THAI HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM
: AN ADMINISTRATIVE OVERVIEW

Prof. Dr. Wichit Srisa-an
Permanent Secretary for University Affairs

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Professor Dr.Wichit Srisa-an

Introduction

The development of Thai higher education system during the past several decades have reflected a strong governmental commitment to and support for the higher learning community . Ever since the establishment of the first university some 70 years ago up to the present, with over 300 postsecondary institutions and more than one million students in the system, governmental roles have been prominent, facilitated by the Ministries of University Affairs, Education and other Ministries. (See Table 1)

Governmental involvement in higher education has also been a reflection of Thailand as a developing country that has gone through various stages of socio-economic change and growth. The setting up of the first university in 1916, for example, was meant to build a solid political and bureaucratic system in pursuance of the Western world. The following 1930 and 1940 post-revolution period also saw new universities emerge as a means of democratizing the country and a timely response to the growing public outcry for educational opportunities. It is unquestionable that the government has put a serious effort in guiding the development of higher education in order to ensure that institutions of higher learning are responsive to national priorities of the time. (See Table 2)

The 1950 decade saw a drastic move of the government to set up a centralized planning scheme as a means to accelerate growth and development of the country. For higher education, the National University Council was established in 1956, bringing under it all five existing universities. Later in 1958, the National University Council was replaced by the National Education Council with its responsibility expanded to cover the policy and planning of education at all levels including the control over university operation.

In addition to the reform of the national body on education, the first 5-year National Economic and Social Development Plan was conceived and promulgated in 1961, having universities as one of the key mechanisms in national development. As a result, the following 15 years with three consecutive plans had witnessed a great expansion of Thai universities including the establishment of three regional universities during 1964-1967, the setting up of National Institute for Development Administration in 1965, and the upgrading of a number of colleges and professional schools to the university status during 1971-75 period. Another important event was the proclamation of Private College Act in 1969 which allowed, for the first time, the private sector to have an active role in higher education provision.

Administrative reform was achieved in 1972 with the establishment of the Ministry of University Affairs. (MUA). It was the result of the 1972 proposal made by the Presidents's

Council of Thailand to achieve higher autonomy of universities through a reform of the coordinating body modeled after the University Grants Committee (UGC) of the British system. Under this new administrative structure, universities were still under the jurisdiction of MUA as a governmental agency but granted greater freedom through the special structure and delegation policy of MUA.

After the founding of MUA, growth and expansion of the system continued. Among the remarkable developments was the establishment of two open universities, Ramkhaeng in 1971 and Sukhothai Thammathirat in 1978. Consequently, the number of students enrolled in the system increased dramatically, from approximately 64,000 in 1971 to 160,000 and 640,000 in 1976 and 1986 respectively. (See Table 3)

Present role of MUA

MUA has confined itself to focus mainly on the tasks relating to all public and private degree-granting institutions, excluding those specialized colleges under the Ministry of Education and other government agencies. The general roles and responsibilities of the Ministry in relation to institutions under its auspices cover the following areas :

1. The formulation of policies and plans for higher education, in accord with each consecutive 5-year National Economic nd Social Development Plan developed by the National

Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) and the subsequent 5 year National Education Development Plan developed by the National Education Commission (NEC).

2. The development of standards and quality assurance mechanisms for higher education institutions

3. The development and continuing improvement of higher education administration

4. The allocation of resources for higher eduvation

5. Thd follow-up and evaluation of academic programs and projects in higher education institutions

6. The review of proposal for the establishment, expansion, merging or termination of higher education instition and its internal units.

7. The promotion of research undertakings at higher education level

All these functions are being performed by the Office of the Permanent Secretary of MUA which in turn has set up a committee structure with high representation from the higher education Community to supervise these various function.

1) **Planning, monitoring and evaluation**

To ensure that higher education development moves forward in harmony with the overall national economic and social growth, MUA renders close cooperation and active participation to the Office of the National Education Commission (NEC), the national educational policy and planning body, throughout the process of policy formulation of National Education Development

Plans. Subsequently, MUA, based upon the policy guidelines of each 5-year National Education Development Plan, draws up the subsequent 5-year National Higher Education Development Plan to provide development direction for both public and private institutions under its jurisdiction.

Besides involvement in policy and planning process at the national level, MUA in close collaboration with the Office of the National Education Commission takes charge of monitoring and evaluation of the National Higher Education Development Plans, the results of which serve not only as feedbacks for necessary modifications and adjustments of the current plan but also as inputs for the preparation of the next plan.

