

**POLICY FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AT
HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN PAKISTAN**



HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

2019

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INTRODUCTION

- 1 Higher Education Commission (HEC) is committed to its founding objective that no one should be denied access to higher education in Pakistan, and this includes making possible equal opportunities of higher education for students with disabilities.
- 2 This Policy aims to enable an environment in the Higher Education Sector which not only motivates students with disabilities to undertake higher education, but also facilitates their participation in all academic and extra-curricular aspects of a university education.
- 3 The Policy recognizes that disability covers a wide range of impairments and different disabilities can have varying impacts on study, work and other aspects of life, warranting special considerations in the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) for persons with disabilities to successfully acquire higher education.
- 4 This policy is an extension of the “Disabled Persons (Employment and Rehabilitation) Ordinance, 1981”, “Disabled Persons (Employment and Rehabilitation) (Amendment) Act 2012”, “Sindh Differently Aabled Persons (Employment, Rehabilitation and Welfare) Act, 2014”, and “Government of the Punjab Higher Education Department Notification No. S.O. (A-II) 1-83/2012, dated November 7th, 2013”. The policy further elaborates and regulates the directions given in the abovementioned legislations to higher education sector of Pakistan.
- 5 Moreover, Pakistan is a partner in the global movement for the socio-economic well-being of persons with disabilities by signing and ratifying the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and through adoption of the SDGs 2030 agenda. The Sustainable Development Goal 10, *Reduce inequality within and among countries*, includes empowerment and promotion of social, economic and political inclusion of all irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status.

DEFINITION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

- 6 Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others¹.

DECLARATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

A person certified as a disabled person from the National/Provincial Council for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons or carrying a Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC) with the disability logo.

¹ United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)

HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION'S MANDATE

- 7 HEC recognizes that persons with disabilities are valuable members of the country and it is its obligation to undertake all judicious actions to enable persons with disabilities to avail the opportunities for higher education available to other students.
- 8 Through this policy HEC endeavors to eliminate regulatory, physical, organizational, academic and social obstacles at HEIs that might hamper academic and career pursuits of persons with disabilities. And seeks to create an environment that provides them equal economic opportunities, recognition of their inherent dignity, protection of their rights and full participation at the Higher Education Institutions of Pakistan.
- 9 All Higher Education Institutions of Pakistan - including universities, affiliated colleges and degree awarding institutions - are to comply with their statutory obligations as well as the constituents of this Policy in a manner that is progressive and facilitative for the persons with disabilities.

SCOPE OF THE POLICY

- 10 This policy applies to all public and private sector Higher Education Institutions of Pakistan. HEC expects all Higher Education Institutions to be aware of this policy and the related code of conduct.
- 11 Through this policy it is stipulated that persons with disabilities at the HEIs including students, faculty and staff will be treated fairly, with respect and will not be subjected to discrimination² at any stage during their academic or professional pursuits.
- 12 The main focus of this policy are all students with disabilities that engage with Higher Education Institutions; including enrolled students, prospective students and students that acquired disability during their course of study.

13 ACCESSIBILITY COMMITTEE

- (i) Each Higher Education Institution will establish a Standing Accessibility Committee comprising of 3-5 members from faculty, administration and student body. This Committee will be responsible for ensuring that this policy is communicated to

² United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities defines **Discrimination on the basis of disability** as:

“any distinction, exclusion or restriction on the basis of disability which has the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal basis with others, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. It includes all forms of discrimination, including denial of *reasonable accommodation*.”

“**Reasonable accommodation**” means necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.”

students, faculty and staff effectively and is being implemented at their Institution in its entirety.

