



**Foreign Affairs
Committee**

8 September 2026

**The Rt Hon Baroness Smith of Malvern
Minister for Skills, Department for Education**

[By email]

Dear Jacqui

Student Loan eligibility for children of members of the Diplomatic Service

Thank you for your letter of 7 September in response to my letter of 14 July about student loans for children of member of the Diplomatic Service. It is good to know that the Department is working on legislation to give Diplomat and their families certainty to plan their time at university.

However, planning this for the academic year 2027/28 does leave uncertainty for families whose children are already in higher education, and also those are thinking about starting next year.

I am pleased to know that your officials are working to update the guidance which helps determine eligibility. You say that "*applications from children of members of the Diplomatic Service, and other Crown servants serving overseas, will continue to be assessed on a case-by-case basis*" and that "*students who satisfy the existing eligibility criteria remain eligible for support*". Unfortunately, this is not the experience of several diplomats, who have been told their children are not eligible for support – and some have found different decisions for two children in the same family, which suggests that there is need for consistency, which you say that the revised guidance is designed to ensure. Therefore, it is very urgent to finalise this guidance as soon as possible. I would be grateful if you could let me know what the timeline is for that and also send a copy to the Committee for review when it is complete.

And finally, given the lack of consistency shown by the Student Loans Company, I wonder whether ministers would be able to suggest that in the short term they set up a dedicated officer/team to work on the loan applications for children of Crown Servants, including diplomats. I assume there is not a large number in receipt of loans, and it



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would not require much organisational change. This should be able to bridge the gap until the legislation is in place to protect the interests of the families of Crown Servants.

In line with usual practice, I will be publishing a copy of this letter and your response on the Committee's website in due course.

Dame Emily Thornberry MP
Chair, Foreign Affairs Committee



**The Rt Hon Baroness Jacqui Smith
Minister for Skills**

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Dame Emily Thornberry MP
Chair, Foreign Affairs Committee
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

7 September 2026

Dear Emily,

Thank you for your letter of 14 July 2026 regarding student support and home fee eligibility for the children of members of the Diplomatic Service. I appreciate the Committee's concern on behalf of the families affected.

It may be helpful to explain how the current position arises. Eligibility for student support and home-fee status is generally based on a student's ordinary residence in the UK and Islands in the period before the start of their course. These long-standing rules are intended to ensure that support is directed towards those with a sufficiently strong connection to the UK. However, they can have consequences for a small number of families who spend extended periods overseas as a result of Crown service.

We recognise the strength of feeling on this issue and the argument that those serving the UK from overseas should not be disadvantaged as a result of that service. This is why the Secretary of State has agreed that we should seek to introduce legislative changes that would mean all Crown Servants serving overseas and their family members, not just those in the diplomatic service, are automatically treated as meeting the ordinary residence requirements for student support.

Department for Education (DfE) officials are currently working closely and constructively with colleagues in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) to take this work forward – including seeking the necessary approvals from HM Treasury - and develop the detailed arrangements needed to support its implementation.

Implementing this reform will require amendments to the regulations governing student support, as well as changes to the Student Loans Company's (SLC) systems. As a result, any changes would be expected to take effect in the 2027/28 academic year for new students. We recognise the importance of making progress as quickly as possible

and officials in both departments are continuing to work collaboratively on the next steps.

Officials in DfE and FCDO are also working together to improve and clarify SLC guidance in relation to determining temporary absence. Whilst this will not change the current legal eligibility criteria, clearer guidance should help ensure that applications are considered consistently and that families better understand the evidence required under the existing regulations.

In the meantime, applications from children of members of the Diplomatic Service, and other Crown servants serving overseas, will continue to be assessed on a case-by-case basis in accordance with the current student support regulations. Students who satisfy the existing eligibility criteria remain eligible for support.

I recognise the desire of affected families for greater certainty, and I can assure the Committee that officials are continuing to prioritise this work. I will keep the position under close review and would be happy to update the Committee further as discussions progress.

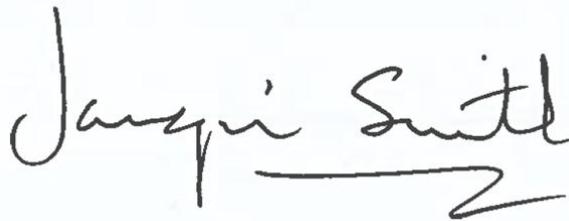
I am grateful to the Committee for its continued engagement.

Yours sincerely,

Baroness Smith of Malvern

Minister for Skills

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Jacqui Smith', with a stylized flourish underneath.

The Rt Hon Baroness Jacqui Smith
Minister for Skills