



# **GRADUATE EDUCATION POLICY (GEP) | 2024-25**

**This policy has been developed in light of the HEC  
Graduate Education Policy (GEP) 2023**

**The PUMHSW Policies and Standard  
Operating Procedures (SOPs) governing  
MS/MPhil/Equivalent and PhD programs.**

**PEOPLES UNIVERSITY OF MEDICAL & HEALTH SCIENCES FOR  
WOMEN (PUMHSW), SBA  
PEOPLES UNIVERSITY OF MEDICAL &  
HEALTH SCIENCES FOR WOMEN, SBA**



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## **HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION, PAKISTAN GRADUATE EDUCATION POLICY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Over a period of two decades, the Higher Education Commission (HEC) introduced various policies to enhance the quality of graduate programs in Pakistan. More or less, these policies were focused on program-level minimum criteria, such as qualification, entry test, CGPA, CH, coursework, publication, dissertation, supervisory load and criteria, and faculty requirements. Meanwhile, HEC also issued several supplementary notifications elaborating the given criteria in pieces. Despite this, the worth of graduate education has always been a matter of concern. Lastly, HEC issued its policy on PhD Program in 2021; however, it received little support from the academia across the country due to disagreement with several aspects of the policy. Many felt that the policy was too focused on coursework and not on research. Despite extensive discussions at the institutional level, various VC forums, and technical experts' committees, a consensus could not be developed. Learning through the experience, the Chairman HEC decided to review the policy afresh through feedback from the entire academia. As a result, the HEC introduced the revised Graduate Education Policy-2023 (GEP-2023).

In line with its name, GEP-2023 encompasses all the minimum standards and guidelines to impart Level 7 and 8 qualifications, with a special emphasis on governance of the doctoral research system in HEIs and quality assurance, while all the previous policies, including the PhD Policy 2021, focused merely on program-level requirements. Accordingly, the revised policy, while addressing the concerns of the stakeholders regarding admission and Credit Hours requirements, also embarks on various aspects of



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a quality dissertation along with research ethics, the roles and responsibilities of research supervisors and supervisees, and the conditions regulating their relationship and the handling of grievances.

3. Further, the new policy, while appreciating university autonomy within the ambit of their charters/acts, seeks to strike the right balance between autonomy and regulatory constraints. Hence, the requirement of obtaining NOC for the launch of a new graduate program has been relaxed for the top HEIs, ranked through a system as may be prescribed, while the lower-ranked HEIs must seek HEC's NOC. However, these HEIs can exercise their autonomy in determining faculty relevance at their end by adopting the mechanism prescribed in the policy. Lastly, this policy also suggests retributive actions for the HEIs violating the provisions that it prescribes.

4. Overall, the policy has three parts: (i) Minimum Standards and Guidelines for Launching a Program and Awarding Degrees, Part-I; (ii) Governance of Doctoral Research System, Part-II; and (iii) Quality Assurance, Part-III.

## **PURPOSE**

Doctor of Philosophy (or PhD) is the highest university degree, awarded in most disciplines. Those who qualify at this level, are expected to serve highly consequential functions in the 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 expertise in their area of study that they can utilize in teaching and further research, as well as in problem-solving and innovation to address important societal challenges. While other degree programs aim to teach students the things that we (the academic community) know, the purpose of a PhD program is to enable students to investigate what we do not know. 2. In view of the highly consequential functions



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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, who carry 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, be able to conduct high-quality research, and have strong scholarly writing skills relevant to their field of study. Therefore, it may be preferable to not confer a PhD degree than to confer a PhD degree based on substandard academic and research work. 3. Since the PhD is a highly specialized degree, it is intended that only 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 HEC 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 the minimum that every PhD candidate must satisfy before being awarded a degree. Universities are encouraged to formulate their own admission and completion requirements that would further enhance the quality of their PhD programs, provided that such internal policies are consistent with the minimum requirements set forth by the HEC.

**MANDATE:** 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 sector. Violations or failure to comply with 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.



