



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Appointment of Chair to the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Darwin Expert Committee

Briefing pack for applicants

Closing Date: Monday 24 March 2025



We are the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. We are responsible for improving and protecting the environment, growing the green economy, sustaining thriving rural communities and supporting our world-class food, farming and fishing industries.

We work closely with our 34 agencies and arm's length bodies on our ambition to make our air purer, our water cleaner, our land greener and our food more sustainable. Our mission is to restore and enhance the environment for the next generation, and to leave the environment in a better state than we found it.



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

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The Biodiversity Challenge Funds

The Biodiversity Challenge Funds (BCFs) are the collective name for three of the UK Government's international biodiversity and environment grant schemes: the Darwin Initiative (DI), Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) Challenge Fund and Darwin Plus (D+).

Funds are allocated through an open and transparent process against clear criteria, with applications scored and recommended for selection by the BCFs expert committee or advisory group.

Darwin Initiative

Established in 1992, the Darwin Initiative awards grants that enable developing countries to conserve their unique biodiversity, reduce multidimensional poverty and address climate change. The technical committee responsible for assessing applications and providing strategic guidance for the fund is called the Darwin Expert Committee. <https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/>

IWT Challenge Fund

The IWT Challenge Fund helps the UK government deliver on its commitment to tackling the illegal wildlife trade (IWT). To date, the IWT Challenge Fund has supported 182 projects in over 60 countries to a value of over £63 million and delivers on the UK's IWT Conference Series commitments by supporting projects that tackle IWT. The technical committee responsible for assessing applications, making recommendations and providing strategic guidance for the fund is called the IWT Advisory Group. <https://iwt.challengefund.org.uk/>

Darwin Plus

The aim of Darwin Plus is to help deliver long-term strategic outcomes for the natural environment in the UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs). The fund helps to meet commitments under UKOT and UK policies, multilateral environment agreements and the SDGs. The technical committee responsible for assessing applications and providing strategic guidance for the fund is called the Darwin Plus Advisory Group. <https://darwinplus.org.uk/>

Please refer to each fund's website for more details about the fund and the current list of members.

What are the BCF Expert Groups?

Our aim is to ensure our Expert Groups are inclusive, diverse, and global.

This recruitment is for a Chair for the Darwin Expert Committee (DEC). A separate recruitment is taking place for Expert Group members. Information provided about the other BCFs is for information only.

The Darwin Expert Committee is made up of independent experts including academics, practitioners and NGO representatives, along with government officials, all with leadership experience, technical knowledge and experience of biodiversity conservation and/or multidimensional poverty reduction programmes.

Description of the Role

The Chair is responsible for:

- Acting as a champion for the Darwin Initiative, alongside Defra and other government ministers, representing and promoting the Fund and its interests at the most senior levels across all sectors including public, business, academic and non-governmental
- Chairing all meetings of the Darwin Expert Committee, to ensure due process is followed and decisions are taken independently, honestly, objectively, impartially and without bias, to enable Defra to award funding to high-quality projects
- Making the final decisions as necessary where members are unable to reach a consensus view on any aspects of the assessment process or the resulting selection of applicants and recommendations for funding.
- Attend 4 Defra Programme Board¹ meetings per year. At these meetings, the Board examines DEC recommendations and decides which projects to fund.
- Supporting the recruitment of members, through participating or contributing to the associated processes including discussing the role with potential applicants, encouraging good applicants who may not otherwise feel they can put themselves forward, sifting/interviewing prospective members and assisting with their induction.
- Providing support and advice to members where needed, e.g., to address performance concerns.

¹ The Programme Board is made up of senior Defra and FCDO officials, along with the Chair of the DEC. It makes the final decisions on which projects to fund, based on the recommendations from the DEC assessments and alongside wider strategic priorities

- Providing strategic advice on the Darwin Initiative aims, priorities and further development to Defra and NIRAS, including attending BCF Chairs meetings.
- Where possible, attending, chairing or speaking at Darwin Initiative events, including workshops and webinars.
- Meet Defra's Chief Scientific Adviser, who oversees all of Defra's expert committees.

To maintain a breadth of experience in our Expert Groups, we would not normally expect to appoint a Chair from the same organisation as an existing member of the DEC or any other Expert group Chair, except in exceptional circumstances. Please contact us if you are considering applying and someone affiliated with your organisation is already an Expert Group member.

The appointment will commence from 1 July 2025, for a three-year term, reviewed annually and with the option of a second term by agreement.

Representation

We encourage applications from a wide range of backgrounds, including the private sector, academia and professional institutions, non-governmental organisations, independent experts and other stakeholders based in the UK or internationally, including in countries where projects deliver their impact, i.e. low- and middle-income countries. Chairs based overseas will need to travel to the UK for the annual Sift and Strategy Day meetings, and potentially on some other occasions.

