Transition and Reforms in Higher and Technical Education

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Firstly, I would like to wish all our Higher Education Staff and Stakeholders, nationally and internationally, my very best wishes for the Christmas Season and a very prosperous New Year. It has been a good year for the Higher Education sector in many ways, including: DHERST’s extensive consultation with stakeholders on the development of enabling legislation for Higher Education Transition and Reform; DHERST’s proposal to NEC for the adoption a 5 Year Sector Plan and Budget, the first Public Sector Agency in PNG to implement such an approach; DHERST’s innovation in advancing Digital Education and digital solutions to administrative challenges; and lastly, DHERST’s design proposal for a Students Loans Scheme currently under deliberation by the NEC. I would like to use my Foreward message to say a little about the proposed Student Loan Scheme.

**The Higher Education Loan Program (HELP)**

The Prime Minister, Hon. James Marape MP recently announced the government’s commitment to establish a student loan scheme for higher education studies. A draft NEC submission on the design of the scheme, to be known as The Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) is currently under consideration by NEC. If approved by NEC, implementation of the scheme will be subject to the establishment of rigorous financial and banking structures, including regulation and administrative arrangements for a Loan Fund, an Investment Fund and a broader Endowment Fund for soliciting and receiving external support for the Higher Education sector. Details of the income-contingent loan scheme will be released once formal NEC processes are complete. I would like to share some thoughts on the benefits of such a scheme.

**Rationale and justification for a Loans Scheme**

The rationale and justification for starting a loans scheme for all eligible higher education students is based on sharing the growing funding cost of higher education with students and their families. A loans scheme would accommodate an increased demand and participation in higher and technical education.

Higher education leads to higher earnings for individuals, often referred to as the ‘graduate premium’. It also leads to more tax revenue and the magnitude of this effect on economic growth is enormous. Furthermore, the scheme allows for a larger proportion of the higher education funding to be disbursed for infrastructure projects at universities and eligible higher and technical education institutions.

**Improved Quality of Education and Efficiency of the system**

It is also important to note that this is a first step in wider sector reform and provides opportunities for enhanced equitable access to places and improved quality and efficiency of the system. The loans scheme will also allow students to make a major contribution to the high costs of their education over time, on commencement of their working life. Setting up the loans scheme goes to the heart of the Governments plan in reversing negative trends across the higher and technical education sector over past decades, including:

- long term declines in real government funding for higher education. A broadly-based student loans scheme can be one very important part of longer-term higher education funding improvement;
- low growth in the number of students attending higher education institutions. Such numbers are amongst the lowest in the world and cannot adequately drive or support our rapidly growing economy;
- declining real value of and access to government scholarships for higher education students and the heavy burden on students and their families;
- growing inequality of access to higher education;

In helping to reverse these negative trends there are also significant personal (as well as societal) returns to higher education in PNG. It is therefore reasonable that students contribute to their technical and university education once they are engaged in productive employment.

I would like to thank my Departmental Officers for their work in preparing the NEC submission on the student loans scheme; and thank our donor partner, the Australian Government for their support in the successful design of the HELP Program.

Hon. Nick Kuman, MP  
Minister for Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology
Affordable funding and budgeting under a 5-year medium term Higher Education Sector Plan

Through a specially convened Interdepartmental Committee, senior representatives from DHERST, Treasury, Finance and National Planning and Monitoring have acted upon NEC Decision for the implementation of a Higher Education Medium Term Sector Plan 2020-2004 and 2020 Budget.

How is the Sector Plan and budget be structured?

The new plan presents a single overarching main program and eight integrated core programs, in contrast to the previous 13 fragmented programs across multiple government agencies. The main program is to develop the higher and technical education as an integrated and unified Sector. The supporting eight core programs are: effective and efficient sector management, administration and coordination by DHERST; effective student loans and scholarships schemes; development of effective universities; development of effective technical and business colleges; development of effective teacher colleges; development of effective nursing colleges; development of effective miscellaneous colleges; and effective cross cutting multi-program support.

Sector Coordination

A key underlying theme of the new sector plan has been the need to reverse the long-term real decline in central government resources provided to the higher education sector. The Sector Plan places high importance on achieving effective coordination of the efforts and resources of the central government agencies through the Interdepartmental Committee; and through better utilizing Development Partner and other forms of external stakeholder funding to support sector objectives.

