

Cross-Party Group on India

Thursday 26th February 2026, 1 to 2.30pm

Location: Scottish Parliament (Committee Room 4)

Minutes

Present

Group members

Pam Gosal MBE MSP, Convenor
Claire Baker MSP
Sharon Dowey MSP
Kenneth Gibson MSP
Sandesh Gulhane MSP
Michelle Thomson MSP
Alexander Stewart MSP

Invited guests

Mr. Amit Chaudhary, Vice Consul India, Edinburgh
Tshering Dorji
Puneet Dwivedi, INSA Indian Student Organisation
Mr Ashar Ehsan, Global Engagement, Marketing and Recruitment, University of Aberdeen
Poonam Gupta OBE, Vice President, Scottish Chambers of Commerce
Deborah Keith, Chair of the Bhutan Society
Lesley Kennedy
Mr Siddharth Malik, Consul General of India, Edinburgh
Professor Sreevas Sahasranamam, Adam Smith Business School, University of Glasgow
Angus Tulloch
Mark White, Chief Financial Officer, University of Aberdeen

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

Apologies

Miles Briggs MSP
Abhijit Chakraborty, IT Professional from the banking sector
Mrs Brij Gandhi MBE
Paul O'Kane MSP

Professor Amudha Poobalan, Professor of Public Health Education, University of Aberdeen
Manjulika Singh OBE

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 AGM and the last meeting of the Group held on 11th September 2025 were approved Sandesh Gulhane MSP and seconded by Michelle Thomson MSP.

The Convenor noted that, as this was the last meeting of the CPG on India before the Scottish Parliament elections in May 2026, she wanted to reflect on the CPG on India's achievements in the last few years and how to take this forward.

2. Bhutan visit – October 2025

The Convenor invited Michelle Thomson MSP to update the CPG on India about the Bhutan visit held in October 2025, which a number of MSPs took part in. The Group was reminded that this was the first trip by MSPs to Bhutan and that the focus of the trip focus was on Education, Culture and Health sectors.

Michelle Thomson MSP commented that this was the trip of a lifetime and a fantastic opportunity to discover another small nation with such an underpinning focus on ethics. She added a full report on the trip had been submitted and was available.

Michelle Thomson MSP highlighted that Bhutan had an amazing commitment to cultural preservation. She added that there was a high-calibre of English-speaking in the Bhutan community, in which English is taught to a very high standard, and that Bhutan's education system encouraged their young people to be mobile. She observed that it was very thought-provoking to witness this from a Scottish perspective while considering aspirations vs risks and what it meant in terms of cultural ethos. She noted that seeing Bhutan's handle on culture and the demands to compete globally was very interesting.

Michelle Thomson MSP noted that the delegation also had the opportunity to visit the Bhutan Parliament and that Bhutan was a democratic, constitutional monarchy and it would be interesting to see how this worked in terms of scrutiny and governance.

Michelle Thomson MSP commented that there were a few areas where there was potential for progress such as agriculture and education. She also added that there was a commonality in reflections about using the Scottish Parliament to develop and

improve the relationship between Bhutan and Scotland and noted the possibility of a CPG on Bhutan, which Kenneth Gibson MSP is looking into.

The Convenor echoed Michelle Thomson MSP's comments about the trip, which was more focused on people than politics. The Convenor added that it was great to meet so many people, including the Prime Minister of Bhutan, the Leader of the Opposition Party as well as entrepreneurs.

The Convenor opened the floor to questions and comments.

Angus Tulloch thanked the Convenor, Michelle Thomson MSP and Kenneth Gibson MSP for organising the trip. He added that the striking point from the trip was the humbleness and humility of the Bhutan people. He observed that, in the Bhutan Parliament, members were sitting not in party blocks but by regional or alphabetical order and remarked that this made Parliament much more cooperative rather than confrontational and led to much more constructive discussions.

