

Interview with professor Bùi Văn Ga, president of Đà Nẵng University, September 2009.

What is your experience working with educational institutes from the US?

We are currently negotiating with them about the signing of a contract for the transfer of knowledge in the fields of technology. We would use their complete curriculum and would send our staff over there to receive training. US professors would come to Đà Nẵng to teach the subjects that are missing here, where staff lacks rudimentary knowledge. On the other hand, Đà Nẵng University provides the infrastructure. The DNU has laboratories in place for students who will study in English.

Could you elaborate about the financial procedures in this cooperation? Do they sponsor or do you provide the funding?

This is completely covered by our MoET. Until now they have not sponsored anything at all. It is all our money so it's quite costly.

Does this program form part of an online course?

Yes, DNU has two such programmes.

Together, how much did those programmes cost?

In total, each year one programme costs 15 billion VND, about, 1 million USD a year. DNU needs to provide for foreign professors, for Vietnamese staff to go abroad, the infrastructure, private classes for students to learn English, work according international standards.

We are currently developing a master plan for the Đà Nẵng International University (DIU). This international university will be the nucleus of DNU. That is why we would like to develop DNU so that it will become a research university by the year 2020. As you know until now there are no research universities in Vietnam. Most are training people at low levels. DNU strives to reach the higher level of Research University. Like for example, the Netherlands we wish to train real PhDs, but currently Vietnam trains PhDs but these are not PhDs in the real sense of the word. The goal is to train researchers on a high level. Let us first develop experience through cooperation with foreign countries to motivate us, to lift up the level of the different fields of the DNU. This way, DNU by studying them will assemble all the subjects DNU excels in and fields that DNU does not yet excel in will be slowly influenced by their programmes. This way DNU will become a research university by 2020 in the real sense of the word, just like in the Netherlands where you also have several research universities.

DNU is interested in the following fields: climate change, tourism, storage and transport (logistics). Currently we also have shipbuilding and it is in great need. The Netherlands is extremely strong in that field. I think that in those fields, DNU and the Netherlands should develop deeper relations.

Are you also interested in the development of staff? Do you have a plan for the further development of staff training?

We are very much interested in that,

What about your students, or are they mainly interested in finance and banking these days?

Highly skilled students will still continue their focus on technical subjects. When they have achieved a deeper understanding of those fields, they often study a second field such as management resulting in a second diploma. If you do not produce anything there is not much to manage. At the DNU we have a parallel scheme that allows students to study for three years at the technical faculty. In their third year, they start to study their second subject. When they graduate, they have two degrees, one technical and one on management. That way it will be much easier for them to apply for jobs than for those who only have one diploma on economics. So along with their technical diploma they have a diploma on management. Foreign languages are also extremely useful.

Who does the DNU consult concerning important issues in the region?

The DNU has an extremely close relationship with people in the region. DNU has researched the sectors region needs very thoroughly to develop our strategies. We look at the whole of Đà Nẵng, the whole of the middle of Vietnam and that includes Tây Nguyên. We look at 11 provinces and cities and our alumni work all over Vietnam. We only develop curricula in the sectors that are really in demand in that whole area. If we do not students will not be able to find work after graduation. In fact the Dutch strengths are in great need in Đà Nẵng in general and for the DNU in particular. (economics & finance, technology, medicine, agriculture, architecture, law, harbor management.)

Does DNU also cooperate with the corporate or private sector?

There are many forms of cooperation. Firstly we have contracts to do academic research, transfer of technology. Currently all faculties, research groups have such contracts with businesses and the further region to transfer technology. Secondly relations exist for student internships especially internships at major companies. Thirdly businesses provide scholarships to students either for five years, or for the most talented students every year or just for the last year of their studies. For examples Japanese companies, they teach Japanese to students and will then choose the most skilled students to work in Japan for three years after which they return to work in their companies in Vietnam. Another example are US companies such as Intel. They also interview students and hire them. A great many Japanese companies provide scholarships consisting of several years of studies to students to provide them with opportunities to develop themselves better.

The strange thing is that Vietnamese companies are less involved in such practices than foreign companies. It may be because foreign companies traditionally train people, only by training people will they have enough human resources. We do not cooperate much with Vietnamese businesses.

According to you what should Dutch HEIs do to cooperate with DNU?

We are open to all initiatives, like any other international university. We would like to learn more about Dutch universities to connect in the field of training or to further coordinate cooperation. Currently we have many young staff and students applying for Dutch scholarships. I just signed a great many letters of introduction to enable them to apply for these scholarships. I know that this (HSP & NFP) programme has reached the students and staff already. Before this time applications for Dutch scholarships were extremely limited. This year I see that many youngsters have asked me for introduction letters to request Dutch scholarships. So I think that they have grasped the information and as a result I am now thinking of working more closely together with a Dutch university in Holland. But because none of us have studied in the Netherlands, we do not know any of the universities and would like the universities to visit us so we may be able to learn who they are.

