

EDUCATION

CAMPUS UPDATE

Phongthep backs student visas, with longer stay till graduation

Education Minister Phongthep Thepkanjana said he wants to introduce student visas, and that such visas should allow foreign students to remain in Thailand until they graduate, rather than for renewable one-year periods as is the current practice.

He said he was trying to get other Southeast Asian countries' education ministers to try to adjust their visa requirements and systems to facilitate students and teachers looking for greater mobility in the region.

"I want Thailand to be an education hub in this region. Therefore, visa matters shouldn't be too cumbersome and complicated. I want a student visa that allows a student to stay in Thailand until they graduate without having to extend their visa every year, as they do now. I will discuss the issue with relevant government agencies, explaining to them why we want to adjust some visa requirements," he said in an interview with Thai media on the sidelines of the 47th Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO) Council Conference in Hanoi in Vietnam.

Phongthep suggested that higher visa fees could be collected for longer periods of stay.

He added that visa requirements should be adjusted to make it easier for foreign teachers to work in

Thailand, as international and English-language programmes are expanding and need more foreign teachers, he said.

Phongthep, who is also the SEAMEO Council vice president, said: "For students in Southeast Asian countries, giving them a chance to study in other countries will help with Asean integration. One of the obstacles [to this] is that visa requirements and visa systems among countries in the region do not accommodate students and teachers, unlike in the US and UK, where they have student visas. The student visas there allow students to stay in those countries as long as they continue their studies, until graduation. But in Thailand, they have to extend their visa every year. So this system could be an obstacle to the mobility of students, especially if they want to study here longer [than one year]."

"There is only one forum that can help facilitate this stuff - SEAMEO - as it includes all the education ministers from the region. If we share the same view, we can go back to our own countries and try to adjust the existing [visa] systems in order to facilitate the visa requirements of students and teachers," Phongthep said.

Apart from the visa issue, he said he would look into host-family and residential programmes to facilitate foreign students.

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