



UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President
Professor Robin Mason

Gurpreet Singh Anand,
Secretary-General,
Sikh Council UK
By e-mail

14 July 2021

Dear Gurpreet Singh Anand,

Thank you for your email raising a number of questions about the Guru Nanak Chair at the University of Birmingham. Before I address these questions directly, I thought it might be helpful to make a few opening remarks. The first is a brief history of the Chair. The public announcement about the Chair was made in November 2019, by the Honourable Union Minister of India, Shri Hardeep Singh Puri. We first advertised for the post in January 2020, but unfortunately our search process was interrupted by the Covid pandemic. I am glad to say that we have recently been able to resume the search process. Secondly, we were very pleased to be awarded the Guru Nanak Chair, given the University's long-standing commitment to Sikh Studies and our strong engagement with the Sikh community. (You will no doubt know that the University of Birmingham was the first UK university to establish a lectureship in Sikh Studies and is still the only Russell Group University to have a programme, our MSc in Sikh Studies, in this field.) An important factor in gaining the Chair was the support of the Guru Nanak Nishkam Sevak Jatha (GNNSJ), who have been an important partner of the University for a number of years. (The GNNSJ generously provided initial funding for a lectureship in Sikh Studies, a post now fully funded by the University.) It is worth noting also that the Indian government's funding and support of centres and chairs in British universities has tended to be in London (e.g., the IG Patel Chair at the London School of Economics, and the Rajiv Gandhi Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship at Imperial College); or in Oxford (the India Centre at Somerville College) or Cambridge (the Jawaharlal Nehru Professorship). It was important for the city and region to host such a high-profile Chair. Finally, I note that you also copied the Information Compliance Manager into this request so that this enquiry could be processed as an FOIA request. I understand from your message, however, that you would prefer to engage directly with me on this matter and therefore I have agreed with the University's FOI team that I will respond directly with this message. If you would still like it to be treated as an FOIA request, please resubmit your queries to foi@contacts.bham.ac.uk.

I now turn to your specific questions.

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?

Our policy on accepting funding is clear and is governed by the University's Code of Ethics,

which can be found here: <<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/university/legal/code-of-ethics.pdf>> A large number of states fund or sponsor activity at the University, ranging from sponsoring students; funding (directly or indirectly) research projects, and hence academic posts; supporting specific events; etc.. Given the very extensive range of this, it would be far from straightforward to supply a comprehensive list.

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?

All academic staff at the University of Birmingham operate under its statutes and ordinances; in line with the Education Reform Act 1988, the statutes and ordinances guarantee academic staff "freedom within the law to question and test received wisdom, and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions, without placing themselves in jeopardy of losing their job or privileges." In terms of the Guru Nanak Chair specifically, the funding agreement with the Government of India states explicitly that the appointment to the Chair will be strictly in accordance with the University's usual recruitment processes, and that as a University of Birmingham employee, the Chair will abide by the University's terms and conditions of employment. While the Chair is expected to engage with the Government of India as well as other stakeholders, these stakeholders will not have any say in determining the research or teaching of the Chair.

3. 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 University's policy in receiving funding from parties with vested interests?

As indicated above, the University has an extensive due diligence and ethics process when considering the receipt of funding from external organisations and funders. The University prides itself as a learning community where different ideas can come together and different perspectives shared. At the core of our commitment to freedom of speech is respectful debate that enables us to challenge discrimination, intolerance and harmful attitudes.

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'?

The University will receive funding support for the Guru Nanak Chair from the Government of India for the first 5 years of the post; this support is approximately a third of the overall resource associated with the Chair over that period. The Chair is a permanent post i.e., the University will fund the Chair in perpetuity.

5. Would the University consider alternative funders from the UK Sikh Community? We have received some community interest.

The University is always willing to engage with stakeholders to support our mission to contribute to the growth and spread of knowledge and ideas which will help to transform the world.

I hope that this response addresses your questions. I would be willing to arrange a call or meeting if there are further aspects that you would like to raise.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "RAMason". The letters are cursive and somewhat stylized, with the first name "Robin" being more prominent than the last name "Mason".

Professor Robin Mason
Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President (International)