

GRP meeting notes - Online HE Afghanistan

26 February 2026

Meeting notes from a [Global Response Platform](#) call where University of Sussex, Arizona State University, and CrissCross Education presented how they have planned and established online learning for women in Afghanistan.

Attendees: representatives from University of Sussex, Edinburgh Napier University., University of London, King's College London, University of the West of Scotland (UWS), University of Leeds, Arizona State University, Victory Afghanistan, Alliance for Education of Women in Afghanistan (AEWA), Cambridge Crises & Refugee Hub, CrissCross Education, Mosaik Education.

Resources/links shared by participants:

- Alliance for Education of Women in Afghanistan – coordination, resources, and [quality standards for online provision](#):
- Overview of remote learning in crises settings, including Afghanistan: [Cambridge Crises and Refugee Hub](#):
- [HEPI article](#) on reclaiming education through localisation for Afghan women.
- [Victory Afghanistan](#) – civil society organisation working on education.

1. How to mitigate risks to women studying online in Afghanistan

- Core Principle: Risk is contextual, and many learners already make informed choices about studying online despite restrictions. Participants emphasised that adult learners should be trusted to assess their own safety conditions.
- Risk mitigation strategies discussed included:
 - Reduced public announcements or press releases.
 - No public listing of student names.
 - Use of secure portals rather than open-access platforms.
 - Cameras optional or not required in live sessions
 - Emphasis on asynchronous participation where possible, as flexible login patterns to reduce predictability.
 - Digital safety briefings prior to programme start.
 - Operational security guidance on device use and communication
- AEWA's online education quality standards have been developed for organisations working in Afghanistan including platform security, data protection measures, and identity verification embedded into programme design.

2. How to undertake recruitment and selection

- A central challenge for universities is balancing fair access with a manageable admissions process. Sussex reported that they had received 800 applications in 24 hours after opening their Masters scholarships last year.

- Partnering with local organisations or preparation pathways could balance fairness and admissions capacity. A model was shared in which a partner community organisation handles early screening, including: transcript review; English language assessment; interviewing applicants before passing on a shortlist to the university.
- English preparatory pathways were highlighted as critical. Arizona State University are currently offering English language programmes online. IELTS and TOEFL are typically inaccessible to women or too expensive, although one contributor noted that a female programme participant had recently received a TOEFL certificate.

3. Academic and Logistical Support

- Learners face barriers including intermittent electricity, shared devices, and unreliable internet. Some universities have partnered with civil society to ensure these devices are in place, although not all have.
 - Providing tablets and power banks where feasible
 - Flexible deadlines and asynchronous access
 - Pre-programme digital literacy preparation
 - Clear guidance on expectations and submission policies
- Trauma-informed teaching: Awareness of Trauma-informed pedagogy was emphasised as essential for instructors working with Afghan women learners. Training and supportive resources — including psychological well-being strategies — were discussed as necessary components to improve learner retention and success

4. Post-Graduation Pathways

- Degrees must be linked to realistic pathways toward income or further opportunity.
- Key employment challenges included severe mobility constraints in Afghanistan and limited formal work opportunities for women
- Participants highlighted several possible avenues for graduates, including remote work, freelance opportunities, digital entrepreneurship and e-commerce.
- Remote employment skills (e.g., digital literacy, communication, project management) should be integrated into programmes where possible, to support livelihood pathways post-graduation.

5. Political and Ethical Considerations

- The political dimensions of online learning in Afghanistan are complex. Local governance attitudes towards online education vary. In some areas, online learning is tolerated because it takes place privately.
- Ethical decisions about scaling or publicising programmes require careful deliberation. A key recommendation was that universities may choose confidential pilots initially, with careful review before broader rollout to safeguard learners and institutional integrity.

6. Sustainability and Institutional Responsibility

- Participants stressed that sustainability is essential: Programmes should be designed for multi-year continuity, with funding and institutional commitment should be secured before launch.
- Initiatives with long-term horizons are more likely to deliver durable benefits and avoid harmful disruptions for students.

7. Collaboration and Networks

- There are opportunities for universities to learn from and join networks was identified such as Alliance for Education of Women in Afghanistan (AEWA), which has quality standards and programme design guidance, trauma-informed pedagogy and cybersecurity.
- Mosaik is happy to facilitate introductions to these networks, community organisations, and other UK universities through the Global Response Platform.

8. Next Steps and Action Points

- Mosaik to circulate summary notes and shared links (including those above) to all participants; Mosaik asked participants to let them know if their email would prefer not to be visible to others in follow up emails.
- Mosaik to establish Afghanistan Action Group, including UK universities and other relevant stakeholders for coordination calls as universities develop pilot initiatives.