

GOVERNOR'S SECRETARIAT
PUNJAB



Subject: MECHANISM TO PREVENT, REPORT AND RESPOND TO INCIDENTS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN UNIVERSITIES IN PUNJAB

I have been directed to emphasize that universities are highly consequential institutions in the society, dedicated towards creation and dissemination of knowledge, wherein the students enrolled, have several important rights and privileges, central among them is the right to pursue and search for knowledge, without hindrance from unlawful or otherwise unacceptable behaviours. In this context, protection against sexual harassment is important because it threatens freedom and conduciveness of the environment at such institutions of higher learning. At a more fundamental level, such conduct is unacceptable because it violates the fundamental rights of citizen towards dignity. As such, it shall not be tolerated under any circumstance. Further, eliminating all forms of violence in education is not only the right thing to do from a human rights perspective, but it is also smart one to do for educational institutions in terms of efficiency and productivity.

2. Above in context, and given the recent happenings of incidents of sexual harassment at universities, as reported in print, electronic and social media, the Hon'ble Governor/Chancellor /Patron has been pleased to desire that the universities, both in public and private sectors, be advised to take following measures to put in place an effective mechanism to prevent, report and respond to the occurrences of sexual harassment:


- i. **Notify Inquiry Committees** in terms of respective provisions of the Protection Against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2010 and the Higher Education Commission Policy on Protection against Sexual Harassment in Higher Education Institutions. In case the Inquiry Committees have already been notified, take steps to make them more proactive and effective in disposal of cases of sexual harassment referred to them.
- ii. Refer all the complaints of sexual harassment to the Inquiry Committees with the direction to **dispose them of within a period of 45 days** or as defined under the Act or the Policy *ibid*.
- iii. **Notify a senior female faculty member as 'Focal Person'** to be the single point of contact to whom all formal reports of sexual harassment are made. The Focal Person must be situated outside of the management structure of the university and to report directly to the Vice Chancellor/Rector of the university. The Focal Person should be trained to respond to trauma and must have access to a space where confidentiality and privacy can be respected to handle the complaints. The contact details of the Focal Person be made publically available to all the students.
- iv. Take measures to ensure strict implementation of provisions of the Protection Against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2010 and the Higher Education Commission Policy on Protection against Sexual Harassment in Higher Education Institutions. The policy should be embedded in code of conduct for the students, teachers and employees of the university.

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- The policy and procedure for reporting complaints must be publically and readily available and translated into Urdu and, if possible, to native languages of the students and employees of the university.
- vi. The policy should be constantly socialized to act as reminder and to inform new personnel and students. This can include providing highly visible information on the university's homepage; in students' common areas; through newsletters; through course outlines; on mobile phone apps and social media.
 - vii. Develop a '**Code of Conduct**' for students, teachers and employees of the university, clearly defining types of unacceptable behaviours and indicate how different acts will be treated.
 - viii. Establish a fair, accessible and transparent '**Complaint Mechanism**' that ensures confidentiality, and security while reporting an incident of sexual harassment. Students and staff should be offered multiple ways to make a formal report of sexual harassment; Safety apps and online reporting may be some of the methods of making a formal complaint.
 - ix. Take steps to '**educate and raise awareness**' among students and staff at all levels on how to recognize, prevent and respond to sexual harassment.
 - x. Put in place a '**robust Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning mechanism**' to regularly monitor the status of complaints of sexual harassment and suggest measures on the basis of lesson learnt to improve overall performance of the system.


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No. GS(Univ-I)1-24/2023-1174

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