

Market Intelligence Brief

Mexico

Contents

1	Executive Summary	3
2	Introduction	5
3	Macro Environment.....	6
3.1	People.....	6
3.2	Economy.....	8
3.3	Government and education policy.....	10
4	Domestic Education Environment.....	11
4.1	Overview	11
4.2	Early years, primary, secondary.....	12
4.3	Technical & vocational education and training	13
4.4	Higher education.....	16
5	International Education	18
5.1	Student mobility	18
5.2	Transnational education and distance learning.....	24
6	UK - Mexico Cooperation.....	25

1 Executive Summary

With a large and youthful population of almost 127m, a rich cultural history and abundant natural resources, Mexico is the second largest economy in Latin America, after Brazil. At around US\$11,000, its GDP per capita (nominal terms) is amongst the highest in Latin America and is around 25 per cent above the regional average. However, over recent decades, Mexico has underperformed compared to similar countries in terms of economic growth, inclusion and poverty reduction which has limited its progress in convergence relative to high income economies.

In common with many other countries across the world, population growth in Mexico has slowed considerably over recent years, with annual growth of just 0.6 per cent in 2021, compared to significantly stronger growth in excess of 1.5 per cent per year in the early 2000s. The student age population (15-29) stood at 31.7m in 2021 and is expected to decline marginally to 31.5m by 2030.

Mexico has a large and diverse domestic education system which has seen rapid growth over recent decades. However, the quality of education provision remains a significant issue, with Mexican students scoring lower than the OECD average in reading, mathematics and science in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results from 2018. Furthermore, in Mexico only 1 per cent of students performed at the highest levels of proficiency in at least one subject compared to the OECD average of 16 per cent.

Looking at the higher education sector specifically, huge growth in demand over recent decades has led to the expansion of the programmes and degree options available, with tertiary enrolments rising from less than 2m in 2000 to almost 5m by 2020. However, in common with the education system more generally, Mexico's tertiary system is characterised by disparities in quality between higher education institutions (HEIs). Oversight criteria for private HEIs vary by jurisdiction and are often inadequate. As a result, the private sector features only a small number of prestigious top-quality institutions. However, given the decentralised nature of quality assurance in Mexico, disparities in quality also exist between public HEIs. At present, there are two Mexican universities which rank in the top 200 in the latest QS World University Rankings, which were the National Autonomous University of Mexico (105) and the private Monterrey Institute of Technology and Higher Education (161).

According to estimates from UNESCO, approximately 35,000 Mexican students travelled abroad to study at the higher education level in 2020, making it one of the largest outbound student markets in the Latin America region, behind Brazil and Colombia, and roughly equal in size to Peru. The vast majority of outbound international students from Mexico tend to study in the US, which is unsurprising given the close geographical proximity, trade and education partnerships and the Mexican diaspora and large Hispanic community. Historically, the next most popular destination choices for Mexican students have included Spain (given cultural and linguistic ties), Germany, Canada, France and the UK.

Looking at the UK's recruitment of Mexican international students over the last decade, Mexico has primarily been a postgraduate market for the UK HEIs, with around 80 per cent of enrolments being at the postgraduate level over this period. In terms of the volume of Mexican students at UK HEIs, after several consecutive years of growth up until 2016/17 when the total number of

Mexican students had risen to just over 2,600, growth trends over recent years have been less encouraging. Mexican enrolments declined by 3 per cent in 2017/18 before rebounding by 7 per cent the following year. Since then, student numbers fell by 8 per cent in 2019/20 before falling more sharply by almost 20 per cent in the 2020/21 academic year as the Covid-19 pandemic weighed on student sentiment and the peso depreciated sharply, thus increasing the cost of international study for Mexican students. In the 2021/22 academic year, student numbers made a modest recovery with growth of 8 per cent, but remain well below pre-pandemic levels. During the last few years, Canada has grown its market share in the Mexican market and has overtaken the UK to become the clear second choice English speaking destination for Mexican international students, after the US.

Meanwhile, UK TNE provision in the Latin America region is of a small scale relative to other world regions such as Asia and the Middle East, with no Latin American countries ranking in the UK's top 50 TNE markets. With a total of 945 students enrolled on TNE and distance learning courses in the 2020/21 academic year, Mexico is currently the UK's largest TNE market in the region but remains a small TNE market for the UK by international standards.

The UK government launched an updated International Education Strategy in February 2021. Although Mexico was not identified as one of the five priority countries, it was specifically mentioned amongst a group of six additional markets for special focus from the UK International Education Champion, Sir Steve Smith. Mexico's inclusion on this list underlines the perceived strategic importance of Mexico by UK policymakers for the future growth of international education in the UK.

2 Introduction

This report was produced by the British Council's Americas Education Insight Hub, with external research support provided by Oxford Economics¹. It is designed to provide UK education institutions with unparalleled data, insight and analysis to support their international education strategies, recruitment activities and partnership development work. The report is also targeted at a UK and Mexican policy maker audience, by highlighting opportunities and barriers to education and research cooperation that exist between the two countries.

Using the latest data from the most reliable sources, this Market Intelligence Brief represents a window onto Mexico's education system and student population, as well as the economic and demographic factors, and policy priorities and developments that shape the country's international education outlook. The report examines various aspects related to the internationalisation of the Mexican education system – including student mobility, transnational education programmes and research collaboration – and also highlights national level education projects and partnerships between the UK and Mexico.

The information contained in this report is based primarily on desk-based research and data analysis, supplemented with insight and context provided by British Council colleagues on the ground in Mexico and the wider Americas region.

While the British Council makes every effort to ensure that the information provided in the report is accurate and up to date, the British Council makes no warranty (whether express or implied) and accepts no responsibility for the accuracy or completeness of the report. The British Council does not assume any legal liability, whether direct or indirect, arising in relation to reliance on the report. Any references to third party organisations in this report are not an endorsement by the British Council of those organisations.

Comments, queries and suggestions in relation to this report are welcome and may be submitted to Lisdey Espinoza, Head of Americas Education Insight Hub, at lisdey.espinoza@britishcouncil.org

¹ www.oxfordeconomics.com

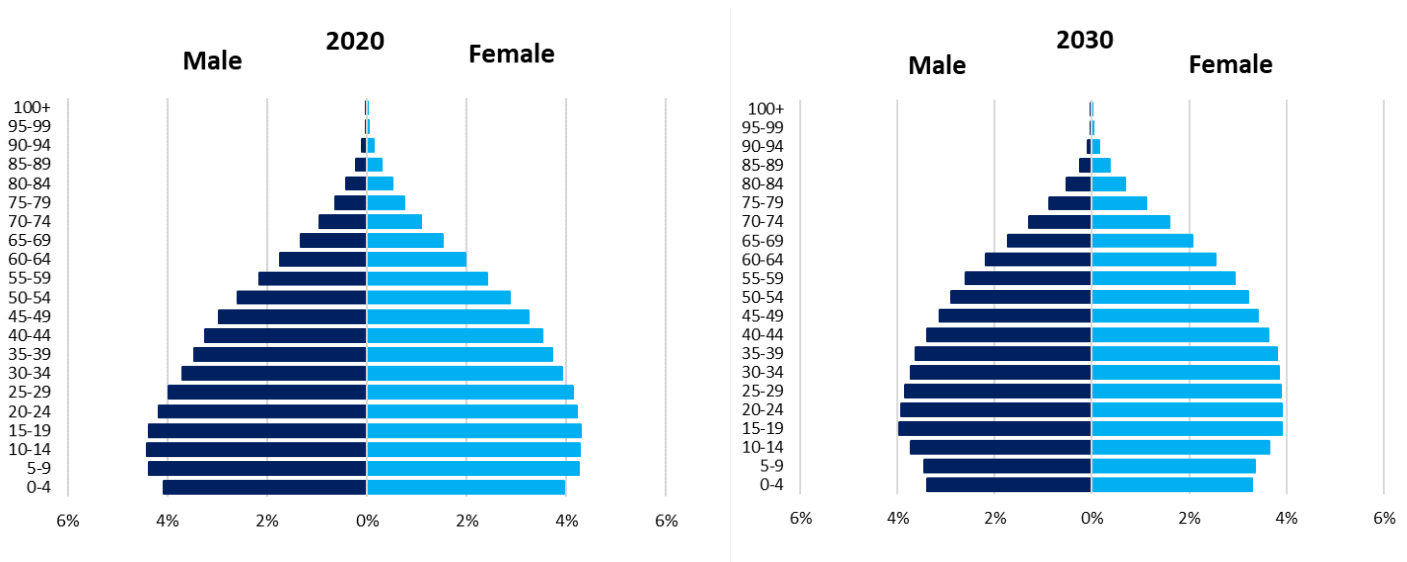
3 Macro Environment

3.1 People

With a population of almost 127m, Mexico is the second most populous country in Latin America after Brazil (214m), and the tenth most populated country in the world.² Throughout most of the 20th century Mexico's population experienced rapid growth. However, over the last few decades, the pace of growth has reduced considerably, slowing to just 0.6 per cent in 2021, from growth in the 1-5-2 per cent range in the late 1990s and early 2000s and much stronger growth of around 3 per cent per year in the 1960s and 1970s. Contributing to the slowdown in population growth has been a sharp decline in the total fertility rate, which fell from 6.6 in 1970, to 2.7 by 2000 and further to 2.1 by 2020.

