OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING

Policy Provisions and Regulatory Framework

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HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

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Contents

PREAMBLE

Open Distance Learning (ODL) is rooted in the beginning of the twentieth century, when the concept of distance education was introduced in Europe. The Open University (OU), United Kingdom, was the first university established under the ODL system, whereas Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) is the second chartered in Pakistan. During the second half of the twentieth century, UNESCO encouraged the developing nations to develop ODL systems to reduce access and equity issues. Historically, ODL has been successfully implemented and recognized, globally, at par with the conventional mode of education. Recently, the emergence of the internet and related technologies have had a radical effect on the transformation of education around the world in the form of e-learning.

The Government of Pakistan not only encourages colleges and universities to enhance enrolment in higher education, but also elaborates on the need for knowledge and skills required for human resource development. In this regard, "HEC Vision 2025" identifies the urgency of opening more opportunities and alternative ways of higher education for those who cannot continue tertiary and further education due to the challenges of time and travel. The world is moving fast, and at this historical juncture of time, it is necessary to formulate a national-level ODL policy that guides and informs institutions interested in offering ODL programs/courses.

This policy sets broader guidelines under which universities/HEIs/DAIs would be allowed to offer education through ODL modes. The success of this policy depends on its capacity to build human resources and strengthen technological resources. The ultimate objective is to protect the interests of students, while providing them with an opportunity to access affordable educational resources.

SCOPE OF THE POLICY

The scope of this policy is to provide broader guidelines to all institutions that offer or intend to offer ODL programs/courses. The policy ensures that the ODL programs/courses offered are of high quality, accessible to all, and aligned with the institutions' overall goals.

VISION

Providing all education seekers with an equal opportunity to access quality education through the ODL mode

MISSION

To develop a standard mechanism for all institutions offering ODL programs/courses and to provide affordable and flexible educational opportunities that may open doors for all learners to explore their potential and lead a productive and responsible professional life.

DEFINITIONS[1]

Academic year refers to a duration of 12 months (a year). Each academic year comprises two semesters.

Asynchronous mode is online teaching and learning in which teacher(s) and student(s) need not remain online at the same time; rather, programmed instruction is used for distant students to learn at their own pace and possibility.

Blended learning is a teaching and learning approach that uses a blend of different methods/modes, technologies, and resources to improve student learning. Some forms of blended learning consist of a flipped classroom, online interaction followed by face-to-face teaching, and online learning that is sometimes supplemented by practical activities on designated premises.

Credit hour as the unit of measurement to indicate the amount of instructional and learning time required to achieve student learning outcomes of a course.

E-learning is an umbrella term that refers to the use of any digital device for teaching and learning especially for delivery or access to content. Thus e-learning can occur with or without reference to a network or connectivity.

Examination centre is a platform where examinations are conducted and all the required infrastructure and workforce for the execution of examinations have been provided with full integrity and sanctity in a proctored environment.

Faculty/Teacher means a permanent faculty member that will be coined as tutor/Instructor/Lecturer/ Assistant Professor/ Associate Professor/ Professor.

Faculty member (Full-Time): Faculty member that will be hired/engaged for minimum 40 hours per week through any signed agreement or contract.

Faculty member (Part-Time: Faculty member that will be hired/engaged for less than 40 hours per week through any signed agreement or contract.

Higher Education means education instructed by any means/systems after twelve years/Higher Secondary School Certificate (HSSC) of education/learning leading to the award of a Degree/Certificate/Diploma or Postgraduate Diploma.

Higher Education Institution (HEI) means the HEC's recognized university, or the degree awarding institution (DAI) charted by any provincial or federal government of Pakistan or the institutions affiliated with any university or DAI, within the provision of their charters, for imparting higher education as described in National Qualification Framework.

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[1] Adapted from "Open and Distance Learning Key Terms & Definition" Commonwealth of Learning - http://oasis.col.org/bitstream/handle/11599/829/Definitions_ODL%20key%20terms_20 150522.pdf?sequence=4

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) refers to a range of technologies and tools for creating, collating, and communicating information and knowledge.

Learning Management System (LMS) refers to a course management system or virtual learning environment, and is a web-based software system that assists teachers in managing courses and delivering lessons online. This helps in the administration, tracking, and reporting of the learning process.

Learning Object (LO): Any entity, digital or non-digital, that can be used, reused, or referenced during technology-supported learning.

Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) is an online course available for large enrolment on the open web, where 'open' largely refers to open registration, and not necessarily courses in the open license.

Online learning is e-learning with the mandatory involvement of a digital network, in which a learner needs to access at least part of the learning materials and services. Online learning refers to network-enabled teaching and learning that allows learners to have increased interactions with content, teachers, and other learners.

Open courseware is digitally designed course material in multiple media content forms available online for teachers and learners.

Open Distance Learning (ODL) mode is a way of disseminating teaching-learning experiences, including practical or work experiences, by keeping teacher and student apart using different modes (synchronous/asynchronous/blended).

Open Educational Resources (OERs[2]) refers to teaching, learning, and research materials in any medium, digital, or otherwise, that reside in the public domain or are offered under an open license that permits no-cost access, use, adaptation, and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions. Open licensing is built within the existing framework of intellectual property rights as defined by relevant international conventions respecting the authorship of the work.

Program refers to a study leading to the award of a certificate/diploma/degree.

Self-learning material (SLM) implies and comprises study material in any form, which is inter alia clear, independent, self-motivated, enabling a student to achieve a specified level of learning in the course of study, but does not include textbooks or guidebooks.

Small Learning Objects (SLO) are media content of small size and short duration that is provided in portable and downloadable format for the prospective and enrolled learners to save and use for reference and understanding.

Student Information System (SIS) is a sourced/developed/customized system for the storage and management of student records. The SIS is linked to the main web portal and

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[2]adapted from OER Paris Declaration 2012

the LMS of an HEI. The SIS manages student information on the main web portal including admission records, result history, and Roll No. Slips, and other institution-related activities.

Student support services refer to the services provided by an HEI to assist in the process of teaching-learning for students to the level recommended by or on behalf of the HEI regarding a program of the study.

Synchronous mode is online teaching and learning when teacher(s) and learner(s) interact with each other at the same time using any online communication tool/platform.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. **Coherence** with the frameworks and standards of education at all levels of higher education.

2. **Openness** in its true spirit for removing all barriers to education for all segments of society.

3. **Flexibility** in the provision of education in the form of transcending physical boundaries of institutions for ensuring **access**.

4. Required due to the **changing demands** of society and the needs of the learners.

5. Becoming more **inclusive** by efficiently using the available and future provisions of technological resources.

6. **Contextualization** of education without compromising on global standards.

7. **Networking, collaboration,** and **partnerships** at a local, national, and international level for the development and execution of the programs/courses in ODL mode.

8. **Design, develop, and deploy** ODL programs in an efficient, effective, and sustainable manner.

PART-I: POLICY PROVISIONS

1. GOVERNANCE OF ODL

a. Any Higher Education Institution (HEI), recognized by HEC, meeting the provisions of this policy can offer ODL programs.

b. All rules and regulations of higher education shall be followed with the amendments under the following sections of ODL policy.

c. Semester and yearly data of enrolled students and teachers shall be maintained and kept ready for monitoring and evaluation.

d. Internal monitoring report will be furnished and submitted regularly to the Office of Institutional Quality Assessment and Enhancement/QEC/Equivalent.

2. CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

a. All curricula must conform to HEC-approved guidelines, including NQF.

b. Every institution shall have a curriculum plan to suit each of the ODL programs. There must be a balance between formality and flexibility within the program structures, such as the credit schemes and specified duration of programs.

c. An online course must be based on specific learning objectives and outcomes same as courses offered through face-to-face mode.

d. Each institution shall develop and implement a specified instructional design for any ODL program; that includes the development of a program plan, a breakdown in the form of a scheme of studies, a course plan elaborating the interaction and face-to-face components, and programmed instructional materials in the form of multiple media contents.

e. Instructional design includes digital material, tutorial support system, and use of audio/visual technology. Within the above instructional modes, innovative designs can be adopted without compromising the quality and rigor of a program.

f. Specific changes in instructional designs must be approved by the statutory bodies, if any.

g. Online and e-learning designs are to be infused within the credit schemes already approved without compromising the prerequisites of the courses/programs.

h. An online instructional design with specific changes, as an alternative to face-to-face and laboratory components, must be approved by the relevant statutory bodies of the HEI.

i. The institutions must ensure the availability of required infrastructure and technological resources at the institution as well as at the end of users before the launch of a program.

j. The curriculum and instructional designs are to be approved by the HEI's statutory bodies.

k. The institutions must ensure the conduct of co-curricular activities for the students in ODL mode.

