



## **Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)**

**for**

### **New Academic Programme Proposal, Review, and Approval Workflow**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Sohail University is committed to develop academic programmes that uphold high academic standards and meet national and international educational expectations. This SOP establishes a structured framework for the creation, review, and approval of new programmes, streams, or specializations. All programme proposals must present updated, accurate, and complete information, and must undergo rigorous internal and external review before being submitted to the Academic Council.

#### **2. PURPOSE OF THE SOP**

The purpose of this document is to ensure that new academic programmes are academically sound, relevant to market demands, meet societal needs, and are financially sustainable. It aims to maintain compliance with national regulatory requirements, ensure academic quality, and guide departments and faculties through the development, evaluation, financial scrutiny, and approval process.

#### **3. SCOPE OF THE SOP**

This SOP applies to all faculties, and departments of Sohail University that intend to introduce new academic programmes. It is applicable to programmes at all academic levels including certificate, diploma, undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate degrees, as well as new streams or specializations introduced within existing programmes.

#### **4. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS BEFORE SUBMISSION**

Each proposal must first receive internal approvals through the departmental curriculum committee, BoS, BoF, and endorsement by the respective Dean or Director. The proposal must then be reviewed by at least two external academic experts who will evaluate the academic structure, content, rigor, relevance, assessment strategies, and overall competitiveness of the proposed programme. After receiving external feedback, the proposal must obtain final sign-offs from the Registrar, the Chief Financial Officer, and the relevant Dean or Director before proceeding to the Academic Council, and subsequent endorsement of Board of Governors (BoGs).

## **5. RATIONALE AND NEED FOR THE PROGRAMME**

The proposal must clearly explain the purpose behind establishing the programme, including its relevance, significance, and alignment with the vision and mission of Sohail University. It should address national or regional needs, demonstrate market demand, and describe the value it adds to students, employers, and society. Any unique features or competitive advantages of the programme must be highlighted. Additionally, the proposal must identify prerequisites for admission, confirm internal academic endorsement, and compare the programme with similar offerings available in the higher education sector.

The proposal must clearly articulate the purpose and justification for establishing the programme by demonstrating its relevance, academic significance, and alignment with the vision and mission of Sohail University, while addressing identified national and regional needs and evidenced market demand. It shall explain the value the programme adds for students, employers, and society, highlight any unique features, interdisciplinary scope, industry linkages, or competitive advantages, and specify the prerequisites and eligibility criteria for admission. The proposal must confirm internal academic endorsement through the relevant departmental, faculty, and statutory bodies, incorporate input from the Office of Research, Innovation & Commercialization (ORIC) regarding research integration, innovation potential, industry collaboration, and opportunities for applied research or commercialization, and include analysis from the Marketing Department covering programme positioning, branding, target audience, and outreach strategy to support effective student recruitment. In addition, a comparative analysis with similar programmes offered at the national and international levels must be provided to demonstrate distinctiveness, relevance, and strategic value within the higher education sector.

## **6. STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS**

The proposal must discuss the stakeholders who will be directly or indirectly affected by the programme. This includes students, faculty, industry partners, and regulatory bodies. A needs assessment or feasibility analysis must be conducted to demonstrate the long-term sustainability of the programme. The document should also describe the expected profile of students who are likely to enroll.

## **7. PROFESSIONAL ACCREDITATION**

If the programme falls under the jurisdiction of any professional or regulatory body, the proposal must describe the accreditation or recognition requirements and indicate the expected timeframe for completing such processes.

## **8. RELATIONSHIP WITH EXISTING UNIVERSITY PROGRAMMES**

The proposal must describe how the new programme relates to existing offerings within the University. It should identify any academic overlap, potential for shared resources or courses, and opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration, along with any anticipated impact on current programmes.

## 9. PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

9.1. The proposal must clearly state the **level of the programme** being offered, whether it is a certificate, diploma, bachelor's degree, master's degree, or doctoral degree.

9.2. The proposal must indicate whether the programme will be offered **full-time, part-time, or through a combination** of both pathways.

9.3. If the programme is structured around the **sequential accumulation of credits** that may lead to a higher academic qualification, this progression framework must be explained.

