

**Higher Education for Thailand for the Next Decade –
Framework of the Second 15-Year Long Range Plan on Higher Education of Thailand
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Introduction

The goal of the Framework of the Second 15-Year Long Range Plan on Higher Education of Thailand, covering 2008-2021, is the Thai higher education system of high quality. Such system will lead to production and development of graduates of quality, capable of life long work and adjustment. Knowledge and innovations, basic and critical to the country's global competitiveness and supportive of sustainable development of every part of Thailand, will be major outcomes. The quality system will be achieved through mechanisms and measures of good governance, financing instrument, higher education standards and university networking. Foundation to this is the university academic freedom, diversity and unity of the system.

The Framework of the Long Range Plan has been prepared by the Office of the Commission on Higher Education under the supervision of the Commission on Higher Education, and the Knowledge Network Institute of Thailand under the Foundation for the Promotion of the Ministry of University Affairs. The Framework is carried out under the policy directive of the Minister of Education. Important to the Framework is participation of important higher education stakeholders through meetings and brain-storming sessions with government agencies on national planning, budget planning and education. Roundtable discussions were held with manufacturing and services sector representatives, civil society groups, youth and university student leaders, and various groups of universities including community colleges. Focus group interviews and panel discussions were carried out with opinion leaders, leading politicians at national, regional and provincial levels. Over one hundred such events have taken place. Important policy research works have been reviewed. New thematic research projects are undertaken.

The Framework represents an integrated and holistic approach leading to strategic directions of the Thai higher education system. It consists of two major parts. The first part covers future scenario and the global and local socio-economic environment impacting society as well as the Thai higher education system. Relevant implications are drawn. The Thai higher education system is dealt with in the second part. Seven scenarios are captured, namely, demography, energy and the environment, employment, violence and conflicts management, decentralization of Thailand, students and youth in the post modernization – post industrialization world, and sufficiency economy. On the Thai higher education system, nine issues are discussed, namely, articulation with secondary and vocational education, proliferation of higher education institutes, university governance and management, national competitiveness, financing higher education systems, staff and personnel development, universities networks, programs for southern Thailand, and learning infrastructure.

Framework of the Second 15-Year Long Range Plan

Demography In the next fifteen years the population of Thailand will be increasing, but at a slower rate owing to the successful family planning since the 1980s, with decreasing numbers of children and youth. The demographic dividend will decline with increasing aging population. The implication of declining birth rate and decreasing children is that the forever expansion of the Thai higher education system as past practice, at least for the 18-22 year age group, should slow and stop. With reduced expansion, universities should now focus on education quality, enhance its role in improvement of economic productivity of working population, and direct more efforts on continuing and life-long education in view of changing jobs and careers, and new and emerging occupations. Supports to the aging population to contribute towards economic and social productivity are to be taken.

Energy and the Environment are common concern and challenges to all mankind. Thailand is highly dependent on imported energy, this greatly impacts the country economy owing to rising energy and oil prices. Fossil energy utilization leads to the green house gases, threatening all forms of lives and mankind. Universities must, therefore, create awareness on conservation of energy, preservation of the environment and natural resources, at all education levels and among the public. Producing on graduates, knowledge and know-how on energy conservation and management, alternative energy and renewable energy, especially bioenergy, are future mission. Cooperation must be forged with the real sector to increase energy efficiency, and with the public on public understanding. Universities must intensify efforts to produce more manpower and knowledge on management of natural resources and the ecological system.

