

The Sikhs in Academia Fresher's Guide

SEPTEMBER 2025



**What every Sikh student needs to
know about University life**

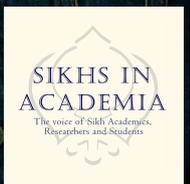


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Credits

STUDENT EXECUTIVE

Ekjot Kaur (University of Warwick), Sushila Kapoor (University of Warwick), Shantae Kaur (Keele University), Daleep Singh Bahra (Imperial College London), Anhad Singh Bagga (University of Warwick)

COMMITTEE

Harjinder Kaur Aujla (University of Birmingham), Parminder Johal (University of Derby), Dr Harjinder Lallie (University of Warwick), Nimrita Kaur Bahia (University of Coventry), Mangalpreet Singh (University of Aston), Preet Kainth (London Metropolitan University), Raj Kaur Mann (University of York), Harprit Singh (Demontford University),

CHAPLAINS

Trishna Singh (Edinburgh/ Scotland regional lead), Amarjite Singh Swansea/ Wales regional lead), Kamaljit Kaur (Sheffield Hallam), Kamaljit Kaur (Bournemouth), Navleen Kaur (Kings College London) and Susan Kaur Sokhi (University of Leicester), Randeep Singh Soin (Oxford Brookes)

VOLUNTEERS

Manjit Kaur, Kam Prior, Dr Navjot Virk, Harpreet Kaur



WWW.SIKHSINACADEMIA.ORG
 INSTAGRAM: @SIKHSINACADEMIA
 INFO@SIKHSINACADEMIA.ORG



Our next conference is on 6-7th June 2026. Please follow our Instagram page to ensure you get to hear about registration

Welcome to our Freshers' Fair guide, created just for you! This guide is the result of a team effort from students, academics, and Sikh chaplains, all coming together to offer you a blend of advice, insights, and support. Our student contributors have shared their real-life experiences of university life, making sure the tips you'll find here are both practical and relatable. Academics have added their advice from years of teaching and mentoring, giving you useful strategies to thrive both academically and personally. And our Sikh chaplains, who are always on hand to support students, offer wisdom and spiritual guidance to help you navigate this exciting time.

Starting university marks the beginning of an exciting new chapter. It's a time for discovering new ideas, meeting new people, and challenging yourself in ways you never have before. At the same time, we know it can feel overwhelming—there's a mix of excitement, but also uncertainty. That's why this guide is here: to reassure you that you're not alone, and to give you the support you need as you find your feet in this new world.

WELCOME

Inside, you'll find advice on all sorts of aspects of student life. We'll introduce you to the Sikh Society, sharing why it might be a great fit for you, what kind of activities to expect, and how a thriving society can add so much to your university experience. We'll also talk about connecting with your local gurdwara—not just as a place of worship, but as a community space where you can find support. Beyond faith and society life, we've also included tips on mental wellbeing, adjusting to life away from home, and managing the stresses of university life. You'll also find practical advice on staying safe online, managing your time, and making the most of the opportunities that come your way.

This guide isn't just about giving you information—it's also here to inspire and encourage you. We hope it becomes a go-to source of comfort and motivation as you begin writing your own story during this exciting new chapter.

SIKHS IN ACADEMIA



THE SIKH SOCIETY



PHOTOGRAPH:
SIKHS
ACADEMIA
CONFERENCE
2023

Starting university is an exciting new chapter, and joining your Sikh Society (SikhSoc) can play an important role in making the most of your experience. Sikh Societies offer much more than social activities: they provide a sense of community, an opportunity to build lasting friendships, and a chance to connect with your Sikhi in a supportive environment. Engaging with SikhSoc can also enhance your personal and professional development.

Organising events, running campaigns, or joining the committee helps you develop transferable skills such as teamwork, leadership, and communication—all of which strengthen your CV and future career prospects. In addition, Sikh Societies often run talks, workshops, and discussions that deepen your understanding of Sikhi, helping you explore its values and teachings in a way that is relevant to student life.

Engaging with SikhSoc is simple and flexible. Start by attending freshers' fair, where the society will usually have a stall. Sign up to their mailing list and follow their social media channels to stay updated on upcoming events. Many societies host weekly or fortnightly meet-ups, whether for langar on campus, study circles, or informal socials—these are relaxed spaces where you can meet others and feel part of a community. Don't be shy about attending your first event; everyone is there to connect and share the journey.

