

# COUNTRY STUDY



## ASK Asia

Erasmus Mundus Alumni Employability Study in  
the Field of Agriculture and Related Life Sciences

**A**griculture  
**S**kills  
**K**nowledge  
**Asia**



With the support of the  
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# Abbreviations and Acronyms

<b>ADB</b>	Asian Development Bank
<b>EM</b>	Erasmus Mundus
<b>GSO</b>	General Statistics Office
<b>HEIs</b>	Higher Education Institutions
<b>HERA</b>	Higher Education Reform Agenda
<b>IFAD</b>	International Fund for Agricultural Development
<b>IIE</b>	International Institute of Education
<b>MOET</b>	Ministry of Education and Training
<b>QA</b>	Quality Assurance

# Executive Summary

Since the new economic reforms and land policy were implemented, the Vietnamese economy has been striving to industrialize. The country's transformation into a market oriented economy has brought many opportunities for skilled labour, particularly by opening up the market to private businesses. On the other hand, recent population growth has placed enormous pressure on the Vietnamese labour market. The unemployment rate among young people aged 15-24 has increased to 34.9% with significant regional differences particularly for skilled agricultural labour. More positions are opening in North and Central Vietnam, where most competent labour is, contrary to the South, where opportunities for skilled agricultural workers are lacking.

The number of foreign investors contributing to the development of various sectors of the national economy has increased. As the Vietnamese economy has risen in recent years, the amount of funding has decreased and co-financing projects is required. One of the sectors in the focus of local government and international investors is higher education. Education and training play an important role in satisfying the demands of the labour market, but, with an ever-increasing quantity of students enrolled in domestic study courses, quality is not guaranteed. Higher education has been highly internationalized by providing numerous mobility opportunities around the world. Erasmus Mundus, as one of the widely recognized programmes, has financed many Vietnamese students and staff in agriculture and related life sciences, building their capacities through European institutions. To analyse how this effort has been received by employers in the Vietnamese agricultural labour market is the purpose of this study.

Two-dimensional research was chosen in order to conduct this study. Firstly, a quantitative survey proceeded among Erasmus Mundus alumni from Vietnam who participated in one of the agriculture-related programmes in Europe between 2004 and 2013. Secondly, a qualitative approach was facilitated using semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with employers and /or HR managers and key informants from related NGOs and public and private institutions. Outcomes from the research were discussed with representatives of higher education in Vietnam and Europe and with representatives of non-governmental, private and public institutions. Recommendations and suggestions for future programme adaptations were handed over to the corresponding authorities.

The main findings showed that the EM programme helped build the capacities of Vietnamese alumni who became very competitive and are able to stand out on the domestic labour market. Being exposed to different and often dynamic structures in Europe can bring new ideas and efficient approaches to the institutional settings in Vietnam and thus increase business productivity. However, with the increasing



number of scholarships offered to Vietnamese students around the world, competition is increasing. The general image of European higher education should be raised so the quality of education becomes equally valued to that of the USA or Australia.

With a range of job opportunities opening in the private sector, often providing its employees with higher salary and incentives, the public sector is facing difficulties keeping competent employees. Moreover, alumni often lose motivation upon returning to Vietnam due to the lack of the necessary facilities and laboratory equipment. Thus they cannot continue research in the field of their interest. The need persists for support in terms of material and academic resources and utilities. Some employers, particularly in the public sector, believed that local graduates still have their own advantages in understanding the local situation and working conditions. Students who travel abroad miss the chance of creating a local network while those who stay in Vietnam do not, giving them a valuable advantage once they enter the labour market. Thus, focus should be put not only on preparatory courses prior to arrival in the EU, but also on pre-departure activities that would make the reintegration process easier.

One component that was found insufficient was the provision of opportunities to do internships during the EM programme. Based on evidence from the alumni survey, the chance to use the full potential of the mobility was limited due to the fact that not enough practical experience in the form of professional internships was offered. Practical work should be included not only in the EM programme but at Vietnamese universities as well as an obligatory part of the curriculum. Active participatory learning techniques need to be incorporated in the didactic approach that is applied at home universities to allow students to actively contribute to the educational process.

# Introduction

Vietnam is one of the countries that benefits from the Erasmus Mundus Programme that provides scholarships for and mobilities of Vietnamese students to study at selected European universities. Such cooperation aims to build the human resources for the future development of Vietnam. To date, over nine hundred Vietnamese students, scholars and fellows have been selected to take part in the EM mobility and to experience educational excellence at European universities, 342 of them under the action 1 programme and 616 under the Action 2 programme (European Commission, 2014). The second phase of the Erasmus Mundus was launched between early 2009, running until 2013 and this gives rise to questions related to its success in the years following. This country report is a part of a comprehensive study that was conducted under the ASK Asia project. The project ASK Asia (“Agriculture, Skills, Knowledge in Asia: Competences and employability of Erasmus Mundus Graduates in Agriculture on the Asian Professional Market”) is an Erasmus Mundus Action 3 project funded by the European Commission (EACEA) in the period from 2013 till 2015. The main objective is to assess how the Erasmus Mundus graduates in Agriculture and related Life Sciences perform on the professional job market in Asia and to identify specific competences and skills that provide these graduates with a comparative advantage in meeting the expectations of their employers following the education/training period.

# Brief overview of Vietnamese higher education and labour market

Vietnam is a country in rapid transition. The country is undergoing economic growth and transition from a centrally planned to market oriented economy and strives to become an industrialized state by 2020. Yet, Vietnam is still a country in development and thus poverty reduction remains an important development goal. The incidence of poverty varies significantly between regions, i. e. areas with a large ethnic minority population have the highest incidence and severity of poverty. The consequence of centralized government, high levels of bureaucracy and corruption are however causing obstacles (Visser and Lap, 2011). Education and training plays an important role in development. Offering opportunities to young academicians to get exposed to diverse values and different pedagogical models is contributing to this process of transformation.

**Table 1** Overview of Vietnamese economy and demography

	2000	2003	2006	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
<b>GDP per capita (current US\$)</b>	433.3	530.9	796.7	1,232.4	1,333.6	1,543.0	1,755.3	1,910.5	-
<b>Agriculture value added (% of GDP)</b>	22.7	20.9	18.7	19.2	18.9	20.1	19.7	18.4	-
<b>Gross agricultural production value (Constant 2004-2006 million US\$)</b>	10,311	12,338	14,419	16,466	16,822	17,613	18,076	-	-
<b>Population (1000)</b>	80,888	83,353	85,748	88,200	89,047	89,914	90,796	91,680	92,548
<b>Agricultural labour (1000)</b>	26,654	27,950	28,819	29,739	30,034	30,310	30,566	30,796	30,994

**Source:** FAOSTAT, 2015; WorldBank, 2015

As a direct result of economic reforms, Vietnam moved from being a rice importer in the mid-1980s to become in 1997 the world's second largest exporter of rice after Thailand, including the two major rice

baskets of the Red River and the Mekong river deltas. Major industries which have flourished include food processing, machine building, mining and the production of oil, cement, chemical fertilizers, glass, tires, textiles, foot ware and ceramics. Private enterprise is officially encouraged and it is estimated that over 70% of domestic trade can be attributed to the private sector. Moreover state-owned firms are now required to be profitable in order to stay in business (VLIRUOS, 2011). With a population over 90 million, robust growth of the country's consumption has made a significant contribution to the development of Vietnamese enterprises.

The state of economic entities changed dramatically from the beginning of the 2000s. In the field of agriculture, forestry and fisheries, a shift from collective to individual management and scale expansion by the individual agricultural, forestry and fisheries units was observed. The number of cooperatives has slightly decreased to 6,256 units in 2008, while the number of large-scale individual farms more than doubled from 57,069 in 2000 to 120,699 in 2008 reaching 145,880 in 2010 (GSO, 2015; Sakata, 2013).

A household's property rights to agriculture land were significantly strengthened due to the newly introduced land certification programme. The Vietnamese Government has applied land reforms that recognize the household as the basic unit of production and allocates land use rights to households. Under this law, lands can be transferred, exchanged, leased, inherited and mortgaged (Marsh and MacAulay, 2006). This resulted in the more efficient land use and in extending the credit and land markets in the country. Land reform has been an important element in Vietnamese economic growth and poverty alleviation (National Assembly, 2003). In the last decade, various types of private farms emerged that are not only operated by agricultural households but also by government officials and the rich. Kojin (2013) argues that private farms developed by agricultural households are still limited because of the difficulty of land consolidation.

