



The Institute of Ismaili Studies

**Post Graduate
Research Fellowship
Prospectus
2022-2023**





Aga Khan Centre. Image credit: Edmund Sumner



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Welcome



The Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS) was established in London in 1977 as both an academic institution, promoting scholarship and learning on Muslim cultures and societies, and as an institution dedicated to developing human resources and educational materials for the religious education of the global Ismaili community.

The IIS is delighted to offer a Post Graduate Research Fellowship Programme (PGRF) that combines the academic standards of critical inquiry with its application for the religious education of the Ismaili community. The programme aims to enhance the academic capacity of the Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Boards (ITREBs) worldwide.

The curriculum of PGRF builds upon postgraduate studies undertaken by the applicants at the IIS.

It has been developed with a view to improving the candidate's capacity and competency to articulate appropriate and relevant responses, both intellectual and programmatic, to the religious formation needs of the Ismaili community at large. It also seeks to provide participants with the requisite tools which they can apply in a variety of contexts where Ismailis reside around the world.

The PGRF journey extends beyond the two-year fully-funded episodic programme with the IIS, as candidates are employed by ITREBs and benefit from continuous professional development and support from IIS, as well as access to an alumni network of professionals. The PGRF is a significant commitment towards strengthening the human resource capacity of ITREBs.

The IIS will offer candidates the best education and academic opportunities to ensure they will be equipped to make a positive contribution in their respective ITREBs towards the delivery and enhancement of its programmes for the Ismaili community in their various geographic contexts. We would like to attract applicants who are seriously committed to supporting the religious education endeavours of ITREBs and want to make a difference.

Dr Farhad Daftary,
Co-Director of The Institute of Ismaili Studies

About the Programme



The Post Graduate Research Fellowship (PGRF) programme is a two-year fully funded programme designed to provide IIS and ISMC graduates with specific knowledge, analytical tools and skills to enable them to contribute more effectively to meet the needs of the ITREB and the communities they serve.

There are two ways to join the PGRF programme:

1. Currently enrolled GPISH students interested in working with ITREBs after completing their GPISH studies can opt for the PGRF programme by securing ITREBs' sponsorship in advance. These GPISH students will select their second year GPISH field research topics and third year Master's degree in consultation with their sponsoring ITREB and the IIS.
2. The PGRF may also consider applications by IIS (GPISH and STEP) and ISMC graduates who have been working or are intending to work in a full time academic capacity with ITREBs.

Professional Development and Career Growth

To further their career opportunities and professional experience, PGRF graduates will be offered opportunities to work on research projects and/or to teach on IIS programmes, particularly in areas where the IIS can benefit from field based personnel (e.g., research projects for the Constituency Studies Unit and episodic programmes such as the International Training Programmes and ITREB Members Training Programmes). While participating in the PGRF and during their professional engagement with ITREBs, candidates will be entitled to use their affiliation as an IIS Post Graduate Research Fellow. This will enable them to publish articles in academic journals as well as on the IIS website, in the annual *IIS Update* and the *Alumni Newsletter*.

As affiliates of the IIS, they may also present papers in this capacity at academic conferences. PGRF graduates will be supported in their ongoing continuing education throughout their time with ITREB. This will include a three-week residential programme at the IIS at the end of the second year of PGRF training.

