

## A process evaluation of K to 12 program

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Although the country has already recognized the need to adopt the K to 12 program since 1949, it was only in 2013 when the government seriously pursued a policy to lengthen basic education. The passing of the Enhanced Basic Education Act has necessitated fundamental administrative reforms in the government to address issues related to absorptive capacities and internal administrative procedures of educational institutions.

To mitigate the adverse impact of the K to 12 program on the country's education system and ensure smooth transition to it, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) established the K to 12 Transition Program. Through the said program, it aims to assist higher education institutions (HEIs) in their updating of the curriculum and the provision of development packages to faculty and staff.

This *Policy Note* assesses the K to 12 Transition Program and the functions of CHED's Program Management Unit (PMU) tasked to operationalize it. It also includes relevant recommendations to improve the country's transition to K to 12 program.

### **Implementation challenges**

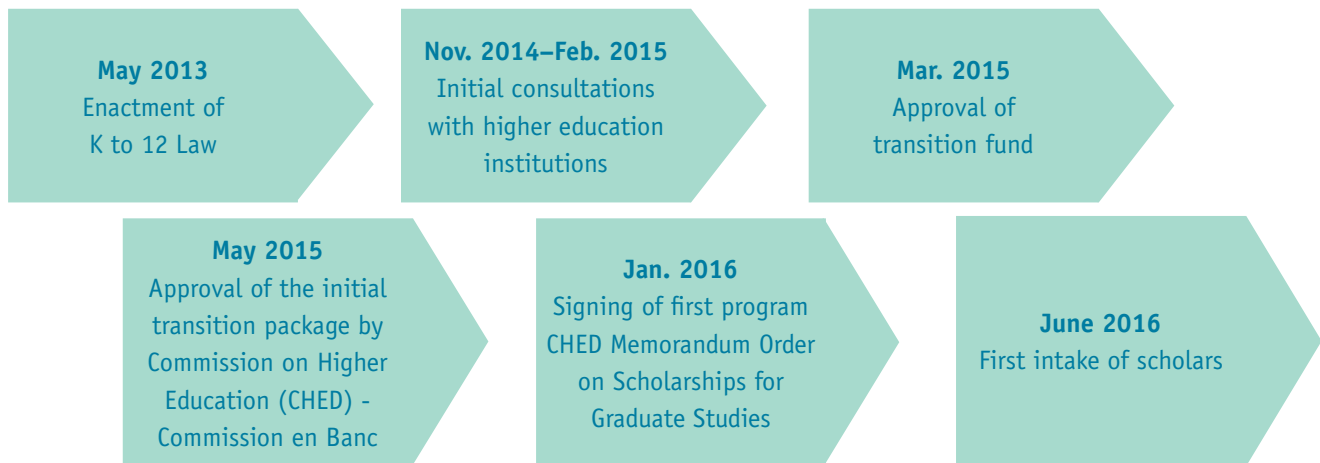
Through a series of interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) among the stakeholders of the K to 12 program and reviews of documents and communication among stakeholders, the study identified several administrative concerns that hindered the country's smooth transition to K to 12. These concerns include the following issues.

#### ***Inadequate preparation for K to 12***

The preparations of CHED for the full implementation of the K to 12 program only began in early 2015, or two years after the enactment of the law (Figure 1). This relatively late involvement in the program could be because the K to 12 program was initially seen by CHED as a program that should be led by the Department of Education. It could have also been a reason for the lack of time for CHED to prepare for the transition process itself, considering that scholarships for affected personnel only began that same year.

The PMU of CHED also did not anticipate the high volume of work that came with the rollout of the program. This was particularly true in terms of the scholarship

**Figure 1. Timeline of preparations of Commission on Higher Education for the K to 12 transition**



Source: Commission on Higher Education (2015)

applications that had to be processed by a limited number of staff, who themselves were also adjusting to the operational demands of the program. This delay was critical considering the magnitude of the task that involved several programs, the core of which was the awarding of scholarships to affected faculty and staff.

#### ***Lack of absorptive capacities of CHED and its PMU***

Due to massive applications for scholarships received by the program, the absorptive capacities of CHED were severely challenged. Its PMU, which was supposed to spearhead the program implementation, had difficulties in coping with the work demands. Usual concerns revolved around the inexperience in government accounting and procurement rules and procedures of the PMU staff and their unfamiliarity with the demands of a bureaucracy marked by rigid processes and procedures.

The lack of familiarity with government rules and procedures was supposed to be addressed through the deployment of experienced technical personnel to the PMU. However, such a move was not sustained. Despite additional workload, no permanent CHED staff was also added to offices highly involved in the program.

CHED also organized the PMU according to specific grant administration tasks, including responsibilities of processing of applications for local and international

scholarships. However, while personnel were distributed uniformly across tasks, the volume of work was uneven. This was particularly true in terms of local scholarships, which were handled by the same number of personnel despite the massive volume of work. In fact, the current ratio of project technical staff (PTS) to local scholarship applications is 1 to 1,384. This is way higher than the ratio of PTS to college readiness grants, which is 1 to 4.

#### ***Underdeveloped internal systems***

The internal systems and processes of CHED failed to handle the volume of beneficiaries efficiently and effectively. During its first year, the PMU did not have an automated system of receiving and processing applications, which has strained its human resource and led to inefficiencies, such as misplacement of documents submitted. This issue was exacerbated by the inadequate record-keeping system, which could have allowed for real-time updates on the status of submissions.

