



Darwin Plus

Guidance Notes for Applicants: Round 13

Darwin Plus Strategic

2024 – 2025

Please note: The UK Government has committed to make £10 million available for Darwin Plus each year until March 2025. Future funding for Darwin Plus will be requested via the next Spending Review. Therefore, funding for new applications is not guaranteed, and results or start dates may also be delayed. Applicants must note and accept this risk before sending their proposals to Defra and manage any commitments associated with the proposal, accordingly.



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs



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These guidance notes provide information on:

- what can be funded
- how to apply
- the process used to select projects for funding

Applicants should also read the Finance Guidance, which explains:

- what budgetary information you need in your application
- how the payments will be made if your application is successful, and how you should manage your budget
- when reporting is due and how it is linked to payments

Applications are made through the online application portal **Flexi-Grant** at bcfs.flexigrant.com

All guidance is available via the Flexi-Grant portal, and replicated on the Challenge Fund website below.

Applications are administered independently by NIRAS.

Please read all the available guidance including the separate Finance Guidance before requesting additional assistance, as these provide answers to most queries.

Further resources and templates to support your application are available on the [Forms and Guidance Portal](#), including:

Application Forms (for drafting purposes)	Change Request Forms
Application Templates	Terms and Conditions
Flexi-Grant User Guide	Reporting Forms
Claim Forms	Project Pages

If you can't find the answer, please contact the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Team. Calls (Team/Zoom/Phone) can be arranged by email.

Darwin Plus

darwinplus.org.uk

BCF-DPlus@niras.com

For queries specific to using the Flexi-Grant system, email: BCF-flexigrant@niras.com

c/o NIRAS, Pentlands Science Park, Bush Loan, Penicuik, UK, EH26 0PL



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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at DarwinPlus@defra.gov.uk

Glossary

Biodiversity	"Biological diversity" means the variability among living organisms from all sources including, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems.
Biodiversity Challenge Funds	Collective name for Defra's Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund and Darwin Plus.
Defra	Darwin Plus is a programme of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), UK Government.
Distinctive	Projects which are distinguishable from other work, including that any outputs can be clearly attributed to Darwin Plus (including through the use of Darwin Plus name and logo in communications and publicity).
DPAG	Darwin Plus Advisory Group is a group of independent experts in biodiversity and the environment in the UK Overseas Territories that provides strategic advice, assesses proposals and makes recommendations to Defra of funding decisions.
Evidence	Ranges in format, quality and relevance and include, documented and undocumented experiences, data, studies, policies, best practices etc. but is particularly valued when it is quality assured, accessible and applicable.
Lead Applicant	The individual who leads on the submission of the application and supporting materials, and will be the project contact point during the application process.
Lead Organisation	The organisation who will administer the grant and coordinate the delivery of the project, accepting the Terms and Conditions of the Grant on behalf of the project.
Matched Funding	Additional finance that is secured to help meet the total cost of the project, including public and private sources, as well as quantified in-kind contributions.
NIRAS	Darwin Plus Administrator, and first point of contact for projects and applicants.
ODA	Official development assistance – commonly known as overseas aid – is when support, expertise or finance is supplied by one government to help the people of another country via activities that promote economic development and welfare as a main objective.
Project Partner(s)	Have a formal governance role in the project, and a formal relationship with the project that may involve staff costs and/or budget management responsibilities. They are essential to the success of the project.
Project Leader	The individual with the necessary authority, capability and capacity, and a full understanding of their role and associated obligations to take responsibility for delivering value for money, managing risk and financial controls whilst fulfilling the terms and conditions of the grant.
Scale	The ability to take a proven approach and evidence to deliver greater impact either through larger grants or through uptake by stakeholders or other mechanisms.
Stakeholder	Are consulted, engaged and/or participate in project activities as they have an interest or concern in the project and its impact. However, unlike Project Partners, they do not have responsibilities for budget management or formal governance within the project.

UK Overseas Territory

UK Overseas Territories (*UKOTs* or *OTs*), also known as British Overseas Territories, refer to the Territories listed at 1.3.

Value for Money

Good value for money is the optimal use of resources to achieve the intended outcomes. Value for money is not about achieving the lowest initial price.

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1 Introduction

This section provides an overview of the Darwin Plus programme, its objectives and eligible countries.

1.1 The Darwin Plus Programme

Darwin Plus is one of Defra’s Biodiversity Challenge Funds. The aim of Darwin Plus is to help deliver long-term strategic outcomes for the natural environment in the UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs).

Biodiversity in the UKOTs is globally significant: the UKOTs are home to some of the world’s most delicate and complex ecosystems, and habitats containing many endemic species. Funding made available through Darwin Plus can support commitments under OT and UK policies, Multilateral Environment Agreements and Sustainable Development Goals.

The Darwin Plus programme (Figure 1) now consists of four grant schemes: Darwin Plus Local, Darwin Plus Main, Darwin Plus Strategic and Darwin Plus People & Skills. The Darwin Plus People & Skills grant is a continuation of the existing Darwin Plus Fellowships scheme, only renamed to increase the scheme’s appeal to audiences beyond academia.



	DARWIN PLUS LOCAL	DARWIN PLUS MAIN	DARWIN PLUS PEOPLE & SKILLS	DARWIN PLUS STRATEGIC
BUDGET	Individuals: up to £20,000 Organisations: up to £50,000	£50,000 to £1 million	Up to £100,000	£1 million to £3 million
DURATION	Up to 12 months	6 months to 3 years	Up to 24 months	3 to 5 years

Figure 1: A diagram displaying the four schemes of Darwin Plus.

Each scheme has separate guidance. This guidance applies to Darwin Plus Strategic only. For guidance on applying to the other schemes, please refer to the [Forms and Guidance portal](#).