Reforming, Transforming and Unifying Higher Education in Papua New Guinea

The new structure provides ‘best fit’ with the reform objectives of NEC Decision NG25/2017 for “Reforming, Transforming and Unifying Higher Education in Papua New Guinea” including the transfer of all higher education institutions offering post-secondary education to DHERST. A comprehensive outline of the Higher Education Reform Bills package follows.
DHERST and the wider sector have been working to develop the legislative changes required to implement the key directives of NEC Decision 25/2017 to “Reform, Transform and Unify the Higher Education System in Papua New Guinea.”

The Higher Education Reform Bills Package consists of eight (8) draft Bills that work together to implement the key directives.

REFORM HIGHLIGHTS

- **Transfer of HEIs to Ministry of Higher Education, Research Science and Technology and DHERST**

The Bills provide a legal process for the transfer of regulatory oversight of higher education institutions (HEIs) to the Ministry for Higher Education, Research Science and Technology and DHERST.

It is proposed that the first HEIs to transfer will be the post-secondary technical colleges and teachers’ colleges (from the Department of Education) and the nursing colleges (from the Department of Health). The various speciality colleges will be considered on a case-by-case basis at a later time.

- **Transfer of Staff**

Staff of transferred HEIs will transfer on their existing employment terms and conditions for at least 12 months after which they may be offered a new specialist lecturers’ contract of employment.

- **Governance arrangements**

Existing Governing Council arrangements will remain in place for 6 months after transfer to allow time for new Governing Councils to be appointed in accordance with the new governance arrangements.

These new arrangements are in relation to the objectives, powers and functions of HEIs; the establishment of Governing Councils; the functions and powers of Governing Councils; the membership and operation of Governing Councils; the appointment of Academic Boards; the appointment of staff and Rule-making powers for HEIs.

HEIs will have much stronger reporting requirements under the new arrangements including for the implementation of Strategic Plans; Business Plans and for the preparation of an Annual Audited Financial and Performance Report. These reports must be provided to the DHERST and the Minister by prescribed dates.
These new arrangements will create effective Governing Councils with strong industry representation; leading HEI’s to be demand-driven and focussing on the economic and social needs of citizens.

- **Transfer of Registration and Accreditation Functions from National Training Council (NTC) to DHERST in relation to Private Training Institutions**

The Bills provide for the transfer to DHERST of the registration and accreditation functions in relation to private training institutions currently undertaken by the NTC.

DHERST already has power under the law to undertake these functions for private training institutions. The Bills formalise this arrangement and remove the duplication of functions that currently exists.

- **National Curriculum and National Training Packages**

The Bills provide for a process whereby DHERST may develop, or facilitate the development of, national curriculum or national training packages in subject matter areas of national importance or as identified as national skills priorities.

Proposed national curriculum or national skills packages will be developed in consultation with relevant institutions, professional accreditation organisations and other stakeholders for approval by the National Higher and Technical Education Board (NHTEB).

- **Stronger engagement with business and industry**

The Bills ensure that DHERST and HEIs have power to engage the support of business and industry representatives; donors and leading corporate entities to ensure programmes offered by HEIs are demand-driven and support national skills priorities.

This includes power for DHERST to enter into arrangements with external organisations (eg. private training organisations, donors, corporate entities) to provide targeted training in skills priority areas in HEIs.

- **Governance of Universities**

The Bills provide various amendments to maintain the autonomy of public universities. The Minister, however, retains significant power to intervene in relation to the governance and management of universities and HEIs through emergency powers in specific circumstances.

- **Status of Reform Bills Package**

Legal clearance for the Reform Bills Package was received from the State Solicitor on 25 November 2019. The Package will now be progressed to the NEC and is likely commencement early in 2020.
Members from the Business Council of Papua New Guinea met recently with representatives from the DHERST to discuss policies on sustainable skills and employment pathways for Papua New Guineans under the National Skills Development Agency (NSDA).

