

Constitution Committee
Report: Review of the UK – Overseas Territories Joint Declaration
Government Response

Introduction

1. The Government welcomes the Committee's detailed consideration of the important constitutional relationship with the Overseas Territories (OTs).
2. The Government recognises the Committee's acknowledgement of the vital societal, cultural, environmental, economic and strategic role played by the OTs as part of the wider British family, as well as the shared commitment to a modern relationship characterised by openness, mutual respect and cooperation. The Government also welcomes the Committee's recognition of the progress made in recent years to strengthen engagement between the UK Government and the OTs, while noting the Committee's view that further work is required to embed these improvements consistently across Governments.
3. The United Kingdom and the OTs share a longstanding constitutional relationship. The OTs have diverse constitutional arrangements, and not all have elected governments or legislatures. Where they exist, Territories operate their own legal systems and local governance structures. The UK retains constitutional responsibilities, including for defence and international relations, and an overarching responsibility to ensure good governance, supported by Governors.
4. The UK–Overseas Territories Joint Declaration, agreed in 2023, reaffirmed the shared principles underpinning this relationship and set out mutual commitments intended to support a strong, modern and forward-looking partnership.
5. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has lead responsibility within the UK Government for managing the UK's constitutional relationship with the OTs and for coordinating engagement across Whitehall e.g. other government departments' own responsibilities to OTs. Given the cross-government nature of many of the issues raised in the Committee's report, this response has been prepared with contributions from relevant departments.

6. This document sets out the Government's response to the Committee's conclusions and recommendations, addressing each in turn. In line with the Committee's request, the response clearly states whether the Government agrees, partially agrees, or disagrees with each recommendation, and sets out the reasons for the Government's position. The Government is committed to continued dialogue with the OTs and with Parliament, and welcomes the Committee's contribution to supporting a respectful and constructive relationship for the long term.

Recommendation 1 - We acknowledge the vital societal, cultural, environmental, economic and strategic role that the Overseas Territories play as part of the wider UK family. We welcome, in particular, the vital work played by the Overseas Territories in the management of unique terrestrial and marine ecosystems, as set out in the UK Overseas Territories Biodiversity Strategy. We also, however, draw attention to the unique exposure of the Overseas Territories to global challenges, not least in relation to climate change and geopolitical uncertainty, and to the potential impact on the UK. We emphasise the constitutional obligations of the UK Government for the Overseas Territories in relation to foreign affairs and defence.

Government Response: Agree.

8. The Government agrees with the Committee that the OTs make an important contribution to the wider British family. They have significant societal, cultural, environmental, economic and strategic value. In particular, the Government recognises the global importance of the OTs' unique land and marine environments and their role in helping the UK deliver environmental and biodiversity goals on behalf of the wider British family.
9. The Government also recognises that the OTs face unique challenges, including isolation, the impacts of climate change, environmental pressures, health security and geopolitical uncertainty. The UK Government takes its constitutional responsibilities for foreign affairs and defence seriously and remains committed to working in partnership with the OTs to address shared risks and opportunities, in line with their constitutional arrangements. We will defend the OTs resolutely.

Recommendation 2 - The UK's relationship with the Overseas Territories has matured and modernised significantly in recent decades. However, there remains an underlying tension between the UK's overarching responsibility for good governance and upholding international commitments, and the Overseas Territories' desire to exercise autonomy. This can in turn engender a sense among some of the Overseas Territories that they are not appropriately respected or valued. The historical attitude of the UK Government was to regard the Overseas Territories as a post-colonial problem to be managed. This mindset is out of date and must be left in the past, allowing the modern relationship to become one truly characterised by—in the words of the Minister for the Overseas Territories — “openness and mutual respect”. In that spirit, the UK Government and the Overseas Territories must ensure that they work together to understand their respective positions and reach resolutions on policy and constitutional matters for mutual benefit. We set out ways in which this can be achieved below.

Government Response: Partially Agree.

