

fluid with some universities moving up many places (Queen Mary University, London from 46th to 11th, Nottingham from 35th to 24th) and some others fell equally sharply. The pockets of excellence spread widely across the system, and three post-1992 universities (Hertfordshire, Brighton, and De Montfort) were for the first time ranked above some pre-1992 institutions.

These results raised serious funding issues. The government had always liked that the RAE methodology chimed with its policy of investment in and concentration of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) research to support national economic ambitions. This policy also helped maintain the United Kingdom's position in worldwide citation tables. For institutions concerned about the resource base, however, the major issues have revolved around the gradient of the reward structures for the different rankings and the size of the "pots of gold" allocated to each discipline. The greater dispersal of former pockets of excellence—the majority in non-STEM subjects—produced in a fixed budget a theoretical redistribution of funding away from the major centers of research concentration and drove a coach and horses through the gov-

*Pockets of excellence were recognized in a much more dispersed set of institutions than in previous RAEs.*

ernment's policy. Rumors of large cuts in high-ranked institutions abounded. To accommodate the difficulty, the size of the fixed sum had to be expanded, and a switch of funding into the STEM "pots of gold" had to be undertaken. Thus, in England, whereas in 2001 90 percent of the R funding was shared among 38 universities, the figure will be 48 in 2008—25 institutions receiving research funding for the first time. There have been significant winners and losers: in spite of their ranking, Imperial College has lost 5 percent of its R money and London School of Economics 13 percent (because of the switch of funding to STEM subjects); Nottingham, on the other hand, which is strong in STEM subjects, gained 23 percent.

#### THE FUTURE OF THE RAE

A compromise may have been achieved. The advocates of concentration can point to 75 percent of the funds going to 26 institutions only, with Cambridge, Oxford, Imperial College, and University College London receiving more than 25 percent. However, the post-1992 universities in particular and many individuals in unfashionable institutions can claim to be vindicated in the exposure of a much greater spread of research talent than was apparent in the past. Nevertheless, the 2008 RAE has created aspirations that will be hard to meet. Another danger is that the new Research Excellence Framework, which is planned to succeed the RAE and will be

much more metrics based, will be more heavily steered by government and less likely to reward excellence wherever it is found. ■

## Vietnam's Strategy on Higher Education: The Hardware Needs Software

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Virtuous and talented men are state sustaining elements: The strength and the prosperity of a state depend on its vitality, and a state becomes weaker as such vitality fails. That is why all the Saint Emperors and clear-sighted Kings did not fail in seeing to the formation of men of talent and the employment of literati to develop this vitality.  
—Nien Hieu Dai Bao, 1442

If Vietnam is to achieve the lofty goals of the prophetic words quoted above and inscribed on a plaque hanging inside Hanoi's Temple of Literature, the first university in Vietnam and for centuries the principal center of learning, it is imperative that Vietnam establishes a high-quality, sustainable system of higher education if it desires to continue on its development path.

#### THE NEW STRATEGY

The recently released Draft Strategy for Education Development for 2009–2020 has set a number of goals for the Vietnamese education system. One of the main targets calls for the construction of four international standard universities, over the next decade, and to ensure that by 2020 at least two of these universities become among the 200 top universities in the world. These universities, estimated to cost US\$400 million to build and staff, will be interdisciplinary, providing high-quality education in both Vietnamese and English.

Another goal outlined in the draft is to have 450 university students per 10,000 people by 2020. This would be a dramatic increase from the current ratio of 180 per 10,000 persons and would require not only a tripling of the number of colleges and universities but a fourfold increase in the number of students.

Vast improvements must occur in the primary and secondary educational sectors to create a pipeline of students into higher education. The quality of higher education must be addressed and significantly improved to meet the objective of

having 5 percent of undergraduates obtain the knowledge equal to that of students graduating with honors from the leading universities in countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

#### THE NEED FOR CHANGE

The poor quality of Vietnam's educational sector is well known. The Ministry of Education and Training, while denying the opinion that Vietnam's educational reform is at a standstill, readily acknowledges the need for major change. Thus, devoting significant resources to building international standard universities can be perceived as a radical move designed to shake up the system.

#### THE TOP-DOWN APPROACH

The policy of building one or more international standard universities to reform the educational system depicts a trickle-down theory. This approach involves providing tax cuts or other benefits to the higher-income groups and business with the expectation that the benefits will eventually flow to the broader population.

It could be interpreted that building an international standard university with high-quality faculty, facilities, and students would serve as a testing ground for higher education reform throughout Vietnam. The successful lessons learned from this model will provide the impetus for other universities to emulate, and the benefits will trickle down to all levels of the educational system.

One of the keystones of the international standard university model is the ability of these institutions to act on an autonomous basis free from the constraints of the Ministry of Education and Training. As Vladimir Briller recently noted, "Vietnam is under a curriculum based on teaching, not on learning. That means the Ministry of Education and Training prescribes what you teach and not what students learn and will be able to do. This is a major crisis." Thus, autonomy would include freedom from regulations that govern curriculum, faculty hiring and advancement, and student enrollment.

#### THE BOTTOM-UP APPROACH

The bottom-up or grassroots approach to economic development includes consolidating the higher education system through mergers of smaller and midsized colleges, reforming university governance and finances, and promoting quality through an innovations program that give the incentive to universities themselves to promote internal reform. To date, however, such an approach has not yet proved successful, primarily attributable to inadequacies in educational management and a system of entrenched bureaucracy.

#### THE REAL PROBLEM MAY BE THE SOFTWARE

Vietnam has already created nearly 100 universities in the past

three years. While the building of more universities tackles the problem of expanding the "hardware," the real debate on the future of Vietnam's education system should focus on the severe shortage of "software" or qualified human resources.

