

Our Communication

Dear Professor Robin Mason
(Pro-Vice-Chancellor (International)),

CC: Dr Jagbir Jhutti Johal, The Information Compliance Manager

We take this opportunity to extend our gratitude to the University of Birmingham for continuing its commitment to Sikh Studies.

We understand that it is common for universities to have various sources of funding, including foreign governmental funders. We thank you for your transparency in sharing that the Government of India is generously funding the new vacancy for 'The Guru Nanak Chair'.

Considering this, we have some further queries:

1. Can the University share its' policy on state-sponsored funding? Apart from the Government of India, what other states fund or sponsor activity or roles at the University?
2. Can the University clarify the level of influence (if any) exerted by funders? For example, do funders such as the Government of India have any say in research programs, teaching content or staffing?
3. According to 'Freedom House', India is currently 'partly free'. There are significant historic and current issues surrounding the treatment of minority communities in India, including Sikhs. Our understanding is that given the proximity of the University and India, you will be fully aware of these. Assimilation into the majority Hindu religion is a widely accepted objective of the RSS inspired BJP Government. The largest elected Sikh organisations, the SGPC and DSGPC, have raised concerns about manipulating curriculum in schools to distort Sikh history.

The relationship between the Sikh community in the UK and the Government of India is also complex. Birmingham's own large Sikh community stages protest at the Indian Consulate in the city many times a year.

In light of this, has the University explored the ethical issues and conflicts arising from accepting funds from the Government of India? How does it intend to resolve issues and manage conflicts? What is the Universities policy in receiving funding from parties with vested interests?

4. In the public interest, can the University make public the total amount of funding provided by the Government of India? What proportion of this is explicitly funding 'Sikh Studies' and 'The Guru Nanak Chair'?
5. Would the University consider alternative funders from the UK Sikh Community? We have received some community interest.

There is a considerable level of concern surrounding the University's funding arrangement with the Government of India in sections of our community. These concerns are heightened through the public appearance of proximity with officials of the Indian Government through the University's 'India Institute'.

We are hopeful that these concerns could be eased through your prompt responses. We remain optimistic that the University has the mechanisms in place to retain the independence of education and has due process to manage ethical risks. Please note we are also submitting our queries to the University's Information Compliance Manager as a Freedom of Information Act Request.

Gurpreet Singh Anand
Secretary-General
Sikh Council UK