9.4. The proposal must specify whether the programme is offered **independently by Sohail University or jointly with other institutions**. In the case of a joint offering, a brief profile of the internal or external partner institutions should be included.

9.5. The proposal must identify the **mode of delivery**, whether the programme is conducted on-campus, through Open and Distance Learning (ODL), via hybrid or blended learning, or through any combination of face-to-face and distance learning formats.

9.6. The proposal must clearly outline the **intended learning outcomes** of the programme and describe how these outcomes align with the University's academic expectations for graduate attributes.

9.7. The proposal must define the **exit competencies** that graduates are expected to achieve upon completion of the programme.

9.8. A detailed explanation of the **programme structure and academic design** is required. This should include:

- A description of courses, modules, and key concepts to be taught
- An explanation of how assessments align with the intended learning outcomes
- A description of the instructional strategies that will be used throughout the programme
- Identification of compulsory and elective courses, including any underlying academic or philosophical foundations guiding their design
- Requirements related to thesis, dissertation, capstone project, practicum, or internship
- A description of the qualifications, expertise, and specialised fields of faculty required to teach in the programme
- Details regarding the appointment and expectations of external examiners
- An explanation of the **credit framework**, timeframe for completion, and the basis for credit calculation and distribution across courses and modules

## 10. ADMISSION AND SELECTION CRITERIA

The proposal must clearly state the eligibility requirements and prerequisites for admission. It should describe the selection process in detail, including the use of admission tests, interviews, personal statements, references, or other evaluation tools. The medium of instruction must also be specified.

## **11. GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS**

The proposal must identify the minimum credit requirements for completion of the programme and outline the mandatory components such as core courses, electives, and research or practical work. It must specify the minimum CGPA required for graduation, attendance requirements, and adherence to University policies on academic integrity and ethical conduct.

## **12. STUDENT ASSESSMENT STRATEGY**

The programme must describe how student learning will be assessed through continuous and summative evaluation. The assessment strategy must be aligned with the intended learning outcomes and include mechanisms for providing feedback to students.

## **13. PROGRAMME DURATION AND CONTINUATION RULES**

The proposal must provide a detailed syllabus for every course or module included in the programme. Each course description should clearly outline the intended learning outcomes and the competencies that students are expected to achieve upon completion. The syllabus must present an overview of the concepts and topics that form the course content, as well as the instructional strategies that will be used, such as demonstrations, role-play, simulations, group discussions, or reflective journaling.

The proposal should also describe the assessment strategies for the course and the approach for providing feedback to learners. Additionally, the mode of delivery must be specified, including whether the course will be taught through face-to-face sessions, online interactions, distance learning formats, or hybrid, blended, or HyFlex approaches.

Each course syllabus should list the learning resources that will be utilised, such as textbooks, hand-outs, assigned readings, bibliographies, library resources, learning resource centres, online materials, laboratories, field sites, or other relevant learning opportunities, including academic workshops or conferences where applicable.

Finally, the proposal must indicate the availability of mentorship and faculty office hours to support students throughout the course.

## **14. QUALITY ASSURANCE MECHANISMS**

### **14.1. Programme Endorsement**

The Academic Council will review the recommendations of the University Registrar and decide whether to endorse the proposed programme. Any approval granted for a new programme is valid for an initial period of five years and will be re-evaluated based on the experience gained. The Council may then decide to continue or discontinue the programme.

### **14.2. Monitoring Programme Quality**

The proposal must clearly outline mechanisms to monitor and maintain academic quality, including effective feedback processes for self-directed learning sessions.

#### **14.2.1. Student Evaluation**

Monitoring and evaluation by students should cover:

- The course
- Faculty performance

- Overall programme structure and content

#### **14.2.2. Faculty Evaluation**

Monitoring and evaluation by faculty should include:

- The course
- Peer review of teaching faculty
- Overall programme structure and content
- End-of-course reports

#### **14.2.3. Programme Review**

The programme should be subject to self-review and external review to ensure continuous quality improvement.

