



# Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities

Broaden Your Horizons  
Prospectus 2021



The Institute of Ismaili Studies





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The Institute of Ismaili Studies



## Message from the Director of the IIS

The Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS) was established in 1977 with the aim of promoting scholarship and learning on Muslim societies and cultures, historical as well as contemporary, and a better understanding of their relationship with other faith communities and cultures. These objectives are realised through a range of programmes and activities organised and implemented by the various departments of the Institute. For those wishing to study at the IIS, the Department of Graduate Studies currently offers two postgraduate level programmes, the Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities (GPISH) and the Secondary Teacher Education Programme (STEP).

GPISH is a unique three-year interdisciplinary programme designed to foster the next generation of thought-leaders to serve Ismaili communities around the world. Selected candidates receive comprehensive scholarships that allow them to dedicate the three years to a well-rounded graduate education in the Humanities and Social Sciences with a focus on Muslim civilisations. The IIS has partnered with SOAS University of London to award an MA degree for the first two years of study with us, after which we support students to specialise in a second Master's at any UK University. At the IIS, small cohorts allow for in-depth discussion and critical exploration with experts in each field of Islamic Studies. GPISH students receive tailored support to do innovative research of their own, and to fulfil their academic and personal potential.

I am confident that your time with the programme will represent an exciting and transformative experience, and I look forward to welcoming you in London.

**Dr Farhad Daftary**  
*Director, The Institute of Ismaili Studies*



## Message from the Director of SOAS University of London

SOAS University of London is a higher education institution that investigates and teaches on the planetary questions of our time through the perspectives of the people of Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

Our research and teaching comprehensively covers the humanities and social sciences and transcends the disciplinary divides of our formal subjects. We do much of this through institutional partnerships with universities and allied organisations in and on Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Our formal relationship with the Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS) is one such partnership where we offer formal recognition of their highly regarded programme.

**Professor Adam Habib**  
*Director, SOAS University of London*



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There is no program in the world like GPISH. It's quite rigorous, at times almost unbearably so – but the process forms you into a more intellectually and emotionally sophisticated version of yourself. The program is both thoughtfully structured and intentionally flexible, ensuring that you receive a critical academic understanding of the canon of Islamic Studies, at the same time as having the freedom to pursue your research interests. I'd recommend it to anyone with a passion for and curiosity about our history and our present conditions, anyone who is interested in refining their approaches to understanding the world. I can't think of a better way to have spent this chapter of my life, and I'm endlessly grateful to the IIS for making this program possible.” **Anika-Amin Kabani (GPISH 2022)**

# Ten reasons to join GPISH

Study with peers from across the globe and a supportive programme team

Engage in critical study of Muslim societies and civilisations across time

Earn an MA from international education leader SOAS University of London

Immerse yourself in one of the world's most diverse and inspiring cities

Develop key skills for lifelong learning and employability





Learn from a diverse cross-disciplinary faculty

Design and conduct your own exploratory field-research project anywhere in the world\*

Enrich your language studies through a language immersion programme\*

Visit the world-famous Alhambra in Spain as part of an educational field trip\*

Join an active global alumni network



\*subject to approval

# Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities

GPISH trains students to use the intellectual tools of the humanities and social sciences and to explore perspectives which relate religious ideas to broader dimensions of society and culture.

Islam's civilisational achievements are studied at the same time as its theological and religious expressions across time. Taking an interdisciplinary approach to studying Islamic history and thought, special attention is paid to issues of modernity that arise as Muslims relate their heritage to contemporary circumstances, all of which contributes to an enriched academic curriculum.

In the context of Muslim societies, GPISH is informed by the full range and diversity of cultures in which Islam is practised today, from the Middle East, Southern and Central Asia, and Africa to the industrialised societies of the West, taking into consideration the variety of contexts which shape the beliefs, practices and ideals of the faith. GPISH highlights and promotes research areas which have had relatively little attention devoted to them. These include the intellectual and literary expressions of Shi'ism in general and Ismailism in particular.

GPISH is a fully funded scholarship programme which covers the cost of tuition fees and includes a living allowance in line with the UK Visas and Immigration's stated cost of living. For further information, please see the UK Visas and Immigration website.



It is very difficult to find a graduate-level programme comparable to GPISH anywhere in the world. GPISH is avant-garde in its nature and approach, paying attention to those facets of Islam that traditional graduate programmes on Islam tend to ignore. It forces you to delve into complex and fascinating intellectual areas, and contributes very meaningfully to the growth of the student as an individual and academic. GPISH is truly interdisciplinary, and I would highly recommend it to anyone who is interested in finding out about their heritage."

**Uzair Ibrahim (GPISH 2021) Pakistan**

## Statement of Philosophy

The principles outlined here inform all the intellectual programmes of the IIS, including the two graduate programmes of study, as well as research, seminars or conferences, and public lectures. GPISH, in particular, reflects a basic re-assessment of conventional academic programmes in this field. Essentially, it seeks to integrate areas and methodologies that have become separated in many existing programmes.

The philosophy of GPISH also reflects the premises guiding the IIS' intellectual activities as a whole. Among the levels on which integration as well as new perspectives are intended, the following are noteworthy.

## Intellectual disciplines

GPISH seeks to avoid a division of pertinent disciplines – e.g. history, anthropology, political science, philosophical analysis, linguistic and literary criticism – in the study of Muslim societies. It aims to do more than merely encourage cross-references between them. Its objective is rather to promote an approach in which the disciplines are intertwined at their roots, to produce an integrated analysis of the subject, conceived as broadly as possible.

## Integrated subject matter

Behind this approach to methods of study there lies a specific approach to the subject matter too. The premise here is that "Islam" can more fruitfully be treated as a civilisation rather than a religion only. This premise has implications for the treatment of the subject matter. Instead of conventional divisions such as theology, law and mysticism, representing distinct religious interpretations of Islam, the programme treats these and other issues in the common framework of a cultural history. This means, first, that religious developments will be seen as part of the development of thought and culture in Muslim societies. Second, those aspects of culture (like art, poetry and architecture), which are not always treated on a par with doctrine, law or religious practice, will be so regarded. Third, as culture cannot be studied in isolation from society, the programme will treat this inter-relationship of ideas and meanings to social and political forces as one of the keys to an integrated understanding of the subject matter.

## Historical emergence of forms and definitions

If the inter-relationship of cultural factors to socio-political ones is of importance, it means that the diverse definitions and schools of thought which emerged in Islam must be understood historically. The division of Islam into its existing sects and schools was not always a neat or hard-and-fast phenomenon in all periods of history. The number and boundaries of the groups tended to fluctuate with time and place. GPISH will show the emergent character of these divisions, rather than assuming them as a given fact. Similarly, assumptions (even where these are implicit rather than explicit) like "orthodoxy" and "heterodoxy" have a strong influence on the way in which Islam is understood. Again, the historically based approach will seek to understand how and where these or similar concepts were arrived at, rather than taking them as given.



## Poetic and imaginative discourse

An historical approach to Islam must be balanced by a due appreciation of the meaning religious ideas have for their followers, and the centrality of spiritual and ethical aspirations in their lives. GPISH therefore gives due attention to the role of poetic and imaginative discourse in the shaping of spiritual life in Muslim cultures.

## Cultural diversity

While the approach to Islam as a civilisation is intended to integrate as well as enlarge both the subject matter and angles of study, this does not preclude an appreciation of the enormous diversity of Muslim societies. One of the objectives is to re-examine all explicit and implicit descriptions of Islam as a monolithic phenomenon. It will examine the dialectic of cultures whereby a variety of older, existing traditions were assimilated, transformed and synthesised, in most areas, into regional expressions of Islam. The diversity of these expressions must be noted without normative preconceptions about their validity. Students will study the diverse features of Islamic culture in such significant areas as the Middle East, South-east Asia, the Indian subcontinent

and Africa south of the Sahara, without assuming such distinctions as that between “peripheral” and “central” Islamic lands. Similarly, the programme will examine the important role of not only “classical” languages (Arabic and Persian) but also national, regional or local vernaculars in the evolution of Islamic sensibilities.

