

# MEASURING THE INTERNATIONALISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THAILAND

## *Milestones, methods, models and mapping*

Countries embarking upon major changes in policy frequently adopt a stance best characterised as *creative mimeticism* whereby they glance either backwards into their own pasts, outwards to their peers overseas or in both directions for prior exemplars, contemporary models and philosophical inspiration to help mould their immediate and future indigenous directions. Thus did Britain emulate the Bismarckian state-subsidised social welfare system used in Germany in the pre-WWI years; the authors of the Chinese Constitution of 1912 imported and adapted the French presidential system while the legal system of Siam and Thailand reflects an eclectic series of influences from Indian, French, Japanese, English and Sharia law.

The end product generally consists of a diverse ensemble in which external sources are suitably modified to accommodate local needs, and a distinctive national identity or version then ensues.

A similar attitude currently informs the evaluation of internationalisation at Thai universities. The Thai Ministry of Education's Office of the Higher Education Commission ('OHEC') – the official body that presides over universities and holds responsibility for implementing the National Higher Education Development Plan – has via its Bureau for International Co-operation Strategy recently acknowledged the usefulness of studying and applying various aspects of the experience of university internationalisation gained within the European Union ('EU').

OHEC's receptiveness to the creative adaptation to the Thai context of insights thus gained is summarised in the Executive Summary of the Report on Higher Education Internationalisation Strategy issued by the Thailand-EU Cooperation Facility - Phase II ('TEC II') Policy Dialogue Support Component (an initiative launched in March 2011 designed to expedite capacity building in Thai universities within the context of ASEAN integration):

"Thailand is open to examining perspectives and learning from a variety of sources in the design and implementation of international higher education policy. This is particularly salient to the context of recent stakeholder consultations feeding into the on-going formulation of a strategy on developing regional and international cooperation in higher education. ¶ Reflection on the

learning derived from the establishment of the European Higher Education Area has been deemed a suitable comparison for ASEAN integration 2015 (AC 2015) and the movement towards alignment of higher education structures in the region.”<sup>1</sup>

## **BEST PRACTICE**

Interest in Thailand in deriving lessons from the European experience has crystallised around the concept of best practice: “a method or technique that has consistently shown results superior to those achieved with other means, and that is used as a benchmark”.<sup>2</sup>

The Executive Summary refers to this concept in the context of the dynamic and continuously evolving nature of university internationalisation: “The bar for best practice in international higher education is being set higher as it demands the universities continually keep pace with new knowledge, innovation and development in the sector, and also in the national, regional and international contexts they occupy.”

This conceptualisation implicitly defines internationalisation in higher education as a *process* with *standards* which are – by implication – susceptible to *measurement* within a *multi-layered context*, thus identifying fundamental aspects of current interests and concerns and the kernel of what is now regarded as best practice. It also implicitly confirms a fundamental and significant characteristic of internationalisation: it is continuously evolving, of indefinite duration and iterative (as opposed to being finite or an end in itself) – a depiction with major implications as to how its effectiveness can best be assessed.

It is not coincidental that the definition reproduced above in the Executive Summary represents the cumulative outcome of a long-term (and continuing) process of liaison, consultation and deliberation between OHEC’s Bureau for International Co-operation Strategy and other local and regional bodies, such as the ASEAN University Network and the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO) Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development (RIHED), the purpose of which has been to effect a workable and comprehensive definition of best practice in the formulation of regional university co-operation strategies. Analogies drawn between the EU and ASEAN may not always result in strict empirical correlation, but they are nonetheless sufficiently strong and suggestive to make the European experience a helpful guide for Thailand as closer ASEAN integration draws nigh.

## POLICY

The constituent elements of best practice referred to above have contributed substantively to the creation of a coherent and action-oriented university internationalisation policy in Thailand. The essential backdrop against which this policy has been designed, refined and applied has been the onset of the ASEAN Community scheduled for 2015 and a concomitant long-nurtured and often referred to desire for Thailand to be a leading regional higher education hub.

