

RMIT Vietnam and Vietnam's Development: Risk and Responsibility

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To help bridge the gap between demand and supply for tertiary education, Vietnam has opened to direct, foreign providers, and the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) International University Vietnam is the first of this category. By sponsoring a large project in a country that some see as risky, RMIT Vietnam needs to be triply viable. Financially, it relies on fees, so its programs must be effective and affordable. Environmentally, with its second campus in an estuarine environment near the centre of Ho Chi Minh City, it must demonstrate sustainable development and show new ways to develop learning and research environments. Socially and culturally, it must provide opportunities for the disadvantaged and engage with local communities. RMIT Vietnam is engaging directly in community partnerships and local projects, providing scholarships for disadvantaged students, and assisting with capacity building for local universities. In an emerging economy, such a market-reliant university can contribute to poverty alleviation and sustainable development.

Keywords: *Vietnam; universities; sustainable development*

The Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) was established in 1887 as the Working Men's College and is now a university established under the legislation of Victoria, Australia. It is a major provider of international education with more than 14,000 international students in Australia and overseas in higher education and vocational education and training programs. RMIT International University Vietnam (RMIT Vietnam) has been operating since January 2001 as a university in Vietnam—a fully owned subsidiary of RMIT. Although RMIT Vietnam must demonstrate financial viability, it aims to contribute to the sustainable economic, social, and environmental development of Vietnam. The purpose of this article is to discuss the ways in which RMIT Vietnam is making such a contribution and the challenges it faces in doing that.

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HIGHER EDUCATION IN VIETNAM

Vietnamese culture holds learning in great reverence, even by East Asian standards, and has a long history of international provision of higher education and training. RMIT is not the first international provider of higher education to Vietnam. The Chinese dominated Vietnam from 111 before Common Era to 938 Common Era and, under the Confucian system, provided all levels of education including access to higher education to some Vietnamese, particularly from the Tang dynasty when students from Vietnam were eligible to take the competitive examinations in Beijing (Hac, 1995; Thu, 1994). Considered as the forerunner of today's universities, the National Institute of Learning and the Royal College were established in the (Buddhist) Temple of Literature from 1253 until the end of the 18th century from where it moved to Hue, the Nguyen Dynasty capital. The Temple of Literature in Hanoi is still visited by university students as the site of the first university.

The legacies of French, Japanese, and U.S. colonialism and wars and Soviet-influenced construction left the higher education sector in a very difficult position at reunification in 1975. Early reforms subsequently focused on literacy and basic primary education and then secondary education. Universities developed more slowly. A system of universities and teacher training colleges was established under the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) and many more technical and professional colleges under other ministries. However, after the market reform policy of *doi moi* was promulgated from 1986, a booming young population created great pressure on the higher education sector. Recent further reforms to the higher education system to amalgamate universities in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Hue, Hanoi, Thai Nguyen, and Cantho attempted to improve the quality of provision, but resource shortages, in particular, have held back the pace of these improvements. Permission to allow fee-paying students into public universities and colleges, to permit semipublic universities to open up, and to establish people-founded (private) universities were attempts to increase the quantity of higher education, but the pressure on places nevertheless became immense with more than 1 million eligible students competing annually (often in recurring years) for 120,000 places in public universities. Although economic reform has enabled the economy to grow rapidly, it became clear to the leadership that there were serious shortages of professionally skilled people and trained technicians thereby potentially holding back economic growth and social development (Dao, 1996). Moreover, without further reform in the higher education and training sectors, Vietnam's leaders saw that they would face social unrest from a growing articulate middle class, particularly in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. They reviewed the experience of other countries with a focus on Southeast Asia and decided to open up the education sector to foreign providers.

With prosperity, a growing number of tertiary students could afford to study offshore, often with financial help from overseas families (see Cohen, 2003).¹ Universities in Australia (by far the largest higher education provider to Vietnam) at first concentrated on attracting fee-paying and scholarship-holding Vietnamese students to Australia and then later became interested in providing university programs in Vietnam itself through *twinning* partnerships with local universities and colleges. Under these arrangements, the local partner university typically provides campus facilities, marketing, licensing, administration, and other services. With the Bilateral Trade Agreement, there is considerable U.S. interest in establishing higher education institutions in Vietnam as well as from other countries (Kelly, 2000).