BCPNG members voiced their need for more local workers with Industry relevant skills and qualifications to ensure less dependence on expensive imported labour. Mr Douveri Henao, PNG Business Council Executive Director, emphasised the importance of aligning skills training with Industry and Productivity demand.

“I am optimistic about BCPNG participation on the NSDA to identify improved industry access to a skilled and competitive workforce enhancing sustainable national workforce capacity.”

The NSDA was launched, in July this year, as a national advisory group that aims to grow the quality and capacity of PNG’s skilled workforce; support Industry’s ability to access those skills to improve productivity, competitiveness, reduce over-dependence of foreign labour; and deliver economic and social impact.

The Business Council of PNG is the peak body representing the private sector across all sectors. Established in 1995, the Council promotes the importance and role of economic growth, freedom and enterprise. The Council provides the private sector with a unified voice, ensuring the views concerning PNG’s economic, social and political environment are expressed in a well-researched and consolidated manner.

The Council will be a key pillar within the NSDA supporting national skills strategy and direction in productive areas of the economy. On behalf of the Skills Regulator, Mr Francis Hualopomomi, DHERST Deputy Secretary for Policy and Quality Assurance, informed the meeting:

“The NSDA aims to bring government and industry stakeholders together to identify sustainable solutions to stem the large capital outflows per annum on imported foreign skilled labour, particularly at the lower trade levels.”

NSDA membership comprises five (5) Government of PNG ex officio members and eleven (11) members representing Industry, Employer, Civil Society and Higher Education Institutions. The Business Council of PNG provides four (4) of the eight (8) private sector representatives on the NSDA. DHERST will convene full meetings of the NSDA in February 2020, once all membership nominees are finalized.
Healthy Lives, Active Workforce

DHERST staff participated in the 2nd Public Servants Sport Day hosted by the Papua New Guinea Sport Foundation (PNGSF) with the theme ‘Healthy Lives Active Workforce’.

The purpose of the event is to urge all Public Servants to be fit, healthy and productive when attending to their roles in their respective organisations.

DHERST registered two teams - mixed soccer and mixed volleyball - and staff, mostly young and active, participated joyfully. DHERST staff member, Mr Molean Kichawen, commented that the program was a wonderful initiative in promoting healthy living and well-being. Mr Kichawen hoped that the program will become an important annual feature in the PNGSF calendar of events.

DHEST staff who participated felt very motivated and expressed thanks to DHERST Secretary for allowing them to take part in the one-day event to promote health and wellbeing. It was the Department’s first time to participate in this fun-filled event and DHERST staff are now looking forward to next year’s event.
The Western Pacific University (WPU) is one of DHERST's major impact projects. The University, established under the Western Pacific University Act 2014 with commencement of the infrastructure development in 2015.

WPU will cater for the growing number of grade 12 school leavers who cannot find places in existing Higher Education Institutions. WPU will be the first Digital University of the 21st century in PNG, incorporating a modern approach to teaching and learning, as well as research by utilizing modern technology for programme delivery, blending modern teaching methods used worldwide in academic institutions, combining online and traditional teaching for the students.
Mrs. Veronica Thomas, the founding Chairperson of the PNG Chapter for the Association for Tertiary Education Management (ATEM) is thrilled that the DHERST continues to be a keen supporter of the ATEM PNG Chapter.

Mrs. Thomas visited the Department on 7th November 2019 to strengthen support and encourage participation at the ATEM’s 3rd National Conference at the University of Goroka on 21st November 2019. DHERST Secretary, Fr. Jan Czuba who is also the Patron of ATEM PNG Chapter was invited to be the keynote speaker during the Conference. The theme of the Conference was ‘Student and Staff Transformation in Higher Education, PNG in Context’. Representing Prof Fr Jan Czuba, John Karani spoke on ‘Digital Transformation in PNG Higher Education: What is it and why we should care?’

Mrs Thomas said: “DHERST is a strategic partner in providing government direction for the higher education sector in PNG and as professionals, we need to be informed to contribute meaningfully in delivering the government agenda”.

