

# **POLICY FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FOR HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTES IN PAKISTAN**

## **INTRODUCTION**

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 others (UNCRPD). Higher Education Commission is committed to a policy of equal opportunities for disabled people to pursue their higher studies in befitting environment and ensure greater accessibility for the disabled to higher education with provision of disabled-friendly campuses and classrooms. The Policy aims at working towards creating an environment in which all individuals are able to participate fully in the academic and social life of the University. Policy recognized that "disability" covers a wide range of impairments including physical and mobility difficulties, hearing impairment, visual impairment, and specific learning disabilities including dyslexia, medical conditions and mental health problems. Different disabilities will have varying impacts on study, work and other aspects of life. Such persons would require special considerations in the institutions and society including HEIs, to mainstream them for inclusive education at all levels. This policy will not only serve to create awareness about specific needs of the people with disabilities but would also promote good practices in the society in general and at HEIs in particular in this context.

## **POLICY STATEMENT**

The Policy recognizes that Persons with Disabilities and Special Children are valuable human resource for the country and seeks to create an environment that provides them equal opportunities, protection of their rights and full participation in society. The focus of the policy shall be on the following:

a. All universities are to comply with the statutory obligations in a progressive/phased manner. b. The Higher Education Commission recognizes that its obligations to take all reasonable steps to enable people with disabilities in the HEIs, to avail the opportunities available to other students and staff. c. HEC will provide additional funding to the Universities and HEIs to provide facilities to "Persons with Disabilities". Such students will be entitled to "Special Care Allowance" for their motivation and mainstreaming towards Higher Education. d. HEC would endeavor to provide equal playing field to the students and staff with disabilities at HEIs by removing all barriers and obstacles in this context. e. The students and staff with disabilities will be provided barrier free access to all important premises at HEIs, to enable them achieve their academic and career objectives. f. Provide focused support and counselling to the people with disabilities at HEIs to enable them achieving excellence in the academic and career plans. g. Creating awareness amongst the other students and staff to provide more space and opportunities to the students and staff with disabilities in their academic and career pursuits.

## **SCOPE OF THE POLICY**

The Higher Education Commission expects all universities and HEIs to be aware of this policy and the related code of practice and to treat disabled students and staff fairly, with respect and in accordance with this policy. Every University has to establish a disability Redressals Committee (DRC), comprising of Deans of Faculties, Heads of Departments and Heads of Services and Administrative Sections, which will be responsible for ensuring that the policy is communicated effectively and is being fully implemented in their area.

In addition, Disability Services are responsible for:

i. Universities and Degree Awarding Institutes shall notify a Disabilities Committee with overall responsibility to monitor the implementation of this policy. ii. Developing policy and provision for disabled students in conjunction with the Disabilities Committee: iii. Providing a service to individual students and staff. This includes determining support needs, assisting students in applying for Disabled Students' allowance and other sources of additional funding and advocacy. iv. Providing information and advice with regard to support for disabled students and staff in academic and other departments throughout the University v. Promoting awareness and positive attitudes towards persons with disabilities, throughout the University through staff training and development

## **1. DISABILITY SERVICES**

i. All students and staff of the University shall have access to a disability advice and support service, which will main include: ii. Offer information and advice to students with disabilities and work to identify their support requirements. iii. Assist with applications for disabled students' allowance iv. Assess and Coordinate a comprehensive Specific Learning difficulties of the people with disabilities. Provide Support Service including referrals for psychological assessment and the provision of individual and group tuition for students with specific learning difficulties. v. Arrange for non-medical assistance: note-takers, readers, lecture recording and enablers vi. Provide specific advice and recommendations in areas including admissions, accommodation, access to study and examinations etc. vii. Oversee the provision of specialist equipment across the University viii. Advise the University on the implementation of the Laws regarding Employment of Persons with disabilities, including Rehabilitation Act 2014 and other relevant legislations. ix. Development of policy and procedures for supporting students and staff with disabilities x. Coordinate and train disability Tutors in order to develop a network of expertise across

the University xi. Work in collaboration with local and national organizations to enhance University capacity and facilities for access to persons with disabilities.

## **2. ADMISSIONS:**

i. The disability policy is committed to the principles of equity, access, opportunity and rights. It seeks to apply these principles to all aspects of admission process. ii. The policy strives for allocation of admission quota for persons with disabilities at all level of programs being offered by the University/DAls as per the national and provincial legislation and its communication/advertisement at the time of admission. The applicant against this quota for persons with disabilities, will be processed by the "Disability Committee" to judge the suitability of candidates. Applicants should be aware that the information provided on their application will be retained on the University's records and made available to all involved in the admissions process and those concerned with student welfare so that the University may discharge its duties. The University will try to ensure that applicants declaring a disability have full information about the support available so that they may make an informed choice regarding the optimal place for their studies. iii. Those with impaired mobility will be advised to visit the University before application to assess the suitability of the premises and their surroundings. Applicants who have declared a disability on their application form should be consulted about their needs and given advice as to how the University might meet those needs. They will have the opportunity to make their support needs known via a questionnaire and will be encouraged to arrange an information visit. Upon admission, students will be offered an opportunity to provide additional information about their needs. iv. University are also required to exempt the students with disability for admission test, relaxation in age limits and fee concession available to these students, as per the Govt. Rules and Disability Act 2014.