1.2 Objectives of Darwin Plus

Darwin Plus supports environmental projects in the UKOTs, split across four broad themes. **Successful applicants must demonstrate substantial measurable outcomes in at least one of the themes of Darwin Plus** either by the end of the project's implementation or via evidenced mechanisms for post-project delivery.

The broad themes of Darwin Plus are:

- **Biodiversity:** improving and conserving biodiversity, and slowing or reversing biodiversity loss and degradation;
- **Climate change:** responding to, mitigating and adapting to climate change and its effects on the natural environment and local communities;
- **Environmental quality:** improving the condition and protection of the natural environment;
- **Capability and capacity building:** enhancing the capacity within UKOTs to support the environment in the short- and long-term.

There are some activities **which are not eligible** for funding through Darwin Plus:

- activities that would normally be part of a UKOT government's core functions (such as full-time staff salaries or routine management activities);
 - Note that funding can be used for discrete pieces of work that provide data to feed into core activities, for example, mapping OT habitats and soils to inform future environmental management.
- long-term research;
- ongoing maintenance of habitats or protection of species;
- work where the main focus is built heritage.

See the Terms and Conditions and BCF Finance Guidance for more information on eligible and ineligible costs.

1.2.1 Darwin Plus Local

Darwin Plus Local is intended for small scale environmental projects exclusively in the UKOTs, with the aim of building capacity in-territory and contributing to local economies. Darwin Plus Local is open to applications from individuals (for up to £20,000) and organisations (for up to £50,000) either based in a UKOT or with a meaningful, long-term relationship with a UKOT. Projects are intended to be short-term and must be completed within one financial year (1 April – 31 March).

1.2.2 Darwin Plus Main

Darwin Plus Main is intended for environmental projects of benefit to the UKOTs, offering grants between £50,000 and £1 million, for projects lasting between 6 months and 3 years. **Preference will be given to projects implementing existing identified environmental solutions on the ground (i.e. action orientated).** Research and scoping work in projects must be clearly justified, explaining how any new research will be applied to drive meaningful environmental outcomes on the ground. As much as possible, applicants should draw on existing findings from other contexts.

1.2.3 Darwin Plus People & Skills

Darwin Plus People & Skills is aimed at building capacity through training, education, and professional development opportunities. **Darwin Plus People & Skills is intended to fund OT nationals and/or long term residents and/or those with a long term relationship with an OT where it does not have a permanent resident population, to increase their knowledge and ability to meet long-term strategic outcomes for the natural environment in UKOTs.** Grants are for up to £100,000 for spending across a maximum of 24 months.

A wide range of projects may be eligible for funding through this scheme. People & Skills is intended to support people to build technical and scientific expertise in the fields of biodiversity and the environment to broaden their knowledge and experience of conservation.

Potential activities that may be eligible include, but are not limited to:

- Relevant academic qualifications, including:
 - Undergraduate and foundation degrees;
 - Masters' degrees;
 - Associate degrees;
 - Online and remote degrees;
- Professional development opportunities, including:
 - Training placements and internships;
 - Travel to and attendance at conferences and workshops;
 - Funding for trainers to come to UKOT(s) to deliver agreed training programmes;
 - Remote or online learning;
 - Territory to Territory skill share and exchanges;
 - Targeted training courses;
 - On-the-ground fieldwork training opportunities, and field work courses;
 - Other opportunities, where there is clear justification.

1.2.4 Darwin Plus Strategic

Darwin Plus Strategic is intended for projects that can demonstrate greater ambition and/or collaboration than projects funded under the other Darwin Plus grant schemes, demonstrating the potential to have a long-lasting and transformative impact in and/or across UKOTs.

Darwin Plus Strategic will offer grants between £1 million and £3 million for projects lasting between 3 and 5 years. **Applications should build on good evidence from smaller projects** to demonstrate the potential to either scale or replicate results further, aiming to deliver improved outcomes for biodiversity conservation in one or multiple UKOTs.

The primary benefit of Darwin Plus Strategic projects must be to at least one UKOT, though secondary benefits for biodiversity in neighbouring countries (which are not UKOTs) will be considered positively¹.

Active Darwin Plus Main projects are able to apply to Darwin Plus Strategic prior to completion in order to allow a seamless transition and a scaling of activities, but there should be no overlap of

¹ Darwin Plus will not fund projects targeting countries which are not UKOTs. Therefore, work focused on benefits to neighbouring countries that are not UKOTs must be paid for using matched funding.

funding. Applicants should provide clarity and distinct timings, activities and outputs between related projects in making the case for new additional support, preventing any duplication (perceived or real) or negatively impacting the value for money assessment of either grant.

1.3 The UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs)

Darwin Plus funding is open to applications for projects in all UKOTs. The fourteen UKOTs are:

- Anguilla
- Bermuda
- British Antarctic Territory (BAT)
- British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT)
- British Virgin Islands (BVI)
- Cayman Islands
- Falkland Islands (FI)²
- Gibraltar
- Montserrat
- Pitcairn, Henderson, Ducie & Oeno Islands
- St Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha
- South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI)
- Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia (on Cyprus)
- Turks & Caicos Islands (TCI)

² When completing the application on the Flexi-Grant portal the Falkland Islands are listed as 'Falkland Islands (the) [Malvinas]'. This is something that cannot currently be changed within Flexi-Grant but reference to the Malvinas will be removed before any documents are made public.

2 Project Requirements

2.1 Lead Organisation and Project Leader

Applications must be made by the Lead Organisation, not an individual, agreeing to the Terms and Conditions including managing the grant, its finances, reporting and governance.

The **Project Leader** is the individual with the necessary **authority, capability and capacity**, and a full understanding of their role and associated obligations to take **responsibility** for delivering value for money, managing risk and financial controls whilst fulfilling the terms and conditions of the grant.

The Project Leader and Lead Organisation can be based in any country, though we strongly encourage projects to be led by an in-territory organisation.

