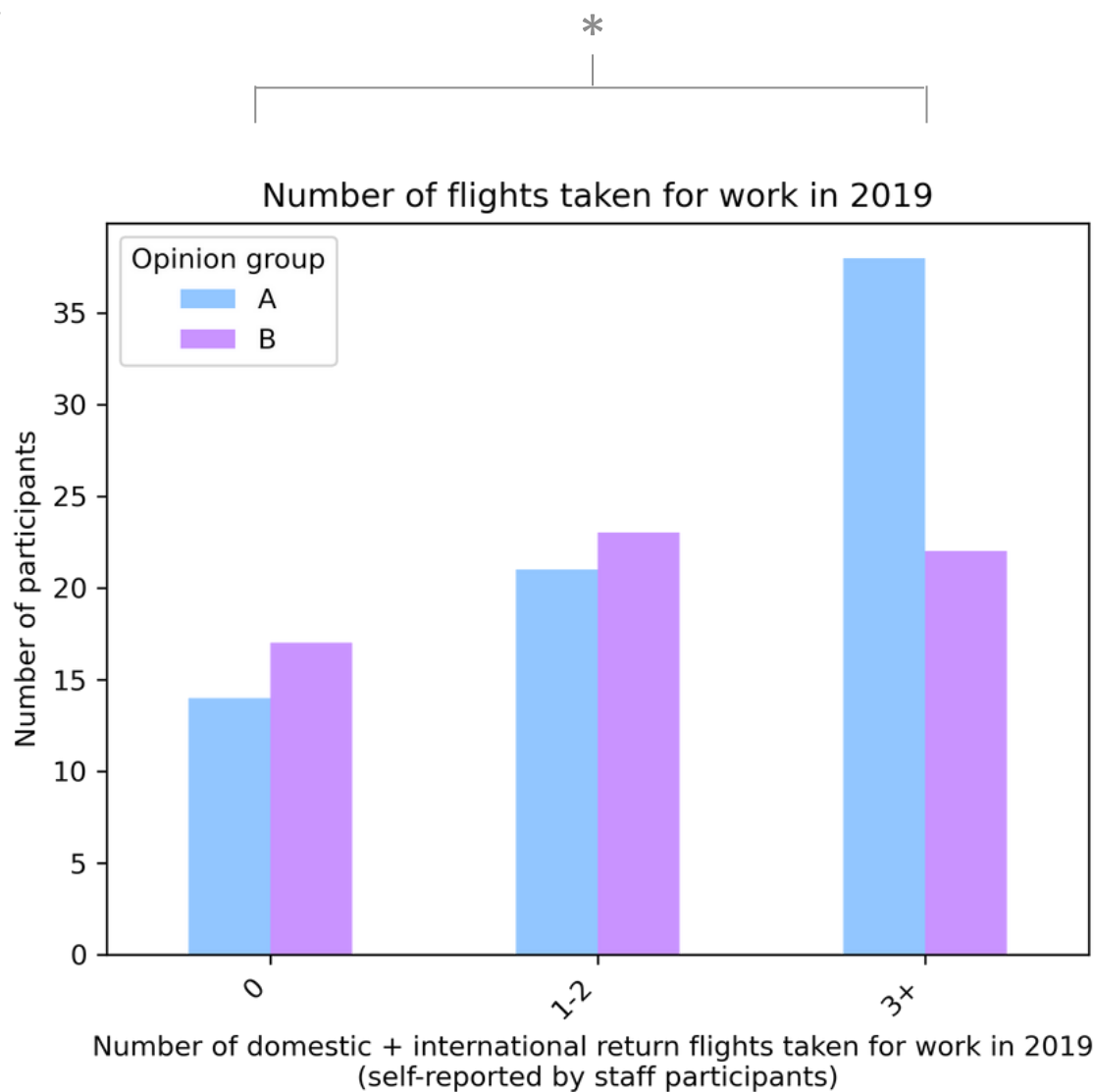
COMPARISON OF AIR TRAVEL CIRCUMSTANCES

Did staff in Opinion Groups A and B have different circumstances relating to air travel?

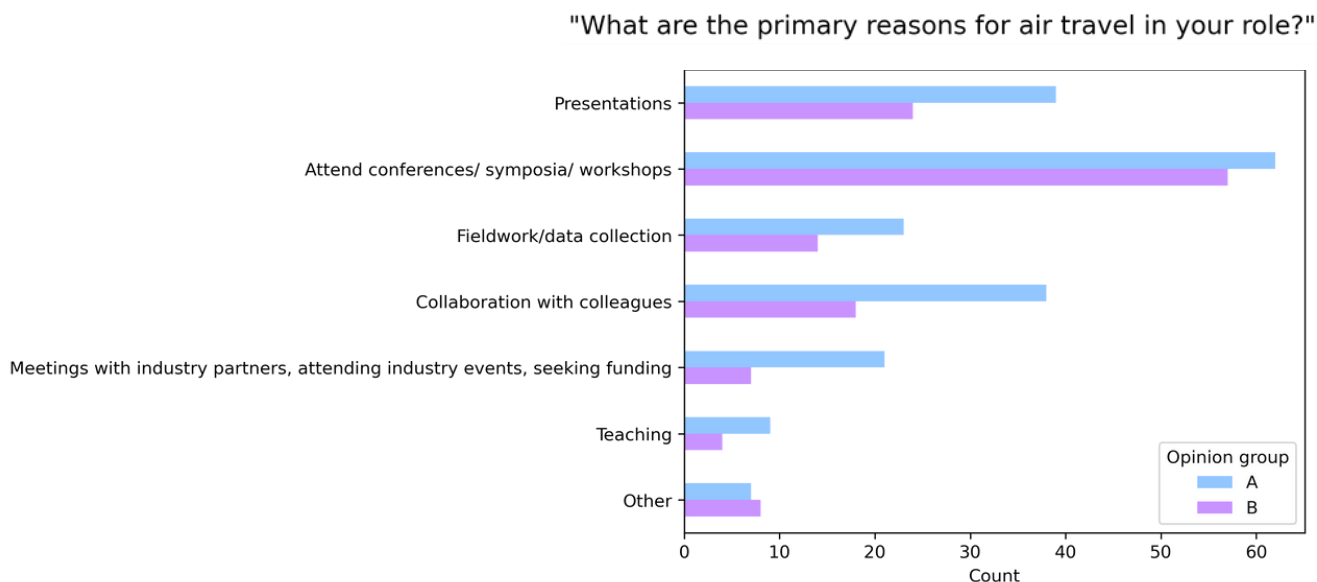
Prior to the Polis conversation, **participants who were staff members** were asked about their circumstances relating to work-related travel. This data was analysed to understand differences in these circumstances between Opinion Group A and B.

Staff who participated in the Polis conversation reported taking an **average of 1.62 international and 1.68 domestic return flights** for work in 2019 (i.e. pre-pandemic).

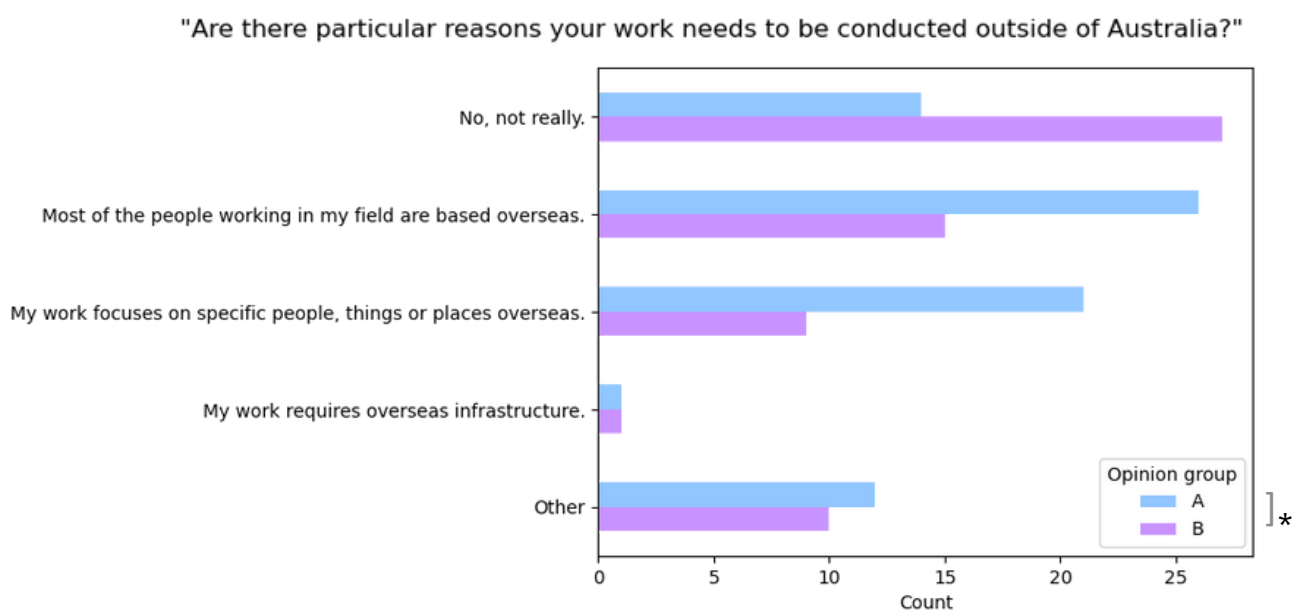
Those who reported taking **3 or more return flights** (international and domestic combined) were significantly **more likely to be in Opinion Group A** (less in favour of changes to reduce air travel) than those who did not fly at all for work in 2019, when controlling for gender and career stage. Further analysis shows this association **can mostly be attributed to international flights** (rather than domestic flights).



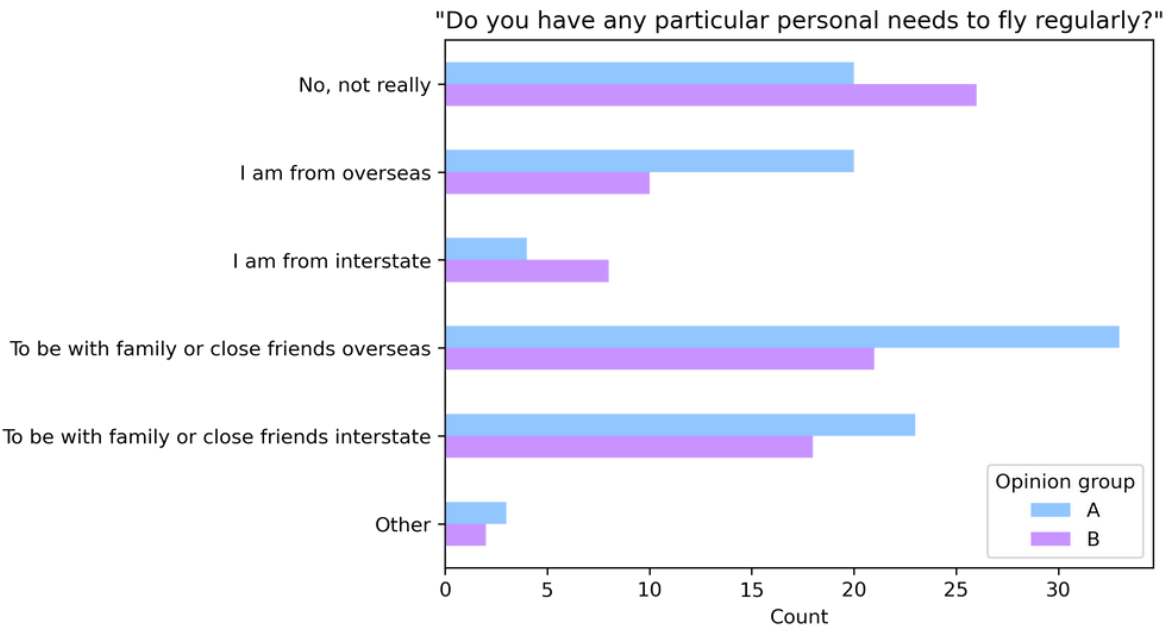
When asked to select the 'primary reason' for air travel within their role, attending conferences/symposia/workshops was the most common response. Differences in primary reasons between Group A and B were not statistically significant.



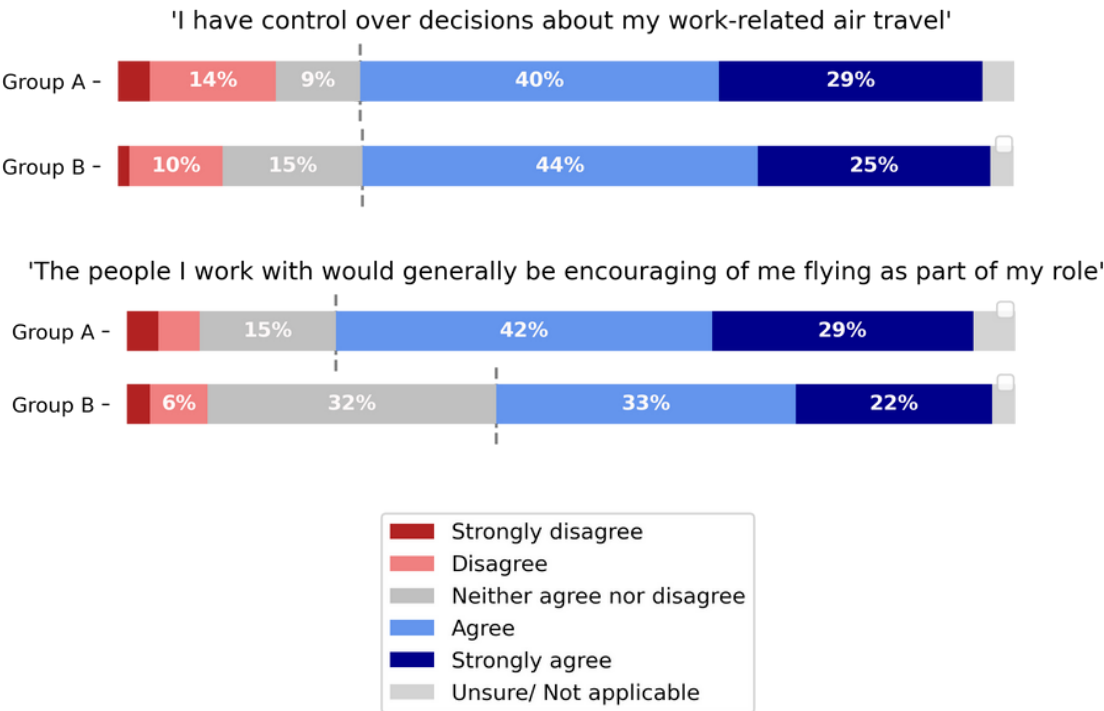
However, when asked if there were particular reasons their work needed to be conducted overseas, answers were **significantly associated** with opinion group membership ($p=0.03$). In particular, **staff who answered 'No, not really' were almost twice as likely to belong to Opinion Group B rather than Group A**. That is, people who did not see any particular need to conduct their work overseas were more likely to express views in favour of changes to reduce air travel emissions.