Looking ahead, Mexico's population is expected to continue to grow modestly until around 2050, peaking at around 144m. Alongside the slowing rate of population growth, the age profile of the Mexican population is expected to continue to transition in the years ahead as the population ages. In 2020, the 0-14 age group accounted for 25 per cent of the total population. By 2030, this is expected to have fallen to around 21 per cent. Over the same time period, the 65+ population share is expected to rise from 8 per cent to 11 per cent.

Figure 1: Mexico's population pyramid, 2020 and 2030



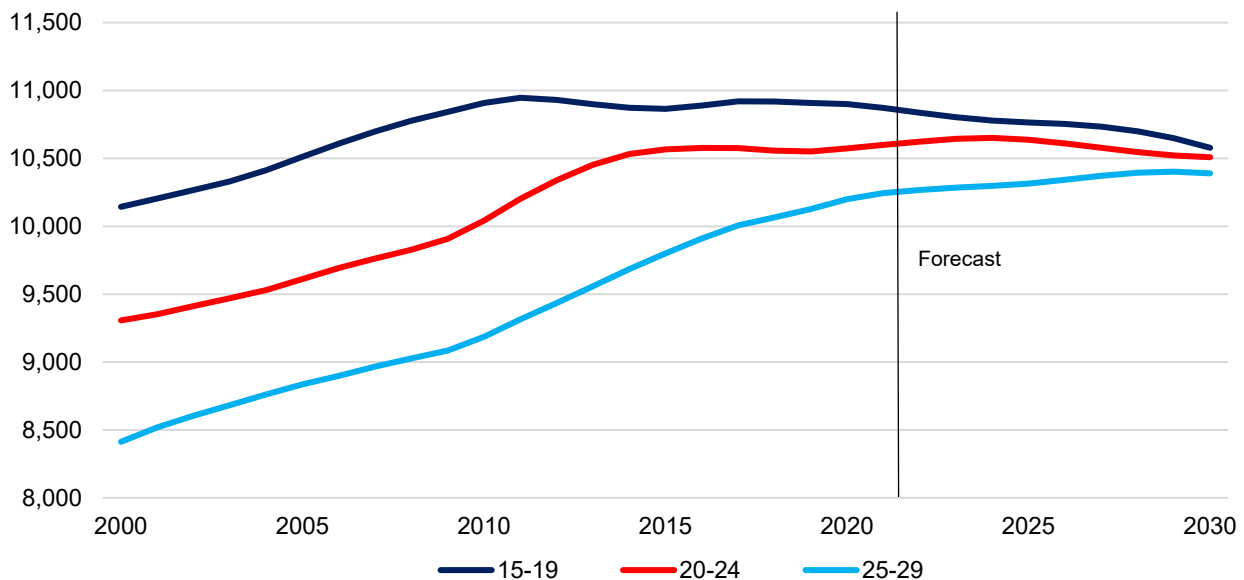
Source: UN Population Division

Looking specifically at the population age bands of interest to UK HEIs, each of these groups experienced strong growth between 2000 and 2010. Since then, the population in the 15-19 age band has remained at around 10.9m, with a modest decline to around 10.5m expected by 2030.

² World Population Prospects, United Nations Population Division, 2022, <https://population.un.org/wpp/>

Similarly, after experiencing strong growth until 2014, the population in the 20-24 age band has held steady at around 10.6m since and is expected to fall marginally to around 10.5m by 2030. By contrast, the 25-29 population has seen strong growth throughout the last two decades, rising from 8.4m in 2000 to 10.2m in 2021 and is expected to continue to grow, albeit at a slower rate, to 10.4m by 2030.

Figure 2: Mexico's student age population (000s)



Source: UN Population Division

According to the UN, approximately 81 per cent of the Mexican population lives in urban areas, which is closely aligned to the regional average. Looking ahead, in Mexico the urbanisation rate is expected to rise to just below 84 per cent by 2030 and to 88 per cent by 2050. The country consists of 31 states and one federal district (Mexico City). The largest cities include Mexico City (12.3m), Ecatepec (1.8m) and Guadalajara (1.5m).³

Mexico is a secular country and has allowed freedom of religion since the mid-19th century. Catholicism is the dominant religion in Mexico and represented 78 per cent of the total population in 2020. However, in recent decades the share of Catholics in the population has been declining due to the growth of other Christian denominations which now constitute nearly 10 per cent of the population.⁴

According to the English First (EF) English Proficiency Index, Mexico ranks amongst the weakest in the world in terms of English language skills, ranking 88th out of the 111 countries analysed in 2022. With a “very low” English proficiency rating, Mexico ranked in 19th place out of 20 Latin American countries analysed, only ahead of Haiti.⁵

³ Mexico population, *World population review*, 2022, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/mexico-population>

⁴ 2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Mexico, *US Department of State*, 2021, www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/mexico/

⁵ English Proficiency Index, *English First*, 2022, www.ef.com/wwen/eipi/regions/latin-america/mexico/

3.2 Economy

With GDP of more than US\$1tn and a population of nearly 130m people, Mexico is the second-largest economy in Latin America after Brazil, and is the sixth-largest emerging market economy in the world. At around US\$11,000, its GDP per capita (nominal terms) is amongst the highest in Latin America and is around 25 per cent above the regional average.

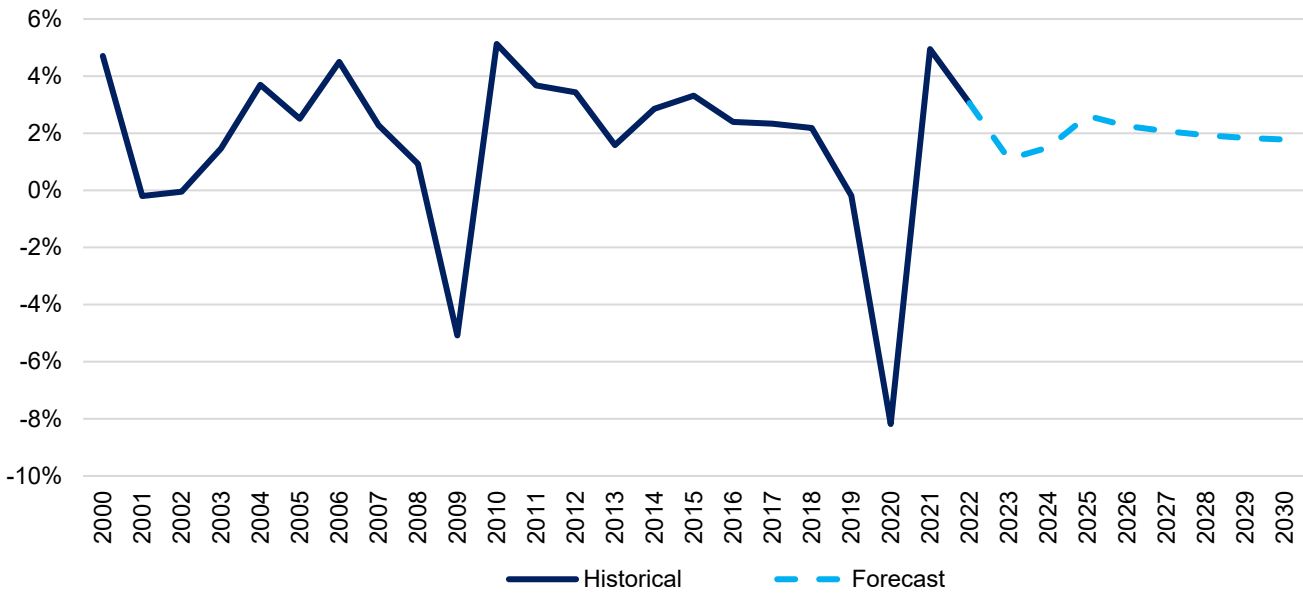
The services sector now generates almost two-thirds of the economy's GDP, with the industrial sector responsible for just under a quarter. Manufacturing accounts for around 90 per cent of Mexico's merchandise exports. Among Mexico's major exports are machinery and transport equipment, steel, electrical equipment, chemicals, food products, and petroleum and petroleum products. About 80 per cent of Mexico's petroleum is exported to the US, which relies heavily on Mexico as one of its principal sources of oil. Mexico's exports grew rapidly in the 1990s after the creation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and Mexico is now the largest exporter in Latin America. In 2020, the value of Mexico's exports exceeded \$430bn, roughly equivalent to the sum of the exports of the next 5 largest Latin American exporters (Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Peru, and Colombia).

