

Truong, Dao Thanh; Anh, Nguyen Thi Quynh

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Kontakt/Contact

ZBW – Leibniz-Informationszentrum Wirtschaft/Leibniz Information Centre for Economics
Düsternbrooker Weg 120
24105 Kiel (Germany)
E-Mail: [rights\[at\]zbw.eu](mailto:rights[at]zbw.eu)
<https://www.zbw.eu/>

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Chapter 5.16

Research Management and Administration in Vietnam

Dao Thanh Truong^a and Nguyen Thi Quynh Anh^b

^a0000-0003-2363-8675, VNU University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Hanoi, Vietnam;  Writing – Review & Editing, Project administration

^b0000-0003-2040-112X, VNU University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Hanoi, Vietnam;  Project administration, Writing – original draft

Abstract

This chapter outlines the structure of research management and administration (RMA) in Vietnam, which is a part of the science and technology management sector. The chapter will present the decentralisation of RMA in Vietnam at many levels: the macro level (state), the medium level (local/province), and the micro level (organisations); describe its characteristics, and identify the conditions for the establishment of the RMA community in Vietnam shortly.

Keywords: Research management and administration; science and technology management; RMA level; policy; Vietnam; profession

Research Ecosystem

In Vietnam, research management and administrations (RMAs) are a part of science and technology (S&T) management and are decentralised at different levels: the macro

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level (state), the medium level (local/province), and the micro level (organisations such as universities, institutes, and enterprises). The RMA activities are dependent on the functions and management competence of the administrative agencies to which the S&T organisation belongs or the general regulations on the S&T management mechanism of the government. From 1981¹ till now, S&T were managed more by scientific organisations, creating more favourable conditions for the transition to autonomy and self-responsibility. The legal framework and S&T policy system have also improved, with the Law on Science and Technology (2013) and other relevant legislations and documents specifying regulations on the management of S&T activities. Vietnam's Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) strategies have emphasised the importance of promoting decentralisation in state management of STI, as well as ensuring the leaness, efficiency, and effectiveness (Decision No. 569/QĐ-TTg of the Prime Minister, 2020a). The Law on Higher Education² (amended and supplemented in 2013, 2014, 2015, and 2018) pays special attention to the autonomy of higher education (HE) institutions. A transformation found among the Vietnamese universities that emerged in the last two decades is characterised by 'university autonomy' which focusses on the main issues are organisational, financial, staffing, and academic. However, university autonomy activities, including academic autonomy, still face many difficulties. Vietnam's legal framework on university autonomy is out of sync, lacking consistency with other related laws such as the Law on Cadres and Civil servants, the Law on Public Employees, the Law on State Budget, the Law on Management and Use of Public Property, the Law on Public Investment, etc.... State budget expenditure for HE is still relatively modest compared to other educational levels and other countries in the region [accounting from 0.25% to 0.27% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the period of 2018–2020]³; the financial resources of public universities are still limited and have not been diversified.

According to UNESCO Institute for Statistics (World Bank, 2022), the school enrolment in Vietnam is about 35%, lower than in some Southeast Asian countries.⁴ Despite the impressive growth of the HE system, the gross enrolment ratio (GER) in Vietnam is still lower than that of other performing countries, i.e. Philippines (32%), Malaysia (43%), and Thailand (49%). Females have higher GER than males at the HE level and the gap seems to have increased since 2016. The spirit of entrepreneurship

¹ The year 1981, The philosophy of 'Decentralization of S&T activities' in Vietnam is realised through the issuance of Decision 175/CP of the Council of Ministers on the signing and performance of economic contracts in scientific research and technical implementation.

² Vietnam's Law on Higher Education, which took effect in January 2013, is the country's first law dedicated specifically to the higher education (HE) sector. The Law aims to reform and regulate HE in order to develop human resources needed for Vietnam's move towards a knowledge-based economy. The Law includes provisions for institutional autonomy, quality assurance, international cooperation, university research mission, university mission in science and technology, private universities, national and regional universities, and university classification and ranking that were not previously addressed in legislation.

