Review of the Darwin Plus Local funding scheme

Biodiversity Challenge Funds: Building and Applying Evidence

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)

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Disclaimer

NIRAS is the fund administrator for Darwin Plus and commissioned this work on behalf of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) under Workstream 5 of the Biodiversity Challenge Funds.

NIRAS works with a range of specialists and consultants to carry out studies and reviews of Darwin Plus. The views expressed in the report are entirely those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views or policies of Defra, NIRAS or the Biodiversity Challenge Funds. Defra and NIRAS, in consultation with wider stakeholders as relevant, are considering all findings and recommendations emerging from this study in how they manage the Biodiversity Challenge Funds.

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Cover photograph: Caribbean marine ecology camp participants out on a snorkel on the coral reefs of Little Cayman, Cayman Islands. Credit: Central Caribbean Marine Institute (CCMI) – DPL0050

Acronyms

BIOT	British Indian Ocean Territory
DPL	Darwin Plus Local
FR	Final Report
SBA	Sovereign Base Area
ToR	Terms of Reference
UKOT	United Kingdom Overseas Territory

Executive Summary

The Darwin Plus programme consists of four grant schemes: Darwin Plus Local, Darwin Plus Main, Darwin Plus Strategic and Darwin Plus People and Skills (the new name for the long-standing Darwin Plus Fellowships scheme). It supports small scale environmental projects exclusively in the UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs), with the aim of improving outcomes for biodiversity, building capacity in-territory and contributing to local economies.

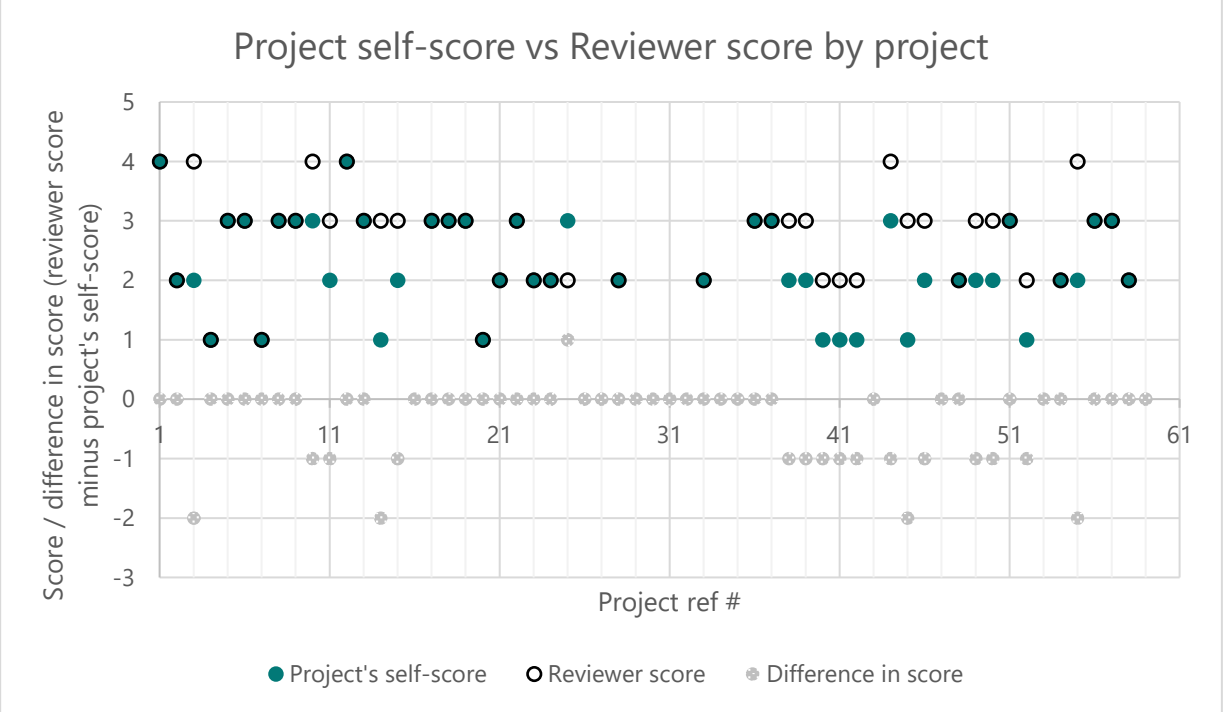
Darwin Plus Local (DPL) was launched in January 2023 in response to feedback from OT stakeholders who expressed a need for more accessible funding for a wider range of stakeholders. The people with the most practical experience and local expertise were being excluded from Darwin Plus grants, and were unable to access funds to implement the best solutions on the ground. DPL was intended to give those individuals a route to funding for their smaller scale projects. This deep dive study seeks to capture learning from early implementation of the DPL funding scheme.

Overview of project performance

Projects under the first two rounds of DPL were scheduled to complete by the end of March 2024, with Final Reports (FRs) due within one month of project completion. Of the 61 projects shortlisted for funding in Rounds 1 and 2 of DPL, 59 were actively funded (2 withdrew).

Projects score their own achievement of Outcomes in line with a five-point scale. Project FRs are subject to an independent desk-based review, in which the reviewer also scores achievement against the same scale. Many reviewer scores align with project scores but there is generally a trend for projects to assess their progress as better than an independent reviewer.

Executive Summary Chart A: Project self-score vs Reviewer score per reporting project. The difference in score reflects the change in grading between the project and reviewer – a negative movement indicates the score has gone up the scale (and therefore has been downgraded in terms of achievement)



Standard Indicator Reporting

The initial results of DPL projects reporting to date (August 2024) are presented in Section 3. Key recommendations emerging from the synthesis of these results are:

- **Recommendation:** light touch specific guidance could improve reporting against indicators known to cause issues, for example to include specific numbers when reporting and disaggregate relevant figures by gender, in order to facilitate the synthesis of results.
- **Recommendation:** Suggest an adjustment to the review template to specifically ask reviewers to give feedback to projects on how they could improve the project implementation but also to improve future reporting. This additional feedback would help strengthen the capacity building potential of this process and scheme overall by helping Darwin Plus Local projects understand the expectations of the Darwin Plus fund overall.

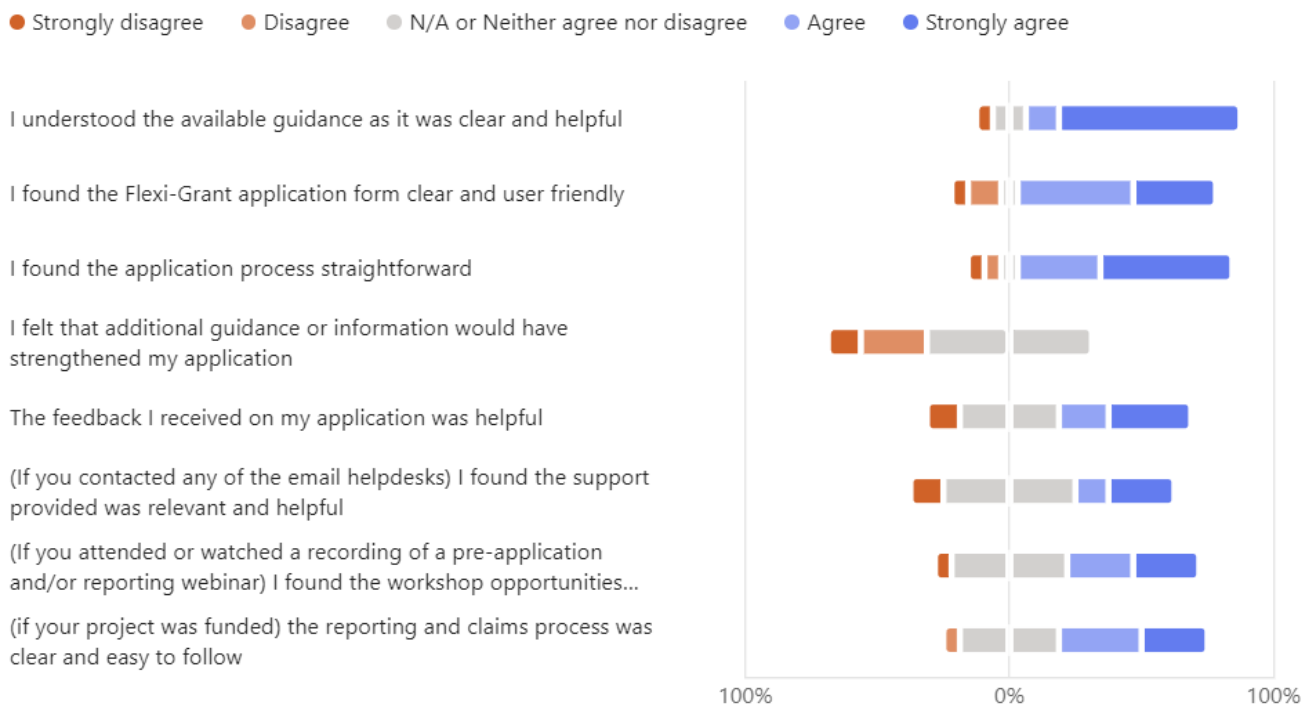
Case Studies

A number of case studies of completed DPL are presented in section 4, including both successful projects and projects with valuable lesson learning potential.