At the operational level, efforts of the Ministry are made to transmit national priorities to their institutions under its jurisdiction, and to ensure that the operation of the institutions correspond well with their functions in support of the national concerns. The main tasks of the Ministry in relation to planning, monitoring and evaluation of university operation fall into the following categories :

- Establishment of new public higher education institutions
- Setting up of new or reorganization of existing units within the institutions
- Monitoring of the implementation of the National Higher Education Plan

Each of the tasks is subject to revision by its specially assigned sub-committee which will scrutinize the matters in pursuance of the criteria and the guidelines provided by MUA. All the sub-committees are set up and coordinated by the Ministry. It should also be added that MUA officials are responsible for the conduct of a preliminary study and analysis. (See Figure 1-2)

2) **Financing**

All public universities/institutions are requested to submit their annual budget proposal to the Ministry which will review the relevance of the requests in accordance with the resolution of the cabinet, policies of the Ministry, National Education Plan, as well as order of priority and urgency. Once the preliminary review by MUA is made, the proposal will be forwarded to the Budget Bureau (Under the Office of Prime Minister). This Bureau, acting as the national coordinating body for budget allocation for all government agencies, will further review the proposal and present the overall fiscal budget to the House Budget Scrutinizing Committee for final scrutiny before getting official approval from the Parliament. (See Figure 3)

3) **Academic standards**

MUA has attached great importance to the maintaining of academic standard. It has thus set up standared criteria of curriculum for both undergraduate and graduate programs, serving as minimun requirements for all academic programs in higher education instituions under MUA.

Previously, MUA adopted an approval process in which various MUA-appointed committees specialized in different fields reviewed and granted approval to new and revised academic programs in higher education institution.

In 1992, however, MUA has delegated curriculum approval authority to each university council. Accordingly, the new quality assurance mechanism is introduced. As for the new system, once a university council has approved any new curriculum, the curriculum will be submitted to MUA for official approval without having to go through the committee review process. MUA, then, will forward the new curriculum information to the Office of the Civil Service Commission for salary specification for graduates of such program. MUA, as quality assurance unit, will then monitor and evaluate each approved program and grant accreditation status to those programs considered to have met quality criteria set forth jointly by MUA and the academic community. (See Figure 4)

4) <u>Personnel Management</u>

The personnel of public universities in Thailand, both academic and non-academic, all have the status of civil servant serving under the general personnel policies and regulations of the civil service system. However, for university personnel, the special commission, namely the University Personnel Commission (UPC), has been established to respond to special needs and interests concerning personnel matters of universities. Accordingly, MUA has been assigned to serve as the secretariat of

UPC. The work of UPC generally is to provide guidelines for personnel management in universities. The universities, however, have considerable authority in the matters of personnel planning, recruitment and promotion. MUA, as secretariat of UPC, on the other hand, maintains the responsibilities for monitoring and enhancing personnel management system to ensure that it corresponds with the manpower policy of the country. In addition, it facilitates training programs for newly recruited personnel along with other training programs on relevant issues for every level of staff. MUA through its sub-committee and committee concerned, also makes the final decision on granting and appointing of professorship in various disciplines of the institutions.

As for the monitoring and supervision of the operation of private higher education institutions, accreditation is the main activity that aims to insure and enhance the quality of higher education. MUA coordinates and encourages the institutions to have their own evaluation and development process. It also formulates standard criteria, serving as basic indicators of the quality of educational provision.

Hence, in case of the relationship of the government with private education institutions, the main thrust is academic standard, commencing from the approval of the establishment of a new instutution, provision of a new program of study, and accreditation of the program being offered. (See Figure 4)

Conclusion

The system of administration for Thai higher education are now moving towards a state-supervision model in which MUA's roles will become mostly facilitative. MUA, through its "delegation and deregulation policy, has made changes in regulations so as to provide universities with more control of their own internal affairs such as academic program approval process, personnel recruitment and promotion, income-generating activities, etc. The Ministry itself has just been granted an approval by the Cabinet to undergo a major structural reform to accommodate its changing role from "Control and Operation" to "Support and Coordination" in higher education affairs.

As evident in the establishments of new universities such a Suranaree University of Technolgy in 1990 and Walailak University 1992, new-born institutions of higher learning are now granted with a totally different administrative structure representing a new form of government-university relationship. For new institutions, the government, through MUA, will withdraw from the direct control over matters of budgeting, reallocation personnel administration, and academic standards, leaving the exercise of full control over these their operations with their respective university councils. The government, therefore, will limit its role to that of monitoring and supporting the academic endeavors of universities, keeping its main activities in areas of policy formulation, fiscal grants approval, quality assurance, monitoring, and information system. In addition,

several activities of MUA now underway are also aimed at facilitating further move to adjust the relationship between universities and the government, e.g. the introduction of accreditation and academic auditing system, the introduction of block-grant budgeting system, the enhancement of management information system at MUA level, etc.

Therefore, it can be said that during the past several decades, several steps and measures have been succeeded which rendered dramatic increase in university autonomy. Thailand now has moved away from the state-control model and set a steady pace toward the state-supervision model of higher education administration with a more effective scheme of planning, resourcing, and reporting of higher education. As it moves along this continuum, however, Thailand will also develop measures for "accountability" that are compatible with university operation and also responsive to the needs of the wider society.

