AIR TRAVEL SURVEY 2022 REPORT

MAY 2024

UNIVERSITY of TASMANIA

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Glossary

Term	Definition
ATS	Air Travel Survey
Carbon	In this document, carbon refers to all greenhouse gases included in the Kyoto Protocol.
Carbon neutrality	Carbon neutrality is achieved when greenhouse gas emissions are reduced where possible and the remainder emissions are compensated by investing in carbon offset projects from activities that: prevent emissions from being released into the atmosphere; reduce the amount of emissions being released into the atmosphere; or remove emissions that are already in the atmosphere (carbon sequestration).
Climate Active	Climate Active is the only government accredited carbon neutral certification scheme in Australia. The Climate Active initiative and Climate Active Carbon Neutral Standard supports and guides businesses as they account for and reduce carbon emissions.
Climate emergency	A situation in which urgent action is required to reduce or halt climate change and avoid irreversible environmental and socio-economic damage resulting from it. In this respect, responding to the climate emergency requires the urgent real-world application of mitigation and adaptation thinking, policies, and technology (climate action). In other words, it entails a response of scale and urgency proportionate to the reality that climate change is the greatest threat currently faced by society and the planet.
Climate positive	Going beyond achieving net-zero carbon emissions to create an environmental benefit by removing additional carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. This means having a negative amount of carbon emissions and positively impacting the climate.
CO_2-e	Carbon dioxide equivalent. A measure that allows comparison of the emissions of other GHGs relative to one unit of CO_2, that is, their global warming potential (GWP) over 100-year period.
Divestment	The removal of investment capital from stocks, bonds, funds, and other financial instruments connected to companies involved in extracting fossil fuels.
ESD	Environmentally Sustainable Design
ERSP	Emissions Reduction Strategic Plan
GHG	Greenhouse gas (e.g., methane, carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide)

Term	Definition
GWP	Global Warming Potential over 100-year period
Net zero	'Net-zero' emissions are achieved when the amount of greenhouse gases being emitted into the atmosphere is balanced by the amount being taken out (sequestered), typically measured on an annual basis.
UTAS	University of Tasmania

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The University of Tasmania (UTAS) is deeply committed to take climate action in all its activities and operations, from its internationally recognised climate research and teaching through to collaborating with communities and industry on responding to climate related risks while developing and promoting low- and zero-carbon innovations, technologies, and lifestyles.

In recognition of the urgency of the climate crisis and the need to limit warming to 1.5C[1], the University of Tasmania is committed to support development of a zero-carbon economy, as demonstrated by:

- Being carbon neutral certified by the Commonwealth Climate Action Carbon Neutral Standard since 2016. To achieve carbon neutral certification, entities must:
    - Measure and reduce emissions where possible.
    - Offset remaining emissions.
    - Publicly report on their carbon neutrality.
    - Undertake independent validation (i.e., audit or verification).
- Becoming an International Universities Climate Alliance member in 2020, a central hub for universities to share the latest climate research.
- Achieving full divestment from fossil fuel-exposed investments in 2021.
- Leading national research and development efforts to promulgate carbon storage in the agricultural sector, such as the Carbon Storage Partnership.
- Joining Race to Zero (previously Global Climate Letter for Universities and Colleges) in 2021, which commits the University to:
    - Pledge: having a 2050 or sooner net zero target.
    - Plan: explain what steps will be taken toward achieving net zero.
    - Proceed: taking action towards net zero.
    - Publish: commit to report progress annually.
- Developing an ambitious Emissions Reduction Strategic Plan in 2022, with a target of a minimum 50% emissions reduction by 2030 from a 2015 baseline year. By 2030, the University will also achieve net (and below)-zero emissions using the Climate Active Standard by combining the ambitious emissions reduction actions in this document with carbon removal from the atmosphere (sequestration) on UTAS and other properties in Tasmania. In addition, these self-generated carbon sequestration offsets will integrate UTAS research and teaching activities.

[1] https://www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-working-group-i/

- Becoming a signatory of the Climate Action Network for International Educators (CANIE) Accord in 2022, which aims to strengthen and accelerate the response of the international education sector to the climate crisis.
- Becoming a Founder member of the Climate Action Barometer (CAB) in International Education in 2023. CAB is a benchmarking tool tailored explicitly for the international education sector, designed to help international teams understand their climate impact and to provide a set of metrics to help them drive change internally.

1.2 Air travel emissions at the University of Tasmania

Air travel has historically been one of the biggest emissions sources at the University of Tasmania (typically 20% of total emissions). Although air travel emissions were virtually zero during the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 1.1), resumption of air travel in early 2022 resulted in an exponential increase throughout the year, which continued in 2023. It is expected that air travel emission will go back to pre-pandemic levels if no action is taken to curtail these emissions.

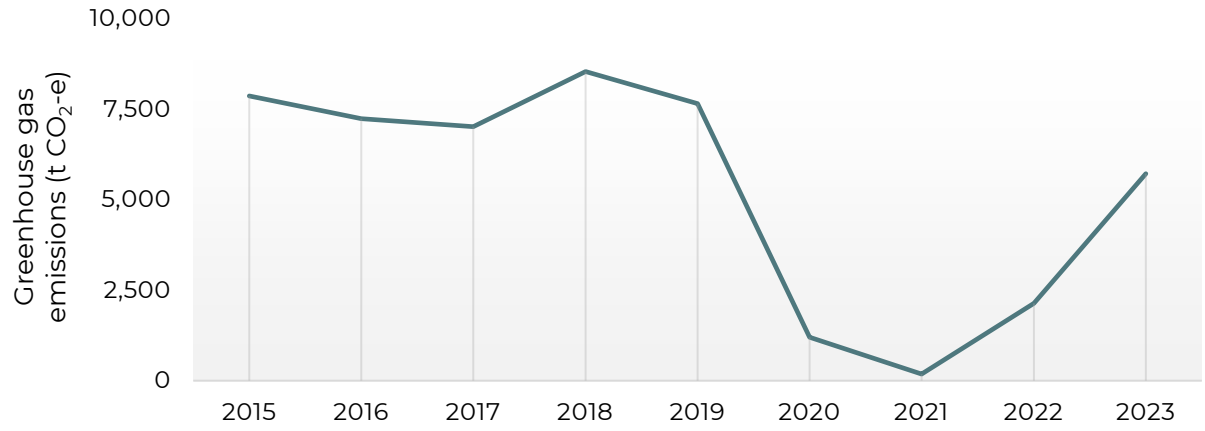

Figure 1.1 *Air travel emissions at the University of Tasmania over time.*

There are multiple reasons why university staff and students need to travel, and these reasons may vary depending on various factors, although position type (academic vs professional staff) is arguably the most influential. Other factors may include career stage (e.g., early career vs senior researcher; entry level vs senior manager professional staff), main role (e.g., teaching vs research; international education vs domestic recruitment), employment status (ongoing, fixed-term contract, casual contract), or gender.

Historically, UTAS academic staff have travelled more than professional staff, both overall and per staff member (Figure 1.2), likely because of activities associated with research. It is worth noting that travel between different colleges, and within different divisions, is also highly variable (data not shown).

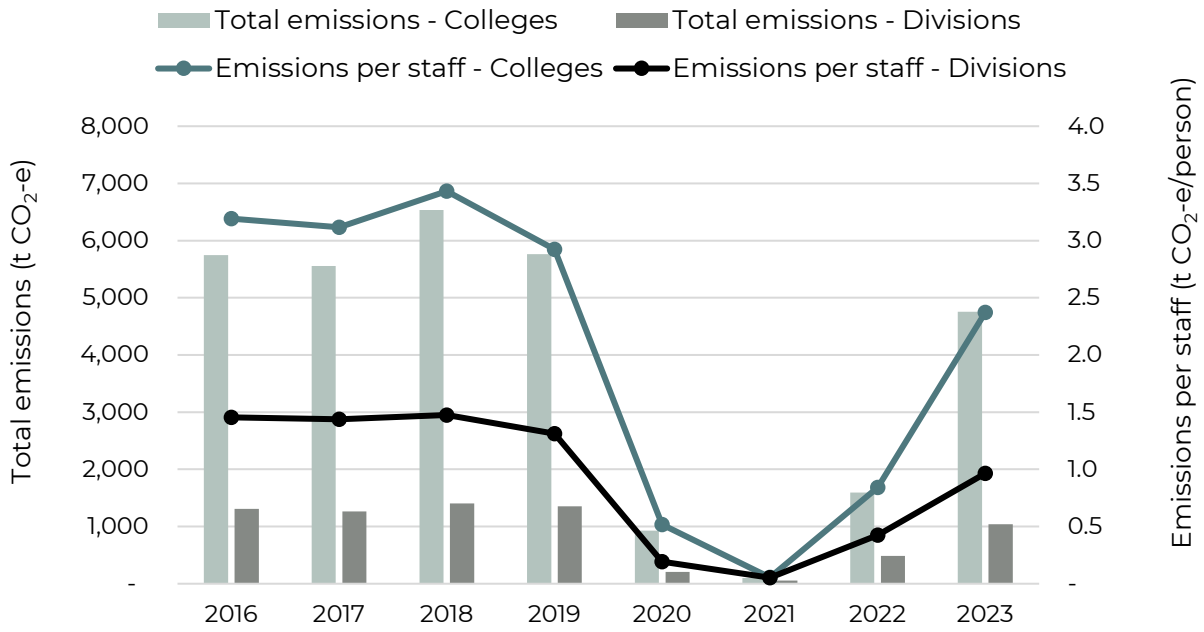

Figure 1.2 *Air travel emissions by University colleges and divisions – overall and per staff member.*