Deborah Keith, Chair of the Bhutan Society, noted that she had previously travelled to Bhutan and visited various cities. She added that she had had the opportunity to meet the King of Bhutan and discussed ambitions for a local city which needed additional funds to be built. She also commented that the Sarpang district in the North of Bhutan was one of the poorest and help was needed with agriculture projects and noted the potential cooperation with the James Hutton Institute was being explored. She also observed that Bhutan had a highly specialized method for measuring happiness through its Gross National Happiness (GNH) index rather than relying on GDP. Finally, she highlighted her keenness to build better links between Bhutan and Scotland.

Angus Tulloch queried how happiness was measured. Deborah Keith explained that GNH was based on 4 categories and broken down into 9 different principles such as sustainability, well-being, etc.

Claire Baker MSP thanked the Convenor, Michelle Thomson MSP and Kenneth Gibson MSP for the opportunity to go to Bhutan and added that she was keen to build links between the 2 nations. She highlighted her areas of interest as language, ie traditional language vs English which is similar to English vs Gaelic in Scotland, entrepreneurialism which is in its early stages in Bhutan and build relationships between the 2 nations using the groups we have here in Scotland.

Tshering Dorji commented that it was great to welcome the Scottish delegation in Bhutan and welcomed the idea of opening a CPG on Bhutan. He added areas of interest such as agriculture, education, environment etc. He added that a potential collaboration with the Royal Botanical Garden in Edinburgh was being explored. Mr Dorji also provided more explanation on the GNH.

The Convenor concluded the discussion on the Bhutan visit and thanked the organisers.

3. International Education in India: University of Aberdeen Mumbai

The Convenor introduced Mr Ashar Ehsan, Global Engagement, Marketing and Recruitment, University of Aberdeen and Mark White, Chief Financial Officer, University of Aberdeen and invited them to speak to this item.

Both guests provided an overview of the forthcoming opening of the University of Aberdeen Mumbai Campus, an exciting project started 18 months ago. This was presented as a new chapter for Scottish Higher Education as, although a number of Scottish universities have various partnerships with Higher Education institutions in India, the University of Aberdeen is the first one to be granted permission to open a campus in India by the Indian Government. It was noted that it aims to open the facility in the suburb of Powai, Mumbai in August 2026 with teaching beginning in September 2026 and that admissions were now open, with a four-year degree being offered. The campus will be fully operational. It was noted that the university had been working closely with architects to provide a campus fit for Indian students rather than replicating what it does here.

It was also added the University of Aberdeen is part of the Universities in India Alliance and highlighted that in February 2026, the British Council and Deputy Prime Minister David Lammy had launched the UK Education Hub in India to strengthen academic collaboration under the India–UK Vision 2035 framework.

It was also highlighted that there had been significant engagement from academics from both Scotland and India and that Indian academics would have the opportunity to come to Scotland and vice-versa.

Mr Ehsan and Mr White stated that there would be a standard launch of Undergraduate programmes initially focusing on economics and computing and data science programmes as well as Postgraduate programmes such as Artificial Intelligence and MBA, which are both attracting many applications so far. In 2 or 3 years' time, Phase 2 of the project will include offering other programmes such as psychology and media and arts. Phase 2 will also see the establishment of a research and innovation office to expand collaborations and industry partnerships in areas such as AI, energy, and life sciences. The University will also be exploring the opportunity for Early Career Lecturers to come over from India to Scotland.

Mr Ehsan and Mr White remarked that the university aimed to leverage the Mumbai campus as a platform for student mobility, therefore allowing undergraduates to spend time in Scotland and Scottish students from Aberdeen to spend time in Mumbai and added that the institution's Qatar campus could also play a role in this mobility model in the near future. They also noted that the university had strong links with a tech entrepreneurs' agency in Mumbai and hoped for them to get involved with businesses based in Aberdeen. They concluded by observing that this was an exciting time for the University of Aberdeen, Scotland for Scottish Higher Education.

The Convenor thanked Mr Ehsan and Mr White and noted that Education was one of the themes which the CPG on India had focused on and that Universities Scotland

had previously contributed to a paper on this. The Convenor welcomed the mobility scheme plans and queried if this had been done before. Mr White confirmed that Scotland was attracting a lot of foreign students and that the law had recently changed in a way that allows global mobility schemes.