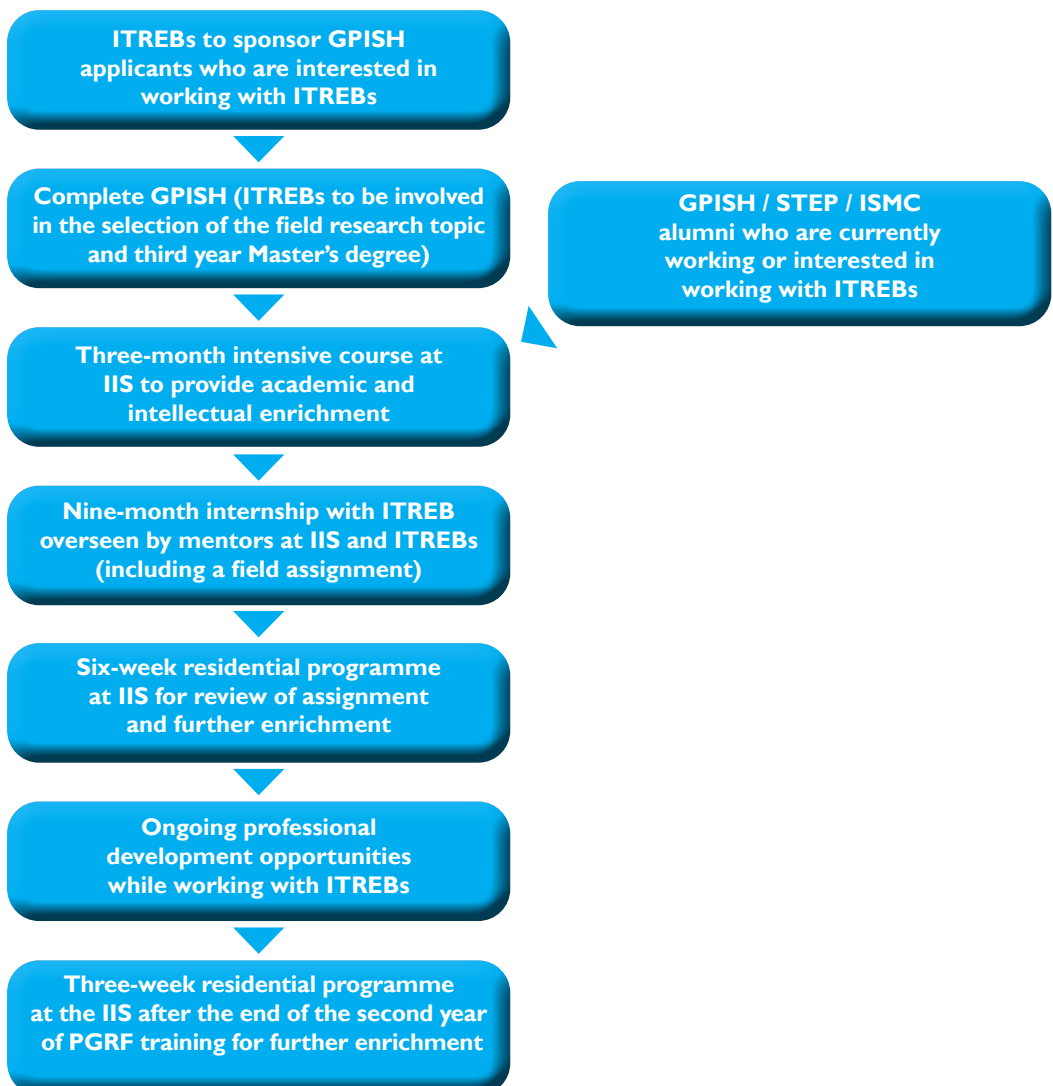
curriculum, followed by a nine-month paid professional internship at their sponsoring ITREBs, during which time they will conduct a field research assignment. PGRF students will return to the IIS twice for three to six-week residential episodes to consolidate their learning and field experience before graduating from the programme.

Structure of the Programme

The PGRF programme builds on the foundation provided through GPISH. Following successful completion of GPISH, PGRF candidates will embark on a three-month residential episode in London which builds upon the GPISH

Graduates of the IIS and ISMC programmes currently employed/ to be employed by ITREBs in a full-time academic role can be sponsored by ITREBs to join the PGRF programme from the first residential episode.

The following chart provides an overview of the PGRF.



Programme Mentors

Each PGRF candidate is assigned a mentor at the IIS and one at the sponsoring ITREB for the entire duration of the PGRF programme. The assigned mentors will offer intellectual and academic support as well as professional support to help students familiarise themselves with the challenges in the field and the role they will be expected to play in the ITREB context. ITREB mentors will guide the PGRF candidates in the selection of a topic for their field assignment and will contribute to charting out their bespoke training at ITREB during the nine-month internship. The mentors will also be the focal point of reference for PGRF candidates in their relationship with ITREBs.

Deployment and Contract

PGRF graduates will primarily be responsible for providing academic support to ITREBs. Like the STEP students, the PGRF candidates are also required to sign a multi-year binding contract with their respective ITREBs confirming

that they will work professionally with them for at least three years after their successful completion of the PGRF programme. We hope that PGRF graduates will continue to work for ITREBs for a much longer period beyond this initial contractual duration.

