



The Institute of Ismaili Studies

Programme Design, Development and Approval Policy

1. Introduction

The policy outlined by the present documents details The Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS) principles, guidelines and procedures for the development, approval, amendment and alteration of taught provisions delivered by the IIS, including programmes of study; new taught modules to be included within existing programmes; and taught modules already included in existing programmes. This policy has been devised following the indicators of the UK *Quality Code for Higher Education* outlined in Chapter B1 'Programme design, development and approval'; B3 'Learning and teaching'; B6 'Assessment of students and recognition or prior learning'; and Part A 'Setting and maintaining academic standards'.

2. Aims of the Policy

The aim of the *Programme Design, Development and Approval Policy* is to ensure that:

- taught programmes, as well as individual constitutive elements of such programmes, are designed and delivered to an appropriate level of academic standards, in accordance with the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications in England Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ); the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education; the QAA subject benchmarks (where applicable);
- that such standards are consistently verified and maintained;
- taught programmes are designed to ensure the highest quality learning opportunities for all students;
- academic, operational, and practical provisions for the delivery of such programmes are adequately planned and set;
- new programmes, or programme elements, are consistent with the IIS's philosophy and educational mission.

3. Programme development and approval categories

The present policy applies to all the following categories of taught programmes and/or provisions:

- a. New Taught Programme: An entirely new programme, including taught elements not currently on offer at the IIS; or, a radically reworked version of an existing programme, where elements belonging to the older version will be significantly reworked, removed or substituted;
- b. New level for an existing Taught Programme: An existing programme is being redesigned to comply with a different FHEQ level (e.g. an undergraduate version of an existing postgraduate programme);
- c. New stream, pathway, or sub-specialisation of an existing programme: A new pathway is added to an existing programme, which will thus branch out into two or more different but cognate curricula;
- d. Significant changes to an existing Taught Programme: an existing programme needs to be re-approved following significant but not radical changes in its underlying structure; its core modules; learning objectives etc.
- e. Minor changes to an existing Taught Programme: some elements within an existing programme (e.g. individual modules, assessment strategies etc.) need to be re-approved following modifications which however do not alter the overall structure and objectives of the programme itself; minor may changes include, but are not limited to: the weighting of individual assessments; assignments deadlines; changes in wording; changes in the sequence (but not nature) of sessions; changes or additions to readings.
- f. Programme suspension or withdrawal: an existing programme is suspended for a definite or indefinite period of time; or it is permanently removed from the IIS's teaching provisions.

4. Responsibilities

- Ultimate responsibility for the development and monitoring of the present policy; associated procedures; maintenance of academic standards and quality assurance; and final taught programme/element approval lies with the Academic Steering Committee (ASC).
- The ASC can delegate the approval of Minor Changes to an existing Taught Programme (case e. above) to the Head of Department of Graduate Studies, who will reach a final decision after proper consultation with the Academic Coordinator of a specific programme, and any other parties involved.
- Every six years the present policy will be reviewed and evaluated alongside the general curricula review, which will involve internal as well as external reviewers.

5. Externality

The development, approval, and/or modification of taught provisions will be carried on with the involvement of appropriate expertise independent from the ASC, the DGS management and the IIS itself. Measures in this sense may include:

- The preliminary phase for the development of new taught provisions may involve the advice of leading scholars in pertinent fields, recruited at the national and international level on the basis of their academic expertise and stature.

- Current and past reports from external examiners on existing programmes are explicitly acknowledged and addressed in the preliminary/development phase of any taught provision.
- Programme Validation Panels include external senior academic staff of internationally recognised expertise.
- Feedback from current students and alumni is actively sought and considered while developing or amending taught provisions.
- The programme Validation Panel will also include a student member, selected following the criteria outlined by the present policy (see *Appendix I*).