³ Hong Hanh (2023). University autonomy: More than 30% of lecturers have an income of over 200 million/year and budget problems. *Online newspaper of the People's Deputies (under the Office of the Vietnam National Assembly)*. Source: <https://daibieunhandan.vn/giao-duc-y-te1/tu-chu-dai-hoc-hon-30-giang-vien-co-thu-nhap-tren-200-trieu-nam-va-bai-toan-ngan-sach-i313570/>.

⁴ According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics. (2022). The tertiary enrollment of Vietnam in 2021 is about 35%, Thailand (44%), Malaysia (43%), Indonesia (36%), Singapore (93%). Source: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.PR.M.NENR?locations=8S&name_desc=true.

in universities is also growing stronger, with the percentage of schools making entrepreneurship a compulsory or elective subject increasing from 30% at the end of 2020 to 33% by the end of 2021. Some large universities and national universities have been established some enterprises in the university, but this rate is still very low due to policy problems.

Besides the Government's National Funds, ministries and ministerial-level agencies as well as Provincial People's Committees have established S&T development funds to support local and regional activities. These funds are formed from initial capitals from state budgets for the scientific and technological development of ministries, ministerial-level agencies, governmental agencies, central-affiliated cities and provinces; annual additional capital from state budgets for the S&T tasks of ministries, provinces, and funds' business results; contributions of enterprises according to laws; voluntary contributions, donations, grants from organisations, individuals, and other legal sources.⁵

The Vietnamese National Assembly and Government have established a number of mechanisms and policies to encourage the development of S&T funds in businesses. However, by 2021, the number of businesses deducting the fund was less than 0.1% of the total number of operating businesses. The fund has been established by many corporations and businesses, but its use is extremely limited. According to Anh Tuyet (2021), nearly 80% of businesses deduct the fund but do not use it because of complicated procedures and processes for spending funds. The fund's establishment and use are limited to a few large enterprises. Some of the effective S&T funds of enterprises are Vingroup Innovation Fund (VINIF) and the VinFuture Foundation (2020) of VinGroup.⁶

Evolution of the Profession

To meet the actual demand for human resources to implement RMA activities at multiple levels (national, local, and organisational), the training programs are increasing. The bachelor's and master's programmes in S&T Management began in 1999, and the doctorate in S&T Management was established in 2013 at the VNU – University of Social Sciences and Humanities (VNU-USSH), and later more Master and doctoral ones in S&T Management was educated in the Vietnam Institute of Science, Technology and Innovation under the MOST. The trainees are mostly officials in charge of scientific research management at universities and institutes, at departments of S&T and localities, and at ministries (MOST, MOET) who have not received formal training beyond the bachelor's level. RMA is not yet considered a profession and is

⁵ According to Article 61, The Law on Science and Technology (2013), ministries, ministerial-level agencies, governmental agencies, people's committees of provinces shall establish funds for scientific and technological development to meet their own demands for scientific and technological development. These funds are formed from initial capitals from state budgets for scientific and technological development of ministries, ministerial-level agencies, governmental agencies, central-affiliated cities and provinces; annual additional capitals from state budgets for science and technology tasks of ministries, provinces and funds' business results; contributions of enterprises according to laws; voluntary contributions, donations, grants from organisations, individuals and other legal sources. Source: <https://www.most.gov.vn/en/Pages/Detaildocument.aspx?vID=44>.

⁶ Vingroup Joint Stock Company (Vingroup JSC) is Vietnam's biggest private conglomerate. As a multi-sector corporation, Vingroup focusses on three core pillars: Technology & Industry, Trade & Services, and Social Enterprise. More information: <https://vingroup.net/vi>.

not included in the list of occupations in Vietnam (Decision 34/2020/QĐ-TTg of the Prime Minister, 2020b). There are also short-term programmes run by government agencies, local governments, NGOs, and charities. MOST, MOHA, and local S&T departments often conduct training courses for civil servants and public employees on scientific research skills and STI management. Some examples are the training projects between the British Council Vietnam, the Vietnam Institute of Science, Technology, and Innovation, and a number of universities in 2019; or the workshop ‘Improving scientific research management skills for researchers in Vietnam’ for researchers and scientific research managers as part of cooperation activities between the Institute of Policy and Management, VNU-USSH and the Australian Research Management Society (ARMS), supported by the Australian Government.

