AUDITOR-GENERAL OF PAKISTAN

February 2026

AUDIT REPORT ON

PAKISTAN SCIENCE FOUNDATION (PSF)

FINANCIAL YEARs 2022-23 & 2023-24

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20 October 2026 03:08:17 PM

Report No: DG CA&E 25-003
AUDIT YEAR 2024-25

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PREFACE

Articles 169 & 170 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973 read with Sections 8 & 12 of the Auditor-General's (Functions, Powers and Terms and Conditions of Service) Ordinance 2001, require the Auditor-General of Pakistan to conduct audit of receipts and expenditure of the Federation and the Provinces or the accounts of any authority or body established by or under the control of the Federal or a Provincial government.

This report is based on audit of ***Pakistan Science Foundation (PSF)*** for the financial years *2022-23 & 2023-24*. The *Directorate General Commercial Audit and Evaluation* conducted audit during Audit Year *2024-25* on a test-check basis with a view to making an independent assessment of the entity and providing reliable information to the stakeholders for making sound decision making. The report also aims at improving the internal controls of the entity, thereby enabling the management to take corrective actions and enhance operational efficiency.

The Audit Report includes key facts about the entity, an audit snapshot, findings on systemic issues, conclusion and recommendation for executive action. Audit findings indicate a number of matters related to the stated roles & responsibilities of the entity, financial management, human resource management, procurement, operational processes, achievements of targets/KPI and digitization.

The report was shared with the entity as well as the Principal Accounting Officer (PAO) on February 10, 2026, however, DAC meeting was not convened until the finalization of this report.

The Audit Report is submitted to the President of Pakistan in pursuance of Article 171 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan 1973, for causing it to be laid before both Houses of Majlis-e-Shoora (Parliament).

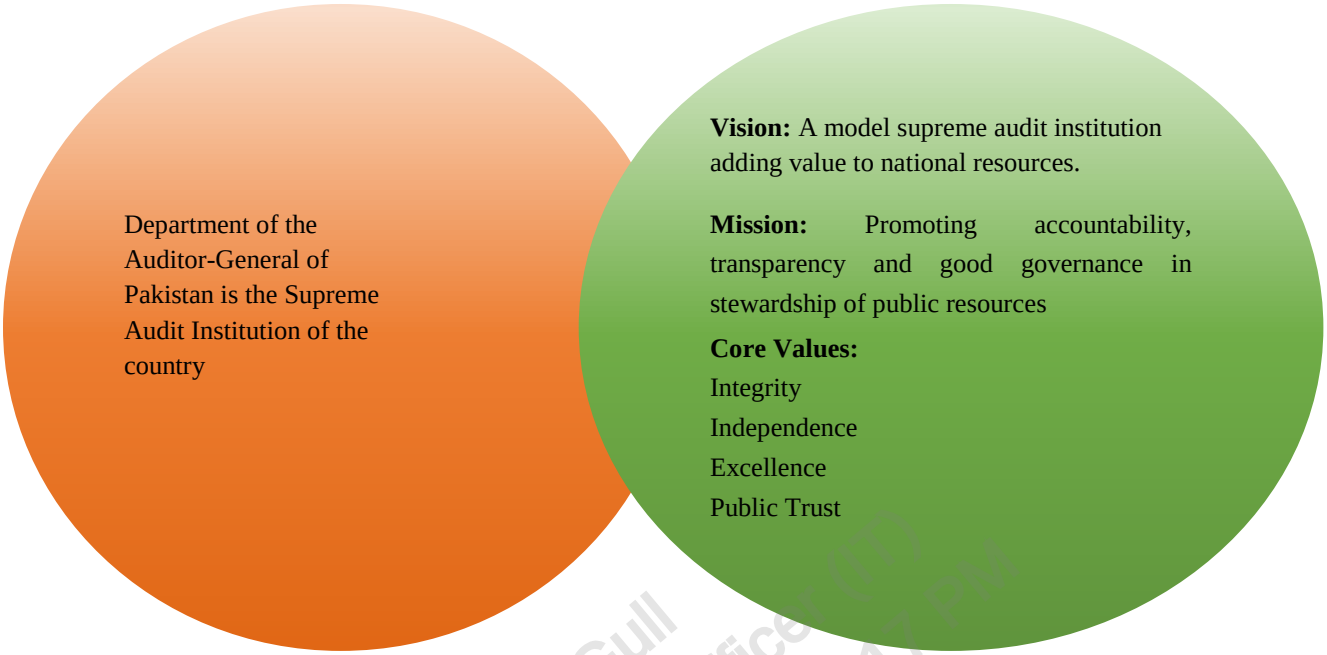
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Islamabad
Dated: *February, 2026*

(Maqbool Ahmad Gondal)
Auditor-General of Pakistan

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Department of the Auditor-General of Pakistan



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The Auditor-General's organization is the prime institution in the country for ensuring public accountability and fiscal transparency in governmental operations. The organization is expected to bring about improvements in financial discipline and the internal control environment in the executive departments to minimize the possibility of waste and fraud.

The Auditor-General of Pakistan is appointed under the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. His reports are laid before the legislature and are discussed in the Public Accounts Committees of the respective legislative assemblies. His mandate enables him to strengthen the legislative oversight by providing an independent and objective assessment of the process of governance at the federal, provincial, and local level.

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AUDIT SNAPSHOT

Why did we conduct this audit?

The audit was initiated to assess whether PSF is effectively performing its statutory mandate of promoting and financing scientific research and development aligned with the country's socio-economic needs, as provided under the PSF Act, 1973. The audit also examined PSF's financial sustainability, compliance with applicable laws and regulations, and the adequacy of its internal controls. Persistent mandate misalignment, operational inefficiencies, and recurring audit observations over multiple years necessitated a comprehensive evaluation.

What did we find?

- Failure to translate strategically aligned research funding into validated and usable outcomes.
- Out of 308 projects reviewed, 179 (58%) were delayed, with 36 projects delayed between 3 to 10 years. Only 6% of projects were completed on time, indicating severe inefficiencies in project management and timeline enforcement.
- Failure to capitalize on funds spent due to non-commercialized and non-viable projects i.e. research reports from 84 completed projects (Rs 361.260 million) are not accessible for academic learning and ONLY 03 patents registered for the past 5 years.
- Systemic execution failure across different projects: CRP utilized only 36.29% of approved cost, NSLP Endowment Fund left nearly 40% funds idle in 2023–24, STEM Phase-I failed to achieve core objectives within extended timelines, Rs 8.363 million remained blocked due to projects not commencing even after the first instalment.
- Financial Statements for FY 2023-24 and 2024-25 have not been prepared despite being overdue. Under the Companies Act, 2017 and the State-Owned Enterprises (Governance and Operations) Act, 2023, organizations are required to finalize their financial statements within 120 days after the close of each financial year.
- The tenure of the Board of Trustees expired on 17.05.2023 and the Board was reconstituted on 30.08.2024. The absence of an active Board during this period, coupled with weak oversight, contributed to violations of the approved recruitment policy.
- Despite its core mandate to promote scientific progress, PSF utilized only 34% of the total grant on core scientific functions during FY 2022–23.

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Key Assessments

- No visible footprint in scientific progress as mandated by PSF Act, 1973
- ⚠ Research Published 2017-22: 132 only
- ⚠ Patents Registered 2017-22: 3 only
- ⚠ Projects Delayed 2019-24: 179 out of 308
- FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY — Solely dependent on Govt. grants
- Administrative Overhead Ratio: 66.4%
- Programme Efficiency Ratio: 33.8%

What did we Recommend?