The one-sided emphasis, in many scholarly accounts, on “learned” or textual Islam to the relative neglect of “popular” and oral traditions, is balanced through considering the validity of these varying expressions in their respective contexts. Avoiding exclusive concentration on doctrinal and intellectual formulations by paying full attention to the practical manifestation of Islamic ideals in living societies is therefore significant.

Anthropology will therefore have a central place as a tool of analysis alongside the “classical” disciplines of philology, history and the like. However, the insights of anthropology will be marshalled widely in the study of the civilisation as a whole. This will enable anthropological analysis to range well beyond its traditional concentration on local rather than national and international societies and cultures.



I treasure my days at the IIS for the unique and meaningful impact that GPISH has had on my engagement with history, literature and identity. It's always difficult to explain the simultaneous joy and responsibility that comes with being a GPISH student. From the opportunity to meet and study alongside wonderfully talented individuals from across the world and the honour of learning from a truly outstanding faculty – it has been an incredible experience.”

**Nayab Tufail (GPISH 2020) Pakistan**

## Bridging history and contemporary societies

Despite recent attempts to link the two, there is a persisting tendency for research into the past to proceed along separate lines from the study of contemporary Muslim societies. This is in part reinforced by academic departmentalisation, whereby those trained in economics, sociology and politics tend to focus on contemporary developments, to the relative neglect of religious and historical topics, and vice versa. The intellectual framework of this programme is designed to bridge this gap. It assumes that spiritual or existential issues are as relevant to contemporary Muslim societies as they were in history. The study of the vast changes introduced in these societies in the modern period will pay attention to the meaning and images of the past which are current in these societies. It will focus as much on the spiritual implications of social change as on the reverse relationship, both in history and contemporary life.

## Re-examining the boundaries of civilisations

The polarity of "Islam" and the "West" assumed in much contemporary discourse about the subject needs to be subjected to critical analysis. GPISH, in addition to parallel research, public lectures and publications, will examine the origins, logic and political and cultural consequences of this categorisation. The overlap between some of the more fundamental issues of society and culture today across Western and non-Western lands, or across the developed and developing worlds, needs to be noted without the distortions inherent in too facile an opposition between the "West" and "non-West".



# Should you apply for GPISH?

## If you are new to the study of Islam and the humanities

GPISH welcomes high-achieving students from all academic backgrounds, and the study of Islam or the humanities is not a prerequisite for gaining admission. Working closely with experienced faculty members, you are supported during the IIS component of the programme to make the transition from previous study experiences to an analytical understanding of and ability to work competently with the new subject matter. It is essential to note, however, that as part of the admissions process applicants must demonstrate a genuine motivation for studying Islam and the humanities. This will involve being able to show understanding of key ideas in Islamic studies and the humanities, and the potential for Master's-level study of these subjects in the UK.

## If you have studied Islam or the humanities before

If you have studied Islam or the humanities before, it offers some advantage, as you are likely to have been introduced to ideas and subject matter covered by the programme. The richness and unique synthesising approach of the programme, however, including our interdisciplinary methods and specialist focus on Shi'i studies and Ismaili studies, covers areas of research not studied elsewhere; as such, those students with a proven interest or academic record in studying Islam or the humanities will find themselves appropriately challenged and stimulated by the curriculum.



## Employability and progression opportunities

GPISH aims to train graduates for leadership positions and runs enrichment activities including a Leadership Workshop and Careers Seminars. Interviews for internships following successful completion of the programme also form part of these, and appropriately qualified students will be offered short-term internship opportunities.

## IIS Postgraduate Research Fellowship (PGRF)

This fellowship is available to applicants interested in working with Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Boards (ITREBs) after completing their GPISH studies. Based on their HR needs, ITREBs may sponsor students to undertake the PGRF training, which aims to help GPISH graduates acquire specific knowledge, analytical tools and skills to contribute more effectively to the needs of the Jamat and ITREBs. PGRF candidates will select topics of their field research and their third-year Master's degree in consultation with their sponsoring ITREBs. Following the successful completion of GPISH, PGRF candidates will embark on a bespoke three-month residential episode which builds upon the GPISH curriculum, followed by a nine-month paid professional internship at sponsoring ITREBs, which will include a field assignment. Thereafter, they will return to the IIS for a four-week residential episode to consolidate their learning and field experiences.

Sponsored graduates will have the possibility of participating in a range of continuing professional development opportunities offered by ITREBs and the IIS before returning to the IIS for a two-week final residential episode. On successful completion of their training, candidates will join ITREB in a fulltime capacity. Following their training and during their professional engagement with ITREBs, candidates will be entitled to use their affiliation as an IIS Post Graduate Research Fellow to publish articles in academic journals as well as on the IIS website, in the annual IIS Update and the Alumni Newsletter for a period of two academic years. As affiliates of the IIS, they may also present papers at academic conferences. GPISH students who opt for ITREB sponsorship and the PGRF will be committed to working with ITREBs for at least three years after the successful completion of the PGRF training.

## PhD Scholarships

For those students who are interested in deepening their analysis and contributing intellectually to the academic world, as well as to the Institute and the Ismaili community, the IIS offers a limited number of scholarships to pursue studies at doctoral level. There is a great need for research in Islamic studies. The most relevant to the Institute's research needs are education, Ismaili studies, wider Shi'i studies, Qur'anic studies and Islamic law.

Scholarships are also open to any area in which Islam can be analysed in one of its various manifestations (historical, theological, philosophical, legal, educational, political, ritual or cultural). Research can be conducted from any of the various perspectives and disciplines related to the humanities and social sciences.

# Key features of the programme

The Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities (GPISH) is a three year postgraduate scholarship programme, funded and designed by the Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS) in London.

This scholarship covers a student's tuition fees and provides a monthly living stipend for three years, subject to satisfactory progress, and provides accommodation in the IIS' student housing in London, Victoria Halls.

Successful graduates of GPISH emerge with two Master's degrees: an MA in Islamic Studies and Humanities and a Master's degree in a subject related to the aims and ethos of the programme.

The MA in Islamic Studies and Humanities is designed and delivered by the IIS and validated by SOAS University of London. Students will study at the IIS for this Master's over the first two years of the programme. The third-year Master's is in a subject of the student's choice at a UK university. To graduate from GPISH, students must successfully complete the two-year IIS component and gain their degree from the third-year university.



# Structure of the programme

## Pre-sessionals

Based on language levels for English, some students attend short in-house pre-sessionals for academic skills before the first term commences. New students who are not proficient in Arabic also have four weeks of Arabic-language classes before the first term.

## Years 1 and 2 – Studying for an MA in Islamic Studies and Humanities at the IIS

- 14 subject modules
- 8 in Year 1
- 6 in Year 2
- Year 1 lays the foundations with regard to knowledge and approach.
- Year 2 confronts broader thematic subjects and particular attention is devoted to cultivating research skills.

Intensive language training in either Arabic or Persian\* with language immersion in either Jordan or Iran\*\*

Educational field trip to Spain\*\*

Leadership Workshop and Careers Seminars

Field research project

\* All students study Arabic over the two years of the programme, unless they are already proficient, in which case they study Persian.

