



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee

Oral evidence: The UK Government's support of education for Overseas Territories students, HC 773

Monday 20 May 2024

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 20 May 2024.

Watch the meeting

Members present: Alicia Kearns (Chair); Dan Carden; Fabian Hamilton; Brendan O'Hara; Henry Smith.

Education Committee member present: Mr Robin Walker.

Questions 1-50

Witnesses

I: Luke Hall MP, Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education at Department for Education; Becky Richards, Deputy Director, Overseas Territories and Polar Directorate at Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office; and Philippa Rouse, Director Migration & Citizenship, Senior Responsible Officer, Future Border & Immigration System Programme at Home Office.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– Department for Education:

committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/130273/html/



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Luke Hall MP, Becky Richards and Philippa Rouse.

Q1 Chair: Welcome to this hearing of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee Sub-Committee looking at the UK Government's support of education in the overseas territories. We are grateful to you, Minister, for joining us. We know that this is not your usual Select Committee, so we appreciate you taking the time. We are delighted, too, to be joined by Becky Richards from the Foreign Office and, shortly, by Philippa Rouse from the Home Office, so that we have a comprehensive, cross-Government response and we are able to deal with everything.

To kick off, Minister, what are our responsibilities, as the UK Government see them, to education in the overseas territories and to our British family?

Luke Hall: Thank you, Chair. We support the delivery of education in the overseas territories in a number of ways. It is fair to say that it has been a bit of an evolving package over the last 10 to 15 years or so. First of all, we had the introduction of home fee status back in 2007-08. More recently, we had the introduction of the eligibility for tuition fee loans in 2022-23, which our Department has been closely involved in. We support with the scholarship schemes—the Turing scheme, the Chevening scheme—and with direct practitioner-to-practitioner support, so peer-to-peer support, training and advice, for example. We are involved with FCDO colleagues in ODA support as well. That is the comprehensive range of measures that we take to support the overseas territories, and we work closely with other Departments such as the Home Office and the FCDO on that.

Q2 Chair: Three overseas territories do not have access to higher education: the Falklands, Pitcairn, and St Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha. How do we assess that we are meeting our obligations under article 73 of the UN charter? Education sits with the overseas territory itself, which obviously has its own Education Minister, but we have the requirement to ensure that education is provided at an adequate level.

Luke Hall: Yes, absolutely. The answer is slightly different depending on the overseas territory itself. In some places, in ODA-eligible territories, there are support schemes—maintenance or loan schemes, for example—and in others, it is about providing advice and expertise to ensure that people have the ability to access higher education.

For example, looking at how closely we work with the Falkland Islands, they have schemes that allow £22,000-a-year grants to individuals looking to study in higher education. I think it is £22,000 a year for both undergrads and postgrads, with some slight changes to the postgrad scheme—some extra conditions. So it depends on the overseas territory itself, but again, it comes back to that range of options that we have available: fee loan support, scholarship schemes, ODA support where



HOUSE OF COMMONS

applicable and, probably crucially, just investment in the capacity in some of those places—particularly in ODA-eligible territories, where we invest in primary and secondary school education and the wider digital capacity, to make sure people have that type of access. So it is bespoke, depending on the request of the overseas territory and the type of need that they have.

Q3 **Chair:** Welcome, Philippa, and apologies—

Philippa Rouse: Sorry I'm late.

Chair: No, it's not your fault at all. You are very welcome.

What is the rhythm of engagement between your officials and, essentially, Education Ministers in the OTs, and what oversight are you given of whether that is appropriate and taking place at an appropriate period?

Luke Hall: The very regular engagement is often from the FCDO and directly with the overseas territories, and then by the DFE—certainly at ministerial level and at official level, where required, too. There is a regular drumbeat of engagement from the FCDO, and others, with the overseas territories, particularly the ODA-eligible territories. They have monthly conversations about spending, for example, and, particularly for places like Montserrat, Pitcairn and St Helena, they have annual delegations and missions, whereby Foreign Office officials spend time on location, talking about educational delivery.

In terms of the DFE, we meet at ministerial level as well. Every Government Department now has an overseas territory Minister. I am the overseas territory Minister in the DFE. Previously it was the previous Minister of State for Schools, who met regularly with overseas territory Ministers. We always accept, as a matter of principle, requests from overseas territory Ministers on these matters, so he met and took forward some requests from overseas territory Governments last year. I think that in March 2023 the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton met the Chief Minister in St Helena to talk about some of the educational assessment provisions that we have in the UK and how we can share them abroad, and that was taken forward. So there is a ministerial drumbeat of meetings. In fact, I met very briefly the Education Minister for the British Virgin Islands on Friday and I am also meeting a number of them later today, when I am sure we will be talking about education matters as well.

Q4 **Chair:** It is really good to hear that there is a positive drumbeat of ministerial engagement, but what if an overseas territory Government official or Member has a concern? In 2012, your Department published an offer to overseas territories, whereby it promised they would be able to speak directly to the Department for Education, so while I understand the Foreign Office is the main body for connections, there should be a direct line in the Department for Education. Is that a phone line? Is there a dedicated email address? How do people in the OTs know who it is in the Department for Education that they can reach, and how to do so directly, without having to go through the Foreign Office?



Luke Hall: There is a direct way to contact officials in the Department. I would have to check for you the exact mechanism of contact, but they can come to us with questions. For example, they contacted us with questions about eligibility for home fee status a while ago. We made sure we gave them very quickly—within the same week, I think, and it may even have been the same day, thinking back on it—a response about eligibility rules and others. So there are ways to contact directly the DFE, and our officials will always respond there, but it is probably fair to say that FCDO officials do a lot of that engagement with the overseas territories as well.

Q5 **Chair:** Is there a particular official in your Department who has, in their brief, overseas territories, and if so, how many people in your Department have that in their title or job description?

Luke Hall: In terms of how many have it in the actual job description, I will have to come back to you. There is certainly an international unit in the DFE who work on a number of these questions, but I can find the exact figures for you in terms of how many have overseas territory liaison, for example, in their titles.

Q6 **Chair:** Do you think it is right that overseas territories are put within the international directorate? I ask because obviously they are part of the British family; they are not foreign. Yes, this Committee has a fundamental issue with the fact that it is the Foreign Office overall that holds the relationship, but that is where we are, and there have been significant improvements over the last five years, which is why most OTs have said they are happy for that to continue. But do you think they should be sat within the international directorate, given how absolutely different the needs are? Do you think there should be a specific OT team who have—not necessarily full-time—responsibilities?

