



Biodiversity Challenge Funds

Expert Groups

Handbook

2025



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs



**UK International
Development**

Partnership | Progress | Prosperity

Contents

<i>Acronyms/Glossary</i>	<i>_____</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>Introduction</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>2</i>	<i>Programme Board</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>3</i>	<i>Expert groups</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>4</i>	<i>Membership</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>5</i>	<i>Member specific guidance</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Annex A.</i>	<i>Terms of Reference of the Expert Groups</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Annex B.</i>	<i>Members Terms and Conditions [Template]</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Annex C.</i>	<i>Chair Terms and Conditions</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Annex D.</i>	<i>Observer Terms of Reference</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>Annex E.</i>	<i>The Seven Principles of Public Life</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>Annex F.</i>	<i>Conflict of Interest Policy</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Annex G.</i>	<i>Remuneration and Travel and Subsistence Rules</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Annex H.</i>	<i>Expert Group Membership Privacy Notice 2022</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>Annex I.</i>	<i>Illustration of the Grant Application Process</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>Annex J.</i>	<i>Grant Assessment Process</i>	<i>39</i>

Acronyms/Glossary

Biodiversity Challenge Funds (BCF)	the collective name for the three challenge funds (Darwin Initiative, IWT Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus)
BCF Secretariat	the Defra team who manage the three challenge funds
Darwin Expert Committee (DEC)	the Expert Group for the Darwin Initiative
Darwin Plus Advisory Group (DPAG)	the Expert Group for Darwin Plus
Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund Advisory Group (IWTAG)	the Expert Group for the Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund
<i>Ex officio</i> member	membership is a result of their role within a public body
Expert Group	consists of individuals with expertise and knowledge of issues relevant to the focus of the fund, assembled in a group to provide high quality and independent technical specialist advice to the Biodiversity Challenge Funds
Funding Round	the process to seek, assess, and award grants
Programme Board	high-level Defra oversight and governance mechanism, see Section 2
Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH)	through the administration of the funds, Defra seeks to appropriately safeguard all key BCFs stakeholders and take all reasonable steps to prevent sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH) from occurring, and to respond appropriately when it does.
Recruited members	appointed to Expert Groups based on fair and open competition following UK Government Public Appointments guidelines
Senior Responsible Officer (SRO)	Defra official with overall responsibility for the fund
Sift Meetings	a meeting of the Expert Group to efficiently and fairly discuss the applications in order to produce a list of recommended proposals to move to the next stage or to Defra for consideration
Strategy Meetings	Expert Group meeting to provide an opportunity to discuss topics or issues of interest, in order to support the adaptive and agile delivery of the funds objectives and strengthen its ability to deliver impact

Communication with NIRAS

BCF-Darwin@niras.com	for all Darwin Initiative related correspondence including DEC
BCF-IWTCF@niras.com	for all IWT Challenge Fund related correspondence including IWTAG
BCF-DPLUS@niras.com	for all Darwin Plus related correspondence including DPAG

*All claims should be sent to your Fund mailbox.

1 Introduction

This handbook sets out to provide guidance on the purpose, management, and activity of the Expert Groups of the Biodiversity Challenge Funds; guidance specific to an individual fund may be set out separately.

Defra has established three challenge funds to strategically deliver grants:

- Darwin Initiative
- Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund (IWTCF)
- Darwin Plus

Each fund has a group of experts that fulfil a role with a delivery mechanism, along with the Programme Board.

2 Programme Board

2.1 Purpose

Each Biodiversity Challenge Fund has a Defra Programme Board acting as the oversight and governance mechanism. The roles and responsibilities of the Programme Board include:

- retaining oversight of the delivery of the fund,
- approving annual workplans, including the timing and scale of funding rounds,
- reviewing the recommendations made by the Expert Group and approving funding,
- monitoring the performance and impact of the fund,
- providing strategic insights and guidance on issues escalated by the Senior Responsible Officer (SRO).

2.2 Approving Funding

When considering whether to approve funding, the Programme Board's role is to ensure that:

- due process is being followed including technical, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL), poverty benefits, gender equality, disability, and social inclusion (GEDSI), safeguarding and security, and finance assessments,
- any grant specific high risks (Contextual, Delivery, Safeguarding, Operational, Fiduciary, Reputational) are managed if awarded,
- flagged issues, for example balance of proposals by geography, are considered,
- views from Defra and other government departments are considered,
- sufficient finance is available to award the grants.

The role of the Programme Board is not to duplicate the technical role that the Expert Group fulfils.

Where a decision on approving funding for an application recommended by the Expert Group is not able to be made at the Programme Board meeting, then a clear timeline and steps to arrive at a decision, along with clear responsibilities of individuals involved, should be identified by the Programme Board.

2.3 Composition

The Programme Board compositions vary, but will typically include the relevant Defra Deputy Director, Fund SRO, Expert Group Chair, and the Head of the Biodiversity Challenge Funds.

Additional members can be added to strengthen the oversight function if desired.

Members of the specific fund delivery team and the NIRAS team will attend the Programme Board to provide advice and support.

3 Expert groups

Each of the Biodiversity Challenge Funds is supported by an established Expert Group:

- Darwin Initiative has the Darwin Expert Committee (DEC)
- IWT Challenge Fund has the IWT Challenge Fund Advisory Group (IWTAG)
- Darwin Plus has the Darwin Plus Advisory Group (DPAG)

These three groups (DEC/IWTAG/DPAG) are referred to here as the 'Expert Groups'.

3.1 Role and remit of the Expert Groups

The primary role of the Expert Groups is to provide high quality and independent technical specialist advice to the Biodiversity Challenge Funds, via the fund's Programme Board.

The objectives of the Expert Groups are to:

- assess applications against the published criteria, to agreed timelines and standards, to enable Defra to award funding to high-quality projects,
- provide strategic advice, and
- champion the Biodiversity Challenge Funds.

The generic Expert Group terms of reference are set out in Annex A, and details of the grant application and grant assessment processes are given in Annex I and Annex J respectively.

3.2 Accountability for Expert Groups

Defra ministers oversee the Biodiversity Challenge Funds' work.

The Expert Groups will report, via the Chair, to the fund lead or the Head of Biodiversity Challenge Funds on a routine working basis, who in turn will report to the respective Programme Board.

3.3 Relationship between Expert Groups

Formal and informal linkages between the Expert Groups remains under review to strengthen the sharing of expertise, knowledge, and best practices. Some Experts have been members of more than one Expert Group to help facilitate cross-learning.

4 Membership

4.1 Types of members

Each Expert Group includes a recruited Chair, recruited members, and may also include appointed *ex officio* members; current membership of the groups, including a brief description of each member's expertise, is provided on the websites:

- <https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/about-us/darwin-expert-committee/>
- <https://iwt.challengefund.org.uk/about-us/iwt-challenge-fund-advisory-group/>
- <https://darwinplus.org.uk/about-us/darwin-plus-advisory-group/>

Currently, the size of each Expert Groups is as follows, although some variation around this number may occur to manage peaks in activities and to ensure continuity and standards of practice.

	Darwin Expert Committee (DEC)	Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund Advisory Group (IWTAG)	Darwin Plus Advisory Group (DPAG)
Chair (recruited)	1	1	1
Members (recruited)	23	14	10
<i>Ex officio</i> members (appointed)	0	1	2
<i>Observer members</i>	0	0	1
Total	24	16	14

Ex officio members, whose membership is a result of their role within a public body and not open recruitment, are currently drawn from:

- Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)
- Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)
- Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (RBG Kew)

4.2 Balance of expertise

Members are recruited as individuals based on their own expertise and knowledge of issues relevant to the focus of the funds. They are not considered representatives of their organisation in this role.

The range of expertise required may change or evolve over time, and therefore, the balance of skills, expertise and experience of members will be regularly reviewed in light of current and anticipated future work programmes.

If necessary, additional experts may be recruited or co-opted for a limited period of time to provide a specific input, including surge support provided by members whose terms have recently ended.

4.3 Appointments

Recruited members and Chairs are appointed for a fixed term of up to three years, with the potential to renew for another period of up to three-years. The Terms and Conditions for members are provided in Annex B, with the Terms and Conditions for the Chair provided in Annex C.

Ex officio members are not recruited, but serve through their role within a public body. There is no fixed term for their contributions.

Consideration is given in appointment and reappointments to:

- the performance and availability of the member to continue to contribute,
- the phasing and length of appointments to ensure continuity and fresh perspectives,
- the diversity of membership, and
- meeting the strategic expertise and knowledge required by the fund.

To serve more than two terms, recruited members are required to apply again through open and fair competition. Chairs cannot reapply for the same Chair role once their second term has completed, though they may apply for the Chair position of another Expert Group or for a member position on any Expert Group.

5 Member specific guidance

5.1 Code of Conduct

All members of the Expert Groups (Chair, recruited, *ex officio* and *observers*) must observe the highest standards of impartiality, integrity and objectivity in relation to the advice they provide. Members must at all times:

- comply with their Terms and Conditions of appointment (Annex B and Annex C) and this handbook (all subject to change);
- follow the Seven Principles of Public Life set out by the Nolan Committee on Standards in Public Life (see Annex DE);
- uphold the Common PSEAH Principles as found in part two of the Common Approach to Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Sexual Abuse and Sexual Harassment (CAPSEAH) (see Annex K);
- not misuse information gained for personal gain or for political purpose, nor seek to use the opportunity to promote their private interests or those of connected persons, firms, businesses or other organisations; and
- declare and register any interests they have that are relevant to the remit of the Expert Group (Annex F).

