



**COUNTRY REPORT:**  
The Islamic Republic  
of Pakistan

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# Introduction

This report is part of a series of country reports that QAA, as part of its contractual arrangement with the four national funding bodies, will regularly produce to offer higher education providers an insight into the higher education and regulatory landscape of key countries for UK transnational education (TNE). The reports offer high level information and intelligence about regulations, challenges and opportunities, signposting to sources of further information. Country reports might also be associated with TNE review activity, in which case they will also include the main lessons learned from reviewing TNE in the subject country, for the benefit of the whole sector.

In producing these reports QAA will seek to liaise with local regulators and quality assurance agencies, and other UK sector bodies with relevant expertise. QAA has a number of strategic partnerships with counterpart agencies in key countries for UK TNE. These are a source of intelligence and direct access to up-to-date information about local regulatory developments.

The first two sections of this report provide an overview of the higher education landscape in Pakistan, including a picture of current UK TNE. It then looks at the regulatory framework for higher education and TNE, and concludes by sharing findings of a recent TNE review exercise undertaken by the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan with support from QAA.

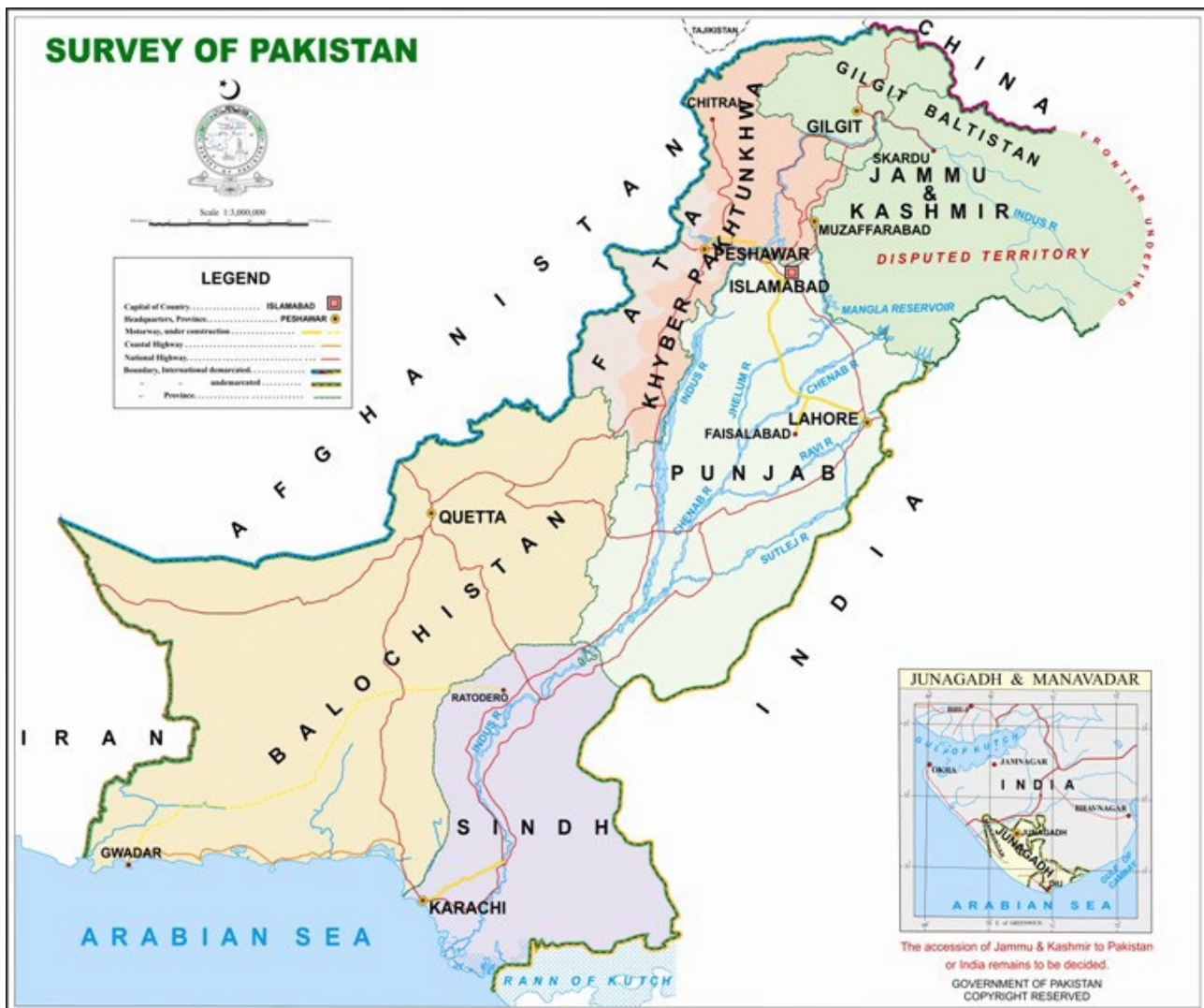
We would like to thank our partner agency in Pakistan, the Higher Education Commission, and Universities UK International, for their valuable support in developing this report. The British Council Pakistan also provided technical support.



Technical Partner\*

\* Any opinions, findings, conclusions or recommendations are those of the authors and do not reflect the views of the British Council, which only provided technical support.

# The Islamic Republic of Pakistan



The Islamic Republic of Pakistan (Pakistan) is a federal parliamentary republic in South Asia. It borders India to the east, Afghanistan to the west, Iran to the southwest, and China to the northeast, as well as the Arabian Sea to the south, where it shares a maritime border with Oman. It comprises the four provinces of Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sindh and Balochistan; and four territories: Islamabad Capital Territory, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Kashmir.

Pakistan is the sixth most populous country in the world, with approximately 190 million people in 2015.<sup>1</sup> The population is projected to increase to over 227 million by 2025, with over 60 per cent comprising younger people below the age of 30, and around 35 per cent under the age of 15. Urban migration is set to continue, with the urban population predicted to increase from 40 per cent to over 50 per cent by 2025.<sup>2</sup>

The vast majority of the population resides in southern Pakistan, along the Indus River, with Karachi by far the most populous city in the country with over 25 million inhabitants. Lahore is the second largest city, with a population of over 10 million, while Islamabad, the capital city of Pakistan, has a population of approximately 2 million.

1 Source World Bank, available at: [http://databank.worldbank.org/data/Views/Reports/ReportWidgetCustom.aspx?Report\\_Name=CountryProfile&Id=b450fd57&tbar=y&dd=y&inf=n&zm=n&country=PAK](http://databank.worldbank.org/data/Views/Reports/ReportWidgetCustom.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&Id=b450fd57&tbar=y&dd=y&inf=n&zm=n&country=PAK).

2 Pakistan 2025: One Nation - One Vision, available at: [www.pakbj.org/statics/css/pakbj/pdf/Pakistan-Vision-25.pdf](http://www.pakbj.org/statics/css/pakbj/pdf/Pakistan-Vision-25.pdf) (PDF, 4.9MB).

Islam is the official religion of Pakistan, the second largest Muslim country after Indonesia. Urdu and English are the official languages, with over half the population also speaking Punjabi and its variants. English is generally used for business purposes in the urban areas, although Urdu can sometimes be used; English is not always spoken in rural areas.

Pakistan's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is estimated by the World Bank to be 271 billion USD, with an annual growth of 4.7 per cent, and a GDP per capita of 1,429 USD. Pakistan is the world's 24th largest economy in terms of purchasing power, and the second largest in South Asia after India, representing 15 per cent of total regional GDP. Services contribute to 55 per cent of GDP, agriculture 25 per cent, and industry 20 per cent. Pakistan has an estimated 40 million middle-class citizens (set to more than double by 2050) and 5.9 per cent total unemployment (11 per cent for those aged 15 to 24).<sup>3</sup> Pakistan is ranked 147 in the Human Development Index, and is regarded as a country with medium human development, with an adult literacy rate of 59 per cent and a tertiary gross enrolment ratio of 10 per cent.<sup>4</sup>

Pakistan is a member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC),<sup>5</sup> the regional intergovernmental organisation in South Asia promoting development of economic and regional integration. SAARC also includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka, the combined economy of which is the third largest in the world after the United States and China; the combined population is 21 per cent of the world's total population.