- Link research funding to measurable outputs and commercialization.
- Reform project approval, monitoring and fund release mechanisms and establish structured oversight mechanisms for the delays and establish accountability for past delays.
- Adopt milestone-based funding, implement a digital project tracking dashboard, and introduce penalty clauses for the delays.
- Rebalance expenditure towards core scientific functions.
- Increase financial oversight and get Financial Reports for FYs 2024 & 2025 published as mandated.
- Reduce dependence on the Govt. funds by exploring Public-Private-Partnership avenues.
- Ensure uninterrupted tenure and timely reconstitution of the Board of Trustees, with mandatory meetings and documented oversight of recruitment, financial management, and project approvals to prevent policy and rules violations.

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HIGHLIGHTS

ENTITY SUMMARY SHEET — Pakistan Science Foundation

Disclaimer: The financial information presented has not been independently verified, as PSF's financial statements have not been audited by an independent Chartered Accountant firm since FY 2023–24. Accordingly, the figures in this report are based on the audited financial statements for FY 2022–23 and the expenditure statements for FY 2023–24 provided by management and may be subject to revision upon completion of the statutory audit.

Description	Details ***(Figures in Rupees)***
Legal Framework of Entity	Pakistan Science Foundation Act, 1973.
Key Responsibilities / Mandate & Objectives	The Foundation is functioning as a financing agency for the promotion of basic and fundamental research and for its viable use in the market to promote scientific progress in the country.
Total Assets (Current / Non-Current)	Rs.424.770 million (PSF) Rs.101.999 million (PMNH), subsidiary Rs.71.631 million (PASTIC), subsidiary
Total Liabilities (Current / Non-Current)	**PSF** Funds: Rs.59.407 million Non-current liabilities: Rs.365.364 million **PMNH** Accumulated Funds: Rs.101.999 million **PASTIC** Funds: Rs.71.631 million
Government Grants / Subsidies	Rs.443.968 million (PSF) Rs.217.353 million (PMNH) Rs.224.542 million (PASTIC)
Expenditure	Rs.444.989 million (PSF) Rs.237.201 million (PMNH) Rs.238.316 million (PASTIC)
Cash Balances	Rs.0.034 million (PSF) Rs.23.742 million (PMNH) Rs.40.737 million (PASTIC)
Total Investments	Zero
Funding Sources	Government of Pakistan
Accounting Policy	• Prepared in accordance with: o Approved International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) as issued by the IASB and applicable in Pakistan. o Requirements of the Pakistan Science Foundation Act, 1973. o In case of any conflict, the PSF Act, 1973 prevails.

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Description	Details ***(Figures in Rupees)***
Status of Financial Statements	Financial statements for 2023-24 and 2024-25 are pending.
Composite Risk Rating	**D — High Risk** due to: • Heavy reliance on Govt. releases • Administrative cost exceeding core business cost • Procurement & stock management irregularities • Unauthorized policy approvals • Poor international benchmarking
Compliance Status of Audit Recommendations	**Partially Compliant / Weak Implementation** Past recommendations largely unimplemented; issues recurring in procurement, stock control, HR & financial management.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AGP	Auditor General of Pakistan
BoQs	Bill of Quantities
BoT	Board of Trustees
CRP	Competitive Research Programme
DRAP	Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan
FABLAB	Fabrication Laboratory
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
NSFC	National Natural Science Foundation of China
NSLP	National Science Linkage Program
PASTIC	Pakistan Scientific and Technological Information Centre
PCSIR	Pakistan Council of Scientific & Industrial Research
PEC	Pakistan Engineering Council
PMNH	Pakistan Museum of Natural History
PMU	Project Management Unit
PPRA	Public Procurement Regularity Authority
PSDP	Public Sector Development Programme.
PSF	Pakistan Science Foundation
R&D	Research & Development
RSP	Research Support Program
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
S&T	Science & Technology
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
STFS	Science Talent Farming Scheme

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OVERVIEW OF THE ENTITY

Pakistan Science Foundation was established on February 02, 1973 under PSF Act. It is working under the Ministry of Science and Technology. The organization has no share capital and it receives development and non- development grants from the Government of Pakistan. Its office is situated at G-5/1, opposite Supreme Court Building, Constitution Avenue, Islamabad.

The Foundation is functioning as a financing agency for:

- The establishment of comprehensive scientific and technological information and dissemination Centre;
- The promotion of basic and fundamental research in the universities and other institutions on scientific problems relevant to the economic development of the country;
- The utilization of the results of scientific and technological research including pilot plant studies to prove the technical and economic feasibility of processes found to be promising on a laboratory scale;
- The grant of awards, prizes and fellowships to individuals engaged in developing processes, products and inventions of consequence to the economy of the country.

Pakistan Science Foundation's Subsidiary Organizations

Pakistan Science Foundation (PSF) is the apex body for promotion and funding of scientific and technological research and science popularization in the country. PSF has two subsidiary organizations i.e. Pakistan Museum of Natural History (PMNH) and Pakistan Scientific and Technological Information Center (PASTIC).

The Foundation functions as a link of PMNH/PASTIC agency for the establishment of comprehensive scientific and technological information dissemination centers, promotion of research in the universities and other institutions, establishment of science centers, museums, promotion of scientific societies, organization of periodical science conferences, exchange of visits of scientists with other countries, prizes and fellowships to individuals engaged in developing processes of consequence to the economy of the country.

Pakistan Museum of Natural History (PMNH)

Pakistan Museum of Natural History (PMNH) situated at Garden Avenue, Shakarparian, Islamabad was established in 1976 under the patronage of Pakistan Science Foundation, Ministry of Science & Technology (Government of Pakistan). It has four principal divisions namely Botanical Sciences Division, Zoological Sciences Division, Earth Sciences Division and Public Services Division. The first three divisions are engaged in the collection, identification and research activities pertaining to plants, animals and mineral resources of Pakistan respectively, while the latter is responsible for mass education and popularization of natural history various displays, exhibits and dioramas. In addition, various projects such as Virtual Orientation Gallery (VOG), Biodiversity Database and Global Networking (BGN) and Focus Baluchistan have also been initiated.

The objectives of PMNH are to collect, preserve, and document natural history specimens of Pakistan to build reference collections, conduct research on biological and geological resources,

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and educate the public through exhibits, publications, and media.

Pakistan Scientific and Technological Information Center (PASTIC)

PASTIC is the premier organization for dissemination of Scientific and Technological Information to the Scientists, Researchers, Engineers, Entrepreneurs, Industry and Citizens of Pakistan. PASTIC National Center is located in Quaid-e-Azam University Campus in Islamabad. It has six Sub Centers throughout Pakistan including Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, Quetta, Faisalabad and Muzaffarabad.

The objectives of PASTIC are to acquire, process, and share scientific and technological information with the R&D community, providing bibliographic and document supply services, develop inter-library cooperation, strengthen the National Science Reference Library, publish S&T journals, directories, and information tools and to collaborate with regional and international information networks.

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AUDIT FINDINGS

1. STATED MANDATE, ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

In this section, the audit examines whether Pakistan Science Foundation's flagship initiatives effectively translated statutory intent into measurable scientific and technological outcomes. It highlights significant gaps between project design and execution, particularly in STFS and CRP-2021, where substantial public funding failed to produce validated research, durable scientific assets, or commercializable technologies. The analysis further benchmarks PSF's performance against international research-funding standards, underscoring systemic governance and outcome-management weaknesses that limit PSF's contribution to national innovation.

