



VIS with Vietnamese Ambassador Nguyen Hoang Long and Professor Jonathan Van Tam among others

## BEYOND KNOWLEDGE DIPLOMACY

By *VIS Vice President, Dr. Que Anh Dang* from Coventry University and *Dr. Le-Nam Tran* from University College Dublin write about the Vietnamese Intellectual Society in the UK and Ireland

### Our strengths lie in collective intellectual capacities

The Vietnamese Intellectual Society (VIS) is a professional volunteer-based society of Vietnamese intellectuals living and working in the UK and the Republic of Ireland. VIS UK & Ireland was formally established in December 2020 with the support and recognition of Viet Nam's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Vietnamese Embassy in London. By the end of 2022, the society had brought together about 100 members of whom 95 per cent are academics (PhD candidates to professors) working in more than 30 disciplines at over 60 higher education institutions in the UK and Ireland.

VIS members are accomplished individuals who collectively possess huge intellectual capacities and global professional networks forged in their career trajectories and academic mobility across many countries. Several members are prominent scholars; many are rising stars in cutting-edge technologies. Regardless of whether they have resided in the UK and Ireland for several decades or recently relocated here, they all share common objectives:

- To foster connections and collaborations among VIS members in the UK and Ireland while building bridges with their global networks.
- To strengthen academic links with Vietnamese partners to contribute to the socio-economic development and international integration of Viet Nam.
- To engage in people-to-people connectivity and enhance the ties between the UK, Ireland and Viet Nam.

### Looking back to see ahead

In recent years, VIS representatives have had opportunities to exchange ideas with Vietnamese leaders. Notably, they met the Vietnamese Prime Minister at COP26 in 2021, and the Chairman of the National Assembly, the Minister of Education and Training and the Chairman of the Party Central Committee's Economic

Commission in 2022. These direct dialogues have facilitated knowledge diplomacy and supported the efforts of VIS UK & Ireland to build stronger knowledge partnerships with Viet Nam. Different from the 'soft power' concept, knowledge diplomacy is based on principles of collaboration, reciprocity and achieving mutual but different benefits.

One of the most impactful initiatives undertaken by VIS UK & Ireland is the 'Mentorship and Talent Development' (MTD) programme embraced by many Vietnamese universities. The programme is designed to help PhD candidates and early career researchers enhance their research capability and skills to succeed in publishing their research internationally. Bespoke mentorship matches each mentee with a dedicated VIS member acting as a mentor for up to nine months. As a testament to its effectiveness, the British Council Viet Nam has invited VIS to be a delivery partner for their 'Researcher Connect' programme.

These concrete activities demonstrate VIS' commitment to enhancing academic collaborations and supporting the socio-economic development of Viet Nam, going beyond knowledge diplomacy.

### Enabling the flow of knowledge

A special lecture was delivered in May 2022 by Sir Professor Jonathan Van-Tam, the VIS honorary Chair, former Deputy Chief Medical Official for England. Sir Jonathan, who is British of Vietnamese origin and advised the British government during the COVID-19 pandemic, shared his reflections: "Scientists should never compromise professional ethics and integrity. Always speak truth to power. Be considerate and kind to your colleagues, especially in pressing situations."

VIS has transformed the traditional 'brain drain' concept into a 'brain gain' model by facilitating the circulation of skills and turning the outflow of human resources into a valuable and accessible asset through expanded networks.