- (ii) The members of the Accessibility Committee will be designated by the Vice Chancellor/Rector/Head of HEI.
- (iii) The responsibilities of the Accessibility Committee are detailed below:
 - a. Promoting awareness of different disabilities and disability related issues, and emphasizing the need to protect and promote rights of persons with disabilities, at the HEI through dedicated seminars, fundraising events, discussions, workshops and community engagement activities.
 - b. Providing information and advice on facilities and support for persons with disabilities to students, parents, staff and faculty.
 - c. Determining access requirements of students with disabilities that enroll/are enrolled at the HEI.
 - d. Arrange assessment of the extent of disability and access requirements of students with disabilities by a professional, whenever necessitated.
 - e. Raise funds for provision or development of facilities for students with disabilities at their institution, whenever necessitated.
 - f. Arrange counseling by a psychiatrist for students with disabilities whenever needed, especially in situations beyond the expertise of the Accessibility Committee.
 - g. Arrange and oversee the provision of academic support, specialized equipment and facilities for the students with disabilities across the HEI.
 - h. Provide advice to their institution on admissions, examinations, dissertations and other affairs of the institution for improving access for students with disabilities.
 - i. Advise the faculty on the policies and procedures relevant to students with disabilities.
 - j. Liaise with national NGOs and philanthropic organizations working for persons with disabilities to enhance capacity of their institution to engage with persons with disabilities and improve the facilities available for them at the HEI.
 - k. Advise the University on the implementation of the Disabled Persons (Employment and Rehabilitation) Ordinance, 1981 and other relevant legislations.

14 FOCAL PERSON FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

- (i) One member - staff or faculty of BPS-19 or equivalent - from the Accessibility Committee will be designated by the Vice Chancellor/Rector as the Focal Person at the HEI for persons with disabilities.
- (ii) The name and contact details of the Focal Person will be displayed on the website, prospectus, brochures, and student handbooks of the HEI and outside the Offices of Vice Chancellor/Rector and Registrar.

- (iii) The Focal Person for persons with disabilities will be responsible to ensure the following:
- a. Be a point of liaison between Accessibility Committee and students with disabilities.
 - b. Advise students with disabilities interested in seeking admission at the HEI in broader choice of academic discipline.
 - c. Guide students with disabilities interested in seeking admission at the HEI on the facilities available and arrangeable at the HEI for persons with disabilities.
 - d. Seek and record information on access requirements of individual student with disability enrolled at the HEI.
 - e. Arrange regular meetings with students with disabilities and maintain records of interactions. This practice should be used to assess any emerging needs the students and decide appropriate course of action to facilitate the student.
 - f. Advise and facilitate students with disabilities in fulfilling administrative requirements of the institution, and benefiting from other services such as accommodation, transport, library, career counselling, extra-curricular opportunities etc. during the course of their studies.
 - g. Advise the students with disabilities before commencement of each semester/academic year on their courses selection and learning activities entailed.
 - h. Refer students with disabilities to the Accessibility Committee for determination of their access requirements.
 - i. Refer students with disabilities to the Accessibility Committee for arrangement of psychiatric counseling; if a student requests or whenever substantial need is established.
 - j. Ensure that the students' access requirements are identified and made known to relevant faculty well ahead of commencement of classes.
 - k. Arrange academic coaching for students with disabilities whenever needed.
 - l. Widely communicate his role to students, staff and faculty at the HEI.

15 SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

- (i) The HEIs shall provide reasonable services to students with disabilities and make reasonable accommodations² whenever required to encourage their participation in higher education.
- (ii) Accessibility Committee will provide advice and support to the HEI on improving accessibility and enhancing other services for students with disabilities. These services include:
 - a. Arrangement of medical assistance (including psychiatric counseling) and non-medical assistance such as note-takers/scribes, readers, lecture recordings and enablers.
 - b. Provision of Laptops, high-tech computers capable to run heavy screen reading software, special softwares, Braille, headphone, video cameras, video conferencing, computers, scanners, braille embosser, Braille Magazines, Audio

