



THE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

GRADUATE EDUCATION POLICY

2023

Contents

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE	iv
APPLICABILITY OF THE REVISED GRADUATE EDUCATION POLICY	v
GUIDING PRINCIPLES	v
PART-I: LAUNCHING A PROGRAM AND AWARDDING DEGREE.....	7
1. MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR LAUNCHING GRADUATE PROGRAMS AT UNIVERSITIES	7
2. MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR AWARD OF MS/MPhil/EQUIVALENT DEGREES (LEVEL 7)	8
2.1 Admission to an MS/MPhil/Equivalent Degree Programs	8
2.2 Coursework requirement for Award of MS/MPhil/Equivalent Degrees.....	9
2.3 Degree Completion Timeline.....	9
2.4 Credits Transfer, Evaluation and Grading.....	9
3. MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR AWARD OF DOCTORAL DEGREE (LEVEL 8)	9
3.1 Qualification.....	9
3.2 Intra-disciplinary Qualifications	9
3.3 CGPA.....	10
3.4 Research Publication Requirement for Admission	10
3.5 Admission Test	10
3.6 Statement of Purpose	11
3.7 Coursework and Residency Requirement.....	11
3.8 Comprehensive Examination	11
3.9 Doctoral Dissertation	11
3.9.1 Selection of Research Area	12
3.9.2 Quality in Reporting	12
3.9.3 Methodological Quality	12
3.9.4 Appropriateness of the Methods to the Aims of the Study.....	13
3.9.5 Relevance to the Policy and Practice.....	13
3.10 External Evaluation of PhD Dissertation	13
3.11 Plagiarism, Similarity Test and Open Defense	14
3.12 Research Publication	15
3.13 Degree Completion Timeline	15
3.14 Award of MS/MPhil Degree based on PhD Studies	16
PART-II: GOVERERNG THE SYSTEMS OF DOCTORAL RESEARCH.....	17

4.	GOVERNING THE RESEARCH SUPERVISION.....	17
4.1	Principles and Purposes	17
4.2	Supervision of Doctoral Dissertation.....	17
4.2.1.	General Conditions to Supervise Doctoral Research	17
4.2.2.	Criteria to be a PhD supervisor	18
4.2.3.	Supervisory Process	19
4.3	University Directorate of Advance Studies and Research or Equivalent Department.....	20
4.4	Teaching Assistantships and Research Assistantships:.....	20
5.	PRACTICING THE ACADEMIC RESEARCH ETHICS	21
5.1	Principles and Purposes	21
5.2	Guidelines to Ensure Academic Research Integrity:	21
5.3	Guidelines on Ethics of Using Similarity Detection Software (for Administrators)	21
5.4	Guidelines on Ethics of Using Similarity Detection Software (for Instructors)	22
5.5	Guidelines on Interpreting Originality Report	22
6.	MANAGING THE GRIEVANCES OF GRADUATE STUDENTS.....	23
6.1	Principles and Purposes	23
6.2	Guidelines to Establish a Grievance Management System.....	23
	PART-III: QUALITY ASSURANCE.....	25
7.	QUALITY ASSURANCE	25
7.1	Minimum Requirement for Academic HR.....	25
7.1.1	Faculty and supervisory requirement.....	25
7.1.2	Determining relevance of faculty with subject/degree program.....	25
7.2	NOC Requirements for Launching Graduate Programs	26
7.2.1	Category-wise application of NOC requirement.....	26
7.2.2	Process and timelines for obtaining an NOC to launch graduate programs	26
7.2.3	Continuing compliance with the HEC’s policies	27
7.2.4	Cancellation of NOC and/or demotion to the lower category	27
7.3	Punitive policy for violation of rules	28
7.4	Reporting Requirements	30

HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION, PAKISTAN

GRADUATE EDUCATION POLICY

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

- i. HEC's National Qualification Framework (NQF) delineates Graduate Programs that lead to award of MS/MPhil/Equivalent and PhD degrees on successful completion of all the degree requirements prescribed by the university and its academic departments. The universities and other higher learning institutes that have extensive infrastructure for research and highly qualified faculty to teach the higher - 5, 6, 7 & 8 level courses and supervise related research activities offer these Graduate Programs to highly competent scholars.
- ii. Doctor of Philosophy (or PhD) is the highest university degree that is awarded in most disciplines. Those who are qualified at this level are expected to serve highly consequential functions in society, including in the fields of teaching and research. With in-depth training and immersion in a particular field of study, which includes making an original contribution to the area of study through the PhD dissertation, those holding PhD degrees are expected to have an expertise in their area of study that they can utilize in teaching and further research, as well as in problem solving and innovation for addressing important societal challenges. While other degree programs aim to teach students the things that we (academic community) know, the purpose of a PhD program is to enable students to investigate what we don't know.
- iii. In view of the highly consequential functions served by PhD degree holders, one of the most important guiding principles of the HEC's Graduate Education Policy is quality. Hence, the policy is intended to ensure that PhD programs are open only to individuals with a passion for and deep interest in academics and research, and who have demonstrated that they can handle the academic rigor required to complete a PhD degree. The overall goal of this policy is that PhD graduates from Pakistani universities should possess expertise in their field of study, should be able to conduct high quality research, and should have strong scholarly writing skills relevant to their field of study. Therefore, it may be preferable not to confer a PhD degree than to confer a PhD degree based on substandard academic and research work.
- iv. Since the PhD is a highly specialized degree, it is intended that only those higher education institutions ("HEIs") that possess resources to offer quality education at the highest level should offer PhD degree programs. The HEC has prescribed standards for launching PhD programs, and universities must obtain the HEC's approval by submitting evidence of compliance with these standards before launching a PhD program. However, it is critical to note that the prescribed standards are minimum that every PhD candidate must satisfy before being awarded a degree. Universities are encouraged to formulate their own admissions and completion requirements that would further enhance the quality of their PhD programs, provided such internal policies are consistent with the minimum requirements set forth by the HEC.
- v. This policy has been made pursuant to the powers granted to the HEC under the Higher Education Commission Ordinance, 2002, and is binding on all HEIs in the country,

whether operating in the public or private sectors. Violations or failure to comply with the HEC policies may lead to regulatory action being taken against non-compliant HEIs including, but not limited to, issuance of warnings; direction to stop further admissions; suspension or cancellation of NOCs; issuance of public alerts; and non-recognition of deficient degrees.