10. The Government agrees that the relationship between the UK and the OTs has evolved significantly and continues to modernise. This reflects a shared commitment to partnership, cooperation and mutual respect, as reaffirmed through regular ministerial engagement, including at the 2025 Joint Ministerial Council (JMC), where Ministers underlined that the relationship is based on trust, openness and joint working to address shared challenges.
11. The Government also recognises that balancing the UK's constitutional responsibilities—particularly for good governance, foreign affairs and international obligations—while respecting the level of autonomy exercised by OTs requires careful handling, sustained dialogue and early engagement.
12. In practice, this balance is supported through the role of Governors, who exercise reserved powers while working closely with elected governments. Governors are expected to operate in partnership, engaging early and respecting local democratic mandates, while ensuring that the UK meets its international and constitutional responsibilities. UK-HMG delivery partners also play a critical role in operationalising the partnership.
13. The Government does not accept that outdated or dismissive attitudes characterise its current approach. The OTs are not viewed as a post-colonial problem to be managed. Such perceptions do not reflect modern practice. The UK's approach is grounded in partnership and respect, and a commitment from both the UK Government and the OTs to openness, transparency, early engagement and clear communication on matters of shared interest.
14. The Government remains committed to working collaboratively with the OTs to understand respective positions and resolve policy and constitutional issues constructively, in line with the new Charter we intend to publish, and the shared direction set out at the JMC, for mutual benefit.

Recommendation 3 - The UK–Overseas Territories Joint Declaration is a useful restatement of shared principles and mutual commitments. As a jointly owned document, it is also a symbolic demonstration of the positive modern relationship between the UK and the Overseas Territories. However, it does not have a substantive impact on day-to-day relations with the UK and, beyond the yearly meeting of the Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council (JMC), lacks any effective mechanism for monitoring whether, how and when the commitments made have been met.

Government Response: Partially Agree.

15. The Government agrees that the UK–Overseas Territories Joint Declaration, established under the previous Government, provides a useful and jointly owned statement of the principles that underpin the modern relationship. While the Declaration represents a political commitment made by a previous administration, it continues to act as an important reference point for engagement between the UK Government and the OTs.
16. The Government recognises the Committee’s view that the Declaration has not always been visible in day-to-day engagement and that monitoring arrangements could be clearer. However, in practice, progress against commitments is tracked through established mechanisms. Commitments agreed through the JMC are recorded and monitored via a JMC action tracker, alongside regular bilateral engagement and ongoing cross-government working.

Recommendation 4 - The Minister for the Overseas Territories told us that the Joint Declaration is still operative. That being the case, the UK Government, working with the Overseas Territories, must ensure that the Joint Declaration is kept at the forefront of their thinking on a day-to-day basis, to ensure that it has a discernible practical impact on their relationship. To facilitate this, formal mechanisms should be established to monitor, and report on, progress against the commitments made within the Joint Declaration. This requires as a minimum the publication of an annual update and review of the Joint Declaration, in conjunction with the yearly meeting of the Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council.

Government Response: Partially Agree.

17. The Government agrees that the Joint Declaration could have a clearer and more discernible practical impact in supporting day-to-day engagement. While the existing JMC action-tracker together with bilateral engagement already supports delivery of JMC actions, the Government is open to a more explicit and consolidated approach and will consult the OTs to form a consensus on how to go about this.

Recommendation 5 - Bilateral Partnership Compacts have the potential to be used as tools to apply the shared principles underpinning the UK’s relationship with the Overseas Territories set out in the Joint Declaration to the specific circumstances in each Territory. We welcome the UK Government’s commitment to establish bilateral Partnership Compacts with individual Overseas Territories that wish to do so. However, we regret that formal negotiations have yet to begin, notwithstanding the enthusiasm of many of the Territories. The UK Government must work with interested Overseas Territories

to bring forward bilateral Partnership Compacts as a matter of urgency. It must also work with the Territories on an agreed framework, setting out which issues are within or outside the scope of Compacts, and how progress against the commitments made will be reviewed.

Government Response: Partially Agree.

