

Muballigheen Training Programme

Report Presented to The Second Executive Council Meeting – 27 February 2010

Introduction

This report will outline the brief history of the Muballigheen Training Programme (MTP) and the milestones concerned with the establishment of the Islamic Institute for Postgraduate Studies (IIPS). It will also describe some of the current challenges faced by the IIPS and will propose solutions.

Part 1: MTP Background and Achievements

Date	Key Achievement
October 2005	IEB Muballigheen Retreat: Muballigheen considered 3-4 different models for creating Muballigheen to serve the KSI community It was ultimately decided to appoint a coordinator (MTC) to take feedback from the community and to devise a fit for purpose programme for WF to consider
January 2006 – August 2006	Consultation: The MTC visited over 90 jamaats and interviewed some 10000 community members, scholars and academics
September 2006	Triennial Conference, Dubai: MTC presented his report to the conference. Following this report, the recommendation was adopted to enrol MTP students at Hawza Zaynabiyyah in Damascus and to run a concurrent MA programme via distance teaching Upon this basis a budget was presented in Dubai: \$12,500 per person, per annum, for four years. This was unanimously approved and twenty sponsorships were pledged for training to start in September 2007
February 2007	Executive Council Meeting, Karachi: MTC reported that Hawza Zaynabiyyah had declined to accept co-educational classroom settings. As this was an integral part of the MTP concept approved in Dubai, the office bearers asked for options to consider to decide a plan B. These options were presented to them in December 2006 The preferred model, to establish our own, independent, institute in Damascus, was presented to EXCO Karachi and was accepted. It required the curriculum to be

	divided into 4 parts: Hawza, Masters, Enrichment Modules and Competency Seminars Recruitment of students, to teach at least the Arabic portion, was started
Feb 2007 – September 2008	Formation: The Hawza curriculum was pieced together at a conference held in London in February 2007 from a range of different curricula that had been gathered from experts throughout the world The Masters and Enrichment modules were pieced together by a conference of academics held in Los Angeles in January 2007 The Competency Seminars were designed based on the feedback from the 90 jamaats who had highlighted these areas as lacking in the current resident alims
July 2007	Executive Council Meeting, Dar es Salaam: A report was presented highlighting the work that had been carried out in preparing the curriculum and the infrastructure of the institute. The progress of the Masters programme and the validation process was also presented A rationale was presented on the suitability of the University of Winchester as our partner in the Masters, having studied Liverpool Hope, Edinburgh, Amsterdam, Warwick, Middlesex, Exeter, and Winchester. Winchester was chosen for its strengths in education as the MTP envisaged the Muballigh to be an educator as well as an alim. Winchester was also attractive due to the lack of non-Shia influence, no pre-existing modules, and a commitment to support the validation (WF had started to work with Winchester in 1989 when experts from Winchester were taken to Mombasa to advise students on further studies and careers in UK)
August 2007	Conference of Core MTP Team, Staverton, UK: A conference of MTP lecturers, WF representatives, regional federation vice presidents and Winchester representatives was held where the entire MTP plan was presented and was granted the go-ahead by the office bearers and regions
September 2007	Damascus: IIPS is established and begins teaching Arabic to two couples (four students)
February 2008	Conference of Core MTP Team, Damascus: The core team, minus Winchester University, met once again in Damascus and devised the potential future governance

	arrangements: the IIPS charter was thus drafted
May 2008	Quality Assurance of First Year, Damascus: A quality assurance process was undertaken by the office of Ayatullah Sistani in Damascus to assess the progress in the first year. A Very positive report was received from Shaykh Haleemi, representative of Ayatullah Sistani in Damascus, who had used four independent assessors to assess the student's Arabic competency
September 2008	Start of Second Year, Damascus: Three new couples (six students) joined the IIPS
April 2009	Quality Assurance of Second Year, Damascus: A team comprising Dr Murtadha Alidina, Dr Saeed Bahmanpour, Maulana Zafar Abbas, Shaykh Safder Jaffer, Syed Mohamed Naqvi and sister Malika Chandoo-Jaffer assessed the progress of the students and based on their detailed report a fine tuning of the curriculum and teaching methodology was initiated
July 2009	Masters Validation Process: The WF successfully obtained the validation with Winchester University

The main pieces of the jigsaw are now in place. In summary, in the last 36 months the team has achieved:

- a unique Shia Ithna Asheri-based Arabic teaching module
- a four year Hawza curriculum
- lesson plans to accompany each lesson of each module
- a fully validated MA in Islamic Education
- a library
- a trained and nurtured work-force in Damascus
- the appointment of an Executive Dean
- the appointment of a Hawza Programme Leader
- the training and appointment of a Designated Tutor
- the appointment of a Masters Programme Leader
- the appointment of an Enrichment Modules Leader
- the appointment of a Competency Seminar Coordinator
- a draft charter

