

**HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION  
RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT (R&D) DIVISION  
RESEARCH JOURNALS SECTION**

## **1. Introduction**

Since 2005, HEC has sought to introduce policies for raising the quality of national research journals. However, there are concerns that academic and research quality in Pakistan needs more improvement. This demands transition to a more transparent, rigorous, and focused system for Accreditation, Monitoring, Capacity Building and Funding of Research Journals.

## **2. Objectives**

Objective of this policy document is to nurture and enhance academic and publication standards of national research journals through a more comprehensive and result oriented criteria for accreditation, financial support and capacity building to bring their academic and publication quality to international standards.

The intended objectives of the proposed policy for research journals are;

- Establishment of minimum and optimal standards, in line with international best practices, for academic review, publication quality, visibility & durability of research, impact creation and ethical practices.
- Establishment and strengthening of monitoring systems.
- Capacity building of editorial teams.
- Provision of financial support and linking of such support to performance, i.e. success in meeting quality criteria.

## **3. Eligibility Criteria for Registration/Application Submission**

- **Objectives:** The journal must have clearly defined aims, objectives and scope of publication.
- **Transparency:** The Journal must have an ISSN, Title and URL (verified from International ISSN register). The journal's website should facilitate online availability and include an archive of previous issues. The submission process, publication fee, and sponsorships / source(s) of funding must be available publicly. Besides, the journal must be published regularly.

Author name, address and contact details along with author contribution should be mentioned on top of each research article.

Published articles must be in line with scope of the Journal and contents with highest quality must be given importance/priority in taking publication decisions but all the process should be very transparent and objective.

- **Publisher Characteristics:** The journal must be owned and published by a registered entity, which could be a University or Higher Education Institution or a Department/faculty of such an entity, or a registered research institution, or a registered Non-Profit Academic Society with a mandate for research. In all such cases, the publisher should have a formal governing body, which must approve the publication decisions. "Registered" means registered with the SECP, or the Registrar of Societies or the relevant Government Organization/Body.
- **Timeliness.** The research journal should be published on time as per their specified frequency in the stipulated time period but not later than one month from due date.
- Each journal should clearly mention on its website its publishing frequency with exact time frame of publishing.

### ***Editorial and Advisory Board.***

#### Composition of Editorial Board

- The Editorial Board may comprise of Patron, Editor-in-Chief, Editor, Managing Editor, Associate / Assistant or Sub-Editor etc.
- An academic editorial board (or equivalent), comprising of members with PhD degrees in relevant fields (i.e., area of publication) and strong research and publications background

#### Composition of Advisory Board

- The journal must have a Diversified Advisory Board having members with sufficient Research Background/Experience relevant to scope of the journal. Members of the Advisory Board shall have more than 50 % members from outside the Journal's Managing Organization.
- Advisory Board may comprise of both national and international members from Academically Advanced Countries. Minimum 8 members should be the Advisory Board.
- Credentials of the Editorial and Advisory Board Members should be taken into consideration and be clearly mentioned in the journal as well as on the Website (*Advisory board members must hold a Ph.D. degree in the relevant field with rich research experience*).
- **External Review Process.** All published articles should have been reviewed by external reviewers (from outside the organization of journal). Review Proforma must cover all qualitative and quantitative aspects of the research article as per research parameters. Comprehensive comments of the reviewer must display the important features/flaws of the reviewed article.
- Review Requirements for each level of accreditation have been given in Section 5 (ii)
- Reviewers' Panel shall be separate from the Editorial/Advisory Board and names of the reviewers shall not be published in the journal/website in any case.

- The Abstracting/Indexing Agency selected by the journal must have relevancy with the discipline, area, and scope of the journal. Category wise requirements for each level of accreditation have been given in Section 5.

- **Independent and Comprehensive Website for Online availability**

A comprehensive website (*as per prescribed guidelines*) with the facility of online submission & review preferably using **OJS, Scholar One** or similar software should be adopted for online visibility of regional research and for permanent archiving of previously published research work.

