

# Roundtable on Innovating TNE: Building stronger UK–Viet Nam partnership for the future

Hai Phong, 26 September 2024



## Event summary

**Event context:** part of the Viet Nam Education Partnership and Investment Conference 2024

**Organisers:** British Embassy, British Council, and Ministry of Education and Training (MOET)

**Date and Time:** 26 September 2024, 14:00 – 15:30

**Venue:** Pullman Hai Phong Hotel, Hai Phong, Viet Nam (Hybrid format)

### Introduction

The parallel session, titled "Innovating TNE: Building Stronger UK-Viet Nam Partnerships for the Future," formed part of the larger Viet Nam Education Partnership and Investment Conference 2024. It was co-organised by the British Embassy, British Council, and Vietnam's Ministry of Education and Training (MOET). This session aimed to explore opportunities for the UK education sector to contribute to Viet Nam's ambitions of becoming a key education hub in Southeast Asia. The agenda focused on innovative approaches to Transnational Education (TNE) partnerships between UK and Vietnamese institutions, especially in light of growing demand for international education in Viet Nam.

### Session Structure

#### Welcome Remarks

- **Marcus Winsley**, Deputy Head of Mission, British Embassy Hanoi, opened the session by highlighting the strength of UK-Vietnam education ties, stressing that the education partnership was central to their bilateral relationship. He noted that Vietnam's young,

ambitious population made it a prime market for TNE. Winsley positioned the UK as a global leader in education, particularly in TNE, which offered a high-quality alternative to traditional overseas study.

He pointed out that with Vietnam reviewing its regulatory frameworks for transnational education, it presented an opportune moment to expand UK educational offerings in the country. He expressed confidence in both nations' abilities to create robust frameworks that maintain the integrity and quality of UK education while addressing Viet Nam's specific educational needs.

- **Donna McGowan**, Country Director, British Council in Viet Nam, elaborated on the UK's role in TNE, providing key statistics: there were more than 10,000 TNE enrolments in Viet Nam in 2022-2023, a growth of 42%, making it one of the fastest-growing TNE markets in East Asia. McGowan emphasised the strong TNE infrastructure in Viet Nam, with over 120 UK programmes being delivered, and a sharp rise in undergraduate enrolments. She also highlighted opportunities for growth at the postgraduate and doctoral levels, particularly in light of Viet Nam's *Project 89*, which aimed to enhance the capacity of higher education lecturers. McGowan concluded by noting that the British Council would launch the research in October 2024 on Viet Nam's readiness to become a student hub.

## Panel Discussion: Viet Nam as a New Study Destination

The panel discussion, moderated by **Van Anh Hoang**, Head of Education at the British Council in Viet Nam, focused on several key topics related to TNE and its future in Viet Nam.

### 1. Internationalisation at Home

- **Prof Mushtak Al-Atabi** from Heriot-Watt University Malaysia emphasised the importance of aligning international education models with local needs. He introduced Heriot-Watt's "purpose-driven education" model, which encouraged students to articulate their purpose and goals through personal impact statements. This innovative approach connected education with a clear sense of direction, making it more meaningful and engaging for students.
- Prof Al-Atabi advised Vietnamese institutions to avoid simply replicating traditional campus-based models and instead adopt flexible education frameworks. He suggested embedding educational centres within business hubs to facilitate closer industry ties and offering a more immersive experience for students. By doing this, Viet Nam could innovate in ways that set it apart as an education hub.

