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SOCIETY

# Everyone on Board

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Bringing the public  
into the aviation  
debate

Natan Doron

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## About the Fabian Society Environment & Citizenship programme

This report is part of the Fabian Society's ongoing Environment and Citizenship programme. The programme looks at environmental policy challenges and the role of citizenship: both in terms of democratic consent and personal behavioural change. It considers the interaction between environmental issues, fairness and social justice and how public support can be built for sustainability measures affecting personal consumption. The programme seeks to influence the ideas, policies and arguments of government, political parties and the private sector through a series of publications, lectures and seminars.

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*"I know it sounds like a paradox. What I'm saying is, we have to. That is the way the world is going, if we said OK lets have less flights, other countries might not do that which would put us at an economic disadvantage. And like in the energy sector, there are loads of jobs in green energy and there's loads of money and its helping our economy to grow. So why couldn't we find ways to have more efficient, productive aircraft?" [Male, London]*

This report explores public attitudes to aviation policy and sustainability. How do people reconcile the tension between avoiding dangerous climate change and the economic benefits brought by aviation to the UK economy? How do the public feel about debates on airport capacity? What policy solutions are attractive to the public and why? And crucially: to what extent are people willing to adjust their flying habits to limit their environmental impact?

The research in this report is based on a set of deliberative focus groups that took place in a range of locations throughout England with over 40 participants. Participants were drawn from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and represented a broad spectrum of political opinion. The deliberative process adopted in this research shows that people readily engage with information about aviation, climate and the economy.

There were seven key conclusions drawn from this research:

- There is a worrying trend towards climate change scepticism.
- The current ill health of the UK economy is the primary concern of most people, but not younger people.
- People are almost universally hostile to the idea of flying less in order to limit the climate impacts of flying.
- Despite the trend to scepticism, public opinion is open to influence on climate issues.
- The public are tired of what they perceive to be politicians making airport capacity decisions only to further their electoral advantage.
- People won't change their behaviour without the government showing a stronger lead.
- The aviation industry can be a central part of a better and more responsible UK economy.

People tend to see environmental and economic objectives as necessarily opposed and 'zero sum'. However the research suggests the aviation debate can be reframed by presenting sustainable aviation as a common endeavour in developing the conditions for green technology and green jobs.

The report draws out the key lessons for all stakeholders. We recommend that the government takes into account the evidence found in this research about positive public attitudes to including international aviation within UK carbon budgets. This would encourage the aviation industry to go further in the work it is already doing to reduce its climate impacts. Participants expressed strong support for the 'greening' of the aerospace sector, so it is clear that all stakeholders need to prioritise the advancement of this agenda.

The report also recommends an independent cross-party commission to review the future for sustainable aviation and airport capacity, whose work will be based on evidence that is accepted by all stakeholders.

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## Introduction

**T**he debate about aviation policy is unconstructive and polarised. It is also very important: aviation is at the forefront of both the success of our economy and the sustainability of our planet.

But the debate is often framed by voices on the extreme sides of the discussion – those who see all flying as wrong and those who dismiss climate change altogether. This polarisation conceals a more measured debate, between those who think the aviation industry’s priority should be meeting increased demand for flying and those who think it should be drastically reducing its carbon emissions.

With the stakes high for both climate change and the UK economy, this is not a policy area that should be driven purely by emotive campaigning, but one that should enjoy measured, informed and considered debate. It is therefore important that a feasible and realistic view of sustainable aviation, with the support of both environmental groups and the aviation industry, begins to take shape.

But for any policy framework to be credible, it must also have the support of the British public. Public attitudes constitute a major constraint on evidence-based policymaking here. The 2009 British Social Attitudes Survey suggests there is strong public attachment to the freedom to fly but that this is coupled with growing public concern about the effect that aviation has on climate system stability.

Exploration of public attitudes is therefore an integral component of developing a credible sustainable aviation framework. A major drawback of the approaches proposed both by some environmental

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groups and some business groups is that neither enjoys strong public support. The political process will be greatly enhanced by policy formation which understands what the public think.

In light of this, our research explores the ways people respond to information about climate change, the climate impact of flying, and the contribution of flying to the UK economy. We wanted to understand how people evaluated the tensions between the varying issues involved, and to find out what people thought the priority should be in policy making. Investigating this threw up issues about the varying flying behaviours of different groups in society, questions of airport capacity, responsibility for decision making, and policy options for mitigating the climate impacts of flying.

The research led to seven main conclusions, which should serve as a wake-up call to all and map out the ground on which consensus in the debate should be built.

## Key findings from the research

### 1) There is a worrying trend towards climate change scepticism.

Despite a sampling strategy designed to filter out hardened climate sceptics, a surprising number of participants in our focus groups thought that climate science was exaggerated or just an exercise in scaremongering. This finding confirms what the recent British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey found in terms of the growth in climate scepticism amongst the British public. In the BSA survey, 37 per cent agreed that many claims about environmental threats are exaggerated. This is up from 24 per cent in the year 2000.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> British Social Attitudes, 28th edition, 2011-2012

Lack of concern about the climate impact of aviation is not necessarily worrying in and of itself (it could result from informed debate about the relative contributions of different economic activities). It is a problem however when it is derived from resistance to the idea of climate change more broadly. Such scepticism presents a challenge for all stakeholders in their attempts to build support for addressing climate impacts both from aviation and across the economy more generally.

2) The current ill health of the UK economy is the primary concern of most people, but not younger people.

Whether discussing the impact of flying on the environment, airport capacity expansion or policy solutions for reducing carbon emissions, participants consistently framed issues in relation to the UK economy. Just as understanding the increase in climate scepticism is crucial for aviation policy, so too is the need to understand the anxiety caused by the current economic situation in the UK.

However whilst younger participants accepted the importance of the economy, they strongly emphasised the climate as a priority for aviation policy. Whereas older participants prioritised short-term economic issues and the personal freedom to fly, younger participants were more focused on the longer-term consequences of aviation and the sustainability of the environment and the economy.

3) People are almost universally hostile to the idea of flying less in order to limit the climate impacts of flying.

Almost all focus group participants articulated an aspiration to continue flying, and many to be able to fly more. This was true even amongst participants who stated that avoiding dangerous climate change should take priority over the maintenance of economic benefits. Indeed, our before and after surveys indicate that resistance to flying less actually

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hardened after three hours of deliberation on the issues of aviation, climate and the economy.

A key factor in this hostility to the idea of flying less was the importance of the holiday abroad. Participants placed a high premium on being able to conveniently and quickly reach good holiday destinations. To some participants, sacrificing flights abroad was seen as too high a burden to bear in changing behaviour to be more environmentally friendly. It is hard to overstate the attachment of participants to the idea of a holiday abroad.

**Male:** *People like to go on holiday, with all the things that are going on in the world, if you're going to do something environmentally friendly, you've got to make it worthwhile. You've got to give people an enjoyment in life... there's no point having a world which is environmentally friendly which isn't worth living in. [York]*

### 4) Despite the trend to scepticism, public opinion is open to influence on climate issues.

From an environmental perspective, one of the encouraging findings emerging from the research is the extent to which the surveys accompanying the group discussions revealed a pro-environmental shift in attitudes. This at first seems to contradict findings emerging from the discussions revealing an increased tendency towards climate scepticism. But closer analysis reveals that the nature of this shift is one to a particular environmental attitudes segment. This segment, known as 'concerned consumers' is a group that is pro-environmental in views but without strong conviction. Furthermore, this group is strongly attached to flying but also confident that humanity is able to overcome big environmental challenges. Analysis of the views of participants who made such a shift showed that they were all particularly engaged with discussion of policy solutions. This suggests that doing more to engage people with policy solutions that work with rather than against their lifestyle

preferences could build democratic consent for sustainability policy. The small sample size involved in qualitative work recommends further study on this aspect of attitudinal shifts.

5) The public are tired of what they perceive to be politicians making airport capacity decisions only to further their electoral advantage.

Participants expressed near universal disapproval of politicians. This came through most strongly when discussing the dynamics of decision-making about airport capacity.

Put simply, the views expressed in the groups indicated that participants are fed up of what they perceive as politicians using airport capacity decisions to suit their electoral purposes. When one group expressed particularly negative views towards politicians in this regard, they were asked what messages they would communicate to politicians if they were presented with the opportunity to do so. One of the resulting answers was something incredibly simple that hinted at the gulf between what participants expected of politicians and what they perceived as the reality:

**Male:** *When they're debating and rationalising, not to have made their mind up before that process starts. [Birmingham]*

6) People won't change their behaviour without the government showing a stronger lead.

Perhaps counter-intuitively given the overwhelming negativity expressed towards politicians, government was still seen as having the greatest responsibility managing the balance between economic and environmental priorities. If government isn't seen as taking climate change seriously, then neither will the public. Including aviation emis-

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sions in climate change targets is a good example of this, with one participant commenting:

**Female:** *That automatically makes me think if they haven't included it in that target it's not one of their primary concerns.* [Bournemouth]

7) The aviation industry can be a central part of a better and more responsible UK economy.

Recent political debate has focused on the need for a more responsible capitalism, less focused on short-term shareholder profit and with greater emphasis on longer-term investment and wider societal duties. Our focus groups showed a clear desire for greater responsibility from business. The aviation industry has an opportunity to become a beacon of responsible capitalism by developing expertise and creating jobs in the UK whilst demonstrating the commitment to climate stability at a global level.



## 1 | Findings: Reconciling climate and economy

- Participants readily engaged with the information about climate, economic and societal issues related to flying, demonstrating that although this is a difficult policy area it is one in which the public are willing and able to consider seriously. There was a sharp difference in age groups in terms of favouring the economy or climate, with young people being far more likely to see a focus on climate as more pressing. In general when asked to choose, participants leaned towards favouring the economy in the short term.
- Despite a recruitment strategy designed to filter out hardened climate-sceptics, a substantial number of participants expressed scepticism about climate science using phrases like ‘exaggerated’ and ‘scaremongering’ to describe how it is reported and presented in the media.
- When shown information about climate change impacts arising from aviation, participants showed a tendency to view emissions as a UK total (of which aviation is relatively small) as opposed to personal carbon footprints (of which aviation is relatively high).
- Participants articulated a strong attachment to the ‘right to a holiday abroad’. The reasons for this included price and weather, as well as the importance of leaving the UK for a different cultural experience. Participants also expressed anger at the cost of train travel and holidays in the UK more generally.