Part 2: Current Situation at IIPS: Dr Mahmood Abdulla, IIPS Executive Dean

Introduction

By the grace of Allah and blessings of the Ma'sumeen, the structure of the curriculum of the Hawza side and MA side of studies, offered at the IIPS, has been well organised and streamlined. The taught modules meet the requirements of the Muballigheen Training Programme (MTP) as approved at The World Federation Triennial Conference of 2006 in Dubai. The MTP is in its third year, and Inshallah it will produce four graduates (two couples) in the year 2011.

The Hawza side of the modules have been carefully selected and planned by the team of experts. The implementation of the plan is monitored continuously to ensure that the lesson plans and the quality of teaching are maintained at the highest level. Additionally, this aspect is subject to a quality audit every two years. The MA modules meet the requirements of the Winchester University and are subject to surveillance by the team of experts of the University, as well as the Team MTP. Hence, the dual curriculum followed at IIPS in the course of four years is distinct and unique to the curriculum of all other Hawzas in Sayyeda Zainab.

According to the mandate of the 2006 WF Conference, each Jamaat was to recommend a candidate for the MTP with an intake of 12 trainees per year, thus fulfilling the mandate of training a total of 120 muballigheen. This obviously did not happen. Therefore, the MTP operated under its capacity, with adverse financial implications.

Thus far, two additional couples have shown a keen interest to join MTP in September 2010. IIPS receives visitors from among the Zuwwar who take interest in the working of MTP; this generates enquiries from interested candidates.

Situation on the ground

The selection of Sayyeda Zainab in Damascus as the venue for IIPS has its advantages and disadvantages. There are four important features which make the venue of Sayeda Zainab outstanding:

1. The spirituality generated by the Haram of Janabe Zainab (sa) and the other shrines of the Ahlul Bayt (as) are ideal for students who devote their time and energy for the study of the Mazhab of Ahlul Bayt (as).
2. Being an Arab country, the environment is most suitable for strengthening the knowledge of Arabic because there is ample opportunity for conversing, interacting and benefiting from a wide variety of lectures by renowned scholars from different Hawzas in the locality.
3. The availability of well-experienced teachers, who are carefully selected on account of their expertise in the subjects they teach. They are paid at an hourly rate. This is the most economical way of employing teachers who teach at different times in other Hawzas in the subjects of their specialisation. Apart from tapping on their experience and expertise, there is no comparison at all between the hourly rate paid to them and that paid elsewhere, for example in Western countries.
4. The availability of past and current resources in the mega libraries, especially at the Centre of Ayatullah Sistani, at Hawza Zaynabiyya, at Hawza Imam Khomeini, and at Musalla of the shrine of Janabe Zainab (sa). However, the resources and the reference books that we have made available in our purpose built library at IIPS are more than adequate for both the Hawza side and MA side of studies. Therefore, the students have hardly had any need to use other libraries thus far.
5. Dr Moledina met potential donors who already own a plot of land of 1100 sq. metres around the Sayyeda Zainab area, and who have tentatively offered to

build a purpose-built institution with the possibility of accommodating students.

There are obvious drawbacks for running IIPS at Sayyeda Zainab:

1. In the academic year that started in September 2009, the government has frozen permission for new Hawzas / Institutes to operate officially. This means that these Hawzas cannot renew the stay permits and visas of their foreign employees and students. The IIPS has applied through one of its guarantors for the licence, but unfortunately, for the last 16 months we have only had verbal promises and assurances that we may operate. There is no confirmation in writing from any official source. The activities of IIPS, the details of its teachers, employees and students, are filed with the departments for Political and National Security. Their representatives visit us regularly at IIPS. (See the subject 'New Developments' below).
2. In the absence of stay permits and visas, we are officially deemed as over-stayers, although the Department of Immigration has an instruction from the Security Force that whenever we want to leave the country, we should be granted an exit visa. Thus we have been able to obtain this without any difficulty for our staff, but we have had to pay over-stay penalties. The security personnel continue to assure us verbally that we are in the 'good books' of the concerned departments.
3. For the simplest of things, certain bureaucratic and protracted procedures need to be followed, which in the Western countries would be done over a phone call or internet. This results in terrible waste of time, energy and money.
4. There is a widespread rumour that a few small Hawzas will be ordered to close down, out of 26 that operate in Sayyeda Zainab. We have heard from very reliable sources that the Hawzas which would have no problems obtaining licence and stay permits for their students are Hawza Imam Khomeini, Hawza Zaynabiyya and Hawza al-Murtadha (the three largest and very influential Hawzas).
5. As is common in third-world countries, the basic civil services and amenities cannot be compared to those in the West. We suffer power cuts and interruptions, cuts in water supply and in internet services. Therefore the students and permanent staff coming from the West have to make sacrifices. The progress of teaching at IIPS is dependent on reliable and stable internet services because all the MA modules are taught through Skype. If these services get interrupted, then valuable teaching time is wasted, considering that the MA lecturers are paid on an hourly basis. So far, we have not had major interruptions during the lectures on Skype. But the problems with the internet services are very common especially in Sayyeda Zainab area, apart from the fact that compared to the Western countries, internet is very expensive here.

