



MINISTRY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION, RESEARCH, SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY & SPORTS



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The National Online Application System (NOAS), the National Online Selection System (NOSS) and the Higher Education Loan Program (HELP)

The National Executive Council (NEC), through the **NEC Decision No. NG25/2017**, instructed the DHERST to reform, transform and unify the higher education sector in PNG.

The online selection and application systems represent a leading-edge response in this regard to the imperatives of the NEC decision.

1. The National Online Selection System (NOSS)

NOSS introduced by DHERST in 2017, is an innovative online platform to facilitate transparent and efficient common admissions of students into the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

The Higher Education (General Provisions) Act 2014 (as amended 2020) under Schedule 1 B, Section 8, (m) and (n) mandates the DHERST to: "to perform central admission functions and verification of admissibility of candidates to higher education institutions; and to develop and implement selection criteria for scholarship awards based on merit, performance and equality".

The DHERST, therefore, has a legal responsibility to ensure that the selection into all HEIs is conducted in a transparent manner, and on merit.

Therefore by law, DHERST is responsible for:

- Facilitating a common selection system for all the HEIs;
- Verifying the transparency of selection criteria in this common selection per HEI program, requirement against HEI's criteria & student eligibility;
- Awarding appropriated national scholarship to school leavers for each academic year.

2. The National Online Application System (NOAS)

An online system implemented by DHERST in 2018 which has now replaced the traditional conventional paper-based School Leaver Form (SLF):

- Facilitate the application process of Grade 12 students applying to HEIs in Papua New Guinea;
- The purpose of the system is to improve efficiency and promote equality and equity in and during application as well as selection processes of school leaver to HEIs;
- The NOAS was developed to address and alleviate the challenges of ill-informed applicants and unfair selections;
- In the past three years (2018, 2019 & 2020), more than 27,000 students have applied for their choices using the NOAS.

3. The Higher Education Loan Program (HELP)

The Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) is a new initiative of the Government of Papua New Guinea (GoPNG) under the leadership of Prime Minister James Marape to provide financial support to those studying in the higher education Sector. In December 2019, the National Executive Council (NEC) made **NEC Decision NG179/2019**, the 'Establishment of the

Higher Education Loan Program'.

The GoPNG's HELP Loan initiative supports the objectives of the higher education sector as set out in the Higher and Technical Education Strategic and Implementation Plan (2017 – 2038). The HELP Loan also supports the sectorial Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP) III target in enabling more access to quality higher education and the development of knowledge-based economy through the higher education sector. The HELP will increase the growth of higher education institutions as well as supporting the dreams of many post-secondary tertiary students to pursue their studies in higher education institutions.

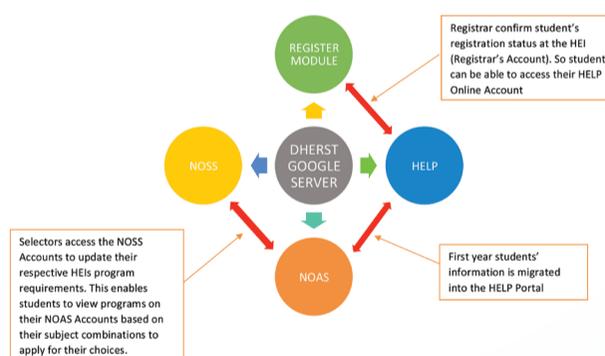
The HELP initiative aims to:

- enhance and increase quality higher education; and
- to ensure continuous access to undergraduate and postgraduate degrees are available to eligible students.

The purpose of the HELP Loan is to assist students enrolled in HEIs with the cost of studies in response to the increase of cost of higher education.

The HELP Loan is not compulsory, and students can choose whether or not to apply for the HELP Loan. If students have other means to support their studies, they should not apply. However, if students choose to apply for a HELP Loan and their application is successful, they will have to repay their HELP Loan when they start working with zero interest.

DHERST has an account with Google to host the online services that DHERST provides which are; NOSS, NOAS, HELP and the Register Module. Refer to the diagram to see the relationship of each systems.



Servers

There are two servers (application and database) hosted on Google Cloud Platform (GCP). Both are Windows Server 2016 (operating system) where;

- one is running/hosts Microsoft's SQL Server 2017 software (database software that holds NOSS/ NOAS data); and
- the other runs/hosts IIS server (web server).

The server was configured by **PCG Academia** so that, to get to the database server, one needs to connect (via RDP session) into the IIS (web) server, then establish another (nested) RDP connection to the database server.

Administering the host servers ought to be done by our department IT administrators, and this is not the case. Therefore, it makes very difficult to have administrative privilege to the full database.

Service Provider & abuse of required procurement process

Under the leadership of the suspended Secretary Fr Jan Czuba, the Department entered into an agreement with PCG Academia to develop the software(s). Fr Jan Czuba argued that PCG Academia is the only service provider (on earth) that can offer such technical services of developing these systems (NOSS, NOAS, & HELP). Subsequently, based on this argument, the necessary procurement process required by the law (National Procurement Act) was not followed.

Conclusion

- The NOAS, NOSS and HELP serves its purpose and eradicate malpractices (bribery, political influence, etc.) and DHERST should continue to utilize the system;
- However, the system is administered off-shore by the service provider (PCG Academia) and the administrative access and/or oversight is something the department does not have;
- Access to database is restricted and limited to one person only, whom that person lives offshore;
- Pertaining to the two aforementioned pointers, the National Security and Data (especially Grade 12 data) is managed off-shore and this poses a threat to National Sovereignty and Security; and
- Thus, work on bringing the system back on-shore must commence immediately.

To ascertain the statements above, my ministry in working closely with the Acting Secretary have proceeded to act on the **NEC Decision No. 80/2021** that called for an Investigation to be conducted pertaining the operation and management of DHERST under the former secretary, Fr. Jan Czuba.

All government institutions must be protected from individuals and companies of questionable characters that attempt to expose our national identities. And more importantly, I do not like to hear our thousands of students data exposed to foreign espionage network groups at the time of social media and sophisticated ICT ascendancy, influencing many countries of the Third World.

Approved for Release

Hon. Wesley Ora Raminai, MP

Minister for Sports & Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology
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