



Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities

Broaden Your Horizons
Prospectus 2023



The Institute of Ismaili Studies





...marching ahead or showing the
(...), soldiers in Iran's modernising palaces
... Russian-style military band was common
... Iran's royal palaces.



Contents

Message from the Director of the IIS	3
Message from the Director of SOAS University of London	4
Ten reasons to join GPISH	6
Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities	8
Should you apply for GPISH?	12
Key features of the programme	14
Structure of the programme	15
MA in Islamic Studies and Humanities	18
The Field Research Project	22
Additional learning opportunities	23
Meet our faculty	24
Academic support	25
Student Services	26
The Aga Khan Library	28
Accommodation	30
The Aga Khan Centre	32
GPISH alumni	34
Studying in London	36
Overview of the UK higher education system	39
Application and admissions procedure	40



The Institute of Ismaili Studies



Message from the Director of the IIS

For 45 years, The Institute of Ismaili Studies has made significant strides in fostering and promoting scholarship on Muslim societies and cultures. Our mission is to preserve and study the intellectual and literary heritage of those traditions, with a focus on the contemporary as well as the historic. Our students contribute towards the extension of a living faith tradition and help to shape and deliver on our mission.

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.

Professor Zayn Kassam
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



This program has not only been rewarding but has also been perfectly in sync with my academic goals. From the moment I embarked on this program, I was captivated by the comprehensive curriculum that GPISH offers. It encompasses a wide range of subjects, including Islamic studies, humanities, and social sciences, allowing me to develop a holistic understanding of the intricate interplay between religion, culture, and society.

GPISH has also provided numerous opportunities for personal and professional growth. The program's emphasis on experiential learning has allowed me to apply my knowledge and skills in real-world contexts. Through internships, fieldwork, and community engagement projects, I have had the privilege of working directly with individuals and communities, gaining insights into the practical implications of my studies.

GPISH has truly exceeded my expectations in terms of academic rigor, intellectual stimulation, and personal development. The program has equipped me with the necessary tools to pursue a career in academia, research, or any field that requires a nuanced understanding of Islamic studies and the humanities. The support and guidance I have received from the program's faculty and staff have been invaluable, and I am grateful for the opportunity to be part of this enriching educational experience.”

Muhammad Ali (GPISH 2025), Pakistan

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 summer immersion programme in the Middle East*

Visit Islamic heritage sites of the Mediterranean 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.

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.



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



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.



GPISH is a unique programme in itself, not only because of its interdisciplinary nature but also because there is a lot to learn from outside the class. Interacting with fellow Ismailis from around the world and learning about multiple traditions within our Jamat is truly a unique opportunity. Moreover, we also get to spend a month in Jordan for the language immersion programme where we not only learn Arabic in classes every day but also try using it outside class, thus experiencing the Arab culture as well. The programme also offers a field trip to Spain, which enables one to witness the ‘Andalusian’ version of Islam. In this sense, GPISH provides amazing learning opportunities to students. I would recommend this programme to anyone who wishes to learn more about Islam, not only the past but also its articulation and relevance in the 21st century.

Qays Batada (GPISH 2024), India

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 Ismaili studies, wider Shi'i studies, Qur'anic studies, Islamic law, Education, and Manuscript Studies.

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 another 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

New students attend an induction and pre-sessional academic programme for around five weeks. Pre-sessionals introduce key skills and ways of thinking in the Humanities and Social Sciences, combined with practical orientations to life in London and at the IIS. Students arrive in London to begin pre-sessionals in mid-August, ahead of the first term of MA study which commences in September.

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

- Year 1 lays the foundation with regard to knowledge and approach.
- Year 2 confronts broader thematic subjects and particular attention is devoted to cultivating research skills, culminating in a 10,000-word dissertation.
- Language training in Arabic or Persian continues throughout the two years. All students take Arabic unless they are already proficient, in which case they study Persian.

The programme is highly intensive. A typical week involves 9 hours of lectures and seminar discussions for subject modules; 6 or 7 hours of language classes; and 30 hours of independent study. Taught modules are delivered over three 12-week terms each year, following a prescribed curriculum.

