

Amalgamation and affiliation in higher education in Papua New Guinea: The Divine Word University experience

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Abstract

Amalgamation in higher education has been going on in Papua New Guinea since the early 1970s by ad hoc decisions of the Government. The higher education sector was formalized into a coordinated system in the early 1980s by the creation of the Commission for Higher Education. Amalgamation and affiliation were placed on the agenda of the Commission for Higher Education in the mid-1990s. This paper is a contribution to the research literature on amalgamation and affiliation partnerships from the perspective of a developing higher education sector, which is riddled with many challenges, including legislation, quality assurance, governance, leadership and management, culture, and resources. All stakeholders need to understand their roles and responsibilities, set differences aside and make a genuine commitment and effort to correctly implement amalgamation and affiliation partnership policies for the benefit of the students and the common good of the people of PNG.

Key words: amalgamation, affiliation, university, Papua New Guinea

Reforms in higher education in Papua New Guinea

Motivated by the wave of reforms in higher education around the world in the 1990s (Harman and Harman, 2008), the Papua New Guinea Government passed its own reformed agenda by a decision of the National Executive Council, NEC Decision No. 50/2001, which approved the “The Papua New Guinea National Higher Education Policy and Implementation Strategy Volume 1: White Paper on Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology Enterprise and Education” and the “Papua New Guinea National Higher Education Policy and Implementation Strategy Volume 2: National Higher Education Plan II 2000-2004.”

In essence the second volume is the implementation guidelines of the policy document, the White Paper, designated as Volume I. These two statements of Government directives instructed the move away from single discipline colleges responsible to parent departments towards a more coherent organizational structure with improved efficiency and effectiveness in the governance and administration of the academic programs and the utilization of resources. In addition, the leadership and management of IHEs are expected to forge links with the professions and employers, such that appropriate practicum and internships can be negotiated to enhance the students’ experience; to

facilitate the integration of graduates into the national workforce; institute formal quality assurance and accountability mechanisms at each IHE; create vertical and horizontal integration of programs within a comprehensive national system of higher education; establish institutional committees for planning, resource allocation; and to review, revise and progressively standardize procedures and criteria for the recruitment and promotion of academic and professional staff as well as to review, revise and standardize procedures and criteria for evaluating academic performance. These and associated decisions of the Government placed an enormous responsibility on the university system, which numbered only two at that point in time.

The pressure prompted the Government to create another four universities, namely, University of Goroka (UOG), University of Vudal (later renamed University of Natural Resources, UNRE), Divine Word University (DWU) and Pacific Adventist University (PAU) by upgrading the status of Goroka Campus of UPNG, Vudal Campus of the PNG University of Technology, Divine Word Institute, and Pacific Adventist College. The first four Universities are owned by the State and administered by agents of the State. The DWU was upgraded from the Divine Word Institute (DWI), which was co-founded by two religious communities: the Society of the Missionaries of the Divine Word and the Holy Spirit Sisters; the PAU was upgraded from the Pacific Adventist College (PAC) founded by the South Pacific Conference of the Seventh Day Adventist Church. Each university is established under a separate Act of Parliament. The last two are independently administered.

Amalgamation

Amalgamation and affiliation are distinct stages in the evolution of institutional partnerships. This article focuses on institutional partnerships in post-secondary or tertiary institutions, including universities, all of which are classified as institutions of higher education (IHEs) in the Papua New Guinea (PNG) context. In the research literature, the term merger is used more frequently to describe amalgamation, which is the preferred term in the PNG context. Amalgamation is a partnership in which two or more institutions combine to form a single entity either voluntarily or by a directive of a higher authority such as the Government. The post-amalgamation single entity may be the larger or stronger of the pre-amalgamation entities or it may be a different independent entity founded under a completely different set of organisational, governance and administrative structures (Harman and Harman, 2008). What is important to understand is that the post-amalgamation entity has one governance and administration system. In the process, at least one of the pre-amalgamation entities has completely been transformed.

Amalgamation has been taking place in Papua New Guinea since the establishment of the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) in 1965, mainly by the directives of the Government and for reasons of academic and economic viability, and for quality assurance considerations. Between 1973 and 1999, UPNG amalgamated the Papuan Medical College, Port Moresby College of Allied Health Sciences, Port Moresby Dental College, and Port Moresby

Lang (2002) thought Harman’s prototype was limited to Government instigated collaboration. He in turn proposed a variation to Harman’s model, which is shown in Figure 2.

