Chapter 1
Higher Education in Vietnam: Reform, Challenges and Priorities

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Introduction

According to the World Economic Forum's *Global Competitiveness Report for 2008–2009*, Vietnam is a "factor-driven economy", reliant largely for its global competitiveness on the availability of unskilled labour and natural resources.[1] In 2008, it ranked 70th for global competitiveness among 134 countries surveyed – alongside the Philippines (71st), and in the vicinity of the former Soviet satellites of Kazakhstan (66th), Romania (68th), Azerbaijan (69th), Ukraine (72nd) and Bulgaria (76th), but well behind some of its important neighbours, including Singapore (5th), Malaysia (21st), China (30th), Thailand (34th) and Indonesia (55th). Its strengths were considered to be its large market for goods and services (the population of Vietnam is now over 85 million people), the effective functioning of its labour market and its high female labour force participation rate. Its competitiveness was judged, however, to have been "eroded by weaknesses in the quality of infrastructure and institutions, as well as in higher education and training", and the economy was said to be adversely affected by "burdensome government regulation", "weak auditing and reporting standards", a "low university enrolment rate" and "the [poor] quality of its education system".[2] Interestingly, despite sustained high levels of economic growth over recent years, its global competitiveness index did not seem to be improving.

This sober assessment of Vietnam's global competitiveness forms a backdrop to the subject matter of this book, that is, the state of Vietnam's higher education system within the context of major structural and policy reform. The book provides a comprehensive and scholarly review of various dimensions of the higher education

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[1] World Economic Forum. The Global Competitiveness Report 2008–2009. Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2008.

[2] Ibid. p. 29

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system in Vietnam, including its recent history, its structure and governance, its teaching and learning culture, its research and research commercialisation environment, its socio-economic impact, its strategic planning processes, its progress with quality accreditation and its experience of internationalisation and privatisation. It also explains and analyses Vietnam's Higher Education Reform Agenda (HERA), a plan approved by the Government of Vietnam in 2005 for the comprehensive reform of the higher education system by 2020.[3]

For the past two decades, higher education reform has been high on the policy agendas of Southeast Asian nations. In response to globalisation, new trade arrangements and developments in information technology, a number of countries have embarked on major reforms with the aim of developing modern higher education systems that can support economic and social development and facilitate enhanced international trade and communications. In many cases, the key themes of the reforms are identical: marketisation, privatisation, changes in governance, enhanced student access, modern curricula and strong emphasis on science and technology. Like China, Vietnam has moved from a Soviet model of higher education towards a western-styled system. Both countries have restructured higher education in an attempt to provide for much larger student enrolments and greater student diversity, new curricula and teaching methods and an enhanced role for university research with stronger links to business and industry. In pursuing reform, countries like China, Malaysia and Thailand have made more impressive progress than some others towards achieving strong modern higher education systems with significant commitments in research and innovation.

The idea for the book developed as the editors became increasingly aware of the existence of a rapidly expanding volume of detailed information and research studies related to Vietnam's higher education and innovation systems, as well as to various aspects of Vietnam's social and economic development. Some of these studies included work commissioned or carried out by international aid agencies or by consultants working on development projects funded by donor agencies. Particularly important were studies commissioned to help develop strategies for implementating HERA. Other research had been completed by independent international scholars and by both Vietnamese and foreign PhD students. Much of this work, however, had unfortunately remained out of the easy reach of scholars and the wider public.

As editors we saw the opportunity to increase access to the body of scholarship that exists by inviting colleagues who have recently completed project work and research studies to develop chapters suitable for an edited volume of papers in the form of this book. Given that to date there has been very little published scholarship about the higher education system in Vietnam, the book sought also to address a need for key details of the higher education system to become better known within Vietnam itself and internationally. One notable feature of the book is that contributors include both Vietnamese and foreign scholars. As a result, we hope that the volume presents both local and international perspectives on various aspects of Vietnam's higher education system.