1.1 Strategic Misalignment and Inefficient Resource Utilization in the Science Talent Farming Scheme (STFS):

STFS was conceived as a flagship initiative to support successive batches of youth, offering exposure to scientific learning. While the spirit of promoting scientific interest is broadly compatible with PSF's mission to advance scientific culture, the project's design leaned more toward programmatic facilitation than toward scientific capacity-building or research generation. The scheme was originally approved for implementation over a five-year period (2015–16 to 2019–20) at a cost of Rs 1,285.361 million, targeting 1,500 students in five batches. Subsequently, in December 2021, the project was revised to Rs 1,517.071 million by extending its duration up to 2023–24 and adding three additional batches.

Instead of strengthening institutions or producing scientific assets, the majority of expenditure went into operational logistics, transport, temporary management units, and batch-based programming. Even with the revised project cost exceeding Rs 1.5 billion, the initiative managed to utilize only Rs 853.157 million (56.24%) of the allocated funds, primarily due to slow procurement, weak management, shifting timelines, and ultimately premature closure of the project.

The most troubling aspect was that permanent assets—mobile laboratories, vehicles, and PMU infrastructure—were procured for project phases that never materialized, leaving Rs 18.311 million worth of resources idle and unproductive. Such expenditures do not correspond to PSF's obligation to promote scientific study, test feasibility of innovations, or create durable scientific value. This misallocation underscores the need for strict expenditure rebalancing toward core scientific functions. The project's structure essentially created recurring operational cycles without producing any lasting scientific outcomes, institutional capacity, or research-linked advancements that could justify the scale of public investment.

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1.2 Failure to Translate Strategically Aligned Research Funding into Validated and Usable Outcomes under CRP-2021:

The Competitive Research Programme (CRP-2021) reflected an even sharper gap between intent and execution. CRP-2021 was, in principle, fully aligned with PSF's statutory role: it sought to support indigenous development of ventilators, AI diagnostic systems, medical devices, and industrial innovations—topics of national importance, especially during the COVID-19 crisis. The program had strong potential to demonstrate PSF's capacity to fund meaningful research that could translate into validated prototypes and commercial technologies. Yet, despite clear strategic relevance, the execution of CRP-2021 failed to achieve even the foundational steps necessary for research utilization. None of the funded projects—amounting to Rs 86.696 million—secured mandatory validation from DRAP, PEC, or accredited testing bodies. Without validation, no medical or industrial technology can advance toward deployment or manufacturing, meaning that the research remained confined to prototype stage with no pathway to national benefit. The absence of validation was not an incidental oversight but a structural flaw originating from weak contracting: agreements did not include enforceable obligations, commercialization milestones, or performance consequences for non-delivery. Monitoring mechanisms were superficial, limited to administrative oversight rather than technical evaluation, and no structured facilitation was provided to link researchers with regulatory or industrial partners. Despite the promise of CRP-2021, not a single project resulted in a validated, market-ready output, producing no measurable scientific value in return for substantial public funding. This systemic failure underscores the need for tying future research grants to clearly defined deliverables, including mandatory publication of final reports, patent filings, technology transfer agreements, or documented policy uptake. Furthermore, all completed projects must be digitally archived and made publicly accessible—with controlled access where necessary—to prevent the waste of public funds and to enable ongoing academic reference, industrial application, and economic value creation. Without such enforceable output requirements and transparent knowledge management, PSF risks continuing a cycle of funded research that yields little beyond prototype-stage stagnation.

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1.3 Comparative Performance Gap between PSF and Global Research Funding Benchmarks

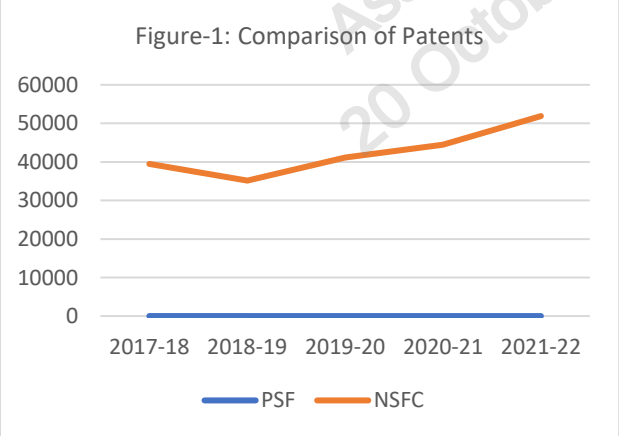
When these outcomes are assessed against global benchmarks, the deficiencies become more evident. China's National Natural Science Foundation (NSFC), which performs a comparable function, operates within a structured research-to-commercialization pipeline where validation, feasibility testing, industrial partnership, and outcome accountability are embedded from project inception. Chinese R&D projects move through rigorous technical gatekeeping, ensuring that scientific research funded through public resources leads to patents, prototypes, technologies, and industry-ready solutions. This cohesive structure forms a core reason for China's consistently high ranking in the Global

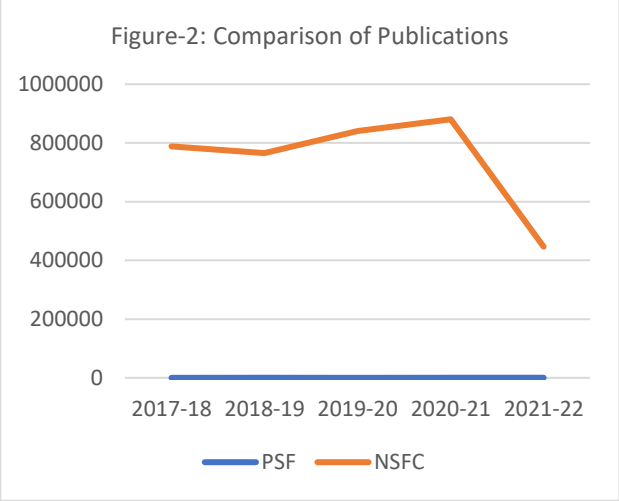
Innovation Index, reflecting an innovation ecosystem where funding, governance, and commercialization are tightly linked. In contrast, PSF's weak enforcement of performance obligations, absence of validation requirements, and fragmented oversight contribute directly to Pakistan's low innovation standing. Research remains disconnected from industry, prototypes remain untested, and public investment rarely transforms into tangible outputs. Below a simple comparison of the outputs of PSF and the Regional/Global benchmark of China's NSFC presents a grim picture of the effectiveness of PSF.

Table-1

S. No.	Year	Patent Registered		Research Publications	
		PSF	China's NSFC	PSF	China's NSFC
1	2017-18	3	703 international, 38,796 domestic	53	787,939
2	2018-19	-	1,044 international, 34,102 domestic	11	765,542
3	2019-20	-	1,026 International, 40,108 domestic	6	840,469
4	2020-21	0	1,146 international, 43,340 domestic	43	880,428
5	2021-22	0	1,545 international, 50,337 domestic	19	446,679

Source: Annual Reports of PSF and NFSC, China





Taken together, the assessment of STFS and CRP-2021 indicates that PSF's recent initiatives fall short of fulfilling the central purpose of its founding statute. Projects were designed without ensuring alignment with long-term scientific value; execution was marred by inefficiencies, delays, and incomplete utilization; and the most research-relevant investments failed to produce validated or commercially viable technologies dissipating substantial public funds without contributing to Scientific advancement of the country.