As with most other countries around the world, the Mexican economy was hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic, with GDP declining by over 8 per cent in 2020, with strict lockdown measures aimed at curbing the spread of Covid-19 leading to a sharp decline in economic activity during the first half of the year. The economy bounced back strongly in the second half of 2020 as restrictions were eased. The further easing of restrictions in 2021 supported GDP growth of 5 per cent for the year overall, but by the end of 2022, GDP had still not returned to the pre-Covid peak level. By contrast, in the labour market, despite seeing large falls in employment and a resultant spike in the unemployment rate during the pandemic, employment levels are now well above pre-pandemic levels, with the unemployment rate recorded at just 3.0 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2022 compared to 3.4 per cent immediately prior to the pandemic.⁶

However, the near-term outlook for the Mexican economy looks challenging. Oxford Economics expects that the combination of elevated inflation, the lagged effect of interest rate hikes and weak global activity will halt job creation and real wage gains. Meanwhile, as the US labour market cools, a slowdown in remittances and tourism spending is anticipated. As such, Oxford Economics expects a mild recession in the second half of 2023 in Mexico. However, the medium-term outlook for the Mexican economy remains positive, with annual GDP growth expected to return to the 2-2.5 per cent range from 2025. By 2030, Mexico's GDP per capita is expected to rise to around US\$15,000 (in nominal terms). This will underpin growth in the number of households with an income of US\$35-70,000, up from 7m in 2021 to just over 9m by 2030.

⁶ National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), 2022, <https://en.www.inegi.org.mx/>

Figure 3: Mexico's real GDP growth



Source: Haver Analytics / Oxford Economics

The Mexican peso is one of the most traded currencies in the world. Due to its high liquidity and large trading volumes, the peso is vulnerable to episodes of risk aversion and volatility. This risk was illustrated in Q2 2020 when the currency plunged at the start of the Covid pandemic and again in March 2022 due to the war in Ukraine. However, more recently, high commodity prices, a wide interest rate differential with the US, and large capital inflows from remittances and FDI have helped the peso recover, reaching a five-year high of 17.8 per US dollar in early March 2023. But the rally proved short-lived as downside risks to growth from the US Fed's aggressive stance increased. Moreover, the central bank of Mexico is expected to start softening its restrictive stance later this year with interest rate cuts anticipated, thus reducing the interest rate differential with the US. Overall, Oxford Economics expects the peso to average 19.2 per US dollar this year and to depreciate mildly to trade in the 21-22 per US dollar range over the medium term.

In common with its strength against the US dollar of late, the peso also appreciated against the pound throughout 2022 and is currently trading at 22 per pound. However, after several periods of depreciation over recent years, Oxford Economics believes that the pound is undervalued and will strengthen over the medium term against both the US dollar and Mexican peso, with the Peso expected to fall to around 30 per pound by 2030.

From a student mobility perspective, the pattern of volatility in the peso's value represents a significant financial risk to prospective students, given that the cost of study abroad is directly influenced by currency fluctuations. However, the recent strength of the peso should provide a positive tailwind to outbound student flows from Mexico in the near-term.

3.3 Government and education policy

Mexico is a federal republic, made up of 31 states and the federal district, Mexico City. Governmental powers are divided constitutionally between executive, legislative, and judicial branches. The legislative branch is divided into an upper house, the Senate, and a lower house, the Chamber of Deputies. Senators serve six-year terms and deputies three-year terms. Three-fifths of the deputies are elected directly by popular vote, while the remainder are selected in proportion to the votes received by political parties in each of five large electoral regions.

Popularly elected and limited to one six-year term, the president is empowered to select a cabinet, the attorney general, diplomats, high-ranking military officers, and Supreme Court justices. The president also has the right to issue reglamentos (executive decrees) that have the effect of law. Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) won the 2018 presidential election by a landslide under the promise to undo his predecessor Pena Nieto's reforms and reverse the liberalisation of the energy sector. His economic manifesto points to a greater role for the state in the economy, which has resulted in a sharp contraction in private investment.

Education in Mexico is administered by the Secretaria de Educación Pública (SEP), and the 32 state-level / federal district jurisdictions. Autonomous HEIs like the National Autonomous University of Mexico also play an important oversight role. Public universities operate with a high degree of freedom from government regulations and have the right to approve and validate programmes of private HEIs and upper-secondary schools. Since 1992, Mexico has decentralised its education system and limited the role of the central government in education. Under financial strain, the federal government gradually transferred the administration of more schools to the state governments and granted autonomy to more HEIs. This multiplicity of quality assurance providers in the Mexican federation results in a highly complex system in which various quality standards, academic calendars, and regulations coexist not only between states, but also within states, regions, and urban and rural areas.⁷

In April 2023, the General Law on Humanities, Science, Technology and Innovation ordered the replacement of the National Council for Humanities, Science and Technology (CONACYT) – Mexico's main funding body for research and scholarships (including scholarships for overseas study) - with a National Council for Humanities, Science, Technology and Innovation (CONAHCTI).⁸ The new council is proposed to be led by representatives of the federal government, raising concerns for the autonomy of science research and funding allocation for scholarships, especially since universities will no longer directly participate in the administration of the council. The law, which is likely to face court challenges, abandons a goal backed in previous legislation of spending 1 per cent of Mexico's gross domestic product on research, according to media reports.⁹

⁷ Education in Mexico, *World Education News and Reviews*, 2019, <https://wenr.wes.org/2019/05/education-in-mexico-2>

⁸ UDGVT.com, 02 May 2023 [Disappearing Conacyt puts the autonomy of science at risk](#)

⁹ Science.org, 02 May 2023, [In frenzied vote, Mexico's law makers pass controversial science reform bill](#)

4 Domestic Education Environment

4.1 Overview

Mexico has a large and diverse domestic education system which has seen rapid growth over recent decades. To support the development of its education system, the Mexican government spent an average of almost 5 per cent of GDP on education between 2010 and 2018, which was well above the global average of 4.3 per cent over the same period. Meanwhile, government expenditure on education as a share of total government expenditure in Mexico averaged 18 per cent between 2010 and 2018, comfortably within UNESCO's recommended range of 15-20 per cent as set out in its Education 2030 Framework for Action.¹⁰

However, more recently, public spending on education has been a lesser priority for the government in power. For example, in the past 5 years, Mexico has cut its textbook budget by a third and reduced its teacher training by more than 40 per cent.¹¹ The reduction in funding in education has meant that improving the quality of the education system remains a significant challenge. The latest PISA results from 2018 show that students in Mexico scored lower than the OECD average in reading, mathematics and science. Furthermore, in Mexico only 1 per cent of students performed at the highest levels of proficiency in at least one subject compared to the OECD average of 16 per cent. Meanwhile, 35 per cent of students did not achieve a minimum level of proficiency in all three subjects, compared to an OECD average of 13 per cent.¹²

As such, despite the recent progress in ensuring that young people finish school, with graduation rates of Mexican students having increased from 33 per cent in 2000 to 45 per cent in 2022, considerable improvement in the quality of the education system is required. Poverty and wealth inequality are significant challenges for the education system in Mexico. About 18 per cent of the country lives in extreme poverty, and among poor communities, school dropout rates, absences, and grade repetition are serious problems. Among OECD countries, Mexico has one of the lowest rates of school enrollment in the 15-19 age group, possibly because poverty drives them to find jobs rather than complete their education. Meanwhile, the indigenous population in Mexico, which represents around 15 per cent of the overall population, are disproportionately poorer than non-indigenous communities which impacts their access to education. Further, education systems aren't designed with indigenous culture in mind, and few teachers speak indigenous languages. This makes it difficult for indigenous students to experience a learning environment that suits their needs.¹³