APPLICABILITY OF THE REVISED GRADUATE EDUCATION POLICY

- i. This policy shall be effective from Fall 2023 (the “Effective Date”). Any additional requirements in this policy in comparison with the HEC’s previously applicable policies on MS/MPhil/Equivalent & PhD Programs (2016 & 2021) shall apply from the Effective Date and shall not be retroactively applicable.
- ii. To assess whether the graduating student is compliant with the HEC’s policies, the HEC shall generally consider this policy applicable on the date of the enrollment of the student in the graduate program.
- iii. Notwithstanding the foregoing, the university and currently enrolled students may take advantage of the revisions in the policy, even if the student had enrolled before the Effective Date, provided that the University/HEI/DAI has adopted/adapted the policy through its statutory bodies. It is, however, to be noted that the Graduate Education Policy prescribes broader outlines/guidelines and minimum standards which could not be lowered. Only enhancement of standards is admissible.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- i. **University Autonomy:** within the ambit of their Charter/Act and HEC’s policies
- ii. **Access:** to all qualified individuals with equal opportunity.
- iii. **Relevance:** with the local needs and national policies.
- iv. **Alignment:** with the outcomes defined in National Qualification Framework and Graduate Education Policy.
- v. **Contextualizing:** without compromising over the global standards.
- vi. **Academic Freedom:** of thoughts and conceiving ideas.
- vii. **Originality:** of thoughts leading to innovation by adhering to the academic ethics.
- viii. **Academic Flexibility:** in conducting research activities without violating the disciplinary guidelines.
- ix. **Collaboration, networking, and partnerships:** at a local, national, and international level for development and execution of the graduate programs.

- x. **Quality:** Promoting high standards of academic and research excellence and student success

PART-I: LAUNCHING A PROGRAM AND AWARDING DEGREE

1. MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR LAUNCHING GRADUATE PROGRAMS AT UNIVERSITIES

Organizational autonomy is crucial for developing self-reliance and resilience within organizations. In the academic context, it creates an environment that is conducive to research. HEC recognizes the importance of universities' autonomy in accordance with their Charter/Act. However, regulatory constraints are also necessary to ensure that the sector's objectives align with national goals. This policy seeks to strike a balance between academic autonomy and regulatory requirements. The Graduate Education Policy provides a broad framework for achieving national goals through academic and research excellence, and universities are expected to program the award of graduate degrees within the guidelines set forth in this policy.

1.1 To launch a new graduate program, universities are required to ensure the following:

- a. The Act/Charter of the university allows for the offering of the program.
- b. Rationale to launch the program is established. It delineates that the need, scope, and objectives of launching the degree program in terms of market demand and supply (both students and resources) have been assessed; societal problems expected to be resolved have been identified, and employability of the graduates that the prospective program is expected to enhance has been determined, satisfactorily through all the statutory bodies keeping in view the national research agenda and sustainable development goals.
- c. The title of the program is defined in the light of the “Criteria for Use of Titles/Nomenclature for the Degree” as listed in National Qualification Framework (2015).
- d. The curriculum of the program is consistent with any guidelines issued by the HEC and international best practices.
- e. An admission policy having the following information:
 - i. An Academic Calendar as per HEC and University policy
 - ii. Procedures and processes to apply for admission addressing both the manual and electronic ways.
 - iii. The processes ensuring the dissemination of admission information to prospective students.
 - iv. The documentary requirements for admission
 - v. The merit determination criteria defined and explained.
 - vi. The minimum eligibility criteria for granting admissions.
- f. The program completion requirements satisfy the HEC’s minimum criteria for award of graduate degrees.
- g. The other requirements of HEC regarding arrangement of relevant faculty (in terms of numbers, level, student to teacher ratio, student to supervisor ratio etc.), establishment of library and laboratory have been met.

- h. The degree program has been approved to be launched by all the relevant statutory bodies of the university/HEI/DAI.
- i. If applicable, any necessary approvals shall have been obtained by accreditation councils to launch the program.
- j. Policies to inculcate a research culture by incorporating a system of research supervision that has been approved through relevant statutory bodies and governed following the guidelines delineated in this policy.
- k. Policies to ensure academic research ethics have been developed, approved by the relevant statutory bodies and have also been implemented as prescribed in this policy.
- l. Policies to address academic grievances of graduate students have been outlined, approved by the relevant statutory bodies and have also been implemented through a grievance management system, as advised in this policy.
- m. If applicable, HEC's permission has been sought to launch a new graduate program.

2. MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR AWARD OF MS/MPHIL/EQUIVALENT DEGREES (LEVEL 7)

2.1 Admission to an MS/MPhil/Equivalent Degree Programs

- i. **Basic Academic Qualification¹:** Sixteen years of schooling or 4 year education (124 credit hours) after HSSC/F.A./F.Sc/Grade 12 or Equivalent shall be required for admission in the MPhil/MS/Equivalent program.
- ii. **Admission Test:** University is required to:
 - a) Enter a 3rd party arrangement under the University rules with any testing bodies recognized by HEC for conducting GRE/GAT/HAT General or equivalent as an eligibility condition for admission to MS/MPhil/Equivalent programs, with the passing score of 50%. OR
 - b) Conduct the test equivalent to GRE/GAT/HAT General developed at the University, with the passing score of 60%.
- iii. **Intra-disciplinary² Qualifications**
 The intra-disciplinary admissions may only be allowed, if:
 - a) The university/HEI policy allows, and
 - b) The applicant has a strong interest in pursuing a MS/MPhil/Equivalent degree in a different discipline.
 - c) The applicant has passed GRE-Subject with minimum 70% marks in the discipline of admission and has taken 6-9 CH of deficiency courses of level 6.
 - d) The admissions committee is satisfied that the applicant's knowledge of primary area (level 6) has sufficiently prepared him or her to undertake the course of studies of the MS/MPhil/Equivalent program (or, in the opinion of the admissions committee, the preparation can be deemed satisfactory by taking a few additional courses after starting the program).

¹ The criteria prescribed in HEC's policy (2016)

² Intra-disciplinary refers to sub-disciplines that occur within one of the ten broad disciplines defined by UNESCO's International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED-F-2013).

2.2 Coursework requirement for Award of MS/MPhil/Equivalent Degrees

For award of MPhil/MS/Equivalent degree, candidates shall:

- a. Either need to complete 30 credit hours of course work or
- b. Complete **24** credit hours of course work along with a minimum of **6** credit hours for research work/thesis.
- c. In case a degree is offered with research work, the university shall develop a policy regarding thesis defense and evaluation through its statutory bodies.

2.3 Degree Completion Timeline

- i. All the level-7 degrees i.e., MS/MPhil/Equivalent shall be awarded by universities after a minimum of 1.5 years³ and not more than four (4) years after the enrolment of the student.
- ii. The normal duration of the degree program is 1.5 years (3 regular semesters) and HEC has allows 2.5 years extra (i.e. 5 regular semesters) to combat with the contingencies. However, the students who are unable to complete the program within four (4) years, the university may designate a competent authority to determine whether the delay was caused by circumstances beyond the student's control (e.g., unnecessary delays/governance issues at the part of university or catastrophes - natural or human caused - and if so, grant an extension in such exceptional circumstances and also fix responsibility in case the delay was caused by the poor governance.⁴

2.4 Credits Transfer, Evaluation and Grading

To handle the credit transfer matters from one university/DAI/HEI to another as well as to evaluate students' academic performance (both formative and summative) and award of grads, HEC Policy Guidelines for Implementation of Uniform Semester Examination System in Higher Education Institutes of Pakistan shall be referred.

3. MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR AWARD OF DOCTORAL DEGREE (LEVEL 8)

3.1 Qualification

Prior to entry into a PhD program, the student shall have been awarded MS/MPhil or equivalent degrees as described in this policy.