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2. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

This section reflects on the PSF's financial management, which is characterized by high administrative overheads, weak expenditure control, and chronic underutilization of research funds, despite increased federal grants. The Foundation's fragile financial position, poor planning, and inadequate internal controls have constrained its ability to translate financial resources into scientific outcomes. As a result, public funds have been absorbed by operational costs and incomplete projects rather than delivering value-for-money research and innovation aligned with PSF's statutory mandate.

2.1 High Administrative Costs

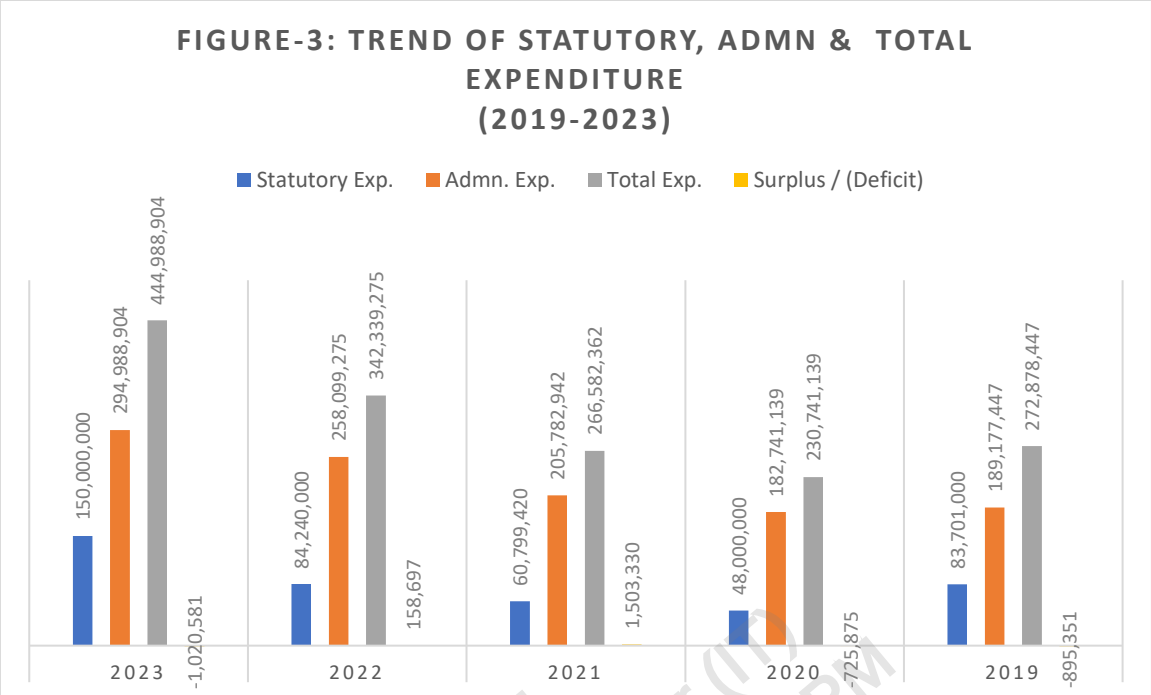
An examination of Pakistan Science Foundation's financial performance and project-level expenditure reveals a pattern of disproportionate administrative spending, weak financial controls, and significant underutilization of research funds. While the Foundation continues to receive substantial federal grants—reflecting the government's support for scientific development—the internal financial management systems have not evolved to ensure efficient utilization, robust oversight, and alignment of expenditures with organizational mandates. The financial statements for FY 2022–23 indicate that PSF expanded programme spending but simultaneously experienced a deterioration in its operating performance, moving from a modest surplus in the previous year to a deficit of Rs 1.020 million. This deficit occurred despite a 29.6% increase in federal grant receipts, underscoring systemic weaknesses in expenditure management and planning.

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Table-2

Particular	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21	2019-20	2018-19
Grant from Federal Govt.	443,968,323	342,497,972	268,085,692	230,015,264	272,383,096
Expenditure (Statutory Function)	150,000,000	84,240,000	60,799,420	48,000,000	83,701,000
Administrative Expenditure	294,988,904	258,099,275	205,782,942	182,741,139	189,177,447
Total Expenditure	444,988,904	342,339,275	266,582,362	230,741,139	272,878,447
Surplus / (Deficit)	(1,020,581) (Deficit)	158,697 (surplus)	1,503,330 (surplus)	(725,875) (Deficit)	(495,351) (Deficit)

(Source: Audited financial statements)



- Despite receiving 29.6% higher grants, PSF reported a deficit.
- This happened because total expenditure increased by ~102.6 million, outpacing grant growth.

Administrative costs alone consumed 66% of the total grant (2023), whereas programme costs consumed 34%.

A key structural concern is the skewed cost composition. In 2023, administrative expenses amounted to Rs 294.989 million—approximately 66% of the total federal grant—while statutory scientific functions received only Rs 150 million, or 34%. Though this marks a relative improvement from 2022, where programme spending was only 24.61% of total expenditure, the dominance of administrative costs still limits PSF's ability to deliver research outcomes proportionate to the scale of funding received. Internationally, research-funding bodies typically cap administrative overhead at 25–40%, allowing the majority of resources to support scientific activity. PSF's current structure runs contrary to this benchmark and indicates an institutional environment where operational burdens constrain scientific productivity.

Table-3

Item	2023	2022	YoY Change
General Fund	17,384,683	18,405,264	↓ deficit-driven decrease
Development Fund	31,681,101	33,090,521	↓
Misc. Fund	10,341,193	11,529,935	↓
Non-current Liabilities (Research Support Grant)	365,363,250	342,577,467	↑ 22.78m

(Source: Statement of Financial Position 2022-23)

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The Foundation's Statement of Financial Position further highlights financial rigidity. Research projects in progress constitute nearly 85% of total assets—Rs 365.36 million in 2023—indicating heavy investment in long-term commitments. With virtually no short-term financial buffer, the organization relies entirely on timely federal releases to meet even routine obligations. This degree of dependence not only exposes PSF to operational risk but also reflects insufficient financial planning and absence of reserve policies that would ordinarily protect an institution overseeing multi-year scientific programmes.