### **15. RESOURCE AND SPACE REQUIREMENTS**

The proposal must describe the physical and academic resources required to deliver the programme effectively. This includes classroom facilities, laboratories, equipment, IT infrastructure, digital platforms, and library resources. The programme may only be launched when essential resources have been confirmed.

### **16. THREE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

The proposal must provide a detailed plan outlining the intended course offerings for the first three years of operation. It should include projected enrollment numbers and the expected distribution of faculty workload.

### **17. STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES**

The proposal must describe the support services that will be available to students, including academic advising, mentorship, financial assistance, accommodation options, and career or internship guidance services.

### **18. BUDGET AND FINANCE**

#### **18.1. Budget Review**

The Finance Department should independently evaluate the proposal's budget, which must be formally approved by the Vice-President Finance & CFO. All associated human resources, infrastructure, and operational costs should be comprehensively identified and included in the review to ensure financial feasibility and sustainability of the programme.

#### **18.2. Resource Implications**

The assumptions underlying programme costs, including personnel costs, must be realistic, carefully examined, and clearly documented. For clarity and transparency, resource implications should be segregated into **one-time expenditures** and **recurring expenditures**, as outlined below:

##### **a. One-Time Expenditures**

- **Additional space:** Renovation, modification, or allocation of classrooms, laboratories, offices, or common areas.

- **Additional equipment:** Procurement of laboratory equipment, IT hardware, teaching aids, and specialized tools.
- **Additional furniture and fixtures:** Classroom furniture, office furniture, laboratory fittings, and fixtures.
- **Additional infrastructure costs:** New construction, utility lines, network cabling, and initial setup of facilities.
- **Initial learning resources:** One-time purchase of core library books, reference materials, and initial database access setup.

#### **b. Recurring Expenditures**

- **Additional faculty:** Honoraria or remuneration for visiting faculty (local and international), adjunct faculty, and contractual teaching staff, aligned with prevailing market rates.
- **Additional staff:** Administrative, technical, laboratory, and support staff required on an ongoing basis.
- **Additional learning resources:** Annual subscriptions for journals, magazines, digital libraries, and academic databases.
- **Additional administrative expenses:** Communication, printing, photocopying, stationery, utilities, routine maintenance, and transportation costs.
- **Operational and maintenance costs:** Ongoing facility maintenance, IT system support, and utilities.

### **18.3. Tuition Fees**

The rationale for the proposed tuition fee structure or any stipend arrangements should be clearly justified. This justification must be supported by a **market survey of comparable programmes**, considering:

- Tuition fees charged by similar national and international institutions
- Market demand and affordability for prospective students
- Cost recovery and long-term financial sustainability of the programme

Consideration should also be given to fellowships, scholarships, and teaching assistantships to support meritorious and financially deserving students.

### **18.4. Other Resource Implications**

Other considerations include IT, Transportation requirements, Library, Registrar's Office, Student Experience, Hostels, and any other student services required for the programme.

## **19. RESEARCH COMPONENT (IF APPLICABLE)**

If the programme includes a research element, the proposal must go through ORIC which should describe the expected scope of research, projected timelines, resource requirements, and the supervision structure. Flexibility for fieldwork should also be addressed.

## **20. SPECIAL PROGRAMME FEATURES**

Any distinctive aspects of the programme, such as laboratory or clinical work, field visits, industry placements, or community engagement activities, must be described.

## 21. FACULTY QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

The proposal must clearly define the criteria for selecting faculty who will teach in the programme or specialisation. For master's level courses, teaching responsibilities may be assigned to PhD scholars who have progressed to an advanced stage of their studies, provided they meet the University's standards for graduate teaching. It is generally not advisable for faculty holding only a Master's degree in the relevant discipline to serve as lead instructors for Master's programmes.

The proposal should also outline whether visiting or adjunct faculty will be engaged to support programme delivery. Involving visiting faculty can help distribute teaching workload and provide students with exposure to diverse professional and academic perspectives. All faculty appointments must meet the University's minimum qualification and expertise requirements to ensure academic quality and programme integrity.

## 22. PROGRAMME SUSTAINABILITY

The proposal must identify the minimum viable cohort size and describe conditions that may lead to the suspension or discontinuation of the programme. Long-term viability must be addressed through enrollment projections and market analysis by Marketing Department.