6. Design of programmes and modules

Proposals for the development of new taught provisions, or the amendment of existing ones, can be submitted at any time by any member of the IIS faculty to the ASC (or the pertinent Programme Leader in case of minor changes). In case of proposals for new provisions or significant changes, in order for a given provision to be incorporated amongst the teaching offer for the following academic year, submissions should reach the ASC no later than the 31st of January of the previous academic year. Proposal and amendments must be submitted using the *Module Proposal Form* or the *Module Amendment Form*, and must be formulated taking into account the following general guidelines:

Purpose	<p>A new programme must be introduced to cover areas, approaches, and subjects or themes currently not being considered, the importance of which is crucial to the broader strategic interest of the IIS.</p> <p>An existing programme must be significantly re-worked to include subjects or approaches of crucial importance; or must be updated/amended to comply with current academic standards and trends.</p> <p>New provision(s) shall introduce new subjects, disciplinary approaches, contents etc. not yet provided, or provided only in part, which significantly enhance an existing programme.</p> <p>New provision(s) shall enhance or introduce good academic practices, across disciplines and subjects.</p> <p>New provision(s) shall foster further learning and students' development.</p>
Standards and Level	<p>The new provision(s) are of academic standards comparable with similar courses across Higher Education in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. New provisions should also be vetted against external reference points, such as the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications; QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education; QAA subject benchmarks.</p> <p>The new provision(s) are academic standards in line with related modules within the IIS.</p> <p>Academic objectives appropriate to the related stage of students' learning.</p> <p>The new provision(s) are compatible and coherent with the related Programme's aims and underlying philosophy.</p>

Integrity and Feasibility	<p>The new provision(s) shall comply with national academic regulations.</p> <p>The new provision(s) shall comply with internal academic regulations.</p> <p>Appropriate teaching staff is available, or can be made available, within reasonable time, cost and circumstances.</p> <p>Appropriate learning resources are accessible, or can be made available within reasonable costs and circumstances, by both staff and students.</p>
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7. Approval of new taught provisions

With the exception of minor amendments to existing taught provisions (see point 4), new provisions will be approved through a two-phases process.

1. Phase One: Approval in Principle by the Academic Steering Committee

Holding a plenary session, the ASC will peruse appropriate preliminary documentation provided by programme/module leaders, advisers, faculty and any other developer and examine the proposed new or amended taught provisions in the light of the principles detailed in point 6. The ASC will meet at least once per year to this purpose.

The first phase can lead to the following outcomes:

- a. a proposed taught provision is 'Approved in Principle' and may move to phase two of the approval process;
- b. a proposed taught provision is referred back to the Head of Department of Graduate Studies, who will liaise with the developers and other relevant stakeholders in order to address the ASC's concerns;
- c. a proposed taught provision is referred to an external adviser(s) for further consideration;
- d. a proposed taught provision is rejected.

The Head of Department and/or the Special Project Manager will relay all pertinent outcomes to the parties involved no later than a week after the conclusion of the ASC session in question.

2. Phase Two: Final Approval by the Validation Panel

An Validation Panel will be appointed by the DGS Head of Department and the Special Projects Manager in mutual agreement, and following consultation with relevant internal and external reference points, as necessary. The appointment of the Validation Panel members is governed by the following general principles, while detailed criteria can be found in Appendix I. Panel members:

- shall not have been involved in any aspect of the development of the provision(s) they are required to examine;
- shall not incur in any explicit or implicit conflict of interest in regard to the content, aim and delivery of the proposed provision(s); or the academic staff involved in the development and delivery of such provisions;
- shall be selected amongst senior academics in a relevant field(s) and/or cognate disciplines, displaying proven competence and academic stature;
- shall be available within a reasonable time frame and cost.

The Validation Panel shall be thus appointed and composed:

- a Chair, external to IIS, appointed in mutual agreement by the DGS Head of Department and the Special Projects Manager from a pool of senior academic staff previously proposed and approved by the Academic Management Committee;
- one other external member, appointed in compliance to the aforementioned criteria and procedures;
- a member of IIS's teaching and research faculty across departments, appointed in mutual agreement by the DGS Head of Department and the Special Projects Manager from a pool of current academic staff proposed by pertinent Heads of Department or line managers, and approved by the Academic Management Committee;
- a student member, selected by the DGS Head of Department and the Special Projects Manager from a pool approved by the Academic Management Committee and comprising alumni, current PhD Students and current ISMC students.