Staff were also asked if they had any particular personal needs to fly regularly. Although more members of Group A cited being from overseas or needing to be with family or close friends, responses were not significantly associated with opinion grouping ($p=0.2$).



Participants were asked about their autonomy in decisions about their work-related air travel, and to what extent they felt that flying was encouraged by the people they work with. There were no significant differences between the Group A and B on these questions.



THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF OPINIONS

About the thematic analysis

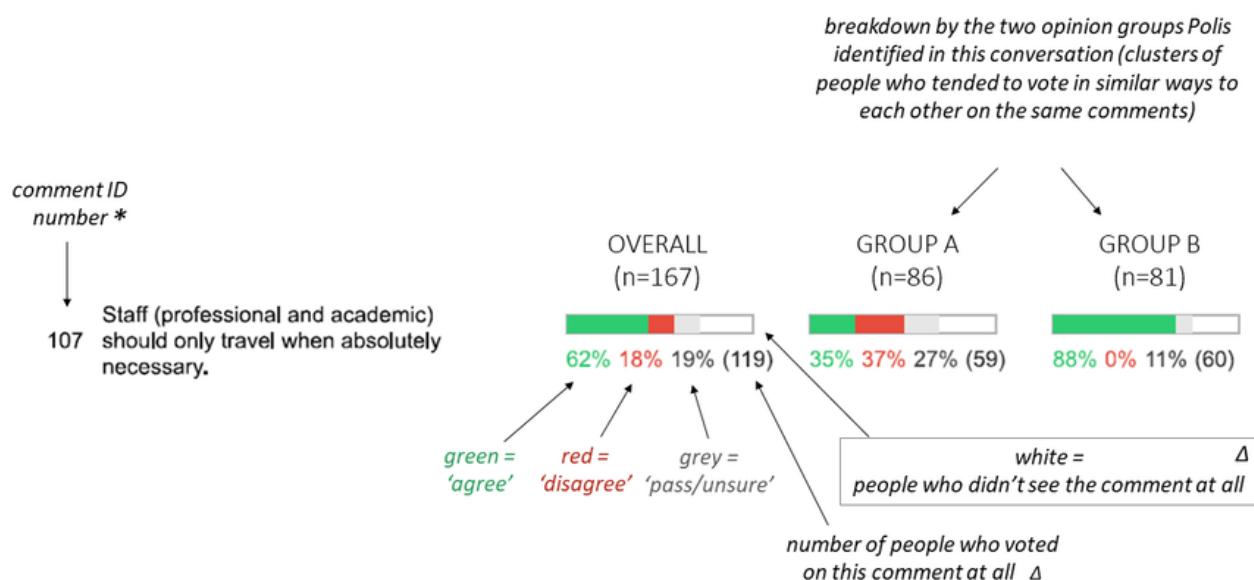
The rest of this report summarises a thematic analysis of all the comments within the Polis conversation. It integrates both the content of the comments, and the patterns of agreement and disagreement they prompted.

A full list of comments can be found in the interactive [automatic report](#) generated through Polis.

Feel free to take a look at the automatic report directly, and if you would like to raise any alternative interpretations of the data please don't hesitate to get in touch (Phoebe Quinn, phoebeq@unimelb.edu.au).

HOW TO INTERPRET THE AGREEMENT/DISAGREEMENT FIGURES:

Here's an example showing what the different parts of the plots in the following pages mean:



* Comment ID numbers are noted within the thematic analysis (e.g., 'c107') for reference. Refer to the [automatic report](#) for a full list of comments.

Δ Response numbers and white space varies across the comments because Polis shows comments to each participant one by one in a semi-random order, and people did not need to respond to each comment.



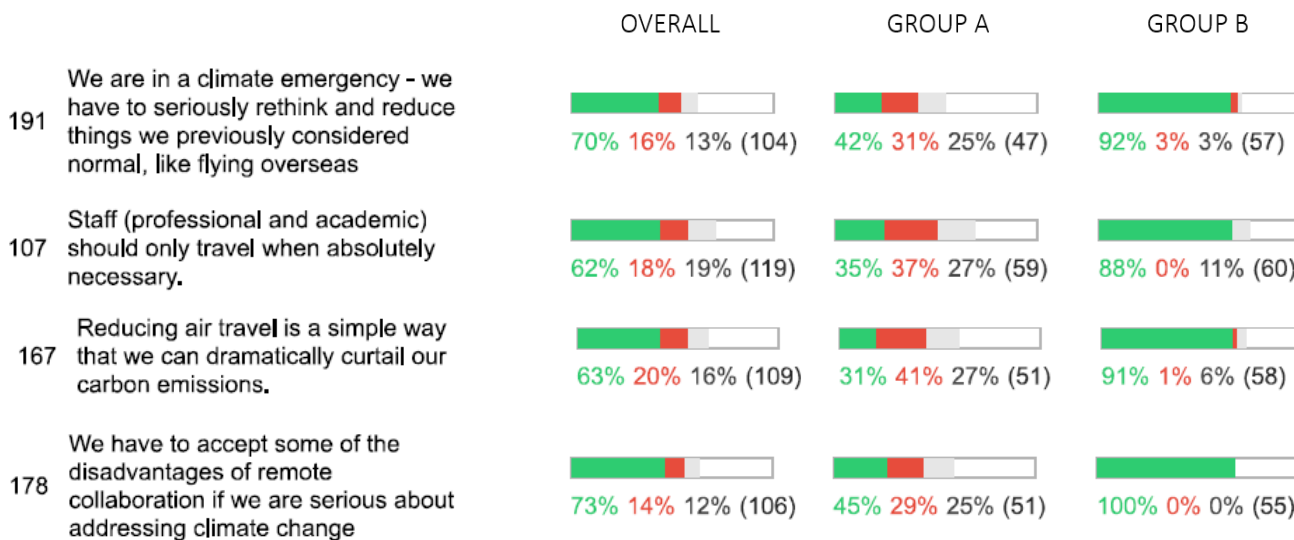
Do we need to reduce staff air travel emissions? How urgently?

GENERAL VIEWS ON AIR TRAVEL REDUCTIONS AND EMISSION REDUCTIONS NEED

Support for air travel emissions reduction **depended on how comments were framed**, including how specific they were about the implications for changes that would impact staff, and how this related to efforts to address emissions from other sources.

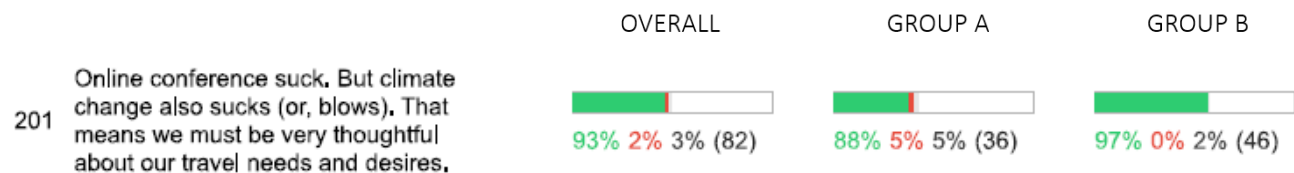
General attitudes on air travel reductions

When comments directly called for **reduced staff air travel**, there was **significant division** (c191, c202, c3, c107, c167, c178, c265, c210, c259, c103). Group B tended to be in favour of reduced flying, while Group A was mixed. For example.:

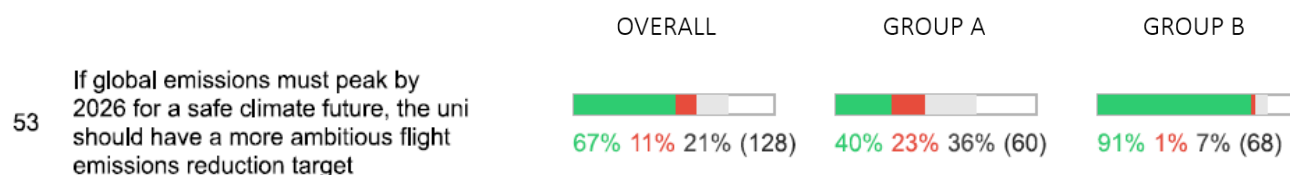


For guidance on how to interpret these bar charts, take a look at the explanation on the previous page.

The **exception** was the following comment which was widely endorsed even amongst Group A (this was one of the top 'consensus' comments in the whole conversation. Its more humorous phrasing and softer suggestion that we be 'thoughtful' may explain its popularity:

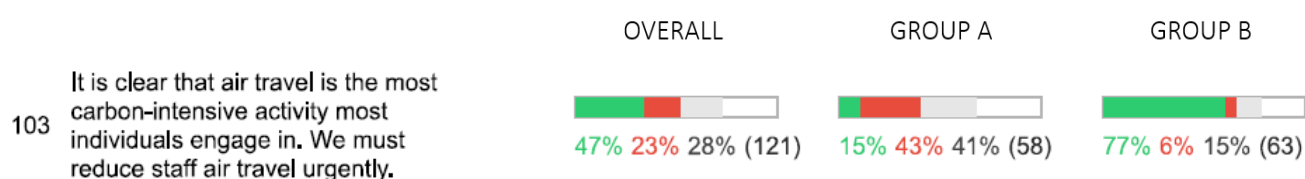


Similarly, Group A and B differed in their views on the [University of Melbourne Sustainability Plan 2030 target to reduce staff air travel emissions by 10% by 2025](#) from 2019 levels. Group B tended to agree with suggestions that the target **should be more ambitious**, whereas most of Group A were uncertain or disagreed (c181, c207, c53, c43), e.g.:

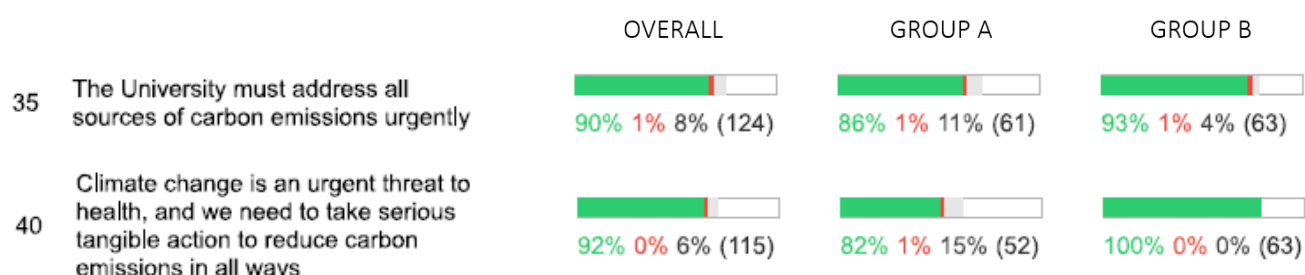


Air travel in the scheme of all emissions

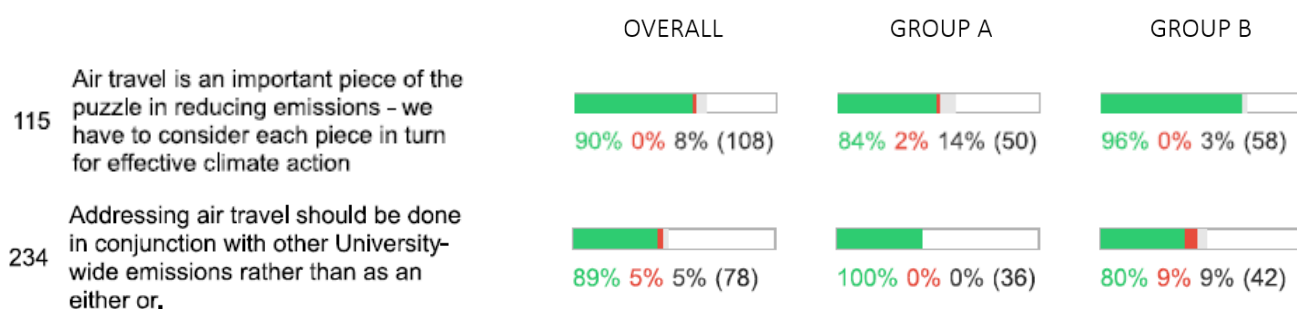
There was **division** (between and within the opinion groups) on comments that framed **air travel as (one of) the most important** emission sources to reduce (c322, 103, c267, c318) e.g.:



...but when comments were framed in terms of the urgent need for **general emissions reduction across all sources, almost everybody agreed** (c35, c40, c128). These were among the **most popular** comments in the whole conversation, e.g.:



Similarly, there was **rough consensus** on comments that asserted the importance of **reducing staff air travel emissions as part of general efforts to reduce emissions, as long as the comments did not mention the relative importance** of the various emissions sources (c115, c206, c234, c215, c109, c288, c106). Nuances in how this was phrased appeared to determine whether consensus was very strong in both groups, or whether there was a 5-10% level of disagreement in one of the opinion groups, e.g.:



206	Finding ways to support reduced air travel is an important part of the university's and academia's wider review of carbon emissions	 88% 4% 7% (84)	 72% 10% 16% (37)	 100% 0% 0% (47)
215	If our air travel emissions are a large proportion of our overall emissions, then we need to address them	 85% 4% 9% (83)	 76% 8% 14% (34)	 91% 2% 6% (49)

The exception was the following comment:

	OVERALL	GROUP A	GROUP B
57	We should discuss all the ways to achieve emissions reduction holistically, rather than talking about air travel in isolation. 71%20%8%(135)	86%9%4%(66)	56%31%11%(69)

Presumably, this was because some **Group B members interpreted this as stalling/resistance to addressing air travel emissions**. This is supported by the fact that **Group B tended to unanimously agree with comments criticising perceived pushback** to changes to staff air travel (c178, c265, c210, c259, c207), e.g.:

	OVERALL	GROUP A	GROUP B
265	55% 19% 24% (61)	8% 44% 48% (25)	88% 2% 8% (36)

See also *Reducing emissions from other sources*.

Views on the link between staff air travel and aviation emissions

Different views on **the extent to which staff air travel necessarily generates aviation emissions** were also apparent. A **significant proportion indicated doubt over this link** by agreeing with the following comment, especially within Group A.

	OVERALL	GROUP A	GROUP B
168	34% 48% 17% (102)	54% 31% 13% (44)	18% 60% 20% (58)

However, most people disagreed with the following suggestion that **"we don't need to worry"** about reducing air travel because of the possibility of more efficient fuels (298, see also c111), although there was significant uncertainty:

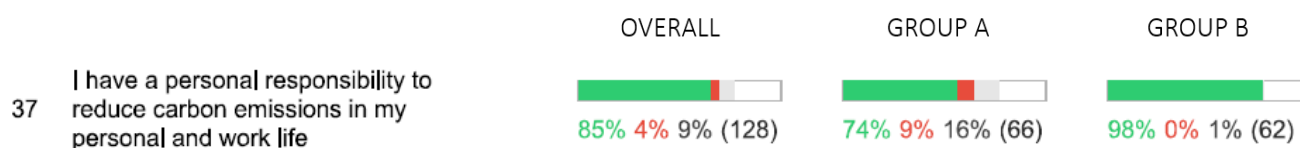
	OVERALL	GROUP A	GROUP B
298	We don't need to worry as much about reducing air travel because more efficient airline fuels are being developed (e.g. cooking oil as fuel: https://bit.ly/3L5Y99b) 4% 61% 34% (49)	9% 42% 47% (21)	0% 75% 25% (28)

See also *Data to inform collective response* and *Providing information supports to staff*.