We recognise the challenges that people with (multiple) protected characteristics may experience in their career progression. We want a group of Experts that celebrate and embrace diversity of thought and experience. We are fully committed to being inclusive and ensuring equal opportunities.

Time Commitment

You should ensure you have sufficient time and expertise to meet the expectations of the role. The Darwin Expert Committee deals with a high volume of applications and currently has four Sift meetings across the year.

An outline of the number of days and indicative timeline for the next round is presented below. This is on top of the additional commitments required to fulfil the description of the role above, which may add another 1-2 days per year.

Fund	Commitment, days	Indicative timing 2025-26
Darwin Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • four one-day sift meetings (and up to a day preparation for each) • one to two strategy discussion days (and up to a day preparation for each) • one to two days of interviews for Extra applications (including preparation) • one to two days for assessing, interviewing and inducting new DEC members • up to three days for attending and preparing for Programme Boards and ad hoc meetings with the Darwin Initiative Secretariat and NIRAS 	<p>Stage 1 Sift likely in early September;</p> <p>Extra Sift likely late October with interviews in early January 2026;</p> <p>C&C and Innovation Sift likely December 2025;</p> <p>Stage 2 Sift and Strategy Day likely January 2026.</p>

The successful candidate will also be expected to attend an induction event following appointment.

Qualities and experience required

The successful candidate will offer sound judgement, discretion, and the ability to effectively and efficiently manage a large group of Experts.

Candidates must be able to demonstrate all the following **Essential** criteria:

1. **Experience in chairing high-level committees** making recommendations on strategic and/or funding priorities, taking full account of the range of relevant factors and opinions; and encouraging consensus from a range of apparently differing views.
2. **Substantial and significant technical expertise and knowledge** of topics relevant to the Darwin Initiative's objectives.
3. **Professional experience of successfully delivering project outcomes** in a variety of low- and middle-income countries over several years from concept to closure. Supported by core capabilities around finance, safeguarding, multidimensional poverty reduction, gender, social inclusion, monitoring & evaluation (including logical frameworks), communicating, risk management, capability building, and delivering through equitable partnerships.
4. **Strong track record of working with, applying and reporting to competitive grant funding schemes.** Ideally including assessing project applications or the ability to articulate technically robust projects that provide strong value for money, can deliver ambitious outcomes in line with the criteria, and provide positive and constructive feedback to applicants.
5. **Experience of working with Government departments,** at a senior level.

In addition, the following criteria are highly desirable:

6. **Demonstrated ability to maximise the impact of Official Development Assistance** by guiding how funds are allocated.

Terms and Conditions of appointment

Further details are available in the [Biodiversity Challenge Fund Expert Groups Handbook](#). You will be expected to abide by the terms in the Handbook if appointed, including operating with the highest standards of honesty, impartiality, integrity and objectivity.

Period of appointment

The initial appointment will be for a three-year term (with annual review points), with the possibility of reappointment for a further term, subject to approval.

The appointment will start from 1 July 2025.

The BCFs are subject to future spending reviews and in the event the programme does not receive funding in a future spending review, all members' terms will be terminated early.

Current Expert members from any BCF Expert Group are eligible to apply for the role of Chair of the Darwin Expert Committee as long as they can meet the requirements set out above.

Remuneration and expenses

We offer Chairs a stipend of £400 per day plus reimbursement of reasonable (standard class) travel and subsistence costs for attending committee meetings and agreed ad hoc tasks, and internet costs if needed, based on Defra's T&S policy limits.

The Department has due regard to diversity. Expenses may include reimbursement of reasonable additional childcare or other carer costs that occur due to Expert commitments, and the reimbursement of reasonable additional expenses of disabled people.

Location of offices and meetings

For convenience and efficiency, the default Sift meeting method is virtual, but meetings are expected to be periodically (typically annually) held in person with the options to join remotely if necessary. For our annual strategy discussion meetings, we expect the Chair to attend in person. Members will be strongly encouraged to attend in person; however we will always accommodate remote attendance where necessary. In person meetings are normally held in London, although other locations may be considered.

Where possible, Sift and Strategy meetings will be held on consecutive days to make in-person attendance easier. The Chair and Experts are expected to be available for and participate in all Sift and Strategy Meetings.

A meeting is considered to be a full day (09:00-17:00, UK time zone) unless otherwise specified, please consider this if joining remotely from a different time zone.