Any appointment can be terminated early if the appointee fails to perform their duties to a satisfactory standard. In addition, members or the Chair can stand down if they so wish by providing at least three months' notice in writing to the Head of the Biodiversity Challenge Funds to support the recruitment process; however, they would normally be expected to complete any current funding round before standing down.

5.2 Safeguarding and Protection from Sexual, Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (SEAH)

Defra and the Biodiversity Challenge Fund operates a zero tolerance to inaction approach to safeguarding and protection from SEAH. All members of the Expert Group (Chair, recruited, *ex officio* and *observers*) must commit to prevent sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment and follow the policies and procedures relating to prevention of SEAH at all times.

Expert group members must act above reproach and report any concerns through the appropriate channels (see Annex K).

The Biodiversity Challenge Fund adheres to the following principles on preventing SEAH as found in the [Common Approach to Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment \(CAPSEAH\)](#).

1. SEAH is prohibited.
 - a. Actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions, is prohibited.
 - b. Exchange of money, employment, goods, or services for sex, including demands for sex/'sexual favour' or other forms of abusive, humiliating, degrading or exploitative behaviour is prohibited.
 - c. Any sexual relationship which involves improper use of rank, role or position, or any abuse of power and power imbalances, is prohibited.
 - d. Sexual activity with children (persons under the age of 18) by those engaged in HDP work is prohibited, regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally.
 - e. Sexual harassment of co-workers (whether in the same organisation or not) or people in communities receiving assistance or protection, is prohibited.
2. Zero tolerance to inaction.
3. Tailor PSEAH approaches to the context and ensure the approaches are inclusive and victim-survivor centred.
4. Embed SEAH prevention as part of working culture.
5. Respond appropriately to suspicions, reports and incidents of SEAH.
6. Respect confidentiality and protect against retaliation.

Failure to uphold these principles may result in immediate expulsion from the Expert Group.

All Experts and Chairs are expected to complete annual training on safeguarding and protection from SEAH. This is usually through current employment but can also be completed independently. Certificates or evidence of attendance should be sent to the relevant NIRAS mailbox for the fund you sit on (see page 4). If you would like a recommendation on appropriate SEAH training, please contact NIRAS.

5.3 Ministers

Members are not restricted from communicating with Ministers and others in their capacity as private individuals. However, if communication takes place in this individual capacity, it should be made clear that the individual's view is not necessarily that of the Expert Group.

Where possible, the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Secretariat should be made aware of any such meetings or on-going relationships with Ministers or other government representatives.

5.4 Media

The Chair will be the primary spokesperson for any contact with the media unless the Chair or Defra has made other specific arrangements.

If a member receives an approach for an interview connected in any way to their role on the Expert Group, the request must be referred to the Head of the Biodiversity Challenge Funds. The Secretariat will liaise with the Defra press office, and the Chair.

The Expert Groups follow a “no surprises” policy when dealing with the media. This is to ensure that Defra remain informed and are able to respond or offer their own input to the media as appropriate.

Chairs and members may be invited to speak to the media independently of their membership of an Expert Group and it is their choice to accept or reject such an offer. When speaking in a personal capacity, this should be highlighted at the beginning of any interview and individuals should refrain from commenting on the Expert Group or the fund. Members may contact the Defra Biodiversity Challenge Funds Secretariat for further guidance and support on setting rules of media engagement.

Social media is a public forum and therefore the same considerations apply. Where any personal social media accounts used by Chairs or members make reference to their role on an Expert Group, they should ensure that it is clear in what capacity they are communicating.

Social media biographies should include an explicit line which makes clear that all views communicated via social media are the account holder’s own.

5.5 Political Activity

In accordance with the Terms and Conditions (Annex B and C) provided with their appointment letter or updated subsequently:

Members will not:

- occupy paid party-political posts or hold particularly sensitive or high roles in a political party; or
- personally lobby against Government policy;

Members will:

- inform Defra of any intention to accept a prominent position in any political party and should understand that their Expert Group membership will be terminated; and
- resign from the Expert Group if they accept nomination for election to the House of Commons, Northern Ireland Assembly, Scottish Government or the Welsh Government.

Members must be, and be seen to be, politically impartial. Guidance, leading up to key political events such as local and general elections, may be issued by the Cabinet Office and shared with members.

At all times, members must remain conscious of their general public responsibilities and exercise proper discretion.

5.6 Time commitment

Members will be expected to commit to the expectations that are detailed in the Terms and Conditions (Annex B and Annex C). Where this may be a challenge, members are encouraged to discuss this early with NIRAS and/or the relevant Chair.

5.7 Claiming remuneration and travel expenses

Claiming remuneration and travel expenses for fund related work is optional for recruited members. Current remuneration rates (subject to review) along with Defra's policy on claiming travel expenses are in Annex G. Any queries regarding claims should be referred to NIRAS. It is expected that claims will be made once a year following the end of the application period.

Ex officio members cannot claim remuneration and it is expected that their own organisation should cover travel expenses.

5.8 Register of Interests

All members must declare interests that are relevant to the remit of the group. To ensure the register is accurately maintained, members will inform NIRAS of any changes as they occur. Further information about the Register of Interests can be found in Annex F.

5.9 Conflict of Interests

The Register of Interests is also utilised to ensure that discussions are not influenced, or applications assessed, by someone with a potential Conflict of Interest, reinforcing the need to keep it up to date and accurate (see Annex F).

5.10 Transparency

To support transparency and trust in the work of the funds, we publish details (including the names of members) on the websites and in associated materials, see the Privacy Notice (Annex H).

Annex A. Terms of Reference of the Expert Groups

Objectives

The primary role of the Expert Groups is to provide high quality and independent technical specialist advice to the Biodiversity Challenge Funds, irrespective of the organisation that they may work for.

The objectives of the Expert Groups are to:

- assess applications against the published criteria, to enable Defra to award funding to high-quality projects,
- provide strategic advice, and
- champion the Biodiversity Challenge Funds.

Membership

Recruited members are appointed to Expert Groups based on fair and open competition aligned to the UK Government Public Appointments guidelines.

The initial appointment will normally be for three years; the duration of the term takes into consideration continuity, diversity and strategic needs of each Expert Group, so the term may vary in order to manage these considerations.

Typically, there is a possibility of extension or reappointment for a further term of up to three years, subject to approval and the needs of the Expert Group at the time.

Members are limited to 2 terms (typically 6 years). Thereafter Recruited Members may seek reappointment through an open and fair competition for new members. Chairs are not eligible to reapply after 2 terms, however they can, if they wish, apply to become a Recruited Member.

Ex-officio members, where membership is a result of their role within a public body, also sit on the Expert Groups and are not subject to a defined term length; they cannot claim remuneration and it is expected that their own organisation should cover travel and subsistence expenses.

Notice of Meetings

The Defra Secretariat will endeavour to give as much notice as possible with regards to meetings and reviewing dates, and at least 6 months wherever possible.

The agenda items for discussion and supporting papers will be emailed to the Expert Group members, and any other person required to attend, before the meeting.

Frequency of meetings

Meetings are typically held 2 to 3 times a year, depending upon the work programme for example:

- Single Stage Funding Call will require a single Sift Meeting.
- Two Stage Funding Call will require two Sift Meetings separated by a number of months.
- Strategy Meeting will be held once a year.

Meetings can be held virtually or hybrid with members encouraged to attend in person for the latter. Discussions between the members, Chair, NIRAS and Defra will determine the right approach to be taken, with all meetings considered to be a full day (09:00-17:00 UK time) meeting unless otherwise specified. Given the international focus of the funds, members often travel to or are based in other time zones. We do our best to accommodate this, but flexibility for meeting timings cannot be guaranteed and the requirement for attendance still stands.

Members are expected to be available for and participate in **all Sift Meetings** relating to applications they have reviewed, **and all Strategy Meetings**, and are expected to review any papers distributed prior to the meeting.

Additional meetings may be held to discuss arising issues, updates on the funds, or workstreams. However, attendance at these meetings will be voluntary.

Format of Meetings

The format of meetings will be agreed between the Chair, the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Secretariat, and NIRAS in advance, and will depend on the objective of the meeting.

Sift Meetings seek to efficiently and fairly discuss the applications in order to produce a list of recommended proposals to move to the next stage.

Strategy Meetings, typically annually, will provide an opportunity to discuss topics or issues of interest, in order to support the adaptive and agile delivery of the funds objectives and strengthen its ability to deliver impact.

Applicant Interviews – a few funds invite a shortlist of applicants to interview to help clarify final decisions.

Decision making

Expert group recommendations on applications, or other questions, will be made following open discussions at Sift Meetings and ideally based on general consensus of the group and policy input.

Where members are unable to reach a consensus view on any aspects of the assessment process or the resulting selection of applicants and recommendations for funding, the Chair, whilst clearly acknowledging the different views, will take the final decisions as necessary on what to include in the recommendations.