Where the Project Leader is not employed by the Lead Organisation, the reasoning behind should be made clear in the application, including their capability to control and be held accountable for the proposed project.

There is no limit on the number of applications a Lead Organisation may submit, but we would encourage internal co-ordination to ensure all submissions are competitive. Defra may consider the number of applications from a single organisation as part of their decision-making process.

Given the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, the Biodiversity Challenge Funds has taken the decision to suspend all bilateral engagement with Russia, including sending any funds to any Russian organisation. Russian organisations are ineligible to be a Lead Organisation or Partner or involved on any Biodiversity Challenge Funds grant. If you are unclear whether these restrictions apply in your specific case, please contact us.

2.2 Partners

Projects are strengthened through collaboration and partnership as the **resources and/or technical capability and capacity** to deliver complex environmental projects rarely exist within a single organisation. Additionally, Partners can bring **local experience, knowledge and networks** to the project, or **best practices and lessons learned** from elsewhere.

All Darwin Plus projects are expected to seek in-territory partners, and the meaningful engagement of stakeholders and OT governments.

All Darwin Plus applicants are expected to demonstrate meaningful engagement of in-territory partners, stakeholders and OT governments during the development and implementation of projects. Evidence of this engagement should be provided in the application through letters of support.

Partners differ from stakeholders as they have a **formal governance role** in the project (for example, representation on a Project Board or Management Committee), and a **formal relationship** with the project that may involve staff costs and/or budget management responsibilities. **Projects must be co-developed with any partners.**

In contrast, **Stakeholders** would not have a budget management, or a formal governance role, within the project but are engaged and participate in project activities.

2.3 Conflicts of Interest

A Conflict of Interest is a situation in which a person or organisation is in a privileged position (i.e. has access to information or influence over an activity or decision) and could use that position to give themselves or someone they are connected to an advantage (financial or otherwise) elsewhere.

It is often important to consult those involved in a particular field of work in order to get key information and to achieve objectives. Therefore, the identification of a possible conflict does not always lead to the exclusion of that person or organisation in the activity in question, however it does allow all parties involved to make an informed decision about how they should proceed.

Any potential Conflicts of Interest should be referenced in the covering letter along with your proposals to mitigate against any allegations of impropriety.

Should a potential or perceived Conflict of Interest arise during the lifetime of the project the Darwin Plus Administrator should be made aware of this immediately.

2.4 Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI)

Depending on the context in which you are working, this section may be more or less relevant to your project. It is recognised that some UKOTs do not have a permanent resident human population. You may also find it relevant to consider the gender context of your project's staffing and governance. Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) is comprised of two key terms, the BCFs define these as follows:

- **Gender Equality:** is about addressing inequalities and transforming the distribution of opportunities, choices and resources available to girls, women and non-binary individuals so that they have equal power to shape their lives and participate in the process thereby increasing equality between people of all genders.
- **Social Inclusion:** refers to the process of improving the terms of individuals and groups to take part in society, and the process of improving the ability, opportunity and dignity of people disadvantage and historically excluded from decision making and spheres of influence on the basis of their identity to take part in society.

GESI adopts an 'intersectional' approach, recognising that groups are not homogenous, and that people face overlapping discrimination based on age, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity and other characteristics i.e. individuals can face multiple barriers.

Evidence from the *Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation* (www.espa.ac.uk) programme demonstrates that individuals access resources differently depending on their gender and social background. As a result, women and men develop knowledge about different species, their uses and their management.

An understanding of how gender and social characteristics can result in exclusion, discrimination, and inequalities is fundamental to project design. Addressing these inequalities and ensuring equal participation of all can have a direct impact on an individual's ability to meet their basic needs and their access income or services such as healthcare, security and education.

With the strong ethical and evidential basis, regard for and a prioritisation of gender equality and social inclusion is an important public commitment of the UK Government, and therefore this fund.

Considerations of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion factors is crucial to developing stronger projects and programming as it enables a better understanding of relationships between society and the environment (power, knowledge, needs, roles and priorities). It helps identify the multitude of ways that different people access, use, and control natural resources and ecosystem services; potentially enabling equal (or equitable) opportunities to benefit for all.

The BCFs have committed to be a GESI sensitive programme.

*A **GESI Sensitive approach** is understood to demonstrate programming will “do no harm”, not exacerbate inequality and ensure meaningful and context appropriate engagement and participation of those involved in the project.*

For further information please see our [GESI Ambition Statement](#).

2.4.1 GESI in your application

The approach taken to promoting equality between persons of different gender and social backgrounds and ensuring individuals achieve equitable outcomes will be assessed at the proposal stage. While it is acknowledged there may be nuances in how projects deliver on a GESI sensitive approach through the various schemes, all successful projects must be able to demonstrate that they:

- Understand the GESI context in which the project is working within and ensure activities and interventions take contextual factors into account in the design and implementation of the project.
- Ensure early inclusive and meaningful participation of all those engaging with the project.
- Will not contribute to or create any further inequalities³.

The above are essential to projects achieving GESI sensitive standard, however projects are encouraged to push beyond these to deepen and improve their GESI contribution.

For information on how to achieve a more ambitious GESI approach, please see the diagram below:



Projects that are able to demonstrate the **integration of GESI considerations in their design and delivery plans**, will **score more highly** than those that cannot.

³ As no action is neutral, by not giving due consideration to GESI, projects could unintentionally exacerbate inequalities, reinforce barriers or cause harm to already disadvantaged groups.

As a minimum, all projects are expected to report **indicators disaggregated by gender** but are encouraged to include gender or GESI focussed indicators, where applicable.

