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## Thai Van Thanh, The role of heads of academic divisions at pedagogical universities in the context of Vietnam's comprehensive reform in education and training

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## **THE ROLE OF HEADS OF ACADEMIC DIVISIONS AT PEDAGOGICAL UNIVERSITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF VIETNAM'S COMPREHENSIVE REFORM IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

In recent years a number of guidelines and policies have been formulated and implemented by the Vietnamese Government in order to develop the system of higher education (HE) and meet demanding requirements when the education is undergoing a drastic reform for international integration. The 11<sup>th</sup> National Party Congress' Resolutions stated that developing educational staff and managers, as well as changing the current educational mechanism is the key in the process of a comprehensive reform in Vietnam's education.

An academic division at a pedagogical university is a unit specialized in and responsible for training and conducting scientific research activities. Head of an academic division is the one who must be a qualified university lecturer who has a deep understanding about the educational sector, and a long-term experience in teaching, conducting scientific research. Thus, heads of academic divisions have an essential role in ensuring the quality of higher education. They make a significant contribution in implementing the 8<sup>th</sup> Central Executive Committee's Resolutions in education reform. The roles of heads of academic divisions are described as follows:

### **1. Drawing up strategies to develop the academic division**

In the management process, the first task of a head of academic division is making long-term and medium-term development strategies, such as five-year plans, ten-year plans. This helps to orient the entire operations of the division, which lays a foundation to maximize resources needed to achieve its given objectives and provide the basis for the examination and assessment of the implementation process.

To perform this role successfully, heads of academic divisions need to understand and be creative when applying strategies on different stages. The first phase includes these following steps:

- step 1: draft planning;
- step 2: obtaining and maintaining the commitment made by stakeholders;
- step 3: analyzing of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges;
- step 4: setting up strategies related to orientation;
- step 5: determining strategic issues;
- step 6: establishing common goals, specific goals and performance measurements;
- step 7: developing strategies;
- step 8: implementing plans;
- step 9: measuring and evaluating the implementation.

The second phase includes setting up meetings to gather up opinions from education managers and lecturers. The third phrase is devoted to completing the plan; and the fourth phrase is submitting them to the department chair and university president for approval.

To accomplish this role, heads of academic division are required to be creative in thinking and executing their leadership duties. They need to be highly innovative when co-operating with experts and faculty members to implement the common goals. They are supposed to adopt a visionary approach while planning development strategies for the department as a whole.

## **2. Directing the division members in the formulation of training programs**

Training quality depends on many factors, among which the quality of the program is of crucial importance. As clearly stated on Article 41 in the Education Law, higher education programs represents higher education goals, set up what is a standard for students and faculty members to meet, defines ways of how to assess academic performance and the level of proficiency, ensuring that there is an interconnection between the higher education program and other educational programs. Specific steps to conduct the program include: 1) developing program's framework; 2) making a detailed program; 3) designing courses. These steps are also mentioned in the university regulations.

Academic programs play a crucial role in ensuring the quality of education at all levels and disciplines. An academic program must ensure that its objectives is consistent with the requirements of social-economic development. It is strictly necessary to request a new training program that is in line with the development of society, with more in-depth subjects while ensuring a balance between theoretical matters and practical ones. An academic division is a professional unit which shoulders important responsibilities in the development of training programs.

From a modern approach, an education program is a complex entity comprising these following components: objectives of education; levels and structures of educational content; methodologies and forms of educational institutions; measurement of educational outcomes. In this case, the head of an academic division has an active role in directing the development of training programs for the division including:

