



# ***7<sup>th</sup> Deans and Directors Conference Report***

***(17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> February 2020)***

***“Enhancing Quality and Inclusivity in Business  
Education Through Engagement”***

National Business Education Accreditation Council (NBEAC)



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## Key Takeaways from the Conference

The main themes of the conference were quality and inclusivity. A diversity of views was on offer at the Conference, not surprising given the diversity of the participants and panelists. From this diversity, some points of consensus emerged. These are noted below as suggestions for business school leaders (including owners, administrators and faculty).

### Business schools should embrace quality as a high priority objective

The Chairman of NBEAC noted that only 22 business schools had achieved quality accreditation so far. The Chief Guest noted a drift towards “mass production of business administration degrees of low quality.” To counter this drift, it was important for more schools to commit to higher quality goals.

### Business schools should embrace inclusivity as a high priority objective

The Chief Guest suggested that business schools develop programs of awareness-raising in rural and remote areas, remedial education for those from non-elite secondary schools and financial assistance for those without adequate means.

### Business schools should use digital technology to achieve higher quality and inclusivity

The spread of digital technology offered a way to achieve both higher quality and more inclusivity. Excellent teaching resources (lectures, articles, video clips, quizzes and exercises, etc.) from across the globe were now available to anyone with digital access. The quality of education was not limited by the quality of faculty present in a given business school but could be improved simply by incorporating globally-available teaching resources into the learning system. At the same time, by developing online programs, business schools could reach many more aspiring learners than they are doing at present, including those in remote areas and with limited means.

### Business schools should be more open to change and collaboration

The rapidity of change in the world of business, in part brought about by the digital revolution, requires Pakistani business schools to become more flexible and nimble. They should not remain wedded to old curricula or conventional pedagogy. They should collaborate with the business sector in order to remain relevant in fast changing times. They should collaborate with each other to learn better ways of teaching students, doing research, building links with industry and benefiting from alumni networks.

### Business schools should connect more to national development challenges

While many academic disciplines are narrow and technical in scope, business education is broad and can play an important role in national development. In particular, it could help in such areas as promoting entrepreneurship, grooming more women for leadership roles, and generating knowledge in critical areas like export development. These and other issues of importance to national development should be more prominently featured in business school curricula.



## Session I- Inaugural Session

Speaker	Designation
Dr. Abdul Hafeez Shaikh	Advisor to the Prime Minister for Finance & Revenue/Chief Guest of Conference
Dr. Farrukh Iqbal	Chairman NBEAC
Dr. Naukhez Sarwar	Vice Chairman, NBEAC
Mr. Ahtesham Ali Raja	Program Director, NBEAC

### Dr. Farrukh Iqbal (Chairman, NBEAC)

Dr. Farrukh Iqbal welcomed the Chief Guest along with other participants. He noted that the themes of the conference, quality and inclusivity, had been chosen with an eye to highlighting the importance of these issues for business education in Pakistan. Quality was central to NBEAC's mission as it had been set up to be a quality accreditation body. Inclusivity was also an important element of NBEAC's guiding philosophy. The fact that the DDC continued to attract participants from all over the country and from a variety of business schools (public and private, rural and urban, small and large) testified to the efforts made by NBEAC to be inclusive.

Dr. Iqbal apprised the gathering that NBEAC's experience to date with assessing the quality of Pakistani business schools had been somewhat disappointing. Only 22 of about 140 registered institutions had received accreditation so far. Some institutions had received accreditation several years ago but had subsequently failed to qualify for reaccreditation. Many business schools had never even applied for accreditation. What lay behind this disappointing outcome?

One possibility was that NBEAC's accreditation standards were set too high. However, he noted that the relevant standards were periodically modified in light of both domestic and international benchmarks and seemed to be reasonable. Another possibility was that many Pakistani business schools did not strive hard enough to improve

their standards since the lack of accreditation did not affect their license to operate. A third possibility was that the potential for higher quality existed among Pakistani business schools but NBEAC needed to mount a stronger mentoring and training effort to get them over the line.