1.3 Air Travel Survey purpose

With business air travel accounting for approximately 20% of annual UTAS emissions (usually our second or third biggest emission source in pre-pandemic years), a key pathway to achieving carbon reduction requires the development of an institutional approach to manage air travel emissions. This survey was designed to help us consider this issue and has the following aims:

1. To develop a baseline understanding of what work-related air travel UTAS staff do and why they do it.
2. To identify barriers and incentives to using alternative travel options.
3. To increase awareness of the environmental impacts of air travel and UTAS's commitments to climate action, including commitment to reduction of gross greenhouse gas emissions.

We are not suggesting that staff suddenly stop traveling, rather that the results of this survey can help the University build alternative approaches, reward structures, appropriate benchmarks as well as the infrastructure and the processes that will enable it to continue to be a leading role model of climate action.

2 About the survey

2.1 Survey design

This survey is based on the questionnaire published by Nursey-Bray et al. 2019[2]. The questionnaire was reviewed by the UTAS Air Travel Emissions Management Working Group and modified to make it more relevant to the Tasmanian context and to UTAS specific challenges in relation to air travel.

2.2 Method

The 2022 UTAS Air Travel Survey (ATS) was conducted via online survey in October 2022; the survey was distributed via bulk email, and it was open for two weeks. An online survey was deemed the most suitable approach given available resources, the need to be able to reach all UTAS staff, and the need to provide capacity for periodically repeated surveys to allow for longitudinal analysis if considered necessary to monitor progress and increase awareness among new staff. The ATS project has approval from the University of Tasmania Human Research Ethics Committee (reference H0027808).

The survey asked participants to provide information on their past and future air travel frequency, reasons for air travel and alternatives used, and opinions on the impacts, barriers, and incentives for university air travel.

Demographic questions asked provided further participant context for the analysis, such primary College/Division and School/Area, age, gender, employment status and role level.

2.3 Participation and statistical confidence

There were 781 responses to the 2022 ATS, with a 74% completion rate. Only complete responses were used in this report (n = 579), representing 13% of the staff population at the time of the survey. Relative to the staff population, sample size provides us with a 90% level of confidence and a margin error of ±3.2 [3].

There was a higher participation of respondents who identify as woman or female (Table 2.1). This translates to only a small bias, as there is a higher proportion of females in the general staff population. However, a relatively high percentage of respondents chose to not self-identify (6% of survey respondents, compared to 0.3% of the staff population recorded in university systems). Likewise, there was a slightly higher participation of professional staff, which reflects the University population.

[2] The Fear of Not Flying: Achieving Sustainable Academic Plane Travel in Higher Education Based on Insights from South Australia. Sustainability 2019, 11(9), 2694; https://doi.org/10.3390/su11092694

[3] A confidence level of 90% means that there is a probability of at least 90% that the result is reliable. The larger the margin of error around a value, the less accurate the value.

Table 2.1 *Participation by demographic groups.*

	Respondents (#)	Respondents (%)
College/Division		
College of Arts, Law and Education (CALE)	63	11%
College of Business and Economics (CoBE)	34	6%
College of Health and Medicine (CoHM)	123	21%
College of Sciences and Engineering (CoSE)	151	26%
Academic Division	63	11%
Division of Future Students	54	9%
Chief Operating Officer (COO) Division	69	12%
Vice-Chancellor (VC) Division	17	3%
Other	5	1%
Role		
Academic staff	278	48%
Professional staff	301	52%
Academic career status		
Early career academic (≤5 years)	76	27%
Senior academic (>5 years)	202	73%
Position		
Full-time (>12-month contract)	419	72%
Part-time (>12-month contract)	87	15%
Casual / short-term contract (<12 months)	47	8%
An Associate/Adjunct/Honorary/volunteer	16	3%
Other	10	2%
Gender		
Men	241	42%
Women	304	53%
Not specified/self-described	34	6%

Most respondents were working full-time in an ongoing or long-term (more than 12 months) contract. This is not reflective of the University population at the time of the survey, with some 52% of staff working in casual or short-term contract positions (not counting honorary positions) compared to 8% of respondents.

Furthermore, most respondents were established academics (>5 years of academic career). Although we do not have data on population composition for this factor, it is expected that there would be a lower number of early career academics.

3 Results

This section presents findings relating to air travel behaviour (pre-COVID), future travel plans at the time of the survey, air travel needs and requirements, as well as barriers and incentives for alternative travel options.

3.1 Air travel behaviour

3.1.1 International travel

Survey participants were asked if they had travelled internationally in 2019 (before the COVID-19 pandemic), and if so, how many times. Some 65% of the respondents (excluding those who indicated they were not working at UTAS in 2019) reported no international air travel. This percentage was lower for academic staff (46% versus 85% of professional staff), indicating that more academic staff travelled that year. Of those who travelled internationally, most travelled only once or twice, while a small percentage (2% of academics and 1% of professional staff) travelled more than 5 times (Figure 3.1). About three quarters of respondents overall (75%) indicated that this was about the same rate of international travel as in previous years, while 17 % indicated they had travelled less than usual, and 8% more than usual.

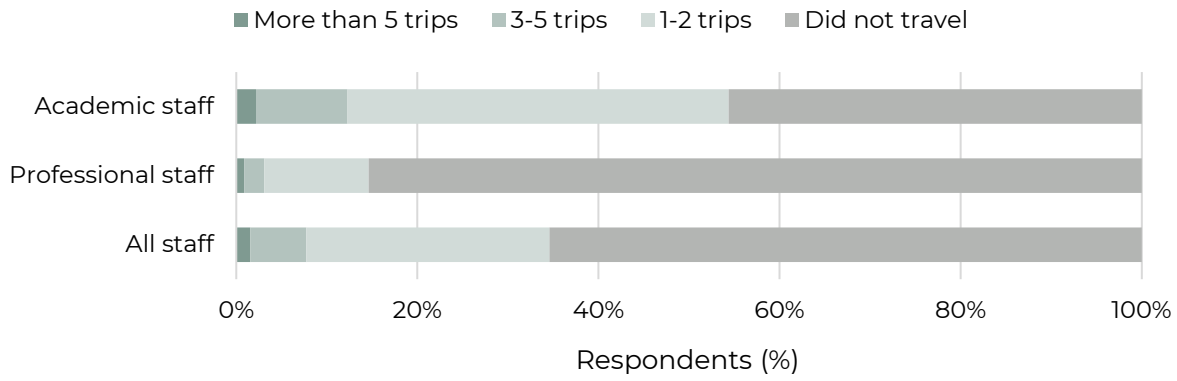

Figure 3.1 *Number of international trips in 2019 by primary role.*

Comparison of work-related international air travel in 2019 (actual travel) and 2023 (expected travel at the time of the survey) showed an intention to travel more (an increase of 7.3 percentage points for individuals undertaking 1-2 trips, although a decrease of 4.1 percentage points in relation to staff travelling 3 or more times) (Figure 3.2).

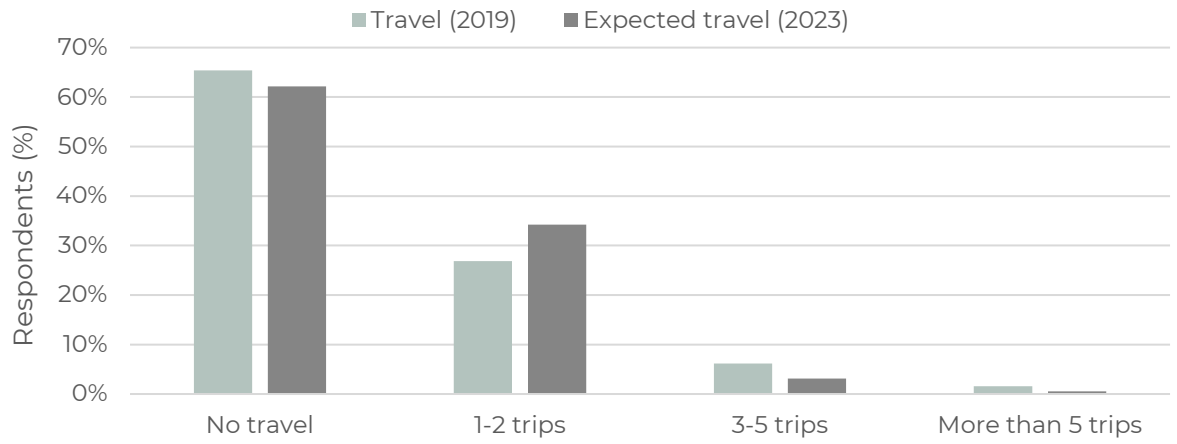

Figure 3.2 *Number of international trips in 2019 and expected trips in 2023.*

3.1.2 Domestic travel

Some 35% of the respondents who worked at UTAS in 2019 reported no domestic (interstate) air travel that year. Again, the percentage was lower for academic staff than professional staff (Figure 3.3), but both groups travelled more domestically than internationally. Most respondents did only one or two trips, but a relatively high percentage of respondents travelled more than 5 times (12% of academics and 7% of professional staff). Among the respondents who travelled domestically, 67% of respondents did so at about the same rate as usual and 32% travelled less than usual.

