



Vietnam **Higher Education**

Policy and system update

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Australian Government
Department of Education and Training

THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

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1. Overview

The national higher education system in Vietnam consists of colleges, regional and national universities and academies (collectively referred to as universities), and research institutes authorised to offer doctoral degrees¹.

According to Article 6 of the *Higher Education Law 2012*, the higher education system in Vietnam provides programs at various levels, including diploma from colleges, bachelor's degrees from universities and academies, and master's and doctoral degrees from universities, academies and research institutes.

In August 2016, policy responsibility for Vietnam's vocational education and training system was transferred from the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) to the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA). As a result, most of the colleges in the below table and professional secondary schools were transferred to MOLISA's jurisdiction. There are now only 33 Teacher Training Colleges and two Teacher Training Schools under the administration of MOET.

Number of institutions, students and lecturers in Vietnam higher education system

	Academic Year 2015–2016			Academic Year 2016–2017		
	Public	Private	Total	Public	Private	Total
Number of universities	163	60	223	171	65	236
Number of students	1,520,807	232,367	1,753,174	1,523,904	243,975	1,767,879
Number of graduates	307,760	45,029	352,789	268,369	37,232	305,601
Number of lecturers	55,401	14,190	69,591	57,634	15,158	72,792

	Academic Year 2014 – 2015			Academic Year 2015 – 2016		
	Public	Private	Total	Public	Private	Total
Number of colleges	189	28	217	189	30	219
Number of students	453,568	86,046	539,614	392,025	57,533	449,558
Number of graduates	167,444	32,678	200,122	131,222	19,629	150,851
Number of teachers	21,181	4,338	25,519	20,309	3,591	24,260

Source: MOET

¹Article 7, Vietnam higher education Law 2012, http://vanban.chinhphu.vn/portal/page/portal/chinhphu/hethongvanban?class_id=1&_page=1&mode=detail&document_id=163054



According to the *Global Competitiveness Report 2017–2018*, Vietnam ranks 84 out of 137 countries in the quality of its higher education system and 79 out of 137 in its capacity for innovation.

In the 2018 QS University Rankings for Asia, five Vietnamese institutions rank in the top 400, with two universities in the top 200—Vietnam National University (VNU) Hanoi (No. 139) and VNU Ho Chi Minh City (No. 142)². No Vietnamese institutions appear in either the QS University World Rankings or other world rankings.

Until recently, reforming higher education focused mostly on expanding supply and access, which led to the inconsistent quality of universities and graduates. The focus of the Vietnamese government has now shifted to improving quality and increasing autonomy for Vietnamese higher education institutions (HEIs). Quality improvement in higher education is focused on ensuring graduates possess good employability skills.

2. Governance

As the government agency responsible for education, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) is in charge of introducing and implementing policies and administering Vietnam's higher education system at the national level. Nonetheless, governance of the higher education system in Vietnam is highly decentralised as the government, line ministries, provincial People's Committees, and private investors are involved in funding and managing universities and colleges.

For instance, VNU Hanoi and VNU HCMC are directly under the Government of Vietnam; however, the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam is under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Hanoi Medical University is under the Ministry of Health

and Hung Vuong University is under the People's Committee of Phu Tho Province. Private institutions are managed by their private management boards. However, all universities and colleges in Vietnam, regardless of sectors, are obliged to report to MOET annually as the central government agency responsible for quality control of the whole higher education system.

Research—an integral activity of higher education, is administered and funded by both MOET and the Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST). The next update focusing on research will have more information about how the government funds and administers university research.

3. Types of ownership

Under Article 7 of the *Higher Education Law 2012*, there are two types of higher education institutions in Vietnam:

- Public higher education establishments: established, invested in and owned by the State Government.
- Private higher education establishments: established, invested and owned by individuals, groups of individuals, or socio-occupational organisations.

Among private higher education establishments, there are institutions invested with foreign sources of capital, either in the form of 100 per cent foreign investment or joint venture between foreign and domestic investors.

4. Financing Higher Education

According to the World Bank in Vietnam, public-private spending for higher education is 43:57, demonstrating that Vietnam has a large fee-for-service HE sector. The Government of Vietnam

spends approximately 0.25% of its GDP on HE, one of the lowest for its level of development. For example, China, Indonesia and Malaysia allocates more than 1% of its GDP towards HE while Thailand, South Korea and Chile spends between 0.5% and 1%. Vietnam allocates the vast majority of the state education and training budget towards general education. Out of 20% of Vietnam's state budget for education and training annually, 83% is allocated for general education.

