

FRAMEWORK FOR RECOGNITION OF LIBERAL ARTS UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS UNDER THE HEC UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION POLICY 2023



HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

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FRAMEWORK FOR RECOGNITION OF LIBERAL ARTS UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS UNDER THE HEC UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION POLICY 2023

1. Purpose

Pakistan has a number of universities offering international standard liberal arts undergraduate programs. These programs combine strong disciplinary training across fields such as the sciences, engineering, humanities, social and behavioral sciences, creative arts, business, and management with broad intellectual grounding across multiple domains of knowledge, while cultivating critical thinking, communication skills, ethical reasoning, and interdisciplinary understanding.

This note provides a framework through which undergraduate programs offered by such universities may be recognized as compliant with the HEC Undergraduate Education Policy 2023, while preserving the curricular structures that are integral to liberal arts education.

2. Scope

This framework shall apply to universities that demonstrate:

- A mission aligned with liberal arts values, including individual development and societal contribution;
- A curriculum structured around breadth and interdisciplinarity and aligned with internationally recognized liberal arts educational models.

3. Liberal Arts Curriculum Structure

The Higher Education Commission recognizes that internationally accepted liberal arts undergraduate programs generally incorporate the following curricular structure:

- Overall Degree: Minimum 120 credit hours
- Interdisciplinary Education Requirements: Minimum 40 credit hours.
(In the context of Liberal Arts universities in Pakistan, this component shall also encompass the General Education requirements prescribed under the HEC Undergraduate Education Policy 2023, including all applicable courses as notified by HEC from time to time).
- Major/Concentration: Minimum 52 credit hours
- Free Electives: Remaining credits
- Minor (optional): Minimum 12 credit hours

4. Recognition under Undergraduate Education Policy 2023

Universities offering programs under this Framework shall, at a minimum, allocate major/concentration credit hours equivalent to seventy percent (70%) of the minimum major credit-hour requirement prescribed by HEC for the relevant discipline. Where an HEC-approved curriculum has been developed through the respective National Curriculum Review Committee (NCRC), the seventy percent (70%) threshold shall be calculated with reference to the minimum major credit hours prescribed therein. In disciplines for which no HEC-approved NCRC curriculum exists, the minimum major requirement prescribed under the HEC

Undergraduate Education Policy 2023, i.e., seventy-two (72) credit hours, shall serve as the benchmark for calculating the seventy percent (70%) threshold.

Where programs satisfy the above requirement along with the curricular structure given in section 3, such programs shall be deemed compliant with Undergraduate Education Policy 2023. Degrees awarded under these programs shall constitute recognized undergraduate qualifications under Undergraduate Education Policy 2023 and the National Qualifications Framework without any requirement for a separate program-wise equivalence determination.

Graduates of such programs shall be eligible for admission to national and international graduate programs and for employment in the public and private sectors on the same basis as graduates of other HEC-recognized undergraduate programs.

5. Professional Accreditation

Programs subject to the requirements of professional accreditation bodies, national councils, international accrediting agencies, or those considered professional degrees even if not falling under formal accreditation bodies (art and design; hospitality etc) shall continue to comply with those requirements. Nothing in this framework shall override accreditation/professional standards applicable to these programs.

6. Associate Degrees

Universities operating under this framework may offer associate degree pathways consistent with HEC Undergraduate Education Policy 2023, and recommendations of respective NCRCs and accreditation councils (where applicable). Such pathways should preserve the interdisciplinary character of liberal arts education and enable students, where applicable, to continue toward completion of a four-year undergraduate degree.

7. Conclusion

This Framework enables HEC to recognize internationally accepted liberal arts curricular structures while maintaining alignment with the HEC Undergraduate Education Policy 2023 and the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). It preserves the distinctive educational features of liberal arts programs while ensuring full recognition of the qualifications awarded thereunder for purposes of further education and employment.

For greater clarity and to establish a comprehensive regulatory framework for future implementation, the Commission may approve, in principle, development of a comprehensive Policy on Liberal Arts Education by the Academics Division, HEC, in consultation with universities offering liberal arts programs in Pakistan.