ATEM - PNG Chapter aims to initiate and encourage professionalism and serve as an avenue for nurturing tomorrow leaders today in the PNG higher education sector. The Chapter provides a forum where members share and exchange ideas, skills, experience, and knowledge as well as promote and encourage the world best practice in higher education governance and management. Members are encouraged to be innovative and solution oriented on today’s problems. The Chapter also establishes and fosters professional relationships/networks of higher education managers locally and internationally.

University Managers and Professionals acknowledged that they must embrace digital transformation to improve efficiency and effectiveness in a rapidly shifting technology and economy.

The 4th ATEM-PNG Chapter will be hosted by Divine Word University in 2020.
The Senior Management Team of the Department headed by Secretary, Professor Fr. Jan Czuba, met with Australian Government (DFAT) and Queensland State Government Officials at the Australian High Commission (AHC) on Friday 8 November 2019.

Discussed during the meeting was the Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea and the State of Queensland with a particular focus on Technical and Vocational Education and Training. Attendees included Mr. Andrew Burke, Director of Intergovernmental Relations from the Queensland Department of Premier and Cabinet, Enga Governor Sir Peter Ipatas, AHC Minister Counselor Andrew Egan, other representatives of the Australian High Commission. The DHERST team included deputy secretaries and senior staff within the Office of the Secretary of DHERST.

The purpose of the meeting was to explore opportunities and deepen the current bilateral arrangement particularly in the area of Technical and Vocational Education and Training. In addition to a range of matters discussed the meeting explored opportunities for greater focus on TVET skills in meet industry labour market demand for skilled workers in productive areas of the economy. Enga Governor, Sir Ipatas shared the experiences of Enga Province in spearheading development of human capital and the establishment of higher education institutions.

DFAT Minister Counsellor acknowledged the ongoing programs and linkages, which include Nursing Scholarships and Twinning arrangements in the Health sector.
Representatives from the Australia Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Australia-Pacific Training Coalition, Technical Enabling Unit, and Immigration and Citizenship Authority (ICA) and the Department of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology (DHERST) visited the Manus Training Centre and the East Lorengau Refugee Transit Centre on November 11, 2019. The delegates also met with the Manus Provincial Administrator, Mr Oka Nungi and his staff.

The purpose of the visit was to inspect the current facilities at both the Manus Training Centre and the Refugee Transit Centre with a view to developing a strategic plan for introducing addressing Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) needs in Manus.

The Provincial Administrator is keen on establishing programs that address the labor market and skills demand at Manus and throughout the Province. These include the possibility of establishing a Nursing College, Teachers College, and improvement upgrades at the Manus Training Centre to offer additional programs in Information Technology, Fisheries, Agriculture, Electrical and Welding. These offerings would be in addition to the current existing (though limited) programs in Motor Vehicle Mechanics, Hospitality and Tourism, Carpentry and Joinery, Carpentry and Construction and Metal Fabrication and Welding.

Considering the current shortage of qualified skilled staff for TVET colleges, and the country’s fiscal situation, the delegates proposed to establish one National TVET College with two campuses - upgrading the Manus Training Centre and converting the current Refugee Transit Centre with both campuses under one governance structure. Development will include Infrastructure upgrades and Equipment fit-out; relevant Course Offerings; increased Staff and Student Facilities; Leadership and Management training; and the provision Teaching and Learning Resources.

In consultation with the Manus Provincial Government as well as regional stakeholder groups in the private sector and civil society, the PNG Government will work closely with the Australian Aid Partnership in developing a long term strategic plan to coordinate the establishment of a TVET Institution that potentially services both provincial and regional workforce needs.
DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION, RESEARCH, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY INTERVENTIONS

- Higher and Technical Education Strategic Implementation Plan (2020-2038) - a road map to achieve the aims of the Higher and Technical Education Sector Transition and Reform in PNG.

- Higher and Technical Education five-year Sector Plan and Budget

- Papua New Guinea Higher Education Loans Program (HELP)

- Innovative and cost-effective roll-out of i-PNG Digital Education and digital administrative solutions.