The recommendations made by the group are presented to the fund's Programme Board (see section 2 above), which makes the decision on which grants to award, or which to recommend to the minister to award, and which strategic recommendations to respond to.

Chair

The Chair is appointed based on fair and open competition, following UK Government Public Appointments guidelines.

The Chair is responsible for:

- Acting, along with Ministers, as the principal figurehead for the respective Biodiversity Challenge Fund. Representing and promoting the Fund and its interests at the most senior levels across all sectors including public, business, academic and non-governmental;

- Chairing Expert Group meetings, including application sift meetings, and ensuring consistent standards of assessment are applied, Conflicts of Interest managed and that recommended projects align to the objectives of the fund and demonstrate strong value-for-money;
- Guiding strategic discussions of objectives, priorities and developments to support the adaptive and agile delivery of the funds and strengthen its ability to deliver impact;
- Where possible, to attend, chair or speak at Biodiversity Challenge Fund events, including workshops and webinars;
- Advising the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Secretariat on preparations for application sift processes, advisory meetings, and other matters;
- Sitting as Chair on the recruitment panel for new members of the relevant Expert Group.
- In some instances, recruited members may deputise for the Chair, and if applicable, may claim the Chair payment rate if these duties are for at least a full day.

Annex B. Members Terms and Conditions [Template]

Commencement of Appointment

Your Appointment will begin on the date provided in your appointment letter.

Period of Appointment

Subject to earlier termination, your appointment will be for a fixed period of three years with the possibility of extension. It will run from [xxx] and will automatically expire on [xxx], unless terminated earlier.

There is no presumption of reappointment. Any reappointment or extension of your appointment will only be made subject to an assessment of your performance over the period of the initial three-year period (see below for details).

Duties of the members

You are appointed as a member of the [Darwin Initiative/Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund/Darwin Plus] Expert Group.

You and you alone must carry out your duties set out below to a high standard and always act in accordance with our reasonable instructions and in line with the Terms of Reference.

Your role, as a member of the [Darwin Expert Committee (DEC)/Illegal Wildlife Trade Advisory Group (IWTAG)/Darwin Plus Advisory Group (DPAG)] is to:

- assess applications against the published criteria, to agreed timelines and standards, to enable Defra to award funding to high-quality projects,
- provide strategic advice, and
- champion the [Darwin Initiative/ Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund/Darwin Plus]

Remuneration

Recruited members can claim remuneration for the duties listed above; *Ex officio* members are not eligible to claim.

Recruited members can claim for time taken to assess applications and participate in Sift and Strategy meetings at £350/day.

Where a recruited member deputises for the Chair for at least a full day, in agreement with Defra, the member can claim the Chair rate of £400 per day.

The number of days you can claim will be communicated to you in advance and be dependent upon the number of assessments that you conduct (by type) and meetings you participate in, as captured under Annex F.

To be eligible for the remuneration, assessments of applications and participation in the meetings must be timely and in line with the standards and procedures set out in the guidance materials.

Tax

Any expenses and remuneration received may be taxable. Members are entirely responsible for compliance with any tax rules applicable to these and any other payments or benefits provided in relation to your appointment. Please consult your local tax office if you have queries.

Expenses and Subsistence

Defra will reimburse all reasonable expenses (including travel, subsistence and other expenses), for recruited members only, properly and necessarily incurred in respect of your appointment.

Each member is entitled to claim the following:

- reasonable travel expenses to and from home to the meeting;
- travel and subsistence expenses incurred as part of the work of the group.

Annex G provides more detail on eligible costs. In accordance with Defra policy, travel and subsistence rates for the Chair and members will be the same as those agreed for staff in the Department. Defra policy on travel and subsistence rates may be reviewed and updated.

Code of Practice

All members have a duty regarding conduct, propriety and confidentiality.

It is essential that you are, and are seen to be, honest, objective and impartial in the exercise of your duties. You must not allow your judgement or integrity to be compromised or permit there to arise any reasonable grounds for suspicion as to the compromise of your judgment and integrity. The Seven Principles of Public Life (Annex E) provide good guidance in the standards expected of members.

You must not misuse information gained in the course of your membership for personal or organisational gain or for political purpose.

If you believe you are being required to act in a way which:

- is illegal, improper, or unethical;
- is in breach of constitutional convention or a professional code;
- may involve possible maladministration;
- is otherwise inconsistent with the Seven Principles of Public Life

you should report the matter to the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Secretariat. You should also report to the appropriate authorities as evidence of criminal or unlawful activity by others.

You may also report if you are required to act in a way which, for you, raises a fundamental issue of conscience.

Confidentiality and Information Disclosure

You must not disclose any information on the fund which is confidential in nature, or which is provided in confidence without authority. This duty continues to apply after your appointment has ended.

This is unless it is already lawfully in the public domain, or it becomes a legal requirement to disclose it.

All personal data provided to you as part of the applications, or other forms, should be destroyed at the end of each Funding Round, or on the completion of your three-year appointment at the latest.

Members will provide all necessary assistance to enable the Secretary of State to comply with his or her duties on disclosure under applicable freedom of information legislation.

Gifts and Hospitality

You must not accept any gifts or hospitality which might, or might reasonably appear to, compromise your personal judgement or integrity or place you under an improper obligation.

You must never canvass or seek gifts or hospitality.

You should inform NIRAS of any offer of gifts or hospitality, and where a gift or hospitality is accepted, that might be connected or perceived to be connected to this role, above the value of £25.

You are responsible for your decisions on the acceptance of gifts or hospitality and for ensuring that any gifts or hospitality accepted can stand up to public scrutiny and do not bring the fund into disrepute.

Attendance

Each member is expected to attend all planned meeting(s), and the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Secretariat will inform members of proposed dates as far in advance as practically possible.

The meeting(s) may be changed or cancelled, without notice, if it becomes apparent that non-attendance will interfere with the good running of the Fund or Expert Group.

Performance Management

The performance of all Experts and Chairs will be noted during each annual cycle. This will note how Experts/Chairs deliver on their Terms of Reference as a way of providing Defra the evidence that funds are being managed appropriately. If there are any significant issues with individuals, they will be addressed separately by the relevant Chair (or Defra, in the case the Chair is involved)

Conflicts of Interest

It is the responsibility of the members to declare in the Register of Interests, any financial or non-financial interests of your own, or of close family members which may, or may be perceived to, influence your judgements in performing your functions.

These interests will be included in the Register of Interests maintained by NIRAS, and you must ensure that your entries are kept up to date. Should a particular matter give rise to a conflict of interest, the member is required to inform the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Secretariat in advance and withdraw from discussions or consideration of the matter.

You are encouraged to register your own non-pecuniary interests and interests of close family members and persons living in the same household which are closely related to the activities of the Biodiversity Challenge Funds.

You must inform the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Secretariat in advance of any new appointments which may impinge on your duties as a member.

Political Activity

In your public role, you should be, and be seen to be, politically impartial.

Members should not occupy paid party-political posts or hold particularly sensitive or high roles in a political party. You should abstain from all controversial political activity, including lobbying against Government Policy.

Subject to the above, you may engage in political activity but should, at all times, remain conscious of your responsibilities as a member of an Expert Group and exercise proper discretion.

Members should inform the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Secretariat before undertaking any significant political activity.

If you have any remaining doubts about your activities, you should seek advice from the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Secretariat prior to undertaking significant political activity.

You are expected to inform the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Secretariat of any intention to accept a prominent position in any political party and to understand that the membership of the Expert Group will be terminated.

Specific guidance, leading up to key political events, such as local and general elections may be issued by the Cabinet Office and shared with members.

Status

Members are not an employee of Defra nor NIRAS. Accordingly, nothing in these Terms and Conditions shall be construed as, or taken to create a contract of employment between yourself and Defra, or yourself and NIRAS.

Appointments to Defra's Expert Committees and Advisory Groups are not ministerial appointments regulated by the Office for the Commissioner of Public Appointments (OCPA).

Media

All requests received by members from the media relating to the Biodiversity Challenge Funds must in all circumstances be directed to the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Secretariat. Where members are asked by Defra to speak to the media, guidance and support will be coordinated by the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Secretariat.

Privacy

The names of all members will be made public, in the interests of transparency. This will include, for example, the inclusion of your name on the GOV.UK and fund websites, and in relevant reports and publications published by Defra.

Please refer to Annex H of the Handbook for the Privacy Notice.

Notice and Termination of Appointment

Either you or the Department may terminate this appointment for any reason before the expiry of the fixed period by giving three months' notice in writing to the other.

No notice period is applicable if this appointment is terminated early by mutual consent.

Should the Biodiversity Challenge Fund(s) be dissolved, restructured or wound up during the period of your appointment, your appointment would cease with effect from that dissolution, or such other date as is specified in any relevant legislation.

