



British Council Going Global Partnerships (GGP) Gender Equality Partnerships (GEP)

Prevention of violence against women/girls so as to build safe-spaces for women in educational universities in Viet Nam

Policy Paper



University of
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1. Introduction

This policy paper is the final output from Work Package 6 of the British Council (BC) project “Prevention of violence against women/girls so as to build safe-spaces for women in educational universities in Viet Nam”. This paper is built predominately upon an analysis of a policy roundtable that took place on 27th November 2024, involving a number of universities in Viet Nam (see more details below), along with colleagues from the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) in Viet Nam, and BC project partners Hanoi National University of Education, the University of Northampton and the University of Salford (lead on this work package).

The purpose of the roundtable discussion and of this policy paper is firstly to provide recommendations on implementing policies on gender and gender equality and secondly to provide insights into the development of a gender-sensitive curriculum for educational institutions in Viet Nam, including recommended next steps and potential actions.

The following universities in Viet Nam took part in the November roundtable discussion as follows: Hanoi National University of Education (HNUE), Thai Nguyen University, Hung Vuong University, Vinh University and Hong Duc University (HDU). This discussion also followed on from training workshop sessions delivered as part of the wider BC project, including a session delivered on the topic of gender sensitive policy on 27th September 2024 at which a range of staff and students at HNUE were present and participated.

The policy roundtable included discussion on the following topics:

1. The development of gender-sensitive curriculums
2. The prevention of gender-based violence
3. The creation of safe spaces
4. Cultural sensitivity
5. Support systems
6. Monitoring and evaluation
7. Legislative and policy frameworks.

A broad thematic analysis of the discussion (and of the transcript provided) has allowed for the identification of some key themes and recommendations related to the above topics and to the two broad goals of the roundtable and work package overall.

2. Legal and Global Context

It is useful to note the important legal context for work on gender equality in Viet Nam and in particular the Law on Gender Equality (2006). The law has a broad scope, as set out in Article 1, which makes clear the responsibilities on organisations with regard to gender equality (as well as how such issues pertain in relationships and families).

Article 7, clause 4 (p.3) seeks to *“encourage agencies, organizations, families and individuals to participate in promoting gender equality”*. Article 14 covers gender equality more specifically within education and training. Clauses 1-3 (pp.5-6) specify that *“1. Men and women are equal in schooling, training and retraining age. 2. Men and women are equal in choosing professions or occupations for learning and training. 3. Men and women are equal in accessing and benefiting from education and professional training and retraining.”* Clause 5 (p.6) states as one of the measures for promoting gender equality in education and training: *“a/ To set the proportions of men and women participating in learning and training”*.

These are aspirational goals that would promote a society with more gender equality and would encourage cooperation between genders that would hopefully support the reduction of gender-based violence. We would suggest that further research is needed to determine how much has been achieved in the near 20 years since the law was passed and to investigate the proportion of women and men in higher education and within specific fields.

There has been an increasing acknowledgement of the education sector being key actors in addressing VAWG (Fancy and Fraser, 2014). The United Nations (UN) has included strategies and action programmes as a key parts of its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030 with its commitment to achieving gender equality, promoting human rights, and ending all forms of violence against women and girls (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). The UN Goal 5 target included within the SDG’s: *‘Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls’* states: Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels. This objective is further emphasised in UN Women’s strategic actions, which focus on creating safe environments and eradicating violence to empower women and achieve gender equality. In alignment with this mission, UN Women actively collaborates with universities to work collectively toward eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls.

A government research report on equality of access and outcomes in higher education in England (Bolton and Lewis, 2024 p. 5) identified a significant gap between the genders that reveals the complexity of achieving gender equality and barriers to attaining this:

“Women are much more likely to go to university than men and have been for many years. They are also more likely to complete their studies and gain a first or upper second-class degree. However, after graduation, men are more likely to be in ‘highly skilled’ employment or further study just after graduation. Male graduate average earnings are around 9% higher than female earnings one year after graduation. This earnings gap grows substantially over their early careers and reaches 31% ten years after graduation.”