Some questions to consider early on:

- What are the prevailing gender and social norms in the host country/location in relation to division of labour, access and control of resources, and ability to participate in decision making?
- How do these prevailing norms affect the project, in terms of what it can achieve, how will it engage with stakeholders and how it needs to be designed?
- How will the project impact (positively and negatively) those engaged with the project in their domestic, economic and community roles and responsibilities and in term of access to and control over assets?
- How will the project ensure equitable opportunities for those engaged in the project to influence and participate in decision making?
- How will the project ensure meaningful participation of stakeholders in project activities?
- Does the intervention address underlying barriers that exclude certain groups from accessing opportunities created?
- How will risks and unintended negative consequences be identified, avoided or mitigated against, and monitored?

Closely related to working with those that are often disadvantaged, projects should carefully consider how they will understand and manage the safeguarding risk (see 2.7).

Further resources include:

- [UN Environment Programme – Why gender is important for biodiversity conservation](#)
- [UNDP – Gender Equality and Social Inclusion](#)
- [ISSD – Mainstreaming Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in Nature-Based Solutions for Climate Change Adaption](#)
- [ICF – Building sustainable development with Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in mind](#)

2.5 Value for Money

Projects must demonstrate strong **Value for Money** in terms of expected impacts from each pound spent.

- **Value for money means aiming for the best feasible project for amount spent.** This means drawing on evidence to carefully appraise possible objectives and delivery options.
- **It does not mean only doing the cheapest things.** We need to understand what drives costs and make sure that we are getting the best outcomes for the lowest price.
- **Nor do we just do the easiest things to measure.** We need to explain what we value, be innovative in how we assess and monitor value for money and what results we are trying to achieve with UK taxpayers' money.
- **Value for money is not something that applies only to project design.** It should drive decision making throughout the project cycle and in relation to running costs and evaluations.

Partners must demonstrate that they are pursuing **continuous improvement** and applying stringent **financial management and governance** to reduce waste and improve efficiency.

We expect Projects to demonstrate openness, honesty and realism about capacity and capability, **accepting accountability and responsibility** for performance **along the project chain**.

For further guidance, see Finance Guidance.

Funded Projects should not significantly cut across or duplicate the work of others. Applicants should acknowledge the work of others (past and present), and demonstrate an understanding of current projects within their area to clearly establish **how they will add value**.

Projects should secure **matched funding** to help meet the total cost of the project, from public and/or private sources, as well as **quantified in-kind contributions** as far as possible.

Projects should consider **evidence** from relevant historical and existing initiatives, and reflect this in project design, incorporating lessons learnt, to maximise the chance of success.

Where there is evidence from historical and existing initiatives, including in geographies where there are other projects working on similar or related needs, it is important that the project is able to **clearly articulate how its activities and impacts add value**.

2.6 Ethics

Projects are expected to meet the **key principles of good ethical practice** and to demonstrate this in the application. All projects must:

- meet **all legal and ethical obligations** of all countries and organisations involved in the project, including relevant access and benefit sharing legislation pertaining to the utilisation of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge;
- follow **access and benefit sharing best practice** where legislation is incomplete or absent;
- include strong **leadership and participation from contributing countries** and the communities involved to enhance the incorporation of their perspectives, interests and knowledge, in addressing the wellbeing of those directly impacted by the project;
- recognise the value and importance of **traditional knowledge**, alongside international scientific approaches, and methods;
- respect the **rights, privacy, and safety of people** who are impacted directly and indirectly by project activities;
- use **Prior Informed Consent (PIC)** principles with communities;
- protect the **health and safety** of all project staff, and demonstrate this through an appropriate Health, Safety and/or Security policy or Security Plan;
- uphold the **credibility of evidence**, research and other findings.

Funding may be frozen or withdrawn in the event that these principles are not met.

Staff involved in the design or conduct of research should maintain the independence and integrity of the process, including intellectual detachment from personal convictions relating to the topic.

2.7 Safeguarding

Defra believes that everyone regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation⁴ has the right to be protected from all forms of harm, abuse, neglect and exploitation.

If you have any questions or concerns around Safeguarding or Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH) please contact the fund administrators NIRAS for further advice and guidance⁵.

All organisations within a project must uphold the [IASC 6 Core Principles](#) and/or the relevant standards on PSEAH of the [Core Humanitarian Standard \(CHS\)](#) as required by the terms and conditions of the grant (see Annex B).

Future terms and conditions of the grant are likely to include the [Common Approach to PSEAH \(CAPSEAH\)](#) in addition to the standards above.

To be eligible for funding, the Lead Organisation must demonstrate that they:

1. have appropriate and proportionate **safeguarding policies and procedures** in place, tailored to the project and reflecting GESI factors and power relationships, to **protect staff, implementing partners, the public and beneficiaries**. The policy must include a statement of commitment to safeguarding and a zero-tolerance statement on inaction to tackling bullying, harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse;
2. have in place a **Code of Conduct** signed by all staff and volunteers that sets out clear expectations of behaviours - inside and outside the workplace - and what will happen in the event of non-compliance or breach of these standards;
3. have an **accessible and clearly communicated whistle-blowing mechanism** which protects whistle blowers from reprisals and includes clear processes for dealing with concerns raised;
4. **proactively share** safeguarding policies with all **partners**, ensuring that they *understand and meet the required standards*, offering support where required as part of their **Due Diligence** process for working with downstream partners;
5. **ensure all staff from lead organisation and project partners are trained** in safeguarding and PSEAH;
6. provide **community sensitisation** on expected standards of behaviour of staff and how to report complaints and provide feedback on services; appropriate and proportional to the project activities;
7. **actively identify, assess and monitor safeguarding risks** in the project risk framework;
8. have **clear investigation and disciplinary procedures** for SEAH allegations and complaints that are survivor centred and in line with best practice⁶.

⁴ Darwin Initiative is a UK government fund, and it is against UK law to discriminate against someone because of a protected characteristic, these are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation ([Protected characteristics | EHRC \(equalityhumanrights.com\)](#)).

⁵ The [Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub](#) is an online resource with further guidance on strengthening your organisation's PSEAH procedures.

⁶ Safety of all parties involved in an allegation is paramount. For an example of appropriate SEAH investigation guideline see [here](#).