Co-curricular activities equip students with field experience and applied skills:

- Summer language immersion, usually in Jordan or Iran.*
- Educational field trip to visit Islamic heritage sites of the Mediterranean, usually in Spain.*
- Leadership skills workshop and careers seminars.
- Training in Research Design and Methods.
- Field research for the final dissertation

* In the event of travel restrictions due to unforeseen circumstances, including but not limited to a global pandemic such as COVID-19, the trip will either be cancelled or, where feasible, alternative arrangements will be made to take place in the UK or in an online environment.

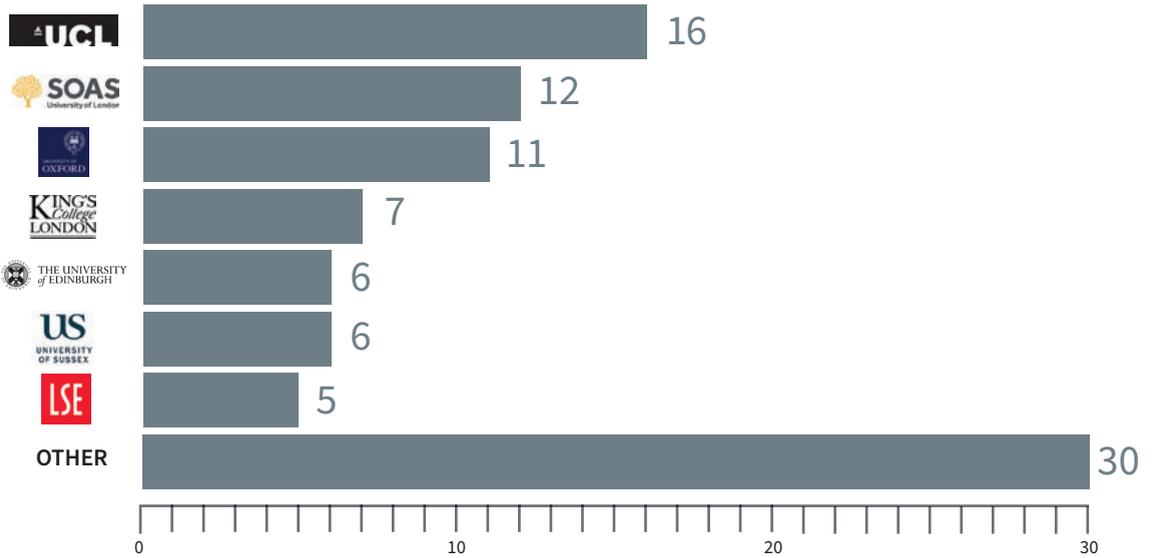
It is the students' responsibility to obtain a Visa for all excursions abroad.

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

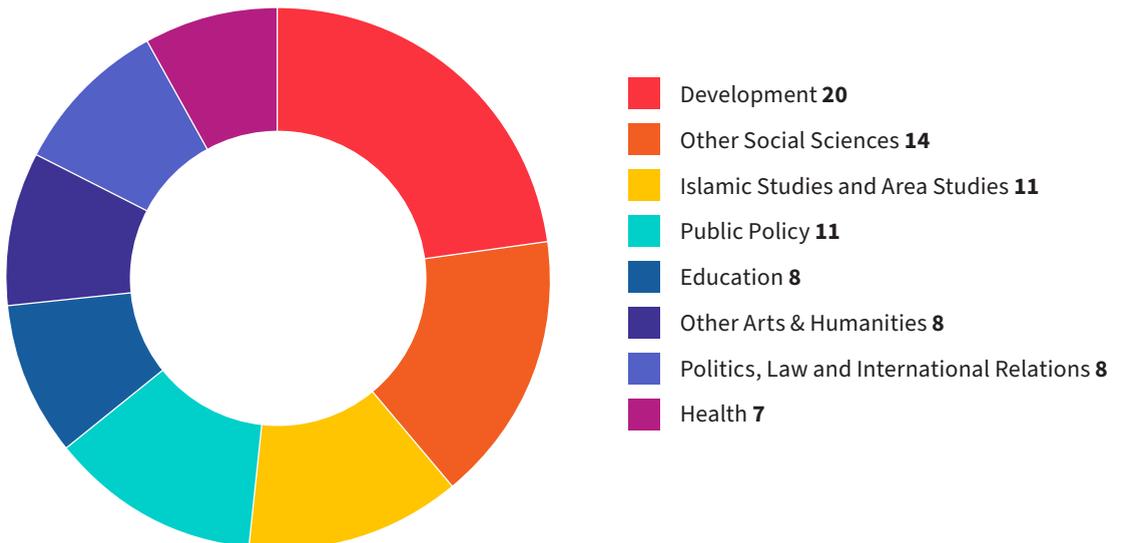
Year 3 is spent studying for a Master's degree at a UK university in a subject of the student's choice from among the Humanities and Social Sciences. Guidance and support are provided to help students select and apply for Master's programmes. While enrolled at a UK university in Year 3, students continue to have access to IIS facilities.