Table 1 : Basic Statistics of Thai Higher Education System, 1990

Institution/Ministry	Number of institutions	Number of full-time lecturers	Number of students
1. Ministry of University Affairs			
1.1 Public universities	21	15,320	581,956
1.2 Private universities	11	2,723	73,897
1.3 Private colleges	18	681	9,815
2. Ministry of Education			
2.1 Teacher colleges	36	6,373	60,660
2.2 Colleges of physical education	17	555	5,010
2.3 Technical and vocational colleges	163	15,040	218,599
2.4 Performing arts and fine arts colleges	11	890	6,712
2.5 Rajamagala Institute of Technology	1	3,559	59,273
3. Other Ministries and agencies			
3.1 Nursing colleges (under Ministry of Public Health)	23	858	13,128

Institution/Ministry	Number of institutions	Number of full-time lecturers	Number of students
3.2 Military/Police Academy (under Ministry of Interior)	4	n.a	n.a
3.3 Buddhist colleges (under Sangha Supreme Council)	2	n.a	n.a
Total	306 (342 campuses)	45,999	1,029,030

Table 2 : Historical Development of Universities in Thailand

Period	Social context	University development
Modernization (1889-1931)	1. Economic threat from western countries 2. Acceleration of national development in socio-economic and political aspects 3. Development of bureaucracy requiring high-level manpower 4. Western influence on directions of social reform and development	1. Post secondary professional schools were set up, e.g. medical school (1889), teacher training school (1892), law school (1897), civil servants school (1902), etc. 2. In 1916, Chulalongkorn University was founded as the first university bringing together some existing professional schools. The first four faculties were Arts, Political Science, Engineering, and Medical Science, all under the jurisdiction the Department of Universities, Thammakarn Ministry (Ministry of Education).
Post- Revolution (1932-1949)	1. Change from absolute monarchy into constitutional monarchy	1. Thammasat University was established in 1934,as academic-market, open-admission university emphasizing social and political science education. Its status was equivalent to a state enterprise but was later

Period	Social context	University development
	2. Need to promote democratic awareness and to provide equal opportunities for the people leading to greater demand for educational opportunities. 3. Continuing expansion of the bureaucratic system requiring more specialized personnel in different fields.	changed to be under the Department of Universities, Thammakarn Ministry in 1956. 2. Three specialized universities were founded in 1934 under the jurisdiction of different ministries; University of Medical Science (Ministry of of Public Health), University of Agriculture (Ministry of Agriculture) and University of Fine Arts (Prime Minister's Office).
Development Planning (1950 - present)	1. Adoption of centralized system of development planning with the setting up of the National	1. National Education Committee was first formed in 1950. 2. National University Council was officially established in 1956. It was later abolished and its works transferred to the National Education Council,a newly set-up

Period	Social context	University development
	Economic and Social Development Council in 1961. 2. Intensification of economic development especially in the regions 3. Greater demand for educational opportunities in parallel with the growing socio-economic status of the country	body in 1958. 3. Three regional universities were founded during 1964-67 in Chiang Mai, Khon Kaen, and Songkla. 4. Graduate studies were expanded with the establishment of the National Institute for Development Administration in 1966. 5. Private Higher Education Act of 1969 was proclaimed resulting in great expansion of private colleges and universities. 6. Two open universities were set up to expand educational opportunities in 1971 and 1978. A number of professional schools were upgraded to a status of university. 7. The Ministry of University Affairs was conceived in 1972 to oversee higher education provision. 8. To date, there are 21 public and 11 private universities and the system is under the Seventh National Plan (1992-1996).

Table 3: Growth of Thai Universities from 1961-1991

Year	Number of institutions		Number of students		Number of lecturers[1]		Overall expenditure (Public Univ.Only) (million baht)
	public	private	public	private	public	private	
1961	5	-	42,181[2]	-	1,698	-	237.84
1966	9	-	35,688	-	3,185	-	623.49
1971	11	-	63,823	-	5,532	-	849.68
1976	13	-	161,363	-	9,648	-	1,833.28
1981	14	-	639,798	-	12,533	-	3,989.47
1986	16	7	675,480	42,122	14,052	1,490	5,299.85
1991	21	11	581,956	73,897[3]	15,320	2,723[3]	10,510.79