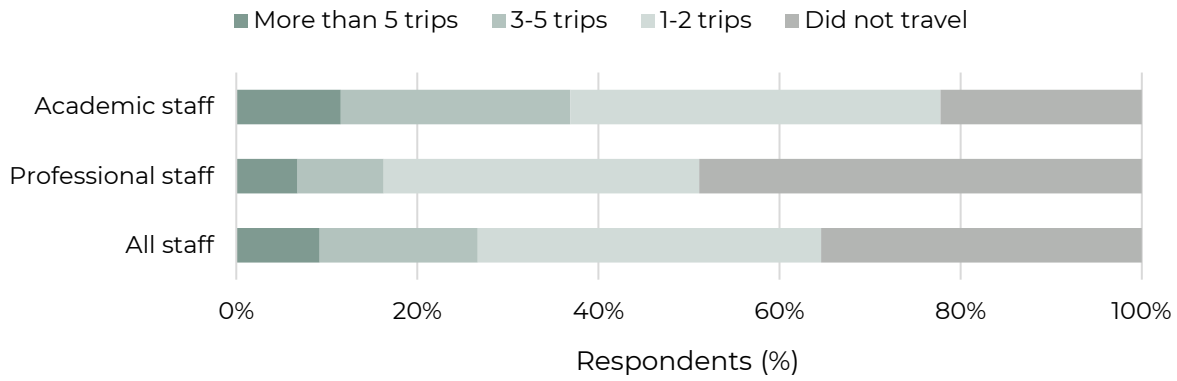

Figure 3.3 *Number of domestic trips in 2019 by primary role.*

Comparison of domestic business air travel frequencies between 2019 and 2023 follows a similar pattern to international travel, with an increase of almost 5 percentage points of staff likely to travel in 2023 compared to the percentage of individuals who travelled in 2019, and most of these doing 1-2 trips (with an 8 percentage points increase from 2019 to 2023). These could suggest a potential increase in willingness to travel for work purposes following travel bans during the COVID-19 pandemic.

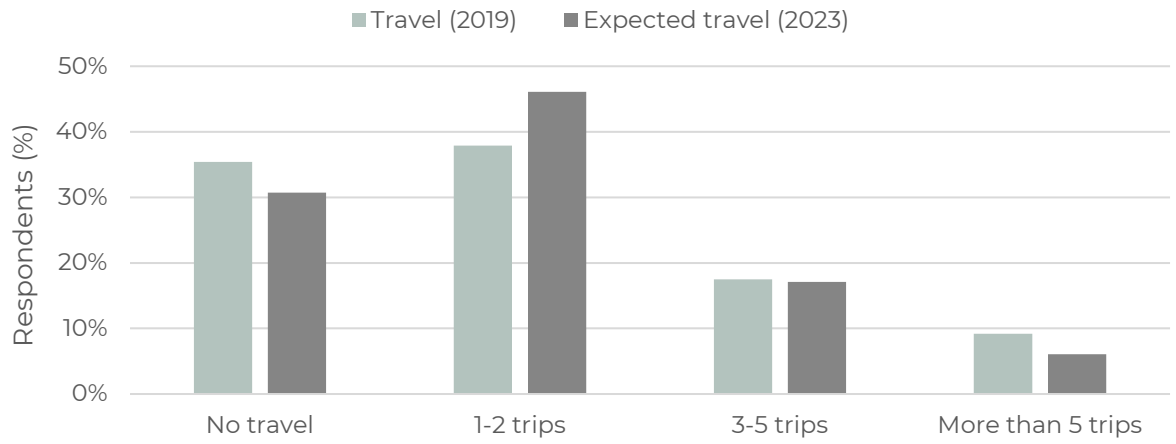

Figure 3.4 *Number of domestic trips in 2019 and expected trips in 2023.*

3.1.3 Reasons for travelling / not travelling

Survey participants who travelled in 2019 were asked to select one or more reasons for their international and/or domestic air travel. The most common reason for travel was attending and/or presenting at conferences/workshops for both domestic and international trips (Figure 3.5). This was followed by partnership support (mainly for international air travel) and networking, project-related activities (research and non-research), teaching and grant development. Some of these engagements are deemed difficult to replicate through online meetings, as the nuances of personal interaction and team dynamics play a crucial role. However, many of these activities were conducted online during the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrating that travel can be avoided, although the benefits from conducting these activities online may be reduced with the lack of in-person interaction.

For those flying to conferences, most individuals overall take the opportunity to present on their work. However, the percentage is lower when attending domestic conferences versus international conferences, and for professional versus academic staff (with only 36% of professional staff attending domestic conferences doing a presentation at the event) (Table 3.1). It is also worth noting that a higher percentage of academics travel to conferences than professional staff (especially for international conferences/workshops, with 71% of academic staff flying overseas *versus* 33% of professional staff).

Some staff indicated that they had done a presentation but did not select attendance to a conference/workshop as a reason for travelling. It is unclear whether these individuals flew expressly to present only, or they did attend the conference but did not select this option in the survey because they considered it to be implied. Likewise, it is not certain that those respondents who chose both attendance and presentation did both in the same trip or different trips. Future surveys should offer more specific response choices to provide a better understanding of reasons for travelling.

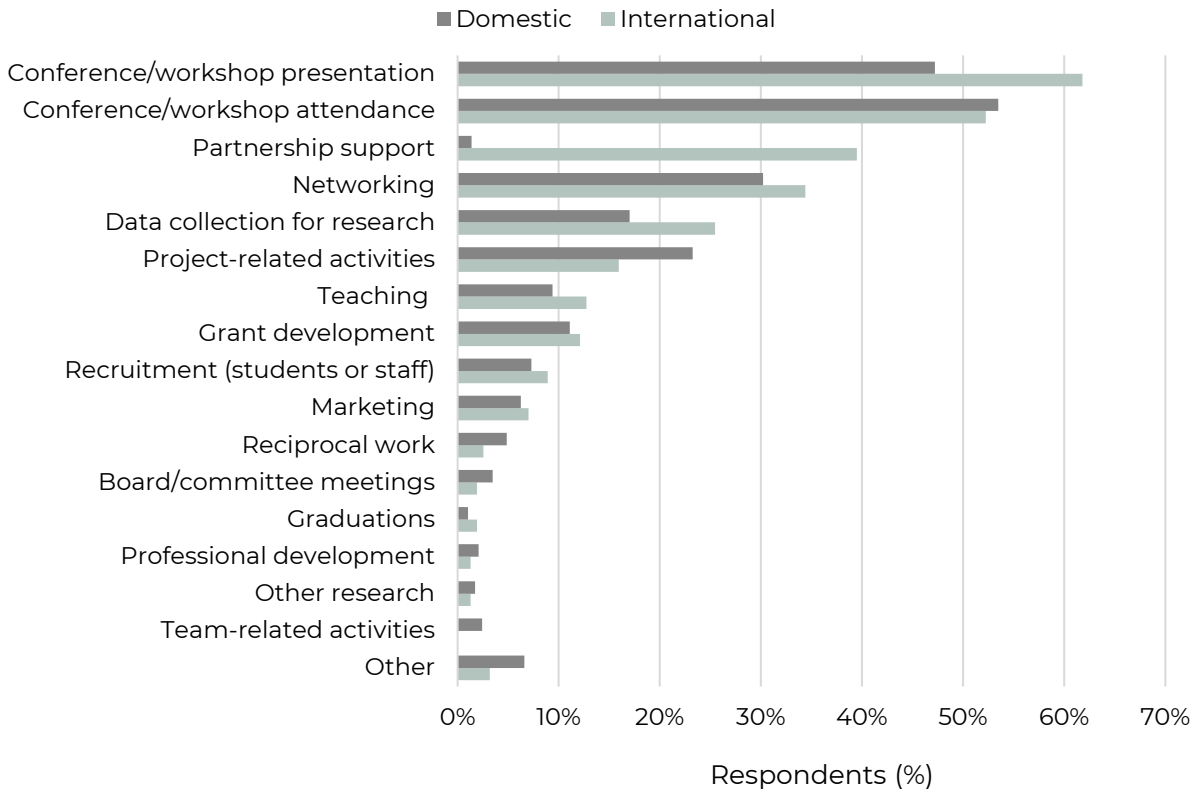

Figure 3.5 *Reasons for international and domestic travel in 2019.*

Table 3.1 *Attendance to and/or presentation at a conference as a reason for air travel by primary role.*

