

Forward Thinking

Pathways into Politics – Information Handbook

November 2020



About Forward Thinking

Forward Thinking is a British charity that has over 15 years of experience in the fields of conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and political dialogue. We work across the Middle East and North Africa, including in Israel-Palestine, Tunisia and Egypt, as well as in the United Kingdom.

In our UK programme we focus on connecting British Muslim communities with policymakers in order to identify shared challenges, discuss perceptions of these issues and then explore how they might be addressed. Forward Thinking has developed a broad network of community stakeholders that represent the cultural and religious diversity of the Muslim community in the UK. The team remains dedicated to empowering Muslim communities, organisations and individuals, by working with them to build long term and sustainable relationships with various government departments and policymakers.

The programme will be led by Maisie Cook, UK Programme Officer and Alice Copland, who works on the UK and Middle East Programmes:

- Maisie joined Forward Thinking in April 2019. Before joining, Maisie received her MA in Conflict, Security and Development at King's College London. Prior to this, she worked as a Research and Administrative Assistant at a think tank in Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq. She graduated in 2016 with a bachelor's degree from the University of York in Philosophy and Politics.
- Alice joined Forward Thinking in January 2020. Prior to this, she completed an MA in Conflict Resolution in Divided Societies at King's College London and graduated in 2018 with a master's degree in Politics & Central and East European Studies from the University of Glasgow. She is also an alumnus of the Olive Tree Initiative, a university-led programme that promotes conflict analysis and resolution through academic research and experiential education with a focus on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The Pathways into Politics Programme

The Pathways into Politics programme was developed in response to insights shared during a series of roundtables Forward Thinking held in 2018. In these conversations, young people from an Islamic faith background expressed that the barriers for engaging with politics were high, and that opportunities for inclusion were slim.

Comprised of a series of practical initiatives, the Pathways into Politics programme aims to support the development of young British Muslim political leaders at a local and national level. The programme seeks to build the political literacy, confidence, and aspirations of young British Muslims to enable them to engage more fully in civic and political life through regular meetings and engagement with senior establishment figures.

Involvement in the Programme

The programme will be comprised of different elements. In light of restrictions due to COVID-19, the programme will be conducted online with the opportunity for in-person meetings if circumstances change.

- The programme will start with a two-day online conference in December 2020 (final date TBC). Various speakers will meet with participants to discuss a range of issues such as networking, parliamentary processes, party politics and foreign policy.
- Following this, we will hold regular online meetings to cover a broader range of issues. Meetings will be interactive and provide an opportunity to engage in discussion with political figures including MPs, councillors and NGO workers. Some sessions will also be skills-based, focusing on issues such as public speaking, communication and campaigning.
- A final component of the programme will be the possibility of a mentorship. We will explore matching participants with a relevant mentor by the end of the programme to provide career guidance and further the skills development of the mentee through semi-regular phone calls/meetings or providing support for the mentor's work.

Upon successful application, participants will take part in a full induction process:

- They will have an individual phone call with Maisie or Alice to introduce them to the course and answer any questions they may have.
- Participants will be invited to join an informal introductory session before the start of the conference.
- There will also be opportunities to speak with previous Pathways into Politics participants about their involvement in the programme.

The Previous Programme



The previous leadership conference was made up of a series of different meetings:

- Parliamentary processes and networking with Amro Hussian, director of the APPG on Freedom of Religion or Belief
- Party politics with former MPs John Grogan and Dominic Grieve QC
- Journalism and the media with Peter Osborne
- Public speaking with Hauwa Shehu, head of the CPS Muslim Network
- Local politics with Cllr Rakhia Ismail, Mayor of Islington, Cllr Amna Abdullatif, Councillor for Ardwick and Hashim Bhatti, businessman and former Councillor

- Foreign policy with Sir Jeremy Greenstock, former diplomat
- Campaigning and activism with Rosalind Comyn, Policy and Campaigns Officer for Liberty

We continued engagement with the group through an online 'mini-series' of workshops with a range of UK-based and international speakers. We also matched several participants with mentors who have helped them with their skills and career development. Following completion of this first phase of the programme, we will continue to engage with the participants and involve them in Forward Thinking's work.



Feedback

Following participation in the leadership conference:

- All of the respondents to our survey agreed that it allowed them to identify barriers to political inclusion and 89% of these agreed that the programme allowed them to identify potential solutions to these barriers
- 77% of respondents agreed that the initial phase of the programme helped them to improve their communication skills
- 89% agreed that they now feel more confident to participate in politics/political processes
- 77% agreed that the programme highlighted ways in which political messages can be portrayed clearly

Following participation in the entire programme, participants reported:

- Hearing from people who look like them and have a similar background in various political and public roles has inspired them and made them more confident in working towards their goals
- They feel more confident in their public speaking abilities
- They have gained an international perspective and developed knowledge of politics beyond Westminster and Parliament