Figure 1 : Approval Procedure for the Establishment of New Public University

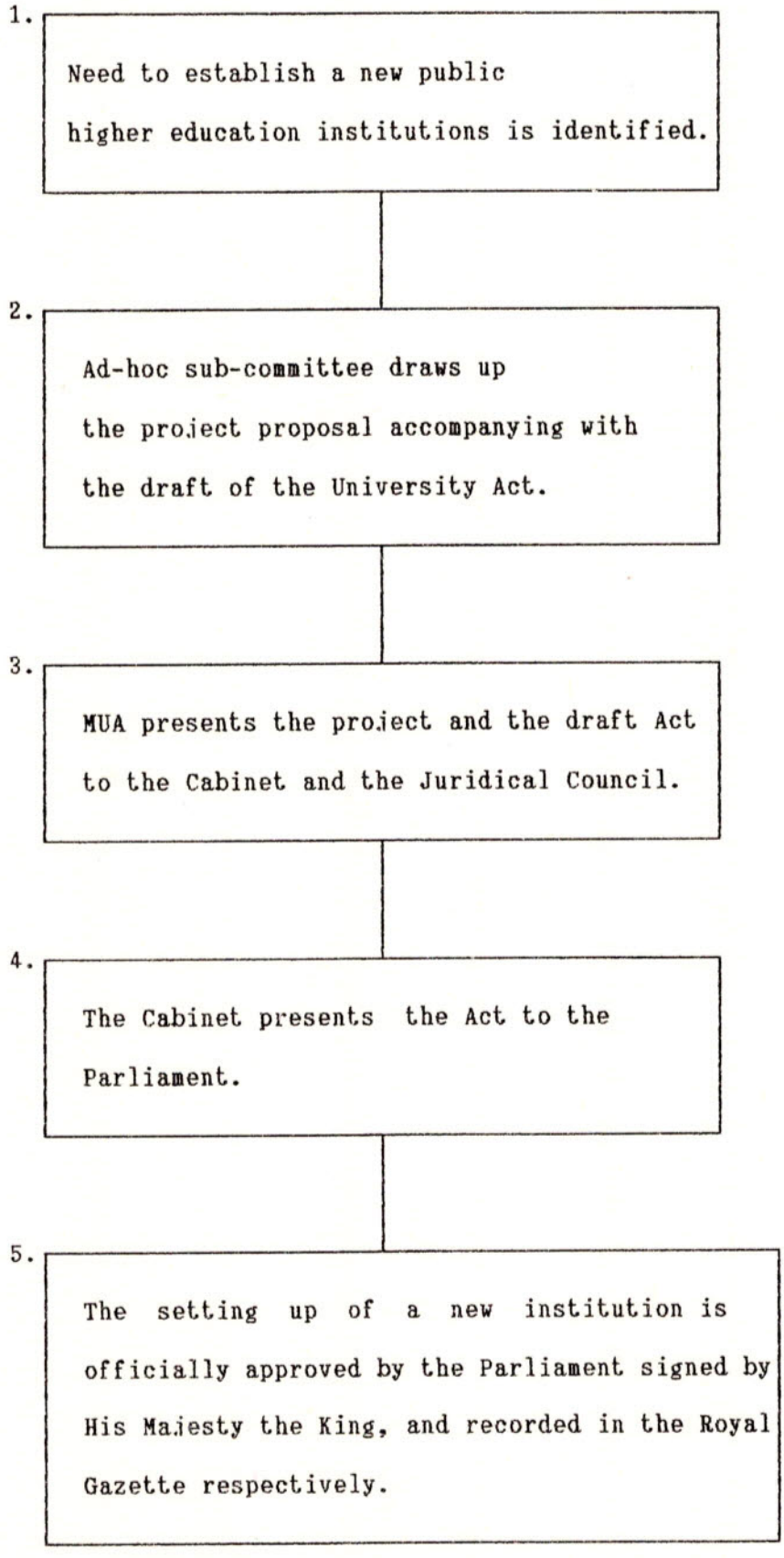


Figure 2: Planning, Monitoring, and Evalution