Future Employment will be determined by four important factors, namely, the changing **economic structure of Thailand, globalization, technological development and information-driven world**. On the Thai economy, it is evident that growth is registered in the industrial and services sectors, in terms of contribution to GDP and employment. Universities must strive to work with the real sector. Understanding is to be made on importance of various economic drivers, namely, small and medium enterprises- SME's, family-controlled business and transnational enterprises. Working with specific industry groups and area-based industry clusters must be made. Demand-led manpower production and productivity improvement is to be encouraged. To create knowledge industry and new services industry, universities must work in conjunction with national planning agencies and the real sector. In comparison to the industry and services sectors the contribution of the agriculture sector to the GDP is declining, 8.9% in 2006, but a significant population, nearly 40%, is still in this sector. In addition, ten of thousands of farmers leave the agricultural sector every year. Migration of farmers is difficult to reverse. Thailand must be robustly agriculture-based and improve life quality and productivity of farmers. Higher education should help prepare migrant farmers in appropriate skills and knowledge before entering the mainstream economy, as well as addressing productivity improvement of industrial and rain fed agriculture. Importance of the strong agriculture sector to the national, communal and family food security is to be recognized. Universities must play important roles on building manpower and capacity in agriculture and agriculture-based industry. Impacts will be strongly felt with globalization of or free trades in education services. Countries in the region are committed to building the ASEAN Community by 2015, whereby nearly half of the population are Muslim and use Bahasa. Thailand could position herself as a lead player in ASEAN higher education, learning from experiences of the European

Union, for example, in mutual recognition and standardization of education and mobility of students. The Asia Century will see prominence of China and India, that Thailand has to prepare for. Technological changes lead to productivity and innovation in manufacturing and services. Various agencies have developed master and strategic plans on science, technology, information and communication technology-ICT. Universities must be cognizant of and be active partners in these.

Decentralization of the country and development of local administrative bodies are new to Thailand and will greatly impact the future of the country. Local administrative bodies (Or-Bor-Tor) are legally empowered to undertake various tasks, hitherto in the domain of the central government. Supports of are needed for system design of administration and management, knowledge management as well as training of personnel. By virtue of the local administrative bodies act, local administrative bodies receive between 25-35% of the national budget and can levy local taxes. As a result, the current total annual earnings of the local administrative bodies amounts to about 3 billion baht and will increase. Working for and with local administrative bodies, and provincial Thailand, enhances one of the mission of universities on services to society, as well as being reasons of existence of certain types of universities. Incomes of universities from local administrative bodies will be important. In working in such environment, networks of universities, area-wise or topic-wise, are advantageous as demands of local administrative bodies needs need integrated approaches and are of multidisciplinary in nature. New challenges and threats to Thailand are **Peaceful Conflicts Resolution and Violence**. We see that outright militaristic wars ended with the Second World War and the proxy cold war stopped nearly three decades ago. Current twenty-first century battles are fought by civilians, devoid of identifiable enemies. Thailand cannot escape from global conflicts, directly and indirectly. Violence in southern Thailand erupted in 2004 after many centuries of accumulated internal drivers, from the perspective of history, culture, ethnicity, religions, low quality education, employment and opportunities, and economy. Violence is coupled with manifested brutalities, imported from conflicts from outside Thailand. The Government tackles the violent problems with decisive militaristic means, building up of understanding, confidence, and access to employment. Long term solutions will be achieved through improvement of education in southern Thailand. University education will be a deciding factor in the medium and long terms.

Future is built on children and youth. It is recognized that major stakeholders of the Long Term Long Range Plan are Thai children and youth, graduates of the future. Profound changes in family and living nature, studying and learning, and risks are indicative of changes and movement towards the Post Modern/Post Industrial world, driven by total commercialization as well as global connectivity by information technology. Graduates and workers of the future would have different work activities, requiring new capabilities, diverse and unfamiliar from their forefathers. Examples are communication skills, team working, problem solving, risk management, and just-in-time learning. Such attributes indicate inadequacies of classroom based education and delivery by monologue teaching. Socialization platforms need to be created within and outside universities. Learning approach must be duly given to building baseline competencies, transcending disciplinary subjects. Universities should reflect multifaceted and multicultural nature of a society. Richness and vibrancy of university education must be achieved through diversities, for example, experiences,