Dr. Iqbal said that he personally inclined to the third explanation. He thought that a revamped mentoring strategy would get better accreditation results. He mentioned analytic work done by Dr. Sadia Nadeem that had identified the areas in which most business schools needed to improve. Based on this analytic work, NBEAC had designed a new approach to mentoring and training for applicant schools. He hoped to announce positive results from this approach in future DDCs.

He concluded by expressing his gratitude to colleagues from the business education community who had worked with NBEAC to set standards, provide mentoring and training services, and become a more effective knowledge-sharing institution. The enterprise was marked by a volunteer spirit that was key to its success. He also thanked the universities and corporate partners who had made the 7<sup>th</sup> DDC possible.



### **Dr. Naukhez Sarwar (Vice Chairman, NBEAC)**

Dr. Sarwar noted that DDC7 had been designed to learn from the diversity of experience among Pakistani business schools. Accordingly, in addition to a general session on common issues of quality and inclusivity, separate sessions had been arranged to learn from public and private business schools, on the one hand, as well as from rural and urban business schools, on the other. He said that different schools had developed different approaches to common challenges in light of their own constraints and strengths. As these schools shared information about their practices and approaches, both formally at panel sessions and informally in breakout gatherings, all participants would benefit.

Dr. Sarwar highlighted the role of the ongoing digital transformation in achieving greater quality and inclusivity. Digital technology now provided aspiring learners the means to acquire quality knowledge from all over the world and forward-looking schools the ability to reach potential students and learners globally as well as locally. In addition, industrial and corporate workplaces were also transforming rapidly under the impact of the digital revolution. As a result, business schools needed to encompass this revolution in their curricula as well as in their teaching methods. This would likely require enhanced collaboration, not only among business schools but also among schools and corporate entities. Furthermore, because digital technology had created a situation of rapid change, business schools would have to be prepared to shed traditional approaches and engage in a continuous process of experimentation and learning. These issues would be taken up in separate sessions at the conference.



### **Dr. Abdul Hafeez Shaikh (Advisor to PM)**

Dr. Abdul Hafeez Shaikh (Advisor to the Prime Minister for Finance & Revenue) thanked the organizers for having invited him to what promised to be an important and interesting gathering. He thought the timing was appropriate as Pakistan was emerging from an economic emergency. He thought the themes of the conference were appropriate as it was important for business schools to enhance quality and inclusivity to contribute maximally to the country's future. In a wide-ranging talk, he mentioned two areas in which he thought business education in Pakistan had failed. First, it had become characterized by the mass production of business administration degrees of low quality. Second, it had failed to imbue the corporate sector with lessons and leaders to achieve success in raising exports and attracting foreign investment.

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He said that the present government was committed to expanding exports and had offered a range of incentives towards this goal. Business school leaders should step up and play a role in this effort. They should think about capitalizing on opportunities from China. They should think about partnering with local and international think tanks to analyze and understand the impediments to Pakistani exports. They should integrate digital technology and the ongoing artificial intelligence revolution in their curricula so as to prepare students to take advantage of these developments when they become business owners and managers. Otherwise, it would be like sitting by a river but never benefitting from its potential because of not knowing how to swim!

He also thought that the business education system needed to do much better on inclusivity. He wondered if business schools were reaching out to lower income and remotely situated students who may have potential to participate in higher management education but are denied the opportunity to do so. He wondered if those from a non-English-medium background were being properly integrated. He suggested that business school leaders think about such issues and develop mechanisms for greater inclusivity. These would most likely require programs of awareness raising in rural and remote areas, remedial education for those from non-elite secondary schools and financial assistance for those without adequate means. He noted that this was also an area of priority for the present government that was setting up a fund of 100 billion rupees under its 'Kamyab Jawan' program to offer scholarships for education and seed money for start-up enterprises. The latter was also being done through the National Incubation Program. He invited business school leaders to join the government in this effort to expand opportunity for all in Pakistan.