A strong emphasis on Thailand's potential and desired positioning in the latter regard forms the bedrock of the Second 15-Year Long Range Plan on Higher Education in Thailand issued in 2008 by the *quondam* Commission on Higher Education and designed to cover the period 2008-2022.<sup>3</sup> It also originally provided the express rationale for the establishment of OHEC's Bureau of International Cooperation Strategy, whose brief is to develop Thailand into a "regional education hub in Southeast Asia" pinned to the putative achievement of specific performance targets in one important area of internationalisation – the recruitment of students from other territories (the Bureau is tasked with increasing Thailand's annual intake of international students from 20,000 to 100,000 over the period covered by the Plan).

The principal motivator for Thailand's interest in examining, drawing analogies with and looking for helpful lessons from the EU in the internationalisation of higher education has been the establishment of the European Higher Education Area ('EHEA').<sup>4</sup> The EHEA was inaugurated in March 2010 and represented the realisation of various principles agreed to by 29 European ministers of education in the Bologna Declaration of June 1999.<sup>5</sup> This Declaration proposed a common European framework of educational qualifications which would be recognised and upheld by all subscribing countries, thus enabling students and graduates from any of the latter to transfer across borders (with suitable certificates issued in one country automatically accepted as entrance requirements for the next appropriate level in another).

This seamless gradation has been achieved within the EHEA by focusing on *learning outcomes* and on *comparable quality control criteria*: guiding principles which have generated enhanced intra-regional collaboration among European universities, quality control agencies and trans-national networks. The EHEA's focus on *measurables* (to use the aesthetically discomfiting but admittedly convenient neologism which has established itself in associated policy debates) and on *process* in integrating higher educational provision among its constituent members - together with the practical co-operation measures adopted to facilitate greater regional harmony among the bodies concerned - explain its interest today among those charged with providing Thai universities with the tools required to quantify their progress towards internationalisation against the background of their country's own regional integration within ASEAN.

Specific practical instances of initiatives inspired by studies of the EHEA model launched in Thailand / ASEAN have included the development of the Thai Qualifications Framework ('TQF') for Higher Education<sup>6</sup>, comparative studies on lessons to be derived from the Bologna process (such as the research seminar held by Chulalongkorn University's Centre for European Studies on 11<sup>th</sup> February 2014 on Lessons to be Learnt from the Bologna Process of EU Education Integration towards ASEAN Education Integration in 2015<sup>7</sup>) and ASEAN student mobility programmes<sup>8</sup>.

## **ACTION**

To give practical effect to the conceptualisation set out in the Executive Summary referred to above and its accompanying desiderata, a seminar was recently conducted at and co-ordinated by Thammasat University. The focus of this seminar's programme – "Measuring Internationalisation of Thai Higher Education" – directly reflects the current emphasis on quantification.

Among the key documents circulated to prospective participants was a comprehensive Work Plan compiled by the EU's Senior Expert, Darren McDermott<sup>9</sup>, which is subtitled "Measurement of University Internationalisation Performance and Relative Improvement". The report contained in this document represents the fruits of a study designed to provide Thai universities with monitoring and evaluation systems enabling them to determine the extent of their progress in internationalising themselves and to identify obstacles impeding the latter. In other words, the pertinent issues are no longer *whether* or *how* internationalisation should take place but rather *how far* internationalisation has been achieved, how progress can most effectively be *measured* and how best to locate and deal with *hindrances* to the process.

The new emphasis on measurables (or quantifiable indices of performance) is itself the result of recent efforts made by OHEC's Bureau of International Cooperation Strategy to use *benchmarking* when appraising progress made towards internationalisation by Thai universities. Benchmarking as a strategy generally adopts quantifiable metrics when assessing practice, thus implicitly facilitating and encouraging the use of efficacy measurables.

A recent example of the latter's use in Thailand (from a non-EU provenance) was a survey of 52 Thai universities (16 public/autonomous, 18 private, 13 Rajabhat and 5 Rajamangala universities) conducted by OHEC's Bureau of International Cooperation Strategy at the beginning of 2014 designed to assess the extent of the respondents' internationalisation.

