

MINUTES OF THE PREPARATORY MEETING OF ASPIRE KP FOR JULY 2026 POLICY EVENTS

Date, Time and Venue: June 01, 2026 1530 hours, Niazabad, Peshawar

Agenda

- 1) Preparations for the Conference on State of Universities and University Education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
- 2) Formation of thematic working groups and assignment of responsibilities.
- 3) Conference logistics, venue, consultants, and rapporteurs.
- 4) Constitution of steering and coordination committees.
- 5) Preparations for the National Dialogue on Counting Merged Districts in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

Participants: The meeting was attended by:

- 1) Muhammad Shehzad Arbab, Chairman
- 2) Sahibzada Saeed Ahmad, Member
- 3) Prof. Dr. Rasul Jan, Member
- 4) Prof. Dr. Qibla Ayaz, Member
- 5) Hifz Ur Rehman, Member
- 6) Adnan Faisal, Member
- 7) Rukhshanda Naz, Member
- 8) Hina Khattak, Research Associate
- 9) Tariq Shah, Program and Administration Officer

Opening Remarks by the Chairman: The Chairman welcomed the participants and briefed the forum on the two major policy events planned for July, 2026. Regarding the Conference on the State of Universities and University Education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, he informed participants that the Higher Education Department had initially proposed holding the event during the first half of June 2026. However, considering the significance, technical nature, and long-term implications of the reforms under discussion, it was decided that additional preparation time was necessary. Accordingly, the conference was rescheduled for second week of July 2026 to ensure meaningful stakeholder engagement and evidence-based deliberations. The Chairman further highlighted the issue of the non-inclusion of the population of the merged districts in national resource distribution mechanisms following the constitutional merger of the former FATA with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He emphasized that the matter carries national implications and therefore requires a high-level national dialogue in Islamabad involving policymakers, parliamentarians, former governors, tribal elders, journalists, academics, and government officials. The objective of the dialogue would be to examine the issue comprehensively and identify practical policy recommendations.

Observations by Mr. Adnan Faisal: Mr. Adnan Faisal reflected on the progress made by Aspire KP since its establishment and appreciated the organization's growing role in policy discourse. He observed that issues relating to the merged districts and the National Finance Commission (NFC) Award are primarily federal policy matters and may require sustained advocacy at the national level. He suggested that Aspire KP should continue supporting policy reforms that directly impact the province while maintaining constructive engagement on broader national issues.

Briefing on Higher Education Reforms: Mr. Hifz Ur Rehman briefed participants on the progress made thus far regarding higher education reforms and provided an update on recent engagements with the Higher Education Department, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He noted that university reform is a complex and technically demanding process requiring specialized expertise and continuous

engagement with stakeholders. He therefore proposed engaging consultants to support thematic work and assist the thematic leads in developing evidence-based recommendations.

Formation of Thematic Working Groups: The meeting approved the following thematic groups for the conference:

Theme 1: Governance in Universities

- 1) Hifz ur Rahman, Lead
- 2) Prof. Dr. Mohammad Rasul Jan, Member
- 3) Rukhshanda Naz, Member
- 4) Tariq Shah, Secretary
- 5) Consultant and Rapporteur to be decided by the team.

Theme 2: Financial Health of Universities

- 1) Sahibzada Saeed Ahmad, Lead
- 2) Arbab Muhammad Arif, Member
- 3) Tariq Shah, Secretary
- 4) Consultant and Rapporteur to be decided by the team.

Theme 3: Research and Development

- 1) Prof. Dr. Nasser Ali Khan, Lead
- 2) Adnan Faisal Kundi, member
- 3) Zafar Iqbal, Member
- 4) Hina Khattak, Secretary
- 5) Consultant and Rapporteur to be decided by the team.

Theme 4: Faculty and Staff Development

- 1) Prof. Dr. Qibla Ayaz, Lead
- 2) Prof. Dr. Mohammad Rasul Jan, Member
- 3) Hina Khattak, Secretary
- 4) Consultant and Rapporteur to be decided by the team.

Venue, Dates and Logistics of the Conference: It was decided that the two-day Conference on the State of Universities and University Education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa will be held on 22–23 July 2026 at the University of Peshawar. Prof. Dr. Qibla Ayaz was requested to identify and finalize suitable venues for the inaugural and closing sessions and thematic group discussions. Participants discussed catering arrangements for the conference. While the previous vendor's services were appreciated, it was agreed that alternative options should also be explored to ensure competition and quality standards. Prof. Dr. Qibla Ayaz will identify and recommend an additional vendor for consideration by the Steering Committee.