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**APPLICABILITY** 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 vi | P a g e on MS/MPhil/Equivalent & PhD Programs (2016 and 2021) shall apply from the Effective Date and shall not be retroactively applicable. ii. To assess whether a graduating student is compliant with the HEC’s policies, the HEC shall generally consider this policy applicable to the date of student enrollment 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 has enrolled before the Effective Date, provided that the university/HEI/DAI has adopted or 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 that cannot be lowered. Only the enhancement of standards is admissible

**GUIDING PRINCIPLES** i. **University Autonomy:** Within the ambit of their Charter/Act and HEC’s policies ii. **Access:** All qualified individuals with equal opportunity. iii. **Relevance:** Local needs and national policies. iv. **Alignment:** The outcomes defined in National Qualification Framework and Graduate Education Policy. v. **Contextualizing:** Without compromising over the global standards. vi. **Academic Freedom:** Thoughts and conceiving ideas. vii. **Originality:** Thoughts leading to innovation by adhering to academic ethics. viii. **Academic Flexibility:** Conducting research activities without violating disciplinary guidelines. ix. **Collaboration, networking, and partnerships:** At the local, national, and international levels for the development and execution of graduate programs. x. **Quality:** Promoting high standards of academic and research excellence and student success

**DEFINITIONS**



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**Academic Calendar:** A schedule of the whole academic year (including fall, spring and summer semesters, semester starting date, holidays during the semester, semester termination date, Mid-Term exam week, Final exam week, Result notification date etc.)

**Accreditation Councils:** A council established either by the Act of Parliament or under clause 10(e) of the HEC ordinance 2002 to carry out accreditation of institutions including their departments, faculties, and disciplines by giving them appropriate ratings.

**Adjunct Faculty:** A contractual faculty member, temporary or part-time, hired outside their fulltime profession such as researchers and scientists at any R&D or public/private sector organization, by educational institutions, typically colleges or universities, to teach specific courses or provide instructional support. Credits Hours: A uniformly recognized measure of time and effort expended to acquire knowledge, skills, competencies, and recognition that a learner has successfully completed the prior course of learning, corresponding to the qualification at a given level. One credit hour is equal to one hour of student – teacher contact per week for the aforementioned purpose.

**Graduate level:** As defined in the National Qualifications Framework, this is equivalent to level-7 and level-8 qualifications.

**Guidelines for the Implementation of Uniform Semester System:** Policy guidelines issued by the Academic Division of HEC providing a uniform system to make Academic Year of Pakistani universities compatible with international standards.

**H Index:** Measured by Web of Science. Intra-disciplinary Qualifications: Refers to sub-disciplines occurring within one of the ten broad disciplines defined by UNESCO's International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED-F-2013).

**Level 5 Degree Programs:** Defined and mentioned in the National Qualifications Framework, including Ordinary Bachelor which includes associate degrees.





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**Level 6 Degree Programs:** As defined and mentioned in the National Qualifications Framework including Bachelor (Hons): BS, B.E., B Arch., BSc (Eng), BSc (Agri), B.Tech (Hons), LLB, B.Com, MBBS, DVM, BDS, Pharm D etc.

**Level 7 Degree Programs:** As defined and mentioned in the National Qualifications Framework including MS, MPhil, MBA, MSc (Eng.), ME, M. Tech., LLM etc.

**Level 8 Degree Programs:** As defined and mentioned in the National Qualifications Framework, this includes PhD.

**National Qualification Framework:** An approved framework of Pakistan's national qualifications classifying them into eight hierarchical levels that is from level-1 to level-8, based on learning outcomes i.e., skill, competence and knowledge specified against each.

**Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** A framework of seventeen goals established by United Nations in 2015 addressing various social, economic, and environmental challenges to be met by 2030.

- ACRONYMS
- APA: American Psychological Association
- CGPA: Cumulative Grade Point Average
- CH: Credit Hour
- COPE: Committee on Publication Ethics
- DAI: Degree Awarding Institute
- DASR: Directorate of Advance Studies and Research
- F.A: Faculty of Arts
- F.Sc: Faculty of Science
- GEP: Graduate Education Policy
- GRE: Graduate Record Examination
- HAT: Higher Education Aptitude test
- HEC: Higher Education Commission
- HEIs: Higher education institutions
- HJRS: HEC Journal Recognition System
- HSSC: Higher Secondary School Certificate
- IEEE: Institute for Electrical and Electronics Engineers