¹⁰ Education 2030 Framework for Action, UNESCO, 2016, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245656>

¹¹ Improving education in Mexico, *The Borgen Project*, 2022, <https://borgenproject.org/education-in-mexico/>

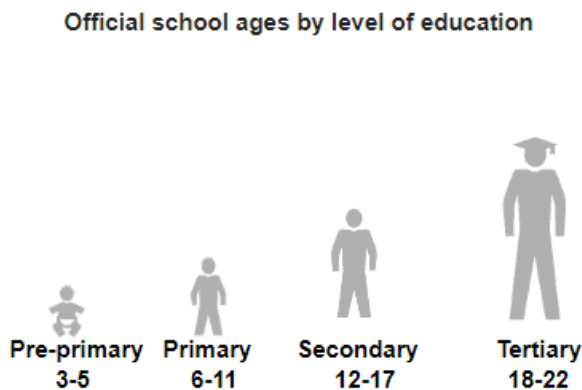
¹² PISA Results 2018, OECD, 2018, www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/PISA2018_CN_MEX.pdf

¹³ 4 barriers to quality education in the Mexico school system, ICF, 2022, <https://icfdn.org/barriers-quality-education-mexico/>

4.2 Early years, primary, secondary

In Mexico, education is compulsory for 14 years, from the age of 3 to 17. Since the 2008/09 academic year, all Mexican children are required by law to attend three years of early childhood education. However, despite pre-primary education now being compulsory, the gross enrolment ratio was only 71 per cent in 2020.¹⁴

Figure 4: Mexican school ages



Source: UNESCO

Primary education in Mexico starts at the age of six. According to UNESCO, there were over 13.4m enrolments in the primary education sector in 2019 with a gross enrolment ratio of 105 per cent, indicating that participation is largely universal. Primary education in its current form became compulsory in 2009. The SEP standardises the curriculum content for both public and private schools, which includes Spanish, mathematics, science, history, geography, art and physical education. The National Institute for Assessment of Education Standards is responsible for quality control. Upon completion of grade six in primary education, pupils are awarded the Certificate of Primary Education. There are no final graduation examinations.¹⁵

According to UNESCO, there were just over 13.4m enrolments in the secondary education system in Mexico in 2019 with a gross enrolment ratio of 105 per cent. Secondary education in Mexico consists of two stages, lower-secondary education (grades 7 to 9) and upper-secondary education (grades 10-12). Lower-secondary school is compulsory and lasts for three years and students may follow either an academic track or a technical track. In public schools there are no entrance examinations. Upper-secondary education is the second stage of secondary school in Mexico and lasts for a further three years. It is free of charge at public schools and has been compulsory for all students since 2012. However, making upper-secondary education universal remains a challenge, as the government have cut scholarship funding that they previously had in place to help increase graduation rates. Many upper-secondary schools are affiliated with large public universities, while others are SEP or state-controlled colleges, preparatory schools or private schools.

¹⁴ Participation in Education - Mexico, UNESCO, 2022, <https://uis.unesco.org/en/country/mx>

¹⁵ *ibid*

High schools are administered by federal government, state governments and independent institutions (which are mostly large public universities). Independent universities that provide upper-secondary education have some scope to design elements of their curriculum. Admission to these programmes frequently involves entrance examinations and is often more competitive than admission to state and federal schools. Many students that complete upper-secondary education at an autonomous university continue their studies in higher education programs at the same institution.¹⁶

There are three main types of upper-secondary programmes, the general academic, technological and the vocational-technical programme. Typically, most students enrol in a general academic program (around 63 per cent) which are designed to prepare students for higher education. Around 30 per cent study in the technological stream which features a general academic core curriculum in addition to several employment-g geared technical specialisation subjects. The remainder attend vocational-technical programmes.¹⁷

Given the multiplicity of providers and curriculum in Mexico, its upper-secondary school system has historically been characterised by a high degree of diversity. However, the federal government in 2008 introduced a national curriculum framework and high school system to harmonise upper-secondary education. While its adoption is voluntary, 4,284 Mexican schools enrolling 52 per cent of students had implemented the system as of 2019 with more expected to join. However, distance learning and community high schools continue to use a different curriculum so a certain degree of heterogeneity will remain in the Mexican education system despite these reforms.¹⁸

4.3 Technical & vocational education and training

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in Mexico is not currently a policy priority for the government and thus is relatively underdeveloped. Despite this, current TVET programmes in Mexico aim to provide quality educational services in order to equip individuals with skills that enable them to participate productively in the labour market and have a high sense of social responsibility and civic values, with the SEP responsible for TVET in Mexico at the federal level. However, as discussed earlier, the education system in Mexico is decentralised and the SEP shares the responsibility with various national and regional bodies. For example, each state has its own Secretariat of Education in charge of the education system and schools. State governments are responsible for administering State Centres for Scientific and Technological Studies (CECyTE) and Institutes of Training for Work (ICAT). Municipalities also provide education services at all levels.

Financing for TVET comes mainly from the federal and state governments, and specifically the SEP, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, and the Ministry of the Economy which is responsible for setting the public sector budget. Since 2010, upper-secondary education (which includes upper-secondary TVET programmes) has also been made compulsory and is free of

¹⁶ Education in Mexico, *World Education News and Reviews*, 2019, <https://wenr.wes.org/2019/05/education-in-mexico-2>

¹⁷ *ibid*

¹⁸ *ibid*

charge in public schools. In addition to the public schools, there are also private TVET institutions which finance themselves through student fees.

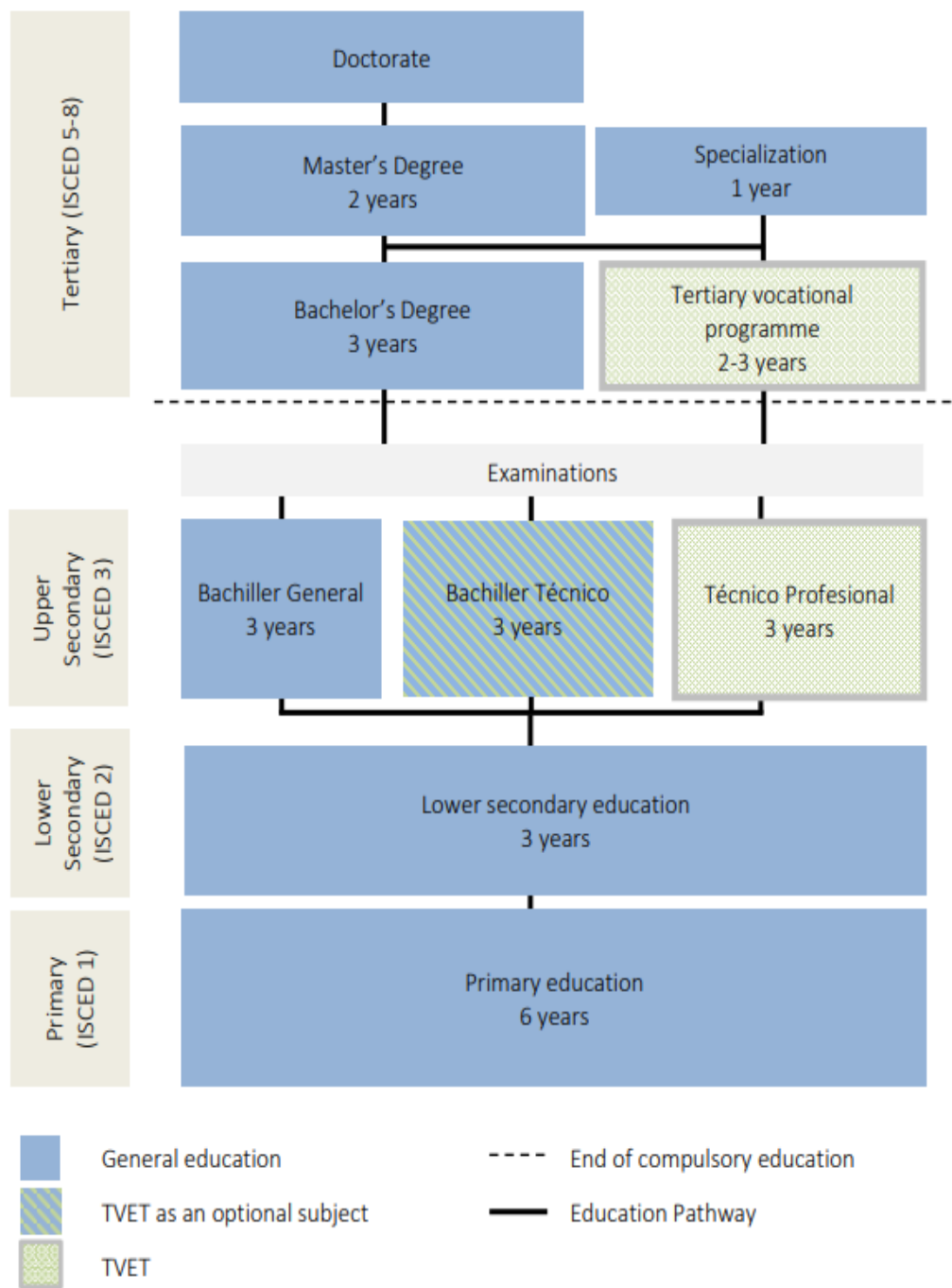
In the formal TVET system in Mexico, there are two programmes available at the upper-secondary level. The Técnico Profesional programme aims to train professions for industrial, trading, service and agricultural activities. Students who complete this pathway receive the vocational upper-secondary education certificate. Initially, this pathway was designed to prepare students for direct entry into the labour market. However, it now enables the students to advance to a Bachelors' equivalent Tertiary Vocational Training Programme following a competitive examination. Meanwhile, the Bachiller Técnico programme is a combination of general and vocational education. This programme offers a pathway for the graduate to enter tertiary education in either vocational or general track, subject to competitive examination. With this qualification, graduates are also able to gain access to the labour market.

