



Higher Education Thailand



Australian Government

Department of Education, Skills and Employment

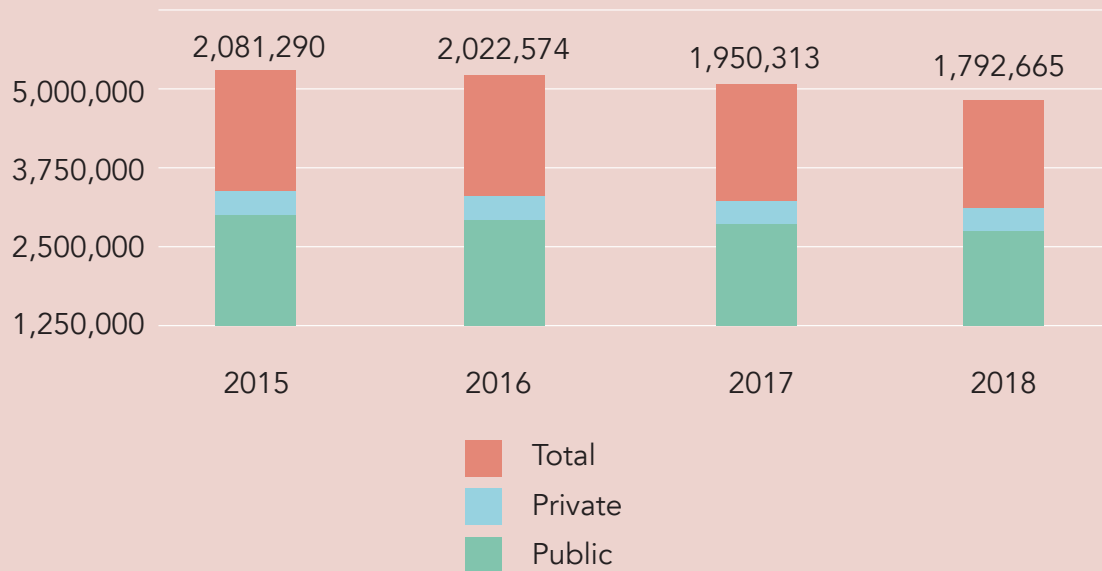
1. Overview

Thailand's higher education system has steadily evolved over the past four decades. Thailand currently has 156 higher education institutions (HEIs) which are divided into three categories: autonomous, public and private (explained in the next section). Currently, there are three levels of qualifications offered: lower than a bachelor-level degree, a bachelor-level degree, and a graduate-level degree.

In 2015, over two million students were enrolled in higher education but student enrolments have shown a steady downward trend since this time. One of the most debated issues among all HEIs is the declining youth population in Thailand which is leading to a lower number of students applying for Thailand's university entrance exam.



Number of students enrolled in HEIs



Another important change has been the creation of the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation (MHESI) in May 2019. This reflects the Thai Government's belief that research is at the heart of higher education, and research can make an impact when researchers work hand-in-hand with HEIs. Although major research organisations were previously under the Ministry of Science and Technology, this change has enabled the government to centralise its research budget within MHESI.

Following the establishment of MHESI, the administration and supervision of public HEIs were no longer under the Office of the Higher Education Commission, nor private HEIs under the Office of the Private Education Commission. Instead, both offices were merged under MHESI and now operate under the umbrella of Office of the Permanent Secretary.



2. Types of ownership

In Thailand, there are autonomous, public and private HEIs. Since 2003, public HEIs, which are financially and human resource ready, have been required by the Ministry of Education (which had policy responsibility of higher education at the time) to transfer to become autonomous HEIs. Despite less financial support from the government, autonomous HEIs exercise greater control over the management of their own affairs to enhance efficiency and accountability. As a result, autonomous HEIs also have to come up with strategic plans to sustain their institutions. Private HEIs operate in a similar way to autonomous HEIs but they do not receive funding from the Thai Government.

In addition, the Council of University Presidents of Thailand and the Association of Private Higher Education Institutions of Thailand are important peak bodies that influence the administration and policy of both public and private HEIs. The government is encouraging the rest of the public HEIs to become autonomous when they are ready.

2019 data from MHESI indicates that there are 27 autonomous HEIs, 57 public HEIs and 72 private HEIs.

No.	Type of Institution	Number	Standard QA	Gov. Regulations	Gov. Budget	Monitoring & Evaluation
1	Autonomous HEIs They continue to receive government funding but less than once they were public HEIs.	27	✓	—	✓	✓
2	Public HEIs - Public HEIs – limited admission (8) - Public HEIs – open admission (2) The two public open admission HEIs have a large number of student enrolments as the admission system is rather less competitive. They serve the function of providing higher education opportunity to a wider public of diverse age ranges and backgrounds. They have campuses across the country and they also offer distance learning. - Rajabhat Universities (38) Rajabhat Universities are regional HEIs which focus mainly on local community development and engagement. They were established as teacher colleges and became comprehensive HEIs in 2004. - Rajamangala University of Technology (RMUT) (9) RMUTs have a strong focus on technology and technical fields as they were established as polytechnic colleges before being granted university status in 2005.	57	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Private HEIs	72	✓	✓	—	✓
Total		156				

The public HEIs dominate overwhelmingly in all study areas due to the strong preference of Thai students to enrol in public HEIs. According to 2018 Thai Government data, around 82 per cent of enrolled students studied at public HEIs, while 18 per cent studied at private HEIs.

