

# THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

## Carbon Offsetting Encouragement Policy

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### A. Aviation emissions

##### **A1 What does offsetting carbon emissions from air travel matter?**

- Air travel is known to have a significant carbon footprint, making it a major contributor to climate change. Making a round trip in economy class between Hong Kong and New York, for example, results in the emission of about 2.2 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per person, which takes 96 trees one year to absorb.
- The aviation industry accounts for 3% of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and this contribution is estimated to rise to over 20% by 2050. Taking climate action starts with calculating an organization's Scope 1, 2 and 3 greenhouse gas emissions and setting reduction targets for each; air travel for business typically falls under Scope 3 emissions of the organization.

##### **A2 Why should I/my office/CUHK offset air travel emissions?**

- International travel plays an important role in CUHK's academic life. Many CUHK members travel either to conduct field research or to attend international conferences. The University recognizes that certain types of research have to be conducted on site, while attendance at international conferences provides valuable opportunities for CUHK's researchers to showcase their research achievements, share information, and develop fruitful relationships with their counterparts from other universities. For the foreseeable future, therefore, a certain amount of international travel for academic purposes will remain unavoidable.
- Given this continuing need for air travel, offsetting carbon emissions for air travel can be adopted as a means to achieve carbon neutrality and mitigate the environmental impact of our journeys. Although offsetting the CO<sub>2</sub> emitted during business air travel does not reduce the carbon footprint of travellers, offsetting programmes offer the opportunity for us to give back to the environment. These programmes support a wide range of environmental projects which help to reduce carbon gain, from planting trees to protecting forest lands, and from improving the efficiency of household stoves to developing clean energy.
- As a further incentive, the participating offices will be rewarded with additional points in the [Green Office Programme](#) (please refer to 'AE2 Reducing carbon emissions from transportation' in the checklist). Staff members who successfully record their purchase of carbon offset for their flights through the [e-form](#) between 1 March and 31 December 2024 will receive an e-certificate and have a chance to win an Airport Express roundtrip ticket e-coupon (10 sets in total).
- Remember to record the carbon offsets of your office colleagues via this [e-form](#).

## B. The Policy

### **B1 Is this policy mandatory?**

Under the Carbon Offsetting Encouragement Policy, the purchase of carbon offsets is voluntary. Staff members are encouraged to offset their carbon footprint from air travel related to university activities and events by their own means (or non-UGC, private funding; details [here](#)).

### **B2 Who should participate in this policy?**

Staff members of CUHK who use air travel related to university and events are encouraged to participate. Students and guests participating in such activities and events are also welcome to offset their carbon emissions.

(see also [Step-by-step Guide to Purchasing Carbon Offsets from Airlines](#))

### **B3 What kind of events are included in this policy?**

All kinds of university activities and events which involve air travel, including conferences, visits, ceremonies and meetings.

### **B4 Do I need to offset carbon emissions for my trips other than air travel?**

The Carbon Offsetting Encouragement Policy focuses on air travel, where carbon emissions are higher than if the journey was made by land (e.g., by train). However, you are also welcome to offset your journeys made by other means, and this will also gain bonus points in the [Green Office Programme](#).

### **B5 Is it considered as a voluntary contribution if the airlines of my choice already include the cost for carbon offsetting in the air ticket?**

Yes, it will also be considered as a voluntary contribution, although it will not gain bonus points in the [Green Office Programme](#).

### **B6 How can I record the carbon offset?**

The voluntary purchase of carbon offsets can be recorded by completing this [e-form](#) and uploading screenshots of the receipts.

## C. Cost and Finance

### **C1 How much does it cost for carbon offsetting?**

The prices vary between airlines and service providers, and the differences are attributable to fuel consumption calculation metrics and operating data. The prices are usually charged in terms of the tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emitted per passenger. Some airlines apply a standardized price per passenger.

- Example: Cathay Pacific's FlyGreener carbon offset programme  
A round trip from Hong Kong to New York in economy class  
= HK\$66 (average unit fee per tonne of CO<sub>2</sub>) x 1.76 tonnes (carbon emission per passenger)  
= HK\$115.51 per passenger
- [Examples of Carbon Offset Prices for Air Travel](#)
- [Examples of Carbon Offset Programmes offered via Airlines](#)

**C2 Why are the offsetting costs different between airlines as well as third party service providers?**

The prices vary between airlines and service providers because of differences in the fuel consumption calculation metrics and operating data. Examples of these metrics include the types of aircraft, fuel efficiency and consumption, flight distances, wind speed, and number of transitions. Other factors, including the cabin class and the nature of the carbon offset projects, can also lead to price variation.

**C3 Can the carbon offset be covered by our office's budget?**

The policy aims to raise university members' awareness of the desirability of offsetting unavoidable carbon emissions from their air travel, and the offset will be borne by the participating staff members. Alternatively, subject to the budget holder/unit head's prior approval, the purchase of carbon offsets using non-UGC, private funding sources without any restricted funding purpose may be allowed. To record your office's contribution to achieving carbon neutrality, you are advised to document the purchases of carbon offsets via this [e-form](#). (Note: UGC funding is primarily for teaching, learning and research and not an appropriate funding source for the reimbursement of the cost of purchasing carbon offsets.)

**D. Carbon Offset Programmes**

**D1 How does carbon offsetting work?**

Carbon offsetting is a means of funding carbon reduction on the ground to compensate for emissions associated with your flight. Through participating in carbon offsetting, you are contributing to the purchase of carbon credits generated by projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

**D2 Can I select my own carbon offsetting programme?**

Yes, you can select any carbon offsetting programme of your choice.

**D3 How should I purchase a carbon offset if the airline of my choice does not offer any carbon offset options?**

You can consider engaging a third party service provider, such as myclimate and CLP Holdings (the two examples given in the [Step-by-step Guide to Purchasing Carbon Offsets from Third Party Service Providers for Air Travel](#)).

**D4 What are VER and CER projects?**

- Verified/Voluntary Emission Reduction (VER) is a certificate given to projects that have attained a voluntary and recognized third party approval. VERs are typically purchased by businesses and individuals seeking to offset their carbon emissions.
- Certified Emission Reduction (CER) is a certificate issued by the United Nations to its member nations for projects achieving greenhouse gas reductions through the use of [Clean Development Mechanism](#) (CDM).