

Roundtable

AI Readiness in Pakistan's Higher Education Sector

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is already influencing how universities teach, assess learning and conduct research through the everyday choices of students, faculty, researchers, and administrators. Institutions now face a more consequential question: will they shape this adoption through deliberate policy and investment, or allow it to develop as fragmented individual experimentation? That choice will affect educational quality, institutional accountability, and whether AI narrows or widens existing inequalities between universities.

Pakistan's policy direction makes this debate timely. The [National Artificial Intelligence Policy](#) provides for skills development, research support, Centres of Excellence, scholarships, internships, and responsible AI adoption. The policy places universities at the centre of AI research, workforce development, and the creation of solutions addressing Pakistan's socioeconomic needs. The Higher Education Commission (HEC) has complemented this direction with a [framework for the use of generative AI in higher education](#), a [mandatory undergraduate AI course](#), and [faculty development for AI-ready institutions](#). Together, these measures shift attention from isolated tool use towards institution-wide capability and governance.

This agenda has gained further urgency following the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives' directive to undertake a [comprehensive review of university degree programmes](#) for technological change, future employment, and the requirements of Industrial Revolutions 4.0 and 5.0. This direction is consistent with [Uraan Pakistan](#), which links youth empowerment with quality education, innovation, advanced technologies, and a knowledge-based economy. For higher education, the practical challenge is to convert this national ambition into institutional choices on curricula, research, operations, investment, and accountability.

National ambition, however, does not resolve the choices facing individual institutions. While these developments create significant opportunities, meaningful gains will not follow from technology procurement alone as institutions differ in terms of digital infrastructure, data quality, cybersecurity, financing, staff capability, and policy maturity. AI also introduces material risks. Inaccurate or biased outputs can affect students and research; extensive data collection can undermine privacy; automated monitoring can become intrusive; and the use of automated systems can result in consequential decisions. Responsible integration requires clear institutional priorities, capable faculty and staff, secure data governance, transparent procurement, inclusive access, regular evaluation, and meaningful human oversight.

Against this backdrop, this roundtable will examine how Pakistan's higher education sector can move from fragmented experimentation towards responsible and institutionally

supported AI adoption. The discussion will highlight the choices facing institutional leadership, the balance between innovation and academic safeguards, and the urgency of aligning university systems, curricula, and capabilities with Pakistan's emerging AI and human-capital agenda. This debate is urgent as AI adoption is advancing faster than institutional policies, skills, infrastructure, and accountability mechanisms. The dialogue aims to:

- Assess institutional readiness across governance, infrastructure, data management, cybersecurity, human capacity, financing, and inclusion.
- Identify priority AI use cases for teaching, research, student services, and institutional operations, together with recommendations for piloting, evaluating, and scaling them.
- Propose essential safeguards for academic integrity, privacy, security, intellectual property, bias, transparency, human oversight, and accountable use of third-party systems.
- Identify areas for coordinated action, including policy guidance, faculty development, shared resources, collaborative research, and institutional pilot programmes.

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