Feedback from projects on process

In August 2024, a feedback survey was shared with 131 DPL applicant contacts with 16 responses received. Full results are presented in Section 5.

Executive Summary Chart B: Subset of Feedback Survey Response



Executive Summary Chart C: Survey responses to question "If you were successful at having a Darwin Plus Local project funded, have you since applied to another (not Local) Darwin Plus funding scheme or have plans to apply to another Darwin Plus funding scheme?"

Lessons learned

Project self-reporting on lessons learned was coded to determine key themes. Key lessons accompanied with examples are outlined in section 6 and summarised below under a number of thematic clusters:

Planning and flexibility:

- **Pre-project planning:** where possible, as much planning should happen prior to grant applications being submitted to help expedite project start-up times. This includes the collection of baseline data or other research as much as possible which can also influence project approach. For early rounds of Darwin Plus Local, this was harder but is likely to be more feasible for latter rounds if they continue on a predictable basis.
- **Accurate timetabling:** Particularly important for projects with a short duration, accurate timetabling from the outset is important, planning activities in advance and taking into account seasonality and the availability of key people to minimise the risk of issues or slippage.
- **Generous work planning:** Taking into account the above, sufficient time should be allocated for project activities, including an allowance for potential delays.
- **Project scope:** Avoid overloading projects with interdependent outputs, and be realistic about what can be achieved in the short timescale of DPL projects. Core objectives should be prioritised, and then built on through later initiatives.
- **Planning for uncertainty:** Despite best-laid plans, things can go wrong. Projects should be prepared to adapt to unforeseen or unpredictable circumstances, such as extreme weather events (common in many UKOTs), logistical issues, or personnel availability. Having backup plans and being flexible in approach are vital.
- **Secure funding early:** When considering when to request funding, account for all costs and engage across the team to consider what might be needed and when. Ensure costs related to logistics, customs and delivery charges (for example) are accounted for.
- **Timely procurement**: Necessary equipment and supplies should be procured as early as possible, and well in advance of when they are required, to avoid delays caused by logistical issues or international shipping challenges which can be particularly pronounced in the UKOTs.

Appropriate staffing and effective resource management:

- **Dedicated project resources:** Having a sufficiently resourced team is critical to effective project delivery. Being realistic about the resources which can be committed by key stakeholders (particularly UKOT governments) from the outset is important, work planning around existing commitments as much as possible.
- **Clear roles and responsibilities**, and allowing provision for back-up personnel and resources can help with continuity should issues arise.
- **Training and capacity building:** provide comprehensive training early in the project to ensure team members are well-prepared, and invest in developing the skills and knowledge of local team members and stakeholders. Using tools appropriate to the size of the project and the skill level of the project team is also important (see also "Data and technology management" under "Technical management and approach-specific lessons").
- **Onboarding and offboarding**: Robust onboarding and offboarding processes enable smooth staff transitions, ensuring continuity and maintaining project momentum particularly where there are staff changes.

Collaboration and communication:

- **Strong partnerships:** Building and maintaining good relationships with relevant partners is essential.
- **Stakeholders engagement:** Consistently keeping key stakeholders informed helps ensure their support and accountability (where relevant) throughout the project. Regular and transparent communication fosters collaboration and trust, and are critical to enabling project success.
- **Effective collaboration:** Foster a collaborative environment within project teams by proactively sharing ideas and knowledge.
- **Public events and outreach:** Well-organised public events and outreach initiatives, especially those co-developed with the community, can significantly boost engagement and project visibility.
- **Volunteer Engagement:** Volunteers are valuable for community involvement and capacity building. Projects reported some success with the use of volunteers, but noted the need to balance the potential benefits (to creating community ties) with delivery efficiencies.
- **Communication:** Effective communication is critical to effective project delivery. Communication should be:
    - Open – by maintaining open communication lines within and outside of teams, through both formal and informal channels.
    - Targeted – through direct engagement with the most relevant stakeholders, such as landowners, especially when their cooperation is crucial to project success. Consideration should be given to whether engagement with key stakeholders is one-to-one or in group setting.
    - Responsive – especially where there are unexpected events or delays to keep all stakeholders informed and involved.

Measuring success

- **Measurable metrics:** Define success with clear, measurable metrics. Some projects found it difficult to gauge impact within the project duration, suggesting that choosing more tangible success indicators might have been more effective.
- **Continuous monitoring:** Regular data collection and monitoring allow for timely adjustments and help in measuring progress more accurately.

- **Iterative Processes**: Use feedback and direct interactions to refine project tools, materials, and approaches. Small, iterative changes can help enhance project outcomes.

Technical management and approach-specific lessons

- **Data and technology management:** Implementing effective data management practices, including early engagement with the people carrying out analysis and eventual user groups, is critical in any data management processes. It is also important to ensure the correct tools and technology are used which is appropriate to the context and capabilities of those involved in the project.
- **Invasive alien species management:** a number of DPL projects dealt with invasive species control projects and reported some specific lessons:
- **Environmental and external factors:** Address known external challenges proactively or building in contingency for likely external factors is important. A number of projects reported specific learning with regard to adapting their logistics or methodologies to respond to such factors. For example,

1. Introduction

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Darwin Plus Local (DPL) was launched in January 2023 in response to feedback from OT stakeholders who expressed a need for more accessible funding for a wider range of stakeholders. Feedback was that Darwin Plus Main application processes were too onerous and inaccessible to many changemakers on the ground. Likewise, the timelines of Darwin Plus Main were too long, and did not allow for rapid-response projects that addressed arising challenges and urgent needs. Requirements around applications (including logframes), financial and project management, and project reporting and monitoring were overly intensive for the smaller-scale projects that many local stakeholders felt would be most impactful, and the amount of time and money needed to invest in the infrastructure to support those processes was out of reach for most local organisations. They simply did not have the capacity or, in some cases, skills and knowledge necessary to deliver in line with the Darwin Plus Main scheme requirements. In essence, the people with the most practical experience and local expertise were being excluded from Darwin Plus grants, and were unable to access funds to implement the best solutions on the ground. DPL was intended to give those individuals a route to funding for their smaller scale projects, with the intention of:

1. funding quick wins and small-scale interventions that could make a big difference from a wider range of changemakers;
2. building skills and experience in grant application and management to put those individuals in a good position to apply for larger grants - whether Darwin Plus or otherwise - in the future, especially if their initial DPL project was a proof of concept or pilot project that could be scaled up;
3. delivering rapid response in territories for urgent and arising needs, like disaster response, small infrastructure needs (e.g. new fencing or signage), and other urgent issues; and
4. broadening the range of Darwin Plus grants to provide access to a wider range of projects beyond exclusively biodiversity-focussed projects, including climate mitigation and adaptation, community engagement and behaviour change, and other approaches which go beyond a narrow focus on biodiversity.

In 2024-2025, DPL provides grants of up to £50,000 for organisations and up to £20,000 for individuals.

This deep dive study seeks to capture learning from early implementation of the DPL funding scheme.