This demonstrates that even when equality of access to education is achieved in higher education, gender inequality persists in measures of career earnings and success. Similar research in Viet Nam would be helpful in determining any measures that could address the depth of these inequality issues. One of the interventions that has been used in the United Kingdom is the Athena Swan Charter¹, which has been used since 2005 to recognise levels of achievement of gender equality in higher education institutions, especially in encouraging women to enter fields in science, technology, engineering, maths and medicine (STEMM) which would likely lead to higher levels of income for women. Universities and schools/colleges within universities can receive Athena Swan awards at bronze, silver, and gold levels to recognise their achievements in gender equality. In 2015, the Athena Swan Charter was expanded to include international partners, and it would be possible to explore whether this is something that might inspire and encourage higher education institutions in Viet Nam. An area of further research would be to see if this is an idea that is acceptable and feasible in Viet Nam and if so, an international charter with Viet Nam could be explored.

The 2006 Law on Gender Equality is unequivocal in its ambitious overall aims in Article 4: *“The goals of gender equality are to eliminate gender-based discrimination, create equal opportunities for men and women in socio-economic development and human resource development, strive to reach genuine equity between men and women, establish and strengthen cooperative and supportive relations between men and women in all aspects of social and family life”.*

The application of gender equality policies within the sector of higher education clearly falls into the overall remit of the 2006 Law and therefore emerging policies can be expected to receive support from the Vietnamese government.

¹ See: <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/equality-charters/athena-swan-charter>
Gender Sensitive Curriculum and Gender-based Violence in Viet Nam / UK

3. Building capacity and rolling out good practice

It is within this legislative context that the initiatives to date in Viet Nam regarding gender equality and a gender sensitive educational curriculum, which were discussed in the roundtable, should be viewed. They are an active expression of a clear national commitment which is widely recognised and clearly promoted in a very active way by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET). An overarching theme which emerges is how to join up and further promote existing examples of good practice across educational institutions (universities and schools). It should be noted that this spreading of best practice is also an issue within the UK educational system and there can be useful mutual learning moving forward about different methods that have been and can be deployed to broaden and deepen involvement in such initiatives.

One good example of training which has taken place, amongst several that involve international partners, is the training session on ‘Integrating gender into teacher education programs’ in November 2024 which was delivered through a collaboration between the Australia-Viet Nam Human Resource Development project with the Department of Teachers and Educational Administrators and Department of International Cooperation. This training session, which was discussed in the policy roundtable only a few days later, involved 30 participants from 17 different institutions. It covered current gender equality and gender integration initiatives and also specifically focussed on integrating gender into psychology and education course content in lectures.

This collaborative training was very positively received by the participants and led to more specific discussion during the roundtable about: the development of gender-sensitive curriculums, the prevention of gender-based violence, the creation of safe spaces, cultural sensitivity, support systems, monitoring and evaluation, and legislative and policy frameworks.

Additional topics during the roundtable discussion included: the development of gender-sensitive curriculums, the prevention of gender-based violence, the creation of safe spaces, cultural sensitivity, support systems, monitoring and evaluation, and legislative and policy frameworks.

3.1. Project Aims

1. Developed training materials on gender-related issues and gender equality (prevention suggestions and responses to gender-based violence) for students and lecturers at pedagogical universities in Viet Nam.
2. Delivered pilot training and workshops on the above materials for students and lecturers from the sampled pedagogical universities.

3. Encouraged dialogue and discussions from stakeholders to identify current projects, initiates and share current practices that are having a positive impact alongside identifying areas for systematic change and the development of training programmes in education to advance point 1 (above).

4. Made recommendations to the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), as well as universities of education more widely, on the implementation of mainstreaming curricula on gender sensitivity, gender equality and the prevention of violence against women/girls (at all levels of education, but especially for pedagogical university students).

The Ministry of Education and Training has recommended that similar training be rolled out in the five main teacher education universities in Viet Nam in the period ahead. The need for further advanced training for lecturers and administrators to further integrate gender equality into the curriculum is also usefully recommended, as are training sessions on monitoring and evaluating such gender related areas of the curriculum. It is noted that the Department of Teachers and Education Management has used UNESCO funding to train such 'master trainers' in schools who will then train their peers. This is key to building capacity in schools and the same applies to universities. It is a recommendation from the roundtable that a specific training package for master trainers could be further rolled out across schools and university departments. The creation of a dedicated website could also add to the training materials, including guidebooks and guidelines, which the MOET already publishes and circulates. These are all areas which the roundtable considered further in terms of practical ways in which these actions can be implemented moving forward and are included in the summary of recommendations later.

