

UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY, INNOVATION AND CREATIVITY

Universities are in need of greater freedom to make improvements in their education activities. Autonomy is an attribute of universities. University autonomy is reflected in three aspects: academic autonomy, organizational and personnel autonomy and financial autonomy.

Responsibilities of university education

In the era of globalization and internationalization, there is a growing tendency of connectivity, cooperation and competition, which is driving the increased integration of economies. Particularly, Vietnam is a quite a special case because it is required to implement three simultaneous processes: Transforming its economic structure into a socialist-oriented market economy, allowing its market to open up to facilitate global integration, and stimulating economic growth to eradicate poverty and improve social welfare.

These three processes pose an enormous challenge, requiring human resources to be qualified and talented enough to succeed. It places a heavy burden on the country's higher education sector. On the one hand, the tendencies of internationalization and globalization seem to make the world flatter in terms of economics, education and social affairs; on the other hand, they affect the other sectors in the world more through the shocks of crises, competitions and takeovers.

Vietnam is in a period of transition of its economic growth model to adapt to the new age. In particular, science and technology, intelligence and creativity, along with the development of high quality human resources, are expected to

play decisive roles. In such a context, we must realize that the advanced higher education based on university autonomy and the spirit of creativity and constant innovation are two pillars of the country's development.

The process of university autonomy in Vietnam

The Party and State have agreed on the policy of university autonomy since the 1990s. There are several stages in the process. It began with experimentation (of the VNU model, 1995), and continued with partial autonomy (Decree No.

43, 2006) and then piloted comprehensive autonomy (or autonomy of recurrent expenditures, Resolution No. 77, 2014) before bringing it into wider use (Decree No. 16, 2015). Presently, the goal of promoting comprehensive autonomy has been recognized at most public higher education institutions in all sectors and disciplines. In particular, they all emphasize the role of the Board of Regents of VNUHCM as the body which governs and represents the rights of ownership and the votes of the board's chairman, presidents and vice

presidents. Regarding university autonomy, the Law on Amendments and Supplements to a number of articles of Vietnam's Higher Education Law, which was approved by the National Assembly on November 19, 2018, has some notable provisions, including: regional universities and affiliated universities are granted enormous power in three major aspects: academic autonomy, organizational and personnel autonomy and financial autonomy; the university system is defined as consisting of two levels: regional universities and affiliated universities; the role of the Board of Regents of VNUHCM has been strengthened, and each university develops its own internal regulation system that provides transparent information about the quality assurance programs and graduate employment rates; and the State, however, still has to supervise the higher education institutions.

Thus, higher education institutions need to boldly promote their autonomy, beginning with a focus on academic autonomy and research, before continuing on with financial and personnel autonomy. Like many other countries in the world, the State still offers partial or full support for specific sectors which have key investments or directives in accordance with the national development policy in each period.

However, higher education institutions must show their own initiative in transforming themselves into autonomous units and insure accountability to the public, rather than relying on the State. Both of Vietnam national universities were established as autonomous organizations, to some extent, and have generally operated as such since their establishment in accordance with decrees and organizational and operational regulations (most recently, Decree No 186, 2013 and Regulation No. 26, 2014).

After 25 years since their establishment and development, the two VNUs are currently systems with several members. The positions of two VNUs in the top 1,000 of the QS World University Rankings 2019-2020 and THE World University Rankings 2020 marked a beautiful milestone in the country's higher education sector, confirming the correctness of the VNU model in accordance with the policies of the Party and State.

Implementation of autonomy at VNUHCM

With its role and position, VNUHCM must prepare itself for an increasingly thorough and extensive autonomy process. Particularly, the following issues should be noted:

First, VNUHCM should insure that its every step is appropriate to the characteristics of the VNU model and its member universities, ensuring consistency, synergy and strengths of each member university. Second, when the member universities transform into autonomous units, they are required to assume their own responsibility, especially strengthening accountability to stakeholders and the public. The management of VNUHCM should also gradually change its structure in order to best promote the strengths of each member university, and produce breakthrough results thanks to synergy power with the aim of strengthening their connection, simplicity, progression and effectiveness.

In the environment of university autonomy, VNUHCM can adopt the following key roles: Directing and facilitating its members in terms of mechanisms and policies in order that they can promote their strengths; accumulating capital and making intensive investment in and completing fundamental construction projects; supporting its members so that they can ensure compliance with current regulations on their sectors; connecting, sharing and exploiting resources of the entire system to produce distinguished results together; developing its brand power and competitiveness with universities in the region and around the world.

Third, regarding the form of autonomy of its member university, VNUHCM can divide them into two groups. Group 1: The public non-business units which guarantee recurrent expenditures, including VNUHCM International University, VNUHCM University of Information Technology and VNUHCM University of

Economics and Law (pending approvals). Group 2: The public nonbusiness units which can provide part of their regular expenditures, including VNUHCM University of Technology, VNUHCM University of Social Sciences and Humanities, and VNUHCM University of Science and VNUHCM School of Medicine.

Fourth, regarding tasks and solutions, VNUHCM should continue to study and supplement the VNU model in accordance with the Law on Amendments and Supplements to a number of articles of Vietnam's Higher Education Law and the process of global integration. Particularly, it should study and identify organizational university development models for itself and its member universities. Regarding the organizational structure, it is necessary to study the differences in Vietnam's Higher Education Law (2012) and the amended and supplemented Law on the organizational structure of VNU and its member universities to properly and appropriately adopt the amended and supplemented law.

Regarding the models of the Board of Regents of VNUHCM of Vietnam National University and their member universities, it is necessary to assess the model of VNU leadership roles and concurrently chairs of the councils of member universities. It is indispensable to clearly stipulate which issues should be decided by the Board of Regents of VNUHCM of the member universities to ensure their assigned responsibility and power. Regarding the hierarchy and relationship between VNU and its member universities, it is requisite to reconsider the tasks of VNU's departments with different functions so that organizational and personnel autonomy, academic autonomy and financial autonomy are allowed at member universities.