18. The Government agrees that Partnership Compacts provide a practical and tailored way to apply the principles of the Joint Declaration. The Government remains committed to offering a Partnership Compact to any OT that wishes to develop one. Compacts will be voluntary and non-legally binding.
19. The Government considers it important that Compacts are developed jointly and at a pace that reflects capacity, so that they are sustainable and deliver meaningful outcomes. For this reason, the Government invited views on the proposed broad terms of reference for Partnership Compacts at the 2025 JMC.
20. Since the JMC, the Government has received clear expressions of interest from two OTs in working with the UK Government to develop the first Partnership Compacts. Other Territories have indicated that, given limited capacity, their immediate priority is to focus on constitutional modernisation and related negotiations. The Government respects these priorities and will continue to engage with all Territories to support progress on Compacts where there is interest.
21. The Government will continue to work with interested Territories to develop Compacts, including agreeing their scope and reviewing progress against commitments, in line with the principles of partnership, flexibility and mutual agreement set out in the Joint Declaration.

Recommendation 6 - We welcome examples of mutual support between Overseas Territories, and note the developing relationship between many of the Overseas Territories and international bodies such as CARICOM. We also welcome the UK Government's commitment to support and facilitate the development of Compacts between Overseas Territories, should any wish to establish them.

Government Response: Agree.

22. The Government welcomes examples of mutual support and cooperation between OTs, including increased engagement with regional and international bodies where Territories choose to pursue this, in close coordination with the UK's obligations. The Government values this collaboration and will continue to support and facilitate it on request within the framework of UK commitments to international law and constitutional responsibilities. This includes interest from

OTs in developing arrangements such as Compacts with one another, where they wish to explore these.

Recommendation 7 - *The UK Government has stated that it will not publish a Strategy as envisaged in the Joint Declaration, but will instead produce a Charter of Engagement. We invite the UK Government to clarify the reason for this decision, the substantive difference between a Strategy and a Charter, whether and when the Charter will be published, whether and what consultation with the Overseas Territories has been undertaken on the scope and contents of the Charter, and how it will be kept under review.*

Government Response: Partially Agree.

23. The Government recognises the importance of clarity and transparency in how commitments to the OTs are set out and delivered. Having considered the approach originally envisaged in the Joint Declaration, the Government has decided not to publish a standalone Strategy, but instead to develop alternative mechanisms, including a UK Government Charter of Engagement.

24. The Charter of Engagement is intended to consolidate and codify principles, responsibilities and established practice for UK Government engagement with the OTs. Unlike a Strategy, which would set out a discrete programme of activity for a fixed period, the Charter is designed to embed responsibilities across Whitehall as relevant, provide clarity for officials, and reinforce consistent engagement in line with constitutional arrangements, rather than create an additional strategic document.

25. The Charter is being developed across the UK Government and is being discussed with the OTs as part of that process. The Government intends for the Charter to be made public in due course and kept under review to ensure it remains an effective and up-to-date guide to UK Government engagement, and holding UK Departments to account.

Recommendation 8 - *The proliferation of extant and proposed documentation concerning the Overseas Territories since the publication of the White Paper in 2012 has engendered uncertainty about the status, relative standing and inter-dependence of the various documents. This uncertainty strengthens the case for publication of an overarching and definitive new White Paper. In the meantime, we call on the Government to clarify how the various documents relate to each other, which of them are still in force or to be developed in the future, and whether the 2012 White Paper continues to take precedence.*

Government Response: Partially Agree.

26. The Government recognises that a number of policy statements, frameworks and proposed tools have been introduced since 2012, which may have caused some confusion about how they fit together. The Government appreciates that clearer explanation of how these documents relate to one another would be helpful.

27. However, the Government is clear that there has never been any doubt that the 1999 and 2012 Overseas Territories White Papers remain important as the foundations of the UK’s modern relationship with the OTs. Their status and role have not been weakened. Later documents and initiatives are intended to build on and update parts of that framework, not to replace it.