### Flying and climate change

**W**hen invited to share their initial thoughts on the environmental impacts on flying, some participants communicated resistance to thinking about flying as something connected directly to climate change. This was often backed up by stating that it is strange to single out one particular sector or activity.

In addition to playing down the link between climate change and flying, participants would often bring up reasons why flying was important or something they enjoyed doing. They would often agree with each other and offer supporting statements that they enjoyed flying for holidays and do not think about the environment when doing this.

**Male:** *I don't think they're completely connected... there are lots of reasons why [the] climate is changing... air travel is just one of them but it's not the only one and I don't think you can put just one factor on it, and I quite enjoy travelling by air.*

**Female:** *I agree in the sense that generally when you think about flying you tend to think about holidays and you tend to be quite selfish... you might detach yourself from it because it's somebody else's responsibility, so even in your mind you might make a logical connection to environmental change because you're on a different dimension when you're planning holidays, you tend to be, well, I tend to be, selfish in thinking what I'm going to get out of it.[London]*

As well as stating that they didn't think about the environment whilst flying, some participants would respond to the initial idea of linking it to climate change by offering alternative things that perhaps emitted more.

**Male:** *Well, flying is said to be bad for the environment I believe, but if you think about the amount of people you can cram into a plane and if you think they each took a car, it wouldn't be clear cut which is worse. [Newbury]*

Participants also sometimes introduced the idea that they might have to pay more for flights or perhaps face restrictions on flying in some cases, demonstrating a general fear for some that the environment inevitably means paying more or flying less.

In five out of six of the groups there were expressions of climate scepticism in response to the information about growing carbon emissions. This was a worrying finding in light of our recruitment sample being designed to filter out hardened climate sceptics. The nature of climate scepticism in the groups was that the problem of climate change had been exaggerated or was being used to frighten people for certain ends, such as revenue-raising by government or industry.

**Male:** *I'm a little sceptical of potential exaggeration of it [climate change] by the government, for their own means, whether it's taxation or whatever.*  
[Gillingham]

**Male:** *...climate change has happened before... so it might naturally happen anyway... supermarkets charge you for a plastic bag, which isn't helping anything because it's just making money off you so I'm not really buying into it.* [Newbury]

Another common response to the information was an example of what has been identified in previous Fabian Society research as an 'outsourcing blame' strategy used in response to information about climate change. This strategy consists of citing the inaction of countries such as the USA or China as being the main contributors to the problem and as a result, any focus on the UK being of little use.

**Male:** *If we all try and do as much as we can in England, I don't think it'll make much of a difference if other countries aren't contributing the same.*  
[Gillingham]

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On average participants guessed that flying would account for over 50 per cent of current UK emissions. When participants were presented with information that this was closer to 6 per cent, there was a lot of surprise. Some participants took to this to imply that there should not be a strong focus on reducing the climate impacts of flying.

**Female:** *It's insignificant really; I think they should leave flying alone.*  
[Birmingham]

In two of the groups, there were participants who immediately responded to this information by expressing concern at how fast emissions from aviation are rising.

**Male:** *My question would be what is the projection for the amount of flights in the future? It might only be 6 per cent now but in 50 years what is it going to be? Because if it goes exponentially crazy than it's an issue.*  
[Birmingham]

Participants showed a tendency to view emissions as a UK total (of which aviation is relatively small) as opposed to personal carbon footprints (of which aviation is relatively high). When asked to explore this tension, participants admitted that whilst they could cut down their personal footprint by not flying, they would rather go without other things. One participant suggested she would even go without heating to allow her to be able fly.

**Female:** *At the end of the day if I choose not heat my house, if I choose to put extra clothes on and not use my fuel because I'm saving my money to fly instead I don't see why I should be dictated to for the way I organise my life.* [Birmingham]

Some participants acknowledged that with flying there was more of an opportunity to do something about your carbon footprint than cutting

down in other areas of the economy. In many cases though, participants would express a feeling that if you personally didn't fly, someone else would in your place. The discussion below is illustrative of such an exchange.

**Male 1:** ... *My feeling is that we have to look after the environment.*

**Female 1:** *I agree with you but there are much bigger things that are damaging the environment than flying. Much bigger areas.*

**Male 2:** *We produce methane and butane to put in the aerosols, but the earth produces it naturally.*

**Male 1:** *But that's not something you can do anything about though, flying is something you can do something about.*

**Female 2:** *But if Sara (fictional character from focus group stimulus material) only did her flight to Sydney once, then the flight, they'd just get someone else on it... [Birmingham]*

## Flying, holidays and the economy

Participants expressed strong attachment to the idea of flying and in particular to the 'right' to a holiday abroad. Following the discussion about flying and climate change, participants were asked to list the kinds of benefits that they felt flying brought to both society and individuals.

Participants in all groups listed a large number of benefits brought by flying. The main recurring benefits included: speed; convenience; wider travel opportunities; a better travelling experience; more affordable than other forms of transport in many cases; safety; benefits to trade; allowing the UK to consume goods it otherwise wouldn't; emergency purposes.

In addition to these benefits, there was a lot of discussion of the impor-

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tance of being able to go on holiday abroad. For some participants, the opportunity to go on holiday to places that are different and exotic was seen as something that should be strongly defended. One participant articulated this view in terms of class:

**Female:** *Well, working class people now can see other parts of the world that they wouldn't have been able to, and it broadens the mind. If you want to go to America, it has to be by aeroplane.* [York]

The above quote also expresses the argument that there is no acceptable alternative to flying in some circumstances. The right to a holiday abroad was sometimes challenged in the discussions with some participants arguing that holidaying in the UK or by train to Europe was a good alternative. This was often met by strong resistance because it did not represent what some participants viewed as a holiday they would personally like to go on.

**Male:** *What is it like in central France, central Spain? You can stop off at great places on the way down and make it part of your holiday.*

**Female:** *I don't want to do that on holiday, I want to be on a beach, drinking champagne. And do nothing. I work 6 days a week.* [Gillingham]

Those participants who advocated the importance of holidays abroad did so for a number of reasons. Weather represented an important factor as it was felt that sunshine and warmth could not be guaranteed in the UK. Price was also an important factor as both travelling and general costs of holidaying in the UK were seen as prohibitively expensive.

**Male:** *I could go to the Caribbean for two weeks for £600 and have everything done, whereas here I'd struggle to live for £600 doing all that stuff.* [Newbury]

When asked to reflect on whether some flights were unnecessary, participants often returned to the importance of holidays and the aspiration to be able to enjoy holidays abroad. One participant responded to the idea that some flying is unnecessary by suggesting bearing burdens by flying less was in some sense too high a price to pay for an environmentally friendly world.

**Male:** *People like to go on holiday, with all the things that are going on in the world, if you're going to do something environmentally friendly, you've got to make it worthwhile. You've got to give people an enjoyment in life... there's no point having a world which is environmentally friendly which isn't worth living in. [York]*

The strength of attachment to flying is an important element of public attitudes here. Even participants who had expressed strong concerns over the climate impacts of flying openly stated that they held aspirations to fly more. The importance of holidays was not just the enjoyment of the holiday itself but also represented an element of lifestyle aspiration. The following quote is from a participant who stated that mitigating climate impact should be a greater priority in aviation policy:

**Male:** *I don't fly that much, but I suppose ideally I'd like to fly five or six times a year, or maybe ten times. You've got that aspiration. [Birmingham]*

As the chart below shows, even before the discussions, participants' responses to the statement 'I am happy to fly less in order to minimise environmental damage caused by air travel' was weighted towards disagreement. This was only hardened following three hours of deliberation about aviation policy.

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Figure 1: "I am happy to fly less in order to minimise environmental damage caused by air travel"

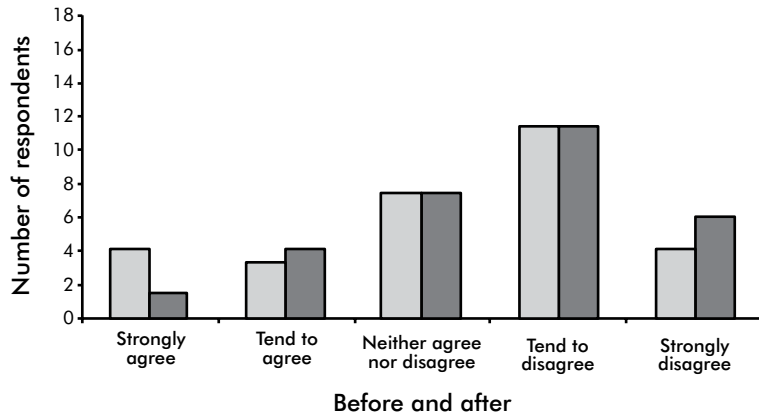
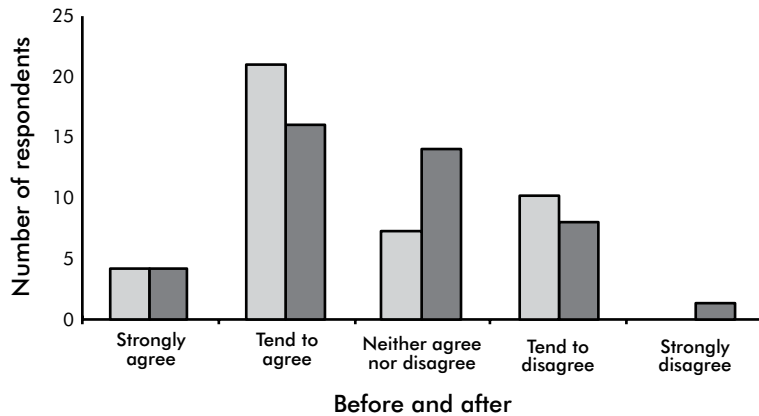


Figure 2: "Air travel has an environmental impact and I am concerned about it"



In part this could be because participants learnt more about solutions to mitigate the climate impacts of flying. This could have had the effect that participants grew more confident that something would be done to address the problem of aviation's climate impacts.

We tested the views of our participants before and after the groups and the information presented did little to change the view about air travel having an impact on the environment. The overall number agreeing with this statement fell slightly but the biggest rise was in the neutral category. This can be seen in the chart above.