### 22.1. Financial Sustainability Report

A **Financial Sustainability Report** must be prepared for each proposed programme, presenting **year-wise projected income and expenditures for a minimum period of five (5) years**, or until the programme reaches financial maturity, whichever is later. The report should include:

- Projected student intake per year
- Tuition fee-based income and any additional revenue sources
- Year-wise operational and capital expenditures
- Break-even analysis and funding gaps, if any

The report must also clearly specify the **minimum student intake required to initiate the programme**, below which the programme shall not be launched.

### 22.2. Programme Approval and Implementation Timeline

The proposal must include a **detailed timeline** covering all key academic, regulatory, and operational milestones, including but not limited to:

- Board of Faculty (BoF) approval
- Academic Council Meeting (ACM) approval
- Submission for NOC / Zero Visit (where applicable)
- Approval from HEC and relevant accreditation or professional bodies
- Advertisement and marketing launch
- Admission opening date
- Programme commencement/start date

The timeline should ensure logical sequencing of approvals and demonstrate readiness prior to programme launch.

### **22.3 Exit Strategy in Case of Programme Derailment or Insufficient Enrollment**

The University shall establish a structured exit strategy to ensure academic continuity and safeguard the interests of enrolled students in cases where a programme is unable to continue due to financial loss, insufficient student induction, regulatory constraints, or other unforeseen circumstances.

#### **22.3.1 Triggers for Exit / Suspension**

The programme may be considered for suspension or phased discontinuation under the following conditions:

- Failure to achieve **minimum viable student intake** as defined in the Financial Sustainability Report
- Continuous **financial losses** over a defined period (e.g., 2–3 academic cycles)
- Withdrawal or non-approval from **HEC or relevant accreditation bodies**
- Persistent **quality concerns** identified through QEC reviews, PREE, or RIPE cycles
- Strategic decision by the University based on academic or operational priorities

#### **22.3.2 Decision and Approval Mechanism**

- The decision to suspend or discontinue a programme shall be initiated by the **Dean/Director in consultation with QEC and Finance Department**
- A formal recommendation shall be submitted to the **Academic Council for approval**
- Final endorsement shall be obtained from the **Board of Governors (BoG)**

#### **22.3.3 Student Protection and Teach-Out Plan**

In case of programme discontinuation, the University shall ensure:

- **No currently enrolled student is disadvantaged**
- A structured **Teach-Out Plan**, including:
  - Completion of all remaining courses within a defined timeframe
  - Availability of required faculty and academic resources
  - Alternative course scheduling (e.g., compressed semesters, summer sessions)

#### **22.3.4 Alternative Pathways for Students**

Where continuation is not feasible, the University shall provide:

- **Transfer options** to similar programmes within the University
- Credit transfer facilitation to **other recognized institutions**, where applicable
- Academic advising and counseling support

#### **22.3.5 Communication Protocol**

- All affected students shall be formally notified in writing

- Clear timelines, options, and support mechanisms shall be communicated
- Relevant regulatory bodies (e.g., HEC) shall be informed where required

#### **22.3.6 Financial and Administrative Adjustments**

- Adjustment or refund of tuition fees (if applicable) in accordance with University policy
- Reallocation of faculty and resources to other academic units
- Proper closure of administrative, academic, and financial records

#### **22.3.7 Documentation and Reporting**

- A detailed closure report shall be prepared by QEC documenting:
  - Reasons for programme discontinuation
  - Actions taken for student protection
  - Lessons learned for future programme planning

### **23. ACTION REQUESTED**

The final section must clearly specify the approvals being requested from the Academic Council and indicate the proposed date for launching the programme, and submit to BoG for final approval.

No academic programme shall be launched or advertised **without obtaining all requisite approvals**, including:

- Approval from the Academic Council Meeting (ACM)
- Approval from the Higher Education Commission (HEC), where applicable
- Approval from relevant professional or accreditation bodies

Any programme initiated without the above approvals shall be considered **non-compliant** with University policy and regulatory requirements.

