

Country Profile: Pakistan

General background

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan has a population of 161 million, the vast majority of which are Muslim. Pakistan emerged as an independent nation following partition from India in 1947. The country is a federation of four provinces, each with a parliamentary system: Punjab, Sindh, Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) and Balochistan. Other territories under the direct administration of the Federal Government are Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit. Islamabad is a separate federal district. The division of responsibilities between the provinces and the centre has been defined by the 1973 Constitution and subsequent agreements.

In the early 1970s all of Pakistan's educational institutions were nationalised. The growing demand for higher education, however, outpaced the establishment of new public universities, and by the mid 1980s private educational institutions were allowed to operate on the condition that they comply with government standards.

Education has been, and is, primarily a provincial matter, under the Federal Ministry of Education (MOE) The Ministry continues to be the overall policy-making, coordinating and advisory authority on education, although 26 provincial boards are responsible for examinations such as the Secondary School Certificate (SSC), the Higher Secondary School Certificate (HSC) and technical/vocational qualifications. Universities are autonomous bodies supervised and controlled by their own syndicates, but are funded by the federal government through the University Grants Commission (UGC)

Islamic Education: Side by side with the modern education system is the religious education system, which provides Islamic education. 'Madrasah' Institutions (muktabas: primary schools, durul ulooms: secondary schools and jamias: universities) have their own management system without interference from provincial or federal governments. Efforts have been made by the present government to bring the Madrasah into the mainstream of the education system under Education Sector Reforms.

Education in Pakistan is not compulsory. Primary education lasts for five years. Secondary education is divided into three cycles: three-year middle school, two-year secondary and two-year higher secondary school.

Academic Year

The duration of the academic year is nine months, from September to June, with some variations. Colleges and universities are now using a semester system which retains three distinct terms. Many of the private universities run programmes all year so that students can finish courses in less time than usual. There is usually a two month holiday in summer and a twenty day break in winter.

Medium of Instruction

Urdu is the official language of Pakistan and is generally used as the medium of instruction within the education system though some higher education courses are taught in English. English is studied in Middle school and is a compulsory subject in secondary education.

Qualifications List

Secondary School

- Secondary School Certificate (SSC/Matriculation)
- Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC/Intermediate)

Further and Vocational Education and Training

- Skilled worker grade 3 Certificate (2-years in vocational institutes)*
- Skilled worker Grade 2 Certificate (2-years in technical training centres*)
- Final Apprenticeship Certificate (Skilled worker Grade 2 Certificate)
- Diploma of Associate Engineer (3-year in polytechnic or college of technology)
- Diploma in Commerce (D.Com) (2-year in commercial institutes/polytechnics)

Vocational training on the basis of practical experience (Grade 3 and 2 skilled worker certificates can be awarded on the basis of respectively 4 and 6 years work in industry plus vocational skills test

Undergraduate

- Bachelor of Technology (2 years full-time)

- Bachelor Degree (Pass - 2 years full-time)
- Bachelor Degree in named specialist field (3 years full-time)
- Honours Bachelor Degree (3 years full-time)
- Honours Bachelor Degree/Professional (4 years full-time, any discipline excluding Bachelor of Education)
- Post Graduate Bachelor Degree (e.g. Bachelor of Education)
- Masters Degree (including MBA, 2 or 3 years full-time after a 2 year Bachelor Degree or 1 year full-time after a 3-year Bachelors Degree)
- Post Graduate Diploma (1 year full-time following a 2 – 3 year Bachelors Degree in a related field of study)

Post Graduate

- Post Graduate Diploma (1 year full-time following a 3 - 4 year Honours Bachelors Degree in a related field of study)
- Masters Degree (including MBA / Professional field 2 years full-time after a 4-year Bachelor Degree)
- Master of Philosophy Degree
- Master of Engineering/MSc in Engineering
- Doctor of Philosophy Degree

Legislative Framework

The Constitution (1973) ensures equality of all citizens and no discrimination on the basis of sex, caste, religion or race. Article 37 states that “The State shall (a) promote with special care the educational and economic interests of backward classes or areas; (b) remove illiteracy and provide free and compulsory education within the minimum possible period and (c) make technical and professional education generally available and higher education equally accessible to all on the basis of merit”.