Current Community

S&T Budget as a Percentage of GDP

The [World Bank \(2022\)](#) estimates that Vietnam’s GDP was 330.39 billion USD in 2019. According to the R&D Survey, the total national expenditure on R&D in 2019 amounted to roughly 0.53% of GDP (Ministry of Science and Technology of Vietnam, 2021).

Number of R&D Personnel

In 2019, Vietnam had 185,436 people participating in R&D activities. The number of researchers with undergraduate or HE accounted for 80.94%, while technical staff accounted for 69.9%, and support staff accounted for 12.07% ([MOST, 2021](#)). The structure of R&D human resources in Vietnam in recent years is relatively stable with a large proportion of researchers (80%), technical staff (6–7%), and support staff.

Number of Academic Institutes (Universities)

In 2019, Vietnam had 237 universities and academies (including 172 public schools, 60 private and people-founded schools, 5 schools with 100% foreign capital), and 31 pedagogical colleges ([MOET, 2019](#)).

RMA is an important activity of S&T management in Vietnam at various levels: the macro level (state), the medium level (local/province), and the micro level (organisations) ([Fig. 5.16.1](#)). At the macro level, ministries (MOST, MOET, MOHA) help to develop institutions and allocate budgets for S&T management activities, including RMAs, and develop strategies for S&T organisations. At the local level, S&T management activities are also associated with the role of the People’s Council, the People’s Committee of the province, district, and commune level, to promote technology improvement initiatives, and technology application, participating in resource management, and supervising the implementation of legal provisions on S&T. The S&T department under the Provincial People’s Committee (y) is the focal point for the general management of S&T activities, including RMA activities. In the last level, RMA activities are concentrated in universities, institutes, and enterprises.

At each level of RMA, it is possible to see the formation and development of many types of S&T development funds of different sizes.⁷ The establishment of S&T devel-

⁷ According to the Law on Science and Technology 2013, the government established the National Science and Science Development Fund (Article 60); Ministry, peer-to-peer agency, the government-based agency, the Provincial People’s Committee established

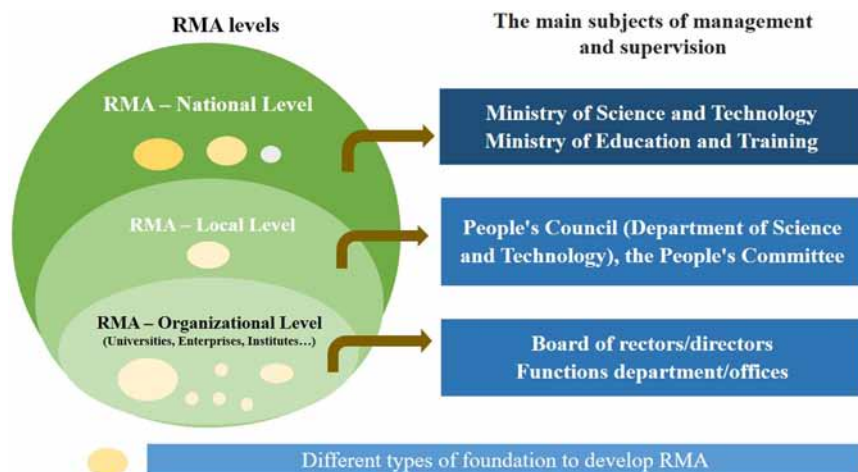


Fig. 5.16.1. RMA Levels in Vietnam.

opment funds is encouraged by the government, in order to provide financial support for S&T activities, including RMA activities of S&T organisations.

Besides, in Vietnam, RMA activities in the public sector should not be considered as support services for research activities, but rather as activities within the function of scientific research regulatory bodies. Councils for appraisal and evaluation of research and projects are established in the system of public organisations, enterprises, research units, and enterprise funds. For projects funded by the state budget, evaluation councils are established by the sponsoring agency/programme to evaluate a project before and after implementation. Currently, public university RMA activities include the formation of ethics committees to evaluate research products and ensure that scientific standards are transparent and strictly followed. Scientific research management departments will be responsible for supporting information and administrative activities, announcing funding results, and managing research projects. In addition, RMA in universities is different from RMA in parent universities such as the model of national universities (Vietnam National Universities in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh). RMA activities at parent universities are divided into several levels of management: S&T management board of the parent university; S&T management departments of member universities and institutes; S&T management departments/sections of research centres and institutes; scientific assistants in the faculties. The RMA activities in parent universities are not only related to the member units, but also have external interactions with the S&T department in ministries. Along with the commitment to integration in education and science that Vietnam joins with ASEAN, MOET are now making