Luke Hall: To me there are two key things. One is that direct-level ministerial designated contact for overseas territories. That is me and that is why I will always accept every single meeting request from overseas territory colleagues. The second thing is about the policy offering that we are giving them. I do think—going back to some of the changes that we have talked about, like the tuition fee loan change in 2022-23—there has been a positive offer there. So I think there is good engagement at a ministerial level, and certainly lots at official level, through DFE and FCDO.

At a ministerial level, there is a meeting with colleagues from overseas territories tonight, and we will no doubt be talking about some of these issues. It feels to me like the ministerial-level engagement is good and the policy offering is good, but of course we continue to take any representations they make to us very seriously and look at them as soon as they come in.

Chair: Thank you. We are delighted to have the Chair of the Education Committee here with us, so I turn to Robin.

Q7 **Mr Walker:** Thank you. I was very interested in your point about our right hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis meeting overseas territories Ministers. I did that job, Minister for School Standards, for



HOUSE OF COMMONS

about nine months, and I don't recall any engagement at that stage. Is this a responsibility that has been reallocated within the Department, or is it something that is new as of 2023, when other commitments were made to the overseas territories? I am not quite clear. It certainly wasn't happening during my time at the DFE.

Luke Hall: The Prime Minister wrote to all Departments to ask for every Department to have a designated overseas territory ministerial lead. Forgive me, but I cannot remember your exact period in the DFE or who may have been responsible—I would have to check. But I know that the Minister of State for Schools at the time was having regular meetings back in early 2023, when there were a number of requests to look at a few different specific issues. One of them was that assessment issue, and there was another around delivering curriculum support in one of the overseas territories. There were a few other requests as well. That regular drumbeat certainly happens, and certainly today there are very clear departmental ministerial leads.

Q8 **Mr Walker:** That is welcome. In terms of the resources funded by the Department, like the Education Endowment Foundation, which builds evidence of what works in education, as well as opportunities such as Oak National Academy, are those made available to overseas territories for their education systems? Is there any process of engagement and information sharing around what the Department is doing in that space?

Luke Hall: On the Education Endowment Foundation, yes, that is a hub for evidence about education to be shared internationally. That is certainly available to overseas territories. Of course we want to do that, and it is a very fair challenge about how we are making sure that overseas territories are aware of the ability to access and engage with that. I am happy to take that away and have a look at it.

Q9 **Chair:** Particularly on Oak, it would be great if you could write to us about that, because that is an exceptional point and something that could easily be rolled out and made more available.

Before I turn to Henry, Minister, when you first came into your ministerial role, which I am aware was only a few months ago, how soon did anyone mention the words "overseas territory" to you? Was it only when this hearing was mentioned, or when the first meeting request came through from an OT?

Luke Hall: The honest answer is that I had a huge amount of induction, like all Ministers—

Chair: I can imagine. Luckily, you remember yours!

Luke Hall: That was in the first couple of weeks, across a range of different issues. No doubt it will have come up in the early conversations that this hearing was happening. I think it was probably established before I was even appointed. I cannot quite remember whether it first came up because this inquiry was happening, but there were certainly lots of different briefings, including about international education matters. I



HOUSE OF COMMONS

cannot remember the exact point, but it was certainly early on, if that is any reassurance.

Chair: Thank you ever so much.

- Q10 **Henry Smith:** Thank you for being with us today. The Government's international development White Paper stated that the UK will be "as ambitious for our OTs as we are for the UK". How does the DFE intend to promote co-ordination of the ODA for education in the British overseas territories?

Luke Hall: There are two key points in terms of ODA. One is about how much ODA is reaching the OTs year on year, and what the direction of travel is in terms of how much is getting there. The second is about how much of that ODA is actually spent on education and education-related matters when it reaches ODA-eligible overseas territories.

On both questions, there is a reasonably positive story to tell, in that the amount of ODA reaching territories is increasing. If you look at St Helena, that increased 4% this year, I think, going up from £31.8 million to just over £33 million this year. Pitcairn went up from £28.4 million to over £30 million. So the direction of travel is positive.

The question underneath that is, how much of that is actually getting to education-related matters? It is slightly more difficult to track than it would be in this country, just because of the way that education spend is checked and controlled. You can quite easily track education and spend on young people. St Helena was spending 6.9% of its overall recurrent budget on education and young person support in 2021-22 and that is forecast to be 7.8% this year, so the direction of travel is broadly positive. It is the same in Montserrat, which was 7.7% in 2022-23 and 8.5% this year.

It is definitely a two-pronged challenge. It is about making sure that the support is getting there and then, once it is there, supporting the overseas territories when they make domestic decisions about spending it on education and, crucially, helping to make sure that it is spent effectively.

- Q11 **Henry Smith:** Thank you, Minister. Perhaps this is a wider question for the officials. Last year, the FCDO announced that it would be co-ordinating a cross-departmental strategy for the overseas territories. What is the status on how that strategy has developed up to this point?

Becky Richards: Good afternoon. Yes, I am happy to answer on the strategy; I am fortunate to be responsible for it in my role. You are right to point out that it was announced last year. What started us off was the joint declaration, which was agreed at the November Joint Ministerial Council and published in December. It set out the combined vision, agreed by all the leaders of the overseas territories and the UK, about what we want the future of our relationship to look like.

At the moment we are consulting on the UK strategy for the overseas territories, and the intention is to publish that this year. It will be about



HOUSE OF COMMONS

how the UK delivers our part of that vision, as well as existing commitments and obligations to the territories. The process is for consultation to be in person as much as possible. The Minister has asked my team to take on the lead on that. I have been fortunate to be able to visit as many territories as possible for in-person meetings, and my team has done some of them as well. The meetings are variable according to whom the Government in the territory want us to see. I am happy to be flexible to make sure we listen to what the territory wants us to hear; I think that is right.

Minister Rutley, as the lead Minister for the overseas territories in the UK Government, is also chairing meetings with the leaders and premiers of the territories to hear from them directly, and to update them about how the consultations are going and key themes that are coming out. The Minister had a call last week and there will be further calls ahead of the publication.

- Q12 **Henry Smith:** Coming to education more specifically, what aspirations are outlined in that strategy for education in the overseas territories? I imagine that will vary—or not, perhaps—depending on which overseas territory we are referring to.

Becky Richards: I am afraid it would be a little ahead of the game for me to set out what will be in the strategy specifically, as it is still in development. The FCDO is leading as the co-ordinating Department, which is our role on overseas territories. The Department for Education is certainly brought into discussions on what specific education commitments there will be in the strategy. It is also important to say that, as set out in the declaration, the intention is for the UK to enter into bilateral partnership compacts with each individual territory after the strategy is published. That will allow us to get into specifics about what our shared priorities are and what each territory can expect from the UK and vice versa.