of Existing Universities

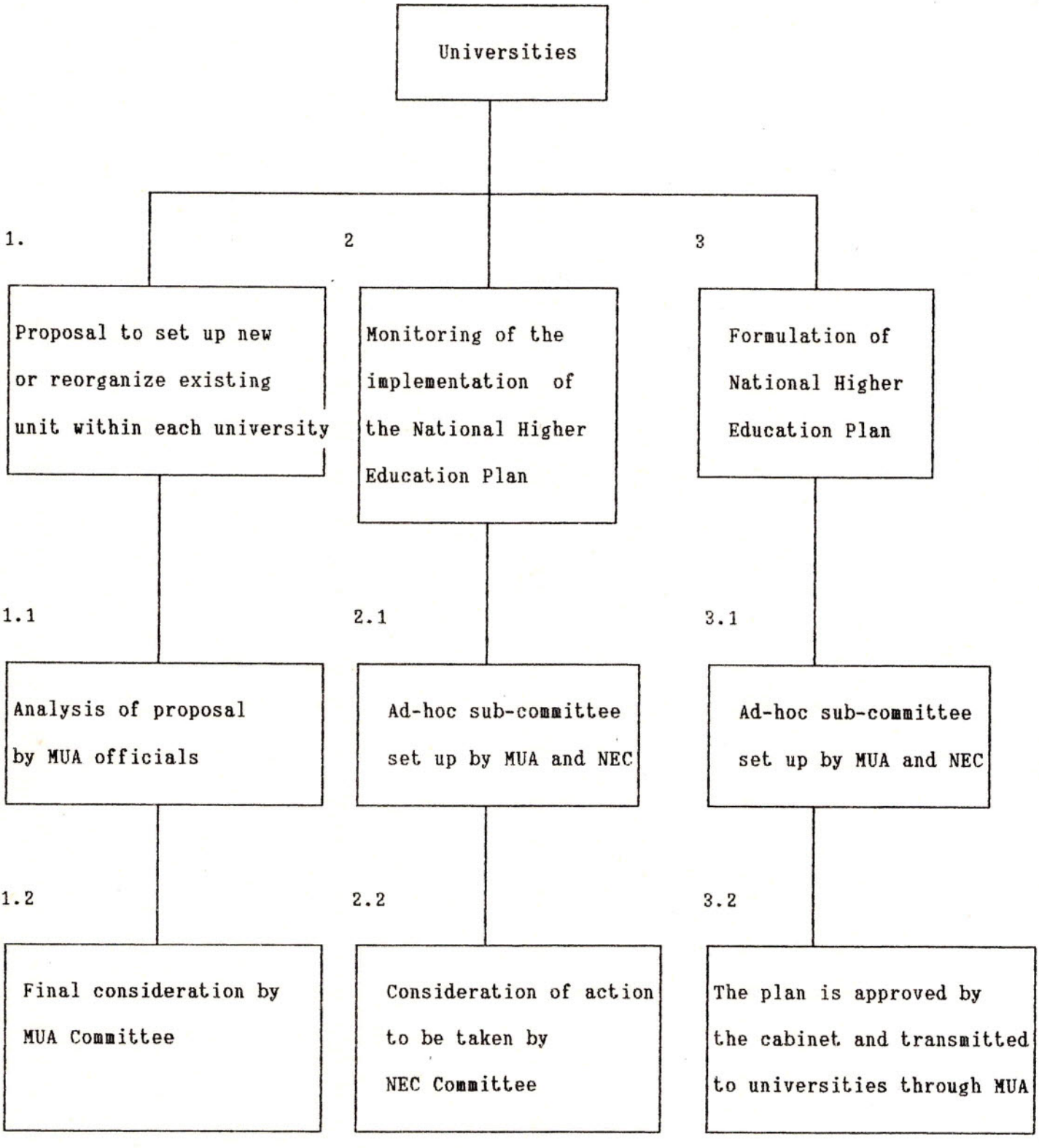


Figure 3 : Budget Approval Procedures for Public Universities

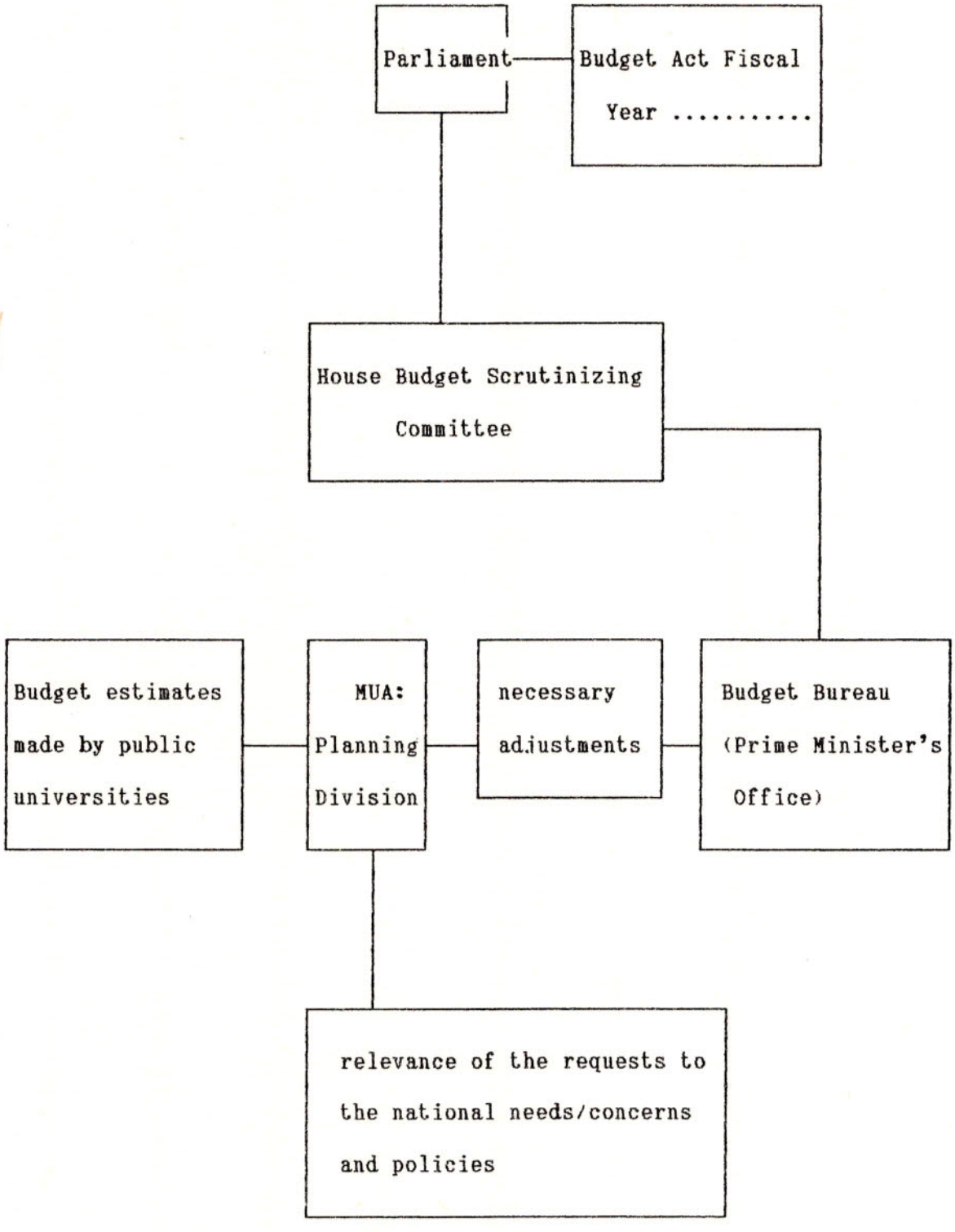