3. CONTENT AND MATERIAL DEVELOPMENT/SELECTION

a. Electronic/digital/multiple media tools/contents shall be developed or selected as per the need of the program/course.

b. In general, the content development/selection shall ensure alignment with objectives, localized/contextualized content, feasibility of utilization, and coherence across courses/programs.

c. Distance education content must be interactive/engaging, enabling, progressive, comprehendible, effective, and transformational. Credit hours of a course are to be distributed in self-study material, self-assessment activities, multiple media content, face-to-face/online tutorials, and workshops. The amount of taught material shall be in line with an example.

d. Every course shall be regularly updated to cope with the recent development.

e. Open Courseware(s) shall be developed and made available according to institutional policy.

f. Small Learning Objects shall be developed/compiled and made publicly available.

g. The use of Open Education Resources (OER), under Creative Commons license shall be adopted in the existing course materials.

4. INFORMATION SHARING PROCESS

a. Two-way communication shall be ensured.

b. Information regarding the offering of programs and admission shall comply with the policy of openness and disclosure.

c. Informed decision-making at the time of enrolment in programs shall be ensured.

d. Any change in policy or procedures shall be conveyed through multiple modes of communication to relevant stakeholders.

e. Students shall be provided with multiple options for contacting the institution.

f. Transparency, right to information as well as confidentiality shall be maintained by the institution.

g. A range of contemporary digital methods and tools shall be deployed to communicate information to students, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders.

h. Training manuals shall be developed by the institute offering the program and shared with students and teachers, in advance.

i. Internal information sharing and communication must be channelized

5. ODL DELIVERY MECHANISM

a. ODL needs specific and specialized modes and mechanisms for the delivery of information, materials, and instructions.

b. Provision of appropriate and adequate infrastructure shall be the responsibility of HEIs.

c. All technological means and human resources shall be made available and ensured before the commencement of the program.

d. Learning Management Systems (LMS) shall be sourced/developed/customized for hosting academic material delivery of instructions.

e. A web portal shall be developed for networking and sharing of information.

f. A mechanism shall be devised to ensure the privacy and secrecy of institutional and individual data.

g. Complaint registration and tracking mechanisms shall be developed to handle online queries/grievances.

h. Communication systems shall be arranged/sourced using technologies and devices available over public network services, e.g., web-based, mobile, and others.

6. STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

a. Face-to-face and/or online advisory services shall be made available for student guidance and counseling.

b. Face-to-face and/or online tutorial support for academic guidance shall be organized appropriately.

c. Provision of financial assistance and scholarships for ODL students shall be at par with that of the students of conventional mode.

d. Online admission and counseling systems shall be established for handling online admission queries.

e. Online help desks and helplines shall be available, and both synchronous and asynchronous support shall be provided.

7. EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT MECHANISMS

a. Student evaluation shall comprise multiple types of assessments at various transition points.

b. Formative evaluation shall include, but not be limited to, course assignments, quizzes, and face-to-face/online participation, while summative assessment shall be proctored physically/in real-time online invigilation.

c. Analytics shall be maintained for analysis of evaluation records.

d. Conduct of examination for ODL programs shall remain consistent/shall comply with the semester examination policy of the institution or the relevant Accreditation Council.

e. Secrecy, security, and identification procedures are to be transparent and informed earlier to the students.

f. HEI can conduct examinations at other government educational institutes, with the approval of statutory bodies. However, the parent institution must have its designated staff for supervising the conduct of examinations under proctored environment as per parent institution's regulations.

8. HUMAN RESOURCE

The human resources of ODL institutions mainly comprise three categories - Academics, Instructional Designers, and Non-Academics.

The following sets of professional expertise are to be developed through professional development programs:

8.1. Academics

a. Expertise in course/program content development.

b. Expertise in writing programmed instructions and developing evaluation/assessment tools.

c. Communication and collaboration with distant instructors, coordinators, and students.

d. Before launching an ODL program/course, the faculty engaged shall be trained accordingly.

8.2. Instructional Designers

a. Expertise in course designing, development, and delivery mechanism.

b. Expertise in Multiple Media Content Development (MMCD), using ICT.

8.3. Non-Academic (Administrative/Technical) Staff:

Non-academic staff shall be properly trained on management skills that are specific to ODL/Leadership/Good Governance/Expertise in ICT operations.

9. QUALITY ASSURANCE

All ODL programs shall be duly recognized by HEC and Accreditation Councils (where applicable):

a. Relevant Accreditation Councils shall develop a specialized set of tools and procedures for external evaluation of ODL programs to meet pre-set standards in consultation with HEC.

b. QECs at the HEIs/DAIs/universities shall adopt/adapt/create an internal evaluation mechanism for ODL programs and generate an annual report according to HEC guidelines.

10. REPEAL

a. This policy supersedes and replaces past HEC policies, regulations, and guidelines on online and distance learning. The policies/directives/office orders/notifications issued by HEC, from time to time, regarding educational matters other than Online and Distance learning shall remain in place.

b. In case of any conflict/contradiction, the HEC has the right to decide/clarify.

PART-II: REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

1.   SCOPE AND COMMENCEMENT

1.1. These regulations explain the minimum requirements for offering program(s)/course(s) in ODL mode. It shall be in addition to, and not in condemnation of, any other regulations/directives/rules provided by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) Pakistan from time to time, except for the HEC's previous policies, regulations, and guidelines on online and distance learning.

1.2. These regulations shall be applicable from the date notified by the HEC.

1.3. No ODL program(s)/course(s) shall be launched, unless and until HEC grants NOC (No Objection Certificate), in this regard.

2.   RECOGNITION OF HEIs FOR ODL MODE

2.1. An HEI planning to launch degree programs in ODL mode for the First Time shall be liable to seek Institutional Level Approval/NOC from the HEC, before the start of the relevant academic year. Only HEC recognized HEIs may be allowed to start ODL programs, subject to fulfillment of the following conditions:

2.2. The HEI has completed at least two batches of the same program in the conventional /regular/face-to-face mode of classroom teaching.

2.3. The HEI has been provided with the approval of the statutory bodies to offer ODL program(s).

2.4. The HEI can submit an application to the HEC for the issuance of an NOC, confirming that the HEI fulfills the essential conditions, and acquires the NOC/permission to proceed further for the development of infrastructure, ICT resources, and Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs). The HEIs cannot start any ODL program without NOC.

2.5. The HEI must provide proof of full-time and regular faculty designated for ODL programs/courses.

2.6. An ODL program/course plan essential for the program must be approved by the relevant statutory bodies of the HEIs, authorized to decide on academic matters.

2.7. Proof of readiness of ICT resources, suitable for quality delivery of the offered study program(s), must be exhibited. Similarly, the estimated number of students to be enrolled must be planned appropriately.

2.8. The application received from the HEI shall be processed by the HEC in the following manner:

2.8.1. The HEC shall review the application by constituting a review panel as prescribed in clause 2.9 and if any deficiency or fault is found, it will be communicated to the HEI within one month, and the HEI shall be

required to remove or correct such deficiencies or faults with the requisite documents or information, if any, within fifteen days.

2.9. Upon receiving a complete application, the panel of experts, in coordination with the HEC's official, shall review the provided data / information, and complete the first version of report identifying main areas of clarification before the physical inspection and conduct physical inspection of the HEI within 30 days (if required), with the approval of competent authority. The composition of the panel shall be as follows:

- The official(s) from HEC: 1-2

- Quality Assurance expert (preferably a Certified Reviewer) having a background in ODL: 1

- An expert in ICT: 1

- Subject/Domain expert: 1

2.9.1. The panel of experts shall physically inspect the HEI to ensure compliance with regulations for ODL and submit the report within 30 days from the date of inspection.

2.9.2. The report/recommendations of the panel shall be presented to the HEC for due consideration.

2.10. After processing, the application may be decided in accordance with the following regulations:

2.10.1. The HEC may pass an order granting recognition/NOC to such HEIs which fulfill the prescribed conditions and the quality parameters stated under these regulations. It may be up to three years in respect of such programs (specifying the number of students/seats and intake in a year) as it may stipulate in the order, and subject to such parameters as it may specify.

2.10.2. Provided that while passing an order where the HEC does not grant recognition in respect of one or more programs, the HEC shall specify the grounds of such refusal in the order.

2.10.3. Provided further that before passing an order, the HEC shall offer a reasonable chance to the concerned HEI of being heard.

2.10.4. Each order granting or refusing recognition to an HEI for their program(s) in ODL mode shall be communicated in writing for appropriate action to the respective HEIs.