Programme Efficiency Ratio

Programme Expenses / Total Grant

= 150,000,000 / 443,968,323

= 33.8%

Administrative Overhead Ratio

Admin Expenses / Total Grant

= 294,988,904 / 443,968,323

= 66.4%

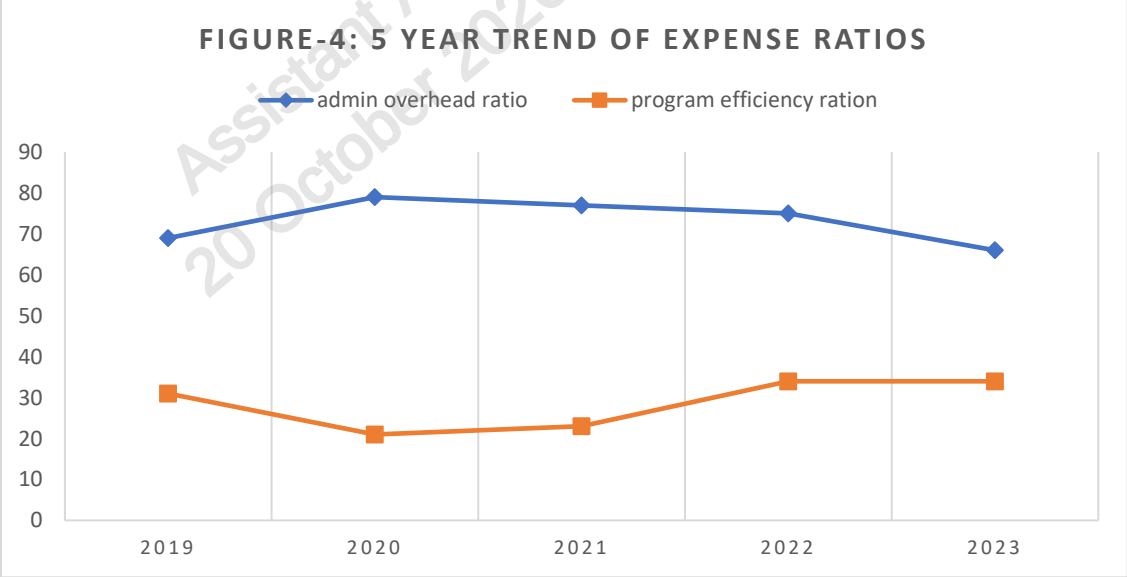
A healthy R&D institution typically keeps **admin < 40%.**[1]
PSF is far above this.

Here is a trend analysis of admin overhead ratio and program efficiency ratio of PSF over the 5 years.

Table-4

Years	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Admin overhead ratio	69%	79%	77%	75%	66%
Program efficiency ratio	31%	21%	23%	25%	34%

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[1] FAQ about Facilities and Administrative (F&A) costs of Federally Sponsored University Research: Association of American Universities.

2.2 Improper Planning and Un-utilized Funds

This financial inflexibility is compounded by serious record-keeping deficiencies. Expenditure amounting to Rs 358.087 million under the Science Talent Farming Scheme (STFS) could not be verified because record was not produced to audit despite repeated requests. It reflects a systemic breakdown in internal controls, weak project file management, and a lack of accountability. The Competitive Research Programme (CRP) illustrates a different dimension of financial inefficiency. The programme was allocated Rs 1,964.5 million, of which Rs 956.7 million were released, yet only Rs 713.056 million—or 36.29%—were utilized. Out of 120 funded projects, only 18 were completed, and just one attained regulatory validation suitable for commercialization. Meanwhile, administrative and monitoring expenses were utilized at a much higher rate (50%) than research funds (35.83%). This spending pattern reveals not only poor planning but also an imbalance in resource deployment, where the institutional machinery supporting research absorbs more resources than the research itself. The consequence is that large sums remain unutilized—over Rs 1.251 billion—while the scientific output remains disproportionately low. The civil works project at the Pakistan Museum of Natural History (PMNH) reflects weak financial governance. The project cost increased by 311% due to poor feasibility planning, outdated cost estimates, excessive variations, lack of technical staff, and weak oversight. Significant cost increases were approved without proper justification, while the project remains only 50% complete.

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3. HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

The review of human resource management practices at the Pakistan Science Foundation (PSF) reveals serious governance and compliance deficiencies during the period under audit. Key HR decisions, including promotions and senior appointments, were undertaken without approval of the competent authority and in violation of PSF Service Regulations and federal recruitment rules. These irregular actions resulted in unauthorized financial liabilities and reflect systemic weaknesses in oversight, merit enforcement, and rule-based administration. Collectively, these lapses undermine institutional credibility and compromise PSF's ability to sustain a transparent and professional workforce.

3.1 Irregular promotions without Board approval

One of the most prominent issues relates to promotions granted without the approval of the PSF Board of Trustees (BoT), which is explicitly designated as the appointing authority for posts in BPS-17 and above under Service Regulation 4(a) and Appendices A, B, and C. Despite the expiry of the BoT constituted through the Ministry of Science & Technology's notification dated 18.05.2020, the PSF Selection Board proceeded to grant regular and acting charge promotions in its meetings held on 12.12.2023 and 15.07.2023. Officers were thus promoted and extended financial benefits without the mandatory ratification of the BoT. The management justified these decisions by stating that the Chairman PSF, who also heads the BoT and its committees, approved the orders to avoid administrative vacuum. However, once the tenure of the BoT had already lapsed, the Chairman's individual approval could not substitute the collective authority of the Board. The irregular extension of promotions, along with expenditures incurred on official vehicles, demonstrates a clear breach of PSF Service Regulation 11, which requires both merit and BoT approval for promotions in senior grades. These actions indicate an erosion of institutional oversight and raise concerns regarding the validity of HR decisions taken during the absence of a properly constituted Board.

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3.2 Violation of Federal Recruitment Rules

A similar pattern of irregularity is evident in the filling of the Director PASTIC (BS-20) post, a highly significant leadership position requiring strict adherence to recruitment rules. According to Establishment Division OM No. 21/1/90-R.5 dated 31.07.1991, in newly created organizations, the initial stage of recruitment must apply the method prescribed in recruitment rules to the total posts in the cadre, after which future vacancies are to be allocated between promotion and initial appointment by maintaining a roster. Because this post was previously occupied by an officer through promotion, the subsequent vacancy arising on 24.02.2020 should have been filled through initial appointment, not promotion. Contrary to these federal instructions, PSF promoted the Additional Director (BS-19), to Director PASTIC (BS-20) w.e.f. 10.06.2021. While the promotion was recommended by the PSF Selection Board and approved by the BoT, such approvals cannot override Establishment Division rules governing quota distribution and roster maintenance. The decision therefore reflects a procedural violation and constitutes the extension of undue benefit through misapplication of federal recruitment instructions.

3.3 Irregular appointment of Project Director and weak project governance under STFS

Despite explicit provision in the approved PC-I for appointment of an independent Project Director (PD) in MP-II scale for the Science Talent Farming Scheme (STFS), the prescribed recruitment process was not followed. Instead, the project was largely managed through additional charge arrangements, whereby senior PSF officers were deputed intermittently to perform the duties of Project Director. This approach was inconsistent with the approved project design and compromised project independence, continuity, and accountability.

Audit observed that from the start of STFS in August 2015 until its completion in June 2024, the project remained under the supervision of eight different Project Directors. Only one PD was appointed on regular basis in MP-II scale, who served for a brief period of six months (20.02.2017 to 15.08.2017) before resigning. Thereafter, the project continued under additional charge arrangements, with most PDs holding the assignment for short tenures. These officers belonged to varied administrative and functional streams, including Member Finance, Secretary PSF, and Directors of Planning & Development, ESD, International Linkages, and Special Programmes, indicating the absence of a stable, dedicated project leadership structure.

Frequent changes in project leadership adversely affected planning continuity, execution discipline, procurement consistency, and monitoring effectiveness. In the absence of a full-time and accountable Project Director, ownership of project outcomes remained diffused, weakening responsibility for timely execution, efficient utilization of funds, and achievement of intended objectives. As discussed in Para 1.1, these governance weaknesses materially contributed to execution failures, partial utilization of allocated funds, procurement of assets for unrealized project phases, and the premature closure of STFS without creation of durable scientific value. This highlights the critical importance of strict adherence to approved PC-I provisions for independent and dedicated project management in large-scale development initiatives.

