

DPLR4\1050

Darwin Plus Local - Final Report (1)

Officer: Linzi Ogden

Section 1 - Darwin Plus Local Project Information (Essential)

Project Reference Number

DPLR4\1050

Q1. Project Title

No Response

Overseas Territory(ies)

☒ Cayman Islands

Lead Organisation or Individual

Abbie Dosell, Dr. Isabelle Schulz, Central Caribbean Marine Institute (CCMI)

Partner Organisation(s)

N/A

Value of Darwin Plus Local Grant Award

£46,208.64

Project Start Date

01 October 2024

Project End Date

31 March 2025

Project Leader Name

Dr. Isabelle Schulz

Project Website/Twitter/Blog etc.

www.reefresearch.org

Report Author(s)

Report Date

29 April 2025

Project Summary

No Response

Project Outcomes

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

Section 2 - Project Outcomes (Essential)

On a scale of 1 (high – outcome substantially exceeded) to 5 (low – outcome substantially did not meet expectation), how successful do you think your project has been?

⦿ 2 - Outcome moderately exceeded

Project outcomes and justification for rating above


Despite the challenge of not being able to conduct boat-based activities due to maintenance delays, the core objectives of the CMEC programme were fully achieved. Students gained meaningful exposure to marine science, developed a deeper understanding of key environmental issues, and demonstrated increased enthusiasm for ocean stewardship. The education team’s ability to adapt the schedule and maintain high engagement speaks to the strength and flexibility of the programme.


Participant feedback strongly supports this outcome. Students described the experience as “eye-opening,” “life-changing,” and “inspiring.” Highlights included snorkelling around Owen Island, daily field-based learning, and lab-based activities such as lionfish dissection and microscope work. Students reported increased awareness of pressing environmental issues like coral bleaching, pollution, and climate change, and several expressed a desire to pursue careers in marine biology, oceanography, or conservation.


The CMEC programme continues to deliver on its long-term goals of fostering environmental stewardship, curiosity, and confidence among young Caymanians. One student shared: “I want to either be a vet, marine biologist, or oceanographer because of what I learned at CCMI.” Another added: “I will definitely make sure to

spread the word to my friends and others who are interested in learning more about the ocean.”
Even without boat access this year, the programme delivered a powerful and memorable learning experience that clearly influenced student thinking and future aspirations.


Supporting Evidence - file(s) upload


 [Intern Post-Programme Questionnaire](#)


 29/04/2025


 18:16:26


 pdf 168.16 KB


 [Darwin CMEC Pre-program Survey Results](#)


 29/04/2025


 18:16:24

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 [Dawin CMEC Post-program Survey Results](#)

 29/04/2025

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Supporting Evidence - links to published document/online materials

Darwin Plus Caribbean Marine Ecology Camp Video: <https://www.facebook.com/reel/666938706015981>

Darwin Plus Caribbean Marine Ecology Camp social media reel: <https://fb.watch/rfRXsXmUx8/>

Pre-programme survey: Uploaded

Post-programme survey: Uploaded

Intern post-programme survey: Uploaded

CCMI's Website News: <https://reefresearch.org/6862-2/>

CCMI's Website Our work (Half term CMEC tab):<https://reefresearch.org/our-work/education/summer-camps/>
This site has an autoplaying video that features a lighthearted and heartfelt phone call between a student and their parent, reflecting on the student's experience at the CMEC.

CCMI`s Website News: <https://reefresearch.org/ccmi-to-visit-grand-cayman-schools-november-12-15-2024/>
As part of the Grant, CCMI's education team conducted Grand Cayman School visits during a week-long outreach tour to raise awareness of available scholarship opportunities for local students.

Press release:

a. CCMI now accepting scholarship applications for the Caribbean Marine Ecology Camp in Little Cayman - Cayman Compass. <https://www.caymancompass.com/2024/09/30/ccmi-now-accepting-scholarship-applications-for-the-caribbean-marine-ecology-camp-in-little-cayman/>

b. CCMI now accepting scholarship applications for the Caribbean Marine Ecology Camp in Little Cayman - CCMI. <https://reefresearch.org/6862-2/>

CCMI Social Media @Reefresearch:

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/reefresearch/?hl=en>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/reefresearch>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/ccmireefresearch>

Project Challenges

The project encountered a few logistical challenges, both anticipated and unexpected. This year, scheduled boat days could not take place, as CCMI's research vessel remained in the marina on Grand Cayman for extended

maintenance.