At the tertiary education level, the Técnico Superior programme is available which is a bachelor's degree equivalent vocational training programme, aimed at training professionals with strong technical skills, both theoretical and practical. These programmes are structured to place a greater focus on practical training (almost 70 per cent of the curriculum) to enable easier access to the labour market.

In addition, there are also non-formal TVET programmes available in Mexico that tend to consist of courses aimed at training adults in order to improve their performance at work. These courses do not always require an educational background. The programmes are provided by the industrial training institutes, in addition to training programmes offered by regional government with federal government support (ODE), and technical secondary and agricultural education.¹⁹

¹⁹ TVET country profiles, UNESCO, 2018, https://unevoc.unesco.org/wtdb/worldtvtdatabase_mex_en.pdf

Figure 5: TVET in the Mexican education system

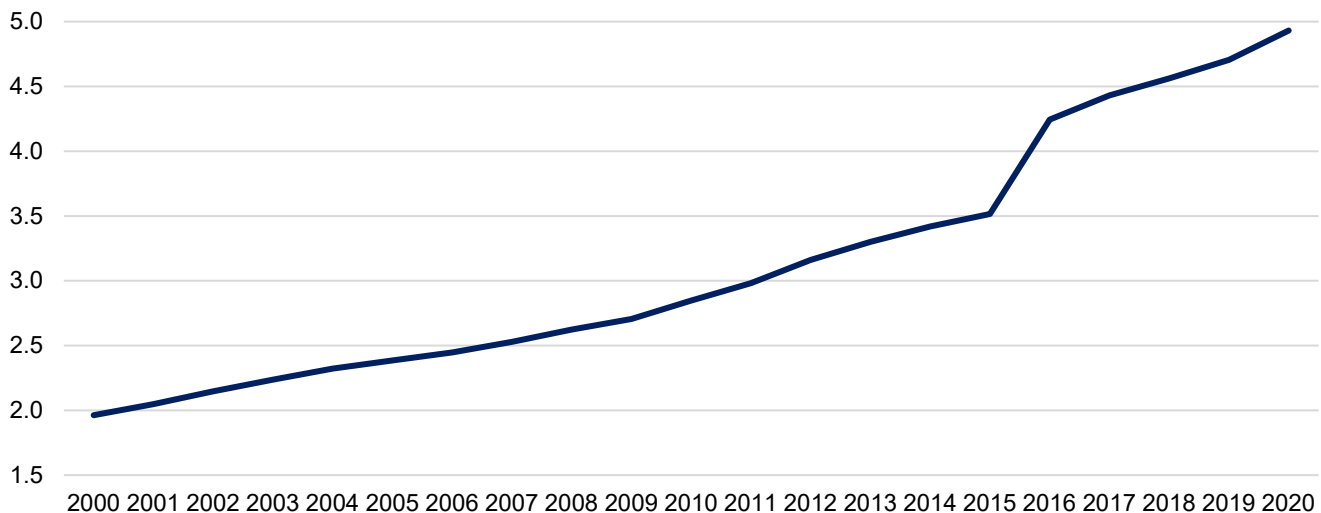


Source: UNESCO

4.4 Higher education

The Mexican higher education system largely follows the US model. A huge growth in demand has led to the expansion of programmes and degree options available, with tertiary enrolments rising from less than 2m in 2000 to almost 5m by 2020. Much of the growth has occurred at private institutions, where minimal fees are maintained.

Figure 6: Mexican tertiary education enrolments (millions)



Source: UNESCO

Higher education is offered at various different types of institutions including public universities, technological institutions and universities, teacher training institutions and private institutions. In the 2020/21 academic year, there were 3,587 HEIs in operation in the country.²⁰ Each Mexican state has a public university and a teacher's training college, for which a diploma is awarded upon graduation. Institutions are recognised by the *Comités Interinstitucionales para la Evaluación de la Educación Superior (CIEES)*. Typically, undergraduate education can range from 2 to 6 years, while a master's degree lasts between 1 to 2 years and a doctorate requires at least 2 years of study beyond a master's degree.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, higher educational activities became exclusively remote for the duration of the 2020/21 education cycle. However, universities, teachers and students were not ready to implement the emergency remote teaching (ERT) strategy because of the limited technological adaptation and digital connectivity in the country.²¹ In 2013, Mexico made internet connectivity a constitutional right, but most within low-income brackets still don't have access to the internet. UNESCO reported in 2021 that around a quarter of Mexican students have no internet access. Thus, inequality within education worsened during the pandemic.²²

²⁰ Number of Institutions of higher education in Mexico, *Statista*, 2022, www.statista.com/statistics/706127/higher-education-institutions-mexico-state/

²¹ Mexico's higher education students' experience during the lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic. *Frontiers*, 2021, www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/feduc.2021.683222/full

²² Pandemic propels poor Mexican students into digital age, *France 24*, 2021, www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210303-pandemic-propels-poor-mexican-students-into-digital-age

Mexico's tertiary system is characterised by disparities in quality between HEIs. Oversight criteria for private HEIs vary by jurisdiction and are often inadequate. As a result, the private sector features only a small number of prestigious top-quality institutions. However, given the decentralised nature of quality assurance in Mexico, disparities in quality also exist between public HEIs. At present, there are two Mexican universities which rank in the top 200 in the latest QS World University Rankings, which were the National Autonomous University of Mexico (105) and the private Monterrey Institute of Technology and Higher Education (161).²³

²³ Top Universities 2022, QS, 2022, www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/world-university-rankings/2022

5 International Education

5.1 Student mobility

According to estimates from UNESCO, approximately 35,000 Mexican students travelled abroad to study at the higher education level in 2020. This makes Mexico one of the largest outbound student markets in the Latin America region, behind Brazil (89,000) and Colombia (57,000) and roughly equal in size to Peru (35,000). Growth in outbound student numbers from Mexico has been consistent for much of the last two decades, with numbers rising from 16,000 in 2000 to 28,000 in 2010, before reaching almost 35,000 in 2020, which represents annual average growth of around 4 per cent over the whole period.²⁴