The SAARC Education Ministers Meeting in New Delhi in 2014 issued a Joint Declaration resolving to collaborate on increased use of information technology and improving the quality of education. In particular, the New Delhi Declaration on Education includes a commitment to:

- ensuring that young people in the age group 15–24 years, including those who have not been able to complete the compulsory stage of education and young people working in the informal sector of the economy, are provided with opportunities to attain skills for employability
- ensuring equitable access to tertiary education by expanding the availability of higher education institutions, including technical and professional education institutions
- facilitating mutual recognition of qualifications and mobility of students and faculty, as well as alternative learning modes such as open and distance learning modes
- improving the quality of teaching and research across all higher education institutions.<sup>6</sup>

Pakistan Vision 2025 is the country's current strategy and road map to become one of the largest 25 economies in the world by 2025, and one of the top 75 most competitive countries.<sup>7</sup> The Vision 2025 comprises seven key priority areas of action, or pillars:

- developing social and human capital and empowering women
- sustained, indigenous and inclusive growth
- democratic governance: institutional reform and modernisation of the public sector
- energy, water and food security
- private sector and entrepreneurship-led growth
- developing a competitive knowledge economy through value addition
- modernising transport infrastructure and regional connectivity.

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3 Source World Bank, available at: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.UEM.TOTL.ZS>.

4 Source United Nations Development Programme, Pakistan, available at: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/PAK>.

5 South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, available at: [www.saarc-sec.org/](http://www.saarc-sec.org/).

6 South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation Framework for Education 2030, available at: [www.unescobkk.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/efa/APMED2030\\_PPTs/APMED2030\\_Session\\_15\\_SAARC\\_MHMNBandara.pdf](http://www.unescobkk.org/fileadmin/user_upload/efa/APMED2030_PPTs/APMED2030_Session_15_SAARC_MHMNBandara.pdf) (PDF, 434KB).

7 The World Economic Forum ranks Pakistan 126 out of 140 countries. The Global Competitiveness Report 2015–15, available at: [www3.weforum.org/docs/gcr/2015-16/Global\\_Competitiveness\\_Report\\_2015-16.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/gcr/2015-16/Global_Competitiveness_Report_2015-16.pdf) (PDF, 8.7MB).

Specifically, the Vision recognises the strategic importance of education to boost human productivity and social cohesion, and to develop a successful knowledge economy. It therefore points to the need to enter a phase of mass higher education, aiming to double Pakistan's higher education coverage by 2025, establishing new universities, so as to have a university campus in each district, and supporting the growth of online learning to provide greater access to higher education. Emphasis is also placed on driving improvement in the quality of science and technology education, particularly the natural sciences, mathematics and ICT, and modernising existing programme content to better meet labour market needs and equip the country's workforce with the required skills for its planned social and economic development and modernisation.

To this aim, Vision 2025 calls for an increase in public expenditure on higher education from 0.2 per cent to 1.4 per cent of GDP and an expansion in higher education enrolment from 1.5 million to 5 million, increasing the number of PhDs from 7,000 to 15,000 and doubling the number of degree-awarding institutions from 156 (in 2014) to 300 by 2025. The Vision also points to the need to overcome a current disconnect between science and technology institutions and the productive sectors, including by encouraging public and private collaboration to modernise current research and development setups, and supporting international collaborations in education and research.<sup>8</sup>

Instrumental to implementing the Pakistan Vision 2025 is the Five Year Plan for 2013-18, which includes a number of higher education-related objectives:

- improve the quality of education, and set up measurable targets and performance indicators for monitoring the delivery of good quality education services
- develop a large pool of highly skilled human resources for reducing skill gaps in key sectors
- provide equal access and opportunities for all to reduce regional and gender disparity in human development and social indicators.

In order to achieve these objectives the Five Year Plan prioritises the strengthening of links between research institutions and industry, and ensuring the relevance of curricula and educational practices to the market and economic needs of the country.<sup>9</sup> A key role in ensuring that this priority area of action is met is played by the Higher Education Commission (HEC), the main body responsible for higher education in Pakistan. The HEC was established in 2002 as the statutory autonomous body with responsibility for allocating public funds to higher education providers, and accrediting their degree programmes.<sup>10</sup> Since its establishment the HEC has developed medium-term plans for higher education forms to help higher education providers 'to serve as engines of growth for the socio-economic development of Pakistan'. The latest strategic plan, the 2010-15 Higher Education Medium Term Development Framework II (MTDF II), focused on six key areas:

- faculty development
- quality assurance
- research, innovation and entrepreneurship
- improving equitable access
- excellence in leadership and governance
- financial management and sustainability.<sup>11</sup>

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8 Pakistan 2025: One Nation - One Vision, available at: <http://www.pakbj.org/statics/css/pakbj/pdf/Pakistan-Vision-2025.pdf> (PDF, 4.9MB).

9 Overall Assessment of the Higher Education Sector (Higher Education Commission, Pakistan), available at: <http://hec.gov.pk/english/universities/projects/TESP/Documents/FR-Assessment%20HE%20Sector.pdf> (PDF, 3.1MB).

10 Higher Education Commission, Pakistan, available at: [www.hec.gov.pk/english/Pages/Home.aspx](http://www.hec.gov.pk/english/Pages/Home.aspx).

11 Higher Education Medium Term Development Framework (Higher Education Commission), available at: [http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/planipolis/files/ressources/pakistan\\_higher\\_education\\_medium\\_term\\_development\\_framework\\_2011-15.pdf](http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/planipolis/files/ressources/pakistan_higher_education_medium_term_development_framework_2011-15.pdf) (PDF, 1.4MB).

Throughout spring 2017, the HEC has been consulting on a strategic long-term plan to sustain further qualitative and quantitative reforms in higher education that are in line with Vision 2025. The Higher Education Commission Vision 2025 (HEC Vision 2025), which is to supersede the MTFD II, sets out the development ambitions for the sector for 2017-25. It covers eight strategic priorities:

- sustain and consolidate the national HEC
- increase equitable access
- excellence in leadership, governance and management
- increased faculty with highest academic qualifications
- enhanced quality of curricular offerings
- research, innovation and commercialisation
- financial management and enhanced investment
- IT-embedded higher education.

Specific proposals to implement HEC Vision 2025 include the establishment of a three-tier model of higher education composed of: Tier I - research intensive universities; Tier II - comprehensive universities; and Tier III - affiliated vocationally oriented colleges. This is to be achieved through supporting the development of existing public universities and colleges and the establishment of new ones, with a view to strengthening innovation and relevance of research outputs, increasing higher education enrolment providing equitable access to 25 per cent of the eligible age group, and enhancing the employability of graduates. There is a specific plan to establish 15 new public science and technology, ICT, agriculture, medicine and allied health professions institutions to engage in internationally relevant research, and to set up research and technology parks in each province with the involvement of business and international organisations. HEC Vision 2025 also sets the goals to increase from 27 to 40 per cent the proportion of full-time staff with a PhD qualification, through funding schemes to support doctoral study abroad, and to embed work experience into degree programmes, through the creation of 2+2 programmes with integrated internships. It also commits to supporting the development of HEC's quality assurance division and to ensuring that every university has a Quality Assurance Cell.<sup>12</sup>

Before looking in more detail at the role played by the HEC in safeguarding and enhancing the quality of higher education in Pakistan, the next two sections will provide an overview of the higher education landscape in Pakistan including a picture of current UK TNE. This report will then conclude by sharing the findings of a recent TNE review exercise undertaken by the HEC with support from QAA.

