

Carbon Offsetting – guidance for departments and institutions

Introduction

In June 2019, University Council approved a science based carbon reduction target, which commits the University to becoming absolute zero carbon from its scope 1 and 2 (energy-related) carbon emissions by 2048. The Council also adopted an aspiration to achieve zero carbon at least ten years ahead of the target date.

Council also agreed initiatives to better understand and reduce our scope 3 emissions. Scope 3 emissions are those that arise upstream and downstream of the University's core operations and activities, and include emissions from business travel (including flights), procured goods and services, staff commuting and waste. These include:

- Develop SBTs for the University's scope 3 emissions.
- Establish a working group, drawing on expertise from across the University and partner organisations, to develop proposals for a transparent and robust internal carbon offsetting scheme.

Offsetting will only be used for addressing the University's unavoidable emissions, i.e. those that cannot be reduced through direct action.

Carbon Offsetting Scheme

A [Carbon Offsetting Working Group \(COWG\)](#) is working to develop an internal offsetting scheme that is likely to include a portfolio of measures including local nature-based solutions and the use of external offsetting schemes. It is likely that the initial focus of an internal scheme will be emissions from University's business flights, but the scheme could be extended to cover other emission sources. It is expected that the University scheme will be implemented during the 2020/21 academic year.

The COWG recognises that several departments and institutions are already or are keen to begin offsetting and that research funders are starting to allow the costs of carbon offsetting from travel to be included in research grant applications¹. Therefore, the COWG are providing a list of suggested external schemes that could be used in the interim while the University scheme is developed. The schemes on this list are those that members of the COWG believe are credible and actually remove carbon from the atmosphere.

Suggested carbon offsetting scheme

Gola Rainforest Project (<https://gola.standfortrees.net>)

This supports a REDD+ partnership project between the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone, the national government and the RSPB, which in just two years prevented emissions of 1.2 million

¹ The Wellcome Trust policy on carbon offsetting is at <https://wellcome.ac.uk/funding/carbon-offset-policy-travel>.

tonnes of CO₂. Following independent auditing Gola has now full accreditation with both the Verified Carbon Standard and the Climate, Community and Biodiversity Alliance. The money not only secures carbon reliably but helps contribute towards sustainable development for 24,000 people living around the edge of the park and safeguards one of the most important protected areas on the planet. The price in July 2020 is £10 per tonne of carbon.

If you have a scheme that you like to be added to this list, please submit it to environment@admin.cam.ac.uk for consideration by the Carbon Offsetting Working Group.

Calculating carbon emissions from flights

If you are calculating carbon emissions as part of a grant application, you should ensure that you use the calculation methodology specified by the awarding body. If none is specified, you could use the tool recommended by the Wellcome Trust: <https://www.icao.int/environmental-protection/Carbonoffset/Pages/default.aspx>.

A template for estimating the total carbon emissions associated with a research grant proposal is available at <https://www.environment.admin.cam.ac.uk/carbon/carbon-offsetting>.

Internal price of carbon

The true cost of carbon is often several times that charged by external offsetting schemes as this price is influenced by market factors.

Through the development of the University's internal offsetting scheme the COWG will set a carbon price based on the basket of measures adopted under the scheme. As an interim measure, the COWG have agreed that an internal price of £45 per tonne should be used in business case calculations etc as this is the price used by the Bank of England².

CUFS transaction code

The transaction code for carbon offsetting is ETQZ.

² <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/-/media/boe/files/annual-report/2020/climate-related-financial-disclosure-report-2019-20.pdf?la=en&hash=5DA959C54540287A2E90C823807E089055E6721B>