



THAI EDUCATION IN BRIEF

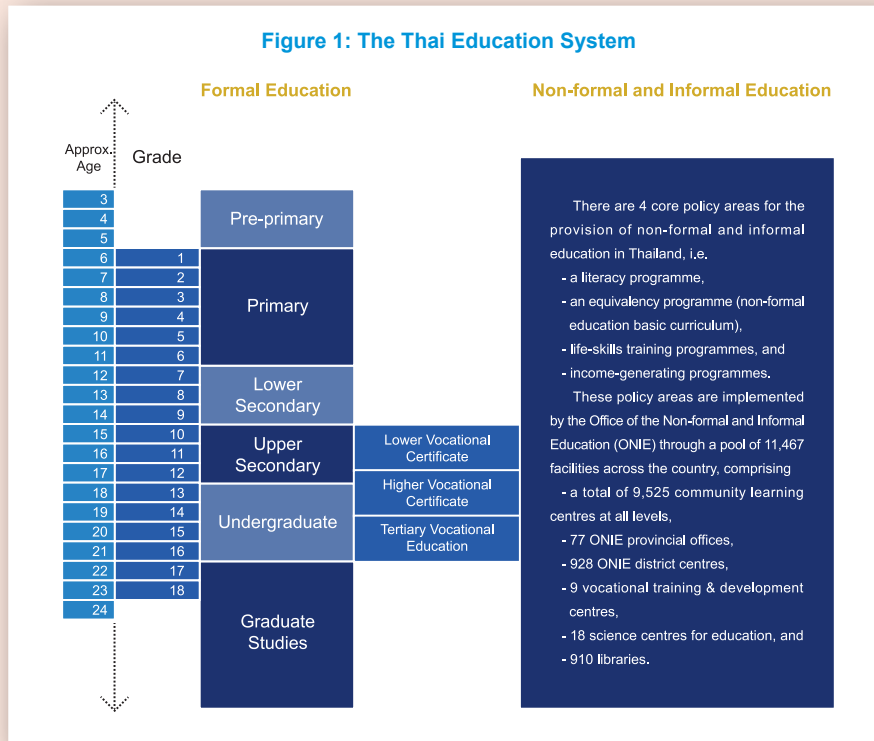
Education as a Spearhead to Break through
the Middle-Income Trap

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OVERVIEW

The Education System

As stipulated in the 1999 National Education Act, the Ministry of Education (MOE) is the main agency responsible for promoting and overseeing the provision of education at all levels, including basic and higher education, and of all types, including formal, non-formal and informal education. Formal education is divided into two levels: basic and higher education. Basic education in Thailand refers to six years of primary education (G1-G6), three years of lower secondary (G7-G9) and three years of upper secondary education (G10-G12).



The mentioned act provides that compulsory education shall be extended from six to nine years, covering six years of primary education and three years of lower secondary education (G1-G9). Those having completed the compulsory education are eligible to choose between two parallel tracks: general or academic education, and vocational education.

The 1999 National Education Act also specifies that not less than twelve years of education shall be provided free of charge. In addition, an initiative to provide 3 years pre-primary up to the completion of upper secondary education free of charge was initiated in 2009. Therefore, the Thai education system has provided 15-year free basic education ever since.

