



## **Faculty of Health Sciences PhD Programme**

**Admission Information  
2024 - 2025 Academic Year**

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## **THE UNIVERSITY**

The Aga Khan University is a pioneering institution of higher education and research that works to improve quality of life in the developing world and beyond. We educate leaders, generate life-saving knowledge, and set an example that raises standards in the societies in which we work. We empower women and the disadvantaged, strengthen pluralism and partner with world-renowned institutions to address problems that affect millions of people.

A not-for-profit institution, AKU was founded in 1983 by His Highness the Aga Khan. As Pakistan's first private university, we paved the way for the growth of the country's private higher education sector. In the early 2000s, the University expanded to Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Afghanistan, and the United Kingdom.

At AKU, students flourish in a supportive environment that embraces diversity, demands excellence, and encourages leadership and direct engagement with real-world challenges. Our graduates go on to study and work at eminent universities and organizations around the world, and to make a difference in their home countries.

AKU is open to all, regardless of race, religion, gender, or geographic origin. Two-thirds of students and half of faculty members are women. Admission is based on merit, and our needs sensitive financial assistance programme ensures that individuals from lower-income backgrounds are able to attend.

We do not discriminate on faith, gender, or national origin. Our selection process is rigorous which varies by academic programmes, but a common criterion includes fluency in English.

## **PHD PROGRAMME**

A PhD programme is the backbone of meaningful and scholarly engagements in any university. It is also crucial for the development of new generations of researchers, teachers, and leaders. The PhD programme in the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) at AKU is central to its mission of producing research-based knowledge that is relevant to the developing world, and which will have impact. With this aim in view, a graduate programme in Health Sciences was implemented at AKU in October 1999.

The University's PhD Programme in Health Sciences is accredited by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) in Pakistan.

The PhD programme is an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary programme in health sciences with four specialities/streams.

- Biological Sciences
- Clinical Sciences
- Nursing
- Population and Public Health

A brief description of these streams has been provided.

- **Biological Sciences:**

Research training within this discipline will include studies in the fields of Anatomy, Biochemistry, Cell Biology, Immunology, Microbiology, Genomics, Pathology, Pharmacology and Physiology. Candidates will be expected to undertake a novel doctoral thesis project in one of the above-mentioned fields.

- **Clinical Sciences:**

Clinical research involves interactions with patients, diagnostic clinical materials or data, or populations in the following areas: (1) disease mechanisms (etiopathogenesis); (2) clinical knowledge, detection, diagnosis, and natural history of disease; (3) therapeutic interventions including clinical trials of drugs, devices and instruments; (4) translational research; (5) behavioural research. This may also include health services research, including outcomes, and cost-effectiveness. Doctoral-level training in clinical sciences will strengthen candidate knowledge in a specific clinically important area with applications of research methodologies for conducting diverse clinical research.

- **Nursing:**

The focus of this stream is to provide candidates with a rigorous training in research that is offered through coursework and mentorship with the aim of developing clinical scholars and faculty members capable of scientific inquiry for innovative practice and knowledge development for human health caring. Candidates will be required to produce an original piece of research that is important for human health from the perspective of nursing.

- **Population and Public Health:**

The programme is designed for a wide variety of candidates, such as epidemiologists and biostatisticians, social and behavioural scientists, environmental scientists, health professionals and health administrators with an interest in population health. The principles of epidemiology, biostatistics, social and behavioural sciences, environmental health and health policy and management will form the core of this discipline. Through course work, students would acquire a broad knowledge of population and public health; they would be required to pursue an in-depth study in an area of specialization within the population health framework.

In each PhD application cycle, projects will be available within each of the above-mentioned streams. These will vary depending on the opportunities for research at the time of admission. Students are advised to check details of available projects on the AKU website [www.aku.edu/admissions/phd-hs](http://www.aku.edu/admissions/phd-hs) at the time of applying to the programme.

## PROGRAMME STRUCTURE AND DESIGN

The PhD is based on a total of 18 credits of coursework to be covered in the initial phase of the programme and followed by a period of three to four years assigned for original research. Upon completion of the coursework, confirmation for PhD candidacy will be based on passing the comprehensive examination and successful defence of the research proposal (synopsis defense).