- Q13 **Henry Smith:** When are you aiming to publish the strategy?

Becky Richards: The aim is to publish it as soon as possible this year.

- Q14 **Henry Smith:** Minister, can I turn back to you? What input does the Department for Education have into that strategy? Can you give us any idea about what sort of aspirations the DFE has for the strategy for the OTs?

Luke Hall: The consultation on the strategy itself is live now. The key thing is making sure that when we get to that point of having individual agreements and priorities set with overseas territories, they reflect the challenges that they have. As the Committee knows, there is a wide, diverse set of educational needs and priorities in the overseas territories. What is required in some of the ODA-eligible territories will present completely different challenges from some of the others.

In some it may be more about infrastructure, capacity building, teacher support and training, so there may be some different asks, but we are



keen for those to be drawn out by the overseas territories themselves in the process. It will depend on what comes to us as part of the request, but ultimately we want to support overseas territories to be able to deliver strong, locally driven education systems with good access to further education for people who want to take that route. It will be mainly locally driven, but the key goals and narratives from us will be ones we want to feed into the process.

- Q15 **Henry Smith:** Finally, will that strategy for the educational aspirations for overseas territories cover everything from nursery through to universities and further and higher education, or is there a particular focus on primary and secondary?

Luke Hall: It is probably a bit early to set out at this stage, as we are still in the early consultation phase about the strategy itself, but our expectation and hope from DFE is that when we get to the point of publication, we will be talking about mechanisms to help people deliver the narrative of strong, locally robust education systems that enable people to access good-quality education, teaching and opportunities onwards. Sorry if that sounds a little vague—it is just because we are still at the early consultation stage in the process.

- Q16 **Chair:** I have two quick follow-ups. Becky, when you were talking about consulting on the strategy, it sounded like we are mainly engaging with Premiers and Governors. There are only 272,000 people in all the OTs put together. That is less than half the population of Leicestershire. I would like to think that if we were writing a strategy on this scale that covers every single aspect of people's lives, we would find a way to engage with the 600,000 people of Leicestershire. Can you give me some reassurance that we are not just relying on Premiers and Governors, not least when 27% of the population of OTs are under 24? Education in particular is something they will have strong views on, but more generally the young population will have strong aspirations of what they want for their futures. We know that many of the Governments end up being family affairs or repeatedly run in the community, shall we say.

Becky Richards: The approach we have taken to the strategy consultation is very much driven by how the OT Government would like us to engage. I think I should step back a bit to mention that there was a period of letter consultation over last summer. This has been quite a process. There were letters shared between the Minister responsible for the overseas territories, who changed in the middle, with the Premiers and Governors asking them for feedback. There were two sets of letters. That led us to the declaration to start with and gave us some starter points for the strategy consultation. We are doing this period of consultation in person as much as possible, but some is unfortunately remote. Who we meet and how we do it is being led by the overseas territory Governments themselves. The Governors' offices are in touch with the OT Governments, and they decide who we meet and how we speak to them. It is really variable according to each territory. When I visited St Helena, there were some large meetings to which members of the public had been invited,



HOUSE OF COMMONS

representing specific specialties and areas of expertise. So there is a real diversity of views coming through from the consultation.

Chair: Can I use this opportunity to put forward my concern that that is the way we are going about this? If we were looking at the population of the whole of the UK, it would be a different situation. I don't think it is too much to ask for a basic online survey, so that young people across the OTs, or anyone from across the OTs, can share their views. Given that we are not yet at the stage where you are putting pen to paper, I feel very strongly—and I will consult my Committee afterwards—that we should be giving the opportunity to all 272,000 OT citizens to have an input into the future of their OTs.

Mr Walker: As a supplementary, it might be worth talking to the office of the Children's Commissioner to see if they can provide advice on youth engagement and the way in which you go about that. She does a fantastic job of driving engagement and having the whole concept of "no decision about us without us" with young people in the English system. She may be able to provide some advice and support as to how that can be done with the OTs.

Q17 **Chair:** And perhaps that phrase—"no decision about us without us"—could be applied here? The reality is that this is one of the problems historically with our relationship with our OTs. They feel that we in London or their Governments impose decisions on them, whereas we want this to be a family. I am sure there is a way in which the Foreign Office can provide feedback. Unlike you guys, with a very small team I have been able to do surveys of 5,000 households and have had over 700 responses back and analysed them within my IPSA-limited budget, so I would encourage that.

One final question before I turn to Fabian: The Chagossian support fund is obviously all about how we support Chagossians in the UK, but we find that there is an issue—Henry will have far more expertise on this than I do—in helping them adjust and adapt to the UK and fully engage with education and the additional support around education. Has the Department for Education engaged with the Chagossian support fund? If not, is that something you might be able to take away, Minister?

Luke Hall: I do not know the answer to that, Chair. I will take that away and come back to you in writing if that is okay.

Chair: That would be good. It is a big, big fund that has been completely underused and we cannot afford for it not to be used. We have a moral duty to Chagossians—our Committee has been very clear on this—to better support them. Additional education support and all the additional services beyond education that the Department for Education has within it might be a good place for the Department to look at.

Q18 **Fabian Hamilton:** Minister, your Department's most recent offer to the overseas territories was published in 2012. I wondered why you had not updated your offer to the territories in the last 12 years.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Luke Hall: The policy offer definitely has changed in that period. The introduction of the tuition fee loan eligibility was a big change. It is still early days for how that is settling in. How many people will take up that opportunity or some of the changes in the scholarships scheme, like the Turing scheme? And there is the way that we deliver ODA support and DFE engages with FCDO and others in that process. We have got some positive policy changes coming forward and we have just heard, from an FCDO perspective, that the resets of the relationship, with these new agreements that will be coming forward, are going to fundamentally change the agreements that we have with overseas territories. We have our forward process now. The policy offering has changed quite significantly.

Q19 **Fabian Hamilton:** When was the last time you consulted any of the territories about how they can support education in their region?

Luke Hall: We have different mechanisms for different overseas territories. For example, on ODA-eligible overseas territories we have an annual delegation where we meet the chief Ministers and education officials and talk to them about the sorts of things that they want to see in policy challenges there. In March this year, just a few weeks ago, officials were talking about education delivery—it was the same in the Falklands, too. The mechanisms differ slightly depending on the relationship with the country.

On top of that we have the bilateral meetings, ministerial meetings and the regular FCDO official-led engagement. There is definitely an ongoing conversation that happens. As I say, some of these policy requests get resolved through that mechanism, like the previous Schools Minister resolving some of these challenges and questions that people brought forward. That definitely is happening; change is happening. But of course we are always looking to continue to improve that type of process.