If you'd like to get more involved, consider volunteering at events, helping with publicity, or standing for a committee role in the future. Even small contributions, such as helping to set up for langar or welcoming new members, can make a big difference. Sikh Societies thrive on participation, and your involvement will enrich both your own university experience and that of your peers.

BUILDING A WELCOMING SIKH SOCIETY



PHOTOGRAPH: WARWICK SIKH SOCIETY LANGAR ON CAMPUS 2025

A Sikh society has a unique role: to provide a supportive environment for Sikhs while also serving as a space welcoming those curious to learn. When planning events, it is helpful to balance spiritual, cultural, and social activities. For example, kirtan nights, Simran sessions, or discussions on Gurbani nurture spiritual growth, while cultural events such as Vaisakhi celebrations foster community spirit. At the same time, inclusive social gatherings such as langar events, interfaith dialogues, or charity drives allow the society to connect with a wider audience and showcase Sikh values in action. If there is not a Sikh society at your university and you would like help in setting one up, contact Sikhs in Academia, where our student exec will help you establish one.

Remaining rooted in Sikh principles is essential. Central values such as seva (selfless service), equality, and remembrance of God can guide decision-making and ensure that activities align with the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib Ji. Running langar at campus or community events, for instance, embodies the principle of equality while also offering practical outreach. Leaders should model humility and fairness in how they organise and manage the society, reflecting the Sikh tradition of servant leadership.

Equally important is creating an environment where people with diverse beliefs feel welcomed. Not all members will be at the same stage in their spiritual journey, and some may simply be exploring. By fostering open discussion without judgment, and avoiding exclusivity, the society demonstrates the Sikh values of tolerance and acceptance. In this way, a Sikh society can be both a spiritual anchor and an inclusive community.

GET TO KNOW YOUR GURDWARA!

Discover local gurdwaras for sangat, spirituality, seva, youth activities, friendship, and langar—offering balance, belonging, and community during university life.



Photo: Guru Nanak Gurdwara, Smethwick, Birmingham

As you settle into university life, it's worth taking time to discover your local gurdwaras. Most UK cities with Sikh populations have at least one gurdwara, and many are within easy reach of university campuses.

Gurdwaras typically run daily prayers, Sunday diwan programmes, kirtan, and community activities such as Punjabi classes, kirtan classes, or volunteering opportunities. Some also host youth programmes, study circles, or sports clubs—if they do, get involved and make the most of these opportunities. If youth-led initiatives are missing, consider speaking with the committee about starting something new, as fresh ideas are often warmly welcomed.

“MAKING A CONNECTION WITH THE GURDWARA WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT STEP I TOOK WHILE STUDYING”

Why should you engage?

Gurdwaras are not only a source of spiritual growth and peace, but also a place to meet sangat and make friends who share your values. They offer a grounding balance to academic life, providing support, guidance, and belonging. Gurdwaras also connect you with opportunities for seva (selfless service), cultural learning, and community involvement. Whether through attending kirtan, joining study circles, or taking part in youth-led initiatives, they create a welcoming environment where you can strengthen your identity, learn new skills, and feel part of something bigger than yourself.

Moving away from home for the first time is a big step. It brings excitement, freedom, and new opportunities, but it can also feel daunting. Missing your family, friends, or familiar routines is completely normal—especially in the first term. A good way to cope is to plan regular contact. Scheduling FaceTime calls, group chats, or even short visits home can help you stay connected without losing momentum in your new environment. Some students find it helpful to return home once or twice in the first term, while gradually building confidence to stay longer as they settle in.

Key Tips for Coping and Thriving:

- **Stay connected:** Use FaceTime, messaging apps, or plan weekend visits home to ease homesickness.
- **Shared living:** Communicate openly, agree on house rules, and respect others' routines and space.
- **Self-care:** Cook balanced meals, maintain a sleep routine, and exercise for wellbeing.
- **Independence:** Learn budgeting, time management, and problem-solving—skills that last well beyond university.
- **Social opportunities:** Join societies, meet new friends, and expand your networks.
- **Seek support:** Use student services, faith groups, or societies if you feel overwhelmed.
- For Sikh students, living away from home can also raise questions about how to manage your faith in a new environment. Routine practices such as Nitnem, or preparing vegetarian food may require extra effort, especially in shared accommodation. It can feel more difficult

STAYING AWAY FROM HOME



PHOTOGRAPHY PIXABAY

without family or a supportive sangat nearby. However, this challenge often brings benefits. You develop independence in your Sikhi, building discipline and finding personal meaning in daily practice. Many students also connect with Sikh societies or local gurdwaras, gaining both spiritual grounding and a new community of friends. Living away from home, therefore, is not just about academic growth—it can also be a period of spiritual growth, where you learn to carry your values into new settings and strengthen your own identity.