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- ISCED: International Standard Classification of Education
  - MLA: Modern Language Association
  - MOOCS: Massive Open Online Courses
  - MPhil: Master of Philosophy
  - MS: Master of Science
  - NAHE: National Academy of Higher Education
  - NOCs: No Objection Certificates
  - NQF: National Qualification Framework
  - PhD: Doctor of Philosophy
  - RAC: Relevance Assessment Committee
  - SDGs: Sustainable development goals
  - UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
  - WOS: Web of Science

## **PART-I: LAUNCHING A PROGRAM AND AWARDING DEGREE**

### **1. Launching a Graduate Program**

Peoples University of Medical & Health Sciences for Women (PUMHSW), Shaheed Benazirabad, may launch MS/MPhil/Equivalent (Level 7) and PhD (Level 8) programs upon fulfillment of the following requirements in line with the HEC Graduate Education Policy 2023:

- Approval of the program by all relevant statutory bodies of the University, including the Board of Studies, Faculty Board, Academic Council, and Syndicate.
- Curriculum development in alignment with the HEC Curriculum Template for the respective level (Level 7 for MS/MPhil, Level 8 for PhD).
- Availability of qualified faculty as per HEC guidelines (minimum PhD faculty for MS/MPhil and minimum number of PhD supervisors for PhD programs).





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- Necessary infrastructure including laboratories, libraries, internet access, and research resources.
- Program NOC/accreditation from the relevant regulatory body (e.g., HEC, PMDC, PCP, PNC, etc.), if applicable.
- Establishment of a Graduate Admission Committee and Graduate Research Management Cell (GRMC) under the Office of Research, Innovation, and Commercialization (ORIC) or equivalent body at PUMHSW.

## **2. Degree Awarding Process**

- Degrees shall only be awarded after the successful completion of all coursework, research, and examination requirements in accordance with HEC minimum criteria and PUMHSW internal academic regulations.
- The University shall ensure compliance with plagiarism policies and ethical research practices before conferring any graduate-level degree.
- Degree-awarding decisions shall be endorsed by the Board of Advanced Studies and Research (BASR) and approved by the Syndicate.

### **Minimum Requirements to Award MS/MPhil/Equivalent Degree (Level 7)**

PUMHSW shall ensure that all MS/MPhil/Equivalent programs (Level 7) meet the following minimum requirements in line with the HEC Graduate Education Policy 2023:

#### **1. Admission Requirements**

- Sixteen (16) years of education or 4 years of education after HSSC/FSc/Grade 12 in a relevant discipline.
- Minimum CGPA of 2.00/4.00 or equivalent in the last degree.
- Entry test (GAT-General or equivalent) as per HEC policy with minimum qualifying marks.
- Fulfillment of departmental and university-specific admission criteria, including interview and/or subject test if required.



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## 2. Program Requirements

- Minimum credit hours: 30 credit hours.
  - 24 credit hours of coursework.
  - 6 credit hours of research/thesis (or equivalent research work).
- Completion of program within 2 to 4 years from the date of admission.
- A minimum CGPA of 2.50/4.00 is required to qualify for the degree.

## 3. Thesis/Research Requirements

- The thesis must be supervised by a faculty member holding a PhD or terminal degree in the relevant field.
- Evaluation of thesis by:
  - One internal examiner.
  - One external examiner (preferably not from the same university).
- Similarity index must be within acceptable limits as per PUMHSW plagiarism policy (aligned with HEC policy).
- Viva-voce examination is mandatory for thesis defense.
- The final approval shall be given by the Board of Advanced Studies and Research (BASR) at PUMHSW.

## 4. Quality Assurance and Record Keeping

- Maintenance of complete student academic and research record by the Office of the Controller of Examinations and Directorate of Graduate Studies (or equivalent).
- QEC shall ensure implementation of minimum quality standards in graduate programs.

## Minimum Requirements for Award of Doctoral Degree (Level 8)



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The Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree at **PUMHSW, SBA** shall be awarded in accordance with the minimum criteria defined by the **HEC Graduate Education Policy 2023**. The following are the key requirements:

### 1. Admission Requirements

- Eighteen (18) years of education or equivalent in the relevant discipline.
- Minimum CGPA of 3.00/4.00 or First Division in the final degree.
- Departmental subject-specific admission test or HEC HAT with minimum qualifying marks as per university policy.
- Interview by the PhD Admission Committee to assess aptitude and research potential.

