

Minutes: British Council APPG Meeting

12th July 2022, 10:00-11:00am

Attendees: John Baron MP, Flick Drummond MP, Catherine West MP, Lord Wigley, Baroness Thornton, Ben Yates, Scott McDonald (British Council), David Thompson (British Council) Rhiannon Melliar-Smith (British Council), Ruth Loeffler (British Council), Lucy Philippson (British Council), Sarah Giles (British Council), Roy Bacon (British Council)

Apologies: Kate Ewart Biggs

1. Welcome

- 1.1 APPG Chair John Baron welcomed attendees and gave a brief overview of topics to be covered in the meeting, including the outcome of the CSR settlement, the debates he has led in Westminster on soft power, and the ongoing situation with British Council contractors in Afghanistan.
- 1.2 John Baron introduced Scott McDonald to first talk about the outcome of the CSR settlement.

2. Update from British Council Chief Executive, Scott McDonald

- 2.1 Scott McDonald first thanked all members of the APPG for their support this year in underlining the importance of British Council funding. He gave an update on the Comprehensive Spending Review.
- 2.2 Scott McDonald set out British Council's priorities and vision going forward, working to support peace and prosperity through our network of global connections.
- 2.3 Scott McDonald then gave an update on British Council contractors who remain in Afghanistan, and that British Council is working with Government to ensure that those who have applied to the Afghan Citizen Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) are processed as quickly as possible. APPG Chair John Baron also explained how he was supporting these efforts.
- 2.4 Scott McDonald provided an update on staff in Ukraine, where some staff have moved from the office in Kyiv, to the hub in Warsaw, Poland. He also spoke about the Ukraine conference day in Stratford, London which saw a gathering of 80 people from Ukraine and from UK sectors talk in the British Council office to talk about the cultural relations response.

3. Q&A on updates above with British Council Chief Executive, Scott McDonald

- 3.1 John Baron thanked Scott for keeping the APPG updated and opened up questions.
- 3.2 Catherine West MP suggested that it would be beneficial for British Council to involve more parliamentarians and see more of British Council's work overseas. She also suggested that it could be useful to encourage British Council staff to be more connected to UK Parliament.

3.3 Vice Chair Baroness Thornton asked whether in the new structure of British Council, certain programmes would still have a civil society focus to which Scott McDonald responded that there would be.

3.4 Vice Chair Flick Drummond MP asked question on where staff are located in Ukraine and Scott responded that he would inquire further into this. She also asked what British Council's digital offer is - as this was one of the priorities for British Council going forward - and Scott McDonald responded that British Council is working to improve our digital offer but in-person connections remain incredibly important.

3.5 Catherine West MP asked whether it would be possible to do anything about the pause in the Chevening programme in Afghanistan for this academic year. Scott McDonald responded that he would find more details on this issue.

4. Future work of the British Council

4.1 APPG Chair, John Baron, introduced David Thompson (British Council Head of Political Engagement) to give an update on future work.

4.2 David Thompson outlined the aim to connect with new parliamentarians and used the Cultural Protection Fund exhibition as one way that has introduced them to our work. He gave an update on plans for overseas delegations, an event in the Christmas period, and how the APPG, and other organisations such as CPA UK And Westminster Foundation for Democracy could be useful to help British Council forge these connections.

5. Close

5.1 The APPG wanted to extend well wishes to Kate Ewart Biggs and a speedy recovery from Covid, and thanked Scott for his contribution and updates. Members of the APPG asked for a briefing on the situation in Sri Lanka, which the British Council External Relations team agreed to send round shortly.