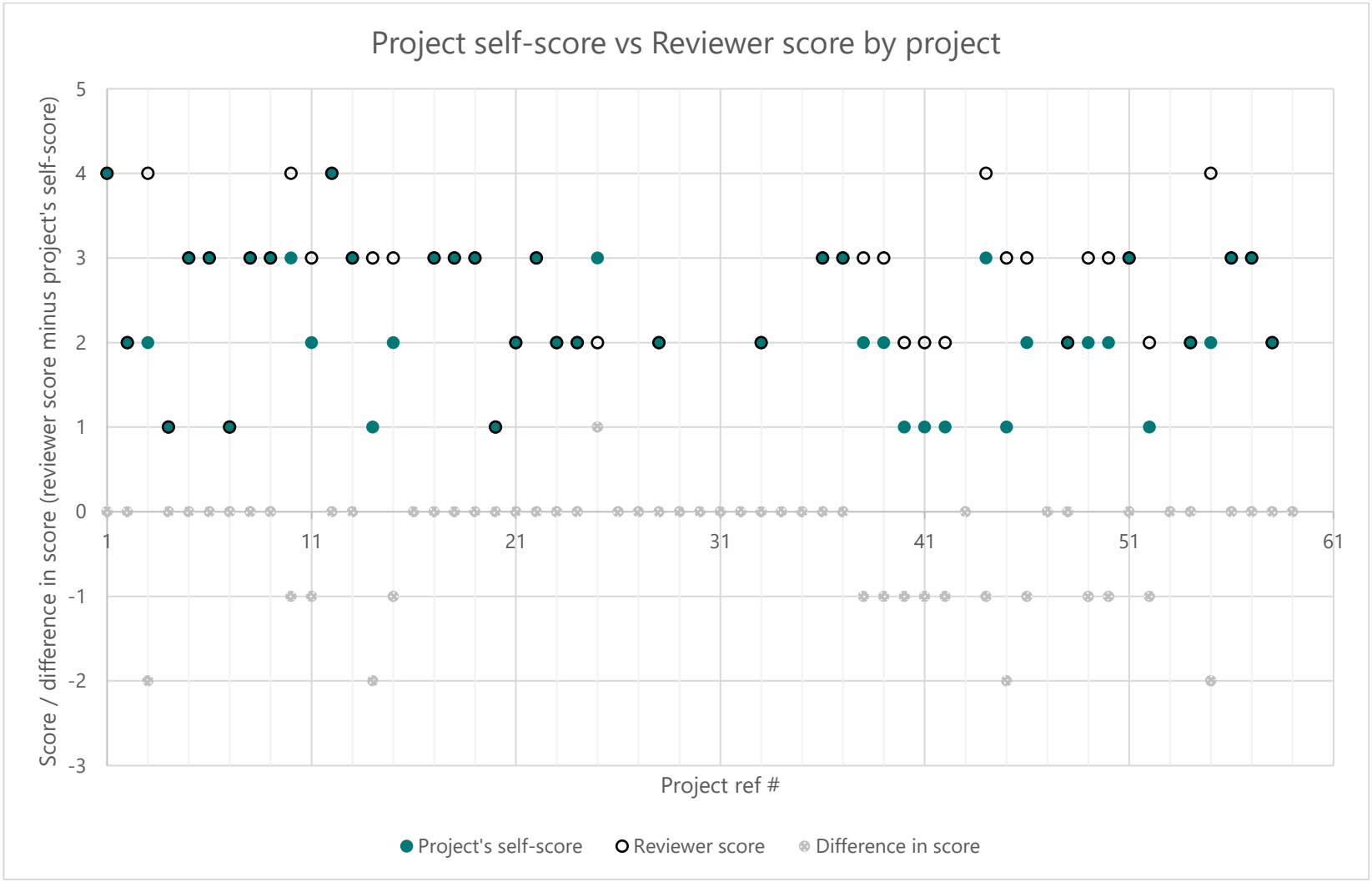
2. Overview of project performance

Projects under the first two rounds of DPL were scheduled to complete by the end of March 2024, with Final Reports (FRs) due within one month of project completion. Of the 61 projects shortlisted for funding in Rounds 1 and 2 of DPL, 59 were actively funded (2 withdrew).

Projects score their own achievement of Outcomes in line with a five-point scale. Project FRs are subject to an independent desk-based review, in which the reviewer also scores achievement against the same scale. Chart 1 outlines the overall scores across reporting projects, and Chart 2 plots this per project, demonstrating how project and reviewer scores vary. As can be seen, many reviewer scores align with project scores but there is generally a trend for projects to assess their progress as better than an independent reviewer.

Chart 1: Project self-score vs reviewer score for DPL Round 1 and Round 2 projects (in addition to the projects below, there are a number of projects where the project self-score and/or reviewer score are not yet available either because the final report is not yet submitted or the final report review is not yet completed)

Chart 2: Project self-score vs Reviewer score per reporting project. The difference in score reflects the change in grading between the project and reviewer – a negative movement indicates the score has gone up the scale (and therefore has been downgraded in terms of achievement)



2.1. Project administration comments

Seven of the 59 funded projects have submitted Change Requests (CRs) to move funds from 2023-24 to 2024-25. At the time of writing this report, two have yet to be confirmed but the other five were agreed. While DPL funds are intended to be spent in the year they are awarded for, there is recognition that UKOT projects face challenges that cannot always be foreseen. Of those CRs agreed, two related to staffing challenges, two to seasonal/weather challenges, and the fifth to equipment failure. The two outstanding CRs relate to procurement issues and delays relating to the need for government approvals.

The DPL Claim process allows projects to claim up to 85% of the grant in advance, with a balance of 15% of the grant amount retained to be paid upon successful completion of the project. In most cases, the amount to be moved through CRs is the 15% balance of the award, being around £5,000 to £7,000.

There have been a number of moderate delays with projects submitting their FR and project claims.

3. Standard Indicator Reporting

3.1. Standard Indicator Results

The initial results of DPL projects reporting to date (August 2024) is presented in this section.

Standard Indicator	# Projects Selecting Indicator	# Projects Reporting Results	Total Result
DPLUS-A01: Number of people from key national and local stakeholder groups completing structured and relevant training.	15	23	237 people
DPLUS-A02: Number of secondments or placements completed by individuals of key local and national stakeholders.	3	2	1 placements/ secondments
DPLUS-A03: Number of local/national organisations with improved capability and capacity as a result of project.	37	55	25 organisations
DPLUS-A04: Number of people reporting that they are applying new capabilities (skills and knowledge) 6 (or more) months after training.	10	8	2 people
DPLUS-A05: Number of trainers trained reporting to have delivered further training by the end of the project	0	0	N/A
DPLUS-B01: Number of new/improved habitat management plans available and endorsed.	8	6	33 plans
DPLUS-B02: Number of new/improved species management plans available and endorsed.	1	0	N/A
DPLUS-B03: Number of new/improved community management plans available and endorsed.	0	0	N/A
DPLUS-B04: Number of new/improved sustainable enterprises/ community benefits management plans available and endorsed.	1	0	N/A
DPLUS-B05: Number of people with increased participation in local communities / local management organisations (i.e., participation in Governance/citizen engagement).	15	11	6,267 people
DPLUS-B06: Number of Local Stakeholders and Local Communities (people) with strengthened (recognised/clarified) tenure and/or rights.	2	0	N/A

Standard Indicator	# Projects Selecting Indicator	# Projects Reporting Results	Total Result
DPLUS-C01: Number of best practice guides and knowledge products published and endorsed.	13	12	21 guides/ products
DPLUS-C02: Number of new conservation or species stock assessments published.	3	2	2 assessments
DPLUS-C03: New assessments of habitat conservation action needs published.	4	4	4 assessments
DPLUS-C04: New assessments of community use of biodiversity resources published.	2	1	1 assessments
DPLUS-C05: Number of projects contributing data, insights, and case studies to national Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) related reporting processes and calls for evidence.	3	1	1 projects
DPLUS-D01: Hectares of habitat under sustainable management practices.	17	15	773,646.43 ha
DPLUS-D02: Number of people whose disaster/climate resilience has been improved.	4	2	9,800 people
DPLUS-D03: Number of policies with biodiversity provisions that have been enacted or amended.	5	0	0

3.2. Commentary on Standard Indicator Results

In DPL reporting, in line with the overall objective of reducing the reporting burden of DPL projects, projects are only presented with small sub-set of all Darwin Plus Standard Indicators to report against in their FR. They are asked to select one per group and report against that. It is therefore possible there will be under reporting against other standard indicators or wider ones in same group (N.B. some projects did select/comment against more than one – those figures have been included if that was the case).