The Department may terminate your appointment immediately by writing to you to that effect if:

- your absence or conduct interferes with the good running of the Biodiversity Challenge Fund Expert Group,
- you become bankrupt or make an arrangement with creditors (you are, in any event obliged to inform the Department if you are made bankrupt),
- your estate has been sequestrated in Scotland or you enter into a debt arrangement programme under Part 1 of the Debt Arrangement and Attachment (Scotland) Act 2002 (asp 17) as the debtor or have, under Scots law, granted a trust deed for creditors,
- you are disqualified from acting as a company director (you are, in any event obliged to inform the Department if you are disqualified from acting as a company director),
- you have been convicted (whether before or after appointment) of a criminal offence, (you are, in any event obliged to inform the Department if you are convicted of a criminal offence), the conviction not being spent for the purposes of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (c. 53),
- you become subject to a debt relief order (you are, in any event obliged to inform the Department if you are subject to a debt relief order),
- you have had an allegation of sexual misconduct, including but not limited to, sexual exploitation, sexual abuse or sexual harassment upheld, whether this is within your role as a member of the Expert Committee, within your workplace, or through a court of law (you are obliged to report any allegations of sexual misconduct made against you as soon as you are aware of said allegation to ODA.Safeguarding@defra.gov.uk),
- or if you are, in the opinion of the Secretary of State, unable or unfit to discharge the functions of the appointment for any other reason of whatsoever nature.

If Defra is considering whether to terminate your appointment prior to the expiry of the fixed term, you will be notified of the proposal and of the reasons for it and will be offered an opportunity to have a meeting with the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Secretariat before any final decision is taken. If your appointment is subsequently terminated you will receive notice in writing of this fact, and such notice will contain a statement of reasons for termination.

On termination of this appointment, you shall only be entitled to accrued fees as at the date of termination together with reimbursement of any expenses properly incurred prior to that date.

In the event of you being notified that Defra is considering whether to terminate your appointment, it may be required that you do not carry out your role for the Biodiversity Challenge Fund.

Annex C. Chair Terms and Conditions

Specific Duties of the Chair

The Terms and Conditions for members (Annex B) also apply to the Chair, with additional specific duties of the Chair outlined here.

The Chair of each Biodiversity Challenge Fund Expert Group must carry out their duties set out below to a high standard and always act in accordance with Defra's reasonable instructions and in line with the Terms of Reference.

The Chair is not required to take part in the assessment of applications conducted by the members, but must take all reasonable steps to ensure that due process is followed, and that conflicts of interest and bias are avoided.

The Chair of each Biodiversity Challenge Fund has the following additional duties relating to the Fund that they chair:

- To act, along with Ministers, as the principal figurehead for the respective Biodiversity Challenge Fund. To represent and promote the Fund and its interests at the most senior levels across all sectors including public, business, academic and non-governmental;
- To act as an independent chair for all meetings of the Expert Group and ensure that they are run correctly to give effect to the objectives of the Fund and in line with the Terms of Reference; to ensure consistent standards of assessment are applied and that the high-quality projects are maintained. To take all reasonable steps to ensure that both yourself, the Chair, and all other members follow due process, declare all conflicts of interest in advance and take decisions independently, honestly, objectively and impartially and without bias.
- Where members are unable to reach a consensus view on any aspects of the assessment process or the resulting selection of applicants and recommendations for funding, the Chair will take the final decisions as necessary on what to include in the recommendations.
- To nominate to Defra an existing member to deputise where a conflict of interest or external commitment prevents the Chair from performing their duties
- To support the recruitment and retention of members through participating or contributing to the associated processes including sifting/interviewing prospective members, and assessing the performance of existing members.
- Occasionally, as and when instructed by the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Secretariat or consulted, to advise on revisions to approved projects or the Terms of Reference and/or terms and conditions of appointment of members.
- To guide strategic discussions on Biodiversity Challenge Funds aims, priorities and further development; and advise on recommendations to be made to Ministers
- Where possible, to attend, chair or speak at Biodiversity Challenge Funds events, including workshops and webinars;
- To advise the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Secretariat on preparations for application sift processes, meetings and other matters.
- To act at all times in accordance to the Code of Conduct and set the standard for ethical behaviour as Chair.

The Chair is required in any event to make themselves available to cover the following “core duties” including:

- attendance at up to four sift meetings and one annual strategy meeting for the Biodiversity Challenge Fund, with one day’s associated preparation time for each.
- attending the Programme Board and ad hoc meetings with the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Secretariat and NIRAS (up to one day including preparation);
- meeting Defra’s Chief Scientist, who oversees all of Defra’s expert committees and groups (ad hoc, but to be recorded to support claims);
- attending and, if required, assisting in the organisation of Biodiversity Challenge Funds-related events instigated by the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Secretariat, and speaking at and/or chairing such events (ad hoc but to be recorded to support claims);
- Participating in recruitment for new members of the relevant Expert Group, including assessment of applications, shortlisting and interview (number of days to be agreed at completion of recruitment).

Recruited Chairs can claim for time taken to deliver the agreed duties at £400/day.

Annex D. Observer Terms of Reference

Commencement of Observer Status

Your Appointment as an Observer of the [Darwin Expert Committee (DEC)/ Illegal Wildlife Trade Advisory Group (IWTAG)/ Darwin Plus Advisory Group (DPAG)] will begin on the date provided in your appointment letter.

Period of Appointment

The Observer appointment is open ended, but will be periodically reviewed by Defra.

Representation

Observer status belongs to an organisation, and not an individual. The Observer must provide the name and contact details of their:

- Observer Representative and,
- Alternate Observer Representative.

Duties of the Representatives

The Observer Representative, and Alternative Representative, must carry out the duties set out below to a high standard and always act in accordance with our reasonable instructions and in line with the Terms of Reference.

The duty of the Representatives of the Observer of the [Darwin Expert Committee (DEC)/ Illegal Wildlife Trade Advisory Group (IWTAG)/ Darwin Plus Advisory Group (DPAG)] is to:

- support the discussions by offering relevant, pertinent and unbiased information during meetings.

The views of a representative will be considered during meetings, but the representative has no decision-making role.

Remuneration

Observer Representatives cannot claim remuneration for their role.

Expenses and Subsistence

Defra will not reimburse any expenses (such as travel, subsistence, and other expenses) incurred by the Observer Representatives.

Code of Practice

Representatives have a duty regarding conduct, propriety and confidentiality.

It is essential that Representatives are, and are seen to be, honest, objective and impartial in the exercise of your duties. Representatives must not allow their judgement or integrity to be compromised or permit there to arise any reasonable grounds for suspicion as to the compromise of their judgment and integrity. The Seven Principles of Public Life (Annex E) provide good guidance in the standards expected of members.

Representatives must not misuse information gained in the course of your membership for personal gain or for political purpose.

If they believe they are being required to act in a way which:

- is illegal, improper, or unethical;
- is in breach of constitutional convention or a professional code;
- may involve possible maladministration;
- is otherwise inconsistent with the Seven Principles of Public Life

they should report the matter to the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Secretariat. Representatives should also report to the appropriate authorities as evidence of criminal or unlawful activity by others.

Representatives may also report if they are required to act in a way which, for them, raises a fundamental issue of conscience.

Confidentiality and Information Disclosure

Representatives must not disclose any information on the fund which is confidential in nature, or which is provided in confidence without authority. This duty continues to apply after their appointment has ended.

This is unless it is already lawfully in the public domain, or it becomes a legal requirement to disclose it.

All personal data provided to you as part of the applications, or other forms, should be destroyed at the end of each Funding Round.

Representatives will provide all necessary assistance to enable the Secretary of State to comply with his or her duties on disclosure under applicable freedom of information legislation.

Gifts and Hospitality

Representatives must not accept any gifts or hospitality which might, or might reasonably appear to, compromise their personal judgement or integrity or place them under an improper obligation.

They must never canvass or seek gifts or hospitality.

Representatives should inform NIRAS of any offer of gifts or hospitality and where a gift or hospitality is accepted, that might be connected or perceived to be connected to this role, above the value of £25.

Representatives are responsible for their decisions on the acceptance of gifts or hospitality and for ensuring that any gifts or hospitality accepted can stand up to public scrutiny and do not bring the fund into disrepute.

Attendance

One Representative is expected to attend **all** planned meeting(s) to which they are invited, and the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Secretariat will consult with the Observer on suitable dates as far in advance as practically possible.

The meeting(s) may be changed or cancelled, without notice, if it becomes apparent that non-attendance will interfere with the good running of the Fund or Expert Group.

If the agreed Observer Representative cannot attend a meeting, the Alternate Observer Representatives may attend notifying the Chair and NIRAS in advance of the meeting.

Conflicts of Interest

It is the responsibility of the Representatives to declare in the Register of Interests, any private financial or non-financial interests of they own, or of close family members which may, or may be perceived to, influence their judgements in performing their functions.

These interests will be included in the Register of Interests maintained by NIRAS, and Representatives must ensure that their entries are kept up to date. Should a particular matter give rise to a conflict of interest, the representative is required to inform the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Secretariat in advance and withdraw from discussions or consideration of the matter.

Representatives are encouraged to register their own non-pecuniary interests and interests of close family members and persons living in the same household which are closely related to the activities of the Biodiversity Challenge Funds.

Representatives must inform the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Secretariat in advance of any new appointments which may impinge on your duties as a member.

Status

Representatives are not an employee of Defra nor NIRAS. Accordingly, nothing in these Terms and Conditions shall be construed as, or taken to create a contract of employment between them and Defra, or themselves and NIRAS.

Appointments to Defra's Expert Committees and Advisory Groups are not ministerial appointments regulated by Office for the Commissioner of Public Appointments (OCPA).

