

## **Written evidence submitted by the Department for Education (OTE0015)**

1. The Foreign Affairs Committee's Sub-Committee on the Overseas Territories (OTs) has issued a call for written evidence on how the UK Government supports the education of students from the OTs both in the UK and in their respective territories.
2. The provision of education is devolved to local OTs governments. However, the UK Government has a responsibility under Article 73 of the United Nations Charter to promote their political, economic, social, and educational advancement.
3. There are currently three OTs that do not have access to higher education facilities in their territory: The Falkland Islands; Pitcairn; and St Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha.
4. The 2012 Government White Paper named education as a "priority" for aid assistance, including teacher training, UK-territory partnerships, and related infrastructure improvements, such as schools and internet access.
5. This call for evidence focuses on the support students and institutions get from the UK Government and asks what areas there are for improvement to their approach, particularly in relation to higher education provision.
6. The deadline for submitting written evidence is 3 May, after which the Sub-Committee intends to hold a public evidence session.

### Call for evidence

The Sub-Committee has said it welcomes written evidence addressing the following:

- In what ways is the UK Government supporting education of students from the OTs?
- Is the Government reaching its aspiration to prioritise aid assistance for education to Official Development Assistance (ODA) eligible territories?
- What challenges do OTs students looking to study in the UK face, and what can the UK Government do to help?
- To what extent are the various responsible Government departments working together in achieving their goals regarding education and the OTs?
- To what extent have they been responsive to requests and concerns raised by the OTs and their students?

## Introduction

1. Education in the Overseas Territories (OTs) is a domestic issue and, therefore, under their constitutions, the responsibility of the locally elected Government. It is a matter of domestic policy for the Government of each OT to determine what proportion of their national budget is spent on study and training, and how.
2. The UK Government has legal obligations, and has made formal commitments, to the OTs. The UK has an obligation to promote the well-being of the people of the OTs. In relation to education, the UK is obliged to ensure the OTs' "...political, economic, social, and educational advancement..." (Article 73, UN Charter). This is a broadly framed obligation, leaving a wide margin for the UK to determine how it is to be met.
3. Recognising the autonomy of OTs and divergent educational requirements, the UK Government realises its commitment in a number of ways. Through the provision of technical assistance including sharing domestic policy expertise and facilitating policy exchange through multilateral international discussions, it helps boost the capacity and development of education systems in the OTs. It also provides access to student finance for further (FE19+) and higher education, and provides access to Chevening and Commonwealth scholarships and Turing Scheme funding for OTs organizations across the education sector. ODA eligible OTs also benefit from additional funding, human capacity and infrastructure investment to support the delivery of quality education. This submission outlines in more detail these contributions.

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

4. OTs students who are also British citizens have access to institutions for further and higher education in the UK. Students from the OTs are charged the home-fee rate for further education and higher education courses at colleges and universities in the UK and are eligible for tuition fee loans in England – see paragraph 8 for further information. This means that students from the OTs are treated on an equal footing with students from the UK.

## Home Fee Status and Tuition Fee Loans

5. Persons from the OTs who come to England to study have been **entitled to Home Fee Status** since academic year 2007/08 when the UK Government decided that EU nationals from specified EU (including British) OTs should be eligible for home fee status when studying at an English university or further education provider. Accordingly, the relevant eligibility criterion for home fee status was expanded from three years' ordinary residence in the European Economic Area and Switzerland, to also include the OTs. The original policy rationale was to support the UK's OTs economic development, given that there are few or no universities or further education providers in the OTs and students must go abroad to study. Due to the requirement to treat EU nationals

equally to UK nationals, the policy covered EU nationals in EU OTs generally, not just the OTs.

6. In the academic year 2022/23, the UK Government **enhanced this offer to include tuition fee loans**. The decision to extend tuition fee loans was a consequence of EU exit. British nationals residing in Gibraltar had uniquely, been eligible for a tuition fee loan, as Gibraltar was in the EU. It was decided that this eligibility should be retained following EU exit, which meant that it was necessary to extend access to the other OTs on the same basis. This also provided additional support for the development of the OTs.
7. To qualify for fee support, persons resident in the OTs need to have settled status and satisfy the three-year ordinary residence requirement in the UK, Islands or specified OT. Eligible persons in Gibraltar may continue to satisfy the three-year ordinary residence requirement in the UK, Gibraltar, the EEA or Switzerland to qualify for student support for courses starting on or before 31 December 2027.