Figure 4 : Academic Program Approval Procedures for Public Universities

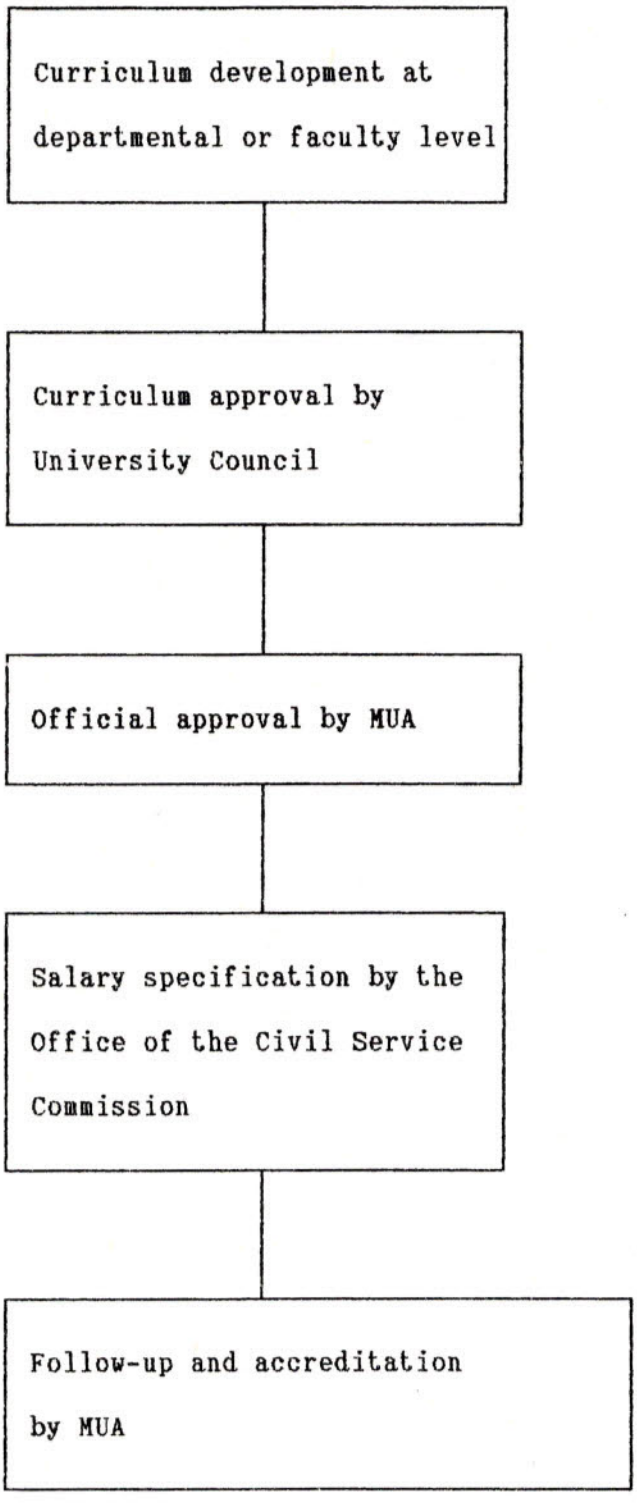
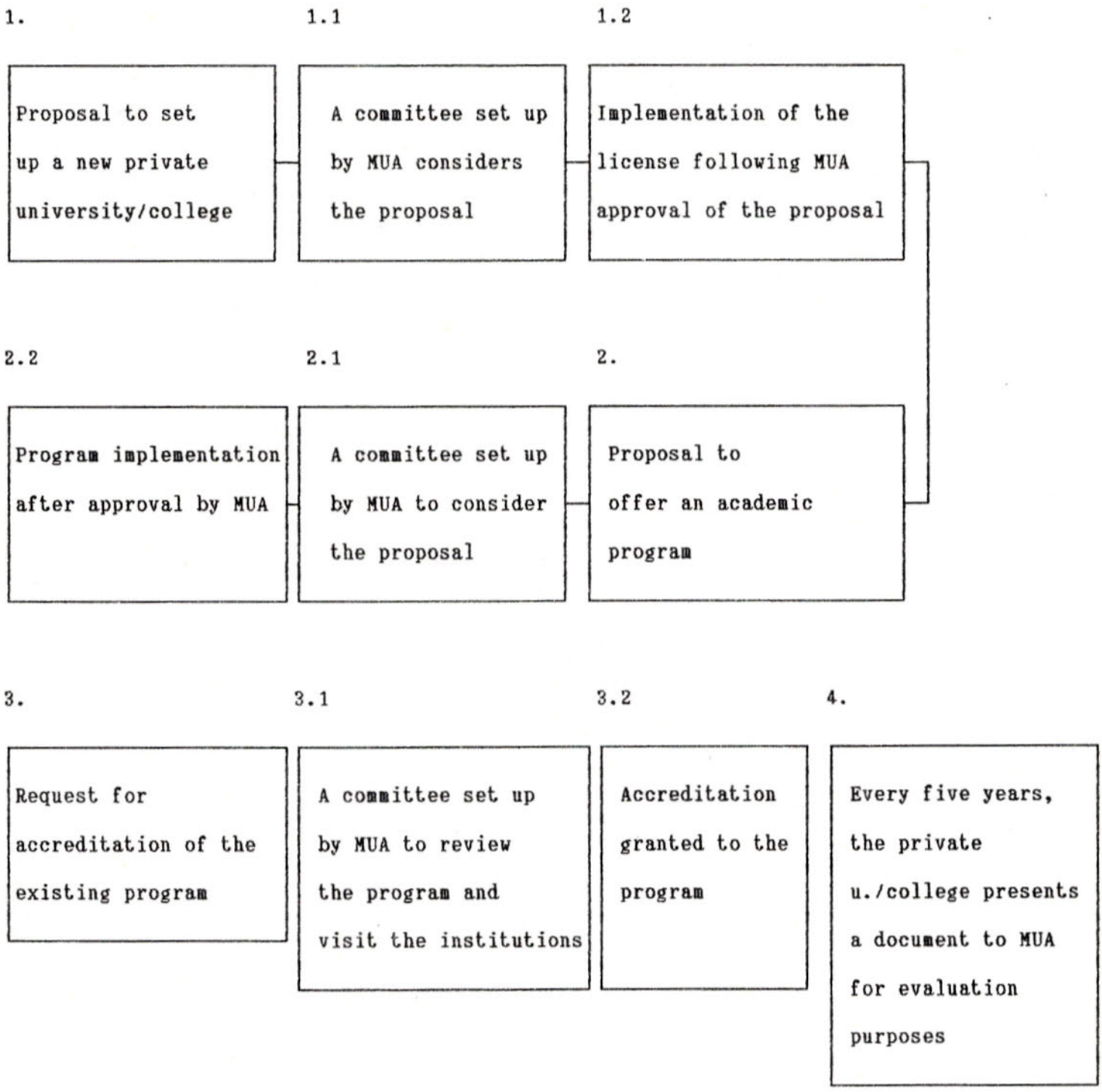