Living away from home builds independence, resilience, and community. Coping with homesickness, managing shared spaces, and maintaining Sikhi through routine, sangat, and gurdwaras makes the experience both personally and spiritually enriching.

CYBER SECURITY AND STAYING SAFE ONLINE

Starting university is an exciting time, but it's also a period when you're more susceptible to scams. Be cyber-smart! Freshers are often targeted because they're new to the environment and may be juggling new accounts for things like student loans, accommodation, and university systems. Scammers exploit this by pretending to be from official sources, using a technique called phishing. They'll create a sense of urgency to trick you into clicking a fake link or downloading malicious software.

- **Enable 2FA.** Set up two-factor authentication (2FA) on all key accounts for an extra layer of security.
- **Use unique passwords.** Don't reuse passwords. Use a password manager to create and remember strong, unique passwords for every service.
- **Be suspicious of links.** Verify email senders. Always hover over links before clicking to check their real destination.
- **Update your devices.** Keep your devices and software updated. Updates include critical security patches protecting you from the latest threats.
- **Avoid public Wi-Fi.** Don't access sensitive accounts on public Wi-Fi. It's unsecured; use your mobile data or a trusted network instead.



IF YOU RECEIVE AN EMAIL WITH OFFER THAT IS TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE, IT IS PROBABLY TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE!

Here are some common examples of scams:

- **Student Loan Scams:** You might get a message claiming to be from the Student Loan Company (SLC) saying there's a problem with your payment or that you're owed a refund. They'll ask you to "verify" your bank details, but this is a scam to steal your financial information.
- **Free giveaways:** Don't fall for "free" giveaways on social media! Scammers often create fake accounts promising free laptops or vouchers, but they just want your personal details or a small "shipping" fee.
- **Accommodation Scams:** This is particularly common for first-years looking for private housing. A "landlord" might offer a great-looking flat at a suspiciously low price and pressure you to send a deposit or first month's rent before you've even viewed the property. Always insist on seeing the property and signing a legitimate contract before paying anything.
- **Fake Job Offers:** Be wary of job offers that seem too good to be true, especially those that ask you to pay for training materials or "admin fees" upfront. Legitimate employers don't operate this way.

Sikhs in Academia is a Sikh Academics and Researchers Network. We are a dynamic, inclusive network promoting academic excellence and connecting Sikh academics across disciplines. The community provides a platform for those studying or working in universities to come together, exchange ideas, and collaborate. The network fosters a supportive, inclusive environment that allows Sikh academics to thrive and contribute to their fields. Sikhs in Academia creates opportunities to showcase work, engage in academic discourse, and connect with like-minded individuals. Members benefit from resources, including regular events, mentorship programmes, and career development workshops. We value diversity and encourage participation from all areas of academia, including the social sciences, humanities, STEM, and beyond.

Sikhs in Academia is the sole academic Sikh network, powered by academics, support staff, chaplains, and, most crucially, **students** at its core. Our reach has now expanded to include the US, Canada, and India. Over the past three years, Sikhs in Academia has been involved in a wide array of projects. We have actively supported Sikh societies across the UK and have significantly expanded the Sikh Chaplain network, working towards our goal of a Sikh Chaplain in every university. Our annual conference has gone from strength to strength, and in 2025, we provided fully funded places for PhD students to present their research. In partnership with Sikhs in Law, we were instrumental in producing the Sikh Leadership Report. We have successfully organised clearing and careers events, and most recently, we secured free laptops for low-income families with A-Level students to prepare them for university access.

SIKHS IN ACADEMIA NEEDS YOU!