Media

All requests received by Representatives from the media relating to Biodiversity Challenge Funds must in all circumstances be directed to the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Secretariat. Where Representatives are asked by Defra to speak to the media, guidance and support will be coordinated by the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Secretariat.

Privacy

The names of all Representatives will be made public, in the interests of transparency. This will include, for example, the inclusion of your name on the GOV.UK and fund websites, and in relevant reports and publications published by Defra.

Please refer to Annex H of the Handbook for the Privacy Notice.

Notice and Termination of Appointment

Either the Observer organisation or the Department may terminate this appointment for any reason by giving three months' notice in writing to the other.

No notice period is applicable if this appointment is terminated early by mutual consent.

Should the Biodiversity Challenge Fund(s) be dissolved, restructured or wound up during the period of your appointment, your appointment would cease with effect from that dissolution, or such other date as is specified in any relevant legislation.

The Department may terminate the Observer status immediately by writing to you to that effect if:

- Representatives absence or conduct interferes with the good running of the Biodiversity Challenge Fund Expert Group,
- Observer organisation or Representatives become bankrupt or make an arrangement with creditors (you are, in any event obliged to inform the Department if you are made bankrupt),
- Representatives estate has been sequestrated in Scotland or you enter into a debt arrangement programme under Part 1 of the Debt Arrangement and Attachment (Scotland) Act 2002 (asp 17) as the debtor or have, under Scots law, granted a trust deed for creditors,
- Representatives are disqualified from acting as a company director (you are, in any event obliged to inform the Department if representatives are disqualified from acting as a company director),
- Representatives have been convicted (whether before or after appointment) of a criminal offence, (representatives are, in any event obliged to inform the Department if you are convicted of a criminal offence), the conviction not being spent for the purposes of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (c. 53),
- Representatives have had an allegation of sexual misconduct, including but not limited to, sexual exploitation, sexual abuse or sexual harassment upheld, whether this is within your role as a member of the Expert Committee, within your workplace, or through a court of law (you are obliged to report an allegations of sexual misconduct made against you as soon as you are aware of said allegation to ODA.Safeguarding@defra.gov.uk)
- Observer organisations are under statutory enquiry and are unable to apply or seek ODA assistance,
- Representatives become subject to a debt relief order (representatives are, in any event obliged to inform the Department if you are subject to a debt relief order),
- or if Representatives are, in the opinion of the Secretary of State, unable or unfit to discharge the functions of the appointment for any other reason of whatsoever nature.

If Defra is considering whether to terminate the Observer status, you will be notified of the proposal and of the reasons for it and will be offered an opportunity to have a meeting with the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Secretariat before any final decision is taken. If the Observer status is subsequently terminated you will receive notice in writing of this fact, such notice will contain a statement of reasons for termination.

In the event of you being notified that Defra is considering whether to terminate your status as an Observer, it may be required that you do not carry out your role for the Biodiversity Challenge Fund.

Annex E. The Seven Principles of Public Life

The Seven Principles of Public Life (also known as the Nolan Principles) apply to anyone who works as a public officeholder. Expert group members are expected to apply these principles in their approach to their term on an Expert Group.

Selflessness

Act solely in terms of the public interest.

Integrity

Avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.

Objectivity

Act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

Accountability

Accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

Openness

Act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.

Honesty

Be truthful.

Leadership

Exhibit these principles in their own behaviour and treat others with respect. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

Annex F. Conflict of Interest Policy

The Biodiversity Challenge Funds are competitive open funds where the objectivity, integrity and fairness of the assessment and outcome is fundamental to the trust that stakeholders place in those that participate in the administration of the funds.

To support this, everyone involved in the assessment and outcome of the funding rounds commits to support our approach to build and maintain this trust by respecting the Conflict of Interest policy.

This includes the Defra officials, fund administration team at NIRAS and the members of the Expert Groups, collectively referred to here as the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Team.

Members of the Expert Groups are highly valued and appointed for their individual experience and capabilities to robustly and fairly assess applications in line with the published Application Guidance and Conflicts of Interest policy. They do not represent their organisations.

The BCFs Team (Experts, NIRAS and Defra) are committed to the Seven Principles of Public Life: Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness, Honesty and Leadership.

To protect the quality of and trust in the funds, whilst delivering on the Seven Principles of Public Life, it is critical and a collective responsibility of the BCFs Team that Conflicts of Interest be effectively managed to a high standard at all times.

Applicants can come from organisations with which the BCFs Team may have personal and/or professional connections, potentially resulting in a conflict of interest, that may compromise the objectivity, integrity and fairness of the assessment and outcome.

A conflict of interest, including a perceived one, can reduce the value for money and impact that the fund can achieve, in addition to inflicting significant reputational damage.

Definition of a Conflict of Interest

A connection or relationship where a BCFs Team member's objectivity, integrity or judgment is or can be perceived to be compromised or impaired, and potentially attract perceptions of bias and unfair treatment.

Register of Interests

To manage and prevent the potential impact of a conflict of interest (perceived or actual), it is the responsibility of everyone within the BCFs Team to identify and declare at the earliest opportunity any factor or interest that may result in a real or perceived Conflict of Interest. These interests are recorded in the Register of Interests, maintained by NIRAS and Defra.

The Register of Interest will be reviewed annually prior to the assessment of applications but can be updated at any point. Everyone must actively confirm, at a minimum annually, that the information held about them is correct and complete.

Potential Conflicts of Interest

Everyone must declare at the earliest opportunity any financial or non-financial interests of their own, or of close family members which may, or may be perceived to, influence your objectivity, integrity and judgement in performing your functions.

Everyone should consider and declare the following examples of potential sources of interest within the **past 5 years**:

- The organisation which **employs or has employed** the individual;
- On the **board** of, or a **trustee** of, an organisation;
- **Consultant or unpaid advisor** to an organisation, including collaborations;
- **Personal connection** with an applicant, partner organisation or project team;
- **Post-graduate level teaching collaboration** with an organisation or an individual named in an application;
- **Close relative**, extended family, **friend**, **household member**, or **neighbour** employed or involved in the organisation or application.

A connection with an organisation or an application can be **paid or unpaid**.

This list is not exhaustive, and where an individual has a doubt as to whether a potential interest is a conflict, the interest should be declared.

Managing Declared Conflicts

Defra and the Chair, supported by NIRAS, will seek to identify, assess and mitigate any potential conflicts of interests prior to assessments beginning, but interests may only become apparent later on given the range of projects and partners involved.

The management of potential conflicts of interest requires an ongoing and collective effort of everyone involved to hold themselves and their colleagues to the highest standards and the Seven Principles of Public Life.

There are two main ways that an interest could influence the integrity of the funds:

- **Direct interest:** where a BCFs Team member has an interest in an application, the lead organisation or any of the partners that stand to benefit from an award.
- **Indirect interest:** where a BCFs Team member has an interest in a **direct competitor** to an application, the lead organisation or any of the partners that would benefit from an award not being made.

In assessing potential **direct interest**:

- **Low Risk Interest:** The interest is on record, but no further action is required, as the interest is not significant enough to warrant concern, for example the connection has not been active for a number of years, or contact is minimal.
- **High Risk Interest:** Where an individual has a connection to an application, including being named (as an individual or an organisation) on the proposal, or having advised on the proposal, or other close connection or interest, as deemed by Defra, they will then play no role in the assessment or discussion of the proposal.

Where an interest assessment is **unclear** or there is **insufficient time** to assess, it will be **considered high-risk by default**.

Assessing potential **indirect interest** is more challenging and requires personal diligence and the establishing of an environment where team members can hold one another to a high standard.

Prior to the funding round beginning and before any meetings held to discuss the applications, the BCFs Team are reminded of the Conflict of Interest policy, their commitment to the Seven Principles of Public Life and the importance of protecting the objectivity, integrity and fairness of the funds. All comments offered on an application must be objective and evidence based.

To protect the objectivity, integrity and reputation of the funds and the assessment of applications, everyone is strongly encouraged to raise concerns about their own interests and the interests of anyone present.

Where the Chair of an Expert Group or the Programme Board has a Conflict of Interest, then they will nominate another member to Chair the discussions while they are out of the room.

A record will be kept of who has assessed an application or where a member has withdrawn from a discussion due to a Conflict of Interest.

If an individual is considered to have so many high-risk interests that it significantly limits their ability to contribute equitably, then discussions may be held to consider their ongoing role.

Other matters

All discussions and all written comments on applications are to be treated as confidential; any requests under the Freedom of Information Act will be handled by Defra.

The Application Guidance clearly sets out how applications are assessed, including publication of the assessment criteria, however if a BCFs Team Member is discussing the application process and/or assessment process externally, they should be careful not to raise false expectations or generate perceived bias and should respect the confidentiality of the process.

Annex G. Remuneration and Travel and Subsistence Rules

Remuneration rates

Recruited members will be remunerated for Expert Group duties as set out below. You cannot claim for travelling time to and from meetings (although travel and subsistence costs are payable).

Recruited members shall be entirely responsible for compliance with any applicable tax rules to remuneration and any other payments or benefits provided in relation to your appointment. Please consult your tax office if you have queries.

Recruited members can claim £350 a day and Chairs can claim £400 a day.