28. The Government therefore sets out below a clearer explanation of how the key documents relate to one another, which ones remain in force, and which are intended to be developed further. This includes the respective roles of the White Papers, the Joint Declaration, the Joint Ministerial Council, the proposed Charter of Engagement and Partnership Compacts.

2002 Overseas Territories Act	Remains the last primary legislation specifically governing the UK’s relationship with the OTs, setting out their status and citizenship arrangements. This flowed from the 1999 White Paper
2012 White Paper	Sets out the constitutional foundations of the current relationship.
2023 Joint Declaration	Political compact reaffirming those principles without reopening constitutional arrangements.
Charter of Engagement	An internal, cross-Whitehall operating framework clarifying how departments engage with the Territories.
Partnership Compacts	Bilateral, Territory-specific delivery tools translating shared priorities into measurable action.
JMC	The UK’s highest-level forum for political dialogue with the Territories, bringing together UK Ministers and Territory leaders to reaffirm the partnership and agree shared priorities and actions.

Recommendation 9 - We strongly agree with the Overseas Territories that the 2012 White Paper is now badly out of date, and that a new White Paper is urgently required, not least to “bring together the existing patchwork of documents into a single clear reference point”.² We urge the UK Government to bring forward a White Paper during the next parliamentary session.

Government Response: Partially Agree.

29. The Government recognises that the 1999 and 2012 Overseas Territories White Papers were produced under different administrations and in a different operating context, and recognises that significant geopolitical, climate, health, security and governance developments since then mean they no longer reflect the full range of current challenges and priorities. The Government also recognises the strength of feeling among OTs on the case for a further White Paper.
30. However, the Government considers that the most effective way to deliver practical improvements in the near term is through work currently underway, including the development of a UK Government Charter of Engagement and Partnership Compacts with individual Territories that indicate they would like to progress one. These initiatives are intended to strengthen clarity, accountability and delivery, while allowing flexibility to reflect differing territorial circumstances.
31. The Government remains openminded about future options, including a new White Paper in due course, and will keep this under review considering progress on existing initiatives and changes in the wider operating environment.

Recommendation 10 - In that context, we welcome the Minister for the Overseas Territories' commitment to consider proposals from the Overseas Territories and urge the UK Government to take account of the important range of issues that they put to us for inclusion in a new White Paper. Not least, a new White Paper provides an opportunity for the UK Government, together with the Overseas Territories, to think more strategically about the constitutional relationship, and how it is likely to evolve in the future.

Government Response: Partially Agree.

32. The Government would welcome proposals from the OTs and values their active involvement in shaping their futures. Ministers will consider proposals put forward by the OTs and engage constructively where these raise issues for discussion.
33. The Government agrees that ongoing dialogue is important. It provides a space to consider how constitutional relationships may develop over time, taking into account the views and priorities of individual OTs. Should the government decide to produce a new White Paper, it would of course engage closely with all OTs in its development.

Recommendation 11 - Consistent ministerial engagement is crucial to the success of the Joint Ministerial Council. The Government should ensure that the Minister for the Overseas Territories is always available to chair the Council,

and that other ministers attend when the agenda includes items within their remit.

Government Response: Agree.

34. The Government recognises that consistent ministerial leadership is central to the effectiveness of the JMC. This was demonstrated by the 2025 JMC which was led by Minister Doughty, with the participation of seven other UK Ministers and events hosted by His Majesty The King, Mr Speaker and the Foreign Secretary. The Government will continue to prioritise the availability of the Minister for the Overseas Territories to chair the Council and to seek appropriate engagement from other Ministers and their Departments where agenda items fall within their responsibilities.

Recommendation 12 - Whilst the Joint Ministerial Council is valuable as a high-level, multilateral engagement forum, it is not a substitute for sustained bilateral engagement with each of the Overseas Territories. Formal ministerial engagement between the UK Government and the Overseas Territories must not be confined to the Joint Ministerial Council.

Government Response: Agree.

