

**Good Governance Practices in Public Administration**

**Documentation of  
ELECTRONIC PAYMENT AND  
APPLICATION SYSTEM OF  
SCHOLARSHIPS  
(EPASS)**

**February 2014**

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# **Electronic Payment and Application System of Scholarships (ePASS)**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

Nelson Mandela

According to UNESCO, 'education is a powerful tool by which economically and socially marginalized adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty and participate fully as citizens'<sup>1</sup>. In pursuance of this objective, India has been offering scholarships to its Post-Matriculation/Post-Secondary students, starting in 1948 with those belonging to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, and eventually extending the coverage to backward classes, disabled, minorities and the economically backward classes over the years.

Today, through the three Ministries of Government of India, namely, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (covering scheduled castes, backward classes, disabled and economically backward classes), the Ministry of Tribal Welfare (covering scheduled Tribes) and the Ministry of Minority Welfare (covering Minorities), financial assistance is provided to the State Governments and Union Territory Administrations to implement the Pre-Matric and Post-Matric Scholarships as a set of Centrally Sponsored Schemes.

Under the Post-Matric Scholarship scheme, the State Governments receive financial assistance from Government of India for the total expenditure under the scheme, over and above their respective Committed Liability<sup>2</sup>.

### **a. Income ceilings and assistance under Post-Matric scholarship scheme**

Post-matric scholarship typically comprises of two components - Reimbursement of Tuition Fee (RTF) that is paid to the College and Maintenance Fees/mess charges (MTF<sup>3</sup>)

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCO. (2013). *Right to Education*. Retrieved May 25, 2013, from UNESCO:  
<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/right-to-education/>

<sup>2</sup> The level of Committed Liability of respective State Governments/Union Territory Administrations for a year is equivalent to the level of actual expenditure incurred by them under the Scheme during the terminal year of the last Five Year Plan Period and is required to be borne by them for which they are required to make required provision in their own budget. In 2010-11, of the total Rs 793 crores expenditure of the Social Welfare department for SC students, 72% i.e Rs 576 crores has been contributed by the Central government. About similar percentage of contribution has been made for the ST students to Tribal Welfare Department by the GoI totalling to Rs 200.36 crores. No substantial amount has been disbursed to the BC Welfare department. On the whole, against the total expenditure of Rs 2953.14 crores made by the State government in 2010-11, Rs 900 approximately has been contributed by the Centre, i.e about 31%.

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paid to the students belonging to the above identified categories. The income ceilings for eligibility to scholarships and rates of MTF payable to students are fixed from time to time by the Government of India and communicated to the State governments. As per the Order issued by the Government of Andhra Pradesh, the eligibility criteria for scholarships are as follows<sup>4</sup>:

S.No	Category of student	Eligibility Criteria
1.	Scheduled Castes	Family income less than or equal to two lakhs and 75% attendance in class at the end of every quarter
2.	Scheduled Tribes	Family income less than or equal to one lakh and 75% attendance in class at the end of every quarter
3.	Backward Classes	
4.	Disabled	
5.	Minorities	
6.	Economically Backward Classes <sup>5</sup>	

Details of scholarship groups and MTF are given in annexure 1.

### **b. Post-matric scholarship scheme in Andhra Pradesh: Introduction of ePASS**

In Andhra Pradesh (AP), the Post-Matric Scholarship scheme covers eligible students in all recognized post-matric educational institutions within the State and students of AP studying in reputed institutions across the country. An online disbursement system was started in 2008 through the initiative of the Social Welfare Department of the State and it is called the Electronic Payment and Application System of Scholarships or ePASS in short. The post-matric scholarship in the State is fully administered through this online system wherein the tuition fee reimbursement is made directly to colleges and the maintenance fee is made directly to the students' bank accounts, after due verifications.

According to Departmental sources, the ePASS integrates activities of multiple welfare departments, treasury, college databases, Secondary School Certificate (SSC) database and banks to facilitate disbursement of scholarships to around 28 lakh post-matric students across 13,600 colleges. It aims to put students at the centre of operations and expedite the scholarship process to ensure timely and correct payments. It also provides

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<sup>3</sup> Maintenance charges are to be sanctioned every month and the tuition fees, twice in a year i.e in September and March of the Academic Year.

<sup>4</sup> In Andhra Pradesh, the amended guidelines on enhancing income ceilings and maintenance charges communicated by GoI were implemented vide GO Ms. No. 60, Social Welfare (Edn2) Department, dt: 27-09-2011

<sup>5</sup> The decision to extend scholarship to EBC students was taken in 2009 thus bringing close to 80% to students of Andhra Pradesh under the purview of the scheme.

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an accountability mechanism with limited scope for discretion thereby minimizing leakages. ePASS also enables collection of reliable, timely and comparable information from the field which feeds into the project MIS and help make informed policy decisions.

Figure 1: ePASS website

The screenshot shows the ePASS website homepage. At the top, there is a banner with the text "ePASS website (<http://epasswebsite.cgg.gov.in/>)". Below the banner, the main content area displays the "ePASS Releases Abstract Report" for the financial years 2011-12 and 2012-13. The report includes a table with data for SC Welfare, ST Welfare, BC Welfare, Disabled Welfare, EBC, and Totals. To the right of the report, there is a photograph of a group of people at an award ceremony, with the caption "ePASS is the Winner of CSI-Nihilent e-Governance Award." Below the report, there are several service icons: "Apply Online", "Scholarship Status", "Know your Application Number", "Find your Field Officer", "Complaints", and "Duplicate eZ Pay ATM Card". On the left side, there is a sidebar with links for "Home", "\*\*\* News \*\*\*", "Scholarships Offered", "Who are Eligible", "Courses Eligible", "Colleges Eligible", "Fee Structure", "Time Line", "Reasons for Rejection", "FAQ's/Instructions", and "GO's and Memo's". On the right side, there is a vertical sidebar with links for "Official Login", "Reports", "College Reports", "Verification Officer Details", "Report of Verification Officers", "Valid College A/Cs", "Valid Student A/Cs", "Invalid College A/Cs", "Invalid Student A/Cs", "Print Application/Ack", "Bank Remittance Details (Students/ Colleges/Hostels)", and "Scholarship Transid Details(Token)".

Department	Total Students (In Lakhs)	Total RIF Released (Rupees in Lakhs)	Total MTF Released (Rupees in Lakhs)	Total Released (Rupees in Lakhs)
SC Welfare	5.81	57462.43	22020.36	79482.79
ST Welfare	1.95	16722.51	7662.42	24384.93
BC Welfare	14.44	141441.30	48306.06	189747.36
Disabled Welfare	0.06	233.41	56.99	290.40
EBC	3.04	68949.64	0.00	68949.64
<b>Totals</b>	<b>25.3</b>	<b>284809.28</b>	<b>78045.83</b>	<b>362855.12</b>

### c. Documentation Methodology

The following sections comprise a documentation of ePASS. The format for this documentation has been prescribed by the Department of Administrative reforms and Public Grievances, Government of India. Accordingly the documentation of ePASS is presented in seven sections, namely, 1. Situation before the intervention, 2. key challenges faced by innovators, 3. strategy adopted, 4. results, 5. sustainability, 6. key lessons learnt and, 7. replicability.

This documentation has been done after a detailed primary and secondary research. Primary research involved consultation with key stakeholders of ePASS such as Students, Welfare Officers and the ePASS Service Providers – the Project team at Centre for Good Governance. Primary research also involved obtaining access to the ePASS website using login credentials and testing different services on-line. As part of the secondary research, previous documentation on ePASS was referred to. The list of these references is given in the bibliography.