[3]Resolution no. 14/2005/NQ-CP, dated 2 November 2005.

This first chapter provides an overview of issues addressed in the book. It begins with a brief review of HERA. It then documents some significant challenges identified in individual chapters of the book. It concludes with a discussion of strategic priorities for the development of the higher education system.

The Reform Agenda

The scale of the reforms proposed by HERA is huge. The main elements are as follows:

- a sizable expansion of enrolments in higher education, the effect of which will be to increase the gross enrolment rate[4] by 2020 to about 45 per cent (three times its present level);
- the development of an enrolment profile by 2020 whereby 20 per cent of students attend selective research-oriented institutions, while the rest attend institutions providing professionally oriented training programmes (at present, this distinction exists only in a de facto way);
- a significant increase in the number of qualified higher education staff, sufficient to ensure a staff/student ratio of 1:20 by 2020 (the ratio is currently about 1:30), with at least 35 per cent of academic staff having a doctoral qualification (up from 15 per cent at present);
- the private sector to be greatly expanded, with enrolments at "non-public" universities and colleges to account for 40 per cent of all higher education enrolments by 2020 (up from about 13 per cent at present);
- the development of an advanced research and development culture, with research and development activities to account for 25 per cent of the higher education system's revenue by 2020 (currently it accounts for less than 2 per cent);
- the comprehensive reform of governance and management arrangements, with line-ministry control of public higher education institutions to be replaced by a system of governance within which these institutions have legal autonomy and greater rights in relation to their training programmes, research agendas, human resource management practices and budget plans;
- the renewal, restructuring and internationalisation of the higher education curriculum; and
- the development of a more internationally integrated higher education system, involving more international commitments and agreements, improvements in the teaching and learning of foreign languages (especially English), and the development of conditions favourable to increased foreign investment in the higher education system.

[4] The gross enrolment rate is the number of students enrolled in higher education as a proportion of the relevant age group in the population.

The impact of these reforms will be enormous. Trebling the gross enrolment rate by 2020, for example, will have major implications both for the size of the system, which will have 4.5 million students by 2020 and as many as 900 higher education institutions,[5] and for its social composition, which will become more broadly representative of the social, ethnic and regional variations in the population.

The reforms build on a previous suite of reforms, approved by the government in 1993. That reform package saw the establishment for the first time of a small group of large, multi-disciplinary universities (these subsequently became the 14 "key" universities in the public higher education system), the granting of approval for the existence of non-public higher education institutions (these institutions have multiplied and now comprise a non-public sector that accounts for almost 13 per cent of all higher education enrolments) and the introduction of student tuition fees to require students to contribute partially (in the case of the public sector) or fully (in the case of the non-public sector) to the cost of their higher education studies.

The HERA reforms will greatly extend the role and importance of market mechanisms in determining the profile and availability of higher education services. Prior to 1993, non-market regulatory mechanisms prevailed, with training programmes tailored to meet the specific labour force needs of particular ministries, and with access to these programmes granted as something of a privilege by the state. Following the reforms approved in 1993, course offerings became more responsive to market-based pressures, mainly through the operation of the non-public sector, and a user-pays principle became more widely influential as a means of determining access, though within strict limits because tuition fee levels consistently remained capped by the state. The reforms approved in 2005 will greatly increase the role of the market. Requiring non-public universities and colleges to enrol as many as 40 per cent of all higher education students by 2020, for example, will result in a significant transfer to individual consumers of the costs of higher education;[6] while requiring the sector as a whole to generate at least 25 per cent of its total revenue from the sale of scientific and technical products and services, and requiring higher education institutions to diversify their income sources by contracting out training and research activities and by engaging in technology transfer and similar related business activities, will make the whole system far more market responsive and much more entrepreneurial.