The policy environment for education is embedded within the national macro reform framework, focusing on devolution, poverty reduction through economic growth, social sector development, and governance reforms. Current initiatives in the education sector are based on the National Education Policy (1998-2010), the Education Sector Reforms

Action Plan 2001-2006 and the Education for All National Plan of Action (NPA) 2001-2015.

Prior to 1972, privately managed educational institutions constituted a sizeable portion of the total educational system. Most of these institutions operated at the school and college levels. Some private educational institutions earned high reputation for the academic standards they maintained and for the quality of their public instruction. The government in 1972 decided to take over all the privately managed educational institutions. As a result, 19,432 educational institutions were nationalised. These included 18,926 schools, 346 madrassas, 155 colleges and 5 technical institutions. The Government of Pakistan reviewed the consequences of nationalization in 1979 and came to the conclusion that, in view of poor participation rates at all levels of education, the government alone could not carry the burden of the whole educational process. In 1984, the existing legislation on nationalisation of privately-managed educational institutions was amended to allow the opening of private educational institutions, and to ensure that such institutions, set up with the permission of government, will not be nationalised in future. It is estimated that more or less 30,000 private educational institutions at all levels, with approximately 3 million students are functioning in the country. Private institutions impart education from playgroup to postgraduate level. Some schools have been established on community basis, while others are owned by individuals.

In 2002, Presidential Ordinance No: LIII founded the Higher Education Commission with the broad mandate to evaluate, improve and promote the higher education and research sector in Pakistan. The reform agenda has been supported through the granting of a large array of powers to the Commission to fulfill its mandate, and record increases in financial resources by the Government to support this process. For further information, see our section on quality assurance in Pakistan.

Education Reforms and their implications

Pakistan faces two major problems in education: Firstly the need to improve the literacy rates of the population as a whole: current literacy rates are estimated as 65 per cent for men and 42 per cent for females; and secondly the country must increase the number of children (especially girls) who complete a basic education: at least 30 million children do not have schooling, of which 5.5 million are aged five-nine years of whom 72 per cent are girls. As one of its Millennium Development Goals (MDG), the Government has the target of delivering universal basic education and eliminating gender disparity by 2015.

The Constitution of Pakistan sets out a broad-based egalitarian view of education, based on values, and responding to the requirements of economic growth. It is in this context that Pakistan has made a commitment to achieve the six “Education for All” (EFA) goals within the specified target dates. EFA goals include improvements in literacy and the universalisation of primary education, improvements in the quality of education through better teachers, reformed curriculum, an efficient examination system, and the strengthening of technical and professional education and training to increase the relevance of qualifications to the labour market.

Recently many new initiatives have been undertaken by the government to address these goals. The traditional approach of improving infrastructure and providing bricks and mortar is no doubt necessary, but not sufficient for quality education delivery and sustainable economic development in the existing burgeoning global competitive environment. Aside from Ministry of Education activities, many other initiatives have been launched recently by other Ministries, organisations and departments, such as the National Commission for Human Development (NCHD), the Higher Education Commission (HEC), the National Vocational & Technical Education Commission (NAVTEC) and the Labour & Manpower Division, in order to develop the human resources of Pakistan in a bid to meet emerging challenges.

The Draft National Educational Policy (April 2008) proposes the development of a national qualifications framework (NQF), along with a changed programme structure that encompasses all qualifications in the country, both academic and vocational/technical. The NQF will be competency based and provide entry points and progression routes throughout the structure of qualifications. In particular, it will provide for the possibility of two-way crossover between the academic and the vocational streams, with clearly mapped out recognition of credit points for each competency level. In addition, it is proposed that national standards for educational institutions and learning outcomes shall be determined. The development of a National Education Standards Authority has been proposed for this purpose.

The Higher Education Commission’s (HEC) *Medium Term Development Framework* (MTDF) 2005-2010 identified a number of specific challenges facing the higher education sector:

1. Poor standard of faculty and lack of training / capacity building;
2. Low enrollment in higher education;
3. Minimal relevance of higher education to national needs and lack of compatibility to international standards;
4. Low quality of research and lack of relevance to national requirements; and
5. Poor governance of universities.