3.2 Intra-disciplinary⁵ Qualifications

Consistent with best practices internationally (including leading global universities), intra-disciplinary admissions may only be allowed, if:

- i. The university/HEI policy allows, and
- ii. The applicant has a strong interest in pursuing a PhD degree in a different discipline.
- iii. The applicant has passed GRE-Subject with minimum 70% marks in the discipline of admission and has taken 6-9 CH of deficiency courses of level 7.

³ Year means "Academic Year" as defined in HEC Policy Guidelines for Implementation of Uniform Semester Examination System in Higher Education Institutes of Pakistan which is measured by a "Regular Semester". One Academic Years includes two Regular Semesters.

⁴ The students enrolled before the enactment of this policy shall also be dealt following the procedure outlined in this document.

⁵ Intra-disciplinary refers to sub-disciplines that occur within one of the ten broad disciplines defined by UNESCO's International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED-F-2013).

- iv. The admissions committee is satisfied that the applicant's knowledge of primary area (level 7) has sufficiently prepared him or her to undertake the course of studies of the doctoral program (or, in the opinion of the admissions committee, the preparation can be deemed satisfactory by taking a few additional courses after starting the program).

3.3 CGPA

- a) For admission in PhD programs, a minimum CGPA of 3.0 (out of 4.0 in the semester system) or First Division (in the annual system) in the most recent degree obtained is required, whether such degree was obtained from Pakistani or foreign universities.
- b) In case of foreign degree, if the CGPA/Grade is not mentioned on the transcript, the candidate must produce equivalent weightage from the parent university.
- c) The students having strong demonstrated pursuit for PhD degree, but their CGPA is below 3.00 (out of 4.0 in the semester system) or Second Division (in the annual system) in the most recent degree obtained, may be admitted to a PhD program fulfilling the following requirements:
 - i. Shall have published one research article in 'X' category journal⁶ for admission in science disciplines or in 'Y' category journal for admission in disciplines of Social Sciences and Art and Humanities. OR
Shall have studied additional courses of 9-12 CH of level 7 and have scored minimum 3.00 out of 4.00 GPA. And
 - ii. The admissions committee is satisfied that the applicant's knowledge of primary area (level 7) has sufficiently prepared him or her to undertake the course of studies of the doctoral program.
 - iii. These requirements shall be in addition to any other requirement set in this policy for admission to a PhD program.

3.4 Research Publication Requirement for Admission

Prior to admission in a PhD program, a prospective candidate shall have published⁷:

- i. Two research articles in 'X' category journals as recognized by HJRS at the time of publication.
- ii. Two research articles in 'Y' category journals as recognized by HJRS at the time of publication.

3.5 Admission Test

- a) University is required to:
 - i. Enter a 3rd party arrangement under the University rules with any testing bodies recognized by HEC for conducting GRE/GAT/HAT General or equivalent as an eligibility condition for admission to PhD programs, with the passing score of 60%. OR
 - ii. Conduct the test equivalent to GRE/GAT/HAT General developed at the University, with the passing score of 70%.

⁶ As recognized by HJRS (HEC) at the time of publication.

⁷ A research article appearing online with valid DOI on website of an HEC's recognized research journal shall be considered published w.e.f. the date it appeared online with DOI.

- b) In addition to clause 3.4(a), the university may conduct subject test for admission in PhD programs, if required.

3.6 Statement of Purpose

As part of the application for admission to PhD programs, applicants shall be required to submit a statement of purpose, which shall form an integral part of the application. The admissions committee shall use the information provided to ascertain the preparedness and interest of the candidate in pursuing doctoral studies, and whether the department has the requisite resources to train and supervise the doctoral candidate in the subspecialty the applicant is interested in.

3.7 Coursework and Residency Requirement

The following requirements shall be fulfilled before the award of a PhD Degree:

- a. The student shall complete coursework of at least:
 - i. 24 credit hours for the students from the same discipline
 - ii. 30-33 credit hours for the students from the intra-disciplinary areas
 - iii. In both the cases, courses shall be offered through regular classes (i.e., classes that are taught on campus by full- time faculty members of the university).
 - iv. The courses shall preferably be of 800 level.
- b. The student shall complete dissertation of 9 credit hours⁸.
- c. There shall be a residency requirement for a period of at least two years starting from the date of enrolment that shall be governed by the minimum attendance requirement of the university.

3.8 Comprehensive Examination

Following the completion of coursework, every PhD student shall be required to pass a comprehensive examination to be granted candidacy as PhD researcher; provided that if the student fails to pass the comprehensive test, he or she shall be allowed one more attempt to take the test. Following are the guidelines for conducting Comprehensive Examination:

- i. The exam should be based on recapitulation of conceptual knowledge of the discipline that the student is admitted to.
- ii. The exam shall cover the courses studied, preferably, at graduate level conducted on one composite question paper.
- iii. The evaluation shall be on an aggregate basis and expressed in terms of Pass/Fail/Ungraded.

3.9 Doctoral Dissertation

Each PhD researcher shall write a doctoral dissertation reflecting relevance, credibility, effectiveness, and legitimacy of the research⁹. The dissertation must be an original and innovative contribution to knowledge that contributes to solving socio-economic problems. To improve quality of a doctoral dissertation, some regulations are suggested for the universities in the following areas:

⁸ 9 CH do not reflect the quality of research dissertation, rather it indicates the minimum number of contact hours that PhD researchers are required to spend with their research supervisor in a semester.

⁹ Boaz and Ashby (2003)

3.9.1 Selection of Research Area

The research area of the PhD researcher must:

- i. corresponds to the community needs at regional and local levels and comply with the priority national research agenda.
- ii. reflects the basic and pure research.
- iii. signifies emerging areas of research that coincide with sustainable development goals (SGDs)

3.9.2 Quality in Reporting

The quality of presentation and reporting in dissertation shall reflect following characteristics:

- i. The document is well written.
- ii. The contents are balanced, well organized, appropriately styled; clearly structured, and well cohered; and
- iii. The document is free from grammatical and spelling errors and flawed terminology.
- iv. Minor shortcomings such as inaccurate use of acronyms and clumsy looking sentence structure has been cared for.
- v. Quantitative research proposals are required to include a valid statistical design for analysis of data.
- vi. The formatting shall be compatible to international standards.

3.9.3 Methodological Quality

To produce PhD researchers capable of conducting research independently, ensuring technical soundness of their PhD dissertation is integral. Following guidelines shall be useful to make the PhD research methodologically sound:

- A. **Guidelines ensuring the quality of Qualitative Research:** A PhD research dissertation, based on the Qualitative Research methods should satisfy, at least, the following questions¹⁰:
 - a. “Does the research, as reported, illuminate the subjective meaning, actions and contexts of those being researched?”
 - b. “Is there evidence of the adaption and responsiveness of the research design to the circumstances and issues of real-life social settings met during the course of the study?”
 - c. “Does the sample produce the type of knowledge necessary to understand the structures and processes within which the individuals or situations are located?”
 - d. “Is the description provided detailed enough to allow the researcher or reader to interpret the meaning and context of what is being researched?”
 - e. “How are the different sources of knowledge about the same issue compared and contrasted?”
 - f. “Are subjective perceptions and experiences treated as knowledge in their own right?”
 - g. “How does the research move from a description of the data through quotation or examples, to an analysis and interpretation of the meaning and significance of it?”