It is often thought to be contradictory that market forces should be so boldly sanctioned by Vietnam, a state that remains strongly committed at a political level to principles of Marxism-Leninism. In this regard, Vietnam, like China, is forging its own path in the development and application of a "socialist-oriented market mechanism".[7]

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[5] In 2007–2008, 368 higher education institutions provided for over 1.5 million students in Vietnam. Forward estimates of the size of the system by 2020 are provided in the official HERA documentation. More recent official statements have suggested that there may be a need for only 600 higher education institutions by 2020, of which about 38 per cent will be universities.

[6] Non-public higher education institutions receive no direct financial support from the government, and students attend them on a full-fee paying basis.

[7] Resolution no. 14/2005/NQ-CP, dated 2 November 2005, p. 2.

Challenges

The authors of individual chapters in this book have tended to perceive an appreciable gap between official aspirations and realistic expectations for higher education in Vietnam by 2020. While not underestimating Vietnam's capacity for resourcefulness and determination, the challenges to be addressed appear to be immense. Each of the chapters in the book provides a particular window on these challenges. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 provide, in addition, more general insights about the system.

In Chapter 2, Martin Hayden and Lam Quang Thiep provide an introduction to the higher education system, having regard both to its recent history and to plans for its future. This chapter highlights the extent of the difficulties involved in trying to develop an internationally competitive higher education system against a background of low per capita national income and a continuing legacy of centralised planning.

In Chapter 3, Elizabeth St. George considers the relevance of the concept of transition to an understanding of how the system came to be as it is. In doing so, she examines issues that were the substance of important debate during the period from 1986 to 1998 when parameters for the current system were being set. These issues included the direction of higher education policy, the place of the market, the shape of the curriculum, and the division of authority between universities and the state. Interestingly, she identifies 1998, the year in which a new education law was approved by the National Assembly, as marking the beginning of a post-communist framework for the system.

In Chapter 4, Pham Thanh Nghi addresses various of the reform measures proposed in HERA, the official blueprint for the development of the system up to 2020. He advances a view that, in an age of globalisation, and especially now that Vietnam is a member of the World Trade Organization, the overriding challenge for Vietnam's higher education system must be to improve the international competitiveness of its professional labour force. In his view, weaknesses in the higher education system mean that this challenge is not being addressed, which then undermines the nation's capacity to achieve rapid global integration.

Financial Affordability

One of the most significant challenges facing higher education in Vietnam concerns the financial affordability of plans for its reform and future growth. This challenge is referred to in various chapters in this book, but especially in Chapters 2 and 4

In Chapter 2, Martin Hayden and Lam Quang Thiep question the affordability of provisions in HERA concerning the rapid expansion of the system, at the same time as improvements are expected in the staff/student ratio and in the proportion of academic staff with doctoral qualifications. They note that Vietnam's rate of expenditure on its higher education system has tended to lag behind comparable rates of expenditure by other countries in the region; and they express concern that there is no evidence to date that a workable strategy has been developed to finance either the growth of the system or proposed improvements in its quality.

In Chapter 4, Pham Thanh Nghi, in appraising HERA, addresses particularly the depleted state of the existing staffing profile. He draws attention to the fact that during the past 20 years the number of higher education students has increased almost tenfold, while the number of teaching staff has managed only to double. He questions where the additional funds will come from to pay for proposed improvements, having regard especially to the fact that the National Assembly has on several occasions resisted proposals to raise student tuition fees or to seek more contributions from students or their parents.[8] He points out that, in order to comply with growth expectations by 2020, the system will need more than 100,000 additional staff holding a master's degree and 60,000 additional staff holding a doctorate – an objective that, given the existing levels of expenditure, he regards as being unachievable.