# Electronic Payment and Application System of Scholarships (ePASS)

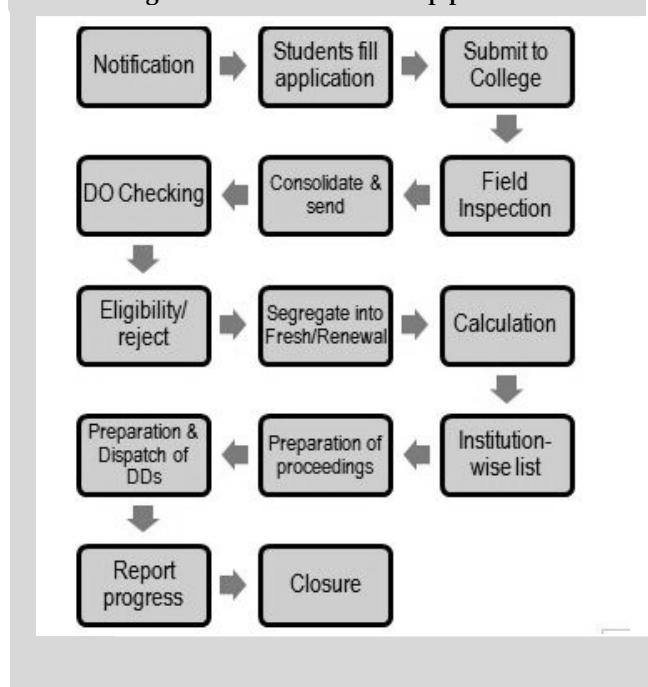
## 2. SITUATION BEFORE THE INTERVENTION

Recognising the importance of scholarship as a welfare measure for students from identified categories, Government of Andhra Pradesh (GoAP) issued a comprehensive order in 2002<sup>6</sup>, even before the introduction of online disbursal system, which outlined the detailed procedure to ensure timely scholarships to genuine students. It evolved procedures to plug the loop holes in the then existing process and methods to streamline the sanction, drawal and disbursement of Scholarships. The procedure followed for scholarship disbursement prior to the introduction of ePASS is briefly discussed below:

### a. Manual process for scholarship disbursement

Notification is given at the start of academic year subsequent to which Colleges collect the application forms from district/field offices for distribution among students. Students fill out applications and submit them to the college along with required documents. College sends all applications along with attendance statements to the district office. These applications are then reviewed by the field officer who conducts field inspections to authenticate the details provided in the applications. The field inspector consolidates his findings and sends it to the district officer. The District Welfare Officer (DWO) then scrutinizes the applications as per eligibility criteria and segregates them into fresh applications and applications for renewal. Applications for renewal are given preference over fresh ones in case of budget constraints. Calculation of fees and other emoluments is done for each case and an institution-wise list is sent to the treasury with the proceedings. Demand Drafts/cheques in the name of students and colleges are prepared and dispatched. Colleges disburse cheques to students,

Figure 2: Manual scholarship process



<sup>6</sup> G.O.Ms.No.90 (Social Welfare (Edn.2) Department) dt: 30-07-2002

## **Electronic Payment and Application System of Scholarships (ePASS)**

prepare utilisation certificates (UCs) for each cheque and submit them to the DWO. The DWO revalidates UCs, checks dual claims and recovers amounts where necessary.

### **b. Key Issues in manual process**

The manual process of scholarship application and disbursement were riddled with many problems. Some of them are discussed below:

- The manual application and disbursement cycle was cumbersome and time consuming. It required all involved parties to make multiple physical visits to different offices and encounter delays at every stage.
- Due to huge staff requirements for manual processing, scholarship applications were kept pending for years and arrears of scholarship payments were getting accumulated for years. Needy students joining institutions in the hope of availing scholarship often dropped out of their courses or completed their courses with huge financial burden.
- Absence of mechanisms for systematic monitoring of transactions meant that there existed little scope for transparency or accountability in transactions. For instance, colleges who received cheques on behalf of students, in some reported cases, often colluded with department officials to misappropriate the maintenance fees payable to students. Existence of fictitious colleges, ghost students and duplicate claimants meant embezzlement of large scholarship amounts, leading to genuine students losing out on scholarship support.

### **c. Efforts towards a new system**

Information Technology & Communications (IT&C) Department, GoAP initiated a programme called 'Social Benefit Management System' (SBMS) covering all schemes of all welfare departments. Sanction and disbursement of post-matric scholarships was one of the modules of this system which was implemented on a pilot basis in Nalgonda District by Tribal Welfare Department and was implemented successfully during 2007-08.

Drawing from the experience of the pilot project, it was proposed to extend the package to other welfare departments and to scale it up across the State. In the workshop held in April 2008 in the State Administrative Training Institute, it was recommended to implement the package in Social Welfare, Tribal Welfare, BC Welfare and Disabled

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Welfare Departments from 2008-09 onwards for sanctioning fresh and renewed Post Matric Scholarships in the entire State.

The magnitude of disbursement and the accumulation of arrears of Rs. 2183 crores of 2009-10, coupled with the demand of 2010-11 only highlighted the urgent need to evolve a student centred solution which will build the much needed confidence among the stakeholders and confirm the seriousness of the Government's commitment to welfare.

In 2008, ePASS, the online scholarship system was launched through a Government Order (G.O.Ms.No.143 Social Welfare (Edn.2) Department dt:15-07-2008) giving detailed instructions covering the entire gamut of post-matric scholarship process in the State and introducing the online application procedure for scholarship.

### **3. KEY CHALLENGES FACED BY THE INNOVATORS**

- a. **Large student database and duplicate entries:** Centralised and electronic disbursement of scholarships, previously handled by multiple departments, requires the compilation of large and fragmented student data bases and weeding out duplicate entries. While the student database was already created by SBMS which preceded ePASS, large number of erroneous/duplicate/fake entries had to be eliminated. Records of close to 15 lakh students (in the initial stage; close to 28 lakhs today) spread across 10944 colleges (close to 13600 today) and handled by four departments (one more was added later) had to be examined for weeding out ineligible entries.

It was therefore decided to use a unique ID as entry for registrations which will act as the primary key to identify each student record. The Senior School Certificate (SSC) ID of the students is currently being used as the unique ID. Over the years, the ID has helped weed out duplicate/ double claims and has brought substantial financial savings for the Departments. Efforts are being made to make the database Aadhar-compliant by linking the SSC ID with Aadhar numbers of students.

- b. **Population of Course Fee structure:** As ePASS aimed to create a transparent application and payment system, providing the course fee structure of all participating colleges was a key requirement. More than one lakh entries had to be made across colleges and their courses. This was achieved by giving facility to

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Universities/Boards for entering course fee details which were later validated by the Project Monitoring Unit (PMU).

- c. Informing the changed application procedures to student community:** Familiarising the students with the new system was a major challenge for the success of the initiative. In order to address this issue, the Joint Director (Social Welfare)/Deputy Director (Social Welfare)/Project Director, Women Development & Child Welfare/ District Tribal Welfare Officer/District Backward Classes Welfare Officer/ Assistant Director, Welfare of Disabled and Senior Citizens were made responsible for giving wide publicity about the procedure for sanction of Post-Matric Scholarships online every year at least one month before the beginning of the Academic Year. The communication campaign focuses on facilitating the students to apply online for the Fresh/ Renewals scholarships and opening of savings bank account by the students in any branch belonging to any of the five nodal banks.
- d. Overcoming the resistance from staff:** The introduction of the new system generated resistance from several stakeholders, primarily officials, due to the difficulties involved in shifting to a new and unfamiliar system and the vested interests associated with the opaque manual system. Efforts were made to minimize the resistance by frequent capacity building workshops and personal interactions. Political will and bureaucratic commitment acted as key enablers for ushering in smooth change.

The compulsion of going through the automated workflows during implementation without scope for any manual overrides also became a major factor for psychological acceptance of the project. During each monthly video conference, the enhancements and version changes are explained and doubts cleared. Workshops are held once in 2 months to discuss required changes. Officials can send queries or doubts through email or SMS to the help desk at PMU which replies to them and escalates unresolved issues to higher levels.

