

Minutes of the 3rd Meeting of the PHEC Committee to “Discuss the Policy Guidelines Regarding Online Learning and Assessment” Held on May 11, 2020

The 3rd meeting of the PHEC Committee, to formulate policy and oversee the matters related to the provision of online courses, teaching methodology and assessments for learning outcomes in the province during the COVID lockdown period, on Online Learning and Assessment was convened on Monday i.e. May 11, 2020 at 11:00a.m under the chairmanship of Prof. Dr. Fazal Ahmad Khalid, Chairman PHEC, at the 3rd floor of ASTP. Some of the members joined via online link.

The following participated in the meeting;

1. Prof. Dr. Khalid Masud Gondal Commission Member PHEC, VC, King Edward Medical University, Lahore
2. Prof. Dr. Syed Mansoor Sarwar VC, University of Engineering & Technology, Lahore
3. Prof. Dr. Arshad Ahmad VC, Lahore University of Management Sciences
4. Prof. Dr. Rukhsana David Principal Kinnaird College for Women, Lahore
5. Prof. Dr. Talat Naseer Pasha VC, University of Education, Lahore
6. Prof. Dr. Muhammad Ashraf VC, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad
7. Mian Imran Masood Commission Member PHEC, VC, University of South Asia, Lahore
8. Prof. Dr. Irfana Mariam Commission Member PHEC, Principal Queen Mary College, Lahore
9. Mr. Sarmad Latif Mir Representative, Virtual University Pakistan
10. Mr. Muhammad Anwer Rashid Former Member Punjab Public Service Commission

Other Vice Chancellors who participated in the meeting were;

11. Major General (R) Obaid Bin Zikria VC, Lahore Garrison University, Lahore
12. Prof. Dr. Ishtiaq Ahmad VC, University of Sargodha, Sargodha
13. Prof. Dr. Mansoor Akbar Kundi VC, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan
14. Prof. Dr. Athar Mahboob Commission Member PHEC, VC, Islamia University Bahawalpur
15. Prof. Dr. Younas Javed VC, HITEC University Taxila
16. Prof. Dr. Shabbar Atiq VC, University of Gujrat

Following members could not participate in the meeting;

1. Prof. Dr. Niaz Ahmad VC, University of the Punjab, Information Technology University, Lahore
2. Prof. Dr. Arif Nazir Butt Commission Member PHEC, Professor, Lahore University of Management Sciences, Lahore

Prof. Dr. Fazal Ahmad Khalid, Chairman PHEC, welcomed all the participants. The meeting started with the recitation of Holy Quran. He appreciated the efforts of the government and the HEIs/universities to provide blended and online education in the prevailing COVID-19 scenario. The Chairman PHEC gave a brief outline of the objectives of the meeting including introduction of online assessments and examinations in the HEIs/universities and various options to conduct practicals and lab work. As part of Phase-I, universities have successfully implemented online education while it was

expected that things would become somewhat normal and universities would reopen by May 31, 2020. However, in the current situation of extension of closure of HEIs due to COVID till July 15, 2020 (Phase-II), universities have to develop their systems and procedures for the assessment (exams, assignments, projects, practicals/lab work), completion of academic sessions and admission cycle. Therefore, the members were invited for their suggestions on modes of assessment and options available to universities considering the current extension of closure of universities. He then opened the house for discussion.