The IIS sponsors Master's programmes that resonate with its aim to promote Humanities research in service of society. The IIS does not sponsor programmes that are primarily scientific, technical, or professional. Programme choices must be approved by the IIS' Department of Graduate Studies.

Third year GPISH student destinations, 2013-2023



Third year disciplines students have pursued 2013-2023





“

I applied to GPISH to find answers to my questions about Islam, its political implications, our historical context, and our position in the world. I expected it to be a great opportunity, but I did not expect to gain a completely new perspective. GPISH is an interdisciplinary programme that offers a unique approach to studying Islam. We explore Islam through the lenses of humanities and social sciences in both historical and contemporary contexts. We look at Islam from various angles, including religion, philosophy, history, law, politics, culture, and arts. It is academically challenging, but the professors and colleagues are incredibly supportive and encouraging. In addition, GPISH provides us with a remarkable living experience with students from diverse cultural backgrounds. For me, GPISH is a dream come true. I cannot express enough gratitude to everyone involved in designing this life-changing programme.”

Fatima Aysha (GPISH 2025), Syria

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

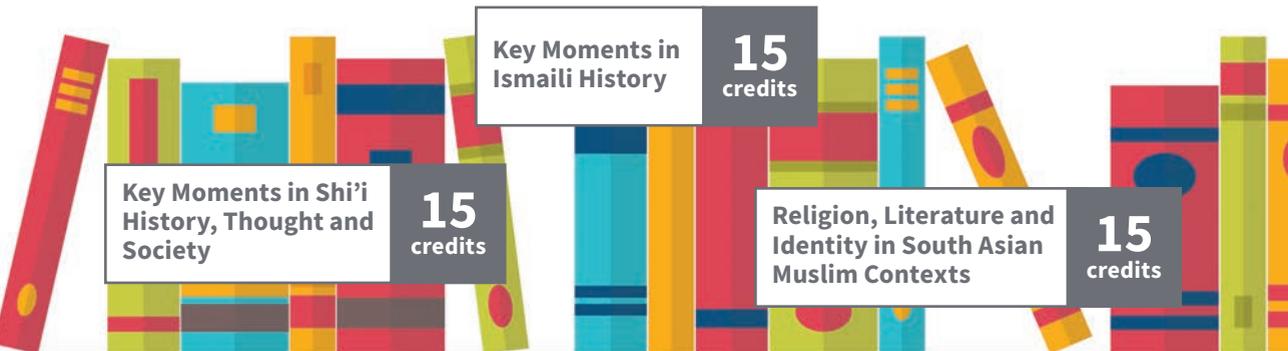
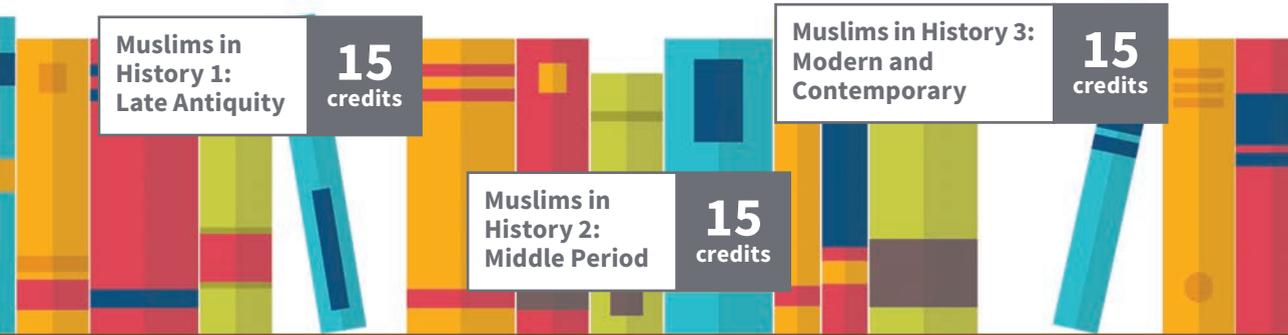
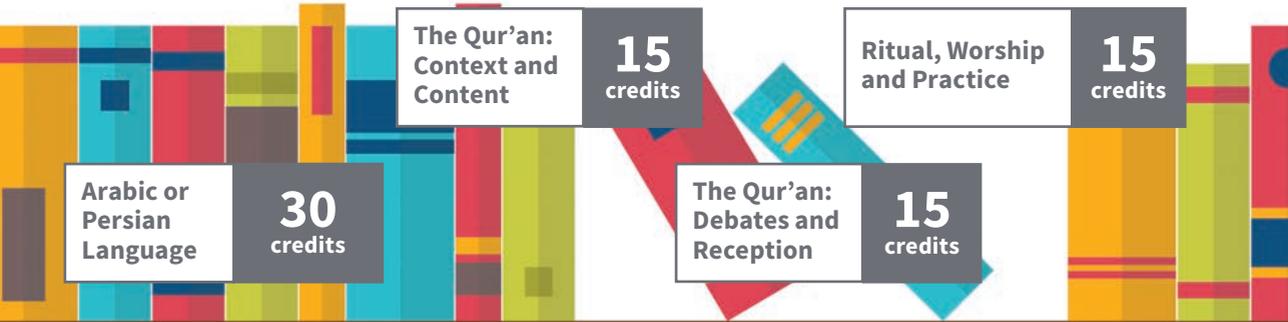
- 1. Finding materials.** Locate relevant materials and gather research data and/or evidence responsibly and ethically for the purpose of exploring and understanding a topic and/or preparing for assessment.
- 2. Interpreting materials.** Summarise viewpoints and arguments from various sources of data 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



YEAR 2

Arabic or Persian Language

30
credits

Ismailis in Modern Times

15
credits

Law, Ethics and Society (parts 1 and II)

30
credits

Art and Architecture in Islamic Societies

15
credits

Literature of the Islamic World

15
credits

Intellectual Traditions in the History of Muslims

15
credits

Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali in the Discourse of Muslim Communities

15
credits

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.

* It is the students' responsibility to obtain a Visa for all excursions abroad. In the event of travel restrictions due to unforeseen circumstances including but not limited to a global pandemic such as COVID-19, alternative arrangements will be made to take place in the UK or in an online environment. 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.*