### 2. Innovative TNE Partnership Models

- **Vicki Stott**, CEO of QAA (UK), presented innovative TNE models under the *Quality Evaluation and Enhancement of TNE (QE-TNE)* scheme, which covered over 75 UK higher education providers. She highlighted various models such as joint and dual degrees, franchise arrangements, and online learning, all tailored to regional contexts. Viet Nam, with over 100 TNE partnerships and 11% annual growth in enrolments (2015–2021), was a focus of the scheme. Collaborative provision, the most popular TNE delivery method in Viet Nam, saw a 235% growth rate in five years.
- Vicki provided examples, including partnerships between **University of Greenwich** and **FPT University**, and **University of Sunderland** with the **Banking Academy of Viet Nam**. She emphasised the need for trust in quality assurance to support innovations like digital learning, artificial intelligence, and joint diplomas. She also posed the possibility of

streamlining programme approvals for institutions that comply with international quality standards, ensuring continued success in TNE collaborations.

### 3. Quality Assurance and Accreditation

- **Vicki Stott** emphasised that UK TNE programmes delivered overseas would be subjected to the same rigorous quality assurance standards as those in the UK. She highlighted the UK Quality Code, a reference point for quality and standards in higher education, which had been updated to align with international frameworks such as the European Standards. Stott explained that the code would allow institutions to maintain the same high standards while contextualising their TNE programmes to local environments. Furthermore, she discussed the *QE-TNE scheme*, which facilitated joint evaluations between QAA and local agencies, helping to ensure that TNE programmes meet both UK and local accreditation requirements.
- **Dr Do Huu Nguyen Loc (Bruce)**, Vice President of the University of Economics and Finance HCMC, added that to maintain quality, his institution must meet strict requirements from partner universities, such as implementing specific learning systems, online resources (like Moodle), and teaching tools. These measures enhanced both teaching quality and the competitive edge of students by providing access to the same academic resources as students at the partner institutions.
- **Prof. Mushtak Al-Atabi** called for a shift from traditional *quality assurance* to *quality enhancement* in TNE, especially as models become more innovative and technology-driven. He criticised the reliance on input-based metrics like staff-student ratios, which did not fit modern, flexible education frameworks. Instead, he advocated for *outcome-based education*, where success would be measured by indicators such as employability and starting salaries. Al-Atabi also suggested that universities collaborate in appointing world-class professors and urged accreditation bodies to adopt more *flexible approaches*, allowing institutions to propose new ways of measuring quality for emerging educational models.

### 4. Sustainable and Long-Term Commitments

The panel emphasised the importance of building sustainable partnerships that would extend beyond academic collaboration.

- **Prof. Mushtak Al-Atabi** introduced his equation: *Collaboration = Shared Purpose x Mutual Trust*. He stressed the importance of having a common goal and building trust between partners to ensure long-term success. Without either, partnerships may fail to sustain over time.
- **Dr. Bruce** highlighted the importance of educating the market. He noted that many parents and students, especially in rural areas, lack understanding of TNE and joint degree programmes. He called for increased efforts from consulates, embassies, and ministries to raise awareness about the benefits of TNE.
- **Vicki Stott** concluded that a successful, sustainable partnership is built on shared values and a joint academic vision. She stressed the importance of developing an honest, trust-based relationship between partners to ensure mutual benefits for both institutions and students.

## Group Discussions: Designing Future UK-Vietnam TNE Models

Following the panel discussion, both online and offline participants engaged in group discussions focused on key areas for the development of TNE partnerships between the UK and Vietnam.

### 1. Building Sustainable TNE Partnerships in Curriculum Design and Local Industry Relevance

The reporting group discussed the need for curriculum design to align with local industry requirements to ensure relevance and sustainability. Emphasis was placed on understanding the skills gap in Viet Nam and developing TNE programmes that would address these gaps. It was also noted that Government support for programme approvals would be essential for sustaining these partnerships.

### 2. Innovative Models of TNE Partnerships

Participants explored new models of TNE that would go beyond bilateral collaborations, suggesting multi-party partnerships that involved universities from several countries. This approach could provide students with a more global perspective and enhance their employability. Additionally, the group discussed the importance of involving local industries in curriculum development from the early stages of the programme to ensure alignment with market needs.