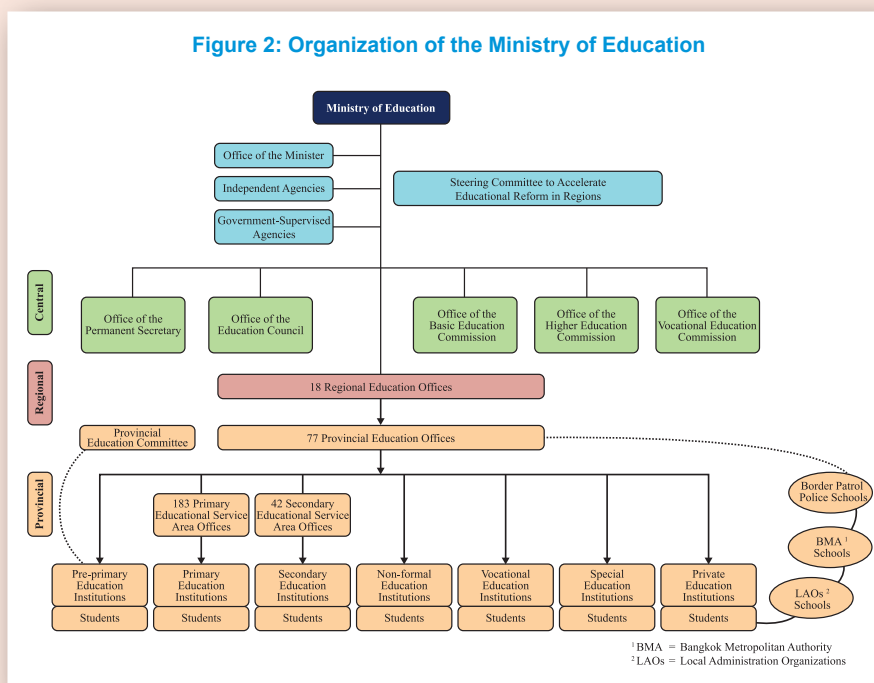
Vocational education is provided in three tiers: upper secondary level, leading to lower vocational certificates; post-secondary level, leading to higher vocational certificates; and tertiary vocational education, leading to bachelor's degrees.

Higher education is provided at a diploma or associate degree level, and degree levels, ranging from bachelor's degrees to doctoral degrees.

MOE's Organizational Structure

The educational administration and management system at the central level is operated by 5 main bodies:

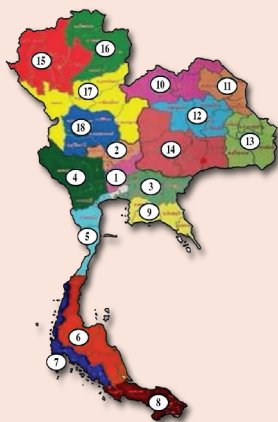
- 1) The Office of the Permanent Secretary is responsible for coordinating administrative and budgetary affairs within the Ministry, setting forth the Ministry's policy, guidelines and work plans, as well as supervising the provision of non-formal, informal and private education;
- 2) The Office of the Education Council is responsible for formulating policies, plans and standards of national education, mobilizing educational resources, evaluating educational provision, conducting research and developing educational laws;
- 3) The Office of the Basic Education Commission oversees the provision of general education from pre-primary to upper secondary levels to ensure that all school-aged children have access to basic education;
- 4) The Office of the Vocational Education Commission administers the provision of technical and vocational education, from upper secondary level to post-secondary education, whereby the nation's labour market demands are incorporated into the matrix; and
- 5) The Office of the Higher Education Commission oversees the standards and quality of higher education, provided by public and private tertiary educational institutions.



At present, there are 4 government-supervised agencies, comprising the Teachers' Council of Thailand, the Office of the Welfare Promotion Commission for Teachers and Educational Personnel, the Institute for the Promotion of Teaching Science and Technology, and the National Scout Organization of Thailand; as well as 3 public organizations, i.e. the International Institute for Trade and Development, Mahidol Withthayanuson School, and the National Institute of Educational Testing Service. These agencies were established to supervise specific tasks mandated by the Ministry.

The educational administration and management system in regions, provinces, and educational service areas consists of 18 Regional Education Offices, 77 Provincial Education Offices, 183 Primary Educational Service Area Offices and 42 Secondary Educational Service Area Offices nationwide.

Figure 3: Locations of 18 Regional Education Offices



As shown in this figure, a total of 18 regional education offices have been established to administer educational provision in 18 provincial clusters, each of which is composed of 4-6 provinces. The regional education offices are responsible for promoting and implementing educational strategies at national, provincial cluster, and ministerial levels. They also formulate and implement regional education strategies by working closely with the Ministry and provincial education offices to ensure the provision of equal access to basic education at the regional level.

In this light, 77 provincial education offices are responsible for coordinating with public agencies involved in providing basic education, including primary educational service area offices and secondary educational service area offices in each specific province, and schools under the supervision of other agencies, e.g. the Bangkok Administration Authority, Local Administration Organizations, and Border Patrol Police Schools. These provincial education offices are also supporting their implementation to ensure equal access to basic education at the provincial level.

Similarly, 183 Primary Educational Service Area Offices and 42 Secondary Educational Service Area Offices work closely with approximately 30,000 educational institutions nationwide to provide equitable access to basic education in all educational service areas.

