

Cross-Party Group on Pakistan

31 May 2022, 6:00pm

MINUTE

Present

Kaukab Stewart MSP (Convener)
Foyso Choudury MSP
Pam Gosal MSP

Invited Guests

Dr Nishat Riaz, Director Education, British Council Pakistan

Non-MSP Group Members

Consul Raja, Consul General, Pakistan
Faisal Syed, PA to the Consul General
Dr Azra Meadows, University of Glasgow
Mariam Ahmed, Amina Muslim Women's Resource Centre
Farah Farzana, CEMVO; Al Masaar SCIO
Somaira Mohsin
Tehmina Mohammed, MEND (Muslim Engagement and Development)
Linsay Taylor, MEND
Sandy Sneddon, Asia Secretary, Church of Scotland
Zafar Iqbal, Associate Medical Director Public Health
Syed Waqar Nabi, Chair, Scottish Pakistani Association
Dr Saeeda Bhatti, Lecturer, University of Glasgow
Ammar Khan
Cllr Hanzala Malik
Shazia Babar
Hilary Brown

Apologies

Willie Rennie MSP
Anas Sarwar MSP
Sarah Boyack MSP
Mohammad Iftkhar
Jahangir Hanif
Shabir Beg
Cllr Hanif Raja

AGENDA ITEM 1 - Welcome

The convener welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked Anas Sarwar and Willie Rennie for their work on the CPG in the last parliamentary session. The focus of the CPG on Pakistan is defined as education and culture and these are the aspects that our agenda setting will consider. Within these two areas there is a wide

scope for coverage, from education of all ages, in all settings, teacher training, curriculum issues, barriers to inclusion in education and more. Kaukab shared her particular interest in girls' education and development.

AGENDA ITEM 2 - Dr Nishat Riaz, Director Education, British Council Pakistan

Kaukab invited Dr Nishat Riaz, Director Education at the British Council Pakistan to address the meeting. Dr Riaz presented a slide show of facts and information about the British Council Pakistan's Offer for Young People in Education and Culture – Scotland Perspective. The presentation is attached. Dr Riaz payed tribute to Azra and Peter Meadows for all the work they have done and continue to do to support and develop links between Scotland and Pakistan. Her presentation highlighted, among other things, the Pakistan-Scottish Scholarship Scheme, PAK UK Education Gateway launched in 2018 which seeks to establish long term links between Pakistan and 8 UK Universities, including 3 in Scotland (University of the West of Scotland, Glasgow University, Edinburgh University).

Dr Riaz suggested the following potential opportunities for partnership, all illustrated in her presentation: Scholarships; Higher Education & Arts; System to system partnerships.

At this point Azra Meadows noted the first female architect in Pakistan, Yasmeen Lari, who is working prioritises low carbon building and initiatives. Further details available from AM.

AGENDA ITEM 3 - Agenda Setting

Kaukab invited contributions about Agenda Setting from those present.

- **Mariam Ahmed, Amina Muslim Women's Resource Centre**
Mariam would like the CPG to consider supporting women in Scotland and in Pakistan who are struggling with domestic abuse and other abuses.
- **Farah Farzana, CEMVO; Al Masaar SCIO**
How will the CPG be affected by the current political situation in Pakistan?
KS noted that despite the political sensitivities, the CPG is a cross party and aims to be an example of consensual, collaborative practice.
- **Pam Gosal MSP**
Pam is Convener of the CPG on India which will host a cultural event at the end of June. How can the two CPGs grow and exchange talent and ideas?
Pam looked forward to including film and TV, including Bollywood, as part of the cultural awareness raising that the CPG could undertake.
- **Somaira Mohsin**

Somaira noted the importance of language connections. She suggested the CPG could support the creation of platforms to explore and learn language in order to share literature and other cultural assets.

- **Tehmina Mohammed, MEND (Muslim Engagement and Development)**

Tehmina noted the opportunity to enhance and enrich skills. She suggested an exchange programme. She has taken teachers to Pakistan where they have learned a lot of new skills and understanding. A young person from Edinburgh is now working in Pakistan to support women who have skills in embroidery to expand their skills, showcase and sell their work online. Similar work could be done with photographers and other skilled workers. She asked if we could create subgroups to focus on different ideas so we can achieve things and not be a talking shop.

- **Foyso Choudhury MSP**

Foyso noted what a great group of people were present for the meeting and that this would ensure we do a good job. He noted particularly the cross party nature of the event and suggested that all Asian community projects should be cross party and actively include colleagues.

- **Sandy Sneddon, Asia Secretary, Church of Scotland**

Sandy raised the issue discrimination and other abuses against non-Muslim women and girls in Pakistan and asked if these are issues the CPG will consider investigating. He noted that he lived in Pakistan for many years and has many Pakistani friends in the Church of Scotland.

- **Azra Meadows, Honorary Lecturer, Institute of Biomedical and Life Sciences, University of Glasgow**

Azra agreed that beautiful cultural exchanges were a possibility. Student exchanges should be encouraged and there is a lot of work already ongoing that the CPG could hear about, raise the profile of, and support development of. As a new member of the CPG Azra is keen to encourage members from diverse backgrounds.

- **Zafar Iqbal, Associate Medical Director Public Health**

Zafar chairs a UK wide public health college dealing with poverty, Covid, child health and many other things. He would like to see a small initial plan of initiatives that can be scaled up.

- **Syed Waqar Nabi, Chair, Scottish Pakistani Association**

Waqar is lecturer in Computing Science at Glasgow University – a useful connection for crating a qualification in computing science across primary and secondary education. *THIS NOTE TO BE CLARIFIED AND EXPANDED.*

- **Saeeda Bhatti, Lecturer, University of Glasgow**

Saeeda is a lecturer and also does STEM work with local primary schools in Glasgow. She established a project called STEM in the Gorbals and her students support her work. Another project is a virtual walk from Glasgow to Chitral with a focus on climate change. Saeeda noted that climate change is

affecting Pakistan now and asked that the CPG focus on climate change as it needs to be integrated throughout culture and education.

Summary of ideas, suggestions, and contributions

The main areas identified in the contributions above could be summarised as

- Cultural Exchanges
- Educational Programmes and exchanges
- Supporting women experiencing violence here and in Pakistan
- Climate Emergency in education and culture

Kaukab suggested that CPG members prioritise 3 areas for the group to focus on:

- 1) to learn about existing programmes, exchanges, enterprises and support networks
- 2) to raise visibility and awareness of projects
- 3) to support the development of ongoing projects
- 4) to identify and take action on gaps in provision of support in these areas

Please write to kaukab.stewart.msp@parliament.scot with your thoughts on what areas to focus on and with any specific projects you want to see highlighted and/or supported by the group.

Final contributions

There is an ongoing teacher training exchange programme. Contact Moyra Boland (moyra.boland@glasgo.ac.uk)

Azra Meadows highlighted the Disaster Preparedness Manual she and others published, supported by Scottish Government funding, for us in communities throughout Pakistan.

AGENDA ITEM 4 - Secretariat

Convener requested that members consider taking on the role of Secretariate. Please email Hilary Brown who can give more information.

AGENDA ITEM 6 - Closing Remarks and Date & Time of Next Meeting

The Convener thanked Dr Nishat Riaz for her highly informative presentation providing us with an idea of what is already happening in terms of educational and cultural links and support between Scotland and Pakistan.

She thanked all those present for their attendance and support and for such a plethora of ideas for the group to investigate and support.

The next meeting will hopefully be in person in Holyrood and that we will agree a date probably in October 2022 when parliament has returned from recess.