	All respondents (%)		Academic staff (%)		Professional staff (%)	
	Internat. n = 123	Domestic n = 213	Internat. n = 106	Domestic n = 136	Internat. n = 17	Domestic n = 77
Attendance (total)	67%	72%	67%	67%	65%	82%
Presentation (total)	79%	64%	83%	79%	53%	36%
Attendance and presentation	46%	36%	50%	46%	18%	18%
Attendance only	21%	36%	17%	21%	47%	64%
Presentation only	33%	28%	33%	33%	35%	18%

When asked about the reason why they did not travel in 2029, most participants indicated that their work did not involve air travel-related tasks. This was the main reason for both academic and professional staff, and for international and domestic travel. However, reasons

for not travelling were more distributed in the case of academic staff, with budget constraints also being a relatively frequent reason for not travelling. A small percentage of respondents indicated that they had chosen alternatives to air travel, with academic staff being more likely to do so (Figures 3.6 and 3.7).

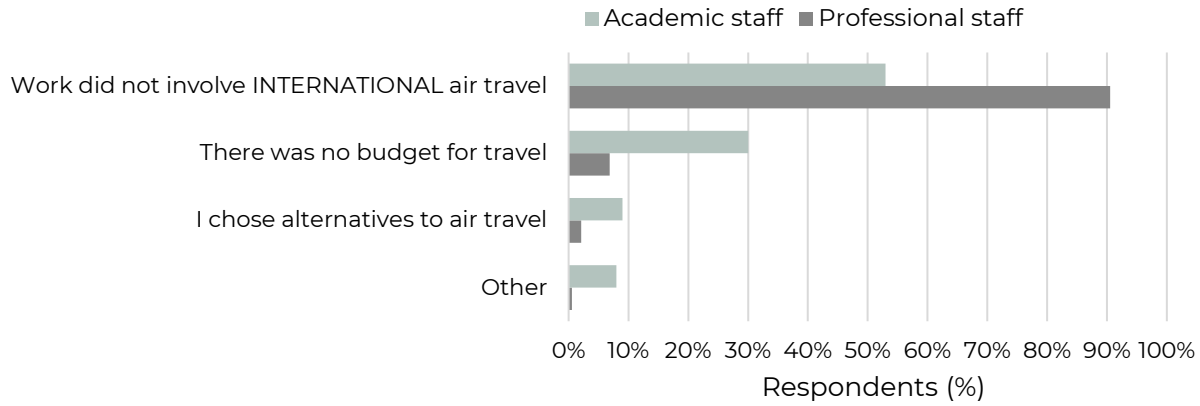

Figure 3.6 *Reasons for no international travel in 2019 by primary role.*

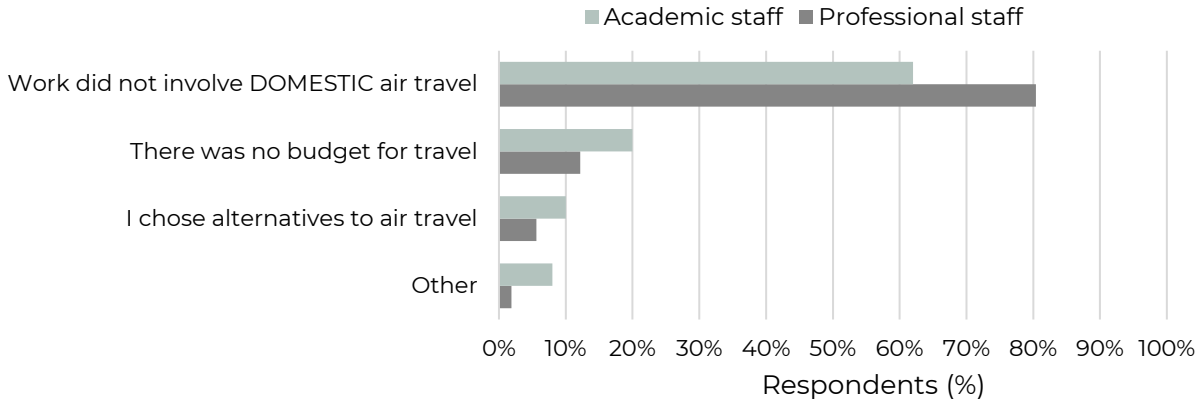

Figure 3.7 *Reasons for no domestic travel in 2019 by primary role.*

3.1.4 Air travel alternatives

Some air travel could be avoided with the use of alternative options. The survey findings underscore the popularity of various digital platforms for remote communication, with videoconferencing, file sharing and phone calls being the top three alternative options to air travel (Figure 3.8). It is worth noting that although most respondents indicated that they had used alternative options to avoid air travel (some 77% for 2019 travel and 91% for 2020-21 travel), some survey participants may have answered this question without consideration of air travel avoidance (i.e., they selected the options they used, but these did not necessary replace air travel).

Smartphone or computer-based video call/webinar platforms (e.g., Zoom, MS Teams) can offer a seamless substitute for face-to-face meetings. Additionally, file sharing platforms such

as MS Teams, OneDrive, and Dropbox facilitate collaborative work without the need for physical presence. Traditional modes of communication such as landline and mobile telephone calls remain prevalent and dependable choices for connecting individuals and organisations across distances. Using alternative modes of communication can not only enhance productivity and collaboration but also significantly contribute to environmental sustainability and cost savings by avoiding air (and other forms of) travel.

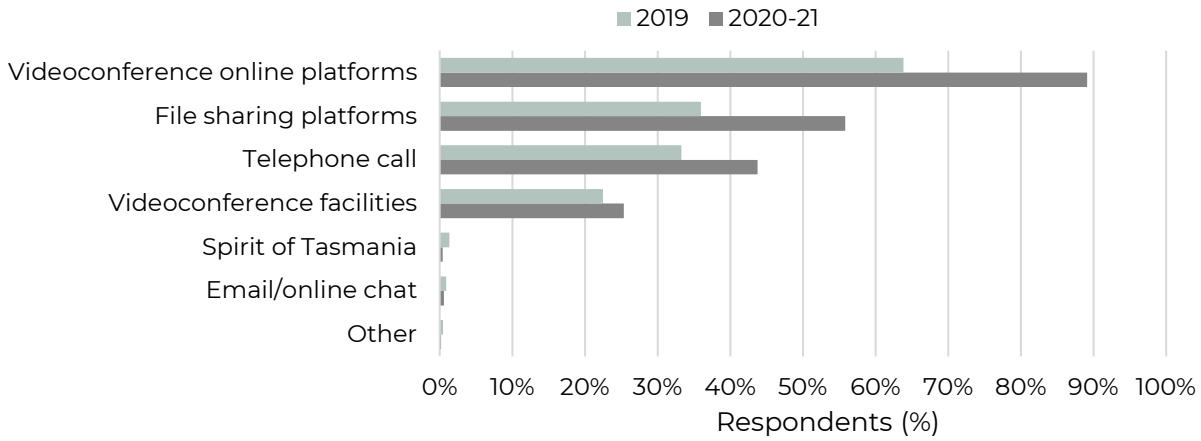

Figure 3.8 *Use of alternative options to avoid air travel in 2019 and during the COVID restricted air travel period.*

Despite the prevalence of virtual alternatives to air travel, 37% of respondents who had travelled and/or intended to travel internationally believed that less than 10% of their overseas business activities could be conducted without flying (Figure 3.9). For some, the reason may be the indispensable nature of face-to-face interactions or personal preferences, while others might cite limitations in technology or infrastructure hindering the use of alternative options.

Face-to-face meetings are valued for fostering genuine connections, facilitating clearer communication, and enhancing team cohesion. It is particularly advantageous in client interactions and recruitment processes, where establishing trust and rapport are important. Therefore, while virtual alternatives offer convenience and cost savings, they may struggle to fully replace the benefits of in-person engagements in certain professional contexts.

Conversely, 6% of respondents overall considered that they could effectively achieve most (over 90%) of their overseas activities using virtual alternatives. This percentage was higher for professional staff (14%) than academic staff (3%) (Figure 3.9). The mean value for percentage of overseas activities that could be achieved without flying was 34% overall.