Teaching and Learning

In Chapter 5, Kay Harman and Nguyen Thi Ngoc Bich refer to challenges relating to the teaching and learning environment. They note, for example, the adverse impact on quality of the lack of formal preparation of academic staff for their role as teachers, the poor academic qualifications of many academic staff, the relatively low salary levels of most academics, the absence of many incentives to encourage improvements in teaching, the constraining impact of rigid curriculum requirements, the general shortage of learning materials and the lack of a sense of local control over the curriculum and over textbook selection. They conclude that enhancing quality and building research capacity in teaching and learning in Vietnam will require a commitment to upgrade lecturer qualifications, raise academic salary levels, reduce teaching loads, encourage lecturers to inform their teaching through research and provide training programmes on university teaching. They also note a need for the curriculum to focus more on assisting young people to develop skills required in an information-based global setting, including skills in critical thinking, problem solving and learning how to learn.

Research and Research Commercialisation

In Chapter 6, Grant Harman and Le Thi Bich Ngoc observe that HERA's targets for improving the research and development environment in Vietnam's universities are ambitious in light of the fact that, except for particular universities, notably the two national universities (in Hanoi and in Ho Chi Minh City) and three of the larger universities in regional areas (Hue, Da Nang and Can Tho), there is not much research taking place in Vietnam's universities. They report that state funding for research and development lags well behind benchmark levels set by other countries

[8] A contributing factor here is the extent to which National Assembly members do not have sufficient information or explanation to assist them in their decision making.

in the region, and that university-based research is severely hampered by infrastructure limitations, the lack of adequate time for research (because of high teaching loads and high student numbers), the lack of appropriate working conditions (with many academics not even having their own offices or places to conduct research) and the widespread absence of any institution-based systems of financial support for research. The absence of a well-developed research culture across the nation's universities is a significant challenge for the attainment of HERA's reform ambitions, as well as for Vietnam's aspiration to achieve industrialised country status by 2020.

In Chapter 7, Marea Fatseas focuses specifically on research commercialisation. She examines the impact to date of government policies on investment in science and technology, technology transfer and the encouragement of increased cooperation between industry, universities and other research organisations. Many impediments to the success of these policies are reported, including the comparatively recent development of a market economy in Vietnam, the apparent reluctance of enterprises to turn to universities for assistance with innovation, the unwieldy management practices of a majority of state-owned enterprises and the general lack of modern business management skills. She notes also a tendency for universities not to understand intellectual property issues and to be distrustful of industry in relation to this topic. There is also a problem arising from the fact that many academic staff have little experience with ways of commercialising scientific knowledge.

In Chapter 8, Robert Spoo and Dao Anh Tuan address issues relating to intellectual property. They identify four significant areas of challenge. The first is simply the need to develop among academic staff and students a greater understanding of the economic and the moral intellectual property rights that may be created by academic research. The second is the need to expand the extent of teaching about intellectual property, both in the general university curriculum and in pre-professional programmes. The third is the need to clarify precisely who owns the economic rights in intellectual property produced within Vietnamese universities. The fourth is the need for higher education institutions to develop expertise in commercialising intellectual property by means of technology licensing offices or similar means.

Governance, Strategic Planning and Management

In Chapter 9, Khanh Van Dao and Martin Hayden discuss challenges relating to the system's governance and management. HERA contained significant reform measures regarding governance and management of the system, including that higher education institutions should be given legal autonomy, that line-ministry control of public higher education institutions should be eliminated and that the role of the state in the management of the higher education system should be redefined. These measures reflect an official commitment to making higher education institutions more responsible for their own sustainability. The fact is, though, that neither the

government nor the higher education community has much experience with institutional autonomy. In addition, the system is lagging appreciably in terms of the extent to which an appropriate infrastructure for institutional self-governance exists. There are also unresolved questions about the lines of accountability between rectors and governing boards and about the formal role of the party in relation to institutional self-governance. The challenges that lie ahead in relation to the governance and management of higher education institutions in Vietnam are significant.