- B. **Guidelines ensuring the quality of Quantitative Research:** A PhD dissertation with Quantitative Research methods should satisfy, at least, the following questions¹¹

¹⁰ Boaz and Ashby (2003)

¹¹ Popay, Rogers, and Williams (1998)

- a. Reliability – are the results repeatable?
- b. Validity – does it measure what it says it does?
- c. Internal validity – do the research results mean what they appear to?
- d. External validity – can the results be generalized to other settings (ecological validity) and to other populations (population validity)?
- e. Replicability – are the results of the study reproducible?

3.9.4 Appropriateness of the Methods to the Aims of the Study

To achieve research objectives, alignment of research approach-methods is necessary. Therefore, a PhD dissertation at least:

- a. reflect a fair proportion of latest knowledge of contemporary techniques and methods in relation to study objectives.
 - b. contain detailed and easily comprehensible discussions regarding the applied methods and techniques.
 - c. justify the use of methods and techniques to achieve study objectives.
 - d. show evaluation of obtained results in relation with study objectives.
- And:
- e. the methods and techniques used should justify the results obtained.
 - f. the obtained results should support the study objectives.

3.9.5 Relevance to the Policy and Practice

The research should have significantly answered the questions related to policy and practice in that area establishing its usefulness and usability. Accordingly, a PhD dissertation at least:

- a. reflect judicious evaluation of study results in relation with policy related aims and goals undertaken while starting the research.
 - b. discuss the practical implications of the study results in association with the developing practices in that area.
 - c. establish usefulness of the study results for devising policy as stated in the beginning.
 - d. discuss that how would the resulting policy be useful for organization/society.
- And:
- e. the study output should be significant enough to be published or to be patented.
 - f. the assessment of the results performed by the author must not be superficial and lacks substance.

3.10 External Evaluation of PhD Dissertation

- i. The PhD dissertation must be evaluated by:
 - a. At least two external experts who may be either:
 - i. Pakistan-based Distinguished National Professors, Meritorious Professors; Professors from any national university or any Professor from top ranked¹² universities by HEC; or Professor from any Pakistani University having

¹² As categorized by HEC applying Pakistan Precepts, Standards, and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Higher Education-2023(PPSG-2023) or applying any other approved criteria (in case the PPSG-2023 is not applicable)

- minimum H-Index 30 for sciences, 15 for social science or 8 for Art & Humanities as determined by Web of Science. OR
- ii. PhD experts from the world top 500 universities ranked by the Times Higher Education or QS World Ranking in the year corresponding to dissertation evaluation year.

OR

- b. At least one external expert qualifying any one of the conditions mentioned at ‘a’ above if the PhD candidate publishes dissertation research in a peer reviewed journal that is classified by the HEC as category X or above.
- ii. At least the following general guidelines shall be observed while selecting external evaluator:
 - a. Relevance of Expertise: in the same or related field as of the dissertation.
 - b. No Conflict of Interest: in personal, financial, or professional stakes in a particular decision or outcome.
 - c. Objectivity: capable of making unbiased evaluation.
 - d. Diversity: in terms of geography, culture, professional backgrounds etc.
 - e. Reputation: must be good in the field, with a track record of fair and thorough evaluations.
 - f. Availability: should have the time and availability to review the dissertation.
 - g. Professionalism: capable of conducting themselves in a professional and respectful manner throughout the evaluation and defense process (if applicable).
 - h. Communication: capable of providing clear and constructive feedback on dissertation.
 - i. Confidentiality: capable of maintaining confidentiality and protecting the intellectual property of the dissertation.
 - j. Compatibility: well versed with the research methodology, approach, and theories used in the dissertation.

3.11 Plagiarism, Similarity Test and Open Defense

- a. Under no circumstances shall a dissertation based on plagiarized research be acceptable. It is the primary responsibility of both PhD researchers and their supervisors to prevent plagiarism. To avoid plagiarism, it is important to follow the provisions outlined in this document i.e., Governing Research Supervision and Research Ethics.
- b. If a PhD dissertation is found to be plagiarized, it will be handled in accordance with the Anti-Plagiarism Policy issued by the Higher Education Commission, Pakistan, as updated from time to time.
- c. A similarity test,¹³ in accordance with the HEC’s Anti-Plagiarism Policy, must be conducted on the dissertation before its submission to the external experts by the student.
- d. An open defense of the dissertation is required after positive evaluation of the dissertation by the committee members. Generally, the following minimum principles/guidelines shall be ensured:

¹³ See relevant section of this policy for detailed guidelines on ethics of using similarity detection software and interpreting the similarity reports.

- i. Public Announcement: using all forms of communication so that anyone interested can participate.
- ii. Public Access: Within or outside of the university like community/town halls or important public venues.
- iii. Neutral Chair: to ensure that defense was conducted fairly and in accordance with the rules and regulations.
- iv. Review Committee: To evaluate the dissertation and defense.
- v. Presentation: of the dissertation by the PhD researcher
- vi. Question and Answer Session: To provide basis for defense evaluation.
- vii. Objective Evaluation: based on quality of research and researcher's ability to defend.
- viii. Final Decision: to be expressed in the following terms:
 - Pass
 - Pass with minor amendments.
 - Deferred for resubmission and re-defense.
 - Fail (in exceptional circumstances and for the reasons to be recorded by the defense committee)

3.12 Research Publication

For award of PhD degree, each PhD researcher shall be required to publish research articles meeting the following criteria:

- i. At least:
 - a. One research article in W category¹⁴ journals or two research articles in X category journals, for science disciplines
 - b. One research article in X category journals or two research articles in Y category journals, for social science disciplines
- ii. The PhD researcher shall be the first author of these publications.
- iii. The total number of authors shall not be more than five.
- iv. The research article shall be relevant to the PhD research work of the PhD researcher
- v. The article shall be published after the approval of research synopsis.
- vi. The article shall be published in the relevant research journal.

3.13 Degree Completion Timeline

- i. The PhD degree shall be awarded by universities after a minimum of three (3) years and not more than eight (8) years after the enrolment of the student.
- ii. The date of notification of the award of the PhD degree after the PhD defense shall be the date of the completion of PhD studies.
- iii. The maximum duration shall be determined from the date of enrollment of the student till the date of the completion notification of the PhD degree.
- iv. The normal duration of the degree program is 3 years (6 regular semesters) and HEC has allows 5 years extra (i.e. 10 regular semesters) to combat with the contingencies. However, the students who are unable to complete the program within four (4) years, the university may designate a competent authority to determine whether the delay was caused by circumstances beyond the student's control (e.g., unnecessary

¹⁴ As categorized in HJRS at the time of acceptance of the research article

delays/governance issues at the part of university or catastrophes - natural or human caused - and if so, grant an extension in such exceptional circumstances and also fix responsibility in case the delay was caused by the poor governance.¹⁵

3.14 Award of MS/MPhil Degree based on PhD Studies

If a student successfully completes the full set of requirements for the award of an MS/MPhil (or equivalent) degree during their PhD studies, the university may award the applicable degree to such students upon completion of the relevant requirements.