Following the discussion of benefits from flying, participants were presented with information about aviation and the economy. The responses to this information were clearly dependent on the context of the troubles currently facing the UK economy. The information on the amount of jobs provided by aviation, both directly and indirectly, was particularly resonant with participants who reasoned that in the current economic climate no jobs could be placed at risk.

**Male:** *To try and decrease that [aviation emissions] would have an impact on employment levels and things like that so I'd rather see it increase actually. [Newbury]*

There was overwhelming support for the importance of maintaining the economic contribution of the aviation sector. One participant stated that a reason for this was because the information on the economy was more reliable than the information on climate.

**Male:** *The statistics on world trade are tangible and evidential; statistics on climate change are one body of scientists' opinions against another. [York]*

Similarly to some of the reactions on information about climate change, the role of other countries was important for some participants' views on the economy. The global economic competitiveness of the UK was seen as something that drove aviation demand.



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*I probably believe most of the business travel coming to this country is because we're one of the major financial centres of the world. [Male, York]*

## Addressing the tension between climate and the economy

After being presented with information about the climate and the economy in relation to aviation, participants were asked to discuss any possible tensions that exist between such information.

The differing timeframes of the two objectives were of great importance to some participants who would distinguish between long and short-term concerns. This led them to reason that in the short-term we should focus on the health of the economy but that avoiding the worst impacts of climate change should be a long-term consideration.

**Female:** *The priority has to be the economy because of how everything is at the moment... in a few years, [if] our economy has stabilised then I would say our priority might be different. [Gillingham]*

**Male:** *At the moment the economy is pretty screwed... taking away however many billion and making all those people redundant, it seems quite extreme, putting them all on the welfare state. It's not going to happen, you just can't take away aviation. [Newbury]*

There were however a number of moments when participants responded to the pro-economy positions of others by stressing the danger in ignoring the climate impacts of flying. The below exchange is illustrative of the way in which the tension between the issues of climate and economy in relation to aviation was discussed in the groups.

**Male 1:** *The fact that we're in a recession at the moment, that's paramount in people's mind I think. The second statement [we should prioritise the*

*economy in aviation policy] is an encouragement of a new economy with jobs.*

**Male 2:** *I come back to the idea that we've only had mass aviation for something like 60 years. It's really new in the context of everything, it's going to be a major problem I think. You've got to give it...*

**Male 1:** *It's OK saying it might be a problem down the line but if you've got someone sitting at home without a job, what's more important to them? What's going on in 10 years time or how they're going to look after their children?*

**Male 2:** *Personally I take the long view. [Birmingham]*

At other points in these discussions, some participants would suggest that the climate and economic objectives are not necessarily zero-sum.

**Male:** *I don't think you have to have either extreme really. You can carry on increasing the aviation sector and keep it competitive and growing whilst taking measures to prevent dangerous climate change. After all it's only a small segment of the emissions and if we look at other areas we can bring them down a little bit, we can still expand aviation, then that will contribute to bringing all the levels [of emissions] down a little bit.*

**Female:** *I agree. I think it's absolutely impossible to have no growth. [London]*

Some participants accepted the need to take action on climate change but expressed clear concerns about the economic competitiveness of the UK. The threat of taking action without co-operation from other nations was an important recurring theme throughout the group discussions.

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**Male:** *We have to make whatever we do on climate change cost effective, and to maintain or to grow, but we will end up growing, we need to grow and not fall prey to the eastern countries or America, who do not take any measures who won't even sign up to anything on climate change. [York]*

Whilst most groups had at least one person who favoured doing something about the climate as a priority, when pushed, the groups usually landed on the importance of the economy in the short term. As has been seen, this was often framed in terms of the UK's current economic situation. The big exception to this was the group made up exclusively of younger participants (under 25 years of age). This group accepted the importance of the economy but very strongly emphasised the climate as a priority for aviation policy.

**Male:** *They're both important. But it's the planet isn't it?*

**Female:** *If you destroy the planet then the other one's no good anyway.*

**Moderator:** *Does anyone think anything different?*

**[Many participants]:** *No*

**Female:** *If you had your own business you might feel differently because you're worried about your own business. But if you're looking at the bigger picture then you'd hope people would say the first one [avoiding dangerous climate change]. [Bournemouth]*

The difference in attitudes of the group of younger participants can be explained in a number of ways. Firstly, as the group which most recently went through the education system, information about climate change is likely to be more familiar and therefore an acceptance (and understanding) of the problem is probably more widespread amongst

this age group. This was the only group where no participant suggested that the information about climate was exaggerated or potentially false. Another reason for the difference is that as younger people, the idea of climate impacts perhaps feels more likely to be something that they will experience as opposed to some of the older participants who articulated a view that the idea of climate change seemed very distant.

The issue of timeframe was of particular interest and at various points, the manner in which some participants would justify a favouring of the economy highlighted, by their own admission, the short-term nature of their thinking.

**Female:** *I'd be leaning more towards the second one [prioritising the economy in aviation policy]*

**Moderator:** *Could you say a bit more about why?*

**Female:** *Erm, well because that benefits me. I think we talked about it before, because I don't actually see anything changing on a day-to-day basis [with climate], perhaps ignorantly, it doesn't really bother me that much. But with the economy I live here and I want to benefit from us making more money. [Newbury]*

## Necessary and unnecessary flying

Participants were given information about the flying behaviour of four different characters to elicit a discussion about whether some flights were more important or necessary than others. Participants were also asked to offer opinions on whether it was a problem that some people flew more than others.

There was a lot of resistance to the idea that some flying could be considered unnecessary. In the case of the fictional characters, the

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important thing was the context. Participants found it hard to condemn specific flying behaviours or an overall volume of carbon emission without knowing the reasons for taking the flights.

**Female:** *I don't think you can say to one person 'this is how many flights per year you're allowed' because everybody's circumstances and reasons for flying are completely different.* [Birmingham]

Our character with the most number of flights was condemned by some participants for taking too many domestic flights. In all groups, this type of flying was the most condemned. The view was that the UK's rail network is good enough so that domestic flights are rarely necessary.

Condemnation of domestic flights was not however universal amongst all participants. Some defended the choice to fly within the UK by arguing that rail travel was too expensive to present a viable alternative to flying. Context was also used to defend some domestic flights. One participant suggested that our frequent flying fictional character may be an eminent surgeon flying to perform life saving operations.

In some groups, participants raised the idea of video-conferencing as a viable alternative to business travel. This usually provoked discussion over whether video-conferencing could ever be a suitable replacement to meeting someone in person or performing business trips that for example, require more detailed observation of production processes. It was usually settled by stating that video-conferencing could have the potential to be a suitable alternative to some but not all business travel.

When the concepts of necessary and unnecessary flying were probed further, some participants said that in principle, they thought most flying was unnecessary. It was here that participants made the distinction between what was necessity and what was a contribution to quality of life. There was a strong feeling from some participants that even though it wasn't strictly necessary to fly, it was something

that contributed to their quality of life and there existed an aspiration amongst most participants to be able to fly more.

When participants were shown information about the unequal distribution of flying behaviour according to household income, they were asked if it was a problem that some people flew more than others. The overwhelming majority of participants did not seem to think so. Only in two of the groups were there participants who felt that this was a problem. When they did feel it was a problem, it was borne of a notion that those flying more bore a greater responsibility for the problem of climate change.

The reasons given for rejecting the notion that inequality in flying was a problem usually centred on the idea of personal freedom. Even when it was pointed out that it was those on higher household incomes who flew more, participants argued that those on higher incomes had worked hard and deserved to spend their money on flights for holidays. This was also related to an argument by those who didn't currently fly much at the moment, that if they had the money, they would aspire to fly a lot.



## 2 | Findings: Airports, decision-making and trust in politicians

- Arguments concerning noise, air quality and traffic disturbances around airports did not resonate with participants. These impacts were seen as unfortunate but necessary. Many participants articulated a ‘tough luck’ attitude towards those affected by such issues. An exception was when people bought or rented properties in an area before an airport was built or expanded. Some participants also argued that there were positive benefits of an airport for local communities.
- Participants accepted that there was a trade-off for politicians in considering national versus local priorities. In discussing this it was urged that politicians show more honesty and transparency in the attempts to balance these trade-offs. It was felt that politicians could engage better with the public, using measures such as referendums, which would add to the legitimacy of decisions.
- When discussing how decisions over airport capacity are made, many participants felt that politicians take advantage of such decisions to win particular votes. This view was accompanied by a general feeling that politicians were untrustworthy and willing to compromise on personal values and the wishes of constituents for power.

## Airport impacts

Our initial research identified airport capacity decision-making as a key flashpoint of the aviation debate in recent years and it was important for our research to explore public attitudes in this context. When presented with information related to noise pollution, air quality and other impacts associated with airports (such as increased traffic), participants were largely unsympathetic to those affected by such problems.

Most participants articulated a 'tough luck' attitude to those living near airports.

**Male:** *Well they've got to be somewhere.* [Gillingham]

Often participants argued that some of the problems listed are not exclusive to airports.

**Female:** *It's not only airports where you get traffic issues.* [Bournemouth]

**Female:** *There are so many things that affect where you live, you could be next to a train station, you could live close to a town centre and have people at two in the morning drunk having a brawl outside your house. Unfortunately it's kind of tough.* [Newbury]

A few participants went further and suggested that the people who had chosen to live near an airport and were now unhappy had not thought it through properly.

**Male:** *People that buy houses on flight paths, they haven't done their homework.* [York]

An exception to the lack of sympathy for those affected by the impacts of airports was for those people who had perhaps moved to an area before an airport was built or expanded.



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**Female:** *When they are building a new terminal, that's fair enough to complain because that's more air traffic and it wasn't there when you chose to move there. [Bournemouth]*

A number of participants articulated a view that having an airport near your house can also have positive impacts such as providing a good source of local jobs as well as easy access when wishing to go on holiday. The following comment was in response to a discussion about communities not wanting airports:

**Male:** *Why is it in the interest of local communities that airports shouldn't be built? Because there are going to be gainers in the local community... Airports are also beneficial to local communities. You're looking at airports from every negative perspective, which is true, all true, but you're not talking about the benefits airports bring to local communities. [London]*

Generally, participants emphasised how locally contingent the resonance of information about impacts was:

**Male:** *I think the airport stuff is important if you live near an airport. But none of us do, so it's not important to any of us. [London]*

## Decision-making processes

Having established some of the issues involved in the impacts of airports and the various ways in which local people are affected, participants were asked to reflect on the manner in which decisions about airport capacity are made.