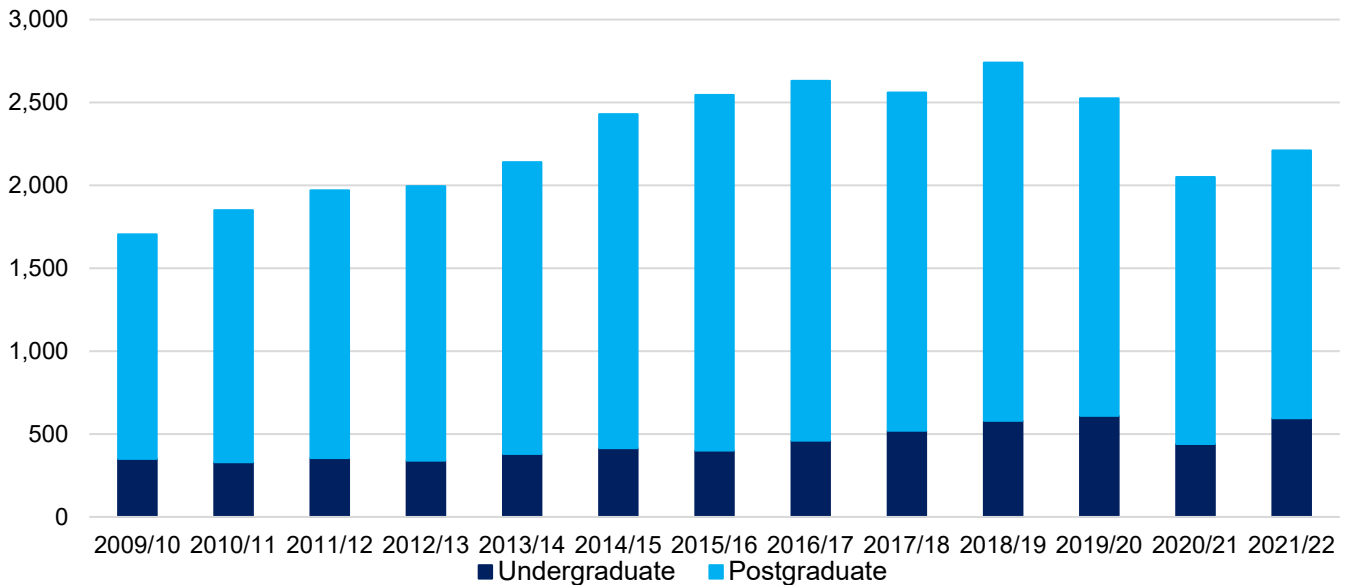
Most outbound international students from Mexico tend to study in the US, which is unsurprising given the close geographical proximity, trade and education partnerships and the Mexican diaspora and large Hispanic community. Historically, the next most popular destination choices for Mexican students have included Spain (given cultural and linguistic ties), Germany, Canada, France and the UK.

Mexico has traditionally been a large scholarship funded recruitment market, with the government funding thousands of outbound postgraduate scholarships, administered by CONACYT. Spain and the US have been the main beneficiary destinations of these scholarship, with the UK accounting for a comparatively small share. Of 3,748 new outbound scholarships funded by the Mexican government in 2019, only 99 of these scholars studied in the UK.²⁵

²⁴ UIS Database, *UNESCO Institute for Statistics*, 2022, <http://data.uis.unesco.org/>

²⁵ CONACYT website <http://datos.gob.mx/busca/dataset/becas-al-extranjero> British Council analysis of CONACYT data.

Figure 7: Mexican students in HE programmes in the UK



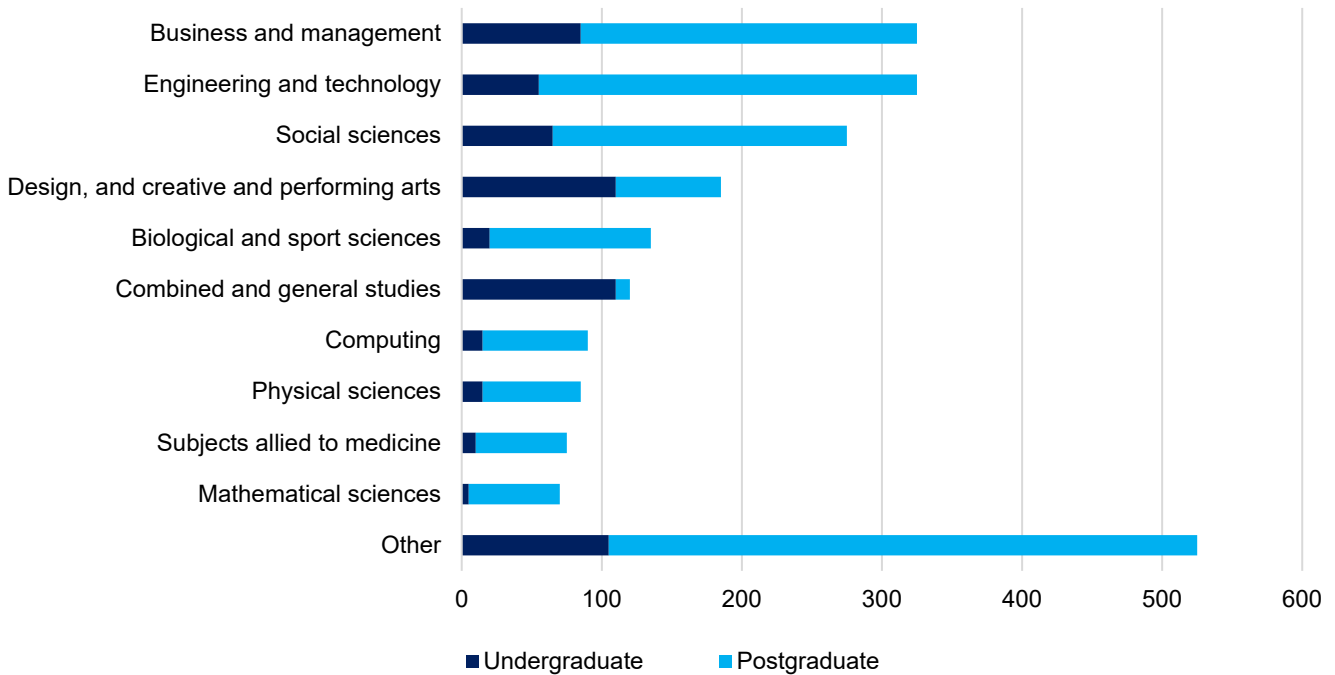
Source: HESA

Looking at the UK's recruitment of Mexican international students over the last decade, Mexico has primarily been a postgraduate market for the UK HEIs, with around 80 per cent of enrolments being at the postgraduate level over this period. In terms of the volume of Mexican students at UK HEIs, after several consecutive years of growth up until 2016/17 when the total number of Mexican students had risen to just over 2,600, growth trends over recent years have been less encouraging. Mexican enrolments declined by 3 per cent in 2017/18 before rebounding by 7 per cent the following year. Since then, student numbers fell by 8 per cent in 2019/20 before falling more sharply by almost 20 per cent in the 2020/21 academic year as the Covid-19 pandemic weighed on student sentiment and the peso depreciated sharply, thus increasing the cost of international study for Mexican students. In the 2021/22 academic year, student numbers made a modest recovery with growth of 8 per cent, but remain well below pre-pandemic levels.

UK student visa statistics show that the number of visas issued to Mexican nationals dropped dramatically in 2020 but saw a strong recovery in 2021, returning to a level only slightly below their pre-pandemic volume. However, 2022 saw another decline, with sponsored study visa issuances falling to 1,104 – a 9 per cent drop compared to the year before, or 13 per cent lower than the pre-pandemic figure in 2019.²⁶

²⁶ Home Office. Figures refer to visas issued to main applicants only, excluding dependents.