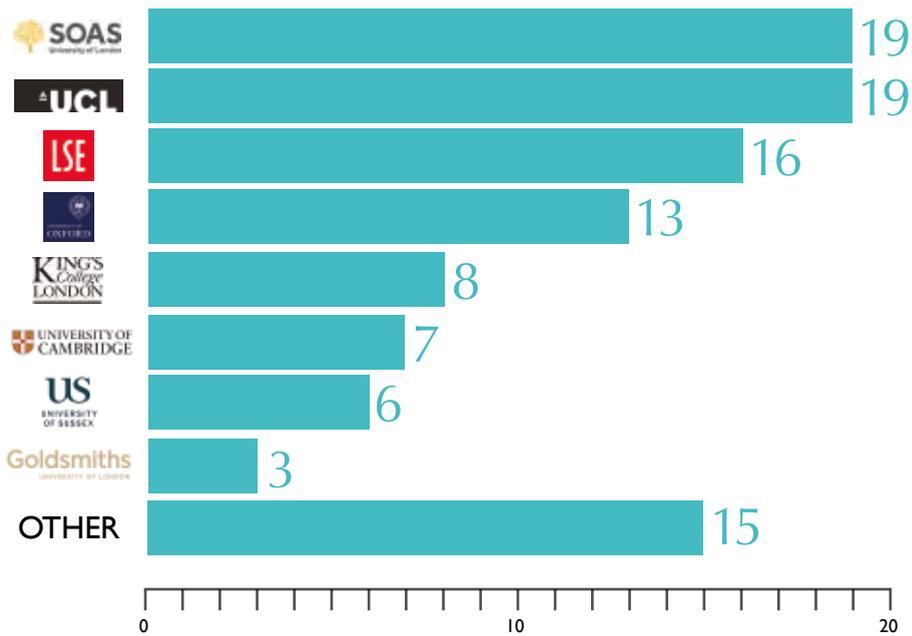
\*\* All study abroad components are subject to travel advice by the UK Government and securing the necessary travel documentation. In the event a student cannot travel, Alternative Study Arrangements will be made; these will take place in the UK.

## Year 3 – Studying for a Master's degree at a UK university

Students spend Year 3 studying for a Master's degree at a UK university in a subject area of their choice that resonates with the aims of GPISH. Guidance and support are provided to help students select their third-year programmes.\*

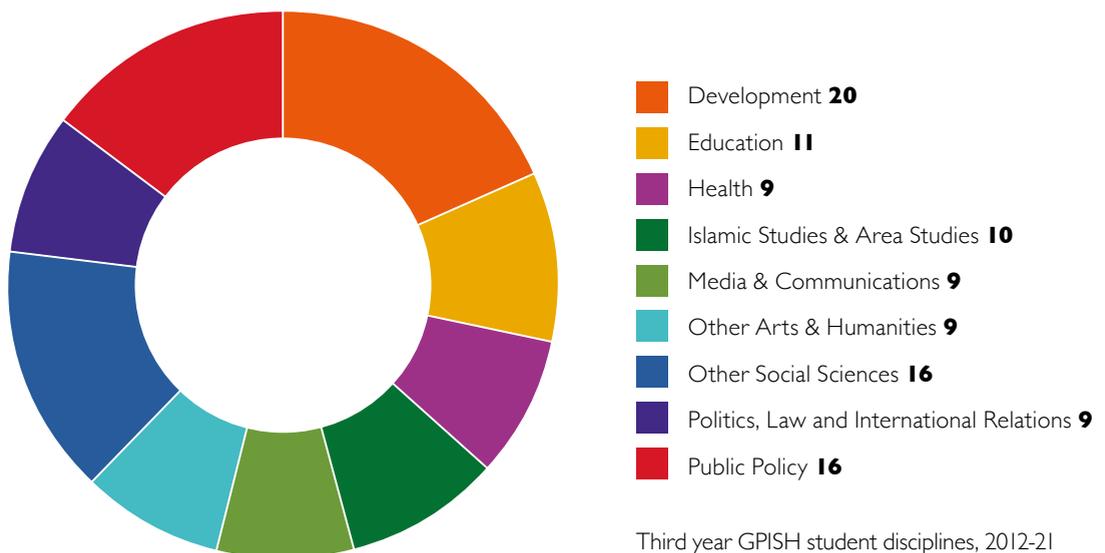
\* Programme choices must be approved by the Department of Graduate Studies and students are responsible for their acceptance by the university. Students will continue to have access to IIS facilities in Year 3, although they will not be enrolled as students at the IIS.

## Third year university destinations



Third year GPISH student destinations, 2012-2021

## Third-year disciplines students have pursued



Third year GPISH student disciplines, 2012-21



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My GPISH journey has been one of the best in my life so far. The integrated content, supporting faculty and the amazing fellow students, all create such a powerful ambience. GPISH gives you a lot of space to grow and nourish yourself and not just academically. I am really looking forward to what is yet to come.”

**Nishat Taranum (GPISH 2021) Pakistan**

# MA in Islamic Studies and Humanities

## Programme aims

1

To engender a critical yet sympathetic examination of many of the issues that contemporary Muslims face; from the debate amongst Muslim intellectuals regarding the re-examination of aspects of the Islamic heritage to the challenges contemporary Muslim societies face in their endeavour to modernise and develop.

2

To emphasise the analytical frameworks and critiques of the social sciences and humanities as they apply (or fail to apply) to the study of the phenomenon of religion in all its aspects.

3

To integrate pertinent disciplines – e.g. history, anthropology, political science, philosophical analysis, linguistic and literary criticism – in the study of Muslim societies in order to promote an approach in which the disciplines are intertwined at their roots, to produce an integrated analysis of the subject, conceived as broadly as possible.

## There are four key areas in which you will develop:

### Knowledge

- 1. A civilisational understanding of Islam.** Demonstrate a systematic advanced understanding and knowledge of Islam from a civilisational perspective.
- 2. Critical awareness of key debates and thinkers.** Demonstrate systematic knowledge and critical awareness of the key debates and thinkers (historical and contemporary) in the field of Islamic studies.
- 3. Critical awareness of challenges in context.** Demonstrate a critical awareness of challenges facing contemporary Muslim societies in their diverse historical, political and socio-economic contexts.
- 4. Understanding methods.** Demonstrate a systematic and comprehensive understanding of contemporary methodologies for the study of Islam in lived contexts.

### Thinking skills

- 1. Making critical sense of materials.** Critically assess data and evidence from primary and secondary sources, and solve conflicts of facts and interpretations commensurably with the level expected of Master's graduates.
- 2. Understanding materials critically.** Employ critical and at times original approaches and question established knowledge on the basis of reasoned interpretations of sources and evidence.
- 3. Integrating materials.** Integrate findings from multiple sources in order to demonstrate and advance a critical understanding of topics under discussion.
- 4. Making and reflecting on conclusions.** Make reasonable and substantiated conclusions independently in the light of research undertaken and evidence reviewed, and reflect on the implications of those and potential future directions.

## 4

To adopt a civilisational approach to the study of Islam. This premise has implications for the treatment of the subject matter. Instead of conventional divisions such as theology, law and mysticism, representing distinct religious interpretations of Islam, the programme treats these and other issues in the common framework of a cultural history. This means, first, that religious developments will be seen as part of the development of thought and culture in Muslim societies. Secondly, those aspects of culture, like art, poetry and architecture, which are not always treated on a par with doctrine, law or religious practice, will be so regarded in this programme. Thirdly, as culture cannot be studied in isolation from society, the programme will treat this interrelationship (of ideas and meanings to social and political forces) as one of the keys to an integrated understanding of the subject.

### Subject-based practical skills

- 1. Finding materials.** Locate relevant materials and gather research data and/or evidence responsibly and ethically for the purpose of exploring and understanding a topic and/or preparing for assessment.
- 2. Interpreting materials.** Summarise viewpoints and arguments from various sources of data and/or evidence, synthesising those where appropriate.
- 3. Integrating interpretive approaches.** Integrate skills and/or approaches from different disciplinary areas for the purpose of exploring and understanding a topic/subject area in comprehensive and, where possible, original ways.
- 4. Self-assessment and refining work produced.** Judging the merit of own work for the purpose of assessing its validity and appropriacy with regard to the subject matter, discipline and task at hand.

### Transferable skills

- 1. Communication.** Communicate knowledgeably and critically in writing and speaking for the purpose of disseminating and contributing to the production of knowledge and to enable active participation in events such as seminars, conferences and symposia where current subject knowledge and approaches are being disseminated and debated.
- 2. Working independently.** Demonstrate skills of research (finding and working with materials) and managing one's own learning in the service of working independently and responsibly.
- 3. Working with others.** Work with others for the purpose of gathering and interpreting information, showing due regard for ethical considerations.