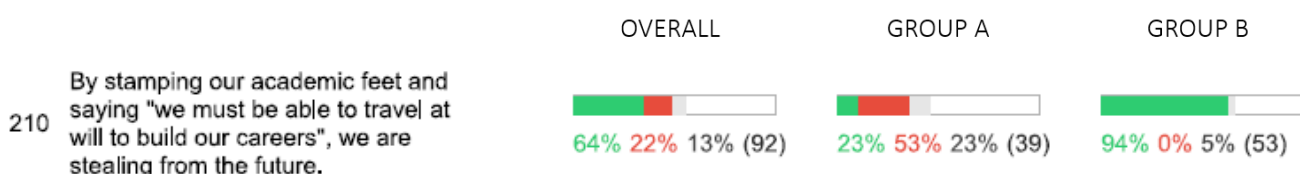
RESPONSIBILITY

Personal responsibility

Most participants felt **personal responsibility to generally reduce emissions**:

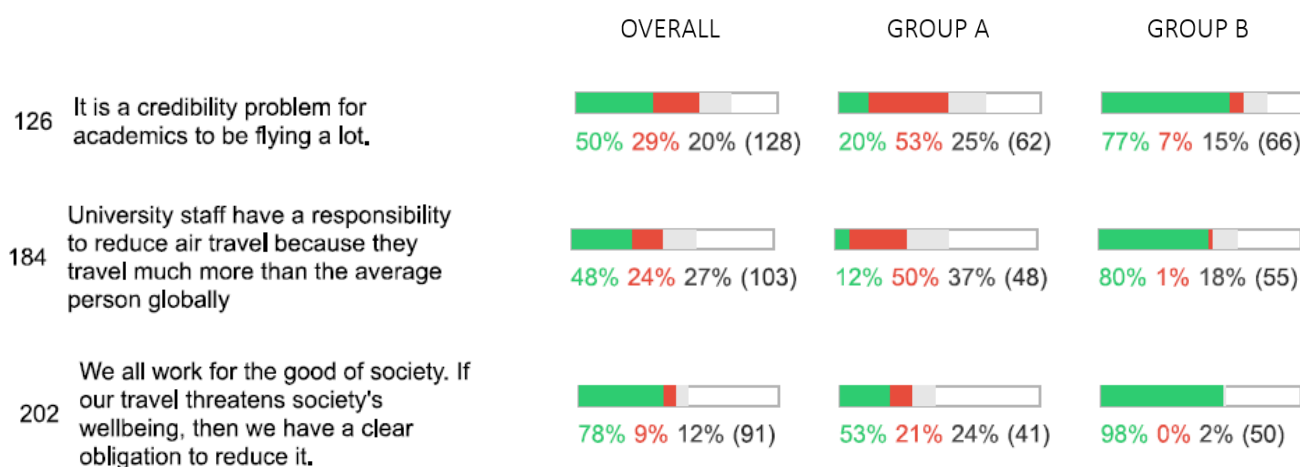


But there was **division on the implications of this responsibility for air travel**. Group A and B tended to respond very differently on these issues, e.g.



Professional responsibility

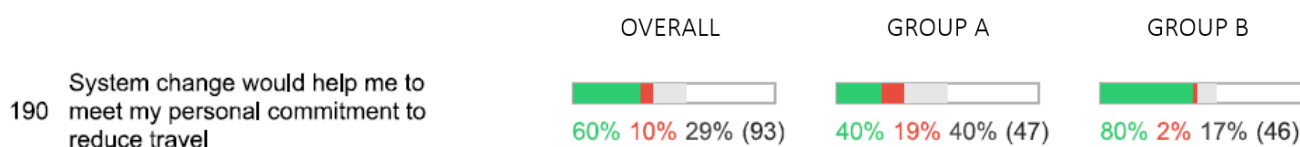
There were **mixed** views on **whether university staff's professions bring extra personal responsibility** to reduce emissions, due to their position of **influence** (c220, c321), **credibility** concerns (c126), commitment to doing **social good** (c202), and **higher than average travel patterns** (c184), e.g.:



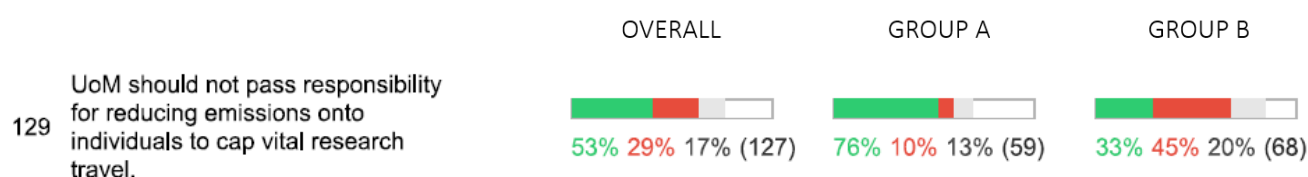
University responsibility

Views were also mixed (within and between the opinion groups) on the links between **individual, Faculty and University-level responsibility** (c316, c190, c130, c129, c6, c162, c249, c223, c175).

The following comment framed **individual and University-level responsibility as complementary** (c190):



...but some participants were concerned about the **University unfairly expecting individual staff to shoulder the responsibility** and burden. This included concerns about the **financial burden of offsetting flights** (c175, c6 - see *Offsets*) and the **burden of having travel restricted** (c130, c129), e.g.:

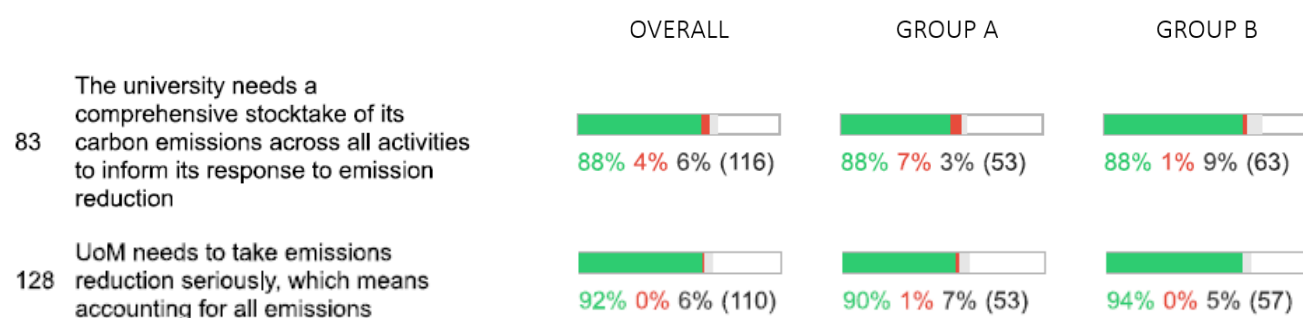


A suggestion that staff should **use their personal funds** for work-related travel was universally unpopular (c316).

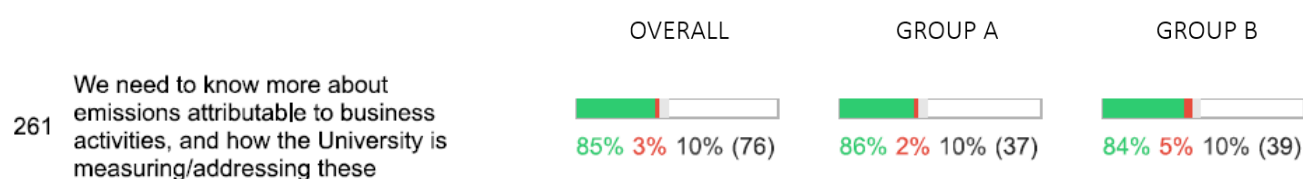
DATA TO INFORM COLLECTIVE RESPONSE

University-wide emissions accounting

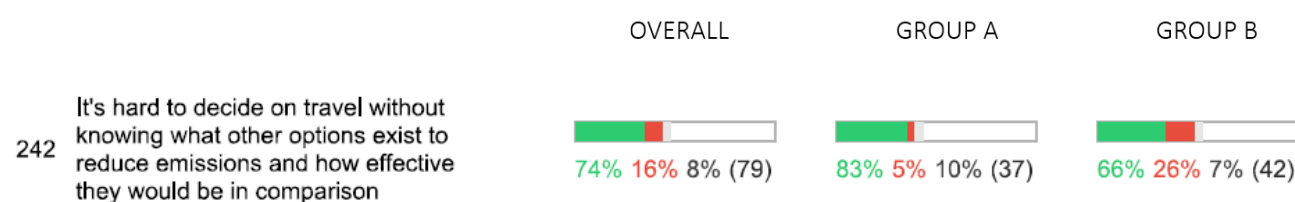
There was **rough consensus** on the **need for information on all emissions sources** to inform University-wide decisions on this issue (c83, c128):



...as well as **information on how the university is currently measuring and addressing emissions**:

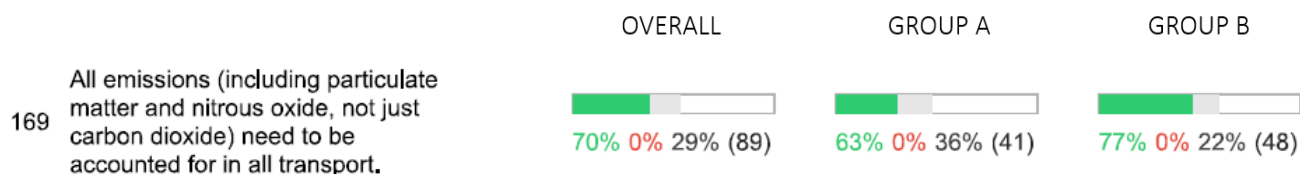


Comments calling for **comparisons of staff air travel emissions to other emissions** received more **mixed responses** in both opinion groups (c219, c164, c197, c242, c241) (see *Reducing emissions from other sources*) . The **most popular of these related generally to understanding other options for reducing emissions**, rather than specifically focusing on a certain other activity (international student travel, local commuting, or internet/device use):



TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN EMISSIONS ACCOUNTING

Two comments addressed technical aspects of **approaches to emissions accounting**, arguably alluding to problems with current approaches. Most people agreed on the need to **count all forms of greenhouse gas** (not just CO₂) (c169):

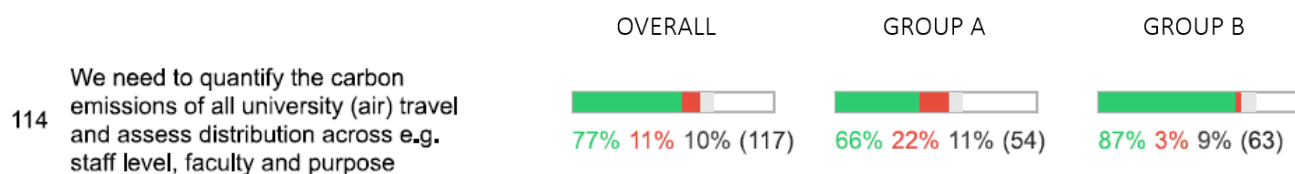


Comment 127 raised the issue of **counting indirect emissions** and expressed scepticism towards the **claim in the University's Sustainability Plan** that staff air travel made up 12.8% of the university's emissions in 2019 (with mixed responses and high uncertainty).

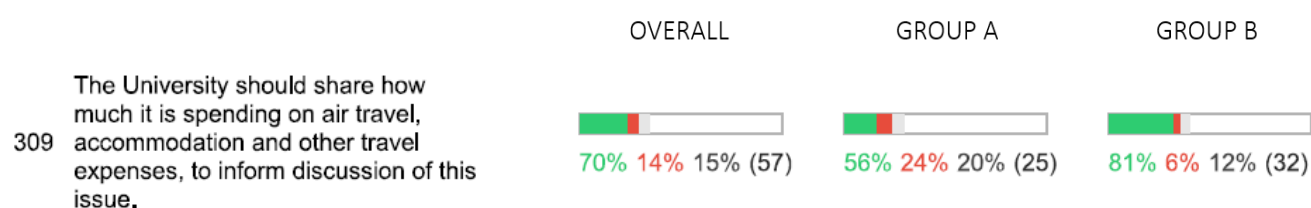
Current air travel patterns at UoM

Participants also discussed the **need for information on current air travel patterns amongst staff (and its impacts aside from emissions)** at the University, **to inform the collective approach** to addressing the staff air travel emissions issue.

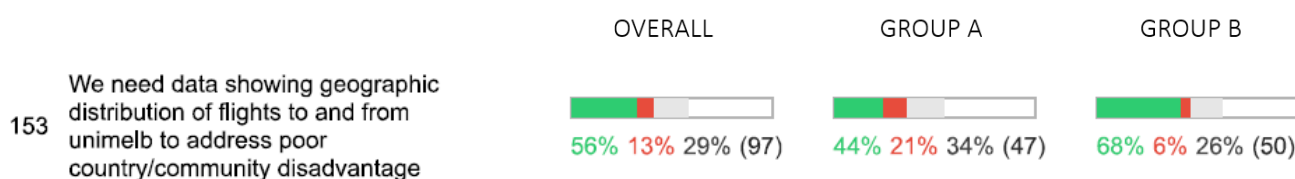
This included calls for information about **how current staff flights break down by level of seniority, faculty and purpose** (c68, c114, c142). These comments tended to be very popular with Group B, and moderately so with Group A, e.g.:



A call for information on current **expenditure** on air travel was popular with Group B, while Group A was more mixed:



Two comments called for analysis of **geographic distribution of current incoming and outgoing flights**, flagging issues of **global inequities** (privileging Europe and the USA over the Global South) perpetuated by and reflected in current flight patterns to and from the University (c28, c153). These received some support, especially from Group B (although uncertainty was high), e.g.:



REDUCING EMISSIONS FROM OTHER SOURCES

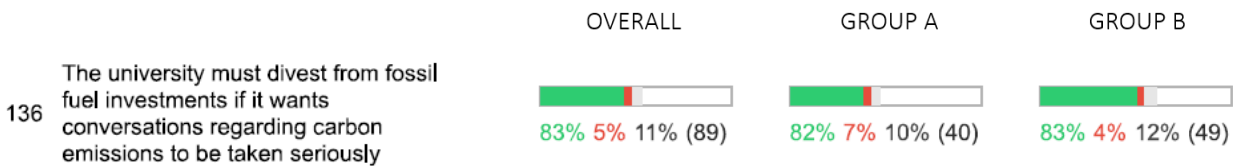
Although the scope of the Polis conversation was specific to staff air travel emissions, many comments raised **other emissions sources** and actions that should be taken either at the **University or individual level** to reduce these.