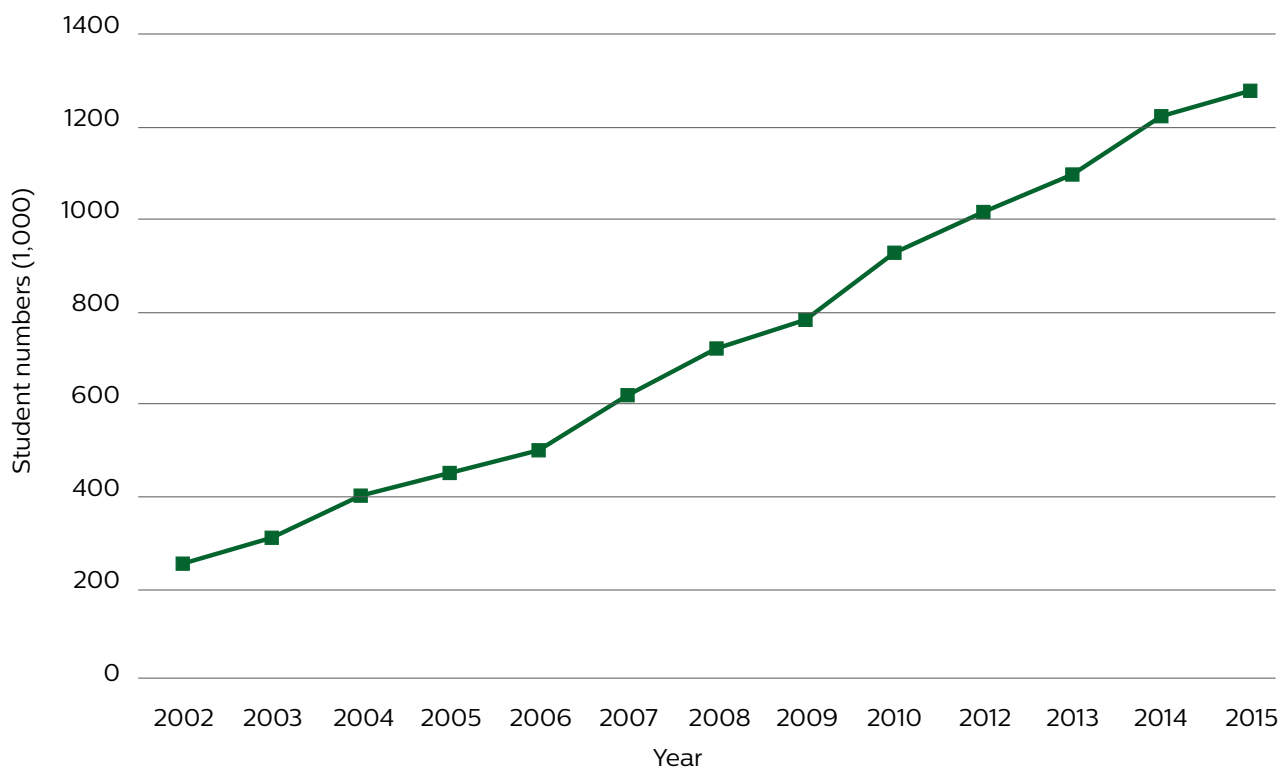
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<sup>12</sup> Pakistan Education Commission Vision 2025 (Universities UK International), available at: [www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/documents/international/PakistanHE\\_iNotes\\_June17\\_final.pdf](http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/documents/international/PakistanHE_iNotes_June17_final.pdf) (PDF, 273KB).

# The Pakistan higher education landscape

At the time of independence in 1947, there was only one higher education institution, the University of Punjab; there are now 183 recognised universities and degree-awarding institutions in Pakistan, both public and private, enrolling over 1.2 million students.<sup>13</sup> Approximately 40 per cent of total higher education providers recognised by the HEC are private. The first private universities were the Lahore University of Management Sciences (1984) and the Aga Khan University Hospital (1985). The higher education sector expanded rapidly after early 2001-02, with an 80 per cent increase in the number of higher education providers, and over 180 per cent increase in student enrolment (see figure 1).

**Figure 1: Student enrolment growth in Pakistan (student numbers refer to 000)**



Universities are broadly categorised as general and professional universities. Professional universities offer academic programmes in specific disciplines such as engineering, agriculture, education and medicine, while general universities offer a variety of programmes spanning the whole disciplinary spectrum. The HEC has devised six categories of universities for ranking purposes: General, Engineering and Technology, Business Education, Agriculture and Veterinary, Medical, and Arts and Design.<sup>14</sup>

The University of the Punjab is the oldest (established in 1882) and largest university in Pakistan, comprising five campuses; 13 faculties; 10 constituent colleges; over 73 departments, centres and institutes; and 614 affiliated colleges. It has over 818 permanent faculty members involved in teaching/research and over 36,000 on-campus students.

In addition to the HEC-recognised universities and degree-awarding institutes, which only have the legal authority to award Pakistani degrees, there are a large number of affiliated colleges and institutes that offer higher education qualifications throughout the country on behalf of affiliated universities or degree-awarding institutes. Over recent years these have also established a number of branch campuses in different parts of the country.

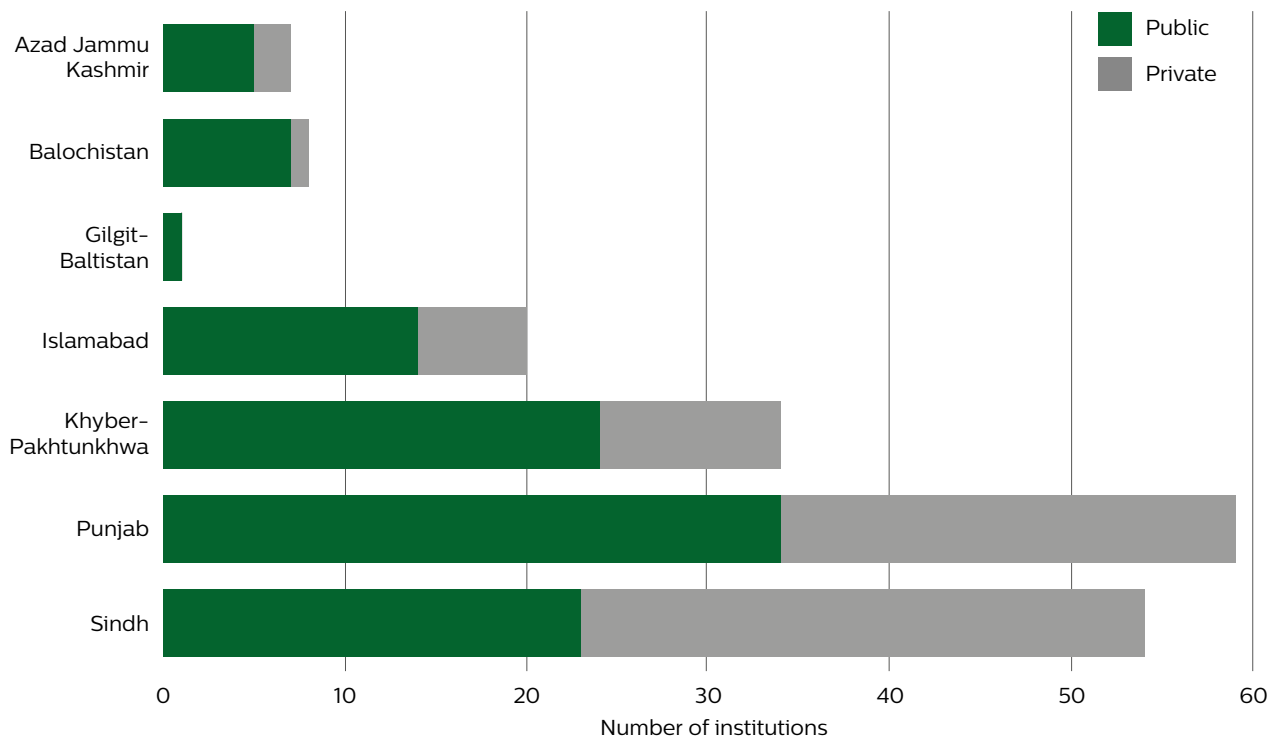
<sup>13</sup> HEC-Recognised Universities and Degree-Awarding Institutions, available at: <http://hec.gov.pk/english/universities/pages/recognised.aspx>.

<sup>14</sup> Ranking of Pakistani Higher Education Institutions 2015, available at: [www.hec.gov.pk/english/universities/Documents/Ranking\\_Doc%20\(2015\).pdf](http://www.hec.gov.pk/english/universities/Documents/Ranking_Doc%20(2015).pdf) (PDF, 551KB).

