



The Institute of Ismaili Studies

## **Secondary Teacher Education Programme (STEP)**

### **Modules Year One**

#### **1&2. History of the Islamic World I & II (MA)**

The paramount aim of the module is to develop in the students an ability to think historically about the ideas, events and institutions that emerged in the Muslim world from its formative period until approximately the 10th century. Ideas – theological, philosophical, moral and political – are to be understood in relation to prevailing forces and circumstances, at any given time, of material (social, political, economic and institutional) factors. A comparative dimension is important for helping students to realise that all history is human history: law, traditions of literary expression, musical composition and recital, the visual arts – whether non-figurative, representational or symbolic – are the hallmarks of all human civilisations.

The module will also challenge the objectively unsustainable dichotomy between ‘pre-Islamic’ and ‘Islamic’ cultures. An analytical study of Muslim history will show, by contrast, that Islam emerged in more than one geographical region, at a number of points in its history, and against the background of pre-existing cultures: Greco-Roman, Indian, Zoroastrian-Persian and sub-Saharan African. This pattern of emergence may in fact be considered one of the defining features of Islamic civilisation. This need not negate the appropriateness of the description of this civilisation as ‘Islamic’. Rather, it points to a dynamic revolutionary process whereby established cultures in the broad span of the Muslim world came, over time, to be adapted, rejected, integrated and transformed into historically-based Islamic definitions and identities.

#### **3. The Qur'an and its Interpretations (MA)**

The Qur'an, believed to be of universal relevance, both reflects and transcends the specific conditions and circumstances of the Prophet Muhammad's mission in the changing environments of Mecca and Medina. Its very status as a sacred text has caused it to be treated in different ways and with varying degrees of intellectual richness, ranging from literalism at one end through legal codes to speculative, esoteric or mystical interpretations at the other. In contemporary times, this diversity is liable to be forgotten, with exclusively legalistic and political-ideological positions brought to the fore instead. Therefore, it is essential to retrieve knowledge of this varied past.

To this end, the module will confront a range of subjects and issues related to the Qur'an and its reception, from the meaning of the idea of Revelation to the process of the compilation of the Qur'an to the canonisation of the Qur'anic text as the premier source of *fiqh* (jurisprudence). The Shi'i principle of living interpretation and the authority of the Imam that emerged as a counterpoint to the overwhelmingly textualist emphasis will receive particular attention in the module.



The Institute of Ismaili Studies

#### **4. Learning, Teaching and Reflective Practice (PGDip)**

Most students in the course will come with a very little teaching experience. The module Learning, Teaching and Reflective Practice (LTRP) will help them prepare for school placement and use it as a basis for reflection upon practice. For this purpose, the module will start with a two-week intensive episode preparing students for teaching practice in schools. Subsequent sessions will connect the students' experiences in the mainstream schools with the module Principles of Learning and Teaching (PLT) (see below). As such there will be parallels between this module and PLT with this module taking more hands-on approach with the PLT providing in-depth theoretical foundations. The philosophical approach underpinning LTRP is to provide students with the tools of systematic reflection, so that by applying these tools they may continue their professional development beyond the module in their own practice.

The module will consist of mixed-mode, face-to-face sessions with opportunities to engage in additional online discussions. Group works and projects will be used within the individual sessions to stimulate discussions and deeper reflections. Specific teaching methods and activities will be modelled by the module tutor, so that students can implement these in their own teaching practice. Throughout the sessions there will be opportunities for reflective practice and recording reflections in a journal. Moodle space will be used to provide readings and supportive materials as well as a platform for sharing resources, lesson plans and examples of good practice, and for maintaining systematic reflection blog.

#### **5. Principles of Learning and Teaching (PGDip)**

The Principles of Learning and Teaching (PLT) module focuses on quality practice in pedagogy, and explores how teachers can equip learners for life and engage with valued forms of learning; how they can promote the active engagement of the learner, assess the needs of learners and recognise the significance of informal learning and the importance of teacher learning. Our experience shows that at the beginning of the curriculum, student-teachers are more able to engage in depth in ideas.

The module teaches through the mixed mode or blended pedagogy the following elements which are key for teachers working in any settings. It has been designed to respond to international settings where teachers may experience different expectations of learning, particularly due to cultural differences and expectations.

### **Modules Year Two**

#### **1. Faith, Ethics and Practice (MA)**

The first aim of this module is to explore faith, not in the restricted sense of an idea or an emotional attitude, but as an integrated phenomenon consisting of ideas, affects and creative action in society, amid historically given circumstances.



The module will then proceed to survey the elaboration of Qur'anic faith, religious authority and ethical ideas in several different genres which came to prominence in classical Islamic civilisation: jurisprudence and law (*fiqh* and *shariah*); philosophy; and mysticism. The social and political context of these ideas will be borne in mind, not as mere historical background, but also as illustrative of the unity of material and spiritual or intellectual life. As it would be highly artificial to regard religious faith and ethics as discrete or separable phenomena, ethics will not be treated here as a distinct, special subject.

The module will also deal with ritual and spaces of worship. These subjects are included in the module for three main reasons. First, while ritual is part of the practice of faith, it is not the whole of it. Secondly, Islamic rites share the characteristic of *fiqh* and *shariah* mentioned above, namely fluidity and variability dictated by time and context. Thirdly, ritual has the same susceptibility to the rigidity of formalism as formulations of belief and codes of law. In this light, forms and rites of prayer in particular will be examined with respect to their historical and contextual development, as well as their variety.