The Draft National Education Policy (April 2008) proposes a number of reforms in order to address these challenges. Amongst these are proposals requesting that universities consider introducing a standard four-year Bachelor degree programme; that PhD degrees shall be a minimum of four years and that universities shall develop quality assurance programmes, which include peer evaluation including foreign expertise.

Both Pakistan's technical and vocational education (TVE) system and the higher education sector operate in some isolation from the needs of the labour market. Combating this deficiency is the main focus of the educational reforms of post-secondary education. The long term goal of these reforms is to generate a quality base of a breadth that can meet the needs of growth and innovation of a high value-added and knowledge economy. The reforms also aim at making Pakistan a significant 'Talent Source' at the international level so that the country can attract high FDI flows and quality foreign enterprises, particularly in the service sector.

Quality Assurance

A major step towards the achievement of quality assurance in higher education is the current development by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) that will regulate and facilitate *Quality Enhancement Cells* (QECs) to be organised in all Pakistan universities in a phased manner. Ten universities in Pakistan have been selected to participate in phase one of the introduction of the QAA and have established Quality Units (Cells) for this purpose. The full list of universities identified for the establishment of Quality Units can be found at: [Higher Education Commission Pakistan](#).

The HEC is empowered under 2002 legislation to '*set up national or regional evaluation councils or authorize any existing council or similar body to carry out accreditation of Institutions including their departments, facilities and disciplines by giving them appropriate ratings*'. To date, four Accreditation Councils have been established:

1. [National Computing Education Accreditation Council \(NCEAC\)](#)
2. [National Agriculture Education Accreditation Council \(NAEAC\)](#)
3. Accreditation Council for Teachers Education (ACTE)
4. Pakistan Business Education Accreditation Council (PBEAC)

The System of Education

Pre-Primary School

A child may begin his/her schooling at the age of three. Over one-third of Pakistani children attend pre-primary lessons known as '*kachis*' within primary schools. According to the National Education Policy 19998-2010, the *Kachi* class will be introduced as a formal class in the primary schools.

Primary

Formal education in Pakistan begins from around age five. The first five years of school are referred to as the Primary cycle (Classes 1-5), thereafter the next three are referred to as middle school (Classes 6-8). The language of instruction for classes 1-8 is usually Urdu. Progression from grade to grade is automatic; however, there is a very high drop out rate, particularly among rural children. There are no formal qualifications at the end of the primary cycle.

Secondary Education and Qualifications

Secondary education is divided into two phases: High School (Classes 9 & 10) and Higher Secondary School. The curriculum in High school is divided into three streams; Science, Humanities and Vocational/Technical (prior to 2002, the three streams were natural sciences, humanities and religion). Progression to Higher Secondary School is based upon successful completion of the *Matric* exam. Students who successfully complete this exam are awarded the **Secondary School Certificate (SSC/Matriculation)** by the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education.

The Higher Secondary stage is also called the 'intermediate' stage and is considered locally as part of college education. Higher Secondary education is generally undertaken as a two-year university preparation course and teaching is conducted at university colleges and equivalent institutions. Course streams are humanities, natural sciences, domestic science, medical technology, pre-medical and pre-engineer. Students must sit an exam at the end of Higher Secondary School. Successful candidates are awarded the **Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC/Intermediate Certificate)** by the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education. This qualification gives access to higher education. Grading is out of 100 and universities set their own requirements for marks with a minimum of 45%. Seventy to eighty per cent of applicants have marks over 80%. The universities also conduct interviews and their own entry tests.

Madrassah

The Madrassah offer Islamic education in *Muktaba* (primary) and *Durul Uloom*s (secondary) schools. These schools are independent, but are now seeking official registration. Pupils, who sit national examinations in Urdu, English and mathematics, are awarded a final certificate which gives entry to further education.

Vocational and Technical Education

Vocational Education and Training

Vocational training programmes are offered at two main levels: for Middle School graduates (class 8) and the other for holders of the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) (class 10). Vocational education courses are designed to train skilled and semi-skilled workers. These courses are mainly at the High School stage of Secondary education. Following completion of vocational education at this stage, students can work as carpenters, masons, electricians, mechanics, welders and in other similar crafts. Such vocational education is provided by vocational institutes.