A few participants responded to this discussion by questioning the need for any more capacity. Some of this was based on participants' own experiences of local airports.

**Female:** *We've got Manston (Kent International Airport) only 20 minutes away and they are struggling; I don't think they've got enough flights going out of there so why build a new one?* [Gillingham]

**Female:** *Do we really need another airport? We've got one near enough every city.* [Birmingham]

One particular participant framed the argument against the need for a new airport in the context of the UK economic downturn. This reflected a view that in future, ordinary people won't be able to enjoy access to flying in a way they once did.

**Male:** *Look at the economy now, the average man can't afford to do some of his holidays... fuels are higher for the aircrafts, which then puts prices up, so not many people are going.* [Gillingham]

In the same sense that participants thought impacts of airports were only of interest if they themselves were affected, there was a feeling that the decision making process would only be of interest to those who lived near planned airports.

**Female:** *It's not just a question of people's perceptions of it but the location of it.* [Birmingham]

In academic literature about environmental politics, the distribution of what are called 'environmental bads' such as waste dumps are often framed as an issue of environmental justice. The idea of environmental justice is that those with a low ability to pay or influence political processes bear the brunt of such environmental bads. Some participants expressed a view in line with this stating that the decision making process could work against those on lower incomes or with a lower ability to influence the political process.

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**Female:** *It gets put in a place where people haven't got the money to buy the politicians hand... so it goes in a place where either people haven't got the ability or the funds to be able to object to something. [Birmingham]*

The above quote indicates a lack of trust in the honesty and judgement of politicians. This was a theme that was returned to throughout the discussion on the decision-making process. Boris Johnson was singled out by participants in the Kent area (near his proposed 'Boris Island' airport in the Thames Estuary) as being a politician using the issue of airport capacity for electoral advantage.

**Female:** *... one of the reasons he brought up the new airport was because he was trying to please Londoners about there being an extra runway. So it all comes back down to him trying to please his local constituents. [Gillingham]*

Participants discussed the tension between politicians representing their constituents on one hand and the national interest on the other. There was a view in all groups that both the local and national interests should be considered by politicians.

**Male:** *They should be thinking about why they were elected to help local people, but then again the bigger picture is that they should think about it nationally. [York]*

In line with general low levels of trust in politicians, many participants doubted that politicians were able to genuinely debate issues of airport capacity on their relative merits and faults. The belief was that decisions are made before debates and negotiations in parliament begin.

**Female:** *I think it's all cut and dried when they go to London – they've made their mind up at the top. [York]*

The acknowledgement that sometimes national and local interests cannot be reconciled led many participants to call for politicians to be more honest about this. This was expressed in a sense that rather than making promises that are then broken after an election, politicians should state clearly when choices are bound to benefit one particular group of voters or interests over others.

A number of participants advocated the use of what were in essence referendums to add democratic legitimacy to decisions about airport capacity. There was a variation in the level to which this was advocated but it is clear that for some participants, an increased democratisation of decision-making was a solution to make difficult choices more legitimate, if not easier.

**Male:** *When they're going to build an airport, Government should say 'right, this is what is going to happen if we build an airport, good and bad; this is what will happen if we don't, good and bad', proper honest, then vote. They should just be honest and say it's up to you, and then you can't moan then can you, if you've voted?* [Bournemouth]

When this view was introduced in the group of younger participants, there was general agreement that more democracy and issue by issue voting was a good thing. Interestingly, no participant raised the objection that politicians are in a sense elected for the purpose of taking responsibility for making decisions about these very difficult issues.

## Trust in politicians

The discussion of the tension between community and national interests was followed by an exploration of participant views about the legitimacy of politicians using decisions about airport capacity to win votes in an election. Participants were asked to consider the issues of consensus, party and national interests in decision-making. The general view was

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that politicians in reality only operate in order to win and maintain power.

When presented with a range of quotes for how and why politicians make decisions on airports, a large number of participants thought that the motivation of party interests and getting into power were paramount for politicians. A common view was that politicians would say or do anything to win votes.

On issues of consensus and whether or not this was desirable, participants often agreed that it would be desirable but in practice was not workable. Some participants used the example of the coalition and university fees as evidence of the impracticability of consensus in political decision-making. These views often led to participants expressing a general disillusionment with the political process.

**Female:** *They should work together and come up with the best solution but that's not going to happen because they're all striving for power. It's just one big power struggle. [Gillingham]*

Such was the low level of trust in politicians that one participant described aviation policy as something that was 'too important' to be left to politicians to decide.

**Male:** *I think it's probably too important to let politicians make these decisions, because they're too self-interested. Because they're trying to build a party and stay in power. Whereas someone else should be making these decisions, an independent body. [Birmingham]*

The participant does not state whether such a body should be elected or indeed offer any ideas as to how it would be appointed. But seeing politicians as too self-interested to be trusted with important policy decisions is in some senses a telling indication of how some members of the public view the political class.



### 3 | Findings: Public attitudes to policy solutions and responsibility

- Participants often mentioned efficiency improvements and alternative fuels unprompted during the discussions. Some participants expected industry to already be exploring these options. One of the most resonant arguments for efficiency and alternative fuels was that it would develop expertise and create jobs in the UK.
- Participants found it strange that international aviation is not currently included in UK climate change targets. Participants who felt warm towards the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) and climate change targets that included international aviation did so because it fulfilled the criteria of not singling out one sector as a focus.
- The idea of flying less or holidaying more in the UK was strongly rejected across all the groups. This was largely based on the ‘right to a holiday abroad’ arguments discussed earlier in the report.
- Whilst most participants felt that the government held the ultimate responsibility for reconciling climate change and economic objectives for aviation, many participants stressed the importance of industry and the public playing their part too. The preference for co-operation also extended to a view that politicians should work across party lines to ensure the right decisions are made in the long-term.

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All the groups ended with participants being given some very basic information about different policy solutions. However some of these solutions were brought up unprompted by participants at earlier points in the discussion. This was particularly true for efficiency and alternative fuels. A common view was that airlines were already engaged in the attempt to increase efficiency of operations and of aircraft as this provided an opportunity for them to save money on fuel in the long-run. These unprompted mentions were surprising and suggest a level of expectation amongst participants that industry is engaged in the 'responsible' endeavour of mitigating its climate impacts. This is explored further towards the end of this chapter.

The unprompted earlier mentions of both efficiency improvements and alternative fuels provide context as to why participants reacted warmly to these when presented with them as part of a wider menu of policy options later in the groups. Another reason was that these options were perhaps relatively easy to understand in principle when compared with the idea of climate change targets or the EU ETS.

Discussions of efficiency improvements sometimes provoked participants to reveal occasions when they had experienced flights that they deemed to be inefficient. Common stories were circling whilst waiting to land or flights not being full enough.

**Female:** *It's something I hadn't thought about, the fact that so many times I've been on holiday and we were just circling... you don't think about all the fuel that's using...* [Bournemouth]

**Female:** *They should make efforts not to fly planes that are not full. Because last year I came back from Turkey and there was about 20 people on the plane. Huge waste of fuel.* [Bournemouth]

One group suggested that efficiency was something that should become compulsory and that airlines should be penalised for failing to meet

efficiency targets. This was expressed as an idea that profitable routes would only be allocated to the most efficient airlines.

**Male:** *You could say to airlines that only the efficient ones can go to America and Australia, like 'you haven't been efficient enough, you're not allowed outside of Europe...' [Bournemouth]*

When asked to choose from a menu of policy options, efficiency and alternative fuels were almost always selected. There were a host of reasons as to why these were appealing. One participant stated clearly that efficiency represented a positive alternative to reducing the number of flights.

Some participants saw efficiency and alternative fuels as being good, feasible options that worked on two complimentary timescales. Efficiency improvements were seen as relatively-quick wins whilst developing alternative fuels were seen as a good option for the long term.

**Male:** *I think this one [alternative fuels] because it's aspirational. It's about [how] in the long term we want to develop cleaner aircraft.[Gillingham]*

A few participants saw an issue with alternative fuels being placed in competition for land with other agricultural production. This was seen as placing a limit on the penetration of such fuels.

**Male:** *I think in principle it's a really good idea but with air traffic growing how much of the earth's agricultural surface are we going to have to use to produce crops to power it? Could that not be used towards better purposes i.e. feeding an expanding population? [London]*

When provided with a range of arguments for why certain policy options were better, the most popular argument was that developing efficiency and alternative fuels in the UK would provide expertise and jobs. The resonance of this argument was again clearly framed by the anxiety in



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all groups about the UK's current economic position. As a result, many of the policy options were seen through the prism of economic anxiety.

**Male:** *Just going back to efficiency actually, you could work on the efficiency of making a jet engine that uses 1 tonne of fuel per thousand miles instead of five hundred miles; that's technology you could sell to other people.* [Newbury]

Whilst many participants assumed that industry was already leveraging efficiency to reduce their fuel costs, they still felt that it should be a priority for airlines but also for government to ensure efficiency is maximised. Some participants suggested that setting ambitious emissions reductions targets that included international aviation would be a good way to do this.

Participants were introduced to the idea of climate change targets and told that the UK does not currently include international aviation within its domestic emissions targets. Participants found this idea quite strange and there was widespread support for changing this. An important element of including international aviation in emissions targets is the signalling function this performs for government priorities.

**Female:** *That automatically makes me think if they haven't included it in that target it's not one of their primary concerns.* [Bournemouth]

The concern about international co-operation also cropped up when talking about emissions reductions targets.

**Female:** *I think that is what we should do but other countries should do the same and they're not so where do we go from here?* [London]

As well as climate change targets, participants also discussed the practicalities and merits of an Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS). The idea of an ETS was seen by one particular participant as being inseparable from

the idea of targets. This was taken to mean that if you introduce targets, you should have to sell emissions credits too.

**Male:** *I think they are both interlinked. If you are going to have climate change targets you are going to have to sell credits.* [London]

The idea of both the ETS and climate change targets appealed to a number of participants because it was seen to fulfil the function of not signalling out a sector when trying to mitigate climate impacts.