#### Access to Higher Education Student Finance and Further Education 19+ funding

8. From academic year 2022/23, persons who have settled status who come to the UK from specified OTs and who are starting designated full-time and part-time undergraduate courses, have been eligible for tuition fee loans and further education 19+ funding in England, subject to meeting the residency requirement. This is in addition to home fee status which is already available. To qualify these persons must have been ordinarily resident in the UK, Channel Islands, Isle of Man and/or specified OTs throughout the three-year period preceding the first day of the first academic year of the course, with at least part of that period having been spent in the OTs.
9. Family members (who are not themselves settled) of a person settled in the UK (or who would be such a person if they were ordinarily resident in the UK) can qualify for home fee status if they can satisfy the three-year ordinary residence requirement in the UK, Channel Islands, Isle of Man and/or specified OTs. The decision to extend support to include tuition fee loans only was made on the basis that settled persons from the OTs have a connection to the UK and a degree of integration within the UK, but one that is less than those persons who have been settled in the UK for three years or more.

#### Chagossians

10. In the 1960s and 1970s, the UK Government forcibly removed the Chagossians from the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT, or Chagos Islands) and introduced laws prohibiting their return. As part of efforts to mitigate the injustice caused by the government and because many of those arriving are likely to have limited education, from academic year 2024/25, home fee status, HE tuition fee support and FE19+ support have been extended to British citizens of Chagossian descent without requiring them to satisfy three-years ordinary residence in the UK. Access to FE19+ funding is likely to be particularly important to those with a poor command of the English language. This treats British citizens of Chagossian descent on a par with British citizens

residing in the OTs, as, had they not been removed from the BIOT, they would, in many cases, have been eligible for the same support as OTs residents.

#### Changing legislation to allow teachers who qualified in Gibraltar to gain Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) in England.

11. Following the introduction of an initial teacher training course and a form of professional status for teachers in Gibraltar, the Education (School Teachers' Qualifications) (England) Regulations 2003 were updated to allow for teachers, who are registered as a qualified teacher in a register established and maintained by the Director of Education of Gibraltar, to gain QTS in England. This will enable teacher trainees in Gibraltar to undertake a high quality internationally recognised teaching qualification leading to QTS and help maintain the pipeline of top-quality teachers entering schools in Gibraltar.

#### Request of University of Gibraltar to receive funding to educate UK-domiciled students

12. Ministers have met the Chancellor and Vice Chancellor of the University of Gibraltar on a number of occasions to discuss their plans for more firmly establishing the university as a relatively new institution and building its reputation in the higher education sector in the UK. A formal proposal from the University of Gibraltar has recently been received and is under consideration.

#### The Turing Scheme

13. The Turing Scheme (Scheme) provides grant funding to education providers in the UK and OTs to support school, college and university students to go on study and work placements around the world. The Scheme aims to enhance skills, advance social justice and ensure value for money. OTs can send their own students overseas and are also able to receive students from the UK and other OTs.

#### Scholarships

14. Students from St Helena and Montserrat are eligible to apply for Commonwealth Scholarships funded by the UK Government; in 2023/24 no student from either Territory was awarded this scholarship. In addition, for 2023/2024 11 Chevening Scholarships (covering studies in Financial Economics, Law, Cyber Security, Public Health, and more) were offered to students from the OTs, as set out in the table below:

CSC and Chevening OT Scholar Stats							
Chevening				CSC			
	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24		2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Anguilla	3	5	6	Anguilla			
Bermuda				Bermuda			
British Virgin Islands				British Virgin Islands			
Cayman Islands				Cayman Islands			
Falkland Islands	1			Falkland Islands			
Gibraltar				Gibraltar			
Montserrat	2	1	1	Montserrat	1		
St Helena				St Helena			
Turks and Caicos	3	1	2	Turks and Caicos			

### Development of digital infrastructure

15. Infrastructure developments, such as internet access, can improve access to education for students in remote territories via access to remote learning offered from other countries as well as access to broader resources. Whilst digital infrastructure is a mostly devolved matter, the UK Government provides significant support to the four ODA eligible OTs: Pitcairn Islands, Montserrat, St Helena and Tristan da Cunha. The FCDO-funded capital investment programme in Montserrat recently delivered a sub-sea fibre cable and in St Helena there is support for improving local telecommunications infrastructure.