Data were analysed using a modified version of a questionnaire (the “Comprehensive Internationalization [sic] Model”) compiled by the American Council for Education’s Centre for Internationalisation and Global Engagement<sup>10</sup>, which addressed six areas related to internationalisation at each university concerned for perusal and analysis:

- (i) Articulated institutional commitment: Mission statements, strategic plans, and formal assessment mechanisms;
- (ii) Administrative structure and staffing: Reporting structures and staff and office configurations;
- (iii) Curriculum, co-curriculum, and learning outcomes: General education and language requirements, co-curricular activities and programmes, and specified student learning outcomes;
- (iv) Faculty policies and practices: Hiring guidelines, tenure and promotion policies, and faculty development opportunities;
- (v) Student mobility: Study abroad programmes, international recruitment and support;
- (vi) Collaboration and partnerships: Joint-degree or double/dual programmes, branch campuses and other off-shore programmes.<sup>11</sup>

This exercise led to the holding of an Education Internationalisation Forum (EdIF) co-hosted by OHEC, the US Embassy Bangkok and the Thailand-United States Educational Foundation (TUSEF/Fulbright Thailand) on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2014 at the Amari Watergate Hotel, Bangkok.

Even in the brief period since this relatively recent event was held, a number of other models have been mooted for possible adoption and adaptation in Thailand; among the most prominent are approaches developed within the EHEA which seek to complement the rigour of metric quantification with a wider, qualitatively informed contextual attitude towards university internationalisation (thus permitting universities concerned to engage in non-quantitative activities such as *critical reflection* on conclusions drawn with a view to encouraging the pursuit of best practice). Darren McDermott’s document refers to two of the latter in particular:

- (i) The Indicators for Mapping and Profiling Internationalisation (IMPI) developed by a German consultancy called CHE Consult.<sup>12</sup> These are helpful, and their online introductory tutorial is especially useful, but these indicators may need some revision for deployment in a Thai and ASEAN context (indicator 02-010, for example, enquires about the proportion of all university staff members in one unit “... with a command of at least one foreign language at level C1 or C2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages” – nomenclature that may not necessarily be familiar to university staff in Thailand);
- (ii) The Mapping of Internationalisation Tool (MINT) developed by NUFFIC (the Dutch organisation responsible for promoting international education co-operation).<sup>13</sup> MINT consists of a digital self-evaluation form that generates a convenient and user-friendly outline of various activities and objectives related to internationalisation. Feedback is collated annually and – in the interests of best practice – incorporated where appropriate into future versions, which are thus subject to continuous improvement.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The fact that both of the foregoing systems focus on self-evaluation places an important onus on Thai (and other) institutions that elect to use them to ensure that the data that ensue from their use are compiled accurately and reflectively and that areas they highlight are addressed appropriately as soon as they are identified (rather than awaiting an external body’s recommendation).

McDermott favours Action Research as the methodological basis for measuring internationalisation performance at Thai universities.<sup>14</sup> Action Research has a number of characteristics that recommend it as the basis for the adoption of a self-evaluation system (or combination of systems) by such institutions when measuring their progress towards internationalisation. It accommodates itself easily to *cyclical* application, to *reflective practice*, to *participant ownership* and to *action outcomes*, all of which are highly desirable principles likely to be conducive to the adoption of critical self-appraisal, attention to identified areas of insufficiency or default and the associated formulation of internal systems designed for continuous improvement on the basis of best practice.

He undertakes to propose a “grounded theory model for measuring performance and progress of internationalisation initiatives” following further consultation with stakeholders. In the

meantime, there is nothing to prevent individual Thai universities from conducting their own internationalisation self-appraisals based on as many of the principles suggested by the range of German, Dutch and other sources referred to above.

A cursory glance at the range of areas considered by the Education Internationalisation Forum hosted on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2014 referred to above will demonstrate that internationalisation is a facet that affects almost the entire gamut of a university's operations (including its academic, administrative, marketing and other forms of provision).