MOE'S STRATEGIES

The 20-year national strategy puts great emphasis on 6 areas of focus, i.e. security, competitiveness enhancement, human resource development, social equality, green growth, and rebalancing public sector development. The Ministry of Education has set forth policies and strategies and also implemented projects along the same line as follows:

1) Enhancement of peace and security: In a bid to enhance security and peace, the Ministry accords particular importance to promoting morality, ethics and governance in schools, providing special support to provision of education in 5 Southernmost provinces, ensuring equal educational opportunities to Thai and non-Thai Citizens, including stateless children and children of migrants and ethnic minorities, etc.

2) Enhancement of national competitiveness: The Ministry has initiated and implemented numerous projects to enhance Thailand's competitiveness. These initiatives include the hosting of English boot camps for teachers of English language in basic education institutions, the promotion of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education in basic education institutions, and the promotion of best practices and excellence in vocational education and training institutions as well as the promotion of work-integrated learning (WIL) in higher education institutions, etc.

3) Development of human resources: As for the development of human resources, a special emphasis has been accorded to the nurturing of our learners in such a way they become all-rounded citizens. A great number of projects have been implemented to boost learners' thinking skills, ethics, life skills, and hygiene or the so-called 4 Hs: head, heart, hand and health, enhance learning skills, e.g. literacy, numeracy and reasoning ability, encourage teachers of English language to develop their English communicative skills in line with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), etc.

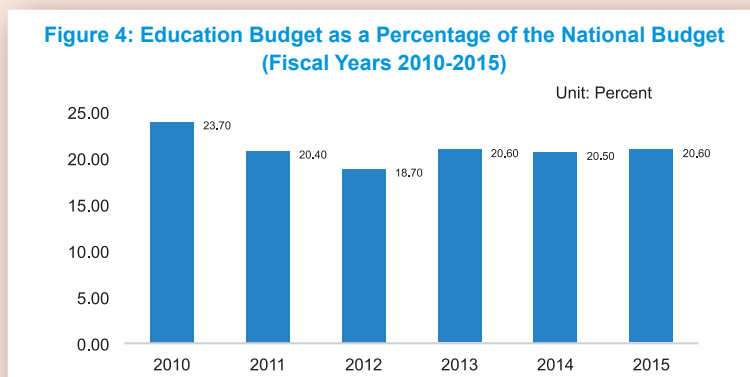
4) Provision of equal educational opportunities to reduce educational disparity: Equal educational opportunities have been provided for all, including the provision of non-formal basic education to out-of-school population segments, the quality improvement of schools in need of immediate assistance, the provision of special education for disadvantaged children and children with disabilities, especially those living in remote areas, etc.

5) Promotion of environmental-friendly projects to improve the quality of life: Various projects have been implemented to promote environmental awareness and recognition, including the school garbage management project. These projects aim to promote the participation on the part of surrounding communities and network agencies, etc.

6) Improvement of educational administration and management system: To improve the country's educational administration and management system, reforms have been implemented in the Ministry's administration and management system at the central and regional levels. Relevant laws and regulations have also been amended to reflect changing structures and responsibilities and also to allow educational institutions greater autonomy, etc.

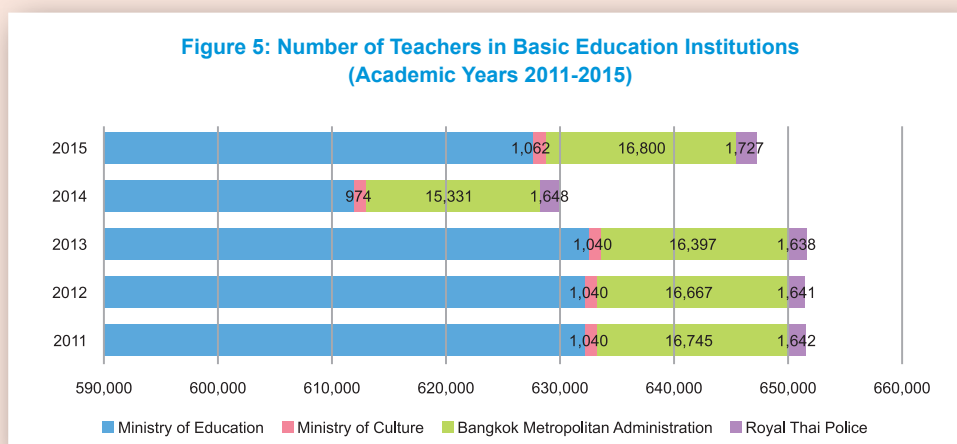
EDUCATIONAL STATISTICS

Thailand attaches great importance to education. As shown below, a sizable proportion of the national budget was allocated consecutively during the 2010-2015 fiscal years.