* It is the students' responsibility to obtain a Visa for all excursions abroad. In the event of travel restrictions due to unforeseen circumstances including but not limited to a global pandemic such as COVID-19, alternative arrangements will be made to take place in the UK or in an online environment. 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

GPISH students are taken on a field trip to a Mediterranean country in Year 2.* The trip is focused on visits to Muslim architectural monuments of the Islamic 'West'. 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. Past trips have taken students to Spain to tour the European heritage of al-Andalus, including the Great Mosque of Cordoba, the Madinat-al-Zahra Museum, and the magnificent palaces and gardens of Alhambra.

* It is the students' responsibility to obtain a Visa for all excursions abroad. In the event of travel restrictions due to unforeseen circumstances including but not limited to a global pandemic such as COVID-19, alternative arrangements will be made to take place in the UK or in an online environment. 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

Core GPISH module lecturers:

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

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

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

Dr Alessandro Cancian (IIS) Cultural Anthropology of Muslim Societies

Dr Farhad Daftary (IIS) Ismaili Studies

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dr Toby Mayer (IIS) Qur'anic Studies

Dr Yaser Mirdamadi (IIS) Philosophy; Ethics

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

Dr Gurdofarid Miskinzoda (IIS) Shi'i Heritage

Mr Abdul Jalil Muhammad (IIS) Arabic Language

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

Mr Wassim Wagdy (IIS) Arabic Language

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

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, students may attend short in-house pre-sessionals for academic skills before the first term commences. Some pre-sessional academic skills classes may also be timetabled for some students pre-arrival in the UK, to offer further academic skills support. In-sessional academic skills classes will also be scheduled 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 is 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 students get the most out of their student life in London.