4. Curriculum integration

With regard to the integration of gender equality into the curriculum then the role of 'master trainers' or champions, as noted above, was identified as one method to promote this integration further. A model for the master trainers to then disseminate further their acquired knowledge and practice also needs to be developed. For example, this could be part of ongoing 'Continuing Professional Development' (CPD) activity in both schools and universities. If this CPD activity is mandatory and linked to specific goals and actions regarding curriculum development then this will help to further embed gender equality issues and a gender sensitive curriculum in a practical way. Such training and activity should also be part of initial teacher training in both schools and universities.

There has also been consideration and discussion in the project training sessions of whole school safeguarding initiatives in UK education, such as Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) guidance and mandatory training which explicitly links to wider safeguarding issues in families including gender-based violence, domestic abuse and coercive control. The workshops have also considered how Personal Social Health and Economic (PSHE) education in UK schools deals with difficult concepts and laws relating to sexual consent, sexual exploitation, abuse, grooming, coercion, harassment, rape, domestic abuse. Consideration of how to develop guidance and education of these topics both in initial teacher training curricula in Viet Nam and also in teaching training and CPD in universities becomes a recommendation to take forward.

A related requirement which has been identified, is to ensure that when new curricula are approved (or validated) that there is an active focus on the extent to which the course is gender sensitive. This could be referred to as 'degenderizing' the curriculum, similar to a concept in UK education with regard the 'decolonizing' of the curriculum. In practice this could mean that curriculum developers are required to demonstrate how their course content, delivery, assessments and student support are gender sensitive and actively promote gender equality. This is considered critical to overcoming a key barrier towards achieving gender equality which is the early creation of gender stereotypes and norms. The link between these stereotypes and gender-based violence is a persistent concern and theme in the roundtable discussion and is something which an embedded gender sensitive curriculum can work to overcome. Training on how to do this can also form part of the above CPD activity for teachers in schools and universities.

Another policy that could be considered would be the incorporation of a core curriculum about gender-based equality and gender-based violence that could be delivered at universities in Viet Nam but that would also become part of teacher training so that developmentally appropriate versions of the curriculum could be offered to younger children in schools. Reading lists could be compiled that would become increasingly complex, as students progress through their education culminating in higher education offering smaller seminar groups to foster discussion. However, the promotion of gender equality is essential throughout education and these concepts need to be introduced to younger people. This also includes forms of psychological abuse and coercive control which are a key part of gender-based violence (as noted by Evan Stark (2009), amongst others, and recognised in UK Legislation).

It was noted how at HDU, as well as integrating gender into a range of disciplines such as biology, Vietnamese literature and civic education, that students and younger (early career) staff are

encouraged to conduct research on gender related issues. There is a specific forum, “Creative Youth” which allows staff and students to share their thoughts on gender equality and this also links to the need for support services more generally.

5. Support Services for Staff and Students

Women that experience gender-based violence are often reluctant to tell anyone what has happened and may be inhibited by intense feelings of shame and guilt and take on gender biases and prejudices where women are often blamed for having provoked the violence (e.g. Australian writer Jess Hill (2020) in her book “See what you made me do : power, control and domestic abuse”). Some of the violence is also psychological or a form of coercive control, as explored in the training workshops in this project, and a new taxonomy of recognised terms is needed to help identify and respond to these forms of psychological abuse when they are happening.

Thought needs to be given to how to help encourage women to come forward for help. A place to start would be to provide a safe space where women could share their accounts of gender-based violence anonymously without any pressure to take action. To keep this anonymous, paper forms might be required that could be deposited in a secure and private mailbox that then might be posted on an interactive website, as the contributors would understand that they were writing these accounts to be shared. This might decrease the isolation and loneliness that victims of gender-based violence feel and address shame issues. Resources should be made available on the website for people who feel ready to talk about it or who are seeking help.

