



CULHAM ST GABRIEL'S  
GRANT FUNDED PROJECT

## Teaching Sikhi in RE

### Project Report

Professor Jasjit Singh, University of Leeds

- How is Sikhi taught in UK schools—and which aspects are missing from the curriculum?
- What resources do RE teachers rely on to teach Sikhi, and are they fit for purpose?
- Why do many RE teachers lack confidence in teaching Sikhi—and how can this be addressed?
- How could local Sikh organisations, institutions, and parents contribute more effectively to the teaching of Sikhi in schools?
- How can lived Sikh experiences be better reflected in classroom teaching?

## Executive Summary

This report presents findings from a national study exploring how Sikhi is represented and taught in Religious Education (RE) across the UK. Drawing on survey responses from 106 RE teachers and insights from a national stakeholder meeting, the report highlights gaps in teacher training, curriculum content, and community engagement. It also identifies a strong appetite among educators for more inclusive, accurate, and accessible resources.

Despite Sikhi being one of the six principal religions taught in UK schools, it often receives limited attention in teacher training and is often inconsistently represented in classroom materials. Teachers report feeling underprepared, with many relying on outdated or generic resources. Engagement with Sikh communities is limited, particularly in areas without local Gurdwaras, and SACREs often lack visible Sikh representation.

The report concludes with a series of practical recommendations aimed at improving the teaching of Sikhi in RE. These are summarised below.

### Key Recommendations

#### A) Joint Initiatives (RE Sector & Sikh Communities)

- Develop a national resource hub and Sikhi support network.
- Promote lived experience through Gurdwara visits, virtual tours, and storytelling.
- Build partnerships with RE networks to ensure Sikh perspectives are included in national discussions.
- Co-create curriculum-aligned, age-appropriate resources that reflect the diversity within Sikhi.

#### B) RE Sector

- Integrate Sikhi more fully into Initial Teacher Training (ITT) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD).
- Ensure consistent inclusion of Sikhi across all Key Stages and exam specifications.
- Ensure that school/community engagement is included in RE curricula.
- Strengthen Sikh representation on SACREs and provide clearer guidance for schools.

#### C) Sikh Communities

- Engage proactively with SACREs and local schools.
- Offer high-quality speakers, workshops, and Gurdwara visits.
- Share diverse lived experiences of Sikhi to enrich classroom learning.
- Encourage youth and volunteer involvement in educational outreach.

These recommendations call for collaborative action to ensure that Sikhi is taught with depth, accuracy, and respect—benefiting both Sikh and non-Sikh students across the UK.

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# Teaching Sikhi in RE: Project Report

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## Introduction

This report presents the findings of the 'Teaching Sikhi in RE' Project, funded by the Culham St Gabriel's Trust, which explores how Sikhi(sm)<sup>1</sup> is represented in Religious Education (RE) curricula in Britain, the extent of teacher training on the subject, and the nature of engagement with Sikh communities and organisations.

Sikhi is one of the six principal religions taught in UK schools (Commission on Religious Education, 2018) yet it often receives limited attention in RE teacher training and in the production of classroom resources. This disparity can lead to inconsistent or superficial coverage, diminishing the quality of education and the representation of the Sikh tradition, while also reinforcing misconceptions and stereotypes.

Key themes explored in this report include teacher confidence, levels of exposure to Sikhi during teacher training, the types of resources available, barriers to engagement, and recommendations for developing the teaching of Sikhi in RE education. The findings highlight a strong desire among RE teachers for more inclusive, accurate, and accessible materials, as well as greater support in building links with Sikh communities. This report aims to inform policy and RE curriculum development and encourage community partnerships in RE.

## Methodology

Responses were collated between June and Sept 2023, through an online survey for RE teachers across the United Kingdom, focusing on their experiences, confidence, and resource needs when teaching about Sikhi. The online survey was distributed through various educational networks and social media platforms and included both multiple-choice and open-ended questions to gather quantitative and qualitative data. In total 106 valid responses were received. The data was cleaned and analysed using statistical software to identify key trends and themes.

On May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2024, an open online meeting was held to discuss the survey findings. The meeting brought together RE teachers, Sikh community members, and SACRE representatives to share experiences, challenges, and resources to discuss the

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<sup>1</sup> Mandair (2013) and others critique the use of the term 'Sikhism' (noun) as a colonial construction and instead advocate for the use of 'Sikhi' (verb) which refers to an active process of learning and developing through lived experience.