Q20 **Fabian Hamilton:** Thank you for that. A year ago it was announced that there would be a new joint ministerial group on the overseas territories. It was to be formed with a representative from each Government Department. Have you had a chance to attend the ministerial group meeting for the overseas territories?

Luke Hall: There has not been one since I was appointed a few weeks ago, but I think one is happening tomorrow—very soon. It didn't align with timings, but I am very much looking forward to attending it.

Q21 **Fabian Hamilton:** Do you know how many times the group has met since 2023?

Luke Hall: It meets four times a year. I do not know the date of the first meeting and therefore the exact answer.

Chair: The Foreign Office will be convening it.

Becky Richards: Yes, my team run the secretariat for the overseas territories ministerial group. I do not have the exact number of meetings



HOUSE OF COMMONS

off the top of my head. I do not want to say it wrong, but I will be happy to confirm how many times it has met.

Q22 Fabian Hamilton: But the next one you are convening is tomorrow.

Becky Richards: It is tomorrow.

Q23 Mr Walker: I declare an interest in this as I chaired the Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council during Brexit and sat alongside Lord Ahmad over a long period of time. Has any warning been taken from the discussions that were had in that group on home fee status? The whole issue around tuition fees was definitely something that came up in that group on a number of occasions. How do we make sure that the new JMC learns from that previous one, which had some valuable discussions in this space?

Luke Hall: I can probably give you a fuller answer when I have attended the first one of them, but you are right. Some of these issues that have been policy challenges or questions for a long time have come up in various forums—such as the council that you served on, no doubt, the one that is meeting tomorrow and others—but the key thing is the policy changes and delivery flowing from that. As you picked up on, there are some challenges on home fee status, which hopefully have been pretty much resolved. The key thing is if the policy issues being raised in those forums are being tackled and challenged. I would argue and hope that in most cases they are, but I am sure that there is complexity to all of them. On a policy level, it is happening.

May I update you on the question you asked earlier about who was the lead when you were in the Department? It was my predecessor, the Member for Harlow. Embarrassingly, I cannot remember the constituency of his predecessor, but it was the current Cabinet Office Minister, so they have been in there while you were at the Department.

Q24 Mr Walker: That is helpful to understand. Obviously a lot of the policy and the lead on this has relevance to the schools space, and I guess that having been engaged with that when I was at DExEU, it was then something of a surprise to sit in the schools seat at the Department for Education and have no sight of it. Joining up across the Department and ensuring that people can filter in in the right way feels important.

Within your own brief, one of the things we used to discuss at that forum is Horizon and the impact on some of the overseas territories of potentially leaving or being part of Horizon. Now that we are able to take part in it again, is engagement going on with the overseas territories to talk about the opportunities of that and how they might fit into any bids and joint working?

Luke Hall: Yes, absolutely, and it is mainly through the mechanisms that I outlined earlier. The subject broadly of access to higher education is clearly a really important one in the overseas territories. There is a range of different levels and types of support depending on the level of the overseas territory. There are some that were referenced earlier—I think the Falkland Islands are an example—where there is quite substantial



HOUSE OF COMMONS

financial support for people to be able to access higher education. Of course, it is more limited in some of the other overseas territories. The answer is yes, through the Chevening schemes, the Turing schemes and all those scholarship schemes, but there are other types of issues around loan accessibility, including the one that we resolved in 2022-23, and the maintenance challenges that have been raised. Yes, to your question, but there are other ones that are probably raised equally regularly as well.

Q25 Mr Walker: Becky, do you have anything to add in terms of the feed-in from the previous JMC that existed and/or the issue of engagement on research programmes in particular?

Becky Richards: I am glad you asked, because I want to clarify something. I appreciate it is unhelpful that they are all called ministerial something or other. The Joint Ministerial Council still exists and is the Heads of the overseas territories Governments—Governors as well as the elected leaders—meeting with Ministers from the UK Government. That is usually chaired by the overseas territories Minister within the FCDO. Depending on the topics, which are jointly agreed between the UK and the territories, we invite Ministers from relevant Departments to come and chair and speak to those discussions, so we have had all sorts of interesting, detailed discussions at JMCs.

Separately, there is then the overseas territories ministerial group, which is UK Government Ministers and every single Government Department, because now we have a Minister from each Government Department representing the OTs. They are separate meetings. Nothing comes to mind about specific discussions at JMC about research funding from my tenure, I am afraid. That does not mean that it has not come up, but I am very happy to check on that for you.

Q26 Chair: Before I go to Brendan, are you happy to write to us, Becky, about the four meetings that the joint ministerial group has hopefully had over the last year, just so that we know how many have taken place?

Becky Richards: Yes, of course.

Q27 Brendan O'Hara: Can I ask you another question about education in St Helena in particular? First, what is your assessment of the state of education in St Helena in terms of available resources and opportunities for students to advance to tertiary education?

Luke Hall: Thank you for raising that issue; I saw that it was raised in the written evidence to the Committee as well. There are four key strands to the work that we are doing in St Helena to support them. The first is financial support through ODA, which we talked about a little earlier. There is a positive news story there in that the quantum is up and the amount that they spend on education is up. The second is about training and peer-to-peer support from practitioner to practitioner. This is one of the requests that we have had, which is about making sure that we are providing resources to train and upskill teachers in different parts of their work. We have facilitated an arrangement with Hampshire County Council. There is a direct relationship between council officials and the overseas



HOUSE OF COMMONS

territory Government in St Helena. There are different levels to that matching-up programme. For example, we facilitated a headteacher-to-headteacher relationship. Every headteacher in St Helena has a designated headteacher lead in Hampshire to talk about educational challenges and the way that they are approaching education.

Slightly further down the chain, there is a relationship between educational leaders in schools and the Government about how to deliver a curriculum. There is curriculum-based training as well. There is also the training given directly to St Helena teachers. That looks particularly at literacy, because there are challenges there; our help has been requested around delivering literacy training and improving the literacy scores on the island. They have also requested—they are now available—all those resources offline as well, so that anybody at school level in St Helena can access and use those resources.

There is also training available for teaching assistants as part of that arrangement with the council. That is particularly based around how to provide inclusion support for special educational needs and disability students in St Helena, as well as for students with specific learning disorder to make sure that they are integrated properly into the education system. That peer focus is mostly at primary and secondary level. There is a range of different support in a peer-to-peer capacity.

The third strand of support for St Helena is on capital infrastructure support. For example, at the moment, we have committed to fund £1.5 million of digital connectivity support, essentially to make sure that they have good functioning internet, because that has always been a challenge. That will allow them to access some of these teaching resources. There is the capital element, and then there are some of the issues that we talked about earlier: the direct bilateral support that we are providing through those mechanisms. There are a range of options available to them, but I agree that it is right that the support is that intense.