RMIT IN VIETNAM

The RMIT has dramatically expanded the number of international students in Melbourne from 700 in 1987 to 8,700 in 2002. Among these, students from Vietnam grew steadily, so by the time feasibility studies were under way for RMIT Vietnam in 1999, the RMIT had 250 fee-paying and scholarship students from Vietnam studying in Melbourne and more than 1,100 Vietnam-born Australian residents.

But sending students and trainees overseas satisfies only a tiny portion of the demand in Vietnam and typically only of the wealthy and well connected. Moreover, overseas study can be linked with migration intentions and risk of overstay in Australia, and nonreturns are seen as contributing to a brain drain and loss of foreign exchange by Vietnam.

Therefore, the RMIT considered strengthening its activities in Vietnam. Its international strategy classified Vietnam as a high-priority country with long-term growth prospects and immediate opportunities for development assistance and community service. There is a large community of Australian Vietnamese in Melbourne, and the RMIT adopted a policy to internationalise its programs, students, and staff. After establishing a number of university partnerships in Vietnam, providing a building on the campus of Vietnam National University Hanoi, and donating computers, scholarships, and books to other universities in Vietnam, the RMIT found itself the leading destination worldwide for Vietnam tertiary students studying offshore, albeit, then, in modest numbers. As the university provided a joint master's of systems engineering program with Vietnam National University Hanoi and a large training program with Ford Motor Company, it recognised a stronger economy in Vietnam than shown by official statistics and a willingness to assemble family resources for social advancement through education. It helped that Australia and Vietnam had strong bilateral relations that feature education and training.

The RMIT discussed with the government of Vietnam how an international university might be developed and drafted a proposal that addressed the patterns of demand and the particular needs of Vietnam by matching them with the technological and vocational strengths of the RMIT.

As a country of 80 million people in transition from a planned to market economy, enriched by its own tradition of university education but held back by war and poverty, Vietnam presented particular challenges. Strong though RMIT's partnerships with local universities and their programs were, the direction of the government's invitation was towards full foreign ownership and independent international curricula so that a new university, with a technical and vocational emphasis, might quickly come into being as a model and training ground to assist the development of capacity across the education, training, and research sectors.

To enable such a venture to start in Vietnam required changes to laws and regulations as well as changes in attitude to national self-reliance and cultural protection. The government pressed ahead and made the changes (Government of Vietnam, 2000). Vietnam has not been given sufficient credit internationally for opening its education, health, and scientific research markets to direct foreign investment in a more open manner than most Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and many Asian countries. Determination to meet the educational and employment needs of the exploding number of young people and to provide a skill base for modernising industries overcame traditional caution and political concern about opening up the education sector to private investment.

Market research showed a number of promising sectors and discrete submarkets, each needing its own approach to program development and provision. To provide programs at international standards at a reasonable price for people in Vietnam and surrounding countries, an educational model different from current Vietnamese practice and at the forefront of current international practice would be needed with an emphasis on electronically distributed coursework, client-driven learning, a significant international staff presence, and staff development for local academics.

Purpose-built learning environments were essential given that the telecommunications infrastructure for full online delivery was not developed and that the new modes of learning required different building layouts and infrastructure setups from most existing buildings.

Ho Chi Minh City was the best location for the first campus given the government's characterisation of regional higher education policy. In this characterisation, the northern regions emphasise scholarship, fundamental research, and the humanities; the central regions emphasise culture, the arts, and history; and the

southern regions emphasise technology, business, and applied research. In the far northern mountain area and the far south Mekong delta, the emphasis is on extension services to national minorities and agriculture/fisheries, respectively. In practice, and consistent both with the license and government encouragement, particular opportunities are pointing to a national network of campuses and sites rather than just one location.

These features shaped the project design. It had to be a new model for private international education and training delivery appropriate to a large transitional economy.

APPROVAL OF PROJECT

The government of Vietnam accepted RMIT's proposal for an international university. After a feasibility study, in 1998, a provisional license to operate a foreign-owned university in Ho Chi Minh City was granted. After further work, in April 2000, an investment license was issued to the RMIT for a period of 50 years. The RMIT then developed detailed academic, financial, and other plans that were appraised by private and multilateral financiers and by Vietnamese and Australian government authorities. Finance for the first stage of development, \$33.6 million (U.S. dollars) has been raised.

The RMIT International University Vietnam commenced operation in Ho Chi Minh City in January 2001. It is the country's first international university of the modern era, aiming to contribute to the development of education, training, and research across Southeast Asia from one of the region's most dynamic cities.