Figure 8: Subjects studied by Mexican HE students in the UK, 2021/22



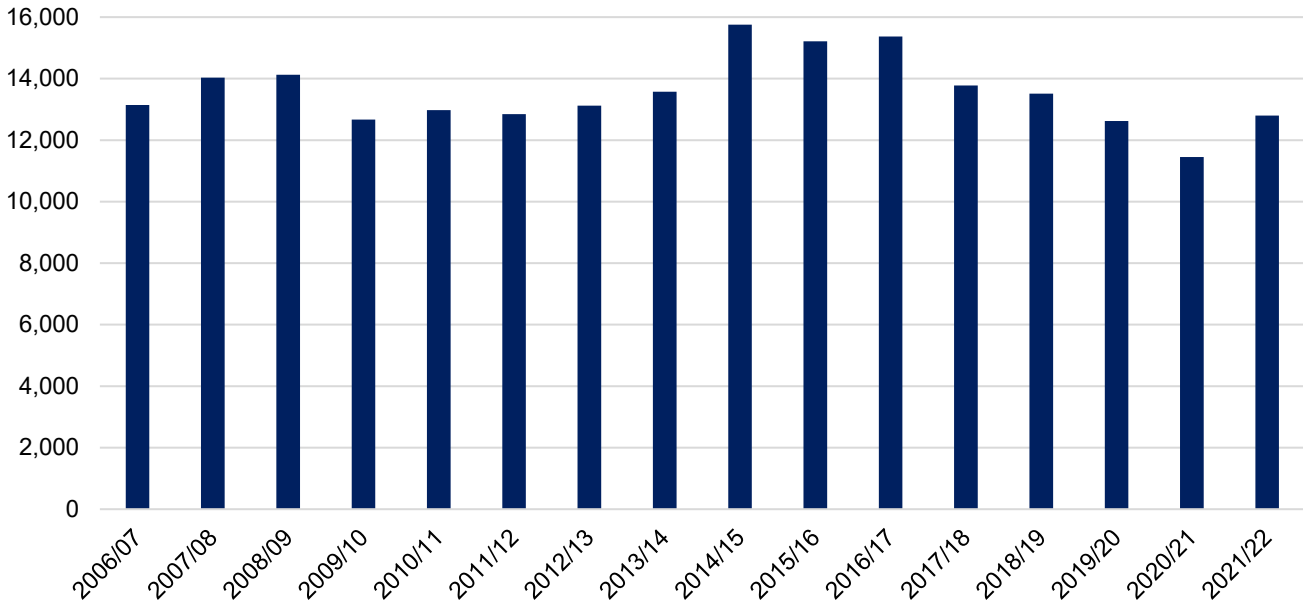
Source: HESA

In terms of subject area choices, engineering and technology was the most popular at the postgraduate level with 270 enrolments in 2021/22. At undergraduate level the most popular subject choice was design, creative and performing arts, with 110 enrolments in 2021/22. The next most popular subject choices for postgraduates were business and management (240), social sciences (210) and biological and sport sciences (115). The top subject choices at postgraduate level were also leading subject choices for undergraduate students from Mexico. Looking back over the last five years there has been a large degree of consistency in terms of top subject choices for both postgraduates and undergraduates, with engineering and technology and business and management remaining the top subject choices overall throughout the period.

The share of Mexican students enrolled at Russell Group (RG) universities has generally been on an upward trajectory since HESA records began, rising from 48 per cent in 2002/03 to a peak of 68 per cent in 2015/16. Since then, the RG share has fallen back marginally each year, standing at 56 per cent in 2021/22. Still, the majority of Mexican students choose RG institutions when coming to the UK, underlining the importance of institution reputation in their decision-making process.

London has historically been the most popular study region within the UK for Mexican students accounting for just over a quarter of total UK enrolments in 2021/22, while Scotland was the next most popular region for students and accounted for 15 per cent of total enrolments in 2021/22. At the institutional level the University of Edinburgh was the most popular choice for Mexican students in 2021/22 with 120 enrolments. The next most popular were the University of Essex and the University of Nottingham, with 100 and 85 enrolments respectively.

Figure 9: Mexican HE enrolments in the US

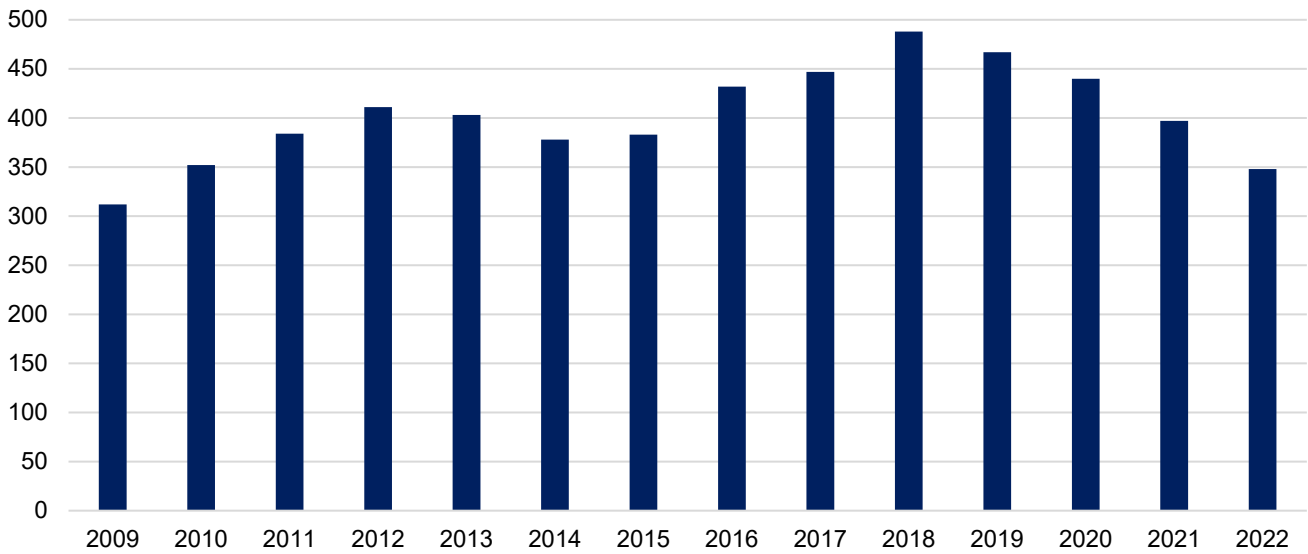


Source: IIE (Note: OPT students excluded)

As discussed earlier, compared to other destination markets around the world, the US is by some distance the market leader for outbound Mexican students. Mexican enrolments in the US peaked at just under 15,800 in 2014/15. However, after remaining at around this level for the next couple of years, Mexican student numbers began to fall back sharply from 2017/18. This coincided with the election of President Trump and the subsequent heightening of political tensions between the two countries amidst the anti-immigration rhetoric under the Trump administration. More recently, in the 2020/21 academic year, the Covid-19 pandemic weighed heavily on international student flows between the countries. As such, after several years of decline, Mexican student numbers in the US fell to just under 11,500 in 2020/21 which was the lowest level seen in more than 15 years. In 2021/22, Mexican student numbers in the US recovered to 12,800, which represented a return to the levels seen prior to the pandemic, but still well down on the previous peak levels seen several years ago.

Looking ahead, a more accommodative environment for international students under the Biden administration and the removal of international travel restrictions due to the pandemic will provide a boost to Mexico-US student flows, with the US expected to remain the leading destination for Mexican international students for years to come.

Figure 10: Mexican HE enrolments in Australia



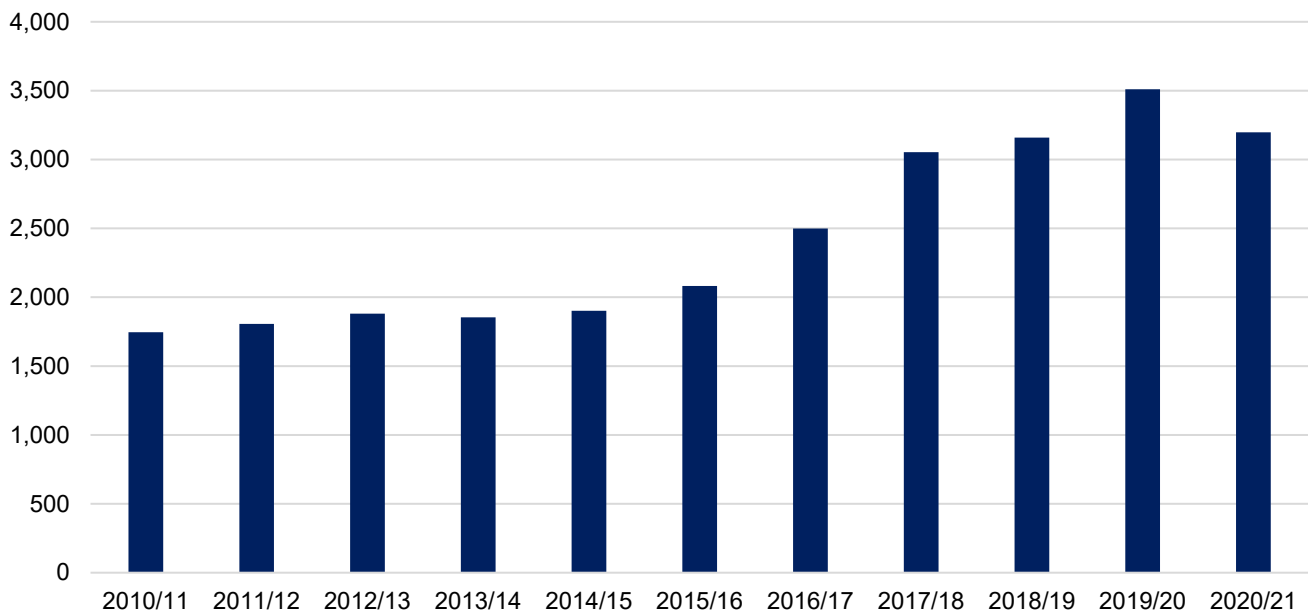
Source: AusTrade

Australia is a relatively small market for international students from Mexico. Mexican HE enrolments in Australia peaked at 490 in 2018 but had fallen to just 350 by 2022 as Australia’s highly restrictive international travel policies during the pandemic (borders closed from March 2020 to December 2021) weighed on student mobility.

