

HEC issues final notification to abolish two-year BA/BSc, MA/MSc

LAHORE: The Higher Education Commission (HEC) has issued a final direction to all the public and private universities of the country and their affiliated colleges to abolish two-year BA/BSc programme and start Associate Degree (AD) programs from upcoming academic year. It also directed the public and private sector universities that they could not offer MA/MSc programs after 2020, after the ongoing programs end.

The move that requires the degree colleges, those not following BS programs, would have to change their current set-up, to start a new Associate Degree (AD) program whose outline has to be finalised yet. Such colleges reportedly don't have the required conditions and staff for the new proposed program and need capacity-building. It is raises concerns among the stakeholders for depriving thousands of students who appear in the graduation or master's programs as private candidates.

According to a HEC notification, issued on July 13, "In place of the two-year BA/BSc programs, universities and colleges affiliated with public sector universities may offer Associate Degree programs (AD) for post-higher secondary students.

Asks colleges to start 'Associate Degree' programmes

The new nomenclature (Associate Degree or AD) shall be adopted in all documentation and announcements related to two-year post-higher secondary or equivalent programs, and the previous nomenclature of BA/BSc programs shall be discontinued forthwith.

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The students who were enrolled or registered in BA/BSc programs on or before December 31, 2018 are allowed until December 31, 2020 to complete their programs and receive the BA/BSc degrees, as applicable. Those who fail to complete their courses of studies by the cutoff date shall be awarded an Associate Degree upon completion of such requirements as determined by the degree awarding university.

For the avoidance of doubt, students admitted to two-year post-higher secondary or equivalent programs of studies after December 31, 2018 shall have been and shall continue to be admitted to Associate Degree programs, as had been notified by the HEC in its prior notification dated March 15, 2017, regarding the phasing out of BA/BSc programs."

Those completing the AD programs would have equivalence to four semesters and of BS programs and they would be allowed to get admission to the programs where they would get a BS degree after doing four more semesters there.

The HEC notification further revealed, "The overall goal of the Associate Degree program is to provide degree holders with a broad-based education as well as marketable skills. Therefore, the Associate Degree program includes a "general education" requirement as well as a "marketable skills" requirement. Detailed rules and guidelines, including specific requirements pertaining to the

“general education” and “marketable skills” components, are being developed by the HEC and will be notified from time to time.

The notification says that the “general education” requirement is aimed at ensuring that every holder of an AD has the basic skills and knowledge relevant to effective participation in the economic, social, cultural, and political life of the country. This will include a scheme of studies that may cover languages (Urdu, English, plus an optional regional language), mathematics, general science, history (including Pakistan Studies), Islamiyat (or religious studies for non-Muslim Students), ethics, economics and general science.

About the “marketable skills,” the HEC notification says that it is aimed at ensuring that every holder of an Associate Degree has the ability to obtain a job or start a business in an area of economic importance, including computer literacy, office management skills, farm management and agri-business, retail service, hospitality industry, technology related, accounting or business-related skills.

The notification further states, “In order to facilitate the transition, universities and colleges offering AD programs will be allowed to move gradually from their current program offerings to the fulfillment of the new requirements. In the first year of the transition, the scheme of studies currently being offered in BA/BSc programs may be adapted, with minimum changes, for the AD program; provided that those institutions that have taken significant steps towards transitioning the AD program”.

The HEC also directed the universities to designate an officer for coordination with the transition to the new scheme of studies. The officer shall liaise with the HEC with respect to the transition and the implementation of HEC policies and guidelines about the Associate Degree program.

A senior Higher Education Department (HED) official, on condition of anonymity, told Dawn the HEC had overlooked the situation and had issued directions to end BA/BSc in one go. He said it was not possible for the department and the universities to start Associate Degree program as they did not have prerequisite resources.

He criticised the HEC for ignoring thousands of private students who appeared in BA/BSc or MA/MSc examination without getting admission to any public and private college.

Punjab University Registrar Khalid Khan said the colleges had not developed capacity to run BS program or start Associate Degree program.

“We have directed our affiliated colleges to develop curriculum for the associate degree program and will soon hold meeting to finalise it,” he said.

He also said that no one was thinking about the million of private students who after passing FA/FSc could continue their education privately.

Mr Khan also raised questions to the fate of those having two-year BA/BSc degrees after the start of the Associate Degree program. He said though the universities were following four-year BS programs but they had not developed a qualitative assessment or examination system to ensure the quality of the these programs.

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