2.11. The HEI shall admit students only when it has been granted recognition.

2.12. The HEI shall seek NOC from the relevant National Accreditation Council, before the commencement of the program, wherever applicable.

3. WITHDRAWAL OF RECOGNITION

3.1. Where the HEC on its own indication or any other information based on any inquiry or inspection conducted by any other legal authority is satisfied that an HEI has breached any of the provisions of these regulations or guidelines and orders issued thereunder or has submitted or provided any information and documentary proof which is found to be fraudulent/fake at any stage or any condition subject to which recognition has been granted, HEC – for the reasons to be documented - may stop programs/courses being offered under the ODL mode, cancel their NOC and/or withdraw the Institutional Level recognition of such HEI for offering any programs under ODL mode, provided that:

> **3.1.1.** No such order against the HEI shall be passed unless a reasonable chance of making a representation against the proposed order has been provided to the HEI.

> **3.1.2.** The students enrolled under such programs are shifted/transferred to the parallel programs being offered under conventional face-to-face mode without putting any extra financial burden on them OR three times the received tuition fee is returned in cases where students are not willing to continue.

3.2. If an HEI offers any program in ODL mode after the issuance of the order declining recognition or where an HEI offering a program in ODL mode before the commencement of these regulations, remains unsuccessful to find recognition under these regulations for offering programs in ODL mode, the degree obtained in such program(s) shall not be considered as a valid qualification.

3.3. Any HEI found offering programs or courses in ODL mode without the approval of HEC or in violation of any of the requirements of these rules and guidelines or orders made thereunder, HEC may:

> **3.3.1.** Issue a Show Cause Notice or withdraw the recognition for an academic year or up to a maximum of the next five academic years. HEC may also cause a permanent withdrawal of the recognition of such institutions.

> **3.3.2.** Lodge a complaint against the officials or management of the failing HEI to act as per the HEC laws/SOPs, if the HEI is found continuing the violations despite withdrawal of HEC's NOC

> **3.3.3.** Bring up the matter to the concerned authorities, as the case may be; and

> **3.3.4.** Take due action as per the requirements of the Act or Rules or Regulations as may apply to such institution(s).

4. APPEALS

4.1. Any institute aggrieved by an order or withdrawal of recognition may register an appeal to the HEC within one month.

4.2. No appeal made after the expiry of the prescribed duration shall be accepted.

4.3. Each appeal made under these regulations shall be supplemented witha copy of the order appealed against and fees as may be prescribed by the HEC from time to time.

4.4. The procedure for processing an appeal shall be as stated by the HEC. .

4.5. The HEC may approve or revert the order for which an appeal is made within two months.

4.6. The decision of the HEC shall be final and obligatory on the HEIs. Unless the final decision is made, the status quo shall be maintained.

5.   PROGRAM LAUNCHING PROCESS AND APPROVAL

i.   Before offering any ODL program, the HEI shall prepare a program/project proposal (as elaborated in this document) for each program/course.

ii.   Risk assessment and risk management strategy shall be developed for handling and running of the ODL program.

iii.   The program/project proposal shall be approved by the statutory bodies of the HEI.

iv.   The HEI shall put in place a monitoring mechanism to ensure its proper implementation.

5.1 Program/Project Proposal

5.1.1   Overview

The Program Proposal (PP) of an HEI is a manuscript composed to launch a new program, which comprises of:

i.   Program aims, goals, and effects

ii.   prospective learners

iii.   Suitability of the program and guaranteeing quality for obtaining abilities

iv.   Designing and development of program content

v.   Budget assessments for the establishment of the program, and

vi.   Admission, provision, and assessment standards

The Program/Project Proposal isto be initiated by the HEI, for introducing the program in the ODL mode. The institution must clearly explain the particular goals and aims for each of the educational programs which will provide the path to initiate a program and will permit to concentrate on outcomes. Each ODL program shall be designed with clear deliverables, knowledge milestones, and learning outcomes to be acquired.

5.1.2   Requirement to formulate ODL Program Proposal

It is mandatory to formulate a program/project proposal before presenting any new program that must be approved by its top academic authority. The main points of the program project report are as under:

i.   **Program's aims and goals:** The HEI shall explain the aims and goals of the proposed programs that must be in line with its Act and objectives, associated with societal needs as well as guiding the future course of action towards their achievement.

ii.   **Profile of Prospective Learners:** Profiling the target learners is essential to design a curriculum. Therefore, the HEI shall identify the learning needs of the target learners, classifying them into different groups e.g., low-income, rustic inhabitants, women, unskilled, etc.

iii.   **The relevance of the program offered in ODL mode to acquire specific abilities and proficiencies:** The institute shall explicitly indicate the learning outcomes for the offered program which shall ensure the acquisition of the required abilities and proficiencies by the pass-out graduates. The program should be designed appositely and intended to achieve the set learning goals. The learning outcomes shall comprise the expansion of skillset, level of awareness, and knowledge appropriate to the specific study domain, and in addition to these, such outcomes should also be an accurate reflection of the educational and professional ideals of that area. The learning outcomes should include essential transferable expertise and proficiencies.

iv.   **Instructional Design:** It consists of curriculum design, extensive syllabi of the program, requirement of faculty and other support staff, mechanism of delivering instruction/teaching method, the suitable medium of instruction; audio/video, virtual or computer-assisted, and student support service systems. The institute shall explain the instructional design or method separately for all the programs to be offered through the ODL mode. Furthermore, the HEI shall plan each credit hour for every course/semester.

v.   **The Method of Admissions, Curriculum Transaction, Assessment, and Evaluation:** HEIs shall describe the policy for admission and/or rules for the proposed program in addition to the minimum eligibility criteria and fee structure. The policy shall also guide necessary criteria and eligibility for scholarships, monetary aid, or assistance, if applicable. The notification of the policy of program delivery along with the details of teaching methods which are online, and through the web-based mechanism, as well as all academic activities, shall be conducted throughout the academic year or a semester.

vi.   **Laboratory and Library Resource Requirement:** There may be programs having a syllabus with practical or applied parts. The HEI shall provide clear guidelines related to the facility of the laboratory for the students to perform their prescribed practical work in a specific program. Practical books shall also be provided to the students, and practical should be

performed through face-to-face methods in case of the online or virtual model of learning.

vii. **Cost estimation of the program:** The cost estimation should comprehensively indicate the amount allocated for the development, provision, and maintenance of the program.

viii. **Quality assurance method and projected program outcomes:** The HEI shall devise the check and balance system to continually improve the quality of syllabi and teaching methods to meet the professional standards of the specific area of the study. The benchmarks of the course should be defined precisely. The institute shall also be deemed responsible for devising a system or structure to monitor/evaluate the program's effectiveness.

6. DEVELOPMENT OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNING

i. It is recommended that any ODL program shall include multiple media content, i.e., text, audio, video, and interactive learning tools.

ii. The curriculum plans can be made as per the need of the institution and specific programs, and comply the minimum requirement for credit hours prescribed for the qualification level by HEC.

iii. Instructional designs shall be made by the specifically hired Instructional Designer in collaboration with faculty members and the ICT support team, as per the requirement of the program/courses.

7. CONTENT AND MATERIAL DEVELOPMENT/SELECTION

i. The curricula shall be developed, as per the HEC guidelines.

ii. The HEI shall specify guidelines regarding minimum requirements for course development, design, and delivery of online instruction (such as course syllabus elements, course materials, assessment/evaluation tools, strategies, and faculty feedback).

iii. The learning objectives and outcomes for ODL courses must align with those of the traditional courses, ensuring consistency in educational standards. Additionally, each delivery mode should incorporate the following minimum factors tailored to its specific requirements:

  a. Synchronous mode: focus on outcomes that benefit from real-time interaction.

  b. Asynchronous mode: focus on outcomes that benefit from independent, self-paced learning.

  c. Blended mode: learning outcomes shall be designed with both synchronous and asynchronous formats in mind.

iv. The course contents must reflect the following characteristics:

a. Interactive and engaging to ensure knowledge retention.

b. Self-explanatory and aligned with philosophy of self-regulated learning in online mode of delivery.

c. Practical components (application/implementation of knowledge) shall be carefully integrated into the content. Student-centered instruction shall be focused during the course development process.

d. Inclusive enough to reflect and include the concerns and expectations of learners from diversified backgrounds including cultural, linguistic, learning styles, and differently abled etc.

e. Visualizing i.e., imparting quality images and graphics to improve interaction and engagement.

f. Contextualized and enabling i.e., using comprehendible language, jargon, and examples to improve understanding and comprehension of the learner.