The other emissions sources raised were:

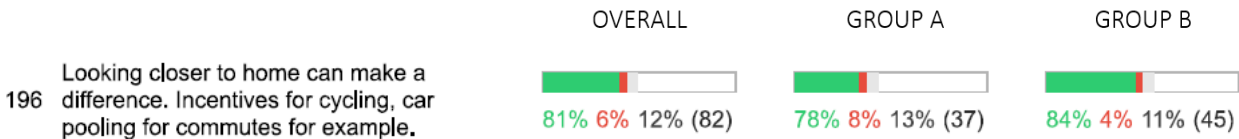
- buildings (heating, cooling, lighting) (c16, c209, c270)
- divestment (c136)
- animal products (c244)
- local commuting (c33, c196, c182, c197, c195, c267, c269)
- other flights linked with the University (aside from UoM staff flights):
 - International student flights (c307, c48, c93, c219, c164, c179),
 - local student flights (c148, c188)
 - incoming visitor flights (c42, c186)
- virtual communication (electronic devices and internet use) (c325)

There was **general agreement** on two comments on other emissions sources:

- a call for **divestment**:



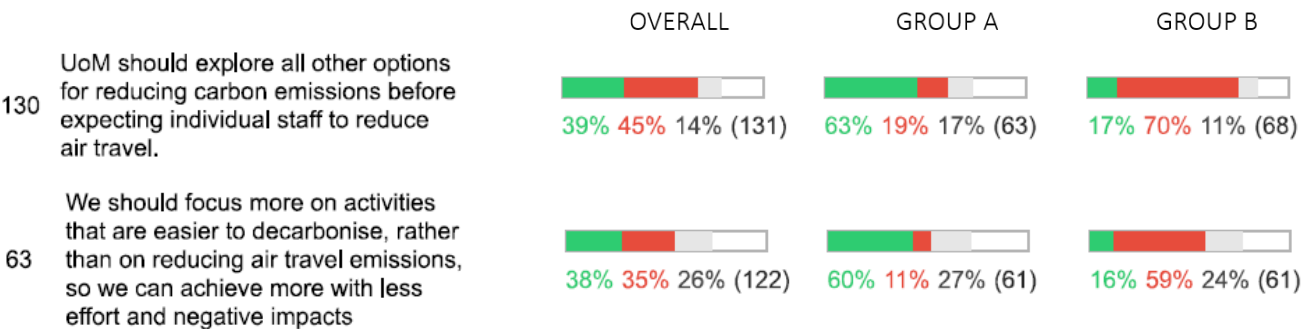
- and a suggestion for reducing emissions from **local commuting through University incentives**:



Beyond those two comments, responses were **mixed**. Patterns of agreement and disagreement appeared to depend on a combination of factors including:

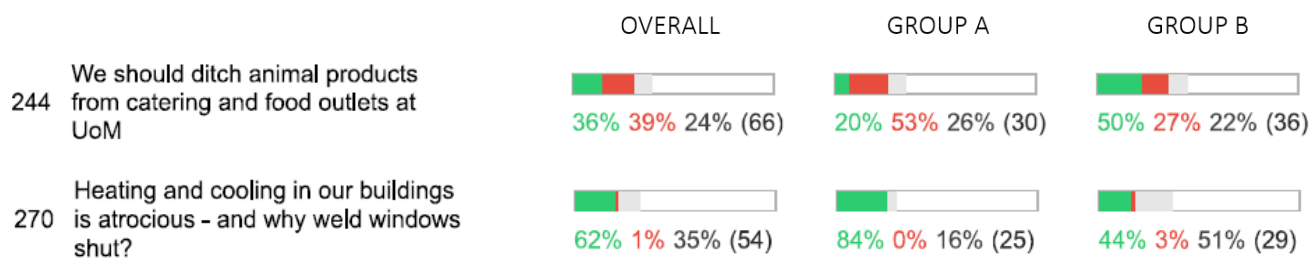
- the specific emissions sources raised; and
- how comments framed the implications of other emissions sources for action (or inaction) on air travel

One of the **most divisive issues** in the whole conversation was the question of whether other emissions sources should be addressed **before** efforts to reduce air travel. Group A tended to agree with this idea while Group B tended to disagree (c130, c63):



Many of the comments on other **specific emissions sources** also suggested these sources should be addressed either **before or concurrently with** efforts to reduce staff air travel emissions (c16, c209, c136, c307, c93, c219, c164, c42, c182). Many of these suggested that efforts on the air travel issue would be **undermined** if they approached it in isolation rather than holistically, either explicitly (c136, c93) or implicitly.

Some comments raised other emissions sources or proposed actions with **no explicit link** to the air travel emissions topic (c270, c179, c148, c188, c244, c196, c197, c195, c269). While these comment may appear off topic, their emergence in this conversation indicates that some participants saw them as relevant to the discussion. This is important to understand as it has **implications for the acceptability of measures to reduce staff air travel**. For example:



See also *Air travel in the scheme of all emissions*.

Emissions from other flights and transport

Participants seemed to **see emissions from other forms of transport as particularly relevant** to the conversation (local commuting and other flights).

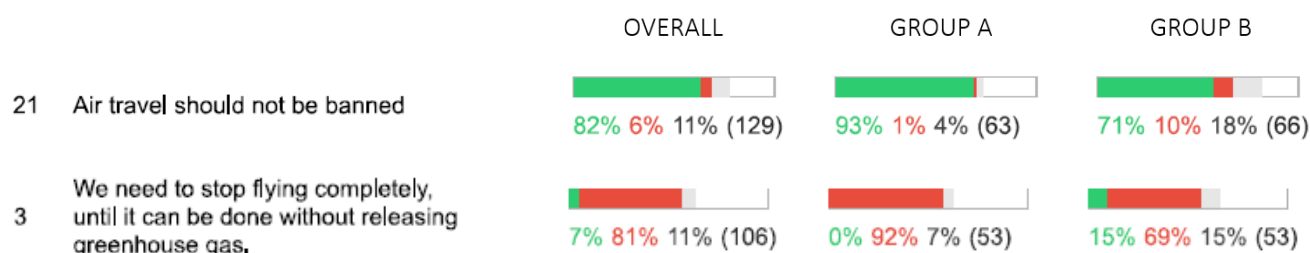
On emissions from **local commuting**: there was general support for initiatives to support staff to commute in more sustainable ways or work from home if they wish (c196, c259, c197), e.g. **incentives for cycling and carpooling, better end-of-ride facilities, and supporting working from home** (which was also raised as supportive of staff air travel reductions, c62). But Group B was mixed when comments implied that such initiatives were equally or more important than air travel reductions (c152, c195, c33).

On **non-staff flights** related to the University's activities i.e. flights taken by **international students** (c307, c48, c93, c219, c164, c179), **domestic students** (c148, c188) and **visitors** (c42, c186): views were mixed on the extent to which the benefits of such flights were worth the emissions, and implications for action.

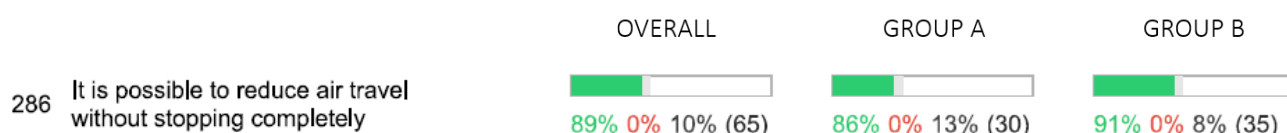
What general approach should be taken to reducing staff air travel emissions?

REDUCING VS. STOPPING AIR TRAVEL

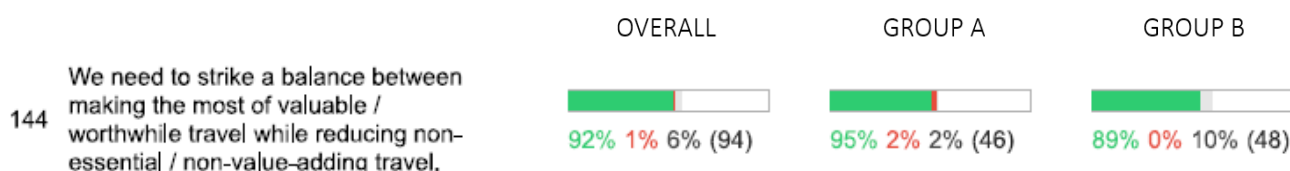
Most people didn't think air travel should be **banned or stopped completely** - although a significant minority did or were uncertain (17-18%):



There was **consensus** that flying could be **reduced** without stopping completely:



...and that reduction efforts should be based on consideration of what air travel is **most "valuable/worthwhile"**:



WHAT AIR TRAVEL SHOULD BE PRIORITISED?

So, what travel was seen as **higher and lower value**?

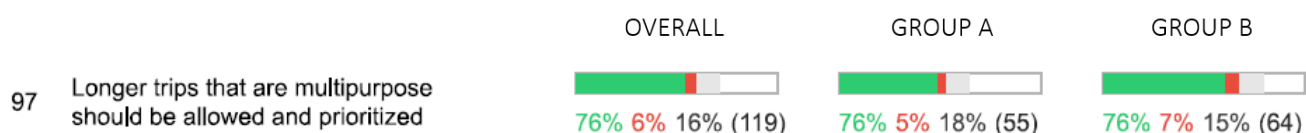
There were **two broad factors** that were raised in terms of which travel should be prioritised:

- **the purpose** of the travel
- considerations of fairness and equity in **who is doing the travelling**.

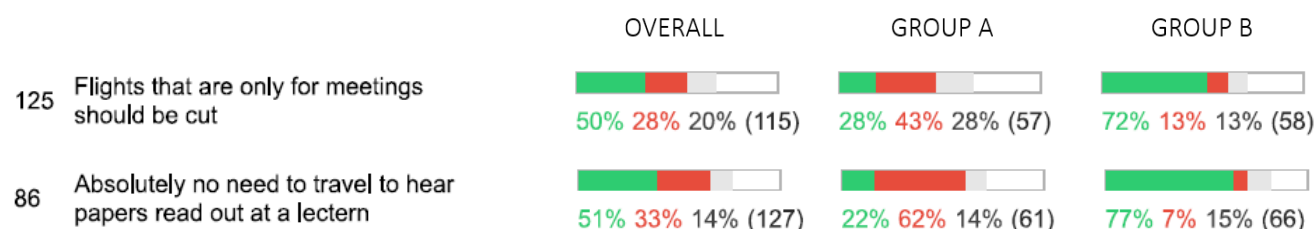
The purpose of the travel

In terms of what purposes of air travel should be prioritised, there was **considerable diversity of views** on the factors raised (c135, c125, c223, c102, c193, c251, c147, c86, c217, c150, c151).

The comment that came **closest to consensus** asserted the **value of multipurpose travel** (c97, although c22 which suggested multiple purpose travel should be *required* was more divisive - see *Restrictions*) – see also *Supporting multipurpose travel and combining trips*.

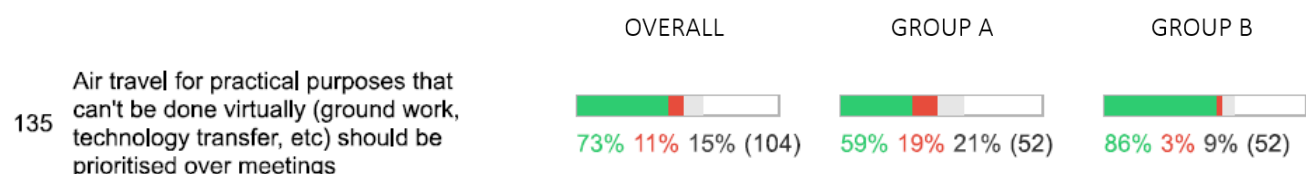


The opinion groups were **divided** on the value of travel for **meetings and conferences** (c125, c135, c251, c86, c217, c313, c193). Group B tended to agree with suggestions that these are not adequate reasons to justify flying, whereas Group A tended to disagree. E.g.:

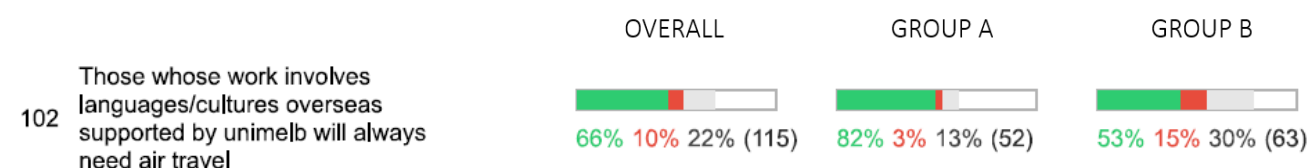


This was consistent with patterns of opinion on comments about the challenges associated with virtual meetings and conferences and the prospect of overcoming these (see *Virtual meetings and conferences*).

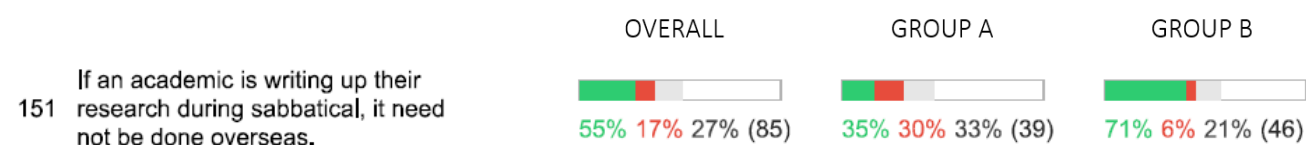
Still, a suggestion that travel for **work that can't be done virtually should be prioritised over meetings** came closer to reaching consensus:



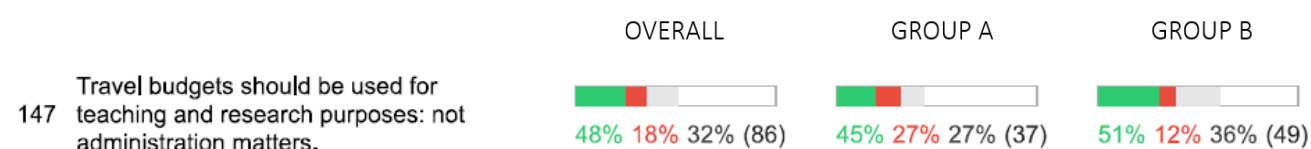
Some comments raised the importance of travel for **those whose work focuses on overseas languages, cultures or settings** (c102, c193, c303). Group A tended to agree with these comments, while responses from Group B were mixed.



Views were mixed on flying for overseas **sabbaticals** (c150, c151), e.g.:



Some comments compared **academic vs. professional/administrative** staff travel (c147, see also c25 in *The person doing the travelling*), with mixed responses.

