Vietnam higher education quality assurance system and developments

Vietnam Higher Education

Since the 1990s the higher education system in Vietnam has been developing rapidly and increasingly aligning with regional and international trends. Higher education in Vietnam consists of 214 colleges (185 public and 29 non-public) and 207 universities (153 public and 54 non-public) in the academic year 2012-2013¹.

Colleges offer associate degrees (2-3 years), while universities offer associate degrees, Bachelor (4-6 years), Master (1-2 years). Universities may offer PhD degrees (2-4 years) only with the approval of the Prime Minister².

Universities and colleges (or higher education institutions – HEIs) in Vietnam mainly deliver courses in a traditional face-to-face mode. The language of delivery is Vietnamese; however, more universities are now offering Bachelor and Master courses in other languages including English, French, and German. With WTO commitments for cross-border education, transnational education is more popular now in Vietnam with more than 350 twinning programs/courses delivered in partnership between local and foreign HEIs. These courses are delivered in foreign languages and provide an option for those who cannot afford overseas study. There are currently 39 twinning programs between 20 Australian HE institutions and Vietnamese partners.

The Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) understands that a robust higher education quality assurance system in Vietnam will help to create trust among higher education institutions, both in Vietnam and in other countries. This trust supports collaboration between higher education institutions around credit transfers, student exchange, research, and qualifications recognition.

Quality assurance (QA) for higher education has been a Vietnamese government priority since 2003 when the General Department of Education Testing and Accreditation (GDETA) was set up under the Minister of Education and Training (MOET). GDETA has become a member of the Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN), the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), and the ASEAN Quality Assurance Network (AQAN). The membership criteria of these networks and Chiba Principles also strongly affect the development of Vietnam’s higher education QA system (VNHEQAS). GDETA and TEQSA have finalized an MOU on cooperation in quality assurance, in May 2014, which is expected to be officially signed in the coming time.

Internal and external assessment

VNHEQAS consists of internal quality assurance (IQA), external quality assurance and quality assurance agencies. According to MOET, all HEIs must set up IQA units.

Currently, more than 75% of universities and 50% of colleges have IQA units. According to MOET’s statistics, by 31 October 2013, out of 421 Vietnamese HEIs, 339 HEIs (166 university and 173 colleges) have completed self-evaluation reports.

¹ http://www.moet.gov.vn/?page=11.11&view=5251
² Article 38 and 42 in Education Law 2005
In the period of 2011-2015, the target is that 90% HEIs in the system will have undergone external evaluation. In the period of 2016-2020, 95% HEIs and programs will have completed external evaluation and are considered for appraisal recognition and formal issuing of the certificate of accreditation.

Due to the limited capacity and personnel resources of the developing accreditation system run by MOET, this program is behind schedule. To date, only 40 universities, 14 bachelor program and 4 associate degree programs have been assessed using the EQAF standards and criteria. The main focus has been on provider level assessment, to be followed by program accreditation.

The government also encourages HEIs and programs to apply for accreditation or assessment by international accreditation agencies. Currently, 19 programs of VNU Hanoi and VNU HCM were assessed by the ASEAN University Network (AUN) during the period 2007-2013, including 4 engineering programs. The University of Technology (VNU HCM) and FPT University has applied to have a number of programs accredited by Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET).

Additionally, according to the Decree 73/2012/ND-CP dated 2012/09/26 on regulations for the foreign collaboration and investment in education, all foreign funded education institutions and joint training programs must be accredited by Vietnamese or foreign accreditation agencies that are recognized by the Vietnam government. This is considered important given the diversity of higher education providers and to avoid diploma mills. Recognition of degrees also supports student mobility.

**Two education accreditation centres**

In early September 2013, the VNU Center for Education Accreditation in Hanoi (VNU-CEA), the first accreditation agency in Vietnam, was established by MOET. VNU-CEA is licensed to accredit all higher education institutions and programs, except schools, faculties and programs that belong to VNU Hanoi. With a similar function, in late 2013, MOET established the VNU-HCM Educational Accreditation Center (VNU-HCM EAC). A third assessment centre is being planned for central Vietnam.

These agencies are authorized to make decisions to recognize institutions and programs that meet accreditation standards without intervention of a third party (including the government). Non-public accreditation agencies are not expected to be established in Vietnam until 2016 at the earliest. The governance arrangement for the assessment agencies is designed to ensure a robust process and avoid conflicts of interest. This includes:

- Separate budgets and decision making role from the VNU
- An Advisory board at the centre, with a minimum of 9 members extended to 19 members for the VNU-CEA, with broad representation across large regional universities, industry and experts in education testing and accreditation.
- All members must sign a conflict of interest and code of conduct declaration.
- A number of subgroups, including a monitoring board to ensure integrity of the external teams.
- All decisions based on advice from the external assessment teams and self-evaluation reports.
Developing a National Qualifications Framework

The project “National Qualification Framework” aims to develop a Vietnam National Qualification Framework (NQF) to make the higher education system in Vietnam become more transparent and support student mobility in the region and the world. NQFs also function as an important instrument for education quality assurance. It is intended that the Vietnam NQF will also be mapped against the ASEAN Qualification Reference Framework by 2018. The Vietnam NQF is expected to be finalised and approved by Prime Minister in November 2014. The steering committee for this project was set up in early 2014. The steering committee has recently agreed on 8 qualification levels in the framework. MOET and General Department of Vocational Training (GDVT) are working very closely on this.

Legislative framework

According to the Higher Education law (2012):

MOET’s role is to issue and regulate the standards and criteria for accreditation, accreditation process and frequency, and accreditation guidelines.

The accreditation process for HEIs includes:
- Self-evaluation by HEIs
- External audit/accreditation. This is conducted by semi-autonomous accreditation bodies. Appraisal of the external audit/accreditation results
- Recognising and issuing certificate

HEIs are required to have internal quality assurance (IQA) units. Functions of the IQA unit are:
- To foster a QA culture in HEIs
- To support HEI’s goals and objectives
- To maintain IQ management systems
- To do periodic approval, monitoring and review of programs
- To develop and implement the institution’s strategy for continuous quality enhancement
- To maintain quality assurance of academic staff
- Staff of IQA units also have the responsibility to support other bodies to prepare self-evaluation reports at institutional and program levels.

Vietnam has created an external quality assurance (EQA) system by defining the External Quality Assurance Framework (EQAF) in government legal documents and more specifically in the Higher Education Law (2012).
- EQAF covers 10 standards & 61 criteria, assessment procedures (5-cycles), HEI status recognition
- The EQAF standards and criteria are issued under the decision 65/2007/QD by MOET on Higher Education Accreditation standards.
- Accreditation is mandatory for all higher education institutions and courses in Vietnam
- HEIs are encouraged to be accredited by international accreditation agencies

Accreditation is compulsory for all HEIs in Vietnam, both public and private HEIs.