- Implementation of the National Skills Development Agency (NSDA) - a shared value partnership between Government, Industry and HEI’s

Reforming, Transforming and Unifying the Higher and Technical Education System in PNG

**NEC Directives**

1. All higher and technical education institutions to transfer to DHERST
2. PNG National Qualifications Framework and Higher &Technical Education Strategic Implementation Plan (2017 – 2038) endorsed
3. DHERST to implement strategies in Plan including establishment of National Skills Development Agency
4. Establishment of Regional Centres of Excellence
5. All recommendations for TVET reform in TVET Needs Analysis Study Report (2011) to be implemented
6. Standards-based DipT & BEd curriculum to be implemented in all Teachers’ Colleges
7. Annual budget funding allocated through DHERST to implement reform strategies

**Institutions**

- Universities
- TVET & Business Colleges
- Teachers Colleges
- Nursing Colleges
- Other Speciality Colleges

**Reform Outcomes**

1. Empowered institutions under DHERST regulatory oversight
2. Strengthened arrangements for church agency institutions
3. Compliance with PNG National Qualifications Framework
4. National Skills Development Agency
5. Strong industry and private sector engagement
6. Targeted funding and infrastructure development
7. Upskilling of educators in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)
i-libraries for all Higher Education Institutions in PNG

Transforming the Higher and Technical Education sector into a diverse and growing network of post-secondary institutions that prepare students for application of knowledge at an advanced level.

The i-PNG Higher Education model includes Cloud-hosted libraries that feed learning and curriculum content to routers for easy download access to higher and technical education sub-sectors, eliminating large internet access costs.

Customised Teaching and Learning Resources

DHERST has developed a unique solution to a unique and specific problems faced by all Institutions of Higher and Technical Learning in PNG. For many years Higher Education Institutions have not able to access relevant and quality learning and teaching resources to support their course offerings. DHERST has identified specialized global providers of customized databases to suit the demands of higher and technical education institutions in PNG.

All customised learning and teaching resources will be utilized by staff and students alike, as opposed to ‘off-the-shelf’ database resources, often irrelevant to the curriculum needs of our institutions. We will significantly reduce costs for contemporary learning and teaching resources, that are fully supportive of program delivery.

Multi-disciplinary teaching and learning

The customised database systems will create the most comprehensive, diverse, and relevant multidisciplinary teaching, learning and research resources available, providing access across all major disciplines and subject areas, including business, health and medical, social sciences, arts and humanities, education, science and technology, and religion.

Delivery a modern, relevant, quality learning experience

The resource collection includes thousands of full-text scholarly journals, trade and professional titles, newspapers, magazines, dissertations, working papers, case studies, and market reports all together on a powerful, user-friendly platform.

The platform will deliver a modern learning experience that guides users’ discovery, access and management of rich, varied content sources, with clean interface with users and responsive design.
The Department hosted the Registrars’ Module Workshop in Port Moresby from 18th-19th November 2019 at the Crown Hotel. Participant Registrars of Higher Education Institutions acknowledged DHERST’s leadership and effort in developing and facilitating digital transformation in the higher education system.

One of the leading participants, University of Goroka Vice Chancellor, Prof Musawe Sinabare commended DHERST for its determinations in achieving digital transformation especially on the National Online Application System (NOAS), the National Online Selection System (NOSS), and now the Registrars’ Module. These innovations have greatly influenced and streamlined previous labour-intensive processing of student applications, selections and student administration in the higher education institutions.

Prof Sinabare also mentioned the value of a unified digital system in achieving uniformity across higher education institutions on policy and administrative differences that affect data quality and consistency. There were also calls for similar workshops for the different Education sub-sectors - Teacher Colleges, Nursing Colleges, Business and Technical Colleges and specialized higher education institutions.

Some generic concerns raised by the participants include the transfer of Government Scholarships - HECAS students’ mobility, day students on HECAS, as well as quality and validity of Grade 12 School Certificates provided by non-school leavers applying for enrolment.
The National Skills Development Agency is the enabling platform for oversight, regulation, planning and development of national SKILLS capacity.

The NSDA is an Agency within the Department of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology operating under the authority of the Higher Education (General Provisions) Act 2014.

Driving national Skills sector reform in Papua New Guinea, the NSDA engages with Industry, the Education sector, Investors, Training Providers and Employers.

NSDA Strategies

“While the benefits of higher education continue to rise, the costs of being left behind are also growing. Higher education is no longer a luxury: it is essential to national social and economic development.”