35. The Government recognises that sustained, direct engagement with each OT is essential. The JMC complements, but does not replace, this bilateral engagement.
36. Since the 2025 JMC, Ministers and officials have maintained regular contact with Territories through visits, calls and in-territory presence. The Minister for the Overseas Territories, Minister Doughty has engaged actively with Territory leaders. He accompanied His Majesty The King during His visit to Bermuda, during which the Minister met Premier Burt. Since the 2025 JMC, Minister Doughty has also met the Premiers of the Virgin Islands, Turks and Caicos, Falkland Islands and Bermuda in London, and has regularly been in touch with other leaders and legislative representatives.
37. The Minister for Children and Families met the Premier of Montserrat in London, and the Attorney General took part virtually in the Overseas Territories Attorneys General Conference, held in the Virgin Islands. The Minister for Skills also met the education ministers from St Helena, the Falkland Islands and the Cayman Islands in London.
38. Minister Doughty has maintained regular contact through group and bilateral calls. He has held discussions with Caribbean Territory leaders, including on illicit finance, and bilateral calls with leaders such as the Chief Minister of Saint Helena and the Premier of Montserrat. He has also engaged directly with

Members of Legislative Assemblies in the Falkland Islands. In response to emerging issues, he has remained in close contact with leaders in Tristan da Cunha, Saint Helena and Ascension Island following the hantavirus outbreak. Officials have supported these engagements.

39. Governors and their offices provide a continuous in-territory link between the UK Government and Territory administrations. Senior officials also engage directly with Territories through key forums, including the Attorneys General Conference and discussions on illicit finance. The FCDO Director has visited seven OTs in the last twelve months.

40. Together, this sustained programme of ministerial and official engagement ensures that the UK responds to Territory-specific priorities, addresses emerging issues quickly, and maintains strong bilateral relationships alongside the JMC.

Recommendation 13 - The strength and effectiveness of the relationship between the Overseas Territories and the UK Government is heavily dependent on the interest and commitment from time to time of the Minister for the Overseas Territories. Recent ministers have approached the role with dedication, but this cannot be relied upon. The regular turnover of FCDO ministers and officials has had a detrimental impact on inter-personal relationships with the Overseas Territories and institutional memory. The UK Government should keep in mind the particular importance for the Overseas Territories, given the breadth, sensitivity and significance of their relationship with the UK, of continuity at ministerial and official level. It should therefore only make changes to ministerial and official responsibilities for the Overseas Territories sparingly. The UK Government should also ensure that processes for regular engagement are deeply embedded within the FCDO so that they are not vulnerable to changing personalities.

Government Response: Agree.

41. The Government recognises that continuity, institutional knowledge and trusted relationships are important to an effective partnership with the OTs. While changes to Ministers and some officials are a normal part of government, the Government agrees that sustained engagement should not depend on individual personalities.

42. The Government therefore places importance on consistent ways of working and regular engagement within the FCDO, to support continuity of approach, retain institutional knowledge and maintain stable relationships with the OTs over time.

Recommendation 14 - *We acknowledge perceptions of an inequality of treatment of the Overseas Territories by the FCDO. Whilst there are legitimate reasons for increased focus on specific Territories, particularly at times of crisis or opportunity, this can cause frustration amongst those Territories that struggle to capture the attention of the UK Government. Furthermore, recent decades have shown that any of the Territories may face specific challenges that require the UK's attention and assistance (including challenges indirectly to the UK), and that these challenges often arise unexpectedly. The UK Government must therefore ensure that opportunities for engagement, particularly at ministerial level, apply to all Territories in a consistent and even-handed way.*

Government Response: Partially Agree.

43. The Government recognises perceptions of uneven engagement across the OTs and understands the frustration this might cause. While there are times when Territories require increased attention—for example in response to crises or significant opportunities—the Government agrees that all Territories should have fair and consistent access to engagement, including at ministerial level.
44. The Government will continue to ensure that opportunities for engagement are applied in a consistent and even-handed way, and that arrangements are in place to maintain regular contact with all Territories, recognising that challenges can arise unexpectedly in any part of the OTs family.