Documentation to be provided to the Validation Panel

The Validation Panel will receive appropriate documentation in regard to the taught provisions under scrutiny, typically including:

- A comprehensive *Outline*, including the provision's overall rationale and learning objectives; assessment method(s); a detailed description of teaching sessions etc.
- A Reading/Resource List (if not included in the Outline)
- A short profile of proposed academic advisers/lecturers, or other relevant developers
- A copy of relevant Internal Regulations
- *Approval Directions*, including principles and checklists
- A copy of the present policy
- Any other relevant material, e.g. general Assessment Guidelines, Timetables, etc.

Duties of the Panel (see also Appendix II)

In light of the principles outlined in point 6, and with the aid of the checklists provided as part of the support documentation, the Validation Panel is expected to:

- critically examine the provided materials and documents, and engage in constructive discussion leading to a collective assessment of the quality, standard and appropriateness of the proposed provision(s);
- reach an impartial, motivated, and collective decision on whether the proposed provision meets the threshold criteria of the pertinent FHEQ level; should be included amongst the taught provisions offered at the IIS; should be approved as a constitutive element of the Programme under consideration in case of individual modules or programme elements;
- produce, wherever necessary, detailed feedback and/or recommendations for the enhancement of good practices and academic standards. In particular, the panel feedback must include all or part of the following:
 - a. *Commendations*: where the panel highlights aspects of good practice, intellectual innovation, breadth of subject coverage etc.;
 - b. *Suggestions*: where the panel proposes desirable changes for the betterment of the provision in question; or suggests the addition of further topical elements; or proposes adjustments to methodology/approach etc. Suggestions will be relayed to the provision's developers, who will freely decide whether to take them onboard or not;
 - c. *Recommendations*: where the panel highlights those issues on which action is advisable and to be seriously considered, possibly before the beginning of the teaching period. Recommendations will be relayed to the provision's developers, who shall then produce a response explaining how the proposed recommendations are going to be taken onboard; or explaining how they are going to address the proposed issues in a different manner; or to justify why they believe the proposed recommendations do not apply. The teaching of the provision in question can nonetheless start before all recommendations have been fully addressed;
 - d. *Conditions*: where the panel highlights those issues on which essential action must be undertaken, before the beginning of the teaching period. Conditions will be relayed to the provision's developers, who shall then produce a detailed response explaining how the proposed conditions are going to be fulfilled. The teaching of the provision in question cannot start until all conditions have been fully addressed to the Validation Panel's satisfaction.

To this purpose, the Validation Panel will meet plenary at the IIS's premises, or other agreed location, sufficiently in advance to allow the inclusion of the proposed provision(s) amongst the taught offer for the academic year in which the delivery of such provision is supposed to start. The meeting will be regulated by an appropriate agenda, which shall in any case include at least one private session for panel members, and one feedback session to the DGS management.

Outcomes

The Validation Panel's examination of the submitted materials may lead to six possible outcomes:

- Approval with no recommendations or conditions
- Approval with recommendations
- Approval with conditions
- Approval with conditions and recommendations
- Delayed approval, pending submission of further material
- Non-approval

Feedback about each individual provision shall be released to the Head of Department of Graduate Studies at the end of the Validation Panel's plenary meeting, who will ensure that the operational aspects related to the delivery of approved provisions are duly undertaken, whilst addressing comments and concerns from the panel in case of recommendations and conditions, and relaying the necessary information to the relevant developers.

Feedback on approved provisions will be relayed to the Institute Director for final ratification.