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4. PROCUREMENT

In this section, Audit presents scrutiny of the procurement activities which revealed serious procedural and governance weaknesses marked by misuse of exceptional procurement methods, lack of transparency, and non-compliance with PPRA rules. Competitive bidding was unjustifiably bypassed, documentation was inadequately maintained, and contracts were awarded in a manner resulting in financial loss and heightened legal risk. Deviations from approved PC-I procurement models further undermined standardization, accountability, and value for money. These deficiencies reflect systemic shortcomings in procurement planning and internal controls, compromising the efficient and transparent use of public funds.

4.1 Misuse of Negotiated Tendering

The procurement practices observed in Pakistan Science Foundation's attached organization, PMNH, in respect of the Honey Bee Hive, Skeleton, and Ocean Diorama projects reveal significant departures from mandated procedures, resulting in irregular award of contracts amounting to Rs 14.419 million and an avoidable financial loss of Rs 1.903 million. The PPRA Rules, 2004 prescribe open competitive bidding under Rule 20 as the default method of procurement, permitting negotiated tendering under Rule 42(d)(ii) only under narrowly defined technical or artistic circumstances.

Contrary to these requirements, the management resorted to negotiated tendering without establishing the existence of exclusive technical or artistic considerations. The Bills of Quantities largely comprised routine fabrication and installation works for which a competitive vendor base existed in the market. Nevertheless, competition was restricted as no public advertisement or pre-qualification of vendors was carried out, and the procurement process remained limited to selected firms.

Audit further noted procedural deficiencies in the conduct of bidding. Tender documents did not clearly prescribe the bidding procedure, earnest money conditions were inconsistently applied, and financial bids of technically non-responsive bidders were opened, in violation of Rule 36(b) of PPRA Rules. In addition, minutes of negotiation were not recorded, formal contract agreements were not executed, and verifiable evidence of the mandatory 10% performance guarantee was not produced to audit.

These departures from prescribed procurement procedures compromised transparency, limited competition, and weakened assurance of value for money. The resulting award of work to the second lowest bidder led to an avoidable financial loss, while the overall procurement process exposed systemic weaknesses in compliance with PPRA Rules and internal controls.

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4.2 Fragmentation and deviation from PC-I

The irregularities extend to the FABLAB component of the STEM programme, where the PC-I explicitly required a centralized, turnkey procurement model implemented by a designated Procurement Cell. The PC-I specifically outlined the formation of a STEM Procurement Cell—comprising senior officials from PSF, MoST, PEC, and technical experts—to oversee all purchases exceeding Rs. 1.0 million, particularly for Mini and Hi STEM FABLAB equipment. It allocated Rs. 300 million for the transformation of labs in 50 schools and Rs. 70 million for university FABLABs, both intended for turnkey procurement to ensure standardization, quality control, and fiscal accountability.

Despite this clear design, the fragmented approach was operationally executed by directly releasing Rs 48 million to schools and colleges, which then procured goods and works on quotation basis, bypassing the mandatory open competitive bidding under PPRA Rules 2004. Consequently, the expenditure incurred stands irregular, reflecting a material deviation from both the turnkey model stipulated in the PC-I and the foundational principles of transparent public procurement. While this approach may have appeared administratively expedient, it violated PPRA's competitive bidding requirements and PC-I's design, which sought standardization, quality control, and fiscal accountability. Direct grants to dozens of institutions effectively fragmented procurement, making oversight difficult and precluding economies of scale.

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5. OPERATIONAL PROCESSES, TARGETS & KPIs

This section critically examines the operational efficiency of PSF. It detects chronic under-utilization of funds, incomplete or delayed projects and misaligned planning of projects with its original mandate hampering the progress of entity to achieve its objectives.

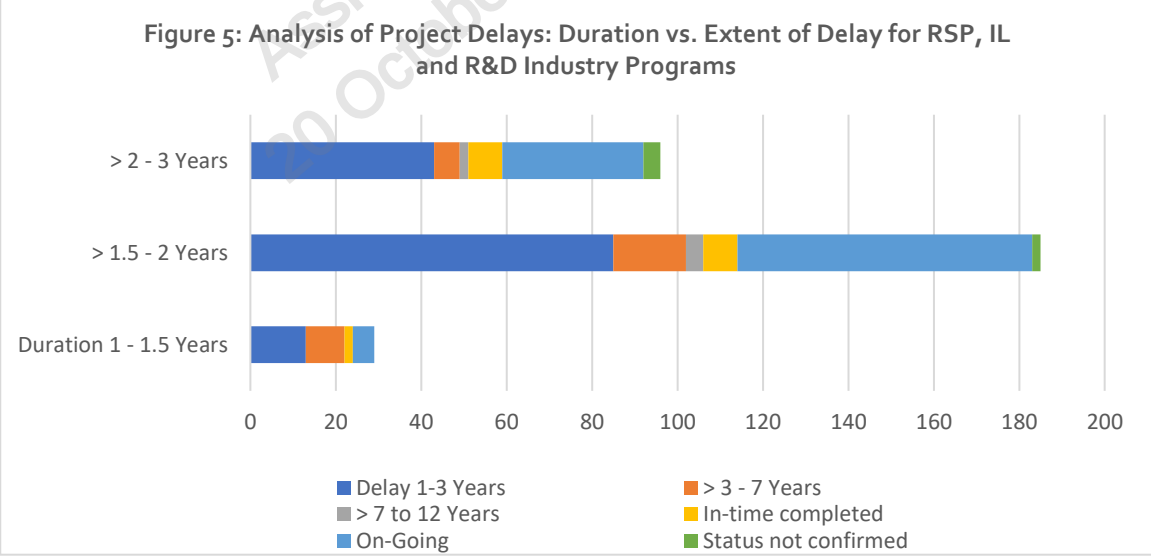
5.1 Persistent under-utilization and timeline failures in funded projects

A total of 308 projects were reviewed across the Research Support (RS), R&D Industry and International Linkages (IL) Programmes from 2019-20 to 2023–24. The status of projects is as follows:

Table-5

Project Duration	Delay in completion	No. of Projects Delayed	In-time completed	On-going	Status not confirmed
1- 1.5 Years	1 - 3 years	13	2	5	0
	Above 3 to 7 years	9	0	0	0
Above 1.5 – 2 years	1 - 3 years	85	7	68	2
	Above 3 to 7 years	17	0	0	0
	Above 7 – 10 years	4	1	0	0
Above 2 – 3 years	1 – 3 years	43	8	32	4
	Above 3 – 7 years	6	0	0	0
	Above 7 – 10 years	2	0	0	0
		179	18	105	6

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Note: "Status not confirmed" refers to projects where the "Delayed / Completed / On-going" field was not informed by the management

.

The above table provides a detailed breakdown of delays across PSF's major programs—Research Support Program (RSP) and International Liaison (IL) and R&D Industry Program highlighting systemic inefficiencies in project management and execution.

1. **Overwhelming Majority of Projects Delayed:** Out of 308 projects analyzed, 179 projects (58%) are delayed. Only 18 projects (6%) were completed on time. This indicates a chronic failure in project planning, execution, and monitoring.
2. **Extended Delays Beyond Acceptable Limits**
    - 36 projects have been delayed between 3 to 10 years, far exceeding original project durations.
    - Such prolonged delays render research outputs obsolete, waste public funds, and diminish relevance to national scientific priorities.
3. **Delay Patterns Correlate with Project Duration**
    - Longer-duration projects (2–3 years) show significant delays, with 43 projects delayed by 1–3 years and 6 projects delayed by 3–7 years.
    - Even short-term projects (1–1.5 years) are not immune, with 13 projects delayed by 1–3 years and 9 projects delayed by 3–7 years.
4. **High Volume of Ongoing Delayed Projects:** 105 delayed projects are still ongoing, indicating persistent weaknesses in the timeline enforcement and corrective oversight.