- Books/Tutorials, Books-Scanning, laser printers, speakers, tape recorders, class printed notes, and wheel chairs at the institution as per requirement and policy.
- c. Some textbooks are also available in other formats -- such as large print versions, e-books, or media with closed captioning, audio versions -- that may be more accessible for students with disabilities. University's library should be equipped with standard textbooks in alternate formats, or should make them available on request.
 - d. Specialized Trainings on using learning aids for students with disabilities and staff/faculty, when needed.
 - e. Access and assistance in libraries, laboratories, cafeterias and sports centers.
 - f. Full Tuition Fee waivers, and 50 % concessions on other fee components such as Admission Fee, Registration Fee, Library Security Fee, Examination Fee etc.
 - g. Age relaxation in admission requirements, quota as per the national and provincial legislation and alternate suitable entrance test arrangements for students with disabilities.
 - h. HEIs shall establish a special fund to support services for students with disabilities, and annually contribute sufficient funds therein through exclusive budgetary provision. Moreover, all funds and contributions raised through philanthropy should accrue in this fund.
 - i. Whenever, HEI's or students own financial resources are deficient in meeting an accessibility requirement pertaining to his studies, i.e. teaching, learning, examination, assessment etc., the HEI will provide necessary funds or remedy in the form of scholarships or financial aid, after thorough evaluation of each case.
 - j. The website of the HEI and other web-based services such as student portals, LMS etc. shall conform to level AA of Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)³.
 - k. Physical infrastructure in HEIs such as footpaths, road crossings, signage etc. shall be developed by observing the recommended accessibility standards for persons with disabilities.
 - l. Provision of ramp/special pathways and dedicated washrooms shall be ensured in all future constructions of public HEIs.
 - m. Where access is currently limited in the existing buildings, the HEI will provide reasonable alternative arrangements.
 - n. Students with disabilities shall be encouraged to suggest improvements in accessibility services available at the HEI.
- (iii) Accessibility Committee will submit its recommendations in regard to provision of above services for students with disabilities to the competent governing body for consideration and approval.

³ <https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag/>

16 ADMISSIONS

- (i) HEI will clearly provide contact details of focal person and information on facilities available for students with disabilities on their prospectus, website, and advertisement for admission.
- (ii) The website and prospectus will clearly mention the designated quota for persons with disabilities at undergraduate and post graduate level, age relaxation, variation in entry tests, details regarding application procedure, and available fee waivers and concessions.
- (iii) Accessibility Committee will be involved in admission, interview, and entrance test processes for students with disabilities.
- (iv) Applicants should be made aware that if they disclose their disability, the information provided on their application will be retained on the HEI's records and made available to all involved in the admissions process and those concerned with student welfare
- (v) The University will ensure that applicants declaring a disability have full information about the support available, so that they may make an informed choice regarding the suitable place for their studies.
- (vi) Students with disabilities will be advised to visit the University before application to assess the suitability of the premises and their surroundings.
- (vii) Applicants who have declared a disability on their application form will be consulted about their needs and given advice on how the HEI will manage their accessibility requirements.
- (viii) Upon admission students with disabilities will be offered an opportunity to provide additional information and documentation about their accessibility needs.
- (ix) Admission application forms will include a portion through which students can convey information on their disability. They will be required to provide attested copies of the disability certificate issued for persons with disabilities from the National/Provincial Council for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons or a CNIC with disability logo.
- (x) The Admission application form shall include a questionnaire for students with disabilities to inform their accessibility requirements for undertaking their studies and taking the entrance exam. They will be encouraged to arrange an information visit of the HEI.