Some women who themselves had experienced gender-based violence might be able to be trained as peer counsellors under the supervision of a professional psychologist or psychotherapist or counsellor specialising in this area, as talking to a peer would most likely be less threatening and less shaming than making a formal complaint. Hopefully, an atmosphere would be created where individuals could seek help, make formal complaints, or otherwise mobilise to request changes in university policies that would result in increased safety for women. These are what can be referred to as ‘trauma informed systems’ that help individuals overcome the shame that sometime inhibits an ability to speak and access support.

Some interventions might be as simple to implement as increasing lighting on campus walkways. It is worth noting that many universities worldwide have participated in Take Back the Night² events where women march together with police protection as a protest that they should be safe to go out at night, and these are often followed by the provision of a private space (usually darkened) where individuals can talk about their experiences of gender-based violence. These events have been described by participants as very empowering. Focus groups could be held to see if such events would be acceptable and feasible within Vietnamese society.

It was also reported in the roundtable discussion that HDU has a code of conduct for addressing gender inequality and for ensuring appropriate behaviour. There is also a Committee for the Advancement of Women. Initiatives such as this could be investigated further and potentially implemented in other universities which currently do not have them and, as with other recommended actions, can be subject to monitoring and evaluation of their efficacy.

6. Monitoring and Evaluation

Establishing a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework is essential to measure the effectiveness of gender-sensitive training programs, knowledge transfer initiatives, and student outcomes. Such a framework will serve as a valuable tool to assess changes in awareness, attitudes, and reported incidents of gender-based violence (GBV), while also providing data to inform the continuous refinement of policies and practices.

6.1. Key Recommendations for an Effective Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

1. Track Progress and Evaluate Impact:

- Design and implement tools to assess the effectiveness of training programs, policies, and interventions aimed at preventing and addressing GBV.
- Conduct regular surveys to evaluate student and staff attitudes toward GBV, analysing trends and patterns in complaint data to identify persistent issues and areas requiring improvement.

2. Inform Continuous Policy Improvement:

- Leverage data insights to refine and enhance existing policies and practices, ensuring they remain responsive to emerging challenges and contextual needs.

² See: <https://takebackthenight.org/about-us/>

3. Foster Institutional Accountability:

- Mandate regular reporting from educational institutions on the implementation, progress, and outcomes of gender-related initiatives.
- Encourage institutions to set measurable benchmarks and provide updates on their progress toward achieving gender-sensitive education goals.

4. Promote Feedback Loops for Program Refinement:

- Engage educators, students, and stakeholders in providing structured feedback on the relevance, effectiveness, and implementation of gender-sensitive initiatives.
- Use this feedback to improve training materials, curricula, and support systems.

5. Publish Annual Progress Reports:

- Require institutions to compile and disseminate annual reports that detail advancements in gender-sensitive education, progress on initiatives, and outcomes of prevention and response programs.

6. Enhance Data Transparency:

- Encourage institutions to monitor and publicly report data on GBV incidents, including the results of campus climate surveys and the outcomes of complaint processes.
- Foster a culture of transparency to improve understanding of GBV prevalence and to evaluate the success of interventions, building trust among stakeholders and driving accountability.

By integrating these recommendations into a robust M&E framework, institutions can ensure that gender-sensitive initiatives are effectively tracked, adapted, and continuously improved to create safer and more inclusive educational environments.

7. Summary of Recommendations

The workshops significantly increased participants' awareness of gender-based issues in education, including gender stereotypes, gender-based violence (GBV), coercive control and the creation of gender-sensitive learning environments. With 80% of attendees new to this type of training and many being young, female student teachers at the start of their careers, the sessions provided valuable early exposure to these critical topics. While not a standalone solution, such workshops are an important

component of broader strategies to advance gender equality in education. It was revealed during the roundtable discussion that MOET issued decision No. 4247/QD-BGDĐT on December 12, 2023, approving the project "Integrating Gender and Gender Equality Content into Teacher Training Programs at the College Level in Early Childhood Education and the University Level for the 2024-2030 Period".

As a result of analysing and synthesising the project outcomes to date, below is a summary of policy recommendations to advance gender equality, gender sensitivity in education and initiatives to prevent and address gender-based violence.