## Labour Market Assessment

Robust population growth over recent decades has placed enormous pressure on the Vietnamese labour market. With the population increasing across all age groups, many people have been added to the country's labour force. Apart from a few large cities, Vietnam has remained mainly rural. However, as cities expand with people constantly moving in from the countryside, the urban population is growing. In 2009 the share of agriculture in the total employment of the labour force over 15 years was 47.6%, a slight decrease from the previous years. According to the Labour Force Survey (GSO, 2014), employment expanded with the majority of job growth concentrated in the services sector and agriculture, forestry and the fishery sector in the first quarter of 2014 and in industry and the construction sector in the second quarter of 2014. The unemployment rate decreased slightly to 2.21% in 2014. However unemployment among young people

aged 15-24 increased to 34.9%. The main income-generating asset for many Vietnamese is labour, and participation in the labour market is crucial for many to survive (ILO, 2010). Concretely, there are approximately 1,165,000 employers to 39,855,000 own-account and wage workers. Moreover, over 11 million workers had unpaid family worker status in 2014 (GSO, 2014).

In Vietnam, education is considered a top priority for the country's development. A study conducted by (Dung Tien, 2012) shows that the returns on education in Vietnam are still low, especially for tertiary level education. It indicates either low demand for skilled workers or, more likely, the mismatch between education and job availability, and the low quality of tertiary education. Investments in higher levels of education in a number of sectors such as real estate services, health and social services and agriculture do not pay off.

According to the 2011 Vietnam labour force survey, the unemployment rate among labour that has not received any technical training is higher than the overall level in urban areas (3.82% compared to 3.6%). The unemployment rate of labour that has received university education is the lowest, 2.28%. Moreover, the most favoured mode of job search among males and females in Vietnam is to search through friends and relatives (Ministry of Planning and Investment, 2012).

## Higher Education

The Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) is responsible for the education system in terms of the regulation of new institutions, the creation of textbooks and curricula, decisions on admissions criteria, and the issuing of certificates and diplomas. Primary education is five years in duration (grades 1-5), and is followed by four years of lower secondary (6-9) and three years of upper secondary. The first five years are compulsory and start at the age of six. So the system implies 12 years of schooling followed by a possible four-year bachelor degree, a two-year master's degree and a three- to four-year PhD. The school year runs from September to June. Admission to the university is restricted to those who have a certificate of secondary school graduation by passing the national university entrance exam.

Top public universities receive the largest number of applicants, with lesser-known private universities receiving the fewest. University-level higher education is offered at three main types of institution: multidisciplinary universities, senior colleges with a narrower teaching focus, and institutes which also tend to have a narrow disciplinary focus, but with a specialized research capacity. Although the number of university students has doubled since 1990, the number of teachers remains essentially unchanged. This is despite recent increases in budgetary allocations, liberalized private sector involvement, and the encouragement of foreign participation in education and training services. Foreign provision will not, however, solve the problem of under-capacity or poor teaching standards (Clark, 2014). Agriculture,

Medicine and Physics were the central focus of science education between 1997 and 2007. From 2008, Vietnam has shifted its focus to Computer Science and Engineering, along with Medicine. Japan and the United States are the top collaborators with Vietnam, followed by France and the Republic of Korea. The compound annual growth rate of its publications is 15.5% (UNESCO, 2014).

The Government has detailed its aspirations for higher education in the Higher Education Reform Agenda (HERA). Enrolment at the tertiary level in Vietnam has grown dramatically over the last decade, with the national gross enrolment ratio rising from 10% in 2000 to 16% in 2005, and 25% in 2013 (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2015). However the system is facing a challenge in responding to the needs of the labour market as the country's economy is growing and moving away from low-wage manufacturing to modern industry.

Vietnam has become a significant source of foreign students for a number of countries worldwide, most noticeably Australia and the United States which enrolled approximately 36% of a total of 106,000 Vietnamese students studying in 49 foreign countries in 2012 (Clark, 2014). The United States is still seen as the gold standard among a majority of Vietnamese students looking at overseas study opportunities and is considered as their first-choice study destination (IIE, 2010). The internationalization of higher education in Vietnam plays a very important role particularly at the doctorate and Master's level. The share of foreign-trained doctorates is significantly large. In Vietnam, domestic doctoral enrolment was approximately 4,700 in 2011; however, during the same year, there were over 3,400 Vietnamese enrolled in doctoral programmes overseas (UNESCO, 2014). Through international cooperation, the quality assurance system was introduced in Vietnamese higher education, firstly through a World Bank project via the establishment of quality assessment centres at selected universities. Since 2005 there have been many discussions about QA, the initial preparation of procedures, the introduction of external accreditation as well as the conduct of self-evaluation, often with the participation of the international projects (Tram, 2012).

While the Ministry of Education and Training oversees all higher education, a recent education reform has allowed universities more autonomy over financing, research and human resources. Thanks to the International Comparative Higher Education and Finance Project, started in 2008, universities are allowed to control their own budgets and prepare their own spending plans. Access to higher education is influenced by factors including income level, the social status of the parents, region, race, religion, ethnicity and gender. Since the open door policy was implemented, and some market factors have started to have an impact on higher education, access to higher education for students from low-income families has increased. Unlike in rural areas and in ethnic minorities, there is no significant gender difference in accessing higher education in urban areas.

# Methodology

To reach the specific objectives, multiple means of data collection were used throughout the survey. The general procedure followed the overall methodological framework explained in the ASK Asia Erasmus Mundus Alumni Employability Study. Three main data collection approaches were applied, firstly an online questionnaire was distributed among EM alumni, secondly in-person interviews were conducted with the key employers and informants in the field of agriculture and related life sciences in Vietnam and, last but not least, focus group discussions were facilitated during the national workshop with representatives of alumni and employers. Some specifications were adjusted in order to be suitable to the local conditions.

The total number of alumni who completed the online survey was 34. The database was cleared of those who studied in non-agriculture related fields and the resulting sample size was 27 respondents. Unanswered surveys are explained mainly due to pending graduation or prolonged periods of study, thus respondents may not have entered the job market yet. Contacts with the particular institutions that employ EM graduates were obtained through the online questionnaire survey. Not all the respondents were reached. A complementary range of interviews was conducted with the key employers and informants in the government, UN agencies, international and local NGOs and in selected business enterprises. The complementary respondents were chosen on the condition of being engaged in agriculture, life sciences and rural development related fields and upon recommendation by local informants. In total 20 interviews were conducted, five of them with employers preselected on the basis of the online survey, the rest were identified as key employers in agriculture.

As follow-up to the previous data collection, a national workshop was organized in Hue, Vietnam on November 12, 2014. In total 19 participants contributed to the discussion, five representatives of European universities, seven alumni and seven representatives of Asian organisations and universities. First the preliminary results were presented and key issues discussed. Secondly, two focus group discussions proceeded, separately for employers and alumni.

Finally, lessons learnt from Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Mongolia, Thailand and Vietnam and final conclusions were discussed during the regional conference that was facilitated in Prince of Songkla University, Thailand on February 2-4, 2015. The regional workshop hosted 25 representatives of European and Asian universities and consultants involved in the research process.

# Erasmus Mundus Alumni Experience

In this chapter results from the alumni survey are presented, including general demographic information about the respondents, their study backgrounds, professional experience and skills development gained through the programme and last but not least, the current employment situation of EM alumni in the field of agriculture and related life sciences.

## Sampled alumni characteristics

The age of respondents varies between 25 and over 36 years. The results show that among respondents various age groups were represented with a predominance of alumni in the age 26-30. This might be explained by mobility being provided primarily to Master and Doctoral level students which corresponds to the given age group.

Of the respondents, 63% were male. More focus should be given to equal gender distribution of EM alumni coming from Vietnam due to the higher proportion of male participants in the past. Alumni who participated in EM programmes come from different environments. The area of origin of alumni is not proportioned equally. As is to be expected, 67% of alumni originally come from urban areas. This provides them with easier access to universities and mobility opportunities. Considering the inequality of access to information, the rural population is significantly disadvantaged.

The majority of the respondents 63% declared they participated in the EM study programme during a Master's level. 15% of respondents participated at a Doctoral level, 11% participated at Bachelor's and three at a Post-Doctoral level.

The length of study was to a considerable extent linked with the level of study. Doctoral programmes and the majority of Masters' studies were financed for the full two and three-year periods while Bachelor's study programmes and Post Doctoral mobility were variously financed for one or two semesters.