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

Counselling Services

IIS students have access to professional and experienced counsellors via a private counselling service, specialising in student mental health and wellbeing. 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 the counselling service.

Disability Support

Students with disabilities will be supported to achieve equality of opportunity to engage with their studies. We can provide advice and guidance for all students with disabilities. Students are encouraged to discuss their needs with Student Services prior to arrival in order to ensure needs are recognised and accounted for; all discussions are in complete confidence.





“

Studying at the Institute of Ismaili Studies has been one of the best decisions I have made in life. Coming to an organization that offers its students the absolute best in order to support and enhance their aspirations to learn is truly magical. The professors, staff, teachers, student services, programme and department leaders all do their utmost to ensure that the students' needs are being met, not only as students but even in their personal lives. It is unlike any other institution of higher learning that I have been to. The ability to also engage and interact with our brothers and sisters from across the world is an amazing opportunity, to really live in this diverse community of learners and educators, and to understand one another. At the IIS, we have an opportunity to play a small role in our Imam's vision, this provides a sense of fulfilment unlike any other. The GPISH programme is challenging but mind-opening, it allows students to truly navigate their own understanding and provides multiple lenses through which one can revisit our history and the world that we live in.”

Aqib Lakhani (GPISH 2024), 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.

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.

SOAS Library

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 on up to five devices for 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 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).

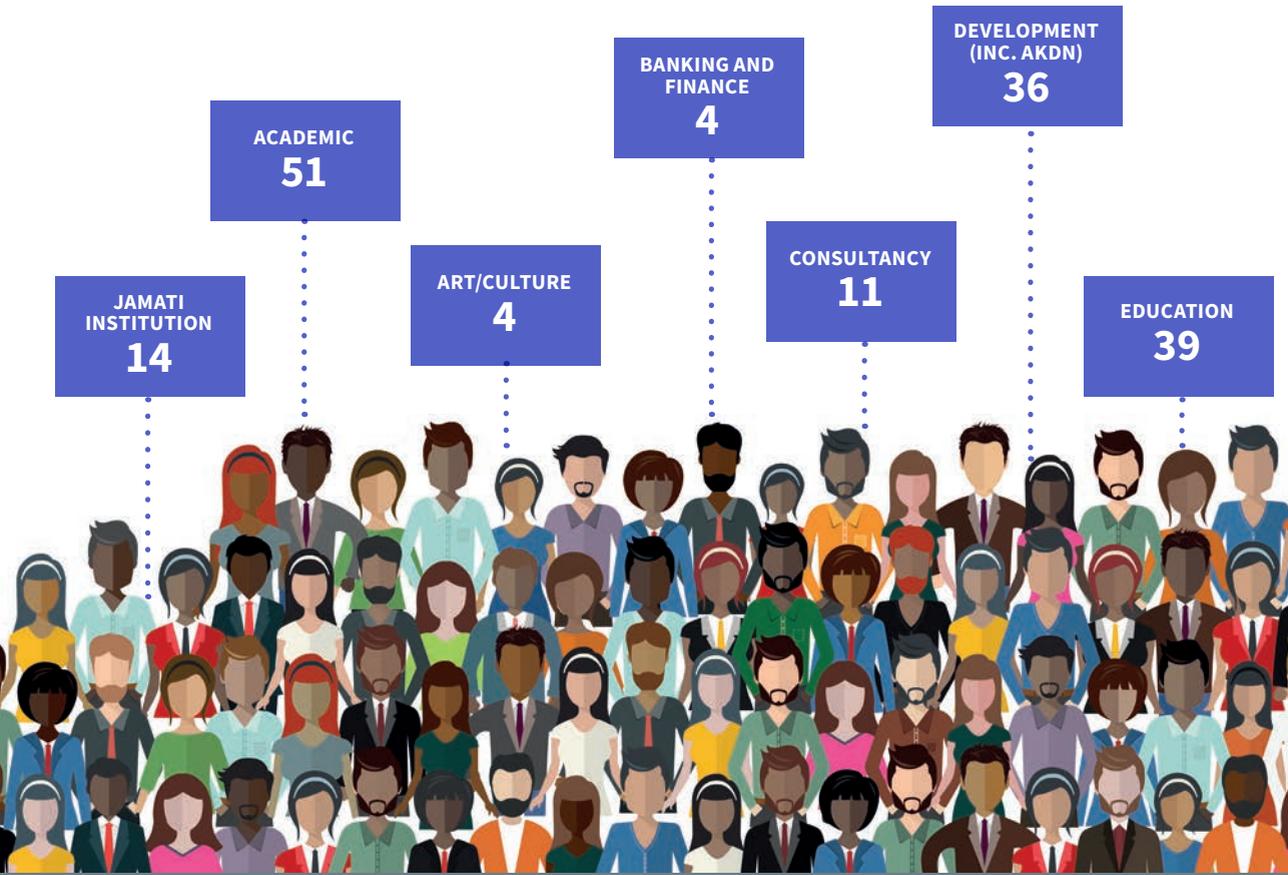
The (AKC) is a short walk from the halls of residence, making it impossible to be delayed by traffic for your classes! Classes led by IIS faculty are held at the Aga Khan Centre.

