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Erasmus+ National Policy Reviews 2024 Thailand

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Thailand

Contributor

ENFP for Thailand: Luksmon Smansin

Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation

This national policy review provides a detailed analysis of Thailand's educational policies and their alignment with the Erasmus+ programme. It offers official, first-hand information into the country's engagement with Erasmus+ from 2021 to 2024, highlighting opportunities for improvement and identifying strategies to enhance integration and outcomes. Prepared and submitted by the Erasmus+ National Focal Point, this review contributes to ongoing efforts to strengthen international cooperation and to maximise the benefits of the Erasmus+ programme in Thailand.

Reviews of policies, initiatives, projects, and/or stakeholders

Higher Education Policy of Thailand

In 2022, the cabinet approved three key plans: the Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation Policy and Strategy (2023-2027), the revised Higher Education Plan (2023-2027), and the draft Science, Research and Innovation Plan (2023-2027).

The National Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation Policy Council (Policy Council) proposed the plans. They are a blueprint for leapfrog development, aiming to transform Thailand into a developed country by 2037, in line with the goals of the National Strategy.

The HE Plan (2023-2027) aims to elevate the quality of education in Thailand to match that of developed countries. It focuses on fostering knowledge and innovation to boost competitiveness, expanding HE access, and developing the skills and competencies of the workforce to meet labour market demands. Additionally, the plan seeks to create jobs and nurture entrepreneurs at the local level to support and grow the local economy.

The plan includes three key strategies:

- Develop human potential
- Foster an innovation ecosystem
- Reorganise the Higher Education System

The Science, Research, and Innovation Plan

This Plan focuses on enhancing innovation capabilities and reforming systems to unlock the potential of higher education, science, and R&I. The goal is to improve national competitiveness and encourage multidisciplinary, cross-agency, and cross-sector collaboration.

The plan is built on four strategies:

- Develop a value-driven and creative economy
- Promote sustainable social and environmental development
- Advance cutting-edge Science, Technology, Research, and Innovation
- Develop skilled workforce and research institutes for sustainable and rapid development

The vision of the Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation Policy and Strategy

The vision of the Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation Policy and Strategy is to combine the power of higher education, science, research, and innovation to achieve rapid and sustainable development, enhance competitiveness, create value and prepare for the future.

It consists of four strategies:

- Develop the economy with a value-driven and creative economy to enhance competitiveness and self-reliance for the future
- Enable sustainable social and environmental development to overcome challenges and build resilience
- Develop cutting-edge science, technology, research, and innovation to open new opportunities in the future
- Develop manpower, higher education and research institutes to drive a leapfrog and sustainable development.

<https://www.nxpo.or.th/th/en/14299/>

<https://www.mhesi.go.th/index.php/news-and-announce-all/pr/announcement-news/8464-2564-2570-2566-2570.html>

New Project of Higher Education Policy - Higher Education Sandbox

Thailand needs higher education reform to address emerging challenges effectively. As multi-stage life becomes the norm, lifelong education is essential. New forms of education are needed to equip the workforce with the knowledge and skills required for future industries. The concept of an «education sandbox» has been proposed to facilitate this. This initiative allows for exploring innovative educational approaches that are not yet regulated or standardised, paving the way for more flexible and responsive education systems.

<https://www.nxpo.or.th/th/en/8320/>

Legislative reforms and/or policies that have been put in place in the past three years or that are still being discussed

Quality Assurance and Standards

A ministerial regulation was issued in 2021, classifying higher education institutions into six categories according to the institute's objective, mission, strategy, potential and past performances. The six categories are:

- World-class research
- Technology and innovation
- Community development
- Religion and wisdom
- Vocational development
- Others

Subsequent ministerial regulations are being drafted to define standards, requirements, quality assessment, and assurance for each higher institution category.

University's Role in Workforce Development

Demand-directed HE is designed to help universities meet their evolving commitments. Over the past decades, the role of universities has expanded beyond just developing manpower, conducting research, providing public service, and cultivating arts and culture.

Today, universities are also expected to promote social equality, support area-based development, and demonstrate social responsiveness and responsibility. Demand-directed education aligns university programmes with the needs of society, ensuring that they contribute effectively to these broader goals.

The Higher Education Act B.E. 2562 (A.D. 2019) introduces several new initiatives to promote various forms of education. These initiatives encourage collaboration between public and private universities, foster academia-industry partnerships, support off-campus education, and establish educational sandboxes for

experimenting with innovative approaches.

Currently, several public funding programmes are available to support manpower development, including the Science, Research and Innovation Fund, the Higher Education Fund, the Equitable Education Fund, and the Student Loan Fund.

Entrepreneurial University

The 2016-2021 Startup Promotion Plan calls for universities to boost entrepreneurial skills among students and citizens. As a result, several initiatives have been launched, including the Entrepreneurship Educator Consortium, Business Brotherhood, Startup Thailand League and Technology and Innovation-Based Enterprise Development Fund (TED Fund).