In response, the education team developed an alternative schedule that maintained high levels of engagement through shore-based activities, including snorkelling in seagrass and mangrove ecosystems, land-based data collection, and lab sessions. The adapted programme was well received, and student feedback remained positive.

We did experience a delay in sending out the post-programme survey. The approach of Hurricane Rafael (Nov. 5-6) and the immediate follow-up with Grand Cayman school visits (Nov. 12-15) disrupted normal scheduling and contributed to the oversight. As a result, we were unable to collect as many post-programme responses as in previous years. This has been noted for future planning to ensure timely follow-up, even during periods of disruption.

Overall, despite these setbacks, the programme outcomes were strong. Students remained actively engaged, and the flexibility of the team ensured that learning objectives were met even in the absence of boat-based components.

Lessons Learned

- CMEC Programme were successfully delivered for over a decade. The programme has evolved through continuous student feedback and is supported by CCMI's experienced and committed education team.
 - A key improvement in this year's project was the inclusion of a Grand Cayman school outreach component, which significantly expanded the programme's reach. By engaging students on Grand Cayman who may not be able or ready to attend a residential camp on Little Cayman, CCMI was able to raise awareness of scholarship opportunities and inspire interest among a broader audience. The addition of this outreach component is now considered an essential part of our engagement strategy going forward.
- ii)
- Recruitment faced some challenges due to a short advertisement window and unfavourable weather conditions in the Cayman Islands during that period.
- iii)
- Expand outreach to increase impact and accessibility. Deliver a 1-day outreach event at government schools on Grand Cayman toward the end of the grant period (March) to ensure early and meaningful engagement with the local community.
 - Engage programme alumni as ambassadors. Encourage alumni to speak to younger year groups or their former schools about their CMEC experience and help promote the programme through peer-to-peer outreach.
 - Longer internship, this would provide more time for the intern to have professional growth. A minimum of 3-month internship
- iv)
- Investing time in building strong relationships with local schools
 - Foster professional development opportunities for interns. Include structured learning goals, mentorship, or skill-building workshops to enhance the value of internships

Section 3 - Project Finance (Essential)

Project Expenditure

Project Spend (indicative) since last Annual Report	2023/24 Grant (£)	2023/24 Total actual Darwin Plus Costs (£)	Variance %	Comments (please explain significant variances)
Staff Costs				
Consultancy Costs				

Overhead Costs			
Travel and Subsistence			
Operating Costs			
Capital Items			
Others			
Total	46,208.64	46,215.07	0.01%

Please provide a short narrative summary on project finances.

Most budget categories were spent in line with initial projections. Staff costs came in slightly over the original allocation [REDACTED] resulting in a variance of 5.73%. This minor overage is within acceptable limits and does not materially impact the overall project budget.

Overhead costs exactly matched the projected budget [REDACTED] reflecting careful financial management. Similarly, Travel and Subsistence costs were closely aligned with the forecast, with a very small variance of 0.50% [REDACTED]

The only notable variance appears in Operating Costs, where actual spend was 8.81% lower than budgeted [REDACTED]. This underspend may reflect efficiencies gained during the project period or slight adjustments in operational needs.

Overall, the total project spend [REDACTED] was almost identical to the projected budget [REDACTED] reflecting a variance of just 0.01%, demonstrating strong financial oversight across all budget areas.

Section 4 - Contribution of Project to Darwin Plus Programme Objectives

Please select up to **one** indicator that applies within **each group/indicator list (A, B, C, D)** and report your results for that indicator in the text box underneath. If you do not have relevant results to report for any of the indicators in a particular group, you can leave them blank.

Please also submit some form of evidence (above) to demonstrate any results you list below, where possible.