- providing the faculty and school with advice to improve and restructure the current curricula; ensuring the interconnectivity of all educational levels; managing a balance between general courses and specialized course; improving the effectiveness of each training course. Depending on each school, the head of an academic division should adopt either a research-oriented approach or career-oriented approach in developing programs;
- adjusting the structure of the current program and making plans of teaching in all subjects for which head of academic divisions holds responsible. This requires heads of academic divisions to direct other staff members to adjust the number of hours that a student has to complete at school. Heads of academic divisions can adjust the order of courses, develop curricula to teach these subjects to students of various training programs. They can add more elective courses to the current training programs;
- innovating methods and forms of teaching, and other educational activities drastically. To implement this requirement successfully, heads of academic divisions must urge other staff members to strengthen their independence in deciding and selecting courses of study, to enhance their adaptability and resilience in designing, formulating suitable programs. Head of academic division must be in the vanguard of an innovation in teaching methods; providing lecturers and staff with techniques to enhance learners' active role in study; increasing the use of information technology, media and ICT in teaching and learning activities;
- improving the assessment and evaluation of the students' academic performance. Evaluation is an important step that is closely associated with teaching. The goal here is to measure the level of target completion and to review the body of tests and examinations and make any adjustment necessary. Therefore, it is crucial that the assessment be closely linked to the given learning objectives, and outcome standards. Heads of academic divisions must take an annual review to consider the suitability and practicality of the targets;
- improve efficiency in the academic division's activities. An academic division is where workshops on the framework of training programs take place. Division members are those who are assigned to compile detailed outlines, set up workshops, pose suggestions and edit syllabus. Heads of academic divisions take the role of holding up conferences and creating opportunities for division members to discuss over the program's framework. Their roles are extended to conducting activities which discuss over the training curricula at other schools at home and abroad. Heads of academic divisions need to conduct in-depth discussions over

merging those subjects similar to each other while ensuring the consistency and feasibility of the training curriculum.

Heads of academic divisions should streamline procedures, truncate any unnecessary, and outdated content as well as increase the number of optional courses. The board of scientific experts of the department and divisions should keep on conducting more scientific research and take reference to the experience of other educational institutions to adjust training programs. This is highly necessary in the context of an increasing demands and requirements of a learning society. To fulfill these requirements, heads of academic divisions must be a strong-minded leaders capable of making the right decisions and have a strong influence on other people.

### **3. Organizing the teaching activities**

*Organizing teaching activities:* heads of academic divisions are required to assign specific tasks to staff members in order to meet given professional and academic requirements. They should organize activities and academic exchanges, help young teachers learn skills related teaching, and conducting scientific research from experienced lectures. Each specific group should have at least one seminar, discussing over the syllabus, teaching methods, books and references.

*Reviewing and inspecting academic performance:* heads of academic divisions steer other division members to compile and design tests, assign the tasks of supervising examinations and marking grades to different staff members. They must instruct teachers to adopt a comprehensive approach while assessing students' academic performance, soft skills and attitudes. University lectures are supposed to grasp the learning outcomes of students, and the fluctuation in the percentage of good and excellent students over years. From that, solutions have to be made to promote the strengths, and reduce weaknesses and limitations in order to improve the quality of teaching.

*Compiling textbooks* is an important matter in the academic activities of an academic division. Heads of academic divisions are obligatory to choose suitable authors; create opportunity for other staff members to put forward suggestions, and complete syllabi.

### **4. Making plans to develop faculty members**

Faculty development grasps a crucial role in ensuring that there are enough qualified faculty members who together can create a united entity, without any gaps between generations. To make sure that the faculty member development programs run smoothly, heads of academic divisions should provide the department chairs and university administrators with advice on these following issues:

*Planning faculty members.* Based on the scheme for developing the faculty members, undergraduate and postgraduate programs, and the university overall plan, academic divisions are required to draw up plans for academic staff, ensuring that there is sufficiency

in the number of qualified lectures to carry out their training programs and conducting scientific research. Heads of academic divisions are also required to play an important roles in conferring titles and upgrading ranking for lectures, such as titles of senior lectures, advanced lectures, associate professors and professors.

*Faculty member recruitment.* Lecturers are recruited under these following principles: while it is important to maintain sufficiency in the number of staff, the quality of recruits should receive top priority. Divisions members are those who search, train and retrain resources, while the expert pannels under the leadership of the head, evaluate recruits and hold responsible for the quality. The staff recruitment process must be strictly controlled, transparent and democratic. Bureaucracy must be avoided. Staff recruitment should be made in such a way as to ensure a continuation in human resource.