The First PGRF Cohort

PGRF programme is designed to take a small cohort of participants. Teaching in PGRF is done in a manner similar to the practice at Oxford and Cambridge, where candidates work in small groups and receive highly personalised teaching time with experts in their field.

The course director of PGRF is Dr Farouk Mitha. Graduates of the first cohort of PGRF include four GPISH and one STEP graduates, all of whom are professionally employed with ITREBs. The cohort attended their first and second residential episodes in London and visited Tunisia as part of an educational field trip to learn about Fatimid history, Ismaili heritage, and material culture.



Modules Offered

1. **Understanding Faith Communities**

Candidates will be exposed to different ideas of community and will engage critically in specific discussions around faith communities through case studies. This module will draw on the research carried out by the Constituency Studies Unit (CSU) on the globalisation of values, identity issues and articulation, and ITREB Needs Analysis as well as findings from the ITREB Core Competencies Assessment Exercise. The module will also include a review of structures and systems, including education systems, of other faith communities.

2. **Normative Understandings of Ismaili Traditions of Beliefs and Practices**

This module will critically review doctrines and practices of Ismailis in diverse contexts using the findings of research carried out by the IIS. It will also require candidates to engage with primary texts which are part of the communal imagination and help them develop a nuanced understanding of these texts in order to be able to articulate responses to various FAQs in their respective contexts.

3. **Devotional Traditions of Ismailis: Lived Practices**

This course will focus on various devotional acts and expressions from different Ismaili contexts to develop an informed appreciation and empathetic understanding of normative practices and devotional literature. Participants will also learn how to use devotional literature in their ITREB endeavours.

4. **Spiritual / Esoteric Traditions**

The course will critically review various mystical traditions in Islam (Sufi / Irfani) and explore commonalities between these traditions and Ismaili articulations and practices, particularly those with a Shi'i esoteric expression. Candidates will also be

introduced to key figures amongst esoterically oriented communities (Shi'i and Sunni) and be expected to engage critically and in an informed manner with their writings.

5. **Ethics in Practice**

This module will engage candidates in a critical exploration of ethics, both as a philosophical enquiry and as a human endeavour. Participants will explore the meaning and purpose of ethics within the context of religious communities in general and of Muslim communities in particular. Candidates will study the ethical principles underpinning the AKDN's activities. The course will pay special attention to different approaches to moral reasoning in response to ethical dilemmas, drawing on case studies of biomedical and gender issues as well as other challenges encountered in contemporary contexts.

6. **Religious Education for Community**

This module will critically review Ta'lim and Secondary curricula and basic principles of Religious Education (RE) as well as different approaches to community-based adult religious education. It will also review the range of skills required for developing accessible and educationally sound materials for use in Ismaili community contexts, and in designing RE programmes that respond to the needs of the community.

7. **Introduction to ITREBs' Work and Systems**

This module will help candidates understand ITREBs' mandate, scope, and the kinds of challenges they encounter. The module will help candidates develop context-specific understanding of how ITREBs engage with the community to organise and provide resources for religious education and of how ITREBs fulfil their mandates.

8. Researching Faith Communities Using Qualitative Methods

This module seeks to provide an informed and critical understanding of the underlying principles of qualitative research and research designs, such as phenomenology, case studies, ethnography, and grounded theory. The module will review key data generation methods and issues in community-focussed research. Candidates also learn how to gather, synthesise and write a research proposal, literature review and a doctoral dissertation.

9. Challenges Facing Muslim Societies

This module examines challenges and opportunities confronting Muslim societies around the world. Participants explore issues around gender discrimination, bio-ethics and blasphemy in Muslim contexts, in addition to examining issues of identity, extremism and Islamophobia as they relate to the emergence of nation-states, globalisation, and foreign policies of world powers.

10. Approaches to the Qur'an

This module will provide candidates with a critical grounding in conceptual perspectives to deal with the complexities related to the Qur'an and its interpretations. The course employs different analytical frameworks to examine tafsir texts to understand how Muslim scholarship has articulated interpretations of the Qur'an based on intellectual, spiritual and ethical principles. Additionally, the module exposes participants to key features associated with Shi'i interpretations of the Qur'an and approaches to ta'wil in Ismaili and Sufi texts. It also explores how Muslims today articulate the source of the Qur'an's authority, especially in ways that can inspire individuals and, at the same time, remain contextually relevant.