Group A: Capability and Capacity - Core Darwin Plus Standard Indicators (select one)

Checked	DPLUS-A01: Number of people from key national and local stakeholder groups completing structured and relevant training.
Unchecked	DPLUS-A02: Number of secondments or placements completed by individuals of key local and national stakeholders.

Unchecked	DPLUS-A03: Number of local/national organisations with improved capability and capacity as a result of project.
Unchecked	DPLUS-A04: Number of people reporting that they are applying new capabilities (skills and knowledge) 6 (or more) months after training.
Unchecked	DPLUS-A05: Number of trainers trained reporting to have delivered further training by the end of the project.

Group A Indicator Results

Fourteen Caymanian students (ages 14–17) completed a week-long residential course focused on marine biology, conservation, and sustainability. They gained hands-on experience through activities like plankton net tows, coral restoration, beach clean-ups, and lionfish dissections, combining in-class learning with fieldwork to deepen their understanding of local marine ecosystems.

Group B: Policies, Practices and Management- Core Darwin Plus Standard Indicators (select one)

Unchecked	DPLUS-B01: Number of new/improved habitat management plans available and endorsed.
Unchecked	DPLUS-B02: Number of new/improved species management plans available and endorsed.
Unchecked	DPLUS-B03: Number of new/improved community management plans available and endorsed.
Unchecked	DPLUS-B04: Number of new/improved sustainable enterprises/ community benefits management plans available and endorsed.
Unchecked	DPLUS-B05: Number of people with increased participation in local communities / local management organisations (i.e., participation in Governance/citizen engagement).
Unchecked	DPLUS-B06: Number of Local Stakeholders and Local Communities (people) with strengthened (recognised/clarified) tenure and/or rights.

Group B Indicator Results

N/A

Group C: Evidence and Best Practices - Core Darwin Plus Standard Indicators (select one)

Unchecked	DPLUS-C01: Number of best practice guides and knowledge products published and endorsed.
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Unchecked	DPLUS-C02: Number of new conservation or species stock assessments published.
Unchecked	DPLUS-C03: New assessments of habitat conservation action needs published.
Unchecked	DPLUS-C04: New assessments of community use of biodiversity resources published.
Unchecked	DPLUS-C05: Number of projects contributing data, insights, and case studies to national Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) related reporting processes and calls for evidence.

Group C Indicator Results

N/A

Group D: Sustainable Benefits to People, Biodiversity and Climate - Core Darwin Plus Standard Indicators (select one)

Unchecked	DPLUS-D01 Hectares of habitat under sustainable management practices.
Unchecked	DPLUS-D02: Number of people whose disaster/climate resilience has been improved.
Unchecked	DPLUS-D03: Number of policies with biodiversity provisions that have been enacted or amended.

Group D Indicator Results

N/A

Section 5 - Project Partnerships, Wider Impacts and Contributions

Project Partnerships

This year's project was implemented by CCMI, with no formal partners. However, key stakeholder engagement remained an essential part of the project's success, particularly in outreach and education. While in-person school visits did not take place ahead of the CMEC this year, due to a compressed timeline between grant approval and programme delivery, combined with several tropical storms and hurricanes in September CCMI still actively engaged its school network through email outreach, newsletter announcements, and social media. These efforts ensured that scholarship opportunities were promoted broadly. However, these challenges may have contributed to a lower number of applicants than in previous years.

Following the residential programme, CCMI staff conducted school visits from November 12-15 to reconnect with teachers and students from 8 different schools on Grand Cayman, to engage students in the marine environment, promote upcoming education opportunities, and encourage future cohorts. These school visits continue to be a valuable way to strengthen CCMI's school network and raise environmental awareness.

Maintaining regular face-to-face engagement is crucial for building trust and continuity with local educators on Grand Cayman. Ensuring that CCMI remains visible and accessible, reinforcing our commitment to long-term partnerships with Caymanian schools and boosting ocean literacy in the Cayman Islands.

The Cayman Islands Government was not formally involved in this project, but CCMI continues to align its

education goals with national conservation priorities and the Caymanian national curriculum and maintains communication with relevant departments when appropriate. Lessons learned highlight the importance of flexible outreach strategies and maintaining strong relationships.