Dr. Shaikh concluded with a hope and a suggestion. His hope was that the DDC would generate practical ideas for improving quality and inclusivity in business education with a view to making a contribution to the national economy. His suggestion was that the conference adopt a format which gives maximum scope for people to talk to each other and interact rather than listen passively to speeches from the podium. He said that if practical ideas were indeed generated, he would be happy to engage in another session with selected business education leaders on how the government might help in facilitating their implementation.



### **Ahtesham Ali Raja (PD, NBEAC)**

Mr. Ahtesham Ali Raja took the opportunity to bid a special welcome to Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad, former chairman of HEC. He also recalled the contributions of the late Dr. Hassan Murad in establishing NBEAC and guiding it to its present state of achievement. With regard to the present conference, he expressed his gratitude to all the university and corporate sponsors who had made contributions in cash or kind. He assured them that their contributions were for a good cause, that of improving the quality of public and private management in the country.





## Session II- Engaging stakeholders to achieve inclusivity and quality in business education

*Moderator: Dr. Syed Zahoor Hassan, Lahore University of Management Sciences*

Speaker	Designation
Dr. Ishrat Husain	Advisor to the Prime Minister for Institutional Reforms & Austerity
Dr. Farrukh Iqbal	Chairman, NBEAC
Mr. Zafar Ali Khan	Chairman Board of Directors, Pakistan Center for Philanthropy
Mr. Muhammad Ahmed	President, Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry



### **Dr. Ishrat Husain (Advisor to PM)**

In his panel remarks, Dr. Husain emphasized that quality was an elusive concept, comprising multiple dimensions that were hard to measure. In the end, many fall back on subjective judgments about quality. Among practical ways to assess quality were employer feedback surveys. These provided relevant judgements on the employability of the graduates of particular business schools. Sometimes, the quality of research being done in business schools could also be assessed through peer reviews and citation studies. However, both these measures ignored an important aspect which was whether or not business schools were paying attention to socioeconomic development issues in the country.

### **Dr. Farrukh Iqbal (Chairman, NBEAC)**

Dr. Iqbal agreed with Dr. Husain's observations and pointed out that the checklists in use at NBEAC to assess quality did not include information on employability or research quality or pedagogical quality. NBEACs assessments were based mostly on processes and inputs and not on outcomes.

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### **Mr. Zafar Ali Khan (Chairman, Board of Directors, Pakistan Center for Philanthropy)**

Mr. Khan expanded on the theme of socioeconomic impact of business schools. He noted that Pakistani business schools did not focus adequately on producing managers for the public sector which accounted for a huge chunk of the economy. While the teaching of public administration was covered by other disciplines and schools, he thought that a hard-nosed and evidence-based management approach was missing there. He also thought that the research being produced in our business schools was largely irrelevant for our business sector. This was why Pakistani firms turned to consultants rather than academics when they needed solutions for business problems.

### **Mr. Muhammad Ahmed (President, Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry)**

Mr. Ahmed suggested that Pakistani business schools should emphasize practical business experience as well as academic learning through books. He noted that he personally learnt “business administration” when he joined his family business after getting various academic degrees. One way to get more of a practical flavor onto our business education was to carry out and use more case studies of local businesses. Another way was to integrate lectures by prominent businessmen into relevant courses.

In the discussion that followed within the panel, the following points were highlighted: (a) the growing shift among global corporations away from a single minded focus on shareholder wealth maximization; (b) the lack of a strong connection (via research or teaching or consulting) between business schools and national economic policy issues; (c) the promising moves made by some business schools towards becoming more inclusive by developing special programs to enroll students from underprivileged backgrounds; and (d) the need to bring more women into business education and then into the world of business either through employment or as entrepreneurs.

### **Open Discussion**

The following points were among those raised in the open discussion part of the session: (a) the proper role of the government in addressing education quality and relevance and (b) the proper use of business graduates in the Pakistani corporate sector.

With regard to (a), Dr. Ishrat Husain said that the audience appeared to have more faith in government than he did. Government has never been a leader in knowing what would happen in the future. It is usually the private sector that responds first to changing technology and circumstances with the government reacting later. He went on to say that his experience had convinced him that it was not the level of government funding for various education initiatives that mattered but the quality of governance. Government had a habit of simply opening new institutes and centers without ensuring that high quality professionals would run them. Today we have 200 public universities. Very few are of good quality and most have become employment centers for non-academic staff.

