

Written evidence submitted by Hon. Andrew Turner (OTE0007)

State of Education in St. Helena

The below submission is my own and is based on discussions with constituents as part of my role as an Elected Member. The below does not therefore necessarily represent the views of The St Helena Legislative Council or the St Helena Government

St Helena island is a British Overseas Territory in the South Atlantic Ocean.

The educational system broadly follows that of the United Kingdom, and education is mandatory, and in the most part free, for children between the ages of 5 and 16.

There are four schools that provide full-time compulsory schooling for children from 5 to 16 years of age under the Education Ordinance (2008).

These are Harford, Pilling and St Paul's Primary schools for children from 4 to 11 years, and Prince Andrew School for students 11 – 18 years.

Schools are supported by the Teacher Training and Inclusion Sectors, as well as the Lifelong Learning Sector, and the St Helena Public Library Service.

While Primary functions have some issues, in my view, the key issues are to be found in secondary and tertiary education.

The education system in St. Helena faces significant challenges due to financial constraints, policy oversights, and systemic issues.

All schools on this island benefit greatly from a cohort of extremely dedicated teachers; however, the recent cuts to scholarships and the lack of maintenance support for students accessing UK student finance have exacerbated the financial burden on families, with the average local wage insufficient to support tertiary education abroad. This has led to a decline in advanced level education and an increase in emigration of families seeking better opportunities.

Tertiary Education Challenges:

- Scholarship Cuts: Scholarships were cut, with the expectation that students would access UK student finance. However, maintenance support was overlooked, leaving students ineligible for such assistance.

- Financial Burden: The cost of travel to the UK is approximately £2,000, a significant amount given the average local wage of less than £9,000 per annum.

- Loan Accessibility: The only bank on the island offers loans at rates which are unaffordable to most parents and requires parental homes as collateral, which is not feasible for families with multiple children.

- Educational Decline: There is already a noticeable decline in students continuing to 6th form, and parents are considering relocation to the UK to support their children's education.

Wider Educational Issues:

- Budget Cuts: The education budget has been repeatedly cut to fund healthcare, leading to a lack of resources across all areas of education.

- Strategic Direction: There is a noticeable absence of strategic and political direction in education.

- Staffing Issues: Low staff wages fail to attract local teachers, resulting in reliance on the Technical Cooperation programme to fill positions.

- Recruitment Challenges: Recruiting overseas teachers is difficult, contributing to severe staff shortages in core subjects.

- Population Decline: The emigration of parents and students is contributing to a decline in the working-age population.

- Creative Arts Cuts: Budget cuts have also affected local creative arts programmes, limiting access to these in schools.

- Youth Disengagement: The lack of priority given to young people is leading to antisocial behavior and reinforcing the desire to emigrate.

Recommendations:

- Ring-Fenced Budget: Implementing a ring-fenced budget for education could ensure that the island's needs are met and prevent reallocation of funds to healthcare.

- Maintenance Loans: Access to UK maintenance loans would significantly support students, but additional local support is necessary for expenses such as flights.

- Teacher Incentives: Increasing staff wages and providing incentives could attract and retain local teachers.

- Creative Arts Integration: Restoring and integrating creative arts programmes in schools could enhance the educational experience and retain youth interest.

I believe there is an urgent need for a comprehensive review and restructuring of the educational policies and financial support systems in St. Helena to prevent further decline and ensure a sustainable future for the island's youth and overall population.

It is clear that there is a role for both the St Helena Government and His Majesty's Government to ensure the young people of St Helena have the best possible future.

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