Checklists Thai universities may wish to consider using in this regard could include the following ingredients:

- An analysis (or the compilation) of a specific university vision statement on internationalisation;
- An analysis of how the agreed university internationalisation vision statement / policy becomes visible in learning outcomes, in the delivery of teaching and learning, in staffing, in the provision of services, in the composition of the student body;
- An analysis (with recommendations then made subsequently to the university if appropriate) of how the agreed university internationalisation vision statement / policy is set forth, communicated, made explicit and shared among staff members, students and other stakeholders and how the latter are consulted during formation or revision of the statement / policy;
- An assessment of the empirical evidence to support conclusions reached in the foregoing;
- An analysis of (or the recommended inclusion of) verifiable objectives and benchmarks in the agreed university internationalisation vision statement / policy, the latter's periodic evaluation as a basis for improvement and the determination of appropriate supporting empirical evidence;
- An analysis of (or the recommended inclusion of) verifiable ways in which the agreed university internationalisation vision statement / policy is properly transferred into the intended learning outcomes of university's academic programmes;
- An indication (or suggestion) as to how the intended international and intercultural learning outcomes are achieved by university graduates;
- An indication (or suggestion) as to how the university's curriculum, educational practice and student assessment systems are consistent with the agreed university

internationalisation vision statement / policy and the intended international & intercultural learning outcomes;

- An analysis of the opportunities the university provides for students to study abroad;
- An analysis of the university's participation in international networks and organisations & in national, regional or local networks supporting internationalisation;
- An analysis of the organisational structures the university deploys to support internationalisation;
- An analysis of (with recommendations if appropriate) of how the university's staff composition and engagement procedures are consistent with the agreed university internationalisation vision statement / policy and the intended international & intercultural learning outcomes;
- An analysis of (with recommendations if appropriate) of whether the university's staff's international experience, intercultural competences and language skills are consistent with the achievement of its agreed university internationalisation vision statement / policy and the intended international & intercultural learning outcomes;
- An analysis of (with recommendations if appropriate) what proportion of the university's staff are international, how many / what proportion of them follow English language training / belong to at least one international academic or professional association;
- An analysis of (with recommendations if appropriate) the extent to which English / foreign language skills of staff members are taken into consideration for promotion and tenure;
- An analysis of (with recommendations if appropriate) university strategies to develop staff participation in internationalisation activities;
- An analysis of (with recommendations if appropriate) what proportion of university staff attends at least one academic international conference or seminar per year;
- An analysis of (with recommendations if appropriate) the extent to which university services provided to national and international students (e.g. information provision, counselling, guidance, accommodation, library etc.) are consistent with the agreed university internationalisation vision statement / policy and the intended international & intercultural learning outcomes;

- An analysis of (with recommendations if appropriate) the extent to which university services provided to staff are consistent with the agreed university internationalisation vision statement / policy and the intended international & intercultural learning outcomes;
- An analysis of (with recommendations if appropriate) what proportion of university courses is taught in English / a non-Thai language;
- An analysis of (with recommendations if appropriate) multi-denominational religious facilities / places of worship at the university;
- An analysis of (with recommendations if appropriate) the extent to which the university provides a mentoring or 'buddy' system for international student support;
- An analysis of (with recommendations if appropriate) the extent to which the university provides international students with comprehensive pre-arrival information (covering such topics as visa procedures, cost of living, tuition fees, accommodation options, institutional services, sports and cultural facilities etc);
- An analysis of (with recommendations if appropriate) the extent to which the composition and engagement of the university's student body is consistent with its agreed internationalisation vision statement / policy and the intended international & intercultural learning outcomes;
- An analysis of (with recommendations if appropriate) how many nationalities are represented in the student body, of what proportion of students may be deemed 'international' and what proportion studies abroad;
- A survey and analysis of (with recommendations if appropriate) the extent to which the international experiences acquired by the university student body are consistent with its agreed internationalisation vision statement / policy and the intended international & intercultural learning outcomes;
- A survey and analysis of (with recommendations if appropriate) the extent to which the inbound and outbound mobility of university students (vis-à-vis degree / credit mobility) are consistent with its agreed internationalisation vision statement / policy and the intended international & intercultural learning outcomes;
- A survey and analysis of (with recommendations if appropriate) what proportion inbound exchange students and outbound exchange students at the university account for vis-à-vis the total student body and the extent to which the ensuing data are

consistent with its agreed internationalisation vision statement / policy and the intended international & intercultural learning outcomes;