The majority of alumni declared that their studies were financed through the Eurasia 2 project (44%), which was a follow-up to the previous Eurasia project through which 19% of alumni were financed. 19% were financed through Lotus I, II and III projects. One respondent was financed through Mover, IMRD and Panacea separately. Another two alumni claimed financing through different sources. The highest percentage of respondents studied in the Czech Republic or in Belgium, followed by Austria, Germany, Netherlands and Poland. All alumni were sent to their studies from a Vietnamese university except for one case when the sending university was located in Thailand, that alumnus being financed through the



PANACEA project. The majority of alumni returned back to their home country immediately after finishing the mobility period. Only one alumnus stayed in Europe because of continuing study and an offer of work.

Alumni stated that they did not experience serious difficulties with integration in the host country except for one case who felt racially-oriented discrimination during their stay in the Czech Republic. This respondent generally expressed dissatisfaction with the EM programme.

The most frequently studied fields were environmental economics and natural resource management, biotechnology and engineering. International economic development in agriculture was also studied.

The results show that the greatest financial support in the field of agriculture and related life sciences was given to full Masters study programmes, particularly in environmental economics and natural resource management, biotechnology and engineering.

Alumni seem to have participated in the EM programme for various reasons. No significant pattern in the choices among respondents could be drawn from the results of the survey. Although, during the focus group discussion, alumni indicated that their choice was often directed towards any study programme available just in order to benefit from a scholarship and conduct the mobility. The most frequent reason for alumni to choose the particular country was mainly their interest in a given university that offered EM study programmes. The country and mobility were often proposed by the sending university or were chosen because of an interest in the particular country's culture and history.

The main reason for choosing the given university was the availability of a particular study programme at the university. These programmes were engineering, biotechnology, crop sciences or environmental economics and natural resources management. Secondly, the particular university was suggested by the sending institution.

Several reasons were identified why the alumni decided to study in Europe through the EM programme. One of the main reasons was the scientific level of the host university, the possibility of living and studying in Europe, the reputation of the EM programme and the opportunity to get a scholarship.

## **Knowledge and professional skills of graduates**

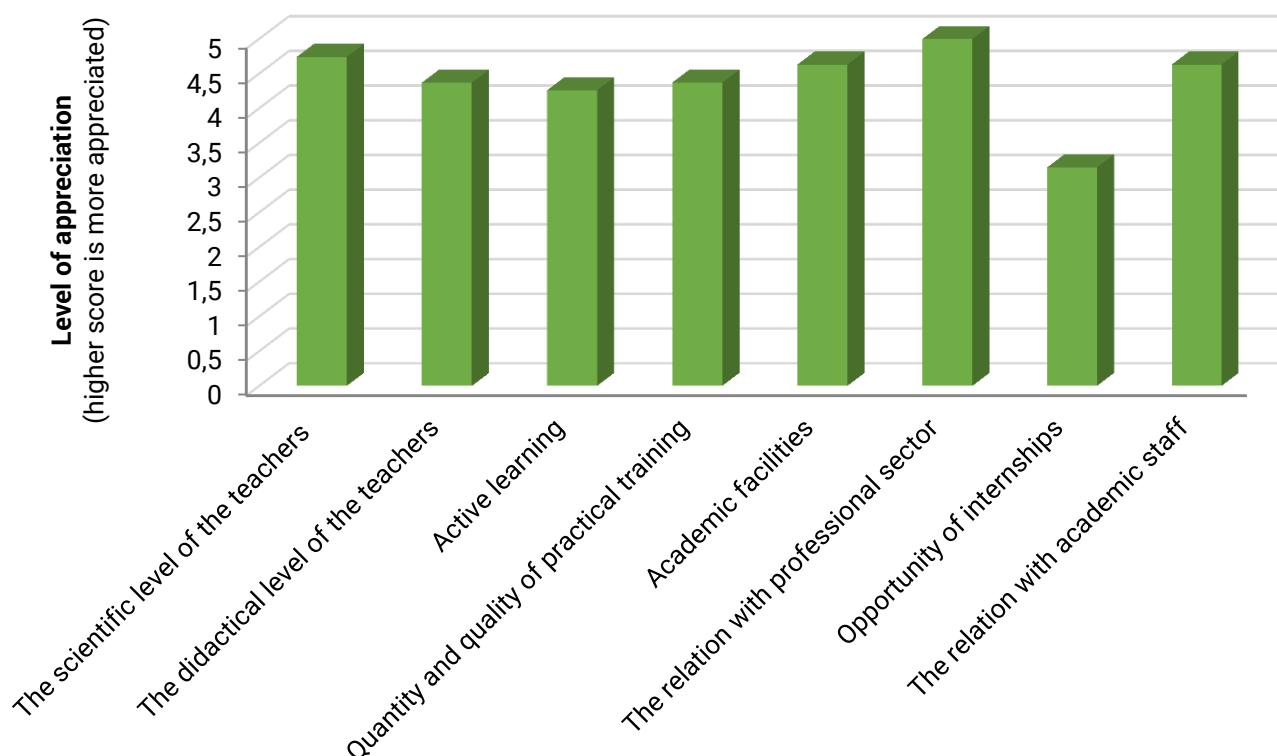
Some of the researched sample stated that they had study, work or research experience outside of their home country already before applying for the EM programme. They were in total 33% of the alumni. This experience was mainly gained in South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, Australia and the USA and in the majority of cases lasted a period of one year. As to professional experience gained during the EM

period, over 1/3 of alumni did not participate in any training or internship nor had a student job nor voluntary position.

As part of our research, the alumni were asked for a self-evaluation of their skill and competence development. It was reported by them that all their targeted skills and competences improved during the programme. Most importantly alumni became more independent after the programme, responsible, able to make decisions and solve problems. Language, research skills and overall technical know-how were improved. Contrary to which, computer skills remained unchanged; this might best be explained by the fact that Vietnamese students are well-used to working on computer at Vietnamese institutions. Moreover, time management and critical and self-critical thinking did not develop significantly.

Among the most important skills developed during the mobility were language skills. Most students considered their English skills improved most (73%) as well as German (13%) and Czech language. Language improvement was directly related to the country of the EM mobility concerned.

During the study period at European universities alumni valued significantly their relationships with the academic staff of EU universities as well as their relationships with the professional sector. Academic facilities such as laboratories, IT equipment etc. were highly rated. Results indicated a high demand for the provision of internships/training opportunities for alumni during their study/training period as they could enhance their practical skills and get experience before entering the labour market. There is also a matter of creating possible valuable professional links. The set of horizontal skills that are developed during the activities beyond the regular study curriculum appear to be the key element making the EM alumni competitive and better off compared with other graduates.

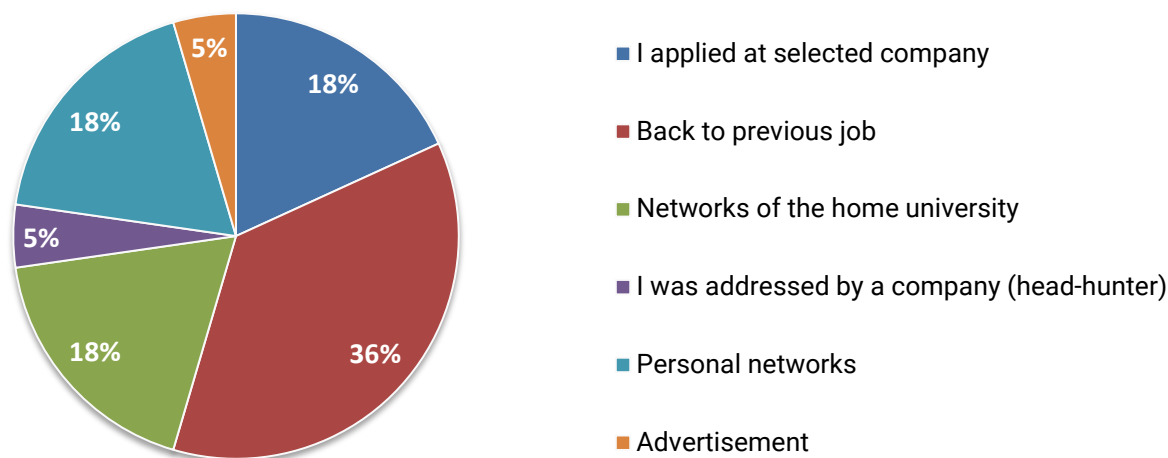
**Figure 1** Alumni appreciation of the European teaching and learning

**Source:** Online survey on alumni experience with EM programme

## Employment

Results show that 82% of alumni are employed in the public sector particularly in universities and ministerial bodies. Contrary to other countries, none of the respondents is employed in the non-governmental sector. At the time of data collection the remaining alumni were searching for a job for a period shorter than three months with the only exception being in a case of a period of employment of less than one year.