Q28 Brendan O'Hara: It is good to hear that there is this peer-to-peer support, and you recognise that special educational needs are being met. How do you measure the success or otherwise of what you are doing? What have you put in place to measure that?

Luke Hall: There are a couple of different ways. It depends on what strand of the support you are talking about. For example, if you look at the way that we work with overseas territories on ODA support, there are some KPIs in education. They are locally driven, but we help them achieve them through advice, guidance and support.

There are two main KPIs. One is the percentage of students achieving the equivalent of five GCSEs at A to C. The second KPI they look at is the percentage of the adequately trained workforce—I will have to double check that.

Becky Richards indicated assent.

Luke Hall: Yes, that is right.



There are a couple of different KPIs that we use there, and of course, we just continue to talk to them about how successful that has been. It is not the only example. There are other examples of that type of relationship. Anguilla has a similar relationship with the London Borough of Bromley. Again, they are evolving in their nature. When they come to us with extra requests, we can try to facilitate them. There are some directly measurable ways such as KPIs and the over-spending controls, and there are also ones that evolve as the asks evolve.

Q29 Brendan O'Hara: One of the big problems that we have heard is about finding and retaining suitably qualified teachers. Is there a programme actively seeking to address that? If there is, what is that?

Luke Hall: There are posts that are specially recruited through ODA. I am sure that we can share the list of those. One of the big requests to us is: what can you do to help with training and peer-to-peer support particularly? That is why we have started to set up those types of arrangements. I do not believe we have had requests to deepen those in the St Helena example, but of course we want to make sure that they have the training they need. The key point to make is that we are trying to evolve that package of peer-to-peer support as much as we can—whether it is a request for more offline support, more SEND support or more teacher training. It is important to make sure that all the teachers are at the standard that we want to support them to be. We evolve the package that comes through, but overall, particularly in terms of St Helena, it is quite a comprehensive, strong package of support, but we recognise that there is a reason why that is so.

Q30 Brendan O'Hara: What did the Integrated Security Fund money go to pay for in terms of education on the island?

Luke Hall: On St Helena?

Brendan O'Hara: Yes.

Luke Hall: I would have to defer on the ISF fund.

Becky Richards: So far as I can recall, ISF funding has not specifically supported education in St Helena. We have a number of different Integrated Security Fund programmes that support all the territories. The key difference with the ODA-supported territories is that there is quite significant budgetary support through ODA, with a slightly different process compared with ISF funding. As the Minister said, there is quite a lot going on with the discussion on the KPIs, including what we call technical co-operation posts, which are funded through that budgetary support. I know that in St Helena they use those to fund teachers, so those can be paid at higher salaries, for instance, to attract international talent. There is not a specific education-focused ISF programme in the territories.

Q31 Brendan O'Hara: To be clear, is it fair to say that the ISF money could have been used but was not?



Becky Richards: The Government decides what ISF programmes to focus on. For example, there is a justice programme; there is not one focused on education across any of the territories. But that ODA support does provide support for the ODA-eligible territories, including for education. Sorry, I should clarify that ISF funding is available to all the territories, whether or not they are ODA-eligible.

Q32 **Chair:** Forgive me Brendan, but the evidence that we received from the Department for Education says that the ISF is being used. In St Helena, it is providing peer mentors to headteachers; in Montserrat, it is providing teachers to teach them how to work with people with SEN and disabilities; and in Anguilla, it is providing funding from the Borough of Bromley to help with early years provision.

Becky Richards: Apologies. I think that is my misunderstanding. I believe that is because that is enabling the supports with the councils, so it is not necessarily specific education funding. Sorry for misspeaking. It is enabling those partnerships with the councils on a wider basis. Those partnerships with councils do go beyond education.

Brendan O'Hara: Thank you.

Q33 **Dan Carden:** I want to ask a few questions about the Falkland Islands. You will know, I am sure, that there are no sixth forms or colleges there that teach post secondary. Will you outline some of the challenges that students in the Falklands face coming to the UK to study for their A-levels?

Luke Hall: Sure. One of the challenges that I think students from the Falkland Islands in particular experience when coming here, particularly for higher education, is the challenge with accessing the documentation in time for the start of the academic year. For example, if you are getting your grades, the time between getting your certificate of acceptance from an institution and then the start of the term is quite short, so it is difficult to obtain all the relevant documentation in that time.

The Falklands example is probably the most challenging of any overseas territory when it comes to trying to get that sorted. For example, if you were in the Falklands and you were wanting to apply for your visa, you would have to send your documentation to New York. That would have to go on a weekly flight, because the flights do not go every day. The documentation then sits in the New York visa office for an average of three weeks while the visa is being processed and approved, and then it has to wait for the next available flight back to the Falklands.

That situation should actually improve with the introduction of e-visas, which will mean that although the passports will still have to be sent over to New York, rather than being scanned and then sitting in the office for three or four weeks—whatever it might be—they are scanned and then sent back on the next available flight, while the visa is being processed. That will mean the documentation can go on the next flight back, so that could shave three to four weeks off the process.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

There are definitely extra challenges for Falklands students who try to access education here, and we hope e-visas will help with that. That is not to say there is not more to do. One of the things I have asked officials to look at is whether we can communicate clearly to universities about flexibility with students from the Falkland Islands on courses where that might be appropriate.

There might be some courses where, if you start slightly late, it is not possible to catch up, but there may be some in different circumstances where it might be appropriate. I am looking at ways that we can improve your situation if you are in the Falklands and having to send your passport off—as you will still have to this year, because e-visas will not be in place for the coming cohort of students, although this will be the last cohort, and e-visas will be in place next year. For people who find themselves in the situation of having to send off their documentation and wait for a period of time, I particularly want to make sure that this year we are at least doing all we can to make sure that where higher education institutions can be flexible, we are supporting them to do so. There is no denial that there is extra layer of challenge there.

Q34 Dan Carden: Students who require the visa also have to prove their English language capability, which requires flying to Santiago in Chile to do their UKVI IELTS exam. How are the Home Office and the Department for Education working to see if there is a way around that?

Luke Hall: You are right that a small number of students—it will be a small number; I can get you the exact breakdown of the figures—will have to fly and do an English language test. It is worth saying that British overseas nationals in the overseas territories will not have to take the test because they are part of an English-speaking country, and so are designated as not having to take the test in the first place. But you are right: a small number will have to fly to Santiago. They have the same challenge with the weekly flight. They have to get the flight out there. In the Falklands, that is funded by the Government there, and if someone is under 18 then an adult or carer is funded to go with them. But that does not alleviate the concern and stress of having to do that trip.

