

NEWS: Higher Education Development Program (HEDP)

On February 25-26, 2022, HEC's Higher Education Development Program (HEDP) hosted 9 universities at LUMS to identify high-quality asynchronous online courses as part of the new undergraduate core curriculum for the country. The new curriculum adds 11 core courses drawn from 5 broad categories to the current Pakistan Studies and Islamiyat courses. Lt. General Bukhari, Rector of NUST said "Here is an opportunity where we can learn from each other, and I am very confident that all the stakeholders – not only faculty and students, but also the market, accreditation bodies will join hands with us."

Discussions were led by Dr. Shaista Sohail, Executive Director, HEC and Ms. Maryam Riaz, Project Coordinator, HEDP. "The HEC aims to create a holistic vision of quality culture for online and blended learning, said Ms. Riaz. **Dr. Arshad Saleem Bhatti, Vice Chancellor (VC) of Virtual University** commented, "We are standing at a junction where the future of education in Pakistan is being decided." Dr. Hasan, Interim VP, Habib University added, "All of HEC's efforts have taken us to this point. We shouldn't forget where we were and where we are going. This is a huge accomplishment in providing breadth of education for undergraduate students across the country."

The purpose of offering nation-wide online courses is to ensure all students across the country have access to the highest quality of foundational education. PakistanEdX was selected as the national online platform to host these courses. It was created by Arbisoft Inc., a major developer for international platforms like MIT/Harvard's edX. Mr. Bashir, CEO of Arbisoft said "Technology that we have helped build during the last decade, has already served over 55 million learners around the world". "The global offerings of MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) have skyrocketed demonstrating that online courses do not replace in-person instruction but rather provide complementary choices to learn anytime, anywhere," said Dr. Ahmad, VC, LUMS.

The meeting was also attended by VCs and representatives from the Aga Khan University, Allama Iqbal Open University, BUIITEMS, COMSATS, and Hazara University. These universities will contribute courses on PakistanEdX by offering multilingual options in the 5 core categories of Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, Quantitative Skills, Natural Sciences, and Expository Writing. Dr. Halai, Vice Provost, Aga Khan University, emphasised the need for quality assurance and a rigorous review process to ensure relevance and high standards. The 9-university consortium will meet on a regular basis to drive this project forward, invite other universities and work together to train faculty members across Pakistan to develop these courses. By pooling course offerings through PakistanEdX, all universities stand to gain from more quality educational choices.