Appendix I: Appointment criteria and duties of Programme Validation Panel members

Member	Criteria for appointment	Intended duties
Panel Chair	<p>A senior academic (Reader or above), external to the IIS, appointed in mutual agreement by DGS Head of Department and the Special Projects Manager, drawn from a pool of senior academic staff approved by the Academic Management Committee. The Panel chair may also hold a senior administrative post in his or her own institution, and shall meet the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • knowledge of the IIS’s mission and strategic priorities, as defined in the Institute’s Philosophical Statement; • knowledge of the IIS’s general taught offer and academic structure; • knowledge and understanding of UK HE sector, including reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and quality assurance; • experience in the design, approval and monitoring of new taught provisions; • experience of engagement with student bodies and representatives; • fluency in English. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to oversee operations at the Panel meeting, ensuring that the Panel reaches a firm agreement on whether the proposed taught provision(s) meet national FHEQ thresholds and internal requirements and criteria; • to evaluate the operational aspects of the new taught provision(s) delivery, in compliance with national and internal regulation, and in respect to the IIS’s capacity for delivery; • to collect and collate feedback, evaluations and outcomes from the panel, and to compile the Approval Feedback Form(s) to be submitted to the Head of Graduate studied for final ratification by the Institute Director.
External Member	<p>A senior academic (Senior Lecturer or above), external to the IIS, appointed in mutual agreement by DGS Head of Department and the Special Projects Manager, drawn from a pool of senior academic staff approved by the Academic Management Committee, and</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to evaluate whether the proposed taught provision(s) contents and delivery are appropriate to meet the intended Learning Objectives and Outcomes; • to evaluate whether the proposed taught provision(s) are set at the correct FHEQ level in terms of content, integrity and assessment; • to evaluate whether the proposed

	<p>meeting the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • academic expertise in one or more disciplines (or cognate disciplines) related to the taught provision(s) under consideration; • knowledge of the latest development in the design and delivery of pertinent curricula; • knowledge and understanding of UK HE sector, including reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and quality assurance; • experience of engagement with student bodies and representatives; • fluency in English. 	<p>taught provision(s) are comparable to existing provision at the national level in terms of quality and topical relevance;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to evaluate whether the proposed assessment(s) strategy and approach is appropriate to verify the achievement of the intended learning outcomes, and in regard to student experience in general.
Internal Member	<p>A senior academic (at least 3 years of continuous service), from IIS's teaching and research faculty across departments, appointed in mutual agreement by the DGS Head of Department and the Special Projects Manager from a pool of current academic staff proposed by pertinent Head of Departments or line managers, approved by the Academic Management Committee, and meeting the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic expertise in one or more disciplines (or cognate disciplines) related to the taught provision(s) under consideration; • Knowledge of the latest development in the design and delivery of pertinent curricula; • knowledge and understanding of UK HE sector, including reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and quality assurance; • knowledge of the IIS's taught offer and academic structure; • experience of engagement with student bodies and representatives; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to evaluate whether the proposed taught provision(s) contents and delivery are appropriate to meet the intended Learning Objectives and Outcomes; • to evaluate whether the proposed taught provision(s) are set at the correct FHEQ level in terms of content, integrity and assessment; • to evaluate how the proposed taught provision(s) will broaden/enhance/supplement the current academic offer by IIS, and how they will be integrated within the existing offer; • to evaluate whether the proposed taught provision(s) are comparable with existing provision at the national level in terms of quality and topical relevance; • to evaluate whether the proposed assessment(s) strategy and approach is appropriate to verify the achievement of the intended learning outcomes, and in regard to student experience in general.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fluency in English <p>Staff members who are directly involved in the writing and/or teaching of any of the provisions under evaluation cannot serve as internal members.</p>	
Student Member	<p>A current or former student at the IIS or ISMC, not currently enrolled in any taught programme run by the DGS, selected by the DGS Head of Department and the Special Projects Manager from a pool approved by the Academic Management Committee comprising alumni, current PhD Students, current ISMC students and meeting the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • expertise in one or more disciplines (or cognate disciplines) related to the taught provision(s) under consideration; • Not acting as representative of a current student body; • recent experience as student representative or other analogous function is desirable; • fluency in English; • Residing in the UK with availability to attend the required meetings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to review the proposed taught provision(s) from the point of view of prospective students; • to comment on the clarity of Learning Objectives and Outcomes; • to comment on the appropriateness and weighting of the proposed assessments; • to comment on the overall workload; • to comment on the level and variety of transferrable skills developed by the proposed provisions; • to evaluate whether the amount and quality of student support offered or planned alongside the proposed provision(s) will enable students to achieve the intended Learning Objectives and Outcomes.