These delays result in blocked funds, reduced research impact, loss of innovation window, and poor return on public investment**.** They reflect weaknesses in contract management, milestone tracking, and accountability mechanisms within PSF.

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5.2 Improper Planning and Utilization of NSLP Endowment Fund

Under the NSLP Rules, the Endowment Fund is designed as a long-term financing instrument to promote collaboration in natural sciences, with the Fund Management Committee and Board of Governors responsible for approving projects, supervising management and ensuring that income from the endowment is used efficiently for research grants and related activities.

In practice, however, the expenditure profile of the NSLP Fund indicates ineffective planning and weak execution capacity. In FY 2022-23, statutory functions utilized Rs 62.224 million out of Rs 66.250 million (leaving 6.07% unspent), but administrative expenses used only Rs 12.246 million out of Rs 20.425 million—40% of admin funds remained idle. The situation deteriorated in FY 2023-24: for statutory functions, just Rs 47.340 million were spent against Rs 74.500 million (36.46% unutilized), and for administration nearly half the allocation remained unused despite an upward revision of the administrative budget from Rs 14.285 million to Rs 25.246 million. In aggregate, Rs 39.704 million—almost 40% of the revised total allocation—remained unutilized in 2023-24, even though the Fund is non-lapsable and intended to finance an ongoing portfolio of research projects. Instead of reflecting careful investment of endowment income into high-quality science, these figures point to over-optimistic budgeting, ad-hoc re-appropriations in favour of administration and a failure to convert available funds into timely, well-designed research grants. High proposal rejection rates, as cited by management, should have triggered proactive pipeline development, guidance to potential PIs and better pre-screening, rather than simply allowing resources to sit idle.

The detail of allocated budget and expenditure there against is as under:

Table-6

S. No.	FY	Description	Budget Allocation (Rs)	Revised Budget Allocation after re-appropriation (Rs)	Total Expenditure (Rs)	Balance (Rs)	%age of un-utilized funds
1	2022-23	Statutory Functions	66,250,000	-	62,224,430	4,025,570	6.07
		Administrative Expenses	20,425,000	-	12,245,963	8,179,037	40.04
		Total	**86,675,000**	**-**	**74,470,393**	**12,204,607**	**14.08**
2	2023-24	Statutory Functions	74,500,000	74,500,000	47,339,909	27,160,091	36.46
		Admn Expenses	14,285,000	25,246,066	12,701,773	12,544,293	49.69
		Total	**88,785,000**	**99,746,066**	**60,041,682**	**39,704,384**	**39.8**

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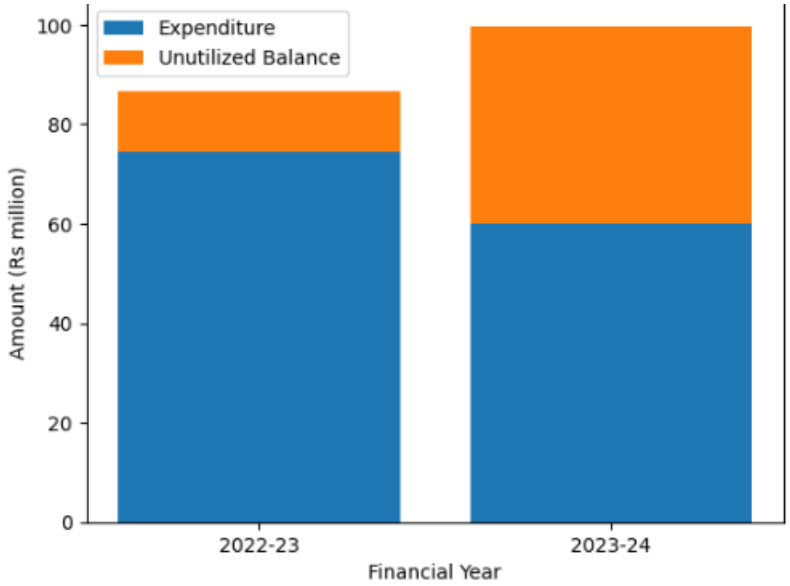


Figure-6: Expenditure vs Unutilized Balance

5.3 Ineffective implementation and delay in STEM Phase-I Project

The project "Launching of STEM in Pakistan, Phase-I," approved on 04.08.2021 at a cost of Rs 993.784 million for completion within 36 months, aimed to establish STEM FABLABs in 50 government higher secondary schools, including six cadet colleges. Despite extension of the project period up to June 2025, the core objective remained unachieved.

By May 2025, Rs 160.10 million had been spent and only 31 FABLABs were established, while implementation in the remaining targeted institutions remained largely incomplete.

The non-achievement of key deliverables indicates weak planning, delayed corrective action, and ineffective monitoring.

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6. ICT & DIGITIZATION

Audit assessment indicates that ICT and digitization at PSF and PASTIC remain fragmented, underutilized, and largely superficial, falling short of supporting core research, accountability, and knowledge-dissemination functions. Although basic systems for grant management and library modernization exist, they are not integrated across the research lifecycle, and critical outputs—such as final reports of 84 completed projects costing Rs 361.260 million—are absent from the central database. Weak data governance, continued reliance on manual records, and the absence of risk-based digital policies for intellectual property and access control further limit transparency and operational efficiency. Overall, the lack of a strategic, integrated digitization framework represents a significant missed opportunity to optimize processes, safeguard public investment, and fulfil PSF's statutory mandate in scientific knowledge management.

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7. CONCLUSION

Pakistan Science Foundation (PSF) is envisioned as the cornerstone of Pakistan's national scientific advancement—a dynamic institution that translates public investment into tangible research outcomes, innovation, and industrial application. Its statutory mandate positions it to nurture talent, fund high-impact research, bridge academia and industry, and strengthen the national innovation ecosystem.

However, the current review reveals a persistent execution gap between this vision and PSF's operational reality. Programmes such as Science Talent Farming Scheme (STFS), Competitive Research Programme (CRP-2021), NSLP Endowment Fund, and STEM Phase-I reflect common shortcomings: weak strategic alignment, slow fund utilization, high administrative overhead, ineffective monitoring, and negligible research commercialization. Chronic project delays—58% of reviewed projects were delayed, with some extended 3–10 years—stall scientific progress and reduce research relevance.

Financially, PSF's model is unsustainable, with administrative costs exceeding 66% of grants, heavy dependence on federal releases, and inadequate expenditure verification. Governance lapses in HR and procurement further undermine institutional credibility and compliance.

- To realign with its envisioned objectives, PSF must undertake urgent reforms, including: Linking research funding to measurable outputs and commercialization to ensure public funds yield validated, accessible research.
- Rebalancing expenditure toward core scientific functions, targeting at least 60% of grants for research activities.
- Enforcing timeline accountability through milestone-based funding, digital dashboards, and consequence management for delays.
- Strengthening financial reporting and diversifying revenue streams to reduce dependence on federal grants.
- Ensuring robust BoT oversight and compliance to prevent recurring governance failures.