Engagement of Consultants and Rapporteurs: The meeting agreed that thematic leads may engage consultants where specialized technical support is required. Consultants may be engaged for a maximum of 15 working days over a 45 days period, subject to an all-inclusive remuneration ceiling of PKR 400,000 per consultant. Rapporteurs may also be engaged for shorter assignments and at lower remuneration levels, depending upon the requirements of each thematic area. Ms. Rukhshanda Naz was requested to identify and recommend qualified mid-career professionals for consideration as consultants and rapporteurs, while ensuring gender balance in the selection process. The Financial Health theme shall independently identify resource persons under the supervision of Theme Lead Sahibzada Saeed Ahmad.

Central Drafting Committee: It was agreed that all thematic leads, consultants, and rapporteurs shall collectively constitute the Central Drafting Committee. The Committee shall be responsible for:

- 1) Consolidating thematic recommendations;
- 2) Preparing the conference communiqué;
- 3) Drafting the final conference report; and
- 4) Prepare speech for the Chairman aspire that includes all the action points to be taken before the Chief Guest.

Constitution of the Conference Steering Committee: The meeting approved the constitution of the Conference Steering Committee comprising:

- 1) Muhammad Shehzad Arbab (Chairperson)
- 2) Prof. Dr. Mohammad Rasul Jan
- 3) Prof. Dr. Qibla Ayaz
- 4) Prof. Dr. Nasser Ali Khan
- 5) Sahibzada Saeed Ahmad
- 6) Hifz ur Rahman
- 7) Nominee of the Higher Education Department (Note: Tariq Shah will coordinate with the Higher Education Department for nomination of its representative).

Post-Conference Technical Cell: Participants agreed that a Post-Conference Technical Cell should be established for a period of thirty days following the conference to support the implementation and follow-up of agreed recommendations. The Technical Cell shall operate under the leadership of the Secretary, Higher Education Department, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Mr. Himayatullah Khan shall serve as Co-Lead from Aspire-KP.

Participants for Conference and Thematic Sessions: The meeting agreed that each thematic session should comprise approximately 15-20 participants to ensure focused and productive discussions. It was further agreed that 2-3 students from different universities should be invited to each thematic session to incorporate student perspectives into the deliberations. A preliminary list of individuals, institutions, and offices has been circulated among participants. Final selection of participants shall be made by the Higher Education Department.

Seminar on “Counting the Population of Merged Districts in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan: The meeting reaffirmed the importance of organizing a national-level policy dialogue in Islamabad on the issue of counting the population of the merged districts in national resource allocation mechanisms. The dialogue is expected to bring together governors, former governors, chief ministers, parliamentarians, tribal elders, journalists, academics, policy experts, and government officials to examine the issue and identify policy options for addressing concerns relating to representation and resource distribution.

Islamabad Coordination Working Group: To facilitate planning and coordination for the Islamabad dialogue, a Working Group of Himayatullah Khan and Adnan Faisal was constituted. Mr. Tariq Shah will help in taking quotations and arrangements where necessary.

Working Group for Coordination with the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: The constitution of a dedicated Working Group for liaison with the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Provincial Assembly was deferred and left to the discretion of the Chairman, Aspire- KP.

Action Points

- 1) Dr. Qibla Ayaz along with other members will visit different venues at the university of Peshawar and finalize one for the conference.
- 2) Dr. Qibla Ayaz will engage with other catering vendors for the conference.

- 3) Concept notes for the groups shall be drafted by the thematic leads.
- 4) Ms. Rukhshanda Naz will provide nominations of consultants and Rapporteur for 3 thematic groups
- 5) Participants for each thematic area will be finalized by the Higher Education Department.
- 6) Mr. Tariq Shah will coordinate with HED regarding nomination of member for steering committee preferably Muhammad Farooq, Additional Secretary, HED
- 7) Mr. Himayatullah Khan and Adnan Faisal will coordinate arrangements regarding Islamabad event to be held on July 1, 2026 while Mr. Tariq will assist in getting quotations and logistical arrangements.
- 8) Chairman Aspire will form a working group to coordinate with the provincial government regarding the event in Islamabad.

Drafted by: Tariq Shah, Program and Administration Officer.