Awards Attainable

Vocational level education is provided by vocational institutes, which award Skilled Worker Certificates. Skilled workers that qualify are classified as Grades 1 (the highest), through Grades 2 and 3. No Grade 1 programmes have been offered yet (2008). Skilled Worker Certificates at Grade 2 & 3 are awarded by provincial Boards of Education or the Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority. Equivalent programmes of vocational training can be provided by Secondary Schools as a stream within the High School stage and successful candidates can achieve a Secondary School Certificate (Vocational). Commerce education to train for the business sector is provided in commercial training institutes, which offer a one-year Certificate in Commerce (C.Com) and a two-year Diploma in Commerce (D.Comm).

Technical Education and Training

The main providers of technical education include polytechnic institutes, colleges of technology affiliated with universities, institutes of technology, commercial training institutes and university colleges. These providers may offer both technical and vocational-level programmes. Polytechnics offer three year courses following the SSC, leading to the award of a Diploma. The Diploma programme is designed to train technicians.

Colleges of technology offer the same qualifications as the polytechnics but also offer degree courses to holders of a Diploma. There is no provision whereby the traditional

apprenticeship experience in the non-formal sector could be assessed and certified for entry into the formal sector of vocational education.

Awards Attainable

The Diploma awarded following three-year programmes in polytechnics and colleges of technology is considered the academic equivalent of the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC/Intermediate Certificate) for the purpose of entry to higher education courses (engineering degrees or Bachelor (Pass) degrees). The Diploma awarded in the field of engineering is known as the Diploma of Associate Engineer.

The two main degrees offered by the colleges of technology are a Bachelor of Technology (Pass Degree) which consists of one year of industrial training followed by one year of institution-based training. The Bachelor of Technology (Honours) is a two-year course following the award of the Bachelor of Technology (Pass degree). The Bachelor of Technology (Honours) is considered comparable to an Engineering degree (BSc Eng) and combines higher education with practical training in industry (see section on higher education).

The certificate and diploma programmes do not seem to offer progression into higher-level education. They do not provide entry routes into the tertiary sector with credit recognition in either the academic or applied streams. The courses are also not linked with apprentice training.

Apprenticeships

Currently there are 610 establishments registered to provide apprenticeship training, which include many state owned utilities such as railways and airlines. The programme usually takes three years and the testing and certification is the same as for skilled worker training or vocational training described above. However, because of the strong reputation that apprenticeship training has amongst employers, and the fact that entry is competitive, the actual entry requirement for entry is effectively the SSC, although the training is at trade level. Apprenticeship schemes are based on guidelines in the Apprenticeship Training Ordinance, 1962, which is now under review.

Higher Education

Since 2002, the Higher Education Commission (HEC) is empowered to carry out evaluation; improvement and promotion of higher education; research and development; to formulate policies, guiding principles and priorities for higher education institutions, and to prescribe conditions under which institutions, including those that are not part of the State educational system, may be opened and operated. The mandate of HEC encompasses all degree-granting universities and institutions, both in the public and private sectors and supports the attainment of quality education by facilitating and co-coordinating self-assessment of academic programmes and their external review by national and international experts. The HEC also supervises the planning, development and accreditation of public and private sector higher education institutions. Its goal is to facilitate the reform process. As part of this process the HEC set up a Quality Assurance Committee in 2003 and its first step in analysing education quality was a ranking exercise of all public and (top) private universities. Approximately half of higher education institutions have been ranked to date (2008). It should be noted that research is the most heavily weighted indicator in the ranking system. For more information see [Higher Education Commission Ranking of Universities](#)

Universities

With the support of Government policy the number of higher education institutions has increased. Today there are over 120 universities and degree-awarding institutions evenly split across the public and private sectors. Typically general universities will offer degrees in arts, commerce, education, law, medicine, pharmacy and science. Degree-granting institutions include the specialist universities, which offer degrees in agriculture and engineering. Most universities have enrolments of around 5,000, although the Allama Iqbal Open University has over 450,000 students. The colleges of technology and the universities specialise in engineering education at undergraduate and post graduate level. These institutions provide programmes leading to a Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Engineering or BSc Eng, and the Master of Engineering. The medium of instruction is English, but some subjects are taught through Urdu.

