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★ Australia Awards

AUSTRALIAN SCHOLARSHIPS FOR DEVELOPMENT IN VIETNAM (ASDiV) PROGRAM

Academic Advising Strategy and Action Plan

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACET	Australian Centre for Education and Training (in Vietnam)
ADS	Australian Development Scholarships
ASDiV	Australian Development Scholarships in Vietnam
ALA	Australian Leadership Awards
ALAF	Australian Leadership Award Fellowships
ALAS	Australian Leadership Award Scholarships
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
CID	Coffey International Development (the ASMC)
DCS	Development Cooperation Strategy
GOV	Government of Vietnam
HRD	Human Resource Development
JSC	Joint Selection Committee
MOET	Ministry of Education and Training (in Vietnam)
PDD	Program Design Document
PhD	Doctorate of Philosophy
PPI	Priority Public Institutions
RMIT	Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
TESOL	Teaching English as a Second Language

1 BACKGROUND

The bilateral development cooperation program commenced with Vietnam in 1992. Since that time an estimated 2,500 Vietnamese students have been trained in Australia with the support of Australian Government scholarships. Australian Development Scholarships (ADS) were introduced in Vietnam in 1998 and currently represent approximately 15% of the Vietnam bilateral program budget. Scholarships are offered for post-graduate study in Australia at Masters or PhD level¹. The annual number of ADS scholarships for Vietnam is currently 225 having risen from 150 in 2008. Australian Leadership Awards (ALA) commenced in 2006 as a mean of supporting current and future leaders from the Asia-Pacific region from government, business, and industry or community sectors. ALA Scholarships (ALAS) cater for longer-term post-graduate study at Masters or doctoral level; and ALA Fellowships (ALAF) for short-term research, study or professional attachments. ALAS and ALAF awards are determined on the basis of regional competition but since inception approximately 41 Scholarships and more than 250 fellowships have been awarded.

The ASDiV Program Design Document (PDD) foresees the need for two Academic Advisers (International and National) to assist ADS candidates with the process of application to Australian universities, and to provide advice to the Joint Steering Committee (JSC) as to the academic suitability of candidates.

This paper outlines the proposed objectives, guiding principles, actions, and indicators associated with the academic advising component of ASDiV.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE ACADEMIC ADVISING COMPONENT

The objectives of the Academic Advising component of the Program are either mentioned directly, or implied, in different parts of the PDD. In summary, Academic Advising will seek to:

- provide the Team Leader with advice as to how Australian University research offerings are structured
- provide advice to the Team Leader as to how ASDiV should approach Australian Universities, and make links that will facilitate the entry of Vietnamese scholars to the Australian system
- advise the JSC as to whether candidates meet the academic requirements for entry to the degree programs in which they seek to enrol, and the suitability of the course selected to fit each candidate's chosen area for contributing to Vietnam's development
- provide advice and assistance to candidates (shortlisted applicants) to enable them to understand the Australian qualifications system, and approaches to study and research in Australia
- assist candidates to understand, and make choices about, course content in a range of universities (for Masters degrees)
- assist candidates to understand the process of PhD application, and to help link them with potential thesis supervisors at relevant universities
- consider the potential for some candidates to benefit from the inclusion of a period of relevant work placement within the overall scholarship package.

¹ Under exceptional circumstances some awards at undergraduate level may be considered.

3. GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND SUPPORTING ACTIONS

The objectives identified in Section 2 will be guided by the following four principles, each supported by specific actions.

3.1 Advice will be “customized”

Academic advice provided to candidates will vary according to the type of degree that they intend to undertake, and their position in the Applicant Profile. In brief, degree-specific advice will likely be as follows:

3.1.1 *Masters by coursework*

Masters-by-coursework academic advice will be provided by the National Adviser, and will focus on:

- matching the academic background/interests of the candidate to the specific offerings of Australian Universities
- discussing specific Australian University Masters-by-coursework programs with candidates
- advising candidates as to areas of weakness, where prior preparation may be of use.