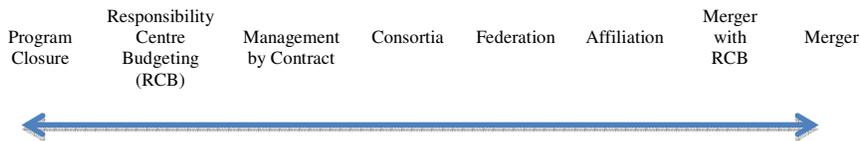


Figure 2: Lang’s 2002 expanded continuum of inter-institutional cooperation

Lang (2002) wanted to account for non-government instigated cooperation and acknowledge the self-generated voluntary cooperation between institutions whose leadership and management teams may by their own accord consider amalgamation or some other form of collaboration as a strategic move to enhance growth and gain development advantage. Lang’s model differs from Harman’s model in two major aspects: academic and financial structures versus government and non-government instigated restructure. By 2004, G. Harman had refined his model and added another two types of collaborative partnerships as shown in Figure 3, with a slight adaptation to maintain the original form of the continuum for comparative illustration.

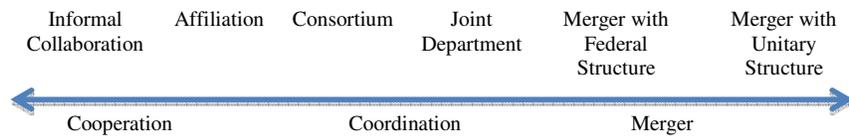


Figure 3: G. Harman’s 2004 model of collaboration and linkage

G. Harman (2004) defines *informal collaboration* as academic relationships involving joint research activities and shared specialised equipment. By *Affiliation* he means a relationship in which by mutual agreement the affiliating partner agrees to accredit the academic programs and issues academic awards to an affiliated partner institution. Other forms of affiliation may involve international institutions, which collaborate in research activities, staff and student exchanges and technology transfer. A *consortium* is the type of partnership in which one or more institutions agree to form a holding corporate body, called a consortium, which has an independent governance and administration structure for coordinating and managing jointly owned programs or joint business ventures. Between a consortium and a merger (amalgamation), there may be a *Joint Department*, a partnership in which two or more institutions co-own an academic facility or department. Such a partnership is distinct from a consortium in the sense that partner institutions co-manage the facility themselves. At the far right hand side of the continuum is amalgamation. G. Harman (2004) defines two types of amalgamation, *merger with federal structure* and *merger with unitary structure*. In a merger with federal structure, two or more institutions are combined but there is not a single governance and administration structure. Powers and responsibilities are

shared by designated academic or functional units, in a type of internal collaboration with another body that serves as the overarching coordinator. This type of arrangement is intended to allow each partner in the federation to exercise a degree of independence, but as G. Harman (2004) reported, the Australian higher education system, which has such a structure has not cited many encouraging examples. It is not difficult to see why. When partners in the federation come with many perspectives, cultures and experiences, it would be unrealistic to expect that consensus in decision-making would be readily achieved. Amalgamation with unitary system means all pre-amalgamation entities surrender their identity and become subsumed into a single entity with a single governance and administrative system with a single “governing body and single chief executive” (G. Harman, 2004, p18). It is to be noted that the “new” governing body and new executive could be from the stronger or strongest partner among the pre-amalgamation IHEs. Accompanying his model of collaboration and linkages, G. Harman (2004) identified a number of drivers of amalgamation, which are the same drivers that the PNG higher education system aspires to.

These are quoted from G. Harman (2004, p18):

- increased efficiency and effectiveness, especially to cope with rapid and substantial increases in enrolments and additional responsibilities for higher education institutions
- action to deal with problems of institutional fragmentation, over-specialisation of particular institutions and non-viable institutions
- improved student access and greater differentiation in course offerings to cater for more diverse student populations
- increased levels of government control over the overall direction of the higher education systems, especially to ensure that institutions more directly serve national and regional economic and social objectives
- more effective university links with industry on research commercialisation.

Based on his comparative analysis of higher education systems in Australia, Canada, South Africa, United Kingdom, and United States, Grant Harman with Kay Harman in 2008 reported a more refined model of institutional collaboration and added the *Joint business venture*. The refined model appeared in Harman and Harman (2008) and is quoted here in Figure 4.