Additionally, Defra strongly encourages organisations to follow the [safer recruitment guidelines](#) and engage a member of staff to act as a Safeguarding Focal Point ([SFP](#)) to monitor and ensure safeguarding is embedded throughout the project lifetime.

Inability to demonstrate the above does not automatically exclude you from applying, rather it can help you identify priority areas for strengthening your safeguarding processes and procedures. If you feel this applies to you, please contact the fund administrators prior to applying.

Defra are committed to ensuring that where possible sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH) is prevented, and all people are protected. However, it is recognised that cases of SEAH do arise. Defra operate a **zero-tolerance to inaction on SEAH** and projects are required to take **all reasonable and adequate steps to prevent** sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment of any person (**staff, implementing partners, the public and beneficiaries**) linked to the delivery of the grant.

All projects **must immediately report to Defra** (ODA.Safeguarding@defra.gov.uk) any allegations or strong suspicions of sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment, this includes those that are *not directly related to the programme but would be of significant impact to their partnership with Defra or the reputation of Defra or UK aid*. **Failure to report to Defra any allegation, even in the case where it's determined to be unfounded, may result in funding being suspended or stopped.**

2.8 Communications

All grants are funded by UK public money (raised through taxation), so it is important to be able to clearly communicate how public money is being utilised.

Initially, each applicant is asked to provide a very short, plain English summary of what the project will do, which if successful will be used in communication activities. This summary should be written for a non-technical audience with little or no prior knowledge of the issue, and clearly describe the project plan and intended outcome.

During delivery, projects will be expected to engage and support wider communications and awareness raising activities to inform audiences what they are planning, learning, and achieving.

2.8.1 Open access policy and data sharing

The UK Government is committed to push for greater transparency in the availability and use of data to improve accountability, decision making, and to help deliver sustainable development outcomes to people living in poverty.

Projects are likely to generate significant outputs including datasets, best practices, peer-reviewed journal articles and technical reports which will be of value to other countries and stakeholders.

All evidence and data must be made freely available and accessible to all, unless there are particular sensitivities involved.

This includes all derived and raw data on species, land cover and land use, through appropriate national, regional and global databases. For help in identifying databases, please refer to: [Compendium of guidance on key global databases related to biodiversity-related conventions](#)⁷.

In your application, please consider the project outputs you expect to produce and how this information can be shared widely and freely. You may include appropriate costs in your budget for to support open access publishing but be realistic about when articles will be published. It is likely that dates will fall outside the formal project, so it is worth considering matched funding for these costs.

Further information on open and enhanced access can be found on [GOV.UK](#).

2.8.2 Transparency

In order to support understanding and in line with the aim of the Challenge Fund, successful project **applications**, along with subsequent **reporting**, **will be published** on the Challenge Fund website and elsewhere.

If there are **any sensitivities** within any of these, for example detailed species location data that would increase threats, please bring this to our attention early and these can be considered for **redaction prior to publication**.

2.9 Monitoring and Evaluation

Robust monitoring framework supports both the efficient delivery of the project as well the capability to demonstrate the impact and value for money achieved.

Further guidance is given in the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Guidance on the Forms and Guidance Portal.

2.10 Terms and Conditions

Successful applicants will be issued a grant award letter with **the Terms and Conditions that will apply to the grant**, including the grant purpose, value, period, and reporting and financial arrangements.

Copies of the Terms and Conditions are available (on the Forms and Guidance Portal), and you should **understand these fully before making an application to ensure compliance will not be an issue**. If applicants, such as public bodies, are subject to established approaches for example with insurance, liability or the Information Act, then please raise this with us as soon as possible as it may not be possible to accommodate them.

Defra retains the right to amend these terms and conditions at any time.

2.11 Specifications

Darwin Plus Strategic provides grants between £1 million and £3 million. **The minimum length of a project is 3 years and the maximum length is 5 years**. Projects should aim to produce strong evidence for the potential of transformative change for the primary benefit of Overseas Territories upon completion, delivering strong results for any of the main themes present in section 1.2. However, proposals that may provide secondary biodiversity benefits to neighbouring countries will still be

⁷ UNEP-WCMC. (2018). Compendium of guidance on key global databases related to biodiversity-related conventions. Cambridge (UK): UNEP-WCMC. <https://doi.org/10.34892/9XC8-0D10>

welcome due to the significant potential for increased international biodiversity conservation within the overseas territories.

Applicants to Darwin Plus Strategic:

- should plan to start on or after **1 April 2025**. You cannot start earlier.
- must ensure their budget commitments end **by 31 March 2030**.

Please note: The UK Government has committed to make £10 million available for Darwin Plus each year until March 2025. Future funding for Darwin Plus will be requested via the next Spending Review. Therefore, funding for new applications is not guaranteed, and results or start dates may also be delayed. Applicants must note and accept this risk before sending their proposals to Defra and manage any commitments associated with the proposal, accordingly.

Please ensure that your budget is set out by financial year (**1 April – 31 March**). As set out in the Finance guidance, budget cannot be moved between financial years, except in exceptional circumstances. Applicants should take this into account when designing project proposals. For example, applicants may consider forecasting less activity in the fourth quarter (January – March) of the financial year to account for the risk of delay.

You should have a realistic budget and timeframe for your project, and logframe targets should be achievable. Do not be overambitious.

We do not give additional weighting to a large project seeking a grant towards the maximum available finance or duration.

The **value for money assessment** in terms of the scale and legacy of the expected impact relative to cost (see Finance Guidance), is a more important consideration than the absolute size of the project. Each project should have a realistic, and not an overly ambitious, budget and timeframe.

All financial commitments within the budget **must be completed by the project end date** and within the maximum duration of the grant, as indicated under each grant.