Wider Impacts and Decision Making

While the primary audience of the project remains Caymanian youth, this year's cohort demonstrated a noticeably strong sense of environmental responsibility and leadership. Several participants expressed interest in pursuing further studies or careers in marine science, education, or conservation highlighting the programme's potential to shape future decision-makers. Although direct influence on current policy is not yet measurable, the project continues to embed environmental awareness in the minds of the next generation. Students actively discussed issues such as marine protected areas, climate change, and sustainable fisheries during the programme, indicating a deeper understanding of how environmental challenges connect to policy and governance. Participants also returned home with a renewed enthusiasm for sharing what they've learned. Some have since engaged in school projects, community clean-ups, or expressed interest in volunteering, creating a ripple effect that promotes environmental thinking among their peers and families. By equipping these young Caymanians with hands-on experience and critical insight into local marine issues, the project continues to lay a strong foundation for informed, environmentally conscious decision-making in the future.

Sustainability and Legacy

This year's project continues to generate long-term benefits for both participants and CCMI's broader outreach efforts. Students after the programme have a deeper understanding of ocean conservation and a renewed sense of environmental responsibility. Some have already begun sharing their experiences with peers and family members, helping to inspire broader awareness within their communities. A new and engaging audio feature a recorded phone call between a student and her mother reflecting on the CMEC experience was created as part of this year's project. This heartfelt and authentic piece is now featured on CCMI's website and serves as a powerful storytelling tool to connect with future students, parents, and supporters. Resources developed through the project continue to be used by CCMI's education team to enhance learning for scholarship recipients and visiting school groups, ensuring that the programme's impact extends well beyond the initial cohort. The project also contributed to capacity building within the organisation. Chandre Delpeche, who joined CCMI as the Darwin Plus Marine Education Intern, has since been offered a permanent role as Education Assistant starting January 2025. Her transition from intern to staff reflects the value of the programme in developing skilled educators who can continue to deliver impactful environmental education in the region and further supports the sustainability of CCMI's education programmes. The legacy of this project will continue through the students, staff, and resources it helped develop and inspire.

Section 6 - Communications & Publicity

Exceptional Outcomes and Achievements

With the support of the UK Government's Darwin Plus Programme, CCMI successfully delivered the Caribbean Marine Ecology Camp (CMEC) for a new cohort of 14 Caymanian students in October 2024. Despite the temporary unavailability of CCMI's research vessel, the education team developed an engaging alternative programme that allowed participants to meaningfully explore and connect with their natural environment. Over the course of the week, students were immersed in marine science and conservation topics, participating in field-based learning across Little Cayman's seagrass beds and mangrove systems. Activities included snorkelling, coral ID, invasive species removal, data collection, and lab work, all designed to foster scientific curiosity and environmental awareness. Several students had never snorkelled before and described the experience as "eye-opening" and "life-changing."





































Even without boat-based activities, the level of student engagement remained high. Participants expressed

enthusiasm for the programme, with several requesting follow-up opportunities and showing interest in pursuing careers in marine biology. Their feedback reflects both the adaptability of the education team and CCMI's commitment to delivering high-quality science education, even under changing conditions. A particularly exciting outcome is that four CMEC participants were recently selected as scholars for CCMI's Young Environmentalist Leadership Course, a dive and educational training programme that builds leadership, communication, and marine research skills for students pursuing careers in environmental and marine science. This milestone demonstrates the effectiveness of CMEC in inspiring young Caymanians to take meaningful next steps in marine science and environmental stewardship.

Thanks to the UK Government's Darwin Plus Programme, CMEC continues to offer transformative experiences for Caymanian youth building environmental awareness, inspiring future scientists, and supporting a more sustainable future for the marine ecosystems of the Cayman Islands.

Photo, video or graphic to be used for publicity and communications.

Please upload at least one relevant and engaging image, video or graphic that you consent to be used alongside the above text in Defra, JNCC or NIRAS communications material.