Whilst for some the ETS satisfied the need to not single out aviation as a sector, many participants were concerned with the effect that this policy option would have on consumers as well as on the wider economy. Some participants saw this as penalising our own airlines at the gain of those from abroad.

**Male:** *If we don't get an agreement from external international flights then we're penalising our own aviation industry.* [York]

All of the policy options suggested were seen in some way to mean increasing costs for consumers and the ETS was seen by some participants as the option most likely to pass on costs in this regard.

**Female 1:** *I think it's a good idea but the reality of it will whack up the fares... from a consumer's point of view we'll...*

**Female 2:** *we'll take the hit.* [London]

Participants were interested in what level an ETS should be operated at. Whilst it didn't make sense to have in the UK alone, there were some worries about it only being at the EU level as opposed to world-wide. One participant articulated a 'red-tape' argument against the ETS suggesting that it would make the EU less competitive internationally.

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**Male:** *If you were producing something and you were having to go through loop holes, something's going to have to be traded, so it does make us less competitive to the rest of the world in terms of producing a service.*

[Newbury]

Some participants could not see how an ETS could work in terms of practicalities from how emissions are measured to how such a system could work without large scale fraud or corruption.

**Male:** *I think it's a really good system but if there's loads of fraud in it, it could just, yeah, it's just very dangerous if it's not regulated properly.*

[Newbury]

Interestingly, some participants opposed the ETS for the reason that putting a price on carbon failed to involve the public, and as a result the policy would do little to address and engage wider values around climate change. This meant that for some participants what mattered in a choosing a policy option was not just the proportion of emissions that are reduced but whether the policy contributes towards more transformative attitudinal change amongst the public. This argument adds further weight to the ongoing importance of understanding values and attitudes in environmental policy.

**Female:** *... the only reason they're going to tackle the environmental issue is by saying 'you can make money out of it'. I think you go down a real slippery path then, because everything has a price tag on it, then that company is never going to look outside, it becomes solely about money.* [Birmingham]

**Male:** *I'm always dubious when money is brought into the equation to try and solve the problem. You can't buy or sell your way out of a problem.*

[York]

**Female:** *I don't think it [the ETS] will make enough impact to make a big enough change. And I think in order for something to work I feel I need to have contributed to it a little bit.*

**Moderator:** *Could you please say a bit more about that?*

**Female:** *It's only the businesses that are trading the emissions and the public or the citizens aren't having much to do with it so why should they care? It's not really in their face.*

**Moderator:** *So you're worried that people won't be engaged with it?*

**Female:** *Exactly [Bournemouth]*

This shows that the values underpinning, as well as the level of democratic participation in a policy process are important to people. This suggests that policy design should include a serious consideration of what values are being harnessed in attempts to win over the public. This is backed up by evidence from previous Fabian Society research on sustainable consumption that demonstrated how appeals to co-operation and citizenship can be important in building support for sustainability measures .

One option for reducing the climate impacts of aviation that got overwhelmingly negative responses was the idea of flying less. Even participants who argued that holidaying more in the UK was a good thing stated that they thought the idea of taking fewer holidays abroad would not be publicly palatable. One of the interesting aspects of reactions to the idea of flying less was the manner in which some participants framed it as being something that would be unpopular or would lose votes.

**Male:** *As a policy, don't see that one [flying less] as being a vote winner. [Gillingham]*

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This was despite universal criticism in every group of how politicians operated only to win power. After condemning politicians for seeing policy through the prism of winning voters' support, it is interesting to note that some participants would take to this mindset when considering policy options for mitigating climate impacts.

Other reasons for resistance to the idea of flying less very much played on the arguments for the 'right to a holiday abroad' explored early in this report.

Amongst the few participants saying something positive about the idea of flying less, one of the arguments was that it would keep more money in the UK economy. Even when participants did see the value or appeal of holidaying more in the UK, the weather was a recurring barrier.

**Female:** *If the weather was guaranteed I would not want a holiday anywhere else but Britain. And there are places in this country that I haven't been to, or have been to and would like to visit again... The country is beautiful... you've got everything here, beautiful coastline. But you don't get the weather. [York]*

As well as the weather, participants expressed a great deal of frustration at the price of train travel and costs of holidaying in the UK. Some participants questioned why train travel is not subsidised in the UK to the same extent as it is in other countries.

**Female:** *Why aren't trains in competition price-wise with planes? With Easy Jet and Ryan Air you know? You never hear anyone say you can go to X and back for a fiver. Maybe if you get it 10 years in advance you might get a cheap ticket.*

**Male:** *In other countries the rail networks are subsidised by the state and they are really nice. Everybody travels by train that I know in Spain. [Gillingham]*

**Female:** *Why are we the only country that does not subsidise trains and public transport?* [Gillingham]

When discussing the possible solutions for mitigating the climate impacts of aviation, participants displayed a strong concern that whilst something should be done, the economy should not suffer. Indeed, if possible, participants wanted solutions to mitigate climate impacts of aviation that would benefit the UK economy through job creation.

When probed on where responsibility lies for meeting climate and economic objectives, participants almost overwhelmingly settled on the government as being the stakeholder with the most responsibility.

Participant views illustrated a wide gulf between expectations and perceptions of the political process. This can be seen in the idea that participants could articulate such a low opinion of what politicians are like when deliberating about policy decisions, yet also state that the government holds greatest responsibility for meeting policy objectives.

**Female:** *I think that avoiding dangerous climate change and [having] a healthy economy are important to our society, and individuals should not be penalised because individuals form the society; and the government take responsibility. That is why they were elected to represent us in a democracy. Ultimately the government should be elected for making the responsible decision which is in the best interest of the economy, the society and the greater good of the global economy and climate.* [London]

At times the focus on government brought some participants to support fairly heavy-handed government intervention. One participant made the link between water meters and the importance of making sustainable behaviour compulsory.

**Female:** *I think until the government make it legislation, what's happening, people are going to do what they want. It's like water meters. With a water*

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*meter, when the tap's turned on, the tap's turned off. If you're told, it's going to cost you, you'll do it. [Gillingham]*

As well as the view that government held ultimate responsibility, some participants expressed a view that by governments demonstrating that they were taking this responsibility seriously, it would have an effect on the public being more inclined to play their part in addressing the problem.

**Male:** *If they [MPs] got on with their job a bit more then we'd all do our bit, you know? [Gillingham]*

We saw earlier that some participants actively preferred policy solutions where individuals knowingly play their part. Whilst this view was expressed a number of times, the popularity of some of the policy options such as efficiency and alternative fuels was because they made no demands on individuals. One participant linked an argument that responsibility should not lie with the individuals to the arguments for a 'right to a holiday abroad'.

**Male:** *I wouldn't want to penalise every day travellers because the majority of people going away on holiday deserve it. It's down to businesses and airlines or government... [York]*

This 'I will if you will' approach to the government also extended to participants' views towards industry and the ability of other countries to take action on the climate impacts of aviation.

**Male:** *You can't tie the hands of our airlines; you've got to get the whole world's airlines to do it. [York]*

A significant number of participants articulated a view that industry demonstrating a commitment to environmental values was in fact the

norm. Whilst it was accepted that industry would be focused on making profit, there was also a view that this should be done in a way that is responsible to the environment.

**Male:** There's a need to travel though, and if you're providing a service there's a responsibility to do that in the most environmentally friendly way. [Newbury]

Another element of this responsible industry theme is linked to the earlier observation that many participants already expected industry to be playing its part in addressing climate impacts arising from aviation.

**Male:** *Is there not an argument that airlines and manufacturers are already going that extra mile to combat climate change by making more efficient aeroplanes? They reckon the A380 Airbus now, which is half as big again as a jumbo-jet, uses less fuel than an old antiquated whatever that's rolling around outside of Europe. So I think they're doing a lot towards making things more efficient and reducing emissions... I think they're doing a lot to combat climate change.* [York]

Participants often used the language or concepts of efficiency and efficacy to underline what taking responsibility would look like in practice.

**Male:** *Well it comes from all areas, there's a responsibility with the companies to offer services in the most efficient way, there's responsibility for government to incentivise people to be more effective and there's a responsibility to yourself to go about things in the most efficient manner and question what you're doing to think about other people.* [Newbury]

Whilst many participants were in favour of all stakeholders playing their part, they still often came back to government needing to play the most important part.



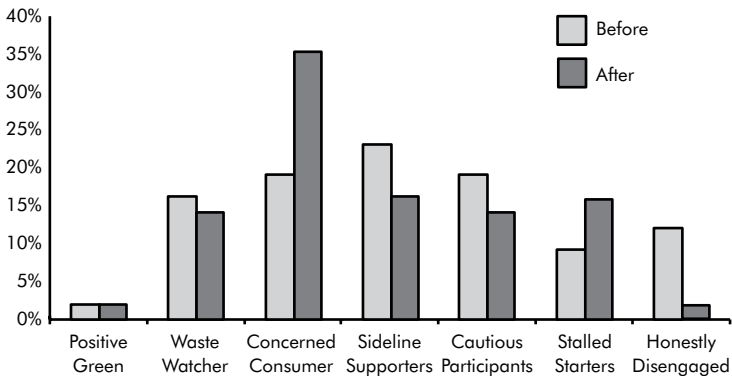
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**Male:** *I think it's got to be teamwork really, from the top. So politicians bringing businesses on board, then people have got to do whatever they can do as individuals. Because then we're all looking in the same direction, trying to look at the environment, which benefits everyone. But then again we elect the politicians, so more education and awareness from the people to elect the right politicians. [Birmingham]*

## The effect of deliberation on opinions

Another important finding of this report concerns how participants fitted into DEFRA segmentation groups. The details of these segments are discussed in appendix ii. All participants were given a survey before and after the focus groups to determine their DEFRA segmentation. The chart below illustrates the breakdown of participants by segmentation before and after the groups.

Figure 3: DEFRA segmentation of participants as a percentage of total population before and after the groups



There was a reduction in the number of participants in the segment most traditionally associated with resistance to pro-environmental behaviour, known as 'honestly disengaged'. Whilst participants hardened in their opposition to flying less, the segmentation movements illustrate a more 'pro-environmental' story. Particularly when we consider the significant jump in the number of 'concerned consumers'.