Without these reforms, PSF will remain a grant-disbursing body rather than the catalytic science foundation Pakistan needs. With decisive action, however, PSF can still fulfil its vital role in building a knowledge-based, innovation-driven Pakistan.

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8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthening internal governance, enforcing outcome-based contracting, ensuring rigorous technical validation, and aligning all initiatives with the Foundation's statutory mandate are essential to enable PSF to function as an effective institution for promoting scientific progress and national innovation.

In light of the above, the following recommendations are made:

Link Research Funding to Measurable Outputs and Commercialization

Future research grants should be tied to clearly defined deliverables, including publication of final reports, patent filing, technology transfer, or policy uptake. Completed projects must be digitally archived and publicly accessible (with controlled access where required) to prevent waste of public funds and enable academic and economic value creation.

Rebalance Expenditure Toward Core Scientific Functions

PSF should institute a mandatory programme-to-administration expenditure benchmark, gradually increasing the share of funds allocated to core scientific and research activities to at least 60%, with annual performance monitoring by the Board of Trustees (BoT) to ensure alignment with its statutory mandate.

Enforce Timeline Accountability by Establishing Structured Oversight Mechanisms

PSF should institutionalize a milestone-based funding and oversight framework that clearly fixes custodial responsibility for project delivery. Research contracts must specify time-bound deliverables, designate accountable officers, and link fund releases to validated milestone achievement. A centralized digital oversight dashboard should enable real-time monitoring and escalation of slippages. Projects exceeding 50% of approved timelines without sanctioned justification should trigger automatic review, termination, recovery of unutilized funds, Penalizing delays reinforcing consequence management and rule-based governance.

Reform Project Approval, Monitoring, and Fund Release Mechanisms

PSF should adopt a stage-gated project financing model, where release of subsequent instalments is conditional upon verified progress, utilization of earlier funds, and achievement of milestones. Idle, blocked, or underperforming projects should be formally closed, with unutilized funds re-allocated to high-impact research areas.

Strengthen Financial Reporting and Enforce Accountability

Immediate preparation and approval of overdue Financial Statements for FY 2023–24 and 2024–25 should be ensured, with timelines strictly enforced. Non-compliance should trigger administrative accountability, while internal audit functions should be empowered to monitor financial discipline on a quarterly basis.

Diversify Revenue Streams and Strengthen Governance Oversight

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To reduce reliance on government grants, PSF should explore endowment income optimization, public-private research partnerships, consultancy services, and international research funding. Simultaneously, the BoT must be timely constituted and actively engaged in strategic oversight to prevent policy violations and restore financial and institutional credibility.

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9. APPENDICES

A. Audit Objectives

The audit was conducted to ascertain whether Pakistan Science Foundation (PSF):

1. Complied with its statutory mandate under the PSF Act, 1973 in planning and implementing programmes and projects.
2. Ensured economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in the utilization of public funds and achieved value for money.
3. Maintained sound financial management, including budgeting, fund utilization, and internal controls.
4. Complied with applicable laws, rules, and regulations, including PPRA Rules, Service Regulations, PC-I provisions, and relevant government instructions.
5. Followed transparent and merit-based human resource practices, with approvals by competent authorities.
6. Ensured proper procurement and contract management, supported by adequate documentation and performance safeguards.
7. Established effective monitoring, evaluation, and performance frameworks, including outcome-based KPIs.
8. Maintained adequate systems for asset management, knowledge preservation, and dissemination of research outputs.

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B. Audit Scope

The audit covered the financial years 2022-23 and 2023-24 and was conducted on test-check basis under Articles 169 and 170 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the Auditor-General's (Functions, Powers and Terms and Conditions of Service) Ordinance, 2001.

The scope included examination of:

1. Governance and compliance with mandate of PSF and its subsidiary organizations (PMNH and PASTIC).
2. Financial management, including grants, expenditure, fund utilization, cash balances, and internal controls.
3. Major programmes and projects, including STFS, CRP, STEM Phase-I, NSLP Endowment Fund, and PMNH development works.
4. Procurement processes and contract management, with reference to PPRA Rules and PC-I provisions.
5. Human resource management, including recruitment, promotions, pay and allowances, and approval mechanisms.

6. Operational performance, including achievement of targets, timelines, KPIs, and value for money.

C. Audit Methodology

The audit was conducted in accordance with the Auditor-General of Pakistan's auditing standards on a risk-based, test-check basis. Audit planning involved review of the PSF Act, 1973, relevant rules, PC-Is, and government instructions to understand the entity's mandate and control environment. High-risk areas relating to governance, financial management, procurement, human resources, and project execution were identified. Audit procedures included examination of financial records, procurement and contract files, project documents, HR records, and approval orders. Compliance with PPRA Rules, Service Regulations, and applicable government instructions was assessed. Performance and value-for-money analysis was carried out through comparison of targets, costs, and timelines with actual achievements.

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Details of Non-Validated / Non-Commercialized Projects

S. No.	Project title	Name of PI / Institute	Agreement No.	Cost of Project (Rs in million)	Observations
1	Development of AI based CADs System for rapid diagnoses of COVID-19 patients using chest X-Ray (CXR) and Computed Tomography (CT) scans	Dr. Ayesha Isani Majeed Principal Investigator (PI) of PIMS, Islamabad	PSF/CRP/COVID-19/C-PIMS/Cons-09	19.001	Validation pending; system idle
2	Upscaling of an AI-enabled Data Mining Platform for Informed Decision-Making (IDM) in COVID-19 and Future Pandemic Scenarios	Dr. Erum Jamil of International Islamic University, (IIUI) Islamabad	PSF/CRP/COVID-19/T-Helix-40	16.896	No validation; not operationalized
3	Upscaling and Pilot Production of Lifesaving Portable Ventilator Device	Dr. Murtaza Najabat Ali (PI) of NUST, Islamabad	PSF/CRP/COVID-19/Consortium-06	14.242	No PEC/DRAP validation; no clinical testing; not commercialized
4	Development of Indigenous Ventilators	Dr. Muhammad Shafique (PI) of Ripha International University, Islamabad	PSF/CRP/COVID-19/TH-42	12.008	No validation; no clinical trials; no commercialization
5	Development of Inhibitors targeting the viral as well as host factors of severe acute respiratory syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2); a way forward to develop a high potency treatment therapy	Dr. Mazhar Iqbal (PI) NIBGE College of PIEAS, Faisalabad	PSF/CRP/COVID-19/ P-NIBGE /Cons-103	9.840	No third-party/clinical validation; no commercialization
6	Indigenous development of automatic syringe pump for intravenous infusion of COVID-19 patients in ICU	Dr. Shafaat Ahmad Bazaaz, (PI) of Sir Syed CASE Institute of Technology, Islamabad	PSF/CRP/COVID-19/C-CASE/TH-16	3.000	Lacked PEC/DRAP validation; no trials; not commercialized
7	Development of value added Zincated Urea with slow release nitrogen feature	Dr. Muhammad Bilal Khan Niazi, (PI) NUST, Islamabad	PSF/CRP/T-Helix-186	6.840	No validation; unviable for industry adoption
8	Recycling of textile and tyre industrial wastes for the development of indigenous Carbon Black	Dr. Aamer Abbas Khan (PI), UET Lahore (Faisalabad Campus)	PSF/CRP/T-Helix-28	4.869	No validation; not adopted by industry.
			Total	86.696	

(Para 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20 & 22, PSF 2022-24)

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