3 Applying for Darwin Plus Strategic

3.1 Timetable

Darwin Plus Strategic

Call for Applications from **Monday 22nd April to 22:59 GMT (23:59 BST) Monday 29th July 2024.**

Shortlisted applicants will be invited to provide clarifications from **30th September to 23:59 GMT Monday 28th October 2024.**

Shortlisted applicants will be invited to interview (remote) between **Monday 11th November to Friday 15th November 2024.**

Results are expected before the end of December 2024.

Please note: The UK Government has committed to make £10 million available for Darwin Plus each year until March 2025. Future funding for Darwin Plus will be requested via the next Spending Review. Therefore, funding for new applications is not guaranteed, and results or start dates may also be delayed. Applicants must note and accept this risk before sending their proposals to Defra and manage any commitments associated with the proposal, accordingly.

3.2 How to apply

All applications must be submitted:

- through Flexi-Grant, using approved templates where appropriate
- with fully answered questions, referencing evidence where possible, the word count indicates the level of detail required; if appropriate, n/a is acceptable
- in English
- attaching the required supporting evidence, and
- signed, with a PDF signature uploaded as part of the Flexi-Grant application.

IMPORTANT: Competition for funding is strong. Applications which:

- are incorrect or incomplete including missing supporting evidence/attachments, or
- do not match all published criteria, including eligible dates and page limits on supporting materials
- are submitted using the incorrect/unofficial template
- exceed the stated page or word limits
- do not support work in a UKOT

will be rejected as ineligible.

4 Supporting documents

The table below lists the documents required to apply for Darwin Plus Main. If the *essential* material is not correctly submitted **with your completed application**, is submitted on a modified/incorrect template, or exceeds the required file or page limits your application **may be rejected as incomplete**.

The application form **provides sufficient space to make your case**, and the submission of unrequested material will significantly **detract from your application or result in its rejection**.

All material must be uploaded to Flexi-Grant as either **PDF** or **Excel** (JPEG is only acceptable for application signature).

Table 1: Summary of required and optional supporting material

	Strategic
Cover Letter	Required (2 sides of A4 maximum) – see more details in section 4.1.1.
Logframe	Required on the template provided.
Theory of Change	Required , no template, 1 side of A4, PDF .
Budget and Financial Evidence	Required on correct Excel template. The last two sets of audited or independently examined accounts covering the last three financial years. Please send as separate PDF Documents i.e. two documents. Maximum file size each 5MB.
Workplan	Required on Workplan template
Counter Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy	Not Required but available on request.
Safeguarding Policy	Required , Lead Organisation’s Safeguarding Policy (see 2.7) must be submitted as a single PDF file.
Ethics Policy	Not required, but available on request.
CVs and Job Descriptions	Required , 1 side of A4 per CVs (or job descriptions if vacant) of all the key project staff named in the application form merged and submitted as a single PDF file .
Letters of Support	Required – from all project partners and OT governments (including from the Lead Organisation). Letters of Support must be merged and submitted as a single PDF file - see more details in section 4.1.3.
Risk Register	Required on Risk Framework template, with completed Delivery Chain Mapping. Issues Log should not be completed.
Map, List of references	To further support your application, if desired a map, and/or list of references can be optionally submitted in a single combined PDF ; hyperlinks are not permitted, and must not exceed a maximum of 5 sides of A4 in total as additional pages will make your application ineligible .

4.1 Evidence types

4.1.1 Cover Letter

The cover letter is an opportunity to support your application: it should be focused referring where needed to the application for further details rather than duplicating information. For reapplication, the cover letter must explicitly set out how you have addressed all the comments/feedback in the application form: you should briefly restate the feedback point, then clearly setting out how (and where) you have responded to it in the application. For a new application, you should briefly indicate any significant points about your application or organisation, but not repeat information already in the application.

The cover letter should be on headed paper and should be succinct and brief (2 A4 sides maximum).

The cover letter must be uploaded as a **single PDF file**.

4.1.2 CVs and Job Descriptions

One-page CVs or job descriptions for each of the key project staff **named in the application form and budget**. If you cannot secure a CV from a named Project Staff member, please provide an explanation, along with a summary of the skills and experience of the team member concerned.

CVs are important to demonstrate the skills an individual brings to the team.

These CVs/job descriptions should be merged and uploaded as a **single PDF file**.

4.1.3 Letters of support

Letters of support are required from all named project partners (including the Lead Organisation) and relevant OT governments. If obtaining letter(s) of support from relevant OT government(s) has not been possible, please explain why not. **All projects must show support from OT-stakeholders such as OT governments and/or OT civil society.**

Letters of Support from other key stakeholders are strongly encouraged but not required.

Letters of support can also be supplied for other project stakeholders e.g. Governor's office but are not required. Letters of support should be on **headed paper and must be in English** (or with an English translation). Those written by high profile stakeholders or project partners are expected to be stronger than from others and act **as evidence of:**

- **support** for the application and the **importance** of the work to your organisation
- your **relationship** with partners and actors within the **OTs**
- **support** for the need of the **proposed project**
- your **ability** to achieve high **quality results** and productive **partnerships**.

These letters of support should be merged and uploaded as a **single PDF file**.

4.1.4 Counter Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy

A copy of your policy setting out how the Lead Organisation complies with legislation and relating to anti-bribery and anti-corruption as covered in the Terms and Conditions **does not need to be submitted** but may be requested.

4.1.5 Ethics Policy

Evidence that the Lead Organisation will meet the **key principles of good ethical practice** (see 2.6) should be demonstrated in your response to the Ethics question in the application form. A copy of your ethics policy **does not need to be submitted** but maybe requested.

5 Assessment process

5.1 Role of the Darwin Plus Advisory Group

All eligible applications that meet the required standard will be assessed by the **Darwin Plus Advisory Group (DPAG)**, made up of experts with experience of living or working in the OTs, UK government officials and representatives from relevant statutory advisory bodies. The group will assess projects against how they meet the funding priorities, the overall impact and technical excellence of each project.