Type of Institution	Number of students	Percentage
Public* including autonomous HEIs	1,467,278	82
Private	325,387	18
Grand Total	1,792,665	100

3. Financing higher education

In 2019, Thailand's Parliament approved a budget allocation of 142,484.69 million THB to MHESI which was a 1.99 per cent increase (2,774.24 million THB) from the previous year. The budget increase was due to two reasons: firstly, the establishment of the new ministry required a larger budget to look after all agencies under its portfolio, and secondly, a portion of research and development (R&D) funds previously allocated to individual public and autonomous HEIs were redirected and absorbed into the MHESI budget. Private HEIs do not receive any R&D funding from the government.

The government budget is divided into four main categories which covers government agencies, public organisations, state enterprises, and a research fund.

Category	THB Million
1. Government Agencies <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Office of the Permanent Secretary- Research Institutes- Public and autonomous HEIs	123,243.7983
2. Public Organisations <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Research Institutes	4,651.7087
3. State Enterprises <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Thailand Institute of Scientific and Technological Research- National Science Museum	2,034.6190
4. Research Fund	12,554.5656
Total	142,484.6916

4. Admission system

Since 2018, Thailand has been using the Thai Central Admission System (TCAS) for admission into bachelor-level degrees, but some programs of public HEIs and some private HEIs also use their own admission system. The TCAS system comprises five different admission rounds, including:

1. Portfolio round (student record)
2. Quota round
3. Direct admission round
4. Central examination round; and
5. Individual admission by faculties for vacant seats.

The aim of TCAS is to encourage equity in education among students from different social classes as it includes arrangements to minimise the cost of travel expenses and examination fees for disadvantaged students.

In addition, students are not allowed to accept more than one offer at a time as it will hinder the chances of other students.

Due to the aging Thai population, all categories of HEIs struggle to fill vacant places so they are working to reduce programs with declining enrolments and offer more attractive courses which are reflective of future skill needs and government priorities such as the digital economy, AI and robotics, and medical engineering. In addition, most HEIs are also attempting to recruit larger numbers of international students to offset the declining number of Thai students. Chinese students are the largest international cohort in Thailand, followed by Myanmar and Cambodia.



5. Quality assurance

The Thai Qualifications Framework (TQF) for higher education was established to assist with the implementation of education guidelines set out in the *National Education Act of 1999*, ensure consistency in both standards and award titles, and make clear the equivalence of academic awards with those granted by higher education institutions from other parts of the world. The framework helps provide appropriate points of comparison in academic standards for all HEIs in their planning and internal quality assurance process, for evaluators involved in external reviews, and for employers in understanding the skills and capabilities of the graduates they may employ.

The TQF and its implementation guidelines have been in effect from 2009 for HEIs to develop or improve their programs of study and teaching, and to enhance the quality of education provision to ensure high-quality graduates. The TQF is also used by MHESI for the purpose of recognising higher education qualifications completed overseas.

The aim of forming MHESI and bringing together all Thai HEIs and related research institutes under the one umbrella is to better prepare human resources for the country's future development programs, while helping tech start-ups and small and medium enterprises to leverage the use of new technologies.





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North Bangkok (KMUTNB)

6. Higher education policy updates

6.1. Policies of the Minister of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation

On 31 July 2019, Dr Suwit Maesincee, Minister of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation, gave a policy speech to the management of the new ministry that summarised the key priorities of MHESI. The four main missions of MHESI are:

- 1. Develop 'smart citizens'** – to encourage lifelong learning policy and to establish a 'credit bank system' and a 'modular system'
- 2. Create and develop knowledge** – to lead to a 'value based economy'
- 3. Build innovation** – support Thailand in becoming an 'innovation nation'
- 4. Reinvent universities** – encouraging universities as agents of change and dividing universities into three groups: frontier knowledge universities (research-intensive universities), technology and industry-led universities, and area-based universities.

6.2. Central government policy: Thailand 4.0

Thailand 4.0 is the official development plan of the Thai Government. It is an economic model that aims to progress the country from several economic challenges resulting from past economic development models which placed emphasis on agriculture (Thailand 1.0), light industry (Thailand 2.0), and advanced industry (Thailand 3.0). These challenges have included a middle income trap, an inequality trap and an imbalanced trap where it has been difficult for workers to seek better job prospects, move between industries or increase their earning capacity.



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Under the “Thailand 4.0” model, the nation’s economy will be innovation-driven by upgrading technology, improving creativity, encouraging innovation, and enhancing research and development capacity. One of the focuses of the policy concerning education is to improve human resources. All government agencies, private sectors and universities are actively responsive to the model. Universities are working to align their research focuses to targeted industries of Thailand 4.0, which are the:

- **5 New S-Curve:** Biofuels and Biochemical; Digital Economy; Medical Hub; Automation and Robotics; and Aviation and Logistics
- **5 First S-Curve:** Agricultural and Biotechnology; Smart Electronics; Affluent Medical and Wellness Tourism; Next Generation Automotive; Food for the Future.

6.3. Areas of collaboration with international partners

MHESI is currently working with, or seeking to collaborate with, international partners on a number of education and research areas. MHESI’s five “hot topic” areas are:

1. Quality assurance and accreditation
2. Internationalisation at home
3. STEM education – advanced technology
4. Research capacity building especially in Thailand 4.0 priority areas
5. English language training.

7. Bilateral relations

7.1. Diplomatic

- Australia and Thailand have longstanding and deep relations.
- Formal diplomatic relations commenced in 1952.
- 2020 is the 68th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Australia and Thailand.

7.2. Education

- In April 2020, there were 14,071 Thai students in Australia, placing Thailand as the 11th largest source of international students for Australia.
- From 2014-2020, Thailand has hosted almost 2,000 Australian students under different models of the Australian Government's New Colombo Plan (NCP).
- In 2018 alone, Australia supported 432 students to study in Thailand under the NCP, more than double the number in 2017.
- According to 2018 data from Universities Australia, there are 180 formal MOUs existing between Thai and Australian HEIs.



Sources

Financing higher education

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Admission system

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