g. Progressive with incremental complexity to support sequential learning.

h. Seat time and length of the recorded lectures: in general, an effective length of time for a course content is below 30 minutes.

i. Flexible in terms of the supplementary material which may be integrated as extra readings for the reinforcement of the learning.

v. The subject expert and instructional designer will develop the Open Courseware and Small Learning Objects as per the demand of the course and the instructional delivery mode specified for the course. The content shall include enough explanation of the significant topics, activities, self-assessment questions, links to further reading, and reference material.

vi. A team of reviewers (Subject expert and Instructional designer) shall review the content and material of the unit for the alignment between learning outcomes & learning material and learning outcomes and its delivery/presentation mechanism.

vii. The subject expert and instructional designer must decide on the format of the material (i.e., digital course material or textbook). The content as per format shall be selected or developed.

viii. After the review, the material shall be revised as per instructions of the reviewer's team, and the content/material shall be compiled as a digital package for the use of the teaching and learning process.

ix. The HEI shall encourage the use of available Open Educational Resources (OER).

x. During the selection and development of the content, it shall be ensured that

the copyrights of the material shall not be violated.

xi. The HEI shall follow the process that ensures permissions (Creative Commons, Copyright, Fair Use, Public Domain, etc.) are in place for the appropriate use of online course materials.

xii. The HEI shall allocate appropriate funds for the purchase/development of electronic study material.

xiii. Every course shall have a complete instructional material package, including e-resources that shall be available in the central Learning Object Repository.

xiv. The HEI shall ensure the periodic revision of course material, and activities at least every three years to keep the courses aligned with the demands of the society and learning outcomes. However, refinement and updating of assessment material shall be carried out every semester.

xv. The HEI shall ensure the training of the subject expert/course developer and Instructional Designer.

xvi. Guidelines for managing the Open Courseware are given below:

Academic Media Format (Learning Objects)	Technology Infrastructure	Delivery Channels
• eBooks • Study Guides	• Content authoring tools • Digital media warehouse	• Internet • Surface mail
• Web pages • Digital Books	• Web page authoring tools • Software for conversion of digital copies of books • Webhosting facilities	• LMS • Internet • PCs and Smart Phones • Web and media servers
• Audio/Video Lectures	• Audio/Video Recording facilities	• Internet • LMS • Electronic storage devices • Broadcast TV & Radio
• Live Audio/Video Lectures	• Audio/Video Conferencing equipment and software	• Internet
• Interactive simulations/virtual labs	• Self-assessment worksheets and Interactive interface in LMS	• Internet

8. ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES

8.1. Credit Hour in Distance Education

i. **Regular Semester:** will be 15-16 weeks of programmed course work, excluding 1-2

weeks for Mid and End Semester Exam.

ii. **Credit Hour:**

a. **Synchronous Mode:** one credit hour for theory courses shall be equal to 15-16 hours of direct teaching and learning per semester, which shall be uniformly distributed over the whole semester.

b. **Asynchronous Mode:** Equivalent programmed instruction materials in multiple media (Audio-visual or interactive learning materials), where one credit hour shall be equal to 15-16 hours of teaching and learning per semester with the following composition:

   i. Prerecorded Lectures: 425 minutes or 7 hours of prerecorded Lectures/pre-developed content that comprises 85 modules, and one module is equal to 5 minutes.

   ii. 5 hours of virtual contact between student and teacher through Moderate Discussion Board and recorded activities by the student on the LMS.

   iii. 4 hours of virtual contact between student and teacher through Graded Discussion Board and recorded activities by the student on the LMS.

c. **Blended Mode:** one credit hour for theory courses shall be equal to 15-16 hours of teaching and learning per semester, while the composition of direct-online and offline teaching and learning shall be determined in accordance with the ratio of synchronous and asynchronous components of the mode.

d. **For all modes:** where lab/project/practical work is involved, for one credit, 45-48 hours of lab work or equivalent practical work shall be required in one semester.

e. **For all modes:** in addition to the above, the following activities shall also be required throughout a semester to complete one credit hour in both modes:

   i. At least one graded assignment.

   ii. Weekly reading materials (1-hour/week).

   iii. Two graded quizzes.

   iv. Weekly online self-assessment exercises.

   v. An optional tutorial(s) for students.

iii. Transfer of credit hours from ODL to the traditional system in case of migration from one HEI to another in the ODL program and re-registration shall be in harmony with the institution's directions and principles and accordance with HEC policy.

8.2. Delivery Methods

i. For a successful distance learning and ODL program, technology arrangement in several provisions and methods are taken as an essential element. Therefore, during this stage, the educational programs are conceived, and various file layouts are defined for the provision or supply channel. The faculty members in consultation with media advancement professionals make plan for suitable media to be employed.

ii. It is required that any ODL program must include multiple media content, i.e., text, audio, video, and interactive learning tools.

iii. The curriculum plans can be prepared as per the need of the institution and specific programs. Maintaining the approved program credit hours, here are some of the options that can be adopted by the intuitions for their

curriculum design and instructions:

8.2.1. Asynchronous Model

i. Registered students get access to complete courseware and small learning objects provided through LMS for self-paced learning.

ii. The online forum used for discussion and Question/Answer (Q&A) sessions.

iii. The online mechanism for the conduct of quizzes and assignments.

8.2.2. Synchronous Model

i. Registered students remain online as per schedule and interact with the instructor in real time. Each face-to-face interaction will conform to the credit hour requirement.

ii. A teacher delivers a fully interactive lecture to students in multiple remote locations. To ensure a natural teaching experience, features such as "whiteboard", two-way audio/video, recordings, numerous notes screens and recording of live lectures shall be available on LMS.

iii. Other than prerecorded lectures, all other features of asynchronous model hosted on LMS shall be made available in this mode as well.

8.2.3. Blended Model

i. The blend of both the above models.

ii. In this mode minimum of 1/3 of credit hours shall be conducted via face-to-face or Synchronous mode lectures.

iii. All other features of the Asynchronous model hosted on LMS shall be applicable in this mode as well. Accordingly, it may include:

    a. Coursework instructions in terms of face-to-face or synchronous online teacher per week up till 15-16 weeks, where:

        i. One credit hour means direct teaching and learning (for 50-60 minutes per week) or

        ii. One credit hour can also be distributed in audio-visual or interactive learning material for asynchronous courses.

        iii. Formative and summative evaluation as well as self-assessment exercises are not included in the time distribution of credit hours.

    b. A blended course (synchronous and asynchronous) shall be a combination of weekly reading materials, multiple media content and or face to face lecture.

9. TECHNOLOGY INFRASTRUCTURE IN MULTIPLE DELIVERY MODES

i.   The HEI which offers a program(s) in the ODL mode shall follow such actions as are essential to merge Information Communication Technologies (ICT) for increasing the usefulness of teaching-learning procedures, administrative procedures, and maintenance of current information. It shall be done keeping in mind the enrolment, registration, handling of teaching-learning events through online help, facilitating the use of Open Educational Resources (OER), for synchronous and asynchronous modes for ongoing comprehensive evaluation, certification, and additional features of learner assistance.

ii.   The HEI shall make possible the arrangements mentioned above for all the offered courses in a specific program in a semester via ODL courses.

iii. Technology Infrastructure in the Multiple Delivery Model (MDM) is the primary component for the success of ODL. In this phase, the academic programs are conceptualized, and different file formats are defined for the delivery channel. The media development expert/Instructional Designers in consultation with the faculty members shall prepare the list of technology and media sources to be acquired/outsourced.

iv.   An HEI before launching an ODL program must have dedicated offices to efficiently host academic, administrative, technical, and support staff. The student facilitation sources must be readily accessible and must have all the modern communication channels available for interaction with remote learners.

v.   The IT support equipment and services acquired to assist ODL programs shall include but not be limited to computing and communication infrastructure, data center/ private cloud, or acquired virtual space.

vi.   The computing infrastructure includes different services, operating systems, communication software, applications, and packages that shall be used in teaching and learning on content delivery. It also includes storage media and shall be distributed at different locations for providing efficient information processing and storage services for a user of ODL. It shall also have security; information security plans for preventing any loss of data and for unauthorized access to personal records.

vii. The communication infrastructure is a backbone of e-learning framework. It shall be providing seamless interaction at fast speed between students and teachers, students, and HEI departments, between teachers and administration and other stakeholders in the education. This communication shall be made using a different mechanism to provide synchronous and asynchronous activities. This communication system shall be fault tolerance and reliable to deliver essential services to all students, teachers, and HEI officers. It shall use multiple technology fiber/VSAT, mobile, etc. to enable different delivery models discussed earlier.

viii. The HEI must provide details of self-maintained/rented servers to host

learning contents, available communication servers, e.g., web, email, video conferencing, and digital and physical library resources.

ix. Details of internet connectivity, regional and global online presence details (must be connected with PERN 2 or equivalent with a dedicated bandwidth).

x. Adequate arrangements for power backup and online availability must be ensured.

10. LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

i. The use of Learning Management Systems (LMS) is mandatory because it can contribute to broader acceptability of online courses among the local and international community. Therefore, the HEIs offering ODL programs must adopt the LMS for providing online courses. Some essential policy guidelines are as follows:

a. All HEIs offering ODL programs will configure the LMS for the delivery and management of ODL courses.

b. All the admitted students and faculty members shall be registered on the LMS. They shall be informed via auto-reply emails about account credentials.

c. The LMS administrators shall be appointed to ensure the operation of academic activities.

d. The faculty members shall be assigned a role to place e-content on LMS and manage the course schedules. They shall be allowed to export contents from previous courses.

e. Accessibility to a course shall be limited to the concerned faculty, registered students, and head of the academic department. LMS administrator may also add observer guest members after due approval from relevant HEI authorities.

f. During the maintenance, the registered users shall be intimated via email.

g. Training manuals shall be prepared for students and faculty members to operate LMS and participate in online activities. Training sessions shall be arranged where required.

ii. The LMS shall be designed to incorporate at least the following features, to support creation and delivery of courseware:

No.	Menu	Description
1.	Course introduction	Describe the introduction of the course
2.	Objectives	Highlights the objectives
3.	Course Outline	Comprises of chapters and topics

4.	Course Calendar	Displays semester schedule
5.	Instructor(s)	Profile of Instructor(s) conducting the course
6.	Announcements	Important announcement / notification about semester activities
7.	Discussion forum	Discussions on course activities
8.	Learning Objects	Comprise of all types of digital content used in the course or links to course web pages, etc.
9.	Assignments	Management of course assignments
10.	Quizzes	Self-assessment and graded quizzes shall be available.
11.	Grade Scheme	Displays the grading weightage, grading methods for various assessment components.
12.	Gradebook	Comprise result report of each student.
13.	Attendance	Record of attendance of all faculty / registered students and their activities.
14.	Feedback	The feedback from faculty and students
15.	Repent Ticket	An alert generated by students during the course

11. EVALUATION AND CERTIFICATION

   i.   In the context of conducting the examination, the HEI shall observe the policies/rules/regulations issued by the HEC from time to time.

   ii. An institution offering ODL programs shall have a well-placed mechanism for proctored examination and certification of students enrolled through ODL mode. Universities/HEI will not be allowed to establish their student support centers/examination center other than territorial jurisdiction.

   iii. Assessment shall be aligning with the learning objectives and outcome with proper record in each course.

   iv. An HEI offering a program shall follow a rigorous process for developing question papers, question banks, assignments and their moderation, the conduct of examination, evaluation of answer scripts by qualified HEIs teachers, and consequently in the declaration of results.

   v.   The question paper shall be well framed to ensure that all levels of the cognitive and affective domains are being assessed, while practical assessment must also include the psychomotor domain.

   vi. The examinations shall be conducted by the controller of examinations of the HEI and shall be held in the HEI-approved examination center.

   vii. The two types of assessment shall comprise continuous evaluation: formative evaluation in the form of Assignments/Quizzes/ Graded Discussion Board

(GDB) and summative evaluation in the shape of mid and end semester examinations.

viii. In an ODL program, the qualifying/passing score shall be aggregate marks in the Mid-semester, Assignments/Quizzes/GDB, and end-semester exam; as per HEC policy.

ix. Assessment and Grading Policy of the HEI shall be the same for ODL and conventional courses/programs i.e., in line with the HEC's Policy Guidelines for the Implementation of Uniform Semester Examination System in Higher Education Institutions of Pakistan.

x. The practical work (if any) of the courses offered through ODL mode, shall be conducted, and evaluated through traditional / face-to-face/ regular mode. Without the completion of the practical work, the semester examination shall not be held.

xi. The 'Examination Centre' shall be established either within the premises of the HEIs or other HEIs/ educational institutions, with the approval of statutory bodies, subject to the following: —

   a. The Examination Centre shall have internationally approved technological tools, staff, and arrangements for invigilation under the supervision of ODL, through the HEI faculty members, Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) for the recording of the complete examination procedure. In case of non-availability of the CCTV facilities, the HEI shall ensure that proper videography is conducted, and video recordings shall be submitted by the superintendent of the examination to the designated HEI, to maintain the integrity and sanctity.

   b. The HEI shall recollect all such CCTV recordings, and these must be kept safe for at least three years after the completion of the program.

   c. The attendance of candidates shall be ensured through biometric system records or Unique Identification Number (UIN), issued by the HEI.

   d. The examination center must be at a convenient place in the city.

   e. The number of examination centers in a city or province must be according to students' strengths from that region.

   f. Examination center (main building, rooms, grounds, and parking) must be up to the mark regarding cleanliness.

   g. The examination center must have an examination hall with adequate seating capacity and necessary facilities.

   h. Fire extinguishers must be in working order and placed in prominent, well-marked, and accessible locations. Emergency exits must be well-marked or identified and easily approachable for all the candidates.

   i. The examination center must provide facilities of adequate lighting,

ventilation, and comfortable seating arrangements. A safe and secure environment must be provided to the candidates.

j. Restrooms must be located near the examination center which must be clean. Moreover, the essential items in them must be available.

k. Clean drinking water must be made available for students.

l. Adequate parking facilities must be provided to students near the examination center.

m. Persons with disabilities should be facilitated.

n. The mode of delivery shall be mentioned on the Degree Supplement form that must be issued to each student by the degree awarding HEI.

xii. It shall be compulsory for the HEI to indicate the registration record of the student and the date of degree/certificate completion' on each of the certificates issued by it.

12. GOVERNANCE

12.1. An ODL management office/unit/equivalent shall be administered by a full-time director/officer who has expertise and background in open and distance institutions/department management. This office/unit shall be responsible for close collaboration between academic and administrative sections for ODL programs/courses.

12.2. From admission to the end of a program/course, all data regarding students and teachers in ODL shall be maintained for at least three years after the completion of a program/course at the ODL management office/unit/equivalent.

12.3. All processes and communications shall be made possible for distant learners, and it shall be ensured that they do not need to come, time and again, to the institution physically during the process of learning.

12.4. At all stages of program/courses, the principles of good governance must be ensured by the ODL management office/unit/equivalent to provide timely and best ODL services with transparency and accountability to meet global standards of quality.

12.5. The ODL management office/unit/equivalent shall conduct internal monitoring and evaluation in coordination with the concerned departments. Tools of internal monitoring and evaluation shall be the same as those approved by the Quality Assurance authorities at the HEC. Internal monitoring reports shall be furnished and submitted regularly to the Office of Institutional Quality Assessment and Enhancement/QEC/Equivalent.

13. HUMAN RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS

13.1. Faculty Members

13.1.1. The role and responsibilities of the faculty members shall be different depending upon the mode of delivery as follows:

i. **Synchronous/Blended Mode:** the main responsibilities shall be course planning, content delivery/teaching, coaching, questions' development, assessment, and evaluation.

ii. **Asynchronous Mode:** the main responsibilities shall be course content development[3], planning/handling, coaching, question bank development, assessment, and evaluation.

13.1.2 The actual strength of the permanent/contractual/full-time faculty shall be fulfilled a s per departmental workload, keeping in view the teacher-to-student ratio as prescribed in this policy or the relevant accreditation bodies. No faculty member shall be allowed to handle more than two ODL courses in one semester.