There is a balance here because there are minimum requirements for English to make sure both that someone is a genuine student coming to study in the UK and that they are able to properly take part in the course when they get here. I understand your point, but it is a small number of students. It is also worth saying that it is up to higher education providers themselves to look at the type of proof they want to make sure that someone meets the requirements for English-speaking. There are different ways that they can commission that sort of testing. To be fair, most of them do ask for an English test rather than using some sort of online system, but it is a small number.

This comes back to what I said about having asked officials to try to find some way, where appropriate and possible, to make sure that HE providers are being flexible where they can. But I agree that it must be a stressful situation for those students.



- Q35 **Chair:** When we say it is a small number, we are looking at 10 to 20 people who have to go to Chile. That is an incredibly expensive flight. But on the process in general, I ask that you look at giving a direct steer. Very few colleges across the UK support OT students to come to them. We are not looking at a massive blast out to every school.

Surely a directive could be given by the Department for Education that says, "This is ridiculous. These students come from English-speaking countries that speak English first." There are all sorts of sub-languages, but English is the primary language spoken, and the students have all studied it as a core subject. We do not ask people from Jersey or any of our Crown dependencies to do an English test, so why in the world do we ask it of people who speak English at home and as their main language? Surely a directive could be given that if schools are so insistent on testing the English of people who are British family, they can at least use an online test. Surely that is something the Department for Education can commit to doing.

Luke Hall: I will hand over to Philippa in a second. There is a very delicate balance here. You are right that 10 to 20 is still a significant enough number that we should in no way dismiss the importance of a student being in that position and having to take the week that it takes to go and do the test. They have to be there for a week because of the flight pattern. It is funded by the Government over there, but that does not denigrate the point. It is about getting the balance right between having a secure system that means that someone is a genuine student and can take part in the course, and the impact on the individual. I understand the point.

- Q36 **Chair:** Forgive me, but the English test does not prove whether you are truly a student; it determines whether you can speak English well enough. I went to an international sixth form. I was very lucky that my local comp had an international sixth form. We had quite a few people with some pretty strong variances in their English, but they got there from being at the sixth form. I find it frankly offensive that we are saying to our OTs, "You have to prove your English is good enough for a whole week," which the OT has to fund and, as we know, their budgets are not significant. Surely you can give a directive to say, "You will do online tests only." Quite frankly, you shouldn't require it from OTs at all, because these are English-speaking people from British families.

Luke Hall: Can I bring in Philippa?

Philippa Rouse: I will come in, because the English language requirements for the student route is a Home Office policy, rather than a DFE policy. As the Minister highlighted, British overseas nationals are, in effect, counted as being from majority English-speaking countries, so they don't need to do an English language test. We are talking about the small number of third-country nationals living in the Falkland Islands who want to come to the UK to study. The same rules apply to them as to third-country nationals from elsewhere in the world. For the reasons the Minister set out, this is about ensuring the integrity of the student visa



HOUSE OF COMMONS

system overall. From a Home Office perspective, it is almost impossible to tell whether somebody has been studying in the Falkland Islands for a few weeks or for all their lives.

There are a whole bunch of other flexibilities in the system. As the Minister said, if they happen to be from another majority English-speaking country and are going to higher education, universities can choose how they do that English language testing. There are other flexibilities. For example, the test can be taken up to two years in advance. If a student knows that they want to come and study in the UK, they don't have to go to Santiago. If they happen to be travelling elsewhere in the world, they can take the test there. There are a range of alternatives but, as the Minister highlights, there are a number who need to do the test.

Q37 Chair: Sorry, I still find that frankly offensive. This is a British family. This is not about third-country nationals; it is about people who live on the Falklands and have a right and permission to live there. If the Home Office is that concerned about integrity, and if it is so easy to do it two years in advance, it would frankly be cheaper and would save the Falklands Government a lot of money—again, a lot of it comes from the UK taxpayer—for the Home Office to fly out every two years and provide the tests.

It would be preposterous for you to tell me that my 16-year-old child had to fly to another country for a week and that I am expected to allow them to be there. Surely, I would have to go with them, in terms of safeguarding. It is preposterous to talk about integrity when it comes to the Falkland Islands. This is a territory that we went to war over. This is not somewhere we suddenly decided is British in the last two weeks. I do not see how it is not possible to give a clear directive, signed off by the Home Office, that says, "If someone from the Falklands wants to come, when it comes to the English language assessment"—we are not asking about the rest of the visa requirements; we will leave that with you for today—"we as the Home Office accept that they only have to do an online test." I do not know why in the world the Home Office needs more than an online test. There is no justification, surely.

Philippa Rouse: This is probably a topic for a different Committee, but we have in the past seen lots of issues with the security of English language testing, which is why we have the system that we do right now.

Q38 Chair: That is why I am saying an online test. Forgive me, how many people from the Falklands have failed the English test in the last five years?

Philippa Rouse: I would not know that.

Chair: Does anyone know how many people from the Falklands have seriously failed the test?

Mr Walker: It might be a question to write on, if there are any people.

Chair: Let's write. I would love to know how many have actually failed in the last 30 years or however long we have required this ridiculous test,



HOUSE OF COMMONS

which requires children to fly across an ocean for five to seven days. This is an absolute waste of taxpayers' money, whether they are from the Falklands or the UK.

There is no question but that children should be able to do an online test. We are trying to get them into further education. We are trying to make sure those 16 to 18-year-olds can go for more education. We are not saying, "Let them come in and"—I don't know—"run a company somewhere." We are saying, "Let them go into more education, where they can further their English even more." This is very different from people coming here to work economically. It is about helping our children, as we have a commitment and a requirement to do.

I would be grateful, Minister, if you could make sure we hear back. Philippa, would you take away the message that the Home Office should be able to come to an agreement with the Department for Education to write and say that an online test is all that is required for people to do further education? That is all we are asking for as a Committee. I apologise to Dan, who wants to come in.

Q39 Dan Carden: To follow on from that, a student from the Falklands or any other overseas territory can only get a visa to study at level 3 or above—A-levels or above. The Falklands has said that that is limiting its capacity to develop a skilled workforce. What is the Government's plan to put that right and ensure students have access to vocational and skills training?

Luke Hall: Thank you. Again, not to denigrate the importance of the point, British nationals of course don't have that limitation because they have a British overseas territories passport and can come and do those courses in the UK, so this would be quite a small number.