Schedule for “Call for Papers” & Publishing Calendar, Complete Process of Publication showing time duration of individual activity and whole process, Publication Fee & Sponsorships / Source(s) of funding, Governing Body, Editorial Ethics, Contact Details, Scope of the Journal, Credentials of Editorial & Advisory Boards and last but not least Hyperlinks for relevant Indexing/Abstracting Agencies & Publication Tools (if any) must invariably be given and continuously updated on website of the journals.

Besides the website must be esthetically pleasing and each article must bear Logo of the Owner Institution on top right corner.

- **Anti-Plagiarism and Anti-Predatory Procedures**

The journal should ensure existence and applicability of Anti-Plagiarism and AntiPredatory Practices/Procedures to ensure transparency and genuineness of research being published in the research journals. The plagiarism detection software like Turnitin, iThenticate etc. can be used for the purpose.

Considering the fact that use of above-mentioned software can only check similarity of words, it is the responsibility of Editorial Team/Board to ensure the existence of all the necessary processes and procedures to ensure that plagiarized work (including self-plagiarism) is not published.

In case HEC or any of its Scientific Review Panels or any committee of HEC detects publishing of any plagiarized work, strict action will be taken against the journal which may lead to black-listing of such journals(s).

Editor will be responsible to follow a specific internationally well reputed protocol to curb predatory practices. Preferably, Guidelines of “Committee on Publishing Ethics” (COPE) should be followed in letter and spirit. In this regard, HEC encourages the journals to take membership of COPE. Membership Certificate be attached with the application for accreditation.

- **Ethical Guidelines**

HEC has given Ethical Guidelines for Authors, Editors & Reviewers to ensure that best ethical standards are followed by its recognized journals and every journal aspiring to get accreditation from HEC and in order to continue enjoying accreditation status will have to follow HEC's Ethical Guidelines. Journal shall be delisted/ derecognized for valid reasons/violation, as and when noticed in accordance with prescribed Ethical Guidelines given at HEC website ([www.hec.gov.pk/site/journals](http://www.hec.gov.pk/site/journals)).

#### **4. Mechanism for Evaluation of Journals**

The criteria described above shall be executed through subject expert panels following a specific mechanism through TORs developed and approved by Higher Education Commission for the purpose.

Following eight Review Panels have been formed by HEC to, inter-alia, oversee the matters for evaluation and recognition of research journals;

- (i) Agricultural Sciences
- (ii) Biological and Medical Sciences
- (iii) Mathematical and Physical Sciences
- (iv) Engineering and Technology
- (v) Arts and Humanities
- (vi) Management Sciences
- (vii) Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences
- (viii) Education and Human Resources

These expert panels have the responsibility to effectively evaluate the proposals for recognition of research journals in their respective areas/disciplines and they will exercise a continuous watch over compliance of SOPs of HEC for continuity of recognition status of journals and for accreditation of research-oriented books.

#### **5. Accreditation of Research Journals in Different Categories**

Research Journals are accredited through an IT Based Comprehensive System of Accreditation giving pre-defined weightages to different Scientific Impact Measures like Impact Factor, SCImago Journal Rank (SJR), Eigen Factor, Impact per Paper (IPP), Source Normalized Impact per Paper (SNIP) etc.

For achieving higher levels of accreditation, the journal will have to show performance not only on compliance of fundamental requirements given in Section 3 above but also it will have to meet the requirements of indexation with international indexing agencies including but not limited to Web of Science or Scopus/Elsevier.

### **(i) Requirements for Registration/ Application Submission**

For submission of application for accreditation of research journals, a journal will have to fulfill the Eligibility Criteria for Registration/Accreditation of Research Journals as detailed at Section 3.

