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**Rt Hon David Jones MP**

**Secretary of State for Wales**

## **SEAMEO speech**

**Hanoi, 20 March, 2013**

### ***Check against delivery***

- It is a huge honour for me to be here today on the occasion of the admission of the United Kingdom as an Associate Member of SEAMEO. Congratulations to you Mr President and you Mr Vice President on your election to your respective offices.
- My country has a bold and ambitious aspiration – to be South East Asia’s Number 1 global partner in education.
- And I believe that British education has the quality and capacity to justify that aspiration.
- It is an ambition that we take very seriously. Hence our application to become an Associate Member of SEAMEO. We are delighted that we have been accepted and are looking forward to sharing your important work.
- Indeed, we are already actively engaged with every one of the members of this organisation.

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- With your immediate past President, Brunei Darussalam, we have - through the UK's education partnership - taken a unique approach to promoting English as a medium of learning.
- To coincide with Brunei's Chairmanship of ASEAN, and to mark our becoming the newest Associate Member of SEAMEO, we have, with the CfBT Education Trust, produced a film entitled: "*English as an ASEAN Language: The Brunei Story*". You will find a copy of this upbeat and, I believe, thought-provoking film with your conference documents.
- With our hosts, Vietnam, we are already delivering an ambitious programme of vocational training. And in January, we agreed that we would, together, launch a world-class UK-Vietnam university this year in Danang.
- We are doing this through effective partnerships – our Embassy here in Hanoi and our partners in the British Council who do such valuable work. Put quite simply, Britain at its best.
- And educational links between our countries are continuously multiplying. Many British universities have already forged strong associations with universities here.
- We are firmly committed to a regional approach, supporting new regional initiatives through the UK-ASEAN Knowledge Partnership, which was recently launched by our Prime Minister, David Cameron.

- There are many projects supported by the Knowledge Partnership that involve the promotion of links between universities and other research institutions – both in the UK and in ASEAN.
- And those links are as varied as the knowledge economy itself: everything from R&D, and science and innovation, through to technical and vocational education and training (TVET).
- What they all have in common is that they respond to priorities which have been clearly articulated by ASEAN and by SEAMEO.
- SEAMEO plays a crucial role promoting regional understanding, cooperation and unity of purpose among its Member Countries.
- Your important work is undoubtedly helping to deliver a better quality of life and better life chances for people across South East Asia, through improved education for all.
- So what will the UK bring to your organisation? Well, we are not starting from scratch. Education already forms a central pillar of the bilateral relationships we enjoy with individual member states of SEAMEO, reflected in the fact that the British Council is already an active Affiliate Member of your organisation.

- Our Associate Membership will reinforce that work, helping us to develop our education initiatives on a regional basis, taking our cue from the way ASEAN member states are learning from one another, and finding both inspiration and economies of scale through the structures of SEAMEO.
- I am pleased to note the launch today of the SEAMEO college, with plans to hold regional conferences on education attracting a global audience; you can be sure we will be looking for ways to connect your initiative with our own Education World Forum which takes place in London each year.
- I hope I am not being immodest when I suggest that my country has a very attractive offer to make on education. 400,000 overseas students chose to study in the UK last year. There are currently almost 3,800 Vietnamese students in higher education in the UK – and it is our ambition to see that figure increase every year.
- Our Prime Minister has made it clear that there are absolutely no limits on the number of legitimate students coming to UK. We continue to welcome the brightest and the best from across the ASEAN region.
- We fully recognise the vital economic, social and cultural contribution that International students make to our country. And we are confident that, in return, we can offer ASEAN students an education that is among the best to be found anywhere in the world.
- Education is a growing global industry. And I believe that a British education will be of enormous and enduring benefit to the workforces of your respective countries.

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- A degree from a British university offers not only world-class academic standards, but also a rich cultural experience. It can help forge lifelong partnerships, build global networks and form the basis of cultural exchanges; and all delivered in the universally-acknowledged language of business: English.
  
- ASEAN is an exciting, dynamic region. With a population bigger than both the European Union and the United States, it will surely continue to be a increasingly important powerhouse of the global economy.
  
- It is, quite simply, an exciting place to be; and I, for one, am excited to be here in Hanoi today, representing my country on such an important occasion.
  
- I am certain that the students and teachers of the United Kingdom and the ASEAN nations can, through the noble pursuit of education, help bring more prosperity, happiness and understanding to this and other regions of our world.
  
- Once again, on behalf of my country, may I thank you for accepting us as an Associate Member of your important organisation.

**ENDS**

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