- (xi) The students with disabilities can request special arrangements for entrance test or interview as per their needs. Where applicable they may be considered for similar alternate arrangements as they had for their higher secondary examinations.
- (xii) The HEI will ensure the provision of appropriate facilities for students with disabilities during their entrance exam:
 - Modified exam materials including Braille papers (Grade 1/un-contracted or Grade 2/contracted), large print: either A4 size (18pt bold font) or A3 size (15.5pt font), listening materials such as special needs CD or lip-reading test, speaking materials such as Braille or large print written prompt or large print visual prompt
 - Other administrative arrangements such as extra time (25-100 per cent extra time depending on student's need), supervised breaks during the examination, use of a computer, an amanuensis/note-taker (a person who will write down students answers), a reader, a scribe/copier (verbatim transcript), speaking test, separate invigilation, a private area to take tests with a note taker.
- (xiii) The students with disabilities will be informed well in advance about the arrangements being provided for them to undertake the entrance exam.
- (xiv) In some cases, students with disabilities may be exempted from a part of an examination because of a disability or difficulty. The HEI may decide to use an alternate assessment tool to ascertain suitability of the student for the degree program. This will be decided by the Academic Council of the HEI.
- (xv) In case the entrance exam is administered by a third party (such as GAT/GRE or NAT/SAT), if the designated test administrator does not provide appropriate facilities for the students with disabilities to suitably take the test, the HEI will arrange alternate entrance exam for the students with disabilities.
- (xvi) In case, the HEI is unable to provide appropriate facilities or make reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities to study at their institution on legitimate grounds, they may refuse admission to the student only through decision of the senate/syndicate/highest governing body. This decision will be communicated to the student via the Office of the Vice Chancellor/Rector.

17 ASSESSMENT OF NEED

- (i) All students with disabilities will be offered an assessment of their study and support needs at the earliest opportunity, preferably before they enroll, or shortly after the commencement of their program.
- (ii) The views of disabled students will be taken into consideration at all times during an assessment of their needs and the content of the assessment report will be discussed with them prior to the release of the report. The report, containing detailed

recommendations, will be shared with the student, the focal person and Dean/HOD/Vice Principal of their faculty. The Accessibility Committee will monitor the implementation of academic support arrangements.

18 TEACHING AND LEARNING

- (i) During the orientation session and at the commencement of each course, staff and faculty shall clearly inform the students that any student who, because of a disability, may require special arrangements in order to meet the course requirements should contact the instructor or the Focal Person for students with disabilities as soon as possible so that requisite arrangements can be made.
- (ii) The instructor, focal person and the student may mutually discuss and decide the alternate special requirements (including those needed for mid-term or final examination) at the start of the course, and share with the Accessibility Committee if their support is needed.
- (iii) The University will take all reasonable steps to ensure that all study components are organized to offer the best possible opportunities of participation for all students including students with disabilities.
- (iv) Where a student with disability is placed at a substantial disadvantage, the University will make reasonable accommodations to help alleviate this. Reasonable accommodations will depend upon the needs and difficulties experienced by the student. Accessibility Committee will be responsible for determining the students' accessibility requirements and the extent of reasonable accommodations needed on part of HEI.
- (v) It is important to remember that accommodations are not advantages, but are a means of providing each student with full access to study programs.
- (vi) Standards for academic credit should not be modified for students with disabilities. They may need accommodations in testing, but the content should not be changed.
- (vii) Faculty are encouraged to use textbooks that are available in alternate format. It is not necessary to rewrite a course to accommodate students with disabilities; simply modifying the presentation of materials may make it fully accessible.
- (viii) If one student with a particular type of disability had difficulty with a specific task, the faculty and the focal person may not assume that the next student with the same type of disability will experience similar problems. Students with disabilities are frequently sensitive about their disabilities, so faculty, focal persons and staff should make every effort to treat these issues sensitively and confidentially.

- (ix) Some examples of reasonable accommodations are: ♣ Provision of copies of lecture slides or typed lecture notes ♣ Permission to tape-record lectures or seminars ♣ Improving accessibility of lecture rooms used by students who use a wheelchair, or equipping them with an induction loop for students with a hearing impairment ♣ Faculty to wear a lapel microphone (to carry the voice of the lecturer to the student using an assistive listening device) ♣ Stenographers to transcribe lectures etc.
- (x) All of these accommodations take a great deal of time, so students should be informed of their course requirements, course components and reading materials well before the commencement of a course and advised on their accessibility requirements at the start of the course.
- (xi) HEIs should also focus on offering academic programs or undertaking research on topics related to issues pertaining to persons with disabilities in Pakistan.