One point I would make is that people coming to do that level of qualification are much less likely to travel abroad to do it. Often, the more common challenge that I have heard in relation to FE is about building infrastructure and capacity in the British overseas territories to make sure that they can deliver that on the islands, whether that is physical infrastructure, digital or teaching capacity, because people are more likely to stay in the overseas territories to do it, although that does not denigrate the importance of the point. I think some of the things that we have done are quite positive—whether that is the example I cited about the digital investment in St Helena, with £1.25 million to connect some of those schools, or St Helena Community College, which we funded, which is now delivering 300 different courses to people on the island. That is the more common approach that we get—certainly that I have so far heard—about building infrastructure capacity on the islands themselves.

Dan Carden: Thank you, Minister.

Q40 Mr Walker: Minister, could you give the Committee the main reasons why overseas territories are treated differently from the Crown dependencies when it comes to support for education from the UK Government?



Luke Hall: Yes. The main difference, or the one that is raised the most, is that if you are from an overseas territory, you are eligible for the fee loan from the UK Government, whereas if you are from a Crown dependency, you are not eligible—you would be looking to the Crown dependency Government in the same way that someone from the devolved Administrations would be looking to their respective Governments. They weren't included in that change back in 2022-23. Correct me if I get this wrong, but I think it is fair to say that if you are a Crown dependency resident who is living and working in the UK—living in England, for example—then you would get access in the same way as with the devolved Administrations, so there are slightly different eligibility rules there.

Q41 **Mr Walker:** The eligibility works that way when it comes to the fee loans, but is it not the opposite for maintenance support? The Crown dependencies and Gibraltar are eligible for maintenance support, but the overseas territories more generally are not. Why would that be the case, when many of the overseas territories have a significantly lower income per capita than those Crown dependencies in particular? I think the difference between St Helena and the Isle of Man is a factor of six.

Luke Hall: Absolutely. There is a range of different maintenance loan schemes available in the overseas territories. Is the point you are making essentially about that difference in eligibility for the maintenance loan?

Q42 **Mr Walker:** Crown dependencies in Gibraltar are eligible for maintenance support, but ODA-eligible overseas territories are not—that is my understanding.

Luke Hall: Not by definition, but in practice, yes, I suppose so. You are right. Take the Gibraltar example I used earlier: you can get the £22,000 grant—it's not even a loan actually in Gibraltar, it is a grant—per year to come and study in the UK, for undergraduate or postgraduate. You're right: St Helena is probably the example you hear the most about where students are asking for extra support. I read the evidence that was submitted to your Committee by Miss Peters and Miss Benjamin, who are students who felt strongly about this, and I understood the points that they made.

There's a couple of things that are available in St Helena. There is the maintenance loan, which was referenced in the evidence—the loan of £5,000 a year. There is some other maintenance support as well. For example, last year in St Helena, the administration there distributed £10,000 between six students—it is not comparable to the Falklands, you are right—to help with set-up costs and flight costs. In 2022, they gave maintenance to just a couple of students and then, in 2023, I think they gave maintenance support to eight students. You are right: there is an inherently different set of schemes set up by the overseas territories.

I think the overall principle is that we want them to take decisions about how best to support students on their island, and they respond to some of the domestic pressures that they face. But you are right to highlight the St



Helena example, which has come up more than most others, as far as I have seen. You have had representations to this Committee, and there have been other domestically run campaigns about them as well.

- Q43 **Mr Walker:** With both the St Helena example and—in written evidence the Committee has just received on this—the Cayman Islands, there is a feeling that what might be the intention is not necessarily translating to the practice. Communication, with students in those territories and the universities in the UK, would be very helpful to ensure that the intentions behind the Government providing, for instance, home fee status and/or maintenance support are made clear, and that these things work in practice for students. The evidence from the Cayman Islands is pretty clear that the intention has not yet been met in practicality. Is that something that the strategy for the overseas territories could help to address?

Becky Richards: Again, you will have to forgive me, but, because the strategy is still being developed, I cannot confirm the content. It is very much driven by what we hear in consultation and it is going to be at quite a high level. Again, there is also opportunity with the partnership compacts; where there are specific challenges for specific territories, we can bring those up. Where it is general, it might be appropriate to cut from the strategy.

Luke Hall: I do not disagree at all that there are some communicational challenges around some of the elements here. You just have to look back at the home fee status point: there were a number of students wrongly denied home fee status who then had to go back and be retrospectively sorted out and clarified. We have since, on that point, resolved the cases by amending the guidance and regulations, but I still want to make sure that, on all those issues, we are taking from DFE a proper belt-and-braces approach to making sure that the communication is right.

On that particular point, I have asked the officials in DFE to go back and have a look at whether there is anything else we can do, particularly on communication with universities. That is particularly the ones where these cases went wrong—there were about 10 of them, but again that does not denigrate the point—and it is about making sure that there is no one slipping through the cracks because the communication is not right. I have asked what more we can do there, and I certainly want to make sure that, if we are taking action there, we do it in advance of the next cohort of students.

- Q44 **Mr Walker:** I recall from my time doing JMCs on these issues that Gibraltar is unusual in having its own tertiary education institutions in this respect. One of its long-standing asks is to have home fee status for UK students to study in Gibraltar. Are there conversations ongoing around that, and are there any particular barriers to delivering that?

Luke Hall: Yes, there have been a number of representations on that point about Gibraltar. It has had ongoing discussions with the Department and the Government about it. Following a number of those discussions,



HOUSE OF COMMONS

they have recently resubmitted a new updated proposal, so that is being looked at by officials in DFE now. It has not quite got to ministerial level yet, but I know that officials are working on it closely. When that progresses, I am sure we can keep the Committee updated about it, but I think it might have a bit further to go.

Q45 Mr Walker: Given that this issue has been around even since when I was at DExEU, which is quite a long time ago, it will be nice to see some progress on that, when officials can put a proposal to Ministers. It strikes me as something that would be beneficial to UK students and to Gibraltar University.

I have one last question, if I may. One overseas territory that has had its challenges—shall we say—on the safeguarding front is the Pitcairn Islands. Obviously, it is a very small territory and it is a very long way away. Given that the Foreign Office provided compensation and support to victims of child sexual abuse in the Pitcairn Islands in 2008, is there any specific programme of work to support the smaller overseas territories with safeguarding?

Luke Hall: I may have to defer on the exact safeguarding point to Becky. As you know, there is the ODA, which is the direct financial and technical support delivered by the Government for safeguarding. Perhaps I have to defer to FCDO.

Becky Richards: Thank you, Minister. On safeguarding, I have a full-time safeguarding expert in my team who visits as many of the territories as possible, and she supports them, discusses with them and provides her expert opinion. She is just one person, excellent though she is. This is a devolved matter, but it is something that we try to prioritise, and the further support comes a lot through that partnership approach that we have described with councils, where they are able to provide support. I know it is something that my colleague is looking at building on, in terms of seeking to get social workers out to territories. There are of course social workers out in territories and there is a good exchange already—I have met a few. It is about social work support and training, as well as policy expertise. This is absolutely an area of active work.