In Chapter 10, Larry Smith and Nguyen Quang Dong explore challenges concerning strategic planning for the system. It is evident from their account that there are many aspects of HERA as a strategic planning document that are deficient. They report that HERA lacks a clear vision for how the system will be positioned in the future, that it involves a large number of overly ambitious objectives, that it provides little detail on how the objectives will be implemented or resourced and that it makes no provision for the existence of a strong mechanism for providing timely and constructive feedback on performance. They argue strongly that the government, through HERA, is at risk of trying to do too much too quickly, without the benefit of a robust strategic planning process.

In Chapter 11, Ta Thai Anh and Richard Winter report on the experiences of senior academic managers at two public universities in Hanoi. The experiences of these senior managers (rectors, vice rectors, deans) provide interesting insights about change-management processes and prospects in the system. Given the tendency in Vietnamese culture for unequal power distributions in organisations to be accentuated, it is evident that senior academic managers will be critical to the reform of the system. Their vision for an institution will drive it in particular directions. It is evident also that their concerns are becoming more like those of their counterparts in the West, including the need to secure more income, contain costs, encourage innovation and distinctiveness and achieve national and international institutional recognition for their institutions.

Equity

In Chapter 12, Kiri Evans and Adam Rorris address specifically issues relating to equity in access to higher education. Improving its accessibility to the poor, a group comprising more than 30 per cent of the population and including disproportionately people from rural, upland and minority ethnic group backgrounds, is an especially difficult challenge. Critical areas of need are identified as including more educational institutions, more qualified teachers in schools (especially teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds) and more and better-quality teaching staff in universities. Of note is their observation that a national policy of decentralising financial autonomy to provincial and institutional levels may be counterproductive in equity terms: provincial governments in poorer regions of the country become less well able to support schools, colleges and universities in their regions, and the

institutions themselves are more likely to be forced to charge for the provision of additional educational services.[9]

Quality Accreditation

In Chapter 13, Don Westerheijden, Leon Cremonini and Roelien van Empel report on efforts to implement quality accreditation on a pilot basis across a selected group of universities. While their focus is on a particular project, contextual details are of note. There has clearly been no lack of official commitment to quality accreditation in higher education: quality assurance centres were established in 2000 at the two national universities; a commitment was made in 2001 to establish a national accreditation system by 2005; a new office was established within MOET in 2002 for the purposes of addressing quality accreditation; a list of quality standards for higher education institutions was issued late in 2004; and the government, through HERA, made a further commitment in 2005 to establish a quality assurance and control mechanism for the system. In 2005 and 2006, a total of 20 higher education institutions were funded to participate in a self-evaluation process related to quality standards. At the same time, however, there has been limited progress: the new office established within MOET in 2002 was inadequately resourced for the tasks assigned to it; an independent quality accreditation agency has not yet been established; and there is not yet any clear national set of quality-based standards for higher education institutions.

Internationalisation

In Chapter 14, Anthony Welch reports on the extent to which higher education in Vietnam has been affected by influences from abroad. The long-term influence of China is especially noted, and so too are more recent influences from France, the Soviet Union and, generally, the West. He notes particular ways in which the system is currently connected with an international setting. These include the extent of the outflow of Vietnamese students to study at foreign universities, the growing presence of foreign universities in Vietnam, the inflow of funds and expertise from members of the Vietnamese diaspora in the West, the growth of foreign investment in universities in Vietnam and Vietnam's increasing commitment to international alliances. The only adverse international influence identified is a long-standing brain

[9] It should be noted here that tuition fees are generally standard across the system, which means they are the same for students from well-off and from less well-off backgrounds. There are also other complexities that restrict equity – for example, universities of agriculture and of forestry are generally required to reserve around 30–40 per cent of their income for waiving tuition fees.

drain to other countries from Vietnam. He sees the future of higher education in Vietnam as including more foreign ventures and partnerships.