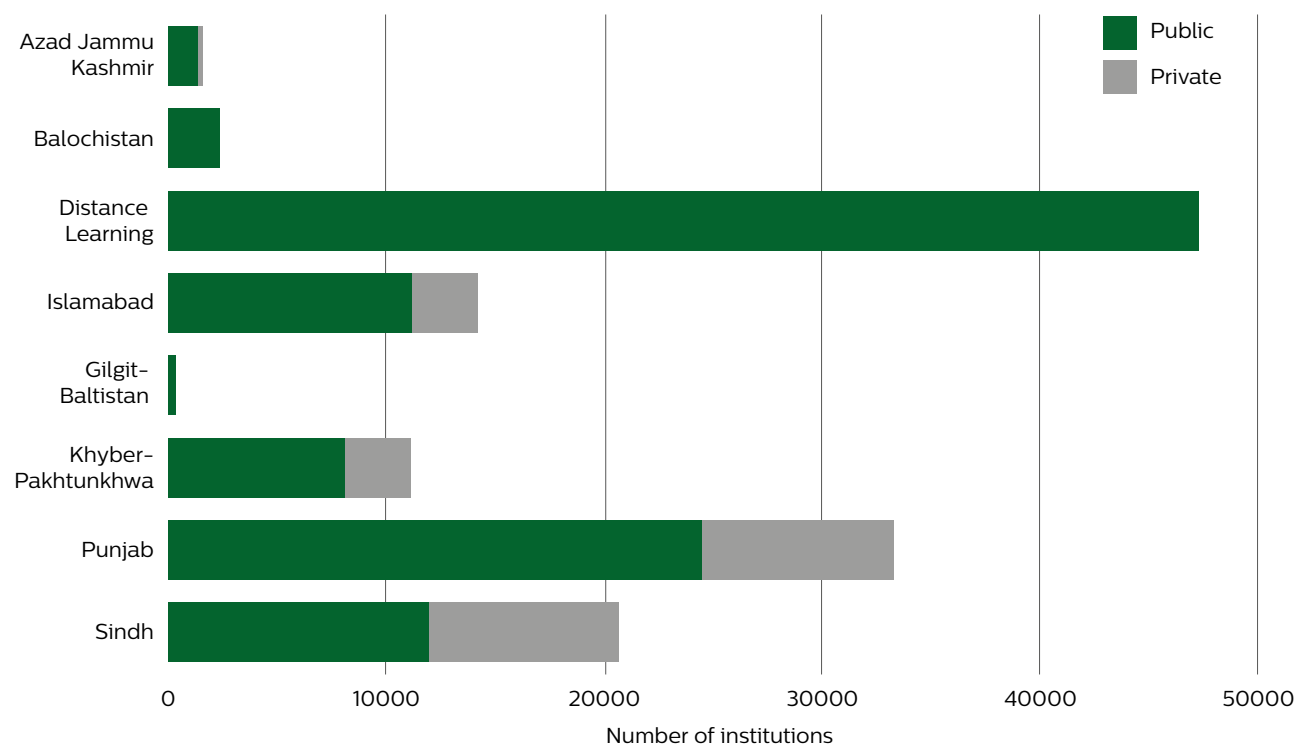


The regional distribution of higher education providers reflects the population density of the territory, with most providers concentrated in the southern region of Sindh and Punjab. Figure 2 illustrates the geographical distribution of higher education providers, both public and private, while figure 3 shows the geographical distribution of higher education students, including distance learning, for public and private providers.

**Figure 2: Distribution of higher education providers by region**



**Figure 3: Distribution of higher education students by region**



Approximately 72 per cent of students are enrolled on bachelor's level degrees, 26 per cent at master's level, and only 2 per cent at doctoral level. The top three subject areas for PhDs are social sciences, physical sciences, and biological and medical sciences; followed by arts and humanities, agriculture and veterinary, with an increase in PhDs of 250 per cent over the past 10 years, from 400 to 1,400, mostly in the public sector. This is also due to the HEC's effort, as part of its MTDf II, to improve the quality of teaching and research in institutions, including by improving qualifications of faculty members, with a view to increasing the percentage of teaching staff with a PhD, currently at 27 per cent.<sup>15</sup>

The HEC has also supported universities to improve the relevance of their research by financing the establishment of Business Incubation Centres in public sector universities. However, according to a recent evaluation of the HEC's Medium Term Development Framework, there is still a mismatch between the research needs of the country and research being undertaken at universities.

Foreign providers also operate in the country, offering collaborative programmes with local institutions. The HEC, approval of which is required to have qualifications recognised in the country, does see quality foreign provision as important in driving up the quality of teaching and research in Pakistan and helping the country meet its skills needs. However, foreign provision is still limited in scope. Currently, there are just nine partnerships approved by the HEC to deliver non-Pakistani degrees in collaboration with local providers: six are with UK universities, and the other three are with universities from Australia, Malaysia and the United States. Most of the foreign-awarded qualifications are in business and finance, followed by law and IT.<sup>16</sup>

HEC-approved collaborative partnerships with foreign degree-awarding bodies	
Management Development Institute (MDI) Pakistan, Islamabad	University of Southern Queensland, Australia
ACCA Pakistan Chapter, Lahore	Oxford Brookes University, UK
College of Accounting and Management Sciences, Karachi	University College Sedaya International, Malaysia
Roots College International (RCI), Islamabad	University of London, UK
Roots College International (RCI), Islamabad	BPP University, UK
Namal College, Mianwali	University of Bradford, UK
Ripah International University, Islamabad	The Northern Consortium UK (NCUK)
Nur International University, Lahore	University of Louisville, USA
The Millennium University College (TMUC), Islamabad	University of London, UK

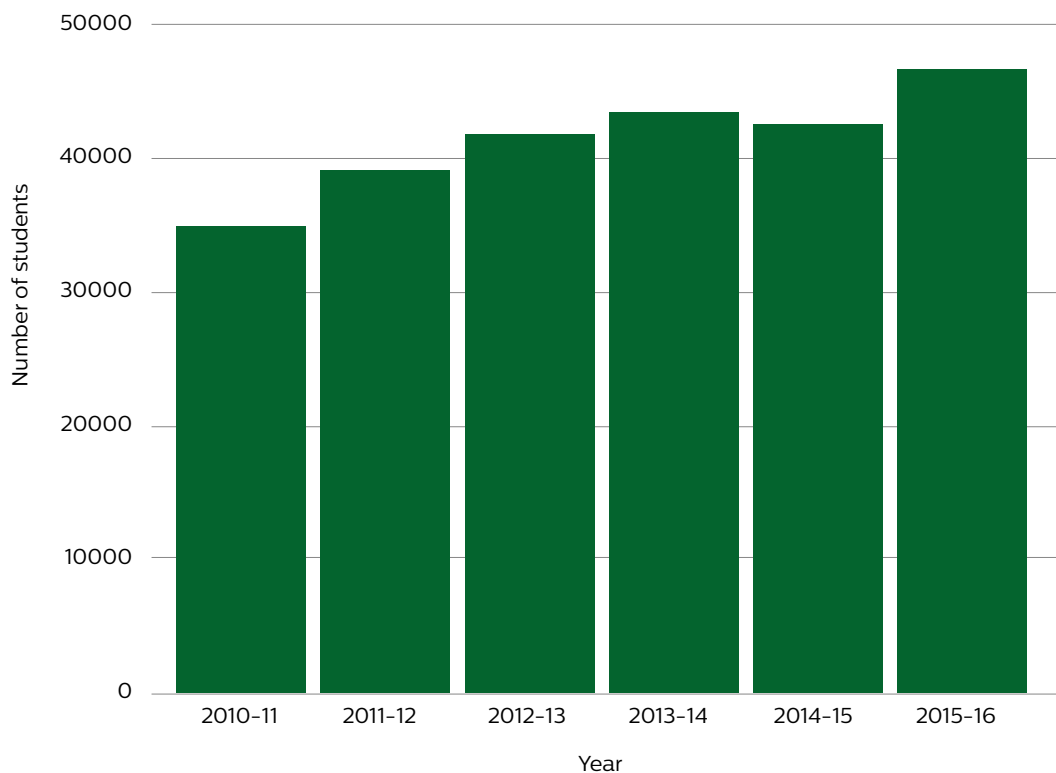
## The UK transnational education landscape in Pakistan

According to the latest Aggregate Offshore Record published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency for the academic year 2015-16, the number of students studying for a UK award in Pakistan has reached 46,640. This represents an increase of approximately 10 per cent from the previous year, and about 33 per cent over the past five years, placing Pakistan as the fourth largest host country for UK TNE, after Singapore, China and Malaysia.