Recruited members are not required to submit a claim if they do not wish to be reimbursed; if you do not submit or contact us before the given deadline, we will assume you do not wish to make a claim. Claims submitted after the deadline cannot be accepted unless agreed to before the deadline. The deadline will be confirmed at the end of the annual funding round.

Where a member deputises for the Chair for at least a full day, in agreement with Defra, the member can claim the Chair rate of £400 per day.

To support a consistent and fair approach, that considers the length of the applications, volume of supporting evidence and the nature of the decision that the assessment informs, we expect members to review and score applications at the following average rates:

- A) All **Stage 1 Applications**, we consider **8 Application Assessments per day** to be a proportionate level of effort.
- B) **Darwin Plus People and Skills Applications**, we consider **6 Application Assessments per day** to be a proportionate level of effort, i.e. 2 such applications being equivalent to one Darwin Plus Main Stage 2.
- C) **All other applications**, we consider **3 Application Assessments per day** to be a proportionate level of effort.

Based on the above average level of effort rate, members will be advised of the maximum number of days we expect you to claim for when you are allocated your applications. We may seek to clarify any claims under the expected amounts. Claims in excess of the advised amount will be capped at the advised amount unless there is a clear justification for exceeding this level.

Travel and Subsistence

The following rules are based on Defra's Travel and Subsistence (T&S) Policy which apply to all officials: a copy will be available on the websites alongside this Handbook.

The policy seeks to strike an appropriate balance between the costs and the benefits, taking into account: Cost, Convenience, Carbon Emissions and duty of care towards the individuals concerns.

Members will be reimbursed for travel and subsistence relevant to the remit of the group (excluding insurance), but are asked to consider sustainability, emissions and environmental issues when planning journeys, and contribute to achieving value for money by following the T&S Policy.

Rail travel (preferred)

Travel by second (standard) class rail is Defra's preferred method of travel within the UK, and should be from the closest station to the traveller's home or work address. You should ask for your train ticket to include the underground (Zone 1) travel where required.

Use of private vehicles

Public transport should always be used when available.

Cars should only be used for short journeys and with prior approval from the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Secretariat. If you are based a long way away from a public transport service, the cheapest, secure car parking should be used close to your destination or departure station.

Travel using private vehicles is discouraged unless essential e.g. on grounds of disability or where there is no practical public transport alternative.

Car parking, congestion charges, and toll charges necessarily incurred on official business are reimbursable. Members will not be reimbursed for any penalties such as parking fines, or speeding tickets incurred whilst travelling.

Use of taxis

Members may only travel by taxi **in exceptional circumstances** - where there is no other suitable method of public transport available or if you are unable to use public transport due to health reasons.

Please inform NIRAS **in advance** of your intention to travel by taxi otherwise reimbursement may be refused.

Flights

Members may travel by air if necessary. Please discuss with NIRAS **in advance** of your intention to travel by air and provide an estimate of the cost (economy class). There will be a level of flexibility between the cheapest flights and the most direct flights.

Please use public transport connections to travel between the airport and meeting location using the rail travel principles above.

Safety

Members should be able to feel safe when travelling on Expert Group business. We encourage you to plan for your safety and take all necessary health and safety precautions before and while travelling. Defra recognises there are times when you may, for a variety of reasons, feel unsafe when travelling and it is not practical to seek prior approval before taking additional or alternative steps. In such cases approval can be obtained retrospectively. Additional guidance on travelling safely within the UK and internationally is available on request from Defra, via NIRAS.

Internet/Data charges

Where members, whilst assessing or participating in meetings, incur additional internet costs (over and above their business-as-usual rates), these can be reclaimed. For example, this may be hotel internet fees whilst travelling or additional data charges associated with connecting from very remote geographic locations (e.g. Darwin Plus locations). Where possible, please discuss this as early as possible with NIRAS to understand what can be claimed.

Subsistence

Subsistence will be paid where the expense incurred is reasonable and additional to the members' normal expenditure.

For all day meetings, lunch/refreshments will be provided so subsistence rates should not normally be claimed.

Where this is not the case and has previously been agreed in advance with NIRAS, payment will be for actual expenditure within the ceiling limits.

The upper ceiling limits for subsistence claims (as at March 2025) are:

- £7 (when on Expert Group business for 5 hours or less; one meal);
- £12 (5 to 10 hours; two meals);
- £17 (10 to 12 hours, three meals); and
- £33 for a 24-hour period.

Optional tips and gratuities may be included up to a maximum of 10% and provided the total amount remains within the limits. Costs relating to alcohol will not be reimbursed. Copies of original receipts for all costs must be provided.

Staying overnight

Where possible, overnight stays should be avoided to keep costs down. If you need to stay overnight, please refer to the T&S Policy for the upper limits, currently London - up to £160 per night; elsewhere up to £100 per night. Defra has the flexibility to agree an additional amount of up to £20 per night where clearly justified.

If you are having difficulties sourcing appropriate accommodation within these rates, please contact NIRAS.

Caring allowance

Defra understands that members will potentially have caring commitments that may need to be considered when fulfilling their roles. If members are travelling to meetings and are likely to incur **additional costs associated with their caring commitments**, please discuss this with NIRAS at the earliest opportunity.

How to claim

Travel and subsistence claims must be made on the forms available on the fund websites, supported by evidence and returned to NIRAS via your fund mailbox.

Please note that travel and subsistence claims, and remuneration must be clearly set out separately on the claim form to ensure they are dealt with correctly.

Copies of receipts must be provided for all expenses claimed (except for remuneration).

Receipts or tickets for rail travel must show the departure and arrival stations. A copy of your Oyster card journey history (available through the Oyster Card website), or annotated bank statement, and price is accepted as a travel receipt.

Where there is no evidence of the rate used, expenses arising in a currency other than GBP will be reimbursed at the exchange rate stated at www.oanda.com on the Friday immediately preceding the date on which the purchase was made or services acquired, or if on a Friday, at the rate stated on that day. Conversion date, source and rate should be specified on the invoice.

If you have any special circumstances, requirements or have a query, please contact the NIRAS team for further guidance.

Annex H. Expert Group Membership Privacy Notice 2022

The purpose of this Privacy Notice is to inform you of the use that will be made of your personal data in connection with the Biodiversity Challenge Funds: Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) Challenge Fund and Darwin Plus.
1. Who is collecting my data?
The data controller is the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). You can contact the Defra Data Protection Officer at: Address: Defra Group Data Protection Officer, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Seacole Building, 2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DF. Email: DefraGroupDataProtectionOfficer@defra.gov.uk Any questions about how we are using your personal data and your associated rights should be sent to the above contact.
2. What of my data is being collected and how is it used? What is the legal basis for the processing?
Defra may collect your name, address, email, phone number, job title and details of your current and past professional experience, organisations and interests. Defra will use this personal data for the purpose of managing your membership and activities as a member of a Biodiversity Challenge Fund Expert Group, including the management of conflicts of interest. Processing of this data is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest or in the exercise of official authority vested in Defra under Section 153 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, and the International Development Act 2002. We would like to include your name on our website listed below. We will process this on a public task basis (Article 6(1)(e)). http://www.darwininitiative.org.uk https://darwinplus.org.uk/ https://iwt.challengefund.org.uk/ We would also like to include your email address in the Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) Challenge Fund and Darwin Plus mailing list to send certain communications to you in relation to details about the funds; newsletters; events, and general communications about the funds. We will process this on a public task basis (Article 6(1)(e)). We may be required to release data in certain circumstances to comply with legal obligations placed upon us including under the 2004 Environmental Information Regulations and the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

3. Who will my data be shared with?
For purposes of administering, monitoring and evaluating your membership of an Expert Group, your personal data may be shared by us with: • our Fund Manager (currently NIRAS or a similar organisation if a new Fund Manager is secured); • Darwin Expert Committee/Darwin Plus Advisory Group/Illegal Wildlife Trade Advisory Group members; • other governmental bodies (including Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Cabinet Office, Border Force, Home Office, Ministry of Defence); • for Darwin Plus, UK Overseas Territory Governments; and • IT contractors for purposes of managing our website if you give your consent for us to include your personal data on our website.
4. If you are relying on my consent to process my data, can I withdraw my consent?
You have the right to withdraw consent at any time, where processing is based on your consent.
5. How long will my data be held for?
Your personal financial data will be kept by us for a period of up to 7 years after project end in line with the retention period for financial information, as this may be required for auditing purposes. Personal data provided on application forms may be kept for a period of 5 years for the purposes of independent evaluation and programme assessment.
6. What will happen if I don't provide the data?
Failure to provide the personal data requested would prevent our ability to manage your membership and the conflicts of interest and would therefore prevent your membership from continuing
7. Will my data be used for automated decision-making or profiling?
The information you provide is not connected with automated decision making (making a decision solely by automated means without any human involvement) or profiling (automated processing of personal data to evaluate certain things about an individual).
8. Will my data be transferred outside of the EEA? If it will, how will it be protected?
We may send personal data to parties listed in Section 3 above, including those outside the European Economic Area to a country without an adequacy decision. This will be to support the administering, monitoring and evaluating of your membership.

Prior to transferring your personal data to a country where no adequacy decision is in place, we will ensure suitable safeguards are in place.

