

# Proposed Regulatory Mechanism for Award of Honorary Doctorate (PhD) Degrees in Sindh

**Preamble:** This policy aims to restore the sanctity of honorary PhD degrees in Sindh by ensuring they are awarded based on merit, integrity, and societal impact, free from political or financial influence.

The conferment of an honorary PhD degree constitutes the highest symbolic and moral distinction that a university may bestow, intended to recognize individuals of exceptional stature whose lifelong contributions have significantly advanced knowledge, human welfare, culture, or public service. Internationally, such honours are grounded in deeply held academic traditions and are conferred sparingly, with great caution, and only after rigorous evaluation of merit, integrity, and impact. The value of an honorary doctorate lies not merely in the title itself, but in the credibility of the institution that awards it and the ethical standards that govern its conferment.

In recent years, however, a troubling pattern has emerged within several universities in Sindh, where honorary PhD degrees appear to be awarded with increasing frequency and without due regard to established academic norms. Concerns have been raised that, in some cases, these awards are influenced by political considerations, personal affiliations, or attempts to gain favour with influential individuals, rather than genuine scholarly or societal contributions. Such practices risk commodifying an academic honour of the highest order and may also create avenues for financial impropriety or undue institutional influence. If left unaddressed, this trend threatens to erode the moral authority of universities, dilute the meaning of academic excellence, and undermine public confidence in the higher education system. It is therefore imperative to introduce a comprehensive and enforceable regulatory framework to restore the sanctity of honorary PhD degrees, ensure transparency and accountability in their award, and protect the integrity of academic institutions in Sindh.

## 1. Defining the Honorary PhD: Purpose and Scope

An Honorary PhD shall be awarded solely in recognition of extraordinary, lifelong, and globally or nationally impactful contributions in:

- Science, technology, education, medicine
- Arts, literature, culture
- Public service, humanitarian work
- Social reform and nation-building

### 1.2 Disqualifying Criteria for Honorary PhD Recipients:

Honorary PhD degrees shall not be conferred for:

- **Political Office or Loyalty:** Holding or having held political positions, or as a reward for political allegiance
- **Financial or Institutional Favours:** In exchange for donations, grants, or other benefits to the university
- **Short-Term Achievements:** One-time or fleeting accomplishments lacking lasting impact
- **Celebrity Status Alone:** Fame without significant scholarly, scientific, or societal contributions

## **2. Eligibility and Merit Criteria**

### **2.1 Academic Relevance**

The field of contribution must be reasonably aligned with the university's academic mandate.

### **2.2 Minimum Contribution Threshold**

Honorary PhD recipients should meet the following stringent criteria:

- **Longstanding Contribution:** A minimum of 20-25 years of documented achievements and contributions to their field
- **Significant Impact:** Demonstrable, measurable impact at the national or global level
- **Independent Recognition:** Endorsement and recognition by reputable, independent institutions or bodies

## **3. Independent Multi-Tier Approval Mechanism**

### **3.1 University Honorary Degree Committee (UHDC)**

#### **3.1.1 Composition:**

- Vice Chancellor (Chair, non-voting except tie)
  - Two eminent external academics (from outside Sindh), preferably international.
  - One nominee of Sindh HEC
  - One legal/ethics expert
- The committee's recommendation should be approved by the statutes and by the Syndicate / BoG prior to conferment.

## **4. Transparency and Public Disclosure**

### **4.1 Mandatory Disclosure**

Universities will be required to publish following details on their website:

- Name of Recipient
- Justification for awarding honorary PhD (detailed rationale for conferring the honorary PhD)
- Evidence of Contribution (documented proof of recipient's impact and achievements)
- Minutes of Approval Meetings (official records of UHDC and Syndicate decisions)

## **5. Quantitative Caps and Restrictions**

### **5.1 Numerical Limits**

- No more than 5 (five) honorary PhD degrees shall be awarded per decade.

### **5.2 Timing Restrictions**

To maintain the integrity of the award process, honorary PhD degrees shall not be conferred during the following periods:

- Election years (including national, provincial, or local elections)
- Periods when a caretaker government is in office.
- Times of major political transitions (such as changes in federal or provincial administrations)

## 6. Financial and Ethical Safeguards

### 6.1 Zero Financial Transaction Rule

To prevent any form of undue influence or quid pro quo, there shall be a strict prohibition on

- **Donations:** Any financial contributions, whether cash or assets, made to the university or its affiliates in relation to the honorary PhD award.
- **Endowments:** Funds or property donated to the university with the expectation of influencing the award decision.
- **Gifts:** Any items of value, including but not limited to money, goods, or services, offered or provided in connection with the honorary PhD award.
- **Sponsorships:** Financial support or resources provided to the university or recipient for events, projects, or activities linked to the honorary PhD conferment.

### 6.2 Mandatory Financial Disclosure

The university must submit a certified affidavit confirming that no financial transactions (including donations, gifts, or sponsorships) were involved in the award process.

## 7. Penalties and Enforcement

### 7.1 Institutional Penalties

Failure to adhere to these guidelines may result in:

- **Suspension of Degree-Awarding Powers:** The University's authority to confer honorary PhD degrees may be revoked or suspended by the Chief Minister / Patron in Chief, on the recommendations of Sindh HEC.
- **Reduction in Development Grants:** Funding allocations from government or affiliated bodies may be decreased or withheld.
- **Adverse Impact on Accreditation Rankings:** The University's accreditation status and overall rankings may be negatively affected.

### 7.2 Individual Accountability

Non-compliance with these guidelines may lead to:

- **Disciplinary Action:** The Vice-Chancellor, Registrar, and Syndicate members involved in the irregular award process may face disciplinary proceedings, including possible termination or other punitive measures.
- **Disqualification:** Individuals may be barred from holding academic administrative offices (e.g., VC, Dean, Registrar, or Syndicate member roles) for a specified period or permanently.

## 8. Revocation and Review Mechanism

### 8.1 Post-Award Review

The Sindh Higher Education Commission (HEC) reserves the right to revoke an honorary degree if:

- **Misrepresentation is proven:** The degree was awarded based on false or misleading information provided by the recipient.

- **Political or Financial Inducement is established:** It is found that the award was influenced by political pressure, financial transactions, or other improper means.
- **Recipient Engages in Conduct Damaging to National Interest:** The recipient is involved in activities that compromise Pakistan's sovereignty, security, or public interest.

## **8.2 Periodic Review**

All honorary PhDs awarded in the last **10 years** to be reviewed retrospectively.

## **9. Centralized Digital Registry**

The Sindh Higher Education Commission (HEC) shall establish and maintain a publicly accessible digital registry of all honorary PhD degrees awarded by universities. The registry will include:

- **All Honorary Degrees Awarded:** A comprehensive list of recipients, including names and dates of award
  - **Awarding Institutions:** Details of universities that conferred the degrees
  - **Justifications and Approvals:** Rationale for selecting recipients and documentation of approval processes
- Establishment of an Honorary Degrees Registry

## **10. Ethical Culture and Capacity Building**

### **10.1 Code of Ethics**

#### **Mandatory adoption of a Code of Ethics for academic honour**

Universities must adopt and enforce a Code of Ethics governing the conferment of academic honours, including honorary PhD degrees, to ensure integrity and transparency.