The university operates within the Law on Foreign Investment in Vietnam and its regulations. It has an independent ability to set curricula, collect fees, and manage its academic and other programs. A board of management is the governing authority of the university, and the RMIT in Australia is the accrediting body for the institution and its academic programs.

The university is completing its second year of operation with a staff of more than 100 at the city campus in District Three of Ho Chi Minh City, a distributed learning platform with considerable investment in information technology and information resources, and more than 800 students enrolled. For a second campus on a 57-hectare site in the Saigon South Development Area, planning and project management work has commenced and a lease entered into for a staged development (12 hectare first stage). A third campus is under consideration. Beyond Ho Chi Minh City, the management of a number of major projects with other universities, government, and business partners is providing valuable experience and building cooperative partnerships.

SUMMARY OF PROJECT

RMIT Vietnam's mission is to provide professional and vocational education, training programs, outcome-related research, and consultancy services that address real-world issues appropriate to Vietnam's economic and social development and its environmental sustainability.

The objectives of the university were established to:

- provide professional and vocational education and training programs;
- provide outcome related research and consultancy services;
- contribute to economic, social, and environmentally sustainable development; and
- provide appropriate levels of return on investment.

The viability of the RMIT Vietnam rests on three criteria in particular: meeting demands in a number of discrete areas, addressing national needs in Vietnam, and mobilising RMIT capability in its areas of strength. Program areas include language learning, preparatory and bridging programs, undergraduate and postgraduate programs, industry training and short courses, research and development, community and regional partnerships, study abroad, and consultancy and project management. RMIT Vietnam's city campus currently offers intensive English-language classes, university preparation programs, undergraduate degrees in three bachelor programs in information technology disciplines and in commerce, and master's programs in systems engineering (also offered in Hanoi through Vietnam National University Hanoi), education, and information technology. Program planning for undergraduate engineering, environmental science, business administration, and other areas are well advanced.

The medium of study is English for all programs (other than some planned Vietnamese and possibly French courses for nonnative speakers). Intensive English is being provided in 10-week courses and other modes for particular clients.

Many students entering into RMIT undergraduate courses also need to undertake a university preparatory program to augment the secondary curricula in Vietnam, improve their English-language skills, and develop further study and learning skills associated with RMIT's educational model.

The undergraduate degree programs will grow to become the main part of the university's activities once language training and university preparatory programs are well established. Business programs commenced in 2002 and engineering is planned for 2003.

Postgraduate programs have been important from the beginning with coursework programs in engineering, education, information technology, and architecture in the first group. The master's programs in education are important for staff

development and are offered to other universities, companies, and agencies as part of RMIT Vietnam's contribution to institutional strengthening in Vietnam. Research degree programs will also commence in 2003 with components in Melbourne and Vietnam.

Industry training and short courses have been identified as core activities for RMIT Vietnam by market research and economic analysis. Skills in demand identified by market research cover a wide range of industries, professions, and occupations. The training program is configuring RMIT certificate courses and individual modules, study visits, supervised-action learning projects, and intensive training workshops.

RMIT Vietnam is also providing customised short courses through enterprises and to individuals for skill development or as part of lifelong learning. This category will include the single-subject market by which interested individuals join award-length students in normal listed subjects. Some are being offered in association with study abroad in Australia, and joint programs are planned with partners in Europe and North America.

Research and development in Vietnam is being grown as a high priority as a reflection of RMIT's overall priorities and the requests of Vietnam partners and governments. The emphasis is on meeting needs for the practical development of products and services such as sustainable water and sanitation, software engineering, and appropriate product design. RMIT's research and development capacity in Melbourne is being mobilised to assist research development in Vietnam. The long-term plan envisages the creation of institutes linked to industry and located alongside academic areas with a small corporate and technology precinct. Each area would seek to attract corporate, government, nongovernment organisation (NGO), and philanthropic sponsors.

The RMIT and RMIT Vietnam plan to step up action research into the major project itself during the year in priority areas. Early priority was given to the following areas:

- Environmental studies is one such area, particularly water resources and sustainable development. Symposia on water quality were held in Hue, Ho Chi Minh City, and Hanoi. Monitoring environmental conditions and the land development of the Saigon South campus offer further opportunities for research and the emergence of a community of professional practice in science, engineering, urban planning, building, and social development. A student research project on these topics was completed in 2002 with a mixed team of Melbourne-based and Ho Chi Minh City-based students.
- Information and communication technology has strengthened its hold on national priorities for research and development and training. The government's science and technology strategy and its master plan on information-technology development for 2001 to

2005 give top priority to software development as well as to biological and new material technologies.