Comments on the data and deep dive recommendations:

- DPL projects are funded for a duration of up to 6 months or up to 12 months (depending on the Round they apply to) – given their limited scope and nature there will inevitably be few Standard Indicators they can report against.
- 51 projects attempted to report against Standard Indicators despite no specific requirement to do so - really positive initial reaction/response.
- DPL projects reporting against these indicators received reporting training but no specific guidance beyond indicator descriptors on methodologies for reporting against indicators - some tangential reporting was noted e.g. against *DPLUS-B02: Number of new/improved species management plans available and endorsed* projects on occasion selected this indicator and commented that data collected through the project have

the potential, or are planned to, feed into management plans - but not recorded if not actually available/endorsed.

- There was no (or very limited) gender disaggregation on "people" indicators.
- There were a few instances where it was apparent projects had selected the wrong indicator - e.g. DPL00041 ticked *DPLUS-B06: Number of Local Stakeholders and Local Communities (people) with strengthened (recognised/clarified) tenure and/or rights* when this likely fits better under "*DPLUS-B05: Number of people with increased participation in local communities / local management organisations (i.e., participation in Governance/citizen engagement).*" as there are formal land tenure rights.
- There were quite a few attempts at reporting with no specific numbers given, either in the specific standard indicator question or elsewhere in reporting. For example,
    - DPL00042 reporting against indicator *DPLUS-A04: Number of people reporting that they are applying new capabilities (skills and knowledge) 6 (or more) months after training report* said "Multiple Turks and Caicos Reef Fund researchers are now trained on the equipment" – but no specific number given.
    - DPL00049 reporting against indicator *DPLUS-B05: Number of people with increased participation in local communities / local management organisations (i.e., participation in Governance/citizen engagement)* said "On several occasions we were able to include volunteers as well as hire local workers to assist. We also sent consistent reports to government." – but no specific number given.
    - DL00061 reporting against indicator *DPLUS-B06: Number of Local Stakeholders and Local Communities (people) with strengthened (recognised/clarified) tenure and/or rights*. Said "Disabled persons in the community has the right to access the garden; vulnerable (mothers with babies) has better access" with no specific number.

Recommendation: light touch specific guidance could improve reporting against indicators known to cause issues, for example to include specific numbers when reporting and disaggregate relevant figures by gender, in order to facilitate the synthesis of results.

- UKOT stakeholders are limited, and many will be working with the same organisations. Therefore, between projects there is a high chance that indicators related to e.g. individual or organisational capacity building could include double counting. For example, two projects working with the same government agency or NGO in same UKOT may both report capacity being built in the same organisation which will be counted twice. This risk is possible for other funds too but more pronounced in Darwin Plus given smaller communities in general. An ***observed instance of double counting is for DPL00019 and DPL00039 which both report entire landmass of SGSSI under indicator DPLUS-D01 – area under sustainable management***.
- Based off DPL narrative reporting, there is a common implicit assumption that building capacity of individuals working in a particular organisation leads to capacity being built int his organisation (i.e. indicator *DPLUS-A03: Number of local/national organisations with improved capability and capacity as a result of project*.). This assumption is moderately well justified given capacity levels are shallow within the UKOTs, with many organisations working on issues relevance to Darwin Plus only having a few staff members - so building capacity in these individuals is likely to significantly influence the capacity of the organisation as a whole.
- Evidence provision for DPL reports is relatively light so there is limited support for claims made.

Recommendation: Suggest an adjustment to the review template to specifically ask reviewers to give feedback to projects on how they could improve the project implementation but also to improve future reporting. This additional feedback would help strengthen the capacity building potential of this process and scheme overall by helping Darwin Plus Local projects understand the expectations of the Darwin Plus fund.

4. Case studies

4.1. Strong project examples

The examples below are projects where the reviewer score was either 1 (Outcome substantially exceeded) or 2 (Outcome moderately exceeded).

4.1.1. Case study 1: DPL00002 Restoring native tussac grassland habitat

Project dates: 01/04/2023 - 30/11/2023
Grant: £21,000
UKOT: Falkland Islands

- Tussac grassland is a native coastal grass that once covered much of the coastline of the Falkland Islands. The introduction of livestock, and the sensitivity of tussac grass to grazing contributed to its decline over the decades. It has been estimated that over 80% of the original tussac grass has been lost since the Falklands were first settled.
- Through this project, led by Falkland Islands Government, 24,182 tussac tillers were planted, improving 4 hectares of existing tussac grassland habitat and created a further 5.06 hectares of tussac habitat, exceeding the original project target of 6 hectares. Through this work, smaller fragments of tussac have been connected into a contiguous coastal habitat, which is an important breeding habitat for Magellanic penguins, sooty shearwaters, kelp geese, steamer ducks and sea lions. The area of tussac habitat on Cape Pembroke is now more than double its previous size.
- The project held two volunteer tussac planting days to build capacity for habitat restoration in the local community.
- Based on the success of this project, more funding has been successfully secured from the Treasury to carry out more restoration next year.

4.1.2. Case study 2: DPL00004 Building Capacity for Coral Restoration: Contributing to Bermuda's Blue Infrastructure

Project dates: 04/04/2023 - 31/03/2024
Grant: £49,977
UKOT: Bermuda

- Prior to this project, organisations in Bermuda were scaling up efforts to restore coral reefs but had limited technology options to monitor this work long-term.
- DPL funding allowed Living Reefs Foundation to produce technology that would support them in developing 3D maps of the seabed.
- The funding also supported 4 people (3 from Living Reef Foundation and 1 from Government) to be trained in using the technology.
- During the project a large area of boulders used for coastal protection were planted with coral colonies.
- Using the technology the team were able to say 99% of these corals had survived.
- In future the hope is that by working with the technology and the Government of Bermuda that more areas can have successful coral restoration such as that transplanted during this project.

4.1.3. Case study 3: DPL00021 Establishing digital data tools for enhanced conservation management and policy-making

Project dates: 15/04/2023 - 31/03/2024
Grant: £49,768
UKOT: Anguilla

- This project was led by the Anguilla National Trust (ANT), working closely with the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (UKCEH). It set out to streamline environmental data collection, monitoring, management and decision-making through the development and application of digital data collection tools for use in Anguilla.
- An online data portal, iRecord AXATrust, was created, representing a hub for all ANT biodiversity data (past and future) that integrates with a new mobile app. The app has already saved a significant amount of staff time, and is already using it in a major rodent eradication programme.
- An AI-informed database of all Lesser Antillean iguanas recorded and photographed in Prickly Pear Lesser Antillean iguana sanctuary was created; AI should also support monitoring of breeding and population trends over time, in a more efficient and less invasive manner.
- An intensive one-week drone deployment course was hosted with Marine Spatial Information Solutions.
- Working with the BTO and locally-based Ardops Environment, a bat call classifier was created; the detector system has already identified a new bat for Anguilla, greater bulldog bat (*Noctilio leporinus*).
- The digital outputs will support the organisation's remit to sustain the islands' natural heritage, including the monitoring of threatened species and habitats, biosecurity monitoring, and habitat recovery. It should also help ANT in future years to make recommendations on EIAs, environmental policy, and protected area designations.

4.1.4. Case study 4: DPL00023 Preventing Common Myna invasion in Akrotiri SBA and Cyprus

Project dates: 01/05/2023 - 31/03/2024
Grant: £31,663
UKOT: SBAs of Akrotiri & Dhekelia (Cyprus)

- This project was led by BirdLife Cyprus in partnership with the University of Cyprus.
- The main objective of the project was to achieve a significant reduction and to prevent the spreading and establishment of Common Myna in the Akroriti SBA and in the Republic of Cyprus. This has been achieved and this project has been the driving force for this success, since it created the right conditions and collaborations to tackle Myna arrivals on the island. In total 14 individuals were shot by the Game & Fauna Service and the SBA Environment Department teams during project duration.
- No new Myna observations have been recorded in Cyprus since November 2023.
- The project produced a short video animation to raise to raise awareness regarding the invasive Common Myna. Links to this are below:
    - Facebook post link https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=293977363504189
    - Instagram link https://www.instagram.com/p/CyxuFsBMk8Z/
    - YouTube link https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dyRq6zoGCYo

4.1.5. Case study 5: DPL00025 Building farm biodiversity planning and monitoring capacity for sustainable management

Project dates: 01/05/2023 - 29/03/2024
Grant: £23,729
UKOT: Falkland Islands

- The Responsible Wool Standard (RWS) is an international scheme to certify ethical and sustainable practises amongst the wool industry's farm producers. It incorporates a number of environmental safeguards including the requirement for land-managers to have an active Farm Biodiversity Management Plan and to conduct annual environmental and habitat monitoring. Since approximately 92% of the Falkland's land area

is under farm management the scheme provides a valuable opportunity to improve the quality of native pastures and habitats at a landscape scale.
- This project successfully pioneered the use of the Responsible Wool Standard (see https://textileexchange.org/responsible-wool-standard/) to promote biodiversity conservation and soil health. The long-term goal is to extend the area of the Falklands Islands under biodiversity management and move restoration beyond the confines of the (small) protected area network into the "working" agricultural landscape.
- The project was led by Falklands Conservation in partnership with the Department of Agriculture and the Falkland Islands Government Natural Resources Directorate.