'Concerned consumers' are pro-environmental in their views, but without a huge amount of conviction. They are more confident than other segments that humans will find ways to overcome the challenge of avoiding dangerous climate change. In relation to flying, DEFRA states that people in this segment are extremely attached to flying and would rather pay for offsetting than give up their holidays. Whilst this segment remain attached to flying and resistant to doing less of this, they are broadly supportive of the environmental agenda and recognise the importance of individual behaviour in attempts to meet the challenges involved.

The movement into the 'concerned consumer' segment is significant in the context of increasing climate scepticism. Of the participants who moved into the concerned consumer category, almost all of them became more likely to disagree with the statement that changing habits to be more environmentally friendly was difficult. When analysing the responses of the participants who moved into this segment, they were often very engaged with the discussions of policy solutions. This indicates that engaging people with attempts to meet climate challenges can be an important tool in environmental communications techniques.

Encouragingly, there was evidence of participants moving into the 'concerned consumer' segment from every other segment aside from 'positive green'. Despite the small sample size, this suggests that the evidence gathered in this research could have implications for large parts of the population in terms of framing and messaging in climate change communications. For example, by allowing people to continuing

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enjoyment of holidays abroad, but emphasising responsibility and sacrifice in other areas of behaviour, it is possible that the environmental movement could have wider impact in motivating support for sustainability measures.



## Conclusion | Lessons for Stakeholders

**D**rawing on these findings, what follows are a set of suggestions for policymakers, industry and environmental campaigners, which may go some way to creating a less polarised debate and help reconcile the challenge of addressing climate impacts whilst recognising aviation's contribution to the economy and to society.

### Lessons for government

The increased climate scepticism voiced in relation to information about the increase in manmade greenhouse gas emissions over the last few decades should be of great concern to the government. This is a time to increase the level of action on climate change but these findings suggests there is also an ongoing need for campaigning to convince the public.

Whilst the government should do more on communicating the issues of climate change more broadly, what of its responsibility for aviation policy? An important lesson that emerged from the focus group discussions was participant views about aviation's place in UK climate change targets.

By the end of 2012, the Climate Change Act requires the government to make a decision on whether emissions from international aviation should be included in UK carbon budgets to 2050. The findings from this research show this would have public support, to provide parity

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across industries. Participants suggested that not including international aviation in targets had a negative signalling effect in relation to how seriously the government was taking the issue of reducing the climate impacts of aviation. The Committee on Climate Change (CCC) should take this into account in preparing forthcoming recommendations on this issue.

Participants were positive about the aviation industry developing more efficient aeroplanes and operational practice, as well as phasing in the use of alternative fuels. There was support amongst participants for government playing a role in incentivising, regulating or even subsidising this activity. These options should be explored to further ensure that the aviation industry within the UK is constantly taking steps to ensure that the sector is looking to mitigate its climate impacts where possible.

The issue of airport capacity looks set to dominate the aviation debate for the rest of this parliament. The lessons from this research are that the decision-making processes can be enhanced to ensure a limit in polarisation around this issue in two ways.

First, greater public participation can increase the legitimacy of decisions. Many participants argued for increased public involvement in the decision-making process. One such example would be the use of citizens' juries to inform the specific consultation on new runways at existing or new airports, such as the Thames Estuary. The use of referendums to show that decisions have been made with proper public consultation also received strong support.

Second, efforts to restore trust in politics and policymaking need to be re-doubled. It is widely acknowledged that trust in politics is at a worryingly low level in the UK, and this was in evidence in our discussions about politicians and decisions on airport capacity. A move away from adversarial, oppositional politics is crucial to reducing the public's trust deficit. The government should therefore seek to work more closely with opposition parties to generate cross-party consensus on airport capacity. Following Baroness Warsi's positive response to shadow

transport secretary Maria Eagle's offer to work across party lines on aviation, there are encouraging signs about an increased appetite for consensus on aviation. But efforts should be stepped up to effect real change.

The final lesson for government is a warning not to devolve responsibility to the market and see deregulation as the sole means of achieving long-term climate and macro-economic objectives. The public see responsibility for meeting climate objectives as falling mainly with government and expect strong action where necessary.

### Lessons for industry

The public expect the aviation industry to be prioritising and investing heavily in increased efficiency and the development of alternative fuels. Where this is not happening already, the industry should take steps to do so but should also place a high premium on the effective communication of progress in this area. The Sustainable Aviation group has set ambitious emissions reduction targets. This work should not only continue but direct more of its efforts into communicating progress to the public. If the public were more aware of existing attempts by the industry to mitigate its climate impact, this would have a positive effect on public attitudes to sustainable aviation policy.

The chairman of Gatwick Airport Sir David Rowlands commented last year that the industry has been engaged in a 'dialogue of the deaf' with green groups. He's right and this has to change. There are a host of environmental issues where large businesses co-operate with environmental campaigning groups to good effect. There is no reason why the same should not occur in aviation. In these situations environmental groups perform the task of collaborating with corporations to ensure sustainability opportunities are maximised. An example of such a situation would be in the water industry where large privately-owned water providers work closely on joint initiatives with leading environmental

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NGOs such as WWF and RSPB to explore opportunities for environmental protection and policy innovation. The Save Water Swindon initiative is a good example of such a relationship working in reality

Participants in the groups readily used the language of responsibility when discussing the actions and duties of government, individuals and also industry. This was especially true of younger participants. This fits with the findings from a recent poll commissioned by the Fabian Society which showed that 80 per cent of the public believe a company's priority should be longer-term investment and a wider responsibility to employees, customers and communities, rather than short-term profit. The same point has been made by business commentators time and again. For example Umair Haque argued recently in *Harvard Business Review* that, demonstrating such wider responsibility beyond profit will in fact become the norm for businesses that want to remain competitive.

But what does this emphasis on responsibility mean for the aviation industry? As a start, the positive response in these groups to the notion of the industry investing in jobs and growth in the UK gives an early indication. The UK aerospace industry is renowned for its contribution to technological advancement. What better way to reframe the aviation policy debate than by talking about the development of UK competitive advantage to increase the role of green technology in aerospace?

By placing a greater emphasis on how much the industry is prioritising the reduction of climate impacts, business can also play an important role in helping to address some of the increasing climate scepticism in evidence during the groups. This would be a demonstration of how the aviation industry can be a central part of a better and more responsible UK economy.

## Lessons for environmental campaigners

If environmental campaigners seek to convince people of the need to fly less in order to save the climate, they face an uphill struggle. The

evidence from this research and a wealth of evidence from other literature shows that the public respond better to a more positive framing of environmental challenges. Public support can be built by reframing the argument towards an optimistic vision of environmentalism that places an emphasis on co-operative and citizenship values, a more responsible society and a better quality of life.

Just as industry must engage more constructively with green groups, so to must the environmental movement demonstrate greater openness. A relationship based on genuine dialogue could and should see environmental groups constructively scrutinising the efforts of the industry to maintain progress on increasing efficiency and the development of sustainable alternative fuels.

A genuine dialogue could lead to a major shift in aviation policy, with a focus on demonstrating the opportunities for developing technological expertise and creating jobs that arise from some of the solutions to climate change. Calling upon the government and the industry to make the UK the world leader in green aerospace technology is an environmental message that could draw broad and strong support from the public, while not undermining the urgency of the climate challenge.

## Lessons for all stakeholders

It is perhaps unsurprising that in a time of economic stagnation, presenting an issue as 'economy versus environment' will almost always see the economy win. But the findings in this research give an indication of how the aviation debate can be reframed to suggest that environmental and economic objectives need not be a 'zero sum'. This could be possible by presenting sustainable aviation as a common endeavour in developing the conditions for green technology and green jobs.

Consensus is increasingly found between stakeholders on the climate challenges of aviation; the real polarisation exists around airport capacity issues. This being the case, all those working in the pragmatic



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centre have a duty to separate the issues out. If the debate is about the local impacts of airports and ensuring decisions about infrastructure are properly thought through, then let the debate focus on this. Not only is separating such issues out a useful tool for policymakers, but as this research has shown, the public want such decisions to be made in a more constructive manner with the long term interests of both the environment and the economy in mind.

In a discussion paper published earlier this year, the Fabian Society said that all stakeholders needed to demonstrate a commitment to the long-term objectives of avoiding dangerous climate change but also to recognise the important economic and social contribution that flying makes to our lives. What this report ultimately demonstrates is that this is exactly where the public are in relation to aviation policy.

The public do not see aviation policy as a zero-sum choice between GDP growth on one hand and avoiding dangerous climate change on the other. Stakeholders who want to engage in negotiation, compromise and evidence-based debate should feel emboldened that the public are very much in the same place.

## Recommendations

Taking up some of the lessons outlined above can go some way to limiting the level of polarisation in the debate. In addition to these broad lessons, we recommend some concrete steps that would go further to generating consensus in the aviation debate. These recommendations are largely based on the focus group participants' calls for increased cross-party and cross-sector co-operation on aviation policy:

- The government should convene a process that brings together experts from across academia, industry and environmental NGOs to develop an agreed evidence base that can form the foundation for increased consensus on aviation policy. Done properly, with

public commitment from stakeholders, this process could represent a positive starting point for further discussion as well as being an important trust-building exercise.

- The government should set up an independent cross-party commission to review the future for aviation policy and airport capacity that implements decisions made on the basis of evidence collected and jointly accepted by key stakeholders. This would go a long way to taking some of the adversarial politics out of the aviation debate and our research shows that the public would respond well to such an endeavour. Done well, this could be the key route to taking some of the more extreme polarisation out of the aviation debate. The final output of the commission should be a list of recommendations that can influence planning around sustainable aviation in the UK for the next 20-30 years. Importantly, if done properly with the input of all parties and genuine engagement from industry and environmental groups, and informed by public deliberation, the recommendations could result in policy that survives parliamentary cycles.
- A large number of participants argued that increased public involvement in decision making would be a positive step for the future of aviation in the UK. As a result, an independent commission should consider the use of deliberative citizens' juries as an input into the decision-making process to ensure that the public are represented and properly consulted before choices are made. Using citizens' juries would increase the legitimacy of the decision-making process. This is an absolute necessity given the polarised nature of the debate up till now.

The important idea behind these recommendations is of demonstrating our ability to think and plan for the long-term. Politics needs to demonstrate that it can be focused on 2050 and not just 2015. Many policy

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areas require the kind of long term thinking about what the country and indeed the world will be like in decades to come. Whilst all parties will have competing visions of what values and methods should drive our long-term policy decisions, when it comes to issues of climate change, industrial competitiveness and infrastructure, the battle of these competing visions should not become so polarised as to lose sight of what is at stake.