The current employment situation is highly affected by previous work experience. In total, 7 % of alumni already had working experience before participating in the EM. In fact, 62% of alumni who are currently working had the job position arranged already before they returned from the EM. Apart from those who returned to their previous employment, 36% of alumni used networks from the sending university and personal networks while searching for a job, 18% applied directly at the selected company, others were directly approached by their employer or found a job based on public advertisement. See the below graph.

**Figure 2** How did the alumni find a job?

**Source:** Online survey of alumni experience with the EM programme

Based on presence or absence of work experience prior to study/training period, a cluster analysis was implemented and the respondents were divided into three clusters.

## Cluster I

The first cluster represents the alumni who had previous working experience and continued working in the same organization after the study/training period in Europe and thus they maintained their employment throughout the programme. This is the biggest cluster accounting for 56 % of respondents. These alumni applied mostly for full length Master and Doctorate mobility and for 6-10 months Post Doctorate positions. Students opted for the mobility due to the academic level of the receiving university and due to the reputation of the EM programme. These alumni were working in the public sector and their placement was arranged already before their return from the EM programme.

The following figure represents selected testimonies of alumni as to their satisfaction with their position in the labour market:

**Figure 3** Testimonies of alumni I.

+ Pros	- Cons
Studies and ideas are applied in practice	Low salary
Main job is not satisfactory however public sector provides free-time to get a part-time job to earn extra for living	Strict social structure in the government
Interest in research activities	Improved capacity was not rewarded by promotion
Work is consistent with the learnt expertise	

**What do they consider to be the most important factor influencing their employability?**

Capacity to apply the knowledge in practice
Confidence, hard-working manner, enthusiasm and responsibility
Overall capacity improvement
Specific knowledge and skills
Experience
Research skills
Communication and ability to work in a team

**Source:** Online survey on alumni experience with the EM programme

## Cluster II

The second cluster represents the alumni with work experience obtained before the study/training period in a different field, amounting to 19% of respondents. These alumni applied for full length and 10 month Master course mobilities. The main reason was the possibility of being in Europe and the opportunity to get a scholarship. None of them went through any internships/training during the EM programme.

Figure 4 Testimonies of alumni II.

+ Pros	- Cons
Very satisfied in the private sector at a managerial position -> respect from society	Require a higher position with better salary
Satisfaction with a teaching position at the university	Looking for compromise because of the low availability of jobs in the home town

### What do they consider to be the most important factor influencing their employability?

Degree from Europe and the reputation of the EM programme

Research skills and academic writing

Specific skills and knowledge

Independence, innovative thinking

Ability to work in a team

**Source:** Online survey on alumni experience with the EM programme

## Cluster III

The third cluster represents the alumni who had no working experience before applying for the mobility, in total 26 % of alumni. These alumni applied either for a full length Master's mobility or a 6 month Bachelor's. Half of them studied because of the possibility of being in Europe. The particular university was chosen because of the study programme put on offer.

These alumni found work equally in the public and private sector within three and within six months. However, the work was not always related to their field of studies. Two of them were unemployed for three months.

Figure 5 Testimonies of alumni III.

+ Pros	- Cons
Interest in academic work  Ability to develop new skills and get experience in a different field	Lacking independence, own ideas and creativity in the public sector

### What do they consider to be the most important factor influencing their employability?

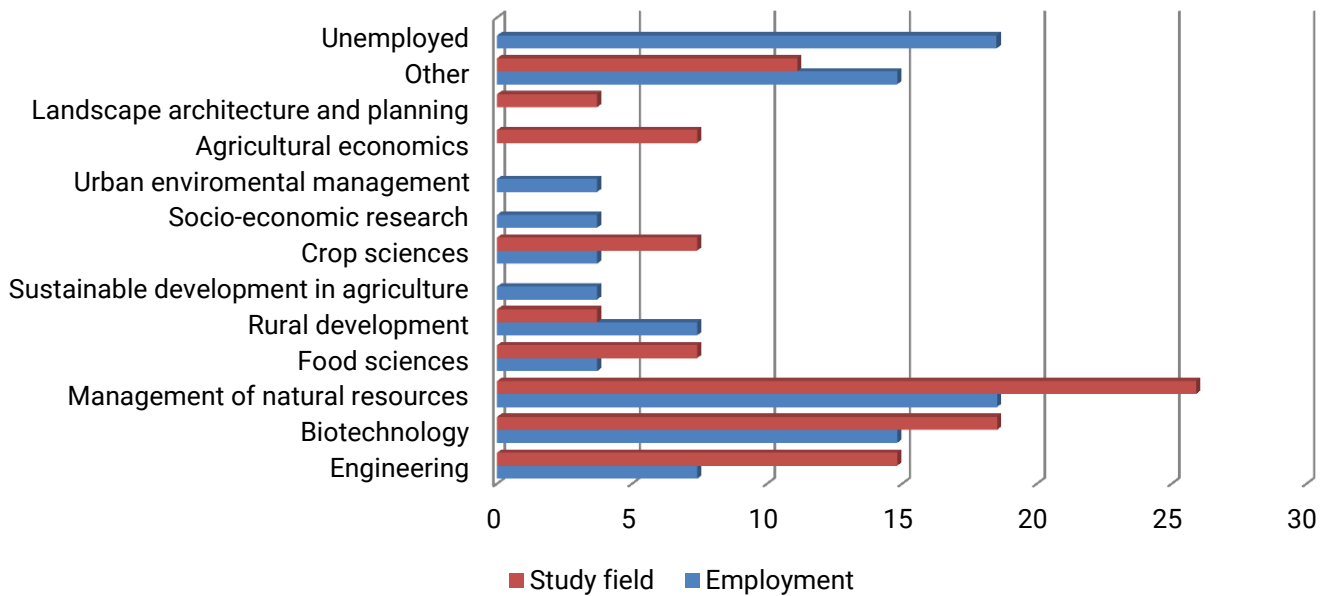
Hard working attitude
Capacity for analysis
The right mix of abilities, horizontal skills and personal qualities
Experience and soft skills developed during training received during the EM apart from the regular curriculum

**Source:** Online survey on alumni experience with the EM programme

The largest alumni cluster is represented by those who went to Europe on behalf of their employer and maintained their position throughout the programme. They aimed to upgrade the scientific level of the sending institutions and contribute to further developments. The results show that the mobility was used to build the capacities of the sending institutions and apply the knowledge received in practice. The obstacle is that alumni do not always continue in the previous field of study and often change their expertise in order to receive a higher diploma and fulfil the requirements of the sending universities.

There was a diversity of positions throughout different fields of employment performed by the alumni within the general area of agriculture and related life-sciences. With only a few exceptions, alumni found their employment in the field related to their studies. Among other fields of employment were mathematics, management in medical services administration, urban environmental management and ordinary or qualified positions in the private sector such as equipment installation. The following graph represents the variety of study programmes in which the alumni were enrolled and field of current employment.

**Figure 6** Study fields and current employment of alumni



**Source:** Online survey on alumni experience with the EM programme

A significant proportion of alumni were academically qualified employees in the university without having any management function, 23% were employed as research assistants in universities and research institutions under the ministry.

According to the alumni, responsibility in work and the ability to solve problems are the most important competences required for success in the range of job positions practiced. Employees need to work independently, generate new ideas, be creative and be just self-confident enough. Contrarily, the ability to interact with different people and cultures is not much required in the Vietnamese professional environment.

Alumni perceive that there is a demand for their specialisation in their country: concretely 82% of respondents agreed that demand is significant, 14% were uncertain about the market situation.