Figure 5 : Approval Procedures Associated with Private Institutions



LINKS BETWEEN AUSTRALIAN AND THAILAND INSTITUTIONS

	Name of Institution	Country	Student Exchange	Study Abroad Program	Staff Exchange	Academic/ Research Collaboration	Status of Agreement	Year of Agreement	Active
Curtin University of Technology	Assumption University	Thailand			Yes		Being negotiated	0	
Curtin University of Technology	Burapha University	Thailand	Yes		No	Yes	In place	1993	Yes
Curtin University of Technology	Chiang Mai University	Thailand	No		Yes	No	In place	1990	Yes
Curtin University of Technology	Chulalongkorn University	Thailand	Yes		Yes	Yes	Being negotiated	0	
Curtin University of Technology	King Mongkut's Institute of Technology	Thailand					Being negotiated	0	
Deakin University	Asian Institute of Technology	Thailand	No	No	Yes	Yes	Being negotiated		
Deakin University	Bangkok University	Thailand	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	In place	1992	Yes
Deakin University	Chiang Mai University	Thailand	No	No	Yes	Yes	In place	1993	No
Deakin University	Khon Kaen University	Thailand	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Being negotiated		Yes
Edith Cowan University	Chiang Mai University	Thailand	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	In place	1988	Yes
Griffith University	Chulalongkorn University	Thailand	Yes				In place	1989	Yes
Griffith University	Dhurakijpundit University	Thailand					Being negotiated	1992	
Griffith University	Ramkhamhaeng University	Thailand					Being negogiated		
James Cook University of North Queensland	Institute of Marine Science of Burapha University	Thailand	Yes		Yes	Yes	In place	1989	Yes
James Cook University of North Queensland	Mahidol University	Thailand	Yes		Yes	Yes	In place	1993	
La Trobe University	Chulalongkorn University	Thailand	Yes		Yes	Yes	In place	1991	Yes
La Trobe University	Faculty of Science Chiang Mai University	Thailand	Yes		Yes	Yes	In place	1987	Yes
La Trobe University	Mahidol University	Thailand	Yes		Yes	No	In place	1992	Yes
La Trobe University	Prince of Songkla University	Thailand	Yes		Yes	No	In place	1992	Yes
Macquarie University	Chiang Mai University	Thailand	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	In place	1992	No
Macquarie University	Srinakharinwirot University	Thailand	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	In place	1983	No
Monash University	Chiang Mai University	Thailand	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	In place	1990	Yes
Monash University	Chulalongkorn University	Thailand	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	In place	1990	Yes
Monash University	Prince of Songkla University	Thailand	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	In place	1992	Yes
Queensland University of Technology	Assumption University	Thailand	Yes		Yes	Yes	In place	1991	Yes
Queensland University of Technology	Chulalongkorn University	Thailand	Yes		Yes	Yes	In place	1991	Yes
Queensland University of Technology	Khon Kaen University	Thailand	No		Yes	Yes	Being negotiated		Yes
Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology	Asian Institute of Technology	Thailand	Yes		Yes	Yes	In place	1992	No
Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology	Chiang Mai University	Thailand	Yes		Yes	Yes	In place	1992	Yes
Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology	King Mongkut's Inst of Technology, North Bangkok	Thailand	Yes		Yes	Yes	In place	1992	No
Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology	Srinakharinwirot University	Thailand	Yes		Yes	Yes	In place	1992	Yes