Privatisation

In Chapter 15, Martin Hayden and Khanh Van Dao assess the significance of the emergence of a non-public sector. The rate of growth of this sector during the 1990s was remarkable. Since then, its growth rate has been more closely tied to the rate of growth of the public sector. HERA proposed that the sector should account for 40 per cent of all higher education enrolments by 2020 (it currently accounts for 13 per cent), which will require a very rapid expansion of the sector during the next decade. Incentives for this expansion are not yet evident, though it does appear increasingly that the profit motive will, within certain limits, become a driving force. At present, though, non-public higher education institutions generally have little room to move within strict controls, and they remain inferior in status.

Priorities

What, then, should be Vietnam's priorities? In HERA, there is a clear statement of intent that by 2020 the higher education system should be "advanced by international standards, highly competitive, and appropriate to the socialist-oriented market mechanism".[10] HERA does not expand on this statement, however, and so questions regarding the meaning of terms such as "advanced by international standards", "highly competitive" and "socialist-oriented market mechanism" remain open to interpretation. There can be little doubt, though, that Vietnam is seeking to have a higher education system that, in addition to contributing to the cultural depth of its society, will contribute solidly to future national economic well-being by providing a highly skilled workforce capable of responding to new opportunities in the global economy. HERA anticipates that this outcome is more likely to be achieved if by 2020 the higher education system is three times larger than at present, better managed and better integrated, more flexible in providing opportunities for course transfer, more equitable, more financially self-reliant, more research-oriented, more focused on the commercialisation of research and training opportunities, more attuned to international benchmarks of quality and more open to international engagement.

These aspirations for the system also underpin a much more systematic reform agenda developed in a recent World Bank publication, entitled *Vietnam: Higher Education and Skills for Growth* (The World Bank, 2008). This agenda is constructed within a framework of *outcomes*, *outputs*, *inputs and processes* for the higher education system. Outcomes include that the system should be a driver of

[10] Ibid.

research and development, a provider of higher level skills and a provider of opportunities for all talented students. Outputs include that there should be a variety of degree types and of fields of education, diverse instructional methods, a mix of public and private providers, "tiered" systems with elite institutions and multiple forms of university–industry collaboration. Inputs and processes include a governance and financing framework conducive to the desired outputs.

Within this framework, an action plan for reform in three stages is proposed. The stages are as follows:

- *laying the foundations of a competitive higher education system*: consolidating the accountability and quality assurance framework; removing remaining restrictions on and regulatory opaqueness relating to the development of a competitive market situation for higher education services; and allocating public funds more strategically;
- *improving the framework for higher relevance of academic decisions*: transferring more decision-making autonomy to higher education institutions within a clear distribution of roles among different actors; further developing the framework for university–industry linkages; and improving information on education sector and labour market outcomes and requirements; and
- *building a first-class higher education system*: identifying and supporting centres of excellence; developing an autonomous higher education system that is accountable to the state and to students; realigning the financing framework for higher education by making it more performance-based and equity-based in its operation; ensuring a higher diversification of funding sources; and making academic decision making more relevant to private sector and labour market concerns.

This action plan is impressive in many respects. It recognises the need for a staged sequence of reforms to the higher education system – a need largely ignored by HERA. Its breadth of vision for the higher education is wide in scope and consistent with international benchmarks. It identifies the need to consolidate an accountability and quality assurance framework for the system as being one of the first priorities for reform. At the same time, the action plan is, however, strongly oriented to an advanced market model for higher education – a feature of the plan that is more evident when some of its details are considered, including a proposal to abandon institutional quotas and to examine the possible removal of caps on tuition fees. Even if Vietnam were to prefer an advanced market model for higher education, it is difficult to see how this model could possibly be fully implemented by 2020 without there being extensive dislocation to the provision of higher education services. More importantly, perhaps, it is difficult to see how the model could be adopted without there also being foundational reform concerning the role of the party and the state in relation to higher education, and without there also being a protracted period of renegotiation of the complex system of shared responsibilities for higher education that has developed over time between the national, provincial/city, district/town and local community levels of government.