Academia-Industry Collaboration

Multiple programmes have been launched to enhance collaboration between universities and industry, providing students with valuable work experience.

These programmes include:

- Work-integrated Learning (WiL)
- Cooperative Education
- Total Innovation Management Enterprise (TIME)
- Higher Education for Industry (Hi-Fi)

Additionally, new platforms have been introduced to support these efforts:

- Thailand Electroplating Professional Network (TEPNET): Developed by the Office of National Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation Policy Council (NXPO), Chulalongkorn University, and Fraunhofer, this platform offers a non-degree course in electroplating.
- Talent Mobility: Facilitates the placement of R&D personnel from academic and research institutions into private companies.

Many of these initiatives also offer tax benefits and investment incentives to encourage industry participation.

A study has been conducted to identify the demand for a high-skilled workforce and the future skillsets needed in the next five years (2020-2024) within the following 12 target industries:

- Robotics Industry
- Medical Industry
- Aviation & Logistics Industry
- Bioenergy & Biochemicals Industry
- Digital Industry
- Advanced Agriculture & Biotechnology Industry
- Food Industry
- Future Mobility Industry
- Intelligent Electronics Industry
- High Wealth & Medical Tourism Industry
- Defence Industry
- Workforce & Education Industry

Initiatives and/or programmes that have been launched in the past three years

The Reskill/Upskill/New Skill Initiative

This initiative, launched by the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation, focuses on developing over 500 non-degree courses that address the future skill sets demanded by target industries. The initiative also includes Reskill-Upskill vouchers worth THB 1,000-2,000, distributed to encourage skill development. Additionally, financial measures are in place to incentivise companies to hire skilled workers and provide training for their employees, with tax exemptions offered for these expenses.

The Online and Hybrid Education (Thai MOOCs)

Thai MOOCs is a free online learning platform that allows students and the public to upskill and reskill. This platform is designed to make education more accessible to those who need it, offering a wide range of courses to enhance skills and knowledge.

The University to Tambon (U2T)

Launched during the COVID-19 pandemic, this project aims to provide job opportunities for new graduates by hiring them and sending them to work in sub-districts (Tambon) to address local economic issues. The U2T initiative focuses on utilising the skills of graduates to solve community problems and improve local economies.

The National Credits Bank

The National Credits Bank promotes lifelong learning and enhances educational opportunities by allowing individuals to convert learning outcomes from various work and learning experiences into academic credits. These credits can be accumulated and used to obtain a degree certificate from higher education institutions.

The Reinventing Universities Initiative

Discuss efforts to modernise and adapt universities to meet current and future educational demands better.

The New Generation Graduate Project

This project encourages universities and targeted industries to collaborate to develop course content and instructional methods focusing on practical, hands-on experiences. The goal is to better prepare graduates for the workforce by ensuring their education aligns with industry needs.

Projects which are examples of good practice that have been launched in the past three years

The Reskill/Upskill/New Skill initiative

The Reskill/Upskill/New Skill initiative, launched by the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation, is developing over 500 non-degree courses to equip people with future skills needed by key industries.

As part of this initiative, vouchers worth THB 1,000-2,000 have been distributed to support skill development. Additionally, financial incentives have been introduced to motivate companies to hire skilled workers and invest in employee training, including a 150% tax exemption on expenses for hiring employees with advanced STEM knowledge and a 250% tax exemption on training costs.

The Online and Hybrid Education

Online and hybrid education are increasingly prevalent in major universities across Thailand. To promote lifelong learning, the country has introduced the Thailand Massive Open Online Course Platform (Thai MOOC), offering open-access courses to everyone, regardless of educational or occupational background.

Thai MOOC features a broad range of subjects, from university-level courses to vocational training, utilising digital technology to provide flexible «anytime, anywhere» learning opportunities. This model aligns with the new normal, offering education that adapts to the evolving needs of society.

The University to Tambon (Subdistrict) or U2T

The University to Tambon (Subdistrict), or U2T, is a project to engage universities in community development. U2T provides grants to universities to employ their knowledge and technology to develop local communities and create jobs to drive the grassroots economy. The project's initial phase is expected to add 60,000 new jobs in 3,000 subdistricts and build a long-term partnership between universities and communities to strengthen local economies.

<https://www.nxpo.or.th/th/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/REINVENTING-THAILANDS-HIGHER-EDUCATION.pdf>

Key players and networks (stakeholders) at the national level (or at the regional level with a national component)

Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation (MHESI)

This Ministry aims to be a model for a new type of ministry that is closely aligned with the mission of policymakers. It will focus on coordinating and supporting efforts in HE, scientific research, innovation, business competitiveness, and human development. This approach will help Thailand progress into the 21st century, respond effectively to the 20-year national strategy, and align with the goals of the Thailand 4.0 policy.

