

Executive summary

Key findings

Vocational education and training (VET) plays an important role in the Thai education system. Around one in three students in upper-secondary education are enrolled in the vocational track, and around one in five postsecondary students pursue a vocational diploma programme. While the share of students enrolled in upper-secondary VET has been relatively stable over the last decade, the share in postsecondary programmes is on the rise. The Thai government has set ambitious targets for increasing the share of students in VET, in recognition that VET can develop the skills that the economy needs.

Employment outcomes of VET graduates in Thailand are relatively strong, especially for those with a postsecondary vocational diploma. Vocational qualifications are also associated with higher wages and a lower probability of informality than general upper-secondary education. Nonetheless, the gap between VET and tertiary education remains large. The relatively strong labour market outcomes of VET graduates – at least in certain fields- suggest that there is strong demand for these skills in the Thai labour market. This is confirmed by employers, who state that they face shortages of workers with VET qualifications. However, at the same time employers often report that the skills of VET graduates do not correspond with their needs.

Several issues are relevant in attracting students to VET and providing them with relevant and high-quality training. VET is not an attractive option to many and continues to have a poor image. Quality issues, a fragmented VET system, and the limited progression of VET students into general or academic programmes contribute to the negative perceptions around VET in Thailand. Certain groups are underrepresented in VET, because of its unattractive offer, but also because of financial and non-financial barriers to access. Female students, for example, are less likely to enrol in VET programmes and are very strongly concentrated in the field of business and commerce. Very few prime-age adults participate in the Thai VET system.

Ensuring that VET provision corresponds with labour market needs is an important challenge in Thailand, especially when global megatrends and the COVID-19 crisis are changing skill needs. To ensure that VET systems are responsive, employers and other stakeholders need to be closely engaged. But SMEs - and especially those in the informal sector- are hardly involved in the Thai VET system, which means that VET provision does not sufficiently take their skills needs into account. The complexity of the Thai VET system and the absence of structures for stakeholder engagement at the national, regional, sectoral and local level contribute to this. The ongoing efforts to strengthen the dual VET system in Thailand are a step in the right direction, and student numbers in these programmes have been on the rise. However, in the absence of strong quality frameworks, work-based learning might not always equip students with relevant skills.

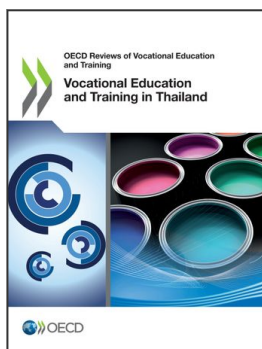
Key recommendations

Improving access to VET: To achieve the targets set by the Thai government for VET enrolment and to overcome shortages of VET graduates, efforts are needed to make the system more attractive. A more transparent and easier to navigate VET system will make it easier for students to make informed choices and use available pathways between VET and further education. Effective measures of co-ordination between the different VET stakeholders need to be put in place. To make existing pathways more effective, articulation frameworks and bridging programmes need to be established and recognition of coursework should be guaranteed. Quality is an important aspect of the attractiveness of VET programmes, and strong quality assurance mechanisms (especially for private providers) are therefore crucial. More and better monitoring of quality could also inform a possible consolidation of small programmes and institutions that suffer from quality issues.

Reducing inequalities in access to and quality of VET: Expansion of the VET system should be inclusive, creating opportunities for all. Disadvantaged students should have access to adequate financial support when needed, and career guidance should promote VET among underrepresented groups, including female students. VET programmes need to be made more accessible to adults, through part-time and modular provision and more effective use of recognition of prior learning. VET students in rural areas should have access to VET programmes of the same quality as those in urban areas, and efforts are needed to encourage qualified VET teachers to work in rural schools. In regions with small or under-resourced schools, more work-based learning opportunities or employer-led joint training centres can expand the availability of relevant training.

Using skills intelligence to inform VET policies: Using high-quality information on skills demand and supply can help better align VET policies and provision with the needs of the labour market. Robust tools should regularly assess skill needs at different levels. A knowledge-sharing platform could help bring together the assessment exercises carried out by different actors, and foster the use of these results to inform VET.

Engaging stakeholders in the design and delivery of VET: Inputs from stakeholders are crucial complements to quantitative information on skills demand and supply to build a more responsive VET system. Governance structures can engage stakeholders at the national, regional, sectoral and local level. Sufficient flexibility in VET is needed at those lower levels to make VET more responsive. Reducing the complexities in the Thai VET system will make it easier for employers and other stakeholders to be engaged. Particular efforts are needed to involve SMEs and the informal sector. The quality of work-based learning needs to be strengthened, by setting quality frameworks that detail the skills that need to be developed at the workplace and by training in-company trainers. To make the most of the expanding dual VET system, the type of students and employers who participate in it need to be closely monitored, so that gaps in provision can be filled and barriers to participation overcome. Additional support for SMEs might be needed, possibly in the form of external bodies to support employers in taking on VET students or incentives for SMEs to jointly provide dual VET.



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