<sup>15</sup> Figure 3, and data about qualification levels and PhD qualifications, refers to the academic year 2014-15. Overall Assessment of the Higher Education Sector (Higher Education Commission, Pakistan), available at: <http://hec.gov.pk/english/universities/projects/TESP/Documents/FR-Assessment%20HE%20Sector.pdf> (PDF, 3.1MB).

<sup>16</sup> In addition, there are a number of collaborative partnerships approved to deliver Pearson-awarded HNDs, as well as HNDs awarded by the Scottish Qualifications Agency and graduate diplomas awarded by the Institute of Commercial Management and the Association of Business Executives. Foreign Universities/Institutions Allowed under Collaborative Degree Programmes in Pakistan (Higher Education Commission), available at: [www.hec.gov.pk/english/universities/Documents/List%20of%20institutes%20with%20foreign%20collaboration-17-04-17.pdf](http://www.hec.gov.pk/english/universities/Documents/List%20of%20institutes%20with%20foreign%20collaboration-17-04-17.pdf) (PDF, 647KB).

**Figure 4: Growth of UK TNE in Pakistan**



The vast majority of UK TNE students in Pakistan - 39,955 students (86 per cent of total TNE student numbers in Pakistan) - are studying on a single degree programme, the BSc in Applied Accountancy offered by Oxford Brookes University in collaboration with the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA). The other two largest providers, accounting for approximately 90 per cent of the remaining UK TNE students, are the University of London, with its distance learning international programmes, and Lancaster University, through its partnership with COMSATS. Considering that the Lancaster/COMSATS partnership has now ceased recruiting and is currently in teaching-out arrangements, and that the Oxford Brookes top-up programme is delivered by distance learning, with local support provided by ACCA, it is possible to conclude that on-the-ground TNE in Pakistan is for the time being very limited. This is confirmed by the list of HEC-approved TNE partnerships.

# The Pakistan regulatory landscape

The main body responsible for higher education in Pakistan is the Higher Education Commission (HEC), an independent body constitutionally established by the Higher Education Commission Ordinance in 2002.<sup>17</sup> The Ordinance provides controlling authority of the HEC to the Prime Minister, who is responsible for appointing the HEC Chairperson. The HEC's powers include:

- formulating policies, guiding principles and priorities for the development of higher education, and its contribution to the socio-economic development of the country
- setting out criteria for the establishment of new higher education providers and for granting degree awarding powers, for both the public and private sector
- establishing national and regional evaluation councils to carry out accreditation, evaluation and ranking of higher education providers, including at subject department and subject level
- overseeing the financing of the public sector providers
- supporting the development of linkages between providers and industry, as well as national and international organisations, with a view to enhancing research
- facilitating the development of educational programmes and curricula that meet the needs of the employment market
- overseeing the equivalence and recognition of national and international qualifications
- collecting information and statistics on higher education.

To oversee its work in the key area of quality assurance, the HEC, soon after its establishment, set up a Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) to function as an advisory body, membership of which includes Vice-Chancellors of public and private sector universities and representatives of the HEC. Upon recommendation from the QAC, an independent Quality Assurance Agency was established in 2005 as a specialised policy-making and monitoring body operating under the HEC umbrella (QAA-HEC). The QAA-HEC is responsible for safeguarding and enhancing the quality of higher education and developing a quality culture in higher education. It discharges this responsibility in two main ways: by supporting the development of internal quality assurance practices and capacity within providers; and developing and implementing reference points and processes for the external quality assurance of providers and accreditation of programmes.<sup>18</sup>

One of the strategic goals set for the QAA-HEC by the QAC is to facilitate and support the establishment of Quality Enhancement Cells (QECs) within public sector higher education providers to oversee and lead on the implementation of national quality assurance and enhancement policies at programme and departmental level. QECs function as integral operational units of higher education providers, reporting to the Vice-Chancellor, with primary responsibility for internal quality assurance and enhancement, and external quality assurance and accreditation bodies. At the end of the 2013-14 academic year QECs had been established in 116 providers, across both the public and private sector.<sup>19</sup> The QAA-HEC regularly supports QECs through capacity-building initiatives, in particular in the early stages of their establishment. QAA (in the UK) has been supporting the QAA-HEC in delivering capacity-building programmes for QECs, as well as QAA-HEC officials.

QECs are mandated by the QAA-HEC to undertake self-assessment of the academic programmes of their institution every two years, against specific guidelines and reference

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17 An Ordinance to Provide for the Establishment of the Higher Education Commission, available at: [www.hec.gov.pk/english/aboutus/Documents/455\\_HECOrdinance.pdf](http://www.hec.gov.pk/english/aboutus/Documents/455_HECOrdinance.pdf) (PDF, 35KB).

18 Quality Assurance Manual for Higher Education in Pakistan, available at: [http://uog.edu.pk/downloads/qec/2\\_quality\\_assurance-in-higher-education.pdf](http://uog.edu.pk/downloads/qec/2_quality_assurance-in-higher-education.pdf) (PDF, 515KB).

19 Annual Report 2013-14 (Higher Education Commission, Pakistan), available at: <http://hec.gov.pk/english/news/HECPublications/Annual%20Report%202013-14.pdf> (PDF, 11MB).

points set out in the Manual for Self-Assessment.<sup>20</sup> To safeguard standards and improve quality of professional programmes, the QAA-HEC has established Accreditation Councils in four disciplinary areas: agriculture, business, computing and teacher’s education. QECs liaise with these accreditation councils to ensure accreditation of programmes in the relevant subject area. In 2016 the HEC approved the National Qualifications Framework of Pakistan,<sup>21</sup> which is intended to serve as a further tool to support and drive the national efforts at establishing consistent standards of qualifications, and facilitate the comparison and recognition of national and international qualifications. The Pakistan Qualifications Framework<sup>22</sup> describes the knowledge, skills and competences associated with different qualifications at different academic levels within the national education system.

**Figure 5: The Pakistan Qualifications Framework**

	Years	Levels	Award Type	Award Example
Higher Education Levels	21	8	Doctoral	PhD
	20			
	19			
	18	7	Master’s	MPhil/MS/MBA, MSc (Engg.), ME
	17			M-Arch, etc.
	16	6	Bachelor’s	MPhil/MS/MBA, MSc (Engg.), BSc (Agri), MA/ MSc (16 year), LLB, B-Com (Hons), MBBS,
	15			
	14	5	Associate Ordinary Bachelor	BA/BSc (Pass), ADE, Associate Degrees etc.
13				
Intermediate Level	12	4	Higher Secondary School Certificate (HSSC)	FA, FSc, ICS, I-Com, DBA, D-Com etc.
	11			
Matriculation Level	10	3	Secondary School Certificate (SSC)	Matric
	9			
	2			Middle (3-Year)
	1			Primary (1-5 Years)
				Pre-Primary (1-2 Years)

Together with the Pakistan Qualifications Framework, the HEC has also established the Pakistan Qualification Register,<sup>23</sup> which provides a comprehensive list of all quality assured higher qualifications in Pakistan and higher education providers recognised/accredited to deliver and issue those qualifications.

20 Higher Education Commission Self-Assessment Manual, available at: <http://hec.gov.pk/english/services/universities/QAA/InternalQA/Documents/Self%20Assessment%20Manual.pdf> (PDF, 332KB).

21 National Qualifications Framework of Pakistan, available at: <http://hec.gov.pk/english/services/universities/pqf/Pages/default.aspx>.

22 National Qualifications Framework of Pakistan 2015, available at: <http://hec.gov.pk/english/services/universities/pqf/Documents/National%20Qualification%20Framework%20of%20Pakistan.pdf> (PDF, 1.5MB).