### **Is the Government reaching its aspiration to prioritise aid assistance for education to Overseas Development Assistance eligible territories?**

16. The Department for Education has a limited Official Development Assistance (ODA) spend, which usually primarily relates to school support for recently arrived asylum seeker children, but the Department does share domestic expertise as outlined in this evidence.

17. Information below, covering paragraphs 18-26, relates specifically to education provision and UK Government support, through the FCDO, in ODA-supported OTs.

### St Helena

18. The UK Government currently provides around 65% of St Helena's recurrent budget (up to £33.06m in 2023/24, an increase of 4% on the previous year). This financial aid helps the St Helena Government to fund the delivery of basic public services such as education, health, and social services. This includes funding for specialist posts, such as teachers, to ensure the Island has the necessary skills across the public sector which it cannot recruit locally. Education on St Helena is free and compulsory between 5-16 years of age. Nursery and 6<sup>th</sup> form education is also available. There are currently four publicly funded schools in operation on St Helena (3 primary, 1 secondary). All schools are supported by a teacher training section that focuses on the professional development and upskilling of all teaching staff. The Education Inclusion service supports children and young people with special educational needs. The Saint Helena Community College (SHCC) offers programmes of study and support to adult learners, with an increasing range of academic and

vocational courses offered. The College offers over 300 courses. Students in St Helena and other OTs are also eligible to apply for scholarships for a Masters course at any UK University under the Chevening Scholarship Scheme. There have been eight Chevening scholars from St Helena since the year 2000.

19. The St Helena Government previously provided scholarships to students wishing to study at university which covered the cost of tuition and maintenance. These were phased out when students became eligible to apply through Student Finance in England for loans to meet the cost of tuition fees for academic year 2022/23. In 2022, the St Helena Government provided a small stipend towards maintenance/living costs for 2 students who started their studies in 2022 and maintained support for 8 students who started their studies in 2021. In 2023 the St Helena Government provided £10,000 between 6 students to help contribute towards the cost of flights and set up costs in the UK. Students on St Helena (aged 18-21) are able to apply for a student assistance loan (up to £5000 each year) from the Bank of St Helena for up to 3 years (£15,000 in total).”
20. The UK Government has facilitated a working partnership for St Helena Government with a local authority in the UK to provide support for children with special education needs. This has included training for teachers, teaching assistants, peer support and mentoring for staff in the education portfolio within St Helena Government, a review of SEND policies and curriculum support.

#### Tristan da Cunha

21. The UK Government funds a technical cooperation and capacity building programme on Tristan da Cunha. This provides funding for international experts to ensure Tristan da Cunha has sufficient technical expertise and that essential services are maintained. This includes funding for 2 expatriate teachers who in addition to teaching, deliver training to local teachers. Tristan da Cunha has one school, which provides children and young people between 3 and 16 years of age with an education. Higher education must be pursued off-island, which the Government of Tristan da Cunha has committed to provide for all who want to pursue further studies.

#### Montserrat

22. Since 1995, the UK Government has provided c£500m of aid to Montserrat, supporting c.65% of annual recurrent expenditure to fund basic needs. Montserrat is expected to graduate from ODA in 2026 as it has exceeded the high-income threshold for over three consecutive years. The UK Government considers that this is due to increased ODA allocations that are required to meet basic needs and ensure the Government of Montserrat is able to deliver essential services rather than local economic development. Inward investment, private sector development and exports are limited and there is a need to grow the economy.

23. Education on Montserrat is free and compulsory between 5-16 years of age. There are three public primary schools on the island which teaches 90 children. There is one secondary school on the island. FCDO is supporting Montserrat through a £40m Capital Investment Programme for Resilient Economic Growth over 6 years (2019-2025). The funding supports strategic infrastructure development, including refurbishment of Montserrat's secondary school.
24. The UK Government is supporting the Government of Montserrat to make strides towards their ambitions for safeguarding in education by providing dedicated resource deployed to the island.