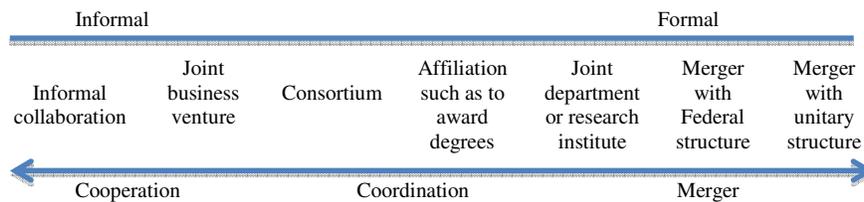


Figure 4: Models of institutional collaboration (G. Harman and K. Harman, 2008)

The progressive refinement in 2008 of the conceptual framework originally developed by G. Harman in 1989 is evidence of an evolutionary process, which can be viewed as reflecting the impact of globalisation and internationalisation. It demonstrates that higher education systems around the world react to global trends and these are reflected in the manner in which institutional collaborations have showed up. Governments, institutional planners, policy makers and academic communities including the academics and students are catalysts in this evolutionary growth. As a developing country, PNG is a follower of international trends. Informal collaborations and sharing of information and research data are standard informal collaboration activities, which have been enhanced by advances in the communication and information technology (ICT) resources. Some examples of amalgamation in PNG are listed above, and others will be given later in the case study. Other types of models such as the consortium, joint-department or joint-research institute, and merger with federal structure are yet to be explored by IHEs in PNG. The first attempt to form a consortium was made by the PNG Vice Chancellor's Committee (PNGVCC) when they agreed in 2007 to establish a consortium to coordinate and manage the Internet service provider, PNG Academic Research Network (PNGARNet), and to establish its commercial arm in a joint-business venture, AlphaNets Limited, to import and distribute as well as to provide after sales service for ICT resources, but the successes of such collaborations are yet to be evaluated.

The Divine Word University experience

Context

Amalgamation and Affiliation came about as a result of reforms in the higher education system in Papua New Guinea. These reforms were consequences of the findings of research conducted during the Higher Education Project, which was facilitated by the Commission for Higher Education between 1995 and 2004. Two major policy directions arose from the research findings:

- Accreditation of programs offered by all institutions of higher education; and
- Affiliation or amalgamation with one of the established universities in PNG

Under their respective Act of Parliament, the Commission for Higher Education (CHE) and all the Universities are authorised to accredit programs. The Universities have the authority to certify academic awards issued by an affiliated IHE. Among the strategic focus areas, which the higher education reforms entail are:

- more relevant curriculum
- improved access to higher education by all
- equity of allocation of financial resources for scholarships and infrastructure development

- improved quality of education
- cost effectiveness considerations
- development of new structures & trends in higher education

In 2000 a policy document titled, *Guidelines for Institutional Accreditation* prescribed the nine national accreditation standards and the process for accrediting new programs and institutions, and for monitoring and maintaining academic standards and quality assurance. In 2012 these guidelines were revised to emphasise quality assurance and four additional accreditation and quality assurance criteria were proposed and are pending approval by the Government. A couple of welcome features of the revised guidelines are the comprehensive package of implementation guidelines and the audit panel's operational ground rules. The pressure is on for all the IHEs to demonstrate fitness of purpose through evidence.

The Divine Word University vision and mission statements

The DWU is the successor of the Divine Word Institute (DWI). In 1977 members of the Papua New Guinea Province of the Society of the Divine Word in partnership with the Missionary Sisters, Servants of the Holy Spirit declared their statement of intent to establish an institute of higher learning in a Charter which led initially to the establishment of DWI, and which was subsequently adopted as the DWU Charter when DWU was declared a University in 1996. The DWU Charter is the basis of the education philosophy of DWU, from which the vision and mission statements of DWU have been derived. They are quoted below:

DWU vision statement

Divine Word University is a national university, open to all, serving society through its quality research, teaching and learning, and community engagement in a Christian environment.

DWU mission statement

The university shares with all institutions of higher education a triple mission:

- The acquisition of knowledge, which is the mission of research
- The transmission of knowledge, which is the mission of teaching
- The application of knowledge, which is the mission of community engagement.

