

How students will acquire Govt's study loans online

- May 12, 2019
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Education minister Janet Museveni is shown around the online system as HESFB executive director Michael Wanyama (extreme R) HESFB chairperson Prof Callisto Loceng (2nd R) plus other board members look on

The Higher Education Students' Financing Board (HESFB) recently launched an online platform to expedite the application, short-listing and follow up processes of loan scheme beneficiaries.

YUDAYA NANGONZI explains how needy-but-brilliant applicants can now apply for study loans from the comfort of their homes using laptops or mobile phones.

Dubbed Integrated Loan Management Information System (ILMIS), the board says it will make it easier, cheaper, and simpler for applicants to access up-to-date information on their applications and loan disbursements.

This system comes amid plans to phase out offline applications where hard copies are manually filled and sent to HESFB offices.

Speaking at the system's maiden launch recently, Education minister Janet Museveni said the ILMIS shall provide data with high integrity as a result of reduced errors that would have, otherwise, been committed. With the online applications, she said the board will not lose applications or receive double submissions by individual applicants which bring about duplication and wastage of time and resources.

"The days of large file rooms, rows of filing cabinets and mailing of documents is fading fast. Today, even universities have changed to digital versions of documents on servers and storage devices," Museveni said calling for training of HESFB staff and applicants on the new system.

"We do not want to invest in systems that will be rendered useless because of lack of human skills to use them. Capacity building is, therefore, important if society is to accept, adopt and use ICTs."

On the same occasion, the minister also announced commencement of applications for the sixth cohort of the loan beneficiaries for the Academic Year 2019/2020. Since 2014, HESFB has awarded loans to 8,190 students in 20 public and private chartered universities and 36 Other Tertiary Institutions (OTIs) that offer diploma programmes.

Student's loans are awarded to students pursuing science programmes save for Persons with Disabilities who access loans to study for Science or humanity programmes.

UNIQUE REFERENCE NUMBERS

According to the HESFB executive director, Michael Wanyama, an applicant needs to register with ILMIS by visiting <http://ilmis.hesfb.go.ug> to register before accessing the online application form to apply for a loan.

The new system will give applicants unique identification numbers that one will continually use to log into the system. The applicant will then fill the required forms, scan and upload recommendation forms, payment slips and submit everything in the system.

"Students can keep checking on the progress of their loans on whether they have been awarded loans or not. For successful applicants, they will go ahead to monitor their accounts with HESFB from time to time instead of visiting our offices physically," Wanyama said.

The reference number also allows beneficiaries to know the status of loans; outstanding balances, repayment status, among others.

This arrangement is opposed to the offline system where one fills hard copies, attaches the required documents and travels to only the nearest centenary bank office to submit all documents to the designated HESFB contact person. The bank staff in turn forwards the hard copies to HESFB offices in Kampala.

Wanyama said the new system will be integrated with universities' Accounting Information Management Systems (AIMS) to get timely updates on beneficiaries, academic progress and disbursements of funds instead of coming up with hard copy reports.

"We want to have a paper-less activity in our offices because more papers mean looking for more ware houses to keep them because they are too many," he said.

Meanwhile, *The Observer* has learnt that the first cohort of the loan scheme beneficiaries have just completed their studies and concluded their one-year grace period given to loanees to reorganize, settle or transit to working life. Already, HESFB has collected Shs 78m through voluntary repayments but projects to collect Shs 150m this financial year 2019/2020.