## **3. ASSESSMENT OF NEED:**

i. All students with a disability will be offered an assessment of their study and support needs (Assessment of Needs) at the earliest opportunity, either before they enroll or shortly after the commencement of their course/classes. ii. Assessments of Needs for the purposes of Disabled Students' Allowance will made on the basis of report from an accredited Access

Centre/Rehabilitation Centre. Students will be required to provide medical/ psychological evidence detailing the nature and extent of their disability or specific learning difficulty from such accredited Centres to be entitled for the "Disability Allowance". iii. The views of a students with disabilities, will be taken into account 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 sent or copied to the student, the student's supervisor or course coordinator and the Disability Tutor. The Disability Tutor will monitor the implementation of academic support arrangements.

#### **4. DISABILITY TUTORS:**

i. Disability Tutors will be designated from all major academic areas/programs, to facilitate "Person with disabilities" with broader choice of education and research.

ii. "Students with Disabilities" may discuss with Disability Tutors their course curricula and the teaching and learning activities entailed and raise any additional learning or other needs. iii. Disability Tutors will: a. Widely communicate their role to students and staff within their subject area. b. Provide a point of liaison between Disability Services staff and academic staff. c. Liaise with departmental staff and provide advice in the areas of admissions, examinations and programs boards etc., necessary for academic development and counselling of the "Persons with Disabilities" d. Make all teaching staff aware of a student's academic support requirements. e. Monitor the implementation of academic support arrangements for "Persons with Disabilities" (for example provision of overheads, access etc.) f. Provide information to "Persons with Disabilities" relating to curriculum accessibility (including field trips, study abroad, work placements and other specialist learning environments) and assist in the arrangement of adaptations where necessary. g. Refer "Students with Disabilities" to specialist support services within the University when appropriate record and keep accurate records of interactions in relation to such students; h. Organize and pursue staff development/training activities with focus on mainstreaming of "Persons with Disabilities" in tertiary education and research. i. Monitor the implementation of disability policy in their area. j. Raise awareness of general disability issues including legislation and national frameworks for best practice.

#### **5. CURRICULUM**

i. The University will take all reasonable steps to ensure that courses (including placements, field trips, study abroad and other specialist learning environments) are organized to offer the best possible opportunities for full participation by all students including "Persons with Disabilities".

Ensuring that rooms used for the delivery of courses are accessible (for example: usable by students who use a wheelchair, or equipped with an induction loop for students with a hearing impairment). iv. The curriculum must be flexible, sensitive and aware of the needs of students with disabilities (for example: a student with a mental health problem may have difficulty speaking in a group seminar)♣ Permission to tape-record lectures or seminars ♣ Provision of copies of overhead slides or typed lecture notes ♣ii. Where a student with a disability is placed at a substantial disadvantage, the University will make reasonable adjustments to help alleviate this. Reasonable adjustments will depend upon the needs and difficulties experienced by the individual student with disabilities. iii. Some examples of reasonable adjustments are:

v. Disabled students may discuss the specific requirements of their intended curriculum in advance with Disability Tutors to ensure that learning support and other needs are identified and made known to relevant staff. This mechanism should also be used to enable disabled students to discuss any emerging needs and identify appropriate possible courses of action to address those needs. vi. Universities and HEIs must focus on offering the programs and courses relating to special education with focus on " Persons with Disabilities" to create awareness amongst the major stakeholders.

## **6. EXAMINATIONS AND ASSESSMENT**

i. Appropriate modes of examination and assessment will be determined following an assessment of study and support needs, with a view to enabling students to demonstrate that they have met the criteria for progression or the conferment of an award. Where required alternate arrangements of assessment may be offered to students with disabilities. The purpose of any alternative arrangements shall be to level the playing field without compromising academic standards. Any request for additional arrangements in relation to examination, assessed work and assessment procedures must be supported by medical/psychological or other evidence and it is the student's responsibility to make that available to the University for making final decision ii. Requests for an alteration to assessment conditions (for example, extra time for examinations) must be approved by the Disabilities Officer. Requests for alterations to the form of assessment (for example, assessed work in place of an examination) must be approved by the Disability Committee. iii. Where appropriate, students with a disability can choose whether or not to have their disability declared on their script so that the marker is alerted to their disability (for example when a student has a visual impairment which may have affected written presentation). iv. Further detailed information be provided within Guidance and Procedures for Alternative Assessment and Examination Arrangements.

## **7. STUDENTS WHO BECOME DISABLED DURING STUDIES:**

i. The University will take all reasonable steps to ensure that a student who becomes disabled (or becomes aware of their disability) during their course has every opportunity to complete their course through the provision of the same level of adaptations and support as for a comparable student who was disabled at the start of their course and through a constructive approach to the interpretation of degree regulations.