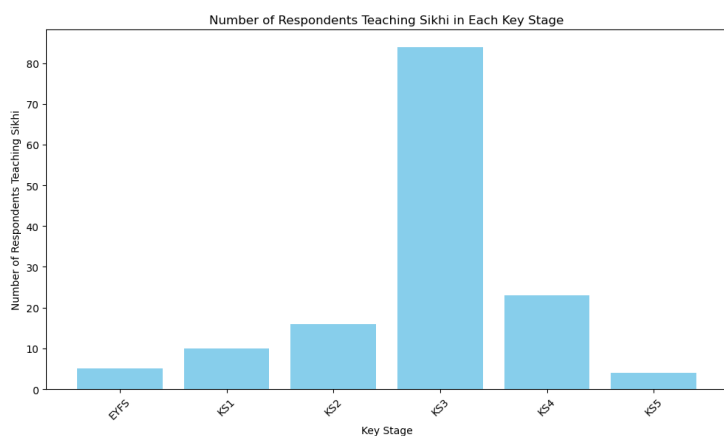
representation of Sikhi in RE across UK schools. The key themes and discussion points raised in this meeting are incorporated into this report.

## Key Findings

### Sikhi by Key Stage

All of the RE teachers responding to the survey teach Sikhi in Religious Education, though further analysis is necessary to understand the depth and consistency of teaching across the RE sector as a whole.

The data reveals a broad but uneven distribution of Sikhi teaching across the educational spectrum, with a concentration in secondary education and more limited engagement in early years and post-16 settings.



#### Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

- **5 respondents** reported teaching Sikhi at this stage suggesting that while Sikhi is occasionally introduced in nursery and reception settings, it is not yet a consistent feature of early years RE provision.
- The low number may reflect a lack of age-appropriate resources or limited curriculum time for religious diversity at this level.

#### Key Stage 1 (Years 1–2)

- **10 respondents** indicated they teach Sikhi at KS1 indicating a modest level of engagement, likely through thematic units such as festivals or values-based learning.

- It highlights the potential for growth in introducing Sikhi earlier in a child's educational journey.

### **Key Stage 2 (Years 3–6)**

- **16 respondents** reported teaching Sikhi at KS2. This is a promising sign of inclusion in upper primary education, where pupils begin to explore religious traditions in more structured ways.
- However, given the national curriculum's emphasis on religious diversity, this number could be higher.

### **Key Stage 3 (Years 7–9)**

- **84 respondents** teach Sikhi at KS3, making it the most represented stage. This aligns with the typical structure of RE in secondary schools, where students are introduced to a range of traditions.
- The high number suggests that Sikhi is often included in KS3 schemes of work, though the depth of coverage may vary.

### **Key Stage 4 (Years 10–11)**

- **23 respondents** teach Sikhi at KS4, typically as part of GCSE Religious Studies.
- While this is a significant drop from KS3, it reflects the fact that not all schools offer Sikhi as a GCSE option.
- The figure underscores the need for greater curriculum flexibility and support for schools wishing to include Sikhi at exam level.

### **Key Stage 5 (Years 12–13)**

- **4 respondents** reported teaching Sikhi at KS5.
- This limited engagement may be due to the lack of A-Level specifications that include Sikhi, or the general reduction in RE provision post-16.
- It highlights a gap in advanced-level resources and opportunities for deeper study of Sikhi.

## Confidence in Teaching Sikhi

The survey results indicate that most RE teachers feel moderately confident (49%) in teaching Sikhi. A minority felt highly confident (25%) or slightly confident (21%) with fewer feeling not confident at all (5%). This suggests there would be value in subject-specific CPD. Responses included:

- “I feel confident in teaching the basics but struggle with more in-depth topics.”
- “I have some knowledge but would benefit from more training and resources.”

RE teachers present at the online meeting spoke candidly about their struggles with resources and confidence. Many felt underprepared to teach Sikhi in depth, citing limited training and a lack of curriculum aligned materials. There was a strong call for authentic, accessible resources, including videos, presentations, lesson plans, and directories of Sikh speakers. Several praised platforms like NATRE, RE Online and RE Hubs, while others shared frustrations with inconsistent terminology across exam boards and the absence of nuanced materials that reflect the diversity within the Sikh community.

## Engaging with Sikh Communities

More than two-thirds of survey respondents (69%) did not engage with local Sikh communities. Barriers included lack of contacts, time constraints, and geographic distance from Gurdwaras. Respondents stated that “I would like to engage more but don't know where to start” and that “There are no local Sikh communities near my school.”

