Higher Education Development in Pakistan (HEDP) project hosted the second meeting

On March 17, 2022 HEC's Higher Education Development in Pakistan (HEDP) project hosted the second meeting of a consortium of 11 universities at NUST Islamabad campus to develop high-quality asynchronous online courses as part of the new undergraduate core curriculum nationwide.

The consortium is formulated based on the expertise of these universities in developing and delivering quality online learning platforms. It includes Allama Iqbal Open University; Agha Khan University, Balochistan University of Information Technology, Engineering and Management Sciences; COMSATS University; Habib University; Hazara University; Lahore University of Management Sciences; Lahore College for Women University, National University of Sciences & Technology; University of Baltistan; and Virtual University of Pakistan.

Vice-Chancellors and senior officials of these universities attended the meeting. The new curriculum adds 11 core courses drawn from five broad categories of HEC Undergraduate Policy courses.

These universities will contribute courses on PakistanEdX by offering multilingual options in these five categories of Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, Quantitative Skills, Natural Sciences, and Expository Writing.

PakistanEdX is a key activity launched under the umbrella of HEC's HEDP project supported by the World Bank. It aims to offer Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) in line with well-known international platforms, i.e., Coursera, EdX, with the vision to expand the horizon of quality education on national level especially targeting the far-flung and underprivileged areas. PakistanEdX will provide subsidized courses (MOOCs) to the underprivileged youth, prepared by high-quality faculty.

The platform is developed by the same organization which has been a major developer for several international learning platforms like MIT/Harvard's edX, University of California San Diego, edX, and Wikimedia. The technology built by this firm has already served over 55 million students worldwide. The platform will be complemented by HEC PERN project which is expanding quality internet access to all universities and affiliating colleges. These initiatives are particularly important for provinces like Balochistan, interior Sindh, and newly merged districts of KP and far-Punjab.

Addressing the event Rector NUST Lt Gen (Retd) Javed Mahmood Bukhari said, "We at NUST offer our full support for this visionary initiative. It's the right time to take advantage of this opportunity and enable our future generations with the right blend of new learning." He appreciated the entire HEC/HEDP team for this remarkable endeavor.

Discussions were led by Ms Maryam Riaz, Project Coordinator, HEDP. She thanked all guests and emphasized the importance of to taking feedback of the universities in making policies regarding higher education.

The representatives of participating universities deliberated on what each university can offer and when each course will be available for the platform. The discussion focused on how these courses can be credited and what were the parameters for 3 credit hour course by HEC. VC AIOU and VC Virtual University agreed to share their quality assurance model with the participants for review and development of a QA model for the national MOOCs platform.

The proposed quality framework consists of six domains: Instructional Design, Content Quality, Learner Experience, Assessment and Evaluation, Publishing and Authoring, and Technology, Accessibility and Usability. Furthermore, other participating universities shared the number and names of courses that were ready or at an advanced stage in the value chain of MOOCs.

The sustainability and financial models were discussed in length with the aim to ensure high quality and accessibility aspects. House agreed to develop collaborative models among universities for the development of high-quality MOOCs with the involvement of experienced and specialized faculty from different universities. All universities agreed to task technical members for various sub-committees for PakistanEdX execution that can work on focused aspects.

The discussions concluded with setting deadlines and outcomes for the next meeting. These included finalizations of course development guidelines; refining of QA model; and review of the finances involved in developing MOOCs, maintenance of the Pakistan EdX and allied revenue sharing models. The procurement modalities for inviting expression of interests within the select group of qualified consortium members will also be fine-tuned before the next meeting.