With regard to (b), Dr. Ishrat Husain noted that while multinational companies and banks operating in Pakistan had been hiring graduates from the best local business schools, the same was not true of the local private sector. A “seth” culture continued to persist there which was not conducive to decentralizing responsibilities and authorities. The local business sector still had a long road to travel in professionalizing management.

## Session III- Quality Enhancement Initiatives: Challenges and Solutions

### A. Public and private sector business schools

**Moderator: Dr. Sadia Nadeem, Dean FAST School of Management, Islamabad**

Speaker	Designation
Dr. Rehana Kausar	HOD, Department of Commerce, Bahauddin Zakaria University, Multan
Dr. Niaz Bhutto	HOD, Sukkur IBA University
Mr. Khusro Pervez	Head of Campus, SZABIST, Islamabad
Dr. Abdul Rehman	Director, Quaid-e-Azam School of Management Sciences, QAU Islamabad
Dr. Huma Ayub	Assistant Professor, Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi



In their initial remarks, panel members highlighted the following aspects of NBEAC’s role in quality enhancement among Pakistani business schools: (a) the establishment of internationally-benchmarked standards for quality assessment; (b) the provision of mentorship and assessment services through seasoned and respected academics; and (c) the provision of useful information through seminars and training sessions. Several continuing challenges were also mentioned. Dr. Huma Ayub said that many universities were unable to pay the fees required for accreditation or for participation in training activities. Dr. Rehana Kausar noted that the lack of good faculty in many public universities affected their ability to improve quality. Dr. Niaz Bhutto wondered if NBEAC could play a role in facilitating collaboration among business schools in student and faculty exchange. Dr. Abdul Rehman thought that many public sector universities would not apply for accreditation unless it was made mandatory.

Some panelists emphasized differences in the opportunities and constraints faced by public and private universities but there was no consensus. Some thought that public sector universities faced financial constraints which affected faculty and infrastructure development. Others, such as Mr. Khusro Pervez, noted that this was true of private universities as well. Many private universities did not have funds to send faculty for training and did not even have access to HEC funds for this purpose. Dr. Sadia Nadeem observed that her analysis of accreditation success and failure had found no difference between public and private schools or rural and urban schools. The key determinants appeared to be motivation among senior managers to engage in the process of quality improvement and in this regard both public and private business schools featured some very successful cases.

## B. Rural and urban sector business schools

**Moderator: Dr. Asfia Obaid, National University of Science and Technology, Islamabad**

Speaker	Designation
Dr. Tariq Ahmad	Dean, BUIITEMS, Quetta
Dr. Mushtaq A. Sajid	Senior Dean, University of Kotli, AJKU
Dr. Shahid Nawaz	Assistant Professor, Islamia University, Bahawalpur
Dr. Usman Ghani	Joint Director, Institute of Management Sciences, Peshawar
Dr. Aneel Salman	HOD, COMSATS University, Islamabad



In response to guidance from the moderator, panelists focused on the challenges faced by their own business schools with regard to accreditation. Dr. Mushtaq Sajid noted that his university had faced a severe challenge in attracting good faculty in the 1980s but that this was resolved over time through setting up funds for faculty development, including support for the acquisition of local and foreign PhDs. Dr. Usman Ghani noted a similar

challenge and response for his university. Dr. Tariq Ahmed noted that attracting good faculty to rural campuses remained a big challenge. It was difficult to maintain a decent student faculty ratio over time.

Among other challenges, Dr. Shahid Nawaz reported that NBEAC’s nine accreditation standards were new to his university and were difficult for faculty and senior administrators to understand and implement. Dr. Aneel Salman said that documentation was not adequately emphasized at his university which found the request for documentation difficult to manage. Dr. Mushtaq Sajid observed that one of his biggest challenges was arranging a link between his university and industry since there was not that much local industry to speak of. Several panelists noted that there was no tradition of a formal strategic planning process in their universities. This was begun in order to meet the relevant NBEAC standard.