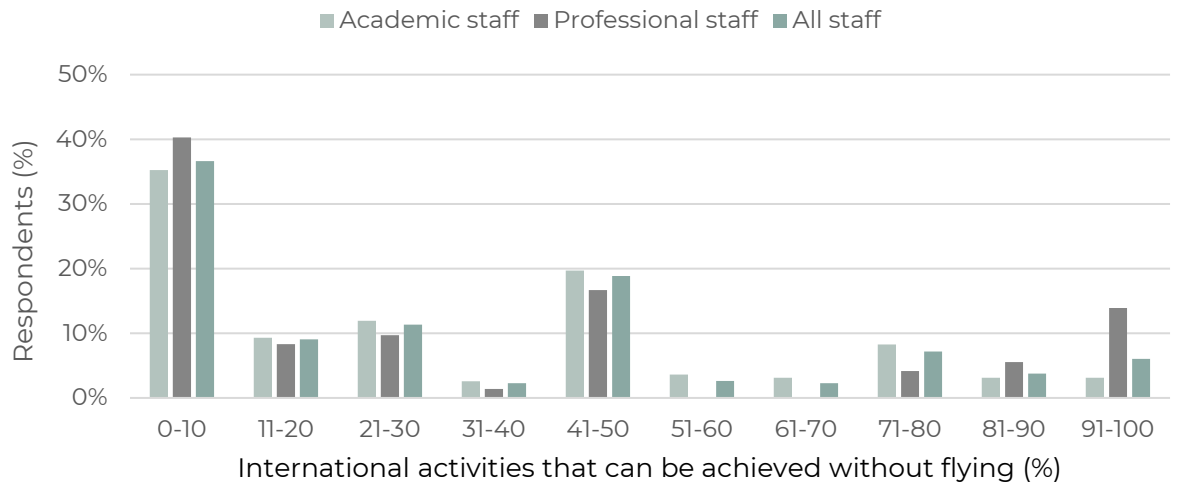

Figure 3.9 *Percentage of overseas activities that can be achieved without flying. Note: excludes respondents who did not travel or intended to travel.*

The survey also asked about motivations for using alternative options to air travel in 2019. As an optional open-ended question, responses were assigned to one or more themes for ease of analysis. Respondents provided diverse motivations, with budget and efficiency being the most frequent themes, followed by ease/convenience (Table 3.2). Almost a fifth of respondents (18%) clearly indicated that they chose alternatives to air travel because of their positive environmental impact, such as reducing carbon emissions and combating climate change. However, this percentage could be higher if those who simply indicated that they preferred not to travel did so because of environmental reasons.

Table 3.2 *Motivations for using alternative options to air travel in 2019.*

Motivation	Respondents (%)
Efficiency	25%
Budget	25%
Ease/Convenience	22%
Environmental reasons	18%
Good alternative option	15%
Personal preference	9%
Other work commitments	6%
Business as usual	4%
Family commitments	3%
Proposed by others	1%

Some respondents merely indicated that alternatives to air travel were good options (15%), or these were used as BAU (4%), so it is unclear whether they considered air travel avoidance in their response. Other factors included work or familiar commitments (6% and 3% respectively), and other teams or organisations' requirements and preferences (1%). The latter might indicate the willingness of other organisations to reduce air travel in their operations, although this was not explicitly mentioned in the comments.

3.2 Air travel needs and requirements

The section discusses the perceived need of air travel for academic and professional staff at UTAS to work effectively and for career progression, as well as specific disciplinary or area requirements and expectations to travel.

3.2.1 Effective work

Overall, 76% of the respondents who travelled in 2019 or intended to travel in 2023 thought that air travel was necessary to do their job at the University effectively. Noting the percentage was higher for academic staff than professional staff (Figure 3.10).

Academic staff noted the need of face-to-face interactions for effective networking and collaboration, as well as research/project requirements and attendance to conference and workshops (many of which only offer on-site programs) as the main reasons for air travel. While these were also the main reasons for professional staff, frequency was lower. Other activities such as partnerships support, professional development or team connection and relevant activities were cited by professional staff more frequently than academic staff (Figure 3.11).

Despite the rise of online communication and collaboration platforms, largely driven by COVID-19 travel restrictions, in-person interactions remain relevant (or even essential) and provide advantages for some university business-related activities (e.g., fieldwork, opportunities for stronger collaboration, idea exchange, and practical application of research findings). Additionally, there are challenges associated with time zone differences and privacy issues (e.g., for live streaming and recording board meetings) when using virtual options. As Tasmania is an island state, land travel is not an option for international and interstate travel. The only alternative to air travel for interstate trips is crossing the Bass Strait by ferry, however this is time consuming and ineffective, especially if travelling beyond Melbourne.

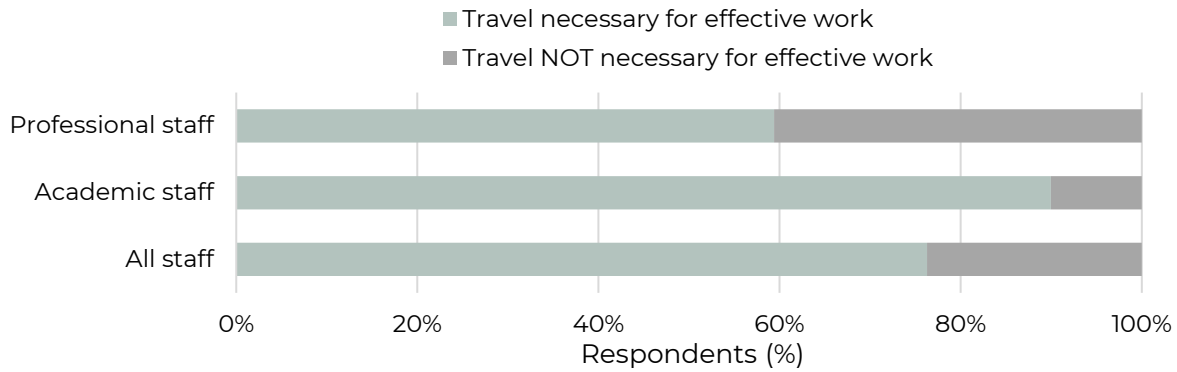

Figure 3.10 *Necessity of air travel to work effectively at the University by primary role.*

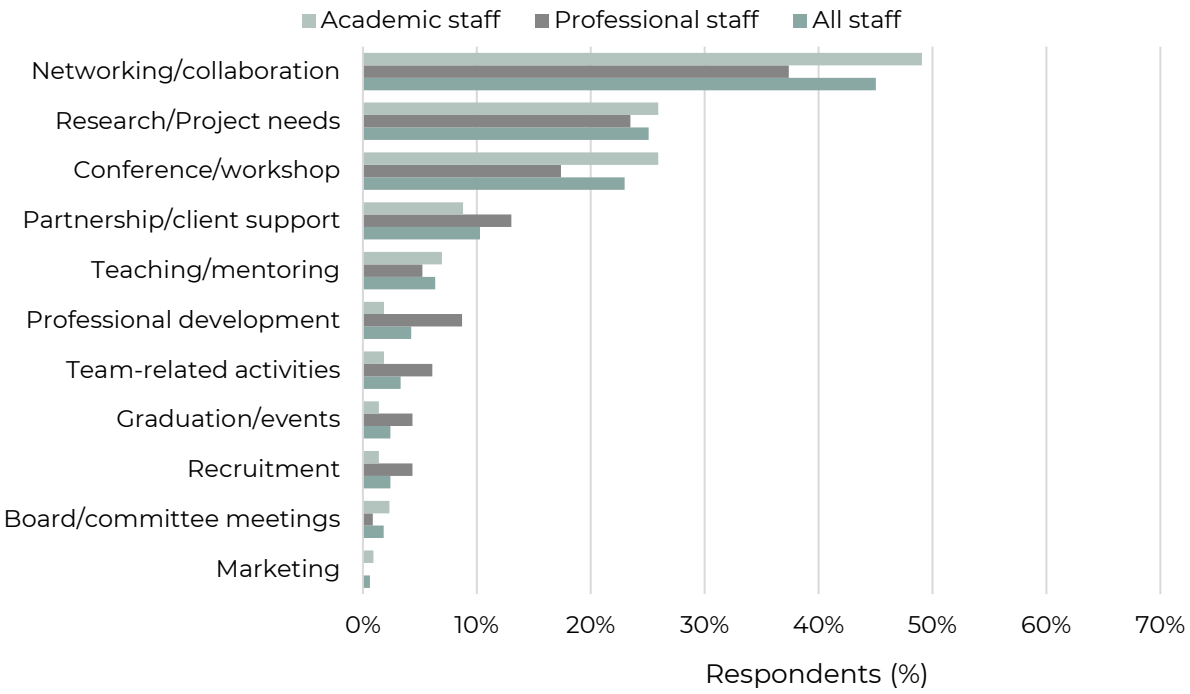

Figure 3.11. *Reasons why air travel is necessary to work effectively at the University by primary role.*

3.2.2 Career progression

Survey participants were also asked about the need of air travel for their career progression. Although most of the respondents who had travelled in 2019 or intended to travel in 2023 thought that air travel was necessary for their career progression, the percentage was lower when compared with the need of air travel to work effectively (61% versus 76%). Again, the percentage was higher for academic staff than professional staff (Figure 3.12).