¹⁵ The students enrolled before the enactment of this policy shall also be dealt following the procedure outlined in this document.

PART-II: GOVERNING THE SYSTEMS OF DOCTORAL RESEARCH

4. GOVERNING THE RESEARCH SUPERVISION

4.1 Principles and Purposes

To inculcate a research culture for producing good quality research, some policies and procedures governing the overall system of research in a university/DAI/HEI, must be in place. Following are the HEC guidelines for improvements:

4.2 Supervision of Doctoral Dissertation

4.2.1. General Conditions to Supervise Doctoral Research¹⁶

At least the following general guidelines shall be observed while allocating a PhD supervisor:

- i. Shall be PhD degree holder complying with the criteria/standards provided in this policy.
- ii. Must be relevant to the field of research in which the student intends to conduct research.
- iii. Should have NO CONFLICT OF INTEREST in personal, financial, or professional stakes.
- iv. Should have the time and availability to supervise PhD dissertation and give clear and constructive feedback.
- v. Capable of conducting themselves in a professional and respectful manner throughout the supervision process.
- vi. Capable of maintaining confidentiality and protecting the intellectual property of the dissertation.

In addition to the afore mentioned:

- vii. The research supervisor shall be allocated to a doctoral student from the date of enrollment.
- viii. The supervisory load of the research supervisor shall be 5 PhD students at a time. However, fresh PhDs can supervise one PhD student in 1st year, two PhD students in 2nd year and maximum up to 5 PhD students from 3rd years onward, subject to fulfillment of other conditions.
- ix. The university/DAI/HEI shall allocate supervision/research space to the doctoral student.
- x. The research supervisors shall not use the research work of their supervisees unless authorized by them.
- xi. The university shall certify that the allocated supervisor fulfills all the requirements set by HEC.

¹⁶ The “General Conditions to Supervise Doctoral Research” along with the “Criteria to be a PhD Supervisor” are applicable on fresh PhDs intending to supervise PhD research and effective from the date of enactment of this policy. All the previously approved supervisor shall remain approved until the date mentioned on their award letter.

4.2.2. Criteria to be a PhD supervisor¹⁷

To be a supervisor of PhD researcher, an individual is to meet the following requirements:

i. General Requirements:

- a) Qualification: A PhD degree from an HEC-recognized national university/degree awarding institute (DAI), or reputable international university/institute.
- b) Courses: Shall have passed self-paced courses, either designed by National Academy of Higher Education (NAHE) or by the University¹⁸ to train PhD degree holders to supervise MS/MPhil/Equivalent and PhD researchers as per the following prescription:
 - i. Basic level course: to supervise students of MS/MPhil/Equivalent degrees.
 - ii. Advance level course: to supervise researchers of PhD degrees.
- c) A regular/adjunct faculty member or researcher at a public or private university or DAI, or position of researcher or scientist at any R&D or public/private sector organization. However, in case of a non-faculty PhD supervisor, who otherwise meets the criteria of being a PhD supervisor, needs to provide an NOC from the parent organization.

ii. Publication Requirements:

In addition to fulfilling the General Requirements, a PhD supervisor must publish research articles in the HEC's recognized research journals and the category as specified in HJRS for the publication year. These conditions are different for different disciplines and aim to ensure that the potential PhD supervisor is an active researcher:

A. Specific Requirements for Science and Technology:

a. For Indigenous PhDs:

- i. Within the last 3 years after PhD: at least one research publications in W category journal. OR
- ii. Within last 5 years after PhD: at least two research publications in X category journal. OR
- iii. Above five years after PhD:
 - a. One W category publication within last 3 years
 - b. Two X category publications within the last 5 years.

b. For Foreign PhDs:

- i. The PhD degree must be obtained from the top 500¹⁹ universities ranked by the Times Higher Education or QS World Ranking. And
- ii. Within the last 5 years after foreign PhD: at least one research publication in X category journal.
OR

¹⁷ Approved PhD Supervisor Criteria of HEC: (<https://www.hec.gov.pk/english/scholarshipsgrants/ASA/Pages/EligibilityCriteria.aspx>)

¹⁸ A course designed by the University itself, shall be accredited by National Accreditation Council for Teacher Evaluation before provision of training.

¹⁹ If a foreign PhD degree is not from one of the top 500 universities ranked by the Times Higher Education / QS World Ranking, but it is recognized by HEC, it will be considered equivalent to a degree from a Pakistani university for the purpose of applying the relevant criteria.

- iii. Above 5 years after foreign PhD:
 - a. One W category publication within the last 3 years. OR
 - b. Two X category publications within the last 5 years.

B. Specific Requirements for Social Science, Arts and Humanities and Business Education:

a. For Indigenous PhDs:

- i. Within the last 3 years after PhD: at least one research publications in W category journal. OR
- ii. Within the last 5 years after PhD: at least two research publications in X or four publications in Y category journal. OR
- iii. Above five years after PhD:
 - a. One W category publication within last 3 years
 - b. Two X or 4 Y category publications within last 5 years.

b. For Foreign PhDs:

- i. The PhD degree must be obtained from the top 500 universities ranked by the Times Higher Education or QS World Ranking. And
- ii. Within last 2 years after foreign PhD degree: 1 W category publication. OR
- iii. Within last 3 years after foreign PhD degree: 2 X category publications. OR
- iv. Within last 5 years after foreign PhD degree: 4 X category publications. OR
- v. Above 5 years after foreign PhD:
 - a. One W category publication within last 3 years
 - b. Two X or 4 Y category publications within last 5 years.

C. Specific Requirements for Local National Languages:

- i. have completed PhD in last five years, two publications in at least Y category journals as recognized by the HEC's HJRS for the publication year.
- ii. have completed PhD in more than five years, three publications in at least Y category journals as recognized by the HEC's HJRS for the publication year.

4.2.3. Supervisory Process

To guide the supervisory process of doctoral dissertation towards desired goals, the universities/DAIs/HEIs shall: i) Devise a supervision manual and ensure its implantation and, ii) Constitute a Supervisory Committee for each individual doctoral student.

- i. The research supervision manual shall elaborate the following areas to guide the supervisory process:
 - a. Description of roles of supervisor & supervisee
 - b. Prescription of supervision timespan
 - c. Guidance about preparation for best supervision
 - d. Guidance to discuss questions and problems with constructive comments observing the element of mutual respect.
 - e. Guidance about setting reasonable amount of work and receiving constructive feedback.
 - f. Directions for supervision per the social norms.
 - g. Provision of tentative timetable and schedule of meetings

- h. Provision of proformas/registers showing meetings and research records etc.
 - i. Provision of grievances policy
- ii. HEC recommends following composition to constitute a Supervisory Committee, for each doctoral researcher, to supervise doctoral research:
- a. Supervisor²⁰ Convener
 - b. Co-supervisor (if any) Member
 - c. Minimum 2 PhD faculty members, of whom one Member
 faculty member shall be from the other department of
 the same university.