 CCMI DplusCMEC 2024 10  29/04/2025  18:33:03  jpg 9.96 MB	 CCMI DplusCMEC 2024 12  29/04/2025  18:32:08  jpg 2.41 MB
 CCMI DplusCMEC 2024 4  29/04/2025  18:31:38  jpg 6.36 MB	 CCMI DplusCMEC 2024 5  29/04/2025  18:31:19  jpg 5.38 MB
 CCMI DplusCMEC 2024 6  29/04/2025  18:31:04  jpg 2.91 MB	 CCMI DplusCMEC 2024 2  29/04/2025  18:30:46  jpg 248.71 KB
 CCMI DplusCMEC 2024 3  29/04/2025  18:30:44  jpg 337.73 KB	 CCMI DplusCMEC 2024 7  29/04/2025  18:30:38  jpg 367.58 KB
 CCMI DplusCMEC 2024 1  29/04/2025  18:30:31  jpg 254.56 KB	

Photo, video, and/or graphic captions and credits.

CCMI_DplusCMEC_2024_1: Group photo of 11 Caribbean Marine Ecology Camp scholarship students enjoying their time at Point of Sand beach on Little Cayman, Cayman Islands — for most, this was their first-ever visit to the island. Credit: Central Caribbean Marine Institute (CCMI)

CCMI_DplusCMEC_2024_2: Group photo of the 14 Caribbean Marine Ecology Camp scholarship students in front of the Central Caribbean Marine Institute (CCMI) facility on Little Cayman, Cayman Islands. Credit: Central Caribbean Marine Institute (CCMI)

CCMI_DplusCMEC_2024_3: Group photo of the 14 Caribbean Marine Ecology Camp scholarship students proudly displaying full trash bags after a successful beach clean-up on one of Little Cayman's beaches, Cayman Islands. Credit: Central Caribbean Marine Institute (CCMI)

CCMI_DplusCMEC_2024_4: Caribbean Marine Ecology Camp participants and the CMEC intern enjoying time in the ocean at Point of Sand beach, following a guided snorkel on Little Cayman's vibrant coral reefs. Credit: Central Caribbean Marine Institute (CCMI)

CCMI_DplusCMEC_2024_5: Caribbean Marine Ecology Camp participants showing off their acrobatic skills in the water at Point of Sand, Little Cayman, Cayman Islands. Credit: Central Caribbean Marine Institute (CCMI)

CCMI_DplusCMEC_2024_6: Caribbean Marine Ecology Camp participants inside the Little Cayman Museum, learning about the island's unique cultural and environmental history as part of their week-long educational experience. Credit: Central Caribbean Marine Institute (CCMI)

CCMI_DplusCMEC_2024_7: CCMI Education Coordinator, Ryan McLaughlin, leads a lionfish dissection for Caribbean Marine Ecology Camp participants, teaching them about the invasive species' anatomy and ecological impact. Credit: Central Caribbean Marine Institute (CCMI)

CCMI_DplusCMEC_2024_10: Caribbean marine ecology camp participants out on a snorkel on the coral reefs of Little Cayman, Cayman Islands. Credit: Central Caribbean Marine Institute (CCMI).

CCMI_DplusCMEC_2024_12: The CCMI education team visiting schools on Grand Cayman to present scholarship opportunities and inspire students to get involved in marine science through the Caribbean marine ecology camp. Credit: Central Caribbean Marine Institute (CCMI).

I agree for the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Secretariat, Administrator, and/or JNCC to publish the content of this section.

☒ Yes, I agree for the BCFs Secretariat and/or JNCC to publish the content of this section.

Please list any accounts that you would like tagged in online posts here. This can include project pages, partners' pages or individuals' accounts for any of the following platforms: LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram.

Instagram:
@reefresearch

Twitter:
@reefresearch

Facebook:
CCMI - Central Caribbean Marine Institute

Section 7 - Darwin Plus Contacts

Please tick here to confirm that you have read and acknowledge the BCF's Privacy Notice on how contact details will be used and stored and that you have sought agreement from anyone that you are sharing personal details with us on their behalf.

☒ I confirm I have read the Privacy Notice and have consent to share the following contact details

Project Contact Details

Project Contact Name	Dr. Isabelle Schulz & Abbie Dosell
Role within Darwin Plus Project	Lead Individual & Project Leader
Email	
Phone	
Do you need further sections to provide additional contact details?	<input checked="" type="radio"/> No