



Muballigheen Training Programme (MTP)

Presented to
The Eleventh Ordinary Conference
Toronto, 23-26 October 2009



THE
WORLD
FEDERATION

OF KHOJA SHIA ITHNA-ASHERI MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

Registered Charity in UK No. 282303



MUBALLIGHEEN TRAINING PROGRAMME (MTP) REPORT

At the Dubai Conference in 2006, a report was presented proposing the establishment of a Muballigheen Training Programme based on consultations that were carried out after visiting 98 Jamaats and 40 Institutions of Higher Education. The conference approved the proposal, and it gives me great pleasure to stand here today to give you a progress report on the Programme. This report is in five parts:

1. The setting up of the Islamic Institute for Postgraduate Studies (IIPS)
2. The development of the Eastern Curriculum leading to the approval of our Merja,
3. The development of the Masters Curriculum leading to the University of Winchester validation.
4. The student recruitment.
5. The IIPS Charter

Islamic Institute for Postgraduate Studies (IIPS): Being counted among the top educational institutes is not an easy task. Meticulous planning, dedicated faculty, adequate funding, autonomy of administration, fair admission procedure, commitment towards building an institute of repute are some of the measures that needed to be addressed.

In order to select the most appropriate educational model, historic institutes set up by our community were researched, followed by the study of existing Islamic Institutes, including Howzas in Iran and Syria. Then a brainstorming session was held to decide on the model that would best suit our needs. The model that was opted for is to have a full time Executive Dean supported by an Administrative Manager, a full time Dedicated Tutor, a full time Arabic Lecturer and all additional specialist lecturers employed on an hourly basis, coming in as and when required. This was deemed as the most financially astute.

The Institute is committed to developing and analysing learning, teaching and assessment strategies and their impact on equality of opportunities and outcomes. The programme learning outcomes will be achieved through a 4 year full time programme, the first year of which is a pre-requisite focusing on the study of Arabic language. The delivery of the Islamic Seminary Modules and the Masters modules will take place in the remaining three years. Alongside, further Enrichment Modules and Competencies Seminars will be delivered, and they will constitute the learning context in which the MA programme is delivered. Hence, the MA is studied in a part-time format as an integral part of the overall Muballigheen Training Programme.

As the institute gradually develops and undertakes modules in a range of disciplines, the on-site library is also being developed with a range of titles that are specific to the taught modules. In addition to this, students have free and unrestricted access to the libraries at the Zaynabiyyah Howza and the University of Damascus.

During the three years that the Institute has been running, the premises have been rented with just enough space as deemed necessary, and the student accommodation also rented as required. An opportunity arose when we were able to purchase a plot of land for constructing a campus when it will be deemed necessary. A volunteer architect, Zehrabai Abedi, has drawn the plans for a phased construction. We are indeed grateful to Zehrabai for undertaking this phase of the project free of charge.



Development of the Eastern Curriculum: The central part of the programme is to provide an in depth study of the Qur'an and its exegesis, Sciences of Traditions, Theology, Jurisprudence, Logic, History, Philosophy and Ethics. Community Aalims were invited to submit proposals for the syllabus that should be taught at the Institute. This was followed up by a seven day conference in London to decide on the basis of a tailor-made curriculum that would be relevant to our community in today's society.

The outcome report was submitted to the Imam Sadiq (Alaihissalaam) University of Teheran to produce the curriculum and lesson plans for the four year course. When the University gave an estimate of \$200,000 with a timeline of two years to complete the assignment, it was decided to undertake the project in house in Damascus with a budget of \$100,000.

Individual subject Specialists were identified and were assigned with the task of submitting their lesson plans in four phases. The first phase had to be completed in time for the Institute to start functioning in September 2007. All the lectures were planned to be conducted by identified experts, face to face at the Institute in Damascus.

Towards the end of the first year, an assessment was carried out by an independent team led by Shaykh Haleem, the Damascus Office representative of Ayatollah Sayyid Ali al-Husayni al-Sistani. Recommendations were implemented by the start of the second year.

Towards the end of the second year, an assessment was carried out by a team led by Shaykh Safder Jaffer. Recommendations were again implemented by the start of the third year.

Shaykh Mohammed Khalfan has now been recruited to lead the delivery of the Eastern Curriculum by evaluating and monitoring the delivery of the Institute Eastern Curriculum Modules, including production of course reports.

Consultation meetings at various stages of the project have also been held with Ayatollah Sistani, (may Allah give him a long life) and with his representative in Damascus, Shaykh Halim and his representative in Qum, Syed Shahrestanni.