## **8. OTHER SERVICES**

i. The University shall aim to ensure that Students with disabilities, have equal access to all student and academic services. While it is recognized that some of these services are located in buildings which have access problems, the University will ensure that the service can be provided in such a way that the needs of the students with disabilities are met. Examples of this would be assistance in libraries to obtain books, provision of information in large print, access ramps to the buildings and other important academic/recreational areas, dedicated washroom, dedicated parking area as

per national and international Disability Code. ii. With reference to computer and Lab facilities, the University will aim to ensure that in the design of official University pages for the World Wide Web, within the limits of current technology, it observes best practice as suggested by the W3C's Web Accessibility Initiative. iii. Various physical infrastructure in Universities such footpaths, curbstones, road crossings, signage etc. shall observe the minimum requirements of International Disability Code in the Architecture planning and designing of such facilities. iv. The provisions of this policy must be adopted in Universities in conjunction with Environmental and Social Management Plan (ESMP) already notified for implementation in Universities and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) particularly for infrastructure development projects sponsored through Public Sector Development Program (PSDP)

## **9. THE ENVIRONMENT:**

i. In the initial phase, Higher Education Commission expects, that the awareness will be created for mainstreaming the "Persons with disabilities" by implementing the provisions of this policy in phased manner, progressively. ii. This shall be followed by access audit of the campuses by HEC, in second phase, to ensure all premises are accessible for people with disabilities. In this regard, a building review committee has already been constituted to ensure that the Disability Code is implemented in new infrastructure under newly approved development project (PSDP). It is

recognized that this is equally important and has to occur within the constraints of existing buildings. iii. Where access is currently limited in the existing buildings, the University will instigate reasonable alternative arrangements by, for example, changing venues and altering timetable to facilitate the "Students with Disabilities" to mainstream in their education and career pursuits. iv. Students with Disabilities will be encouraged to suggest improvements to physical access. All suggestions will be considered and, where appropriate, incorporated in the accessibility guidelines by the building review committee. v. It shall be an explicit policy for all the HEIs that all practicable steps will be taken to ensure safe access and adequate working conditions for all people on its campuses.

## **10. ACCOMMODATION**

i. This policy ensures the provision of on campus residential facilities to students with disabilities. Subject to availability, students with disabilities will be offered equal access to University accommodation. In case of large hotels, it will be more advisable to dedicate, one wing of purpose built rooms for students with disabilities, with wash rooms for students with disabilities ii. Each applicant with a disability will be given individual consideration and advice about accommodation. Within the general residential availability the University will provide a variety of accommodation which has been designed for use by students with disabilities. iii. In the case of disabilities that do not require special adaptations to the environment, students may nevertheless prefer for various reasons to have a single

room and university will do its best to meet such requirements. Continuing students with a disability may remain in University accommodation if necessary by reason of their disability, provided that they observe the application procedures of the Accommodation Office.

## **11. CONFIDENTIALITY AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION**

i. All students declaring a disability to Disability Services will be provided with a written leaflet setting out the policy on and procedure for the handling and disclosure of personal information. They will then be asked to sign a form to show they have read and understood this leaflet. Further detailed information on this is provided within the leaflet Student Support Services Confidentiality and Information Access.

## **12. COMPLAINTS**

i. The complaints procedure is to be set out in the universities. The University complaints procedure should be applied in all cases of complaints from disabled students. The Disabilities committee should be informed of all such complaints. In line with the University complaints procedure, complaints relating to any aspect of services provided by Disability Services should be raised in the first instance with the Disabilities Officer/Adviser at the university campus. Where a person is not satisfied with a response the complaint can be taken up with the post-holder responsible for student support and welfare at that campus.

## **13. STAFF DEVELOPMENT**

i. All staff members are strongly encouraged to participate in staff development opportunities with special focus on the needs and mainstreaming of "Persons with Disabilities" to higher education. ii. The faculty and staff training programs must include the sessions relating to the needs and challenges of students with disabilities and their mainstreaming. iii. General Sessions on disability equality issues and an annual training event specifically for Disability Tutors will be arranged. The University shall provide sessions to address specific aspects of disability such as deaf awareness, dyslexia awareness and visual impairment. Specific sessions can also be arranged on request for groups of staff as required.

## **14. DEGREE CEREMONIES**

The University shall make every effort to ensure that students with disabilities are able to participate fully in their degree award ceremony/convocations and enjoy this day along with all their fellow graduates. In such cases the parents of such students must be specially invited to the event to feel them proud over the achievement of their ward. With prior notice, special arrangements can also be made for guests with disabilities.

#### **16. FURTHER HELP, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE**

The University should have a Disability Forum, which comprises representatives from various departments, all Disability Tutors and students and meets regularly to discuss issues relating to disability.

#### **17. AWARDS / REWARDS**

Higher Education Commission & Government of Pakistan will recognize the efforts of Universities for meeting the Disability Codes and compliance to this Disability Policy. To encourage all the universities for compliance of this policy in letter and spirit, a weightage in the recurring grant formula will be given to those universities who comply with the policy. The more the universities will comply the more funds will be provided to them. Further, those universities which provide best facilities will be recognized by awards. The achievement of the Universities will also be made part of their ranking system under facilities and infrastructure.