

Cross-Party Group on India

Thursday 11th September 2025, 1 to 2.30pm

Minutes

Present

Group members

Pam Gosal MBE MSP
Alexander Burnett MSP
Foyso Choudhury MSP
Sharon Dowey MSP
Murdo Fraser MSP
Kenneth Gibson MSP
Sandesh Gulhane MSP
Craig Hoy MSP
Liam Kerr MSP
Douglas Lumsden MSP
Alexander Stewart MSP
Paul Sweeney MSP
Michelle Thomson MSP

Invited guests

H.E. Mr. Vikram K. Doraiswami, High Commissioner of the Republic of India to the United Kingdom
Ms Aline Dobbie, Author, Blogger and Travel Writer
Ms Hamna Mariyam Khan, First secretary, High Commission of India in London
Mr Enkhee Namsrai, Independent Consultant
Mr Sonal Negi, Vice Consul, Consulate General of India, Edinburgh
Mr Ritwij Raj, Global Challenges Scholar, Adam Smith Business School University of Glasgow
Poonam Gupta OBE, Vice President, Scottish Chambers of Commerce
Mr Siddharth Malik, Consul General of India, Edinburgh
Manjulika Singh OBE
Mr Hari P, Photographer

Secretariat Services provided by Yolande Claes, of PG Paper Company Ltd

Apologies

Abhijit Chakraborty, IT Professional from the banking sector

Harish Lokhun, Head of Education, British Council Scotland
Pauline McNeill MSP
Paul O’Kane MSP
Douglas Ross MSP

1. Welcome and Apologies

The Convenor welcomed the group to the meeting and thanked everyone for their attendance.

Apologies were noted.

The minutes from the last meeting of the Group held on 7th October 2024 were approved by Alexander Stewart MSP and seconded Sandesh Gulhane MSP.

2. AGM

Re-election of Office Bearers

The Convenor, Pam Gosal MSP, handed over the meeting to proceed with the re-appointments of the Office Bearers and Secretary.

Alexander Stewart MSP nominated Pam Gosal MSP as Convenor, and this was seconded by Sandesh Gulhane MSP and Sharon Dowie MSP.

Alexander Stewart MSP nominated Paul O’Kane MSP and Michelle Thomson MSP as Deputy Convenors and this was seconded by Foysol Choudhury MSP and Kenneth Gibson MSP.

Alexander Stewart MSP thanked the Convenor and Co-Vice Convenors for the work in the past year.

The Group nominated Yolande Claes as Secretary to the Group and the Convenor thanked PG Paper for providing secretariat services to the Group.

The Convenor thanked the Group for her re-election and for their hard work for the CPG on India. The Convenor also conveyed her thanks to the H.E. Mr. Vikram K. Doraiswami, High Commissioner of the Republic of India to the United Kingdom and Mr Siddharth Malik, Consul General of India, Edinburgh for supporting the CPG on India, as well as Mrs Poonam Gupta OBE for all her support, including during the trade mission to India in October 2023.

3. India – UK Trade Deal

The Convenor welcomed and introduced H.E. Mr. Vikram K. Doraiswami, High Commissioner of the Republic of India to the United Kingdom.

H.E. Mr. Vikram K. Doraiswami said it was a pleasure to be back at the Scottish Parliament and welcome the delivery of the final version of the India – UK trade agreement which had been planned and conceptualised for years. He added that the agreement could considerably change the Indi – Uk partnership and that opportunities were significant, with a potential £5 billion increase forecast for the UK – India trade.

H.E. Mr. Vikram K. Doraiswami highlighted that the Scottish whisky industry would clearly highly benefit from the agreement, with a further commitment to reduce cost of tariffs as well as an opportunity to see how new partnerships could be created.

He added that primary targets were the Scottish distilleries.

