

## Migration to Australia Made Easier for Vietnamese

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*Under Australia's strict immigration laws only applicants for skilled migration who have recognised qualifications are eligible to apply for migration. All professionals and associate professionals are assessed by various authorities. In all cases assessing bodies make their assessments on the basis of information contained in what are known as the Country Education Profiles (CEP) published by Australian Education International-NOOSR.*

*A revised CEP for Vietnam issued in September 2006 has opened up new opportunities for Vietnamese people interested in obtaining skilled migrant visas for Australia.*

- Nguyen Van H. completed a Bachelor of Science in Commerce, from Hanoi University of Commerce (Truong Dai Hoc Thuong Mai Hanoi). He has been working for some years as an internal auditor for one of the major multinationals with operations in Vietnam.

He is aged 32 and has a sister in Sydney who has been trying to sponsor him as a skilled migrant to Australia for some years. Each time she has come up against the brick wall that her brother's qualifications have not been recognised by the relevant assessing authority in Australia (VETASSESS).

- Pham Thi N. completed a specialist IT degree from the University of Foreign Languages – Information Technology, Ho Chi Minh City (Truong Dai Hoc Ngoai

Ngu va Tin Hoc, TP HCM). She is 29 and has 4 1/2 years work experience as a computer programmer for one of the major Vietnamese Banks. She has no family in Australia.

She has come up with a brick wall in her attempt to apply to migrate to Australia because she has been told her degree is not recognised. If her qualifications were recognised by the ACS - provided she applies before she turns 30 - she would score enough points under the points test to be eligible to migrate as an independent applicant.

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The specialist professions are assessed by specific regulatory bodies like the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia (ICAA), CPA Australia or National Institute of Accountants (NIA) for accountants, or the Australian Computer Society (ACS) for IT professionals and Engineers Australia for engineers. Other generalist professionals, like scientists and business professionals, and all Associate professionals are assessed by VETASSESS.

In all cases assessing bodies make their assessments on the basis of information contained in what are known as the Country Education Profiles published by Australian Education International-NOOSR.

The Country Education Profiles (CEP) are also used by Australian educational institutions for the purposes of assessing comparability of status of qualifications for student visas. Thus a student who has a fully recognised degree will be admitted into a post graduate course without further question, whilst students whose qualifications are not at all recognised in Australia, notwithstanding the status of the university in the home country, may find themselves having to pursue extended studies before being able to obtain access to higher level studies in Australia.

A third area of important use for the CEP is in facilitating the employment prospects of the newly arrived migrant. Clearly it looks better on a person's CV to have public recognition of academic qualifications obtained overseas. The CEP guidelines have been developed for most countries over the years. They are advisory and have no status in law as such. They also do not cover trades recognition which are assessed on a competency basis by Trades Recognition Australia.

The introduction to the CEP stresses the difficulties associated with comparing educational qualifications from countries with very different education systems. Some of the factors used to assist the assessment process are the nature, educational status and

local recognition of the awarding institution, and the level, length and structure of the course undertaken.

- One difficulty comes when attempting to match courses overseas with Australian courses which may be of differing lengths. Thus typically an Australian bachelors degree may be of 3 years duration whereas in Vietnam it may be 4 or 5 years in duration.
- It is also important to understand that recognition in the CEP does not guarantee recognition by all professional assessing authorities in Australia. Different authorities have different approaches.
  - Some, like the ACS, will accept the NOOSR-CEP classification.
  - Others, like the various health care profession assessing authorities or Engineers Australia, will use the classification only as a starting point for their further assessment processes.

Rather the assessment provides the status of the comparability of the degree to Australian standards.

In Vietnam there are approximately 300 higher education institutions, most of which approved by the Ministry of Education and Training, Vietnam.

The new CEP for Vietnam notes that there is a significant variation in quality of education provided by universities. There is also a variation in curricula, resources, and teaching standards which can affect quality of graduates.

In Vietnam the most widely used indicator of quality of an academic program are the results from the university examinations and they are approved and endorsed by the Ministry of Education and Training. The exams are highly demanding and there is no comparable professional examination system in Australia.