4.3 University Directorate of Advance Studies and Research or Equivalent Department

- i. The head of the Directorate of Advance Studies and Research (DASR) or equivalent department shall not be less than a Dean or equivalent position.
- ii. The Directorate shall serve as the secretariate of the Board of Advance Studies / Equivalent Body. Such a board/body shall be responsible for the quality of all the graduate degree programs being offered by the university/DAI/HEI as well as the research that shall be conducted under these programs.
- iii. DASR/Equivalent department shall prepare a graduate Studies Prospectus, describing the complete process for award of a graduate degrees and ensure that the booklet shall be available for guidance of all the graduate students.
- iv. DASR/Equivalent department shall monitor and ensure that thesis/dissertation is progressing in accordance with the time prescribed in the booklet. It includes, but not limited to, the timely: approval of the research synopsis, evaluation of the research thesis / dissertation in accordance with the HEC guidelines as well as its submission, and finally the conduct of open defense.

4.4 Teaching Assistantships and Research Assistantships:

The university departments may offer Teaching and Research Assistantships to outstanding PhD enrolled students at various stages of their enrollment.

- i. Teaching assistantships provide an opportunity to PhD students to assist a professor to prepare teaching and research materials for groups of students enrolled in his/her classes.
- ii. Research assistants are paid a Fellowship stipend to outstanding Research scholars who assist a professor out of Research Grant he/she has received. The stipend varies based on the level of effort and the budget available to the Principal Investigator.
- iii. Universities may have named scholarships to promote quality Research by philanthropic donors on priority themes and topics on the national research agenda.

²⁰ “Supervisor” means the research supervisor of the PhD researcher.

5. PRACTICING THE ACADEMIC RESEARCH ETHICS

5.1 Principles and Purposes

The international Center for Academic Integrity²¹ (2022) defines Academic Integrity as “a commitment, even in the face of adversity, to six fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage. From these values flow principles of behavior that enable academic communities to translate ideals into action.”

Thus, the main purpose of this section is to guide academics how to put these core values into practice in universities/HEIs/DAIs so that academic communities could be protected by preventing academic misconducts. This may, however, be noted that these guidelines are not binding, rather are prescriptive in their nature. In this regard, the main regulatory framework to prevent academic misconducts lies with the Anti-Plagiarism policy issued by the Higher Education Commission, Pakistan, from time to time.

5.2 Guidelines to Ensure Academic Research Integrity²²:

To inculcate a culture of academic integrity, the Universities/HEIs/DAIs shall:

- i. Develop/adopt/adapt and regularly publicize policies promoting academic integrity and dealing with allegations of academic misconduct.
- ii. Develop procedures to prevent foreseeable risks to academic and research integrity.
- iii. Strengthen the system governing the conduct of doctoral research.
- iv. All the governing bodies must ensure that occurrence of academic misconduct and breaches are monitored, and action taken to address underlying cause is documented.
- v. Regularly educate and train students/faculty and administration about what constitutes academic or research misconduct and maintain good practices in this regard.
- vi. Ensure that information to keep academic integrity is available to all prospective and current students.
- vii. Ensure that unauthorized access to private and sensitive information is detained/controlled.
- viii. Regularly assess and ensure that the academic and research integrity are maintained in accordance with the developed policies and procedures. In this regard, it shall be ensured that a self-assessment checklist has been prepared and implemented.
- ix. Acquire license of similarity detection software and develop policies/procedures to ensure its productive use. In this regard, some guidelines are given in next sections:

5.3 Guidelines on Ethics of Using Similarity Detection Software (for Administrators)²³

- i. Universities/Institutions need to apprise students/faculty members about the HEC Anti-Plagiarism Policy and Turnitin service.
- ii. The Administrators need to create accounts of all faculty members of their respective University/Institution.

²¹ International Center for Academic Integrity, <https://academicintegrity.org/>

²² Tertiary Education Quality and Standard Agency, Australia

²³ HEC guidelines on using Turnitin.

- iii. The Administrators shall maintain their privacy and shall not disclose any report to anyone except the concerned person and to the concerned authorities, if required.
- iv. If the Instructor/Scholar is involved in screening of papers and of theses of other authors, then the Administrator shall report to the University authorities with evidence.

5.4 Guidelines on Ethics of Using Similarity Detection Software (for Instructors)

- i. Instructors are required to create classes and enroll students in these classes.
- ii. Students/Scholars should be informed that their work will be checked through anti-plagiarism service, therefore, they must follow proper documenting style in writing report/paper/thesis.
- iii. References/bibliography and table of contents must be removed from document which is submitted. If these are included, then the similarity index of the document will be increased.
- iv. Instructor may allow students to view their reports. Instructor will maintain the privacy and will not disclose any report to anyone except the concerned person and to the concerned authorities, if required.
- v. If Scholar/Student is involved in checking of papers and of theses of any other person, then Instructor shall report to University authorities about that with valid proof.
- vi. Originality/Similarity reports generated by Turnitin provide clues in form of text matches. Proverbs, Universal Truths, phrases etc. Scholars/Students must make sure that document they are submitting is in proper documenting style (i.e., IEEE, Chicago, MLA, APA etc.) and is free of plagiarism.
- vii. If the report has similarity index $\leq 19\%$, then benefit of doubt may be given to the author but, in case, any single source has similarity index $\geq 5\%$ without citation then it needs to be revised.
- viii. If similarities of a report are from author's own (previous) work, then these may be ignored only if the material has been cited by the author.
- ix. As documents which are checked through this service are not yet published and no benefit is acquired, therefore, no punishment or penalty is recommended. It is advised that similarities at greater level may be taken care of in the light of the HEC plagiarism policy.

5.5 Guidelines on Interpreting Originality Report

- i. Similarity index of the originality report is showing matches of submitted work with internet content. It is not verdict that document with high similarity index is plagiarized.
- ii. Similarity index is based on percentage of matched text out of total number of words in the document.
- iii. Instructor/Faculty member must verify each similarity index for potential clue of plagiarism.
- iv. If similarities in the document are significant then scholar/student may be guided accordingly, or case may be reported based on the evidence.
- v. The similarities in the document may contain matches with author's previous work; it may be ignored if it is the same work.

- vi. Bibliography and quoted material may be excluded after verifying. It is important to note that too much quoted material is not desired as per policy.
- vii. Common phrases and proper nouns also appear as similarities in the report; therefore, every instructor/faculty member should ignore matches returned from them.
- viii. The originality report will show similarities from three major sources: internet, periodicals, and student repository. Similarities returned from student repository may be ignored if it is author's own same work. Similarities from Student repository helps in detecting collusion in the documents.
- ix. The graphs, tables, formulae, and other pictorial material are not matched through the service therefore, it will only offer similarities with only text.
- x. The instructor/faculty member supervising students/scholars can give verdict of plagiarism after interpreting report.