The timelines and other details of the PhD programme for full-time students will be as follows:

### Year 1 - 2

- Compulsory eight credit hours for Core Courses.
- Six credit hours for Stream-specific courses and four credit hours for Electives.
- Course work of 18 credit hours preferably to be completed within 12 - 18 months and followed by a comprehensive examination (written and oral)/Resit examination and Synopsis defense for granting candidacy as a PhD researcher.
- Thesis synopsis approval leading to progression of full PhD candidacy.

### Year 3 - 4

- Completion of Research Work and Thesis, as per AKU policy.

## Coursework

The coursework will comprise of:

- i) Compulsory Core Courses:* These will be essential for all students. These includes but are not limited to are Scientific writing, Biostatistics in Health Care and Ethics in Healthcare Research.
- ii) Stream-specific Courses:* These courses are essential for all students in the particular discipline and constitute six credits hours.
- iii) Elective courses:* Different elective courses will be available to students from which they can choose the ones related to their interest/specialty and constitute ten credit hours.

## Research Work

The student will be expected to work towards his/her research Thesis in parallel with coursework. At the time of admission, the student will select a Principal Thesis Supervisor.

## ADMISSION INFORMATION

### APPLICATION ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Candidates must have 18 years of education including a MS/MPhil or equivalent degree in relevant field based on a minimum of 30 credits after 16 years of education. A minimum CGPA 3.0 (out of 4.0 in the Semester System) or First Division – 60% (in the Annual System) in MS / MPhil / FCPS / FRCP / equivalent degree is required.

The University may request for additional documents to better understand and evaluate applicant's eligibility as per University and regulatory body requirements.

**Discipline**

**Minimum Eligibility Requirement**

Biological Sciences

MS / MPhil / Equivalent in Biology / Botany / Zoology / Genetics / Microbiology / Molecular Biology / Plant Science / Biotechnology

Clinical Sciences

MBBS with FCPS / MS / MPhil/Equivalent

Nursing

MSN / MScN / MPhil-Nursing

Population and Public Health

MS / MPhil / Equivalent in Health Sciences or Public Health

Additional requirements include:

**ADMISSION TEST**

**NOTE:** *The test will be conducted online onsite on computers.*

**Candidates are required to write the AKU Admission Test.**

The Test comprises of three components:

- i. English Language: This tests language competency. It serves as a qualifier. The score for which will be determined by the University and may change each year.
- ii. Quantitative Reasoning and Subject Specific component: A minimum of 50% passing score is required in each component and a cumulative score of 60% is required to proceed further in the admission process.

Sample test paper for the Test is available on: [www.aku.edu/admissions/phd-hs](http://www.aku.edu/admissions/phd-hs)

*The University does not provide any special preparation for the Admission Test, nor does it authorise any publication or preparatory classes for this purpose.*

**IDENTIFICATION OF SUPERVISOR AND THE RESEARCH PROJECT**

Each PhD applicant must identify a potential research project and a PhD supervisor from the list of research projects available on the AKU website [www.aku.edu/admissions/phd-hs](http://www.aku.edu/admissions/phd-hs) depending on their research interests. Prior to submission of PhD application, candidates must contact their potential faculty supervisors to learn about the relevant projects prior to completing their application forms. Each student is required to submit a statement of purpose/research intent (500 – 700 words) which describes the reasons for the interest in the project and how the project meets with his/her career objectives. This is an integral part of the application.

## PROGRAMME TIMELINES

The PhD in Health Sciences is offered as a full-time and as an “extended timeline PhD”. The extended timeline PhD is open to AKU faculty only.

All PhD students must be enrolled continuously until the defence of their thesis, unless approval of temporary withdrawal has been obtained from the FHS-PhD Committee.

For applications internal to AKU, support (in writing) from the Departmental Chair/Head is required at the time of application. For external candidates who are taking long leave to undertake the PhD, support letters from their home institutions will need to be submitted upon acceptance of the offer to join the programme.

## SCHEDULE OF SEMESTERS

The programme will have two regular Semesters, each comprising of 17 weeks and an 8-week summer semester.