# The MA curriculum comprises the following modules

## YEAR 1

Arabic or Persian Language

30 credits

The Qur'an, Parts 1 and 2

30 credits

Ritual, Worship and Practice

15 credits

Muslims in History 3: Modern and Contemporary

15 credits

Key Moments in Shi'i History, Thought and Society

15 credits

## YEAR 2

Arabic or Persian Language

30 credits

Ismailis in Modern Times

15 credits

Law, Ethics and Society, Parts 1 and 2

30 credits

Art, Literature and Religion, Parts 1 and 2

30 credits

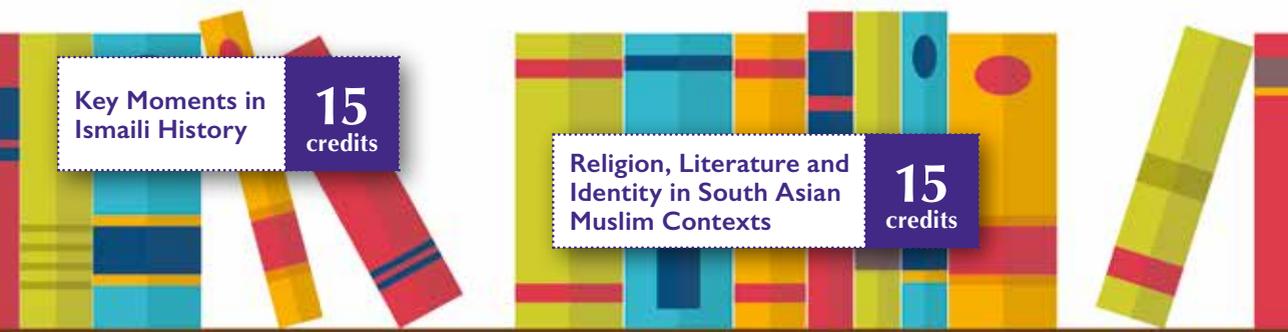


Muslims in  
History 1:  
Late Antiquity

**15**  
credits

Muslims in  
History 2:  
Middle Period

**15**  
credits



Key Moments in  
Ismaili History

**15**  
credits

Religion, Literature and  
Identity in South Asian  
Muslim Contexts

**15**  
credits



Intellectual  
Traditions in the  
History of Muslims

**15**  
credits

Prophet Muhammad and  
Imam Ali in the Discourse  
of Muslim Communities

**15**  
credits

Research Design and  
Methods (assessed  
by Dissertation)

**60**  
credits

**Total 360 credits**

# The Field Research Project

The Field Research Project is an integral part of the programme which can also serve as a basis for continued study or career development. Students will conduct research during the summer of their second year and produce an original dissertation.\*

A Research Supervisor is allocated to each student, to guide them in planning, preparing, conducting and writing up the dissertation. A year-long module in Research Design and Methods provides students with the tools to plan and conduct an empirical study. During this preparatory module, students will submit a project proposal for their field research, and approved projects will receive modest funding to contribute to the cost of travel to and from the place of research and other project-related expenses.

\* All study abroad components are subject to travel advice by the UK Government and students' obtaining the necessary visas. In the event a student cannot travel, Alternative Study Arrangements will be made; these will take place in the UK. In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, the field research component may need to be converted into a desk based research, if field work is no longer feasible.



# Additional learning opportunities

## Language Immersion

Supplementing language training at the IIS is a four-week language immersion programme in Jordan or Iran at the end of Year 1. This is an opportunity for students to immerse themselves in the language and culture of an Arabic-/Persian-speaking country.\*

\* All study abroad components are subject to travel advice by the UK Government and students' obtaining the necessary visas. In the event a student cannot travel, Alternative Study Arrangements will be made; these will take place in the UK. In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, the language immersion may need to be held virtually if travel is no longer feasible.

## Leadership Skills Workshop

The objective of this workshop is to start integrating learning with the development of leadership skills congruent with today's globalised and highly mobile workplace. Practical leadership skills for communicating, influencing and motivating across cultures and deepening individual impact within society are linked with theoretical knowledge.

## Educational Field Trip to Spain

GPISH students are taken on a field trip to Spain in Year 2.\* The trip is focused on visits to Muslim architectural monuments of Andalusia. The field trip also allows students to witness the contemporary use of the architectural sites, developing their visual literacy and contributing to learning about the formation of political and religious identity, art and architecture. With the help of an academic lead, the field trip complements in-house academic modules, bringing to life the places students have read about. Some of the primary sites students will visit during this trip are the Great Mosque of Cordoba, the only surviving monument of the Caliphate of Cordoba; the Madinat-al-Zahra Museum, awarded an Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 2010; and the magnificent palaces, fountains and gardens of Alhambra, which exemplify the blending of Moorish and traditional Andalusian architecture.

\* All study abroad components are subject to travel advice by the UK Government and students' obtaining the necessary visas. In the event a student cannot travel, Alternative Study Arrangements will be made; these will take place in the UK. In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Spain trip may need to be held virtually if travel is no longer feasible.

# Meet our faculty

**Prof. Kamal Abu-Deeb** Arabic Literature

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**Mr Rafiq Ajani** (IIS) Islamic Law; Ethics, including Bioethics; Philosophy

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**Dr Omar Ali-de-Unzaga** (IIS) Qur'anic Studies

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**Dr Hasan Al-Khoee** (IIS) Arabic Public Oratory in the Early Muslim Period

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**Dr Nuha Al-Shaar** (IIS) Classical Arabic Literature and Thought

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**Prof. Ali Asani** (Harvard) Indo-Muslim and Islamic Religion and Cultures

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**Ms Liz Austin** (IIS) Academic Literacies and Skills Development; Curriculum Design; Testing

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**Ms Rosa Barugh** (IIS) Global Ethics; Postgraduate Teaching; International Teaching and International Programmes

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**Dr Karen Bauer** (IIS) Islamic Social and Intellectual History; Qur'anic Studies

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**Dr Stephen Burge** (IIS) Qur'anic Studies; Devotional Literature

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**Dr Alessandro Cancian** (IIS) Cultural Anthropology of Muslim Societies

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**Dr Farhad Daftary** (IIS) Ismaili Studies

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**Dr Dagi Dagiev** (IIS) History and Religion of Contemporary Societies in Post-Communist Central Asia; Re-emergence of Islam

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**Dr Maria De Cillis** (IIS) Islamic Philosophers and Shi'i Studies

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**Dr Zamira Dildorbekova** (IIS) Islam and Modernity in Post-Soviet Tajikistan

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**Dr Hakim Elnazarov** (IIS) Central Asian Studies; Islam in Central Asia; Ismaili Studies

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**Dr Hadi Enayat** (Richmond) Religion and International Relations; Sociology of Law; Secularism

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**Dr Laila Halani** (IIS) Anthropology; Gender; Ismaili Studies; Contemporary Islamic movements

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**Prof. Gerald Hawting** (SOAS) Early Development of Islam in the Middle East; Premodern Islamic and Middle Eastern History

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**Dr Alex Henley** (IIS) Religion and Politics in the Modern Middle East; Critical Theory in Religion

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**Dr Shainool Jiwa** (IIS) Fatimid History

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**Mr Zulfiqar Khimani** (IIS) Critical Social Theory; Contemporary Muslim Communities; Media Studies; Philosophy

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**Dr Tullio Lobetti** (IIS) Philosophy of Religion

---

**Dr Toby Mayer** (IIS) Qur'anic Studies

---

**Dr Anna McSweeney** (Sussex) Islamic Arts and Architecture

---

**Dr Orkhan Mir-Kasimov** (IIS) Intellectual History of Shi'i Islam; Islamic Mysticism and Messianism

---

**Dr Gurdofarid Miskinzoda** (IIS) Shi'i Heritage

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**Mr Abdul Jalil Muhammad** (IIS) Arabic Language

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**Dr Daryoush Mohammad Poor** (IIS) Ismaili Philosophy

---

**Dr Maryam Rezaee** (IIS) Research Methods; Persian Language

---

**Dr Mohammad Rasekh** (IIS) Philosophy of Law; Law and Society; Comparative Law

---

**Dr Amier Saidula** (IIS) Central Asian Studies; Islam in China; Ismaili Studies

---

**Mr Wassim Wagdy** (IIS) Arabic Language

---

**Dr Roy Wilson** (IIS) Applied Language Studies; International English Language Teaching; Academic literacy

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Please note that some faculty members may not teach every year and this list is subject to change.

