

Unam's IT system in a mess

■ Albertina Nakale

WINDHOEK - Some senior students at the University of Namibia (Unam) who are registering for the 2019 academic year are disappointed with the university's IT system, saying it is in a mess.

For the past few years, senior students could register online without going through long queues, but they are now forced to join these lines at the main campus to register due to the ongoing migration of an IT system. Most senior students say they have been unable to access their portals to acquire their academic data. Over the years, Unam faced challenges of migrating historical data from its Integrated Tertiary Systems (ITS) to University Management System (UMS) which cost millions of dollars despite the fact that it couldn't work effectively. Unam spokesperson, John Haufiku explains that between 2007 and 2009, the university embarked on a new project to continue the development of UMS, with three different systems focusing on human resources, finances and students' administration. "The three systems under UMS mentioned above could unfortunately in the end not provide the university with an integrated solution commensurate with meeting its diverse

needs," Haufiku says.

Therefore, he says the Unam council resolved and directed the disengagement with the former service providers of the finance and human resources management systems effective December 31, 2018. As a result, Haufiku notes, Unam last year, through a tender process, acquired the services of Adapt IT, formerly known as ITS, which the university inherited from the then Academy for Tertiary Education since its establishment in 1992. The ITS system was custom-built for the Academy. ITS has rebranded itself as "Adapt IT".

"As can be expected with the introduction of any new system in an organisation, the introduction would entail a period of transition and users getting accustomed to the new way of doing things. To date, all users have been trained on the ITS systems and students' registration is currently being performed on the new system," he maintains.

Giving a breakdown of the migration process of the systems, Haufiku says the second system used was the in-house project under the name UMS.

UMS comprised three systems, namely: the Students Management System (SMS) done in-house and went live in June 2017; the Finance Management System supported by Acumatica went live during October 2016;

and the Human Resources Management System which was supported by Sage that went live in March 2017. However, all these systems did not work well together as some data were even reportedly gone missing.

The systems all went through tender processes and were all approved by the Tender Board. He explains as the university expanded in terms of its campuses, qualifications, students and staff numbers, so did the need for new functionalities on the ITS. In terms of Unam contractual agreement with ITS, he says any request for additional functionalities was always met with costs, as well as an increment in the annual licensing costs and version migrations. Haufiku adds that at one point, the university benefitted from technical assistance of an ICT expert seconded by the Government of India.

Equally, he says around 2003, the university decided to build its own system (UMS) to mitigate the escalating costs of millions of dollars. Around 2004, Navayuga Info Tech. (NIT), a company based in Hyderabad, India, was awarded the contract to build the system following a public tender, on which ITS also submitted a bid. He explains that the university and NIT signed an agreement stipulating the duration, responsibility of each party and the payment terms.

"However, due to some irregularities, the contract of NIT was terminated. This caused a major delay in the implementation of the project. Nonetheless, systems development commenced around 2007. The first working version of UMS was delivered to the university in 2009. At this time, a new Computer Centre Manager was appointed, and took over the responsibility of managing the UMS project," he notes. Therefore, Haufiku says the university embarked on a new project to continue the development of UMS, with three different systems focusing on Human Resources, Finances and Students' Administration.

The students' administration system was designed and architected by the University's Computer Centre together with stakeholders from different units within the university and is therefore owned by the university. The other two systems, namely Human Resources and Finances, were an open system which meant that the university could develop capacity and 100 percent take over the customisations, implementation and support thereof.

Although, the IT systems did not work, Haufiku says the idea was meant to create an enabling environment for the university to build its own systems, such as the point of sale system and the student & staff portal.