Recommendation 15 - *It is important that there is a department within the UK Government that has overall responsibility for managing the relationship with the Overseas Territories. To best support the Territories, this department needs to invest in developing strong relationships with each of the Territories and in maintaining deep institutional knowledge about them all, at the same time acknowledging the impact that the changing geopolitical picture may have on these relationships.*

Government Response: Agree.

45. The Government agrees that clear departmental leadership is essential to managing the UK's relationship with the OTs. The FCDO has overall responsibility for this relationship, in line with the UK's international obligations and constitutional responsibilities and liaises with foreign countries and multilateral agencies on behalf of the OTs. The FCDO is committed to strengthening its engagement with each Territory while maintaining deep institutional knowledge across the OTs.
46. The Government underlines that this relationship is delivered on a cross-Government basis. All UK Government departments are responsible for

supporting the OTs within their areas of competence, and each has designated ministerial responsibility for this engagement. The FCDO plays a central coordinating role, including through the Overseas Territories Ministerial Group and the Overseas Territories Directors' Board, which support joined-up policy development and engagement across Whitehall.

47. The Government also recognises the importance of integrating the OTs into wider UK international engagement, including through work in the Commonwealth and across relevant regions.

48. The Government acknowledges that the geopolitical context continues to evolve, with implications for the OTs and for the UK's engagement with them. It will continue to ensure that its approach remains informed, joined up and responsive to these changes, supported by strong relationships, sustained dialogue and a clear understanding of each Territory's individual circumstances.

Recommendation 16 - *The Government should review the appropriateness of, and set out the rationale for, responsibilities relating to the Overseas Territories remaining in the FCDO. In doing so, it should consider how to develop a career pathway for civil servants specialising in the Overseas Territories.*

Government Response: Partially Agree.

49. The Government is clear on the rationale for the FCDO leading the UK's relationship with the OTs. This reflects the UK's international obligations, constitutional responsibilities, including for foreign affairs and defence, as well as the diplomatic, security and regional dimensions of engagement including international discussions on climate change and biodiversity for example. It also enables the OTs to be integrated into the UK's wider international work, including through engagement in the Commonwealth and across relevant regions.

50. The Government underlines that this relationship is delivered on a cross-Government basis. All UK Government departments are responsible for supporting the OTs within their areas of competence, and for maintaining direct engagement where relevant, including each UK Government department having an assigned minister with responsibility for their department's relationship with the Territories.

51. The FCDO plays a central coordinating role, ensuring coherence across Whitehall and supporting effective collective delivery.

52. The Government also recognises the importance of sustaining deep expertise and institutional knowledge on the OTs. This is supported through careful

preparation for postings, structured learning and development, and continued investment in capability. This includes the development of dedicated OTs learning through the College of Diplomacy, with the intention of wider availability across the Civil Service, alongside targeted programmes to support those preparing for roles in the Territories.

53. This approach is reflected in the experience of those currently serving in senior roles, including Governors and Heads of Government Offices, many of whom have previously worked on and in the OTs, in relevant regions, or across a range of UK Government departments. A number have served in multiple OTs roles, contributing to continuity and depth of expertise.

54. At the same time, the Government considers it essential to continue drawing on experience from across the Civil Service, reflecting the full range of issues covered. The OTs benefit from a wide range of professional skills and perspectives, and the Government will continue to recruit and appoint individuals with relevant expertise from across departments, rather than limiting roles to a single specialist career pathway.

Recommendation 17 - Constructive UK Government departmental engagement with the Overseas Territories requires early engagement, ongoing and transparent communication, and clarity over roles and responsibilities, particularly between UK departments. These principles should be reflected in the upcoming UK Government Charter on Engagement as the basis for engagement with the Overseas Territories.

Government Response: Agree.

55. The Government believes that the principles set out in this recommendation are essential to effective engagement with the OTs. These principles will be reflected in the UK Government Charter of Engagement, which is intended to provide a clear and consistent basis for how UK Government departments work with the OTs across Whitehall.