If you would like more information on such safeguards, please contact the Defra Data Protection Officer.

9. What are my rights?

A list of your rights under the General Data Protection Regulation, the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018), is accessible at: <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/individual-rights/>

10. How do I complain?

You should first raise any concerns with the Defra Data Protection Officer.

You also have the right to lodge a complaint with the ICO (Information Commissioners Office) (supervisory authority) at any time. Should you wish to exercise that right full details are available at: <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/individual-rights/>

Personal Information Charter

Defra's Personal Information Charter, which gives details of your rights in respect of the handling of your personal data, is on the Defra section of Gov.uk. If you don't have access to the internet, please telephone the Defra helpline 03459 33 55 77 and ask to speak to the Data Protection Officer for a copy of the Information Charter.

Annex I. Illustration of the Grant Application Process

The funds typically adopt either a single stage or two stage application process. The Expert Groups' primary role is during the assessment of the applications and the following Sift Meeting, although strategic and technical advice from the Expert Groups will feed into the design and detail of each funding round.

Some schemes may vary from these illustrations, for example Darwin Initiative Extra and Darwin Plus Strategic follow a single stage process, but the sift shortlists a number of applications for a clarification/interview process before agreeing which applications to recommend.

The Chair of the Expert Group will represent the Expert Group at the Programme Board stage.

Figure 1: Single Stage Process with Expert Group activities in orange.

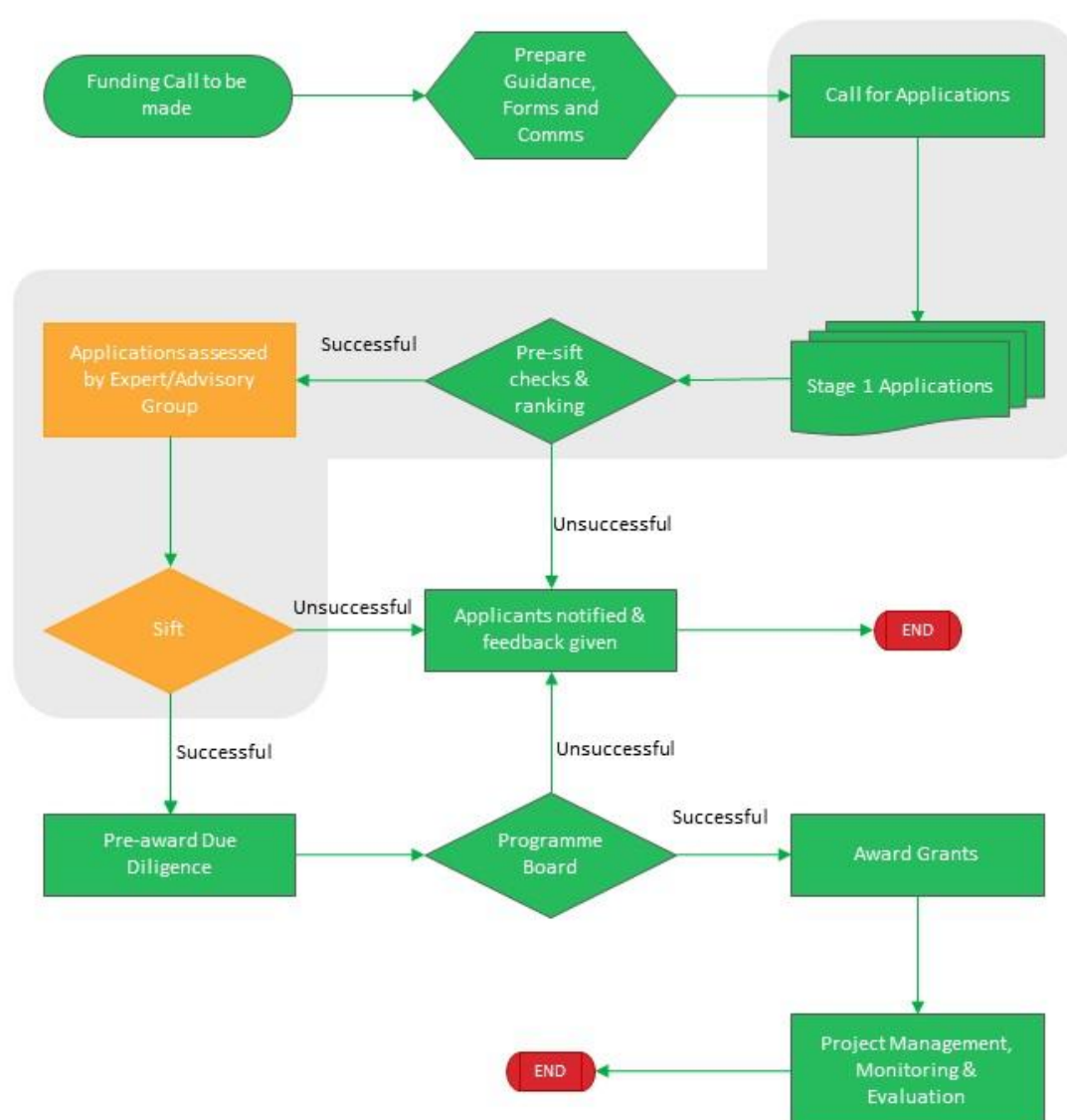
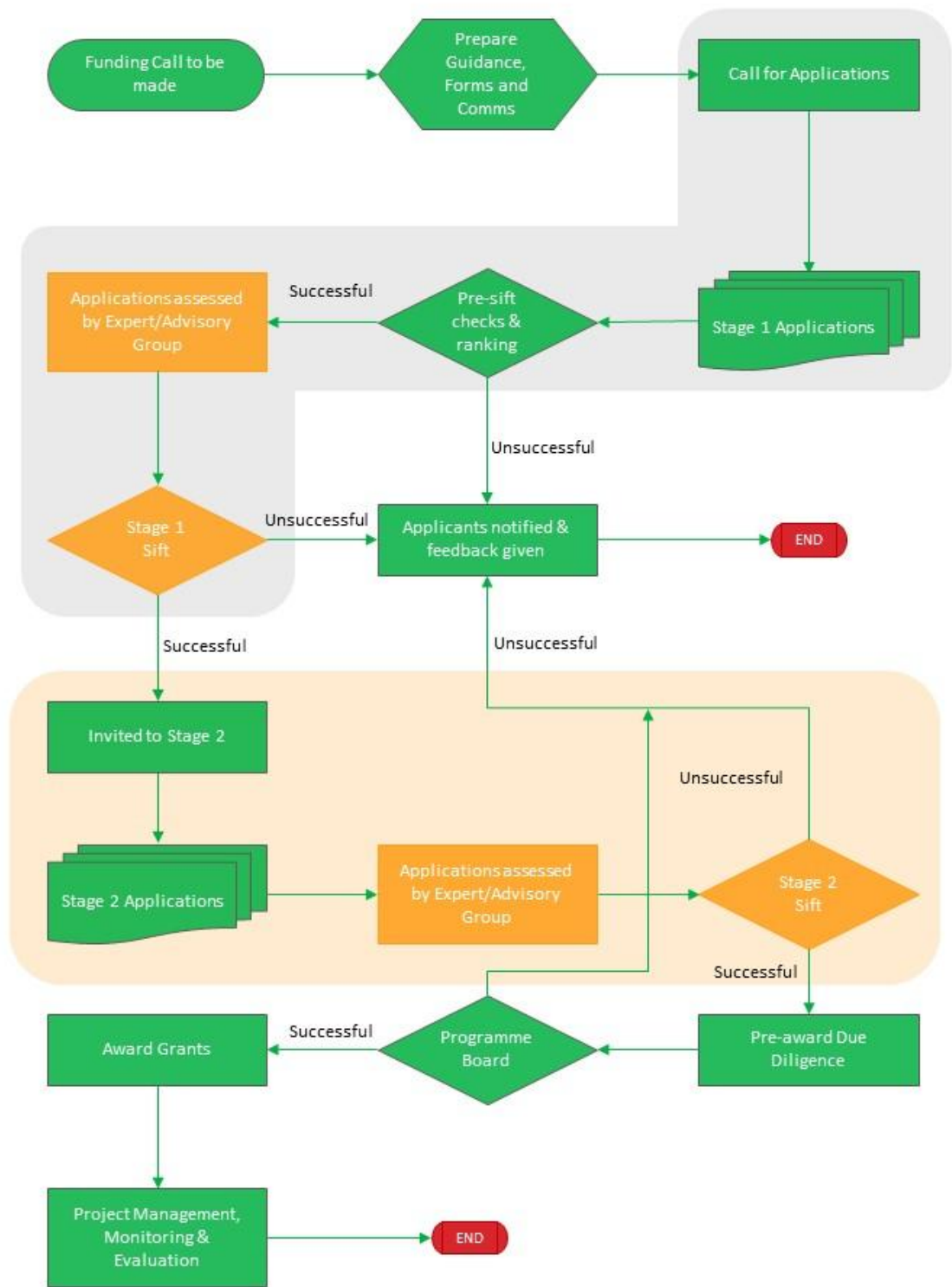


Figure 2: Two Stage Process with Expert Group activities in orange.



Annex J. Grant Assessment Process

All eligible applications that meet the required standard will be assessed by the Expert Group, who are independent experts within the area that the fund operates.

