

# STATEMENT

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## **Statement by Honourable Sharie B. de Castro Minister for Education, Youth Affairs & Sports on HLSCC Relationships with UK Universities & Colleges**

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**Statement by Honourable Sharie B. de Castro**

**Minister for Education, Youth Affairs & Sports**

**At-Large Representative**

**Fifth Sitting of the Second Session of the Fifth House of Assembly**

**Tuesday, 3rd June, 2025**

**HLSCC Relationships with UK Universities & Colleges**

Madam Speaker, it is with great purpose and optimism that I rise today to provide an update on the strategic steps being taken by the Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports, in collaboration with the H. Lavity Stoutt Community College (HLSCC), to expand educational opportunities for the young people of these Virgin Islands.

The H. Lavity Stoutt Community College continues to make commendable strides in fulfilling its vision "to empower students to pursue meaningful lives and careers." As part of this ongoing effort, the President of the College accompanied me to the Education World Forum (EWF) in London, held from 18–21 May 2025. With the support of the BVI London Office, preceding EWF we engaged in a series of meetings with several tertiary institutions including Barnet & Southgate College, London Metropolitan University, Morley College, the New Model Institute for Technology and Engineering (NMITE), Richmond American University London, and the University of Westminster.

These engagements are more than ceremonial. They reflect the very real and growing interest of HLSCC graduates in pursuing further studies in the United Kingdom. They also represent a proactive, forward-looking response to recent and concerning developments in the United States, where the current U.S.

administration has temporarily halted certain categories of student visa processing—a move that has disrupted educational planning for many families and has, understandably, cast uncertainty over the future of Caribbean students seeking study in the U.S.

Madam Speaker, it is for this very reason that this trip was not just timely—it was essential.

Virgin Islanders are either British citizens or British Overseas Territories citizens and, under UK law, are classified as home students when studying in the United Kingdom. This legal status allows our students to benefit from "home fee status", a significant tuition reduction compared to the international rates charged to foreign students. This means that our students pay the same tuition as UK nationals—currently capped at £9,250 per year for undergraduate programmes—whereas international students in the UK may pay £15,000–£30,000 per year or more, depending on the course and institution. When compared with the rising cost of tuition in the United States and the current visa uncertainty, UK study offers both affordability and stability for Virgin Islands families.

I am proud to announce that this mission has already yielded results. The College has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Richmond American University London, marking a major milestone. With this new arrangement, HLSCC graduates—whose degrees are accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE)—can now for the very first time enter directly into the third year of a bachelor's programme at Richmond. The fact that Richmond is also accredited by MSCHE ensures strong academic alignment and facilitates seamless credit transfer. This development means a faster, more affordable, and academically efficient path to completing a full degree for our students.

In the past, students graduating from HLSCC with an associate degree would typically matriculate into Year 1 of a UK university programme, effectively repeating academic content they had already mastered. In some cases, they were even required to complete a foundation year before beginning their bachelor's studies, despite already holding post-secondary qualifications. This not only added time and cost but also delayed the student's entry into the workforce.

In addition, our discussions with the University of Westminster were especially productive. Westminster is a large and well-established institution known for its excellence in fields that align with our national development goals. These include architecture, biomedical science, digital business, law, construction, computer science, digital media, finance, and tourism and events management. Their academic offerings and scale of resources make them a strong candidate for becoming a preferred institution for BVI Government scholarship recipients.

Similarly, we explored exciting opportunities with London Metropolitan University, which is highly regarded for student satisfaction and teaching quality—especially in early childhood education. Their programme offerings in business and management, law, construction management, computer science, data science, digital media, education and social sciences, fashion, film and television, and tourism and events management are strongly aligned with the Ministry's strategic education and workforce priorities. We are exploring the feasibility of London Met becoming a preferred scholarship institution and possibly developing a 2+2 transfer model, particularly given their past association with MSCHE.

Of equal significance, Madam Speaker, are the innovative and technical programmes discussed with Barnet & Southgate College and Morley College, particularly in areas such as esports, fashion, design, music production, and technical trades like plumbing, electrical installation, and HVAC. These colleges offer both degree-level and short, intensive certifications that could benefit adult learners and professionals seeking rapid upskilling.

Finally, I want to emphasise that these new UK-based education pathways are the product of long-term policy planning. In Fall 2024, we reinstated the CAPE programme at HLSCC, a critical step in providing our students with qualifications widely accepted by UK universities. CAPE remains a key university entry requirement and its reintroduction was a foundational move to re-establish the academic rigour and global readiness of our student population.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry will continue to support HLSCC's efforts to develop and solidify international partnerships that open doors to higher education for BVI Islanders. In doing so, we are creating new opportunities for our youth, new

pathways for adult learners, and ultimately, a stronger and more resilient Virgin Islands.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.