### Pitcairn

25. Three Pitcairn islanders are children. Two are attending Boarding school in New Zealand and the third child, having reached school leaving age has returned to the Island. The local school, which followed a New Zealand curriculum, closed in 2022 due to the lack of children attending, and the remaining attendee went to boarding school in New Zealand. The UK Government's budgetary support for Pitcairn covers all elements of Government of Pitcairn Island expenditure. Education is one of the primary calls on this spend. The education for the children is paid for out of the ODA budgetary support - all education on the island is free up to the age of 16, and the island's budget pays for overseas education including at tertiary level. When the school was open, the ODA budget paid for an expatriate teacher for the school. Children on Pitcairn do not study in the UK because of the distance. The island has a good relationship with a New Zealand educational establishment.

### The Integrated Security Fund (formerly the Conflict Security and Stability Fund) Justice Programme FY23/24 Education Support

26. The Integrated Security Fund (ISF), which is an £18m of cross-Government programme funding, includes an FCDO coordinated justice programme which supports OTs social services. The FCDO have paired three OTs (see below) with high-performing local councils in the UK to provide training, expertise and mentoring to social workers. Through this support, the OTs are also able to access education support:
- a. St Helena: Hampshire County Council (HCC) have provided peer mentors to headteachers in St Helena by pairing them with Headteachers in the UK. HCC have also delivered virtual training to teaching assistants focusing on special educational needs and disabilities inclusion in the secondary setting, as well as curriculum support, and support to St Helena teachers regarding literacy and reading development to improve island literacy scores.
  - b. Montserrat: teachers in Montserrat have received training on how to support children with special educational needs and disabilities,

particularly in relation to communication difficulties and autism in Montserrat. In 24/25, the Justice Programme is funding an education specialist who will be embedded into the secondary school to provide support, expertise and training to teachers.

- c. Anguilla: In 2023/24, the Justice Programme has funded the London Borough of Bromley to deliver sessions that focused on early help provision, as well as sessions on working with children with special educational and disability Needs.

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

### Maintenance support

27. It is a longstanding requirement of the higher education system in England that, **to be eligible for full student support, that is, including maintenance support**, a student must have been ordinarily resident in the UK, the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man for three years prior to the first day of the first academic year of the course. This is based on the underpinning principle that eligibility for full support should be based on a recent residential connection, and not nationality.
28. The **rationale behind the residency requirements** is to demonstrate a connection with or integration in the UK, including a likelihood of remaining in the UK, rather than just coming here for the purposes of study. The policy was put in place to ensure that the financial support for students is carefully targeted, and that the rules governing that funding are clear and easy to apply, and to ensure that the limited public taxpayer funds available are targeted on those categories of persons with a lawful and substantial residential connection to the UK.
29. Decisions on student finance must be taken alongside other spending priorities to ensure the system remains financially sustainable. The UK Government decided to allow eligible students from the OTs to access fee loans, including postgraduate loans, when they study in England, for the reasons described above. These loans are subsidised by the UK taxpayer, not all of whom will have had the opportunity to go to university.

### Visas

30. OTs citizens without British citizenship need to apply for a visa to study in the UK. In 2023, 19 applications were made for sponsored study visas by OTs citizens and 19 sponsored study visas were granted. (In 2023, there were 457,673 sponsored study visas granted to main applicants, 5% fewer than in 2022 but 70% higher than 2019.) Data is provisional and can be found here: [Why do people come to the UK? To study - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/why-do-people-come-to-the-uk-to-study) The guidance on student visas and the caseworker guidance are published online at the following gov.uk websites: [Student visa : Overview - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/student-visa-overview), [Student route: caseworker guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/student-route-caseworker-guidance)



31. A transition to eVisas will solve some of the challenges faced by students, for example, from the Falkland Islands. Currently, visa applicants send their passport to the nearest UK Visa and Citizenship Application Service (usually in New York for applicants from the Falkland Islands), where the passport is stored until a decision has been made on the application and, where relevant, a visa is printed and endorsed in the passport. The passport is then returned. The UK Government is developing a border and immigration system which is digital by default. Using a phased approach to implementing digital services, the aim is that, by 2025, most applicants will have a secure and seamless digital journey when they interact with the UK's immigration system. Over time, this will see physical and paper-based products and services replaced with accessible, straightforward online and digital products and services such as the eVisa product and the 'view and prove' service. eVisas will remove the need for physical documents such as visa vignettes (a physical visa sticker in a passport), and as such, passports will be returned after they have been scanned.

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

32. Each of the requests received by HM Government from the OTs Tare given due regard and consideration. Funding decisions, as with any policy, are made alongside all spending priorities.