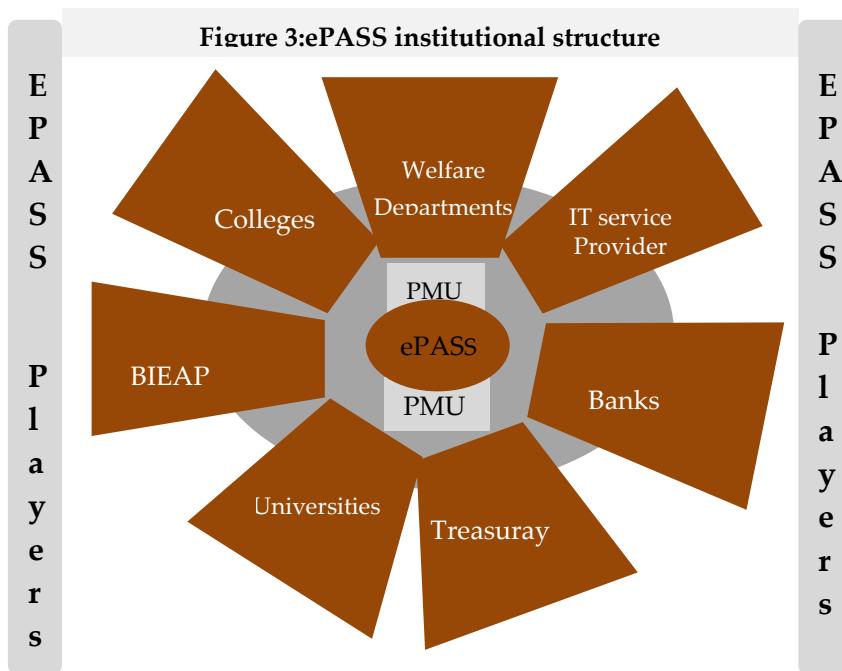
### **4. STRATEGY ADOPTED**

The strategy adopted for the implementation of ePASS is examined below through discussion of following dimensions: a) ePASS institutional structure b) ePASS modules and process flow and c) Monitoring, review and evaluation.

## Electronic Payment and Application System of Scholarships (ePASS)

### a. ePASS Institutional Structure

ePASS works through the seamless integration of the activities of diverse entities: the students, colleges, departments, IT service provider, banks and treasury and five welfare departments. Following is a brief description of the key players in the ePASS institutional structure:



- i. **Welfare Departments:** Five welfare departments of the Government of Andhra Pradesh namely, Social Welfare, BC Welfare (includes Economically Backward Classes), Tribal Welfare, Disabled Welfare, and Minorities Welfare departments handle identification, verification of beneficiaries, authorisation of payments and administration of the project.
- **Nodal authority:** Social welfare department has been designated<sup>7</sup> as the nodal authority for issuing of Government Orders (G.Os) on the subject of Post-Matric Scholarships in respect of all welfare departments. This ensures that respective welfare departments do not issue different instructions on the same issues of Post Matric Scholarships leading to unnecessary duplication of Government efforts.
- **Verification officers:** Starting with around 400 field officers of welfare departments in 2008, the scholarship verification system now operates through close to 2361 verification officers who conduct online and physical verification of

<sup>7</sup> G.O.Ms.No. 3 (Social Welfare (EDN.2) Department) Dated:05-01-2010.

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scholarship applications. They are appointed by District Collectors and work on deputation from different departments.

- **Field officers:** Field officers belong to the participating welfare departments and work with support from verification officers in the verification process. Colleges assigned to such officers may change on an annual basis as decided by the concerned District Collector. They are responsible for final validation of all verification reports and their forwarding to the DWO.
  - **District Welfare Officer (DWO):** DWO is responsible for verification of all applications and issue of sanction orders which are then uploaded to the Treasury server.
- ii. **Project Monitoring Unit (PMU):** In 2009, Government issued orders to set up a State level PMU at *Samkshema Bhavan* control of the Social Welfare Department to ensure effective monitoring and smooth administration of ePASS. Three posts of the rank of Deputy Directors from welfare departments have been sanctioned exclusively to assist the PMU.
- The current composition of PMU is as follows: Project Officer, Integrated Tribal Development Agency (Plain Areas), Department of Tribal Welfare as Head, Project Manager (Technical), CGG, Deputy Director (Social Welfare), Deputy Director (Tribal Welfare), Deputy Director (Backward Classes Welfare), District Tribal Welfare Officer, Ranga Reddy District, Regional Officer, A.P.State Minorities Finance Corporation, Hyderabad and three Help Desk Engineers identified / deputed by CGG/Andhra Pradesh Technology Services Limited.
- iii. **Centre for Good Governance, Hyderabad (CGG):** CGG handles development and management of the ePASS website and related data management. A representative (Project Manager, ePASS) of CGG is also part of the State PMU for ensuring convergence.
- iv. **Treasury:** Director, Treasury & Accounts, GoAP manages the actual disbursement of benefits.
- v. **Banks:** Every student applying for Post-matric Scholarship needs to have an account opened in any one of the nodal banks identified for the purpose. Starting with five major public sector banks, the system now operates through 23 nationalised banks.
- vi. **Universities and colleges:** Universities are responsible for populating the data on fee structures of all courses and colleges on the ePASS website using logins

## **Electronic Payment and Application System of Scholarships (ePASS)**

allotted to them. Autonomous colleges are also provided similar logins for entering data. These are then validated by PMU.

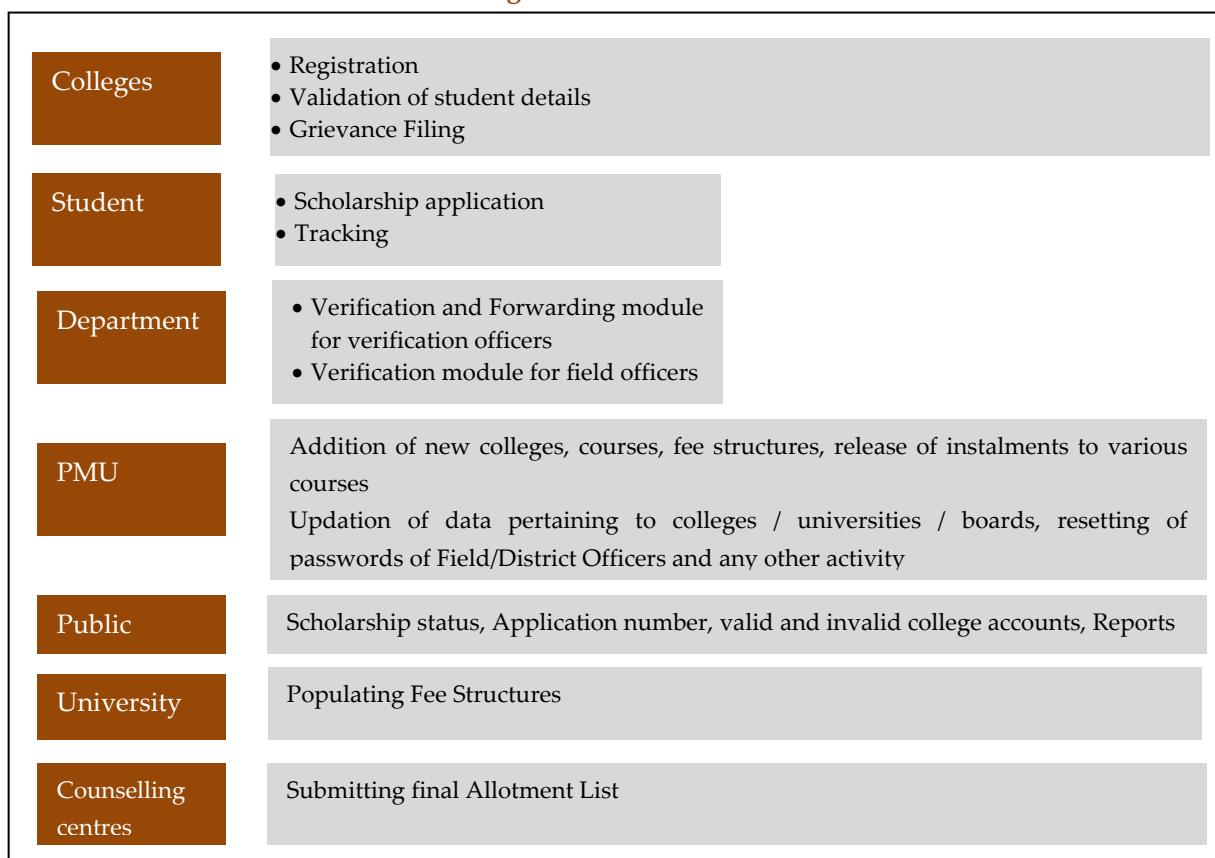
Currently, ePASS covers 72 Universities and 13,600 colleges in the State whose admission process is regulated/administered by the State Government. The scheme also applies to 188 premier institutions outside the State recognized by the Ministry of Human Development<sup>8</sup>.

