

REPORT OF THE VBF EDUCATION WORKING GROUP

Vietnam Business Forum, 4/12/2007

Ministers, Ambassadors, Ladies and Gentlemen

I am pleased to have this opportunity to update you on the aim and recent achievements of the recently formed Education and Training Working Group. The Group consists of a number of private local and foreign organisations which are either already established or looking to be established in Vietnam. Our working group was set up within the framework of the VBF to engage in dialogue with the government, particularly with the Ministry of Education and Training, to identify solutions to obstacles faced by the private sector.

Everyone recognises that the limited effectiveness of Vietnam's education and training is starting to negatively impact the growth of the economy. Companies- state and private, foreign and local- all comment on how the lack of qualified / skilled labour is impacting their ability to grow. It is for this reason that we have focused our energy initially on higher education and professional education. The Government of Vietnam sees the need for private sector involvement in addressing this issue but the legislation is often not clear enough and even when it is clear, its enforcement is not quite effective as expected. This impedes organisations that are already established as well as those who are looking to be established.

We recently held our first introductory meeting with the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) which was represented by Vice Minister Banh Tien Long. During the meeting we raised a number of issues, namely:

The first issue concerns the establishment of an independent quality assurance organisation. As no such organization is currently available in Vietnam, it follows that the public has little information on the academic performance of each education institution. As a key part of the solution we proposed that MOET establish an independent quality assurance organisation that would be comprised of members of MOET as well as local and foreign experts from higher education. On the positive side MOET has already drafted legislation concerning the set up of an independent quality assurance organisation but there has not been sufficient time for us to give constructive feedback to MOET on this legislation.

The second issue is closely related to the first and concerns the ability of the education sector to meet the needs of the labor market. In Vietnam today it is not easy for private universities to adapt courses or enter into cooperation with a foreign university to provide courses to suit the needs of industry. The procedures required to do this are too lengthy and time consuming. We have proposed to MOET that a reliable quality assurance organisation should be given the authority and responsibility to approve such changes.

Furthermore, to improve the responsiveness of the education sector to the needs of economy, cooperation between industry and education institutions is crucial. We hope that together with the business community and the government, we can work out an effective mechanism to strengthen the education-industry linkages, so that our programs are more relevant to industry needs.

Another important point is that in order to provide relevant training, information on the employment of graduates, labor markets, and skills should be readily available. Again this requires a strong co-ordination between all parties involved- such as MOET, HE institutions, MOLISA, GSO.

The third issue concerns the legislation for establishing higher education institutions, both local and foreign. The current legislation and licensing procedures are not clear enough, and involve several parties with different interpretations of the law. We have been informed by MOET that there is new legislation in the pipeline and look forward to giving constructive feedback to MOET on this legislation. There are other issues connected to licensing and set up procedures such as making it easier for higher education institutions to access land, obtain work permits for foreign faculty and so on.

We have only had one meeting with MOET, so it is still early days but we feel hopeful that we can engage in a constructive dialogue and replicate the success of some of the other working groups. On behalf of the Education and Training Working Group, I would like to thank Vice Minister Banh Tien Long and his team at MOET for their willingness to engage in dialogue. I would also like to thank Sin Foong Wong and the secretariat of VBF for their invaluable support.