11. Ismaili Communities: Needs Analysis Research and Programme Development Strategies

This module introduces candidates to IIS programming and research around Jamati needs and concerns undertaken by

different departments at IIS. For example, candidates are mentored and given opportunities to contribute to Jamati-based programmes run by the Department of Community Relations (DCR), which include delivering or facilitating sessions in STEP Continuing Professional Development (CPD) workshops and IIS Short courses, as well as being introduced to programme development projects by DCR on Adult Education. Candidates continue examining in more detail the relevance for their Jamati contexts of research by the Constituency Studies Unit (CSU) on topics ranging from spaces of worship, youth identity challenges to inter-faith marriages, etc.

12. Introduction to AKDN Institutions: Mandates and Projects

This module is organised around presentations and workshops by representatives from different AKDN Institutions on their mandates and current projects with a focus on contributions to addressing development challenges and raising quality of life standards. During some of the Educational Field Visits, candidates participate in workshops and seminars delivered by AKDN project staff members in the field.

13. Educational Field Visits

As part of the PGRF, candidates will participate in educational field visits that complement the above academic modules. The educational field visits will allow candidates to learn more about the formation and development of religious identity and relevance of heritage to faith communities. Participants will also be exposed to the work done by the AKTC and resources accessible through the AKTC that can be utilised in educating various constituencies.

Faculty*

The PGRF programme faculty is largely drawn from the IIS. In addition and where possible, scholars from the Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations (AKU-ISMC), other

universities in the UK, AKDN, and ITREBs are invited to deliver sessions. Preference is given to those who have prior experience of engaging with ITREBs.

Please note that all faculty members are associated with the IIS unless stated otherwise

Mr Rafiq Ajani

Dr Mohamed Keshavjee

Dr Omar Ali-de-Unzaga

Mr Zulfiqar Khimani

Mr Nemat Alifbekov

Dr Tullio Lobetti

Dr Hasan Al-Khooe

Dr Orkhan Mir-Kasimov

Dr Nuha Al-Shaar

Dr Farouk Mitha (Victoria)**

Dr Seth Anziska (UCL)

Dr Wafi Momin

Dr Stephen Burge

Dr Nicholas Boylston (Harvard University)

Dr Farhad Daftary

Dr Karim Murji (UWL)

Dr Al-Karim Dattoo (Sukkur IBA/UCL)

Dr Jonas Otterbeck (AKU - ISMC)

Dr Zamira Dildorbekova

Dr Farid Panjwani (AKU-IED)

Dr Aziz Esmail

Dr Everett Peachey (AKDN)

Dr Laila Halani

Dr Daryoush Mohammad Poor

Mr Hussain Jasani

Dr Mohammad Rasekh

Dr Shainool Jiwa

Mr Riaz Rhemtulla

Dr Shiraz Kabani

Dr Shiraz Thobani

Dr Laila Kadiwal (UCL)

Dr Saeed Zeydabadi-Nejad (SOAS)

Dr Nazneen Kanji (Independent Consultant)

* Not all faculty will teach every year

** Current PGRF Course Director

Application and Admissions Procedure

If you are a GPISH, STEP or ISMC graduate currently employed / to be employed by ITREB and you wish to join the fully funded PGRF programme, please complete the online application form available at <https://iis.ac.uk/PGRF>

The application form must be submitted with the following supporting documents:

- A personal statement
- A sample of academic written work
- Official transcripts and certificates from all undergraduate and postgraduate studies
- A sponsorship letter from the ITREB
- Shortlisted applicants will be required to sit a written examination.

Note: For currently enrolled GPISH applicants, admission to the PGRF programme is contingent on the successful completion of GPISH and other merit criteria: a timed essay for PGRF and a face-to-face interview conducted by the Course Director.

Deadline: Completed applications, with all relevant documents, must be submitted by 12 noon (GMT) on 22 November 2021

Disclaimer

This prospectus contains information about the PGRF programme that The Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS) intends to run for student. The Institute has made reasonable efforts to ensure that the information provided is both helpful and accurate. In order to ensure quality, the Institute regularly reviews the modules offered and when deemed necessary, may change or withdraw a module or add a new one.



The Institute of Ismaili Studies

www.iis.ac.uk