

Written evidence submitted by Falkland Islands Government (OTE0011)

Dear Ms Kearns,

The UK Government's support of education for Overseas Territories students

The Falkland Islands Government welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, Sub-Committee on the Overseas Territories' inquiry into the UK Government's support for education for Overseas Territories students.

As proud members of the UK Family, we value our relationship with the UK, particularly when it comes to the provision of education. This specific aspect of the UK-Overseas Territory relationship is particularly important for those Overseas Territories, like the Falkland Islands, that have small populations and are therefore unable to provide education from primary schooling through to university. We are therefore incredibly grateful to the Sub-Committee for taking an interest in education in the Overseas Territories.

If the Committee would like to discuss anything in this response in more detail, please do not hesitate to contact us:

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We remain available to provide oral evidence should we be invited.

Yours sincerely,



The Hon Pete Biggs MLA
Chair of the Falkland Islands Legislative Assembly

Formal Response from the Falkland Islands Government to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, Sub-Committee on the Overseas Territories' inquiry into the UK Government's support for education for Overseas Territories students

In what ways is the UK Government supporting education of students from the Overseas Territories?

The Falkland Islands does not have any in-person 16 to 18 education or university provision, due to the small size of the population in the Islands. Currently there are 41 students studying at Level 3 in the UK and 26 students studying for a first degree at university.

The four countries of the UK treat 16 to 18 students "home" students, if they are British or British Overseas Territory Citizen (BOTC) passport holders. This means their tuition is funded by the nation they study in. This is an important contribution in supporting the Falklands to educate its young people. The Falkland Islands

Government pays all other costs for 16 to 18 students to study to remove barriers to study (accommodation, transport, and some living expenses).

The four countries of the UK treat university students as “home” students, if they are British or BOTC passport holders (although the Scottish position is confusing – see challenges). This means the students’ tuition fee is the home fee not international. This is useful support. The Falkland Islands Government pays all first degree university costs for eligible students – tuition fees, accommodation, food, transport and some other living costs – to remove barriers to study. The percentage of Falkland Islanders who go on to study at university is currently lower than in the UK and the Falkland Islands Government wishes to encourage more young people to achieve higher skills.

What challenges do Overseas Territories students looking to study in the UK face, and what can the UK Government do to help?

Delay to education at 16 – Some Falkland Islands residents require a visa to study in the UK – anyone with a BOTC passport and any permanent resident with a passport from a non-British country.

Falkland Islands students who need a student visa face a delay of a year at 16 before being able to enter the UK to study. This disadvantages them, particularly in subjects where they are building on the knowledge they have gained at GCSE, such as STEM subjects. This delay has affected 10 per cent of our current 16 to 18-year olds and this is likely to continue. Furthermore, it demotivates some students from progressing and they do not continue their education.

The issue is created by the following:

- The UK immigration process only considers the passport the student is travelling on, not whether they are permanent Falkland Islands residents, nor that the Falkland Islands Government is sponsoring them.
- Falkland Islands students take English and Welsh GCSEs each year. A full suite can only be taken in June (after UK reforms some years ago removed the opportunity to take a full suite of GCSEs in November). The results are therefore only available at the end of August.
- There are about 10 days between GCSE results day and the start of the new academic year. GCSE results are required for a college to give an unconditional offer to the student, which they need for their visa application.
- The time advised for a visa application to be processed, having been sent from the Falkland Islands to New York, is three months, the best time achieved is 1.5 months. Either period is too much of a delay for Falkland Islands visa students to be able to start sixth form with their peers.

In order to help, the UK Government should provide a different visa process for Falkland Island students which does not delay the students’ start date.

Proof of English unnecessarily required as part of visa application – The UK Student Visa requires proof of English if the passport being travelled on is not on the list of English-speaking countries. This is despite the student being resident in the Falkland Islands, an English-speaking society, and having taken English GCSEs.

This results in students having to travel to Santiago, Chile to take an UKVI IELTS exam at an approved centre (the nearest available location). The Falkland Islands Government sponsors them to do this at a cost which can

be several thousand pounds, as they are often under the age of 18 and have to be accompanied by an adult. They have to be away for at least a week, as the flight to Santiago is only once a week.

The students pass the exam well – which is unsurprising as they are fluent English speakers.

The UKVI online information states that the proof of English requirement can be satisfied if an under-18 international student passes English GCSEs or Scottish National Qualifications at a UK school or college. However, there is no mention of schools in the British Overseas Territories – several of which teach GCSEs.

In order to help, the UK Government should agree that GCSEs taken and passed in the Falkland Islands' secondary school are acceptable proof of English.

The Falkland Islands is restricted in what it can send people to study or train in – Vocational and technical subjects typically start with courses at Level 2 and 1, e.g. Construction Trades, Motor Vehicle mechanics, Chefs, Early Years, Care. These are all examples of essential skills needed in the Falklands. However, young people and adults who need a visa to study, can only study at Level 3 and higher, so any resident in this category is prevented from training in these key skills because of the visa rules. This is limiting the development of a skilled workforce in the Falkland Islands.

In order to help, the UK Government should agree, in consultation with the Overseas Territories, a list of essential skills courses at Level 1 and 2 that visa students from the Overseas Territories may study.

To what extent are the various responsible government departments working together in achieving their goals regarding education and the Overseas Territories?

UK nations – Devolution of education to each nation has made fee status rules difficult to navigate. Each nation has set out its own rules on “home students”, which are challenging to understand particularly for Overseas Territories with limited resources. It also appears challenging for institutions to interpret – in Scotland some institutions are treating students from the Falkland Islands as home students, however in one case a Falkland Islands student with a British passport has been considered an international student, and charged the full international fee.

Departments working together – There is some evidence of departments considering Overseas Territories. We were pleased to find out recently that Overseas Territories are now included in the Turing Scheme, which supports students to travel and study in other countries. However, the scheme's mechanism of funding does not recognise the unique situation of the Overseas Territories and appears to have been extended to the Territories without any consultation about changes that might need to be made.

The scheme funds travel based on a straight-line calculation from the country/territory of departure to the destination. This does not work for the Falkland Islands. The Falkland Islands only has two routes of travel, either to the UK or to Chile. If we wish to take students to any other country, they will need a first flight to leave Islands and then further transport. The costs are significantly higher than the Turing Scheme has considered and so it is not a helpful offer.

To what extent have they been responsive to requests and concerns raised by the Overseas Territories and their students?

The Falkland Islands experience of raising education requests and concerns has been variable. In 2023, we queried why GCSEs taken in the Falkland Islands are not acceptable as proof of English. A reply from the Department of Education stated that it was because the students sit the Cambridge iGCSE, which is not accepted by the Department for Education in their accountability measures for English schools. However, our recent investigations note that a Home Office document on proof of English requirements gives a different answer¹. This document states that the English qualification should be issued by an Ofqual, SQA, Qualifications Wales or CCEA regulated awarding body in the UK. The Cambridge iGCSE is regulated by Ofqual. Our secondary school – The Falkland Islands Community School – is an exam centre recognised and inspected by the Joint Qualifications Council.

The Home Office visited the Falkland Islands in March 2024 and have taken back our issues regarding visas, including the proof of English issue. We are awaiting feedback on whether the issues raised can be resolved.

¹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65b930c04ec51d0014c9f1af/English_language_requirement.pdf