Another issue was the need for an integrated communication system within the PMU. This can be seen in the presence of many communication channels, including email, text, landline, and social media, through which stakeholders reach the PMU for queries or requests for assistance. This resulted in conflicting responses from PMU personnel and unanswered stakeholder concerns.

### ***Slow internal administrative processes***

Largely due to the volume of work and uneven distribution of staff, the slow processing of allowances of the scholars has had some negative outcomes, including the dropping out of scholars from the program. At the macro level, this has also resulted in lower uptakes, as the enormous delay of release of the allowances for the first two batches of scholars has become the mark and image of CHED.

### ***Inadequate monitoring mechanisms***

While the PMU has its own monitoring and evaluation team, it came late in the program implementation in 2017. Prior the establishment of said team, CHED only relied on the monitoring report containing enrollment status and academic performance of CHED scholars that their delivering HEI periodically submitted.

With no comprehensive monitoring system and the system failures in the online portal, CHED overlooked violations of the program eligibility and conditions. These include the noncompliance of some grantees with the conditions for deloading. The PMU also failed to monitor grantees who remained scholars despite having full teaching loads and administrative positions.

### ***Unclear interoffice administrative procedures***

Unclear requirements for the processing and disbursements of program benefits resulted in back-and-forth transactions between the PMU and CHED's accounting and finance office. This resulted in delays in the release of the benefits.

### ***Poor coordination and absence of feedback mechanisms***

Almost all different stakeholders reported having difficulty in communicating with the PMU. They likewise raised the lack of timely feedback on the status of fund release, scholarships disbursement, or project status.

### ***Other considerations***

Overall, the K to 12 Transition Program has to be appreciated as an innovative program, spurred by the

need for reform. Among others, it required adjustments to and in the internal bureaucracies of CHED long steeped in bureaucratic processes and routine, referred to sometimes as bureaupathology.<sup>1</sup> The establishment of the PMU itself had to go through its own transition measures as it adjusted to the regular CHED bureaucracy, reminiscent of Lindblom's classic "muddling through".<sup>2</sup>

The transitional nature of the program must be appreciated as a bureaucracy's learning lesson as it was being implemented. Because of the delays experienced by the program, it adopted administrative reforms, including decentralization, mostly through the deconcentration of processes to the regional offices of CHED. This measure improved the delivery of the program, mostly in terms of the processing and release of living allowances to the scholars.

Despite the administrative challenges raised above, the program has still been able to extend assistance to basic education and opportunity for professional growth through the creation of graduate programs unavailable before and increasing HEI collaborations for the delivery of programs and in research endeavors. It has likewise paved the way for the formation of partnerships among academe, industry, and other sectors, and the conceptualization of research projects with practical relevance and positive potential societal impacts. Unfortunately, negative perceptions of the program overshadowed said improvements and positive aspects.

### ***Recommendations***

In light of the foregoing, CHED could consider adopting the following specific recommendations.

<sup>1</sup> The term "bureaupathology" has been used in public administration to refer to dysfunctional and irrational aspects of bureaucracy that may arise from excessive rigidities, exaggerated bureaucratic controls, and lack of flexibilities to adapt to radical changes (in this case K to 12). Elements of bureaupathology include routinization, overreliance on regulations, and resistance to organizational change.

<sup>2</sup> Bureaucracies often make decisions based on a much more limited range of information and analysis, hence "muddling through" (Lindblom 1959, p. 79).

### *Institutionalize review of policies*

CHED should consider the feedback from the stakeholders and institutionalize a continuing review of policies. This move may lead to the streamlining of operational procedures and the rationalization and simplification of required documents with the goal of reducing the burden of compliance for the grantees.

### *Strengthen deconcentration*

It should also sustain and strengthen deconcentration processes initiated in 2017. As stated earlier, this measure has helped improve the processing and release of living allowances to the scholars, among others.

### *Improve capacities of PMU*

It should continuously build the capacities of its PMU staff, including on basic government accountability mechanisms and procedures and communication. With the whole goal of sustaining the gains and institutionalizing the program within CHED, it should also begin the process of requesting regular plantilla positions from the Department of Budget and Management.

CHED should likewise improve measures to strengthen communication and exchange between them and their stakeholders. This includes the upgrading of communication infrastructure of CHED and PMU to facilitate the access to information of all stakeholders. The use of appropriate and globally competitive systems is imperative.

### *Prepare a sustainability and follow-through plan*

Together with the stakeholders, CHED should prepare a sustainability and follow-through plan that would build

upon the gains of K to 12 initiatives and include this in the organizational design for the implementation of K to 12 as it is to be integrated into the regular CHED bureaucracy. This includes the development of a continuous tracking, monitoring, and communication system with mechanisms that would enable grantees to give back within the broad context of improving the system and making Philippine higher education more globally competitive, which after all has been one guiding philosophy of K to 12 as provided for in the Enhanced Basic Education Act.

### *Focus on the broader goal*

The process evaluation surfaced many administrative challenges in the implementation of the K to 12 program from the perspective of CHED. Unfortunately, these challenges—framed mostly within the context of absorptive capacities, including the delivery of living allowances to scholars, a number of whom belonged to the sector of personnel displaced as a result of the transition—seem to have overshadowed the broader goal of the K to 12 Transition Program. Given the immediate lessons from the administration of the program, it may be timely to take a look at the broader goal of improving our competitiveness in higher education among the community of nations. 📄

### **References**

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