Source: Bureau of the Budget

The Office of the Basic Education Commission under the Ministry of Education supervises over 30,000 basic education institutions. According to the statistics presented in Figure 5, most of the teachers in basic education institutions are under its supervision while the rest are under other agencies.



Source: Thailand Education Statistics Reports (2011-2015), Office of the Education Council

On the whole, the number of students in basic education institutions has been decreasing over the years as a result of the current decreasing birth rate.

Table 1: Enrolment Ratio in Basic Education Institutions (Academic Years 2011-2015)

Academic Years	Population Aged 3-17	Number of Students	Percentage of Students Per Population
2011	12,981,183	12,514,491	96.4
2012	12,801,534	12,322,197	96.2
2013	12,607,577	12,151,467	96.4
2014	12,436,848	11,925,070	95.9
2015	12,469,766	11,874,205	95.2

Source: Thailand Education Statistics Reports (2011-2015), Office of the Education Council

In response to the labour market demand and the national development policy, the Thai Government and the Ministry of Education continuously attempt to enhance the quality of vocational education and training as well as increase the number of students in vocational tracks. The proportion of students in vocational track to those in general track remains around 40:60 for numerous years. Nevertheless, continuous effort will be set forth to raise their proportion to 50:50. The number of pupils studying in vocational track in formal and non-formal education system is shown in the table below.

Table 2: Number of Students in the Vocational Track, Classified by Level of Education (Academic Years 2011-2015)

Levels of Education	Academic Years				
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Certificates	739,526	727,097	699,029	667,944	654,476
Diplomas	350,269	308,116	301,566	299,547	331,713
Higher Diplomas	1,674	425	1,266	1,266	3,703
Total	1,091,469	1,035,638	1,001,861	968,757	989,892

Source: Thailand Education Statistics Reports (2011-2015), Office of the Education Council

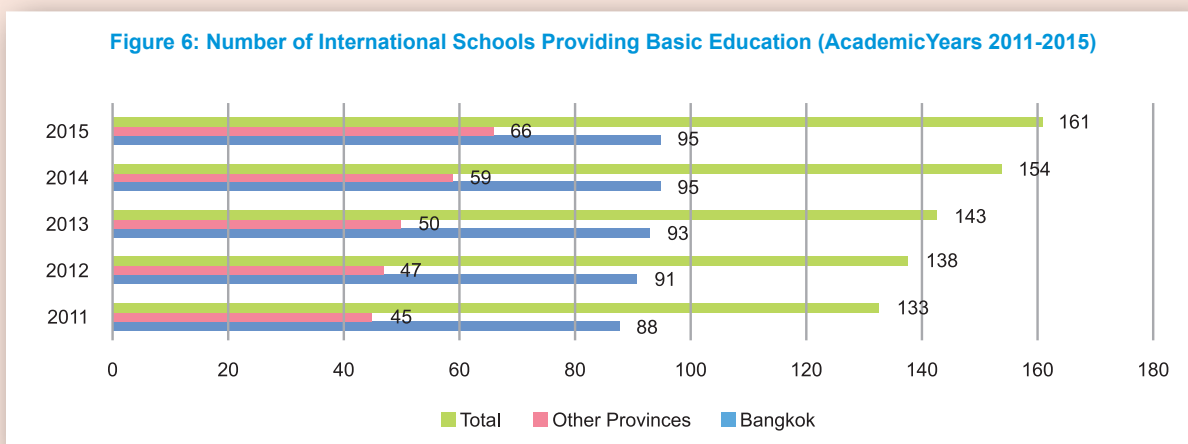
The Office of the Higher Education Commission under the Ministry of Education oversees 157 public and private tertiary educational institutions, comprising 82 public universities, and 75 private universities. As presented in the table below, the majority of students are studying at the bachelor's degree level.