# Academic support

There are several ways in which students are given academic support throughout their two-year study at the IIS.

## Pre-sessional and In-sessional Academic Skills Support

Each new cohort has students with varying levels of English language and academic skills proficiency.

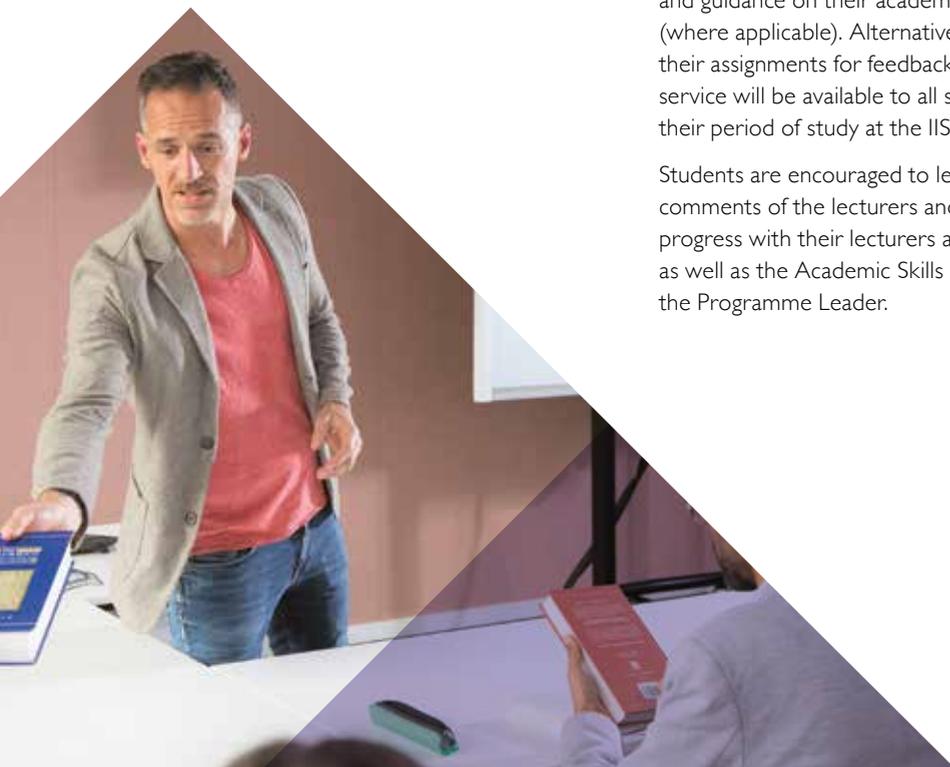
Based on the entry tests we conduct with students and the English language test results at the time of admissions, some students attend short in-house pre-sessionals for academic skills before the first term commences. Some in-sessional academic skills classes will also be timetabled for all students at the start of the first term at the IIS. This is to orient students to the academic conventions of the IIS and enhance students' skills in this area prior to submission of their first assignments. Other sessions may be scheduled by the Academic Skills Support Team at the IIS according to need and upon request (see below for details).

## In-house Support

In-house support includes one-to-one sessions with individual Academic Advisers, lecturers and the Academic Skills Support Team at the IIS. All students are allocated an Academic Adviser at the IIS, who is available to provide students with constructive academic and personal development guidance and support across the programme of study that will guide them in their journey to become professionals. Academic Advisers also review students' wider academic progress.

Students who need additional support will be able to meet regularly with the IIS' Academic Skills Support Team, who will work with students to determine the type of support they need. This support is available for academic skills needs and some language needs. Students may request academic skills classes or workshops, or one-to-one tutorials and consultations where a member of the team will offer them support and guidance on their academic skills and language (where applicable). Alternatively, students may email their assignments for feedback on their writing. This service will be available to all students throughout their period of study at the IIS, subject to availability.

Students are encouraged to learn from the comments of the lecturers and to discuss their progress with their lecturers and Academic Advisers as well as the Academic Skills Support Team and the Programme Leader.



# Student Services

The Student Services team are responsible for overseeing non-academic matters spanning the entire student journey; from the point of recruitment, right through to completion of the programme. The areas covered by Student Services include admissions, immigration, accommodation, student welfare, travel, and graduation.

Student Services also organise arrival, orientation activities, field trips, and run a programme of exciting social events throughout the year.

The dedicated Student Services team operate an open-door policy and are on-hand to offer advice, guidance, and support to help you get the most out of your student life in London.

## Counselling Services

IIS students have access to professional and experienced counsellors via Only Connect, the University of Westminster Counselling Service. Their counsellors are used to working with people from a range of different backgrounds and cultures, and work to the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy Code of Ethics and Practice. Students may use the service to discuss, in confidence, any issues that are bothering them – from homesickness, anxiety or depression, to relationship problems or bereavement. Anonymity and confidentiality is maintained, as sessions are arranged directly with Only Connect.

## Disability Support

The IIS welcomes applications from students with disabilities, and will endeavour to make reasonable adjustments wherever possible. The Student Services team can provide advice and guidance on the type of support and accommodation available. Students with any kind of disability are invited to discuss their needs with Student Services - all discussions are made in complete confidence.





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Coming to GPISH has been an experience of a lifetime! The ability to come and learn about who I am and what my community is, that is a blessing! Then to have the opportunity to be taught by the greatest thinkers and scholars of our time is a bonus. We are living in a time where we have the ability to rewrite an accurate history about Ismaili's, but now we have the luxury to be able to study at the Institute that is leading that charge is comforting as well as contribute to this endeavor. Our Ismaili community is diverse, to learn about it in the classroom is one thing, but we have the ability to live it – meeting brothers and sisters from across the world, learning and engaging with their unique traditions and ways of practicing, it is this part of the experience that I find most valuable. We are putting into practice the vision of our Imam to live and work together as one Jamat.”

**Aqib Lakhani, GPISH 2023 (USA)**

# Aga Khan Library, London

The Aga Khan Library holds over 52,000 volumes focusing on Islamic Studies in general and Ismaili, Shi'i, and Qur'anic Studies in particular.

Additionally, the Library actively collects materials on Muslim civilisations, past and present, and Muslim diasporas around the world, as well as on a broad range of research topics including religions and philosophy, history, social sciences, art and architecture, literature, and education.

As part of its commitment to become one of Europe's most relevant Islamic studies libraries, the collection includes books in English and several other European, Asian (Gujarati, Sindhi, Tajik, Urdu) and Middle Eastern (Arabic, Farsi, Ottoman Turkish, Turkish) languages. The Library has three dedicated subject librarians to provide expert guidance to help students and scholars with their research.

The Library is continuously growing its resources both in print and electronic format. Its digital collection now offers access to over 84,000 titles including journals, databases, encyclopaedias, dictionaries and other reference resources to support research and teaching.

The Aga Khan Library Digital Collections platform has been developed to make many of the titles in its rare and special collections freely available. These unique collections comprise manuscripts, artworks, out-of-print publications, photographs, and maps produced in different periods and areas of the Muslim world and are invaluable for the study of Muslim communities and the history, politics, customs, and beliefs that have shaped them.

Beyond written texts, the Library has built up a collection of documentary and feature films covering a wide range of themes and regions of the Muslim world, including Afghanistan, Central Asia, Egypt, Iran, Morocco and Tunisia, as well as Muslim diaspora communities in Europe and North America. It also has a unique collection of audio recordings of Qawwali music from the Indian subcontinent, Sufi music from Iran and Turkey, and Gnawa music from North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa.

The Library is a member of Jisc Library Hub Discover, a network of academic and research libraries in the United Kingdom and Ireland; and through its partnership with OCLC, has made its holdings available in WorldCat, an international library catalogue.

## SOAS Library

IIS students have borrowing privileges with the nearby SOAS Library. The SOAS Library is one of the world's most important academic libraries for the study of Asia, Africa and the Middle East, and one of only five National Research Libraries in the UK. The Library attracts scholars from all over the world to consult its holdings and further their research. The Library houses over 1.3 million volumes at the SOAS campus at Russell Square in central London, together with a major collection of archives, manuscripts, rare books and special collections, an expanding Digital Library and a growing network of electronic resources.