The Expert Group follows a strict code of practice: if any member has been involved in or is closely associated with an application, the applicant or a project partner, they must **declare their interest** and play no role in its assessment.

A basic overview of the typical assessment process:

- 1) **Initial Review:** Applications that are poor quality, incomplete or do not meet the eligibility criteria will be rejected. Applicants will be informed of the reasons for rejection. This assessment is completed by NIRAS.
- 2) **Independent Expert Assessment:** Applications are scored by at least three Expert Group members against the assessment criteria to inform the discussion at the Sift Meeting.
- 3) **Sift Meeting:** Members discuss applications and agree the strongest proposals to recommend to Defra or invite to Stage 2 (followed by a second assessment and sift meeting).
- 4) **Funding Decision:** Programme Board reviews the Expert Group recommendations within the context of Defra's principles (risk, political economy, finance etc.) and awards the grants.

Defra reserves the right to apply more stringent assessment at the Initial Review if the number of applications is high to ensure that the Experts can focus their reviews on those with the highest chance of being discussed at the Sift Meeting.

Assessment Criteria

Applications are assessed by members of the Expert Group against the fund's criteria on a 0-6 scale for each score. Unless noted, all benefits or impacts are in reference to the host country.

Assessment Scoring

Points	Description
6	<i>Strong Demonstration of Evidence.</i> Substantial evidence presented that it meets all the of assessment criteria, with no concerns raised ; the majority of which are met to a high standard. There may be a few minor issues which if addressed may improve the project, but they are unlikely to be detrimental to the delivery of the project and should not prevent it from being funded without changes being made.
5	<i>Good Demonstration of Evidence.</i> Good evidence presented that it meets most of the assessment criteria, no major concerns identified . The met criteria are mostly to a high standard. There are minor issues that could improve the project, but should not prevent it from being funded. It is likely to significantly contribute to the objectives of the fund.
4	<i>Acceptable Demonstration of Evidence.</i> The proposed project meets most of the assessment criteria, no major concerns identified . The criteria it does meet are often to a good standard. There are a few minor issues that would improve this project which they would be advised to consider if funded. It is likely to contribute to the objectives of the fund.

<i>Indicative scoring threshold of competitive applications</i>	
3	<i>Emerging Demonstration of Evidence</i> that the proposed project meets many of the assessment criteria, some concerns raised . Those met criteria are largely to an acceptable standard, and the concerns can be addressed. It has the potential to contribute to the objectives of the fund, if the issues are addressed to strengthen it.
2	<i>Weak Demonstration of Evidence</i> . The project meets some of the assessment criteria, or has raised concerns . Those criteria it does meet are to a modest standard, but the application requires important changes to address the concerns and assessment criteria in order to make it competitive.
1	<i>Minimal demonstration of Evidence</i> . The proposed project is unsatisfactory and meets only a few criteria, or raises important concerns . The proposal is likely to require significant revision.
0	<i>No demonstration of Evidence</i> . The project fails to meet any of the criteria outlined and raises serious concerns e.g. flawed approach, subject to serious technical difficulties or risks, unclearly written that it cannot be properly assessed, or is duplicative.

Sift Meeting

Defra will provide guidance on the number of applications that could potentially progress to Stage 2 or could be awarded. Using this number, the Chair will structure the discussions in order to provide Defra with the appropriate number and standard of recommend projects.

All recommended projects must meet a standard, for example in ambition, value for money, quality of design, capabilities and capacity, and matching the requirements as set out in the guidance.

Some principles used to structure the meeting include:

- All participants are expected to have reviewed the Sift table and any associated documentation ready to discuss the applications they have reviewed.
- Prior to discussing any application, members with Conflicts of Interest will leave the (virtual/in person) room and play no role in the discussion or decision. If any potential conflicts of interest are identified during the Sift Meeting, these should be raised with the Chair.
- The ambition is to reach consensus of the group on the assessment of each application, but the Chair will make the final decision where consensus is not possible.
- To make robust recommendations, each application must be treated fairly and consistently with participants adhering to the principles of public life.
- Irrespective of each application's score, any member can challenge or champion any application, supporting its case for consideration or flagging risks/issues.
- Discussions often focus on applications that have received a range of scores from the assessors to challenge, test and understand the assessment scores.
- Where possible, the assessment notes and discussions at the Sift Meeting are used to provide constructive feedback to the applicants in support of strengthening the standards of projects and future applications. It is not always feasible to provide lower scoring applicants with tailored feedback.

Results of applications

Once the funding decision has been made, **all Lead Applicants** (both successful and unsuccessful) **will receive notification**. If successful they will receive an offer of funding or, in the case of a two-stage process, an invitation to Stage 2.

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

Normally, only unsuccessful applicants whose applications were competitive will receive tailored feedback in support of strengthening the standards of projects and future applications.

Resubmission of applications

If an application is unsuccessful, it may be resubmitted in a future round, but it:

- **can only be resubmitted once**, unless there is prior agreement owing to exceptional circumstances or the proposed new project is significantly different.
- **must** outline how the applicant has **responded to any feedback** or gaps to strengthen the application.

Feedback

Feedback is a valued method to support the development of capability of potential applicants, and strengthen current or future proposals in support of the objectives of the funds.

Applicants recommended to Defra for funding are provided **specific feedback** that may form a caveat of funding or a recommendation to strengthen their project.

Applicants **invited to submit a Stage 2 application** are provided **specific feedback** on their Stage 1 application; **this must be responded to in the Stage 2 application**.

Near-misses: applications that are considered **competitive but narrowly miss** being invited to Stage 2 or recommended to Defra for funding are provided **specific feedback** on how to strengthen future applications.

Non-Competitive applications that are significantly below the expected standard and would require substantial work to be competitive, are not always provided with specific feedback but are encouraged to consider application guidance and other available resources ahead of any future applications.

This feedback is also utilised when reviewing funding guidance, workshops and information notes.

Annex K. Safeguarding and Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment

All members of the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Expert Groups are required to uphold the Common PSEAH Principles found in Part 2 of the Common Approach to Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Sexual Abuse and Sexual Harassment (CAPSEAH) which can be read in full [here](#).

If you have been subjected to or have concerns around SEAH during the course of your work with the BCFs please inform ODA.Safeguarding@defra.gov.uk. You are obliged under the Terms of Condition of this contract to inform Defra of any allegations of sexual misconduct made against yourself. To not report can lead to cancellation of the contract without notice.

Common PSEAH Principles

1. **SEAH is prohibited.** SEA constitutes gross misconduct and grounds for termination of contract, and potential prosecution under criminal, civil or military law. SH is misconduct and can constitute gross misconduct depending on its severity. Acts of SEAH are an abuse of power and undermine the integrity and impact of HDP work. In particular:
 - a. **Actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions, is prohibited.**
 - b. **Exchange of money, employment, goods, or services for sex, including demands for sex / 'sexual favours' or other forms of abusive, humiliating, degrading or exploitative behaviour is prohibited.** This includes exchange of any assistance or protection that is due to people or communities.
 - c. **Any sexual relationship which involves improper use of rank, role or position, or any abuse of power and power imbalances, is prohibited.**
 - d. **Sexual activity with children (persons under the age of 18) by those engaged in HDP work is prohibited, regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally.** Mistaken belief regarding the age of a child is not a defence.
 - e. **Sexual harassment of co-workers (whether in the same organisation or not) or people in communities receiving assistance or protection, is prohibited.**
2. **Zero tolerance for inaction.** This means: zero tolerance for acts of SEAH; zero tolerance for inaction to prevent, report or respond to SEAH; and zero tolerance for retaliation against victim-survivors or whistleblowers. It does not mean having zero cases of SEAH being reported. Reporting is strongly encouraged and should not be penalised.
3. **Tailor PSEAH approaches to the context and ensure the approaches are inclusive and victim-survivor centred.** Consult people and communities, particularly vulnerable groups. Build on and strengthen existing community and national mechanisms when assessing SEAH risk and designing PSEAH approaches. Embed and prioritise the rights, safety, needs, wellbeing and dignity of victim-survivors and their communities.
4. **Embed SEAH prevention as part of working culture.** Always act with integrity and help create and maintain an environment which prevents, reports and responds to SEAH. Leaders and managers at all levels have particular responsibility to resource, develop, implement and support PSEAH systems to proactively identify, monitor and address SEAH risks and reports.

5. **Respond appropriately to suspicions, reports and incidents of SEAH.** In particular:
 - a. Knowledge, concerns or suspicions of SEAH by HDP personnel, whether in the same organisation or not, must be reported in line with organisational policies, guidance and reporting mechanisms.
 - b. Assistance and investigations should prioritise the rights, safety, needs, wellbeing and dignity of victim-survivors. Help victim-survivors who report an incident to access support, regardless of whether they participate in an investigation.
 - c. Hold those found to have committed SEAH accountable and take appropriate action in line with relevant due process.
6. **Respect confidentiality and protect against retaliation.** Ensure reports can be made safely and confidentially. All those involved in an allegation should be protected against retaliation, have their confidentiality and dignity respected and receive appropriate support. This includes victim-survivors, complainants, witnesses, whistle-blowers, and the subject(s) of complaint.