Table 3: Student Enrolment in Higher Education Institutions (Academic Years 2011-2015)

Levels of Education	Academic Years				
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Diplomas	351,682	323,380	316,288	312,770	344,377
Bachelor's degrees	1,825,066	1,845,253	1,881,816	1,843,477	1,851,653
Graduate Diplomas	13,434	5,409	5,399	3,829	7,788
Master's degrees	183,858	193,638	200,304	188,327	179,245
Higher Graduate Diplomas	1,245	1,227	1,442	1,523	1,438
Doctoral degrees	18,190	21,636	25,394	24,487	24,742
Total	2,393,475	2,390,543	2,430,643	2,374,413	2,409,243

Source: Thailand Education Statistics Reports (2011-2015), Office of the Education Council

The number of international schools providing basic education has consistently exhibited an upward trend indicating the remarkable level of popularity enjoyed by these schools across the country.



Source: Office of the Private Education Commission

Throughout the 2009-2013 academic years, the number of foreign students in Thai higher education institutions is relatively consistent. The majority of these students are studying at the bachelor's degree level.

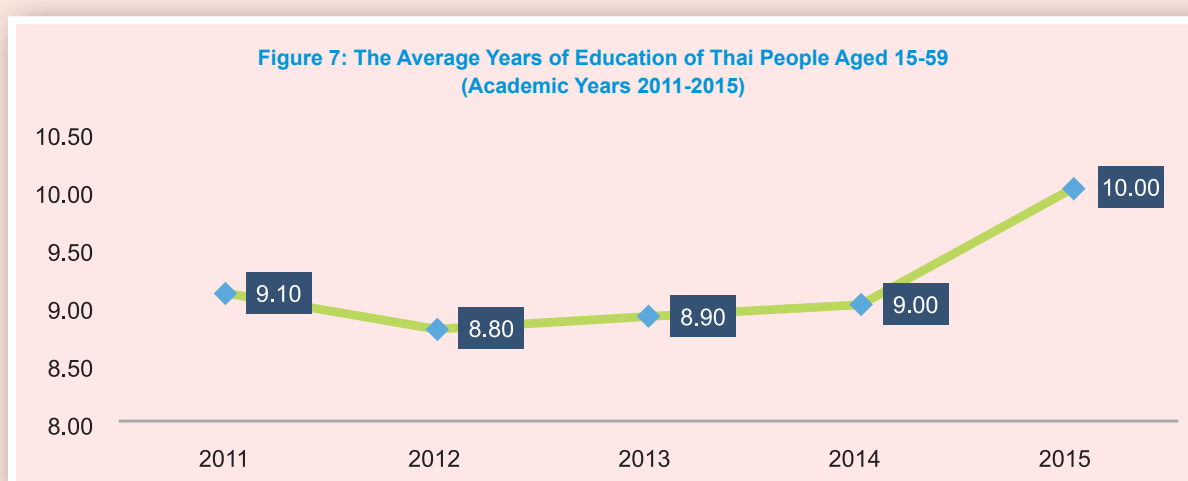
Table 4: Number of Foreign Students in Higher Education Institutions by Levels of Study (Academic Years 2009-2013)

Levels of Study	Academic Years				
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Certificates	2,613	2,078	1,722	1,488	1,218
Bachelor's degrees	12,465	13,138	13,397	10,384	11,785
Master's degrees	3,141	3,371	4,031	3,830	4,327
Doctoral degrees	459	656	667	721	985
Graduate diplomas	192	56	12	196	99
Others	182	352	480	380	400
Total	19,052	20,115	20,309	16,999	18,814

Source: Office of the Higher Education Commission

MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS

Increasing Educational Attainment



Source: Educational Research and Development Bureau, Office of the Education Council

15-Year Free Basic Education:

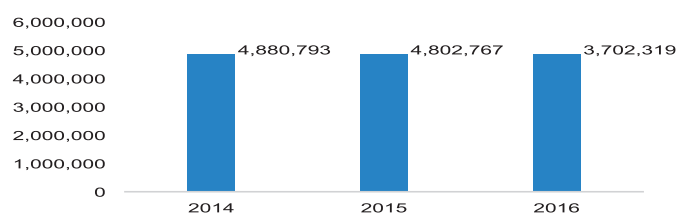
The Ministry of Education has implemented the 15-year free basic education programme since 2009. This initiative helps provide the tuition fees, uniforms, textbooks, learning materials, and extra-curricular activities free of charge, for pre-primary, primary and secondary pupils in public schools.