Affiliated and Constituent Colleges

The traditional university system in Pakistan is that of a university (for example the University of Karachi) that consists of a number of affiliated or constituent colleges. The university maintains the overall standard of courses and conducts examinations. Affiliated colleges (linked colleges) have greater freedom within the university and typically offer Bachelors degrees (pass). The constituent colleges, which are effectively campuses of the university and are managed and maintained by the university, typically

offer Bachelors (Honours) and Masters degrees. Affiliated and constituent colleges may be public or private. A university can consist partly of its own faculties and constituent colleges offering post-graduate studies and research, and partly of affiliated colleges offering Bachelor degrees under the direction of the university and with examinations conducted by the university.

Degree-Awarding Institutions

A degree-awarding institution consists of up to four faculties with at least one in the science area, while a university must have five or more faculties, including one in the science area.

Research Centres

The University Grants Commission has established a number of Research Centers or Centers of Excellence. These are publicly funded and controlled by the Higher Education Commission (HEC).

Qualifications System

The previous degree structure for university-level higher education included:

- a 2-year Bachelor (Pass) degree with three subjects in humanities (arts), commerce and natural sciences;
- a 3-year Bachelor (Honours) degree in one subject within humanities, commerce and natural sciences; and
- a 4-5-year professional degree in areas such as agriculture, engineering, dentistry, medicine, etc.
- The subsequent Masters degree in humanities, commerce and natural sciences was 1 year or 2 year depending on the duration of the earlier Bachelor degree.

The new degree structure established by the Higher Education Commission in 2002 includes a 4-year Bachelor degree followed by a one – two-year Masters degree. The Higher Education Commission has also revised the core curriculum in a range of subjects. They have introduced reflective elements, critical assessment and research methodology in a range of courses with a view to matching education courses in other

countries. Many Bachelor courses now include a bachelor project or major task, and in some cases the Masters degree course can include 6 months to 1 year of a Masters project based on a minor piece of research work, sometimes replacing coursework.

Even prior to 2002, private universities offered a 4-year Bachelor degree following the American model based on a credit hours system and a grade-point average (GPA).

Individual degrees are normally awarded in first, second and third-class divisions depending on the student's results. The third-class division does not normally qualify a student for entry to continued studies at the next level.

The Master of Philosophy (MPhil) and the Ph.D. are 2-year and 3-year research degrees respectively, subsequent to a Masters degree. According to new structures since 2002, the M.Phil. and the Masters degree can have equal status in terms of entry to Ph.D. programmes. The new 4-year Bachelor degree should also give entry to Ph.D. studies.

Undergraduate Qualifications

Bachelor Degree (Pass) is generally awarded after two-year programmes in arts, commerce or science courses. Entry usually requires the HSC or Intermediate exams.

Bachelor Degrees (Honours) in arts, commerce and science are usually three years in length. *Honours Bachelor Degrees* in agriculture, dentistry, engineering, pharmacy and veterinary medicine all require four years of study, whilst degrees in architecture and medicine are five years in length.

Post graduate Qualifications

Postgraduate Bachelor degrees, such as the *Bachelor degree in Law (LLB)* is a three year post graduate qualification. Entrance is based on completion of any Bachelor (pass) degree.

The Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) is a one year post graduate qualification following any Bachelor (pass) degree.

The Bachelor of Library Science (B.LibSc) is a one year post graduate qualification following any Bachelor (pass) degree

Postgraduate Diplomas are offered by many universities and generally require one year of study. Entry is usually based on a first degree in a related field.

The Masters Degree in arts, commerce or science is awarded two years after the Pass degree or one year after the Honours degree. Masters degree courses are usually based on coursework and examination and typically do not involve the presentation of a thesis.

The Master of Business Administration (MBA) is usually taken after a two year degree in a different field within arts, commerce or science. The MBA programme is therefore comparable to an undergraduate degree.

The Master of Education (M.Ed) is a two year course, following the Bachelor of Education. Masters degrees typically require a 1st or 2nd division or class in the relevant Bachelor degree required for entry.