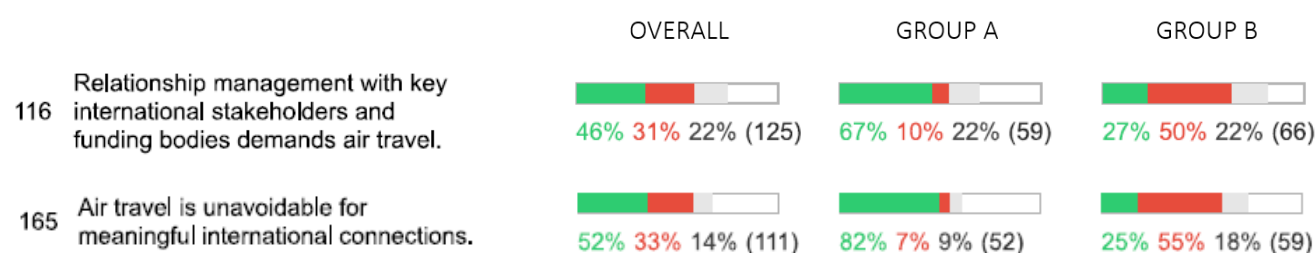


One comment suggested prioritisation according to '**significance of research**' (c223), however responses cannot be interpreted as the comment also proposed some equity-based prioritisation criteria.

MORE GENERAL COMMENTS WITH IMPLICIT LINKS TO PRIORITISATION

A further set of comments had implicit links with issues of prioritisation of travel - these related more **generally** to some of the **benefits or air travel or the needs it addresses** (c10, c303, c116, c165, c313).

Most of these related to the benefits of and need for travel in terms of **collaboration, connections and relationships** (c116, c165, c10, c303). Responses varied across these comments, but the opinion groups were divided on two comments which framed air travel as *necessary* for such relationships:

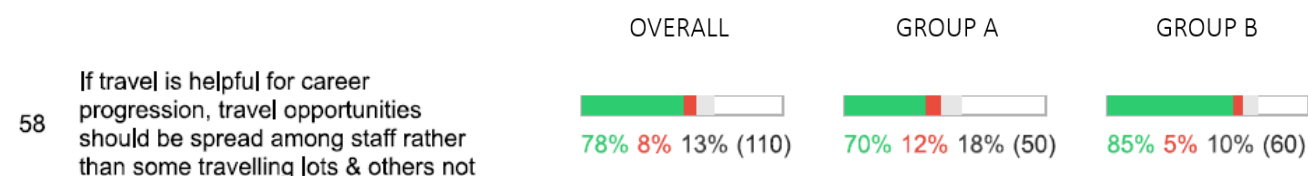


Most people agreed on a comment about the **general importance of in person learning and research** (c171).

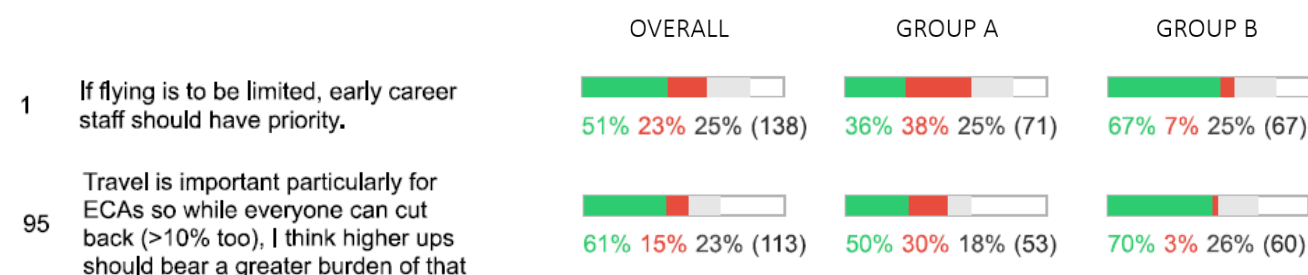
A comment about air travel helping staff **get away from busywork** generated mixed responses both within and between the opinion groups (c31).

The person doing the travelling

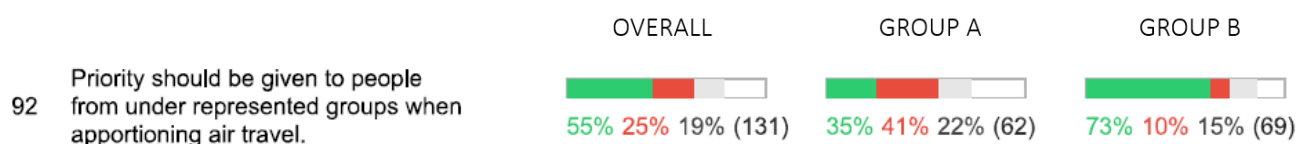
In terms of **whose air travel should be prioritised**, there was general agreement that **opportunities to travel should be spread** amongst staff:



There was also discussion of prioritising the travel needs of **certain groups of staff**. The most prominent factor raised for consideration was **career stage**, with several comments suggesting **early career staff** travel should be prioritised (c95, c1, c248, c223, c134) or that seniority should not be (c283). Group B generally agreed with these comments, while Group A was divided on this idea. This is interesting given Group A had a higher proportion of early career staff than Group B did (not statistically significant). E.g.:



Similarly, a few comments proposed prioritisation of opportunities for '**underrepresented**' or '**disadvantaged**' staff (c92, c223, c134). These suggestions of **active prioritisation** were favoured by Group B while Group A was mixed e.g.

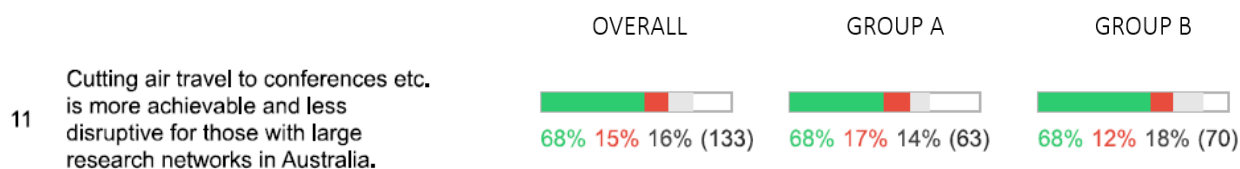


This contrasts with comments that were framed in terms of **not disadvantaging certain groups**, which were very popular across both opinion groups (c134 and c208, see *Ensuring processes to restrict air travel don't exacerbate inequities*).

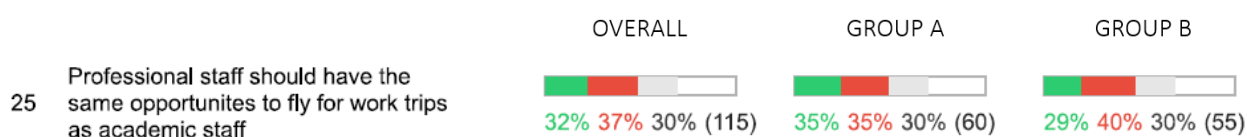
Consideration of some **other particular groups was also raised**, and both opinion groups responded similarly to each other.

There was:

- moderate support for a comment implying that **those without large research networks** in Australia may need to be prioritised:



- mixed views on opportunities for **professional staff** (see also c147 in *The purpose of the travel*):



- and consensus on allowing **business class travel for disabled staff** based on physical need (c283, see *Ensuring processes to restrict air travel don't exacerbate inequities*).

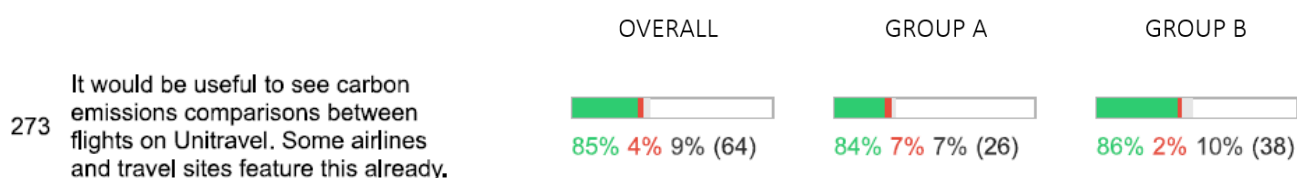
See *Equity* for other ways ideas of equity featured in the conversation.

PROVIDING INFORMATION SUPPORTS TO STAFF

In addition to *Data to inform collective response*, there was also discussion of information supports needed for **individual staff to make decisions** about their air travel behaviour.

Some comments related to **the need for information on the emissions impact of air travel generally and specific flights** (c91, c273, c8, c24, c289, c168, sort of c68 and c242).

There was rough **consensus** on calls for **factual, comparative emissions information to be provided to staff**, e.g. flight emissions comparisons **via UniTravel**:



91	Factual numerical standards of comparison about carbon emissions should always be provided to students and staff	 83% 2% 13% (105)	 84% 6% 8% (46)	 83% 0% 16% (59)
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...but Group A was divided on calls for more staff **'education'** about air travel emissions (Group B was in favour):

		OVERALL	GROUP A	GROUP B
8	Staff need more education about the climate impacts of air travel.	 69% 20% 9% (139)	 47% 40% 11% (69)	 91% 1% 7% (70)

There were also suggestions of **supports for individual staff to make decisions about their activities and emissions** (c24, c105). A call for **tools to track general emissions** was generally popular, although there was some disagreement and uncertainty from Group A:

		OVERALL	GROUP A	GROUP B
105	Tools to quantify and track the carbon impact of work activities are needed.	 78% 9% 12% (122)	 65% 15% 20% (60)	 91% 3% 4% (62)

A suggestion for **a support team to assist staff to make 'carbon neutral choices'** was also quite popular with Group B (with some uncertainty), while Group A was mixed:

		OVERALL	GROUP A	GROUP B
24	The University should have a specific support team/department to assist staff with making carbon neutral choices	 58% 21% 20% (133)	 42% 40% 17% (69)	 76% 0% 23% (64)

There were also calls for **guidance on how often staff should aim to fly** (c289, c68). Group B was supportive of this idea, while responses from Group A varied across the two comments (presumably based on objection to the suggestion in c289 that the recommendation would be to fly very rarely):

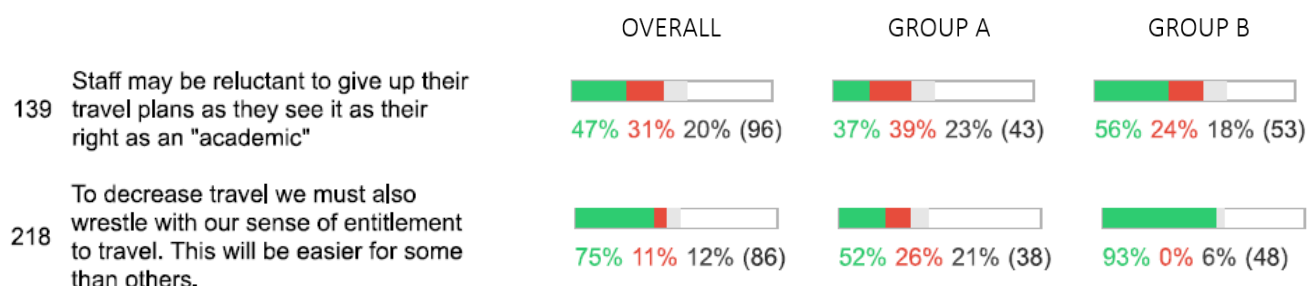
		OVERALL	GROUP A	GROUP B
68	How much is too much? To aid this discussion, we need anonymous metrics on number/distance of flights by individual and by career level.	 77% 7% 14% (102)	 70% 12% 16% (48)	 83% 3% 12% (54)
289	Some guidance on how often we should aim to fly would be good -The Guardian suggests one long haul every eight years: https://bit.ly/3U6TjMQ	 56% 22% 20% (62)	 11% 50% 38% (26)	 88% 2% 8% (36)

There were mixed views on whether **more information on the link between staff flying and aircraft emissions is needed** (see also c127):

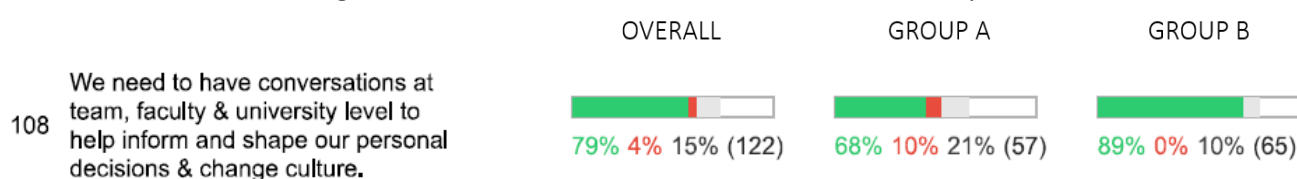
		OVERALL	GROUP A	GROUP B
168	We need to know if staff air travel create significant demand. If flights are going to fly anyway then we need to reduce emissions elsewhere	 34% 48% 17% (102)	 54% 31% 13% (44)	 18% 60% 20% (58)

SHIFTING CULTURE AND ATTITUDES THROUGH CONVERSATIONS

Comments about current staff **attitudes** towards flying (e.g. seeing flying as a right vs. a privilege) tended to be divisive (c218, c66, c139, c255, c271, see also *Providing information supports to staff* regarding 'education'), e.g.:



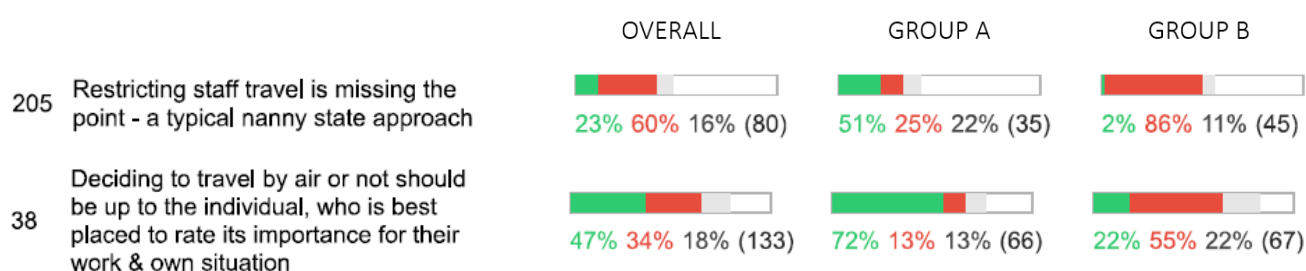
However, there was more agreement on the **need to have conversations** to shape decisions and culture:



RESTRICTIONS

Attitudes on autonomy

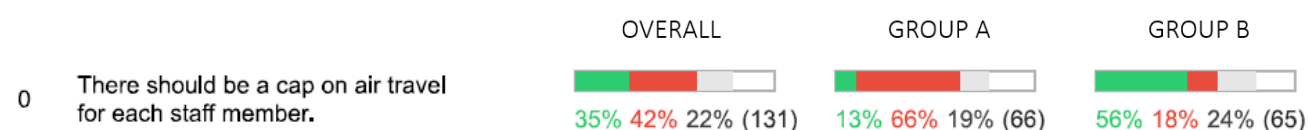
Groups A and B differed dramatically in their **general attitudes on individual autonomy** on this issue (c205, c38):



Partial restrictions/processes for enforcing limits on lower priority air travel

Many possible **mechanisms and processes for partially restricting** individual choice and limiting lower priority flying were raised.