## ADMISSION PROCESS SUMMARY

Candidates are evaluated in stages:

<b>Stage I</b>	Online submission of application. Applications are reviewed and only eligible candidates are invited to write an AKU PhD Admission Test.
<b>Stage II</b>	Candidates will be shortlisted based on the Admission Test as per the shortlisting criteria. Interviews will be conducted for those shortlisted candidates whose applications are complete in terms of all the required documents and the reference letters. Eligible candidates will be required to attend interviews with senior faculty members of the University. The candidate would be required to make a short PowerPoint presentation on the chosen research project.
<b>Stage III</b>	Final selection is based on an overall assessment of each candidate’s dossier which is formally approved by the University’s Admission Review Committee.

[WWW.AKU.EDU/ADMISSIONS/DOCUMENTS/ADMISSION-PROCESS-SUMMARY.PDF](http://WWW.AKU.EDU/ADMISSIONS/DOCUMENTS/ADMISSION-PROCESS-SUMMARY.PDF)

## APPLICATION FOR ADMISSION

Applications for admission will be accepted between **January 14** and **March 14, 2024**. Candidates must apply online by logging on to [www.aku.edu/apply-online](http://www.aku.edu/apply-online)

**Applications must be submitted via online process. Applications will only be accepted if a candidate completes the following:**

1. Submit the application form online. *(Candidate will receive a copy of the application form on their registered email as a confirmation when the application is submitted successfully)*

*In the application form, please upload the following:*

- i. Upload the application fee on the online form.
  - ii. Upload the CNIC/NICOP both sides as one combined file or relevant Passport pages (for foreign nationals)
  - iii. Upload the Passport size coloured photograph with a plain white background; taken within the last 1 week to reflect your current appearance (*see photograph specification section*)
2. As a mandatory requirement:
- a. Upload attested SSC / O Levels marksheet or equivalent qualification; Equivalence from IBCC, in case of foreign qualification.
  - b. Upload attested HSSC / A levels marksheet or equivalent qualification; Equivalence from IBCC, in case of foreign qualification.
  - c. HEC attested educational documents:
    - Undergraduate Degree & Transcript: Upload all sides of the degree as a single combined pdf file. Upload all sides of the transcripts as a single combined pdf file.
    - Graduate Degree/s and Transcript/s: Upload all sides of the degree as a single combined pdf file. Upload all sides of the transcripts as a single combined pdf file.
    - For unattested documents, upload HEC receipt as evidence.
  - d. 18-years of HEC equivalence, if applying with Post-RN BScN degree or foreign degree.
  - e. Curriculum Vitae with list of publications (if any)
  - f. Upload the duly filled Research Title form.
  - g. Write “Research Intent” as per the instructions given on page 8.

*Note: The photograph should be in JPEG format with 2 MB size and all other documents should be in PDF format with 5 MB file each.*

**Application Fee:** - Applying from AKU residential countries\* is Rs. 7000/-  
- Applying from AKU non-residential countries is US \$ 150/-  
- (*See mode of payment section for details*)

**The application fee is non-refundable. Candidates must ensure eligibility before applying.**

*\*Afghanistan, Burundi, Kenya, Pakistan, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda*

**Incomplete applications or submission of applications after the deadline is not accepted.**

## **INSTRUCTIONS FOR RESEARCH INTENT**

Please identify a potential research project of your interest from the list of available projects on the AKU website [www.aku.edu/admissions/phd-hs](http://www.aku.edu/admissions/phd-hs). Write Project title and Primary supervisor's name.



Your statement of intent has a direct impact on the overall strength of your application to study a research degree. The following advice may help you to improve the quality of your statement of intent. This is an integral part of the application.

- Clearly articulate your current understanding of the field and your ideas for a potential area of research that you would like to study.
- Conduct some initial research about the field or discipline you would like to study.
- Think about the impact you would like to achieve by researching in this area.
- Why do you want to do it? Who might benefit from your work? Why is it important?
- Demonstrate your passion and enthusiasm for the area of research!

Your statement of intent may vary in length and detail, but it is expected to be approximately 500 - 700 words. We will use your statement of intent to assess your broad understanding of your area of research interest.