In communal practice (as distinguished from individual choice and inclination), rites require standardisation. This in turn requires them to be mandated by what is understood, in the particular school of Islam concerned, as a locus of legitimate authority. The prevailing principle in Ismaili Jamats is that the community's practice of faith is legitimised by the authority of the Imam of the time. Selected case-studies will be considered to illustrate this principle.

## **2. Literature in Muslim Societies (MA)**

Literature is an important aspect of complex civilisations, such as Islamic civilisations, and the complexity of the civilisation is reflected in the complexity of its literary productions.

This module will examine such complexity against the background of the uses of language in human societies. Every language with a lettered tradition has a unique scope as well as limits in the expression of human experience. These are reflected alike in representations of nature, the moral order, and the human soul in its quest for salvation. It will be one of the aims of this module to note the treatment of these themes in the languages of Islam (even if only in translation). To this end, the module will employ an inductive approach, using examples from both classical and contemporary literature diachronically in order to illustrate the proposed themes and their development across time.

This idea of literature encompasses both oral and written forms, sacred as well as worldly themes, and fictional as well as empirical narratives. A selection of illustrative samples will stimulate in the student a feeling for the beauty of the verbal composition in the service of expressing (a) moral or transcendent ideals; (b) perspectives on reality, as in travelogues, biographies, scientific treatises etc.; (c) the imaginative world of mythical and legendary narratives; (d) the quest for self-transformation. Texts from Ismaili history, which reproduce much of the above range, will be accorded special attention. Also, aspects of material and visual culture that relate to literary productions will be highlighted in the module.



The Institute of Ismaili Studies

### **3. Developments and Issues in the Contemporary Muslim World (MA)**

The module will undertake a thematic examination of ideas, institutions, and socio-economic developments characteristic of the Muslim world from the beginning of the 19th century to the present. The module will also be particularly concerned with critically reviewing the long-prevalent assumption that modernity is a singular process dictated by the historically contingent events and circumstances of European history. It will be important to appreciate that, in fact, there are in the world today, potentially as well as in actuality, differing models of modernity. The issue of modernity in the Muslim world will be addressed in the light of this principle. Similarly, the view, once dominant and still persistent, that the Muslim world has been an essentially passive recipient of the impact of western modernity will be critically assessed with supporting evidence, highlighting a range of developments that emerged from within a variety of Muslim contexts.

The module will also hone in on a recurrent element in modern Islamist discourses: the assumption that there are clear dividing lines between ideas and practices within the broad spectrum of Muslim communities which may be branded, according to pre-given criteria, as either 'Islamic' or 'non-Islamic'. This pattern of thinking is closely tied to claims of orthodoxy and heterodoxy in regard to doctrine and practice. Although the outlook entailed in this assumption has antecedents, the module will show how the relation between such ideas and practices and their modern versions is likely to be less than straightforward. More importantly, the actual history of Islam would appear to belie this dogmatic standpoint and expose its basis in power-politics. Indeed, a section of the module will be dedicated to the ways in which authority and community in Muslim countries are built and legitimated, and it will also include a comparative overview of non-Muslim contexts.

### **4. MA Research (Dissertation)**

Research study for the MA is desk-based (or, secondary research), which involves identifying and carrying out a systematic review, evaluation and analysis of existing secondary source material and data sets. It entails a systematic investigation by students of an approved topic of their choice, and is aimed at developing a student's expertise in a specific field as related to the broader aims of the IIS' Secondary Curriculum. Engagement with the design, application and evaluation of the research study will equip students with core proficiencies to support ongoing professional development. Students will be exposed to a range of sessions to help them develop key practical and analytical skills and approaches required for writing a professional level research paper, including: selecting a topic and formulating a specific research question; identifying and carrying out a systematic review of secondary source material; analyses and synthesis of data sets; and presenting results in a written form according to highest academic standards.

### **5. Leading Learning in Ismaili Contexts (PGDip)**

The Leading Learning in Ismaili Contexts (LLIC) is a second year module aimed at developing students' understanding of their own learning, the learning of others, and the teacher's role in maximising both. 'Leadership' is understood in its widest sense: at home, schooling, and community levels, thus promoting the future teacher's civic engagement within a diverse range of



The Institute of Ismaili Studies

sites of learning. The focus on the Ismaili contexts will be brought in through students' own background knowledge which will be drawn upon extensively in the module and guest speakers. During part of the module, the students will be in their own countries and this will give an opportunity to apply programme and module learning in particular Ismaili contexts. There will be comparative engagement with both Jewish and Christian religious education, alongside an exploration of wider global debates, such as issues of extremism and migration. The overall aim is to provide students with the tools of inter-cultural dynamics before they return to their home countries. Supportive field sessions develop students 'capacity to bridge their learning in the UK within their Ismaili community setting.

#### **6. Teacher as Author: Curriculum Design and Development (PGDip)**

The curriculum is an important aspect of any educational institution and this module, whilst recognising that teachers are sometimes constrained by statutory requirements (e.g. The National Curriculum in England and Wales) they are still likely to be 'authors' of the curriculum and so have ownership and authority over it. After graduation, the students in the proposed PGDip will be teaching the IIS' Secondary Curriculum in their respective countries. This module will be adapted to respond to the expectations of an Ismaili curriculum as explored in the earlier modules, with students empowered to challenge ideas they may meet in their own settings.