The creation of the Ministry represents a significant step in bureaucratic reform, moving from policy ideas to practical implementation. This ministry aims to positively impact the economy and society by improving higher education, science, research, and innovation. Its goals include eradicating poverty at the local level, boosting the country's competitiveness, and enhancing the skills and knowledge of the Thai people. This, in turn, will help create income security and improve the overall quality of life for the population.

The establishment of the Ministry resulted in the merger of various government departments with distinct legal functions and powers. This merger brought together the Office of the Higher Education Commission—which oversees 25 state universities, nine public universities, 38 Rajabhat universities, nine Rajamangala Universities of Technology, and one community college—and two national research funding agencies, the National Research Council and the Office of Research Support Fund. Rather than dissolving the Ministry of Science and Technology, this restructuring aligned with the country's 20-year strategy and the Thailand 4.0 reform policy, aiming to streamline and enhance the effectiveness of these institutions in supporting national development.

<https://www.ops.go.th/en/inter-about-ops-mhesi/inter-about>

Vocational Education and Training (VET)

- The Office of the Vocational Education Commission (OVEC)

Plays a crucial role in driving the implementation of government and Ministry of Education policies, particularly those focused on producing and developing a vocational education workforce in line with international trends from 2012 to 2026.

Its key responsibilities include:

- **Policy Development:** OVEC provides recommendations for developing policies, plans, standards, and curricula related to vocational education and training (VET).
- **Programme Improvement:** coordinates the enhancement of VET programmes and professional standards to ensure they meet current and future needs.
- **Teacher and Personnel Development:** OVEC focuses on developing VET teachers and personnel to maintain high educational standards.
- **Government and Private Sector Coordination:** facilitates collaboration between the government and the private sector in developing the VET system.
- Additionally, OVEC plays a significant role in financing the VET system by setting criteria and managing the allocation of budgets and other necessary resources.

Vocational education and training are a vital component of the Thai education system. Approximately one in three students in upper-secondary education are enrolled in the vocational track, and around one in five postsecondary students pursue a vocational diploma programme.

While the share of students enrolled in upper-secondary VET has been relatively stable over the last decade, the share in postsecondary programmes is rising. The Thai government has set ambitious targets for increasing the share of students in VET in recognition that VET can develop the skills that the economy needs.

Employment outcomes for VET graduates in Thailand are generally positive, particularly for those with postsecondary vocational diplomas. Graduates with vocational qualifications tend to earn higher wages and are less likely to work in informal sectors than those with general upper-secondary education. However, a significant gap exists between VET and tertiary education in terms of outcomes.

Despite the strong demand for VET skills in the Thai labour market—especially in specific fields—employers often report a shortage of workers with VET qualifications. At the same time, there is a recurring concern that the skills of VET graduates do not fully align with the needs of employers. This mismatch suggests that while VET graduates are valued, there is room for improvement in how VET programmes align with market demands.

Several challenges impact the appeal of VET in Thailand and the quality of training provided. VET is often viewed as less attractive than other educational paths, partly due to its poor image. Key issues include:

- **Quality Concerns:** There are ongoing issues with the quality of VET programmes, which affect their overall perception
- **Fragmentation:** The VET system is fragmented, leading to inconsistencies and inefficiencies in training
- **Limited Progression:** VET students have few opportunities to transition into general or academic programmes, which can limit their long-term career prospects

These factors contribute to the negative perceptions of VET, making it a less appealing option for many students.

Certain groups are underrepresented due to a combination of unattractive offerings and various barriers to access. For instance:

- **Female Students:** Women are less likely to enrol in VET programmes and are predominantly concentrated in business and commerce
- **Prime-Age Adults:** Participation among prime-age adults in the VET system is very low

These disparities are influenced by financial and non-financial barriers, which further limit access and participation in VET.

Ensuring that VET provision corresponds with labour market needs is an important challenge in Thailand, especially when global megatrends and the COVID-19 crisis are changing skill needs. To ensure that VET systems are responsive, employers and other stakeholders need to be closely engaged. However, SMEs - especially those in the informal sector- are hardly involved in the Thai VET system, which means that the provision of VET does not sufficiently consider their skills needs.

The complexity of the Thai VET system, along with the lack of effective stakeholder engagement at national, regional, sectoral, and local levels, contributes to its challenges. While efforts to strengthen the dual VET system are progressing and student enrolment in these programmes is increasing, there are concerns about the quality of work-based learning. Without robust quality frameworks, there is a risk that these programmes may not always provide students with the skills relevant to the labour market.

https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/cc20bf6d-en/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/cc20bf6d-en&csp_=8ef53868420f3c611ef3534da50a3f9c&itemIGO=oecd&itemContentType=book

UNESCO-UNEVOC (2015), World TVET Database Thailand:

https://unevoc.unesco.org/wtdb/worldtvtdatabase_tha_en.pdf

<https://www.vec.go.th/Englishpage/VisionandMission.aspx>