- Innovations in educational direction characterise much of the approach to learning offered through RMIT Vietnam. The educational model adopted for RMIT Vietnam, a requirement to monitor the experience of course provision, the strong national and international interest in the learning resource centres program, and the requests of the Ministry for Education and Training and local universities all have caused priority to be given to research and development in teaching and learning with technology in a cross-cultural setting.
- Product design and materials is another area where RMIT's strength matches needs and opportunities in Vietnam in such areas as safety product design where it is possible to make a contribution to the reduction of road trauma—a major cause of death in Vietnam.

Community and regional partnerships are vital to RMIT Vietnam's success. It is clear that there are real needs that can be addressed through community action research. Issues include social dislocation/tensions arising from the shifts from rural to urban economies, entrepreneurship in very small enterprises as a method of poverty alleviation and capacity building, and the need for appropriate technology solutions for the very poor in Vietnam such as in water treatment, sanitation, waste management, information and communication technology, community health, and education. The RMIT Vietnam is exploring a role in this field by strengthening partnerships with NGOs and international development assistance agencies.

Project management and consultancy are in strong demand in Vietnam. Some examples of projects include the following:

- Jointly with Hue University and the East Meets West Foundation, developing an international-standard learning resource centre in Hue through project management services and training and the organisation of procurement and acquisitions. This will enable the RMIT Vietnam to extend academic and other forms of cooperation with Hue University.
- A further learning resource centre at the University of Danang is under way following RMIT Vietnam's postoccupancy review of a centre already at the city campus of that university. Linked academic cooperation is planned to follow. Another learning resource centre at Cantho is in development in the south with feasibility work proceeding in Thai Nguyen in the north.
- To ensure learning resource centres are easily integrated and take advantages of economies of scale in acquisitions, classification, search protocols, and library management systems, a review of national standards and systems for information resources in Vietnam was undertaken. This resulted in the unexpectedly rapid adoption of recommended, common, national library standards by the Vietnam National Library, National Science and Technology Library, and key ministries and further stages of work towards a common national classification system and serials list (Robinson & Stueart, 2001).

RMIT VIETNAM'S DEVELOPMENT CONTRIBUTION

In responding to the invitation of the government of Vietnam to propose a new institution of training and higher education in Vietnam, the RMIT has been conscious to support the economic, political, cultural, and social interests of Vietnam. Concerns have been expressed over the role of market-oriented international higher education providers in developing countries (or addressed online to developing countries) through providing services only to the rich or through being a medium of uncritical globalisation (e.g., see Ziguras, 2001).

The RMIT Vietnam has undertaken to support Vietnam's development in the following ways:

- Provide a combination of training, education, and innovative research and development that will be closely geared to the needs of private industry, the government, and the community with a particular emphasis on international-standard technological education and training in Vietnam;
- Improve labour skills and competencies, produce graduates, develop trainees, and support the human-resources development of Vietnam and the capacity of Vietnamese training and educational institutions;
- Operate as a good model in technological education, new teaching and learning methodologies, institutional organisation, and management;
- Participate in the development of the Greater Mekong Region, particularly the development of the southern delta region of Vietnam;
- Strengthen the links between Vietnam and other Australian communities and companies;
- Provide employment for Vietnamese people and promote cooperation among international and Vietnamese staff and students;
- Respond to community needs and assist economic development and poverty alleviation; and
- Develop campuses that are examples of international best practice environmentally and socially.

These contributions to development are consistent with the challenges recently identified by the World Bank for tertiary education in developing countries (World Bank, 2002). They are examined in more detail as follows.

HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Contributing to education and training in Vietnam is obviously a key aim of the RMIT Vietnam. More than most countries, Vietnam reveres the scholarly purposes of education. The first two objectives of a draft of its 2010 long-term vision for the education sector (World Bank, 2001) aim at:

- Broad intellectual development for all citizens enabling each to participate actively, innovatively, and flexibly in a fast evolving and changing economy;
- Specific learning goals include (a) independent and creative thinking, (b) self-discipline and social responsibility, (c) control and use of science and modern technology, (d) teamwork and community skills and spirit, and (e) healthy and harmonious living.

The RMIT Vietnam is specifically licensed as a pilot project to contribute to Vietnam's development through innovative teaching and learning. The RMIT Vietnam aims to provide a model for Vietnamese institutions in terms of curriculum, teaching and learning methods, setting educational and training standards, and monitoring learning outcomes. Clearly, the paths to learning are in both directions as the RMIT learns to provide programs in Vietnam's cross-cultural setting.