- vii. **Board of Intermediate Education of Andhra Pradesh (BIEAP):** The BIEAP database is used by ePASS to validate that students applying for scholarships after gaining admission into colleges have actually given their intermediate exams.

### **b. ePASS Modules and Process Flow**

The following sections describe the detailed process flow adopted by the online scholarship administration system primarily through the modules shown in the diagram below. Towards the end of this section, the process flow is summarised through the work flow diagram.

**Figure 4: ePASS modules**



<sup>8</sup> The list of these institutions is available in Memo no 1611/SW.Edn.2/2011-9, dated 17-08-2011

## Electronic Payment and Application System of Scholarships (ePASS)

- i. **University module:** Universities and autonomous colleges across the State have been provided login facility to populate the fee structure of courses offered by them. These details are then validated by the PMU.

Colleges listed as 'premier institutes' as discussed in the previous section are registered on the website and fee structure populated as and when students apply for scholarships. No centralized database has been created w.r.f to these institutes.

- ii. **College module: The college module provides the following facilities:**

- **College Registration:** During the beginning of an academic year (July–August), colleges participating in the scholarship process are required to register their details through the college registration interface. Documentary evidence of recognition of courses and number of seats granted to colleges by the relevant authority and details of bank accounts are filled in.

Figure 5: College registration module

1.COLLEGE DETAILS	2.COURSE DETAILS	3.DETAILS OF GOVERNING BODY	4.BANK DETAILS
5.COLLEGE ATTACHED HOSTEL DETAILS			
<b>College Details</b>			
1.Name of the college & College Code:	PRAGATHI	DEGREE	COLLEGE (COED)
2.Boys/Girls/Co-Education	Co-Education	3.Year of Establishment:	1991
4.University Affiliated :	OSMANIA UNIVERSITY		
5.Nature of the college :	PRIVATE COLLEGE	6.Approval Authority :	apsche
Affiliation orders of University (7/8)			
7.a. Affiliation orders of University G.O No.&Dept.	2250/H/1523/91/ACAD	8.a. G.O Date :	0608199 (DDMMYYYY)
7.b. Affiliation orders of University G.O No. & Dept. :	APSCHE/SECY/UGCORSES/OU-2	8.b. G.O Date :	3006201 (DDMMYYYY)
7.c. Affiliation orders of University G.O No. & Dept. :	NO.MR-1129/1155/EXT.OFPORV.	8.c. G.O Date :	3008201 (DDMMYYYY)
7.d. Affiliation orders of University G.O No. & Dept. :	MR-835/1155/EXT.OFPORV.AFFL	8.d. G.O Date :	3108201 (DDMMYYYY)
9.Admissions of Student by: (University/Board/EAMCET /ICET etc )		<input type="checkbox"/> CET	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NON-CET
9.b)College Code given by University/Board:		1155	
10.Renewal Status :	Yes	10a.Relevant GO or Order :	
11.Minority Status :	NO	12.Minority Type :	Select
13.Road No./Street No./DoorNo./Locality :	ROAD NO.1 , MIG -12, KPHB COLONY, KUKATPALLY, HYDERABAD	14.District :	Ranga Reddy
17.LandMark :	NEAR GANDHI STATUE	15.Mandal /Municipality:	BALANAGAR
19.Telephone with STD code :	04023155276	16.Village/Ward :	KUKATPALLE (M)
Contact Details			

Registrations of colleges are confirmed by the Deputy Director or Joint Director, Social Welfare after physical verification and cross-checking of documents. Thereafter, the State level Project Monitoring Unit (PMU) assigns the College ID and password through the PMU interface. If colleges are not registered on the website, no student in the college can apply for scholarships.

- **Student verification:** Principals verify the documents furnished by each student with the entry made in the application form. Once the verification is completed and all entries are found correct, these are forwarded online to the verification officer. The Principal also prints them in bulk, signs each of them and sends the application booklet to the DWO for verification.

## Electronic Payment and Application System of Scholarships (ePASS)

Apart from College registration and student verification, other services in the College module include confirmation of course change requests, release acquittance confirmation, tracking of student application status, verification of ration card and Aadhar numbers and bulk printing of applications.

The College module provides close to 18 MIS reports on aspects such as Students status, Aadhar enrollment, pending applications, valid and invalid bank accounts, and disbursal status.

- iii. **Student module:** The student module of ePASS provides two major services, fresh applications and renewal of applications. Notifications for scholarship applications are issued at the beginning of an academic year with clear stipulation of the time period during which, eligible students admitted into post-matric courses in recognized educational institutions, can apply for scholarship<sup>9</sup>.

Students can access the application form by entering the SSC ID & year of passing. Students who are already enrolled in Intermediate colleges have to enter SSC/ equivalent ID, upon which the college/ course details will be populated from Board of Intermediate server. Following this, bank details<sup>10</sup> and address for communication are entered along with scanned copies of relevant certificates and passport photograph. The student submits one hard copy of the application along with computer generated acknowledgement and necessary certificates to the college.

<b>Fresh Application Form (2012-13)</b>																																																																																					
<b>Applicant Details Registration</b> <hr/> <p>Ration Card No. (Not mandatory): WAP <input type="text" value="1581068 A0431"/> UID (Aadhar) No. If available : <input type="text" value="599725714667"/></p> <p>Medium: English <input type="text"/> EID No. If available: <input type="text"/></p> <p>Religion: Hindu <input type="text"/> Date Of Birth : <input type="text" value="11-10-1994 DDMMYYYY"/></p> <p>Caste Category: SC <input type="text"/> Sub Caste : MALA <input type="text"/></p> <p>Orphan: <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No NCC : <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No</p> <p>Profession of Parents: AGRICULTURE <input type="text"/> Family Annual Income(Rs): <input type="text" value="65000"/></p> <p>Gender: MALE <input type="text"/> Disabled Category: <input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No</p>																																																																																					
<b>Student Pre Qualification Details</b> <hr/> <p>Qualifying Class : SSC <input type="text"/> Marks Obtained(GPA) Grade : 525 Point Average(1-10): <input type="text"/></p> <p>Total Marks : <input type="text" value="600"/> Percentage : <input type="text" value="87.5"/></p>																																																																																					
<b>Institution Details</b> <hr/> <p>College Admission No : <input type="text" value="5506"/> College Joining Date(Current Year) : <input type="text" value="02082012"/> DDMMYYYY</p> <p>Distance between College and Native Place (Kms): <input type="text" value="54"/> Scholarship Type : Day Scholar(DS) <input type="text"/></p>																																																																																					
<b>Welfare Officer Details</b> <hr/> <p>Field Officer : ASWO CHEVELLA <input type="text"/></p> <p>Field Officer Address : ASWO Office,Chevella,Opp. Post Office main roadChevella Ranga Reddy <input type="text"/></p> <p>District Officer : Sri G. Suresh Reddy <input type="text"/></p> <p>District Officer Address : DD (SW) Office,Ranga Reddy,RANGA REDDY COLLECTORATE LAKDI KOTA <input type="text"/></p>																																																																																					
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**Figure 6: Student application form and filled up details**

<sup>9</sup> All welfare departments and college managements are required to give wide publicity on the registration process to ensure that students adhere to the timelines.

<sup>10</sup> All students must have the bank account in any of the nationalized banks.