Arrangements are in place to ensure there are no potential conflicts of interest. For more information about the DPAG, see <https://darwinplus.org.uk/about-us/>.

5.2 Process overview

An overview of the process for assessment is:

- 1) **Initial Review:** Applications that are poor quality, incomplete or do not meet the essential eligibility criteria or standard will be rejected. You will be informed of the reasons for rejection.
- 2) **Independent Expert Assessment:** Applications are scored by at least three members of DPAG, against the assessment criteria (Section 6) to inform the discussion at the First Sift Meeting.
- 3) **First Sift meeting:** The experts discuss comments and agree the shortlisted applications and clarification points.
- 4) **Clarifications:** Shortlisted applications are required to respond in writing to clarification questions from the Panel, and may be invited to attend a virtual interview with nominated members of the Panel.
- 5) **Second Sift meeting:** The experts discuss the applicants' responses and agree the strongest applications to recommend for funding.
- 6) **Final result:** Defra reviews DPAG's recommendations and awards the grants.

Due diligence is conducted on all projects prior to award.

5.3 UKOT Government Priorities

All applicants are required to consult the relevant OT government in the development of their application and letters of support should be provided. If obtaining letter(s) of support from relevant OT government(s) has not been possible, please explain why not. All projects must show support from OT-stakeholders such as OT governments and/or OT civil society.

Relevant UKOT governments may also be contacted by Defra for feedback on applications which will assist the DPAG and Defra in their overall assessment and recommendations.

5.4 Results of applications

Once the Funding Decision has been made, **all Lead Applicants** (both successful and unsuccessful) **will receive notification** via email from Flexi-Grant.

Darwin Plus retains the **right to clarify any issues** raised during the application process or to award funding **subject to required amendments**. If the applicant is subsequently unable to meet the requirements of the award, Darwin Plus retains the right to withdraw the offer.

5.5 Feedback

Unsuccessful applicants will receive detailed feedback to help strengthen future applications.

5.6 Resubmission of applications

If your application is unsuccessful, you may submit a revised application to a subsequent Round.

A resubmitted application for a particular project will **only be accepted once**, unless there is prior agreement owing to exceptional circumstances or the proposed project is significantly different to the original application. Applicants should re-submit in the correct format and in accordance with the guidance applicable to the round in which the resubmission is made. The **cover letter** of any such resubmission must outline how you have responded to any feedback provided.

6 Assessment Criteria – Darwin Plus Strategic

The application will be assessed by the DPAG against the criteria below to generate a score (Section 7). **However, a successful project does not need to meet all of the criteria listed below.** The DPAG will use these four scores to determine the suitability of projects for funding.

Strategic Value

- The legacy of the proposal is demonstrated through the potential to have a **long-lasting and transformative impact** within the broader themes of Darwin Plus.
- Projects present a **strong evidence base** to provide **confidence** that the project can **deliver at this scale on a pathway** to greater ambition.
- The project explicitly demonstrates the **potential for replicability within other UKOTs**.
- The proposal provides opportunities for **cross collaboration between multiple UKOTs**.
- The partners are **well connected within and outside the project**, supporting the mobilisation of knowledge and resources.
- The proposal is clearly game-changing, and ambitious; could **lead to new effective products, processes, or services** to deliver more desirable and useful solutions than currently available.

Policy Priorities

- The project implements existing proven environmental solutions, or tests promising innovative solutions;
- Any research or scoping work is clearly justified and shows how it will be applied for meaningful environmental outcomes on the ground;
- The project demonstrates substantial measurable outcomes in at least one of the themes of Darwin Plus, either by the end of the project's implementation or via evidenced mechanisms for post-project delivery;
- The project contributes to the delivery of existing commitments for individual Territories, such as those set out within the national biodiversity strategies, environmental action plans and roadmaps, or equivalent.
- The project supports commitments set out within the Joint Ministerial Council (JMC) Communiqués or any commitments under international conventions extended to their Territory, such as contributing to the goals in the Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework;
- The project has good local ownership, as evidenced by commitment from relevant local stakeholders including UKOT governments or UKOT civil society;
- The project outcomes will contribute to embedding good environmental decision-making in UKOT policies and processes.

Impact

- The project applicant has the capacity and capability to deliver the project;
- The project contributes to environmental goods and services within the UKOT(s);
- The project is sustainable – the outcomes will be sustained after the funding is finished;
- The project demonstrates how it will strengthen the capability and capacity of local partners.

Technical Excellence

- The project has been well-planned and has a clear goal, purpose and outputs;
- The activities are practical and achievable;
- The risks are identified, assessed and have clear mitigation actions;

- The monitoring and evaluation plan ensures changes are measurable and exhibits a clear understanding of the evidence needed to demonstrate these changes, and how this evidence will be shared and made publicly available;
- A well-defined exit strategy is in place from the start of funding;
- The project represents value for money;
- The uncertainty and probability of the risk of negative or unintended outcomes is understood and will be managed effectively;
- The project addresses inequality, including gender inequality, through its design, monitoring and evaluation; and intentional or unintentional increases in inequality will be prevented.