The learning model for the RMIT Vietnam is based on the principle that program materials are developed by or with the RMIT academics, deliverable through electronic courseware, and compliant with RMIT's distributed learning system. Students in Vietnam access the materials under the guidance of academic staff members who, in turn, are mentored and guided by relevant academic staff in Australia and considered part of the overall program team for quality assurance purposes.

The campus based e-learning environment is enhanced by face-to-face support, direction, and communication and with facilities for laboratories, projects, individual work, presentations, work placements, team experiences, and field-work. An individual's learning style is identified and the delivery of the subject matter is tailored to suit this learning style thereby allowing accelerated learning. The courses and programs presented at the RMIT Vietnam are, in most cases, the same as their equivalent in Melbourne, but the delivery process and the support environment in Vietnam are different. The education model relies on collaborative research on student learning across national boundaries.

To support this learning model, there is a challenge to apply appropriate technology with extensive use of information technology, high connectivity with the RMIT and the Internet, access to equipment including that at non-RMIT sites, and links with employers and other service providers. The university will depend on high-capacity, reliable, domestic, and international telecommunications, which in Vietnam are improving rapidly but from a low base. Considerable care and expense has been committed to the implementation of the learning model that the RMIT is implementing university-wide.

Quality assurance in higher education is also important to the development of Vietnam's capacity. Although the RMIT Vietnam enjoys independence of control for program accreditation, it must demonstrate to the government of Vietnam that its standards of provision are equivalent to the RMIT Australia. This is a good discipline to accept and is consistent with the view in the other direction

taken by the Australian Agency for University Quality Assurance, as it addresses the quality of offshore provision by Australian universities.

To provide RMIT programs effectively, academics familiar with the educational model and committed to lifelong learning are required. Student and client feedback indicates that a significant proportion of academic staff should be international thus befitting the university's international status. In addition, a major staff development program is under way whereby academic staff—local and international—take part in postgraduate programs in educational leadership and management, tertiary teaching and learning, or research.

The positive contribution to development is made not only through building the capacity of the RMIT Vietnam to meet the country's objectives cited above but those of other institutions, as well. For example, the RMIT Vietnam is extending its staff development programs to Vietnam National University Hanoi, Hue University, the University of Danang, Cantho University, and Thai Nguyen University as part of the commissioning of learning resource centres in those cities.

The effort involved in creating an effective learning platform in Vietnam should not be underestimated. The Ho Chi Minh City campus, including its purpose-built new information technology centre and the setup for distributed learning across the campus attracts many visitors interested in learning how it can be done elsewhere. The Saigon South campus and other sites controlled by the RMIT Vietnam will be designed and built as tertiary learning environments and should attract even stronger interest in Vietnam to transfer the education and infrastructure experience. The RMIT is continually learning from Vietnam, and the reviews and evaluations that make up RMIT's quality assurance system are intended to create a self-reflective community of practice. Whether such experience can extend to other countries is addressed below.

In summary, the educational model and its implementation contribute not only to the immediate purposes of the RMIT Vietnam but assist other universities and provide external benefits to the modernisation of teaching and learning in Vietnam as a defined part of that country's development.

Economic Development

The direct contribution of the RMIT Vietnam to building up the professional capacity of the Vietnamese workforce is clear. The RMIT Vietnam aims to provide Vietnam's workforce with skills, competencies, and qualifications required in an emerging market economy. Skilled managers and knowledge workers are recognised as the key to modernisation, industrialisation, and information literacy by which Vietnam is seeking to improve its standards of living, redistribute income, and develop its human capital for sustainable development.

The RMIT Vietnam will make a long-term contribution in the tertiary sector. It will be able to provide students in Vietnam with an international standard of education initially in the key areas specified above. The Vietnamese government has acknowledged that it currently does not have the necessary trained people to achieve its economic goals and therefore must bring overseas expertise into the country as well as send Vietnamese people to study overseas. The RMIT Vietnam's capacity in-country will result in considerable savings and foreign exchange benefits to households, employers, and government scholarship providers who would otherwise pay for overseas education and training or offshore procurement of consultant or project-management services.

