

OFFSETTING AND CARBON CREDIT POLICY

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The University of Aberdeen's Net Zero Strategy sets out a series of targets and pathways associated with the commitment to achieving net zero before 2040 articulated as part of Aberdeen 2040.
- 1.2 While there are established routes to decarbonising Scope 1 and 2 emissions, there are likely to be residual Scope 1 & 2 emissions that require offsetting. There are also likely to be some categories of indirect emissions that we track under Scope 3 that will require to be offset e.g., as part of the conditions of grant funding. As such, we anticipate using various forms of offsetting, insetting, or other forms of sequestration to address these emissions.

Carbon Sequestering	Carbon Offsetting
<p>Carbon sequestration is where an organisation captures, removes and stores carbon dioxide from the earth's atmosphere. This can happen in two basic forms: biological or geological.</p> <p>Biological sequestration: happens when carbon is stored in the natural environment. This includes what are known as 'carbon sinks', such as forests, grasslands, soil, oceans and other bodies of water. This is also known as an 'indirect' or passive form of sequestration.</p> <p>Geological sequestration: happens when carbon is stored in places such as underground geological formations or rocks. This process is largely artificial or 'direct', representing an effective way of neutralising emissions arising from human practices, such as manufacturing or construction.</p>	<p>Also known as the use of carbon credits, carbon offsetting is the practice of purchasing emission reduction credits from an external company that relate to one or more carbon sequestration schemes.</p> <p>Such schemes could include tree planting, renewable energy projects, or carbon capture.</p> <p>These transferable credits are certified by governments or independent certification bodies to represent an emission reduction of one metric tonne of CO₂ (or an equivalent amount of other GHGs).</p> <p>The purchaser of an offset credit can "retire" that credit to claim the allotted emissions reduction towards their GHG reduction goals.</p>

- 1.3 It is acknowledged that the practice of offsetting to negate the emissions associated with certain operational activities is likely to form some part of the University's net zero journey. As part of the development of our Net Zero Strategy, the need for a definitive institutional position on emissions offsetting emerged as an area for further development.
- 1.4 The University's current focus is the decarbonisation of its estate and operations, in alignment with expectations and guidance from Scottish Government.
- 1.5 This document serves as an interim policy position on offsetting until a more comprehensive institutional approach is required. This timeline will reflect any guidance and expectations from the Scottish Government.
- 1.6 In the meantime, this policy aims to:
- Identify the categories of emissions we wish to offset in the short-term.
 - Ensure the credibility of any offsetting schemes we use.
 - Establish an agreed institutional process for tracking and managing offsets.

2.0 Guidance

- 2.1 It is important to note at the outset that **we do not encourage the independent offsetting of emissions via schemes that are not endorsed under this policy**. Any offsetting that is approved will be centrally managed and will take place through institutionally endorsed schemes that meet enhanced quality standards.
- 2.2 For example, ad hoc schemes, such as those offered by airlines at the checkout stage of online booking, will not be supported by University procurement processes and should not be used in any circumstances. Costs incurred in purchasing such offsets will not be reimbursed as these offsets cannot be counted towards reducing institutional emissions.
- 2.3 We recognise, however, that in certain circumstances it will be deemed appropriate and necessary to offset emissions e.g. as part of the formal conditions of some types of research grant funding. Most notably this is now a standard of condition of grant for Wellcome Trust funded research.
- 2.4 Where such offsetting is required, the University will engage the Carbon Coalition (i.e. the Higher Education sector's bespoke offsetting broker). This will ensure that any credits purchased comply with funder requirements, are of a high-quality, and ensuring consistency and transparency in how credits are managed and verified.
- 2.5 The projects available through the Carbon Coalition also have the following focuses to ensure strong links with the values and ambitions of the Higher Education Sector:
- Educational projects
 - Projects with teaching opportunities
 - Projects with research opportunities
 - Projects mapped to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals
- 2.6 This offsetting will be co-ordinated centrally to allow accurate records to be maintained and to support our statutory emissions reporting processes. This process will be overseen by colleagues in Estates & Facilities and Research & Innovation. **Individuals are not permitted to undertake this offsetting independently.**

3.0 Procedure

- 3.1 To ensure that all credits purchased align with our Offsetting Policy, and to enable accurate regulatory and external reporting, anyone required to purchase carbon credits to offset the impact of their research must adhere to the University's offsetting procedure.
- 3.2 As part of the development of an offsetting component of any research grant application, e.g. for the Wellcome Trust, staff are expected to liaise with the Research Finance team as part of the development of their grant application.
- 3.3 The Research Finance team, supported by Sustainability staff in Estates & Facilities, will provide detailed guidance on what information is required at the grant proposal stage. Applicants will be given access to guidance materials and emissions calculation tools to develop a breakdown of the anticipated travel and related emissions. This will enable the development of an estimated offsetting budget associated with the research grant. This will be reviewed and verified by the Sustainability team.

- 3.4 If the research grant application is successful, R&I will purchase carbon credits in advance to cover the total emissions estimated as part of the application process. These credits will be added to a ringfenced Offsetting Credit Bank. This advance purchase will help to mitigate against potential future carbon credit price rises during a project's lifetime.
- 3.5 Grant holders will be asked to submit a quarterly breakdown of travel undertaken over the previous 3-month period to establish the emissions associated with the project to date. Credits equal to that volume of emissions and the associated cost will be allocated to the project from the ringfenced Offsetting Credit Bank.
- 3.6 The pre-purchased credits will be formally retired at the time of purchase by the carbon broker on behalf of the Sustainability team. This retiral will formally offset the travel as required by the research funder. Evidence of this will be provided to the grant holder for their records.
- 3.7 If additional travel occurs that was not originally budgeted for, credits will be purchased on behalf of the project from the University's carbon broker at current prices. The processing of these credits will follow the normal procedure for procuring, allocating, retiring and tracking the credits.
- 3.8 A full summary of this procedure can be found in **Appendix A**.