13.2 ODL Program Coordinator

The ODL Program Coordinator shall be responsible for program and course development, coordination, and revision and shall reside at the relevant faculty/department. The following are the actions identified:

ODL Program Coordinator Role	Action Points
Responsible for managing and coordinating all program development activities	• Development of Program Plan/Scheme of Studies with Program Goals and Semester break-down
	• Initiate course development
	• Organize a committee for course development
	• Prepare and submit the agenda to HEI Academic Council through the departmental and faculty Board of Studies in conventional mode and approval from Academic Council and other statutory bodies
Preparation and delivery of course material	• Preparation of students' learning material (SLM) in collaboration with the department
	• Checking the mailing package and delivery mechanisms
Coordinating instructional processes	• Coordination and facilitation in mentoring process of the student
	• Date sheet finalization

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[3] In asynchronous mode content development activity can be performed by outsourcing or engaging a temporary resource; hence it is not counted towards faculty load while calculating the teacher-student ratio. However, it covers 33% of the requirement for completing 3-credit hours. The remaining 66% time is counted towards faculty load covering the time that a teacher spends in other activities in a face-to-face or synchronous mode, like marking attendance, recalling salient points from the previous lecture, coaching i.e., answering student's questions during the lecture, taking quizzes etc., while in asynchronous mode, the teacher and the students do all these activities being offline. Hence, 3-credit hours of students complete performing these activities in offline interaction with teachers, while the faculty members workload can be equated to 3 credit hours' loads by increasing the number of students 0.33 times. Hence, the teacher - student ratio in Asynchronous mode could be 0.33 times higher to that of in face-to-face/synchronous mode. For example, if teacher-student ratio in face-to-face/synchronous mode is 50:1, in asynchronous mode it would be 66:1.

	• Submission of results to the examination department
	• Complaint/concerns management with the examination department
	• Coordination of the certification process
Coordinating the course/program review /revision	• Preparation of timeline for revisions/review
	• Monitoring the review process
	• Submission of review report to Academic Planning and Curriculum committees
Assuring the Program's Quality	• Coordination with Quality Enhancement Cell (QEC)/equivalent body
	• Processing program accreditation
	• Preparation and submission of required reports
Coordination within department	• Policy-making in collaboration with the head of the department
	• Coordinating with course and thesis coordinators
	• Monitoring all internal processes related to the program

13.3 Instructional Designer

a. A specialized, trained, and experienced instructional team shall be mandatory for each ODL program.

b. HEC suggests the following role of the instructional designer, under the ADDME Learning Design Framework. However, the HEIs may choose an appropriate framework, among the several commonly available frameworks[4], keeping in view their context, objective, contents, and delivery methods as well as the needs of the learners and instructors. Role of Instructional Designer under ADDME Learning Framework:

Instructional Designer's Role	Action Points
Analyze	• Analyze the characteristics of the target audience. • Evaluate the existing technologies available for instruction design. • Work with a subject expert to conceptualize the format of

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[4] ADDIE (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, Evaluation), ASSURE (Analyze, State Objectives, Select Strategies and Media, Utilize Media and Materials, Require Learner Participation, Evaluate), Dick and Carey Model (Analyze, Identify Instructional Goals, Conduct Instructional Analysis, Analyze Learners and Context, Write Performance Objectives, Develop Assessment Instruments, Develop Instructional Strategy, Develop and Select Instructional Materials, Design and Conduct Formative Evaluation, Revise Instruction), SAM (Successive Approximation Model) (Plan, Design, Develop, Review, Test), or TPACK (Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge) (Content Knowledge, Pedagogical Knowledge, Technological Knowledge).

	Learning Objects.
Design	• Design the formats of learning objects for synchronous, asynchronous, and blended modes. • Work with a subject expert to decide the sequence and flow of information to elaborate the concepts. • Work with a computer programmer to select the appropriate tools and techniques for the development of learning objects and instructional materials. • Design training programs for students and faculty members.
Develop	• Work with multimedia and computer programmers to develop the learning objects. • Work with graphic designers and computer programmers to develop the organizational structure of the course, web pages on LMS and conduct feedback surveys. • Prepare training manuals. • Work with academic departments to devise training schedules.
Maintain	• Maintain the proper documentation during the development process. • Provide implementation roadmap for instructional strategies Work with computer programmers to maintain the learning object repository and course web pages. • Analyze feedback surveys and prepare updated plans. • Promote and maintain collaboration among academic, services, and technical departments.
Evaluate and Redesign	• Continuously conduct the internal program evaluation. • Keep the feedback mechanism active during and after the program/course completion. • Gauge the issues and problems during the implementation. • Assess the needs for improvement and revision. • Revise the instructional design in collaboration with the program/course coordinators.

13.4 Video Producer[5]

Shall have relevant experience for producing and editing video content, including recording of lectures, demonstrations, and/or interviews by adding special effects, graphics, and animations to the video content.

13.5 Sound Producer

Shall have relevant experience for creating and editing audio content, including narration, sound effects, and music.

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[5] Video Producer, Sound Producer and the Graphic Designers need not to be hired if the content development is outsourced.

13.6 Graphic Designer

Shall have relevant experience in designing the course visuals, such as slide presentations, infographics, and images.

13.7 Quality Assurance Specialist

Shall have relevant experience in producing online courses and ensure that it is error-free, accessible, and meets quality standards.

14. DISCLOSURES, DECLARATIONS, AND REPORTS

The HEI which offers an ODL program shall adequately exhibit an announcement on its website by an official signatory, minimum at the level of the Registrar, verifying that the following documents have been published on the HEI website, namely:

i.   The HEI's Act, Statutes/Regulations or Memorandum/Approvals, or both authorizing it to deal with the program in ODL mode.

ii. Prints of the acknowledgment letters issued by the HEC and other related legislative or supervisory authorities.

iii. Program particulars which include flyers or instructions inter alia data, such as the name of the program, time-period, admission eligibility, program dues, and program structure, or any other.

iv. Syllabus-related program-wise information, recommended readings, interaction ideas for advising, program structure including credit points, program-wise faculty particulars, details of supporting staff, contact details, working hours and advising schedule, or any other necessary information.

v.   Significant plans or date sheets for enrolment, registration, re-registration, counseling, assignments and feedback, examinations, result declarations, or any other.

vi. Meticulous lesson plan of online course transmission, containing learning resources offered through online and learners assessment system and quality assertion practices of ODL program.

vii. The feedback procedure on progress, layout, transmission, and ongoing evaluation of learners-attainment shall form an essential part of the ODL programs and shall prove to be the input to manage the program quality and link the gaps, if any.

viii. Information related to any newly offered program and the one suggested for the upcoming two years.

ix. Full information regarding digital learning material, containing the name of the faculty member who recorded it, the time it was updated, the source for the LOs and its references, etc.

x. Availability of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and answers.

xi. A complete list of the 'Examination Centers', and

xii. The period of the enrolment procedure, along with the particulars of the academic year and dates of the mid-semester and end-semester examinations.

15. ADMISSION

i. Admission of students to an HEI for a program in ODL mode shall be offered transparently and made directly by the main campus of the HEI. It shall be solely responsible for the final approval of admissions or registration of students, provided that a regional campus shall not admit a student to any program in ODL for or on behalf of the HEI.

ii. Every HEI shall:

   a. Maintain a detailed record of its enrolled students and its graduates.

   b. Maintain the record of the entire academic process from selection of the candidates to their graduation. Preserve such records in a Student Information System (SIS). It shall be liable to produce such documents, whenever called upon to do so by any statutory authority of the government under any law in force.

iii. The number of seats approved by relevant statutory bodies in respect of each course or program of ODL mode shall be in line with the available resources such as infrastructural, technological, financial, and human, etc.

iv. The conditions of eligibility, including the minimum age of a student in a particular course or program of study, where so specified by the HEI, will be fulfilled.

v. The minimum educational qualifications required for admission in program(s) are defined by the relevant statutory authority or body, or by the HEI, where any statutory authority has specified no such qualifying standards.

vi. The process of admission and selection of eligible candidates, applying for such admission, including all relevant information regarding the details of the test or examination for selecting such candidates for admission to each course or program of study and the amount of fee to be paid for the admission test.

vii. Details of the teaching faculty, including therein the educational qualifications and teaching experience of every member of its teaching faculty and indicating therein whether such member is employed on a regular or part-time or visiting or contractual basis.

viii. Broad outline of the syllabus specified by the appropriate statutory body or by an HEI, as the case may be, for every course or program of study; and

ix. Activity planner including all the academic activities to be carried out by the HEI during the educational session and the details of Fall and Spring semesters shall be notified separately:

x. No HEI shall issue or publish:

    a. Any advertisement for encouraging and enrolling students for taking admission in the HEI, claiming to be recognized by a relevant statutory authority or by HEC where it is not recognized; or

    b. Any information, through advertisement or otherwise in respect of its infrastructure or its academic facilities or of its faculty or standard of instruction or educational or research performance, which the HEI or the person authorized to issue such advertisement on behalf of the HEI knows to be false or not based on facts or is misleading.

xi. On being granted recognition under regulation, an HEI shall admit students to its approved programs only from the academic session specified in the notification/letter of recognition:

    a. Provided that enrollment of students to the HEI, for any reason whatsoever, has been done in anticipation of the grant of recognition for offering a program in ODL mode, shall render the enrolment invalid.