Institutional scholarship and need-based student loans exist but both suffer from low coverage, i.e. a small share of students get low amounts that are not sufficient to cover their tuition fees and living costs. The Loan scheme challenges include interest rates, maturity and liability.

While Vietnamese universities, especially those piloting the government's autonomy policy with no subsidy from the government for tuition fees, are proposing to increase tuition fees to enable them to improve quality, the World Bank reminds the sector that any tuition fee increase should be after a good financial support scheme to students is announced. The annual tuition fee is currently about AUD460 per student for public universities and approximately AUD1,000 for universities piloting autonomy.



²<https://tuoitrenews.vn/news/education/20171019/5-vietnamese-schools-listed-in-qs-2017-university-rankings-for-asia/42151.html>

HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY & SYSTEM UPDATES

1. Quality assurance and accreditation

MOET has the authority to issue and regulate the standards and criteria for higher education accreditation. Accreditation is compulsory for all higher education providers and higher education courses in Vietnam.

MOET's updated regulation on accreditation of higher education institutions issued in 2017 has 25 standards and 111 criteria for external evaluation. The accreditation process consists of four steps: self-evaluation, external evaluation, appraisal of external evaluation results, and recognition of meeting the national higher education quality standards. The last three steps are conducted by one of the five independent centres for education accreditation set up outside of MOET, which are operating on a cost recovery basis. The accreditation cycle is five years.

By August 2018, there are five centres for education accreditation, including the VNU Centre for Education Accreditation in Hanoi (VNU-CEA), VNU-HCM Education Accreditation Centre (VNU-HCM EAC), the University of Danang Education Accreditation Centre, Vinh University Education Accreditation Centre and the Education Accreditation Centre under the Vietnam Association of Universities and Colleges. These centres are licensed to accredit all higher education institutions and programs, except the schools, faculties and programs of the hosting universities to ensure a degree of independence.



Workshop on Building an Internationally Competitive University with Research Culture and Industry Links, co-organised by Australian Department of Education and Training and Vietnam National Institute of Educational Sciences in March 2018.

These centres are authorised to make decisions to recognise institutions and programs that meet accreditation standards without the intervention of a third party.

According to MOET, by June 2018, 117 out of 122 universities which completed self-evaluation reports and had an external evaluation by the above education accreditation centres have been recognised as accredited ones, i.e. meeting the national higher education quality standards. The five universities that failed to meet the accreditation standards will have to work for improvement in areas recommended in the external evaluation reports and register for another external evaluation.

2. University autonomy and accountability

University autonomy is a top priority of the Vietnamese government. The government targets that all universities will be autonomous by 2020. MOET is taking some steps toward the target, which includes legalising different

aspects of autonomy under the amended Higher Education Law, especially in university financing and governance.

In 2014, MOET approved a list of 23³ universities to pilot autonomy to improve capacity and capability across the higher education sector in accordance with Resolution 77. The autonomy in the resolution covers university governance, i.e. organisational structure, number and position of staff, university financing, i.e. setting its own tuition fees and having no subsidy from government budget for both regular and investment expenditures, and academic programme, i.e. curriculum design and research agenda. For example, the universities on the list can open their own training disciplines and make decisions on training partnerships with foreign partners for twinning programs without having to ask for approval from MOET.

According to MOET, the pilot has indicated improved quality of the piloting universities including graduate quality and research outcome. The government expects that university autonomy will be a breakthrough to improve the quality of the higher education system.

³The list of universities with autonomy status is available in the MIP at: <https://www.austrade.gov.au/australian/education/news/updates/list-of-vietnamese-autonomous-universities-released>



3. The amended Higher Education Law

In the context of changing socio-economic conditions in Vietnam, the *Higher Education Law 2012* has revealed its own limitations in various aspects. Therefore, in early 2017, MOET proposed and drafted amendments to the *Higher Education Law 2012*. The amended law is expected to be approved by the National Assembly in late 2018. Among various provisions that are recommended to be either modified or supplemented, the draft amendment particularly emphasises the autonomy of universities, formation of university networks, and streamlining of universities.

