

The management of personnel records for accountability, good governance and protection of human rights: The case of National University of Science and Technology (NUST) Human Resource (HR) department,

Introduction

- NUST was established in 1991 and has 6 Administrative departments (Non-academic), 32 Departments in 7 Faculties (Academic).
- Currently the staff establishment stands at 1600 for both Academic and Non-academic departments
- The Human Resource (HR) department is responsible for managing personnel records. This department falls under the University Registrar's office.

Background and LR

- Universities manage personnel records (aka HR records, staff records, employee records, workforce records) for administrative purposes.
- Employee records can be defined as staff records that contain general, confidential and sensitive personal data. This information may include initial application forms, copies of academic and professional certificates, disciplinary documents leave forms, communication, payment vouchers etc
- While the core business of the universities is learning, teaching, research and community development (Chinyemba and Ngulube, 2005) this would imply that universities employ people in both academic and non-academic departments.

Employee records

- Employee records serve as evidence that an employee really exists and the grade for salary (Dzandu, 2009)
- Personnel records should be properly managed to foster the democratic values of transparency, trust, good governance and accountability
- Improper management of personnel records may lead to loss of evidence and litigation.
- Accurate, complete, reliable right information available in personnel records assist university administrators for academic planning, personnel management particularly staff training and development, payment of pensions and gratuities, staff retirement, payment of wages and salaries, conflict resolution (Popoola, 2009).

Personnel records for accountability

- Accountability refers to holding organizational officials responsible for their actions in public management. Accountability is a good governance element
- “the ability to determine who in government is responsible for a decision or action and the ability to ensure that officials are answerable for their actions” (Lipset 1995:9 cited in The Ghana Center for Democratic Development, 2011).

Personnel records and accountability

- Accountability is also defined as holding responsible elected or appointed officials and organizations charged with a public mandate to account for specific actions, activities or decisions to the public from which they derive their authority.
- it is also concerned with the establishment and enforcement of rules for corporate governance, avoidance of conflict of interest, and prudent as well as competent discharge of public trust (The Ghana Center for Democratic Development, 2011).

Personnel records and good governance

- The issue of good governance is the key to the functioning of Universities.
- Good governance may refer to the provision of good public services with transparent and decision-making and implementation of policy without corruption or maladministration (Cain and Thurston, 1997).
- The key elements of good governance include legality and the rule of law; absence of corruption; absence of discrimination; procedural fairness in the decision-making process; substantive fairness in the decision making process; efficiency; civil service independence; the right to judicial review before an independent and impartial tribunal; and access to information (Cooper, 2007)

Personnel records and human rights

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is built on the fundamental principle that human rights are based on the “inherent dignity of all members of the human family” and are the “foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world” (Cooper, 2007).
- Individual have the right to work; the right to liberty; the right to equality before the law; the right to presumption of innocence until proven guilty; the right to privacy and protection of that privacy by law; the right to legal recourse when rights are violated; freedom of opinion and expression; freedom of assembly and association.
- The employee records contain personal data that in some cases is sensitive and confidential.

Statement of the Problem

- In spite of the important role of records and archives in society, studies done in Africa have inadequately addressed issues related to how records and archives facilitate transparency, accountability and protection of human rights in society (Kemoni, Ngulube and Stilwell, 2007).
- Some personnel records need to be maintained for long periods of time, often after an employee has left the organization, in order to protect rights and interests of the employee and the organization.
- Personnel records that contain information about individuals are also likely to be highly sensitive and confidential and must therefore be adequately protected from unauthorized access (State of New South Wales, 2003).

Methodology

- The study used the case study method to establish how the management of personnel records at NUST fosters accountability, good governance and respect of individual employee rights.
- Questionnaires, interviews and observations were the main instruments for data gathering.
- The study population consisted of all the 20 HR officers
- Purposive sampling was used to select the three Senior Assistant Registrars who are the heads of academic, non-academic and staff and training development divisions of the HR department.

Findings

- NUST HR department has created 3196 staff files (live and dead). However the majority of the files are dead files.
- NUST HR keep authentic and trustworthy records for administrative purposes. Records generated by the University are signed by authorised signatories/supervisors e.g. Permanent Secretary, VC, Pro-VC, Registrar, Chairpersons, Deans. The HR checks records for correctness and then becomes custodian of the records. Internal and external auditors check records for compliance and conformity purposes
- Access to individual files is confined to individuals whose job descriptions entitle them to use these in pursuit of institutional goals.

Findings (contd)

- Personnel records are kept to comply with legal requirements (Labour Act, NSSA Act, Tax Act, Pensions and Providence Act, AIPPA) Policy requirements (NUST Policy) and HR professional practice (confidentiality and preservation of records for reference).

Personnel records and human rights Findings (contd)

- On appointment employees go through an induction programme and are told of their rights and obligations. Employees are made aware of their rights and obligations through induction, training, workshops.
- Circulars, emails, memos are sent out by the Registrar, or Information and Public relations on relevant updates to employees.

Findings (contd)

- The university keep accurate employee records to avoid prejudicing employees on their benefits and entitlements.
- The university may lose court cases if it fails to avail required evidence in the courts.

Findings (contd)

- Updated records enable employees to enjoy their rights and benefits e.g. with reference to promotion, pension benefits and salary reviews and training and development.

Findings (contd)

- NUST HR Department keeps its staff files in a storeroom. All the dead files are kept in boxes which are not acid free.
- HR Records are at risk of deterioration, misplacement thereby endangering the rights of its employees.

Recommendations (contd)

- NUST should established a post of University Archivist to assist in the management of university-wide records including HR records
- NUST should improve on housing records(acid free boxes, shelving, establish a university records centre)

Conclusion

- The records need to be protected from various threats that can destroy the evidence in records
- The university must built a Records Centre for all its records.

The End

Thank you