Recommendation 18 - A cross-Whitehall culture that respects and values the Overseas Territories is central to effective engagement. The FCDO should play a more active role across government in educating officials in other departments about the Overseas Territories and the UK's constitutional relationship with them. This should involve practical guidance about when and how to engage with the Territories at official level.

Government Response: Agree.

56. The Government agrees that a cross-Whitehall culture which respects and values the OTs is essential to effective engagement. The Government recognises the importance of ensuring that officials across departments understand the UK's constitutional relationship with the OTs and what this means in practice for policy development and delivery. As part of this commitment, the Minister with responsibility for the Overseas Territories has engaged directly with his Whitehall counterparts to facilitate engagement with the OTs.
57. The FCDO plays a leading role in supporting this understanding across Whitehall. This includes sharing clear expectations about roles and responsibilities, supporting early and appropriate engagement with the OTs, and helping departments draw on existing learning and development opportunities. These include preparation for OTs postings, knowledge sharing between officials, and wider Civil Service training and development routes, including through the Fast Stream and international capability building programmes.

Recommendation 19 - We welcome the Minister for the Overseas Territories' statement that the Charter of Engagement will commit to a dedicated point of contact for the Overseas Territories in each Government department. The UK Government should ensure that a list of these officials is made available to Territory governments as soon as possible and updated annually.

Government Response: Agree.

58. The Government welcomes the recommendation for the Charter of Engagement to include a dedicated point of contact for the OTs in each UK Government department aligned to the assigned minister with responsibility for their department's relationship with the Territories. This aligns with the 2023 JMC Communique which agreed that "each UK Government department has an assigned minister with responsibility for their department's relationship with the Territories."
59. The FCDO already shares a list of Ministerial and departmental points of contact with OTs governments through their Representatives on an annual basis and keeps this list under review, updating it as needed.

Recommendation 20 - Structured processes should be put in place ahead of the next meeting of the ministerial group on the Overseas Territories to provide the Territories with the opportunity to feed into the agenda. The final agenda and a readout of the meetings should also be shared with them.

Government Response: Agree.

60. The Government agrees that early and structured engagement ahead of ministerial group meetings is important to support effective and inclusive discussion. OTs already have the opportunity to contribute to agenda-setting in advance of meetings, and this will continue.

61. The Government also recognises the importance of transparency. Final agendas and meeting readouts are shared with OT Representatives through regular coordination meetings with the FCDO. This helps support clarity, accountability and effective follow-up.

Recommendation 21–22 (Concluding observations) - *The relationship between the UK and the Overseas Territories is of fundamental constitutional importance. The Minister for the Overseas Territories told us that the UK Government’s approach is based on “openness and mutual respect”, and that the relationship “is definitely the strongest that it has been in a number of years”. We heard that the relationship has been strengthened and modernised in recent years, and we recognise the positive progress that has been made under recent ministers. We were also, however, made aware of a range of examples that suggest that openness and respect for the Overseas Territories is not yet consistently embedded across the UK Government’s engagement with the Territories. These include:*

- *the lack of a dedicated mechanism for structured monitoring or assessment of delivery on the commitments set out in the Joint Declaration, the 2012 White Paper and other published framework documents;*
- *the lack of delivery of a number of commitments made in these documents;*
- *in particular, the lack of urgency in delivering bilateral Partnership Compacts in spite of the enthusiasm of many Overseas Territories;*
- *furthermore, the failure to fulfil the commitment to a new Strategy, or to produce a new White Paper, despite the 2012 White Paper being badly out of date;*
- *the lack of information shared with the Overseas Territories about the work of the ministerial group on the Overseas Territories;*
- *the detrimental impact on inter-personal relationships of the regular turnover of FCDO ministers and officials with responsibility for the Overseas Territories;*
- *inconsistent engagement with the Overseas Territories by other Government departments, together with a lack of understanding of the implications for the Territories of policy decisions; and*
- *a perceived lack of equity in the treatment of Overseas Territories.”*

The UK Government must commit to structurally embedding the features of positive engagement with the Overseas Territories, to support a respectful, reciprocal and constructive relationship for the long-term. This should begin with the publication of a new White Paper in the next parliamentary session.