4.1.6. Case study 6: DPL00028 Nature-based solutions to treat SCTLD - Montserrat - Pilot Program

Project dates: 01/05/2023 - 31/03/2024
Grant: £39,127
UKOT: Montserrat

- This project was the first in the Caribbean region to implement solutions for Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease (SCTLD) based on treatments developed from naturally occurring marine based compounds. This project is the essential and necessary precursor programme prior to in-situ treatments.
- This project, led by Island Solutions Inc., created the first marine research facility in the Caribbean and the UK Overseas Territories to conduct tests of probiotic based treatment for SCTLD.
- The facility is the first to be able support marine research in any capacity within the islands directly neighbouring Montserrat, and can thus assist neighbouring countries with the same challenges faced in Montserrat.

4.1.7. Case study 7: DPL00033 Building on island capacity for long-term seabird monitoring

Project dates: 01/05/2023 - 31/05/2023
Grant: £25,709
UKOT: St Helena

- St Helena National Trust (SHNT) carried out a pilot project to develop a long-term seabird monitoring and conservation programme that would build capacity of its staff to undertake long-term monitoring/conservation work with seabirds, and collect data to feed into biodiversity conservation management plans.
- The project carried out comprehensive training for SHNT members which has enhanced seabird research capabilities and improved data management systems; monitored the Madeiran storm petrel population on Egg Island, showing a recent decline that has implications for conservation planning; and monitored masked boobies at Sandy Bay as planned, to support conservation efforts. The project also extended monitoring to red-billed tropicbird, identifying challenges to the local population.
- The project team also leveraged existing data and strengthened local conservation efforts, including the ringing of juvenile seabirds. The project reports that it has been particularly influential in the proposed expansion of seabird habitat surveying, enhancing understanding of seabird distribution and nesting sites – very important if future threats are to be addressed.

4.1.8. Case study 8: DPL00040 Ascension Scaly Crickets: Urgent Conservation of a Unique Endemic Genus

Project dates: 23/05/2023 31/03/2024
Grant: £5,300
UKOT: Ascension

- On a limited budget, this project, led by the Ascension Island Government Conservation & Fisheries Directorate, has been hugely beneficial in uncovering threats to local biodiversity and developing effective management strategies for mitigating biodiversity loss.
- The project researched and described in detail the ecology and threats to the endemic scaly cricket *Discophallus ascension*: this revealed that these endemic crickets are coastal scavengers on crab and fish carcasses and are immediately threatened by invasive species. Even in barren areas far from settlement, the species is threatened by predation from invasive black rats *Rattus rattus*. With encroachment of the invasive woody shrub *Neltuma* (formerly *Prosopis) juliflora*, invasive ants also further threatened the crickets with unnatural predation. These findings have directly informed management, as they showed that both invasive shrubs and rats must be controlled if the population of this endemic insect is to be restored to natural levels.
- The project has identified areas of high conservation potential. These areas are well on the way to becoming designated as new or expanded protected areas with explicit management actions aimed at the recovery of *D. ascension* populations. The legal designation of these areas as new reserves has already passed approval vote by local council, and requires only final confirmation before coming into force. The red listing of the species as Critically Endangered is also under way.

4.1.9. Case study 9: DPL00053 Emergency Recovery Plan for the world's rarest coral, *Ctenella chagius*

Project dates: 01/10/2023 - 31/10/2023
Grant: £49,576
UKOT: British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT)

The FR notes particular sensitivities around the project which means that the project's efforts can't (at the time of the FR) be published, noting "currently, with ongoing negotiations between the UK and Mauritius over the sovereignty of the Chagos Archipelago MPA, we are awaiting permission from BIOT Administration to formerly publicise this conservation effort".

Once publicity is possible, the following points highlight the key achievements of this project.

- The Chagos brain coral, *Ctenella chagius*, is endemic to BIOT and on the brink of extinction, likely due to ocean heatwaves. The imminent El Niño climate event is predicted to be severe, with potential for mass bleaching of coral reefs across the region. Based on expert assessments, an Emergency Recovery Plan is the recommended response.
- As part of that response, this project recovered live colonies of Ctenella, transported them to London, and established a safety net population in aquaria.
- This successful establishment of an ex situ founder population of *Ctenella chagius* has saved it from likely extinction in the wild.
- 121 Ctenella colonies (101 from Middle Brother and 20 from South-West Diego Garcia) were geo-tagged and documented in situ (9), and are currently being 3D-modelled in high resolution. Until now, only approximately sixty colonies had been observed throughout the entire Archipelago in four years, and these only imaged in low resolution 2D. These new data obtained will better inform measures of the health status and growth rate of these colonies on returning to these sites.
- Middle Brother Lagoon was comprehensively mapped and imaged for the first time - with full 3D-models generated from underwater imagery of each of the six knolls.
- Data from existing water temperature loggers were collected and additional loggers installed. The data collected by these in recent (and upcoming) months will give us an as yet unprecedented glimpse of the variation in temperatures in lagoonal waters associated with 2024's imminent El Niño climate event."

4.2. Valuable lesson learning examples

4.2.1. Case study 10: DPL00036 Island wide predator control to prevent loss of bird biodiversity

Project dates: 01/05/2023 - 31/03/2024
Grant: £39,302
UKOT: St Helena

- The objective of this project was to protect bird biodiversity on St Helena, and build the capacity of St Helena National Trust in predator control skills to trial and develop an island wide comprehensive predator control programme for seabirds and endemic Wirebirds. This project experienced a number of challenges:
  - Issues around team resourcing and available expertise. There were multiple changes in project management which led to disruption and delays in project implementation. In addition, the absence of a permanent vet on the island delayed the development of a predator control plan and training in safe animal handling and euthanasia.
  - Equipment failures, including broken camera traps and vehicle issues, hampered data collection efforts and reduced the capacity of the programme.
  - The project reported that "initial efforts with rat bait stations yielded inconclusive results, highlighting the need for more effective methods. Focusing mainly on the feline population may have oversimplified the issue, as the ecosystem interactions between multiple invasive species are more intricate than initially assumed, emphasising the importance of considering the broader context."
- If the project were to be repeated, they would "[shift] focus from one predator species, [and] future projects should take a more holistic approach by assessing the impact of multiple invasive species on bird populations. [In addition] recognising the complexity of ecosystem dynamics, future projects should implement controlled interventions to minimise potential negative impacts and maximise effectiveness. [It is recommended that] collecting thorough data on predator populations and their interactions with native species is crucial for informed decision-making and effective management strategies."
- As the project's FR notes "this project highlights the importance of a holistic and adaptive approach to invasive species management, emphasising the need for comprehensive data collection, flexibility in strategies and collaboration with stakeholders."

4.2.2. Case study 11: DPL00012 Claw and Order, making Ascension Island safe for Land Crabs

Project dates: 01/04/2023 - 31/03/2024
Grant: £15,246
UKOT: Ascension

- Through the use of signage and education, this project – led by Ascension Island Government - aimed to reduce the number of land crabs killed on Ascension's roads.
- The project encountered some problems that were unexpected, including staff changes and poor weather; incredibly heavy rainfall at the beginning of the year caused major disruption and damage to the road infrastructure. This meant the signs were not able to be considered until repair works were completed and the roads deemed safe once again. Severe weather also meant the cancellation of one of the public engagement spawning tours.
- The project reported that if they had to do it again they would time/sequence activities differently, including starting the project with the public consultation for the road signs and ensuring they had substantial baseline data for crab mortality allowing them to calculate mortality reduction due to project activities. In addition, they would share the survey of the general public at the start of the project.

- The project experienced challenges with only one person running the entire project, which created significant issues when this person left. Their recommendation would be to always have a number of persons involved at every stage of the project, where possible.

