

Afghanistan & Central Asia briefing call meeting notes

12 November 2025

Attendees: University of Arts London; University of South Wales, Cardiff Metropolitan Universities, Abertay University, Cardiff University; University of Leeds, Newcastle University, Criss Cross Education; Mosaik Education.

Programme Relevance & Employment Pathways

Universities sought clarity on which programmes would be meaningful for Afghan women given the restrictions inside of Afghanistan. The briefing paper annex includes subjects requested by students in the CCE network, focused on fields with remote employment potential (digital marketing, cybersecurity, software programming, etc.). UK firms have expressed interest in mentorship opportunities.

Criss Cross Education emphasised dual purpose: education as a fundamental right, and preserving an entire generation of educated Afghan women for the post-Taliban era. Even without immediate employment prospects, equipping women with skills and qualifications is essential for Afghanistan's future.

Safety & Feasibility of Online Delivery

Universities raised concerns about safety risks for women accessing online education in Afghanistan. Key reassurances:

- Online learning (secondary and tertiary) is already happening successfully. American University of Afghanistan delivered programmes online; multiple initiatives ongoing
- No explicit Taliban decree banning home-based online education. Taliban appear to be turning a blind eye currently
- Sussex University are already delivering online master's to Afghan women
- No confirmed evidence of monitoring leading to consequences
- Internet access sufficient in urban areas (as one participant noted: "My grandmother in a remote village can send WhatsApp voice notes")

Action needed: Guidance on student anonymisation, online security protocols, and learning from Sussex's existing programme.

Export Controls & Sensitive Subjects

There were questions about teaching cybersecurity and ethical hacking given Afghanistan's sanctioned status. These subjects fall under arms export controls and require careful navigation. Courses can be redesigned to be "exportable," and similar teaching occurs in other sanctioned countries with appropriate delimitations. However, clear government guidance is difficult to obtain and usually provided on an ad hoc basis.

Action: Mosaik has scheduled a call with the Department for Business and FCDO to seek guidance that can be shared with universities in these subject areas.

Financial Constraints & Practical Models

Multiple universities noted current financial pressures in the HE sector—cutting courses rather than expanding. Most viable approach: **adding Afghan women to existing programmes** rather than creating new courses, which requires less institutional investment and easier internal approval.

Collaborative teaching between institutions flagged as potentially challenging given resource constraints, though interest remains for future exploration.

Three Pathways Forward

1. Regional Scholarships (Central Asia)

Universities with branch campuses in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan can offer scholarships for Afghan women in neighbouring countries. CCE can support student recruitment networks.

2. Online Scholarships (Within Afghanistan)

Existing programmes: Adding places on established online courses (simplest, fastest route)

3. Foundation & Pathway Programmes

Academic English and foundational skills are critical enablers. Key elements:

- Pre-sessional academic English courses (Duolingo assessment available free for refugees as alternative to IELTS)
- Foundation programmes for specific disciplines
- Clear pathway mapping showing students how to progress from English preparation → undergraduate → postgraduate
- Recognition frameworks between universities to create seamless journeys

Mosaik's role could be to map pathways (already does this in other contexts), facilitate connections between universities offering different components, share learning from existing programmes, and provide access to student networks through Afghan partners.

Mosaik's Support Functions

Based on university feedback, Mosaik can provide greatest value by:

- **Student reach:** Connecting universities to Afghan networks (CCE etc.) for recruitment and communication
- **Pathway coordination:** Mapping educational journeys across multiple institutions

- **Safety guidance:** Sharing best practices on anonymisation and online security from existing programmes
- **Inter-university facilitation:** Creating connections so students can flow from one institution's English course to another's degree programme
- **Funder engagement:** Leveraging university commitments to unlock funding (funders interested in covering complementary costs where universities waive fees)
- **Government liaison:** Using collective voice to seek guidance on export controls and other policy questions

Next Steps

1. **Individual follow-up:** Mosaik to contact each institution to register specific interest areas (regional scholarships, online provision, foundation programmes, or combination)
2. **Working groups:** Organise either as a single Afghanistan group or split by themes depending on scale of interest. Connect with Sussex and AEWA to share lessons from existing online delivery to Afghan women
3. **Policy guidance:** Pursue export control clarification through FCDO/DBT channels for universities teaching sensitive subjects
4. **Timeline:** Aim for courses operational within next academic year (2025-26)