#### **REFERENCE LETTERS**

Three letters of recommendations /references: Referees should be individuals who are well-acquainted with your previous academic work and professional experience. Two letters of reference must be from individuals who are at arm's length. Please download reference form from [www.aku.edu/admissions/phd-hs](http://www.aku.edu/admissions/phd-hs) These letters should be emailed directly by your referee to [postgrad.query@aku.edu](mailto:postgrad.query@aku.edu). The letters need to be from i) an academic referee from an institute where the individual has trained recently, ii) from a referee who is familiar with the work capacity of the candidate. should be current or not more than one-year-old. *The referees must not be close friends or family members, where there may be a conflict of interest.*

#### **NOTE FOR ALL CANDIDATES**

Candidates are requested to ensure they meet application eligibility requirements before applying. These are listed in the programme brochure. Moreover, candidates are responsible to complete the application and other requirements according to the published instructions and time schedule.

Aga Khan University reserves the right to admission; to revoke admission and registration if an application is discovered to be inaccurate or incomplete, or if supporting documents are discovered to be fraudulent. Any candidate who presents a fraudulent document in support of an application for admission may be identified to other universities and colleges.

Candidates may apply for multiple programmes simultaneously. Candidates who are shortlisted for interviews in multiple programmes will be required to provide their order of preference. This information will remain confidential with the Admission Office, and the candidates must attend interviews for all shortlisted programmes. If the candidate is

accepted in more than one programme, the preference order provided by the Candidate will be considered by the University, the University reserves the right in its absolute discretion to offer the programme, which it determines to be the most suitable for the Candidate and the decision made by the University will be final.

### **ADMIT CARD**

The admit card to allow you to write the test will be received by candidates who apply online on their portal and/or through an email.

In cases where the admit card is not received 12 working days before the date of the test; candidates must email the Admission Office at [postgrad.query@aku.edu](mailto:postgrad.query@aku.edu) for the required information and application details.

If a candidate would like to write the test at a different test centre from the one originally noted in the application form, candidate must inform the admission office via email at least 72 hours before the test so that information can be sent to the Test Centre. Walk in candidates are not encouraged.

*Please Note: The University does not take responsibility to conduct the test for candidates who walk into a Test Centre without information.*

Please note: To be allowed into the Test Centre to write the Test, candidates must bring:

- A hard copy of the admit card issued by AKU AND
- A valid current photo ID card/original CNIC/college ID card/enrolment card for identification And

Without these documents, AKU reserves the right not to allow you to write the Test.

### **SHORT-LISTING AND INTERVIEWS**

Candidates will be shortlisted based on the Admission Test as per the shortlisting criteria. Interviews will be conducted for those shortlisted candidates whose applications are complete in terms of all the required documents and the reference letters. In addition to presenting the research intent, the purpose of the interview is to assess a variety of attributes, including integrity, motivation and interest in the programme, maturity, social and cultural awareness, knowledge of public health issues in developing nations and evidence of initiative and commitment to the programme.