- Mian Imran Masood, VC University of South Asia, said that online learning has to be taken up as COVID may stay for significant duration. Few universities are in the process of developing online systems for teaching and assessment. The mode to deliver lab, art and practical work has to be determined. He stressed that a mutual approach is needed to monitor and facilitate the HEIs.
- Prof. Dr. Arshad Ahmad, VC LUMS, informed that LUMS conducted two surveys of faculty and students. He said that the data showed that serious concerns exist for learning at home regarding submission of online assignments in time and finding the right working environment at home. He further said that 3 options regarding assessment are being practiced in LUMS including the acceptance of grade assigned by teacher, a pass/fail with continuing study and re-taking the semester later at no cost. He also said that the faculty expressed that their work has doubled which needs to be considered. He proposed that a WhatsApp group of this Committee may be created to help answer queries at a fast pace. Virtual training of faculty needs to be launched on a large scale with formal award of certifications. He said that HEIs need to develop a future strategy to meet any circumstances.
- Prof. Dr. Muhammad Ashraf expressed that the theoretical part of curriculum has been covered but the practical work, which is 33% of the total course, has raised concerns in the University of Agriculture, Faisalabad. In this scenario, there are issues of delaying examinations, re-taking the semester/course and the new admissions in the next academic year. The Chairman PHEC explained that the universities are autonomous to devise their own mode of examinations and admissions but they need to focus on implementation.
- Prof. Dr. Khalid Masud Gondal, VC, King Edward Medical University said that KEMU is already using online facilities for learning like Zoom and Google Classroom etc. For supplementary examinations, in June, students are given 2 options; one is to join through online link and the other is physical classroom exam with implementation of SoPs of COVID and physical distancing.
- Prof. Dr. Mansoor Akbar Kundi, VC, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, said that readiness for online learning has been low, however, the university will start the same from June 1, 2020. The quality of learning may be compromised through online learning as compared to conventional learning. Students, who don't have the internet facility, would be offered to re-take the semester afterwards. Affiliated colleges also face difficulties in the context of online learning. He said that directions given by HED, HEC and PHEC need to be aligned to facilitate implementation. He added that since universities are autonomous, they should take their independent measures. The Chairman PHEC agreed that the universities are independent to adopt appropriate measures, among the available options, for promoting online education. However, Mian Imran Masood stated that as announced by Federal Government, the students of 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th standard would be promoted on the basis of their

previous grades. He said that clear and uniform instructions should be issued to all HEIs for ensuring uniform education.

- Prof. Dr. Talat Naseer Pasha, VC, University of Education, informed that their university started online education from April 20, 2020. Option is also provided for using learning material that is shared on web. He said software may be used to provide virtual lab work. The issues of internet, affordability and accessibility are found since the students belong to middle or lower classes of society. The university would be offering loans to students on easy instalments.
- Prof. Dr. Syed Mansoor Sarwar, VC, University of Engineering & Technology, Lahore, expressed that the university started online learning from May 4, 2020. A survey is being conducted to assess the accessibility issue of students which reflected good access of students to online learning. Chairman PHEC emphasized the learning opportunity that pops up due to online meetings since they provide a forum for sharing of experiences.
- Prof. Dr. Ishtiaq Ahmad, VC, University of Sargodha, appreciated the guidelines provided through the platform of PHEC. The government should provide help to the students to resolves issues of accessibility and affordability. He requested to provide list of software that facilitate online learning and assessment. The university shall start online education from June. He highlighted the challenges faced by students in this new mode of learning in which getting quality education comes foremost. Specific guidelines for conducting assessments need to be issued.
- Mr. Samad Latif Mir, Representative, Virtual University, said that their university is conducting online exams in more than 200 campuses for the last 10-15 years. The university is focusing on maintaining physical distancing in the campuses as per instructions of government. For overseas students, the online system is in practice since many years which also evolves with the passage of time. The negotiations are in process, for instance online test of U.E.T may be conducted in V.U campuses. The university maintains the subject based question bank which is utilized as per defined criteria. Discussions are going on with U.A.F and LUMS also. V.U is also willing to support other HEIs for national cause. Chairman PHEC appreciated the online facilities of V.U and emphasized collaborative efforts by HEIs in the current scenario.
- Major General (R) Obaid Bin Zikria, VC, Lahore Garrison University said that their university is providing online education since March 29, 2020 and faculty were also given short training. The attendance has also been satisfactory with few cases of accessibility and affordability. The examinations are being planned in consultation with V.U and other HEIs. He said the university is focusing on Moodle, which is an online education-based application, unlike Zoom or GMEET. The university has a subjective and objective question bank, customized according to subject areas, which is used for online assessment after applying shuffling of items, answer options and time-barring. The system is secured which prevents cheating among students. He also proposed that the online education system may be continued even after COVID-phase ends as this system has qualities of smooth flowing plus huge cost reduction in terms of minimizing paper usage. He offered help to other HEIs for provision of blended learning system and assessment.
- Prof. Dr. Athar Mahboob, VC, Islamia University Bahawalpur, mentioned that the online assessment process is under discussion. The university is considering developing question bank and online assessments as well as

classroom tests if there is some flexibility in the lockdown. He said that if students are not satisfied with their marks, they can be moderated depending upon their performance in the test or viva.