### **(ii) Categories of Research Journals for Accreditation & Funding**

Journals only in W Category will enjoy the status of accreditation and all category W journals have equal standing for the purpose of academic benefits. X and Y category journals do not qualify for accreditation standards but can receive funding as per prescribed limits. Criteria for award of X and Y Categories have been set only for gradual uplifting of the journals to reach W Category Accreditation Level.

In case a journal proves to be incapable of maintaining eligibility criteria for an assigned level, it can be delisted/ derecognized, as and when necessary, in accordance with the prescribed Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

Details of the categories in terms of Minimum and Additional Quality Criteria for each category are as follows:

#### **(a) Basic Quality Criteria (Y Category Journals)**

- Must be an **Eligible Journal** as defined in Section 3.
- Each paper should be reviewed externally by **at least 2 reviewers**. Both the reviewers may be national or international. Correspondence with Reviewers shall only be made via official email addresses.
- **Authors may be national or international**. However, publications of editor/member of the editorial team of the journal must not be published in that journal and local authorship (from the same publishing institute) excluding members of Editorial/Advisory Boards must not be more than 1/5th of published articles per issue.

#### **(b) Quality Criteria (X Category)**

- Must be an Eligible Journal and should meet Basic Quality Criteria given in Section 5 (ii) (a). It requires to fulfill additional quality criteria in addition to Section 5 (ii) (a).
- Open Journal Management System (OJS) to be adopted for submission, acceptance and rejection of each research article.
- Each Article shall be got peer reviewed by at least **2 external reviewers; one national and one international**.
- Journal must be registered with **one or more well reputed Abstracting/ Indexing Agencies** from HEC's Recognized Indexing Abstracting Agencies (available at website of HEC)
- **At minimum; ¼th** of the published articles must comprise of **international authorship** (from outside the territorial jurisdiction of Pakistan)

- **Self-institutional publications** (either of Editorial/Advisory Board Members or else) **shall not be allowed in any case.**

### **(c) Additional Quality Criteria for International Recognition (W Category)**

Journals registered with well reputed international indexing agencies such as Web of Science or Scopus along with having citation information from different Scientific Impact Measures like Impact Factor (IF), SCImago Journal Rank (SJR), Source Normalized Impact per Paper (SNIP), Impact per Publication (IPP), Eigen Factor (EGF) etc. shall be considered for grant of Accreditation in W Category.

**A Weighted Average Score will be calculated on the basis of above Scientific Impact Measures and a minimum bench mark will be fixed for award of W Category in each of the 8 scientific disciplines on the recommendations of respective Scientific Review Panels. Details will be notified separately.**

The laid down bench marks for each scientific area will be incorporated in an IT Based “Journals Accreditation System” to determine eligibility for recognition in W Category.

## **6. Process for Recognition of Research Journals**

### **A-Application Submission**

- Call for submission of applications will be issued once a year on HEC Website for Journals to apply for award of category and funding.
- Editors of new/ emerging journals as well as already listed journals, aspiring to seek higher level of accreditation, may apply on prescribed application forms available at Website of HEC along with documentary evidences through email or online portal up to a specified deadline.

### **B-Required Documentation/ Evidences in Soft Form**

- Application Form Duly Signed by Chief Editor
- Covering Letter/ Letter of Recommendation from Head of the publishing Institute
- ISSN Certificate, Title and URL
- Information of Editorial/Advisory Board members
- External peer review record. In case of application for W Category, it is not mandatory
- Last two years of published issues for new journals and recent issues for already enlisted journals

### **C-Evaluation Procedure**

### **(i) Scrutiny**

- Initial scrutiny of documents will be conducted within one month of closing of submissions as per eligibility criteria and required documents as per checklist.
- In case of incomplete documents or non-compliance with the eligibility criteria, the case will not be considered for further processing and will be returned/ rejected.
- Only complete applications in all respects will be processed further.

### **(ii) Formation of Scientific Review Panels and Selection of Reviewers**

Journals' applications complete in all respects will be sent for evaluation to the Chairman/Convener of Scientific Review Panels, who will forward the case to Subject Experts as per his/her professional judgement.