### **24. AUTHORS AND DATE**

The proposal must include the names, designations, and signatures of all individuals involved in its preparation, including the Department Chair or Head and the Dean or Director.

# Matters Requiring the Approval of Academic Council Academic Programmes Review Process

## Step 1. The Concept Stage

- 1.1 Academic unit (BoS, BoF) will prepare a 3–5-page Working Paper
  - The Working Paper should clearly outline the knowledge, understanding, skills, and other attributes that students will develop upon successful completion of a specific programme. It should also provide details of teaching and learning methods, assessment criteria, career opportunities in the field, and how the programme aligns with the qualification’s framework.
- 1.2 Working Paper Submission: Once prepared, the Working Paper is submitted to the Academic Secretariat.
- 1.3 Working Paper Review: The Academic Secretariat reviews the Working Paper and submits for approval.
- 1.4 Working Paper contents- The Working Paper should provide:
  - A brief overview of the proposed academic programme
  - Justification for the programme's need in the region/country.
  - Alignment with SU's mission and the academic entity's strategic plan
  - Environmental scan/landscaping, including related programmes in the region and similar international programmes.
  - Market survey findings with appropriate benchmarking
  - Faculty and staff requirements (both new and existing)
  - Facilities and space requirements
- 1.5 The Working Paper is shared with Deans/Directors: discussion; identification of synergies.
- 1.6 Following Step 1 review & approval, proposal moves on to Step 2.

## Step 2. Development of a Detailed Proposal

- 2.1 Academic units will develop a full programme proposal.
- 2.2 The University Finance should work with the Academic Unit to develop the financial feasibility.
- 2.3 The detailed proposal is sent to the Academic Secretariat, ORIC and Marketing Department.
- 2.4 The University Registrar reviews the proposal for compliance (SU, professional bodies, regional /government accreditation bodies, etc.) and sign off
- 2.5 The University Registrar will ensure that the proposal is distributed to internal offices for necessary sign offs (Hostels, Student Services, IT, Library, etc.)
- 2.6 Exit Strategy and Teach-Out Plan (Mandatory Requirement)  
The detailed proposal must include a formal Exit Strategy Plan, covering:
  - Conditions under which the programme may be:
    - Suspended
    - Phased out
    - Not launched due to insufficient enrollment
  - A Teach-Out Plan, ensuring:
    - Completion of studies for already enrolled students
    - Availability of faculty and courses until graduation
  - Student Protection Measures, including:
    - Transfer options within the University
    - Credit transfer mechanisms to other institutions
  - Communication and regulatory compliance procedures

## Step 3. Financial Review

- 3.1 Prior to the approval from the Academic Council, the proposal will be sent to Finance for comment and approval.
- 3.2 Finance must explicitly validate:
  - Financial sustainability
  - Risk of loss

- Viability under low enrollment scenarios

#### **Step 4. Academic Council**

Following receipt of Step 1, 2, and 3 sign-offs, the proposal will be sent to Academic Council

- 4.1 Consideration/review of the proposal by the Academic Council
- 4.2 Academic Council shall also evaluate:
  - Programme sustainability
  - Exit strategy robustness
  - Student protection mechanisms

#### **Step 5. Board of Governors (BoGs) Review**

- 5.1 Following receipt of comments from Finance, the proposal will be sent to the BoG for final approval
- 5.2 BoG ensures:
  - Strategic alignment
  - Financial risk acceptance
  - Approval of programme lifecycle including exit conditions

#### **Step 6. Final Approvals**

- 6.1 Approved programme is sent to professional regulatory body, regional accreditation body (as appropriate)
- 6.2 Where required, newly approved programme will be sent to the Board of Trustees
- 6.3 Programme Launch Condition:
  - No programme shall be launched unless:
    - Minimum approved student intake is achieved
    - Required resources and faculty are available
    - Regulatory approvals are secured
  - If minimum intake is not achieved:
    - Programme launch shall be deferred or cancelled
    - Approved Exit Strategy procedures shall be activated