In order to help recover its market share in Latin America, in January 2022 AusTrade launched its ‘Study Australia Experience’ platform, exclusively for Spanish-speaking countries. The platform features 30 Australian education institutions and provides practical advice about studying in Australia. The project also involved the creation of dedicated social media accounts in local language, online events, and a virtual recruitment fair. Following the success of this first edition and positive feedback from users, a second edition is now in development.²⁷ However, despite the clear recent efforts by Australia to expand in the Latin America international student market, it appears unlikely that Australia will become a major player in this market given the geographical distance between the countries.

²⁷ Study Australia Experience platform engages over 300,000 Latin American students, *Austrade*, 2022, www.austrade.gov.au/australian/education/news/austrade-update/study-australia-experience-platform-boosts-engagement-with-over-300-000-latin-american-students

Figure 11: Mexican HE enrolments in Canada



Source: StatCan

After several years of sustained strong growth, Canada has become an increasingly important destination market for international students from Mexico. After remaining stable in the 1,500-2,000 range for several years, strong growth began in 2015/16 and was sustained for several years thereafter, with student numbers reaching 3,500 in 2019/20. This has enabled Canada to overtake the UK and become the clear second choice English speaking destination for Mexican international students, after the US. However, in 2020/21, due to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and related travel restrictions and closure of visa application centres, Mexican student numbers in Canada declined by almost 9 per cent.

The sharp uptick in Mexican enrolments in Canada prior to the pandemic coincided with the decline in Mexican enrolments in the US over recent years, particularly during the course of the Trump administration. Indeed, Canada's generous Post-Graduate Work Permit Programme (PGWPP) has been a driving factor in the growth in students from Mexico as it offers students a clear pathway to permanent residency, with many Mexican students seeing international study as the first step in their immigration journey. Looking ahead, data on study permit approvals for Mexican students suggests that Canada's strong performance in the Mexican market is set to continue in the years ahead, with a strong post-pandemic bounce-back expected.²⁸

From an inbound perspective, Mexico was home to just over 43,000 international students in 2020, according to UNESCO. This marks a significant increase from 10,000 inbound students in 2015 and is consistent with the wider general trend of increasing inbound mobility to Latin America over recent years. A key part of Mexico's appeal is that it offers a more affordable option

²⁸ Student visa approval trends in Canada-Mexico, *Apply Board*, 2022, www.applyboard.com/applyinsights-article/student-visa-approval-trends-in-canada-mexico

compared to the traditional international student host countries, and together with Argentina was included in the QS top ten list of most affordable places to study abroad. Furthermore, although the main language of instruction is Spanish, Mexican universities are increasingly offering English-taught courses to attract international students.²⁹

A particular area of focus for Latin American universities of late has been on encouraging intra-regional mobility to boost inbound student numbers. By 2019, 23 Latin American countries had signed up to a new Convention for the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Higher Education Diplomas in Latin America and the Caribbean. The agreement was born out of concern that too many Latin American students were going overseas to study rather than staying within the region. The hope attached to the agreement was that encouraging intra-regional mobility would concentrate graduate talent in Latin America rather than too much of it migrating overseas.³⁰

5.2 Transnational education and distance learning

UK TNE provision in the Latin America region is of a small scale relative to other world regions such as Asia and the Middle East, with no Latin American countries ranking in the UK's top 50 TNE markets. Mexico is currently the UK's largest TNE market in the region, with a total of 945 students enrolled on TNE and distance learning courses in the 2020/21 academic year. This places Mexico ahead of other major Latin American countries including Brazil (740), Peru (395), Colombia (275), Chile (160) and Argentina (145). However, despite comparing favourably to its regional peers, Mexico remains a small TNE market for the UK by international standards.

Looking back over the last few years, there has been no consistent trend in UK TNE and distance learning student numbers in Mexico. After increasing by 14 per cent in 2017/18 to 840, student numbers declined for two consecutive years, falling to 665 by 2019/20, before increasing sharply by 42 per cent in 2020/21 to 945. In the 2020/21 academic year, bachelor's degree provision accounted for around half of total TNE and distance learning provision in Mexico, with taught masters and research doctorates accounting for a combined 40 per cent.

At present, the UK has no branch campuses in Mexico and as such the mode of provision is evenly split between distance learning and students registered for their course through a Mexican partner organisation. Unsurprisingly, the US is the leading TNE and distance learning provider in Mexico and has a total of four branch campuses through Arkansas State University, Alliant International University, New Mexico State University and St. Luke School of Medicine.

²⁹ 10 most affordable place to study abroad, *TopUniversities.com*, 2022, www.topuniversities.com/student-info/studying-abroad/10-most-affordable-places-study-abroad

³⁰ Latin American institutions increasingly prepared to compete for international students, *ICEF Monitor*, 2022, <https://monitor.icef.com/2022/06/latin-american-institutions-increasingly-prepared-to-compete-for-international-students/>

6 UK - Mexico Cooperation

The UK government launched an updated International Education Strategy in February 2021, which restated its commitment to the target of hosting 600,000 international students and growing the industry's economic impact to £35bn annually by 2030. Within this plan, five priority countries (India, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam and Nigeria) with significant potential for bilateral growth in the international higher education sector were identified. In addition to the five priority countries, six additional markets, including Mexico, were highlighted for special focus from the UK International Education Champion, Sir Steve Smith. Mexico's inclusion on this list underlines the perceived strategic importance of Mexico by UK policymakers for the future growth of international education in the UK.³¹

In the political context, Mexico-US bilateral relations became increasingly tense after President Trump took office in January 2017, with Mexico trying to diversify away from its reliance on the US since. In this context, the UK government has been aiming to strengthen its relationship with Mexico, and, across the Prosperity Fund programme, the International Climate Finance programmes and the Chevening scholarship programme is aiming to invest around £126m in Mexico over a period of four years. A strengthened bilateral relationship presents opportunities for the UK-Mexico HE relationship. The Newton Fund has been an important international research and innovation cooperation tool, with £74m jointly invested by Mexico and the UK up until 2021.³²

An agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Higher Education awards, titles, diplomas and academic degrees was signed in 2015 between the governments of Mexico and the UK. This agreement designated 2015 as The Year of the UK in Mexico and The Year of Mexico in the UK (so called "Dual Year") with the aim of bringing the British and Mexican societies closer together. However, mutual recognition of qualifications remains a work in progress between the SEP and UK government.

Bilateral linkages between the UK and Mexico remain strong for the 2022-23 academic year, with nine postgraduate scholarships available at UK institutions for those in Mexico through the GREAT scholarship programme. The GREAT scholarships facilitate study at UK universities across a variety of subjects for students from 14 countries, including Mexico. Each scholarship is worth a minimum of £10,000 toward tuition fees for a one-year taught postgraduate course.³³

³¹ International Education Strategy: 2021 update, *UK Dept. for Education and Dept. for International Trade*, 2021, www.gov.uk/government/publications/international-education-strategy-2021-update/international-education-strategy-2021-update-supporting-recovery-driving-growth

³² Collaborating with Mexico, *Universities UK international*, 2019, www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/UUKI%20reports/collaborating_with_mexico.pdf

³³ GREAT Scholarships, *Study UK British Council*, 2022, <https://study-uk.britishcouncil.org/scholarships-funding/great-scholarships>