DWU as an agency of higher education

In November 2003, the Government of PNG authorized DWU as an agency of higher education. This paved the way for DWU to move ahead with implementing the policy on amalgamation and affiliation. Currently there are two amalgamated IHEs, the former Kaindi Teacher's College, and the former Madang College of Allied Health Sciences; two amalgamating IHEs, Kabaleo

Teachers College and Vunapope School of Nursing in Rabaul are in transition into complete amalgamation; four affiliated IHEs, Lutheran School of Nursing in Madang, Don Bosco Technological Institute in Port Moresby, Holy Trinity Teacher's College in Mt. Hagen, and Good Shepherd Seminary in Banz; and one affiliating IHE, St Barnabas School of Nursing in Alotau is in pre-affiliation phase. The faculties, which are involved in amalgamation and affiliation partnerships, the Faculty of Business and Informatics, Faculty of Education, Faculty of Health Sciences, and Faculty of Theology.

The majority of the IHEs, which the DWU is involved with through amalgamation or affiliation, were founded by an agency of the Catholic Church in PNG and the Solomon Islands. Through an agreement between the Church and the State, all the Church agency IHEs were placed under the custody of the State, but only to the extent that the State pays salaries and some development costs while the agency of the Church as the original owner would fund operational costs and wages of the ancillary staff. The entry of DWU into the picture created a tripartite relationship, which is very complex in nature and requires careful strategic thinking.

The DWU amalgamation model

The experience of DWU is consistent with the descriptions of Deloitte and Touche (2012), which stated that there are three phases of the process of amalgamation, namely: pre-amalgamation phase, transition phase and post-amalgamation phase. In the pre-amalgamation phase it is highly critical to secure the support of the Government officials (politicians and bureaucrats) and to establish rapport with them. Some of the significant stakeholders include the incumbents of the following positions:

- Minister for Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology
- Minister for Education
- Minister for Health
- Chairman, Commission for Higher Education
- Director General, Office of Higher Education
- Secretary for Education
- Chairman, Teaching Service Commission
- Secretary for Health
- Chairperson, PNG Nursing Council

Under ideal conditions, the Director General of OHE takes over the facilitating role and liaises with the Secretary for Treasury and Secretary for National Planning with regard to budget support. In anticipation DWU would draft a National Executive Council (NEC) submission seeking approval for amalgamation process to begin and to seek approval for budget support. When conditions are not conducive DWU has been left in a state of uncertainty for an extended period of time. The challenges are inherent in the tripartite relationship between the DWU, the Catholic Church Agencies and the State. For instance, in the case of the amalgamation of the Kaindi Teachers college,

which is in the post-amalgamation phase, the Government agencies involved were: CHE, OHE, the National Department of Education (NDOE) and the Teaching Service Commission (TSC). Even though DWU has played all the strategic moves, the financial support that is due according to the NEC Decision 221/2003 is not readily realisable. Differences in cultural perspectives, resistance to change, and political or institution possessiveness have created gaps in communication that have hindered timely resolution of issues. For instance, State agencies may pass the responsibility around with no one making any real commitment to resolve issues of financial support. In spite of the challenges, DWU has persevered within its own resource constraints and after about ten years, significant progress has been made such that the post-amalgamation phase at the DWU Kaindi campus is effectively ended and full integration and consolidation are underway.

The DWU affiliation model

Similarly, in affiliation, three phases of the process can be identified, namely: pre-affiliation phase, transitional phase and post-affiliation phase. The pre-affiliation phase takes an average of two years. During this period the representatives of DWU assist the representatives of the intending affiliate to prepare for an academic audit. The preparatory work involves writing a number of important documents such as, the institutional self evaluation report and a program specification document for each program on offer by the intending affiliate and for which accreditation is sought, and following an external audit of the institution, an institutional audit report. This phase requires a change driver or champion. Naturally, this would be the Principal who is the team leader or chief executive officer. However, for various reasons such as time and capacity constraints, it is not realistic to have the Principal carry out this task so a committed senior academic member of staff is recommended. Due to the challenges, which are indicated below, the outcomes of the pre-affiliation phase cannot be achieved until the inherent issues are resolved.

The culmination of the transitional phase is the MOA on affiliation, which articulates the roles and responsibilities of each partner. The transitional phase of affiliation takes an average of three years, during which the affiliated IHE is required to respond to the recommendations of the audit team as per the audit report. It does this with a lot of assistance from the representatives of the DWU involving continuous monitoring and evaluation to ensure that the expected outcomes of the affiliation agreement are achieved or progressively being achieved. At the end of the transitional phase, a second external audit is conducted on the intending affiliate and affiliation is confirmed if the audit report is significantly positive. The post-affiliation phase takes five years during which the affiliated IHE operates with minimum interference by DWU but regular updates of the academic aspects of affiliation are required and the affiliated IHE may be asked to explain a major cause for concern that may have arisen. In contrast to amalgamation, affiliation is not a terminal partnership, rather it is a cyclical partnership in the sense that at the end of each five-year cycle, an external audit is required by the DWU and the affiliation partnership

is reassessed. The MOA has a terminal clause, which provides for the termination of the partnership should any irreconcilable differences arise.