Appendix II: Validation Directions

The Institute of Ismaili Studies
Department of Graduate Studies

Validation Directions for Validation Panel Members

Academic year 2015-16

1. The Approval Process

The approval process is designed to examine new or significantly reworked programmes or programme elements to verify their overall standards and/or applicability to the related academic Programme(s). Approval procedures are inspired by and closely follow the principles of the *QAA Quality Code for Higher Education* on academic standards and quality.

The approval of a new provision must ensure:

- academic standards appropriate for the intended FHEQ level
- academic standards comparable with similar courses across Higher Education
- academic standards in line with related provisions within the IIS
- academic objectives appropriate to the current stage of students' learning
- curricula contents fostering further learning and students' development
- in case of programme elements, compatibility and coherence with the pertinent Programme's aims and underlying philosophy
- enhancement or introduction of good academic practices, across disciplines and subjects
- compliance with internal academic regulations
- appropriateness of course documentation
- availability of appropriate teaching staff
- accessibility of appropriate resources to both staff and students

2. Approval Documentation

For each module, the panel members shall receive:

- A comprehensive *Outline*, including the provision's overall rationale and learning objectives; the module assessment brief; a detailed description of teaching sessions

- A *Reading List* (if not included in the *Outline*)

Support materials:

- *Assessment Guidelines*, summarising the range of assessment methods which have been proposed to module advisers/lecturers
- *Assessment Chart*, summarising the assessments methods chosen by advisers across the Programme, which can help to better evaluate student workload
- A short profile of academic advisers/lecturers
- The programme *Student Handbook* and (when available) *Lecturer Handbook*
- The present *Validation Directions*

3. Duties of the Panel

In light of the principles outlined in point 1, the Validation Panel must:

- critically examine the provided materials and documents, and engage in constructive discussion leading to a collective assessment of the quality, standard and appropriateness of the proposed provision(s). Please see *Appendix 1* for a detailed description of the Panel duties
- reach a motivated, collective decision whether the proposed provision should be approved as part of the IIS taught offer; or as a constitutive element of the programme under consideration in case of programme elements
- produce, wherever necessary, detailed feedback and/or recommendations for the enhancement of good practices and academic standards. In particular, the panel feedback must include all or part of the following:
 - *Commendations*: where the panel highlights aspects of good practice, intellectual innovation, breadth of subject coverage etc.
 - *Suggestions*: where the panel proposes desirable changes for the betterment of the provision; or suggests the addition of further topical elements; or proposes adjustments to methodology/approach etc. Suggestions will be relayed to the programme conveners, who will freely decide whether to take them onboard or not.
 - *Recommendations*: where the panel highlights those issues on which action is advisable and to be seriously considered, possibly before the beginning of the teaching period. Recommendations will be relayed to the programme advisers/lecturers, who shall then produce a response explaining how the proposed recommendations are going to be taken onboard; or explaining how they are going to address the proposed issues in a different manner; or to justify why they believe the proposed recommendations do not apply. The teaching of the specific modules can nonetheless start before all recommendations have been fully addressed.
 - *Conditions*: where the panel highlights those issues on which essential action must be undertaken, before the beginning of the teaching period. Conditions will be relayed to the programme advisers/lecturers, who shall then produce a

detailed response explaining how the proposed conditions are going to be fulfilled. The teaching of a specific module cannot start until all conditions have been fully addressed to the Validation Panel's satisfaction.

Outcomes:

The Validation Panel's examination of the submitted materials may lead to six possible outcomes:

- Approval with no recommendations or conditions
- Approval with recommendations
- Approval with conditions
- Approval with conditions and recommendations
- Delayed approval, pending submission of further material
- Non-approval

4. Approval Checklist

The panel is invited to consider the following points when examining the proposed provision(s), which are here provided for guidance, but of course do not prevent panel members from raising different points or suggestions whenever required:

a. Design and rationale

- Is the provision title appropriate?
- Is the content relevant to the Programme?
- Is the content well integrated within the Programme structure, and in relation to other modules?
- Are the learning objectives clearly outlined?
- Are the learning objectives appropriate for the Programme level?
- Are the learning objectives appropriate for the student learning stage, at that particular point in their curriculum?
- Does the module design foster intellectual and academic progression both within itself and in relation to other modules in the Programme?
- Is the module balanced in regard to subject knowledge, theoretical background, breadth of vision etc.?

b. Delivery

- Do the proposed teaching staff members possess appropriate qualifications and experience?
- Are the proposed modes of delivery (lecture, seminar, case-study analysis etc.) appropriate to achieve the module learning objectives?