H.E. Mr. Vikram K. Doraiswami also sought the CPG on India's assistance in finding other businesses here and making them more successful in India. He highlighted that, for example, the salmon industry had opportunities to benefit from the trade agreement as well as other Scottish food and confectionary products. He also observed that there were opportunities for the pharmaceutical industry as well as for research centres in Scottish universities, with the possibility to develop campuses in India. In addition, opportunities for the hospitality industry were noted, with strong interest from all major investors in India and the possibility to get hold of skilled workers from India to Scotland. H.E. Mr. Vikram K. Doraiswami also stressed that the trade agreement not only offered the potential to develop such partnerships but could also lead to a major increase in export from Scotland to India.

Mr Siddharth Malik, Consul General of India, Edinburgh commented that there had been a lot of interest from Scotland to explore trade possibilities in India since the signing of the trade agreement and that cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, etc could be targeted.

H.E. Mr. Vikram K. Doraiswami noted that it was hoped that the trade agreement would be ratified in summer 2026 and suggested that the CPG on India could visit India shortly afterwards.

In a query by Liam Kerr MSP noting that visa applications were complicated, H.E. Mr. Vikram K. Doraiswami confirmed that e-visas were very straightforward to apply for online. Kenneth Gibson MSP highlighted the need for direct flights from Scotland to India; H.E. Mr. Vikram K. Doraiswami confirmed that discussions were ongoing with relevant airlines and that direct flights to Scotland were a high priority but that the main current issue was a lack of available aircrafts. The Consul General of India also confirmed ongoing talks with Glasgow and Edinburgh airports.

In response to a query by Foyso Choudhury MSP on the current presence of Scottish universities in India, H.E. Mr. Vikram K. Doraiswami confirmed that Aberdeen was opening a campus in India and highlighted that the new education policy was bringing new opportunities for UK campuses to open there, with one from Scotland so far.

Michelle Thomson MSP queried if there was any progress with regards to financial and tech services, H.E. Mr. Vikram K. Doraiswami observed that there was scope for more to happen. Citing opportunities to make the railways in India greener, develop solar energy and building and increasing airport and port capacity, H.E. Mr. Vikram K. Doraiswami stated that capital and private investment were needed to develop the infrastructure in India and that big infrastructure projects were being repackaged to attract capital partnerships. In addition, the Consul General of India confirmed that a FinTech delegation would visit Scotland and that talks were ongoing.

Liam Kerr MSP highlighted the big prospects in the North East of Scotland, including in terms of renewable energy and the need to diversify in order to rely less on gas and oil. H.E. Mr. Vikram K. Doraiswami noted that there were big solar projects in the Gujarat region of India and commented that India was naturally well-suited in the renewable energy sector, with a skilled workforce, and had the capacity to be a net exporter of green hydrogen, highlighting the potential for opportunities for Scotland with India in that sector. Mr Kerr noted that the Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce was very pro-active and keen to seek such new opportunities.

Alexander Stewart MSP noted that education had been mentioned but wondered about culture and opportunities there. H.E. Mr. Vikram K. Doraiswami highlighted that, once the basics had been addressed, other areas like culture and sports could be looked at, noting that these were expandable and exportable. He noted that skills in managing museums for example were lacking in India while Scotland was very skilled in the culture sector and could help India develop it as well as make it marketable. The Consul General of India observed that many Bollywood films were filmed in Scotland, including in Inverclyde and that there was a big contingent of Indian artist at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. H.E. Mr. Vikram K. Doraiswami stressed that there was a big opportunity in that industry to have a sustained branding campaign.

4. India – UK Trade Deal

The Convener invited Michelle Thomson MSP to brief the CPG on India on a forthcoming trip to Bhutan in October 2025.

Michelle Thomson MSP confirmed that a number of MSPs would be taking part in the trip to such an interesting country. This will be the first trip by MSPs to Bhutan. It was noted that Bhutan has many opportunities in the tourism sector but was limiting the number of tourists to protect itself. The trip will focus on Education, Culture and Health sectors.

H.E. Mr. Vikram K. Doraiswami observed that Bhutan supplied fresh food to India and had natural resource power. It was also noted that The King of Bhutan has made considerable investment in education, for example opening schools for disadvantaged kids only.

The Convener noted the potential for many synergies with Scotland.