4.2.3. Case study 12: DPL0026 Remote monitoring of Sister Islands Rock Iguanas on Cayman Brac

Project dates: 01/04/2023 - 31/03/2024
Grant: £33,627
UKOT: Cayman Islands

- The project sought to use custom-made Wireless Sensor Nodes (WSNs) attached to individual iguanas to enable remote tracking of Sister Islands Rock Iguanas (SIRI) on Cayman Brac in the Cayman Islands. Data collected will help identify areas and habitats most important for the survival, reproduction, and foraging of SIRI so that effective conservation measures can be implemented.
- The project experienced significant delays related to availability of electronic components on the market. Many of the sensors were no longer in production. Fortunately, they were able to replace the out-of-stock components with new and different modules.
- They have very specific technology requirements and low units needed, which drastically limited the number of appropriate suppliers. This along with other supplier issues introduced several delays in the timeline and were the primary cause for the change request asking for a 3-month extension which was gratefully received.
- The most serious challenge experienced was a novel radio interference causing communication issues inhibiting transmission of the collected sensor data from the WSNs despite significant and extensive lab testing and previous experience. This led to further testing in the field being required to confirm this as the ultimate cause preventing the retrieval of the data.
- Another challenge was represented by the poor weather conditions during the field work. Important equipment relied on solar charging and the overcast and rainy weather conditions during the narrow window for field testing were suboptimal.
- Due to the many supplier delays, dates for fieldwork were changed multiple times, creating secondary logistical issues. To avoid this in the future, organisation of the field portion should be done once WSNs were completed and tested, ideally on similar focal species.
- Despite months of successful testing, simulating the antenna signal attenuation fell short. Two potential solutions proposed by the project include conducting preliminary field tests to directly calculate attenuation capability of the surface, and/or build the WSNs using a transmitting antenna that could adapt its emitting frequency.

5. Feedback from Darwin Plus Local applicants and projects

DPL applicants apply via an online cloud-based platform "Flexi-Grant". It is possible to extract contacts from this platform for applications which have been started but not submitted as well as all submitted applications (whether or not they were ultimately successful at receiving funding).

A survey was shared with all DPL contacts on Flexi-Grant in August 2024. Across the first four rounds of DPL, there were 258 draft applications in Flexi-Grant. In order to generate the contact list for the survey, duplicate contacts were removed. In addition, contacts from applicants who are based in other countries and clearly not working in UKOTs were removed to ensure survey responses were relevant (this included applicants from Benin,

DRC, Gambia, Haiti, India, Kenya, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, Tanzania, Uganda, Yemen, and Zimbabwe[1]). In total, the survey was shared with 131 contacts with 16 responses received.

See Annex 1 for full survey questionnaire with results reported in this section.

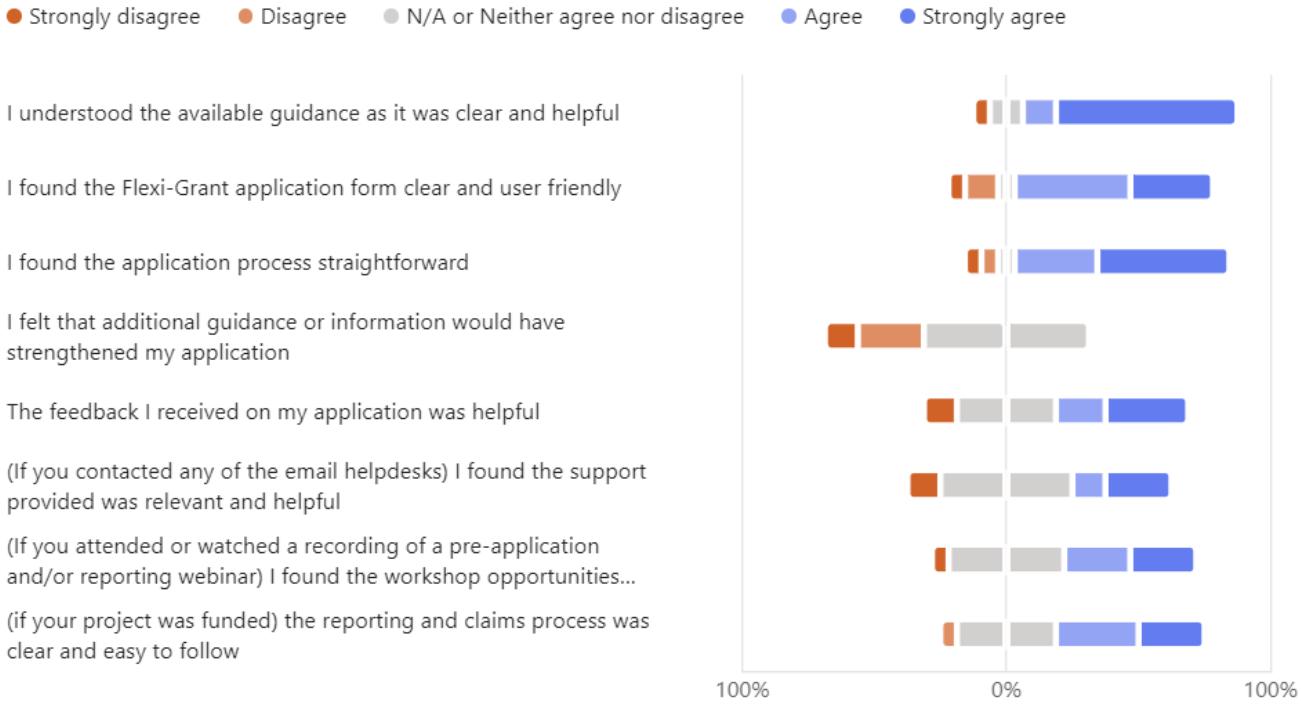
Survey responses to the following questions can be summarised as follows:

In your own words, how would you describe the key differences between Darwin Plus Local and the other Darwin Plus schemes - what is "unique" about Darwin Plus Local?

- **Ease of application and management:** Many respondents found DPL easier and quicker to apply for compared to other Darwin Plus schemes. It is seen as fitting well with the capacity of smaller organisations and individuals, with simpler reporting requirements and a more focused, less burdensome administrative process.
- **Project scope and focus:** The scheme supports smaller projects that can be completed within shorter time frames and with less funding. The scheme is valued for allowing projects that are closely aligned with the needs and priorities of local communities.
- **Accessibility and inclusivity:** DPL is considered more inclusive, especially for small, hands-on projects and citizen scientists. It is seen as accessible to those based within the territories, leading to a lasting legacy in terms of capacity building and relevance to local priorities.
- **Challenges and limitations:** Despite its advantages, some respondents mentioned limitations in terms of the duration and funding, which may not be sufficient for more extensive research projects.
- **Comparison with other schemes:** Those familiar with other Darwin Plus schemes noted that while DPL is more straightforward and easier to manage, it also has more limited scope. In contrast, larger schemes like Darwin Plus Main are more complex and have lower chances of success, but they encompass broader, more comprehensive projects.

[1] N.B. all training materials and guidance are clear on the geographical eligibility of Darwin Plus Local but across Darwin Plus there is often a misunderstanding of its eligibility to non UKOT countries. Many of the removed contacts were from unsubmitted applications.

Please comment on the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements



What (if any) additional guidance, information, or changes to the existing guidance would strengthen your application or your experience of applying?

- **Guidance and support:** Most respondents found the guidance provided to be adequate, helpful, and comprehensive, and a webinar was reported as helpful.
- **Application process:** Opinions on the application process were mixed. Some found it straightforward and simple, while others felt it was overly burdensome for the relatively small amount of funding available, with a lack of transparency. The online portal system was praised for its user-friendly design, which guided applicants effectively through the process.
- **Supporting documentation:** One respondent suggested that the ability to provide more supporting material would have helped strengthen their application, but they recognised that this would make the application process more cumbersome to assess.
- **Funding and Examples:** There was a call for a wider range of funding examples, particularly those focused on community capacity building and educational initiatives, but it was recognised that for early funding rounds these examples did not exist.

Several respondents indicated they had no significant comments or additional feedback to provide.

Please share any other comments you might have on your experience of applying for or managing a Darwin Plus Local project.