RMIT Vietnam graduates are expected to make significant contributions in their professional areas. This will have a direct flow-on effect for the development of Vietnam's economy. Asian Development Bank (ADB) evaluation for their due diligence demonstrated that the lifelong increase in earnings potential and external effects more than counterweigh the fees and income foregone during student study periods. This is consistent with World Bank research into rates of return on education in Vietnam, which show that, although lower than other developing countries and comparable with other command economies, university education in Vietnam is a good private investment comparable to returns from primary education and well above secondary and vocational levels (Moock, Patrinos, & Venkataraman, 1998). The same work shows that social rates of return are, by contrast, relatively low for higher education in Vietnam thereby suggesting to the researchers oversubsidisation of higher education and opportunities for private higher education to contribute to national economic efficiency (Moock et al., 1998; World Bank, 1996). The conventional view of overall gains accruing to society from public funding for the expansion of higher education, as distinct from the positional gains of participants, is coming under question (e.g., see Blöndal, Field, & Girouard, 2002; Wolf, 2002). In developing countries, the externalities associated with investment in higher education suggest to the World Bank that spending of 15% to 20% of the education budget is appropriate for higher education (World Bank, 2002, p. xxiii). The proportion of higher education contributed by private and social sector providers in Vietnam is very small indeed, and the many externalities enumerated in this article accumulate into significant net positive social benefits.

Long-term benefits from the project will also flow from the creation of job opportunities during construction and operation of the campuses and sites associated with the RMIT Vietnam and the stimulus to economic activity through continuing operations of a university that will bring in up to \$33.6 million (U.S. dollars) of investment capital by 2007, enroll 6,000 students, hire 400 staff, procure scientific equipment, and issue many contracts in Vietnam for goods and

services. These benefits will be local, regional, and national. They will result in increased personal and household income and, therefore, in increased expenditure on food, rent, transport, entertainment, clothing, education, and health.

Some of the intangible benefits accruing for Vietnam are in the design and delivery of one of the country's largest direct foreign investments in the services sector. Intellectual property, software license integrity, service agreements for offshore procurement, and the mobilisation of academic and consultant teams for philanthropic purposes are not common in Vietnam and are assisting regulatory agencies dealing with managing a more sophisticated services economy.

Initially, the RMIT Vietnam is providing international personnel with the skills to provide a higher level of education and training. More than half of all staff members at present are non-Vietnamese nationals. Through careful selection of local staff and a staff development program, the ratio of foreign to Vietnamese staff would enable a rising share of the teaching and research to be led by Vietnamese nationals, although, at present, there is a strong market perception that the staff of an international university should be international. With normal staff turnover, the staff upgrades programs for other employers, and the demonstration effect of RMIT Vietnam practices and the human resource externalities are strongly positive.

Social Development

However, indirect benefits and economic externalities may not address the distributional effects of the RMIT Vietnam nor directly address the roots of poverty. Having demonstrated its financial viability, the RMIT Vietnam went on to satisfy its RMIT, International Finance Corporation (IFC), and ADB stakeholders that it was committed to and would make a positive difference to the alleviation of poverty and disadvantage. In the course of developing its plans, the RMIT Vietnam is grateful for the major contribution made by its partners to social and cultural development policy (e.g., see ADB, 1994, 1998b, 1999).

One of the key factors is to enable the RMIT Vietnam to be more affordable to students from poorer, remote, indigenous, or otherwise disadvantaged backgrounds. Dedicating part of income to recycle as scholarships for able and needy students was a policy adopted early and was augmented significantly by further donor scholarship support to more than \$2.6 million (U.S. dollars). The RMIT and RMIT Vietnam seek further scholarship support to widen participation in international university education without leaving one's own country including seeking scholarships for inbound students from neighbouring countries such as Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar.

With the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) and IFC support, an innovative student loan scheme has been shown feasible. With

securities such as insurance policies and registerable mortgages now possible in Vietnam, preferable as saving instruments to conventional banking, the scheme would enable more to afford to study or train or research at RMIT Vietnam. Such a scheme could be associated with current practices of marketing university places to insurance policy holders in Vietnam.

As students undertake programs at the RMIT Vietnam, they will be exposed to and able to explore issues of equity, antidiscrimination, legal rights, and other principles. For example, student leaders from the RMIT Australia have met the leaders of student organisations in Vietnam, exchanging views from two very different systems. The desire of students in Vietnam and Australia to encourage access and equity will be supported. The standards of corporate behaviour set by the RMIT Vietnam will be important in empowering its graduates and staff to follow their own ethical standards in their professional and personal lives.