How to apply

Appointments to Defra's Biodiversity Challenge Funds Expert Groups are filled through open competition.²

To apply candidates must complete the application form on Flexi-Grant which seeks the following information:

1. **Statement of suitability:** It is essential that your statement of suitability gives full, but concise, information relevant to the appointment, clearly demonstrating how you meet each of the Qualities and Experience required for the role. Please provide specific examples. **(1,000 words)**
2. **CV:** should include education, professional qualifications and employment history, and the names and contact details for two referees. CVs **should not exceed two sides of A4 pages.**
3. Completed Section 2 on Conflicts of Interest, Conduct and Advertising and Section 3 on Diversity Monitoring.

For an informal discussion about the role please contact NIRAS on BCF-Darwin@niras.com.

Applications should be submitted through the online application portal Flexi-Grant at <https://bcfs.flexigrant.com/>. This is the same system that applicants to the Biodiversity Challenge Funds use. All guidance is available via the Flexi-Grant portal and replicated on the three BCFs websites.

The deadline for receipt of application is **23:59h** (UK time) on Monday 24 March 2025.

² Appointments to Defra's Biodiversity Challenge Funds Expert Groups are not ministerial appointments regulated by Office for the Commissioner of Public Appointments (OCPA). The posts will, however, be filled through open competition, in line with OCPA guidelines on best practice for making public appointments.

Selection process

Selection Panel

The panel will be selected from officials in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Panel Chair), the current Chair of the Darwin Expert Committee (or delegated member) and will be supported by the Fund Manager.

Shortlisting

The selection panel will assess candidates based on the written application against the Qualities and Experience section (page 5 above), as well as consideration of experience and expertise provided in the CV.

Candidates may be invited for interview or appointed on the basis of the evidence supplied in the application. It is therefore essential for your application to give full, but concise, information/evidence/examples relevant to the appointment.

Disability

We guarantee to consider anyone with a disability whose application meets the minimum criteria for the post. By 'minimum criteria' we mean that you must provide a full application with evidence which demonstrates that you generally meet the level of competence required for each criterion, as well as meeting any of the qualifications, skills or experience defined as essential.

Defra are committed to the employment and career development of disabled people.

More information about Disability Confident Leaders is available by clicking the logo on the cover page. We have a duty to make reasonable changes to processes where possible to ensure that disabled people are not disadvantaged.

If you need a change to be made so that you can make your application, please contact NIRAS on BCF-Darwin@niras.com.

Interviews

Interviews are likely to take place at the end of April 2025 and will take place via MS Teams. Further details will be provided at the time.

Reserve List

A reserve list may be agreed for a period of 12 months from which further appointments can be made to Biodiversity Challenge Fund Expert Groups, or OCEAN Expert Committee³.

Ineligibility criteria

You cannot be considered, or will cease to be a member, if:

- you occupy a paid party-political post or hold a particularly sensitive or high role in a political party;
- you become bankrupt or make an arrangement with creditors;
- your estate has been sequestrated in Scotland or you enter into a debt arrangement programme under Part 1 of the Debt Arrangement and Attachment (Scotland) Act 2002 (asp 17) as the debtor or have, under Scots law, granted a trust deed for creditors;
- you are disqualified from acting as a company director under the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986, or equivalent in any country;
- you have been convicted of a criminal offence anywhere, the conviction not being spent for the purposes of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (c. 53), or equivalent;
- you become subject to a debt relief order or a bankruptcy restrictions order or equivalent;
- you fail to declare all relevant conflicts of interest.

³ The OCEAN Grants Programme is another competitive UK government grants scheme, supporting innovative proposals from local coastal communities that aim to deliver marine protection and reduce poverty worldwide.

How we will handle your application

You will receive an automatic confirmation of receipt of your application on submission through Flexi-Grant.

The short-listing will take place week commencing 17 March 2025.

Candidates will then be notified by the week commencing 7 April 2025 by email through Flexi-Grant, whether or not they have been shortlisted.

References may be taken up if candidates are shortlisted.

The interviews, if required, will take place in late April 2025.

Shortlisted applicants will be informed of the outcome by mid-May 2025.

The successful candidates will be expected to attend an induction event in late May/early June 2025 and be available to take up the role from 1 July 2025.

Dealing with your concerns

For queries about the application process, including potential conflicts of interest, please e-mail BCF-Darwin@niras.com.

Privacy Policy

We will keep the data of successful candidates for the duration of their contract with the department and according to our retention policy at the end of that contract.

We will keep the data of reserve candidates for one year, by agreement.

Where candidates are unsuccessful their data will be destroyed within 30 days following the announcement of the results.

The material you submit will be reviewed by Defra, the Chair of the Darwin Expert Committee (or a nominated alternate) and the Fund Manager.

The equality, diversity and inclusion information will be treated in confidence.