It was also noted that, from a legal perspective, the University of Aberdeen now had a legal entity in India, allowing it to do more and to have a global footprint.

It was also confirmed that degrees obtained in India would be awarded by the University of Aberdeen and that all quality assessment checks had been carried out.

The Convenor re-affirmed that this was a great project and a fantastic opportunity for Scottish students to go to Mumbai and experience that culture.

Mr Puneet Dwivedi congratulated the Convenor on the work of the CPG on India. He then added that his organisation, INSA, was having very engaging conversations about potential collaborations and was looking into promoting student mobility and enhancing student employability. Mr Ehsan and Mr White noted that the University of Aberdeen was looking into employability and considering paid internships.

Mr Dwivedi said he would share various points on this with the Convenor.

It was observed that Eastern and Northern parts of India remained untapped markets for Higher education and that there was a lot of potential there.

Mr Siddharth Malik congratulated the University of Aberdeen on being the first Scottish University to be granted a licence to open a campus in India and queried how many places were being offered to students for the September 2026 intake and how this would increase later on when the campus is fully operational. The Consul also mentioned that SQA was working on a MOU with India.

Mr Ehsan and Mr White noted that they were aware of SQA's MOU with Glasgow Caledonian University. With regards to number of places, they were reluctant to provide that information as there is strong competition in Mumbai but confirmed that there were enough places on offer to meet the current demand. They also added that the University of Aberdeen was not elitist and had a strong Widening Access Policy.

The Convenor thanked Mr Ehsan and Mr White for their contribution and highlighted that the project showed how strong relationships with India should be.

4. Closing remarks on 5 years

The Convenor noted that a number of MSPs had left the meeting to be in the Parliament's Chamber.

The Convenor stated that it had been an honour to be the CPG on India Convenor for the past 5 years and reminded attendees that the CPG had been set up in 2021 and had focused on the Education, Culture and Trade themes.

The Convenor commented that the trip to India in October 2023 had been the highlight, with the opportunity to meet many people there. The Convenor thanked Poonam Gupta and the Consul General of India as well as the High Commission of India for their help in making the trip happen. She added that there had been a lot of positives from the trip, including the signing of a MOU between Scotland Financial Enterprise and FICCI.

The Convenor thanked the two Deputy Convenors, Paul O’Kane MSP and Michelle Thomson MSP, for their support. She also thanked Yolande Claes for her support in taking very accurate minutes of the meetings as well as PG Paper Company Ltd for its support. The Convenor thanked Poonam Gupta for her engagement with the CPG on India and her help in organising the trip to India.

The Convenor then thanked Mr Bijay Selvaraj, previous Consul General of India and Mr Siddharth Malik, Consul General of India for their support as well as H.E. Mr. Vikram K. Doraiswami, High Commissioner of the Republic of India to the United Kingdom for his support.

The Convenor thanked her team for their support as well as the Scottish Parliament.

The Convenor thanked all the presenters and contributors to the CPG on India over the last five years.

Mr Siddharth Malik stressed it had been a delight to be part of the CPG on India and that its work had deepened the Scotland-India relationship.

Mr Malik thanked the Convenor for her vision, noted she was always available to the Consulate as well as her warm welcome when he had taken office.

Mr Malik also thanked the Deputy Convenors, PG Paper Company Ltd and the Convenor’s staff as well as his staff.

Mr Malik highlighted that, although there had been a wide range across parties in the CPG on India, the discussions were always productive with political views put aside.

Mr Malik noted that the Indian diaspora was very active and thanked the CPG on India for enhancing Indian culture. He also noted that the visit to the Scottish Parliament by the Speaker of the Lower House in India had been well received on both sides.

Mr Malik thanked the University of Aberdeen.

Mr Malik concluded by noting that the friendship between Scotland and India would always transcend political divisions.

The Convenor closed the meeting.