All were quite **divisive**. They tended to be popular with Group B, whereas Group A generally disagreed if the proposals appeared **rigid**, and was mixed on comments where some degree of **flexibility** was implied. For example, compare these suggestions for **capping flights for each staff member** (see also c156, c319 and c68) – the suggestion in c67 that each flight should require progressive justification instead of a hard cap was the most acceptable, especially amongst Group A:



67	Instead of a hard cap, multiple flights should require progressively greater justification per flight.			
		58% 21% 20% (118)	46% 31% 22% (54)	68% 12% 18% (64)
133	Perhaps having a points/travel allocation system, where they carry over to the next year?			
		50% 27% 21% (111)	33% 43% 22% (53)	65% 13% 20% (58)
156	UoM should institute a cap and trade system for carbon credits for large emission decisions like flying			
		35% 24% 40% (85)	20% 43% 35% (39)	47% 8% 43% (46)

Along with c67 above, many other comments suggested requiring **justification** (detailed, formal and/or public) based on the purpose of the travel (c51, c66, c67, c90, c107, c252, c22, c61, c237). Again, comments tended receive more disagreement, especially from Group A in particularly if they suggested rigid approaches or emphasised that lower value travel may not be permitted, e.g.:

		OVERALL	GROUP A	GROUP B
66	Stringent criteria should be applied for University support of air travel - see it as a privilege used only in exceptional circumstances			
		40% 38% 21% (123)	6% 65% 27% (58)	70% 13% 15% (65)
22	Air travel should be maximised by requiring longer trips for multiple purposes to justify travel			
		50% 28% 21% (130)	35% 42% 21% (64)	63% 15% 21% (66)

...whereas comments that emphasised consideration and left open the prospect of **ultimate decision-making remaining with the individual** tended to be more popular:

		OVERALL	GROUP A	GROUP B
237	The necessity of air travel should be evaluated carefully and deliberately to balance academic needs and environmental responsibility			
		87% 8% 3% (78)	76% 17% 5% (34)	95% 2% 2% (44)
61	The real value of physically attending an overseas event needs to be fully understood and articulated before committing to fly there.			
		81% 10% 8% (122)	64% 23% 12% (56)	95% 0% 4% (66)

Several comments framed air travel as a limited or '**scarce resource**' (c277, c292, c293, c294, c295) and suggested it be treated accordingly (with mixed responses).

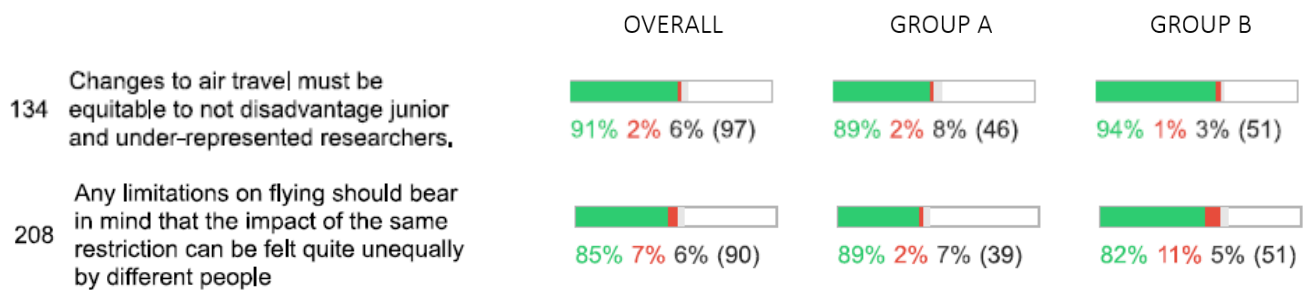
A suggestion to focus on reducing **business class travel** was divisive (see also *Ensuring processes to restrict air travel don't exacerbate inequities* for an equity consideration in this for disabled staff):

		OVERALL	GROUP A	GROUP B
124	Business-class travel should be reduced as it has higher emissions than flying economy.			
		55% 19% 24% (101)	42% 31% 25% (47)	66% 9% 24% (54)

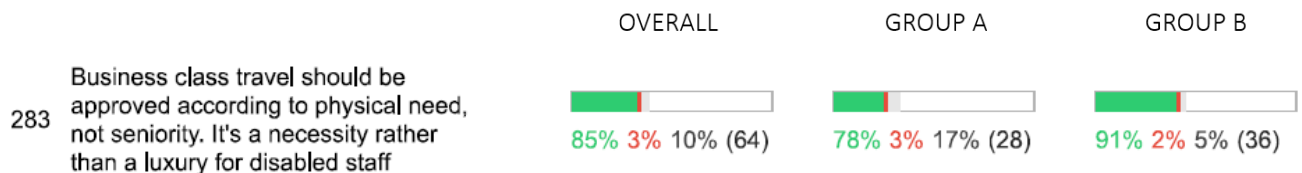
Ensuring processes to restrict air travel don't exacerbate inequities

The idea that "**it is possible to reduce air travel equitably**" was mostly endorsed by both groups (c287).

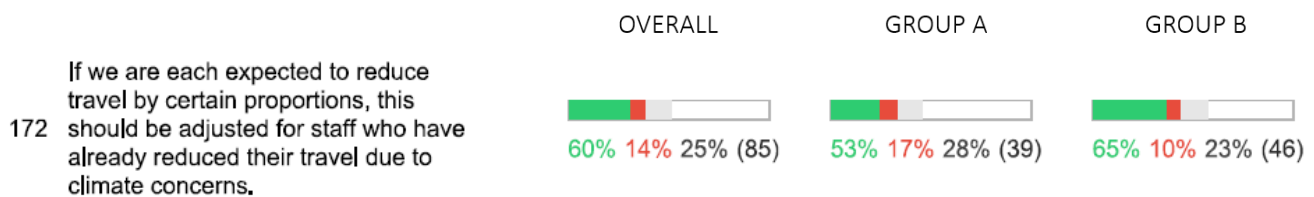
There was **rough consensus** that about the importance of **ensuring that any process changes/mechanisms for limiting travel don't exacerbate inequities** (c134, c208) or "unfairly" limit academic opportunity (c216), e.g.:



Particular concerns about exacerbating inequities related to particular possible mechanisms for reducing travel. For example, there was consensus that restricting **business class travel may be inequitable if it overlooked the physical needs** of disabled staff (c283):



In addition, most people agreed that focusing on **multi-purpose travel would be harder for some** e.g. due to family commitments (c268); and there was moderate support for a comment flagging that **requiring travel reductions of certain proportions may be unfair on staff who have already changed their flying behaviours** (c172):



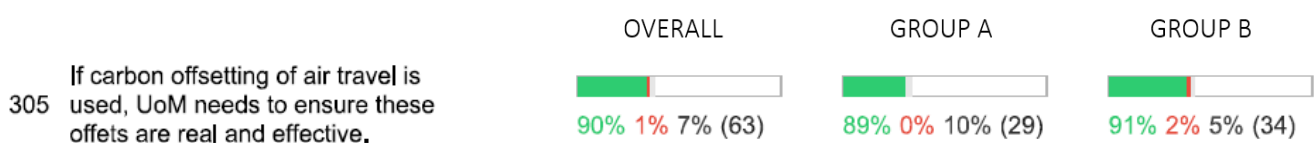
See *Equity* for other ways ideas of equity featured in the conversation.

Restrictions and autonomy regarding finances

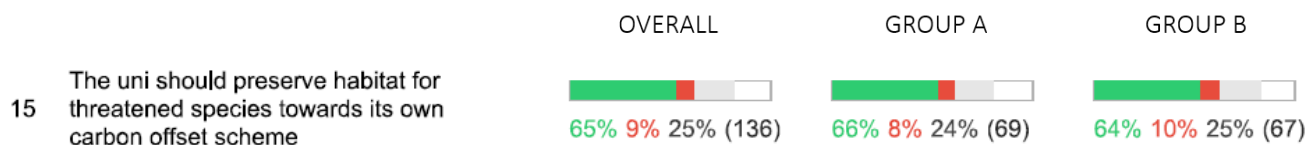
There were also comments about **mandating offsetting** (mixed responses) and individual **control over carbon budgets** (mixed responses) - see *Offsets*.

OFFSETS

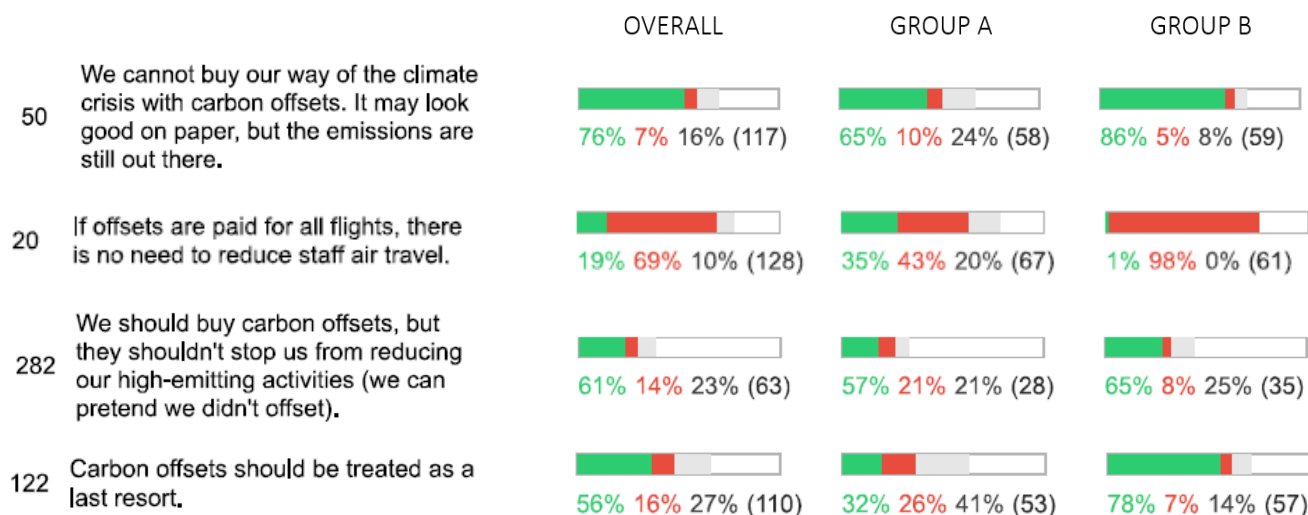
There was general agreement that **effective offsetting is possible** (c288, c14, others implicitly), but most people agreed that **offsets require scrutiny** to ensure they are effective in counteracting staff air travel emissions:



There were some suggestions for how the effectiveness of offsets could be increased through **UoM's own offsetting scheme**: a suggestion to increase the offsetting rates for each flight (c174) generated mixed/uncertain responses, but there was some support for the following idea:

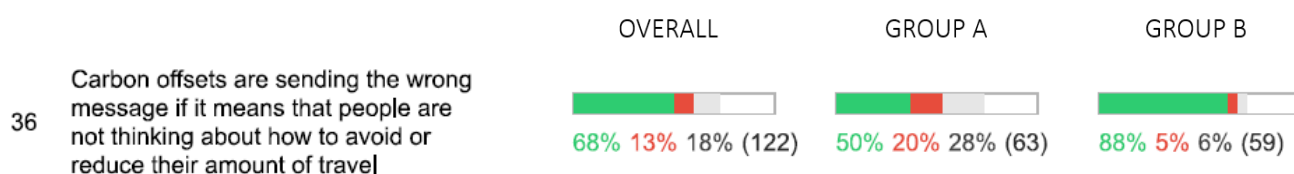


There was division on **whether offsetting removes the need to reduce flying** and **how effective offsetting is** - responses varied depending on how comments were framed (c20, c50, c282, c278, c235, c311, c122, c121), e.g.:

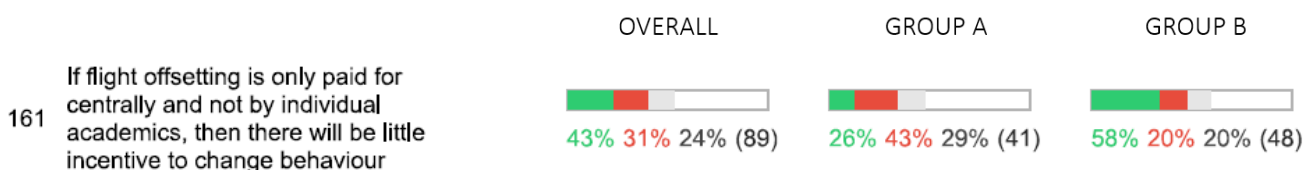


There were mixed views on how offsetting may **influence behaviour**/flying decisions.

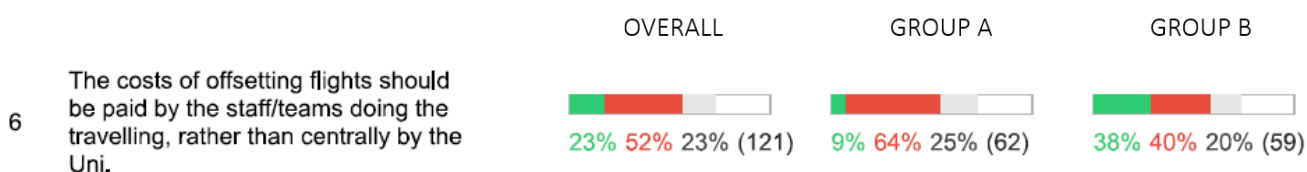
On one hand, there was moderate support for suggestions that **offsets may even be counterproductive** (inhibiting behaviour change/"greenwashing") (c121, c36), e.g.:



Conversely, some comments (c159, c160, c161) suggested **mandatory offsetting may incentivise reduced flying**, with mixed responses, e.g.:

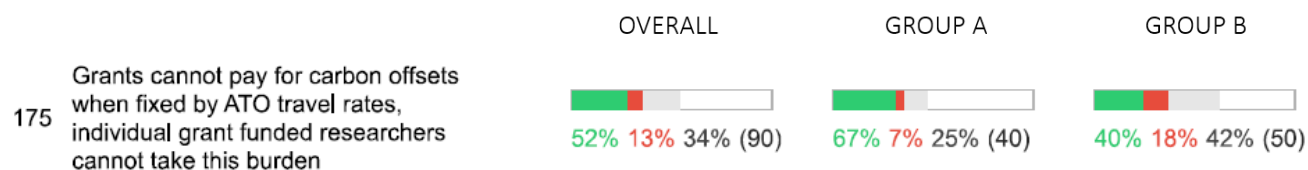


The idea of mandatory offset payments raised questions of **whether control and responsibility/burden should sit at the individual, team, Faculty or University level** (c2, c6, ,c7, c160, c162, c175, c249, c279). This included a divisive comments suggested costs should be borne at the staff/team rather than central level:

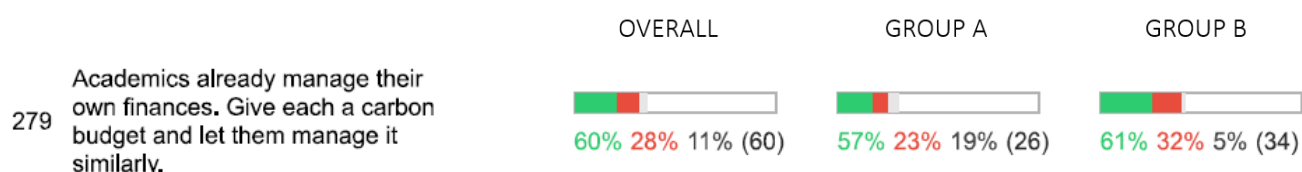


Responses to this set of comments were varied (within and between the opinion groups, and across the comments), and uncertainty was generally high.