6. The amount of pollution in Sayeda Zainab area and irregular garbage collection system could become a health hazard although so far, we are saved from this eventuality.
7. The medical services are unreliable. Sometimes doctors are not available even in the emergency wards of the hospitals. Medical insurance is not available as in the Western countries. Therefore there is a potential risk of the students or staff ending up paying large medical bills.

New Developments

During his recent visit to Damascus, Dr. Asgar Moledina and I had a meeting on 7 February with Hujjatul Islam Shaykh Haleemi Bahbahani, the representative in Syria of Ayatullah al-Udhma Sayed Sistani in which the situation and the legal status of the Hawzas in Sayyeda Zainab were discussed. Shaykh Bahbahani informed us that the government is in the process of issuing a new law regulating all the Hawzas and other religious institutions in the country. Apart from the largest Hawzas, which would be granted licences to operate, those who opt to come under the Ministry of Awqaf may be granted licences too. But from among the small Hawzas some will be ordered to close down and others will have to fall under the Mudiriyyah (Directorate) which will be formed under him. If this happens then we do not have to worry about the legal status of IIPS. When this will happen is still an uncertain area.

We also met the main guarantor of IIPS, Abu Talal of Ashkar Travels. He emphasised the point that our application has already passed through the major hurdles. It has been approved by the National and the Political Security and is in its final phases. The reason the licence has not been issued is because the authorities cannot treat each application separately. They want to issue a law which will apply to all. If the Hawzas had opted to go under the Ministry of Awqaf, then there wouldn't have been any problem in getting a licence, but there would have been problems in future in being dictated to by an outside authority. In order to convince us that we do not have to worry about the licence, Abu Talal and his colleague assured us that they have personally seen the paper of consent for IIPS.

He also said that in order to get approval, he has mentioned that IIPS owns land of 36,000 sq. metres which will be utilised to build a campus. This made our case stronger. Therefore, until the licence is issued, he advised that The World Federation should not even think of selling the land. In any case, the market for land is at rock bottom at present. In future, when the land is sold, Abu Talal remarked about 2000 sq. metres should be maintained for IIPS.

This gives an impression, that in future, the renewal of our licence may have to be connected, somehow or another to the existence of this land, originally planned for building a campus.

Hawza Curriculum

Many man-hours have been spent to devise a suitable curriculum for MTP. This has resulted in a tailor-made course for the Hawza side. The structure of the modules and the total number of sessions of 50 minutes each, of tuition and tutorial time over a period of four years, are shown below:

YEAR ONE	Number of Sessions
Arabic Syntax and Grammar	150
Arabic Language	150
Islamic Laws by Ayatullah Sistani	150
Tajwid (Reading Qur'an correctly)	90
Book Review (relevant to issues pertaining to Aqaid)	90
Akhlaq (in English)	60
Tutorials	150

TOTAL	840

YEAR TWO	Number of Sessions
Arabic Syntax and Grammar	150
Arabic Language	120
Logic	90

Fiqh (Ayatullah Sistani)	90
Tajwid (Reading Qur'an correctly)	90
Islamic Theology (Aqaid in English)	60
Akhlaq	60
Isti'aab (Arabic comprehension)	60
Tutorials	150

TOTAL	870

YEAR THREE	Number of Sessions
Principles of Qur'anic Exegesis	50
Arabic Syntax & Grammar	150
Arabic in Media	100
Islamic Theology (Aqaid in Arabic)	90
Fiqh (Ayatullah Sistani)	90

Ilm al-Hadith	20
Akhlaq	60
Thematic Exegesis (selected)	100
Usul al-Fiqh	50
Logic	40
Tutorials	150

TOTAL	900

YEAR FOUR	Number of Sessions
Arabic Rhetoric (Balaghah)	300
History of Islamic Jurisprudence	50
Fiqh	150
Usul al-Fiqh	60
Akhlaq	60
Islamic History	100

Philosophy	30
Tutorials	150

TOTAL	900

The teaching of the modules and tutorials are conducted by the hourly paid and also the permanent members of the staff. IIPS also arranges tarbiyyah (ethical training) classes, practical fiqh and extra tuition when the need arises.