23 Pakistan Qualification Register, available at: <http://hec.gov.pk/english/services/universities/pqr/Pages/default.aspx>.

Recognition/accreditation of a higher education provider is awarded by the HEC after successful review against a set of standards for institutional performance evaluation developed by the QAA-HEC.<sup>24</sup> These periodic reviews are undertaken by peer review panels organised by the QAA-HEC, and include on-site visits by QAA-HEC peer review panels, informed by an institutional performance evaluation report prepared by the provider's QEC.

There are 11 institutional performance evaluation standards covering the following areas:

- Standard 1: Mission Statement and Goals
- Standard 2: Planning and Evaluation
- Standard 3: Organisation and Governance
- Standard 4: Integrity
- Standard 5: Faculty
- Standard 6: Students
- Standard 7: Institutional Resources
- Standard 8: Academic Programs and Curricula
- Standard 9: Public Disclosure and Transparency
- Standard 10: Assessment and Quality Assurance
- Standard 11: Student Support Services

The QAA-HEC is currently working to develop criteria and guidelines for the approval and quality assurance of foreign providers, with a view to facilitating the growth of quality TNE in the country. While these criteria and guidelines are still being developed at the time of writing, it is possible to say that a key requirement for obtaining HEC approval of programmes leading to a foreign degree is a demonstrable academic commitment and quality assurance oversight by part of the overseas awarding body. How this requirement will be formulated and implemented is not yet clear, but it might affect the approval of validated provision and programmes leading to double awards.

In this context, QAA has recently been approached by the HEC to help it develop reference points for quality assuring TNE provision in the country. As part of this developmental exercise QAA has supported a HEC review of UK TNE in the country by sharing two expert QAA reviewers to lead the HEC review team.

The approach adopted for this TNE review exercise, which took place in May 2017, was to assess UK TNE against UK expectations. This meant, in the case of UK degree-awarding bodies, using the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code), and in particular *Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others*, as the key reference point. The following and concluding section offers an overview of the findings from this HEC TNE review exercise supported by QAA.

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<sup>24</sup> Institutional Performance Evaluation Manual, available at: <http://hec.gov.pk/english/services/universities/QAA/externalQA/IPE/Documents/IPES%20Manual%20for%20Universities%2011%20standards%2008%20Nov%2016.pdf> (PDF, 641KB).

# Higher Education Commission 2017 review of UK transnational education in Pakistan

The HEC review of UK TNE in Pakistan was undertaken during May 2017 by a HEC review team led by two QAA reviewers. This section reports the key findings emerging from this review exercise.

The HEC review team analysed collaborative partnerships between private local delivery partners and two UK degree-awarding bodies - the University of Bradford and the University of London International Programmes - as well as Pearson and the ACCA. Specifically, the following TNE arrangements were looked at:

- the delivery of qualifications awarded by the University of London International Programmes, the ACCA and Pearson, by a local delivery centre, the Millennium University College, in Islamabad
- the franchise arrangement between the University of Bradford and Namal College, in Mianwali
- the delivery of Pearson BTEC Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) by the British Education and Training Systems (BETS), in Lahore
- the delivery of ACCA's global professional qualifications through its network of Approved Learning Partners in Pakistan.

The review exercise thus provided the opportunity to analyse a range of models of TNE delivery. This section offers an overview of how UK bodies managed these different arrangements, how each was set up using a collaborative provision model, how it evolved, and how it met the requirements of the awarding bodies involved in delivering the provision, together with the environment of operating within Pakistan.

## Overview of the partnerships

The Millennium University College (TMUC) Pakistan is a private organisation founded in 1988, and owned by Roots Millennium Schools Education Group. One of Pakistan's largest TNE groups, it operates purpose-built university campuses across major urban cities offering a range of international higher education programmes, and aspiring to become a leading provider of borderless education. TMUC currently acts as a delivery centre for the provision of a range of University of London International Programmes and ACCA qualifications, and Pearson BTEC HNDs. In May 2017, 619 students were registered at TMUC on these UK TNE qualifications (130 studying ACCA qualifications, 247 BTEC HNDs, and 240 University of London International Programmes). TMUC operates largely through the standard regulations and policies that are applied by the awarding bodies. The provision is therefore defined by the awarding bodies, except that the learning and teaching takes place in Pakistan.

Namal College was established in 2008, in collaboration with the University of Bradford, as a rural institute of higher education in Pakistan, with a view to becoming a centre of academic excellence for rural uplift and development and the development of innovative solutions to rural challenges. The University of Bradford's collaborative arrangement with Namal College is based upon a franchise agreement in which the University retains control of all aspects of the programmes delivered in its name. A BSc (Hons) in Computer Science and a BEng in Electrical Engineering have been offered under the franchise agreement, enrolling a total of 75 students in 2015-16 (62 Computer Science, 13 Electrical Engineering). The relationship between Namal College and the University of Bradford is now drawing to a close, as the College has entered into a new agreement with the University of Education and Technology in Lahore to deliver the Electrical Engineering qualification following the University of Bradford's withdrawal of that programme at the home campus.

BETS, located in Lahore, has its head office in Nottingham. It was launched in 1997 by a consortium of five British further education colleges and training organisations, but of the five partners only one has remained, the Nottingham Community College. BETS offers a range of vocational and academic qualifications in high local demand that include Pearson BTEC HND awards in Business, Computing and Fashion with the possibility of a top-up award at a number of universities. BETS prefers in-country top-up arrangements, although it has worked with a number of UK degree-awarding bodies in the past. The top-up awards last for two years at Pakistani universities, or one year at a UK university. Some of the top-up programmes with UK universities are offered in online or blended-learning format. At the time of the review visit, there were 125 business students, 31 computing students and 57 fashion students studying for these BTEC HNDs.

ACCA operates worldwide through a network of Approved Learning Partners, which support teaching delivery and examination. ACCA has been operating in Pakistan since 1996 and has a network of six offices across the country. As part of the review the team visited the ACCA offices in Lahore, and visited two Approved Learning Partners, one Gold in Islamabad and one Platinum in Lahore. ACCA has approved three Platinum and 17 Gold Approved Learning Partners operating throughout Pakistan. At the time of the review visit ACCA had 4,998 members and 33,449 students and affiliates in Pakistan. There is a strong partnership between ACCA and the British Council for the administration of its examinations, including invigilation. ACCA has developed a partnership with Oxford Brookes University to offer a top-up BSc in Applied Accounting and a Global MBA, as well as with the University of London to develop an integrated MSc, available to ACCA students, affiliates and members.

## Models of delivery

Applicants for higher education programmes in Pakistan must either have completed level 12 of the local education system or have O and A Level qualifications from the UK system.

Pakistan has examples of a diverse range of TNE arrangements, with a range of providers based in the UK, USA, Australia, Malaysia and Ireland. These arrangements include overseas campuses, franchise agreements and delivery partners. Of these, the majority involve a UK-based partner, and by far the most common model is the delivery of two-year HNDs by delivery centres, such as BETS in Lahore.

The majority of HNDs delivered by Pakistani institutions are BTEC HNDs awarded by Pearson, although Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) HNDs are also available.<sup>25</sup> BTEC HNDs are delivered by the in-country partner, in accordance with the awarding body's requirements. A key feature of the BTEC HND model is a learner-centred approach with a focus on learning by doing and assessment through evidence of learning, rather than by examinations. While the awarding body provides detailed learning outcomes, each with its associated assessment criteria, the delivery centre carries delegated responsibility for setting assessments that ensure students have appropriate opportunities to demonstrate they have achieved the intended learning outcomes. Oversight of the assessment process is generally provided through an annual monitoring process, which includes an external examiner function to ensure that the provider has the capacity and the subject-specific resources and facilities to deliver a high quality programme, and that assessments are set at the appropriate UK national standard.

Most of the partners delivering BTEC HNDs in Pakistan have arrangements with other institutions for the provision of top-up degree awards. These top-up programmes are normally one year in duration at UK higher education providers. However, top-up awards with Pakistani universities are two years long, reflecting the fact that the HEC stipulates that bachelor's degrees follow the same four-year model as in the USA and Scotland, rather than the three-year model of non-Scottish UK universities.