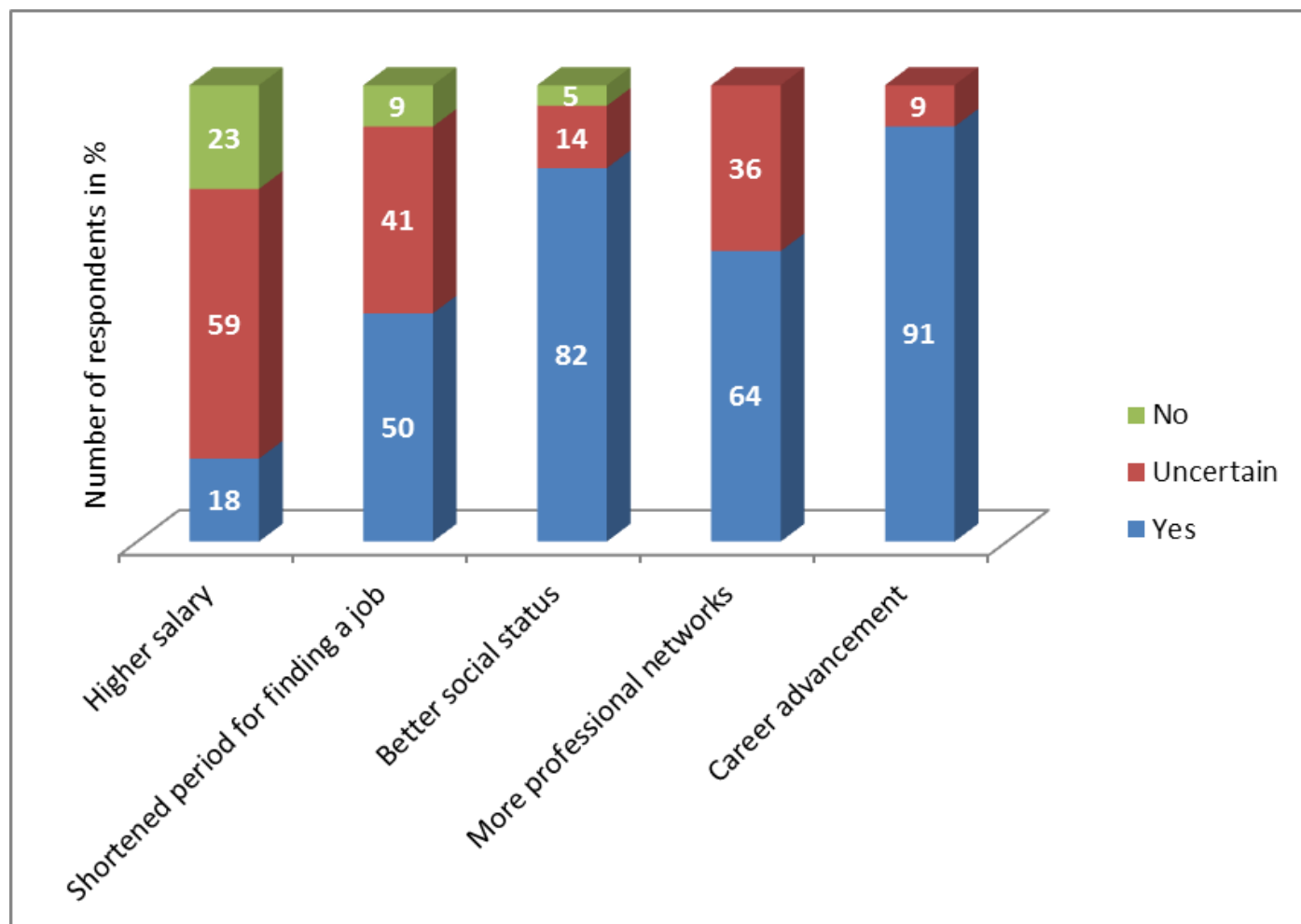
Alumni perceive themselves as having a better social status and good chances for career advancement after the study/training period particularly in the public sector where international experience and higher qualifications are required for career enhancement. However, this is not always reflected in the salary. The period of unemployment reflects this. However, there is a difference between the private sector where decisions about employment are taken immediately and the public sector that requires a long-term process.



## Alumni's perception of their position in the labour market

Do the alumni feel advantaged in comparison with home university graduates who did not have a chance to study abroad? This element is represented in the following figure.

**Figure 7** Advantages of EM alumni



**Source:** Online survey on alumni experience with the EM programme

In general alumni are rather satisfied with their position on the labour market. They feel they built their capacities and skills during the EM programme and thus are competitive in the domestic labour market in both the public and private sector. Particularly those working in the universities and research institutions enjoy the ability to spread the knowledge and research skills they obtained during EM. On the other hand, alumni complain about low salaries, strict structures and not enough managerial power and freedom being given to them, particularly in the public sector. In 86% of cases the alumni agreed or strongly agreed that their stay in Europe helped them develop their career.

# Employers' perceptions of the employability of EM alumni

To get a wider picture of the employability of Vietnamese alumni, the project consultants relied not only on the information provided by the employers of EM alumni but they also wanted to access other information from other organizations and companies. Therefore 20 interviews were held in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Can Tho and Hue. Based on the structure of these organizations, 20 interviewers were divided into 3 targeted sectors: the private sector 40%, the public sector 25% and international organizations or non-governmental organizations 35%. These 3 sectors provided a picture of Vietnam's labour market and the evolution of the agricultural sector.

Vietnam is known as an agricultural country in the world but under the influence of the process of industrialization and modernization, along with globalization, the agricultural job market is ever more volatile. Foreign enterprises and companies have entered Vietnam but most of them are in the field of industry and electronics. Because of their high salary and attractive remuneration regimes, those foreign enterprises and companies have attracted a more significant workforce than agriculture. This has led to the situation that the number of students studying agriculture, rural development and life-sciences at universities has significantly declined. However, in recent years, the Government of Vietnam has shown concern for agriculture and agricultural labour. The government has changed and reformed policies (e.g. land ownership, open markets) so this situation is now improving.

The results of the survey illustrated key aspects of agriculture and the agricultural job market in Vietnam. Currently, the job market in the agricultural sector in Vietnam is quite exciting and there are many opportunities for students. Based on the employers' opinions, the survey also defined the characteristics that Vietnamese students still miss and the important skills that they need to improve.

## Sector evolution

The most obvious evolution of Vietnamese agriculture in recent years has been in the formation and development of private companies. Since privatization happened, more households and companies are taking on a role in the economy and making for a competitive trend in agriculture. With the involvement of private companies, the Vietnamese agricultural market became more vibrant with many more products and competitive prices. In addition to which, private companies also opened up new employment opportunities for students of agriculture and life-sciences. However, the requirements of scientific services, technologies

and market needs are more fragmented. Along with privatization, advertising is now becoming important. Many centres related to promotion of agricultural products are being established to meet the need for product promotion of various enterprises, so that people can know more about the use and quality of the products advertised.

## **Support of the sector by government**

Around 20 years ago when Vietnam implemented policies on industrialization and modernization, the Government focused more on industry. Many policies were created with favourable conditions for foreign investors. The Vietnamese Government also provided funds, a budget to support industrial plants. However the economic efficiency of industry was negligible and Vietnamese industry could not afford to compete with other developed countries. Therefore with natural conditions and resources available in agriculture, in recent years the Government of Vietnam has been giving more attention to agricultural development. The Vietnamese Government has tried to promote and improve the quality of products and food processing while looking for export markets and aiming to ensure food security in the country.

## **Visible impact of international donors**

As a developing country, Vietnam has received numerous investments from other countries around the world, impressive commitment from donors up to 3 billion USD per year including ODA and grants. Japan, the World Bank and the United Nations are the biggest donors. In agriculture, the IFAD and ADB are the biggest donors. The Netherlands is focusing on climate change in the Mekong delta. South Korea is also forth-coming. Russia, Japan, Denmark, Germany and Finland especially support water resources. These countries have supported Vietnam in many different projects, providing funds for construction and scholarships. However since 2012, the Vietnamese economy has developed significantly so that the amount of foreign funding is now decreasing and the Vietnamese government has to co-finance projects. This is an obstacle that the government is gradually seeking to overcome.

## **Supply of people with this specialization and new positions to be filled**

When recruitment is announced, the employers get responses from candidates quickly. Depending on the size and reputation of the companies or organizations and on the positions that employers need to recruit for, the number of responses will be different. Most of employers said that they always have a demand for people with specializations. However, there are differences in the demands of three sectors. For employers from the public sector, their immediate task is to improve the quality of teaching staff and researchers. Therefore, they always want to recruit a professional. For employers from the private sector, the first task is

to boost the sales, so they always want to hire the best salesman. In such a case, employers do not value qualifications highly but instead give priority to the experience and the ability to work. Finally come international and non-governmental organizations; for key positions, expertise is an indispensable element. Example: If the project is about agricultural development, it requires you to have professional training in the agricultural sector. For a high position, such as a project manager or coordinator, experience is necessary. This is seen in the interview stage of the recruitment for such positions.

Thus, we can see that the job market in Vietnam has been waiting for people with specializations and a good ability to work, so that the students need to make more effort and struggle harder to achieve the best results.