ethnicity, ages, disciplines, socio-economic background, and mobility of students and personnel. We may have to revisit the concept of “Liberal Arts Education” in the Post Modern/Post Industrial context. Work-based education, community-based education, internship/apprenticeship with the social and real sectors, co-operative education and engineering practice school approaches need further amplification. Lastly, experiences of Thailand since the 1997 economic collapse forces us to reflect on the fundamental approach to the country development since the advent of the modern development plan in the 1960s. Through His Majesty the King’s novel philosophy on “**Sufficiency Economy**”, understanding and appreciation of the country ethos has slowly accumulate. His Majesty the King has advised us to seek and practice the middle path, in our daily livelihood including self conduct. We have to address sufficiency economy at every level, be it ourselves, our family and our community. That also includes how a government should manage a country, its economy. We are counseled that the three underpinning principles of sufficiency economy are self-immunity, moderation and rationale. The first basis to this is knowledge, knowledge of mankind, knowledge in technical disciplines, and knowledge with prudence. The second basis is moral principles and honesty. The third basis is perseverance. One needs to be steadfast, diligent and mindful in one’s course of actions. It is through such words of wisdom that Thailand is shaping its self- sufficiency and sustainability in the dynamics of the changing world.

The Framework of the Long Range Plan takes an integrated and holistic approach to university system development. In addition to the aforementioned scenarios and external environment, the Framework embodies related factors and internal attributes of the Thai university education. The first issue is **Articulation of University System with Basic Education and Vocational Education**. What is of great concern is declining basic education quality, manifested in education achievement results, and in particular, Thai language competency being fundamental to all learning. Quality of school teachers is directly tied to quality of school outputs or students, and become low quality inputs into universities. Low quality university outputs would ensue. Those who become school teachers after graduation join the vicious circle of producing endlessly low quality students. The other great concern is declining quality of vocational education and output technicians, and decreasing number of vocational students. Fixing basic and vocational education, especially in science and mathematics, is the domain of respective agencies. But universities can contribute in at least three aspects. The first is focusing towards **improvement of teacher education in universities**, bearing in mind that good teachers are great multipliers in the system. Active recruitment for good students is a major first step. Universities need to review the adequacy of the current 5-year teacher training program. An alternative of a 4+x year approach must be considered, especially secondary school teachers and technician/industrial education teachers that may require sound knowledge in disciplines and intensive training in pedagogy as well as industrial attachment. The second issue is **basic and university education of the gifted and talented**, so that they would be catalytic in future economic and social development. Universities need to work closely with schools and provide special tracks of university programs for these students. **Flexibility in university education for practicing real sector workers**, normally holding vocational/technician qualifications must be the third point addressed. The current practice is that of requirement for full time study. It is a mindset of undergraduate study whereby students, paid by parents or student loans, do not have to work.

Required full time study for real sector workers would pull them away from their economic production, and in most cases force them to pursue study in non-technical soft science programs, not relevant to their vocation. Credit bank type of programs should be encouraged for university education for practicing real sector workers. Reform of **the Existing University Education System** is the next issue. The present state of universities exhibits many weaknesses such as proliferation of degree granting institutes, over 140 under supervision of the Commission on Higher Education in 2007, low education quality, limited staff and resources, and with declining school students. Numbers of instrument are to be used, important ones are **enforcement of education assessment and standard and resources allocation**. Division of work / labour through the **development of the Thai university system into subsystems**, this being university positioning based on its strength and aspiration, is a major goal to be achieved with the 15-year time frame. Four subsystems are to be developed. They are (i) community colleges, (ii) four-year universities and liberal arts colleges, (iii) specialized including science and technology universities and comprehensive universities, and (iv) research and graduate universities. Each subsystem would serve national priorities and strategies as well as addressing global, national, regional and local demands. These are global competitiveness and prime-movers, real sector workforces in manufacturing and service sectors, decentralization of governance, continuing and lifelong education, social and economic productivity improvement, and right down to equipping migrant farmers with requisite skills and knowledge. **Good Governance and Management** would fast-track development of the Thai university system. What must be done is strengthening governance of university councils and management of university in particular. Governance and management of renowned universities overseas should be explored and adopted. Full time university council secretariat should be set up. Finally, the Commission on Higher Education, currently being represented and functioning as a committee, should be refigured to fulfill its originally design as a commission.