Q46 Mr Walker: In the case of Pitcairn, I appreciate that it is a very small territory and it is very remote. Would that be done through direct social worker support, or would that be better done through a partnership with New Zealand—a country with which it perhaps has more regular contact than the home nation?

Becky Richards: I am afraid I do not have the detail myself, off the top of my head, about exactly what the partnership is with Pitcairn, but there are not very many children in Pitcairn. There is one 17-year-old who has just returned from full-time education on Pitcairn, and there are not any young families at the moment.

Q47 Brendan O'Hara: Further to Mr Walker's earlier point about the cost of supporting students into tertiary education, in St Helena that cost is prohibitive, which means that many students simply do not even attempt



HOUSE OF COMMONS

to progress even to A-levels. Are the UK Government working with the Government of St Helena to try and encourage more students to study to A-level, and to make access to tertiary education more accessible and affordable?

Luke Hall: We are certainly working with them on their priority of getting more money into the education system generally and supporting them with that infrastructure development. I did read the written evidence about St Helena carefully, and the other things I would point to are the extra schemes that were not mentioned in the evidence and some of the scholarship schemes that are available to ODA countries, too.

There is the Chevening scheme and the Commonwealth scholarship scheme, which students can apply to from St Helena. We continue to engage with them on those annual delegations and through the rolling ODA programme to ensure that money is being well spent and support is given in the right way. Between the package of the domestic schemes they have, loans, grants, the Chevening scheme and the Commonwealth scholarship scheme, there is a good package, but we will work with them to ensure they can achieve their aims. Education is a big part of that, and so is access to HE.

Q48 **Chair:** I have three brief questions. One of the problems that we have heard frequently is that, for example, if you are in St Helena and you want to access support for special educational needs from a UK resource, unless you have a British bank account—which obviously they don't—they cannot pay for access to expertise, courses and all sorts of other things that we want them to have access to. An individual may have to rely on ringing the St Helena rep to ask them to pay with their bank account here in the UK so that a SENCO back in St Helena can benefit from it. Perhaps it goes back to the acorn discussion, but is there anything that we are doing to provide more centralised access to resources?

Luke Hall: There is definitely the Hampshire example, where they are supporting SEND training. Perhaps it does come back to another one of those points we were talking about earlier: ensuring that the information is available and communicated properly, and that the resource is there. It is a positive resource. It means that we are giving proper SEND training on both keeping SEND students in schools and ensuring they are being properly included in the educational setting, and that we are training teachers about how to make the most of their time in school for those pupils. There is a support package there, but there is certainly a fair question around local knowledge and how accessible it might be. That is an issue that we can continue to work on with St Helena.

Q49 **Chair:** In terms of universities, how often do we take the time to explain to universities that these are not foreign or international students, and that they will come with very specific needs? In some ways, they will come with more needs than many others who come from a big state. Could we do that on a regular basis? Do you think we are doing enough to have that conversation with heads of universities?



Luke Hall: This is exactly why I want to do something this next academic year about communicating that to universities. There are a couple of things that we need to communicate clearly. One is that we need to take a belt-and-braces approach to that home fee status issue. I want to ensure that is done before the start of the next academic year, and before the next tranche of students goes through that process. There is also a point around understanding the specific flexibilities that students might need coming from the overseas territories. That goes back to some of the points we talked about earlier, around having to take extra time to get your English language test or your visa, for example.

I want to ensure that we are doing what we can to make sure that higher education providers understand that there are different sets of circumstances here. That is what I have asked officials to look at, and to do something about before the next applications. The answer is that there is always more to do in that space—there could always be more to make people aware—but I want to ensure that we are taking some action before this next application window.

Q50 Chair: Perhaps you can write to us in September with where you managed to get with that. Obviously, we are very keen to help to communicate that as well.

I do not know what the answer is to my final question, but perhaps it is one for the Department to look at—we held a session with young people from overseas territories who are here studying in the UK. Some are in further education, and some were at university. It was really interesting hearing from them, but many of them said to me, “One or two of us will go for further education, away from our OT to the UK to study.” They said that two or three more may go to the US or New Zealand, but really we are talking about classes where it is a handful of kids—if we are lucky—who are choosing to go on to further education. The majority said, “Look, I’m just going straight into training. There’s apprenticeships; there’s jobs.”

That’s great; we want overseas territories that are full of employment opportunities. But of course, one of the main sectors that so many of our overseas territories rely on—one that is fundamental to their economies—is tourism. I did wonder whether, as an investment in the future of our overseas territories, we should be looking at some sort of vocational school, located somewhere in the Caribbean, where people from across our overseas territories family can come to become experts in that sort of vocational area, because it seems that we are not investing as heavily in supporting apprenticeships. Apprenticeships are happening, but not with all the support and infrastructure that we put in place here in the UK.

Is there something we can do to create and support some sort of vocational college located within the region for young people to attend? If they want to go straight into work, that is good—we want to shift away from this ridiculous idea that we all have to go to university—but I am talking about co-locating something in the region that can benefit from that first-class UK education focus on this vocational area. Maybe that is



HOUSE OF COMMONS

something that the Department could take away.

Luke Hall: That is a very fair challenge. I think it comes back to the absolutely central point about capacity building in the overseas territories over the longer term. It comes back to the first answer I gave, at the start of the session. This is about making sure that we invest in overseas territories so that they can themselves deliver the kind of world-class education that we would want to access—that we do access—here in this country. That is the challenge that we all need to be ambitious in setting, and that is why all those policy interventions are important.

As I say, there are some examples of the type of intervention that you are talking about—I gave the example earlier of St Helena, and the community college there with 300 courses now, which we have helped to fund, as well some other refurbishments. But your point is absolutely valid; capacity building has to be central to the strategy of delivering good education. Yes, absolutely, we need to fix some of the smaller issues around timetabling, getting people to courses, and ensuring flexibility and proper maintenance schemes. That goes without saying. On top of that, we need to make sure that capacity building is a key part of what we do.

Chair: I will say, Minister, there has been a significant increase in engagement with the overseas territories, which is very much acknowledged, but we have also heard today that the issues with education are within our means to correct. We are not looking for significant new financial investments; this is about changing processes and cracking down on bureaucracy.

I think we will leave it on exactly the point that you land on, which is that we are one British family and there should be equal access for all, no matter where you grow up within our British family. Thank you ever so much, Minister. Thank you, Becky. Thank you, Philippa.