### **(iii) Conflict of Interest**

The Members of Review Panels must declare "No Conflict of Interest" in the Journal under consideration as follows:

- The Expert/Member or his/her spouse is not associated with journal as an editorial/advisory board member or as a reviewer or with the concerned publishing organization
- Must not have published research article in the journal being evaluated in the last 2 years

### **(iv) Journals' Evaluation by Subject Experts**

The Subject Experts, as selected by the Chairman of Expert Panel will submit their individual review reports on prescribed Proforma to the Chairman. These review reports will be presented before the relevant Expert Panels in meetings organized by HEC for further deliberations across the board. The members may consult other experts (national or international) in writing, where required and the consultation made will be accompanied with the review form/ final recommendations.

The members will develop a consensus on recommending the grant or refusal of fresh accreditation or upgradation of aspirant research journals. Concerned HEC officials will record minutes of such meetings which will be got approved by the competent authority of HEC for adoption/approval thereof. Decisions regarding accreditation shall be notified provisionally on website of HEC. Emails will be sent to the concerned Editors giving a right of appeal within a month of receipt of intimation.

The appeals, if any, will be presented before the R&D Ethics Appeal Board with appropriate justifications provided by the Editor. The Ethics Appeal Board will decide the appeals within a fortnight and final lists of Accredited Journals will be issued on Website of HEC.

All the above process of accreditation should be completed within maximum of 6 months.

#### **(viii) Online Feedback/ Complaint Box for Public**

All the stakeholders from Academic and Research communities may rate and recommend journals or may report predatory/ corrupt practices by Editorial Team or individuals of journals or may report inclusion of a journal in any predatory list like Beall's list (<https://beallslist.weebly.com>) etc.

The Complaints will be investigated and dealt by the relevant team of R&D Division and necessary action will be taken accordingly.

### **7. Funding Limits, Conditions and Procedures**

National journals listed at Category W, X & Y will receive financial support as per prescribed limits and procedures.

#### **(i) Procedure for Funding HEC Recognized National Research Journals**

The following procedure will be followed in making the funding decisions:

- a) Call for applications will be issued once a year (every January) on the HEC's Website.
- b) Existing accredited journals may apply for funding.
- c) Applications can be submitted by email or on the online portal before the specified deadline.
- d) Applications should be on the prescribed form, and must include all documentary evidences as mentioned in Sub Section (v) below.
- e) The Journal/Editor will have to justify the need of HEC funding with solid justifications of inability of owner institution to meet expenses of journal. A Certificate from Registrar of the University/DAI concerned/Head of Organization duly verified by Treasurer/Head of Finance will have to be provided to HEC in this regard.
- f) All the applications for funding shall be subject to initial scrutiny by desk officer in HEC and detailed review of journal's performance as per Minutes of preceding meeting of relevant Expert Panel and checking of compliance of SOPs of HEC.
- g) Financial assistance will be awarded upon availability of funds, provided prerequisites are fulfilled by the Journal.

#### **(ii) Required Documents for Applications to Seek Funding from HEC**



- (a) Duly filled in, signed, Stamped Prescribed Application Proforma along with Covering Letter.
- (b) Certificate as required vide Section 7 (i)( e) above
- (c) Budget Estimates for Current FY duly signed by Editor and Head of the publishing organization/ institute along with covering letter from the Editor of the Journal
- (d) Bank Account Details jointly operated by Editor and Head of the publishing Institute
- (e) Audited Income and Expenditure Account/Statement verified by Treasurer and Resident Auditor (public/ private sector HEIs and Institutes) for the last year's funding received.
- (f) **(iii) Funding Limits:**

HEC provides funding to Eligible Journals as per following limits;

Sr.#	Category of Journal	Type of Funding	Maximum Limit of Funding per Year (PKR)
1	W	Eligibility Funding	700,000/-
2	X	Performance Based Funding	450,000/-
3	Y	Seed Funding	250,000/-

**(iv) Expenditure Heads for Funding**

The Funding will be provided for covering expenditure in following Heads of Accounts;

- (i) Licenses/Agreements with approved well-reputed Indexing/Abstracting Agencies
- (ii) Remuneration/Honorarium to Editorial Team (Not more than 1/5<sup>th</sup> of Maximum Limit of Funding of relevant category)
- (iii) Website Launching, Hosting and Maintenance as per HEC Guidelines. (iv) External Peer Reviewers Fees/Remuneration/Honorarium etc.