Affiliation is difficult and complex in a different context. The reasons are direct consequences of the nature of affiliation such that an affiliated IHE maintains their autonomy and ownership of their governance system and their curriculum, while the affiliating institution is expected to mentor and assist to build capacity of the leadership and management team and support them to achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness in their own academic governance and administration practices and improve the quality of delivery and outcomes of the curriculum and generate desirable graduate attributes. The challenges experienced by DWU are consistent with those reported in the literature. The most influencing dimension of the challenges is the culture. K. Harman (2004, p92) expressed it so well in the following quotation,

"... the language, history, customs, traditions, beliefs, the stories that surround institutions, all of which are shared by a cultural group and influence their behaviour, and which are deeply embedded into their psyche and their identity. Culture represents an institution's spirit or soul, which is passed on from one generation to another and that is sometimes very hard to understand. While institutional structures are very easy to see, their cultures are very elusive, they're all-pervasive, and often very difficult to understand. Like the wind, the influence of culture can be strongly felt, but very rarely seen, cultures can be at once forceful and strong, powerful yet subtle. And in institutional settings, culture is so embedded that it's virtually impossible to just unfreeze or turn off, or change overnight."

Cultural differences among the stakeholders involved in amalgamation and affiliation in higher education in PNG are the most significant impediment to progress and underpin other challenges described below. The challenges experienced by DWU may be unique in its circumstance but nonetheless are worth sharing for the benefit of IHEs, which have similar circumstantial or cultural contexts. There are issues of resource allocation, lack of change champions, misguided expectations, differences in culture and perspectives, frequent change in personnel in leadership roles, and multiple legal instruments creating confusion in areas of responsibility. The MOA on affiliation explicitly states that each party in the agreement will share the cost of managing the partnership but there is no budget appropriation for affiliation by an affiliating IHE and expenses are managed in an *ad hoc* manner. Affiliation involves change and managing change requires change drivers or champions. It is often difficult to identify a willing candidate for the role of change driver or champion.

The initial excitement about affiliation with DWU usually dissipates into disappointment and demotivation when the much needed resources such as teaching and learning resources e.g. computers and accessories, Internet equipment and support services, and text-books are not readily delivered by the DWU. A stakeholder's perspective and culture adds to the challenges by

nature: the affiliated institution is owned by a Church agency and operated by more than a State body under multiple legal instruments, while the DWU is expected to influence the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of governance and curriculum. All three parties in the affiliation MOA come with their own perspectives and expectations, and they generate political and cultural pressures from all directions. In some instances, a stakeholder may reassign the personnel placed in a leadership role after two years of mentoring and capacity building efforts, jeopardizing the whole process and DWU has to restart the efforts. The consequence is very plain to see, which is that the expected outcomes of affiliation are not achievable under such circumstances.

Milestones

In spite of all of the challenges listed above, DWU has reached a number of milestones over the last six years. In 2007, the second and final MOA for Kaindi St Benedict's was signed paving the way for integration and consolidation to get underway. In 2006 and 2011, Don Bosco Technological Institute (DBTI) renewed their affiliation agreements and after many years of negotiation, the Government approved that DBTI students would be eligible for scholarships under the Tertiary Education Scholarship Assistance Scheme commencing in 2009. In 2008 and 2011, the Good Shepherd Seminary and Lutheran School of Nursing renewed their affiliation agreements, respectively. In the same period, a number of affiliated IHEs made significant advancement in the review and writing of revised curricula assisted by regular site visits by DWU representatives to offer workshops according to needs. The latest (2011) entrant to the DWU group of affiliates is the Holy Trinity Teacher's College in Mt Hagen, Western Highlands Province.

Conclusion

Considerations for the advancement and development of the higher education sector in Papua New Guinea will be complete and the objectives of the Government will be achieved when the non-university IHEs are brought into full view and genuine commitment and appropriate actions by all stakeholders are demonstrated. Critical issues include, legislation, quality assurance, governance, leadership and management, culture and resources. All stakeholders need to understand their roles and responsibilities, set differences aside and make a genuine commitment and effort to correctly implement amalgamation and affiliation partnerships for the benefit of the students and the common good of the people of PNG.

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