In the last three years regular progress reports have also been hand delivered to Ayatollah Sistani, (may Allah give him a long life).

Development of the MA curriculum: The introduction of an MA in Islamic Education will make a major contribution to community cohesion because it addresses the need that has been identified to ensure that the leadership of our communities is appropriate to the concerns of those communities in playing a full part in those societies in which they now reside. Community Scholars were invited to submit proposals for the syllabus to be taught at the Institute. This was followed up by a conference in Los Angeles to decide on the modules that will be taught at the Institute as part of the Masters Course. The outcome report was submitted to identified scholars to prepare lesson plans with a target of September 2008 as the start of the Masters part of the Programme.

Dr Mahmood Datoos volunteered to lead the delivery of the Masters Curriculum leading to the validation by the University of Winchester and AlHajj Barkatbhai Walji volunteered to lead the delivery of the Enrichment Modules.

The lectures are successfully delivered via Skype Internet conferencing from the lecturers' homes. Towards the end of the module delivery, the lecturer spends a week at the Institute in Damascus, for a face to face interaction with the students.



Student Recruitment: As you might all be aware, in most years it is normal for two or three community young men and women to proceed to Qum for Islamic Studies. We are delighted that in 2007 two young men and two young women who wished to go for Islamic Studies, chose to join IIPS, and three young men and three young women signed up for the course that started in September 2008. It is our duty now to encourage more young men and young women to choose to go for Islamic Studies and hopefully to join IIPS.

We are looking at forming a team of core MTP presenters, each committed to attending a monthly meeting between themselves for debrief and update and each member to visit 10 Jamaats per year. During the visit the presenters have to be given an opportunity to give a presentation to the Jamaat EC, to address the entire membership from the podium during a major occasion, to sit with Madrasah teachers and to address senior Madrasah classes and youth groups and youth discussion circles.

We are also looking into scholars such as Dr Mahmood Abdulla, Shaykh Mohammed Ali Ismail and Shaykh Muhammed Khalfan to offer taster programmes at regional and jamaat levels when they travel for CPD, Muharram and Ramadhaan. Such tasters can be personal, virtual, and via CD / DVD. These videos would then be uploaded onto websites and also be made into CDs by the Islamic Education media team.

We will continue our efforts to ensure that every Jamaat and Regional directory, publication, memorabilia, madrasah, calendar, newsletter, website, etc. carries an MTP advert, and every jamaat, Regional event eg careers fair has an MTP representative.

IIPS Charter: The proposed charter is attached.

TeamMTP: During my travels, Muballigheen as well as community members offered their services and volunteered to assist in the preparation of the Muballigheen Training Programme (MTP). In the past three years 86 volunteers working tirelessly together as TeamMTP, ensured that the programme started in Damascus, on Saturday 8th September 2007. In that first year tasks were allocated to teams that delivered as follows:

1. The Curriculum Team (Eastern) finalised the subjects that will be taught, and which books will be used. Students will go through in-depth modules on the Qur'an and its exegesis, Sciences of Traditions, Islamic Theology, Jurisprudence (General and Principles), Logic, History, Philosophy and Ethics. This team was chaired by Maulana Zaffar Abbas.
2. The Curriculum Team (Western) finalised the contemporary Western academic subjects in 34 identified areas — including Islamic Civilizations, Interfaith training, and Islam and the West — which forms an integral part of the studies at the Institute. This team was chaired by AlHajj Hasnainbhai Walji.
3. The Arabic Language Team developed and tested a unique module aiming at teaching Arabic with a goal of enabling an understanding of Qur'an, Hadith (Traditions) and Islam, and being able to use the language in daily cultural and educational situations. This team was chaired by Shaykh Kassim Assady.
4. The University Validation Team selected the University of Winchester to academically recognise the MTP program. The team successfully obtained the validation on 21st July 2009. This team was chaired by AlHajj Yasinbhai Raheem.