The Sikh Society's student committee plays a huge role in shaping our network's direction. We're looking for enthusiastic and dedicated volunteers to help with our annual conference and other initiatives. This is a great chance to put your skills to use, gaining experience in social media management, content creation, website editing, and graphic design. Help shape a welcoming and inclusive community. You'll be central to organising local events at your university, from spiritual gatherings to social and charity drives. If you are a student passionate about seva and sangat, we need you. This is an opportunity to build your CV, develop leadership skills, and work with like-minded individuals to make a difference. Join us and help create a space that embodies our core principles while being open to everyone. To sign up, contact us on Instagram.



Contact us at info@sikhsinacademia.org if you are interested in volunteering

COPING WITH UNIVERSITY LIFE

Starting university is one of the most exciting, challenging, and transformative experiences you will go through. For many, it is the first taste of independence — managing your own timetable, making choices about your lifestyle, and shaping your future direction. With this freedom comes responsibility, and it is important to strike the right balance between being disciplined and focused while also enjoying yourself, making friends, and building memories that will last a lifetime.

What to Expect

The early weeks can feel overwhelming. New surroundings, different teaching methods, and the responsibility of managing your own schedule can all take time to adjust to. You might also experience homesickness or uncertainty about whether you “fit in.” These feelings are completely normal. With time, routines become familiar, friendships grow, and confidence builds. Remember: you are not alone — thousands of other freshers are experiencing the same mixture of excitement and nervousness.

Making Friends

Building new friendships can feel daunting, but remember that everyone is in the same position. The key is to be open, approachable, and willing to step outside your comfort zone.

- Be proactive: Start conversations in lectures, flats, or society events.
- Mix widely: Don't limit yourself to one group — meet people from different backgrounds and courses.
- Stay authentic: Genuine friendships form when you are yourself, not when you try to “fit in.”
- Check in on others: Small acts of kindness — like inviting someone to join you — go a long way.

Discipline and Focus

Success at university depends on self-motivation. Unlike school, you will not be chased for homework or reminded constantly about deadlines. Lectures and seminars set the framework, but the majority of learning comes from independent study. Good habits early on will help you stay on top of your workload and reduce stress later. Consider:

- Create a timetable: Use a planner or app to map out lectures, deadlines, and revision sessions.
- Set realistic goals: Break big tasks into manageable steps so you don't feel overwhelmed.
- Develop a routine: Aim for regular study blocks, balanced with breaks and time to relax.
- Stay organised: Keep your notes, files, and resources in order so they are easy to find.



Enjoying Your Time

While academics are central, university is also about growth, exploration, and enjoyment. Making time for fun and relaxation is essential for your wellbeing and will enrich your overall experience.

- Join societies and clubs: From sports to cultural or faith groups, these are excellent ways to meet like-minded people.
- Attend events and socials: Freshers' week is just the beginning; most societies run events all year.
- Explore your new city/town: Take time to discover local attractions, cafes, and cultural spaces.
- Say yes (within reason): Being open to new opportunities often leads to unexpected friendships and experiences.

New Horizons

One of the greatest opportunities at university is the chance to learn something entirely new, beyond your course. With such a wide range of societies, workshops, and community connections available, this is the ideal time to try something you've always been curious about but never had the chance to pursue. It could be learning a new language, which not only enriches your communication skills but also opens doors to new cultures and friendships. It could also be exploring a creative talent, like playing an instrument, painting, or writing, which offers a valuable outlet for self-expression and stress relief. For many, university may also be the moment to connect more deeply with faith and tradition, such as beginning the journey of learning Gurmat Sangeet. This unique form of Sikh devotional music combines spiritual practice with musical discipline, offering both peace of mind and a connection to heritage.



Mental Wellbeing

Looking after your mental wellbeing at university is just as important as keeping up with your studies. Stress, homesickness, or loneliness can affect anyone, so it helps to recognise early signs such as changes in sleep, low motivation, or withdrawing from friends. If this happens, take small steps: set routines, get fresh air, exercise, and avoid isolating yourself. Talking is also key — reach out to family and friends for reassurance and support.

Universities provide a range of services, including wellbeing teams and chaplaincy. These offer confidential support for issues such as stress, abuse, coercive relationships, bullying, or race and religious hatred. A Sikh Chaplain may also be available for initial emotional support and signposting.

Remember, seeking help is a strength. By looking after your mental wellbeing, you give yourself the best chance to thrive academically, socially, and personally during your university journey.