

Global Response Platform Afghanistan Action Group call

30 March 2026

Summary: The Global Response Platform convened UK universities and Afghan education organisations to coordinate pathways for Afghan women's access to higher education, following the UK visa ban that prevents Afghan students from studying in the UK. The session featured 11 UK universities and multiple education providers working in Afghanistan.

Notes

1. Alliance for the Education of Women in Afghanistan (AEWA): Victoria presented AEWA as a de facto ministry of education for Afghan women and girls, created over three years ago by the American University of Afghanistan. The Alliance has 130+ member organisations reaching approximately 900,000 students through various learning providers. AEWA's latest mapping found over 206 organisations providing learning in Afghanistan.
2. The Alliance provides quality standards recognition for learning providers and is rolling out a credentialing strategy to create learning pathways from basic education through to tertiary education.
3. Afghan Education Provider Pathways
 - Begum Academy :
 - Provides online education for grades 7-12 following pre-2021 Afghan curriculum
 - 24,000+ students registered across website and mobile application, plus 8,000 in underground schools
 - Not officially recognized by current Afghan government
 - Partnership with American University of Afghanistan created bridging pathway: Begum selects graduates, AUAF conducts selection including Duolingo English test
 - Recent program with University of Cambridge Afghanistan desk provides online English courses with co-branded certificates
 - Brave Future (Marcela):
 - Follows British international curriculum with Pearson Excel GCSEs and A-levels

- Students receive international A-level certificates equivalent to international high school diploma
 - Students have been placed in Canada, Indonesia, Portugal, and would have gone to UK before visa ban
 - Recent graduate achieved A in maths and A in business, qualifying for competitive university admission
 - Also provides TOEFL exams, skills workshops, and visa/integration support
 - Programs operate in Gaza, Afghanistan, and Kenya
- Charmaghz (Salahuddin):
 - Operating mobile libraries for 7-8 years, now shifted to online programs due to government restrictions
 - Four program streams: online book clubs, entrepreneurship, English, and secondary school
 - Currently bringing first cohort of 45 students through years 10-12
 - Providing structured pedagogy with STEM, English, and mathematics classes
 - Working toward proctored online exams and transcripts for university admission
 - Considering GED or equivalent exam pathway
- American University of Afghanistan (Tracy):
 - Fully online institution serving approximately 1,100 students, 75% female
 - Students lack official high school diplomas due to fall of Kabul in 2021
 - Offers bridge/pre-university program covering high school subjects
 - First year includes remedial coursework in maths and English
 - Provides free Duolingo test codes to reduce barriers
 - Receives 22,000+ applications per term, can only keep applications open 24-48 hours
 - 70-74% of recent applicants were female
 - Students have successfully transferred to institutions including Stanford and UCLA
 - Even when AUAF was brick-and-mortar pre-2021, bridge programs were necessary
- Right to Learn Afghanistan (Lauren):

- Operates nearly 30 years, launched online high school in 2022
- Hybrid model: Afghan curriculum for middle school, Ontario curriculum for grades 10-12
- Students graduate with Ontario high school diploma from Canadian authority
- Inaugural grade 7 cohort from 2022 now starting grade 11
- Serves 700 students
- Scholarship program funded 1,500 scholarships last year covering computers and internet access
- Received nearly 25,000 scholarship applications from women already admitted to programs

4. **Proposed Three-Track System** @Ben Webster/ Mosaik proposed organising pathways around three entry points aligned with UK university systems:

- Foundational Track: Students requiring additional language and academic skills preparation (pre-sessional English, English for academic purposes, foundational subjects, academic skills)
- Undergraduate Track: Students ready for first-year UK university courses, either through online degrees or branch campuses in the region
- Postgraduate Track: Online postgraduate programs, which several UK universities already offer and find relatively straightforward to set up

5. The system aims to balance student choice, guided access, and manageable recruitment for universities while avoiding chaotic application cycles

6. Credentialing and Recognition Challenges: No regular high school transcripts have been issued in Afghanistan for over 5 years since the fall of Kabul. Universities must understand they're working with completely different credentialing environments.

7. Learning providers use two approaches:

- Homegrown peer-based transcripts (organizations like Begum Academy reach thousands but recommend only top students)
- Advanced/accredited transcripts (AUAF's makeshift transcripts used by Stanford; Right to Learn provides accredited high school diplomas)
- Organizations have well-established systems genuinely recommending top students

8. Student Support Needs

- Even academically prepared students will require significant mental health and adjustment support. Students feel extremely vulnerable knowing there's "no way back" and are living on "borrowed time." Universities must accept the "full package" of support needed.
- UN Agency Engagement: UNESCO is part of the Alliance, but most UN agencies exercise caution due to their presence in Afghanistan and relationships with de facto authorities. UNHCR collaborates with organizations like AUAF through special admissions processes. UNHCR, UNICEF, UNDP, British Council, and UK government are engaged in exploring alternative pathways.

9. Branch Campus Opportunities

- Royal Agricultural University expressed interest in using campuses in Uzbekistan and UAE (Sharjah) for Afghan students.
- Several universities have TNE partnerships in the region that could be leveraged, though not all UK provision is available at overseas campuses.

10. Next Steps

- UK universities to indicate interest in one or more of the three tracks: foundational, undergraduate, and postgraduate. Mosaik to organise follow-up engagement with universities around the three proposed pathways.
- AEWA to work with Afghan education organisations to organise further detail on credentials, student pathways, and documentation models to support university decision-making.
- A further call to be arranged for universities interested in branch campus placements to discuss learning and logistics of this model.