By better understanding the nature of public attitudes to aviation policy, and demonstrating a genuine commitment to consensus-building, all stakeholders can seek to participate in a debate that is focused on securing the long-term health of our climate as well as our industry. Perhaps just as importantly, it can help restore some faith in the ability of politics and in turn society, to meet some of our greatest challenges.

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## Appendix 1

### The Focus Groups

- Participants were drawn from the full range of age groups, socio-economic backgrounds and political opinion. The groups were held in a variety of locations in England. We took steps to filter out green activists and hardened environmental sceptics.
- Exercises were designed to explore the climate impacts, economic impacts and general benefits of flying to see how participants responded to different information. The groups then moved on to discuss aspects of aviation policy including the decision-making process as well as what kind of policies participants felt were most appropriate.
- The general approach was to place participants in the position of decision-maker, providing them with relevant information and asking what they thought should happen.

The focus groups consisted of several discussion exercises. Generally speaking, the approach we used did not ask participants to reflect on their own behaviour but rather we put them in the position of decision-maker. This involved giving participants relevant information, explaining some of the trade-offs involved and asking them what they thought should happen. This is an effective method to allow participants to talk with openness about issues that may relate to their own behaviour. By discussing the issues from the position of decision-maker, participants are not placed under pressure to give account of or justify their own choices.

Participants readily took to the approach. Participants seemed to enjoy being put in the role of decision maker and seemed comfortable with the judgements they were being asked to make.

It is worth sounding a note of caution about how far one can generalise the views expressed by participants in group discussions. This is in part because all deliberative processes are prone to pro-social bias (or even at times, anti-social bias). At times, dominant participants can influence the responses of others. Care was taken to limit these effects in moderating the groups and the analysis attempts to reflect a consideration of such factors. Despite these constraints, the group discussions allow real insight into the reasons behind certain viewpoints and as a result add value to the existing, largely quantitative evidence base.

### Focus group participants

The deliberative research comprised six three-hour focus groups with six to eight participants each. These were undertaken between December 2011 and January 2012 in six locations around England (Birmingham, Bournemouth, Gillingham, London, Newbury, York). Participants were aged between 18 and 80 years of age, and drawn from the full range of socio-economic groups as well as from a broad range of political opinion. The series of groups included one specifically with older participants in York (over 65) and one specifically with younger participants in Bournemouth (under 25). All groups had an exact or close to 50 per cent gender balance.

We were also keen to filter out participants representing the extremes of environmental opinion, both hardened climate sceptics and committed green activists. This is not because the views of those parts of the population are not of interest but rather that our project objective is not relevant to the attitudes of those with extreme environmental views (pro or anti). We wanted to explore the views of the majority of the population that fall in the broad range between the extremes and how these change during deliberation.

To filter out climate sceptics we used two statements from DEFRA's survey of attitudes to the environment (DEFRA, 2007) and strong

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agreement with these statements was taken to indicate climate scepticism. The questions were asked twice, once at the recruitment stage and once just before the groups:

- “The so-called ‘Environmental Crisis’ facing humanity has been greatly exaggerated”
- “The effects of climate change are too far in the future to really worry me”

To filter out committed green activists we used two further statements from DEFRA’s survey. Again the questions were asked twice, once at the recruitment stage and once just before the groups:

- “I would be prepared to pay more for environmentally friendly products”
- “Any changes I make to help the environment need to fit in with my lifestyle”

As a result of the recruitment process we ensured that no participant strongly agreed with the first statement or disagreed with the second. As an additional step we filtered out members of pro-environmental non-governmental organisations such as Greenpeace or WWF. We also filtered out airline employees to ensure that such participants did not dominate the discussion from a position of experience or expertise.

Once we had recruited our participants, we wanted to understand better the composition of our groups and to develop an approach to enable us to analyse how participants’ environmental attitudes changed during the discussions. For this purpose we used DEFRA’s environmental framework (DEFRA, 2008) along with the associated segmentation methodology.

DEFRA’s framework splits the UK population into seven segments on the basis of their responses to a survey of attitudes and behaviours: Positive Greens, Waste Watchers, Concerned Consumers, Sideline Supporters, Cautious Participants, Stalled Starters and Honestly Disengaged. Each segment denotes a distinct set of attitudes and beliefs towards environmental issues and behaviours. Appendix I contains a more detailed description of each.

Using the ‘combined block method’ developed by DEFRA for its segmentation technique, we allocated our participants into these seven segments. Table 1 shows the proportion of our participants in each segment compared with that among the population as a whole.

Table 1: Proportion of people in each DEFRA segment (before the focus groups) and DEFRA’s estimate for the UK population (2008)

<b>Segment</b>	<b>Proportion of focus group participants in each segment</b>	<b>Share of UK population in each segment</b>
Positive Green	2%	18%
Waste Watcher	16%	12%
Concerned Consumer	19%	14%
Sideline Supporters	23%	14%
Cautious Participant	19%	14%
Stalled Starter	9%	14%
Honestly Disengaged	12%	10%
Total	100%	100%

Table 1 demonstrates that our participants were weighted slightly towards the less ‘environmentally friendly’ end of the segmentation spectrum with the main concentration of participants in the middling segments. We had significantly fewer Positive Green participants than the population as a whole; this is likely a result of filtering out committed green activists. It is important to note that as a result of our recruitment



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process, participants were identified as Honestly Disengaged because they were resistant to behaviour change, rather than being hardened climate sceptics.

### Exercises

The focus groups began with a general discussion about awareness of aviation and its environmental impacts. Following this, the groups were presented with some basic information about the idea of climate change. The main concepts introduced were the greenhouse effect, the increase in atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gasses and the idea of dangerous climate change.

Participants were then presented with information about the climate impact of aviation. This was based on government data. Participants were shown that aviation accounts for roughly 6 per cent of UK carbon emissions. Participants were also told that taking into account the impact of emitting other gases at altitude, the figure for aviation's total climate impacts could be as high as around 12 per cent of the UK total. Participants were then asked to discuss responses to this information.

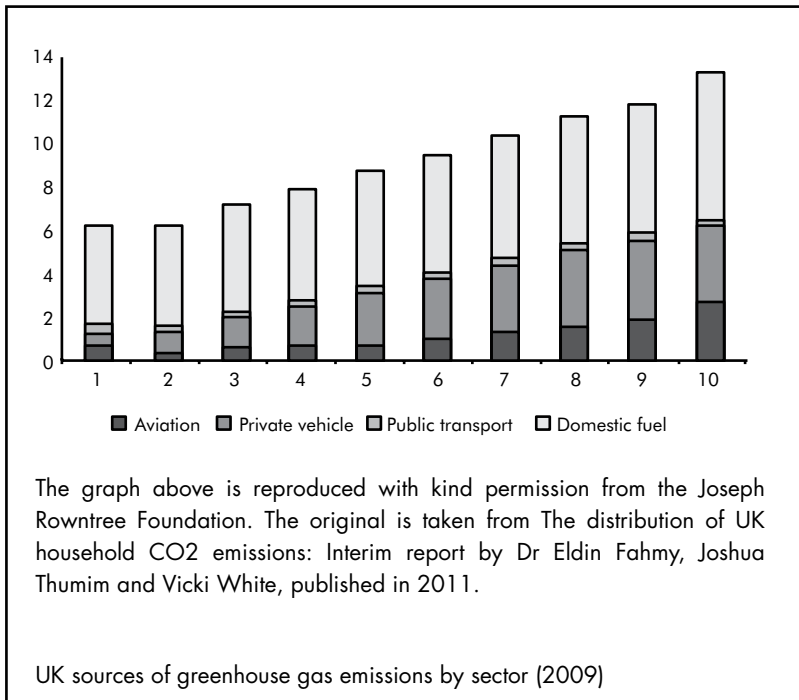
Following the discussion of climate impacts associated with aviation, participants were asked to list what they perceived to be the main benefits that aviation brings to society. Following this, they were presented with information about aviation's contribution to the UK economy. This information included contribution to GDP, number of jobs directly and indirectly dependent on aviation as well as the number of tourists who arrive in the UK by plane.

The next exercise saw participants being presented with a range of fictional characters with different flying behaviours and a range of carbon footprints. Other exercises included presenting participants with information about the different impacts associated with airports (air quality, noise pollution, increased traffic etc.).

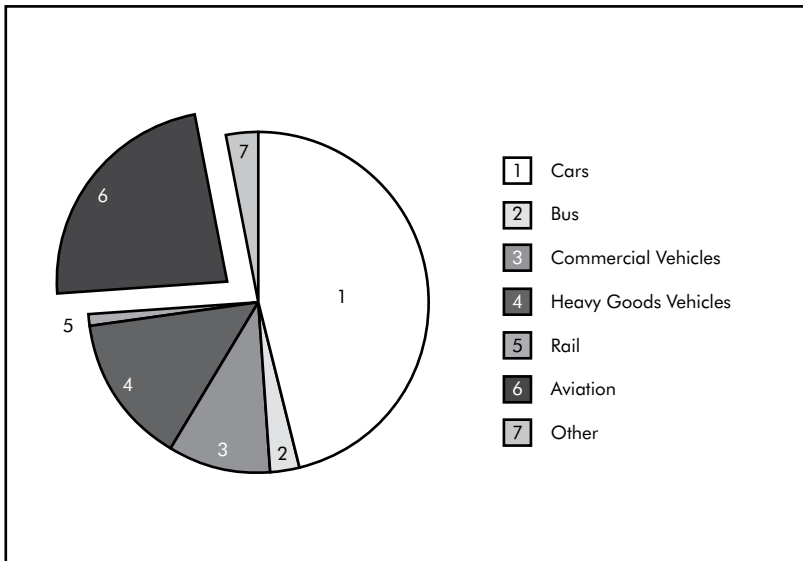
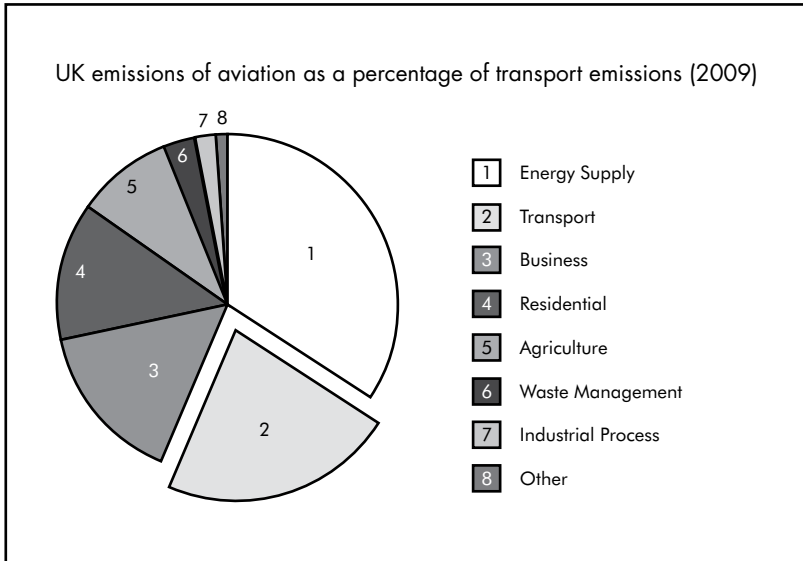
Participants were presented with a range of policy options to mitigate the climate impacts of aviation that they were asked to rank and discuss. These included operational and technical efficiency, emissions trading, developing sustainable alternative fuels, flying less and a discussion about climate change targets (UK, EU and international).