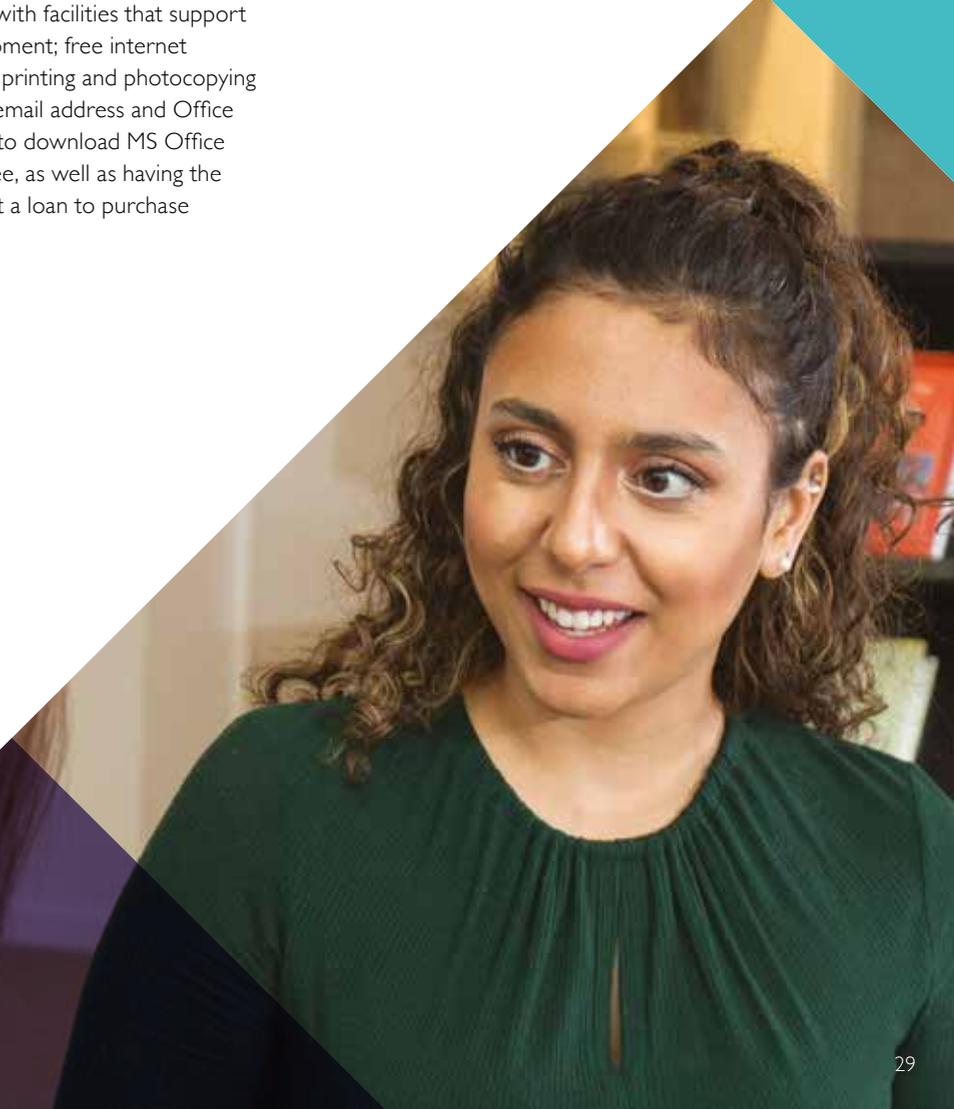


## Conference Fund

Students are actively encouraged to participate in conferences, which the Department aims to facilitate through the dedicated Student Conference Fund.

## IT Facilities and Support

Students are provided with facilities that support both Mac and PC equipment; free internet access, and high quality printing and photocopying facilities; receive an IIS email address and Office 365 that enables them to download MS Office to up to five devices free, as well as having the opportunity to take out a loan to purchase IT equipment.



# Accommodation

Designed by the multiple-award winning architects Stanton Williams, Victoria Hall King's Cross is an extraordinary new building for students who are looking for a more enriching place to live and study.



Built to the highest standards from limestone, oak, brick and metalwork, the accommodation was conceived with ergonomics, nature and well-being at the forefront of our thinking.

The ground and first floors are set aside for shared spaces. There is a large social lounge for relaxing, eating, watching TV and playing games, a breakout room for studying and meeting, a reading room, a courtyard garden and plenty of bicycle parking. Natural light is utilised throughout the building and as many rooms as possible face south. On the eighth floor, there is a fitness room and a stunning garden terrace with views across London.

In each room, large desks let students spread out to facilitate different study habits; there is a small double bed and plenty of storage space, an upholstered desk chair, and a lounge chair. Every room also features an en-suite bathroom. Wi-Fi is available throughout the building and each bedroom can access the high-speed broadband connection. The communal spaces are equally spacious with plenty of room in the shared dining area and kitchen areas to store groceries and for cooking.



# The Aga Khan Centre

This signature building features the Islamic Gardens of King's Cross, which are inspired by the rich heritage of gardens in Muslim contexts. Each green space within our complex of buildings corresponds to the landscape of a given country or region of the Muslim world.

The collection of gardens is a unique and distinctive feature of the development. The relationship with the natural world resonates harmoniously with the landscaped gardens, leafy parks, squares and pathways already welcoming the public across the King's Cross development.

The Aga Khan Centre is a place to learn and study, housing a two level library and state of the art lecture and classrooms. Level one through to four of the building houses the teaching and learning spaces for IIS students, with large and smaller seminar rooms where students will have lectures and seminars as well as a student lounge for you to relax, spend time with colleagues and eat during your breaks between classes. The upper floors house offices for faculty members as well as members of staff for the other departments within the IIS. The building is shared with Aga Khan Foundation and the Aga Khan University, Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations (AKU-ISMC).

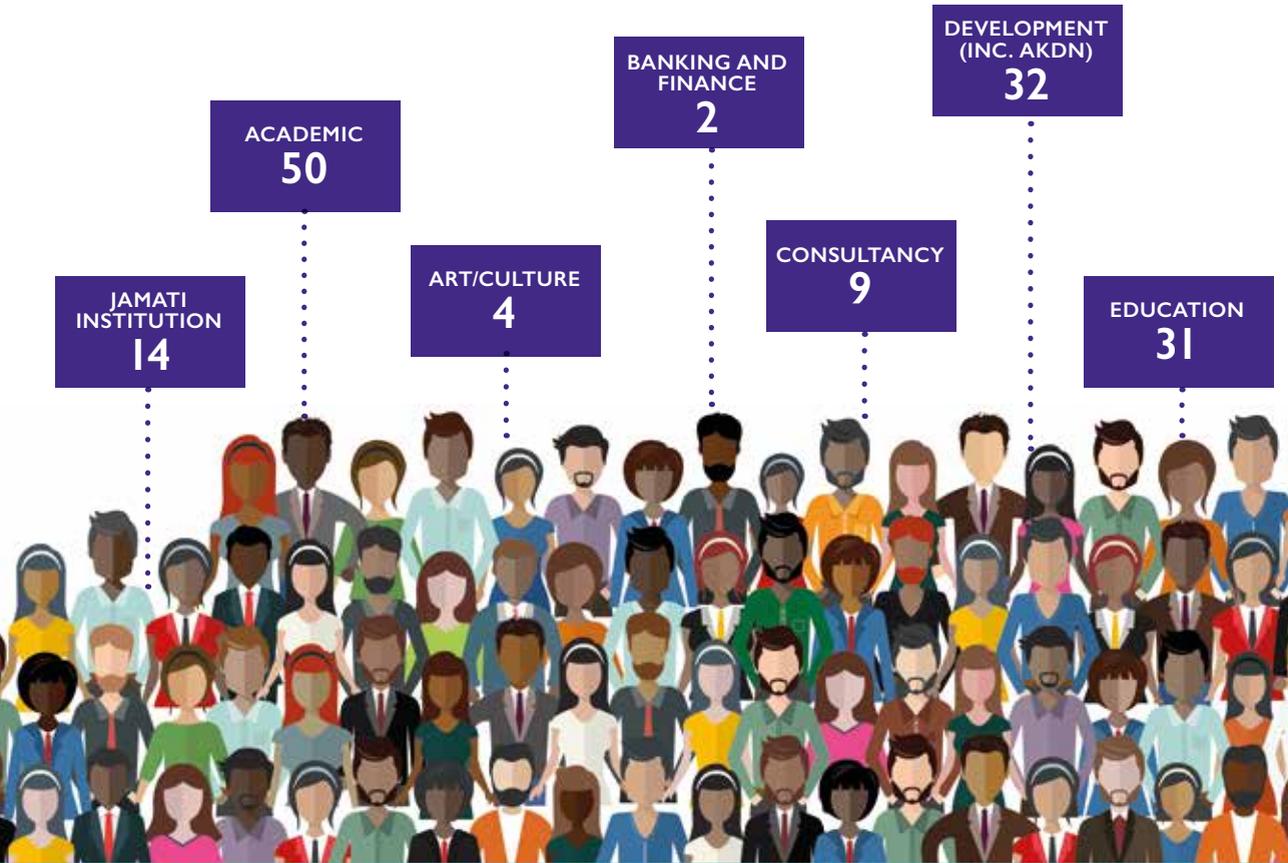
The (AKC) is a short walk from the halls of residence, making it impossible to be delayed by traffic for your classes! Classes led by IIS faculty are held at the Aga Khan Centre.