## Electronic Payment and Application System of Scholarships (ePASS)

Documents to be submitted with hard copy of application form, to the college	Documents to be scanned & uploaded on the website
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• SSC ID (Hall Ticket) Number</li><li>• BIEAP Hall Ticket number where applicable.</li><li>• CET number in case of professional courses.</li><li>• Caste Certificate.</li><li>• Income Certificate obtained from "MeeSeva Centres" only</li><li>• Ration Card with No. &amp; Name of the Candidate</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Caste Certificate and Income Certificate numbers obtained from Mee Seva centres only</li><li>• Latest photograph</li><li>• First page of the pass book showing name, account number &amp; IFSC Code</li><li>• CET/ M.Tech/ ME/ M Pharmacy/ M Arch/ M Phil/ Ph.D etc allotment order.</li><li>• Ration Card copy showing details of the family members &amp; Ration Card Number</li></ul>

*It may be noted that ePASS has achieved two major process simplifications at this stage. First, by linking the application to SSC database, the system ensures that data entry requirements are minimised and student details are cross checked with the SSC database. Next, ePASS has linked up with Mee Seva<sup>11</sup> for accessing student's caste certificates and income certificates. This means that when a student enters his Mee Seva reference number for each of these certificates, ePASS fetches these certificates from the Mee Seva database thereby saving the time spent in scanning documents and the cost incurred in stationery. This also minimises the possibility of forgery as certificates have digital signatures.*

iv. **Department module:** The department module is the most crucial module of all and provides the following facilities:

- **Verification of students:** The verification and forwarding facility has logins for verification officers, field officers and DWOs. Each verification officer's account is automatically populated with a list of assigned colleges and list of students<sup>12</sup> registered within the college for scholarship. Following are the key steps involved:
  - **Physical Verification:** Verification officers conduct physical verification of colleges as per date-wise, college-wise schedule drawn up by the District Collectors. These are communicated at least one week in advance to the college management to ensure that the college management and all scholarship applicants of the college are available on the date fixed of verification with all requisite documents.

<sup>11</sup> Mee Seva is a single window service delivery platform introduced by the Government of Andhra Pradesh by leveraging the NeGP infrastructure. Mee seva centres deliver digital certificates for high volume citizen centric services.

<sup>12</sup> Varying number of applications to be processed by different Officers based on region, usually around 1000 applications are processed by a single officer

## **Electronic Payment and Application System of Scholarships (ePASS)**

- **Decisions upon verification:** Where no variations are found in the documents and physical verification, the verification officer signs the application and affixes stamp. Applications where variations are found are kept pending for detailed scrutiny by the field officer.
- **Posting details on the website:** Verification officers are required to login to the ePASS website and enter details of variations comprising application number, name, course, department and details of variations noticed.
- **Forwarding to Field Officer:** The verification officer submits application booklets of all students along with his/her signature to the field officer attached to the college for further verification. Where variations have been observed, such details are also entered on the application form of the concerned student (s).
- **Forwarding to District Welfare Officer (DWO):** The district officer scrutinizes the applications forwarded by different verification officers within the district with reference to the scholarship rules and regulations. DWO sanctions the scholarship in two parts- RTF proceedings (for reimbursement of tuition fee) and MTF proceedings for Maintenance fee. RTF proceedings are sanctioned in the name of the college while MTF are sanctioned into the student accounts (for day scholars) and college/department accounts (for hostellers). Sanction of scholarship results in automatic generation of bills for the State Treasury. Each of these bills is sent to the treasury online and a response confirmation of receipt is displayed in the form of TBR number (Treasury Book Register number). Hardcopies of these bills with accompanying documentation is sent to the District Treasury Officer (DTO) for verifying with the automatic bill forwarded electronically from the District Officer after sanctioning of scholarship.
- **Verification of Colleges:** Details of all colleges which register through the website are verified by the DWOs in terms of the declared strength (seats allocation) and actual strength by the relevant authority.
- **Release of Budget:** As per annual allocation under Post Matric scholarships, the HoDs of participating departments release the budget every quarter based on fund requirements to the Joint Director/Deputy Director Social Welfare, District

## Electronic Payment and Application System of Scholarships (ePASS)

Tribal Welfare Officer, District Backward Classes Welfare Officer and Assistant Director, Disabled Welfare and Senior Citizens.

- v. **Treasury interface:** The DWO sanctions the scholarships, generates the proceedings and bills and forward these to the District Treasury Officer (DTO). The bill is simultaneously uploaded on the ePASS server which sends the bill to treasury server. The DTO scrutinizes and sanctions the bills with specific token numbers. Based on the bills sanctioned, the DTO transfers requisite funds from treasury account to the Bank with registered Corporate Internet Banking interface (CIBI). Once the DTO logs into the CIBI facility, sanctioned bills are uploaded electronically. Bank details, student ID numbers and approved amount of disbursement are automatically captured here and transfers are facilitated in bulk by CIBI. Return confirmations are obtained against each token number and student accounts listed for failed transactions. This helps in receiving integrated reverse information from banks.
- vi. **Release of payment:** Upon receipt of money from the treasury, the banks adjust sanctioned amount to their respective bank branches to credit into the accounts of the scholarship recipients by first of every month. In respect of Colleges having attached hostel/college hostel, the maintenance charges are adjusted to the account of Honorary Director/Hostel Welfare Officer (HWO)/Warden, who are required to maintain proper account for the amounts received towards maintenance charges of students. The accounts maintained by Honorary Director/HWO/Warden are to be periodically verified by District Officers/Field Officers of Welfare Department.
- vii. **PMU module:** As the PMU is responsible for updating all data masters and addressing key issues, the PMU module enables the following functions:

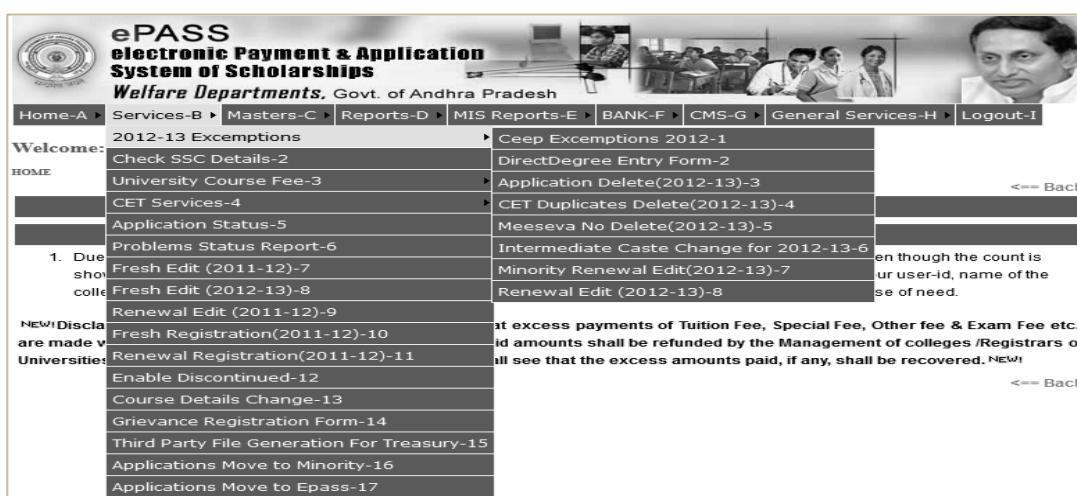


Figure 7: PMU module

## Electronic Payment and Application System of Scholarships (ePASS)

- Validation of data including SSC data, registration and renewal details, and course fee data,
- Handling of exceptions and edits
- Maintenance of 30 master databases
- Overseeing 22 reports on colleges, courses, students, and grievance and four MIS reports on budget abstracts, intermediate student results, university courses and registered universities
- Managing the online grievance redress system and help desk
- Updation of Content Management System comprising Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), GOs/Memos/Circulars and grievance reports
- Maintenance of bank related information including ezpay card details, valid/invalid accounts, etc.

This module enables PMU to liaison with all welfare departments, CGG, Bank and Treasury Departments for online transfer of the scholarship amount. PMU also coordinates with officers concerned to resolve technical implementation issues in consultation with the respective HoDs through this module. Given the overarching role of PMU, the PMU module has the largest number of functions.