Other exercises involved participants being asked to respond to a number of quotes relating to issues such as the distribution of responsibility amongst stakeholders and the priorities of politicians making decisions about airport capacity. Examples of some of the stimulus material used can be seen below.

Examples of some of the stimulus material used can be seen below.



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**Jeff**

Single, age 32. Lives in a large house in central London. Regularly flies for both business and personal reasons.

Flights per year: 1 return flight to Dubai; 2 return flights to New York; 12 flights to Manchester (for work)

Flying carbon footprint: 9.63 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>

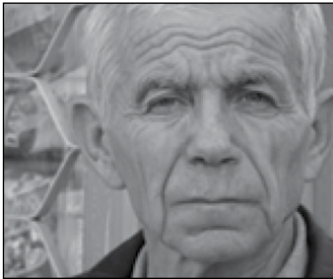


**Vera**

Single, age 55. Lives in a maisonette in a suburban area. Occasionally flies to visit family abroad, or for a holiday.

Flights per year: 1 return flight to Barcelona; 1 return flight to Glasgow

Flying carbon footprint: 0.85 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>



**William**

Single, age 68. Lives in a flat in a small town. Retired, and very rarely flies abroad for holidays or to visit family.

Flights per year: 1 return flight to Dublin

Flying carbon footprint: 0.09 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>



**Sara**

Single, age 30. Lives and works in London. Sara is Australian and flies back home to visit her family and friends twice a year.

Flights per year: 2 return flights to Sydney

Flying carbon footprint: 6.04 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>

## Appendix 2

### The Defra segmentation profiles

This Appendix illustrates some of the main characteristics of the seven segments of Defra's segmentation framework. The text has been extracted from A Framework for Pro-environmental Behaviours (Defra, 2008a).

#### **Group 1: 'Positive Greens' (18 per cent of the population)**

- This group assess themselves as acting in more environmentally friendly ways than any other group does. Additionally, they are the most likely group to want to live a more environmentally friendly life than they currently do.
- They are the most likely by far to be in AB socio-economic groups (SEGs) and have the highest levels of income, with household incomes of £40,000 and over per annum. They are the most likely to have a degree, and to read The Guardian, The Independent or The Times. Their profile is biased towards middle age (41–64), and owner-occupancy.

#### **Group 2: 'Waste Watchers' (12 per cent of the population)**

- This group are doing more than any other (except group 1) to help the environment. However, this behaviour is driven by an urge to avoid waste rather than seeking to reduce their environmental impact.
- There is a middle age and older age bias. One third are aged 65 and over (nearly twice as likely as average), while less than a quarter are 40 and under (half as likely as average). One third are retired,

and many are on low incomes (two fifths on £20,000 per annum or less). Over half own their homes outright and they are the most likely to read the Daily Mail or The Daily Telegraph.

### **Group 3: ‘Concerned Consumers’ (14 per cent of the population)**

- This group holds broadly pro-environmental beliefs, although with less conviction than groups 1 and 2. Members of this group are particularly sympathetic to the concept of ‘climate change’, acknowledging their personal impact and seeing taking action as important. Conversely, they show the strongest rejection of any group to the idea that we are reaching our limits to growth and they also doubt that an ecological crisis is imminent.
- One third are aged 30–40, and there are the lowest levels aged 65 and over. There is a slight bias towards ABC1 SEG. One third have household incomes of £40,000 and above per annum and, notably, this includes the highest level of all groups with household incomes of £60,000 and above (nearly one fifth of the group). They are the most likely to be owner-occupiers with a mortgage, and the most likely to have dependent children (along with group 5). They are the second most likely to have a degree.

### **Group 4: ‘Sideline Supporters’ (14 per cent of the population)**

- This group have a generally pro-environmental world view, although these beliefs are held relatively weakly across the board. Members of this group are second only to group 1 in anticipating an imminent crisis; however, they are more likely to think that humans (possibly other people) will find the solution.
- Members of this group span all ages, although under 30s are over-represented. They have average levels of household income, but

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with a bias towards C2DE SEGs. They are more likely than average to read the Daily Mail or The Sun, and fewer than average are educated to degree level.

### **Group 5: 'Cautious Participants' (14 per cent of the population)**

- This group's environmental world view is close to the average for the population: members of this group tend to agree there is a pressing crisis, and that there are limits to growth. They are pessimistic about our ability to tackle climate change, but recognise its impacts.
- This group have a younger than average age profile, with one quarter aged 30 and under, and nearly as few aged 65 and over as group 3. Equal with group 3, members of this group are the most likely to have dependent children; however, they are slightly more likely to be renting than group 3. They are the third most likely to have a degree, after groups 1 and 3.

### **Group 6: 'Stalled Starters' (10 per cent of the population)**

- This group present somewhat confused environmental views. Mostly the views are strongly negative: members of this group have the highest level saying climate change is too far in the future to worry about and, with group 7, the highest levels believing that the environmental crisis has been exaggerated (about half). However, they are also the most likely (with group 1) to agree that there are limits to growth and that humans are damaging nature; if the group genuinely hold these views, they appear not to want to act on them.
- They have the lowest social profile of any group (nearly half are DE SEGs), and the lowest levels of income (nearly half are on less

than £20,000). They tend to be younger or older, with middle-aged people under-represented, and the group includes more BMEs than average. They have the lowest levels of qualifications of any group (half have none), and are the most likely not to be working. They are the most likely group to read *The Sun*, the *Daily Mirror* and the *News of the World*.

### **Group 7: 'Honestly Disengaged' (18 per cent of the population)**

- This group's ecological world view is predominantly shaped by a lack of interest and concern. However, members of this group are also sceptical about the current environmental threat (half think it has been exaggerated). They are nearly as likely as group 6 to deny that their behaviour contributes to climate change and more likely than most to think the problem will be solved without people needing to make changes to their lifestyles.
- While the group spans all ages, under 30s are over-represented (comprising more than a quarter). In terms of social grade, members of this group are slightly more C12DE SEGs, with ABs underrepresented; income levels are also slightly below average. Similarly, slightly fewer than average of this group have degrees. They are more likely than average to be working full-time, to be renting, and to read *The Sun*, the *News of the World* and the *Daily Star*.



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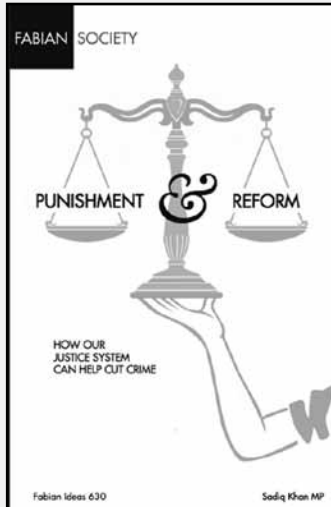
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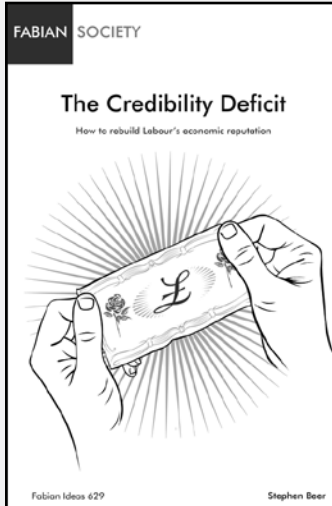


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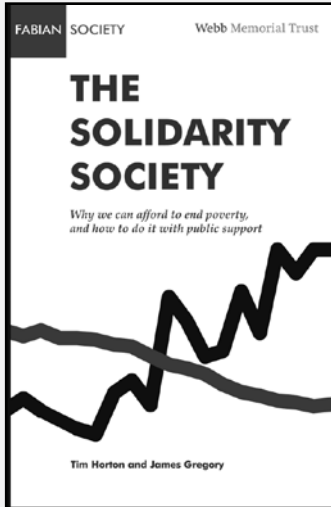
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In 'The Credibility Deficit', Beer argues that Labour also needs to understand economic realities, including the power of the bond markets. Stimulus measures should focus on investment to raise the productive potential of the economy and, at the heart of what we are about, on employment. Labour must support – and learn to love – a reformed City with a refreshed reputation and understanding of the common good.



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Bringing the public into the aviation debate

Natan Doron

Aviation is a highly polarised issue, with political debate often dominated by those who see all flying as wrong and those who dismiss climate change altogether.

However, this conceals a more measured debate between those who think the aviation industry's priority should be meeting increased demand and those who think it should be drastically reducing emissions. But for any policy to be credible, it must also have the support of the British public. Few approaches proposed by either environmental groups or business groups currently enjoy strong public support.

This report is based on original qualitative research which seeks to learn more about public attitudes to some of the big questions in this debate. How does the British public reconcile climate change and the benefits brought by aviation to the UK economy? How does the public feel about airport capacity? What policies are attractive to the public and why? And, crucially, to what extent are people willing to adjust their flying habits to limit their environmental impact?

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