In person networking and collaboration, research and projects requirements, and attending conferences and workshops were the three main reasons provided by academic staff who

believed air travel was necessary for career progression. Common outcomes of these activities are increasing exposure, building profile, and meeting collaborators. These are critical for career progression in academia.

For professional staff, networking was also the main reason for air travel in relation to career progression, however this was followed by professional development. Some respondents mentioned they could engage better with industry and build more beneficial relationship during face-to-face events. However, most of these events were held outside Tasmania (Figure 3.13).

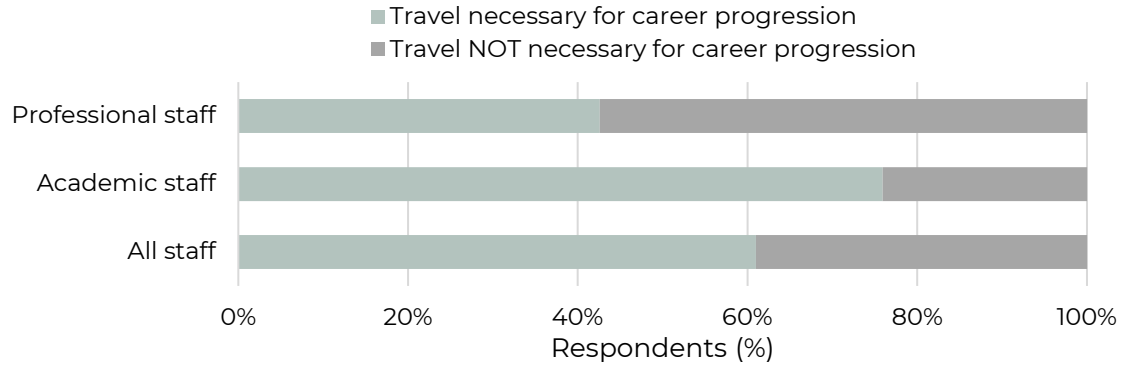

Figure 3.12 *Necessity of air travel for career progression at the University by primary role.*

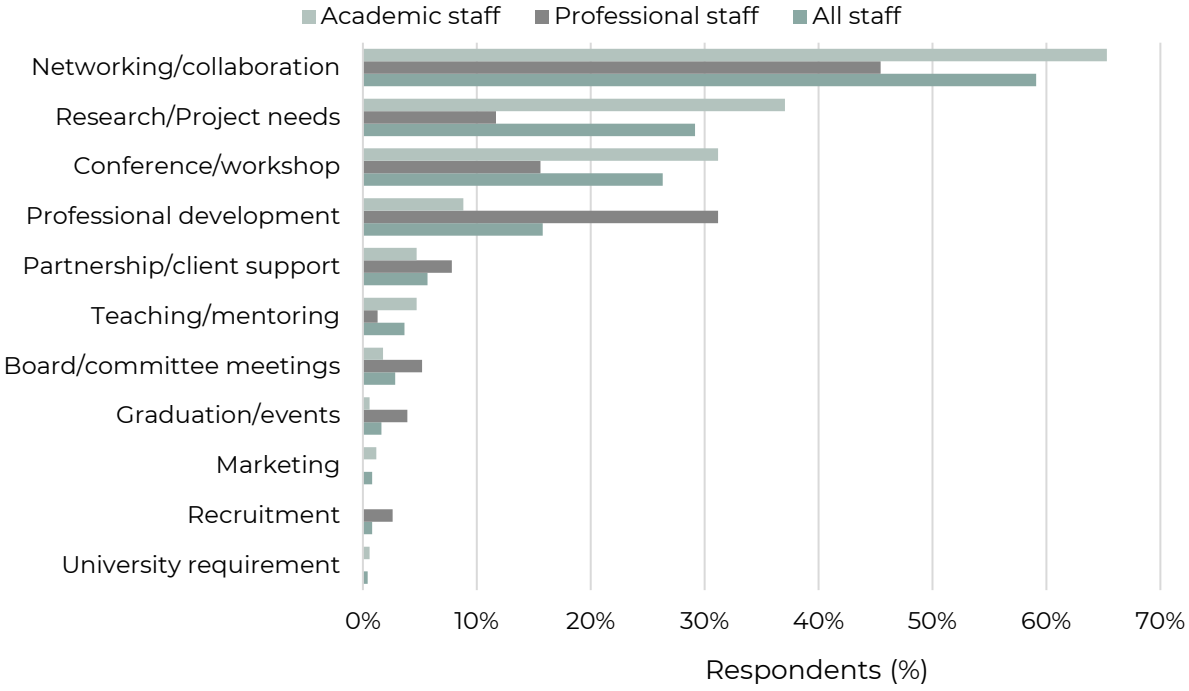

Figure 3.13 *Reasons why air travel is necessary for career progression at the University by primary role.*

3.2.3 Discipline/College/Division requirements and expectations

When asked about specific disciplinary or College/Division requirements or expectations for air travel (optional open-end question), most respondents indicated that there was none (50% of academic staff and 66% of professional staff; 58% overall). Interestingly, some respondents (most of whom had travelled or intended to travel in the future) expressed uncertainty about requirements/expectations (8% overall).

Although several participants who responded affirmatively to this question did not provide details, among those who did, the most frequently cited reason was research/project requirements (Figure 3.14). This was followed by networking/collaboration for academic staff, and conference/workshop attendance for professional staff (although the number of respondents was too low to draw strong conclusions).

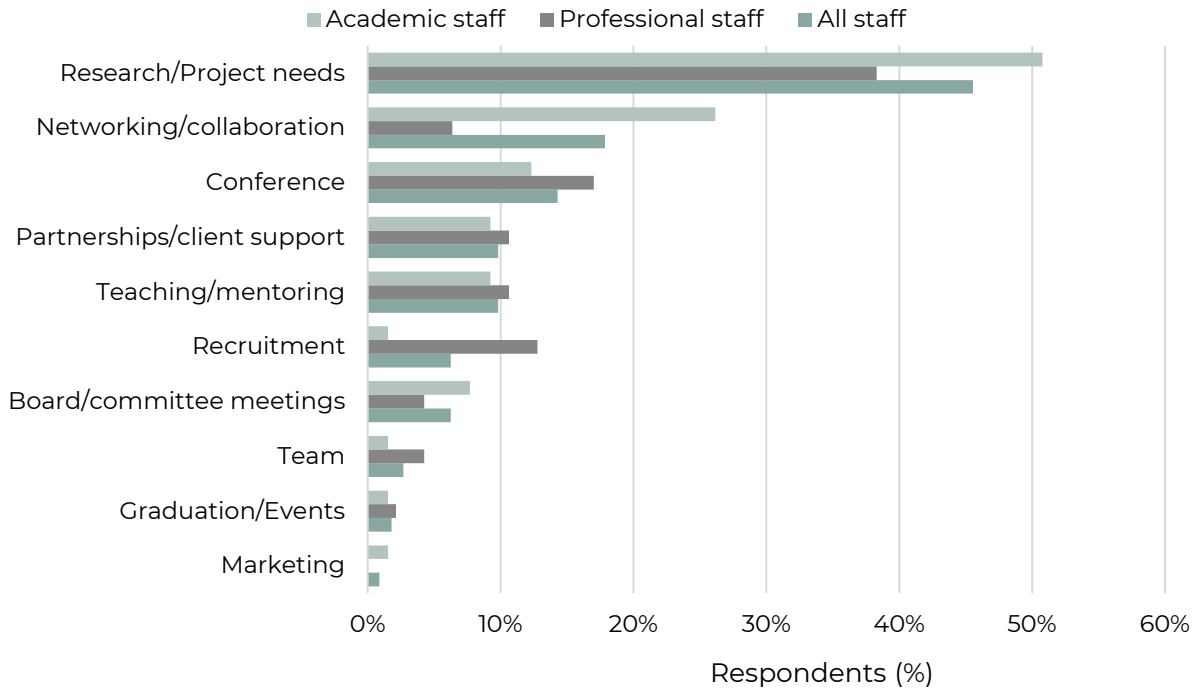

Figure 3.14 *Discipline/College/Division requirements or expectations for air travel by primary role.*

3.3 Climate action awareness and opinions

3.3.1 Commitment to climate action

3.3.1.1 University's commitments awareness

Survey results indicate that approximately three-fourths of the participants were aware/familiar with the University's commitments to climate action and/or the University Emissions Reduction Strategic Plan (ERSP) 2022-2030 prior to this survey (Figure 3.15). This

suggests commendable efforts by the University in communicating these initiatives, while also having areas for potential improvement. Respondents on professional roles were slightly more likely to be aware/familiar with the University's commitments, perhaps because various areas within divisions are tasked with the implementation of the ERSP, and/or report on climate-related initiatives.