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

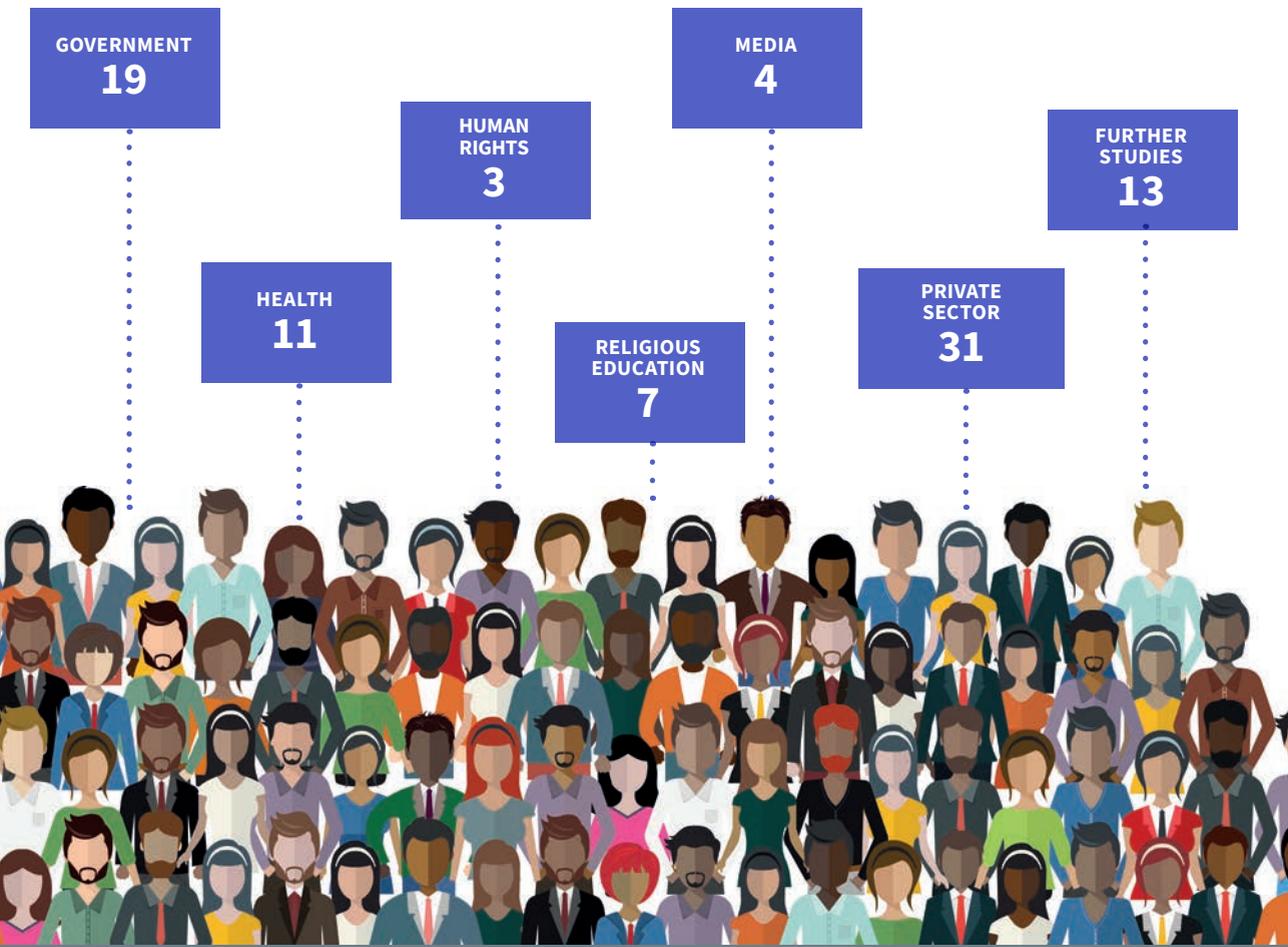


Alumni

The Institute's global alumni body now consists of more than 760 graduates – including 275 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 allowed me to interact with brilliant minds from across the globe. It allowed me to become part of a global and transnational network of scholars, professionals, and volunteers. The diverse alumni network yields a sense of international community, which is a valuable asset for my personal and professional growth.”

Shafaat Saleem (GPISH 2021), ALUMNA

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 400,000 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

Over 800 bookshops

4 UNESCO World Heritage sites

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

1.35 billion Tube passengers annually

Over 170 million items in the British Library

47% green space in London

Over 15,500 restaurants and eateries

Over 300 languages spoken in London

8 Royal Parks

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.



“

GPISH is academically challenging, yet in an extremely supportive and comprehensive environment. It is unique in its structure and design, which allows diving deeper into the areas that I am most concerned about. Apart from academic growth, it has adequately equipped me with the right skills and understanding of pluralism, diversity, and tolerance that are witnessed in daily residential and campus life.

Naima Kimatshoeva (GPISH 2024), Tajikistan

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 2021/22, more than 2.8 million students were enrolled on undergraduate courses, while more than 800,000 were studying for postgraduate qualifications.

www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/whos-in-he

Application and admissions procedure

Entry Requirements

- A UK 1st or 2nd Class Degree (2:1 preferred) or recognised equivalent. Candidates will be expected to meet SOAS postgraduate entry criteria, please see the following link for information: www.soas.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/entry-requirements-postgraduate
- Applicants must submit an IELTS Academic score with their application which 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.
