

Nust appoints vice chancellor amid red flags

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by **Sakeus likela**



Erold Naomab

THE council of the Namibia University of Science and Technology (Nust) has denied allegations that it disregarded its own rules when it appointed Erold Naomab, who came second in the interview processes as vice chancellor.

Naomab was favoured by the council despite scoring lower than his opponent – University of Namibia (Unam) pro-vice-chancellor for academic affairs Frednard Gideon, who was recommended for the position by the committee that conducted the interview processes.

A final report by the joint search committee of council and senate seen by The Namibian shows that both candidates failed to meet the required 70% that was set for choosing the top candidate, with Gideon scoring 68% and Naomab 64% from the interview processes, respectively.

The committee raised red flags in appointing Naomab, saying “his results on all four of the five capabilities meet the requirements at the minimum level”.

“His results on integrity tests cause concern as it may indicate a willingness to circumvent established organisational policies and practices,” the committee said.

Despite these concerns, Nust council chairperson Frolette Nakusera said there was “nothing sinister” in their decision to appoint Naomab through a vote.

Some members of the council were opposed to the voting process.

Nakusera, at a media event on Friday, said the scores from the interview processes, which shows Gideon leading Naomab, were not the only assessment criteria considered for the appointment.

She said the council also considered background and reference checks to appoint Naomab. The decision to vote on which candidate to appoint was taken after council members disagreed on who was best fit for the position, Nakusera said.

“There was a difference in opinion among council members and in terms of governance, when there is a difference of opinion, we call for a vote and nine out of 14 members voted for Naomab. There is nothing sinister in appointing Naomab. We looked for the best candidate, in our view as the council, to lead Nust,” she said.

She added that: “Unfortunately, this is not your typical administrative position. So, we looked at the issues facing Nust and which of the two candidates was fulfilling the criteria and the type of person that we are looking for? And that's a thorough process that we followed. We also look at what we want as a council in the person against what was emanating from all these processes.”

She also denied allegations that the council was pushed by higher education minister Itah Kandjii-Murangi to appoint Naomab.

She said if the minister was involved in the process, it could bring “our credibility into question”.

“We are independent people who have got a fiduciary duty towards Nust and we want to ensure that governance is maintained at Nust,” she said.

Naomab's appointment and the allegations that he was favoured ahead of Gideon, who was recommended, drew public criticism with some institutions calling for the process to be nullified.

The Namibian Society of Engineers in a statement on Friday said the decision to appoint Naomab posed “a grave danger to the engineering profession in Namibia”.

The society further expressed concern over the increasing trend of political interference in the operation of Nust.

Swapo Party Youth League's Hofni Ipinge on Friday said the alleged favouritism could taint the credibility of the institution and the education sector in Namibia.

Kandjii-Murangi had also raised concern over the alleged favouritism on Friday, saying the decision to vote and disregard the outcome of the interview and assessment processes was “totally out of line and at odd with the practices of good governance”.

She, however, abandoned her concerns on Saturday saying the council provided her with an adequate explanation on why it chose Naomab.

“This is a council appointment, I don't know why I am being bothered with this. If I comment, people would say I interfered. Just leave me alone,” Kandjii-Murangi said.

There are allegations that Naomab's appointment was politically influenced.

The Namibian was told that the higher education minister was involved in a plot to appoint Naomab “by any means necessary”.

The minister, however, denied that she had influence in Naomab's appointment.

She said if it was the case, she would not have expressed concerns over allegations that the Nust council disregarded the outcome of various assessments to favour its preferred candidate.

Naomab is the current assistant pro-vice-chancellor for academic affairs in charge of Unam's southern campus. He is appointed on a five-year contract effective from January 2021.

Gideon yesterday refused to comment on the outcome of the Nust recruitment process, saying he was not yet briefed.