- **Deadlines and timing:** Some participants found the deadlines for project spending challenging, particularly when grappling with inefficient UKOT processes. Delays in the results announcement were also noted, with a suggestion that better communication about such delays would be helpful.
- **Application process:** The application process was generally regarded as thorough and user-friendly, especially for those new to grant applications. However, some found it time-consuming, and there was a

suggestion to allow more background information, like photos, to improve the quality of applications. One comment mentioned that the process seemed lengthy compared to the relatively small amounts of money requested.

- **Reporting requirements:** Participants appreciated the simplified reporting requirements, with a single final report, and the focused nature of the questions. However, there was feedback that reporting forms were not always well-suited to projects focused on capital equipment rather than broader project outcomes.
- **Impact and importance:** The scheme is seen as crucial, particularly for researchers working in UKOTs where alternative funding is scarce. The scheme's simplicity encourages more applications, which is viewed positively.
- **Support and communication:** The support from JNCC via telephone, as well as the guidance notes and submission format, were praised for being helpful and instructive. Despite this, there was some dissatisfaction with communication regarding delayed announcements of submission results.

Overall, the feedback is largely positive, with suggestions for minor improvements in communication, application flexibility, and reporting forms.

If you were successful at having a Darwin Plus Local project funded, have you since applied to another (not Local) Darwin Plus funding scheme or have plans to apply to another Darwin Plus funding scheme?

6. Key lessons learned

Project Final Reports includes a specific section on lessons learned. Project responses to this question were coded to identify key themes emerging from reporting DPL projects, with these summarised below alongside illustrative examples. The approach used was an inductive coding approach, a ground-up approach where the codes/categories are derived from the data itself.

Planning and flexibility:

- **Pre-project planning:** where possible, as much planning should happen prior to grant applications being submitted to help expedite project start-up times. This includes the collection of baseline data or other research as much as possible which can also influence project approach. For early rounds of Darwin Plus Local, this was harder but is likely to be more feasible for latter rounds if they continue on a predictable basis.

- **Accurate timetabling:** Particularly important for projects with a short duration, accurate timetabling from the outset is important, planning activities in advance and taking into account seasonality and the availability of key people to minimise the risk of issues or slippage.
- **Generous work planning:** Taking into account the above, sufficient time should be allocated for project activities, including an allowance for potential delays.
- **Project scope:** Avoid overloading projects with interdependent outputs, and be realistic about what can be achieved in the short timescale of DPL projects. Core objectives should be prioritised, and then built on through later initiatives.
- **Planning for uncertainty:** Despite best-laid plans, things can go wrong. Projects should be prepared to adapt to unforeseen or unpredictable circumstances, such as extreme weather events (common in many UKOTs), logistical issues, or personnel availability. Having backup plans and being flexible in approach are vital.
- **Secure funding early:** When considering when to request funding, account for all costs and engage across the team to consider what might be needed and when. Ensure costs related to logistics, customs and delivery charges (for example) are accounted for.
- **Timely procurement**: Necessary equipment and supplies should be procured as early as possible, and well in advance of when they are required, to avoid delays caused by logistical issues or international shipping challenges which can be particularly pronounced in the UKOTs.

Examples:

- DPL0045 "Developing biodiversity stewardship among TCI fishers through outreach and education" reported that *"[it is important to] try to develop a better understanding of how long each step in the project will take, and what can be achieved during trips to islands. Due to lack of human and financial resources of local government, it is not a reasonable expectation that they can dedicate extra resources to an external project. Therefore, when partnering with local government, costs of the project should be covered in the grant and should not be burdened on government."*
- DPL0035 "Restoration of grassland at Tristan da Cunha" had challenges around slow germination of seedlings, reporting that *"harsh winter weather slowed grass seed germination…the timing of seeding did not fully account for severe local winter conditions."* The noted that *"the team adapted well to challenges like adverse weather and the project leader's medical leave"* and that *"flexible scheduling and task prioritisation allowed continued progress despite obstacles."*
- See also case study 11 (4.2.2)

Appropriate staffing and effective resource management:

- **Dedicated project resources:** Having a sufficiently resourced team is critical to effective project delivery. Being realistic about the resources which can be committed by key stakeholders (particularly UKOT governments) from the outset is important, work planning around existing commitments as much as possible.
- **Clear roles and responsibilities**, and allowing provision for back-up personnel and resources can help with continuity should issues arise.
- **Training and capacity building:** provide comprehensive training early in the project to ensure team members are well-prepared, and invest in developing the skills and knowledge of local team members and stakeholders. Using tools appropriate to the size of the project and the skill level of the project team is also important (see also "Data and technology management" under "Technical management and approach-specific lessons").

- **Onboarding and offboarding**: Robust onboarding and offboarding processes enable smooth staff transitions, ensuring continuity and maintaining project momentum particularly where there are staff changes.

Examples:

- DPL0009 "Head in the Clouds: Extending Ascension's cloud forest" reported that "*If we had to do it all again, we would add funding for one person to continually oversee the project and arrange more work days and community volunteer days. Utilising the two warden staff we have managing Green Mountain was over stretching our already very small team. We feel we could have achieved a greater number of trees planted with significantly more numbers of volunteers…we would recommend adding an extra staff member to the funding bid to oversee the project. Given the remoteness and the long recruitment times faced by most of the OTs, hiring a new staff member from overseas would be unsuitable within the one-year time frame. However, hiring a local person already based in the OT to serve as a Volunteer Coordinator may improve local engagement and communication, creating a greater sense of ownership."*
- DPL0030 "Establishing a Video Survey Library Program for Montserrat's Coral Reefs" reported that "*a goal of the project was to not only train but also regularly utilise multiple members of the Government of Montserrat dive team. Though commitment was provided by department heads the reality was that these persons were often not available. Adjustments need to be made to ensure commitment to support and participate in a project. The team leaders used valuable time communicating and rescheduling to fit support team schedules. "*
- DPL0033 "Building on island capacity for long-term seabird monitoring" reported that *"weaknesses in on-boarding and off-boarding protocols during the transition of the Head of Marine Conservation reduced capacity and effectiveness."*

<u>Collaboration and communication:</u>

- **Strong partnerships:** Building and maintaining good relationships with relevant partners is essential.
- **Stakeholders engagement:** Consistently keeping key stakeholders informed helps ensure their support and accountability (where relevant) throughout the project. Regular and transparent communication fosters collaboration and trust, and are critical to enabling project success.
- **Effective collaboration:** Foster a collaborative environment within project teams by proactively sharing ideas and knowledge.
- **Public events and outreach:** Well-organised public events and outreach initiatives, especially those co-developed with the community, can significantly boost engagement and project visibility.
- **Volunteer Engagement:** Volunteers are valuable for community involvement and capacity building. Projects reported some success with the use of volunteers, but noted the need to balance the potential benefits (to creating community ties) with delivery efficiencies.
- **Communication:** Effective communication is critical to effective project delivery. Communication should be:
    - Open – by maintaining open communication lines within and outside of teams, through both formal and informal channels.
    - Targeted – through direct engagement with the most relevant stakeholders, such as landowners, especially when their cooperation is crucial to project success. Consideration should be given to whether engagement with key stakeholders is one-to-one or in group setting.
    - Responsive – especially where there are unexpected events or delays to keep all stakeholders informed and involved.

Examples:

- DPL0003 " Greening Our Schools – Let's think green!" reported that "*collaboration with the Department of Education (DOE) was critical on this project. The DOE were able to successfully rally, engage and support schools as well as garner support for support of the project, by schools. The Department of Environment and Coastal Resources (DECR) have access to knowledgeable individuals and experts on each of the topics and together we were able to pool human resources to support students in the best possible way"* and that they "*would hold the private sector partners to account. At the inception of the program, we solicited the expertise of the private sector, applicable to each theme, however they waivered on their support. Much of the final part of the project (assessment phase) has fallen squarely on the shoulders of the DOE and the DECR."*
- DPL0007 "Bermuda Zoological Society's Micro Forest Project" reported that *"regular team meetings and open communication fostered collaboration and ensured everyone stayed informed."*
- DPL0045 "Developing biodiversity stewardship among TCI fishers through outreach and education" reported that *"presenting materials to stakeholders individually, rather than in group settings allowed us to initiate in-depth discussions about the regulations and the ecology behind them, as well as addressing misconceptions."*

Measuring success

- **Measurable metrics:** Define success with clear, measurable metrics. Some projects found it difficult to gauge impact within the project duration, suggesting that choosing more tangible success indicators might have been more effective.
- **Continuous monitoring:** Regular data collection and monitoring allow for timely adjustments and help in measuring progress more accurately.
- **Iterative Processes**: Use feedback and direct interactions to refine project tools, materials, and approaches. Small, iterative changes can help enhance project outcomes.