The Convener stressed the importance for the CPG on India to be involved in relevant discussions and partnership opportunities and added that the CPG on India was keen to keep working with the High Commissioner of the Republic of India to the United Kingdom. It was noted that Scottish Parliamentary elections would take place in 2026 but it is hoped that the CPG on India can continue.

H.E. Mr. Vikram K. Doraiswami stressed that the Consul General of India would continue doing everything he can to help the CPG on India, which has a crucial role to play in making the FTAs work.

Mrs Poonam Gupta OBE informed the CPG on India of a forthcoming visit by the Power Minister of India to the UK. Mrs Gupta also added that there had been recent changes in India for importers, including a new required certification (BIS) possibly being applied to paper products, and that these changes were making it more difficult for companies based in the UK.

H.E. Mr. Vikram K. Doraiswami acknowledged the trade-related issues, which can be discussed with the relevant ministers.

Opportunities around sports were also briefly discussed. H.E. Mr. Vikram K. Doraiswami mentioned cricket and interest in the European League kicking off in 2026, as well as India's bid for the 2030 Commonwealth Games. He added that soft skills such as sport coaching were lacking in India. Mrs Poonam Gupta observed that the University of Stirling was very good for sports and at training athletes and there may be opportunities there. Liz Smith MSP joined and agreed that more could be done through sport.

The Convener mentioned opportunities in the hospitality sector. H.E. Mr. Vikram K. Doraiswami highlighted that the use of technology was being developed in that sector to minimise the use of face-to-face and staff resources. He also added that Scotland, which Indians love to visit, was a great location for boutique hotels and that India had a lot of skilled hospitality staff who could fill that gap in Scotland.

The Convener queried what the FTAs would bring for small businesses. The Consul General of India observed that, following the Free Trade Agreement, more small businesses were showing interest in potential opportunities with India and that the Consulate endeavoured to help them.

H.E. Mr. Vikram K. Doraiswami kindly requested that MSPs spread the word in their constituencies on the FTAs and opportunities with India.

Kenneth Gibson highlighted that the aerospace industry has a big presence in Ayrshire, with a lot of engineering skills on offer. Connections could be made, including, through the CPG on India.

Mrs Poonam Gupta added that the CPG on India, through the MSPs, could also help accelerate trade missions in India and Scotland. Paul Sweeney MSP noted that the Chambers of Commerce could also help promote the FTAs.

ACT: The Consul General of India to submit a 2-page document to the Convener on the FTAs.

To sum up, it was noted that the CPG on India could:

- 1) Help develop business opportunities
- 2) Develop opportunities in the Education sector.
- 3) Investment, skills development, technology opportunities were also noted.

Mrs Poonam Gupta also added that many investors from India were looking to invest in the hospitality industry in Scotland.

Ms Aline Dobbie highlighted the strong connections between Scotland and India, with many Scots taking their aspirations to India even years ago and that it was great to see that connection being promoted.

Paul Sweeney MSP, whose constituency has a big contingent of Indians, mentioned his involvement in deals with Norway and Denmark in the naval sector and opportunities in the steel industry and for strategic cooperation.

Craig Hoy MSP queried the scale of opportunities with the FTAs, including in the defence sector.

H.E. Mr. Vikram K. Doraiswami confirmed that significant progress in the defence sector had been achieved in the last few years and that negotiations were ongoing, with the hope to create partnerships in the warship industry. He also mentioned the ongoing partnership with Rolls Royce for aircraft engines as well as Indians training at 3 British military bases.

H.E. Mr. Vikram K. Doraiswami stressed that an estimated \$25 billion increase was expected following the FTAs and that Scotland would be a significant beneficiary in terms of tariff cuts and customs simplifications. In addition, India will open its procurement network to the UK and Scotland.

Paul Sweeney MSP queried partnerships would be possible for MBA students. H.E. Mr. Vikram K. Doraiswami confirmed the set-up of a professional scheme allowing 3,000 students a year to go and study in the other nation.

The Convener closed the meeting and thanked H.E. Mr. Vikram K. Doraiswami for his visit.

Date of the next meeting: tbc