Based on the foregoing description, the ePASS workflow can be summarized as shown in the following diagram:

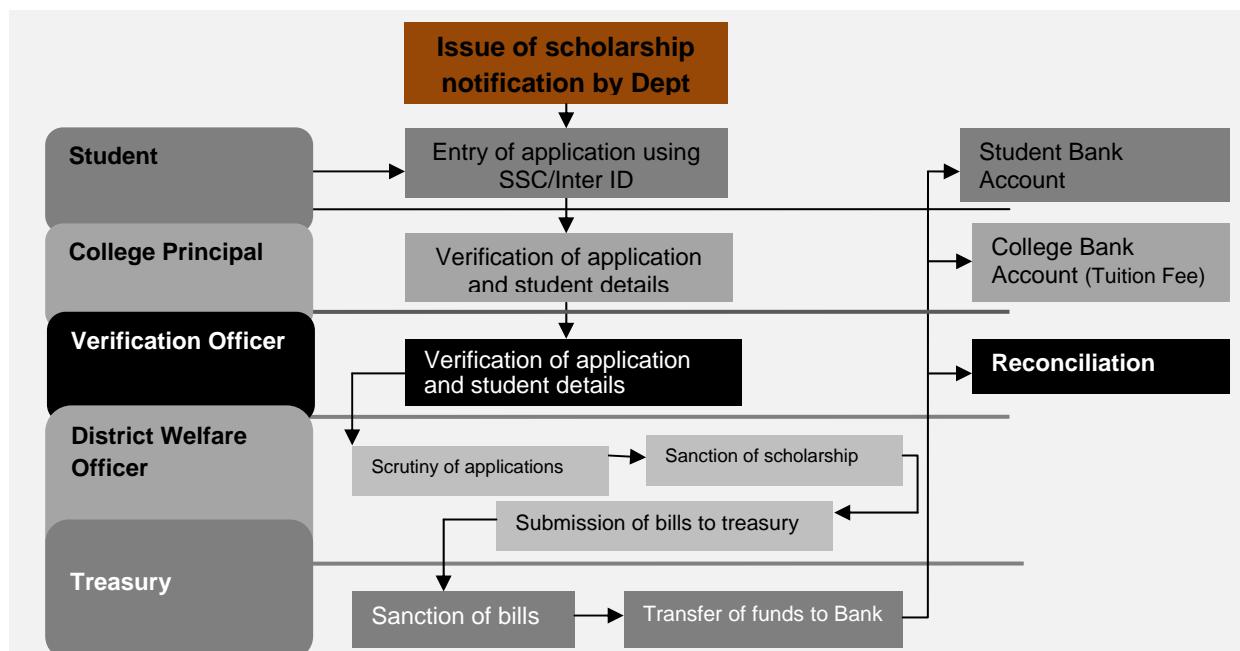


Figure 8: ePASS process flow

## **Electronic Payment and Application System of Scholarships (ePASS)**

### **c. Monitoring, Review and Evaluation of Scholarship Process**

- i. **Utilisation Certificate:** The sanctioned tuition fee for students is adjusted to the College account on behalf of the student. The Principal submits utilization certificate to the District Officers within (15) days of receipt of the funds. The Nodal Banks furnish the drawal particulars and the details of inoperative accounts of students, college-wise, every quarter to the District Officer, who in turn verifies the student details. If a student has dropped out, the District Officer advises the concerned bank to stop the release of MTF for such students. The District Officers are also required to ensure the closure of student accounts on completion of the courses.
- ii. **Furnishing of attendance particulars of students:** Quarterly report of students with less than 75% attendance is submitted to the respective DWOs who withhold the scholarship for such students in the subsequent quarter. If the student maintains requisite attendance in the subsequent quarter, the scholarships including arrears are released. The attendance details are periodically verified by the DWOs and field officers concerned.
- iii. **Display of Scholarships Sanctioned List:** Complete lists of students for whom scholarships are sanctioned are displayed on the notice board of the college throughout the academic year.
- iv. **Review by the District Collectors:** District Collectors are required to take up regular reviews and co-ordinate with all the departments concerned, as also with District Coordinators of the Principal Banks.
- v. **Social Audit:** The HoDs are required to take up social audits on the sanction and disbursement of the Post Matric Scholarships every year.
- vi. **Verification of Scholarship Sanction:** Random sample verification of sanction and disbursement of Post Matric Scholarships in colleges are to be conducted by teams constituted by the HoDs with officers of the Department. Similar verifications are also to be conducted by District Collectors through teams of officials concerned.
- vii. **Task Force:** A Task Force has been constituted to spearhead and oversee the implementation and also to monitor the system.

## Electronic Payment and Application System of Scholarships (ePASS)

- viii. **Grievance System:** Starting 2012, ePASS requires students and colleges to register their complaints online for priority redress. All complaints are to be routed to the welfare officer concerned, PMU or the Department Head. Welfare officers are required to track the progress of grievance redress on a daily basis.

### 5. RESULTS

In 2011-12, around Rs.1,90,000 lakhs have been released to 25 lakhs students, in both RTF and MTF, through ePASS. By enabling uniform, speedy, and transparent administration of scholarships, ePASS has brought about a paradigm shift in service delivery by the welfare departments

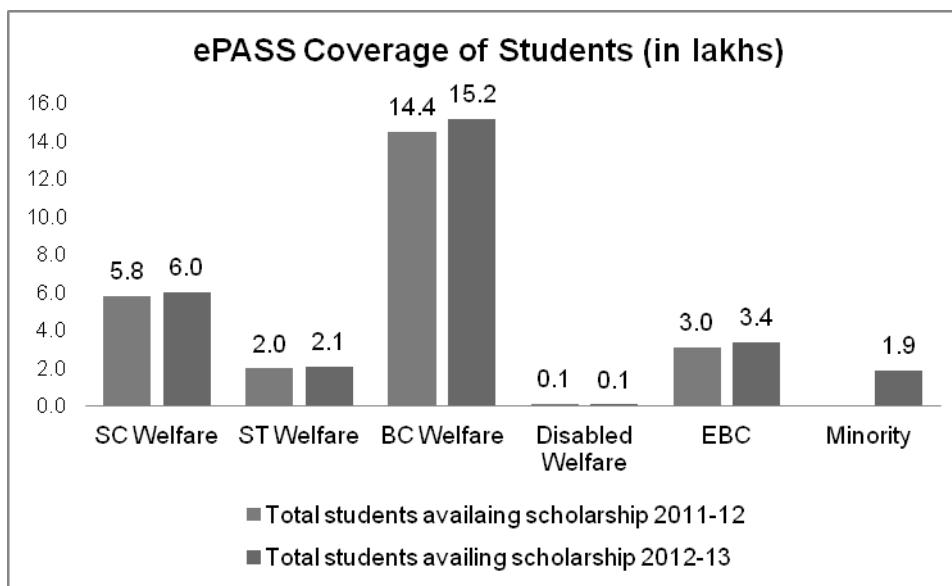


Figure 9: ePASS coverage of students

- i. **Puts students at the centre of operations** and protects them from fund misappropriation as the fee structure is publicly available and scholarship is directly debited to their accounts. Equal opportunity to access to information is provided regardless of one's physical location and physical ability.
- ii. **Personalized services:** ePASS offers personalized services through call centre and help desk at Project Monitoring Unit to reach out to the students and colleges.
- iii. **Time saving:** Friendly workflows and standardized procedures help quick processing of the applications. As the system receives applications directly from students online and sanctions them in time, it eliminates middlemen and minimizes the need for personal follow-ups. The simplified hierarchy of sanctions, and a comprehensive set of MIS reports has not only reduced time but has fostered greater transparency at all levels of Government.

## Electronic Payment and Application System of Scholarships (ePASS)

- iv. **Management Information System (MIS):** ePASS provides for excellent MIS reports. It generates all transaction-based reports, helping officials to closely monitor the program and take informed decisions.