The National Adviser will undertake preliminary research into specific degree offerings, once the candidate applications reach the short-list stage. The National Adviser will also advise the JSC as to the capabilities of short-listed candidates.

3.1.2 *Masters by research*

Masters-by-research academic advice will be provided by the International Adviser and will focus on:

- matching the academic background/interests of the candidate to the specific offerings of Australian Universities
- discussing specific Australian University Masters-by-research programs with candidates
- assessing candidate's abilities to undertake the research component of chosen Masters programs
- preparing candidates for undertaking the research components of Masters programs
- advising candidates as to areas of weakness, where prior preparation may be of use.

It should be noted that most Masters-by-research degrees in Australia consist of a mixture of coursework and research components. The research component will vary in intensity and length, depending on the institution, and the content focus of the degree. A small percentage of Masters-by-research degrees will be entirely research-focused. Sometimes universities offer a Master of Philosophy degree, which is considered to be direct entry points for PhD research.

The International Adviser will undertake preliminary research into specific degree offerings, once the candidate applications reach the short-list stage. The International Adviser will also advise the JSC as to the capabilities of short-listed candidates.

3.1.3 *PhD*

Academic advice to PhD candidates will be provided by the International Adviser, and will focus on:

- assessing the suitability of the research proposal with candidate's academic background and stated future contribution to Vietnam's development
- explaining the Australian University PhD application system to candidates (see section 5.3 for more details)

- assisting candidates to link their research interests to possible PhD supervisors
- undertaking preliminary searches for potential Australian PhD supervisors
- refining initial research proposals with candidates
- examining possible “critical mass” synergies where PhD candidates go to Australian universities as research “teams” and/or join existing research teams in Australia.

The International Adviser will also advise the JSC as to the capabilities of short-listed candidates.

3.1.4 Undergraduate

The PDD envisages a limited number of candidates in exceptional circumstances being offered undergraduate studies. For these candidates academic advice will be provided by the National Adviser, and will focus on:

- assessing the candidates’ capacity to undertake an undergraduate degree in an Australian university given the candidates special circumstances
- matching the academic background/interests of the candidate to the specific offerings of Australian Universities
- advising candidates as to areas of weakness, where prior preparation may be of use.

The National Adviser will also advise the JSC as to the capabilities of short-listed candidates.

3.2. Matching of study programs to the capabilities of Australian Universities needs to be carefully designed

The matching of proposed Masters study programs (both by coursework and by research) in the three priority areas of the draft Australia-Vietnam Development Cooperation Strategy (DCS) (Human Resource Development, Economic Integration, Environmental Sustainability) to the capabilities of Australian universities should not be so difficult. There will likely be an adequate number of Masters programs from which to choose and Universities are keen to attract fee-paying international students.

The situation with regard to PhD programs, however, will be more of a challenge. The Australian PhD system focuses on a close working relationship between the candidate and supervisors. Candidates can apply to universities (in fact, they must do this at some stage), but they will only be accepted if the university in question can find a specific supervisor for the proposed research project. Another problem that sometimes exists is that good supervisors are often already overcommitted with PhD students, so finding supervisors with “vacancies” can be difficult.

3.3. Gender equity considerations

The program can strengthen understanding of gender mainstreaming and its integration into GOV policies and implementation strategies by enhancing the understanding of gender mainstreaming and equity issues among GOV policy-makers, officials and university lecturers. In line with ASDiV’s Gender Equity and Social Inclusion Strategy, the Academic Advisers have a role in promoting gender-related studies and courses to relevant ADS candidates. The Academic Advisers will inform themselves about universities that have strong gender studies and social studies courses or courses that integrate gender modules into other courses, so they can discuss and promote these studies/courses as appropriate with relevant candidates.