At a general level, Vietnamese universities are now supplying a sufficient number of graduates in agriculture and life-sciences as the enrolment ratio in higher education has increased significantly. However, according to the evaluations of employers, graduates often do not meet their requirements in terms of the quality of work, working attitude, responsibility and independence. This happens due to a lack of practical training and a lack of active participatory learning approaches at Vietnamese institutions. Thus graduates lack both technical and horizontal skills and therefore the employers often cannot recruit people as required and/or have to retrain them.

## **New job positions as a result of evolution**

Thanks to their latest developments, agriculture and life-sciences have created many job opportunities for graduates. Today, graduates are not only working in the state agencies (public sector) but also in private companies, foreign companies, international organizations and non-governmental organizations. Besides which, they not only work in agricultural production, but also have the opportunity to work in new fields related to life-sciences and rural development such as agricultural advertising, climate change mitigation, water management, land policy, aquaculture and to cooperate on a range of international projects that are managed in the country. According to the survey, agriculture is becoming a less popular field of expertise and is often being replaced by a number of alternatives with students becoming interested in industry and services. Moreover, regional differences between the South and North of Vietnam to a large extent influence the number and type of positions available on the labour market.

## **Recruitment process**

The recruitment process is very important for the labour market of the country because it demonstrates the needs and desires of employers and their evaluation of employees. In the interviews with 20 employers, we

found that there are some differences in the recruitment process between the public sector, the private sector and international or non-governmental organizations.

### **The public sector (Educational institutions, ministries and other governmental institutions)**

Announcement of recruitment in the public sector is usually longer in advance compared to the private sector and international or non-governmental organizations. Recruitment takes from three months to one year due to the large amount of candidates and due to the complicated recruitment process. To announce the recruitment process, the public sector uses public newspapers and their website, such as Lao Động. Additionally, some governmental institutions not only use the internet and newspapers, but also personal relationships to achieve their recruitment goals in terms of quantity and quality. Ministries, universities and other institutions which belong to the public sector usually require a wide variety of documentation. Besides a curriculum vitae, covering letter and letters of recommendation, they require other documents such as a health certificate, high school reports, drivers license etc. The number of responses in the public sector is also higher than in the private or international organizations due to the stability of such positions so that they often get 6 – 20 for senior and highly specialized positions or 55 – 100 applicants for rather junior vacancy. The recruitment process of the public sector is more complicated than in private and international or non-governmental organizations. It takes at least three months and many steps need to be taken. Firstly the employers will select the candidates according to their profiles. Then they invite the selected candidates for the recruitment examinations. The candidates have to attend to an English test and a computer skills test. If they pass these two exams, they may take the next exam called the administrative exam. After passing all these tests, the candidates can then come to the final round of interviews with the employers. Based on the structure of each organization, the structure of a jury and the method of interviewing differ. For example, with educational institutions such as universities, a jury includes the head of faculty, the head of department and some lecturers in cases where the candidates are applying for the position of lecturer. The candidates have to demonstrate one teaching lesson which is selected by the jury. Some organizations do not conduct interviews, they just select people from the results of the test. The final selected candidates are then chosen from the highest score downward.

### **Private sector and International or non-governmental organizations**

The formation of private companies is one of the highlights of recent agricultural development. Many companies were formed with various scales of production and product variety. Depending on their scale and needs, each company has its own recruitment process. Private companies use many channels to announce their vacancy such as websites ([www.vietnamwork.com](http://www.vietnamwork.com)), alumni associations, and in some cases they use head-hunters. Particular universities organize job fairs to link students up with local

businesses. Such events aim to introduce students to the private companies and provide information about the activities carried out by these organisations, as well as to vacancies, career opportunities and the recruitment process. The recruitment process is more rapid than that in the public sector. After the vacancy is announced, the employers start to select the most suitable profiles of candidates. The most important documents which employers usually require are a CV and educational certification. After selection, some of them require the candidates to undergo a written exam. Some companies require an English test and a professional test; some companies require only a professional test. They then pick those with the highest scores to call for interview. A jury often includes three to five people such as the head of company, the head of the department, the vice director and the human resources manager. The jury usually asks the candidates questions about their background, work experience, trying to find out about their ability to solve problems and their knowledge about the position they have applied for. Selection grids are used when the employers assess the ability of candidates. They assign a weighting for education and experience abroad at a medium level (max. 60 % of the total score of applicant). Those who are selected after interview will be admitted to a probation period (of at least two months). After this probation period, the employers assess the candidates again and decide on hiring the candidates or not.

The recruitment process of international and non-governmental organizations is similar to the private sector but their requirements for candidates are higher. They often require the candidates to have three to four years' experience. The English exam often involves essay writing. The candidates have to write about the given topic and communicate in English and they have to prove that they are able to come up with new ideas and solutions.

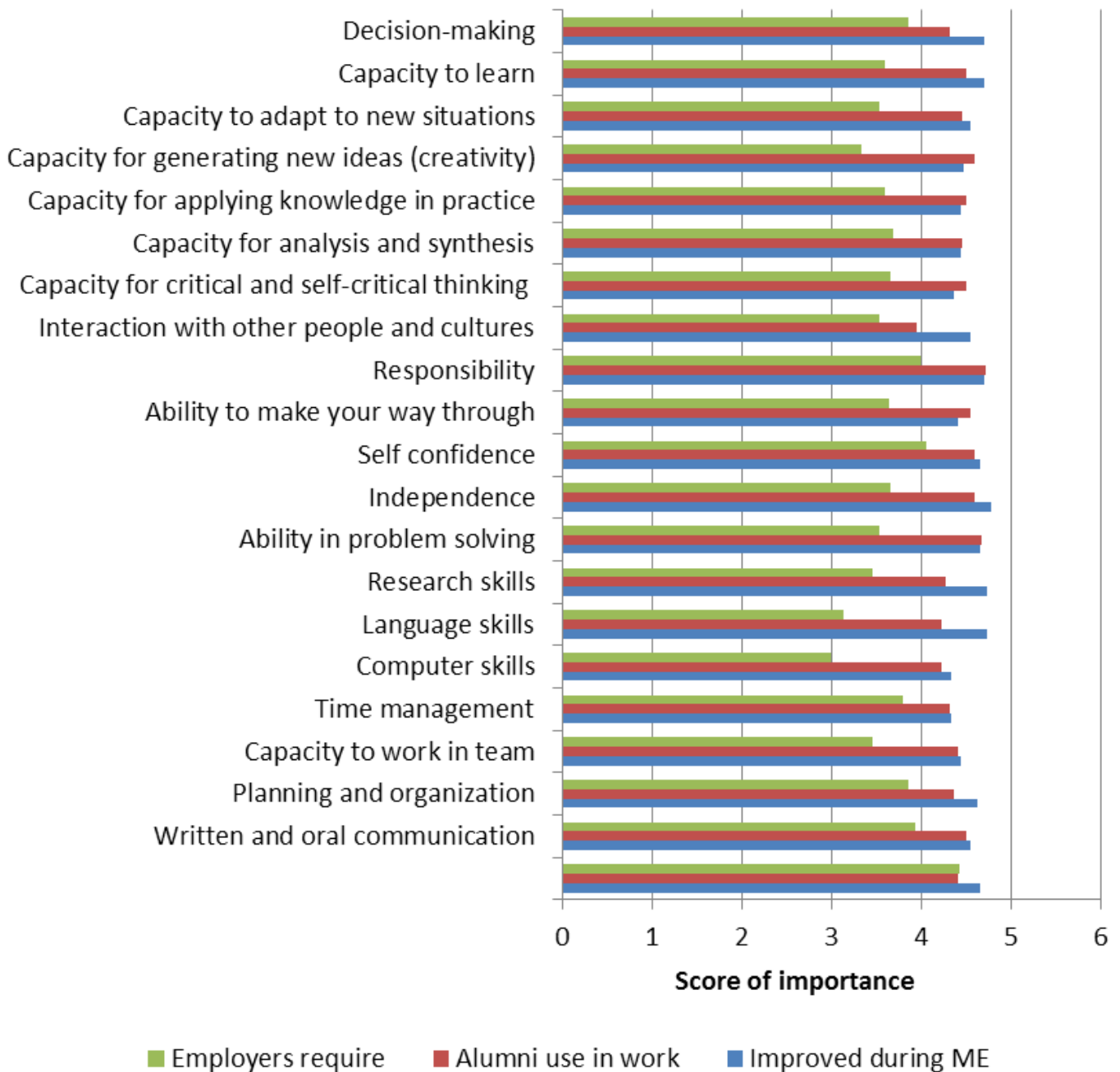
### **The most important points in the candidates' background**

Practical experience, education, training and their professional network were judged the most important points of the candidates' background by the employers. However, depending on the sector, the importance of these factors was evaluated differently. For the public sector, academic background, research skills and analytical thinking were the most important. Vietnam is in the midst of a process of innovation, so this country has a lot of development projects to be carried out. This requires high research skills but few Vietnamese students meet this requirement. Other skills and competencies such as technical know-how, planning and organization, time management, language skills, independence, self-confidence and responsibility are much needed by the employers. Some governmental institutions only recruit candidates with Master's and PhD degrees, such as state universities and research institutions. In the public sector, if candidates want to get ahead to an advanced career or higher salary, they must improve their education level preferably on the international level.