    b. The number of seats and intake, approved by the HEI's statutory bodies for each discipline or program in ODL mode, shall be according to the resources, to start any program. However, it shall be reassessed and adjusted to the available resources at the time of the grant of NOC/recognition by the HEC/accreditation body. While executing the permitted programs, the HEIs shall provide access to LMS and other relevant resources for effective monitoring and evaluation by the HEC/accreditation body.

xii. **Synchronous/Blended Mode:** A student-to-teacher ratio in synchronous/blended ODL mode shall not be exceeded in any case for the following levels:

    a. Undergraduate level: 50:1

    b. Graduate level: Not Allowed

xiii. **Asynchronous Mode:** A student-to-teacher ratio in asynchronous ODL mode shall not be exceeded in any case for the following levels:

    a. Undergraduate level: 70:1 for non-lab courses, and 30:1 for practical courses

    b. Graduate Level: Not Allowed

xiv. **Availability of Laboratory:** The access and conduct of the laboratory must be the same as is required in the traditional mode.

xv. **The Frequency of Intake:** At the time of NOC, fresh admissions frequency shall be specified (not more than 02 in a year) for each program, and the number of students shall be according to the number of qualified faculty members available, libraries, online connectivity and ICT facilities, appropriate technological infrastructure, and well-equipped laboratory.

xvi. It is expected to limit the number of admissions for ODL program according to the capacity prescribed at the time of recognition by the HEC. Admissions in all modes shall be offered at the same time.

xvii. On being approved for recognition under regulation, the HEI shall admit candidates to its approved programs only from the academic year prescribed in the recognition order.

16. FEES

16.1. General Conditions

To provide opportunities of higher education to a large segment of the population and to promote the educational well-being of the community in general, the fee structure shall be devised by the HEIs in such a manner that it is affordable to all the stakeholders, and the HEIs shall comply with the following:

i. An HEI shall, for admission in respect of any program in ODL mode, accept payment towards admission fee and other charges, as may be fixed and declared by it in the prospectus for admission, and on the website of the HEI.

ii. With a proper receipt in writing issued for such payment to the concerned student admitted in such HEIs.

iii. Payment made directly in favor of the HEI, only by way of online transfer, bank draft, pay order, or any such mechanism as may be prescribed by the HEI.

iv. The fee waiver for scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and people with disabled categories shall be by the instructions or orders issued by relevant authorities.

v. An HEI shall not engage in the commercialization of education in any manner and shall provide for equity and access to all deserving students.

vi. No HEI shall, directly or indirectly, demand or charge or accept, capitation fee or demand any donation, by way of consideration for admission to any seat or seats in a course or program of study conducted by it.

vii. No person shall, directly or indirectly, offer or pay a capitation fee or give any donation, by way of consideration either in cash or kind or otherwise, for obtaining admission to any seat or seats in a program in ODL mode offered by an HEI.

viii. Every HEI shall publish, in print or electronic form, before the expiry of sixty

days prior to the date of the commencement of admission to any of its programs in ODL mode, a prospectus containing the following for informing those persons intending to seek admission to such HEIs and the general public, namely:

    a. Each component of the fee, deposits, and other charges payable by the students admitted to such HEIs for pursuing a program in ODL, and the other terms and conditions of such payment.

    b. The percentage of tuition fee and additional charges refundable to a student admitted in such HEIs in case such student withdraws from such HEIs before or after completion of the course or program of study and the time within, and the manner in, which such refund shall be made to the student.

ix.   Admission of students to the institution for a study program in ODL mode shall be presented transparently, and the principal office/campus of the HEI shall be exclusively responsible for final approval linking to admissions or registration of students by the HEI.

x.   Every HEI shall be responsible for providing such records, whenever needed by any legal authority.

xi.   The HEI shall not compel any student to pay any fee or fees in respect of any course or program of study which such person does not intend to pursue or avail any facility in such an HEI.

xii.   In case a student, after having admission to HEI, subsequently withdraws from the institution, no HEI shall refuse to refund a percentage of the deposited fee by such student within the period mentioned in the prospectus.

16.2. Financial Assistance

Institutions shall ensure that the provision of financial assistance and scholarship for ODL students is at par with the similar facility for students of formal programs. Information on available facilities and support services is required to be prominently displayed/flashed on the institution's website as well as on the admission portal and LMS. Different financial assistance schemes must be introduced and publicized for information of students. There must be a separate budget allocation for students' financial assistance as per HEC policy. The HEI is also expected to create need-based scholarships in collaboration with HEC for the deserving students of the HEI.

17. STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

17.1. Student Information System

A Student Information System (SIS) shall be sourced/developed/customized for the storage and management of student records. The SIS shall be linked with the main Web Portal and LMS of the HEI. The SIS shall manage the student information on the main Web Portal including admission records, result history, roll no. slips and other institution-related activities. The integration with LMS shall

facilitate efficient data transfer from SIS to LMS. It may enable the automatic creation of LMS shells once the admission confirmation is notified by the SIS.

17.2. Advisory & Counseling Services

To provide academic assistance to the students and to enable them to continue their course of studies smoothly and to remove the hurdles and bottlenecks, which can impede the progress of the students during the semester, advisory and counseling services are required in each institution offering the ODL system of education. The students need support during the study and before the start of research. In this regard, the institution shall establish a full-time dedicated help desk and appoint student counselors well versed with ODL system knowledge, program offering, and student information database. The helpdesk shall provide single-window services for all student-related queries. In addition to the physical office and staff, the HEI shall provide similar facilities for online guidance and counseling. There must be a separate department to provide this information and counseling services to the students. Support services for students under the ODL system may include information on the following:

i.   Enquiry, admission, and pre-study advisory services.

ii. Tutorial support for continuous academic guidance shall be organized in an appropriate form as in the ODL system students are not usually familiar with the system of programmed instruction and formative assessment.

iii. Guidance and counseling services throughout the course/program.

iv. Self-assessment of prior and acquired learning.

v.   Ensuring access to online library resources.

vi. Examination centers with differentiated services for students with special needs of one sort or another, e.g., disability, geographical remoteness, prisoners.

vii. The HEC (Grievance and Redressal) Regulations shall be adopted and operationalized by the HEI, and the HEI shall institute a system of Grievance Redressal, according to the guidelines.

viii. Students need to be provided support services; at the main campus as well as any study centers /affiliated institutions/ sub-campuses to overcome learning difficulties and to achieve satisfactory academic standards. However, for counseling distance learners, the various types of media may be utilized by the institute including face-to-face, telephone, teleconferencing, letters, handbook, online FAQs, Audio/Videotape, radio, television, computer and Internet via chat rooms or social media groups, etc.

17.3. Co-curricular Activities

The HEIs shall ensure all opportunities for students enrolled in ODL programs

/courses are equivalent to the students enrolled in conventional mode. In addition to the co-curricular activities offered in conventional mode, many other activities like virtual debates, speech competitions, online showcasing of creative and performing arts; webinars, science bowls, quizzes, and blog/essay writing can also be organized as per institutional calendar. All international and national days of significance must be celebrated including the distant learners; field trips or study tours shall be arranged as per the level and need of the program.

18. GRIEVANCE REDRESSAL

18.1. Overview

The HEIs offering programs in either mode, i.e., traditional or ODL must lay down its System of Grievance Redressal (SGR) or its procedure on the e-portal of HEIs. Moreover, the concerned HEI shall be responsible for updating the system as per requirement. Each HEI shall offer an online facility to the students to launch their complaints and track their status. It will also be the responsibility of the HEI to monitor, assess and review the effectiveness and potency of its SGR.

18.2. Guiding Principles and Standards

The following guiding principles and standards to develop an SGR policy shall serve to govern unit for an HEI:

i. A comprehensible policy must be bias-free.

ii. A specific timeline must be observed for each stage of the procedure.

iii. The system should be available on HEI's e-portal so that the students may consult it and go through it.

iv. It should be provided to special students (students with disabilities) in a format that is appropriate to their disability. Accordingly, it should also be made a provision in the policy document.

v. The neutrality of administrators/authorities/experts taking part in the SGR to inspect the matter must be ensured.

vi. The HEIs should have a time frame for the resolution of the complaints to minimize interruption in the learning process. The HEI should make available an appropriate mechanism that can be controlled, and also monitor the whole process through online applications to communicate and disseminate information/progress.

vii. The institute must preserve the privacy of the student to the maximum possible extent.

viii. The HEI should make sure that official(s) appointed for student support at the institute, any regional campuses, and student support center(s) are competent enough to offer guidance regarding complaints submitted in the e-portal.

ix. Students should have the provision of withdrawal of their grievance(s), unprejudiced and unbiased, anytime during the procedure, and

x. Students must be provided information regarding their complaint's status.