- **Universities' autonomy:** Foster universities' autonomy in 3 key aspects (academic activities, personnel and organisation, and finance) through more detailed regulations
- **University networks:** Establish university networks based on academic fields and market demands instead of administrative divisions
- **University streamlining:** Categorise universities into research-oriented and application-oriented ones

4. Highlights relating to the higher education sector from Decree 86 on foreign cooperation and investment in education

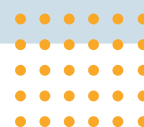
Decree 86/2018/ND-CP, which took effect on 1st August 2018, replacing Decree 73, applies to foreign cooperation and investment activities in education in Vietnam from early childhood education, school to higher education sectors. The cooperation and investment activities under Decree 86 are open to all fields of study, except the ones relating to national security and defence, politics and religion. The foreign cooperation and investment activities in education regulated by Decree 86 include joint training with foreign partners at the tertiary level (bachelor's, master's and PhD).

Approval of Joint training programs at the tertiary level

- The Minister of Education and Training shall approve joint training at the bachelor's, master's and doctorate levels.
- Presidents of Vietnam National University Hanoi, Vietnam National University HCMC, Thai Nguyen University, University of Hue, and University of Da Nang and Rectors of the autonomous universities shall approve joint training at the bachelor's, master's and doctorate levels at their institutions.
- The licence for twinning programs will be valid for five years and may be extended with each extension not surpassing five years

Joint training programs which lead to foreign qualifications must be delivered in foreign languages, i.e. not taught in Vietnamese or with translation into Vietnamese. Translation into Vietnamese is acceptable for study programs that lead to Vietnamese qualifications. Foreign curriculum delivered in the joint training programs should be accredited or recognised for quality by legislative/authorised agencies for education quality in its native country.

Joint training programs or twinning programs at bachelor's, master's and PhD levels can be delivered in partnership between Vietnamese and foreign statutory and accredited higher education institutions. Its mode of delivery can be in class, online, or blended learning. This is the first time that the online and blended learning mode for transnational education is covered and recognised in a legislation. The Minister for Education and Training shall have specific provisions on joint training programs delivered via the online and blended learning mode. MOET is drafting a circular to provide detailed guidance on implementing some areas of the decree, which includes joint training programs via the online and blended learning mode.





5. Projects supporting policy and system reforms

5.1. Project 911 (2010 – 2020): Vietnamese government PhD scholarship programme

In 2010, Project 911 which aspired to increase both the quantity and quality of university lecturers and researchers was approved by the Government. The project targeted to have offered 10,000 scholarship opportunities for lecturers to pursue a doctoral degree at prestigious universities abroad by 2020. However, when the project completed its last selection cohort in 2017 for PhD course completion in 2020, less than half of the scholarships had been offered. One of the main reasons for the failure of the project is the severe shortage of qualified candidates who can meet the admission requirements of universities in other countries. English language requirement is always the most obvious challenge for the candidates.

MOET has been reviewing the project 911 and is proposing the second phase to the government for approval.

5.2. Project 599 (2013 – 2020)

Under the Decision 599/TTg of the Prime Minister, the Project “Training officers abroad by state budget in the period of 2013–2020”, often referred to as Project 599, was launched in 2013 to grant competent candidates scholarships to pursue either undergraduate or graduate programs (focus on Master’s courses) abroad. The project targets to offer 1,650 scholarships at the master’s level and 150 at the bachelor’s level.

5.3. Support for Autonomous Higher Education Project (SAHEP) (2017 – 2022)

SAHEP, approved in 2017, is a development project by the World Bank and the Vietnamese Government that aims at leveraging research, teaching, and institutional capacity at selected autonomous universities as well as improving the national higher education management system in Vietnam. With 174.6 million dollars earmarked, as well as 155 million from the World Bank and the rest from Vietnam’s match funding, the project consists of two components: (1) support targeted institutions in improving research, teaching, and institutional management capacity so that those pilot models can be generalised into a wider scope; (2) support the establishment of an e-Library Portal to foster policy development and key higher education subsystems. ⁴It is estimated that more than 150,000 students and 3,900 lecturers from the Vietnam Academy of Agricultural Sciences, Hanoi University of Science and Technology, and HCMC University of Industry, as well as thousands from other universities, will benefit from this project.

⁴World Bank. “Support for Autonomous Higher Education Project (SAHEP)”. <http://projects.worldbank.org/P156849/?lang=en&tab=overview>