Amongst other points noted by the CEP Guide are the following:

- ❖ Vietnamese place a high value on education with high literacy rates in the country, especially in urban areas.
- ❖ The education system is based on the standards set by the Ministry of Education and Training.
- ❖ Access to the higher education system is reasonably widely available.
- ❖ Vietnamese is the medium of instruction at tertiary levels.
- ❖ Entry to tertiary studies is dependent on a student applicant passing the National Secondary School Examination (NSSE) and National Entry Examination for Universities.

- ❖ Most of the institutions use the same grading systems: most commonly the 1 to 10 scale (where below 5 is a fail or weakness).

The new CEP for Vietnam was issued by AEI-NOOSR on 15 September 2006. It does not list all the institutions but it does refer to a significant proportion of them. There are more institutions included in the list and many more were upgraded to Section 1 and Section 2 classifications.

Previous issues of the CEP divided the colleges into essentially 4 classifications:

- Section 1 institutions were the top ones in the country where essentially degrees are fully recognised as comparable for general academic purposes to Australian degrees. In the last CEP published in 1996, there were very few such institutions listed, notably, HCMC Banking University and Thai Nguyen University. While Full-time mode (Chinh quy) graduates will be recognized automatically by the Australian skills assessing bodies, In-service or Open mode (Tai chuc va Mo rong) will be assessed on a case to case basis.
- Section 2 institutions essentially had 5 year undergraduate degrees recognised as equal to Australian bachelor degrees, but only if the applicants completed with full-time mode (Chinh Quy). In-service or Open mode (Tai chuc va Mo rong) will be assessed on a case by case basis.
- Section 3 institutions are assessed on a case by case basis.
- Section 4 institutions are assessed on a case by case basis.

The new classification divides universities in to 5 sections:

- Section 1 institutions have the same educational comparability status as before for the full-time mode (Chinh Quy). For the in-service mode (Tai Chuc or Chuyen Tu) or open mode (Mo Rong) is assessed on a case by case basis. These universities most of which are state run were identified on the basis of the results in the graduation examinations and the reputation they enjoy in graduate studies given the quality of their teaching standards.
  - There has been a significant number of universities now added to this list, including provincial universities like , Thai Nguyen University, can Tho University and Vinh University (just to name a few).
  - This means that graduates from any of these universities now have a real chance of meeting the skills assessment component of the Australian migration rules, and essentially opens up the opportunity to a significantly larger pool of potential applicants than was previously the case.

- Section 2 institutions have a similar assessment regime to previously, but with a significant addition, especially private universities such as Phuong Dong Private University, Luong The Vinh University and Hung Vuong University (just to name a few).
- Section 3 institutions will be assessed on a case by case basis as previously.
- Sections 4 and 5 institutions: there are many more universities and institutes included in the new CEP for these two sections. They will be assessed on a case by case basis.

The new classification includes all colleges in one group as Technical and Vocational Education Section 1. There are more colleges included in the list.

Masters degrees, Vice-Doctorate, Associate Doctorate from Section 1 universities are assessed as comparable to the educational level of an Australian Master degree. Doctorate in Section 1 will be assessed on a case by case basis.

Doctoral degrees for Section 2 universities are assessed on a case by case basis.

The changes to sections 1 and 2 essentially open the field for recognition now to all Vietnamese applicants for several reasons:

- A much larger number of students who had been studying full-time mode (Chinh Quy) will be automatically recognised given the large increase in the number of section 1 and 2 institutions.
- Those who are not automatically recognised may be able to secure recognition by assessing on a case by case basis.

The significance of these changes for potential applicants for skilled migration from Vietnam is accordingly greater.

Our friends Nguyen Van H. and Pham Thi N. will now be able to proceed and will have a good chance of achieving their dreams of obtaining that skilled migration visa to Australia.

However it must always be remembered that obtaining recognition of the degree is only one step in what is otherwise a complex process. As anyone with experience in the area will know, obtaining that migration visa involves many steps and there are many pitfalls for the uninitiated.

Interested applicants should always be encouraged to obtain professional advice from a qualified lawyer or migration agent whose advice is given in accordance with the MARA Code of Conduct applying to anyone giving immigration assistance in Australia.

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