7 Assessment Scoring

Score	Description
6	The proposed project meets all the of assessment criteria . The majority of the assessment criteria are met to a high standard. There are few minor issues which if addressed may improve the project but they are unlikely to be detrimental to the delivery of the project and should not prevent it from being funded without changes being made.
5	The proposed project meets most of the assessment criteria . The criteria it does meet are mostly to a high standard. There are minor issues that could improve the project but these are unlikely to significantly impact the project's success and should not prevent it from being funded. It is likely to significantly contribute to the objectives of the Darwin Plus scheme.
4	The proposed project meets most of the assessment criteria . The criteria it does meet are often to a good standard. There are a few minor issues that would improve this project which they would be advised to consider if funded. It is likely to contribute to the objectives of the Darwin Plus scheme.
<i>Indicative scoring threshold of competitive applications</i>	
3	The proposed project meets most of the assessment criteria . Those criteria it does meet are largely to an acceptable standard. It is likely to contribute to the objectives of the Darwin Plus scheme. The project has some issues with design which the team would be recommended to review to increase its suitability for funding.
2	The project meets some of the assessment criteria . Those criteria it does meet are to a modest standard. Overall however, it is inconsistent in terms of the assessment criteria. The application requires changes to make it suitably address the assessment criteria to make it competitive.
1	The proposed project is unsatisfactory and meets only a few of the criteria outlined. The proposed project is likely to require significant alterations to make it address the assessment criteria.
0	The projects fails to meet any of the criteria outlined and raises serious concerns e.g. flawed approach, subject to serious technical difficulties or risks, unclearly written that it cannot be properly assessed, or is duplicative.

Annex A. Project Team CV

All key project staff must be named in the application form and budget. Key Project Staff includes those that make up the main project team and are critical to project success. They can be from any of the Project Partners.

You must provide a **one-page CV or job description** (if not yet recruited) for these named project staff, to demonstrate that the project will have the capability and capacity to deliver the outcome.

The table below provides a guide to relevant and useful CV evidence, and evidence that is less relevant to demonstrating the capability of the Project Team.

Useful evidence	What it demonstrates	How assessors will use this
Previous roles/ positions on similar projects	Up to date and relevant expertise	If the roles listed are relevant to the proposed project, it will demonstrate appropriate experience leading or working on a similar type of project.
Skills and knowledge	Technical or Specialist skills and knowledge relevant to the proposed project role	Relevant skills and knowledge tailored to the project; it will provide evidence of the individual's match to the project
UKOT experience	This individual has recent experience of working in project environment (political, social, legislative etc.).	We do not expect all of the team to have worked in the host territory but, we do expect some will have experience working in countries or territories with similar environments. This is especially valued in the senior project roles.
List and scale of project funding received	The individual is good at leading projects, managing the budgets and fulfilling reporting requirements.	Good evidence of an experienced Project Leader in running projects
Less useful evidence	What it demonstrates	How assessors will use this
List of courses/ lectures given	The individual is a recognised teacher	Gives no indication of their ability in a non-academic setting.
List of job titles held	Range of experience	If this is a list of job titles i.e. lecturer, coordinator, researcher then it is unlikely this list will provide much useful detail.
List of published papers	Academic or scientific achievement but may not be relevant to the project	A list of all papers ever published is of little interest to reviewers. A tailored list of papers, relevant to the project, will demonstrate expertise in this area.
List of Post Graduate Students	This individual is a recognised research supervisor	Doesn't show that the individual is capable of undertaking project work, although may be relevant if the project involves significant mentoring of local students

Annex B. Safeguarding

Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Six Core Principles

1. Sexual exploitation and abuse by anyone associated with a BCF project constitute acts of gross misconduct and are therefore grounds for termination of employment.
2. Sexual activity with children (persons under the age of 18) is prohibited regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally. Mistaken belief regarding the age of a child is not a defence.
3. Exchange of money, employment, goods, or services for sex, including sexual favours or other forms of humiliating, degrading or exploitative behaviour is prohibited. This includes exchange of assistance that is due to beneficiaries.
4. Any sexual relationship between those associated with a BCF project and a person benefitting from the project that involves improper use of rank or position is prohibited. Such relationships undermine the credibility and integrity of humanitarian aid work.
5. Where anyone associated with a BCF Project develops concerns or suspicions regarding sexual abuse or exploitation by anyone else associated with a BCF project, whether in the same organisation or not, they must report such concerns via established reporting mechanisms.
6. Everyone associated with a BCF project are obliged to create and maintain an environment which prevents sexual exploitation and abuse and promotes the implementation of their code of conduct. Managers at all levels have particular responsibilities to support and develop systems which maintain this environment.

Adapted from the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) [Six Core Principles](#)

Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability

The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS) sets out the essential elements of principled accountable and high-quality aid. Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Sexual Harassment (PSEAH) is essential to this.

How an organisation should prevent and respond to allegations of sexual abuse and harassment is woven throughout the Core Humanitarian Standard.

The CHS Alliance published a verification tool called the PSEAH Index to help organisations to verify their performance against the CHS by determining whether they have the right policies and practices in place to protect people in vulnerable situations.

To access the PSEAH Index tool, please visit the CHS Alliance [here](#).

Annex C. Awarded Grants

The award is made to the Lead Organisation, not to an individual. The Project Leader will be the first point of contact for all aspects of project management (including financial management), and will be responsible for the overall management of the project and accountability of the award, on behalf of the institution they represent.

Contact details will be required for a nominated individual from the finance section of the institution to whom the award is made. This person may be identified once the grant has been offered.

Reporting Requirements

Projects must provide Annual and Half Year progress reports that are reviewed each year. These reports must provide robust reporting against intended objectives and include information on outputs and ethics and environmental impact.

All projects are required to submit a Final Report at the end of the award.

To continue receiving funding from Darwin Plus reports must be complete and within deadlines. If you do not meet these requirements your funding can be stopped.

Project datasets

Data collection, analysis, management and storage protocols should be established to ensure the integrity of research findings and their subsequent use within the research team, Darwin Plus and eventual wider public domain.

The application should demonstrate that the publication of results and secure data storage has been thought about, a plan exists, and appropriate resources are included.

We encourage that where possible and appropriate data is shared directly or indirectly with Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF.org) for wider accessibility.

Data protection and use of personal data

Information supplied in the application form, including personal data, will be used by Defra as set out in the Privacy Notice, available from the [Forms and Guidance Portal](#).

This **Privacy Notice must be provided to all individuals** whose personal data is supplied in the application form. Some information may be used when publicising Darwin Plus including project details (usually title, lead organisation, project leader, location, and total grant value).