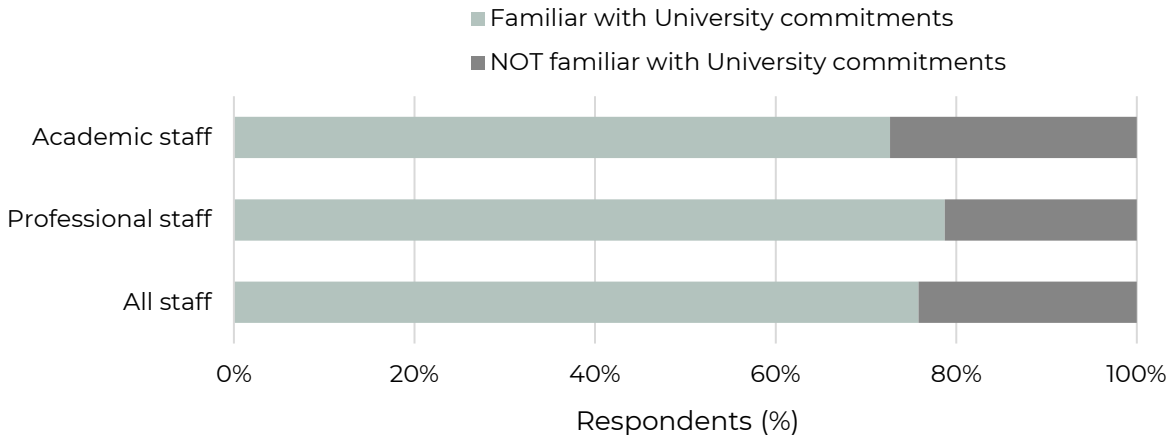

Figure 3.15 *Familiarity with the University's commitments to climate action and/or the ERSP by primary role.*

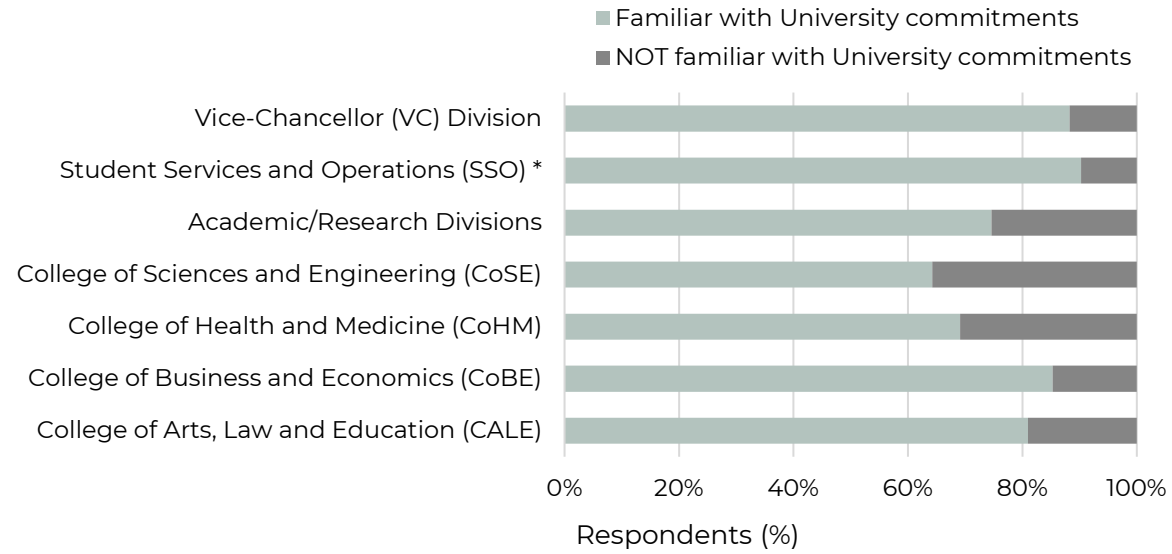

Figure 3.16 *Familiarity with the University's commitments to climate action and/or the ERSP by College/Division.*
** SSO includes the previous Future Students and Chief Operating Officer (including People and Wellbeing) Divisions.*

Analysis by College/Division revealed that the College of Sciences and Engineering exhibited the lowest proportion of familiarity with the University's commitments (Figure 3.16). This was surprising considering many academics in this College work on climate-related topics.

Student Services and operations together with People and Wellbeing showed a relatively larger proportion of respondents who were aware of the University's commitments. Note that as the survey was prepared before various Divisions restructures, and the school/area questions were optional, therefore it is not possible to separate People and Wellbeing respondents or Academic/Research Divisions.

Efforts to promote awareness should be tailored to colleges/divisions with lower levels of familiarity to ensure broader engagement and contribution to sustainability initiatives.

3.3.1.2 Carbon offsetting

Survey participants were informed that the University has been offsetting air travel since it became carbon neutral certified in 2016, and then asked about their opinions about offsetting air travel emissions. Most respondents were supportive of this practice to some degree, with some respondents adding the caveat that offsets need to be of high quality, with demonstrable emissions reduction. Some supportive respondents noted that offsetting is better than doing nothing, but the focus should be on emissions reduction. Some added that while air travel remains necessary to achieve our strategic goals, offsets are needed, in addition to emissions reduction, to achieve carbon neutrality. Interestingly, various respondents indicated that they did not have a strong opinion, or they did not know enough about offsets to express their opinion.

Respondents who were unsupportive of offsetting emissions named the lack of trust and ineffectiveness of these schemes, with some also commenting on their lack of trust that the University is engaging in true offsetting. The words "scam" and "greenwashing" were used by various respondents. Others indicated that it is only a "feel good" initiative, with no actual impact. It is worth noting that the University works very closely with our carbon offsets supplier to ensure the integrity of the projects we choose, and that these projects meet carbon offsetting principles as required by our Climate Active certification. We also seek projects that have additional certifications (such as Climate, Community & Biodiversity Standards), and follow a portfolio approach to our offset credits, including domestic and international projects from various countries (primarily from where our international students originate).

Table 3.3 *Level of support to the University offsetting air travel emissions by primary role.*

Level of support for carbon offsets	All respondents (%)	Academic staff (%)	Professional staff (%)
Supportive	73%	72%	74%
Unsupportive	16%	19%	12%
No opinion/neutral	6%	5%	7%
Don't know	5%	3%	7%

3.3.1.3 Air travel reduction pledges

When asked about pledges to reduce air travel (optional open question), 86% of respondents indicated that prior to the survey they were not aware of or signatory to any pledge. Only 6% of respondents were aware of these pledges, and only one respondent clearly indicated that they were a signatory. Because of the way this question was asked ("Are you aware of or a signatory to any public pledge (...)"), it is unclear whether respondents who simply answered "Yes" (6%) were only aware or also a signatory.

It is worth noting that various respondents commented on the fact that these pledges are not realistic in the University of Tasmania's context due to the barriers of living in an island. Although most respondents did not express their opinion in relation to pledges, some stated their support of these type of initiatives, while other respondents' comments were quite negative, showing a mix of opinions across the University.

3.3.1.4 Concern about the impact of air travel

Survey participants were asked if they were concerned about the impact of university air travel on climate change, and why. About half of respondents overall indicated that they were concerned, while the rest were not concerned or unsure. Interestingly, the percentage of respondents concerned about the impacts of air travel was higher for those who had travelled or were planning to travel (52% versus 42% of those who had not travelled or were planning to do so) (Figure 3.17).

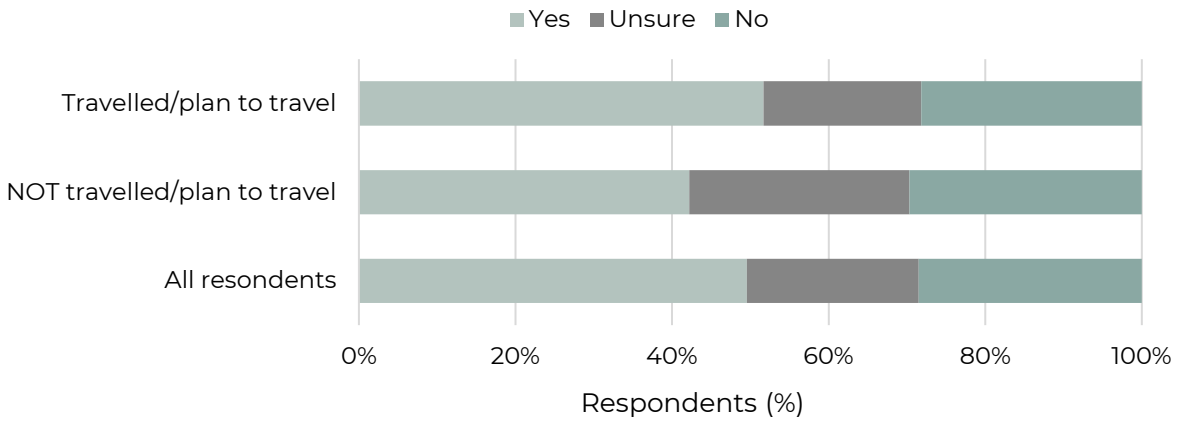

Figure 3.17 *Level of concern about the impact of university air travel on climate change in relation to whether they had travelled in 2019 or planned to travel in 2023 (either domestic or international).*

The main reason provided by those who were not concerned was that impacts from university travel on climate change were not significant or should not be the main priority (i.e., other emission sources should be addressed first), followed by the reassurance that the University was already addressing this issue (implying they did not need to). Some also pointed out that air travel was necessary in many instances to achieve University goals.