On the basis of international competitiveness ranking, Thailand is below many countries in East Asia. Thai universities are ranked below renowned universities of the region and the world. Innovations of the country are not significant while science and technology infrastructures are not highly weak. In most countries with advanced economy, their universities are a key player in respective **national research systems** that are well developed. Excellence in university research is synonymous with national research excellence. In such systems, there exist strong national research policy body, numbers of research funding bodies, and good research management mechanism. Linkages between research agencies and different economic and social sectors are well established. Universities have traditionally been entrusted upon leading roles of being social guardians, conscience drivers, wealth creation through research, to name just few examples. In the age of globalization, the public expects **Universities as National Prime Movers for Competitiveness**, with strong research bases. Limited numbers of quality researchers and research funding necessitate focusing and judicious financing of research. Mechanisms such as **Research Assessment Exercise-RAE** should be explored and developed for assessing university research capability and potential, its standing among peers. Universities should push for the setting of the national research system, systemisation of research funding and funding agencies, and linkage mechanism between research

and various socio-economic sectors. Mechanism for demand-led research should be further encouraged.

Successful higher education reform in many countries are driven by good governance and well defined **University Financing** system. Public financing of Thai universities, even though inadequate and not well focused, produces mixed results, and with improvement it could be used as an effective policy instrument, especially on education quality and capacity strengthening. We need to design a scheme on higher education contribution by different stakeholders, such as the public, students and parents, beneficiaries of universities outputs (graduates, research and services). The university long range plan calls for **performance-based financing of universities** while the supply-side financing is still in place. Setting up of a **Contribution Scheme** with due regards universities beneficiaries and benefactors and a **University Development Fund** scheme. While an annual budget is used for normal operations, the development fund supports staff development and facilitates universities to answer national socio-economic requisites such as linkages with the real sector including productivity improvement and retraining of labour forces, development, management and commercialization of university intellectual properties. A **buffer organization** between the state and universities should be set up to engage universities on effective planning and operation such as university strategic planning, budget development/funding advice/allocation, and academic program review

Rapid economic development of past few decades led to proliferation of large numbers of higher education institutes including universities to produce required manpower. This has occurred with inadequate planning, lack of proper funding, cohesion and direction among public agencies concerned and linkages with the real sector employing graduates. Consolidation of the newly established Rajabhat Universities and Rajamangala Universities, totaling 49, with the original public and private universities in the Ministry of University Affairs in to the Commission on Higher Education dictates accelerated and well-defined direction of **University Staff Development** of these new and the original universities . Traditionally, academic development, in terms of obtaining graduate degrees and academic promotion through research, has been addressed. New dimensions must be brought into staff development, namely, mentoring in teaching, learning and university management, research capacity strengthening, appreciation of and experience in professions relating to respective academic disciplines, and socialization process. Life cycle from an early career path, a working age with varying degree of maturity, and senior years, covering 40-50 years of a working life need to be set up. The Long Range Plan calls for establishment of a staff development fund, a staff development scheme based on mentoring and real experience, for example, sabbatical and shadowing, and participation with various stakeholders such as the real sector and the community.

Thai universities exist in a realm of a great divide, for example, size, budget, maturity, quality of staff and students and reputation. Even though each individual university or discipline is excellent, without co-operation, synergy, and clear division of labour that would lead to building up specific expertise, serving the country of its complex and myriad needs would be difficult. One important strategy is to cultivate **Networking of Universities** of various dimension. Sharing and consolidation of academic programs and teaching activities to build up mutual trusts among staff, and investing in common infrastructures must be fostered. Reducing duplication in

programs, increasing efficiency and building up critical mass in research, with legal instrument in place, consolidation and federalization of universities should be explored in the medium to long term. Incentives for existing universities of forte and reputation to help strengthen new universities, and supporting mechanisms for university networks of various dimensions should be developed, for example, networks on learning, staff development, community services.

Complex socio-historical factors leading to existing violence in southern Thailand and recommendations to foster understanding and development have been outlined in the first part on future scenarios. In 2007, a national strategic education plan for southern Thailand was prepared. This is done in conjunction with the corresponding **Higher Education Plan for Southern Thailand**. The plan calls for 4-prong approach, namely, development of students and youth, development of university staff, capacity strengthening of institutes and building bridges with ASEAN. Winning of hearts and minds of all concerned, foundations to these are understanding, recognition and cultivation of values among Thais that **Thailand is a country of multi-faceted nature and multiculturalism**. Inward and outward mobility for students and youth should be promoted. Building up of and access to quality education at all levels would ensure good and meaningful employment in within and outside southern Thailand, and opportunities in ASEAN and the world Muslim community.