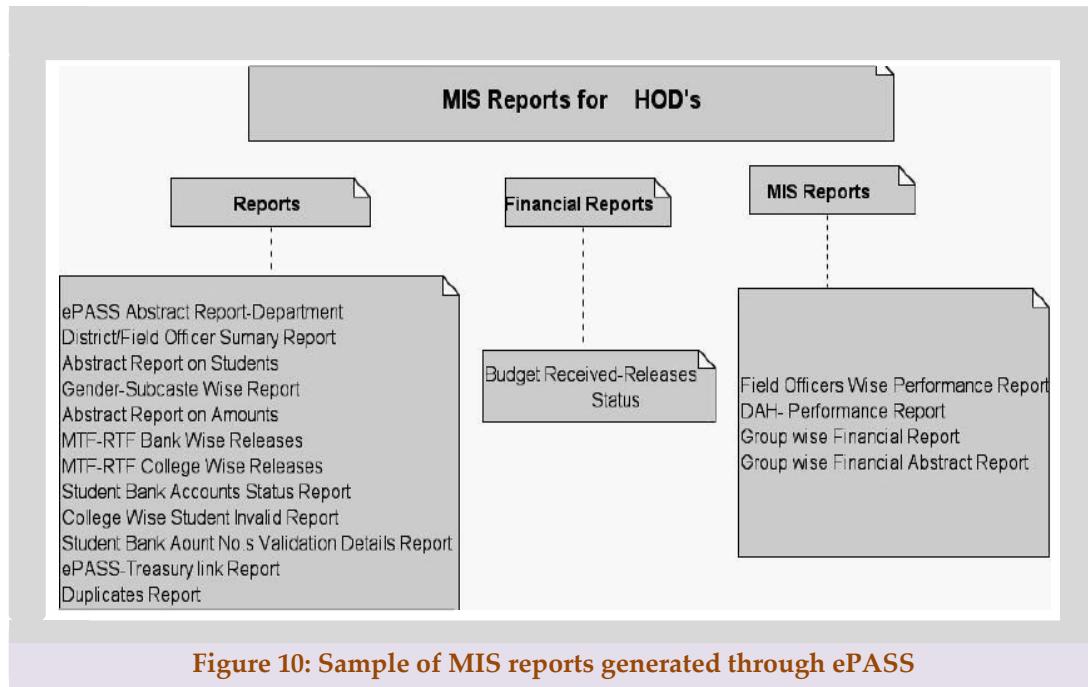


Figure 10: Sample of MIS reports generated through ePASS

- v. **Efficiency:** Efficiency of the entire scholarship cycle is ensured through inbuilt validations of applications which prevent submission of an application unless all parameters are fulfilled, transaction-based reports, seamless exchange of information among departments and standardisation of procedures and rules for applying for a scholarship across departments. Further, ePASS has reduced transaction costs for all departments as the system is operated through a central server and inter-linkage with other department servers for verification and validation of data.
- vi. **Accountability:** Time lines for each stage of processing are set and strictly monitored. Alerts in the individual logins and exception reports to higher officials help in streamlining the administration. As the activities of Departments and Colleges are easily monitored, instances of corruption have come down drastically.
- vii. **Awards:** ePASS has bagged the 2010-11 CSI-NIHELENT e-Governance award of excellence (by Computer Society of India) in G2C (Government to Citizen) category.

### 6. SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability of an eGovernance initiative has been defined as *the retaining and using of eGovernment system with no intention by government organisations and people to abandon it and return to the manual system.*

Following are the key factors that contribute to the sustainability of the ePASS system:

- a. **Criticality of the service:** Scholarship disbursement is one of the most budget and labour intensive works of all welfare departments influencing the future of close to 30 lakhs students who constitute about 80% of the State's post-matric student population. Quality of scholarship administration therefore has a high degree of citizen interface and thereby, has significant implications for citizen's satisfaction with government. By ensuring efficient, transparent and accountable administration of the scholarship process, ePASS caters to a crucial requirement of the welfare departments as well as those sections of students that are in need of financial assistance for accomplishing their academic pursuits.
- b. **Organisational changes:** Any system which brings about a well thought change in its organisational structure, culture, practices and employees' skill sets stands a good chance for long term sustenance. Through a set of close to 300 G.Os, Memos and Circulars, substantial changes have been brought about in the way the welfare departments administer the scholarship system. Every related process of these departments has been modified to make them amenable to the ePASS workflow. All officers of these departments dealing with scholarships are required to perform their scholarship related activities through ePASS and undergo regular capacity building sessions on ePASS .
- c. **Inter-linkages:** One of the key factors contributing to the efficiency and sustainability of ePASS is the set of inter-linkages it has created with a series of databases to leverage their benefits. The most important linkage has been achieved with the treasury system which has enabled mass bill sanctioning and transfers of payments, making ePASS probably the first initiative to achieve this linkage. ePASS is linked with the Mee Seva data base for accessing caste and income certificates of students, with the Board of Intermediate education

## **Electronic Payment and Application System of Scholarships (ePASS)**

database for SSC data of students, with the Counselling Centre database for Common Entrance Test (CET) data of students and with the Aadhar data base.

- d. **Funding model:** ePASS has financial backing in terms of a provision in regular Government budget and the payment for service provider (CGG) is based on number of transactions processed. The funding of ePASS is made from the Scholarship Head of Account.

ePASS does not have a revenue model as the students are not charged for the services provided through it. However, the implementation of ePASS has saved resources to the tune of several crores for the government by weeding out fake entries, saving on stationery, minimising staff requirements and time in scholarship processing and eliminating opportunities for corruption. For instance, the weeding out of duplicate and fake entries itself saved close to Rs. 50 crores for the Government. For the students, colleges and departmental officials, ePASS saves substantial time and effort.

- e. **Security & Strategy for disaster recovery and continuity:** ePASS data is stored in CGG data centre with strict adherence to firewall security and other data centre security measures. CGG has an agreement with Cyber Security Works, a CERT.IN empanelled agency, for undertaking security audit of the data centre on a quarterly basis. Disaster recovery and continuity is planned in a remote location.
- f. **Continuous improvements:** ePASS has made efforts to constantly improve upon its achievements and make course corrections based on feedback from its stakeholders. To keep itself abreast of the latest technological changes, it has planned a series of initiatives which include introduction of digital signatures, mobile governance (SMS alerts, SMS based tracking, etc.), data-warehousing for digital dashboard and business analytics, etc.
- g. **Duration of operation:** ePASS has been operational since 2008 and has reported a consistent increase in the number of students, departments, colleges, universities, and banks utilising its services.

## **7. KEY LESSONS LEARNT**

ePASS can be considered as one of those eGovernance applications which have learnt its lessons swiftly. The stream of G.O.s, memos and circulars which give detailed instructions for course corrections at every stage since 2008 are an evidence of the same.

## **Electronic Payment and Application System of Scholarships (ePASS)**

Following are some of the major lessons learnt by the ePASS team in the course of its operation.

- a. **Payment of scholarship amount to students:** *There is no easy way:* Large scale discrepancies in disbursal of scholarship amounts to students was one of the key reasons for introduction of ePASS.

In view of the collusion observed between colleges and departmental officials in embezzling the money meant for students, ePASS started with a system where each student was required to open a bank account in one of the five identified nodal banks. However, it was soon realised that banks were reluctant to open zero balance/no-frills accounts for students from low income categories as these were essentially non-remunerative. Therefore, it was decided to issue eZpay cards through SBI to students to enable drawal of monthly amounts through ATMs without opening of bank accounts<sup>13</sup>. While some of these cards were distributed through 'distribution melas' or distributed by the District coordinator of the Bank during verification of students by field officers, eventually it was observed that large number of these cards were being hoarded by colleges with the connivance of officials and used for embezzlement of student funds. It was therefore decided to discontinue the issue of new eZpay cards.

Today, the responsibility for opening bank accounts lies with the students. Registration for scholarships cannot be completed without valid accounts provided by students. While this means some burden on the students, it minimises the possibility of large scale fraud by colleges.

