

Cross-Party Group on Malawi

Wednesday 17 September 2025

Minutes

Present

MSPs

Liam McArthur MSP
Alexander Stewart MSP
Sarah Boyack MSP

Invited guests

IN-PERSON:

Jeremy Bagg
Peter Lee, Architect, McAslan + Partners

ONLINE:

Dr Peter Chimimba
Patrick Calisse

Non-MSP Group Members

Christine Campbell
Moir Dunworth
Tom Ferris, CDO Scotland
Niamh Flanagan (aide to Liam McArthur, MSP)
Olivia Giles
Peter Stephen Ndungu
Joyce Nicoll
Elaine Pritchard
Diane Swanson

Stuart Brown, SMP
Chad Morse, SMP
Dorothea Nelson, SMP
Nasim Vadalía, SMP

ONLINE

Chloe Cafferkey
Joshua Chimtengo
Christopher Cox
Heather Cubie
Maha El Tantawi
Carol Finlay
Patrick Grady
Esther Khomba
Lorna Macpherson
Nellie Mnyalira
Tracy Morse
Gift Blessings Nyoni
Jordan- OurCrown
Niall Rogerson
Sally Rae
Nausheen Ron
Ruthie Markus
Lisa Taylor
Blessings Tembo
Cleopatra Matanhire-Zihanzu

Apologies

Ben Macpherson MSP

Welcome, apologies and minutes of last meeting

Liam McArthur MSP welcomed attendees, recognised MSPs in attendance and noted apologies where these had been given. The minutes of the previous Malawi CPG held on 25 September 2025 were proposed by Sarah Boyack MSP and seconded by Alexander Stewart MSP.

Malawi's First Dental School

In 2018, the Scottish Government granted international development funding for a project entitled 'The MalDent Project: towards a dental school for Malawi'. The grant was a partnership venture between the University of Malawi College of Medicine (now Kamuzu University of Health Sciences) and the University of Glasgow. Following development of a Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS) curriculum, the first students joined the course in 2019 and graduated in April 2025. There are now 124 dental students studying at KUHeS.

To date, clinical dental training has been delivered in the Ministry of Health Dental Departments at Kamuzu Central Hospital in Lilongwe and the Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital in Blantyre. However, it was clear from the outset that a purpose-built teaching facility was required to make the BDS course sustainable.

A significant component of the Scottish Government MalDent Project grant has funded the design work for the new clinical dental teaching facility, which also incorporates generic teaching space for other healthcare disciplines taught at KUHeS. The success of the funded design programme has facilitated leverage of \$5.2m from the World Bank to support construction of the building, which is now underway.

Both the design and construction phases of the building are underpinned by a consortium of architects, engineers and surveyors from Scotland and Malawi, led by John McAslan + Partners. This represents an exciting fusion of international partnership working across healthcare, education and building construction in Malawi.

During this meeting members of the academic, healthcare, design and construction teams provided the background to this innovative project and an update on its status and progress.

Q&A

Q: As there were 10 newly graduated dentists in April, how many dentists are there in total in Malawi now?

A: (JB) We don't know how many qualified dentists/therapists there are in Malawi, we were working on an estimate of there being 50, so the increase is significant.

The next cohort has 14 students and there are between 20-30 in the cohort after that, the number of dentists will ramp up quickly.

This increase puts pressure on the system and the organising of internships can be difficult and there need to be clinics for the newly graduated dentists to work otherwise there is a high risk of recent graduates being drawn away from Malawi.

Q: I like the notion of "casual collisions" – As well as creating a dental educational service would there be more added value to bring dental awareness to medical training? Had indigenous knowledge been included? Had thoughts been given to the oral/gut relationship?

For the building work, with the big ditch around the walls, had any thoughts been given to laying a ground source heat pump? Not necessarily to heat but to cool the building? Also to help with heating/cooling water?

A: (PL) The building was conceived to provide as simple a solution as possible to keeping the temperature down. Providing simple solutions to ventilation such as opening and closing a window was preferred to introducing potential problems with new technology that might be difficult to service.

A: (JB) Those were all good questions and all had been considered and included.

Q: Do the casual collisions include access to the facility by the local population?

A: (PL) Building was first and foremost a University building but there was a secondary entrance for public access to private clinics. Members of public would be coming to the teaching facility as well.

A: (JB) The beauty of the public space was that it could be used for health promotion and help with prevention.

Q: If the number of dentists increase - despite the need, is there enough funds to pay them? I am aware of Registered nurses and others who do not have employment - despite the need - because of MOH lack of funding.

A: (JB) It is hoped that some of the new graduates work in rural administrative health facilities and there is also scope in larger communities space for private dentists.

Q: This time frame seems heroically ambitious, what will the impact of the rainy season be?

A: (PC) It was critical to get the building roofed by December which then gave contractor time to work inside. The construction industry was a bit unpredictable at the moment in Malawi, especially when it comes to procurement of materials or the availability of materials and resources. However, the targets were achievable.

By 30th of June 2026, the World Bank expects all, if not most, of the contract funds to be dispersed.

AOB and Close

Thanks from Chair – Liam McArthur MSP

Liam McArthur MSP thanked Dr Peter Chimimba and Patrick Calisse for joining online from Malawi and Peter Lee and Prof Jeremy Bagg in person in Edinburgh. After the meeting closed, in-person attendees had the opportunity for networking over Malawi gin and tonics or soft drink.