3.4 Advice will vary depending on delivery mechanism

The PDD (p. 8) makes it clear that the scholarships program should take account of the changing nature of educational delivery in the tertiary sector. Specific mention is made of three possible “flexibility mechanisms”. These are:

- making greater use of existing joint Masters Programs taught wholly or mainly in Vietnam which lead to a qualification that is formally recognised by both the GoV and by the Australian partner institution;
- split Post-Graduate programs where a proportion of the study is undertaken in Vietnam, or where the research for PhDs or Masters by research is done in Vietnam on subjects which are relevant to the Vietnam experience or priority development areas; and
- cost-effectiveness of using limited numbers of undergraduate courses at the existing Australian accredited university in Vietnam (RMIT) for those in the ‘exceptional circumstances’ category.

These mechanisms will be the subject of a feasibility study to be undertaken by the Managing Contractor during the first ASDiV phase (October 2009 to January 2012) and to be implemented in the next phase as appropriate. Clearly, academic advice provided will vary depending on which of these delivery mechanisms are recommended by the feasibility study and are taken up by ASDiV.

4. CANDIDATES' ASSESSMENTS FOR JSC

In line with the PDD (p. 27) the Academic Advisers will prepare a written assessment of each candidate for the JSC that advises on:

- the appropriateness of the course selected for the Candidate Profile
- the suitability of the selected course(s) to the candidate's indicated plan for making contributions to development on graduation
- the match of the candidates' academic capabilities to meet the course entrance requirements.

The Academic Advisers' assessments will be made in two batches – first for Fast Track Group short-listed candidates to be considered by JSC 2 for a scholarship award and second for the English Language Group candidates, who require pre-departure English Language Training, to be considered for a provisional scholarship award by JSC 3.

5. INDICATORS AND PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

The ASDiV M&E Strategy and Action Plan presents a Program Logic (shown below as Figure 1) and Logframe, both based on the PDD. With regard to the measurement of the performance of the Academic Advice component, only the three “outputs” are measurable and relevant. A Logframe relevant to this component is attached as Annex 1.