Literacy rates for women are lower than those for men, and women are underrepresented in higher education and the professions. The RMIT Vietnam will follow and adapt the gender and antiracial discrimination policies and procedures the RMIT has for staff and students. It will be proactive in targeting women as students in traditional male areas such as engineering and encourage their access into RMIT programs.

As well as its formal education and training activities, the RMIT Vietnam will be an active and responsible participant in the community. The RMIT's engagement with community and regional partnerships will extend to Vietnam, and the RMIT will learn from Vietnam. The RMIT Vietnam will ensure that all staff and students have the opportunity to become socially and environmentally responsible and engaged with the relevant communities.

Although the build up of the RMIT Vietnam's community-partnership strategy has been gradual, there is enthusiastic engagement with prospective NGO and equity partners. The promotion of equity and access in the allocation of major scholarship funding, grant-supported contributions to local universities, and assistance to development projects are driven by the RMIT's values and are aligned with the RMIT's own community and regional partnership strategy. The RMIT Vietnam is working with donor groups, NGOs, and other universities in Vietnam in an effort to open up opportunities into the tertiary education sector, including through the network of learning resource centers hosted by other universities, and to extend its education, training, research, and community partnership programs to other cities and regions beginning with Hanoi.

Voluntary contributions to local assistance programs are strong, for example, with the Loreto Vietnam Australia Program that is building up to train the teachers of intellectually disabled children with the RMIT's Department of Social and Community Services. The scholarship programs, for example, English for

Health Workers, are also intended to build relationships with NGOs including student-volunteer movements.

The RMIT Vietnam has a continuing relationship with local communities near the campus site in Saigon South through project planning and resettlement planning. A detailed environmental action plan that included social impacts has been publicly exhibited and approved on the basis that the conditions of living for any project-affected households will show a demonstrable and sustainable improvement (Gutteridge, Haskins, & Davey Pty. Ltd., 2001).²

This community liaison will grow into a wider involvement with local groups over elements of campus development and university access wherever campus development occurs. The RMIT Vietnam is planned as an open institution serving many communities with active campuses and balanced student life. In the long term, there will be a mix of Vietnamese students and trainees with international students from surrounding Mekong states, ASEAN, Australia, and other countries as well as staff, researchers, and visitors. Already, international students from a number of countries have enrolled. Social life will be enhanced by the provision of common academic, sporting, and recreational facilities and through the support of student activities and associations provided for within Vietnamese law. Sporting and recreation activities and facilities will be open selectively to the public and possibly to national training teams, and an effort will be made to create social and cultural integration with the surrounding community and beyond. With triple bottom-line reporting, social and cultural development issues should stay at the forefront of consideration.

In summary, through scholarships, loan schemes, access and equity, policy and practice, liaisons with project-affected persons, linkages with NGOs, participation in philanthropic projects, ethical practices, and sincere and active local and regional community engagement, the RMIT Vietnam is making a positive contribution to Vietnam's social and cultural development.

Environmental Sustainability

The RMIT Vietnam has pledged to implement the RMIT's own environmental policies. The RMIT is a signatory to the Talloires Convention governing university environmental practices, and its environmental practices were commended in the most recent review of the RMIT's International Organisation for Standardisation 9001 certification (see Association of University Leaders for a Sustainable Future, 2002). It is important that the RMIT Vietnam be environmentally sustainable so that future generations inherit a university and associated environment better than what went before and so that the environment is able to be maintained and improved further with the likely means available.

For any development on Saigon South, waste water discharges will be reduced, wetlands retained, and any land contamination remediated. The environmental impact of landfill is be minimised by a system of overhead walkways. Building design, the use of local materials, public health measures, and the creation of safe, occupational precincts will make a net positive contribution to the area of any RMIT Vietnam campus.

Environmental research priorities have become preeminent in the RMIT Vietnam's research and development strategy, and a number of projects to engage staff, students, and partners have been mooted. Design of the Hue, Danang, and Cantho learning resource centres and others such as Thai Nguyen that might follow embodies long-life design for natural air circulation, lighting, and minimal energy consumption. The new approach to campus planning for Saigon South is exciting from the standpoint of building a professional community of practice around environmental monitoring and design. The RMIT Vietnam has an opportunity to devise and disseminate the know-how for environmentally sustainable development of the Mekong Delta region having publicly exhibited and met World Bank and ADB requirements for environmental effects statements. The successful student environmental monitoring project will be extended in future years.