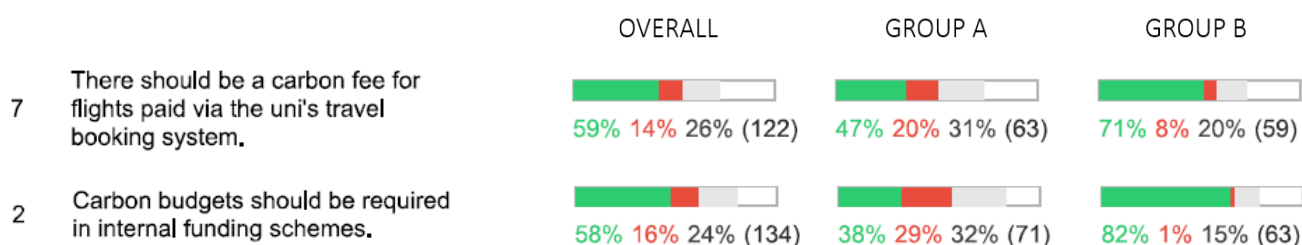
In addition to the comments noted above about individual-level offset payments incentivising behaviour change, there was some concern around **unfair burden** being placed on individual staff (c175, c6 somewhat - relates to *Responsibility*), e.g.:



There were mixed responses to suggestions that **staff should be given a budget to manage their own offsets** (c162, c279 - relates to *Restrictions*), e.g.



Suggestions for **integrating offset payments into existing systems (UniTravel and grant applications)** received mixed responses:



Improving alternatives, increasing efficiencies and reducing pressures: Initiatives the University could pursue

The conversation generated a wide range of specific suggestions for **initiatives and changes that the University of Melbourne could pursue (internally and as a leader in the sector)** as part of efforts to reduce air travel emissions.

These related to:

- **making alternatives to air travel more feasible** e.g. through improved virtual conferencing and train travel;
- **reducing emissions where air travel does proceed** e.g., encouraging combined trips, advocacy for cleaner aviation; and
- **reducing pressures and incentives for air travel** e.g. by changing promotion standards, attitudes to international vs. local work, and reforming funding systems.

VIRTUAL MEETINGS AND CONFERENCES

Context: Challenges and benefits of virtual meetings and conferences

Many comments discussed barriers and challenges around virtual meetings/conferences, without making suggestions about what should be done. These will only be briefly described here.

Broadly, the **challenges discussed** related to:

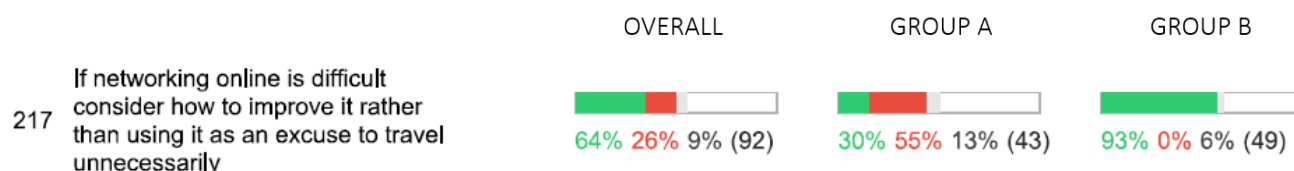
- Australia's geography, including time zone (c12, c104) and lack of non-aviation alternatives such as train travel (c111) - links with *Equity*.
- quality of interactions and implications for relationships and collaborations (c163, c13, c101, c64, c166, c213, c262), including consideration of cultural differences (c163) and recordings impeding networking opportunities (213)
- competitive disadvantage for staff and the University overall (including concern about loss of funding and speaking opportunities) (c13, c117, c64, c296)
- particular challenges relating to regions with poor IT infrastructure barriers based on remoteness of the locations that would be visited and cultural differences (c69)
- online conferences being recorded, reducing networking opportunities (c213)
- online conferences being less engaging (c314)
- other (c104, c102)

These comments were generally quite divisive - they **tended to be popular with Group A, with mixed responses from Group B**. This is consistent with the different response patterns between the groups with regard to the value of air travel for conferences and meetings - see *What air travel should be prioritised?*.

On the other hand, there was discussion of **co-benefits of virtual engagement** including time and cost savings, and increased accessibility for some (see *Co-benefits of reducing air travel*).

Some comments acknowledged that challenges to virtual engagement exist and that in person interactions are important, but asserted they nonetheless **have a role** alongside in person interactions (c180), or that **challenges diminish with learning over time** (c250).

One comment (c217) suggested that discussion of challenges was being used as an excuse to fly unnecessarily, and encouraged thinking about solutions.

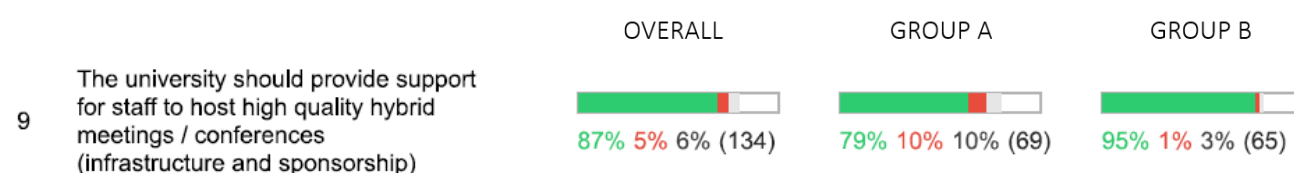


Indeed, many possible solutions to these challenges were discussed, as outlined below.

Possible initiatives to improve and encourage virtual meetings and conferences

Some specific **suggestions for improving virtual conferences and meetings** were made.

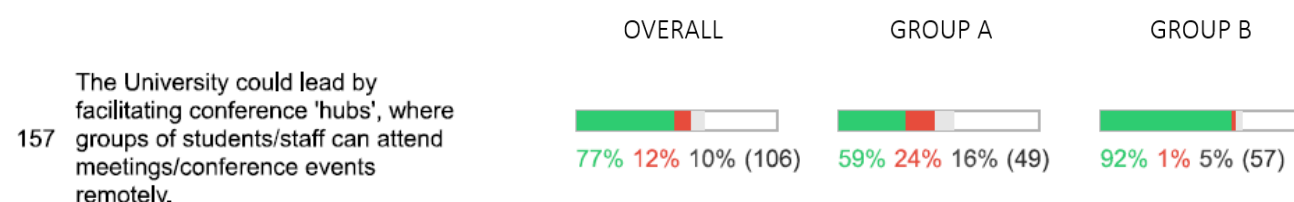
The most popular was a suggestion for better support for **UoM staff to host hybrid events** at the University (see also the moderately popular c177 which asserted the need for UoM to 'massively upgrade infrastructure' to be competitive):



Perhaps tellingly, the above suggestion appears more geared towards reducing incoming travel, rather than reducing UoM staff outgoing travel.

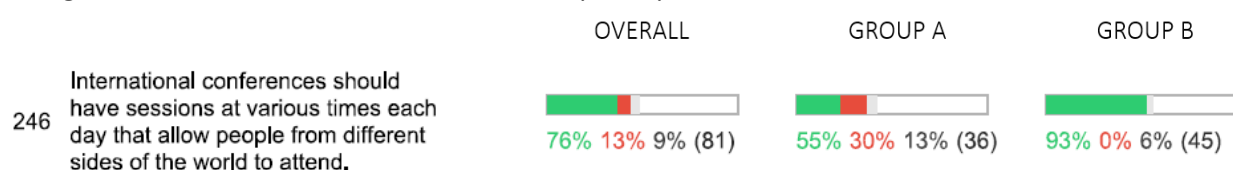
Suggestions for improving options for UoM staff to **attend conferences virtually** received more **mixed responses: they were popular with Group B, but views in Group A varied**.

Several moderately popular comments suggested **in-person experiences** to complement virtual conference attendance (c157, c257, c291, also c84 which refers to 'perks'), e.g.:



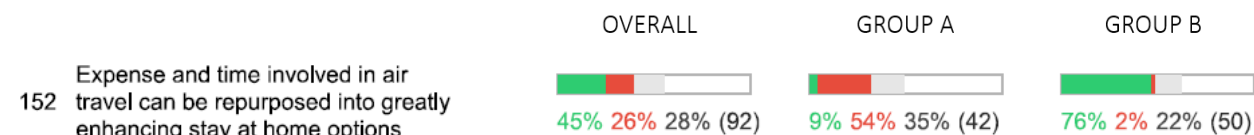
Other suggestions included:

- changes to conference **session times** to enable participation across different time zones:

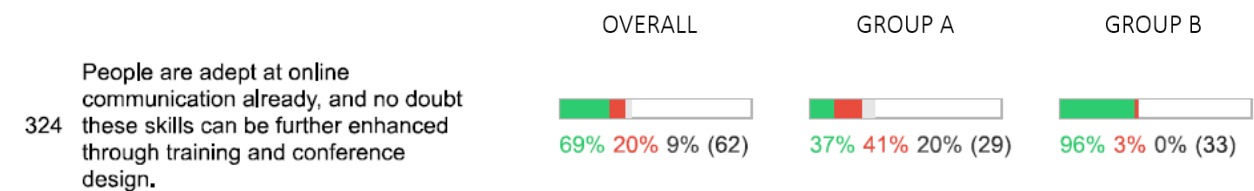


- funding for engagement** with international collaborators (c131), and related suggestions to **allocate time and cost savings** arising from virtual rather in-person engagement (see *Co-benefits of reducing air*

travel) towards improving options for virtual engagement (c152, c87) . These were divisive – most of Group A disagreed, and most of Group B agreed, e.g.

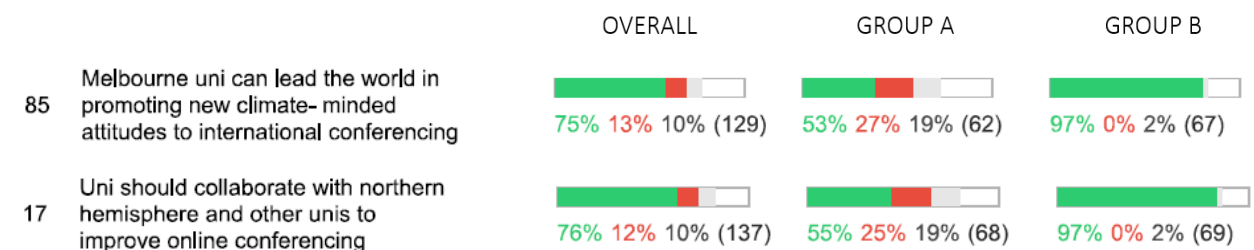


- training to improve online communication skills (c324):

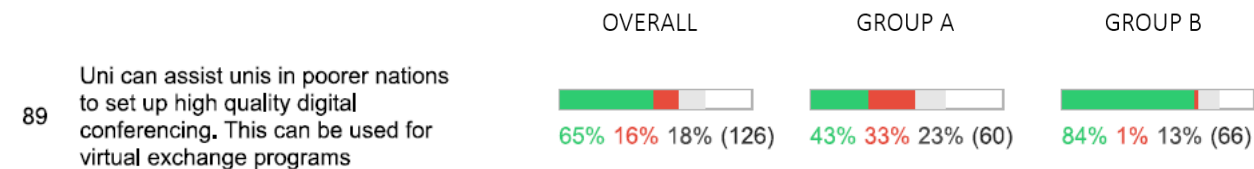


Some comments emphasised **opportunities for the University to play a leadership role and collaborate with overseas universities** to make the most of the increasing role of virtual engagement (c85, c17, c89, c323). Again, Group B overwhelmingly agreed with these suggestions, which Group A was mixed. This included:

- general comments on global leadership on this issue:



- suggestions that providing **IT infrastructure assistance to poorer countries** could open educational and 'virtual exchange' opportunities for UOM (c89, c323), e.g.:

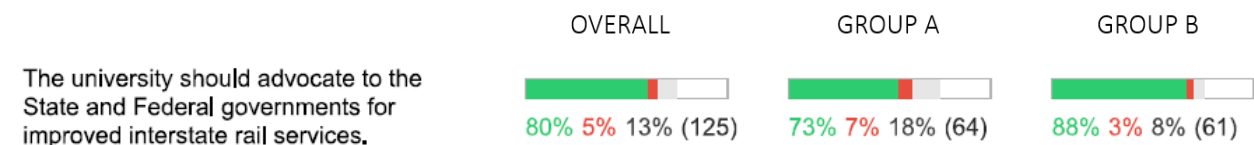


There was also a call for the University to support **more international conferences in Melbourne** (c245), but this received mixed responses from both groups.

TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE AND DOMESTIC TRAVEL

People discussed ways the University could support staff to travel in alternative, lower-emissions ways.

University advocacy for interstate rail and **cleaner aviation** was strongly supported (c29, c65; related: c155, c111):



65	UoM should use its influence to discuss with aviation industry R&D, driving conversations with airlines to develop cleaner aviation fuels	 79% 6% 13% (117)	 78% 7% 13% (51)	 80% 6% 13% (66)
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There was moderate/mixed support for some other ideas to **support staff to travel domestically by train or electric vehicle**:

	OVERALL	GROUP A	GROUP B	
18	The University should offer funds (and cover time) for staff to travel domestically by train instead of flying.	 66% 13% 19% (132)	 52% 20% 27% (69)	 82% 6% 11% (63)
199	University should have a fleet of electric cars for people to drive to conferences if able	 59% 17% 23% (82)	 51% 25% 23% (39)	 67% 9% 23% (43)

Less popular suggestions related to intercontinental boat travel (c302) and lobbying against the proposed third Tullamarine runway (c189).

