

# Academic Standards – MA (SOAS)

1. This document describes the Institute of Ismaili Studies' (IIS) approach to setting, maintaining and ensuring the quality of its Master's programmes, in line with the Framework for Higher Education (2014), resulting in Master's awards. Therefore, for the purpose of clarification for all staff and students involved in the design and delivery of validated programmes, the wording of the common descriptor for Master's degrees awarded in the UK is reproduced below. Additional key reference points are the *UK Quality Code* (expectations S1-S4) and the *Characteristics Statement for Master's Degrees* (CSMD 2015 and 2020).

## **Master's degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:**

A systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study, or area of professional practice

A comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship

Originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline

Conceptual understanding that enables them to apply their knowledge and skills to new situations

2. Graduates will be able to:
  - Deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, make judgements in the absence of complete data, and communicate their conclusions to a range of non-specialist audiences
  - Demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level of complexity
  - Continue to advance their knowledge and understanding, and to apply this to their own learning, in a self-directed manner to a high level.

## **And holders will have:**

- The qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment readiness
- o The exercise of initiative and personal responsibility
  - o Decision making in complex and unpredictable situations
  - o The independent learning ability required for continuous professional development.

All the aforementioned character

- 5.1.1 The JPC meets regularly and maintains oversight on the academic quality and standards of validated programmes (MoA Appendix 2). Its composition includes IIS and SOAS representatives, as well as an External Advisor (not to be confused with the External Examiner), and student representation.
- 5.1.2 The External Examiner (EE) is appointed by SOAS following recommendations made by the IIS through the JPC (MoA 8.2.6). The EE will present a yearly report to the Exam Board, including an evaluation (and possibly recommendations or suggestions) in regard to threshold standards. Oversight on responses to EE reports will be maintained by SOAS (MoA Annex 7).
- 5.1.3 The consistent use of externality also reassures ourselves of the comparability of our degree standards with other providers in the sector. As the External Adviser and the External Examiner nomination criteria also require appropriate subject expertise, we are also reassured of the maintenance of our standards and currency at the subject level (re QAA QC S2).
- 5.2 Secondly, threshold standards are maintained internally via a range of structured processes aimed at assuring the quality and continuity of our teaching and learning (re CSMD 2020: 3.2):
- 5.2.1 All staff participating in the delivery of academic programmes are required to have relevant academic qualifications and recent experience of teaching and learning at Master's level in the UK. Where staff are new to teaching at the Master's level in the UK, or where they return to teaching at that level after a specified hiatus, they are required to attend the IIS *Principles of Teaching, Learning and Assessment in Higher Education Workshop*, run by the QA&E unit. Such workshop may also include the collaboration of members of academic staff at the IIS who have extensive direct experience of modular and programmatic design and approval, best practice in teaching and learning (including assessment), and quality and standards assurance, and are recognised as Fellows of the Higher Education Academy.
- 5.2.2 Additionally, we require all internal staff involved in teaching and learning to be recognised by the External Examiner (EE) and the External Adviser (EA) as being qualified to teach at the relevant level. This is achieved through the External Examiner (EE) and the External Adviser (EA) nominating staff to the relevant committees (the External Examiner (EE) and the External Adviser (EA) committees) for recognition by the External Examiner (EE) and the External Adviser (EA) committees. The External Examiner (EE) and the External Adviser (EA) committees will then recommend to the relevant committees (the External Examiner (EE) and the External Adviser (EA) committees) for recognition by the External Examiner (EE) and the External Adviser (EA) committees. The External Examiner (EE) and the External Adviser (EA) committees will then recommend to the relevant committees (the External Examiner (EE) and the External Adviser (EA) committees) for recognition by the External Examiner (EE) and the External Adviser (EA) committees.

**Assessment:** Do students regard your approach to assessment as fair and transparent? Do students understand how their marks are decided?

**Course quality:** What do students think about the design, content and organisation of your course? What do they think about the quality of your teaching?

**Staff:** Do students think the teaching team is able to deliver a high quality learning experience at the Master's level?

**Facilities, learning resources and student support:** Do students consider that your facilities, learning resources and support services are able to deliver a high quality learning experience at the Master's level?

**Student engagement:** Do students think that you engage them in ensuring the quality of their educational experience? Are there a variety of different ways students can engage – either on an individual basis or as a collective group?

**Student support:** Do students feel like you support them to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes? Do students receive helpful and timely feedback on their assessed work?

**Complaints and appeals:** Do students know how they would raise a complaint or appeal? Do they perceive those processes to be fair and transparent?

- 5.2.4 *Additionally*, Heads of relevant Departments, Programme Leaders, and the Head of Quality Assurance serve as mentors for staff involved in teaching and learning to ensure that they are adequately informed about setting threshold standards, the meaning of these, and the importance of maintaining them. The plenary staff meetings, co chaired by the Programme L

## 6. How we demonstrate the achievement of threshold standards

6.1 Markers provide students with an overall mark (out of 100) on their work as well as written feedback. All students' work is marked according to component specific marking criteria which clearly describe the level expected at each grade band for a mark in that band to be awarded. Our *Policy and Procedures for Assessment Development* provides guidance on the formulation of Assessment Briefs that will enable students to understand the criteria to meet and exceed threshold standards (re QAA QC S4). Attention also is paid to the achievement of transferrable skills and other attributes pertinent to the programme objectives (re CSMD 2020: 3.1). Also for this reason, the aforementioned policy aims at ensuring varied assessment methods within and across modules.

6.2 At least one assessment component per module will be subject to second marking and the moderation of marking. The first and second markers must confer to ensure that they share a clear and consistent understanding of their expectations of the assessment components and marking criteria, and that the latter are applied consistently. Summary records of marks moderation are retained.

6.3 *Additionally*, the *Academic Malpractice Policy* governs our process for reporting on and investigating academic malpractice (including plagiarism). Specific measures are envisaged for the prevention and detection of contract cheating. Investigations are carried on by an Academic Malpractice Committee independent of the department delivering the relevant provisions, thus supporting the IIS in establishing and maintaining rigorous standards of academic integrity.

6.4 *Additionally*, the Institute takes a pro active stance in encouraging good academic practice and discouraging malpractice, including contract cheating, as part of the student's regular academic skills training dispensed by the Academic Support unit.

## 7. How we report about threshold standards and the threshold:

7.1 All teaching staff help students understand the Assessment Criteria (

8.1 Our IIS-SOAS Joint Programme Committee, arrangements for external examining, and inclusion