### 2. Program Structure and Duration

- Completion of a minimum of **48 credit hours**:
  - 18 credit hours of coursework (600+ level courses).
  - 30 credit hours of research work/dissertation.
- Duration: Minimum 3 years and maximum 8 years (inclusive of all extensions).
- Maintenance of a minimum CGPA of 3.00/4.00 in coursework.

### 3. Comprehensive Examination

- Mandatory **Comprehensive Exam** to assess knowledge in the major field of study.
- Must be passed within the first 4 semesters.
- Maximum two attempts allowed.
- A student failing both attempts shall be dropped from the PhD program.



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#### 4. Research Supervision

- A PhD supervisor must:
  - Hold a PhD in the relevant field.
  - Be an HEC-approved supervisor.
  - Be a regular or TTS faculty member of PUMHSW or HEC-recognized institution.
- Co-supervisors may be appointed, including international experts, with approval from BASR.

#### 5. Dissertation and Evaluation

- Dissertation must represent original research contributing to knowledge in the field.
- Similarity Index must be within the limit prescribed by HEC plagiarism policy.
- Evaluation by:
  - Two foreign experts from technologically/academically advanced countries.
  - One internal examiner.
- Open defense is mandatory and shall be conducted after positive reports from foreign reviewers.

#### 6. Publication Requirement

- At least **one research paper** based on PhD research must be published in an HEC-recognized **x-category or above** journal before the final dissertation defense.



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## 7. Final Award of Degree

- Upon successful defense and approval from all statutory bodies including BASR and Syndicate, the PhD degree shall be awarded.

## 8. Record Keeping and Quality Assurance

- All data shall be maintained by the Controller of Examinations and Graduate Studies Directorate.
- QEC shall monitor adherence to quality and HEC compliance throughout the PhD process.

# **Part II: Governing the System of Doctoral Research**

Peoples University of Medical & Health Sciences for Women (PUMHSW), SBA, ensures a structured and transparent system for managing doctoral research programs in line with HEC policy to promote academic integrity, scholarly rigor, and global standards of excellence.

## 1. Governance Structure

- The **Board of Advanced Studies and Research (BASR)** shall be the highest academic authority for doctoral programs at PUMHSW.
- The **Graduate Research Management Cell (GRMC)** or equivalent office under ORIC shall facilitate all operational matters related to PhD research.
- PhD supervisors and co-supervisors must be approved by BASR based on HEC criteria.



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## 2. Synopsis Approval

- PhD candidates must submit a **research synopsis** within the first 18 months of admission.
- The synopsis shall be reviewed and approved by:
  - Departmental Research Committee (DRC)
  - Faculty Research Committee (FRC)
  - Board of Advanced Studies and Research (BASR)

## 3. Research Progress and Monitoring

- Each PhD scholar shall submit **six-monthly progress reports**, signed by the supervisor and endorsed by the DRC.
- The progress shall be reviewed by GRMC and submitted to BASR for monitoring and record keeping.
- Scholars with unsatisfactory progress for two consecutive periods may be warned or dropped from the program as per policy.

## 4. Change in Research Topic/Supervisor

- Any request to change research topic or supervisor must be:
  - Justified with strong academic grounds.
  - Approved by the DRC, FRC, and BASR.
- Such changes shall not affect the minimum residency or credit hour requirements.

## 5. Dissertation Submission

- PhD dissertation shall comply with the prescribed format and guidelines approved by PUMHSW and HEC.
- It must undergo similarity index testing before submission to external reviewers.



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- The candidate must submit:
  - Five hard copies.
  - One soft copy.
  - Proof of publication in an HEC-recognized journal (Y category or above).

## **6. External Review and Open Defense**

- Dissertation must be evaluated by **two foreign reviewers** from technologically advanced countries.
- Only after receiving **positive reviews**, the candidate may proceed to open defense.
- An **open defense** shall be organized by the Department and ORIC/GRMC in the presence of internal and external examiners.