- A survey and analysis of (with recommendations if appropriate) the extent to which the university dedicates a proportion of its total budget for scholarships to international recipients;
- A survey and analysis of (with recommendations if appropriate) what proportion of the university's research collaborations are international;
- A survey and analysis of (with recommendations if appropriate) what proportion of published university research is published internationally;
- A survey and analysis of (with recommendations if appropriate) what proportion of university researchers are involved in at least one research project with an international partner;
- A survey and analysis of (with recommendations if appropriate) what proportion of published university research is produced through collaborative activity involving researchers at university and of what proportion of university researchers are considered to be international visiting researchers.

Thai universities may also wish to conduct an internationalisation audit and to compile a report (with recommendations where appropriate) citing evidence in support of the indicators referred to above as a way of determining their progress towards internationalisation, to make such a report available to university executives periodically and to help implement agreed policy with a view to enhancing internationalisation.

They may also be minded to consider giving such potential indicators an expressly ASEAN orientation and dimension by surveying, analysing, reporting on and making recommendations where appropriate on how far and how well the following areas of ASEAN-focussed internationalisation provision are being addressed:

- Greater mobility among university faculty and students within ASEAN;
- Academic and research collaboration within ASEAN;
- Academic entrepreneurship within ASEAN;
- Promotion of an ASEAN identity (via ASEAN Studies etc);
- The formulation of an ASEAN concept of best practice in relation to quality assurance procedures and criteria;

- The development of easily understood / easily enacted / user-friendly transferability of QA criteria to universities partnered with their own university in other ASEAN territories;
- Recommendations for improving their university's university rankings within ASEAN (thus enhancing university's appeal as a destination for faculty from other ASEAN territories);
- Scope for enhanced liaison / mobility / exchange among faculty through internationalisation projects & initiatives within ASEAN;
- Training for international officers to ensure an ASEAN orientation;
- The organisation of ASEAN-focussed staff development events at their university;
- Assistance with the induction of / advice over the integration of seconded faculty at their university from ASEAN territories;
- Assistance, advice & support over collaborative university partnerships, pathway & exchange programmes, split degrees, credit transfers, exemption agreements & other inter-institutional links to facilitate greater student mobility within ASEAN;
- Representation for their university at international marketing / student recruitment events designed to enrol more ASEAN students;
- Advice and guidance over best practice in pastoral care, support, induction and social/cultural/legal issues associated with enrolling students from ASEAN at their university;
- Training in internationalising (with an ASEAN focus) the student experience at their university;
- Suggestions re overcoming obstacles to student mobility within ASEAN;
- Advice over the application of an ASEAN focus to all university activities;
- Training in developing social and environmental responsibility across ASEAN;
- Internationalising the curriculum (vis-a-vis an ASEAN regional focus);
- Training and guidance to university managers and staff in exploring curricular, pedagogical & assessment strategies in terms of regional (ASEAN) perspectives, inter-cultural capabilities and responsible citizenship;

- Engaging with regional funding bodies for ASEAN-oriented curricular reform;
- The methodology, equipment/technology, (e-)books, assessment materials, integration of English with specialist fields (ESP – English for Medicine etc), bearing in mind that English is the formally adopted language of ASEAN.

## **CONCLUSION**

Thai universities have arrived at a critical juncture in their own and their country's history vis-à-vis international and ASEAN-oriented positioning. The current emphasis (with official sanction) on identifying and applying suitable evaluation tools and systems for the measurement of their progress towards internationalisation provides them with an exciting chance not simply to select and use those most appropriate for their needs and future directions but also to participate in an invaluable exercise in self-analysis. The proliferation of European and other foreign exemplars should not deter Thai universities from constructively adapting the latter's best points to suit their national and regional needs. The effectiveness with which they proceed in the latter regard is likely to have major and significant repercussions on their country's ability to occupy and retain the status of a leading regional hub in higher education and on its capacity to address the challenges and opportunities presented by ASEAN integration in a manner fully consistent with its long-cherished aspirations and its national potential.

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