Anna University was established on 4th September 1978 as a unitary type of University. It offers higher education in Engineering, Technology and allied Sciences relevant to the current and projected needs of the society. Besides promoting research and disseminating knowledge gained therefrom, it fosters cooperation between the academic and industrial communities. The University was formed by bringing together and integrating two well-known technical institutions in the city of Madras.

- College of Engineering, Guindy (CEG)(1794)
- Madras Institute of Technology, Chrompet (MIT)(1949) and three Technological Departments of the University of Madras.
- Alagappa College of Technology (ACT)(1944)
- School of Architecture and Planning (SAP)(1957)

Situated in the southern part of the city of Madras (Chennai), the University's main campus extends over 100 hectares abutting the Adyar River on the north and Raj Bhavan on the south. The Madras Institute of Technology at Chrompet constitutes the second campus of the University which extends over 20 hectares. Both the campuses have a variety of buildings serving the various needs of the University community. A third campus extending over 80 hectares is located at Taramani near the Instronic campus, Adyar. The Bioprocess Laboratory donated by SPIC is located at present in this campus and a few more centers of advanced studies, like National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), Sugar Research Institute, Mechatronics Institute, Entrepreneurship Development Park, and Convention Centre will also be housed there in future.

Since December 2001, it has become a large, highly renowned Affiliated University, having brought into its fold about 426 Self-financing Engineering Colleges six Government Colleges and three Government-aided Engineering colleges located in various parts of Tamilnadu State.

The Anna University, which is of the affiliated type is a member of the Association of Indian Universities, the Association of Commonwealth Universities and Partner of UNESCO International Center for Engineering Education (UICEE). UGC have accredited Anna University with Five Star Status in 2002 which is the highest rating. With proven capabilities both in academic and research areas, Anna University was able to receive this honour for a period of five years for excellence in Technical Education.