Most of those who indicated their concern for the impact of university air travel on climate change, commented on the high level of emissions from air travel (and other activities that use fossil fuels). Some also stated that the University can and should reduce air travel, although several respondents noted that some air travel is still needed.

Almost half of the respondents who were unsure of the impacts of air travel indicated that they did not know enough about the level of air travel at the University, the topic more generally, or had never considered it. Several respondents in this category pointed out that impacts were likely low or not a priority, while others also noted that travel was still needed, and it was difficult to find a balance between the benefits and the impacts of air travel.

It is worth noting that 5% of respondents who provided a comment (most concerned about the impacts of air travel) thought that a mixed message was being sent. Several respondents thought senior management were responsible for a high part of our air travel emissions (often flying unnecessarily) and were not 'walking the walk'. Some expressed their scepticism in relation to university motivations to reduce air travel, and one also commented on the pressure that academics feel to fly for career progression.

3.3.2 Barriers and incentives

The survey also prompted respondents to comment on barriers preventing university staff from using alternative travel options, and what personal and/or institutional incentives would encourage staff to use these options.

3.3.2.1 Barriers to the use of alternatives

When talking about barriers, half of the respondents mentioned the need of human interaction to achieve outcomes, which is more difficult in virtual communication. Some mentioned feeling they were missing out more in hybrid events, when online participants do share the benefits of the in-person event and are often considered 'second-class' attendees.

The second most common theme (raised by 21% of respondents) was in relation to issues that come from using online platforms. These included network/connection issues (at the University, but also external organisations) and the need of better facilities, as well as 'Zoom fatigue', personal challenges with the use of technology, the need of skilled hosts to make interactions engaging, the tendency (or expectation) for staff to still do their job while attending online events and meetings.

Other themes included a culture of travelling (15%), with some seeing it as a perk of the job, the need to be physically in specific locations, with no online alternative (e.g., for fieldwork, in-person only events, audits), sometimes because of contract, grant or partners'' requirements (16%), the ineffectiveness (or impossibility) of travelling by sea/land from Tasmania (5%), and the need of travel for career progression (3%).

It is worth noting that 8% of the respondents who commented on this topic though that there were no barriers to the use of alternative travel options.

3.3.2.2 Incentives to use alternatives to air travel

The most frequent comment in relation to personal and/or institutional incentives was that there was none that would encourage staff to use alternative travel options (39% of comments), although some of the respondents were simply unsure or could not think of any, while others indicated that none was needed because this was already happening.

Financial incentives (anything from vouchers to reallocate savings to research accounts) and additional resources (such as time for additional travel days or TOIL for evening conferences, for example) were mentioned often (20%).

Several staff commented on the need of state-of-the-art technology and facilities, as we all innovative and engaging approaches to virtual engagements that ensure outcomes equivalent to in-person interactions. Related comments were about the need to encourage others to support virtual conferences and engagements (including professional associations and the Australian Research Council, for example), and for staff not travelling to be recognised and not penalised in terms of career progression.

The need for strict policies and procedures for air travel approval coupled with guidelines for approval decisions, was mentioned in 9% of the comments, with some of these and other respondents highlighting the need of senior/executive staff to lead by example. Budget restriction and carbon price were also suggested by some respondents to limit air travel.

Several respondents indicated that having accessible information on the amount of travel per university area and/or the impacts on climate change and suitable alternatives, would help staff to make informed decisions when planning activities that might require travel. Some suggested that combining various activities while travelling (rather than several trips) would be effective; this would have to be paired with remote work being allowed while away.

3.3.3 Final remarks

At the end of the survey, all participants were given the chance to provide further comments about air travel at the University. Some 33% of respondents took the chance to do so; these comments were analysed and assigned to one or more themes. Most of the identified topics had already been mentioned in other parts of the survey.

The most common topic (43% of all comments) was the need to travel for academic or other related University business, with some respondents highlighting the special situation of the University being in an island state. The need of reduction of air travel was also mentioned often (31%), although several respondents asked for air travel not to be limited (13%) and some suggested that the focus should be on other emission sources or more urgent University issues (5%). In addition, some respondents commented on the need to be equitable when prioritising air travel for staff, with postgraduate students/early career researchers and family needs specifically mentioned. Others highlighted the need to empower our staff to make informed decisions about their own travel (3%).

Several respondents (7%) commented again on their belief that senior management/academics were responsible for most air travel emissions (often flying unnecessarily) (see section 3.3.1.4). It is also worth noting that various respondents (6%) complained about the existing booking system (e.g., excessive cost of airfares compared to online purchasing, waiting time for processing, approval procedures).

Figure 3.18 *Word cloud of comments in response to the question "Is there anything else you would like to say about air travel at UTAS?"*

4 Where to from here

The 2022 Air Travel Survey has provided a better understanding of behaviours and reasons for travel by UTAS academic and professional staff, the state of understanding by staff of what UTAS was doing at the time of the survey in relation to air travel, barriers to the use of alternatives to air travel, and potential approaches and incentives that would encourage staff to fly less and value add to the air travel that is conducted. That is, the intent is not that staff stop traveling, rather that the results of this survey can help the University build alternative approaches, reward structures, appropriate benchmarks as well as the infrastructure and the processes that will enable it to continue to be a leading role model of climate action.

Pursuit of air travel emission reductions can be informed by application of the 'Transport Cultures Framework of Academic Flying'[4], with adaptation to professional staff, which allows identification of the factors that form and influence flying cultures. These include material culture, practices, and cognitive norms that allow touchpoints to reduce travel demand. For

[4] Book Chapter: *Academic Air Travel Cultures: A Framework for Reducing Academic Flying*. In: Academic Flying and the Means of Communication (pp.327-353) (January 2022). DOI:10.1007/978-981-16-4911-0_13

example, availability and quality of virtual interaction support for meetings and conferences, self-reflection opportunities for staff regarding travel choices (e.g., pledges to reduce travel), university expectations related to career progression (especially for academics) and other outcomes (e.g., student recruitment), and guidelines used to assess the value of proposed travel. Noting that it is important that the approach be forward-looking and focus both on institutional and individual responsibility rather than individual blame/guilt.

The proposed resolution seeks to build on lessons from the COVID period of significantly reduced travel and, given that many individual and university outcomes were achieved without air travel, actively seek to lock in a portion of the reduced travel demand while judiciously allowing some travel to occur that meets a needs and outcome filtering process.

In line with the University Emissions Reduction Strategic Plan minimum 50% reduction in gross emissions by 2030 on a 2015 baseline, the information from this survey, coupled with current data from the University's travel management system, will support development and implementation of a range of initiatives to manage our air travel to maximise value, including:

- Explore ways to make attending online conferences more attractive (acknowledging that many conferences no longer offer that option), such as technology improvements, dedicated on-campus attendance spaces so participants can focus on the conference (that is, not from home or the office with attendant distractions), meal vouchers, etc.
- Introduce an internal carbon price (carbon budget) based on social cost of carbon in late 2024 for inclusion from the 2025 budget cycle.
- Ensure that where possible grant applications for projects requiring air travel for research and conference attendance specifically include allocation for carbon offset costs and work with grant providers to provide this inclusion in the budget.
- Provision of regular reports on air travel emissions per organisational unit and a combined report (de-identified for individuals) for UET.
- Maintain the economy class Travel Policy and procedure requirement.
- Implement a decision guide for approvers of air travel that includes:
    - Is the travel essential?
    - Can it be done in any other way?
    - Can someone else at that location do the task?
    - How long and how far away is the location (and therefore proportionate benefit to climate emissions expended).
    - is it possible for value-adding to the travel undertaken?
    - Consider issues of equity for early career researchers.
    - Consider the type of activity/event: high ranking, events that are specialised for the field, the time when scholars get together, when there are opportunities for early career researchers to meet leaders in their field.

- Promote use of the online calculator for flight emissions embedded in the UTAS Travel website.
- Promote opportunities for staff (and students) to commit to a public pledge to reduce air travel and to share their stories (e.g., https://noflyclimatesci.org/ and https://flightfree.org/).