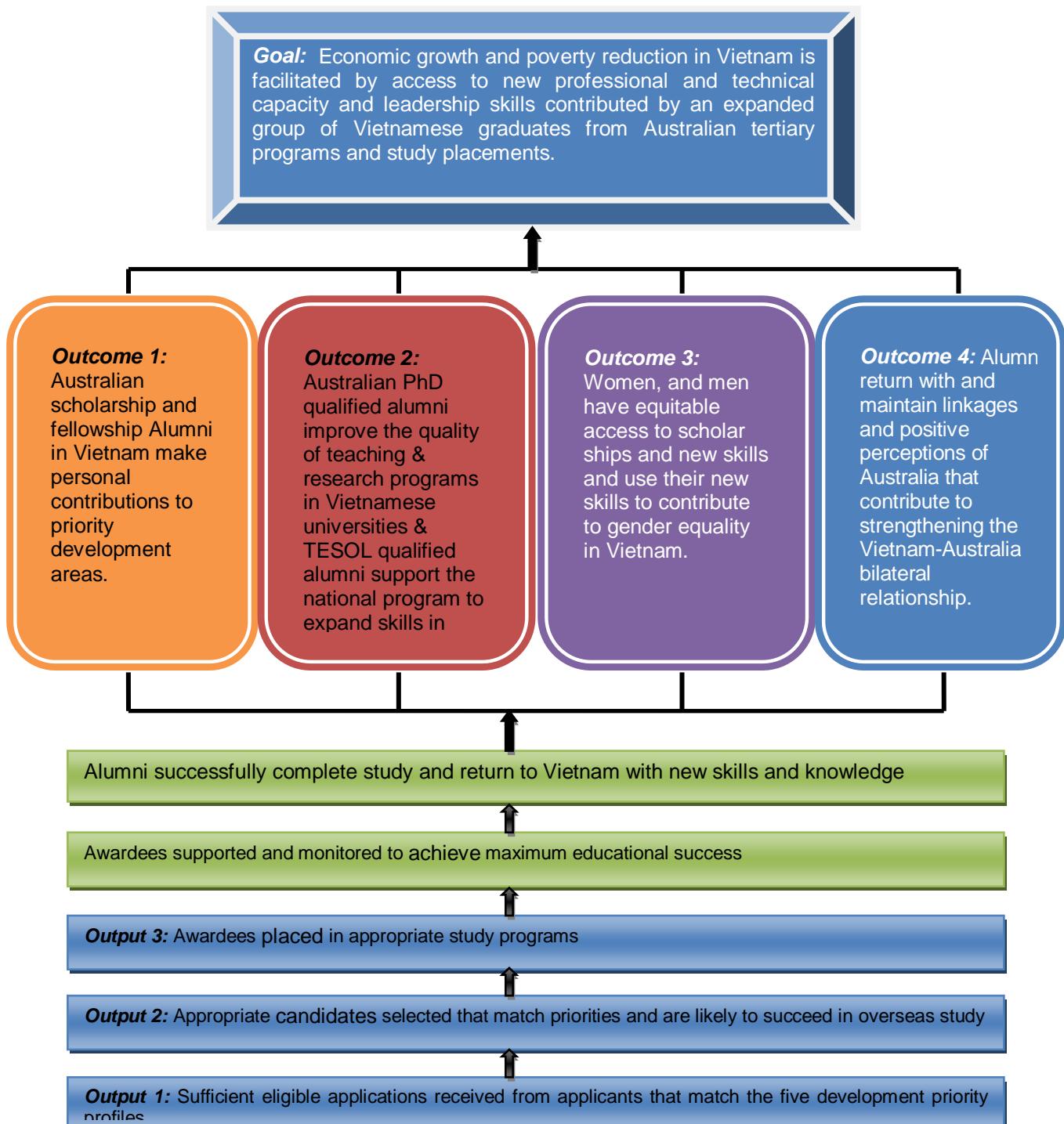


Figure 1 - ASDiV Program Logic

A n n e x 1

Academic Advice Component Logframe

Academic Advice Component Logframe

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION	INDICATORS	MEANS OF VERIFICATION	ASSUMPTIONS
Outputs			
Output 1: Sufficient eligible applications received from applicants that match the five development priority profiles	% of applicants that match each of the five development profiles	Program Data	Development profiles accurately reflect Vietnam's development needs and AusAID's development priorities
	% of applicants from profiles 1,2 and 3	Program Data	Awardees in profiles 1,2 and 3 are able to contribute to Vietnamese development and poverty alleviation
	% of applicants from profiles 4 and 5	Program Data	Awardees in profiles 4 and 5 are able to contribute to improved university level teaching and research and the development of English language teaching nationally
	% of female, ethnic minority and disabled applicants	Program Data	Equal opportunities provided to women and men, ethnic minorities and disabled applicants
Output 2: Appropriate candidates selected that match priorities and are likely to succeed in overseas study	% of awardees that match each of the five development profiles	Program Data	Development profiles accurately reflect Vietnam's development needs and AusAID's priorities
	% of awardees from profiles 1,2 and 3	Program Data	Awardees in profiles 1,2 and 3 are able to contribute to Vietnamese development and poverty alleviation

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION	INDICATORS	MEANS OF VERIFICATION	ASSUMPTIONS
	% of awardees from profiles 4 and 5 that are from appropriate teaching and research positions	Program Data	Awardees in profiles 4 and 5 are able to contribute to improved university level teaching and research and the development of English language teaching nationally
	ratio of female, ethnic minority and disabled awardees compared to applicants	Program Data	Equal consideration provided to women and men, ethnic minorities and disabled applicants
Outputs			
Output 3: Awardees placed in appropriate study programs	% of awardees placed in a course consistent with academic adviser recommendations	Program Data	Academic advisers are able to recommend placements consistent with awardees needs and future development contribution
	% of PPI awardees whose study plans are consistent with PPI needs		PPI needs are consistent and still relevant on awardees return
	% of alumni who felt they were in the right course and right university	Survey in 2011,2013 and 2015	Alumni are able to express an informed opinion about the relevance of placement to their needs