



# Teaching Buddhism in Schools: a project proposal

Providing accessible and authoritative resources on Buddhism for teachers of Religious Studies, Philosophy and Ethics

***Windows into Buddhism** is an exceptional online resource for teachers. The website itself is easy to navigate and beautifully presented. The resources for pupils - the videos and worksheets - are well pitched, providing clear explanations of beliefs and practices. **Windows into Buddhism** is organised around key concepts, stories and practices; this allows teachers to use the various resources within their existing programmes of study. The detailed subject knowledge provided will increase teachers' confidence as they secure and enhance their own understanding in order to teach Buddhism effectively. Another particular strength of the website is that it is supported by Dominique Side's book 'Discovering Buddhism' which is an invaluable resource for any RE professional teaching Buddhism. It is both scholarly and accessible.*

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## Vision and mission

Education is a core activity of the European Buddhist Union and an area that the Union wishes to develop and expand. Research has shown that the teaching of world religions in the classroom makes a significant contribution to fostering attitudes of tolerance in today's multi-ethnic societies. This has been a frequent theme in meetings of the Council of Europe. And yet, of all the major world faiths, Buddhism currently lacks the networks and resources required for the highest standards of teaching. Much work is still to be done for Buddhism to be as widely taught and understood as other widespread religions.

To this end, the EBU is developing a range of activities to meet the needs of the diverse educational systems across Europe. Its **Teach Peace** project meets the needs of countries and schools that wish to educate students in the compassionate and meditative values of Buddhism in a secular way, without teaching Buddhism itself. Its **Windows into Buddhism** website makes educational resources on Buddhism available to schoolteachers who teach the subject as part of their world faiths, philosophy or ethics curriculum. And its **EcoDharma Network** explores the interface between Buddhism and environmentalism and the benefits of applying Buddhist approaches to social action. The contribution that



religions can make to society in this sort of way is increasingly one of the main themes of religious education in schools.

## **Background and expertise**

Buddhism has been taught in UK schools for over thirty years as part of the multifaith curriculum, and now many countries of the European Union include it on their national syllabus for all ages, usually under religious education, philosophy or ethics. This is the case in the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Italy and Ireland, for example. Despite the need for appropriate teaching materials, reliable and authentic resources remain scarce, limited and scattered, thus not easy for busy teachers to locate. This makes it easier to teach other religions instead where resources are better established. This project proposal specifically concerns the two latter projects: Windows into Buddhism and the EcoDharma Network. The Teach Peace project has separate funding.

### **Windows into Buddhism**

In September 2022 the EBU launched a new website dedicated to supporting the teaching of Buddhism in schools. It is called **Windows into Buddhism** <https://windowsintobuddhism.com> Its purpose is to bring together in one place trusted, original and interesting sources from all Buddhist traditions organised by age group and topic. In addition, the site serves as a platform for teacher webinars with participants from across Europe. It is the only site of its kind and had 13,000 unique visitors in its first year.

For Buddhist organisations, an added benefit of this website is that it can be used by parents to teach basic Buddhist ideas to their children. Stories and videos are especially relevant for this. And in the case of Buddhist communities with a children's programme, Windows into Buddhism has proved a very useful resource.

The project was initiated by Dominique Side who was vice-president of the EBU from 2013 to 2018. She has a Ph.D. in Buddhist philosophy and over thirty years' experience teaching Buddhism in secondary schools and to adults, and of holding teacher training seminars. Dominique's acclaimed textbook on Buddhism (*Buddhism*, Philip Allan, 2005) has been used widely and its German translation has been a standard textbook in Austria. It went out of print and was updated and republished in 2022 as *Discovering Buddhism*. This is a key source of information for the website. It has been translated into French and German.

The other members of the project team responsible for content development are all currently teaching in schools. See <https://windowsintobuddhism.com/about-us/>



The creation of the website was funded through a grant from the Khyentse Foundation (USA and India) which also granted minimal funding in 2023. Much has been accomplished through voluntary work in 2022-2023 but this is now unsustainable. From 2024 onwards the website needs to secure a stable financial basis that supports professional management, content development and marketing. Khyentse Foundation has indicated it is interested in co-funding the project on an on-going basis if other sources of finance are obtained.

### **Uniqueness of this project**

The following guiding principles make this site distinctive.

- Communication is not only about information but also about design. **Windows into Buddhism** reflects the spirit and mental space of Buddhism through the way it is aesthetically designed. This makes the site visually appealing and engaging.
- Teachers find it extremely difficult to find materials that reflect the lived experience of Buddhists, so we have drawn on the network of European Buddhist Union members to ensure practising Buddhists have a voice and can share their personal views in short videos. This brings the subject alive.
- The entire site is designed to make resources easily available by topic and age group, so it is not primarily a site of general interest but specifically targets educational needs. User feedback has consistently praised the site for its clear and simple organization.
- Unlike most existing sites, this one features Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhist traditions - as required by some school curricula - and draws directly on expertise in each of those traditions.
- Dominique Side checks all materials for accuracy before they are uploaded. And the website manager, Claire Zimmerman, formats and fine edits everything. She previously managed the Middle Way Education website in the USA. Other sites lack the reassurance of such quality control.
- Translation of these English resources into other European languages is made possible through collaboration with national organisations that are familiar with the needs of children and schools in their respective countries, and that are therefore able to select their resources appropriately. Two such collaborations have already begun: with the German Buddhist Union [and with](#) Boeddhistisch Vormingsonderwijs in the Netherlands.  
<https://buddhismus-unterricht.org/category/unterricht/einheiten/>