The online meeting attendees also highlighted good examples of community engagement. Gurdwaras in Newcastle, Gravesend, Shepherd's Bush and Croydon were commended for their openness to school visits. However, for many schools, especially those in rural areas, Gurdwara visits are logistically and financially challenging. Attendees were enthusiastic about virtual visits, which were seen as a practical and inclusive alternative. RE teachers also shared accounts of using Sikh student voices in the classroom—testimonies that brought the subject to life and helped students connect with lived experiences.

## Exposure to Sikhi during Teacher training

Survey respondents highlighted how Sikhi had received significantly less attention than many other traditions in their teacher training.<sup>2</sup> Responses included:

- “We had minimal coverage of Sikhi during my PGCE.”
- “Sikhi was briefly mentioned but not in detail.”

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<sup>2</sup> The UK Parliament (2019) briefing paper outlines challenges in RE including teacher training and resource provision, echoed in the findings of this report.

Tradition	Average % of time spent during teacher training as stated by respondents
Christianity	31%
Islam	17%
Judaism	13%
Hinduism	9%
Buddhism	9%
Sikhi	8%
Humanism	4%
Paganism	2%

As Sikhi received significantly less attention than other traditions in their teacher training, many respondents reported lower confidence and limited subject knowledge, which can result in Sikhi being underrepresented or omitted entirely from school curricula.

## Barriers to Teaching Sikhi

Despite a general willingness to teach Sikhi, RE teachers highlighted a range of structural and practical barriers that hinder effective delivery. A significant number of respondents cited a lack of curriculum time, with Sikhi often being deprioritised or omitted entirely from schemes of work. In many schools, Sikhi is not offered as an option at GCSE or A-Level, limiting opportunities for deeper engagement.

Teachers also reported difficulties in accessing reliable resources and establishing connections with local Sikh communities, particularly in areas with small or dispersed Sikh populations. Logistical challenges such as arranging Gurdwara visits, securing guest speakers, and balancing competing curriculum demands further complicate efforts. Additionally, some RE teachers expressed uncertainty or discomfort due to limited subject knowledge, which can lead to avoidance of the topic altogether. These barriers highlight the need for systemic support, including curriculum reform, resource development, and stronger community-school partnerships. The main stated barriers to teaching Sikhi were:

- Lack of curriculum time.
- Lack of high quality resources.
- Sikhi not being an option in some schools.
- Difficulty in establishing contact with local Sikh communities.

Responses included:

- "I struggle to find local Sikh contacts."
- "I have tried to reach out but did not get a response."



Respondents attending the online meeting highlighted how despite a clear willingness among RE teachers to teach Sikhi, many face significant challenges that hinder effective delivery. One of the most pressing issues is the limited availability of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and initial teacher training focused on Sikhi. As a result, teachers often feel underprepared and lack the confidence to explore the subject in depth, particularly when addressing the diversity within Sikh beliefs and practices.

Another challenge lies in the inconsistency of terminology across exam boards. While some Sikhs are advocating for the use of “Sikhi” to reflect an authentic and respectful understanding of the tradition, using a term from the Sikh tradition itself, many textbooks and specifications continue to use “Sikhism,” leading to confusion and uncertainty among RE teachers striving for accuracy and sensitivity.

Furthermore, the lack of high-quality, curriculum aligned resources makes it difficult for teachers to plan and deliver engaging lessons. This is especially problematic at GCSE, where some schools are eager to offer Sikhi as a subject but struggle due to gaps in available materials and limited access to expert support. These challenges underscore the need for systemic improvements in training, resource development, and community engagement to ensure Sikhi is taught with the depth and respect it deserves.

## **The role of SACREs**

The survey data highlights a mixed picture regarding teacher awareness and engagement with their local Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs). While several respondents were aware of SACREs and some actively participate, either as members or through curriculum consultations, others reported limited or no interaction. Several teachers admitted they were unsure whether their SACRE had a Sikh representative, and others noted that even when such representation existed, it often lacked visibility or influence.

A recurring theme was the desire for stronger Sikh representation on SACREs to ensure more accurate and inclusive curriculum development. Teachers also expressed a need for clearer communication channels and more proactive outreach from SACREs, particularly in supporting resource development and facilitating community connections. During the online meeting, teachers from areas including Kent and Northumberland shared that their local SACREs had no Sikh voices, while others, such as Coventry and Warwickshire, highlighted the positive impact of having active Sikh members. The conversation revealed both structural barriers and cultural nuances. In the online meeting, participants questioned whether the traditional SACRE model, which often seeks a single “community representative” aligns with the egalitarian ethos of Sikhi.