## Session IV- Contemporary Curriculum Designs and Learning Pedagogies

**Moderator: Dr. Zaki Rashidi, Iqra University Karachi**

Speaker	Profession
Dr. Irfan Hyder	Rector, Institute of Business Management (IoBM), Karachi
Dr. Farooq-e-Azam Cheema	Dean, Bahria University, Karachi
Dr. Zeeshan Ahmed	Dean, Karachi School of Business & Leadership (KSBL)
Dr. Aamir Khan	Associate Professor, Lahore School of Economics
Dr. Nadia Tahir	Managing Director, QAA, HEC



The theme of flexibility and openness to change was prominent in the panel discussion related to curricula. Dr. Irfan Hyder noted that it was not necessarily a good idea to design local curricula strictly against international benchmarks. Dr. Zeeshan Ahmed noted that every society has unique needs with respect to professional

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management and entrepreneurship. These must be reflected in business school curricula. Dr. Aamir Khan thought it important to identify the customer when designing the curriculum. Who are the most important customers of business schools? Parents, students or potential employers? Dr. Cheema thought it important to teach students about small enterprises and family businesses since these were the dominant models prevailing in Pakistan. Dr. Nadia Tahir recommended that business schools also consider national priorities in curricula and ensure that they have programs in at least one area that connects with the Sustainable Development Goals.

The discussion of learning pedagogies was marked by an emphasis on making better use of digital technology and generating familiarity with local problems and priorities. Dr. Nadia Tahir noted that business graduates must know of national problems and priorities in order to become good corporate leaders. Dr. Irfan Hyder said that a curriculum is only as good as the teacher and our teachers should be confident of teaching from his or her own research and experience. Dr. Aamir Khan decried the emphasis on formal research which had little relevance for local business problems and suggested that local cases should be given more prominence in business school pedagogy as well as in teacher assessments.

## Open Discussion

In the open discussion that followed the panel remarks, questions were asked regarding the role of the HEC in setting curricula and whether new learning pedagogies had been adequately tested. In response, Dr. Nadia Tahir clarified that HEC only provides a platform for relevant academics to meet and establish appropriate curricula in different fields. The content is determined by academics and not by HEC staff. These are then reviewed and updated by a similar gathering of academics every few years. Within overall guidelines, individual business schools have great flexibility in what to teach and how to teach it. With regard to learning pedagogies, Dr. Irfan Hyder noted that the best assessors of teaching quality were students. Furthermore, not all subjects were best captured in quantitative models. Teachers of management should feel comfortable in assessing students for their qualitative knowledge of the subject. Dr. Aamir Khan echoed a similar concern and noted that many western observers had begun to criticize the quantitative research emphasis of business education pedagogy as well. Business was like medicine and law in that a lot could be learned from practice directly rather than from academic constructs and theoretical frameworks.

## Session V- The Future of Business Education

*Moderator: Dr. Naveda Kitchlew, University of Management Technology, Lahore*

Speaker	Profession
Dr. Idrees Khawaja	Dean, Air University, Islamabad
Dr. Jawad Syed	Professor, Lahore University of Management Sciences
Mr. Syed Najmul Hussain	Council Member, Institute of Chartered Accountants, Pakistan
Mr. Sajjeed Aslam	Head ACCA, Pakistan
Dr. Nagina Gul	HoD Management Sciences, Sardar Bahadur Khan Women University, Quetta



Two themes received the most attention from panelists: (a) the relevance of the current model of business education in Pakistan; and (b) ethics. Regarding the first, Dr. Idrees Khawaja noted that the content of business education in Pakistan was more attuned to the needs and practices of multinational companies rather than the small and medium enterprises that prevail in the country. Dr. Nagina Gul emphasized the need for a better linkage between academic and industry. Mr. Najmul Hussain thought this could be done by inviting industry experts for guest lectures in relevant classes. This practice would also give students better knowledge of Pakistani business issues and practices. Dr. Jawad Syed recommended that business school faculty come out of their classrooms and visit industry to learn from practitioners. Practitioners are far better equipped to solve business problems. He also said that business schools were producing too many MBA generalists whereas the need of the hour was deeper specialization. Dr. Khawaja noted that this could be a tall ask since this may require schools to hire more faculty across a range of specializations. He also thought that a preoccupation with formal quantitative methods among faculty was making their work irrelevant.