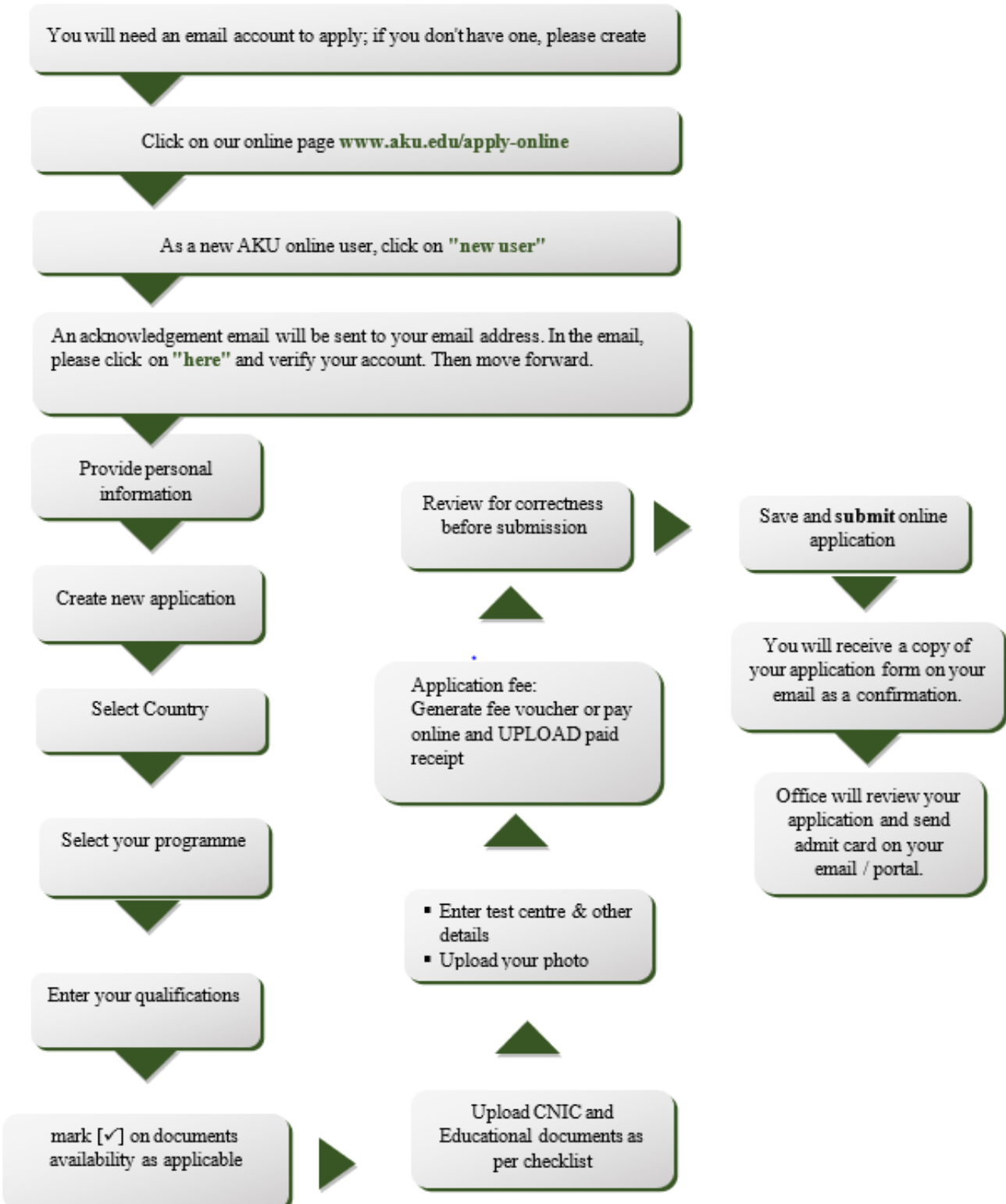
Interviews are conducted in Karachi. For all candidates who reside outstation, overseas, interviews are conducted over Zoom.

### **VALIDITY OF TEST SCORES**

The AKU Admission Test scores are valid for a period of two years from the date the test is written.

## APPLY ONLINE

Follow the steps below to apply for an academic programme online:



## MODE OF PAYMENT

Candidates may pay the application fee through any of the following modes. *When the fee is paid, please upload the receipt on the online admission portal to complete the application.*

- **FEE VOUCHER (FOR PAKISTANI CURRENCY ONLY)**

Please follow these steps to pay the application fee through fee voucher:

1. On the application home page, please click on “Application Fee Information”
2. For **payment options**, select “Fee Voucher”
3. Click “Yes” to generate the voucher (*make sure that your pop ups aren’t blocked*)
4. Take the printed voucher to any branch of Habib Bank Ltd (HBL) and pay the fee. (*Please don not transfer online*)
5. Upload the paid voucher by clicking the “Upload Button” on the proof of fee payment section.

- **ONLINE PAYMENT THROUGH DEBIT/CREDIT CARD (PAKISTANI & US\$ CURRENCY)**

Follow these steps to pay application fee online through a debit / credit card:

1. On the application home page, please click on “Application Fee Information”
2. For **payment options**, select “Online Payment” and click yes (*make sure that your pop ups aren’t blocked*)
3. Complete your payment details on online web portal: <https://payonline.aku.edu/>
4. Upload the payment acknowledgement email or screenshot by clicking the “Upload Button” on the proof of fee payment section.