Learning Infrastructure for University Education is key to success, covering the content related infrastructures (humanwares, learnwares, etc.) and physical infrastructures. An essential learning infrastructure for successful outcomes of education is curriculum responsive to current social and economic demands and proactive towards world dynamism. Contributing factors on learning infrastructures are information-based society, knowledge-driven society, system underpinning life long education, and learning environment. Universities must educate students for life and prepare students for employment. Given that academic and technical disciplines relevant to professions are traditionally covered, the state should encourage **Liberal Arts Education**, with proper interpretations in the Post Modern World context. Universities can be differently approached this from the learning foundation angle, additional courses and activities, or eventual transformation of existing programs and universities into liberal arts programs and liberal arts-based universities. Post modern liberal arts education may call for, inter alia, music, information technology, brain-based learning, energy and environment, contemporary issues, etc. **Informatization of Thailand**, especially upcountry, through the national strategy on e-Society, e-Industry, e-Commerce, e-Education, and e-Government, could be realized with government procurement policy using universities as implementers. In so doing, universities could eventually better serve and empower local administrative bodies, as well as being drivers of information technology. **Using IT as an instrument for public understanding and consumers protection**, university profiles, academic programs review, results of education assessment and evaluation should be constantly updated and uploaded on university webs. Cost-effective investment, utilization of and research in information technology need to be addressed, by universities, the government and stakeholders, to support **massification of university education and life long learning**, overcoming access and digital divide problems. Building a knowledge-based country necessitates systematic knowledge management, including dissemination. Encouragement should be made to universities for **availing**

university courseware to the public. Apart from information technology infrastructure, substantial and judicious investment is required for learning spaces and libraries. Research on negative impacts and discordance of communication and information technology should be constantly conducted. **University Infrastructure Development Fund** has to be established. Lastly, life-long education, being rather new to Thailand, is basis of information-driven and knowledge-based society. Universities should establish “**University Education Life Long Learning Framework**”. Recognizing that the framework is multisectorial in nature, aimed at the diverse populace, the framework must be designed to ensure learners-centered development and life-long education of quality.

The Next Step

The Framework has been approved by the Commission of Higher Education in October 2007 for onward transmission to the Cabinet. Possibly in the first part of 2008, essence of the Framework will be incorporated in the 4-year official operation plan and, perhaps, will lead to revision of the Higher Education Plan of 10th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2007-2011). The Commission on Higher Education will prepare the Higher Education Plan with specific goals, measures and indicators leading to annual operational plans. Necessary legal and official instrument will be subsequently enacted. Of importance are university financing instrument, and tools to support smooth passage of the existing system into 4 groups of higher education institutes. Performance oriented and goal driven development funds need to be established, for example, competitive research, cooperation with the real sectors, engaging with local administrative agencies, and strengthening of the agricultural sector. Major public sector agencies responsible for national and university planning and operation need to work closely, they are the Office of National Economic and Social Development, the Education Council, the Budget Bureau, the Office for National Education and Standard Assessment, and public research funding agencies. Ingenuities are require to institute working and workable mechanism among universities, the Commission of Higher Education, the real sectors, local administrative bodies, the civil society part

At university level, regular dialogues have been conducted since early 2007 between universities, the Commission of Higher Education, and the Task Force on the framework preparation, on the emerging issues and direction of the framework, and eventually the salient features and ramification to universities. In this respect, universities have, in various degrees, been primed to develop their university long range plans, various roadmaps (manpower development, research, etc.). This could be done with university initiatives under guidance of respective university councils.

It is this dual approach, at national and university levels, of driving the university reform with instrument at the national level and movements at the university level that the Thai university system could be transformed for the betterment of the country.

Note Additional information can be found at www.knit.or.th