7.1. Policy Recommendations

- **Mandatory Training:** Implement nationwide mandatory gender sensitivity and GBV prevention training for educators, both at the pre-service and in-service levels. Integrate sexual health training, understanding consent, digital safety and a nuanced understanding of coercive control and the harmful psychological impacts this can have.
- **Standardisation of Guidelines:** Develop and disseminate standardized guidelines for integrating gender sensitivity into curricula, teacher training, and institutional policies. This can include consideration of guidance around 'keeping children safe in education' (which brings families and schools together in this quest) and Personal Social Health and Economic (PSHE) education which explicitly deals with aspects of gender-based violence, and how these can be developed and taken forward in schools and universities.
- **Legislative Support:** Strengthen legislative frameworks to enforce gender-sensitive policies in education and provide resources for implementation. Collaborate with the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) to establish and enforce national policies on gender equality and gender-based violence in higher education. Establish directives for ongoing training for educators on gender sensitivity and GBV prevention. Make information regarding legislation readily available and easy to understand. Encourage students to advocate for broader legal protections against all forms of GBV, including those outside the scope of domestic violence laws, to ensure comprehensive coverage and protection for all women and girls.

7.2. Institutional Recommendations

Safe Spaces and Support Systems:

- **Counselling:** Establish counselling services and safe spaces at all universities, ensuring confidentiality and accessibility. Publicise details of faculty and staff leaders who are sources of

designated support and university hotlines. Identify credible external sources of support in the community and publicise how they can be accessed and what they offer. These could be religious spaces such as temples or churches.

- **Train staff and lecturers** to handle disclosures of GBV with sensitivity and trauma-informed approaches and provide anonymous reporting mechanism for incidents of GBV, coercive control and sexual harassment/violence.
- **Trauma-Informed Support Systems:** Universities offer specialised counselling for GBV survivors, emphasising psychological safety and addressing intersecting issues such as shame, coercive control, and suicide risk.
- **Committees for Gender Advancement:** Create and formalise gender equality committees at each university to oversee policy implementation, monitor progress and advocate for gender equality initiatives.
 - **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Introduce robust evaluation mechanisms to measure the effectiveness of training programs, knowledge transfer, and student outcomes.

7.3. Collaborative Initiatives

- **International Partnerships:** Continue leveraging international collaborations for knowledge sharing, funding, and capacity building.
- **Regional and Institutional Networks:** Create platforms for universities to share best practices, research, and resources on gender equality.
- **Incentivizing Participation:** Develop campaigns to encourage male participation in training and gender initiatives for male students to understand their role as allies and positive role models.
- **Engage Diverse Stakeholders:** Partner with ministries, NGOs, and national and international organisations to align efforts and resources. Projects with UN Women and other global partners enhance awareness and promote gender equality on campuses. Foster partnerships with local community organisations such as churches and temples, safe shelters and specialised services and projects.
- **Engage the Male Participation:** Target recruitment strategies to involve more men in training programs and leadership roles.

7.4. Awareness and Advocacy

- **Communication Campaigns:** Launch targeted campaigns to raise awareness about GBV, coercive control, sexual harassment/violence and promote cultural change around gender norms.

- **Student Engagement:** Involve students in gender equality initiatives through forums, research opportunities and peer-led workshops. Consult with students to keep up to date with emerging cultural developments.

7.5. Capacity Building

- **Expand Master Trainer Programs:** Scale up training initiatives to cover all regions and ensure equity in access.
- **Develop Comprehensive Resources:** Provide guidebooks, videos, and case studies accessible through centralized platforms such as a learning management system.
- **Train Support Personnel:** Equip counsellors and administrative staff with skills to address GBV and support survivors.

By adopting these recommendations, policymakers and institutions can create a cohesive, inclusive approach to promoting gender equality and preventing gender-based violence in education systems. Stakeholders will be given the opportunity to be pro-actively involved in identifying best practice and actionable strategies to advance gender equality, gender sensitivity, strengthen teacher training, and establish support systems for students and staff fostering systemic change within education systems.

8. Conclusions and Future Prospects

This collaborative effort between UK and Vietnamese universities highlights the importance of systemic approaches to advance gender equality in education. By leveraging best practices, addressing barriers, and fostering international collaboration, education systems can become catalysts for societal change. The actionable steps outlined in this report provide a roadmap for achieving these goals and creating inclusive, safe learning environments which are gender sensitive and key terrains for countering gender-based violence in schools and universities and with benefits for society as a whole.

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