To contribute to the practice of environmental services in Vietnam, the RMIT plans to provide degree programs in environmental science and environmental engineering in 2004. As with the educational model, the RMIT seeks to instill reflective practice in the planning and delivery of the RMIT Vietnam. For example, the campus planners, Norman Day and Associates, will provide leadership for a master's by project program in architecture to build local capacity and to encourage debate about design and environmental issues. Each main part of the development in Saigon South and elsewhere will incorporate action research projects.

Institutional Development

In issuing the RMIT a license to operate in Vietnam, the government expressed a particular interest in encouraging reform in university management to Vietnam and a request that the RMIT work with local universities in university planning, quality assurance, the use of information technology, and the management of finances and resources. Although none of these are required as any condition on the RMIT Vietnam, it is consistent with putting institutional reform high on Vietnam's development agenda and with the current World Development Report focus (see Islam, 2002; World Bank Development Report, 2002). Regular contact with senior government officials and an active advisory board for the RMIT Vietnam keep the dialogue going.

Because the RMIT Vietnam's teaching and learning practices are different from traditional practice in Vietnam, because action research has implications for organisational design, and because it is designed to grow in stages, organisation development at the RMIT Vietnam will not be like that in the established universities in Vietnam. It is early in the new university's history, and there are many management and organisation-development issues ahead.

Through a long-standing relationship with Vietnam National University Hanoi and newer relationships with learning resource centre recipients in Hue, Danang, Cantho, Thai Nguyen, and possibly elsewhere, the RMIT Vietnam finds itself working well inside Vietnam's universities and closely with the relevant ministries. These privileged links assist the joint provision of staff development and training programs mentioned above.

When particular issues spill beyond institutions into policy arenas, as they did in 2001 over the unresolved status of information resource systems and standards, the RMIT Vietnam has been in a position to organise national reviews and workshops that have sought to help crystallise policy and encourage consorted behaviour between universities in procuring electronic library materials, management software systems, classification systems, and interchange standards (Robinson & Stueart, 2001). Likewise, there are common issues facing universities with campus planning, for example, incomplete functional mergers retarding intercampus integration, and a possible project to enhance the national universities' planning capacity is under consideration.

The RMIT Vietnam does not have all of the answers and serves to benefit from a greater understanding of practice in Vietnam and learning how institutional development occurs in Vietnam.

Internationalisation

Vietnam has shown considerable courage in opening its doors to foreign providers in education services, wider than most other ASEAN-plus-three countries. Its resolve to internationalise its higher education, training, and resources sectors is very strong but is clearly hampered by lack of resources. As the RMIT Vietnam attracts international students to Vietnam, as it hubs its activities for the Greater Mekong region out of Vietnam, and as it integrates the RMIT Vietnam in its emerging global practice, the RMIT can make a positive contribution to Vietnam's international aims.

The RMIT Vietnam expects to have active study abroad, student exchange, visiting scholar, and international executive training programs for which it plans to develop housing and campus facilities. It will attract many students undertaking a semester or year abroad from the RMIT's campuses in Australia. Negotiations are under way with prospective North American, European, and Southeast

Asian partners. The narrow economic benefits through travel and tourism and the wider cultural exchanges from an open international university within the system will as certainly contribute to Vietnam's development as they will present occasional challenges.

The university will be an exporter from Vietnam in that it will provide education and training services to individuals and firms from outside the country through inbound study abroad, training for overseas companies, and other services to international clients. It also hopes to export some of the products and services generated through research and innovation such as software products, educational testing services, CD-ROMs for language learning, or product designs. Some of these exports will be directly from the university, whereas others will be from joint ventures with government or corporate sponsors or under license to them. These exports will contribute to the economic and technological development of Vietnam.

CONCLUSION

There are as many ways of classifying the contributions of universities to development as there are definitions of development.³ Whichever the realm, the RMIT Vietnam expects to make a significant net positive contribution to the sustainable development of Vietnam and welcomes further dialogue on how this can be done well.

NOTES

1. Even official overseas remittances, at an estimated \$2.06 billion (U.S. dollars) for 2002, now exceed direct foreign investment and overseas development assistance.

2. For a discussion of good practice, see Asian Development Bank (1998a). For local resettlement practice, see Official Development Assistance Partnership for Ho Chi Minh City (2000). For a discussion of the net development benefits of resettlement, see Cernea (1998).

3. For different definitions of development and approaches to development assistance, see Cowen Shenton (1996). Sustainable development is well defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland, 1987).

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