## Resources

The survey responses reveal a strong and consistent demand for more diverse, engaging, and accessible resources to support the teaching of Sikhi. While videos (used by 103 respondents) and books (66) were most commonly highlighted, teachers expressed a clear need for more interactive and experiential tools. These include artefacts, music, and especially opportunities for direct engagement with Sikh communities through Gurdwara visits and guest speakers. However, logistical challenges such as time, funding, and geographic distance often limit these opportunities.

Teachers also highlighted the importance of resources that reflect the lived experiences and diversity within the Sikh community, moving beyond textbook representations. Many called for structured schemes of work, visual aids, and CPD materials that are both curriculum-aligned and culturally authentic. The popularity of platforms like BBC Teach, NATRE, and RE:Online underscores the need for a high-quality resources hub tailored specifically to the education of Sikhi. Responses included:

- “I haven’t found any resources for teaching Sikhi. We use resources we have created from our own reading and research.”
- “We need more varying sources showing the lived experience/expression of Sikhs rather than just an academic statement of belief/practice.”
- “It was a long time ago that I trained, but we looked at the origin and core beliefs then key areas such as the GGS and festivals. Little was done on lifestyle and community, which I have studied independently since.”

## Types of Resources Used

Respondents highlighted how videos and books are the most commonly used resources. In-person engagement (e.g. speakers, visits) is less frequent, likely due to logistical barriers. Indeed, one respondent stated that “Gurdwara visits are helpful but not always feasible.”

Resource Type	Count
Videos	103
Books	66
Articles	55
Gurdwara visits	49
Art (Paintings etc)	34
Music	28

The data also reveals that resources created by Sikh organisations are rarely used by RE teachers. Despite the availability of platforms such as Basics of Sikhi and SikhNet these are mentioned far less frequently than mainstream providers like the BBC or NATRE. This suggests a gap in awareness, accessibility, or confidence in using Sikh-led materials and

could also reflect that these Sikh produced materials are not always suitable for RE lessons as they have not been specifically designed to be used in the classroom.

Organisational Resource	Count
BBC	77
NATRE	64
RE Online	42
Local RE Syllabus	27
Other	43

Teaching resources most often mentioned by survey and meeting respondents included:

1. [BBC Bitesize – Sikhism](#)
2. [NATRE – Inspiring RE: Sikhs](#)
3. [RE Hubs – School Speakers](#)
4. [Sikh Missionary Society UK](#)
5. [Sikh Education Service](#)
6. [Sikh Coalition Educator Resources](#)
7. [Teaching Packs – Sikhism Guide](#)
8. [RE:Online Sikhism](#)
9. [Oak Academy Sikhism](#)

## Additional Resources Needed

Teachers expressed a need for a variety of additional resources to help in their teaching of Sikhi. Common requests included more visual aids, such as videos and interactive materials, to engage students more effectively. Several teachers also highlighted the need for more detailed lesson plans and structured schemes of work that align with the curriculum. Access to artefacts and real-life examples was another frequently mentioned resource, as these can help bring the subject to life and make it more relatable for students. Additionally, teachers expressed a desire for more opportunities to engage with Sikh communities and speakers, either through visits to Gurdwaras or by inviting guest speakers into the classroom. These resources would not only enhance the learning experience but also provide students with a more comprehensive and authentic understanding of Sikhi. Common requests included:

- Downloadable Presentations
- In person workshops
- Videos and artefacts
- Access to Sikh speakers or Gurdwara visits

Responses included:

- “Resources that begin with the lived experience of Sikhs. So often materials focus on externals (the 5 Ks)”
- “More up-to-date interviews with practicing Sikhs about how being Sikh in the UK can be challenging.”
- “Information that is correct and accurate, originating from Sikhs.”
- “We need access to Sikh speakers and workshops.”
- “Suitable written resources that can be shared with colleagues”
- “I would like more resources on Sikhi diversity.”
- “Virtual visits are fun and amazing – especially for rural schools.”
- “Sikhi is egalitarian – the ‘take me to your leader’ model doesn’t always work.”
- “We want speakers and trips and more first-person videos.”

RE teachers present in the online meeting expressed a strong need for:

- Authentic, curriculum-aligned resources.
- Access to Sikh speakers and Gurdwara visits.
- Clear guidance on terminology (e.g. “Sikhi” vs. “Sikhism”).
- RE Hubs and NATRE were highlighted as useful platforms.
- A Sikh worldviews booklet and new curriculum materials.

A powerful thread throughout the online discussion was the importance of teaching diversity within Sikhi. Participants highlighted how not all Sikhs are Amritdhari, and that students should be introduced to different ways in which Sikhs in Britain express their beliefs and practices. This, they agreed, must be done with care, ensuring that personal perspectives are balanced with accurate representations of the Sikh tradition.