MA Curriculum

In addition to the Hawza studies mentioned above, the students have to study for their MA in Islamic Education within the four year duration.

The structure for the MA programme is indicated below:

(1)Teaching Religion:

Indicative Learning Activities	Hours
Lectures / Seminar	26
Tutor directed tasks	12
Student managed learning	162
TOTAL	200

(2)Spiritual, Moral & Religious Education

Indicative Learning Activities	Hours
Lectures / Seminars	26
Tutor directed tasks	12
Student managed learning	162
TOTAL	200

(3)Qur'an – Scripture and Signifier

Indicative Learning Activities	Hours
Lectures / Seminars	22
Tutor directed tasks	10
Student managed learning	168
TOTAL	200

(4)Authority in Shi'a Islam

Indicative Learning Activities	Hours
Lectures / Seminars	26
Tutor directed tasks	6
Student managed learning	168
TOTAL	200

(5)Islamic Ethics

Indicative Learning Activities	Hours
Lectures / Seminars	26
Tutor directed tasks	6

Student managed learning	168
TOTAL	200
(6)Research Methods	
Indicative Learning Activities	Hours
Lectures / Seminars	24
Tutor directed tasks	8
Student managed learning	168
TOTAL	200

At the end of the course, the students must present a Dissertation of between 18,000 – 20,000 words, the subject of which must be pre-approved by the IIPS.

As time permits, the students also take enrichment modules and skills seminars which are not part of the Hawza or MA courses, but are essential to enhance the effectiveness and personal development of the students in guiding the community.

Dr. Mahmood Y. Abdulla,

Executive Dean, IIPS,

Sayyeda Zainab, Damascus.

Part 3: Expenses

The MTP expenses presented at every EXCO since the start of the project can be better understood if we bear in mind the change in strategy from partnering Hawza Zaynabiyah to establishing an independent institute. The following have been achieved:

- In-house formation of curriculum. Alternative quote was \$200,000.
- Training and Development of key personnel
- Establishing a library
- Establishing a fully-functional office with IT
- Numerous meetings, seminars and conferences
- Consultancy fees and support towards achieving the validation in only two years

2007

- Income: £3,727
- Total Expense: £91,923
 - o Consultancy: £15,122
 - o Travel: £8,151
 - o Training and Development: £8,918
 - o Meetings and Conferences: £3,807
 - o Accommodation in Damascus: £21,650
 - o Stipends and lunch: £3,066
 - o Salaries of Staff & Lecturers: £25,111
 - o Office: £2,745
 - o Other: £1,531
 - o Non MTP: £1,822

- Purchase of Land: £221,000

2008

- Income: £2,070
- Total Expense: £185,363
 - o Consultancy: £20,870
 - o Travel: £8,010
 - o Training and Development: £8,713
 - o Meetings and Conferences: £9,089
 - o Accommodation in Damascus: £38,501
 - o Stipends and lunch: £11,308
 - o Salaries of Staff & Lecturers: £50,540
 - o Office: £10,331
 - o Curriculum: £11,820
 - o Printing and promotion: £1,579
 - o Non MTP: £14,602

2009

- Income: £1,778
- Total Expense: £255,365
 - o Consultancy: £22,051
 - o Travel: £4,187
 - o Meetings and Conferences: £189
 - o Accommodation in Damascus: £78,862
 - o Stipends and lunch: £21,510
 - o Salaries of Staff & Lecturers: £96,338
 - o Office: £16,796
 - o Curriculum: £9,914
 - o Promotion and printing: £686
 - o Non MTP: £4,832

Part 4: The Way Forward

As is evident, there are a number of considerations to be made. It is hereby proposed:

1. By the next EXCO, the situation with regards to our position in Syria be carefully monitored and other potential venues be looked into as feasible alternatives, should the need arise
2. Increase the age of acceptance of students from 30 – 35
3. Begin to accept single male students
4. Continuously review the situation of single male students with a view to accepting single females after 12 months if deemed feasible. Note: the establishment of our own campus will make it a lot easier to accept single females
5. Begin to introduce a range of courses of shorter duration, and provide opportunities to students in their gap year

6. Increase and improve internal commitments by allowing MTP team to reach the jamaat grassroots directly
7. Earmark 10% of our Khums collection to MTP. This will ensure stability
8. Conduct a review of costs and implement a streamlining of costs where feasible

And all praise is for Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

Abbas M H Ismail

February 2010

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