- 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

- Shortlisted applicants will be required to sit a written examination and attend an interview.
- We welcome high-achieving applicants from all academic backgrounds; prior study of Islam or the humanities is not a prerequisite for gaining admission. Nevertheless, all applicants must be able to demonstrate a serious, motivated, and informed interest in pursuing academic Islamic studies and the humanities.
- Some exposure to the academic study of Islam, the humanities or the social sciences is desirable.

- All stages of the application process are intended to ascertain intellectual breadth, analytical skills, and an interest in issues relating to the study of Muslim societies.
- The written application and interview are intended to ascertain leadership potential and skills, community empathy and engagement, and a considered vision for a career that will benefit the community.
- Applicants must demonstrate engagement at a professional or voluntary level with Jamati or Imamat institutions.

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.

*Please note that as of January 2024, overseas students will no longer be able to bring dependants to the UK unless on a postgraduate research course.

Student Route Visa Requirements

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. In order to qualify for exemption based on prior study, you must have completed your degree no later than the summer two years prior to the proposed date of enrolment (i.e. Summer 2021 for a 2023 enrolment).

Postgraduate Study Cap

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.

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
- A copy of your **passport**

Deadline: Completed applications, with all relevant documents, must be submitted and received online by **Monday, 15th 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.

Please see SOAS' Equality and Diversity Policy: 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

UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA): www.ukcisa.org.uk

UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI): 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