**(v) Conditions for Grant of Funding:**

- (a) Funding is subject to tangible measures for improving quality standards and meeting HEC's criteria for not only maintaining existing accreditation level but also for taking solid measures to reach higher levels of accreditation.
- (b) HEC's authorities will have an exclusive right to stop funding if the journal is not adhering to the highest ethical academic and research standards or if the journal fails to maintain the minimum criteria for existing level of accreditation or if the journal has not been able to improve its existing level for more than 2 years unless the journal reaches W Level.
- (c) The competent authority may decide, for reasons to be recorded in writing, to extend funding for another year, with close monitoring of the journal's performance.

**8. Capacity Building of Editors and Members of Editorial Team**

- HEC will organize capacity building programs for editorial teams of eligible journals

- An open call will be issued, in July each year, on HEC's website for nominations from journals
- All eligible journal may apply for Capacity Building Workshops.
- The selected candidates will be invited to participate in the Capacity Building Workshop.
- HEC will provide remuneration to resource persons and/or to the trainers.
- Collaboration with COPE (Committee on Publishing Ethics) and similar national or international organizations will be developed in order to promote editorial ethics and to infiltrate the global anti-predatory and anti-plagiarism standards in the national research journals.
- In this way, local journals will be equipped with internationally accepted publishing ethics/standards by giving them an orientation of publishing tools used worldwide to globalize regional research and to attract the international authorship in indigenous journals. Such practices will one hand help create positive impact of locally originated research and on the other hand it will boost citations and visibility/durability of research.

### **9. Validity of Research Journals and Verification of Publications**

R&D Division is responsible for the accreditation, financing and capacity building of journals. It will play no role in establishing or monitoring criteria for utilization of journals, validity of research journals, or verification of publications for the purpose of faculty appointments, promotions, appointments as PhD supervisors, or award of PhD degrees.

The Quality Enhancement Cells of HEIs are responsible for assisting the faculty/students and University Authorities in verifying research publications in accordance with HEC's criteria governing research journals. In case a specific matter is not resolved by QECs concerned, the matter shall be referred to HEC in writing. The relevant division of HEC (i.e. Quality Assurance Division for TTS/BPS Appointments/Promotions and Attestation and Accreditation Division for award of PhD Degrees etc.) dealing with that specific matter shall be responsible to resolve the matter.

### **10. HEC Policy on Books Evaluation for Grant of Equivalence to Research Publications**

Books published after peer-review by international publishers of repute from the academically advanced world and books published by national publishers of international repute, recognized by HEC can be considered equivalent to a maximum of TWO research publications in either of the X or Y Categories.

Only research-oriented books are entertained whereas Text Book, compilation, guide, edited book, Book Chapters, Translation or any thesis either of M.Phil or Ph.D. is not acceptable for the purpose of equivalence as per policy.

#### **i. SOP for Book Evaluation**

Aspirant Authors meeting criteria will have to apply for an equivalence of their research based books on prescribed HEC Proforma available at HEC website [www.hec.gov.pk](http://www.hec.gov.pk). HEC will initially evaluate the application as per its policy.

Meeting of Experts Panel will be convened as and when needed.

Only eligible applications received in sufficient number in a particular subject will be presented before the respective panel for careful consideration and necessary recommendation in line with the HEC policy.

The decision of competent authority recommendation of the Panel will be considered final.