In Vietnam, where two-thirds of the population is under the age of 30, universities are struggling to cope with a growing demand. Despite the fact that education has expanded, the number of lecturers has not seen any considerable change. Given the low salaries of instructors, averaging only US\$150 per month, many people have moved to more lucrative careers—putting severe strains on universities and impeding the enticement of new entrants into the field.

The Vietnamese government reports approximately 1.6 million students and over 53,000 lecturers, or one lecturer for every 28 students. However, to enroll close to 4.5 million students by 2020 and keep the student to lecturer ratio constant, 220,000 more lecturers—an average of 12,000 more lecturers every year—must be employed.

The current shortage requires faculty to teach more hours. At one of the major universities in Hanoi, for example, the

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average teaching hours of lecturers are reported to be 162 percent higher than the required hours under the current regulations. Some institutions have resorted to staffing a majority of their courses with full-time lecturers from other schools, hired on a part-time basis or employing faculty with only a bachelor's degree.

The shortage of faculty is especially severe at the advanced level. Data indicate slightly over 10 percent of faculty hold a doctoral degree, although the term may be misleading. Many Vietnamese doctorate holders, particularly if educated domestically, are actually educated only to the bachelor's level on the international scale.

#### HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

The Vietnamese government has embarked on an ambitious plan to enable individuals to pursue advanced degree programs both in Vietnam and abroad, although the target to train 20,000 PhDs over the next decade may not be realistic. The educational authorities appear to be counting on outside aid and educational partnerships to assist in this undertaking. A number of countries, including the United States, Switzerland, Finland, Belgium, France, and Japan, are currently providing support for such endeavors. Yet since funding is a scarce resource for all parties, cost-effective programs are advisable, and only time will tell if the current methods of training are

economically beneficial.

There is no doubt that “virtuous and talented men” are state sustaining elements. However, if Vietnam is to take a great leap forward in developing its educational system it must choose the proper strategy of hardware and software development to produce graduates with the skills and qualifications needed to survive in the new market-oriented environment. ■

## The United Arab Emirates and the Branch Campus Gold Rush

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The fairly new higher education system in the United Arab Emirates is experiencing accelerated growth. The country opened its first university in 1976, established its Ministry of Higher Education in 1992, and began full-time licensing and accrediting of higher education in 2000. Many foreign institutions have opened branch campuses. This expansion’s frenetic pace has presented both opportunity and peril for the nation and its students.

### EXISTING BRANCHES

Branch campuses have opened throughout this tiny nation from the high-profile city of Dubai to the little-known enclave, of Ras Al Khaimah. However, the government of Dubai, with its market-driven approach, has certainly been at the forefront of the branch-campus movement in the United Arab Emirates. It has done this through the establishment of two education free zones, which often provide facilities, offer subsidies, and bypass the federal higher education accreditation system. Of the two free zones, Knowledge Village has been in operation since 2003, while its successor, International Academic City, was established in 2007. International universities such as the University of Wollongong, University of Exeter, St. Petersburg State University of Engineering & Economics, and, most prominently, Michigan State University, have all been attracted to what has been called a branch campus gold rush. Not to be outdone, the Emirate of Ras Al Khaimah has an education free zone that includes the University of Bolton, the University of Pune, and, for a little while longer, George Mason University. Branch campus supporters claim that the large number of institutions in Dubai and Ras Al Khaimah are beginning to

create a culture of academia and that some are transitioning to a more comprehensive model, including research. Nevertheless, it is within these two emirates, with their limited government support and market-driven approaches, that cracks are beginning to appear in the branch campus façade.

As a newer approach to internationalization, the government of Abu Dhabi has also begun to actively pursue high-profile institutional partnerships. In contrast to other emirates, Abu Dhabi has generally funded the branches and presided in a far more measured and exclusive manner. Regarded as the richest city in the world, it is assumed to possess the financial power to fund branch campuses. The two major partnerships at this time are with New York University and the Paris-Sorbonne University. The government recently gifted New York University US\$50 million as a commitment to launching a branch campus in the capital. The Paris-Sorbonne branch campus is also government financed and will have a prestigious landmark facility built. The latest candidates for branch campuses include the University of Oxford and the American women’s liberal arts college, Bryn Mawr. Not all Abu Dhabi branch campus overtures have been successful, however. Even with full financial support, Yale dropped plans in 2008 to open an arts institute because of a dispute concerning the degrees being offered. Whether the more measured approach taken by Abu Dhabi will fare any better than the market-driven model employed by Ras Al Khaimah and Dubai remains to be seen. Though Abu Dhabi’s funding seems sound, it too may become stretched in these times of global economic uncertainty and reduced petrochemical revenue.

### CLOSURES

As the first high-profile casualty of this branch campus gold rush, the University of Southern Queensland closed its doors in 2005, after just one year. With the recent announcement of George Mason’s closing after only three years, a shadow has been cast over the entire branch-campus industry in the United Arab Emirates. At last count more than 55 universities were operating in a country with a population of only 4.5 million. Furthermore, a scan of programs on offer indicates that far too many institutions are now looking to the American-style MBA as their way into an already overcrowded marketplace—for example, the University of Pune. One begins to question the motives of many of these institutions—if they have the development of the country at heart, especially when closures and abandonments occur. More often than not, the allure of financial gain for the home campus seems to be a major driving force for establishing any branches.

Continually, the mantra of branch campuses in the United Arab Emirates describes them as committed to the country, meeting the diverse needs of the student population, and understanding what it takes to succeed in the region. These claims have generally been followed up by overinflated predictions for the size of the initial student intake, the potential for subsequent growth, and the language proficiency of regional