## **7. Award of Degree**

- The PhD degree shall be awarded only after:
  - Successful defense.
  - Positive evaluation reports.
  - Completion of all requirements.
  - Approval by BASR and Syndicate

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## **Part III: Quality Assurance**

PUMHSW, SBA, through its **Quality Enhancement Cell (QEC)**, ensures rigorous quality standards in the planning, execution, monitoring, and evaluation of graduate education programs, particularly MS/MPhil/Equivalent and PhD.





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## 1. Role of QEC

- QEC shall act as the central body for implementing and monitoring the **quality assurance mechanisms** in graduate education.
- It shall ensure **compliance with HEC guidelines** and university policies in all academic and research components.
- QEC shall work in close coordination with the **Graduate Studies Directorate, ORIC, Departments, and Controller of Examinations.**

## 2. Internal Monitoring and Review

- Periodic **Self-Assessment Reports (SARs)** for graduate programs shall be prepared and submitted to QEC.
- QEC shall facilitate **program review, curriculum revision, and learning outcomes assessments** through internal and external evaluations.
- QEC shall verify that the **faculty-to-student ratio, supervision load, and infrastructure** meet minimum standards.

## 3. Monitoring of Research and Ethics Compliance

- QEC shall ensure that all graduate research:
  - Complies with **academic integrity** and **ethical standards.**
  - Is passed through plagiarism detection software (Turnitin or equivalent) with similarity index within HEC-allowed range.
- QEC may collaborate with the **Institutional Review Board (IRB)** or **Ethical Review Committee (ERC)** for ethical clearance of research projects.



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#### 4. Capacity Building and Trainings

- QEC shall organize regular **faculty development workshops, student orientation sessions**, and **training on research ethics**, supervision, and plagiarism prevention.
- The goal is to foster a **quality culture** at all academic levels, particularly within graduate programs.

#### 5. Documentation and Reporting

- QEC shall maintain records of:
  - Program initiation and review.
  - Faculty credentials and supervision records.
  - Graduate student progress and grievances.
  - Research publications and defenses.
- An **annual quality assurance report** shall be submitted to the Vice Chancellor and Syndicate, as well as HEC if required.

### Practicing Academic Research Ethics

PUMHSW upholds the highest standards of **academic and research integrity** in its MS/MPhil/Equivalent and PhD programs. All graduate students, faculty, and supervisors are expected to abide by ethical norms throughout the academic and research process.

#### 1. Ethical Conduct

- Research must be conducted with **honesty, objectivity, transparency, and accountability.**



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- Data fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, and misrepresentation of findings are strictly prohibited.
  - All researchers must obtain approval from the **Institutional Review Board (IRB)** or **Ethical Review Committee (ERC)** before conducting research involving human subjects, animals, or sensitive data.

## 2. Plagiarism Policy

- Every thesis/dissertation must be checked using plagiarism detection software (e.g., **Turnitin**).
- The similarity index must fall within the **acceptable range prescribed by HEC**.
- Violations will be dealt with under **PUMHSW's Plagiarism Policy**, in line with HEC's policy on plagiarism.

## 3. Authorship and Publication Ethics

- Authorship should reflect significant contributions to research design, execution, or writing.
- Ghostwriting, honorary authorship, or duplicate publication is prohibited.
- Graduate students must **acknowledge funding agencies, institutional support**, and co-researchers appropriately.

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## Managing the Grievances of Graduate Students

PUMHSW promotes a **supportive academic environment** and ensures a fair process for the resolution of grievances for graduate students.



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## 1. Grievance Mechanism

- A **Graduate Student Grievance Committee (GSGC)** shall be established to address academic and research-related concerns.
- The Committee shall include representatives from:
  - Directorate of Graduate Studies
  - QEC
  - Department concerned
  - One senior faculty member (neutral)
- Grievances may include: supervisor conflict, unfair evaluation, academic harassment, or procedural delays.

## 2. Filing a Complaint

- Students may submit written complaints to the **Head of Department (HoD)** or directly to the **Director Graduate Studies**.
- Complaints must be acknowledged within **5 working days** and resolved within **30 working days**, following due process.

## 3. Appeals and Higher Authority

- If not satisfied with the GSGC decision, the student may file an appeal to the **Dean** and then to the **Vice Chancellor**, whose decision shall be final.