the Foundation for Scientific Development and the technology to serve its requirements for scientific and technological development (Article 61); The state encourages the organisation, the individual to establish a scientific and technological development fund by the rule of law. The organisation's science and technology development fund, the individual is the non-profit organisation for non-reimbursable funding, lending at low-interest rates or not taking interest, the loan guarantee serves the requirements for the development of science and technology of the organisation, the individual (Article 62); Foreign enterprises are encouraged to establish their own scientific and technological development funds or contribute to the S&T Development Fund of the industry, local and the benefit of the provisions of the Fund (Article 63).

remarkable efforts to ensure university accreditation standards⁸ according to international standards, including indicators related on RMA.

About the RMA in private universities, it should also be noted that one of the quite popular trends in Vietnam today is the transfer of private universities to enterprises, which will also create changes in resources and methods of RMA when the university's scientific research or technology transfer activities will focus on the development orientations of enterprises. Besides, some private, not-for-profit universities have been established by large private conglomerates. For example, in October 2020, VinUniversity was set up with a total investment of VND 6,500 billion (approximately USD 285 million) from Vingroup. The emergence of investment policies for research activities and professional, internationalised RMA activities of these universities also created a phenomenon of social mobility, and brain drain from both public and private universities. Therefore, the establishment of RMA communities needs to be implemented quickly so that cooperation and investment mechanisms can be created for harmonious development among current university models in Vietnam.

In enterprises in the fields of science and education, investment enterprises, or owners of private universities, RMA activities are mainly concentrated in departments/committees in charge of cooperation and investment in S&T. In large corporations, RMA can be specialised in the important role of funds, investment appraisal boards in S&T.

The state budget's overall spending on S&T activities increased by 1.3 times from 2015 to 2020 (as shown in Fig. 5.16.2). If the majority of the funding for S&T activities comes from the state budget (roughly 70–80% of the total investment in S&T), today's funding for S&T comes from the state budget balanced, with 52% and 48%, respectively (MOST, 2021).

In recent years, state budget investment in S&T activities has maintained at about 2% of total annual expenditure, approximately equal to 0.5% of GDP (including defence

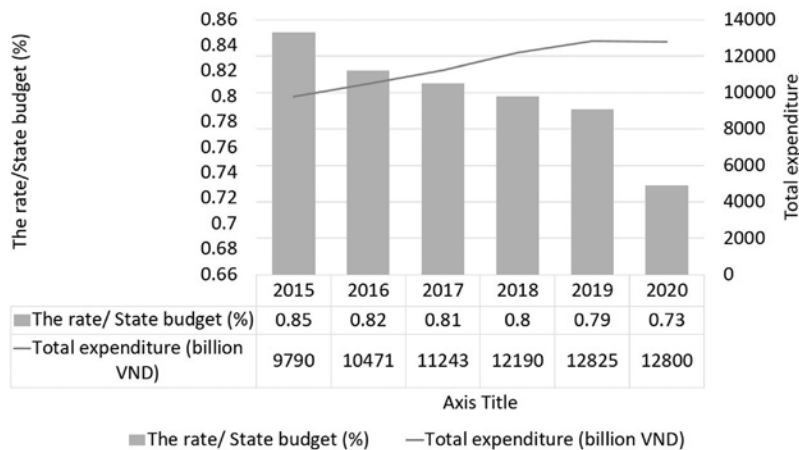


Fig. 5.16.2. Expenditures on S&T Activities from the State Budget from 2015 Through 2020. Source: Ministry of Science and Technology of Vietnam (2021).

⁸On 9 September 2022, the MOET issued Decision NO 2576/QĐ-BGDĐT to recognise the activities of the High Council for Evaluation Research and Higher Education (Hcères), the Decision No.2577/ QĐ-BGDĐT to recognise the activities of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) in Vietnam.