The building has been designed by Pritzker prizewinning Japanese architect Fumihiko Maki, who also designed the Delegation of the Ismaili Imamat (Ottawa, 2008) and the Aga Khan Museum (Toronto, 2014).





# GPISH Alumni career paths

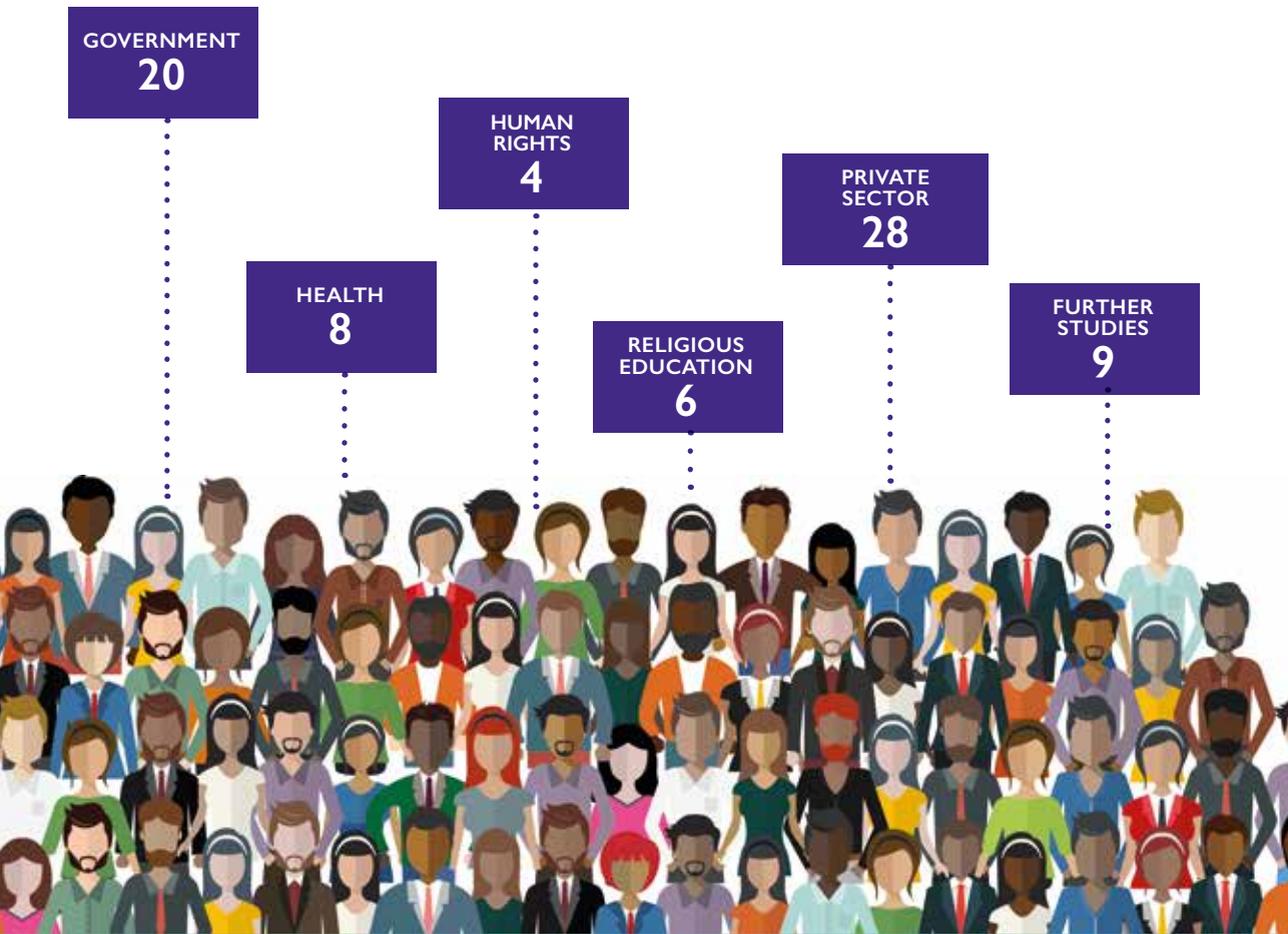


## Alumni

The Institute's global alumni body now consists of 697 graduates – including 257 GPISH alumni – who are dispersed across the world.

They are supported in their continuing professional and career development through the IIS' Alumni Relations Unit. Our Alumni Relations Unit offers our graduates a number of services and benefits, including:

- Professional development and networking opportunities at Annual Chapter Group meetings of the IIS Alumni Association, Alumni Lecture Series, and Local Meet & Greet events.
- Access to funding for research, publishing monographs and articles, conferences, and courses supporting research activities up to £1,000.
- Access to a customised Career Support Programme.
- Leadership opportunities to become a regional President or Secretary for the Alumni Chapter Groups in Asia, Europe or North America.
- Access to facilities at the Aga Khan Centre, including to the Aga Khan Library, London.
- Access to global job opportunities and events as well as the international alumni directory via the IIS Alumni Online Community Portal.
- Opportunities to publish articles in the annual Alumni Newsletter which features academic and professional contributions of IIS alumni and much more.
- Becoming an alumni mentor to current IIS students and new graduates through the IIS Alumni Mentorship Programme.



Current occupational data of GPISH graduates taken from the IIS global alumni survey 2021



GPISH has enhanced my career opportunities through its global alumni network. It has been incredibly helpful to make connections with a diverse group of individuals spanning industries, occupations, and geographies.”

**Naveed Nanjee, GPISH 2014 ALUMNUS**

# Studying in London

To fully appreciate the wealth of opportunities offered by GPISH, you need to experience the city of London. This is a dynamic and diverse environment, where thinking globally comes naturally.

London is home to more than 360,000 university students. Of these, 100,000 international students are from over 200 different countries – that's more international students studying in London than in any other city in the world. Studying in a global city has many advantages, including access to cosmopolitan cultural events and an international network of friends.



## London at a glance

Over 50 academic libraries

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Over 800 bookshops

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4 UNESCO World Heritage sites

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Home to 3 of the top 10 museums  
and galleries in the world

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1.35 billion Tube passengers annually

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Over 170 million items in the British Library

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47% green space in London

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Over 15,000 restaurants and eateries

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Over 300 languages spoken in London

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8 Royal Parks

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Over 260 theatres

## Exploring London

London is a city of opportunity, where you can enjoy yourself and continue to learn from the experiences only a vibrant, cosmopolitan city like London can offer. The central location of the IIS in London makes planning a short getaway easy. You can hop on a train to Oxford, Stonehenge or Stratford! There is also plenty on offer for the sports fanatic – Premier League football, international rugby, tennis and cricket.

