Despite official exhortations to prepare young people for the 21st century, the future-oriented skills covered in this study do not feature prominently in education strategy and are not yet a focus for teachers in the classroom. Beyond increasing enrolment at all education levels, the policy priorities have involved improving the quality of teaching (where some progress has been achieved—see next section), tightening up high school exams and university admissions, and strengthening core cognitive skills in the curriculum. Expanding vocational education has also been a priority, with a focus on providing training in the technical skills that are currently in short supply in the workforce. The government has backed up these changes with investment. In 2013, the South-east Asian economy’s students do well on tests, but more will be needed to bring Vietnam’s education system into the 21st century.
the most recent year data are available, spending on upper-secondary education was 23% of GDP per head—18th highest of the 50 index economies.

The teaching of many 21st-century skills, though, has yet to benefit from this largesse. The school curriculum largely reflects the above priorities and, according to experts, places only moderate emphasis on approaches such as problem-based learning. “We train our children to do well in tests,” says Ms Dao, “but we stumble when it comes to teaching them how to be creative and think for themselves.”

Prestige in teaching

Although falling in the bottom half of the index table in the teaching environment category, credible performance in a handful of indicators suggests that Vietnam has some of the tools needed to adapt education to future-skills needs once policymakers prioritise it. For example, the teaching profession is valued in Vietnamese society, and tertiary-level enrolment in advanced teacher training programmes is among the highest of all index economies (see figure III). Teachers are also required to undergo in-service training, and the World Bank is helping build capacity for school-based and continuous professional development for teachers and administrators.

In an effort to tie education more closely to labour market needs, career counselling is being made mandatory across the secondary- and vocational-school systems. Although the extent and quality of

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4 UIS.stat website, UNESCO
5 Unless indicated otherwise, this and other qualitative assessments about Vietnam’s capacity to provide training in future skills are based mainly on interviews with experts on its education system conducted as part of index development
6 “Vietnam Enhancing Teacher Education Program”, World Bank
counselling are currently limited, by 2025 all secondary and vocational institutions must offer professional career counselling that is aligned with the needs of local businesses. Teachers will also be expected to provide such counselling.\(^7\) Vietnam thus ties for tenth in the index indicator relating to career counselling, thanks also to the existence of a periodically updated national database on job opportunities for students with different educational qualifications.

**Moulding global citizens**

The “internationalisation” of education—particularly tertiary education—is another objective articulated in education strategy.\(^8\) Meeting it involves efforts, for example, to encourage Vietnamese youth to study abroad. In this it has been successful, with the number of outbound university students increasing almost eightfold between 1999 and 2016. Internationalisation also involves efforts to attract overseas students to Vietnamese universities, although these have been less successful. Foreign students account for less than 0.24% of the total student body; only three index economies (Colombia, India and Indonesia) have a lower share.\(^9\)

The study of English as a second language is now mandatory at Vietnam’s universities, although this is not yet the case at the upper-secondary level. Ms Dao confirms that policymakers understand the need to expand the learning of foreign languages, especially English, and this goal is supported in teacher training and textbook development.

The aforementioned measures can all contribute to an environment in which global citizenship values are allowed to develop among young people. Despite these efforts, however, Vietnam’s socio-economic environment has some distance to go before it can match economies in the upper half of the index in tolerance of cultural, religious and other types of diversity as well as acceptance of global values such as gender equality and protecting the environment. “Discussions of such things are not commonplace in our public schools,” says Ms Dao. “We need to help students understand and be able to deal with these issues.”

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7 “All secondary, high schools to offer professional career counselling by 2025”, Viet Nam News, June 7th 2018
8 Stefan Trines, “Education in Vietnam”, World Education News & Reviews, November 8th 2017
9 International student data in this paragraph are sourced from the UNESCO UIS.stat website