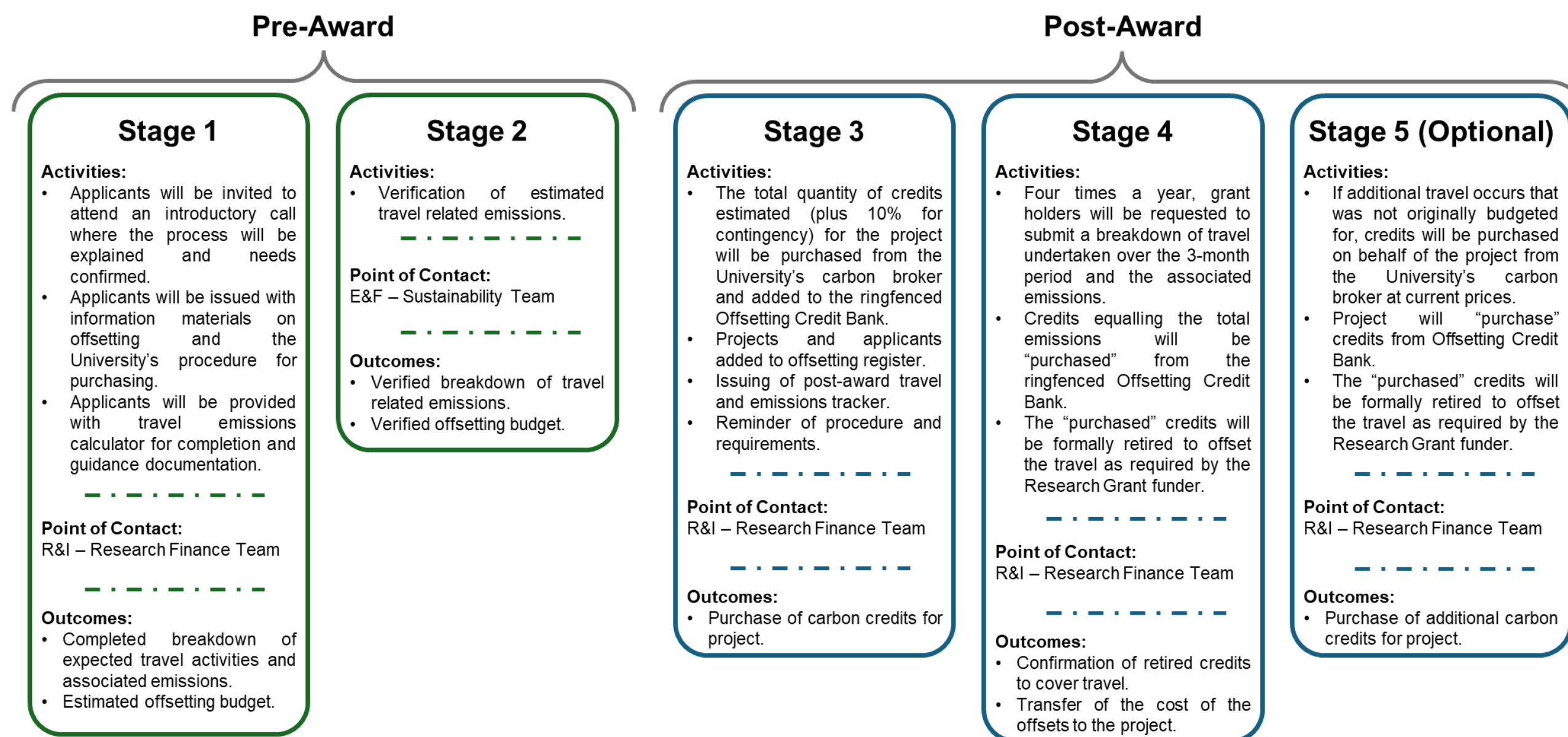
4.0 Further Information

- 4.1 If you require further information or guidance on the policy, please contact colleagues in either of the following areas:
- Estates & Facilities (Sustainability): sustainability@abdn.ac.uk
 - Research and Innovation (Research Finance): ResearchFinance@abdn.ac.uk

University of Aberdeen

Research Grant Offsetting Procedure

To ensure any and all credits purchased align with our Offsetting Policy, and to enable accurate regulatory and external reporting, anyone wishing to purchase carbon credits to offset the impact of their work must adhere to the following procedure:



Metadata			
Title	Offsetting Policy (Interim)		
Author / Creator	Roederer Rose Lyne		
Owner	Sustainable Development Committee		
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Version	Version 1	May 2025	SDC
Date for next review	2028 (three-year cycle)		
Audience	All		
Related documents	Aberdeen 2040 Strategy Net-Zero Strategy Expenses & Benefits Policy		
Subject / Description	<p>A statement detailing the University's procedure and parameters for the offsetting of emissions where currently required e.g. as the conditions of a research grant.</p> <p>A more comprehensive approach to the issue of offsetting is anticipated as national guidance and expectations around offsetting evolve.</p>		
Equality Impact Assessment	n/a		
Section	Estates & Facilities (Sustainability) Research & Innovation (Research Financial Services)		
Aberdeen 2040 Theme	Sustainable		