Doctoral Qualifications

Entry requires a Masters Degree, but many require a Master of Philosophy or Professional Masters Degree. *The Master of Philosophy (M.Phil)* is a research-based course that also requires a thesis. *The Ph.D (Doctorate of Philosophy)* is a research degree which requires on average, three years study after the M.Phil degree and 4 to 5 years of study after the Masters Degree.

The Degrees of Doctor of Literature (D.Litt), Doctor of Science (D.Sc) and Doctor of Law (LLD) are awarded after five years of study.

Teacher training

- The Primary Teaching Certificate (PTC) is awarded after one-year programmes from colleges for elementary teachers or normal schools. Entry to programmes is on the basis of the Secondary School Certificate, i.e., 10 years of school attendance. The award qualifies the holder to teach in primary school (1st to 5th class).
- The Certificate in Teaching (CT) is awarded following one-year programmes from teacher training colleges (TTC). Entry to programmes is on the basis of the Intermediate/Higher School Certificate examination. The award qualifies the holder to teach in middle schools (6th to 8th class).
- The Diploma in Education is awarded following 18-month programmes. Entry is on the basis of the Intermediate/Higher School Certificate examination. Since 2002, it has replaced the Primary Teaching Certificate (PTC) and the Certificate

in Teaching (CT). However, PTC and CT can still be available.

- The Bachelor degree (2-year) + 1-year B.Ed. or 3-year B.S.Ed. (Bachelor of Education) qualifies the holder to teach 9th and 10th class.
- The M.Ed., a 1-year programme following from a 1-year B.Ed. qualifies the holder to teach 11th and 12th class + teacher training PTC, CT and B.Ed. + supervision.
- The M.A. Edu, a 2-year programme following from a BA/B.SC, qualifies the holder to teach 11th and 12th class + teacher training PTC, CT and B.Ed. + supervision.
- The Master of Education (Med) can qualify the holder to teach in higher education institutions.

A 4-year Bachelor of Education and a 5-year (or more) Master of Education are being implemented since 2002, aimed at teaching 11th and 12th class.

Professional Accreditation

Professional and specialist education is offered by several professional bodies. Four of these are recognised by the Higher Education Commission and are authorized under charter to issue diplomas and certificates.

The Institute of Chartered Accountants in Pakistan (ICAP): Minimum entry requirements are based on the Higher Secondary School Certificate (HSC) and the programme may take 3-5 years depending on the student's entry level. Students must complete three stages; foundation, intermediate and professional before being granted Associate Membership of ICAP

Institute of Cost and Management Accountants of Pakistan (ICMAP): Entry is based on a Bachelor degree in arts, commerce or science and an entry test. The programme of study involves 6 stages of study with four subjects at each stage and includes work experience. Certificates are awarded after stages 2, 4 and 6. Associate Membership of ICAMP requires three years of approved work experience in addition to the passing the examinations of all stages.

College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan (CPSP): The College provides postgraduate medical education. Fellowship training leads to FCPS (Fellow of the College of Physicians and Surgeons); Diplomas awarded by the College lead to the title MCPS (Member of the College of Physicians and Surgeons); Diplomas in Health

Professions Education are awarded by the College following 1.25 years of supervised work experience of medical and dental graduates; the Postgraduate Diploma in Healthcare Systems Management is awarded by the College and requires three semesters of study for medical and dental graduates.

Pakistan Nursing Council: The Council accredits nursing schools and professional programmes in universities.

There are a number of professional Regulatory Bodies that accredit courses leading to practice in regulated professions:

- Pakistan Medical and Dental Council
- Unani, Ayurvedic & Homeopathic Practitioners
- Pakistan Pharmacy Council
- Pakistan Bar Council
- Pakistan Engineering Council
- Pakistan Council of Architects and Town planners
- Pakistan Veterinary Medical Council.

The Grading System

The usual grading system used in secondary school is as follows on a 1-100 scale:

A-F (Division 1=60%+; Division 2 = 45-59%; Division 3 = 33-44%; Fail = below 33%

The usual grading system used in higher education institutions is as follows:

A-F (Division 1=60%+; Division 2 = 45-59%; Division 3 = 33-44%; Fail = below 33%

For both secondary and higher education institutions the highest grade is 1st Division, the Pass level is 3rd Division and the lowest on the scale is Fail.