Examples:
- DPL0001 "A wild welcome to Ascension" reported that "*the metrics for success were dependent on measuring behaviour change within the public as a result of presenting these displays. It was recognised in the proposal that gauging people's awareness and enjoyment of the island would be very difficult within the project duration. If repeating this project, we might have chosen more measurable metrics to determine success."*
- DPL0007 "Bermuda Zoological Society's Micro Forest Project" reported that "*A lack of baseline data for certain native and endemic plants made it challenging to measure the full impact of the project using Bermudian Species."*

Technical management and approach-specific lessons

- **Data and technology management:** Implementing effective data management practices, including early engagement with the people carrying out analysis and eventual user groups, is critical in any data management processes. It is also important to ensure the correct tools and technology are used which is appropriate to the context and capabilities of those involved in the project.
    - DPL0006 "Restoring peat soils and tussac grass habitat in the Falklands" reported that *"changing use from QGIS to Google Earth Pro has simplified things as I am not very well technically versed and I was losing time in trying to teach myself programmes when I needed to be storing and using the data. For the smallness of my project and team I have learned its best to use simple methods and apps that I can work with."*
    - DPL0011 "Achieving long-term recreational fisheries sustainability through community-led data collection" reported that *"in terms of data collection, using social media ('Facebook') suited fishers as they*

regularly use the site, including to send or post catch pictures. However, it is resource-heavy in the long-term as individual records need to be accessed, verified and then input. Future projects or initiatives around data collection could seek to develop an app for offline use that would automatically collate data but could still be accessed via fishers' phones."

- DPL0032 "Strengthening Montserrat's Marine Ecosystem through Coral Restoration Implementation and Training" reported that *"by using cloud storage for the project's data we have created a database that can support future researchers, monitoring and reef restoration efforts. With the easy access to affordable virtual storage it is an easy method to both protect project data and share it."*
- DPL0035 "Restoration of grassland at Tristan da Cunha" reported that *"using a Tele-Handler with a bucket, along with manual extraction, was effective. This approach efficiently removed both large and small rocks, increasing cleared grazing land."*
- DPL0055 "Cost-effective habitat monitoring to understand seagrass decline in Bermuda" reported that *"introducing the low-cost pH / lux / light sensors, necessary to record and monitor water quality parameters, did required extended technical work beyond our original predicted effort. We realised that we needed to ensure that other sensors could be integrated in the future (i.e. conductivity / salinity / dissolved oxygen) without having to redesign and remanufacture enclosures, as there was already interest and appetite from local partners regarding upgrades to the sensor in the future, especially to support any long term Darwin programmes and extend the scope of work. If we were to repeat this project again, or share our experiences with others, our recommendation would be to focus less on the quantity of sensors and more on the quality, focusing first on optimising one sensor at one initial deployment site."*
- See also case study 12 (section 4.2.3).

- **Invasive alien species management:** a number of DPL projects dealt with invasive species control projects and reported some specific lessons:
  - DPL0017 "Pollution and invasive species management, Spittal Pond Nature Reserve" reported that *"making fence posts for the project out of invasive species was an effective recycling project. Removal of invasive trees from other reserves freed up space to plant more natives and endemics, increasing biodiversity and protection of endangered species."*
  - DPL0038 "Can biocontrol halt the tsunami of non-native species on Ascension?" reported that "assessing the suitability of a biocontrol agent for a given country requires consideration of numerous factors including host specificity, cost/benefits and potential non-target effects. Not every potential agent is likely to be appropriate for each situation and for many serious invasive species there has yet to be any work done on biocontrol. Although off-the-shelf options are generally more cost-effective, sometimes new agents have to be found and assessed to fit particular local requirements. Surveys for new agents and testing of their host range can be costly, particularly in the case of small islands where, due to the small area covered, the investment versus benefit ratio can often be unfavourable. Such investments must be offset against the costs of clearance and damage caused by the invasive species. Biocontrol projects involve a long-term process that requires several stages. It is difficult to fit a full biocontrol program into a single funded project, because the field-testing phase and release phase may each require two years. Sources of longer-term funding will be necessary."
  - See also case study 10 (section 4.2.1).

- **Environmental and external factors:** Address known external challenges proactively or building in contingency for likely external factors is important. A number of projects reported specific learning with regard to adapting their logistics or methodologies to respond to such factors. For example,
  - DPL0002 "Restoring native tussac grassland habitat" reported that *"some of our newly planted tussac tillers were grazed by hares, which are an introduced pest on Cape Pembroke. This was expected and it was not a serious problem because hares only eat the green tops and not the roots, so the tillers will*

survive. However, in future I would actively reduce the numbers of hares in the area before planting commences to limit the impact they have on the new habitat."

- DPL0052 "Unveiling the Unrecognized: Sea Cucumbers' Role in Coral Reef Health" reported that "*considering the difficulties posed by the weather, conducting the project at shallower depths might be a viable strategy to enhance accessibility under adverse conditions. Although our nurseries were initially established at the current depth, a shallower location could facilitate more frequent monitoring, reduce effort, and offer the possibility to secure equipment and specimens should rough weather arise. This adjustment could potentially streamline our operations without compromising the project's integrity."*
- DPL0035 "Restoration of grassland at Tristan da Cunha" – see example above under Planning and flexibility regarding optimising their seeding schedule.
- DPL0053 "Emergency Recovery Plan for the world's rarest coral, *Ctenella chagius*" were relying on the use of military to travel to project sites and reported *"we would recommend more reliable air corridors than military ones, which can (and as we experienced) be notoriously fickle; instead we might suggest sailing to the Maldives, where access to regular private and commercial flights back to the UK would be available."*

Annex 1: Survey questions

On behalf of Defra, NIRAS is carrying out an initial review of the Darwin Plus Local scheme. You are receiving this survey as you either started or submitted an application to one of the first 4 rounds of Darwin Plus Local. We are interested in understanding how applicants find the process and would be grateful for your feedback using the form below.

Your participation in this survey will in no way influence the decision making process on any application you have submitted under this or subsequent rounds. Responses are anonymous unless you choose to provide your name.

The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete, and we thank you in advance for your participation.

Q1. Please share your name and email address if you would be happy to be contacted about any of your responses.

Name

Q2. Email address

Q3. Did you submit an application to Darwin Plus Local? [Yes/No]

Q4. If you answered Yes to Q3, was this your first time applying to Darwin Plus? If so, how did you find out about the scheme and why did you choose now to apply? [Long answer]

Q5. If you answered Yes to Q3, how many applications have you submitted to Darwin Plus Local and under which rounds? [Short answer]

Q6. If you answered No to Q3, why did you not apply?

Q7. Where is your organisation primarily based or headquartered? Or where are you based, if applying as an individual? [Short answer]

Q8. Did you receive funding from Darwin Plus Local? Please provide comment for all and any applications you have submitted (i.e. if you submitted more than one application, how many were successful out of the total number submitted?) [Short answer]

Q9. In your own words, how would you describe the key differences between Darwin Plus Local and the other Darwin Plus schemes - what is "unique" about Darwin Plus Local? [Short answer]

Q10. Please comment on the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements [Strongly disagree/ Disagree/ N/A or Neither agree nor disagree / Agree / Strongly Agree]

- I understood the available guidance as it was clear and helpful
- I found the Flexi-Grant application form clear and user friendly
- I found the application process straightforward
- I felt that additional guidance or information would have strengthened my application
- The feedback I received on my application was helpful
- (If you contacted any of the email helpdesks) I found the support provided was relevant and helpful

- (If you attended or watched a recording of a pre-application and/or reporting webinar) I found the workshop
- (if your project was funded) the reporting and claims process was clear and easy to follow

Q11. What (if any) additional guidance, information, or changes to the existing guidance would strengthen your application or your experience of applying? [Long answer]

Q12. If you were successful at having a Darwin Plus Local project funded, have you since applied to another (not Local) Darwin Plus funding scheme or have plans to apply to another Darwin Plus funding scheme? [Yes/No/Maybe]

Q13. Please share any other comments you might have on your experience of applying for or managing a Darwin Plus Local project. [Long answer]