6. MANAGING THE GRIEVANCES OF GRADUATE STUDENTS

6.1 Principles and Purposes

The purpose of this section is the provision of minimum guidelines for Universities/HEIs enabling them to establish a grievance management system so that all the grievances/complaints of graduate students/prospective students and stakeholders are ensured to be addressed in a fair, equitable and timely manner, by adhering to the following principals²⁴:

- a. Provide timely responses to grievances from students, potential students, or stakeholders.
- b. Aim to develop a culture where grievances are viewed as an opportunity for improvement.
- c. Ensure that students or potential students are free to make complaints without fear of discrimination.
- d. Ensure that staff are aware of grievance processes and are trained appropriately to ensure that processes are consistently applied.
- e. Require respectful behavior amongst all parties when handling grievances.
- f. Communicate effectively in a timely manner to keep all parties up to date with the progress of the grievance.
- g. Ensure that all information is held in the utmost confidence.
- h. Ensure that the principles of natural justice are applied.
- i. Aim to ensure that grievances are resolved to the satisfaction of all parties.

6.2 Guidelines to Establish a Grievance Management System

- i. The Universities/HEIs shall develop/adopt/adapt a grievance management policy, through its statutory bodies, covering:
 - a. Aims of the policy and nature of the grievances. In general, all grievances of academic nature include, but not limited to, issues related to student progress, assessment, curriculum, and awards during study.
 - b. Values to inculcate a culture where grievances are viewed as an opportunity for improvement. In general, such values may, but not limited to, include

²⁴ Health Education Collaborative Grievance and Harassment Policy (2020), (<https://healthec.com.au/>)

valuing diversity, inclusiveness, equality, confidentiality and showing respect for all the parties involved. A culture of reporting through the appropriate forums should be encouraged.

- c. The principal authorities responsible to address the academic grievances/complaints and their roles/responsibilities. In general, the Heads of the Departments/Directors/Deans and the Vice Chancellor/Rectors/Heads of Universities/HEIs shall be responsible for addressing the grievances of graduate students/prospective students and stakeholders, in line with the grievance management policy of their relevant university/HEI.
 - d. Rights, roles, and responsibilities of the complainers.
 - e. Procedures/processes and timelines for easily accessing grievance settlement procedure/system and lodging grievances/complaints; timely response thereto; and settlement thereof, up to the satisfaction of all the parties.
 - f. Rules ensuring that the complainants shall have a fair opportunity to formally present their case and each party to a grievance may be accompanied and assisted by a support person (such as a family member, friend, counsellor, or other professional support person, other than a legal representative) at any relevant meetings.
 - g. Methods and rules ensuring that the complainants and the respondents shall not be victimized and/or discriminated at any time.
 - h. Procedures of keeping records and confidentiality.
 - i. Guidance to give hearing to the parties involved, taking notes and reasoning for decisions to be written and actions taken.
 - j. Process elaborating how and when to launch an appeal in case the decision does not support the complainer or the accused.
 - k. Process to implement the decision and/or required corrective and preventive actions in case the decision supports the complaint.
- ii. The structure of the grievance management system shall be hierarchal, starting from lowest authority like Head/Chair of the Department, then Dean/Director of the faculty/institute and shall finally be presented to the Academic Board/Committee constituted to hear grievances in case the grievance/complaint is not settled at each level. However, the intent of the system should be to resolve the grievance/complaint at lowest level with minimal impact.
 - iii. To make the system more effective and efficient, the Universities/HEIs shall develop a parallel, informal, system to preempt the grievances/complaints by allocating Councilors to the students and Mentors to the employees. The Councilors and Mentors should be competent to use consultative and teaching approaches to raise awareness and prevent issues.
 - iv. To create, further, awareness about the grievance management system and inculcate its values, the Universities/HEIs shall conduct seminars and trainings for students, faculty, and non-academic staff.
 - v. The system/policy shall be reviewed after an appropriate time to be decided by the Board/Committee constituted to hear the grievances.

PART-III: QUALITY ASSURANCE

7. QUALITY ASSURANCE

In preceding parts, the HEC has prescribed minimum standards/guidelines for the launching of new programs at Graduate level and requires universities to provide evidence of compliance with these standards/guidelines to obtain approval from the HEC before starting the graduate programs. The purpose of this policy is that only those universities should start graduate programs that have the necessary faculty and infrastructure resources to impart education at the highest level in the discipline. The Quality Assurance Agency, HEC shall validate the implementation of the these standards/guidelines prescribed in Part-I & II as well as mentioned hereafter through its QA Framework:

7.1 Minimum Requirement for Academic HR

7.1.1 Faculty and supervisory requirement

- a. At least two (2) full time faculty members holding PhD degrees in the relevant field shall be available/appointed to the department to launch an MS/MPhil/Equivalent program that may be increased up to three (3) in case a PhD program is also to be launched in the same discipline and department.
- b. The minimum appointment tenure of full-time faculty member must not be less than the duration of the intended degree program.
- c. The teacher to student ratio shall be 1:12, where a supervisor can supervise a total of twelve (12) MS/MPhil/PhD students at a time with no more than five (5) of these students being PhD students. Graduate teaching and supervision load shall be adjusted accordingly.

7.1.2 Determining relevance of faculty with subject/degree program

- a) The subject and supervisory relevance of faculty members shall be determined based on:
 - i. Qualifications including Bachelor, Master, and PhD degrees.
 - ii. Research includes Thesis/Dissertation and published articles.
 - iii. Experience consisting of teaching and administrative domains.
- b) To ascertain the relevance of the faculty in the related discipline with the program and supervision of theses, the university shall:
 - i. constitute a Relevance Assessment Committee (RAC), with approval of the Vice Chancellor/Rector/Head of HEI.
 - ii. The RAC shall consist of at least 5 members namely:
 - a. Respective Dean of the university
 - b. Director QEC of the university
 - c. Two External subject expert not less than a professor /Associate Professor
 - d. Program Team/Assessment Team member who was involved in preparing self-assessment report of the program.
- c) RAC shall submit a report with detailed reasons and rationale of the decision of assessment.
- d) The Report shall be effective with the approval of the relevant statutory bodies.

7.2 NOC Requirements for Launching Graduate Programs

7.2.1 Category-wise²⁵ application of NOC requirement

- a. Effective from the enactment date of this policy, the top ranked universities/degree awarding institutes (DAIs)/Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) need NOT to obtain no objection certificate (NOC) from HEC, provided that these universities/DAIs shall not have violated HEC's rules, regulations, or policies in any material respect in the last two years. The top ranked universities/DAIs/HEIs that shall be found violating the HEC's rules/regulations/policies, shall be included in the lower category and may be dealt with in accordance with the HEC's policy for violation of rules.
- b. All the universities/DAIs/HEIs enlisted in the categories below the top category, must have to obtain NOC prior to the launch of any graduate program adhering to the following timelines:
 - i. Graduate Programs Launched Prior to November 7, 2013:
For any graduate programs launched before November 7, 2013, universities shall be required to ensure compliance with this policy. HEC shall ensure compliance systematically applying approved quality assurance mechanism.
 - ii. Graduate Programs Launched After November 7, 2013:
Any graduate programs started after November 7, 2013, without getting an NOC from the HEC shall not be recognized, and degrees awarded by such programs shall not be attested by the HEC.
- c. The lower category universities/DAIs/HEIs that have taken adequately and timely remedial measures to rectify the deficiencies/violations and have demonstrated an ability of sustainable compliance with the HEC's requirements may be included in top category, on sole discretion of HEC.
- d. Similarly, the top category universities may also be demoted to lower category where such universities are found violating HEC's requirements within past two years. For this purpose, such under observation universities/DAIs/HEIs must have to take adequate and timely remedial measures to rectify the violations.
- e. The lowest category (Ineffective/Unclassified) universities shall not be allowed to launch more than two (2) PhD programs in a single year.
- f. The Higher Education Commission shall issue the lists of universities categorized in afore-mentioned terms.
- g. The university/DAI/HEI that shall be found violating the HEC's rules/regulations/policies, shall be dealt with in accordance with the HEC's policy.