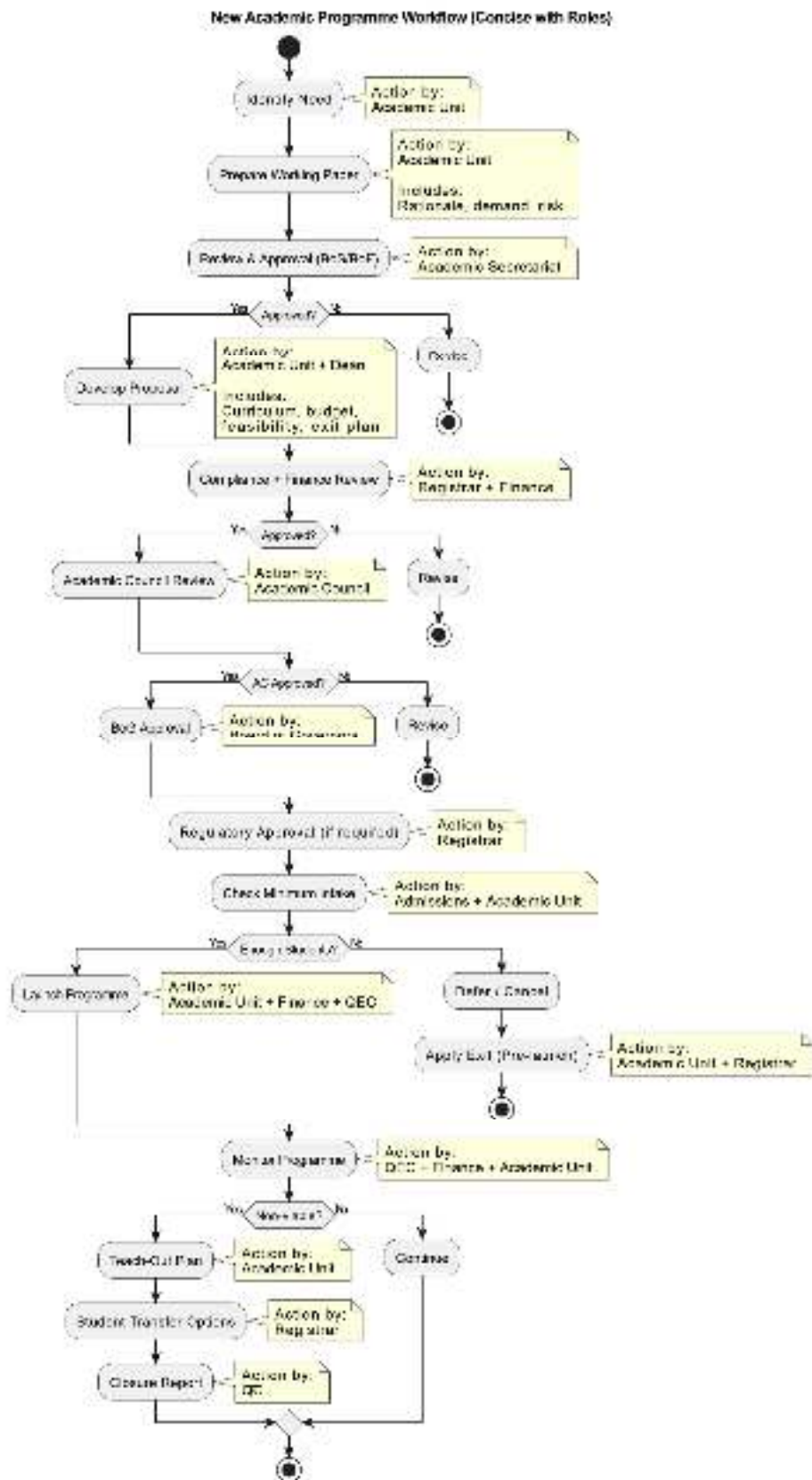
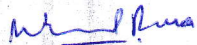





Figure 1: Flowchart for Interlinked Steps

	Initiated by	Reviewed by	Reviewed by	Approved by
Signature				
Name	MUHAMMAD RAZA	NAJEEB JAFRI	Dr. Shahid	Dr. Saeed Quraishi
Designation	DATA ANALYST, GEC	Director OEC	Pro. VCSU	VC SU

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