5. The Institute Team finalised and published, in French and in English, the four-year programme, the Student Selection Criteria, the Student Application Form and the Institute Code of Conduct. This team was chaired by Shaykh Sami Bu Khamseen.
6. The Campus Construction Team searched for and purchased a 37000 sq.m. plot of land in Damascus, identified a dynamic community architect who submitted the drawings for a six phase project of construction, and selected a contractor for the Campus construction.
7. The Communications Team published articles, brochures and magazines in English and in French, and conducted seminars and presentations publicising MTP to the worldwide community members. The team is led by Mohammed Riyazbhai Sachedina.
8. The MTP web team led by Meimunabai Walji, designed and published the Institute website which is essential for keeping the community informed and to provide the required information to potential students. (www.wfiips.org)
9. The Human Resources Team produced Job and Person's spec for key positions and trained a team for carrying out interviews. Those who applied for positions were given a psychometric test to assess development needs prior to their interviews. The team was advised by AlHajj Abdulhussein Tejani.
10. The Legal Team finalised the staff contracts, the Institute Organisation and Consultative Structure and its Charter and the registration of the World Federation as an NGO in Syria. This team was chaired by AlHajj Makbulbhai Rahim.
11. The Administration Team established an office in Damascus and has created streamlined Systems and Processes for the smooth running of IIPS. This team was chaired by Dr Ahmed Hassam.
12. The Student Cohesion Team carried out development programmes in Damascus. Our students come from different parts of the world and it is crucial to gel them into a learning community. The Team was led by Al-Hajj Sarfraz Jeraj.
13. The core members of Team MTP met over the 2007 August Bank Holidays and discussed in depth all aspects of MTP and agreed on procedures for dealing with anticipated challenges that may be faced by the Institute in the coming years. This team was chaired by AlHajj Gulam bhai Dinani. The team met again in Damascus in April 2008 to check on progress and to assess the functioning of the Institute.
14. The World Federation Secretariat Staff at Stanmore led by Iqbalbai Panju, at Harefield led by Abbasbhai Ismail and at the Institute in Damascus led by AlHajj Husseinbhai Ravji provided the dedicated logistical support that made it all possible.

As can be seen from the above, community members working together as a team with a focused vision, were able to deliver on what initially appeared an unsurmountable target. TeamMTP rejoiced and celebrated with the community on Saturday 8th September 2007 (25th Sha'baan 1428), the day The Islamic Institute for Postgraduate Studies in Damascus, started to train Muballigheen to serve our community.

However, this was only the beginning, as work commenced immediately on the next phase:



1. The Curriculum Team (Eastern) were looking at finalising and signing off the Second Year Lesson Plans and started working on the Third Year Lesson Plans.
2. The Curriculum Team (Western) were looking at finalising and signing off the lesson plans for the course introductions and the Second and Third Year Lesson Plans.
3. The Arabic Language Team started the monitoring process of the module delivery and amend course books as necessary for the following years.
4. The University of Winchester Validation Team started evaluating the Institute progress, and suggesting systems for delivery improvement, finalising the validation document and recommending an External Examiner.
5. The Institute Team started monitoring and assessing the systems and processes, proposing changes that they deemed necessary.
6. The Communications Team started organising seminars for undergraduates and graduates in North America, Europe, Malaysia, Madagascar, Mauritius and Reunion.
7. The Human Resources Team needed to produce Job and Person's spec for further positions that had to be filled during the year.

Looking Ahead: This project has attracted many well-wishers from within and from outside our community. It is imperative that while remaining focused and resolute in our intent we should be open to ideas in enhancing the project. Ideas being studied at this time include:

1. Allow students that meet the criteria, to participate just in the first year IIPS course.
(From our experience from short courses and 1 year gap year courses in Qum, to take a couple for a one year period may get them interested in IIPS in the long term and will definitely achieve more positives than negatives. The examples from Jamia Zahra and Madressa Imam Khomeini are many.)
2. Organise Summer Courses at the Institute in Damascus for post A Level students.
(Curriculum to be designed around these headings: Elementary Arabic, Quran recitation, Aqaid (to be delivered in English and then Arabic), some more general Islamic Studies of the calibre of Shaykh Khalfan / Shaykh Mohammed Ali Ismail. Use existing CPDs already devised by Islamic Education.)
3. Offer one year gap diploma course at the Institute in Damascus.
(Essentially it should be set up as a separate stream to mainly absorb the gap year students who wish to learn Arabic. IIPS thus offers an alternative Arabic course to that offered by the University of Damascus. This will be an easy one to achieve and students to be self funding but partial grants to be made available to those students who can show they will add value to the community.)

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the 86 TeamMTP members for their unstinting support in delivering this project and bringing it to where it is today. It has been an honour to coordinate such a dedicated and focused team. I would also like to thank the Office Bearers of the World Federation for their support especially during the bleak moments when it did not feel as if there was a light at the end of the tunnel. Special thanks to Dr Ahmad Hassam for the number of times that he flew to Damascus and to Najaf to help smooth the path and to AlHajj Azadbhai Kanani and AlHajj Ahmedbhai Daya for providing adequate funding for the Institute to flourish.