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Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology	University of Thai Chamber of Commerce	Thailand	Yes		Yes	Yes	In place	1991	Yes
Swinburne University of Technology	University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce	Thailand	Yes		Yes	Yes	In place	1990	Yes
The Australian National University	Chiang Mai University	Thailand	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	In place	1991	Yes
The Australian National University	Prince of Songkla University	Thailand	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	In place	1993	Yes
The Australian National University	Silpakorn University	Thailand	Yes	No	No	No	In place	1978	Yes
The Australian National University	Thammasat University	Thailand	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	In place	1993	Yes
The University of Melbourne	Chulalongkorn University	Thailand	Yes		Yes	Yes	In place	1988	Yes
The University of Melbourne	Khon Kaen University	Thailand	Yes		Yes	Yes	In place	1991	Yes
The University of Melbourne	King Mongkut's Institute of Technology	Thailand	Yes		Yes	Yes	In place	1989	Yes
The University of Melbourne	Srinakharinwirot University	Thailand			Yes	Yes	In place	1991	Yes
The University of New England- Armidale	Kasetsat University	Thailand	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Being negotiated		No
The University of New England- Armidale	Payap University	Thailand	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Being negotiated		No
The University of New England- Northern Rivers	Chiang Mai University	Thailand	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	In place	1991	No
The University of New South Wales	Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok	Thailand	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	In place	1991	Yes
The University of New South Wales	King Mongkut's Institute of Technology, North Bangkok	Thailand	No	No	Yes	Yes	In place	1990	Yes
The University of New South Wales	Thammasat University, Bangkok	Thailand	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Being negotiated	1993	Yes
The University of New South Wales	Wittayalai Mahanokorn University, Bangkok	Thailand	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	In place	1990	Yes
The University of Newcastle	Suandusit Teachers College	Thailand	Yes		Yes	Yes	In place	1988	
The University of Queensland	Chiang Mai University	Thailand	Yes		Yes	Yes	In place	1980	Yes
The University of Queensland	Kasetsart University	Thailand	Yes		No	Yes	In place	1993	Yes
The University of Queensland	Khon Kaen University	Thailand	Yes		Yes	Yes	In place	1981	Yes
The University of Queensland	Mahidol University	Thailand	Yes		Yes	Yes	In place	1984	Yes
The University of Queensland	Prince of Songkla University	Thailand	Yes		Yes	Yes	In place	1993	Yes
The University of Queensland	Srinakharinwirot University	Thailand	Yes		Yes	Yes	In place	1983	
The University of Sydney	Chiang Mai University	Thailand				Yes	In place	1990	
The University of Sydney	Chulalongkorn Univesity	Thailand				Yes	In place	1990	
The University of Sydney	Khon Kaen University	Thailand			Yes	Yes	In place	1992	Yes
The University of Sydney	Mahidol University	Thailand			Yes	Yes	In place	1992	Yes
The University of Sydney	Silpakorn University	Thailand					In place	1990	
The University of Sydney	Srinakharinwirot University	Thailand					In place	1989	

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	Name of Institution	Country	Student Exchange	Study Abroad Program	Staff Exchange	Academic/ Research Collaboration	Status of Agreement	Year of Agreement	Active
The University of Western Australia	Prince of Songkla University	Thailand	No	No	Yes	Yes	In place	1982	Yes
University of Canberra	Thammasat University	Thailand	Yes		Yes	Yes	In place	1992	
University of South Australia	Chiangmai University	Thailand	Yes		Yes	Yes	Being negotiated		
University of Tasmania	Silpakorn University	Thailand	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	In place	1993	Yes
University of Technology, Sydney	Chiang Mai University	Thailand	Yes		Yes	Yes	In place	1991	
University of Technology, Sydney	King Mongkut's Institute of Technology, North Bangkok	Thailand	Yes		Yes	Yes	In place	1992	Yes
University of Technology, Sydney	King Mongkut's Institute of Technology, Thonburi	Thailand	Yes		Yes	Yes	In place	1991	Yes
University of Technology, Sydney	Mahidol University, Bangkok	Thailand	Yes		Yes	Yes	In place	1991	Yes
University of Technology, Sydney	Pranakorn Teachers' College	Thailand	Yes		Yes	Yes	In place	1991	Yes
University of Western Sydney	Chiang Mai University	Thailand	Yes		Yes	Yes	In place	1991	Yes
University of Wollongong	Assumption University	Thailand	No		Yes	Yes	In place	1990	Yes
University of Wollongong	Chiang Mai University	Thailand	Yes		No	No	In place	1991	Yes
University of Wollongong	Chulalongkorn University	Thailand	Yes		Yes	Yes	In place	1990	Yes
Victoria University of Technology	Burapha University Department of PE & Rec	Thailand	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	In place	1991	Yes
Victoria University of Technology	Chiang Mai University Faculty of Business	Thailand	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	In place	1989	Yes
Victoria University of Technology	King Mongkut's Institute of Technology, Faculty of Engineering	Thailand	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	In place	1988	Yes
Victoria University of Technology	Srinakharinwirot University, Department of PE & Rec	Thailand	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	In place	1989	Yes