In the 2017 academic year, the government allocated a total budget of 39,234,150,800 baht (approximately 1,174 billion US Dollars) to provide 15-year free basic education to approximately 7 million students taken care of by the Office of the Basic Education Commission.

Provision of Education for the Benefit of Disadvantaged Children

The National Policy on Educational Provision for Disadvantaged Children (2005) ensures that this policy applies equally to Thai and non-Thai Citizens, including stateless children and children of migrants and ethnic minorities who lack relevant registration documents for citizenship verification.

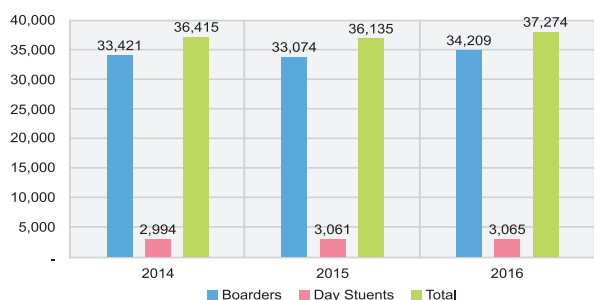
Figure 8: Number of Disadvantaged Students in Inclusive Schools (Academic Years 2014-2016)



Source: Office of the Basic Education Commission

As exhibited in this figure, the majority of disadvantaged children are studying in inclusive schools.

Figure 9: Number of Disadvantaged Students in Welfare Schools (Academic Years 2014-2016)



Source: Special Education Bureau, Office of the Basic Education Commission

Almost 40,000 disadvantaged children, including orphans, are currently studying in welfare schools, which are founded to take care of disadvantaged children. These schools are mostly equipped with boarding facilities.

Looking ahead

Taking a more positive stance towards an aging population challenge

According to a case study conducted by Pramote Prasartkul, the Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University, Thailand first became an “aged” society in 2005 with over 7 percent of its population aged over 65. This phenomenon is to be expected for Thailand, whereby birth and mortality rates have been decreasing and elderly population has been increasing consistently over the past decades.

POPULATION AGING IN THAILAND	Year	Classification	Age Group	% of Population
	2005	an “aged” society	over 65	7%
	2021	a “complete aged” society	over 65	14%
	2031	a “super aged” society	over 65	20%

Source: Population Aging and Health: A Case Study of Thailand, Pramote Prasartkul, Keynote lecture presented at the RGJ-PhD Congress XIV, 5th April 2013, Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University Publication No. 416.

As this phenomenon is inevitable, we should take a more positive stance towards it, and act upon its implications with regard to education. With a decreasing total number of young students, the teacher/student ratio may well be adjusted to a more proportionately class size on average, culminating in the class being more manageable for teachers. As such, relevant agencies should work closely and collectively to raise student achievements as class sizes drop.

The fact that certain segments of a country’s population reach advanced age groups does not necessarily mean that its skills pool will readily disappear overnight. Elderly people have a wealth of experience and talent to be shared and utilized for the common good. As a matter of fact, encouraging the elderly to work can be a pivotal part of the perceived solution to the aging-related financial and social challenges. As for the role of education, the non-formal education sector can help equip the elderly with essential skills, ranging from basic healthcare to computer literacy.

Education as a Spearhead to Break through the Middle-Income Trap

While Thailand has consistently enjoyed a series of commendable achievements in terms, there is still room for improvement, especially in enhancing cognitive skills, which enable individuals to learn, solve problems, and create new bodies of knowledge. These skills are essential in learning mathematics and science. A study by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) affirms that education can promote growth effectively only if it enhances cognitive skills. The ADB has predicted that “if Thailand could increase its scores in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) to meet the benchmarks of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), it would lead to a 60-per-cent increase in GDP per capita between 2015 and 2045.”

Thailand became an upper middle income economy in 2011. The current government has set forth the ‘Thailand 4.0 Initiative’ in order to overcome the middle-income trap. Education is key to the transition to high-income levels. The Ministry of Education and relevant agencies will continue to improve the quality of education to turn this envisaged transition into reality.