- Is there, across the Programme, a sufficient variety of teaching methods and approaches?
 - Are the proposed modes of delivery appropriate for the current student learning stage?
- c. Assessment (please also see the attached assessment charts and assessment brief)
- Is assessment appropriate to verify the proposed learning outcomes?
 - Is each learning outcome explicitly or implicitly assessed?
 - Are individual assessments appropriately weighted?
 - Are the proposed assessment methods sufficiently varied?
 - Are the proposed assessment methods including significant formative elements?
 - Do the proposed assessments allow students to develop transferable skills?
- d. Learning Resources
- Are the necessary learning resources available and accessible by students?
- e. Student Support
- Are students provided with academic support appropriate for this stage?
 - Are tutorial/seminars or analogous activities explicitly or implicitly included in the module description?
 - Are lectures sufficiently interactive and/or stimulate students' activity and participation?

The Institute of Ismaili Studies

Approval Feedback Form for New or Significantly Revised Provisions

1. Title	
2. Academic adviser/lecturer name	
3. Panel chair name	
4. Date	

5. General feedback

6. Proposed outcome

- Approved with no recommendations or conditions
- Approved with recommendations
- Approved with conditions
- Approved with conditions and recommendations
- Delayed approval, pending submission of further material
- Not approved

7. Details of suggestions, recommendations and/or conditions

Appendix: Duties of Programme Validation Panel members

Member	Intended duties
Panel Chair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to oversee operations at the Panel meeting, ensuring that the Panel reaches a firm agreement on whether the proposed taught provision(s) meet national FHEQ thresholds and internal requirements and criteria; • to evaluate the operational aspects of the new taught provision(s) delivery, in compliance with national and internal regulation, and in respect to the IIS's capacity for delivery; • to collect and collate feedback, evaluations and outcomes from the panel, and to compile the Approval Feedback Form(s) to be transmitted to the Head of Graduate studied for final ratification by the IIS Director.
External Member	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to evaluate whether the proposed taught provision(s) contents and delivery are appropriate to meet the intended Learning Objectives and Outcomes; • to evaluate whether the proposed taught provision(s) are set at the correct FHEQ level in terms of content, integrity and assessment; • to evaluate whether the proposed taught provision(s) are comparable to existing provision at the national level in terms of quality and topical relevance; • to evaluate whether the proposed assessment(s) strategy and approach is appropriate to verify the achievement of the intended learning outcomes, and in regard to student experience in general.
Internal Member	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to evaluate whether the proposed taught provision(s) contents and delivery are appropriate to meet the intended Learning Objectives and Outcomes; • to evaluate whether the proposed taught provision(s) are set at the correct FHEQ level in terms of content, integrity and assessment; • to evaluate how the proposed taught provision(s) will broaden/enhance/supplement the current academic offer by IIS, and how they will be integrated within the existing offer; • to evaluate whether the proposed taught provision(s) are comparable with existing provision at the national level in terms of quality and topical relevance; • to evaluate whether the proposed assessment(s) strategy and approach is appropriate to verify the achievement of the intended learning outcomes, and in regard to student experience in general.
Student Member	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to review the proposed taught provision(s) from the point of view of prospective students; • to comment on the clarity of Learning Objectives and Outcomes; • to comment on the appropriateness and weighting of the proposed assessments; • to comment on the overall workload; • to comment on the level and variety of transferrable skills developed by the proposed provisions; • to evaluate whether the amount and quality of student support offered or planned alongside the proposed provision(s) will enable students to achieve the intended Learning Objectives and Outcomes.