### Diversity Within Sikhi

A key theme that emerged in the online discussion was the importance of recognising and teaching diversity within Sikhi. Participants emphasised that Sikhi is expressed through a range of lived experiences. For example, while some Sikhs are Amritdhari, many others identify as Sikh without taking this step. This diversity is reflected in how individuals interpret and practice their faith, from daily rituals to broader theological understandings.

RE teachers noted that many Sikh students in UK schools may be unfamiliar with various Sikh teachings or may express their Sikh identity in ways that differ from textbook definitions. Some students may even question or distance themselves from certain aspects of the tradition, which can present challenges for teachers trying to present an accurate yet inclusive picture of Sikhi.

The discussion highlighted the need to balance normative doctrinal content with lived experience. While it is essential to teach the foundational beliefs and practices of Sikhi, it is equally important to acknowledge the varied ways in which Sikh identity is expressed in

contemporary society. This approach not only fosters a more authentic understanding of the tradition but also helps students, both Sikh and non-Sikh, to appreciate the richness and complexity of religious identity in the modern world.

## **Recommendations**

These findings highlight a clear need for coordinated action across both the RE sector and the Sikh community to improve the teaching of Sikhi in UK schools.<sup>3</sup> By working collaboratively, the RE sector and Sikh community can ensure that students receive a more accurate, inclusive, and meaningful education about Sikhi.

### **a) Joint Initiatives (RE Sector & Sikh Communities)**

1. Develop a National Resource Hub / Sikhi Support Network
  - Establish a centralised, RE teacher-led platform with lesson plans, videos, artefacts, and directories of Sikh speakers and Gurdwaras.
  - Create a National Sikhi Support Network supported by RE networks like NATRE.
2. Promote Lived Experience in Learning
  - Encourage Gurdwara visits, virtual tours, and assemblies.
  - Properly resource Sikh speakers and Gurdwara visits.
  - Use storytelling and lived experiences from Sikh individuals to enrich classroom learning.
3. Build Partnerships with RE Networks
  - Collaborate with NATRE, RE: Online, and local education authorities to ensure Sikh perspectives are included in national RE discussions.
4. Develop and Share Resources
  - Co-create accurate, engaging, and age-appropriate teaching materials that reflect the diversity within Sikhi.

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<sup>3</sup> Clarke and Woodhead (2018) argue for a rethinking of RE to reflect the diversity of belief in modern Britain, which aligns with this report's emphasis on inclusive curriculum reform.

## **b) RE Sector**

1. Enhance Teacher Training (ITT & CPD)
  - Integrate Sikhi more thoroughly into Initial Teacher Training.
  - Provide ongoing CPD with input from Sikh educators.
2. Improve Curriculum Representation
  - Advocate for consistent inclusion of Sikhi across Key Stages.
  - Promote Sikhi as an option at GCSE and A-Level.
3. Support Engagement with Sikh Communities
  - Ensure that school/community engagement (in person / online) is included in RE curricula.
4. Strengthen SACRE Involvement
  - Encourage SACREs to include Sikh representation.
  - Provide clear guidance to schools on engaging with Sikh communities.

## **c) Sikh Communities**

1. Increase Visibility in Education
  - Engage with local SACREs and offer representation to influence RE curriculum development.
2. Support Teacher Access to Expertise
  - Offer high-quality speakers, workshops, and Gurdwara visits.
  - Create a network of Sikh educators and community contacts to share experiences.
3. Promote Understanding of Lived Sikhi
  - Share personal stories, community practices, and contemporary Sikh experiences.
4. Encourage Volunteer Involvement
  - Empower volunteer Sikhs to participate in school outreach, interfaith events, and educational initiatives.

## Summary

Teachers provided valuable feedback on the project. Many respondents appreciated the opportunity to share their experiences and highlighted the importance of ongoing support and resources for teaching Sikhi. Some teachers expressed frustration with the lack of training and resources available, while others emphasised the need for more collaboration with Sikh communities. Overall, the feedback highlighted the importance of providing teachers with the tools and support they need to effectively teach Sikhi and foster a deeper understanding of the subject among students.<sup>4</sup>

The online meeting concluded with a sense of momentum. Ideas for a national Sikhi support network for RE teachers were warmly received, and several attendees offered to help build it. There was a shared recognition that improving Sikhi education in schools would require more collaboration—between teachers, the Sikh community, and schools.

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<sup>4</sup> Ofsted (2021) highlights that high-quality RE includes accurate representation of all principal religions, reinforcing the need for better Sikhi coverage.

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