Sources: M25 Consortium, Times Higher Education, Mayor of London, TfL, British Library, GiGL, ONS, Royal Parks, Theatres Trust.



“

Despite the pandemic and the consequences that unfolded, I have cherished every single moment of my journey at the Institute of Ismaili Studies. Meeting my fellow Ismailis from various parts of the world has been the highlight of my experience. Through their stories, life experiences and knowledge, I have gained new insights which made reflect more on how to improve the world around me. Among many other elements, the interdisciplinary approach of the GPISH program and expertise of the staff are what I find most outstanding and unique about GPISH. This program did not only challenged me intellectually, but also helped me develop new language skills such as Arabic. Through my role as a student representative, I also had the opportunity to further develop my leadership and teamwork skills. I would highly recommend GPISH to anyone who seeks to discover more about their history, heritage and identity, and likewise who wish to challenge themselves in various ways.”

**Fariah Baksh, GPISH 2022 (Canada)**

# Overview of the UK higher education system

Higher Education in the UK involves the final and highest phase of education. Higher education providers are most frequently known as ‘universities’, but may also include private education providers and colleges, as well as other types of publicly-funded and privately-funded institutes.

Courses and degrees are usually aligned to two levels:

- Undergraduate (Bachelor of Arts, BA; Bachelor of Science, BSc – pitched at Level 6 of the National Qualifications Framework for England, Wales and Northern Ireland)
- Postgraduate (e.g. Master of Arts, MA; Master of Science, MSc; Master of Education, MEd; Master of Philosophy, MPhil – all pitched at Level 7).

The highest available award is the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), which is a research-based degree pitched at Level 8.

Most students start Higher Education at the age of 18, studying for an undergraduate degree. The average Bachelor’s Award usually takes three years to complete, although some incorporate or have an option for a fourth year. Tuition fees are currently capped at £9,250 per year for British students, whereas fees for international students are likely to be significantly higher, sometimes reaching £30,000 per year or more. Undergraduate courses are focused on the acquisition of knowledge, the development of critical thinking skills, and – particularly for technically-oriented programmes – work-related skills. On graduation from their first degree, many students continue their studies

enrolling in a postgraduate programme. The average postgraduate programme usually lasts one year, although longer courses are also on offer. Such programmes emphasise research and critical thinking: the student is considered an advanced learner, capable of pursuing their study and research interests independently and creatively. Postgraduate tuition fees for British students are usually in the region of £6,000 per year, but they may also be significantly higher. Fees for international students are usually significantly higher, sometimes reaching £30,000 per year or more.

In 2019/20, more than 2.5 million students were enrolled on undergraduate courses, while more than half a million were studying for postgraduate qualifications.

**([www.hesa.ac.uk/news/27-01-2021/sb258-higher-education-student-statistics](http://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/27-01-2021/sb258-higher-education-student-statistics))**

# Application and admissions procedure

## Entry Requirements

- A UK 1st or 2nd (2:1 preferred) Class Degree or recognised equivalent.
- Applicants must submit an IELTS (Academic) score or IELTS Indicator with their application (any IELTS (Academic) test or Indicator must have been taken no more than two years before the proposed start date of the programme being applied for). The minimum requirements for English language proficiency are as follows: An overall band score of 6.5, with a minimum score of 6.0 in each component in an IELTS (Academic) test certificate / IELTS Indicator statement of results. Please select "The Institute of Ismaili Studies" as receiver of your scores when registering for IELTS Indicator.
- Alternatively, applicants can submit scores from the following English language tests: TOEFL iBT with an overall score of 92 and a minimum of 24/30 for Reading & Writing, and 20/30 for Speaking & Listening, PTE Academic with an overall score of 62 and a minimum of 59 in Communicative Skills Papers, Cambridge English CAE/CPE with an overall score of 176 and a minimum of 169 in each sub-test and Trinity ISE III with a Standard in all sub-tests.

## Selection

- We welcome applicants from all academic backgrounds, but all applicants must be able to demonstrate a serious and motivated, informed interest in studying Islamic studies and humanities.
- Interviews are intended to ascertain intellectual breadth, analytical skills, and an interest in issues relating to the study of Muslim societies.
- Exposure to the academic study of Islam, the social sciences or the humanities is desirable.
- Shortlisted applicants will be interviewed and will be required to sit a written examination.

## Student Route Visa Requirements

- The recent change from Tier IV visas to the Student Route means that there is no longer a cap on the amount of time a student spends studying at postgraduate level in the UK.
- In accordance with UK visa rules, the IIS exempts candidates from the English language requirements if they are nationals of, or have completed undergraduate studies taught in, the following countries: Antigua and Barbuda, Australia, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Canada (only if you are a national), Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Ireland, Jamaica, New Zealand, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. If you are a national of Canada you are also exempt from taking the test. If you have completed an undergraduate and postgraduate degree in Canada and are not a Canadian national you will be required to take the test.

## Postgraduate Study

It is the applicants' responsibility to provide authentic and verifiable evidence of qualifications. If you are found to have submitted fraudulent documents, your application will be automatically rejected.

## Fees

GPISH is a fully-funded scholarship programme. Successful applicants receive housing in the UK as well as a living allowance for the duration of the three-year programme of study. Programme-related fees and travel costs are also covered. Students who wish to contribute to their fees may make an unconditional donation to the IIS via the Aga Khan Foundation office in their country of residence.

## How to Apply

Please complete the online application form available via our website. Please make sure the name on your application is the same as the name on your passport. You will need the following to complete your application:

- Your **personal statement** (750 words)
- A **sample of academic written work** (up to 10 pages)
- **Official transcripts** from all undergraduate and postgraduate study
- A copy of your **degree certificate(s)**
- **Academic English Skills certificate** (if applicable)
- **Contact details for reference letters:** three academic and one character reference.
- **Passport**

**Deadline:** Completed applications, with all relevant documents, must be submitted and received online by **Monday, 17 January at midday**.

## Equal Opportunities

The IIS and its partners are firmly committed to equal opportunities for all students, regardless of sex, sexual orientation, marital or civil partnership status, ethnic origin, race, colour, nationality, political beliefs, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, disability and age.

If you have a disability that might have an impact on your studies, please do let us know so we can ensure reasonable adjustments, if needed, can be made. If you have not already disclosed your disability on the application form, please contact Student Services at [admissions@iis.ac.uk](mailto:admissions@iis.ac.uk).

Please see SOAS' Equality and Diversity Policy: [www.soas.ac.uk/equality-diversity-and-inclusion-strategy](http://www.soas.ac.uk/equality-diversity-and-inclusion-strategy)

## Terms and Conditions

The terms and conditions of the GPISH scholarship can be found on the IIS website.

## Complaints

For complaints about the admissions process, please refer to the Complaints policy on the IIS website.

## Additional information

For further information on studying and on international student recruitment in the UK, please refer to the following sources:

British Council: [www.britishcouncil.org](http://www.britishcouncil.org)

UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA): [www.ukcisa.org.uk](http://www.ukcisa.org.uk)

UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI): [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)

## Disclaimer

*This prospectus contains information about the GPISH programme that the Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS) in collaboration with SOAS University of London intends to run for students. The Institute has made all reasonable efforts to ensure that the information provided is both helpful and accurate.*

*In order to ensure quality, the IIS regularly reviews the modules offered and, when deemed necessary, may change or withdraw a module or add a new programme.*



“

Studying in libraries is normally associated with pressure, but the Aga Khan Library challenges this perception with its unique design. It is colourful, bright and aesthetically very pleasant, which makes research and study very much enjoyable. Each and every student can find here something pertaining to their interest. My personal interest is law and here there is a section dedicated to law, both Islamic and secular law. This is the place where I spend most of my time as a student, and I'm really glad that here we have access to such resources. And I would also say that highly qualified staff in this library makes our experience of study and research much more easy, yet deep and insightful.”

**Dilrabo Khujanazar (GPISH 2022) Tajikistan**





The Institute of Ismaili Studies