Our own approach is one of suggesting a more limited number of priorities for attention. The first of these concerns *funding*. HERA does not make clear how its intended reform measures will be funded. Loan funds from the World Bank, together with funds provided by international aid donors, may assist in achieving some reform measures, but it is inconceivable that these funds would ever be sufficient to raise the quality of the system to a level where by 2020 it was "advanced by international standards". Additional funds, presumably from an increased national investment in higher education, will be required. The issue of funding is, therefore, a matter of the highest priority.

This priority may be difficult to address because it will inevitably require some significant shifts in the funding priorities of the state. The World Bank has estimated that total higher education expenditure as a proportion of GDP may need to be doubled in order to simply reach the enrolment targets set by HERA for 2020 (The World Bank, 2008: 96). Within this context, it has been suggested that higher education institutions might, in future, "tap harder for private resources through cost recovery, revenue generating programs targeting employees of public and private enterprises, fostering stronger ties with the private sector to become the preferred provider of research and development services, and soliciting charitable giving from the alumni and foundations" (The World Bank, 2008: 96). The fact is, though, that with so many more higher education institutions likely to exist by 2020, and with a far higher proportion of them than at present being non-public, and therefore ineligible for any financial support for the state, tapping harder by individual institutions may not be anywhere near enough to keep them all going, especially as higher standards of service provision have also been mandated by HERA. It seems inevitable, therefore, that a very large increase in public expenditure on higher education will be required if HERA's reform measures are to be achieved by 2020.

The second priority concerns *quality standards*. The need for universities in Vietnam to be required to comply with a set of quality accreditation standards that are closely aligned with international standards of quality is compelling. As Don Westerheijden and colleagues note in Chapter 13, Vietnam cannot afford to be immune from striving to ensure international recognition of the academic qualifications awarded by its universities, and thus it cannot afford to ignore the need for a rigorous system of quality accreditation for its university system. This theme is also an element in Pham Thanh Nghi's argument in Chapter 4 that the success of the higher education system in Vietnam must be judged in large part by the extent to which it is effective in improving the international competitiveness of the nation's professional labour force.

The introduction of a quality accreditation system for Vietnam's public and private higher education institutions should be introduced progressively. Vietnam's "key" public universities, together with a number of proposed new "international" universities, might be the first institutions to be required to achieve accreditation. If the accreditation system is to be effective, then it must also be unyielding in terms of its expectations. It follows that a good deal of additional expenditure, and a great deal of further reform, will be required in areas of teaching and learning, research and research commercialisation, governance, strategic planning and management,

and equity, before any existing institutions are granted accreditation. A progressive approach to quality accreditation will inevitably mean that, for as long as it takes for all higher education institutions to become accredited, there will be tiers of institutions, that is, those that meet quality standards and those that have yet to meet them. This situation seems unavoidable.

In addressing quality accreditation, there will also be a critical need to address the *governance* of the system. Without a concerted effort to embed appropriate levels of autonomy in the system and to require strict adherence to transparency and accountability in decision making about academic standards and the use of financial resources, there is a risk that increases in funding and the establishment of what appears to be a coherent quality accreditation system will not have the desired effects on the higher education system.

The challenge of raising standards across the higher education system in Vietnam cannot be left to wait until sufficient funds have been found to ensure that all higher education institutions can be accredited against rigorous quality standards. Incremental reform of the system must continue. In this regard, the reform measures listed in HERA are valuable in that they indicate to the system at large the direction of change during the period up to 2020. The reform measures in HERA need to be more fully explained, though, and strategies for their attainment need to be developed. This book will hopefully contribute to the process of identifying suitable strategies by providing an understanding of the context for their development and by discussing specific aspects of the system within an international perspective.

Reference

The World Bank (2008) Vietnam: Higher Education and Skills for Growth. Washington DC: The World Bank.