Regarding ethics, Mr. Sajjeed Aslam said that this must be an integral part of the business education curriculum. As they start their careers, students have to navigate in a challenging environment where people from top to bottom expect some special payment for their services. Mr. Najmul Hussain echoed a similar sentiment noting that the curriculum for chartered accountants is now expressed as ABCDE for Accounting, Business Economics, Cost Accounting, Data Analysis and Ethics. Dr. Jawad Syed said that ethics should be taught through the use of local role models.

## Session VI- The Impact of Digital Transformation at Workplaces

**Moderator: Mr. Irfan Wahab Khan**

Speaker	Profession
Mr. Ali Sarfaraz	CEO, Karandaz Pakistan
Dr. Shaukat Brah	Founder Rector, KSBL
Dr. Laeeq-ur-Rehman Khan	Associate Professor, NUST, Islamabad



Mr. Irfan Wahab set the tone for the session by noting more than five billion persons across the globe now had cell phones while three billion were active on social media every day. There were fifteen billion connections between sensors and devices. This meant that a very large number of people were now connected and had potential access to information. Business schools should make use of this interconnection in what and how they teach. Mr. Ali Sarfaraz continued in the same vein, noting that one could have access to bank accounts and financial services from virtually any location. Financial inclusion trends in Pakistan were also moving in the right direction though penetration was still below that in neighboring countries. Dr. Laeeq agreed with the general



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point that business schools should make greater use of the digital technology now available. He said data is the new oil when it comes to industry development. Dr. Shaukat Brah observed that Pakistani business schools were not moving as fast into the realm of digital technology as Pakistani companies. He thought it was high time for our universities in general to come forward and produce thinkers, leaders and managers with the right skillsets for the modern age. Mr. Irfan Wahab noted in conclusion that many companies that do not engage with digital transformation will fail. Companies that reinvent themselves periodically to stay abreast of technology have a better chance of survival.

## **Policy Round Table: Collaboration among Business Schools**

Dr. Sarwar (of NUST) opened the discussion by noting that it would be useful to consider some practical measures that could lead to greater collaboration among universities. Such collaboration was needed because very few universities had adequate resources of their own to sustain quality-enhancing research and pedagogy. Dr. Zahoor (of LUMS) thought that the lack of collaboration could be traced in part to an insular culture among universities, where faculty and student sharing was considered inimical to their interests. He thought that if some universities joined hands to establish a common platform for joint research and workshops that would be a good start. Dr. Attaullah (of Karakoram) supported the idea of inter-university collaboration on research and short-term faculty exchange. He said that Karakoram University would be willing to participate in this with other universities. Dr. Ranjha noted that such collaboration was especially needed in such new areas as artificial intelligence and cybersecurity which were becoming critical to business performance. Others noted that collaboration could help in the production of good textbooks for use by all. Dr. Khusro Pervaiz added that student competitions were often a good way to encourage collaboration, noting as examples the hosting of the “Imagine Cup” by SZABIST and of competitions in the area of cybersecurity by IBA and LUMS.



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## Session VII- Closing Remarks

Noting that all good things have to come to an end, Dr. Sarwar, Vice Chairman of NBEAC, appreciated the contributions of all panelists and general participants. He noted the diversity of the panelists and participants in this DDC. He thanked the HEC Chairman for his presence and for his inspiring remarks on the importance of quality in higher education. Following up, Dr. Iqbal, Chairman of NBEAC, observed that the DDC had been made possible by the generosity of others, whether as financial sponsors, or panelists willing to share their knowledge and time, or volunteers who helped with the complicated logistics of running a large event. Volunteers this year had come largely from two local universities, NUST and FAST-NU. He was grateful to the volunteers as well as to their schools. He also offered a special word of thanks to the small but dedicated staff of NBEAC who had put in long hours to deliver a very fine conference.