7.2.2 Process and timelines for obtaining an NOC to launch graduate programs

The process and timeline for requesting NOCs for the launch of graduate programs shall be as follows:

- a. Universities intending to launch a new graduate program shall submit a prescribed dossier, duly signed by the Dean, Registrar, Director Quality Enhancement, and head

²⁵ As categorized by HEC applying Pakistan Precepts, Standards, and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Higher Education-2023(PPSG-2023) or applying any other approved criteria (in case the PPSG-2023 is not applicable)

of the relevant university who shall certify to the correctness of the information provided and shall ensure that all required documents are attached with the application dossier.

- b. Universities shall apply for the NOC before launching any new graduate programs, and no admissions shall be advertised unless the NOC has been obtained from HEC.
- c. Universities requesting NOCs for launching graduate programs in the fall semester shall apply no later than March 31 of the same year.
- d. Universities requesting NOCs to launch a graduate program in the spring semester, shall apply no later than September 30 of the last year.
- e. The HEC may, at its discretion, require an external review or a zero visit in connection with the launching of graduate programs by a university.

7.2.3 Continuing compliance with the HEC's policies

If a university's application for launching a graduate program is successful, the university shall be granted an NOC for starting the program. Upon receiving the NOC from the HEC, the university may launch the program subject to the following conditions:

- a. The university shall ensure that it will continue to comply with the requirements set in this policy during the entire period that it offers the graduate program.
- b. If an ongoing program fails to meet any of the requirements set in this policy, it shall immediately stop further admissions to the program and notify the HEC, including providing information on remedial actions being taken by the university.

7.2.4 Cancellation of NOC and/or demotion to the lower category

If a graduate program fails to meet the requirements set in this policy, the HEC may:

- a. Stop all activities of the program for six months to make up the deficiencies.
- b. Further intake may be stopped if the deficiencies are not fulfilled within 6 months of the date of the review report.
- c. In case the major deficiencies are not fulfilled even after one year of the date of review report, HEC may take the following actions:
 - i. The university may be demoted to lower categories (if applicable), and
 - ii. NOC of the deficient graduate program may be cancelled; and/or
 - iii. Further NOC for the under-consideration program may be banned for at least two years.
 - iv. In case the NOC is cancelled, the students who are at advance stage i.e., have passed Comprehensive Examinations and their research synopses have been notified by the Directorate of Advance Studies (or equivalent department), may be allowed to continue with their research, if research supervisors are available for them. However, those who are yet to pass comprehensive exam, may be stopped or allowed to quit/shift to another university at the risk & cost of the parent university.
- d. The officers responsible for cancellation of NOC shall be subject to dealt under the punitive policy.

7.3 Punitive policy for violation of rules

In addition to the afore mentioned, the following punitive policy shall also be applicable in case the rules and regulations mentioned in this policy are violated:

Sr.	Quality Parameter	Nature of Violation	Proposed Action(s) if Existing Policy is Violated
	Admission Criteria	Violation of admission criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admission be cancelled. • University to return three tie the amount received from the student. • Disciplinary action against responsible staff.
	Illegal Admission	Admission of students without NOC from HEC	
	Course Work	Degree awarded without minimum fulfilling the minimum credit hours requirement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Degree shall be considered equivalent to MS/MPhil/Equivalent degree. • Supervisor shall be banned from supervising the new PhD scholars for five years. • Disciplinary action against Department Chair
	Comprehensive Examination	Failure to clear Comprehensive Examination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Termination of PhD candidature / registration of the student.
	Supervision of dissertation	Supervision of PhD dissertation by a person who does not fulfil the minimum criteria to a PhD supervisor.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disciplinary action against the Department Chair
	Maximum number of Supervisees	A supervisor is supervising PhD students beyond the maximum number specified by HEC.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervisor be banned from supervising the new PhD researchers for 05 years. • Disciplinary action against Department Chair.
	External Evaluation of PhD dissertation	The external evaluation of thesis is not per the prescribed criteria of HEC.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One additional paper be published by the student from his/her dissertation before degree attestation. • Supervisor be banned from supervising the new PhD researchers for 05 years. • Disciplinary action against Department Chair
		Unjustified delay in sending dissertation for external evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The officer(s) responsible for sending dissertation for external evaluation be warned.

	Relevance	The dissertation has no relevancy to the Title and Scope of the degree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervisor be banned from supervising the new PhD researchers for 05 years. • Disciplinary action against Department Chair.
	Research Publication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No research paper published but degree awarded. • Paper published but not in the HEC's recognized journal. • Paper published but not in the required category of journal. • Paper published after award of PhD degree. • Degree awarded on the basis of the paper published before approval of PhD research synopsis. • Degree awarded on the basis of the paper that has no relevancy with the dissertation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper to be published in the required category of the HEC recognized journal before attestation of degree. • Supervisor be banned from supervising the new PhD researchers for 05 years. • Disciplinary action against Department Chair.
	Plagiarism	Degree awarded and major or minor plagiarism found in the thesis at any stage in future.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The PhD researcher/degree holder and his supervisor will be penalized as per the provisions of Anti-Plagiarism Policy of HEC.
	PhD Duration	Degree awarded before or after the minimum or maximum time specified by HEC.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Degree shall not be accepted / attested. • Supervisor be banned from supervising the new PhD scholar for 05 years. • Disciplinary action against Department Chair.
	Degree Issued in Violation of University's Own Rules / Law	Degree issued in violation of the university's PhD Policy / rules in addition to HEC guidelines.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervisor be banned from supervising the new PhD researchers for 05 years. • Disciplinary action against Department Chair and Controller of Examination.

7.4 Reporting Requirements

On completion of PhD studies, the universities/HEIs/DAIs are required to submit following documents to the HEC as per the HEC's procedure:

- a. A duly filled completion form by Office of the Controller Examinations of the university notifying that the PhD scholar has completed all the requirements for the award of PhD degree.
- b. A soft copy of PhD Dissertation for inclusion in PhD Country Directory and for attestation of the PhD degree by the HEC.
- c. A duly filled Proforma for the PhD Country Directory, approved by the Principal Supervisor, Controller of Examination, and the Vice Chancellor (or Rector).
- d. Any other requirement/procedure amended/approved by the HEC from time to time.