*Training and retraining staff members.* It's important to make sure that every faculty member is well aware about the importance of regular training in all areas of the school's work. Every teacher must be aware of their responsibilities, duties and the ranking standards. In this way, they make efforts to learn and gain more professional qualifications.

Academic divisions should make an annual plan on training and retraining staff members. Based on the institution's master plan, and the current situations of staff, academic divisions can arrange working plans suitable for each member and plan for their faculty members to have further training and retraining. Skills related to languages, information technology should be updated, especially for those who are leading experts and hold doctoral degress. Faculty members need to complete a certain amount of scientific research as stated in the institution's regulations. Experience exchanging and overseas co-operation are highly recommended. Academic divisions should make a clear scheme over training newly enlisted teachers, and set up a set of criteria to evaluate, place faculty members to positions that suit their qualifications and skills.

In this context, heads of academic divisions need to pay attention to these following issues: first, capacity to develop programs; second, practical and creative activities to enhance students' experiences; third, integrated interdisciplinary teaching (especially teachers teaching methods of delivering lectures); forth, assessment of students' learning outcomes based on their specific characteristics; fifth, skills related to analysing general education programs for graduates to have a better performance.

## **5. Organizing and managing faculty's scientific research activities**

Scientific research and technology transfer is one of two key tasks of a university lecturer. Heads of academic divisions hold responsible for the organizing and managing scientific research activity. They guide students and colleagues to participate in research projects, educational technology transfer and consider this as one of the most important criteria when it comes to evaluating scientific research.

Heads of academic divisions are required to provide the school and faculty with constructive advice on setting up a mechanism in which the faculty receive fund and

necessary education technology to perform given tasks. To fulfill these tasks, it is important that heads of academic divisions must be adroit at these following skills related to: making a record of faculty's activities connected to scientific research and education technology transfer; implementing regulations on management of scientific research and technology transfer; assessing and classifying scientific research; planning a framework for scientific research.

## **6. Giving the department and schools advice on promoting international integration in higher education**

Vietnam's accession to WTO has brought about a plethora of opportunities as well as challenges. Currently, higher education worldwide is following to these trends: Diversification; Privatization; Ensuring the quality while enhancing competitiveness; Developing a network of research universities into a center which uses, produces, distributes, exports and transfers knowledge, modern technologies; Discovering and attracting talents and technology through training and researching activities; Promoting international and regional human resource training.

In developing countries, where there is an urgent need of technology, university is where talents are educated in accordance with companies' purposes, thereby attracting investment from international donors and funds. These trends has a direct impact on teaching staff, educational managers at local universities.

The government's Resolution No. 29-NQ / TW on fundamental and comprehensive innovation in education and training sector stipulates these matters as follows: Developing a strategy of international integration while improving cooperation and competitiveness of higher education in Vietnam; Implementing agreements and international commitments; Deploying teaching and learning in foreign languages (especially English); Improving the quality of training programs and research capable of attracting foreigners; Create mechanisms suitable for investors and creditable international institutions to open their subsidiaries or to offer joint degree programs in Vietnam. Broaden the scale of overseas training supported by state budget for faculty majoring in basic sciences and spearheaded scientific disciplines. Provide incentives to international organizations and individuals, Vietnamese overseas so that they can participate in training activities, research, application and transfer of science and technology in Vietnam. Strengthen international exchanges in culture and academic matters.

Thus, heads of academic divisions are required to offer their department and insitution more constructive advice in setting up an advanced training program, with a reference to international practices. Agreements on bilateral cooperation, joint training degree, exchange of teachers between local and international university should be concluded as soon as possible.

To fulfill this role, heads of academic performance must be capable of: understanding guidelines and policies toward international cooperation in higher education set by the

Government; realizing opportunities and challenges occurred in the process of international integration; having a visionary outlook; being adroit at negotiating and co-operating with regional and global universities in the field of international management, experience exchange, academic exchange, scientific research.