SUPPORTING MULTIPURPOSE TRAVEL AND COMBINING TRIPS

There was rough consensus that **changes should be made to better enable** people to combine **multiple travel purposes in one trip**. This included **combining personal and work travel** (c23 & c26), e.g.:

	OVERALL	GROUP A	GROUP B
23	To limit emissions from multiple trips, combining work and personal travel should be encouraged (rather than discouraged, as now) 82% 6% 10% (129)	85% 7% 7% (67)	80% 6% 12% (62)

See also c97 in *The purpose of the travel*. Another fairly popular comment called for flexibility in **allowing remote working** to make longer periods away more feasibility:

	OVERALL	GROUP A	GROUP B
62	79% 7% 13% (121)	69% 11% 18% (59)	88% 3% 8% (62)

Yet participants agreed that multipurpose travel is **not always feasible**:

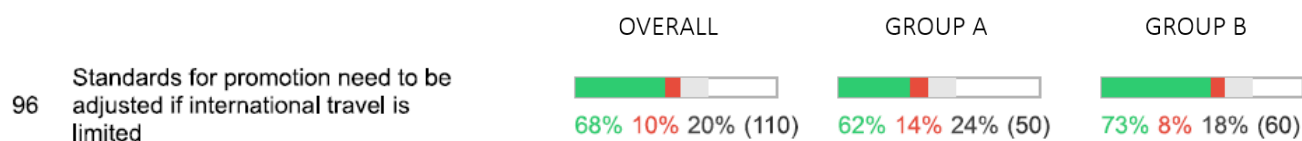
	OVERALL	GROUP A	GROUP B
268	Aiming for long trips with multiple events makes the most of air travel, but is hard for those with family (or other) commitments 73% 4% 21% (64)	79% 6% 13% (29)	68% 2% 28% (35)

Responses were more mixed to suggestions of combining travel to **geographically close locations** (c224), and staying longer to be **immersed in other research communities** (c299).

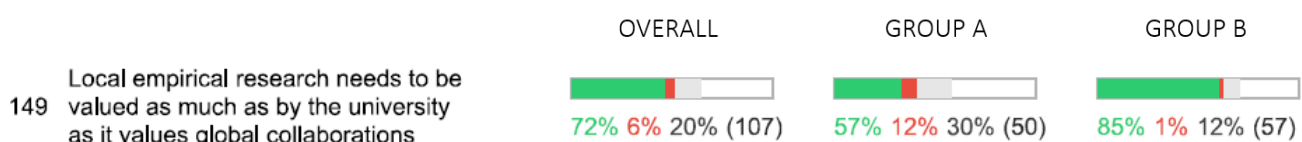
EXPECTATIONS, PROMOTION STANDARDS, AND WHAT IS VALUED

There was general agreement (with minor disagreement within Group B) about the **need to change expectations in academia** to shift air travel patterns.

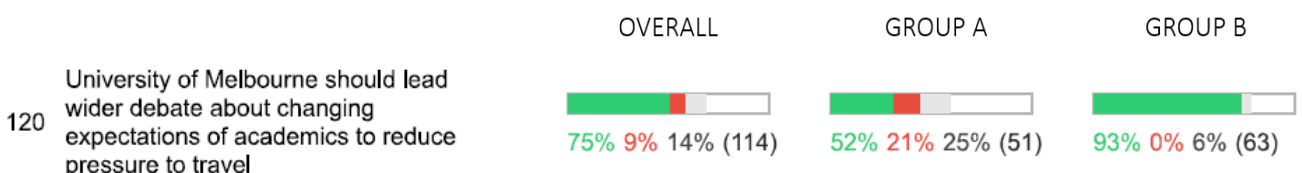
This included calls for **changes to promotion and performance review standards** (c96 & c187):



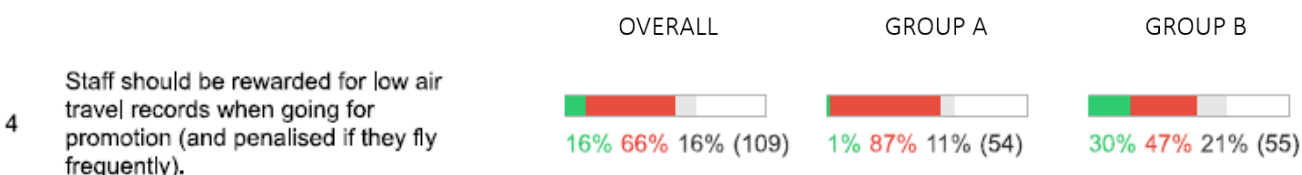
...increased value on **local research**:



...and calls for **UoM leadership** in the sector (c120 & c255):

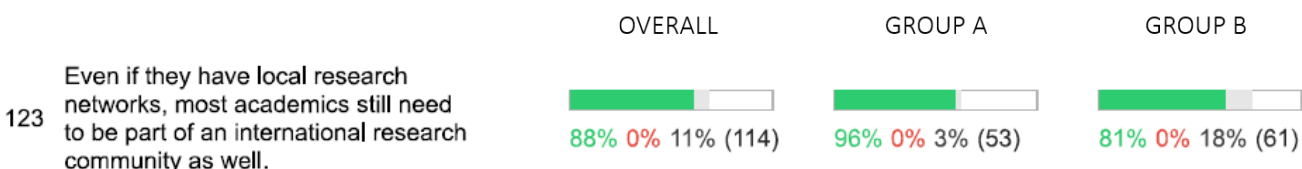


But the idea of **direct rewards and penalisation** based on air travel history was unpopular:



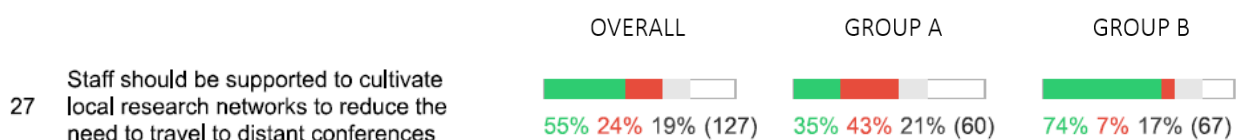
LOCALISM VS. INTERNATIONALISM

Participants agreed that **having large local networks is helpful** for cutting air travel (c11), but there was also consensus on the **importance of belonging to an international community**:

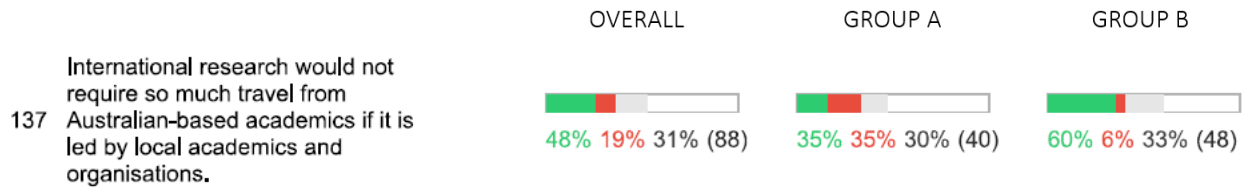


There was division on **possible changes to policy and practice**, including:

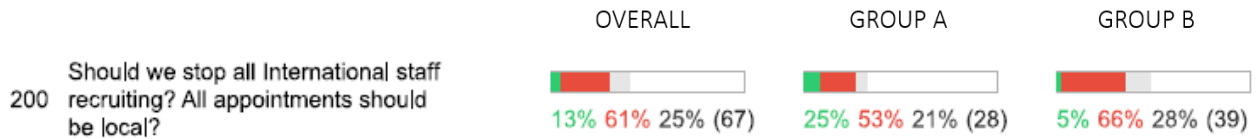
- Efforts to increase domestic networks



- Reduced Australian leadership of international collaborations



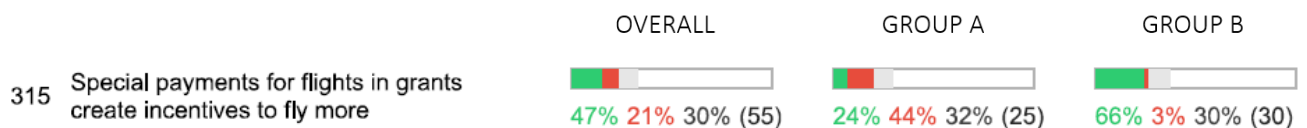
- Reduced recruitment of international staff



There was also discussion of emissions from visitor flights and student flights, including the role of international student travel in the University's business model - see *Reducing emissions from other sources*.

ADDRESSING FLYING INCENTIVES IN FUNDING SYSTEMS

Late in the conversation, there was an assertion that special payments in budgets for flights create incentives to fly more - this had mixed responses, and low response numbers:

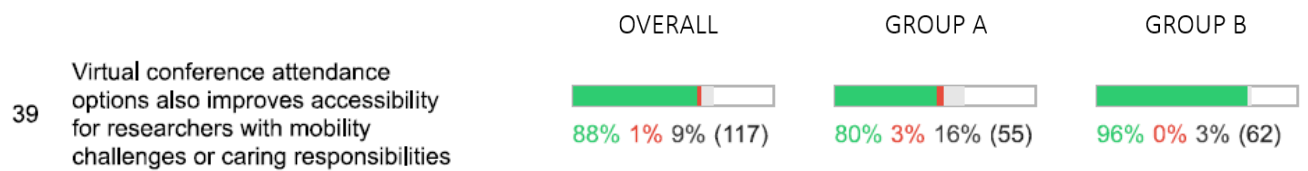


Co-benefits of reducing air travel

Some comments raised potential co-benefits of efforts to reduce staff air travel. The most prominent of these are noted below.

EQUITY CO-BENEFITS

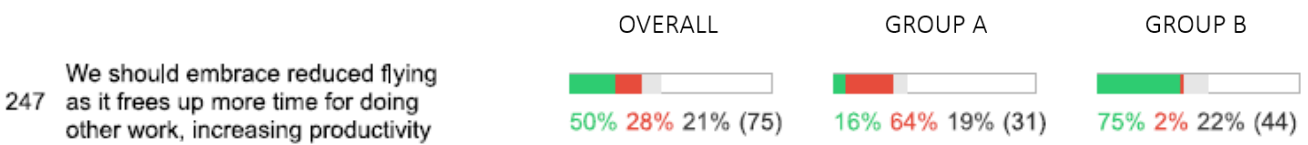
One of the top consensus comments in the Polis conversation raised **equity and accessibility co-benefits of increased virtual conferencing**:



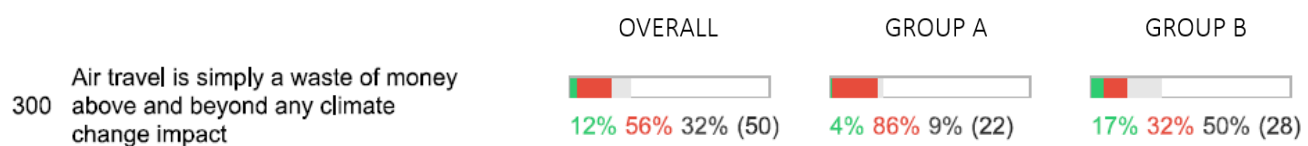
See *Equity* for other ways ideas of equity featured in the conversation.

TIME AND COST SAVINGS

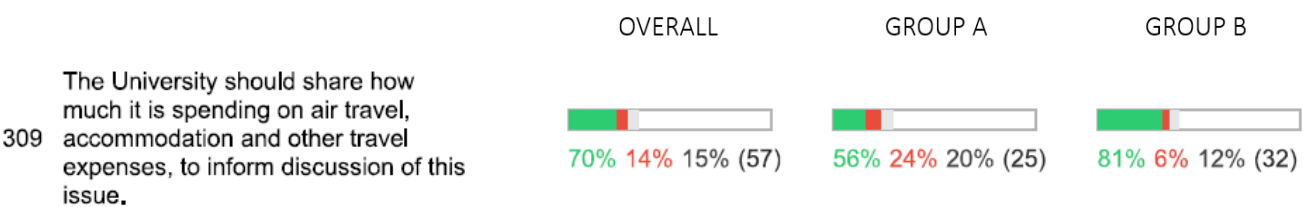
Comments that raised **time or cost savings as co-benefits** to reducing air travel (time: c247, c143, c87, c152; cost: c300, c152, c260, c309) were divisive, tending to be unpopular with Group A and popular with Group B, e.g.:



...although a comment that went as far as to claim that air travel is a **'waste of money'** was quite unpopular even with Group B:



On the other hand, a comment that called for **information on potential cost savings** received majority support from both groups (although there was notable disagreement and uncertainty in Group A):



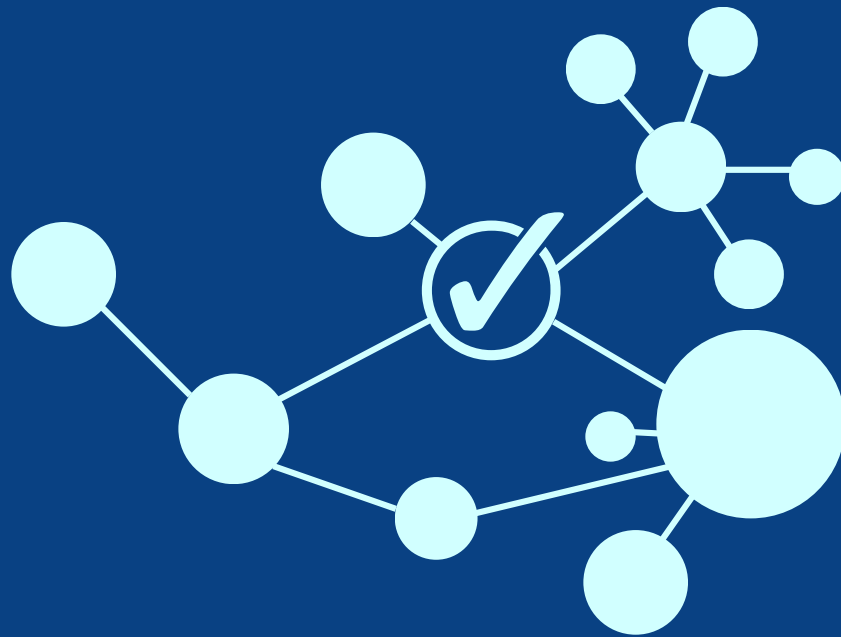
Equity

Considerations of equity appeared across many themes, as shown in comments featured earlier in this report:

- See *What air travel should be prioritised? – The person doing the travelling*
- See *Restrictions – Ensuring processes to restrict air travel don't exacerbate inequities*
- See *Co-benefits of reducing air travel – Equity co-benefits*
- See *Data to inform collective response – Current air travel patterns at UoM*

In addition:

- some comments raised inequities for those based in Australia in the global context due to geographic isolation (c111) and time zone (c12, c104, indirectly 246)
- comment 48 raised equity considerations for international students/researchers in low income/rural settings
- comment 210 raised matters of intergenerational justice, framing resistance to reducing air travel as 'stealing from the future'.



THE UNIVERSITY OF
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