<sup>25</sup> There are differences between the two types of HNDs reflecting the fact that they are regulated by different regulators (Ofqual and SQA). Only BTEC HNDs awarded by Pearson were looked at as part of the HEC TNE review exercise.



A variation on the BTEC HND model is that operated by ACCA. Its network of Approved Learning Partners in the country provide students with quality tuition support to prepare them for its examinations that, in Pakistan, are delivered through an arrangement with the British Council.

Pakistani higher education does have examples of franchise arrangements, such as Namal College, a rural institute of higher education associated with Bradford University. Since 2008, it has offered bachelor's programmes in Computer Science and Electrical Engineering. These programmes have operated alongside the same degrees delivered in the UK by the University of Bradford. The assessments have largely been identical, although Namal College has started to design some assessments, and the same examination boards oversee assessments at both locations. Although both programmes in the UK are accredited by the relevant professional body, the Namal College programmes are not accredited. In a recent development, due to the University of Bradford ceasing recruiting onto its BEng Electrical and Electronic Engineering programme, Namal College has entered into an alternative agreement with the University of Education and Technology in Lahore for the delivery of an equivalent programme in Electronic Engineering. As part of the University agreement, for reasons of exclusivity, Namal College has also withdrawn from the franchise agreement with the University of Bradford for Computer Science. The College sees the new agreement with the University of Education and Technology as an interim arrangement as it develops as an independent institute of higher learning seeking its own degree awarding powers.

There are very few examples of higher education programmes delivered by distance learning in Pakistan. The University of London is the only UK partner, and is likely to remain so, as the HEC is no longer approving such arrangements.

## **Setting up the collaboration**

The four collaborations considered during the review have been operating for a number of years. ACCA and BETS have been delivering UK qualifications for about 20 years, while Namal College and TMUC have been delivering UK TNE for just under 10 years. These TNE arrangements have evolved over time, leading to developments and enhancements at each local delivery partner. In some cases the development of delivery partner networks reflects UK awarding bodies'<sup>26</sup> global ambitions and their experience in managing risk in transnational partner collaborations.

In order to operate as a provider of higher education in Pakistan, the institutions and awarding bodies must be recognised by the HEC, and be able to demonstrate approval by the relevant awarding institution.

Some awarding bodies reviewed by the review team are clearly taking a global approach to the development of delivery partner collaborations, for example ACCA, Pearson and University of London International Programmes. In terms of setting up each delivery partnership, each awarding body ensures that there is an alignment to the respective strategic plan or strategy document. Due diligence and approval processes follow a standard awarding body's reporting process and template. The models used by the awarding bodies are generally global and therefore offer a level of consistency and comparability to ensure that partnerships are evaluated on a similar basis. The approval processes enable the awarding bodies to identify provider strengths and weaknesses and to identify the support each partner may require in order to ensure that it is successful.

In most cases each awarding body had put a great deal of work into setting up the delivery partnership in order to ensure that the desired award outcomes were delivered. However, the review team did identify that delivery centres would benefit from more oversight from the awarding body once the partnership was up and running. In particular, staff and students would welcome more contact to discuss standards and the maintenance of quality.

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<sup>26</sup> General reference to 'awarding bodies' cover both the two degree-awarding bodies within scope of the review and ACCA and Pearson.

On the whole, the delivery partnerships reviewed have been successful. The thorough and robust processes at the start of the partnership have enabled each to succeed, despite initial challenges. Each delivery partnership offers a number of awarding body programmes and the review team noted that having a formal process for set up, monitoring and regular review is more likely to strengthen the robustness and long-term sustainability of the partnership. Clear and robust awarding body processes ensure that a suitable delivery partner is approved, reduces risk, and ensures that the fit to the awarding body strategy is met.

All the awarding bodies reviewed had a clear agreement in place with their delivery partners, for example a Memorandum of Agreement or a robust and detailed approval process to become a delivery partner. The agreements or approval processes are essential to ensure the quality of the partnership and how it operates. In addition, each awarding body provided good quality centre handbooks, regulation handbooks, responsibility documents, student and staff handbooks, and a range of operations manuals and protocols to support each delivery partner. Three out of the four awarding bodies (ACCA, Pearson and University of London International Programmes) operate through a standardised global approach, whereby their manuals apply across their entire collaborative global provision. In addition, the operational manuals outline clearly the expectations and responsibilities of each awarding body and how they are used in practice at a detailed operational level at delivery partners. The detailed arrangements outlined in the manuals could have been improved and embedded further with more direct oversight by awarding body staff. At the time of the review a number of delivery partner staff noted that more direct contact would aid clarity and support the partnership as it evolves.

Of the four reviews undertaken, the responsibility for academic standards is set out clearly in each case, indicating that the awarding bodies have ultimate responsibility for the academic standards of their own qualifications, and that this was clearly understood and implemented by each delivery partner. The UK awarding bodies all had suitable systems in place. Each awarding body was clear about the role of external examiners in maintaining UK academic standards; the processes for examination were in many cases based upon global standards developed over a number of years. External examiners in all cases were appointed by the awarding body and report specifically on the academic standards of programmes and on the outcomes from the global examinations.

In each review the arrangements for developing, agreeing and managing the establishment and operation of the partnership were all satisfactory, and in accordance with the Quality Code.

## **Managing the partnership**

The review undertaken in Pakistan identified a number of UK awarding bodies that work on a global higher education stage and run very sophisticated worldwide operations from which collaborative quality assurance processes are managed from a centralised structure based in the UK.

One partnership run by a UK university (the University of Bradford) operates via a franchise agreement, which clearly articulates that the delivery partner delivered the programme of the University and that the degree programmes remained under the complete control of the University. A second (Pearson) retains control over the awards made in its name by defining the learning outcomes for each part of the programme, together with the assessment criteria associated with each outcome. The delivery partner carries responsibility for setting assessments that ensure students had appropriate opportunities to demonstrate they had achieved the intended learning outcomes.

All awarding bodies had developed clear procedures, policies and local committees for the management of their collaborative provision. Each provider produced detailed periodic reports, and annual monitoring reports providing effective oversight of their TNE provision. This centralised approach undertaken by the awarding bodies provides a robust management of the collaborations, both in being able to identify problems and enhance their collaborations across their TNE provision, and also by establishing a level of consistency in their global collaborative delivery offer.

The review team confirm the importance of maintaining awarding body oversight of each delivery partner at institutional level. In some reviews, the team identified that issues arose not from the detailed and clear written procedures available in manual form, but from inconsistency in awarding body written feedback following visits (remote sampling in the case of Pearson) and the frequency with which awarding body staff visit or interact with the delivery partner to meet staff and students, both of which could be improved.

Although one awarding body operated through a number of local offices in Pakistan, the review team concluded that more regular ongoing monitoring/visits would aid the development of the delivery partner in securing the student outcomes expected. In particular, the review team noted that a number of partnerships were subject to a higher turnover of academic staff, which resulted in not all awarding body regulations and procedures for assessment being understood to the same level. Regular annual monitoring and periodic review events are important in ensuring that partnerships remain stable.

The review considered a number of positive examples of how UK awarding bodies conduct effective monitoring arrangements, including some that have operated for a number of years. In some cases, the mature operating environment of delivery partners with whom the awarding bodies collaborate encourages a positive environment that is mutually beneficial to both the delivery partner and the awarding institution. UK awarding bodies in general work well with their delivery partner institutions, with regular communication at central level together with support from locally managed committees. At senior level awarding bodies have a strong working relationship with their delivery partners; however, further communication with teaching staff in some of the partnerships would support and enhance student learning opportunities, identify issues and improve the general learning environment.

Each awarding body has a clear strategy to support the development of staff in order to enhance their understanding of awarding body requirements and ultimately improve the provision delivered at the delivery partner. The review team did, however, note that in some of the partnerships visited many staff were fairly new to the delivery institution and did not appear to be as clear about awarding body requirements.

## **Focus on students**

As noted in previous TNE reviews, the review in Pakistan confirms that UK higher education continues to be well regarded globally. Students and staff whom the review team met commented on the global reputation of UK higher education and recognition of UK higher education qualifications within the country and globally.