### **7. Offering the department and school constructive advice on building up a motivating environment for faculty members**

University lecturer is a highly professional job, as a result, it is crucial to provide lecturers with favourable conditions necessary for their job such as offices, labs, and fund. Lacking these conditions, teachers will be hindered and therefore, cannot make use of their full potentials.

With reference to the Government's Decree No. 43/2006 / ND-CP dated 25/4/2006 (which gives an emphasis on autonomy, self-responsibility for performance, payroll and finance of state-owned institutions) and Circular No. 71/2006 / TT-BTC dated 9/8/2006 (which offers a clear explanation on the implementation of Decree 43/2006 / ND-CP), heads of academic divisions are required to do these tasks as follows:

*Providing academic departments with advice on deploying policies to encourage faculty members.* While drawing policies, it is crucial to adhere to the principle that those who perform better will have better income and reward. Heads of academic divisions need to formulate policies to reward staff members who have made major contributions in research and teaching activities. They should support staff members to increase their foreign language proficiency, provide necessary conditions to leading experts and young teacher to visit, exchange experience with their counterparts within the country and abroad.

*Promoting the sense of independence and creativity amongst staff members so that they can make use of their full potentials.* Helping them to fulfill their responsibilities over conducting scientific research, making technology transfer to meet new requirements. Successfully implementing favourable policies to attract, nurture and retain talents. These policies are effective in two ways. On the one hand, it helps to recognize the dedication, achievements that ones have made. On the other hand, it also helps to cull unqualified members. This is also a measure to enhance, stimulate faculty members to strive and thrive.

### **In summary**

Heads of academic divisions at pedagogical universities are those who are experts in their fields, highly respected amongst academics and capable of management. In our view, to implement their duties and meet new rising criteria in this stage of the educational reform, heads of academic divisions are required to accomplish such tasks as: drawing up strategy to develop the academic division, directing the division members in the formulation of training programs, organizing the teaching activities, making plans to develop faculty members, conducting scientific research, providing their academic

departments and insitution with advice on promoting international cooperation, building up a motivating environment for the faculty.

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### **The role of heads of academic divisions at pedagogical universities in the context of Vietnam's comprehensive reform in education and training**

The paper aims to clarify the role of heads of academic divisions at Vietnam's pedagogical universities in the context of its comprehensive educational reform. In our view, to implement their duties and to meet the new criteria in this stage of the educational reform, heads of academic divisions are required to accomplish such tasks as: drawing up strategies to develop their academic division, directing the division members in the formulation of training programs, organizing the teaching activities, making plans to develop faculty members, conducting scientific research, providing their academic departments and institution with advice on promoting international cooperation, building up a motivating environment for the faculty members.

**Keywords:** heads of academic divisions, university, educational reform.

### **Rola kierowników wydziałów akademickich na uniwersytetach pedagogicznych w kontekście wietnamskiej kompleksowej reformy edukacji i szkoleń**

Celem artykułu jest wyjaśnienie roli kierowników wydziałów akademickich na uniwersytetach pedagogicznych w Wietnamie w kontekście kompleksowej reformy edukacji. Aby realizować swoje obowiązki i spełniać nowe kryteria na tym etapie reformy edukacyjnej, kierownicy wydziałów akademickich są zobowiązani do realizacji takich zadań jak: opracowanie strategii rozwoju wydziału, kierowanie członkami wydziału przy formułowaniu programów szkoleniowych, organizowanie zajęć dydaktycznych, opracowywanie planów rozwoju kadry naukowej, prowadzenie badań naukowych, zapewnianie wydziałom akademickim i instytucji doradztwa w zakresie promocji współpracy międzynarodowej, budowanie środowiska motywującego dla członków kadry naukowej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** kierownicy wydziałów akademickich, uniwersytet, reforma edukacji.

*Tłumaczenie Anna Oleszak*