## **Proposal for activities in 2024/2025**

1. Priority will be given to making the site better known and increasing its audience throughout Europe and in the USA and Australia. This will be done in several ways:



- a. A specialist in Search Engine Optimization will define keywords and ensure better online visibility
  - b. Team members will gather information on interested teachers, organisations and teacher training programmes from within their respective countries, and pass this on to the networking coordinator who will spend one day a week following up on leads and establishing a sound network of contacts. This is a new role we consider necessary for further growth.
2. In accordance with the vision of the EBU, we will establish a Europe-wide network of teachers who teach elements of Buddhism in the classroom. This will result partly from the work of the networking coordinator and partly from the organization of online teacher webinars.
3. A special online-conference/webinar is planned for the end of 2024 to launch the creation of a Europe-wide network of teachers specializing in Buddhism. Provisionally, the topic will be: “Who is the Buddha and what did he teach?” Stefano Bettera, president of the EBU, will present his vision regarding the important role that Buddhism can play in our children’s education. Bee Scherer, the rector of the Buddhist Seminary in the Netherlands and professor at the University of Amsterdam, will speak of his experience of teaching Buddhism within the educational system. Dominique Side will briefly present some main points related to the topic itself, and there will be small groups (divided into primary and secondary education) where teachers can share knowledge and teaching methods, discuss the challenges they face and identify their needs. The webinar will last around two hours.

Importantly, this will be followed up by a series of webinars in 2025 and beyond so the network can share together regularly and will become a valuable form of support for teachers. Every effort will be made to register all these webinars in each country as part of in-service professional training to encourage attendance. Talks given during the webinars will be archived and made available on the Windows into Buddhism site.

4. **Windows into Buddhism** will create a series of new modules with resources related to “Engaged Buddhism”, featuring different areas of society where Buddhists are active. Materials on the environment will benefit from a new collaboration with the **EcoDharma Network** of the EBU to develop original sections on Buddhism and the Environment for all age groups. Other topics include Chaplaincy, work in prisons and selected examples of social work undertaken by Buddhists in Europe and the USA. The plan is as follows:
  - Year 1 (2024): Primary + secondary level materials on socially engaged Buddhism including the environment



- Year 2 (2025): Further secondary level materials on socially engaged Buddhism including the environment.

The new resources will feature downloadable text documents, PowerPoint slides, videos, activities and worksheets. **Windows into Buddhism** will partner with other groups where appropriate to avoid duplication and will work with university departments researching the connections between religion, the environment and the climate crisis. It will also re-purpose existing resources to meet educational needs.

This work requires research as well as content development and we need a new member of the team who is devoted especially to it. It is proposed this will be Munisha (Catherine Hopper) who is currently vice president of the EBU and a qualified classroom teacher for secondary schools. A Buddhist since 1993, she was ordained a member of the Triratna Buddhist Order in 2003. From 1998 to 2012 she worked for The Clear Vision Trust, a former Buddhist video project specialising in classroom materials for Buddhism in Religious Education in the UK. During this time she taught thousands of young people visiting the Manchester Buddhist Centre in school groups. Munisha is also a co-author of the textbook *GCSE Religious Studies for AQA A: Buddhism*, Oxford University Press, 2016.

5. A new collaboration will be explored with **Boeddhistisch Vormingsonderwijs** in the Netherlands with a view to translating selected Windows into Buddhism materials into Dutch, and to commissioning Dutch teachers to create content for the English website. This will be coordinated by our existing team member, Jesse van Delft, who has already received a very enthusiastic response to the idea from colleagues.
6. We shall open discussions with other organisations throughout Europe that are interested in translating Windows into Buddhism materials into their own languages.
7. The website will continue to be maintained and updated on a regular basis. Further resources will be added to complete existing sections on the site. Teacher webinars will be offered throughout 2024 and newsletters will be sent to our subscriber list and posted on social media.



## Budget

This proposal concerns activity from April 2024 to March 2025. It is proposed to seek funding from the Khyentse Foundation of €20,000. The EBU has committed an additional €2,000 for April and May. **The fundraising target of this Appeal is therefore €26,000.**

### Windows into Buddhism Budget April 2024-March 2025

Item	Description	Cost €
Project manager	Administration, funding proposals, organising team meetings, coordination and quality control 1 day/week @ €250	12,000
Content development	10 new sections @ €750	7,500
	New materials in existing sections: 5 days @ €250	1,250
Research	Research on environmental materials 10 days @ €250	2,500
Video creation	Eva Rycroft: 2 @ €750	1,500
Video editing	Short informal videos with interviews and talks 50 hours @ €30	1,500
Website designer	Updating site and adding new sections 5 days @ €250	1,250
Website management	Fine editing and uploading materials, managing the WiB YouTube site 1 day/month @ €250	3,000
Illustrations	15 drawings @ €75	1,125
<b>Teacher network</b>		
First webinar to launch teacher network	Online conference management and planning: 1 day/ week for 6 months @ €250	6,000
	Speaker fees	250
	Webinar management	250
Networking coordinator	1 day per week @ €250	12,000
Netherlands coordinator	1 day per month @ €250	3,000
Search Engine Optimization	Estimate received	1,189
Website administration	Website hosting, software updating	1,500
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>47,304</b>
Finance/Accounts	EBU: 2% of budget	946

**GRAND TOTAL**

**€48,250**