Currently we have several 2+2 programmes with foreign institutes such as the US, France, Japan and China. For example when we work with a Dutch university we would also train the student for some time in basic knowledge here and send him or her abroad to further deepen their knowledge.

Has the DNU already implemented the ECPS?

We are working with the two US curricula exactly because we want to achieve that standard. The DNU has one programme with Europe, that has already been evaluated and recognized as an European standard Engineer degree. This high quality programme is the subject of automotive production. This programme was recognized by the association for European engineers. Every year they come to re-evaluate and to provide a certificate. The second programme is the one we are currently developing. We are currently trying to negotiate with AREC from the US to evaluate the quality.

How many new lecturers has the DNU recruited and how many of them will study abroad?

We have just recruited 40 new lecturers. Directly after they have been accepted they will start learning a foreign language. The first year they only work as interns and at the same time have to focus on their foreign language studies. The second year, all of them have to study abroad. Currently none of the DNU lecturers are trained within the country. If in the third year you still are not able to go abroad, you have to leave the university. We follow the regulations strictly. With such drastic guidelines, the largest part of the youngsters has to go and study abroad. All of them try to find scholarships from the different governments. That is why this introduction to your country's scholarship is of great importance to them.

Do your lecturers partake in programmes such as the government funded 322 fellowship programme?

Yes, but apart from governmental scholarships, cities also provide scholarships to train MAs and PhDs abroad. DNU go abroad continuously either using the city sponsorship

or the 322 fellowships. The city provides us with the scholarships and some are used for our staff and the rest will be used by the department of internal affairs.

Could you share your experiences of working with European higher education institutes?

I find them friendly, serious, open minded and easy to communicate with. What I mean is, as soon as we have an understanding, it easy to work together to solve problems. When developing a programme or a curriculum the first phase is extremely complicated and exhausting, but as soon as that phase has past, the work is often very easy. European culture, with its traditional values, seems to instill respect for others and we highly respect that aspect when working with Europe. For example, Holland, France, Germany. We maybe poor as a country, but we never have the feeling that they do not respect us because of that. They treat us as equals and that does positively influence the development of cooperation in the future.

Are there any legal issues we need to be aware of when cooperating in the field of education?

Currently MoET has given DNU a very high level of independence when it comes to international cooperation. Concretely we do not need any approvals from the Ministry when developing international cooperations. We just need to report them. This level of independence has resulted in a great number of students and lecturers going abroad and in many cooperation programmes with international partners. That is the benefit of being a regional university.

What about Dutch students who are interested in Vietnam?

The DNU is extremely experienced with the exchange of foreign students. For example French, American, Australian and Norwegian students often come here to do research internships in fields such as environmental studies, alternative sources of energy, management.

Their visits depend on the semester and on the perquisites set by the two partners. There are many shapes and forms of cooperation. They may provide us with content and we will discuss that. We also invite lecturers to teach them for example about culture, customs, life, living in urban areas or rural areas. We discuss with them what they would like to do and for how many weeks. When those points are clear and decided upon, we ask the experts in the different fields to accommodate them. Students may also live with local families for several periods. With some programmes they ask us to organize some activities somewhere in the region. We also have our students join such programmes so that they will be able to interact with them.

Does the DNU have a programme that foreign students can study?

Students can come to our institute for internships for any subject they want. [But for programmes to enroll in] We have some English- and French- taught programmes that they can join. The Vietnamese taught programmes are not an option. We have

implemented the credit learning system and we have uploaded this information on our website. Currently we have some French students at the university.

Could you elaborate on the ADB and World bank projects?

In October we need to have decided about the master plan for the construction of this project. Then the plan needs to be presented to the ADB and the World Bank. They will process the documentation to process the loan. The prime minister has already decided what the direction should be. We will have four projects so four organizations were assigned by the ADB and the World Bank to prepare proposals for the loan.

It is planned that in the beginning of 2010 the project will be implemented. Concerning building site, regional regulations are all agreed upon. We now only have to wait for the government to process the master plan and apply for the loan.

[If the Netherlands wishes to join this project,] they should first contact the DNU and work with us and then we need to report this to the Ministry and then take the basic next steps. I think that the interaction of Dutch universities with DNU is an important first step, but I would also ask you to invite and introduce some high level officials to visit our university to discuss future plans in more detail.