Government Response: Partially agree.

62. The Government agrees that the relationship between the UK and the OTs is of fundamental constitutional importance and that positive features of engagement should be applied consistently across government. The Government welcomes the Committee's recognition of the progress made in recent years to strengthen and modernise the relationship.

63. The Government acknowledges the Committee's view that engagement has not always been consistent across Whitehall. In response, the Government has focused on practical steps to improve clarity, transparency and follow-through. In particular, commitments agreed through the JMC are recorded in a formal action log, which is monitored regularly and shared with OT governments through their UK Representatives. OTs are invited to comment and engage on progress. Actions that are not completed within a JMC cycle are rolled forward. As set out in the Minister's evidence, 94% of actions agreed at the 2024 JMC have already been delivered or are well under way, with the remainder carried forward for continued scrutiny.

64. Government does not agree that there is a lack of delivery against commitments overall, nor that the absence of a new White Paper means that the framework for engagement is ineffective. The Government does not consider the 1999 and 2012 Overseas Territories White Papers to be redundant. They remain the cornerstone of the UK's modern relationship with the OTs and continue to provide a clear constitutional and policy foundation. Subsequent initiatives are intended to build on that framework, not replace it or to cover issues not adequately reflected at the time. The Government also notes the Minister's invitation for the OTs themselves to bring forward proposals on how the relationship should continue to evolve.

65. On Partnership Compacts, the Government recognises the interest expressed by a number of OTs. Since the 2025 JMC, two Territories have formally indicated their wish to begin work on developing Compacts, and the Government is engaging with them on this. Compacts are voluntary and are being developed collaboratively to ensure they are proportionate, durable and deliver practical value.

66. The Government recognises concerns about continuity arising from changes in Ministers and officials. While movement is an inherent feature of the Civil

Service, and Government in general, the Government notes that many officials working on the OTs build long-term expertise through multiple roles over time, and that a number of current Governors and Heads of Government Offices have previous experience working on OTs issues and a depth of expertise on the critical policy issues that many of the Territories face. At the same time, the Government considers it important to continue recruiting from across the Civil Service, drawing on a wide range of professional experience rather than restricting roles to a closed specialist cadre.

67. The Government also recognises the perception held by some that engagement has not always felt equitable across the OTs. The Government remains committed to addressing this through clearer expectations across Whitehall, improved understanding of the constitutional relationship, and continued dialogue with Territories to ensure their perspectives are understood and reflected in policy development.

68. In light of these measures, the Government does not agree that publishing a new White Paper in the next parliamentary session is necessary at this stage. The Government considers that the most effective way to deliver practical improvements in the near term is through work currently underway to strengthen clarity, accountability and delivery including the development of a UK Government Charter of Engagement and Partnership Compacts. As stated the Government remains openminded about future options, including a new White Paper in due course, and will keep this under review considering progress on existing initiatives and changes in the wider operating environment.

Conclusion

69. The Government is grateful to the Constitution Committee for its report on the United Kingdom's relationship with the OTs and for the scrutiny it has brought to the operation of the UK–Overseas Territories Joint Declaration. The Government welcomes the Committee's constructive engagement and the contributions made by OTs representatives, Ministers, officials and other witnesses during the inquiry.

70. The Government recognises the importance of regular, meaningful dialogue and consultation with the OTs to ensure that the relationship remains effective, respectful and responsive to changing circumstances.

71. Throughout this relationship, Governors and Administrators play a central role in upholding the constitutional framework, supporting effective partnership with elected governments, and ensuring that the UK's responsibilities are exercised in a way that reflects the principles of openness, mutual respect and cooperation.
72. The Government remains committed to continuing and strengthening engagement with the OTs, working in partnership to address shared challenges and opportunities, and to supporting a modern constitutional relationship that continues to evolve in line with shared principles of openness, mutual respect and cooperation.