In terms of student expectations, there is clearly a balance to be struck between the cost of a UK education and the quality of its provision. While students generally reported being very satisfied with the provision and resources associated with their programmes of study, the review team saw wide variations between the different institutions visited during the review. For example, TMUC is housed in a new building, purpose built to high specification, with excellent facilities for students of accountancy, business, fashion, computing and management. The quality of the facilities is reflected in the tuition fees. BETS, on the other hand, has chosen to maximise the affordability of its programmes with a low-fee, low-investment model. It has developed an agile business model, adapting to market trends, and adjusts its provision to suit the labour market. The low level of tuition fees, while making the programmes affordable to a wider range of students, has severely limited its capacity for investment in resource and teaching staff. However, BETS has been able to manage the expectations of its student expectations; students considered they were receiving value for money and were satisfied with their experience.

The majority of institutions visited during the review offered scholarships to students on the basis of merit or need. This was clearly a major consideration for potential applicants and, in some cases, limited the number of students admitted. One institution visited during the review provided some form of financial support to over 90 per cent of its students.

Recognising that many young people in rural Pakistan were unable to attend city-based higher education institutions, Namal College was purposely built as a rural higher education

institute, providing international degrees to students from underprivileged backgrounds. The remote location brings benefits and disadvantages to the College. The benefits include the provision of higher education opportunities to students who would otherwise be unable to study, the nurturing of a committed body of staff, and the development of close, productive links to the local community. The disadvantages reported by students, and recognised by staff, largely concern the infrastructure, including unreliable internet connection and the shortage of social, sporting or leisure facilities.

Two initiatives by the HEC are already having an impact on the quality of the student experience on TNE programmes. The first is the development of institutional ranking procedures for Pakistani higher education providers, and international benchmarking through the QS World Rankings, to drive improvements in quality of teaching and research.<sup>27</sup>

The second initiative to impact on the student experience is the requirement for each higher education institution to establish a QEC as a mechanism for monitoring and improving their academic quality. Each of the institutions visited during the review had a QEC in operation, which was largely having a visible effect on the quality of provision. In Namal College, the QEC has been instrumental in driving a culture of enhancement that will be invaluable to the institution as it ceases its formal relationship with the University of Bradford and applies for degree awarding powers of its own.

## **A relevant curriculum**

TNE programmes in Pakistan are almost exclusively vocational and include accountancy, business management, computing, engineering and fashion. The review team saw positive examples of local partners working with UK providers to make the curriculum relevant to their students. This generally involved the UK provider relying on the expertise of the partner institution to contextualise the curriculum and assessment design to the local, as well as the international, context in an appropriate way. A number of the partnerships had secured or were seeking accreditation from professional, statutory and regulatory bodies for the qualifications awarded in Pakistan.

BTEC HND programmes, which account for the majority of TNE provision in Pakistan, have a focus on learning by doing, with case study discussions and assignment review sessions, and assessment through evidence of learning, rather than by examinations. This makes them inherently suited to contextualisation. The awarding body, typically Pearson, retains control of its awards by defining the learning objectives and assessment criteria, while the provider is free to tailor the learning experiences and assessments to suit the local situation. Pearson ensures that its agreements with delivery partners are being honoured through an annual visit that scrutinises all aspects of delivery of the programmes, including student registration, student support, programme delivery, assessment and internal verification.

The model operated by ACCA is very different from that of BTEC HND agreements. ACCA retains complete control over the assessments and, while the delivery partner is free to design its own teaching and support, all students on ACCA programmes around the world sit the same examinations. This restricts the opportunities for local contextualisation of the curriculum to national requirements.

Yet another model was provided by the collaboration between Namal College and the University of Bradford. The programmes delivered by the College were originally identical to those delivered by the University at its UK base. While much of the curricula remains identical, the College recently requested permission to design its own assessments. The result has been increased freedom for the College to develop assessment tasks, although, at the time of the review visit, there was just one assessment that was entirely College-derived. There are further opportunities for contextualising the learning experience through the project work that is a feature of the programmes delivered by Namal College. The review team heard of examples of projects that had been designed specifically to address the requirements of the local community.

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<sup>27</sup> Ranking of Pakistani Higher Education Institutions, available at: <http://hec.gov.pk/english/services/universities/Ranking/Pages/Ranking-of-Pakistani-HEIs.aspx>.

## Language of study

Pakistan and the UK have a shared history. Consequently, English is the lingua franca of Pakistani elite and of most government ministries. All of the programmes in the review were taught in English, as were the institutional websites and student handbooks.

Proficiency in English was an entry requirement for each of the programmes reviewed. At TMUC, for example, the admissions threshold for BTEC HND programmes and undergraduate programmes includes an International English Language Testing System (IELTS) equivalent of 6.0.<sup>28</sup> Admissions to master's programmes require an IELTS score of 6.5.

English language support was available to students enrolled on the TNE programmes reviewed. The School of English at BETS runs language qualifications, which account for three quarters of the business of this institution. Students at Namal College complete English language in core first-year modules. From September 2017, TMUC intends to test the proficiency in written and spoken English of applicants or require evidence of an acceptable test score such as APTIS. As TMUC is an IELTS-approved centre, TMUC will advise students to prepare for, and take, the IELTS test. Any student that falls below the required level of English language proficiency will be required to undergo intensive English language training through the APTIS English Language Programme being offered at TMUC.

## Conclusion

The overseas review of TNE in Pakistan in May 2017 provided the review team with the opportunity to analyse a range of TNE models delivered by two UK-based universities, the awarding body Pearson and the professional accountancy body ACCA. The provision operating by UK-based awarding bodies can be described as collaborative provision, operating in partnership with a local private delivery centre.

In each review a clear feature was that each delivery partner operated the curriculum and examination procedures of the awarding bodies. It was unambiguous that each awarding body retained control of all aspects of the programmes and qualifications supported in its name and specified the delivery partner's obligations in this regard. This included annual and periodic review, the arrangements for enrolment of students, recruitment and training of staff, provision of learning resources and assessment. It was clear that the onus remains on the UK awarding body to maintain its academic standards and quality as these partnerships are set up and developed.

In developing and managing the collaborations reviewed, UK awarding bodies generally take two approaches. Firstly those that take a global approach to setting up and managing their delivery partnerships, managed through a centralised UK office, but with local country support offices. Secondly through franchised university provision where delivery partners operate the same programme as the home-based university. It is important that all UK awarding bodies describe and detail the key roles and responsibilities to ensure clarity is provided from the start of the partnership in order to avoid misunderstandings. Memoranda of Agreement, and student and staff handbooks, are effective in outlining in detail the roles and responsibilities of delivery partner institutions and staff.

All UK awarding bodies were confident in their relationship with their collaborating delivery partners. Each undertook due diligence or a detailed approval process to ensure that the partnership was sustainable and could meet the management responsibilities for quality and standards. Formal consideration at institutional and qualification level provides the best opportunity to develop and maintain a sustainable partnership. The review team identified some positive practice for the effective management of partnerships, conducted formally through strong local committee structures and through strong staff teams.

Students met by the review team in Pakistan were attracted to the strong reputation of UK higher education and to the style of teaching and learning offered in English. Student representation was found to be effective in most cases; some delivery partners also offered

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<sup>28</sup> Note that for BTEC Higher National qualifications, proficiency in English is only a requirement when the qualification is being assessed in English. It is possible for a provider to assess in a language other than English with Pearson's permission and certificates are issued to reflect this.

a range of extracurricular activities and student societies. Students met by the review team would like to see staff from the awarding bodies more often - this approach does require significant effort by each awarding institution. The curriculum of each awarding body is set by the centre, so does not allow for any modification by the delivery partner. Students clearly welcome the fact that they are receiving a UK qualification with global appeal. In some cases, the qualifications also receive relevant professional, statutory and regulatory body recognition.

In Pakistan, all of the qualifications and programmes were operating in English as specified by each awarding body. Because all teaching, learning and assessment is in English it reduces risk and ensures the maintenance of academic standards. The students met by the review team were confident, impressive and spoke well about their experience at each delivery partner.

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