

Further Guidance for HEIs following closure of academic institutions by the Government of Pakistan

In the light of the concerns about the 2nd wave of the coronavirus pandemic, the government has directed as follows:

- i. All academic institutions (universities, colleges, schools, tuition centers, or similar entities) shall be closed w.e.f. 26 November 2020 until 24 December 2020. However, they shall continue to deliver education through online or hybrid means or through assigning homework (especially if there are problems of connectivity).
- ii. Winter Holidays shall be scheduled from December 25, 2020 to January 10, 2021, and all academic institutions shall remain closed during this period.
- iii. Academic institutions are scheduled to open on January 11, 2021. However, a review meeting will be held in this regard during first week of January 2021 to assess the situation, and authorize opening of academic institutions.
- iv. All large exams planned in December 2020 have been postponed. However, an exception is provided for assessment exams (such as MDCAT, other entrance exams, recruitment exams), or prescheduled small exams (e.g., less than 30 students). These may be conducted, if absolutely necessary, with strict observance of all health and safety protocols.
- v. VCs have been given the authority to allow small groups of “essential” individuals on campus. Further guidance on this is provided below.

The following additional guidance is provided with a view to operationalizing the directions of the government:

- i. In the light of the government's instructions, VCs may allow the following categories of students on campus: low income students who may have connectivity problems at home because of lack of access to the Internet or the availability of proper devices, foreign students, those PhD or MPhil students (or final year students) who need to use the laboratories to complete their thesis work, or third year or higher medical students who need to obtain clinical training. Similarly, VCs may require that faculty members come to campus for delivering or preparing their online lectures.
- ii. However, the above flexibility is to be exercised most judiciously, and only if the campus presence of the said individuals is absolutely necessary. Also, in no case shall the total number of the students permitted to come to campus should exceed 30 per cent of the total enrollment, or a lower number if dictated by the campus conditions. Universities will clearly announce their policy on which category is allowed on campus and at what time and with what scrutiny mechanisms or safeguards.
- iii. Similarly, VCs have the authority to allow limited occupancy of hostels, subject to the same restrictions as above, namely that (1) only students in the “essential” categories will be

allowed, (2) the total shall not exceed 30 per cent of the design capacity of the hotels (or a small number if so dictated by health considerations), (3) all SOPs shall be implemented strictly and diligently, and (4) the university puts in place appropriate measures including isolating hostel residents (i.e., treating the hostel as a safe bubble) to protect them from external infection

- iv. Universities shall draw up rules regarding the presence of faculty members or staff on campus.
- v. All Vice Chancellors/ Heads of Institutions shall ensure that the flexibility granted by the government is exercised in a judicious manner, authorized at the highest level, and monitored and managed effectively and efficiently.
- vi. HEC has released an amount of Rs.10 million each to public sector universities to help them establish any supportive arrangements needed to improve the quality of the online education process. One option is to recruit senior, tech-savvy students to assist faculty members in technology related problems involved in online education.
- vii. To support and guide universities, HEC has established a Covid Response Oversight Committee, headed by Dr. Niaz Akhtar, VC Punjab University, and comprising Dr. Tabassum Afzal (for ICT), VC CUI, Dr. Aslam Uqaili, VC MUET (for Sindh), Dr. Abid Ali, VC Peshawar U (for KP), Engr. Farooq Bazai, VC BUIITEM (for Balochistan), Dr. Kaleem Abbasi, VC AJKU (for AJK), and Dr. Naeem Khan, VC Baltistan U (for GB). The Committee will collaborate with the VCs in their respective regions, clarify questions or concerns, share best practices, and oversee implementation. The Committee will also interact with the respective provincial governments to ensure synchronized and cooperative action.