For private companies and international or non-governmental organizations, practical experience, training and professional networks are more important than the candidate's level of education itself. The employers give a lot of attention to work attitude and devotion, reliability, an individual approach to work, innovative and analytical thinking and communication skills. In addition, the ability to solve problems deriving from actual work experience is always appreciated as it leads to greater work efficiency and better results. Besides all this, the employers also said that if the candidates are trained in a professional network, their ability in work will be much higher than others. Professional networks build the basis of the professional working style of the candidates.

The following figure represents the subjective opinion of target groups involved in the research on the importance of predetermined skills and competences. Firstly alumni evaluated how the skills and competences developed during the EM period, secondly the alumni scored the skills according to how much those are used in their work and thirdly, the employers scored individual skills and competences according to how important they are. The results were combined in the following figure.

**Figure 8** Importance of skills and competences



**Source:** Online survey on alumni experience with the EM programme; Personal interviews with employers

**Skills missing in the candidates**

Employers were asked about missing skills and competences in the candidates. Most candidates lack soft skills such as planning and organising skills, time management, the ability to work in a team, writing and research skills and the ability to come up with solutions to solve existing problems. When they study at university, they cannot determine their future career so they do not devote their life to studying. That is the



reason why soft skills are not practised during the time they study. Employers mentioned that it takes almost five to seven years before graduates are able to work independently. Students of Vietnamese universities are strong in theory but they are lazy to learn actively. Soft skills, such as communication with other people, team work, and the ability to solve problems, are needed but not developed during studies. All graduates need to be retrained. Students do not know how to get answers to their questions, how to write a letter or organize procedures for a project. Students learn everything in work not in the school. Students tend to keep knowledge and experience to themselves, they do not share experience between each other. Recent young graduates are energized and look for opportunities and experience, especially in the big city.

### **Advantages of EM graduates in comparison to graduates from local universities**

60% of the interviewed employers believed that local graduates still have their own advantages. The local graduates usually have a better understanding of the local situation and working conditions than those who graduated abroad. Students who are travelling abroad miss the opportunity of creating a local network while those who stay in Vietnam do, giving them a clear advantage once they are being recruited. Furthermore Vietnam's education in recent years is in constant evolution so that the quality of local graduates is becoming better. But 40 % of the remaining employers did not think the local graduates had any advantages. These employers said that the graduates abroad were trained in an advanced environment. They had better conditions for practical training and better language skills so that the quality of over-seas graduates is better than local graduates. What, however, was mentioned, was that many researchers lose their motivation upon returning to Vietnam as they lack the necessary facilities and equipment to continue with the research they started in Europe. Hence they have to do research and provide lectures in a different field to the one that really interests them.

All employers said they EM graduates have advantages in comparison to other graduates. EM graduates have a chance to get a higher salary, need a shorter period to find a job and make advances in their careers. EM graduates are students who are chosen because they are intelligent and studied in advanced institutions, so they have an opportunity to get more favourable conditions in comparison to other graduates.

### **Mission and activities carried out**

#### ***Public sector***

Governmental institutions such as universities and research centres always need lecturers and researchers. Vietnamese education has grown significantly in the size and diversity of its training. The Vietnamese

Government not only tries to improve the programmes and the training process but also to mobilize more social resources.

To improve the quantity and quality of lecturers and researchers, according to employers, universities are implementing different solutions. Universities and research institutes are implementing the Party's policy of building and developing a team of employees, specifically:

- Training and standardizing lecturers and researchers
- Taking care of teachers' lives
- Establishing a system of rights and obligations of employees
- Ensuring the recruitment is fair and scientific
- Guaranteeing teachers the right to education, scientific research, participation in economic and social activities.

### ***Private sector***

Private companies often focus on the profits of the company, so that their missions and activities focus on the aim of increasing revenue. Many strategies are proposed and implemented, especially recruitment strategies. Currently Vietnamese private companies mainly offer salesman and accountant positions. To attract candidates, the companies often have bonus policies. For example, to boost the volume of sold goods, some private companies have incentive policies for the employees. Additionally, they also offer many competitive programmes with prizes among employees to enhance the employees' abilities at work. Having received much attention from employers and candidates, the position of salesman is now rated as one of the most exciting jobs in Vietnam. This is a good employment opportunity for graduates, so the graduates should seize this opportunity to hone the necessary skills.

### ***International and non-governmental organizations***

Most international organizations and NGOs in Vietnam are there to help invest in social and economic development, so they usually have a lot of projects implemented. The projects have long-term and short-term implementation times and are often carried out in different regions. Therefore, in addition to full-time employees, international and non-governmental organizations also need contractual staff and volunteer staff. However, due to the international nature of the project, employers of international and non-governmental organizations require candidates at a very high level. The candidates must have a minimum of 2-4 years experience and they have to know English very well. However, new graduates can participate in the international or non-governmental organizations as volunteers, so they can learn and accumulate experience for themselves.

***Is there a greater likelihood of a promising career for candidates with European experience?***

Half of the employers said the candidates with European experience ask for higher salaries. Those candidates asking for higher salaries are usually more experienced. Results showed that candidates with European experience have a greater likelihood of a promising career progression. As they were exposed to higher standards and different attitudes, their competitiveness increased. With more open-minded and a better working attitude, practical skills and communication skills, they will achieve better performance, based on which they will get promoted. They learnt modern working approaches that often are more professional and efficient. This could be transmitted to their colleagues. The obstacle remains in the reintegration process back into the Vietnamese environment. Compared to European universities, Vietnam is under-financed in terms of science, technology and research and often alumni become discouraged.

# Outcomes from the national workshops

During the regional workshop, focus group discussions proceeded separately with selected employers and alumni. The points discussed are summarized in this chapter.

## Employers' perspective

**EM alumni are often perceived by the employers as a little more interesting than national students as they have wider vision. However, they are difficult to retrain in the public sector.** Universities had already selected the EM alumni from among the top students so before being accepted for the studies or training abroad they were already better qualified than the national students. When they come back, their horizontal skills and knowledge of foreign languages improved and additionally they had the experience of how to publish on an international level. This makes them very interesting particularly in the public sector and educational institutions. With their international experience, their evaluation score is higher, thus they can be more easily promoted. This fact is valid not only for students but also for staff mobility. The obstacle however remains in the motivation of alumni. Often they cannot continue research in their specific field due to the lack of facilities and laboratory equipment in the work place. There is still a need to provide support in material and academic resources.

**There are different approaches to the recruitment process depending on the organisational structure.** Generally the public sector is ruled by strict regulations and recruitment is a very lengthy process, while in the private sector one can be hired within one day. This issue is considered by alumni as they decide what position they apply for.

**Employers, generally speaking, perceive EU education as “open vision”.** This is compared to Japan or Australia, being islands they are more closed and inwardly-directed.

**US higher education is perceived as more practical and direct in voicing critical opinions** while giving its students time to think and work. Moreover US alumni are considered better than EU alumni as they have the capacity to think more outside the box. European education is perceived to be focused more on study while providing less time to think critically on the whole. In order of priority, employers would put the US education as first, European education second and Australian together with Japanese the third, which is also due to less pressure put on publishing.

**There is a problem with visas for students going to Europe as they do not allow them to study and work at the same time.** This is in contrast to the US and Australian systems where students are allowed to work while studying. Such a system is more attractive for the students as they can earn some money while studying and get practical experience.