- Dr. Younas Javed, VC, HITEC University Taxila, informed that online teaching has been started since March 30, 2020 in the university. Some challenges have been confronted; however, they are being managed. 85% of the syllabi has been covered and online assessments are also under process as far as quizzes are concerned. Midterm exams may be conducted in classroom if the COVID pandemic ends in the summer break. He stressed upon the implementation of basic criteria by the government in order to ensure quality. Chairman PHEC endorsed that efforts are being made to take benefit from the various initiatives being implemented by different organizations.
- Prof. Dr. Rukhsana David, Principal Kinnaird College for Women Lahore, appreciated the efforts of various HEIs amidst the COVID outbreak. She laid emphasis on the implementation of clear policy for assessments and practical work. Admissions may be discussed later in the phase since there is still time in the next academic year.
- Mr. Muhammad Anwer Rashid, former member Punjab Public Service Commission, appreciated the ongoing initiatives and focused on maximum utilization of software like MOODLE. Dr. Sajjad Shami, Member PHEC, said that online practical work may be conducted on the pattern of online classes; i.e. one complete practical in the laboratory can be filmed with the resource person/teacher first explaining the theory and aspects of the practical and then completing all steps of the practicals hands on with additional explanation step by step. Video recordings of all practicals of a lab course can then be placed on MOODLE etc. which can be viewed by students several times. The assessment of the lab course can then be made through online viva.

Chairman PHEC thanked the members for their contribution and participation. He concluded the meeting with the summary of following recommendations;

1. Universities are autonomous to consider and to revise the policies on assessment (assignments, midterms, final examinations etc.) for blended/online education. PHEC will also coordinate with all stakeholders (HEC, HED, Accreditation Councils, HEIs) to develop guidelines for assessment, legal requirement and practical/lab work which shall be provided to universities and colleges to ensure quality and efficiency. In case of design and lab work involved in programs such as Engineering and Medical Sciences etc., universities can opt to defer assessment for such courses with Incomplete (I) Grade.
2. Most universities have successfully implemented the online education system in Punjab ensuring online readiness and training of faculty members. In this context, PHEC has conducted training sessions on awareness and use of various softwares especially MS Teams that were attended by more than 70 participants including faculty members from public and private sector institutions. PHEC will continue to coordinate and organize online training sessions for faculty members inviting the resource persons from LUMS, VU, LGU and other universities. PHEC has completed a survey for need assessment of universities to find their requirements of hardware and software for online education and how the universities can provide training to other institutions. The training sessions will also be extended to the college teachers for online education.
3. The college sector in general, and affiliated colleges in particular, shall be brought in the mainstream for online education. PHEC will coordinate with HED and DPI to initiate an awareness and training program for colleges

regarding online education and assessment in Punjab. Also, 36 colleges selected in Punjab for Associate Degree Program shall deliver training to faculty for online classes as per consensus expressed in meeting held on May 8, 2020.

4. Blended learning/online education shall be promoted even after the end of COVID outbreak.
5. Assessment procedures and practices adopted by Virtual University can be considered by other institutions and universities and suitable training sessions may be arranged as required.
6. Universities can create awareness among students, staff and faculty to benefit from the stress management and counselling services offered by KEMU, which have been playing a crucial role in the wake of COVID related depression.

The meeting ended with a vote of thanks to and from the chair.

Distribution:

- i. Committee members and all Vice Chancellors of universities in Punjab.
- ii. Secretary Higher Education Department.