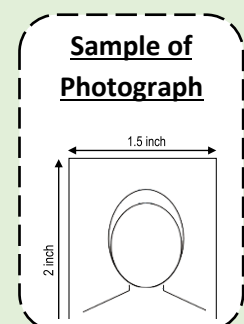
*In case you are unable to receive the payment acknowledgement, please notify the Finance Office by emailing your query along with tracking Id, name, and programme name at [student.finance@aku.edu](mailto:student.finance@aku.edu)*

## PHOTOGRAPH SPECIFICATION

Your photograph is a vital part of your application. Please follow these instructions carefully.

- Passport size coloured photograph with a plain background; taken within the last 1 week to reflect your current appearance.
- File size and format: 2 MB and JPEG format.
- The photo should show a clear front view, full face of the person.

**If your photograph does not reflect your current appearance, the University will not allow you to write the Admission Test.**



## CURRICULUM VITAE (CV) SPECIFICATION

### Your CV must include the following:

- qualifications with cGPA/grades/percentage and dates of attendance (admission date & completion date)
- other Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses (if any)
- list of publications (if any)
- other additional information to support your application

## FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Admissions to all the academic programmes at Aga Khan University are based on merit and are needs blind, i.e. without considering the financial background of the student.

AKU charges fees for all of its programmes. For financial information including student's fee-paying status and fee structure, please visit: [www.aku.edu/admissions/fees-and-funding](http://www.aku.edu/admissions/fees-and-funding).

The Aga Khan University will provide full sponsorship based on ACADEMIC MERIT to students admitted to each of the PhD programme streams. This would include tuition fee waiver and a monthly stipend. Tuition waiver consists of full tuition fees in addition to monthly stipend for the four-year period. These can be applied for upon meeting the PhD admission shortlist. *Accommodation costs are not provided as part of tuition support.*

Students who are sponsored or supported by an employer or other Institution will be required to pay the tuition and find monthly stipend support.

All students will be required to pay the other costs of education as provided in the fee schedule.

All students will receive start up research funds for their PhD studies. Details are available with the respective Stream Directors.

## STUDENTS ON SPONSORSHIP FROM EXTERNAL AGENCIES

Students expecting to receive sponsorships or scholarships from external agencies to complete the programme are requested to submit the relevant documents and approval letter from the relevant external agency when accepting the offer of admission.

For more details, please contact Graduate Programme Admission Office, Aga Khan University, Stadium Road, Karachi 74800, Pakistan, Phone: +92-21 3486 5456 / 5173.

## **ACCOMMODATION**

Accommodation for outstation students is arranged in the hostels managed by the University. These are shared, non-air-conditioned, furnished accommodation. Hostel space is restricted to students from outside Karachi only.

A fee is charged for all accommodation. For accommodation charges, visit: [www.aku.edu/admissions/fees-and-funding](http://www.aku.edu/admissions/fees-and-funding). Meals may be purchased separately from the University's cafeteria.

All students living in the university hostels are expected to conform to rules and regulations. Residence is conditional upon proper use and care of the property, considerate behaviour and periodic reappraisal of the student's need for such accommodation.

## **CONTESTED DECISIONS**

In all matters pertaining to the selection of students, fees, grants, evaluation of scholastic performance, discipline and student affairs, the decision of the University shall be final. Appeals in matters of student selection will be considered within 15 days of the announcement of the new class only if the appeal cites circumstances suggesting that the University has violated provisions of its Charter or that there has been failure to comply with the admissions procedure as described in this document.

### KEY DATES FOR 2024 - 25 ADMISSIONS

January 14 – March 14, 2024	<b><u>Admission Open</u></b> <b>Registration</b>	
Sunday, May 12	<b><i>AKU</i></b> <b><i>Admission</i></b> <b><i>Test -Pakistan</i></b>	<b>Test Centres</b>  Chitral, Gilgit, Karachi, and Islamabad
<b><i>Please note: Timings and address for the venue will be stated on the admit card. In case of a change, candidates will be notified through email.</i></b>		
July/August	Interviews	
February 2025	Commencement of Classes	

## **DISCLAIMER**

This booklet contains information about the programme offered by the Aga Khan University, Pakistan, for the academic year 2024 - 25. The information provided is subject to change over time. Candidates aiming to apply for programmes in any other academic year are requested to get updated information about minimum eligibility requirement, application, and admission process from the University Admission Office.

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