### 3. The Role of Technology in Enhancing TNE

The discussion focused on how technology could increase accessibility and flexibility in TNE delivery. Online and on-site participants proposed expanding blended learning options and implementing virtual exchange programmes to facilitate cross-border collaborations without requiring physical relocation. AI-powered tools, adaptive learning platforms, and virtual reality (VR) technologies were highlighted as ways to improve student engagement and personalisation in learning experiences. Additionally, the group discussed how technology would support international students, facilitating personalised learning through data-driven insights from LMS/VLE systems, and enabling collaboration via Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) and virtual internships. AI-powered tools were noted for their potential in supporting both students and staff, while virtual environments help bridge time zones, fostering cross-institutional collaboration.

### 4. Challenges and feasibility of setting up UK International Branch Campuses (IBCs) in Viet Nam

The group discussed the regulatory and financial challenges of establishing full-scale branch campuses in Vietnam. Participants suggested that smaller-scale collaborations with local industries and existing institutions might be a more feasible approach to establishing a presence in Viet Nam, rather than the large financial investments required for a branch campus. They emphasised the importance of gradually building relationships with local partners and focusing on programmes that address Viet Nam's specific educational and industry needs.

## Closing Remarks

**Dr Suzanna Tomassi**, Higher Education Specialist from the UK Department for Business and Trade, closed the session by highlighting the importance of TNE partnerships for both the UK and Vietnam. She emphasised the UK's leadership in transnational education and noted that

Viet Nam's growing demand for international education would present significant opportunities for collaboration. Dr Tomassi encouraged further partnerships to be built on mutual understanding, trust, and the shared goal of addressing local skills gaps.

## Key Insights

### 1. Internationalisation at Home:

Viet Nam's ambition to become an education hub presents significant opportunities for UK institutions to offer innovative TNE models that are tailored to local demands. Institutions like Heriot-Watt University are leading by example in integrating local industry needs into their internationalisation strategies.

### 2. Purpose-Driven and Localised Education Models

Prof Mushtak Al-Atabi's concept of "purpose-driven education" was a compelling example of how international institutions could engage students more deeply by aligning education with personal goals and local needs. His suggestion for Viet Nam to adopt innovative, flexible education models would offer a pathway for the country to establish itself as a leading education hub.

### 3. Sustainability through Quality Assurance

Vicki Stott emphasised that quality assurance played a crucial role in the success and sustainability of TNE partnerships. She highlighted the adaptability of the UK's quality frameworks and the importance of collaboration with local accreditation bodies to maintain high standards.

### 4. Technology as a Key Enabler in TNE

The discussions underscored the transformative potential of technology in TNE. Expanding the use of AI, VR, and blended learning could make education more accessible and personalised for students, while virtual exchanges could provide international experiences without the need for physical travel.

### 5. Building Trust-Based and Financially Sustainable Partnerships

The panelists emphasised that successful TNE partnerships must be built on trust and financial sustainability. Both UK and Vietnamese institutions would need to align their goals and work collaboratively to ensure that partnerships remain mutually beneficial over the long term.

## Conclusion

The session reaffirmed the strong commitment between the UK and Viet Nam to enhance their TNE partnerships. It emphasised the need for innovative models that are flexible, sustainable,

and aligned with local contexts. As Viet Nam continues its journey to become a regional education hub, the UK is well-positioned to play a leading role through its quality TNE offerings and collaborative partnerships.

The discussion and recommendations from this roundtable will inform future collaborations, with both sides eager to build on the momentum created during the event.

## Next Steps

- **Continued Engagement:** UK and Vietnamese institutions are encouraged to engage in further discussions and collaborations to explore new partnership opportunities.
- **Report and Follow-up:** Participants were reminded to register to receive the report 'Viet Nam – Towards a new international education hub in Southeast Asia. Lessons and Evidence'.

By fostering innovative, sustainable partnerships, the UK and Vietnam are well-positioned to lead in the field of transnational education, creating mutually beneficial outcomes for students and institutions alike.

*Summarised by Nguyen Lien Huong*