19 EXAMINATIONS AND ASSESSMENT

- (i) At the commencement of each course appropriate arrangements for examination and assessment will be determined through mutual consultation between faculty, focal persona and the student. Alternate arrangements will be made with the view that students are able to demonstrate their learning appropriately and suitably meet the criteria for progression or the conferment of an award.
- (ii) Alternate arrangements for examination (for example, extra time) must be approved by the Accessibility Committee in advance.
- (iii) Where needed, students with disabilities can choose whether or not to have their disability declared on their exam booklet so an external examiner is alerted to their disability.
- (iv) Section 17(xii) details some examples of alternate arrangements for examination.

20 STUDENTS WHO ACQUIRE DISABILITIES DURING STUDIES

The University will ensure provision of the same level of services and support to students who acquire disability/s (or becomes aware of their disability) during the course of their study. Every reasonable opportunity will be provided to them to complete their studies successfully.

21 ACCOMMODATION

- (i) Applicants with disabilities will be given suitable advice about accommodation facilities before enrollment.

- (ii) The HEI will ensure provision of on campus residential facilities/hostel to students with disabilities if they require. In case of large universities with numerous hostel facilities, it is advised that a wing of purpose built rooms with wash rooms, privacy and other necessary arrangements may be dedicated for students with disabilities.
- (iii) The HEI shall facilitate transformation of existing hostel facility into a more accessible accommodation for a student with disability as per their needs. In case the student cannot afford these arrangements on their own, the HEI will make these arrangements through their designated fund for students with disabilities or through philanthropy.
- (iv) In case a student with disability requests for single accommodation, their request should be given precedence over other students.

22 GRIEVANCES

- (i) Any grievances pertaining to disability services available at the HEI or mistreatment of students with disabilities will be submitted to the Focal Person. If they are unable to resolve the concern, Accessibility Committee may be approached. The matter may be referred to the Vice Chancellor if the issue is not appropriately resolved by the Accessibility Committee.
- (ii) The Accessibility Committee may recommend removal of the designated focal person or one of its members to the Vice Chancellor, if substantial grounds are established such as harassment, discrimination, indolence etc.

23 STAFF DEVELOPMENT

- (i) HEIs shall encourage its staff, faculty and students to participate in development opportunities related to provision of education to persons with disabilities.
- (ii) HEI is encouraged to organize special trainings for members of Accessibility Committee and other faculty through collaboration with organizations working for advancement of persons with disabilities.

24 CONVOCATION

The University shall make every effort to ensure that students with disabilities are able to participate fully in their convocations and enjoy this day along with all their fellow graduates.

25 AWARD OF DEGREE

After successful completion of the degree program, students with disabilities will be provided fee waivers for the issuance of degree, transcripts/Detailed Mark Certificate, degree attestation or equivalence certificate.

26 RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

- (i) HEC will assign a weightage to compliance of international accessibility standards and implementation of this Policy in the recurring grant formula; the ranking criteria and the Institutional Performance Evaluation (IPE).
- (ii) Students with disabilities will be assisted by HEC's staff during the degree attestation/equivalence process, including the submission of application for degree attestation/equivalence.
- (iii) Proposals for infrastructure development at HEIs that are submitted to HEC will be reviewed to ensure that any new building infrastructure complied with the recommended international accessibility codes for persons with disabilities.
- (iv) HEC will build collaborations with international and national organizations working for advancement of persons with disabilities.
- (v) HEC will designate a disability officer who will provide guidance on the matters pertaining to this policy, and act as a focal person for persons with disabilities interacting with HEC.

27 FURTHER ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

- (i) The HEC may be consulted for clarification and advice in regard to implementation of this policy.
- (ii) In case of any difference of opinion regarding the interpretation of this policy, the HEC's judgment shall be considered final.