- b. **Student data:** *Student is the custodian:* Few years into the operation of ePASS, it was noticed that some college authorities and departmental officials resorted to changes in the students' database without their knowledge. To retain the integrity of student data, student login was provided, whereby only students are permitted to carry out any change in their application forms making students fully responsible for their application.
- c. **Verification of students:** *Innovation helps:* At the start of the project, the responsibility for verification was assigned to close to 400 field officers of the welfare departments. Over time, it was realised that 400 officers cannot handle the verification responsibilities of 28 lakh students spread across 13000 colleges. Hence in 2011, all district collectors were directed to identify verification officers for each

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<sup>13</sup> Bank was not required to create any ATM cards or follow the mandatory Know-Your-Customer (KYC) norms. The responsibility for KYC rested with the Government which also owned the eZPay cards while the possession lies with the students.

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college or group of colleges for undertaking verification of students and furnishing reports. Today, the number of verification officers range between 2000-4000 depending on the workload and availability of officers.

- d. **Grievance system: Feedback is crucial:** While ePASS claimed to be a transparent system, it was operated without a formal grievance redress mechanism for almost four years. This had caused major inconvenience for students, colleges and officials since they had to physically visit PMU based in Hyderabad to sort out several issues. However, starting 2012, ePASS has introduced an online grievance redress facility to deal with grievances of students and colleges. However, many students are still unaware of the grievance system and continue to depend on their respective colleges to sort out several issues. This could lead to problems if colleges decide to exploit the dependency of students as has happened earlier.
- e. **Impact of the system: Efficient need not mean effective:** The major aim of implementing ePASS was not only to ensure that scholarships reached the right beneficiaries but also reached them at the right time. However, the scholarship administration system still faces major bottlenecks at following stages:
  - i. **Student and college-oriented delays:** Students often change colleges and courses without updating these details in ePASS. Sometimes, they lose their eZpay cards or keep their bank passbooks inactive for more than six months leading to invalidation of pass books. Sorting out such issues require repeated visits to District Welfare Offices as students cannot approach the banks directly for making these changes. On the other hand, colleges often delay the uploading the relevant details into the system leading to cascading delays.
  - ii. **Physical verification stage:** The physical verification of students by verification officers could get delayed if a student for some reason is found unavailable during the day of verification. Moreover, as the verification officers may belong to any department, the Welfare Office has least control over them. Although the government instructions stipulate that colleges need to be informed one week in advance about the schedule of visits, delays on this account still persists.
  - iii. **Hard copy verification stage:** Regardless of ePASS, hard copies of all applications are to be verified by the District Welfare Officer before issuing sanctions. The major delay at this stage arises on account of staff shortage. A single district may be required to handle nearly 1.5 lakh applications in a year with hardly 4-5 staff members to do all physical verification.

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iv. **Release of budget:** The most important concern about the functioning of ePASS arises from the delay in release of budget from the Central and State governments. As a result, scholarship processing which should ideally take a mere few days through ePASS still takes several months depending on the availability of funds. This limitation is indicative of a more fundamental and general problem faced by several eGovernance initiatives across the country where systemic deficiencies cripple an otherwise efficient system.

### **8. REPLICABILITY**

ePASS as an effective model mechanism of scholarship disbursement has gained national recognition and is being replicated in five other States. Following are the key points to be considered in relation to replication of ePASS:

- a. **Open source technology:** ePASS is a simple and easy to use application developed using open source technologies and tools including PostGreSQL Database, Java Programming Platform, Tomcat web server, and Linux Server operating system.
- b. **Level of customization:** ePASS is not a generic application which means that it is not a product which can be replicated easily in a new setting. In replicating ePASS in a different setting, the application needs to be built from the scratch and completely customized to the requirements of the user. However, with some modifications, ePASS can be used for pre-matric, merit cum means, other scholarship schemes and other similar educational schemes in any State of India.
- c. **Unicode compatibility:** ePASS is not Unicode compatible and hence cannot support local language based applications. However, efforts are now being made to customise the website in Telugu language and other local languages.
- d. **Peak load:** ePASS has tremendous potential for scaling up as the ePASS server can handle a peak time load of 1.5 lakh applications in a day. Upto 80000 sessions have been handled at a time.

As recognition to its potential, ePASS has been selected under the Rapid Replication Roll-out initiative<sup>14</sup> of the Department of Electronics and Information Technology,

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<sup>14</sup> The Rapid Replication Roll-out Initiative comprises of selection of some of the successful applications of one State and replicating them in other States that are willing to adopt them with customisation as per the Seeker States requirements.

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Government of India. State Governments of Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh and Tripura are currently replicating ePASS under this initiative. It is expected that ePASS will be replicated by more States in the coming days.

**Conclusion:** ePASS is a carefully planned and well-executed innovation that strives to achieve continuous improvements through mid-course corrections. However, the stability and long-term sustainability of ePASS depends not only on the project leadership or the quality of the application but also on the support from crucial external elements such as the timely release of scholarship budgets. It is hoped that the Government of Andhra Pradesh as well as the governments in different States gearing up for replication of ePASS would keep in mind these challenges and take effective measures to address them. With the right political and administrative support, ePASS can become a truly powerful tool to take the benefits of education to disadvantaged sections and help them fulfil their aspirations.



## **Electronic Payment and Application System of Scholarships (ePASS)**

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## **Electronic Payment and Application System of Scholarships (ePASS)**

### **ABBREVIATIONS**

AP	Andhra Pradesh
BC	Backward Classes
BIEAP	Board of Intermediate Education of Andhra Pradesh
CGG	Centre for Good Governance
CIBI	Corporate Internet Banking interface
DTO	District Treasury Officer
DWO	District Welfare Officer
ePASS	Electronic Payment and Application System of Scholarships
GO	Government Order
GoAP	Government of Andhra Pradesh
HoD	Head of Department
HWO	Hostel Welfare Officer
MIS	Management Information System
MTF	Maintenance Fees/mess charges
PMU	Project Monitoring Unit
RTF	Reimbursement of Tuition Fee
SSC	Secondary School Certificate
TBR	Treasury Book Register
UC	Utilisation Certificate

## Electronic Payment and Application System of Scholarships (ePASS)

### **ANNEXURE**

**Classification of Courses:** For the purpose of the Post-Matric Scholarships scheme, all courses have been categorized into four groups as under:

S.No	Category of group	Level of the courses	Courses involved
1	Group – I	Professional including Ph.D	Professional Courses (Degree and PG Courses in Medicine, Engineering, Technology, Management, Agriculture, Veterinary and Allied Sciences, Business Finance, Business administration and Computer Applications/ Science, Commercial pilot License course)
2	Group – II	P.G level	Other professional and technical graduate and PG including M.Phil, PhD and post doctoral research level courses not covered in Group-I. C.A./I.C.W.A./C.S./ etc., courses, All post graduate, graduate level diploma courses All certificate level courses
3	Group – III	Degree level	Degree courses not covered in groups I&II, National Institute of Fashion Technology courses
4	Group – IV	Intermediate level	ITI/ITC, Intermediate, Vocational, etc.

#### **MTF Rates:**

For BC, Disabled, Minority Students, the MTF rates are as follows:

Group	Rates (in Rs.) per month			
	Hostellers (Dept. Attached Hostels) <sup>15</sup>	Hostellers (College Attached Hostels)	Student Managed Hostel (SMH)	Day Scholars (DS)
<b>Group-I</b>	1050	962	442	429
<b>Group-II</b>	1050	682	442	429
<b>Group-III</b>	1050	520	325	240
<b>Group-IV</b>	1050	520	325	182

For SC and ST Students the enhanced MTF rates are as follows.

Group	Dept. Attached Hostel (DAH) / College Attached Hostel (CAH) <sup>16</sup>	Day Scholars (DS)/ Student Managed Hostel (SMH)
<b>Group-I</b>	1200	550
<b>Group-II</b>	1050	530
<b>Group-III</b>	1050	325
<b>Group-IV</b>	1050	325

For institutions outside the State, SC&ST students are eligible for RTF and MTF and other students are eligible only for MTF at AP State rates.

<sup>15</sup> G.O. Ms. No.40 (Social Welfare (SW.EDN.2) Department), dt: 08-12-2012

<sup>16</sup> G.O. Ms. No.60(Social Welfare (SW.EDN.2) Department) ), dt: 27-09-2011 for Group I and G.O. Ms. No.40 (Social Welfare (SW.EDN.2) Department), dt: 08-12-2012 for other groups