18.3. Rights and Responsibilities of a Student

i. Students shall have every right to complain about any facet of their studies, such as the quality of the program, learning materials/resources, student support and guidance system, quality of teaching, learning, and assessment.

ii. Students shall be allowed to consult the relevant Student Support Centre (in case of offline or blended learning) to launch their complaints. Whereas the students of online mode can lodge their complaint directly to the HEI, the complaint can be launched either by a single student or a group of students.

iii. The student shall put up a proper grievance complaint according to the procedures devised by the HEI regarding the expression of dissatisfaction with the quality of the provided facility or the absence of a service.

18.4. Responsibility of the HEI

i. The HEI shall work by the principles of impartiality, receptiveness, openness, and teamwork.

ii. The HEI shall keep improving the service it provides. When any complaint is registered, the HEI shall examine it carefully and thoroughly, and make the required amendments to its facilities.

iii. The institution is bound to ensure confidentiality and privacy unless and until disclosure is inevitable to continue with the matter.

iv. The registered complaint must carry all the reasons for dissatisfaction appropriately and properly along with the expected resolution/solution. The complainer should also provide the auto-generated online reference number of his/her grievance/complaint in the e-portal generated at the grievance registration time.

v. The responsible authority (Head/Dean) of the relevant school/department/faculty of the HEI shall look into the matter(s) or forward the complaint(s) to an authorized person, body, committee, or department(s), as per the requirement.

vi. The head of the concerned school of the institution shall be responsible for monitoring the progress and timely resolution of the complaint.

vii. They shall provide a written response (letters, email, or any other form of writing), via online/ offline mode, offering reasons for making the judgment and action taken to it.

19. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

i.   Professional development is essential for all the personnel engaged in the development and delivery of ODL. Training is particularly critical for institutions and universities currently planning to initiate an ODL system along with the traditional/face-to-face system. The Institutions already engaged in the ODL system are also facing a challenge to train their staff to meet the ever-changing landscape of distance, blended, and online learning needs.

ii. Following groups shall be focused on specialized training:

a.   Academicians (subject experts/content developers, faculty members, evaluators, etc.)

b.   Instructional designer, ICT experts, production staff for audiovisual materials, technicians, web designers, graphic designers, etc.

c.   Non-academic departments (Admissions, examiner, student advisory, recruitment, finance, accounts, procurement, legal section, planning and development, course production management, monitoring and evaluation, etc.)

iii. **Training mode:** Face-to-face, online, or combination

iv. **Training Duration and Frequency:** after formal induction at least six to eight weeks of training for academics and educational technologists before assigning specialized ODL teaching/production tasks and at least four weeks for the servicing and administrative personnel. Refresher courses should also be arranged every two to three years to meet changing needs in ODL techniques and strategies.

20. MONITORING & INSPECTION (ACADEMIC AUDIT) OF HEIs

i.   An HEI which offers programs in ODL mode shall abide by all HEC regulations.

ii. An HEI recognized under these rules for teaching programs in ODL mode shall get each program evaluated by the DQE/Equivalent body one time a year in the format suggested by the HEC. Furthermore, the quality assurance report shall, at the end of an academic year, be prominently placed on its website and a copy submitted to the HEC. The HEI may be instructed to provide such information as the HEC may be required from the perspective of ensuring observance of the regulations by the HEI. For this purpose, the HEI shall have a responsibility to provide such information in the specified period.

iii. Where considered appropriate, the HEC shall ask, based on the received information, regarding malpractice, if it is necessary, for reasons to be documented in writing, for review through examination, or otherwise of the expert bodies. Also, if it may consider fit, to assure that the HEI is following all the mandatory requirements under these regulations, the teaching programs in ODL mode must be stopped and shall take suitable action to get

compliance imposed on the erring HEI.

21. QUALITY ASSURANCE (QA)

21.1. General QA Requirements

An HEI, offering program(s) in ODL mode, shall take the following measures for quality assurance:

i. Within one year of starting the programs through ODL mode, it shall establish a quality assurance section in the existing Quality Enhancement Cell/equivalent body, dedicated to assuring the quality of programs offered in ODL mode.

ii. Follow the Quality Assurance recommendations on LOs for students, syllabus, teaching, and multimedia, as stated by the HEC or by any other regulatory body approved by it for recommending such instructions, and shall post the same on the website.

iii. Take satisfactory actions for the guidance and capacity improvement of the educational and managerial staff and advisors at fixed interims of time.

iv. Make sure that the standard of the program of the study, put forth through distance education mode, is kept at par with the quality observed in the traditional mode of classroom education, as offered by the concerned body or the proper legislative authority.

v. Grant only such degrees as described by the Act and allowed in the Order of acknowledgment under these regulations.

vi. HEIs shall have to submit copies of the authorization letters, duly obtained from the relevant legislative supervisory body or council to render the professional courses or program on the corresponding HEI's website. Besides this, the name of each academic program should correspond to the HEI brochure or bulletin and inform HEC about this matter frequently.

vii. HEIs are to maintain a student feedback system in line with the feedback system mandated by the HEC for traditional programs. The feedback system shall be launched and maintained regularly to improve the quality of all ODL programs and must be in place from the start of each program.

viii. HEIs must maintain LMS-based enrollment/registration data and attendance records of all students.

ix. Any student with less than the required attendance as per program rules in any course shall not qualify to appear in the final examination of that course. Analytics of the online system shall be used for calculating synchronous and asynchronous active time.

x. An HEI that offers a program in ODL mode shall, to facilitate the learning pace and multiple options for the students, prepare learning objects (LOs) taking into consideration the following:

a. The LOs have openly listed goals, planned learning results, education help, and advice for the students on how to best use the related reference material for the enhanced learning experience, and links within the text for using other media (for digital LOs) are kept for easy referencing.

b. The LOs are self-contained, self-explanatory, illustrative, easy to understand, and in feasible parts and chunks.

c. The LOs offer sufficient tools to the learners to respond to their comprehension of the subject(s) they study.

d. The LOs are to be regularly updated from the viewpoint of refining quality and helping learners.

e. The recommendations for preparing the LOs are laid down in these regulations.

xi. Given that an HEI shall arrange the LOs only after authorization of the Program Proposal.

xii. Provided that no program in ODL mode shall be offered by the HEI unless it has developed the LOs, taking into account the above aspects.

21.2 QUALITY ASSURANCE MECHANISMS

A separate directorate of Quality Assurance or a Quality Enhancement Cell is functional at all HEIs. It shall be ensured that a section within this department may deal mainly with the ODL programs, following these steps:

Step 1. The quality indicators for the ODL programs based on the ODL Policy shall be developed and ensured at each stage of the launching and execution of a program.

Step 2. The internal academic review shall be conducted as a regular feature of the programs; this may be done by filling up evaluation forms at the end of each semester and a report generated annually.

Step 3. Every HEI offering ODL must ensure that external reviews shall be conducted within one to three years as per the level and need of the program and prescription of HEC.

Step 4. Student evaluation and accessibility of reports and results as per the need of good governance policy shall be monitored by the QEC/Equivalent department.

21.3. Academic staff

i. Faculty members and relevant academic positions for ODL shall be selected from the existing permanent/contractual/full-time faculty members of the department, appointed as per the minimum qualifications prescribed by the HEC for Lecturer, Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, and Professor.

ii. Every faculty member, in conjunction with his or her academic responsibilities, shall contribute to teaching, curriculum, and course material development, undertaking examination/evaluation/invigilation work, providing general help to the students/learners in respect of their academic/learning problems, and ensuring institutional support activities.

iii. A faculty member's working capacity shall be in accordance with the strategies developed by HEC from time to time. The workload of each faculty member should be justified. The HEI shall have defined criteria for the estimation of departmental workload, and this should be placed on the website of the HEI.

iv. In every offered program, the number of full-time teachers, and other administrative and technical staff shall be appointed as per these regulations, HEC's policies as well as HEI's rules.

v. The details of the faculty, i.e., the complete profile for ODL shall be available on the website of the HEI.

22. OWNERSHIP AND USE

The HEIs shall reserve the right of property of all courses, digital contents, question banks and programs developed and approved by their statutory bodies.

23. AUTHORITY

The HEC officials may be authorized to perform various functions in executing these rules. For the sake of organizing, the HEC may entrust its authority to hear and decide an appeal to some person or persons, including the HEC officials, as it may state in writing.

24. INTERPRETATION CLAUSE

In case of a difference of opinion regarding the interpretation of these rules, the HEC's judgment shall be considered final.