## Alumni testimonies

Results from the focus group discussion show that students from Vietnam prefer to study in the USA to receive a Masters' degree and in Europe to conduct research at a PhD level. US higher education is perceived as providing the most practical education making the students think outside the box and thus get to understand themselves more easily. Information about mobility in USA and Australia seems to be wide-spread as representatives of local universities apply in a personal response to the marketing of these programmes. Moreover they seem to be more easily accessible compared to Europe as they are single nations, except for Great Britain that is perceived as easily accessible as well. However, the USA provides a picture of higher criminality, thus safety too is considered when making the choice. Europe is perceived as a territory providing better conditions for scientific work and seems to be more open towards discussion of various phenomena. Moreover, alumni receive wide multicultural experience as Europe is a continental territory not isolated by the ocean. The least preferred country was Australia, although all were preferred compared to studies in other Asian countries. In general, a country with higher English proficiency is a priority for all.

The results show that the information about mobility opportunities in Vietnam is not wide-spread nor easily accessible for the general public and thus the opportunities are not always equally distributed. The sending universities do not always enable their students to apply for the mobility and thus applicants have to look for different channels to submit their application. Moreover, there is a mismatch between the study programme undertaken by alumni in Vietnam and the offer of study programmes in Europe so often alumni switch their field of expertise.

The following testimonies explain some particular cases.

“The EM programme was introduced to me by my employer. I studied forestry but the programme offered was in environmental management and thus I changed my field of study. Currently, back in my position, I am doing household analysis in the rural areas which is a very attractive topic combining economics with the social aspect; however, it is not very closely related to my previous studies. I feel I am lacking the skills in project proposal writing on the international level and thus I intend to fill in this gap and build this capacity in my worksite.”

“No mobility was offered in the mathematics that I previously studied. Thus I changed my field of study to environmental management which was supported by my employer. During my EM training I actively participated in a project implemented by the host university using GIS mapping. Unfortunately, after my return this cooperation could not continue much. I am looking for employment within this specialisation. I am still employed at the university but I have a side job that gives me extra money and where I apply my English knowledge.”

“The EM programme was offered to me by my university/employer, however, I had to apply for the programme in a different field from my previous studies. The sending university require their staff to upgrade the academic level through obtaining a higher diploma.”

There were different reasons observed during the study why alumni applied particularly for the EM programme. One reason was due to the reputation of the programme and fair competition during the selection procedure for the EM programme. Stories of selected cases are described in the following paragraph.

“I hesitated between two programmes offering scholarships in Europe and I chose the one that provided me more money to cover living expenses. My parents helped me decide between the countries offered, however I did not find any appropriate study programme to follow up on my previous studies in mathematics. Thus I decided to study environmental management. The selection procedure for the EM programme is transparent compared to other governmental programmes offered. That was another reason why I decided to apply for the EM programme instead of any other mobility.”

“I already had previous experience from studying in Australia and thus I wanted to experience something else. Through the cooperation of my worksite with one of the EM partner universities the mobility was offered to me. I preferred EM over the governmental programmes offering scholarships due to the programme's reputation and the scientific level of the university. ”

Alumni participating in the EM programme often had working experience before applying for the mobility. Still, they did not always utilize their capacity particularly in any additional training or internships. Stories of selected alumni are described in the following paragraph.

“My mobility was supported by the sending university, after I returned from Europe I started working in the project for agriculture development in the South of Vietnam implemented by the university. I would have appreciated more training opportunities during the EM period to enhance my research skills.”

“I had previous experience working in big international private company where I received the information about the mobility opportunity. I had some difficulties submitting my application through my university so I

found another way and I was selected for studies in Germany. However with my previous work experience I did not feel that I was receiving much knowledge at the university and I could not apply for any practical training because I do not speak German. Thus my studies were terminated. I looked for a managerial position in a private company but I was not lucky, thus I decided to establish my own small business. I am still interested in applying for a PhD degree from Europe.”

## Implications and outlook

Agriculture is the most important economic sector in Vietnam. With good natural conditions and agricultural resources available, in recent years the Government of Vietnam is giving more attention to agricultural development, so many changes are implied. The most obvious evolution in Vietnamese agriculture in recent years is the formation and development of private companies. The involvement of private companies has made the agricultural job market more volatile with many new employment opportunities for graduates. Besides support from government, agriculture has received numerous investments from other countries around the world. However from 2012 onwards, the Vietnamese economy has developed significantly, so the number of foreign funds has decreased and co-financing is now required.

Implementation of land policy has had a significant impact on agricultural sector evolution but there are still questions remaining regarding land accumulation. Rich land owners are avoiding policy regulations, thus new policies and controls are being adopted. The quantity of agricultural production in Vietnam has increased rapidly, however the competitiveness of agribusiness remains low. Developing the private sector is a way to provide work. However there are still non-technical barriers towards private sector investments coming from old socialist policies. Training in public policy education is lacking in regards to understanding the role of the private sector.

The employers from the public sector are facing difficulties keeping competent employees in the public sector as there are job opportunities opening in the private sector providing higher salary and incentives. The role of social insurance based on family relationships still plays a very important role particularly in the public sector.

Currently there is a surplus in the supply of graduates with insufficient quality of skills and competences. With an increasing quantity of students enrolled in higher education, the future quality of education is not guaranteed. The concentration of work opportunities is strongly influenced by geography. More positions are opened in the North and in the Central part of Vietnam. Most of the competent labour force is available there, contrary to the situation in the South, where job opportunities for skilled agricultural labour are lacking. With the trend of migration from the provinces to the cities, knowledge and technologies are, however, staying in the cities, leaving the rural areas behind.

In a competitive market, staffing is a crucial issue that leads the organization to success. With the goal of assembling the best quality team, employers in Vietnam often go through a thorough recruitment process. The employers use the internet and newspapers as their two main channels where they want to announce



their information for recruitment because of the huge number of people looking at the internet and newspapers every day. Besides this, they also use personal contacts and relationships, personnel agencies and headhunting from universities. The fields of veterinary studies, land management, rural development and economics are becoming more attractive than agriculture itself. They provide graduates with a wider range of expertise. Agriculture as a field of employment is lagging behind industry and services.

According to this survey, alumni and employers are satisfied with the availability of the exchange study programmes and they enjoy the international experience. In the university and research environment, being exposed to different structures and approaches is even a precondition for career progression, particularly with regards to the establishment of international cooperation. Besides a diploma, alumni obtain important skills and competences such as the ability to think critically, responsibility, time management and, particularly, to improve their language abilities. However, more practical experience and internship opportunities would be appreciated during the EM programme. Employers believed that local graduates still have their own advantages in understanding the local situation and working conditions. Practical work should be included as an obligatory part of the curriculum in the EM programmes and as well at Vietnamese universities. Public-private partnerships need to be strengthened to provide opportunities for practical experience and to better address the needs of the market. During the research, a number of issues concerning the quality of education at Vietnamese universities was identified.

Active participatory learning techniques need to be incorporated in the didactic approach that is applied at home universities to allow students not only to listen and study, but rather actively contribute to the educational process.

## **Recommendations for the EM programme**

1. There is still room for improvement in regards to the EM programmes. In some cases alumni are assessed as too assertive upon return to their home country. It is the responsibility of the EM programmes to help alumni to reintegrate and re-adapt in their own country with the support of the sending institutions in Asia. Preparatory courses for students travelling to and from Europe should be in place in terms of orientation events prior to their travel to Europe and then the same when alumni leave Europe and return to their homeland.
2. The stipulation that they cannot do research in their home country must be terminated. This blocks the reintegration and the application of the knowledge learned once back in the home country.

3. More joint research activities should be promoted not only at Doctoral but also at a Masters' level to maintain the contact with the sending institutions.
4. Moreover, intensive English preparatory courses should be introduced so the alumni are prepared to adapt quickly to the English speaking environment in both oral and written communication.
5. Scholarships for doctoral students should be adjusted to three and four years respectively, according to the length of the doctorate programmes provided in Europe, as it is difficult for the alumni to co-finance the programme, so that unfinished programmes can be eliminated.
6. EU scholarship opportunities are not widely-enough known in Vietnam. EU higher education is undervalued compared to that of the US or Australia. More effort is needed to work against the misrepresentation of European higher education, so that it becomes as valued as that in the US.
7. We recommend organising promotional tours about EU higher education directly to the partner universities in Vietnam and to the students.
8. Innovative approaches in information sharing about the scholarship and education possibilities in Europe should be implemented. The general standing of European higher education should be raised and a sense of ownership created among the EM alumni so they feel proud of being part of this programme. This would help to build the EM alumni community in Vietnam.
9. Additionally, the application process for European scholarships is perceived as very complex and complicated and the visa application process is very difficult. Thus many applicants give up and apply for different scholarships.

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