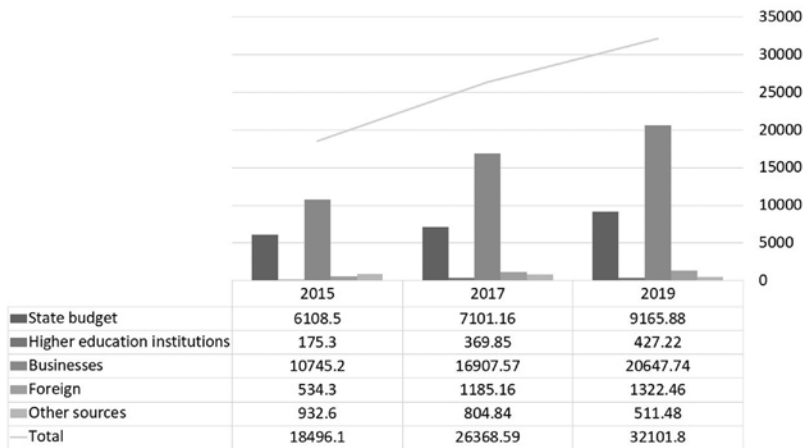


Fig. 5.16.3. Vietnam's R&D Expenditures by Funding Sources in the Three Years of 2015, 2017, and 2019 (Billion VND). *Source:* Ministry of Science and Technology of Vietnam (2021).

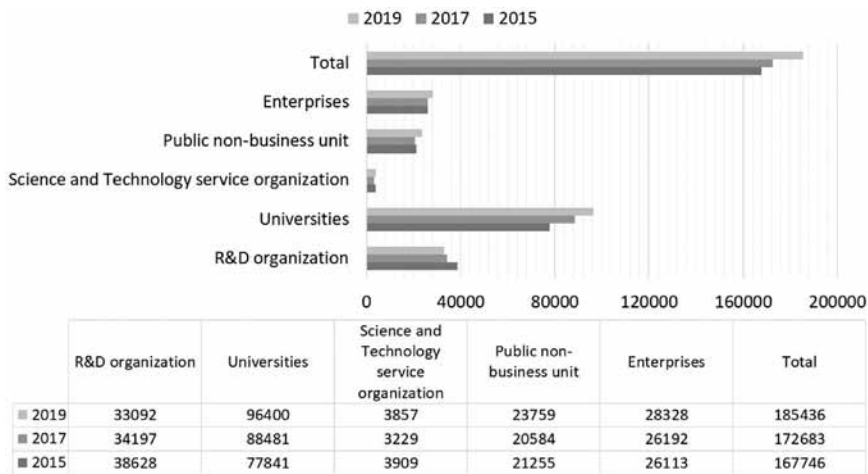


Fig. 5.16.4. R&D Human Resources by Implementation Area (Person). *Source:* Ministry of Science and Technology of Vietnam (2021).

and security expenditure and contingency expenditure). From 2015 to 2019, the state budget increased by 1.5 times (as shown in Fig. 5.16.3). The promotion of socialisation has caused a shift in the expenditure sources for Vietnam's R&D activities in 2015, 2017, and 2019. The investment from business sources increased about 1.9 times from 2015 to 2019, with 50–60% the total Vietnam's R&D expenditures by funding sources.

From 2015 to 2019, R&D personnel in HE institutions (including universities, colleges, and institutes) account for the highest proportion of the total R&D workforce of the country (about 50%) (as shown in Fig. 5.16.4). Despite having the largest proportion of R&D human resources, the R&D investment rate of Vietnam's universities is the lowest. This is also one of the barriers in the development of UAM activities, especially in the public sector.

Implication and Conclusion

RMA's activities in Vietnam are decentralised at many levels: the macro level (state), the medium level (local/province), and the micro level (organisations) and are governed by administrative institutions in the field of S&T. To establish RMA communities in Vietnam, the following conditions might be necessary: (1) The support of RMA networks in exchanging, learning, and applying international RMA criteria and assessment systems to refer to Vietnam's regulations; (2) The mechanism of autonomy and self-responsibility for public institutions, particularly universities will continue to be effectively deployed to attract more resources for RMA activities besides the state budget; (3) RMA policies and RMA regulations need to be further specified at the above levels; (4) The strengthening of human resources with expertise and training in RMA; (5) The development of professional research on RMA.

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